LABYRINTH Vol. 28, No. 1, Autumn 2026

TECHNOLOGIES OF WORLDLESSNESS AND EMBODIED PUBLICITY: HANNAH ARENDT AND THE DIGITAL CONDITION

Michalis Dagtzis (Athens)

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to assess the public character of digital media through Hannah Arendt's concept of worldliness. Arendt's critique of modernity shows that technology must be understood within the broader process of world alienation associated with the rise of the social and the ascendancy of animal laborans*. Building on recent phenomenological interpretations of Arendt, I argue that her concept of worldliness involves an embodied dimension which, whilst it has gained interest in Arendt scholarship in recent years, has not been linked to the rapid technological change of our time. Embodied situatedness conditions the perspectivity through which plural actors encounter a common world and appear to one another. Digital mediation transforms this relation by allowing public appearance to circulate beyond the bodily situation in which it originates, thereby attenuating the public relevance of embodied position. Digital media can thus expand public visibility, while at the same time erode the embodied aspect of worldliness, allowing them to be understood as technologies of worldlessness.*

Keywords: Hannah Arendt; worldliness; embodiment; digital media; public sphere.

Introduction

The emergence of the digital technological system has transformed human experience and, with it, the conditions of political life itself. An increasing proportion of our everyday activities—from communication and economic exchange to political participation and public deliberation— is now mediated through digital technologies. Social media platforms, online forums and algorithmically structured networks have become central environments in which individuals encounter one another, exchange opinions, mobilize collectively and participate in public affairs. However, according to Stéphane Vial, computers and information processing constitute a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the formation of "the digital" (Vial 2019, 34). The essential element of "the digital" is the World Wide Web, which thus becomes the decisive mechanism

through which the computer emerges as a universal artifact. In this sense "while the computer is the central star of the system, the internet is the orbital structure that allows this star to glow in every place and in every part of the world" (Vial 2019, 38).

The digitalization of social life has therefore raised a fundamental political question: do these new technological environments constitute genuine public spaces, or do they instead transform the very meaning of publicity? Much of the contemporary debate has oscillated between a techno-optimist and a techno-pessimist standpoint. From the first perspective, digital media appear to fulfil many of the conditions traditionally associated with democratic publicity. The decentralized architecture of networked communication seems to weaken hierarchical forms of political organization, facilitate horizontal participation and enable new forms of collective action (see e.g., Margetts et al. 2016, Papacharissi 2002). Conversely, critical approaches emphasize the pathologies of digital communication, focusing on the fragmentation of public discourse, the erosion of political judgment and the emergence of new forms of social isolation (e.g., Schwarz 2014; Salikov 2018). These developments have renewed interest in Hannah Arendt's political thought, whose concepts of public realm, plurality and worldliness have become central reference points for assessing the political significance of digital technologies.

Existing Arendtian interpretations have predominantly approached the digital condition through the categories of the dominance of *animal laborans* and the rise of the social. Thus, the current debate evaluates the quality of public deliberation and democratic participation generated by the digital transformation and focuses on the durability of the human artifice. Yet these approaches leave largely unexplored a more fundamental issue that is essential to the constitution of publicity itself.

Although the theme of embodiment in the works of Hannah Arendt has sparked scholarly interest and has been gaining momentum in recent years (see Zerilli 1995; Hart 2013; des Portes 2021; Borren 2021; Hyvöne 2021; Mc Inerney 2025), it has not been considered in the context of the rapid development of digital technologies. This paper argues that Arendt's concept of 'worldliness' contains an embodied dimension that is becoming crucial in our increasingly digitized and virtualized world with regard to political life. Against readings that associate the body primarily with biological necessity and labor, (see Zerilli 1995), I suggest that embodiment also belongs to the conditions under which appearance becomes possible. Publicity, on this account, is more than communication, deliberation or the exchange of information characteristic of a Habermasian model of the public sphere (Salikov 2018, 93). It depends on the

embodied presence of plural actors who can appear to one another within a common space. Drawing on recent interpretations of Arendt's work, I argue that embodied situatedness provides the basis of the perspectivity through which a common world is disclosed, while the appearing body participates in the disclosure of the actor's unique "who". Embodiment thus articulates the relation between the objective world of things (*Dingwelt*) and the relational world that arises among acting and speaking subjects (*Mitwelt*).

The argument proceeds in four stages. I begin by reconstructing Arendt's diagnosis of modern world alienation, tracing the victory of *homo faber*, the eventual ascendancy of *animal laborans*, and the historical conditions within which modern technology becomes politically relevant. Then, I examine the structure of Arendtian worldliness through the world of appearances, the durable *Dingwelt* and the relational *Mitwelt*, before turning to the embodied conditions of perspectivity through Arendt's accounts of appearance, freedom and plurality. In the final section I discuss how technological mediation and, digital media in particular, transform the relation between embodied situatedness, public appearance and worldly plurality.

