

## Freedom, Earth, World: An Arendtian Eco-Politics of Dissent

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### Introduction

The category of nature within Arendt's thought, as Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves has commented, is granted an ambiguous status (D'Entrèves 1994: 6-7). Whilst on the one hand *The Human Condition* narrates the victory of the *animal laborans* which elevates labor to the highest end of humanity, it also explains how the developments of this same period are embodied by their increasing artificiality, characterised by the radical embrace of technology, expansionist capitalist economics and the abstract tendency towards the over-rationalisation of modern science. This seems to stretch Arendt's critique of modernity in two contrary directions where in the first instance human activity is reduced to nature, to cycles of production and consumption; whilst in the second, the same period also promises the technological liberation from such natural limitations. Though the role of 'Nature' might be enthused with ambiguity, it is important to note that Arendt's work operates within a complex picture which perhaps suggests that it should not be approached from the perspective of a hard dichotomy between the natural and the artificial. As she points out, the 'human condition' refers to a composition of forms of activity that both link humanity to the biological and ecological processes that condition our existence, and which also includes the more productive and creative aspects of life that allow us to positively relate to the givenness, facticity and thrownness of our existence (Loidolt 2018: 44) that such a rigid account of 'Nature' might imply. Her blend of political theory and phenomenology transposes the discussion into a different register giving rise to a distinction instead between earth and world. I emphasise how in Arendt's account the latter term which refers to "the man-made home" must be kept, to some degree separate from the former, even though "the material [...] earthly nature" is delivered "into human hands". As she continues, "if nature and the earth generally constitute the condition of human *life*, then the world and the things of the world constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can be at home on earth" (Arendt 1998: 134). Though earth is concerned primarily with the material and physical planet on which we live, for her, it is only through the notion of world that we can come to dwell upon the earth.

The distinction between world and earth provides a different vantage point from which to view Arendt's critique of modernity—a period which she claims is characterised by

unique forms of alienation from both the world and the earth. Though these processes are interrelated, importantly the concepts of world and earth grounding them remain essentially distinct. Through a meditation on Arendt's notion of freedom and its interconnectedness to her descriptions of dissent, in this paper I consider the consequences of collapsing this distinction, which may act as an Arendtian warning for contemporary environmental movements. I suggest that Arendt can serve as a useful interlocutor in conversations concerning environmental politics as on the one hand, her account provides tools which are both critical of a romantic form of environmentalism that promises a return to nature. On the other, it additionally gives rise to a productive scepticism concerning movements which promise the overcoming of the carbon-based economy through vast technological developments.<sup>1</sup> I suggest that environmentalist approaches may need to be weary of overlooking the distinction between world and earth, which are different in kind for Arendt. Though they are essentially linked, she maintains that there is a distinction between the interwoven fabric of the world and the materiality of the earth; whilst the concept of 'dwelling' (of instituting-a-home-on-the-earth) points to the intersection between them, there are troubling consequences of equating the two. Though the success of an environmental political project may be judged upon how it manages to reverse and prevent the most drastic consequences of climate change on the Earth, I suggest it is important for any political project which aims to bring about change to also care for the world beyond this. Within the context of the climate crisis, I argue that it is important to consider the artificial world as a resource analogous to the material earth, which is under threat and in need of care and protection. On this point Arendt can be of crucial importance because her thought contains a unique impulse to protect the world, not in the form of a classic conservative tendency but rather to preserve a space characterised by its contingency and by an equal openness to the possibility of constructive and deconstructive moments. As I will suggest, the world as a space of 'dwelling' which allows us to see ourselves as belonging to the material earth is for Arendt essentially fragile and requires the ever-present possibility of its own undoing; a point which is evident from the co-relational concepts of plurality, freedom, and dissent that she proposes.