1. Modernity through the Lens of Arendt's Political Thought

Hannah Arendt's deconstruction of the conceptual categories through which the modern age understands itself reveals world alienation (*Weltentfremdung*) as one of its defining characteristics. The condition of worldlessness possesses a double meaning. Politically, it signifies the gradual disappearance of the public realm and the weakening of the common sense (*sensus communis*) through which a shared world is sustained. Existentially, it refers more broadly to the alienation of human beings from a world capable of providing a relatively stable and common horizon of existence. As Arendt herself writes in the Preface to *The Human Condition*, the purpose of her historical analysis is "to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins" (Arendt 1958, 6). The conceptual thread connecting the temporary victory of *homo faber* with the eventual triumph of *animal laborans* thereby illuminates the historical developments that shaped the specifically modern relation to technology. This genealogy is indispensable given that Arendt's critique is directed not against technology as such but against the historical transformation of the human condition that technology both expresses and

intensifies. Modern technology therefore cannot be understood independently of the political ontology of modernity itself.

Which, then, were the events that "contingently caused" (Arendt 1978b, 137) the loss of the world? Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves summarises them in the following passage:

> the discovery of America and the corresponding shrinking of the earth, the waves of expropriation started by the Reformation, the invention of the telescope challenging the adequacy of the senses, the rise of modern science and philosophy and subsequently of a conception of man as part of a process of Nature and History, and the expansion of the realm of the economy, of the production and accumulation of social wealth (Passerin d'Entreves 1994, 36).

If, for Arendt, expropriation and the accumulation of wealth contributed to world alienation, the invention of the telescope —alongside the discovery of America, the invention of the airplane, and the conquest of space— constitutes a partial cause for the emergence of earth alienation. The telescope, in particular, cast doubt on the reliability of sensory experience, thereby encouraging the search for an Archimedean standpoint outside the earth, based on which reality could be apprehended with certainty. This aspiration finds its philosophical counterpart in the Cartesian *cogito*, which responds to the loss of certainty through a withdrawal from the world and, ultimately, a turn inward. For Descartes, once certainty about the perceptual world has been lost, it can be recovered only through introspection; hence, "the mind can only know that which it has itself produced and retains in some sense within itself" (Arendt 1958, 303), namely, the clear and distinct ideas of mathematics. Reality is consequently mathematized, insofar as sensory data are reduced to determinate mathematical variables (Arendt 1958, 265). At the same time, the principle according to which "I ‘know' a thing whenever I understand how it has come into being" (Arendt 1961, 57) inaugurates an experimental approach to knowledge, according to which nature is subjected to the conditions imposed by our own cognitive faculties. The modern shift from "what" to "how" —that is, from an essential to a genetic definition— implies that knowledge itself is now conceived as a process, which scientists seek to reproduce through their tools and instruments. Ultimately, insofar as reality itself comes to be understood in terms of fabrication process, the activity of *homo faber* is elevated into an ontological principle. It is in this sense that Arendt conceives the modern victory of *homo faber* — a victory which, as we shall see, ensured its defeat (Villa 1995, 197).

The main consequence of the (temporary) prevalence of *homo faber* was the emergence of an instrumentalist worldview, according to which all ends are "transformed into means for some further ends" (Arendt 1958, 154). The so-called perplexity of utilitarianism consists precisely in its inability to provide an answer to the question of "what is the use of use? " (Arendt 1958, 154). Once the logic of fabrication is universalized and elevated into an absolute principle, the result is the erosion of meaning itself. If every end is converted into a means toward a further end, nothing within the worldly chain of means and ends can provide an ultimate principle of meaning. According to Arendt, once every other meaning-conferring principle has collapsed, the human being, understood as a biological being, is itself elevated into an end in itself (Villa 1995, 198).

> The only way out of the dilemma of meaninglessness in all strictly utilitarian philosophy is to turn away from the objective world of use things and fall back upon the subjectivity of use itself (Arendt 1958, 155).

The perplexity of utilitarianism is thus resolved through the principle of happiness, whereby worldly values are ultimately subordinated to the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (Arendt 1958, 308). The transition from the limited instrumentality proper to fabrication to the unlimited instrumentalization of everything that exists paves the way for the ascendancy of the values of the *animal laborans* and the condition of worldlessness (Arendt 1958, 118). The preservation and enhancement of individual life now become the highest principle, accompanied by a corresponding devaluation both of the world of things and of the institutions established within it, including the public realm. Care for common affairs (*ta koina*), which can arise only within the human in-between, gives way to care for the self.

The emergence of the capitalist economy further contributed to this development by bringing the activities of labor into the public realm. The clear distinction between the public and the private that, according to Arendt, characterized antiquity was thereby disrupted, giving rise to a historically unprecedented realm between the two: the social. Far from constituting "a true public realm", the social consists merely of "private activities displayed in the open" (Arendt 1958, 133). The intrusion of private interests into public space culminates in mass society, undermining both the human artifice composed of objects whose durability allows them to withstand the transience of human life and the political realm in which action can appear as a new beginning. Society —as distinct from community— is composed of individuals from whom a predictable and normalized

mode of behavior is expected, leaving progressively less room for the spontaneity proper to action. Eventually, the common world is dissolved by conformism and imitative behavior (Nicolaidou-Kyrianidou 2021, 69).

Against this background, Arendt notes that the distinctive feature of modern technology is the replacement of tools by machines, that is, by the mechanization of labor or, in other words, by automation (Arendt 1958, 167–8). It is within this context that technology becomes a political problem (Yacoob 2014). Her concern is not primarily with who controls modern machinery, but with "whether machines still serve the world and its things" (Arendt 1958, 151). To the extent that modern technology emerged within and in response to mass society —that is, under historical conditions in which the products of *homo faber* came to be treated as objects of consumption— it contributes to the naturalization of human existence and to the dissolution of the public realm.

Under the conditions of this renewed naturalization of human existence, the artifacts that are produced are directed either toward the further automation of the productive process or toward consumption during leisure time. Modern technology thus plays a significant role in the process of world alienation characteristic of mass society.

2. Worldliness and the *Vita Activa*: Appearance, *Dingwelt* and *Mitwelt*

It has become clear so far that the problem of world alienation is at the center of Arendt's diagnosis. Yet if modernity is characterized by an increasing "loss of the world" (Arendt 1998, 98), we must first clarify what precisely is being lost. This question is particularly important for the argument developed here, since "world" is by no means univocal in Arendt's work. For Arendt, the world encompasses a complex structure that emerges from the relations human beings establish with things and with one another through the activities of the *vita activa*. Or, in other words, the world is "the primary space of appearances which is intersubjectively shared and in which reality and the real can manifest themselves" (Loidolt 2018, 98). As Arendt famously states at the beginning of *The Human Condition*, "men, not man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" (Arendt 1958, 7). Human existence is thus worldly from the outset: no human life is possible "without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings" (Arendt 1958, 22).

Sophie Loidolt's phenomenological reconstruction is particularly helpful in disentangling the different meanings condensed in this notion. We may distinguish three

interrelated dimensions of the Arendtian world: the appearing world or the space of appearances; the *Dingwelt*, that is, the objective world of things; and the *Mitwelt*, the interpersonal world or the second in-between generated through acting and speaking together (Loidolt 2018, 98–9). These dimensions should not be understood as three autonomous realms; instead, they designate different aspects of the worldly structure within which the activities of labor, work and action acquire their respective meanings. From this perspective, the distinctions constitutive of the *vita activa* are simultaneously distinctions between different modes of relating to the world. Indeed, action, labor and work articulate different relations to nature, things and other human beings.

The world of appearances provides the appropriate starting point. In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt famously states that "Being and Appearing coincide" (Arendt 1978, 19). To be worldly is, in the first instance, to appear: whatever exists in the world appears to perceiving beings and is itself situated within a field of appearances. Hence, every appearance is an "appearance *of* something *for* someone" (Loidolt 2018, 57). This intentional structure of appearance introduces the notion of plurality into the very constitution of the appearing world. As she puts it, "nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular" (Arendt 1978, 19). The world is therefore the phenomenal field within which beings appear to one another. In this sense, the coincidence of Being and Appearing is inseparable from Arendt's law of plurality.

It is against this phenomenological background that the three activities of the *vita activa* must be differentiated. Labor establishes the most immediate relation between human beings and nature: its corresponding condition is life itself (Arendt 1958, 27). The activity of the *animal laborans*, which encompasses both labor and consumption (Arendt 1958, 151), is governed by the vital necessities involved in sustaining the human organism; as Arendt later puts it, labor "corresponds to the biological process of the human body" (Arendt 2018, 288). Human beings are thus subjected to the necessities of life that they share with other living beings. Labor follows the cyclical temporality of nature, a realm where "no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition" (Arendt 1958, 96).

In this respect, labor has a fundamentally unworldly tendency. Its activity binds the human being primarily to the life process and therefore does not itself produce the relative permanence required by a human world. Whatever labor produces is destined for consumption and must continually be produced anew. Moreover, the experience of bodily necessity tends to withdraw the individual from the plurality of the common world. As Arendt writes, in the experience of physical pain the human body "is thrown back

upon itself" and concentrated upon "nothing but its own being alive" (Arendt 1958, 115). The body enters Arendt's topology of worldliness, then, in an apparently negative form: as the laboring body, immersed in its own necessities and thereby withdrawn from the public realm. As des Portes observes, it is precisely this figure of the body —the body of the *animal laborans*, subjected to biological necessity— that has largely determined the reception of corporeality in Arendt and led scholars to regard the body as essentially private and antipolitical (des Portes 2021). His reconstruction, however, will later allow us to ask whether this biological body fully accounts for the significance of embodiment in Arendt's account of worldly and political existence.