Constructing this argument involves bringing together three different aspects of Arendt's thought. Firstly her historical analysis of world and earth alienation (including her appropriation of materialist interpretations of modernity); secondly, drawing out what can perhaps be considered as her most important and novel contribution to phenomenology—a refined and nested definition of the world; and, finally her interrelated political definitions of freedom and dissent. From this I will argue that a key characteristic of Arendt's understanding of world is characterised by its ever-present

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1 For reasons of brevity I do not here put forward fully constructed accounts of these schools of thought which are present within contemporary environmentalism. For a more detailed analysis of the roots of romanticism which have been inherited by the environmentalist tradition, including a focus on the individual and a rejection of science and civilisation, see (Pepper 1996: 188-201). Additionally, it is worth noting that recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) guidance for policy makers suggests that technological innovation is a key component in the post-carbon future (IPCC 2018: 20). This point is reflected in the fact that many UN member states have adopted domestic economic strategies with the intention of fostering favourable environments for investment in green technologies.

capacity for dissent and that this spectral characteristic of the world is worth preserving as our attention turns towards protecting the Earth. In doing this, I hope to highlight how Arendt's thought may serve as an important touchstone for environmentalist thought because of the ways in which it tells a parallel narrative of the loss of the world through the modern age.

In setting out this argument, I begin by considering Arendt's account of the modern age and the commentary that it provides of world and earth alienation. This entails getting to grips with the historical analysis that she provides which brings political theory into dialogue with phenomenology, as Arendt draws upon a range of thinkers including Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger. As such this means that she maintains a distinction between the world and earth which interrelatedly contribute to the growth of the modern age. From here I follow a more recent trend within Arendtian scholarship and move into a detailed phenomenological analysis of her concept of world, with a particular focus on how she goes above and beyond the more traditional interpretations of the term. Whilst the world may more generally be considered as a conservative concept whose primary function is concerned with giving stability to the human life, I suggest that a more refined phenomenological analysis of the term reminds us of the fact that it is equally concerned with change, difference and a phenomenal distancing between inhabitants, as we unpick the levels by which we are both *of the world* and actively *constitutive of it*. I emphasise these elements of Arendt's concept of world, concerned with contingency and change, by looking at the term's relation to the concept of freedom that underlies her political thought. This necessitates bringing the notion of world into dialogue with a wider network of terms which collectively characterise her notion of politics. As such her understanding of freedom sets certain parameters for her notion of world, a fundamental characteristic of which is the freedom to dissent. After exploring Arendt's definition of freedom in more detail and the unorthodox interpretation of political dissent that it suggests, I will conclude by speculating what a world without dissent may look like in an effort to articulate the importance of preserving both earth and world for eco-politics.

### **Between materialism and phenomenology: the fabric of the world and materiality of the earth through the modern age**

The narrative of the modern age that Arendt weaves is in part intended to redress the deficiencies that she perceives in the Marxist materialist account of capitalist development and proletariat alienation from labor. Writing at what she believes to be the end of the modern era, Arendt explains such an account is lacking because "the basic error of all materialism [...] is to overlook the inevitability with which men disclose themselves as subjects" and to ignore the sense of a common world, a web of human relationships which forms an in-between (Arendt 1998: 183). This point is of vital importance for the way in which Arendt positions her work, bringing historical and materialist analysis into dialogue with phenomenology. As her account of the *vita activa*

attests, her thought attempts to walk a line somewhere between Marx's claim that philosophy ought to aim at changing the world,<sup>2</sup> and Heidegger's retort that such a statement "overlooks the fact that a world change presupposes a change of the world's conception" which relies upon the fact "that one interprets the world sufficiently" (Heidegger 1977a: 39). Against Marx she questions what she considers to be the naïve assumption that politics can know exactly how to change the world and bring about communism, a point which from the outset denies humankind's capacity for disclosure. Against Heidegger, she rallies against what she perceives to be the "oblivion of praxis" (Villa 1996: 224-30) in Western philosophy which suffocates any attempt to retrieve the phenomenological conditions of political life. In this sense her exploration of the *vita activa* follows what some consider to be her anti-Platonic tendency (*ibid.*, 82-6) to bring philosophy back to bear on the world of human affairs (Arendt 1990a: 102-3) and to reflect on the ways in which human activity is both constitutive of and conditioned by the world.