If labor binds human beings to nature, work introduces worldliness in the more specific sense of the *Dingwelt*. Arendt's distinction between "the labor of our body and the work of our hands" (Arendt 1958, 131) is ultimately grounded, as Margaret Canovan observes, in the more fundamental distinction between nature and world (Canovan 1995, 128). The activity of *homo faber* consists precisely in constructing an artificial world of things. Unlike consumer goods, the artifacts produced through work are not exhausted in their consumption. Whether governed by the criterion of utility, as in the case of tools, or by that of beauty, as in works of art (Arendt 2018, 179), they acquire their worldly character through their relative permanence. By virtue of their durability, they have the function of "stabilizing human life" (Arendt 1958, 137). Against the constantly changing subjectivity of human beings and the cyclical temporality of natural processes, the human artifice establishes a relatively stable objective environment. It is in this sense that fabrication transforms the earth, our natural habitat, into a world (Arendt 2018, 179).

The objectivity of this world has a specifically relational significance. According to Loidolt, the world is "objective" because it stands between human beings (Loidolt 2018, 98); the common world "gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other" (Arendt 1958, 52). The material world provides an objective in-between that simultaneously relates and separates those who inhabit it. It thus provides human plurality with a relatively enduring worldly setting. Without such durability, human affairs would lack the stability necessary for anything to remain common across time.

The worldly significance of fabrication exceeds the mere production of useful objects. Through work, *homo faber* endows the common world with a material durability that outlasts the fleeting span of individual lives. Unlike labor, which is bound to the cyclical reproduction of life, work has a determinate beginning and a predictable end and is structured according to the means-end relation. Yet the completed artifact does not remain an end in itself: once produced, it enters new contexts of use. Arendt compares

the means-end relation to a chain in which "every end can serve again as a means in some other context" (Arendt 1958, 153–4). It is precisely the universalization of this logic that eventually undermines the worldly achievement of *homo faber* itself. The durability of the *Dingwelt*, however, accounts for only one dimension of worldliness. It explains how a relatively stable world can stand between human beings, but not yet how this world becomes common to them. This requires turning from work to action and to what Arendt calls the "second in-between" (Arendt 1958, 203), that arises when human beings act and speak together.

For although durable things establish the objective structure of the world, objects alone do not make a world public. Publicness requires a plurality of actors who appear to one another. Loidolt conceptualizes this "second in-between" as the *Mitwelt*, the explicitly relational dimension of worldliness. Unlike the tangible *Dingwelt* produced through fabrication, the *Mitwelt* arises through the relations established among acting and speaking subjects (Loidolt 2018, 99). It is this "web of human relationships" within which actors disclose who they are (Arendt 1958, 203). The ontological significance of this second in-between for Arendt's conception of the world has also been developed in terms of its spatial and temporal dimensions.

It is within this relational *Mitwelt* that action assumes its distinctive worldly significance. Action is the only activity of the *vita activa* that cannot occur in isolation; its fundamental condition is plurality. It is therefore "the political activity par excellence" (Arendt 1958, 9). Through speech and persuasion human beings participate in political life (Arendt 1958, 26), but action cannot be reduced to deliberative communication. To act also means to begin, to set something new in motion (Arendt 1958, 177). This capacity for beginning is rooted in natality, in the fact that each human being is *initium*: a newcomer who enters an already existing world and possesses the capacity to bring into existence something "which did not exist before" (Arendt 1998, 160). Freedom and action consequently coincide: "to be free and to act are the same" (Arendt 1958, 153).

The two familiar interpretations of Arendtian action—communicative and agonistic—thus capture genuine but partial dimensions of the same phenomenon. The former stresses deliberation and participation, whereas the latter emphasizes spontaneity, inauguration and the passion for excellence (Passerin d'Entreves 1994, 85; Benhabib 2003, 125; Canovan 1995, 145). Villa accordingly asks how Arendt can combine "deliberation with initiation, the dialogical with the agonistic" within a single theory of political action (Villa 1996, 56). His answer points toward the phenomenon that unites them: what ultimately matters is that opinions and judgments appear (Villa 1996, 70). In contrast,

Loidolt argues that the apparent opposition between agonistic and communicative models rests on an insufficient understanding of the interrelation between plurality and natality (Loidolt 2018, 208ff).

Action belongs to the world of appearances. In acting, individuals enter an already existing *Dingwelt*, while exposing themselves to the presence and judgment of others. The political significance of action lies not only in what an actor accomplishes but in the disclosure of the "who" that accompanies speech and deed. Plurality is therefore not simply an external precondition for action, as though already constituted individuals subsequently entered a common arena in order to communicate. It is, as Villa puts it, both the "source and the goal" of action (Villa 1996, 75). Through acting and speaking before one another, plural human beings constitute the *Mitwelt* in which their distinctiveness can become manifest.

Consequently, these three dimensions of the world distinguished by Loidolt can be seen to converge. The world of appearances refers to the phenomenal condition under which anything can become manifest; the *Dingwelt* supplies the durable objective in-between that stabilizes human existence; and the *Mitwelt* emerges as the relational in-between generated whenever plural actors disclose themselves through speech and action. Worldliness is therefore "this interwoven and multilayered connection to others, to objects, to stories, within the whole of a context of involvements, as *Dingwelt* and, most of all, *Mitwelt*" (Loidolt 2018, 100). A genuinely common world requires both a relatively stable world between us and a plurality of actors among whom that world can appear as common. This connection is already implicit in Arendt's twofold definition of the public. Publicity refers both to what "can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity" (Arendt 1958, 50) and to "the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us" (Arendt 1958, 52). Publicity thus binds appearance and worldliness together. The common world acquires public reality insofar as it appears to a plurality of spectators, yet plural appearances require a common world within which different perspectives can refer to the same things.

This is why Arendt's notion of objectivity is itself inseparable from perspectivity. The common world is not common because everyone perceives it identically, but because the same world can appear differently to a plurality of situated beings. As Borren emphasizes, Arendtian plurality does not mean sociocultural diversity; it stands for the paradoxical conjunction of equality and distinctness among situated beings, each of whom occupies a particular standpoint on the world. These differences become manifest only through speech and action in the presence of others (Borren 2021, 79). The common

world is therefore "fundamentally perspectival": it must be disclosed from a plurality of standpoints if it is to attain public reality (Borren 2021, 80).

3. The Embodied Conditions of Worldliness

Arendt, however, never fully develops such an approach. What makes such a perspectival appearance possible in the first place? If the common world depends upon a plurality of situated perspectives, what accounts for this situatedness? And if *Mitwelt* emerges through actors disclosing themselves to one another, what is the mode of appearance through which the actor's "who" becomes manifest? These questions suggest that embodiment may have a worldly significance that cannot be reduced to the biological body of the *animal laborans* discussed above.

Arendt's explicit account of labor might initially suggest that corporeality is inherently unworldly. The body appears there as the bearer of biological necessity: absorbed in pain, need, and the cyclical reproduction of life, it "is thrown back upon itself" and withdrawn from the common world. However, the actor who enters the space of appearance does not cease to be embodied upon leaving the private realm. If political existence depends upon appearing before others, and if the common world exists only through a plurality of situated perspectives, the possibility of public appearance already presupposes an embodied mode of being-in-the-world (des Portes 2021).

Arendt's own work, however, provides important indications that corporeality may assume a different significance within the space of appearance. In *The Life of the Mind*, the thesis that Being and Appearing coincide is accompanied by a critique of the Cartesian *res cogitans* as bodyless: worldly reality cannot be separated from the perceptual activity of beings who themselves belong to the world of appearances (Arendt 1978, 19, 48). On this basis, des Portes distinguishes between the biological body of labor and the appearing body involved in political speech and action. The latter's function exceeds that of a physical object exposed to public view and reveals the "unique distinctness" of the actor (Arendt 1958, 176), the embodied who (des Portes 2021).

Borren approaches embodiment from the complementary viewpoint of spatiality and perspectivity. Her point of departure is a corporeal strand already present in Arendt's account of freedom. In *Willing*, Arendt recalls that, for the ancients, "a person was free who could move as he wished; the I-can, not the I-will, was the criterion", adding strikingly that freedom was "an objective state of the body, not a datum of consciousness or of the mind" (Arendt 1978b, 19). This experience of *eleutheria* situates freedom within

a space of possible movement: the space of appearance is also a space in which embodied actors move, orient themselves and occupy different positions. Thus, bodily motility provides an experience of spatiality and perspectivity — the very elements that receive their political articulation in public space as freedom, action and plurality (Borren 2021, 77–79).

Borren develops the phenomenological implications of this connection through Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought. For Merleau-Ponty, bodily motility is constitutive of spatiality itself. Space appears as a horizon of bodily possibilities within which a multiplicity of movements can be performed. The very perspectivity of perception is grounded in the condition of the embodied subject, since the body is our "anchorage in a world" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 146; Borren 2021, 86). If the Arendtian common world depends on being disclosed from different standpoints, then Borren's Merleau-Pontyan reconstruction locates the phenomenological basis of this perspectivity in embodied situatedness. As she puts it, "appearing and the disclosure of the shared human world do not just happen through speech, but they rely on our bodies with their perspectives and I-cans" (Borren 2021, 89).

However, the plurality of perspectives through which the common world is disclosed includes both actual and potential standpoints. Arendt's account of enlarged mentality describes the imaginative capacity to "visit" other standpoints (Arendt 1992, 122). Such imaginative displacement, through which we distance ourselves from the limitation of our immediate standpoint, enables judgement to take into account perspectives that one does not actually occupy. In this sense, this mental mobility acts in parallel with our bodily motility, that is with our embodied movement in the external world (Borren 2021, 81).

Therefore, if plurality entails that a common world is disclosed from irreducibly different standpoints, then perspectivity is indistinguishable from the situatedness of those who perceive and inhabit the world. Such situatedness is embodied: human beings encounter the world from somewhere, move within it, and become perceptible to others. Consequently, corporeality acquires a worldly significance that exceeds both the body as an object within the *Dingwelt* and the needy organism of the *animal laborans*. It is through their embodied situatedness that actors occupy a particular perspective within the appearing world and appear before others as distinct "whos".