Therefore, from the very outset her account of the modern age attempts to sit between these two traditions. As Arendt explains in *The Human Condition*, this blending together of traditions is no academic exercise but is intended "to trace back modern world alienation in its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins, in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of society" (Arendt 1998: 6). Furthermore, she undertakes this historical analysis in the wake of the totalitarian phenomenon, as "the subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition" (Arendt 1973: xi). Arendt suggests that this novel phenomenon which "aims at abolishing freedom" and "eliminating spontaneity in general" (*ibid.*, 405) is a result of "the tragic fallacy" that undercuts the history of western thinking, which originated "in a world that was still safe" and supposed "that there was such a thing as one human nature established for all time" (*ibid.*, 456). Her argument here is that the form of instrumentalised thinking which sets the foundations for the rise of totalitarianism begins with reducing the human into the material of history, a movement which encompasses human life into the unfolding of a teleological form of politics. Consequently, this form of thought also requires the forgetting of the capacity that we have to act into history. Therefore although she praises Marx as a political thinker for basing his theory on a demonstrably "material human activity," (Arendt 1998: 183) she also considers such an analysis to be too shallow. What is needed is a historical analysis which goes beyond this, which is also attentive to the ways in which we have been alienated from those forms of activity that allow us to realise our disclosive capacities.

Arendt analyses how modern developments have led to the twofold alienation from both world and earth understood as distinct but interrelated concepts. She references three key events, the discovery of the Americas and subsequent global expansion, the Protestant Reformation, and the invention of the telescope, as waypoints along a path

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<sup>2</sup> A point which is reflected in the fact that the project of work which went on to become *The Human Condition*, began with Arendt's intention to provide a fuller commentary on the history of Marxism. See (Young-Bruehl 2004: 277-8).

tending towards increasing alienation from firstly the world and secondly the earth. This means that there are two key phases to the story that Arendt tells which chart the development of what she terms *modern society* and *modern science* respectively (ibid., 264). Although these two processes overlap she implies that there is a unique chronology underlying each, as alienation from the earth increasingly dominates science, world alienation is propagated through expropriation and wealth accumulation (ibid., 264). Arendt's distinction between world and earth bears the marks of the influence that she draws from Heidegger.<sup>3</sup> Though the former is a fairly common phenomenological concept (which she modifies significantly, as I will explore in the next section), the mechanics of bringing these two terms together is most prominently put forward in Heidegger's text "Origin of the Work of Art", where he defines the *work* like characteristic of the *art-work*. Heidegger explains how the artwork sets up the world and sets forth the earth, (Heidegger 1971b: 45) a claim which establishes an important reciprocity between artificiality and materiality. In setting up the world, the art-work creates a space of meaning for a people, whilst at the same time it renders the materiality of the earth in a particular fashion, where "rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to speak" (ibid., 45). Contained within this distinction is the characteristic play of concealment/unconcealment that is hallmark of Heidegger's thinking of Being (Villa 1996: 220-1). Whilst work sets up a world (as the Greek temple contributes to the establishment of the Greek culture and people), the earth constantly shrinks back into itself in a way that ever eludes command or mastery—it is an inexhaustible reserve. This thinking of earth informs Heidegger's critique of technology and modernity in ways that are important for Arendt. He explains how in contrast to the "technological imperialism" of subjective "man as a rational being in the age of enlightenment" who seeks instrumental "rule over earth" (Heidegger 1977b: 152), the creation of the art-work "does not use up or misuse the earth as matter, but rather sets it free to be nothing but itself" (Heidegger 1971b: 62). The 'work' of the artwork therefore consists in the cultivation of a certain 'free' relationship to the earth, which does not instrumentalise the materials but rather brings something out in them, or renders their materiality in such a way that shows something new about it. In this description of the art-work, Heidegger's critique of modern *praxis* is therefore clearly present, as the artistic process "is much more revelatory than it is creative", like Aristotle's account of "the carpenter [who] addresses [the] wood in which the form of the finished product is already hidden, that is, potentially present" (Sinclair 2011: 161). The form is already contained in the matter, the task of the artist lies not so much in instrumentalising the canvas and producing the artwork, but of an openness and receptivity to the material. This is where the 'work' of the art-work unfolds, in maintaining as Villa describes "a 'strife' between the 'world' and its primordial hiddenness [...] the 'earth'" (Villa 1996: 132).