This does not mean that Arendt herself developed a systematic phenomenology of the political body. Indeed, this aspect remains underdeveloped in her account (Borren 2021, 85). Nevertheless, the theoretical reconstructions developed above suggest that embodiment articulates the relation between actors and the different dimensions of

worldliness. The body situates actors within the world of appearances, grounds their distinct perspectives upon the objective *Dingwelt*, and conditions their appearance to one another within the relational *Mitwelt*. A common world must also appear as common to plural actors, whose embodied situatedness allows them to encounter the same world from different perspectives and whose speech and action disclose these perspectives to one another. What this analysis brings into view, then, is a dimension of worldliness that remains implicit in Arendt's work: worldliness is not only material and relational but also embodied.

This embodied dimension introduces a further problem for the analysis of digital media. If technological mediation affects the conditions of public encounter and world disclosure, the question of modern and contemporary technology can no longer be confined to the erosion of the world of objectivity. It must also address whether a technologically mediated space can sustain the embodied, perspectival plurality through which a world becomes genuinely common.

4. Digital Media and the Transformation of Embodied Publicity

What becomes of the common world when public appearance is increasingly technologically mediated? Given the discussion developed above, the question posed by the contemporary digital condition is whether the forms of appearance enabled by digital media preserve the worldly conditions of publicity — or whether their transformation contributes to a new form of worldlessness.

Such an approach requires moving beyond the question of whether digital environments satisfy a pre-established set of criteria for Arendtian political action. As Longo argues, an Arendtian analysis of technological mediation should begin instead with the worldly conditions within which action becomes possible, asking how technological environments shape the intentional relationship between actions and world (Longo 2024, 91–92). The question pursued here focuses on the embodied condition of this transformation.

There are, of course, reasons to regard digital media as capable of sustaining, or even expanding, public life. Interconnected computer networks introduced a significant rupture into the highly centralized communicative structures characteristic of modern society. Digital platforms enable forms of communication that bypass traditional institutional gatekeepers, while also facilitating decentralized association. These features seem, to some extent, compatible with Arendtian categories of plurality and public action. Elke

Schwarz, for example, has shown why online social networks can initially appear to offer precisely the horizontal and decentralized spaces in which Arendtian action might become possible, even while ultimately subjecting this promise to sustained criticism (Schwarz 2014). Likewise, other scholars have focused on digital media's capacity to expand participation while simultaneously questioning whether increased communicative accessibility is sufficient to constitute genuinely political publicity (Salikov 2018).

The conventional Arendtian objection can be formulated through the category of the social. Digital media emerged within, and remain deeply embedded in, a socioeconomic order oriented towards commodification and consumption. The expansion of direct communication between individuals therefore does not in itself reverse the modern collapse of the distinction between the public and the private. The conditions that Arendt associates with the rise of the social persist in digital environments: private interests are publicly displayed, behavior is quantified and normalized, and visibility itself becomes integrated into economic processes. Moreover, increased connectivity need not entail an equivalent strengthening of the relations through which people act together politically. As Coeckelbergh argues, drawing on Arendt's analysis of isolation and loneliness, contemporary technologies confront us with the paradox of being ever more connected while remaining "alone together": the mediation of social relations may coexist with a weakening of trust, solidarity and collective action. "If Arendt is right, this loneliness is not only a sad state at the personal level; if it leads to a general loss of trust and solidarity, it is also a political problem and dangerous to the extent that it helps to create a ground for totalitarianism" (Coeckelbergh 2022, 88). Digital platforms may multiply public expression without necessarily restoring the care for a common world. A comparison between the Arendtian and the Habermasian conceptions of the public sphere brings this tension into focus by questioning whether the communicative possibilities generated by social media can overcome the fragmentation and privatization of contemporary publicity (Salikov 2018, 88–102). Salikov's critique, however, captures only part of the problem of digital worldlessness. Once we conceive of worldliness in its embodied dimension, attention must also turn to the conditions under which the world can appear as common.

Arendt's account of the public realm provides the starting point. She famously distinguishes two senses of the term "public". First, it designates everything that "appears in public" and therefore "can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity". Second, it refers to "the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us" (Arendt 1958, 50–52; cf. Benhabib 2003, 127). These two senses are closely related but not identical. The first concerns visibility; the second concerns worldliness. In terms of

visibility, digital platforms are unquestionably public. They provide technologically mediated spaces in which individuals may appear before potentially vast audiences, express opinions, enter controversies, and expose matters that would otherwise remain private. However, the fact that something is accessible to many does not by itself make it part of a common world. Plurality is therefore not equivalent to the multiplication of subjective viewpoints. It presupposes the coexistence of different perspectives on something common. The expansion of digital visibility raises the question of whether the multiplication of appearances also sustains the worldly conditions through which such appearances can constitute plurality.

The embodied dimension of worldliness becomes here decisive. If plurality depends on situated perspectives on a common world, and if such perspectivity is grounded in embodied situatedness, then the question is what happens to this relation when public appearance becomes technologically mediated. Digital mediation alters the relation between bodily situatedness and public appearance without rendering interaction bodyless. Online communication is obviously performed by embodied human beings who remain physically situated somewhere in the world. Some accounts nevertheless characterize digital appearances as virtual, as "images at a distance", in contrast to authentic, embodied appearances (Spaid 2019, 676). Such an opposition between an authentic embodied public sphere and a "virtual" digital realm is, however, inadequate for the argument developed here (see also Longo's argument mentioned above). What digital transformation affects is the role played by bodily situatedness in public appearance itself.

In an embodied space of appearance, to appear before others means simultaneously to occupy a position among them. The actor's presence cannot be separated from the *here* from which they speak and act. The spatial in-between both separates those who inhabit the world, allowing them to remain distinct, and holds them together within a common field of appearance. This spatial differentiation is also perspectival: different positions disclose different sides of a world that nevertheless remains common to those who inhabit it. Indeed, the world is common precisely insofar as it remains "multi-faceted" (Nicolaidou-Kyrianidou 2021, 60–61). Embodied difference and worldly commonality are therefore internally related.

Digital media alter this relation by enabling public appearance to circulate without requiring the actor's bodily co-presence within a shared spatial field. What actually circulates are technologically mediated manifestations of the actor (texts, videos, comments, etc.) which can be reproduced and encountered independently of the bodily situ-

ation in which they originated. The actor remains embodied, but public appearance becomes abstracted from the actor's embodied situatedness. The issue is therefore whether bodily situatedness continues to structure the actor's mode of appearing within a common public space. Thus, what is attenuated is the public relevance of embodied position, that is, the constitutive relation between bodily situatedness and public appearance.

Digital media may multiply voices and viewpoints, but such multiplicity does not necessarily constitute plurality in the Arendtian sense. Plurality requires not simply difference among viewpoints but their relation to a world that can appear as the same world differently disclosed. To the extent that digital mediation abstracts public appearance from the embodied positions through which actors encounter such a world, the multiplication of viewpoints need not amount to an equivalent multiplication of worldly perspectives.

The expansion of digital visibility must therefore be distinguished from the preservation of worldly publicity. Digital media can therefore be understood as technologies of worldlessness in a sense that cannot be captured solely through Arendt's critique of mass society. Their worldless tendency lies in the attenuation of the embodied relations through which a common world is disclosed and sustained. Worldlessness does not arise only when the durable *Dingwelt* is eroded, but also when the embodied *Mitwelt* is weakened: when actors become increasingly visible to one another while the situated relations through which they disclose themselves to one another and encounter the world as common recede. The paradox of digital publicity is thus that an expansion of public visibility can coincide with an erosion of public worldliness.

5. Towards worldly technologies (Conclusion)

The aim of this study was to reconsider the political significance of digital media from the perspective of Arendtian worldliness. Arendt's assessment of modernity shows that technology cannot be understood independently of the historical conditions within which it emerges. The rise of the social and the ascendancy of the *animal laborans* transform the relation between human beings and the world before modern technology becomes a political issue. The question of technology is therefore inseparable from the broader problem of world alienation, in which the durability of the human artifice, the distinction between the public and the private realm, and the space available for political action are progressively undermined.

To comprehend what is at stake in this process, however, it was necessary to reflect on Arendtian notion of worldliness itself. Given Loidolt's tripartite distinction between the world of appearances, the relatively durable *Dingwelt*, and the relational *Mitwelt*, it becomes clear that the common world acquires its publicity only insofar as it appears to a plurality of actors who perceive it from different perspectives and disclose themselves to one another within it. Moreover, these dimensions are internally related: the objectivity of the *Dingwelt* stabilizes the relations of the *Mitwelt* and provides them with enduring points of reference, while things and artifacts themselves acquire meaning only within a shared human world (Loidolt 2018, 99). Worldliness therefore involves both the stability of the worldly in-between and the perspectival relations through which this world can appear as common.

This line of argumentation also brings into view the embodied dimension of worldliness by reconstructing the relation between embodied situatedness, perspectival world-disclosure and the appearance of actors to one another. Although the body appears most explicitly in Arendt's work in connection with biological necessity and the unworldly experience of the *animal laborans*, embodiment cannot be confined to this function. The actor who enters the public realm remains an embodied being who encounters the world from a particular position, moves within it, and appears before others. Bodily motility and situatedness condition the perspectivity through which the common world is disclosed, while the appearing body participates in the disclosure of the actor's unique "who". In this sense, the very commonality of the world is conditioned by the embodied situatedness of those who inhabit it.

Digital mediation transforms the relation between bodily situatedness and public appearance by allowing appearances to circulate without requiring the embodied presence of actors. Digital mediation thereby attenuates the public relevance of embodied position: the constitutive relation between the situation from which an actor perceives and inhabits the world and the mode in which the actor appears before others. From an Arendtian perspective, the multiplication of digitally mediated voices and viewpoints therefore cannot in itself be equated with plurality. Plurality presupposes different perspectives upon a world that remains common through the differences of its appearances.