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3 Macauley provides a very helpful discussion of the broad directions of this influence suggesting that "Arendt's contemplation of" these concepts "emerges directly from the shadows of Heidegger's reflections." Significantly, he also notes that "Arendt often gives these subjects a new phenomenological twist or adds a needed political dimension and insight where it is woefully lacking in Heidegger's work" (Macauley 2009: 29).

Though Arendt will appropriate the distinction between world and earth into her account of the modern age, she is heavily critical of the political implications of Heidegger's account. One way in which this can be witnessed is in the semantic uneasiness that lingers around Heidegger's concept of "dwelling", which plays a crucial role across his later works. This is a complex concept for Heidegger referring to the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and divinities, which explains how human beings come to dwell upon the earth (Heidegger 1971a: 147-9). Each of these terms implies the other establishing a complex relationship between our needs for stability, permanence and homeliness, whilst still accepting our essential finite condition and acknowledging a more open and contingent understanding of our relationship within nature. In the context of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, the Greek temple "holds its ground against the storm raging above it" (Heidegger 1971b: 41) meaning that the materiality of the earth needs to be rendered in the art-work in such a way that it comes to constitute a world, in which it is possible to live. It therefore implies the founding and preservation of a space: as he continues, "the work moves the earth into the Open of a world and keeps it there. The work lets the earth be an earth." This is, for Heidegger, how "historical man grounds his dwelling in the world" (ibid., 45). If we compare these descriptions to Arendt's usage of the term in *The Human Condition*, where she refers to the world of "human artifice" offering "mortals a dwelling place" (Arendt 1998: 152), it is clear that she does not appeal to the same intricate network of concepts that is implied in the later Heidegger's discussion of world and earth. For example, though Heidegger's Greek temple may set up the world, notably it is "the god [that] is present in the temple" (Heidegger 1971b: 40), as it does not simply institute a space of refuge by which people can live upon the earth. Therefore it is a fundamentally different inquiry to investigate the degree to which Heidegger's framework of world and earth maintains an interrelation between artificiality and naturality. Though Arendt retains a crucial sense of "homelessness" in her references to dwelling, one may wonder whether this may be more reminiscent of Heidegger's earlier concept of thrownness.

Yet upon further analysis it becomes clearer still that the distinction between world and earth in Arendt's account of the modern age distinguishes her position from Heidegger's, as she is heavily critical of the political implications of his account of 'poetic-revealing' which characterises the art-work (Villa 1996: 219-225). In particular, she rejects fundamentally the conflation of art and politics that she perceives in his later works, where the creation of the people and the polis is equated with the artistic revealing described in "Origin of the Work of Art." In this sense, she claims that Heidegger comes to prioritise the freedom of the earth, or Being over the freedom of the *polis*, or the freedom of the world (Arendt 1994a: 432-3). This is because the emphasis given here suggests a sense of politics which rests upon the moments of founding where the poet or statesman articulates the first principles by which a political community is brought into being (akin to Plato's articulation of *The Republic*). Consequently, politics of this kind can be described as a kind of 'plastic-art', concerned with the fashioning of a people, a description which fundamentally goes against the form of political action that Arendt advocates. The point here is that such a version of politics falls back into a teleocratic

conception, where the political community is established for a particular end or with a certain ideal in mind. As Villa describes this, “the result is that the fashioning or ‘fictioning’ of the community in conformity with an ideal of Justice is transformed into an exercise in self-production” (Villa 1996: 247). Following Arendt’s phenomenology will help us to see how her emphasis on the plurality of political action disrupts this account and how it highlights the dehumanising dimensions of such a form of politics, as it hollows out the claim that there can be such an ‘organic’ tie between any members of a community. Additionally, it foregrounds the potential damages done by revealing a question at the heart of the theme of community, which Heidegger’s account troublingly overlooks. As Villa further explains “the conundrum is simply put: the people, who do not yet exist *as a people*, must somehow always already be enough of a subject in order to author or fashion themselves *qua* community” (ibid., 247). Consequently, the construction of *a people* in this sense often requires the enforcement of one particular way of life over the whole population and the suppression of genuine political plurality in the service of an imposed consensus; a form of politics which fans the flames of all racist, chauvinist and colonial ideologies. We can stretch this same point out into two different directions: on the one hand, it objects to forms of politics stemming from a romantic desire to shape a world more in harmony with nature, characterised by the ideal of a ‘return to nature’. On the other, it carries with it a warning about the dangers of applying a more utopian logic to the construction of the polis, which promises to overcome natural limitations and to settle the question of climate change by liberating the capitalist economy from its carbon dependency. In both instances a form of productive *techne* is appealed to, where the real task of building the community falls to a particular class of people. Be it the poets, the artists, or the statesman, the political task is one of envisioning the will of the people into a collective identity, or a *volk*.