Digital worldlessness thus extends beyond the familiar problems associated with the rise of the social and the erosion of the public realm in mass society. It also concerns the transformation of the embodied dimension of worldliness. Digital media may vastly extend the range of public visibility and connect actors across geographical distances,

while simultaneously weakening some of the worldly relations on which Arendtian publicity depends. The resulting paradox is that an expansion of public visibility can coincide with an erosion of public worldliness.

Such an outcome, however, is not inevitable. According to Arendt, human beings inhabit a world that conditions their existence and action without determining them; through their capacity to begin, they can act upon and transform the world into which they have been born. Technology can be understood within a similarly reciprocal relation. As Longo argues, technology "always already shapes the environment in which [political action] unfolds" (Longo 2024, 92). Technological artifacts participate in configuring the worldly setting within which action becomes possible. At the same time, they are themselves produced within historically specific political, social and cultural circumstances. Technology is therefore neither an autonomous force nor a neutral instrument. It belongs to the worldly environment that human beings both inherit and continually remake.

Technological production thus shapes the world within which political action takes place, while the political and cultural character of that world informs the technologies produced within it (see Baş 2022). This mutual formation is what allows the diagnosis of technologies of worldlessness to open, rather than to close, the question of technological transformation.

The issue of worldly technologies thereby comes to the fore. The possibility of such technologies rests on the reciprocal relation between politics, culture and technological production. A movement toward worldly technologies would therefore have to occur simultaneously at the political and at the cultural level. To speak of worldly technologies is not to advocate a return to an allegedly unmediated form of political existence. It is to ask how technologies might participate in sustaining rather than eroding the conditions under which a world can become common. The question raised by digital worldlessness is ultimately not whether technology should mediate our political existence, but what forms of technological mediation might contribute to the constitution and preservation of a common world.

Michalis Dagtzis, PhD Cand.,
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
midagtzis[at]ppp.uoa.gr

References

Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, Hannah. 1961. *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: The Viking Press.

Arendt, Hannah. 1978a. *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*. New York: Harvest.

Arendt, Hannah. 1978b. *The Life of the Mind: Willing*. New York: Harvest.

Arendt, Hannah. 1992. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Edited by Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, Hannah. 2018. *Thinking without a Banister*. New York: Schocken Books.

Baş, Melis. 2022. *Technological Mediation of Politics: An Arendtian Critique of Political Philosophy of Technology*. PhD dissertation, University of Twente.

Benhabib, Seyla. 2003. *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Borren, Marieke. 2021. "The Embodiment of Political Freedom: Spontaneous Movement, Plurality and the Ontological Constitution of Public Space". In *Hannah Arendt: Challenges of Plurality*, edited by M. Robaszkiewicz and T. Matzner, 75–92. Switzerland: Springer.

Canovan, Margaret. 1995. *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coeckelbergh, Mark. 2022. *The Political Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

des Portes, Charles. 2021. "Hannah Arendt's Hidden Phenomenology of the Body". *Human Studies* 45, 139–156.

Hart, Mechthild. 2013. "Laboring and Hanging Out in the Embodied In-Between." *Hypatia*, Vol. 28 (1), 49-68. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2012.01304.x

Hyvöne, Ari-Elmeri. 2021. "The Value of the Surface: Reappreciating Embodiment, Labor, and Necessity in Arendt's Political Thought Open Access." *Critical Times*, vol. 4 (2): 263–283.
https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-9092732

Loidolt, Sophie. 2018. *The Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity*.
New York: Routledge.

Longo, Anthony. 2024. "Reversing the Primacy of Political Action: Thinking Politics and Technology with Arendt". *Arendt Studies* 8: 89–113.

Mc Inerney, Aoife. 2025. *Hannah Arendt's Forgotten Spatial Ontology*. Nijmegen: Radboud University Press.

Margetts, Helen, Peter John, Scott A. Hale, and Taha Yasser. 2016. *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2012. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. New York: Routledge.

Nicolaidou-Kyrianidou, Vana. 2021. *Hannah Arendt: The Law of the Earth and the Forgotten Tradition*. Athens: Alexandria Press.

Papacharissi, Zizi. 2002. "The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere." *New Media & Society* 4, no. 1: 9–27.

Passerin d'Entreves, Maurizio. 1994. *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt.* New York: Routledge.

Salikov, Alexey. 2018. "Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Rethinking the Public Sphere in the Age of Social Media", *Russian Sociological Review* 17 (4); 88–102

Schwarz, Elke. 2014. "@hannah_arendt: An Arendtian Critique of Online Social Networks." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43 (1): 165–186.

Vial, Stéphane. 2019. *Being and the Screen: How the Digital Changes Perception*. Translated by Patrick Baudoin, Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Villa, Dana. 1996. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Yaqoob, Waseem. 2014. "The Archimedean point: Science and technology in the thought of Hannah Arendt, 1951–1963." *Journal of European Studies*, 44(3): 199–224.

Zerilli, Linda. 1995. "The Arendtian Body." In *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*. Edited by Bonnie Honig, 167–194. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press.