In drawing out such a critique, I suggest that we can begin to see one key way in which the distinction between world and earth operates differently for Arendt, which also brings to the fore her concerns about collapsing the artificial fabric of the former into the materiality of the latter. As was suggested above in the discussion of “dwelling”, the constitution of the world for Arendt points towards a drastically different conception of politics than Heidegger; by extension, I suggest that this implies a very different relationship with the materiality of the earth. This point is hinted at in her description of the twofold processes of world and earth alienation, where she writes as follows,

When the immensity of available space on earth was discovered, the [...] shrinkage of the globe began, until eventually in our world [...] each man is as much an inhabitant of the earth as he is an inhabitant of his country. Men now live in an earth-wide continuous whole where even the notion of distance, still inherent in the most perfectly unbroken contiguity of parts, has yielded before the onslaught of speed. Speed has conquered space [...] it has made distance meaningless, for no significant part of a human life—years, months, or even weeks—is any longer necessary to reach any point on the earth. (Arendt 1998: 250)

I suggest that Arendt's claim here actually implies two different senses of 'distance', one worldly and one earthly, both of which have been significantly devalued by the processes of alienation that she describes. Though her description accords broadly with something like a critique of accelerationism, she importantly phrases two different processes of acceleration, which refer to world and earth separately. To tackle the latter of these first, earth alienation refers to the growth of modern science specifically. Stemming from the Copernican realisation that the Earth is no longer at the centre of the universe, Arendt claims science reached an Archimedean point where "we always handle nature from a point in the universe outside the earth." Through this process, the Earth loses its significance as a planetary condition of human existence and is instead instrumentalised into mere raw-material, entirely malleable to science. As she continues, "still bound to the earth through the human condition, we have found a way to act on the earth and within terrestrial nature as though we dispose of it from outside" (ibid., 262). Arendt suggests that as we become increasingly alienated from the earth "it means that we no longer feel bound even to the sun [...] we move freely in the universe choosing our point of reference whatever it may be convenient for a specific purpose" (ibid., 263). The transformation therefore does not relate to a specific location (i.e. the planet Earth per se) but instead to the orientation that modern science takes towards geographical space and materiality more generally.<sup>4</sup> This escape from geographical space, Arendt claims, is in part due to the foundations of modern science and to the method of Cartesian doubt, that suggests we can abstract from the world of sense data to the certainty of the mind. Such a manoeuvre prefigures "the modern ideal of reducing terrestrial sense data and movements to mathematical symbols" (ibid., 265). This twofold escape from the earth and retreat into abstract rationalism characterises the transformation of space that takes place through the process. Earth alienation "is typified strangely by an historical expansion of known geographic and physical space which brings about, ironically, a closing-in process that shrinks and abolishes distance" (Macauley 2009: 22). The further we drive to expand the boundaries of human life beyond the planet the more we retreat into the realm of abstractions. At the same time the growth of abstract space instigated by our alienation from the earth is also the process by which we shrink back into the certainty of the self. What persists throughout this twofold movement is the divorce between the materiality of the earth and the rational; or rather the nullification of the former by the latter. Much like the descriptions of technology and planetary imperialism offered by Heidegger, as this process progresses the material space in which we live increasingly comes under the yoke of oppressive rationality and instrumentality (Heidegger 1977b: 152).

Though the process of earth alienation and the deformation of 'distance' that it describes is related to the same historical analysis that sets out the process of world alienation, Arendt importantly maintains a key distinction between these two terms.

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4 Macauley notes how Arendt's descriptions of earth alienation bear close resemblance to Heidegger's remarks in 'The Thing' about the abolition of distance failing to bring about the nearness of things. (Macauley 2009: 28-9) However, although Heidegger discusses the world in this text and processes of "worlding", the discussion implicates his account of the fourfold. Therefore, it cannot be said that there is the same distinction between two different types of "distance" as there is no separation, at least in the Arendtian sense between the natural and the artificial (Heidegger 1971c: 178-80).

Unlike the complex interplay suggested by Heidegger's account of the truth of the art-work and of dwelling in the fourfold, the question of 'home' means something fundamentally different for her. Arendt's discussion of world alienation indeed grapples with the themes of dwelling and homelessness, but it strikes a different tone by highlighting the dynamics by which certain groups of people have been deprived of their place in the world and exposed to the exigencies of life (Arendt 1998: 255). The modern age, according to Arendt, has deformed the artificial world in such a way that has eclipsed the "common public world" leading to "the formation of the worldless mentality of modern ideological mass movements" (ibid., 257). This claim pulls us into the heart of a point of contention between Arendt and Heidegger on the constitution of the world. For her, the political task of instituting the world is not simply a matter of founding a place in which a 'people' can say that they belong together. In order to resist the process of world alienation, such a space would need to preserve the phenomenon of 'distance' that she describes, an element of her thinking that crucially separates her understanding of politics from a teleocratic or 'plastic-art' politics. Just as technological imperialism has come to exploit the earth, such a politics could come to also dominate the world by instrumentalising the space in order to build it in the particular image of the people. Rather still, it places the emphasis of setting up the world solely into the hands of the artists or the statesman, whose primary responsibility lies not to the community but rather to the work. In such a description the polis is fashioned according to the work, meaning that the world and the space of dwelling is but a result of this founding process; whilst the founder sets up the world, the only duty that falls down to inhabitants is the task of conserving it as it is. Therefore, for the vast majority of people the world comes to be seen not as a political problem to be engaged with but a state of affairs to be tended to, to be maintained and preserved. Here I suggest that a world tinged with a sense of fatalism may, under an Arendtian diagnosis, stem from a failure to fully appreciate the distinction between the artificial fabric of the world and the materiality of the earth, because it fails to see how these distinct logics of distance operate within them.

Whilst the process of earth alienation shows the complex shrinking of geographical distance and expansion of abstract geometric space, the abolition of distance which characterises world alienation suggests something altogether different for Arendt, distinguished by its notably political consequences. To acknowledge the Arendtian account is to see the equal importance of protecting these two distinct things but to also see them as separate demands that we face. The artificial fabric of the world must be something fundamentally different to the materiality of the earth and therefore any environmental movement worthy of warranting the title 'eco-politics' in the Arendtian sense, will need to attribute equal importance to the task of preserving the former in its artificiality in addition to conserving the latter. Whilst the climate catastrophe forces us to re-think the ways that we may conserve the earth and our connection to it, the modern deformation of world raises a different problem. To understand what is at stake in the loss of the world, we need to take a renewed phenomenological appreciation of Arendt's concept, which can help us to see how this form of distance operates and further, to see how we may be able to preserve it.

### **Arendt's phenomenology of world: the artificial in-between**

Peter Gratton's recent suggestion that Arendt's thought from at least *Origins* onwards has been motivated by phenomenology highlights how her account of "totalitarianism operates by a sort of horrific parody of metaphysics." As he explains, totalitarianism refers to a closure of political space, that "goes beyond just the loss of 'plurality' marked by lawless tyrannies", instead utilizing terror to create "one Man" and not "men in the plural" (Gratton 2021: 99-100). His claim here builds upon the fact that her work is phenomenological, in the basic sense that it "accepts the premise that holds various phenomenological accounts together, namely, that there is no Being beneath appearances" (ibid., 98). The thread that he traces through her work is her commitment to the notion of a common world, which designates a public, shared space of appearances. Though commentators have long observed that Arendt's work carries basic traces of phenomenology within it, Gratton's idea of approaching her as a pre-dominantly 'phenomenological' thinker reflects a trend within scholarship that has become increasingly popular in recent years. There are good reasons for considering Arendt as a phenomenologist, firstly because, as Gratton indicates, it shows a continuity which cuts through the heart of the most important aspects of her thought, from beginning to end, threading together her discussions on the concept of world, totalitarianism and the network of political concepts she espouses. In the next section I will continue this thread by looking at how it relates to the concepts of freedom and dissent specifically. However, a second benefit of considering Arendt's work as primarily phenomenological, and what I will focus on in this section, is seeing the originality of her thought as it is held up against the background of the broader phenomenological tradition. Whilst she borrows much from the tradition to supplement her historical analysis, Arendt's discussion of world modifies the significance of the term in several important ways by highlighting the uniquely political dimensions of intersubjective existence; a contribution which warrants her inclusion as an original contributor to the field (ibid., 98). By approaching her work through phenomenology, we can see exactly how she builds plurality into the concept and how through this notion she preserves a sense of distance at the root of the world. Furthermore, in doing this she is able to emphasise the tragic elements and politically catastrophic aspects that may come to pass if we lose this sense of the world, characterised as a complex composite, an *in-between* space capable of housing genuine political plurality.

To set out how she arrives at this position, Arendt incorporates Heidegger's critical appropriation of Husserl, through the way that she builds upon the former's analysis of world, worldliness and worldhood. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger sets out his intentions to go beyond the Husserlian sense of the life-world by proposing a more primordial notion of worldhood which characterises Dasein's existence. According to Heidegger, the "ontologico-existential concept of worldhood" (Heidegger 1962: 93) is neither the world conceived as a composite totality of present-at-hand things, nor an all encompassing sense

of world expressing the Being of a multiplicity of entities denoting the realm of possible objects within the subject field (as in the ‘world’ of mathematics). On top of this, neither is it merely the “life-world” considered as “a ‘public’ we-world, or one’s ‘own’ closest (domestic) environment” (ibid., 93). Rather, Heidegger’s notion of worldhood stresses the dimensions by which Dasein is already-within-the-world, essentially belonging to it, so that any attempt to phenomenologically investigate the structures through which the world arrives for consciousness must already depart from this position (ibid., 93).

A similar point can be seen in Arendt’s rather harsh critique of Husserl (Arendt 1994b: 167).<sup>5</sup> However her concept of world also takes us beyond the Heideggerian reformulation in two specific ways. Firstly, her discussion of the ‘worldly’ realm of human affairs is fundamentally different to Heidegger’s sense of worldhood because there is a key change in emphasis from ourselves as appearing beings in the world, immersed in object and tool relations, to the intersubjective sense in which the world is created through interaction with others. Secondly, though she incorporates motifs of Heidegger’s critique of modernity, Arendt marries together the reciprocal points that because the world “can be actualized on different levels and with different emphases,” to “destroy it means to destroy the possibilities of human existence” (Loidolt 2018: 101) in a way that is suspiciously absent from his thought.

To help address these transformations in more detail, Sophie Loidolt has identified that Arendt’s thought actually contains three interrelated concepts of world (ibid., 98-9). The first of these she refers to as an “appearing world”, that posits “the primacy of world before Dasein” (ibid., 98): there is no beyond the fundamental space of appearance to which we belong inescapably. The second concept is identified as the “first in-between world” (ibid., 98), which can be considered as the world in a practical sense. It refers to the world of objects and objectivity and is the domain that Arendt specifies when she refers to the activities of world-building. In this sense of world, the emphasis is on stability and durability; we are *constituted by the world* we inhabit and through it we can dwell upon the Earth. Over and above these more Heideggerian senses of the term, Loidolt identifies the third concept as what she calls the “second in-between” which refers to the political “with-world” (ibid., 99) that Arendt intends to preserve. This second in-between differs from the first, as its phenomenological emphasis lies in its intersubjective constitution, it underlies how the world is a network of relationships which is “not tangible” (Arendt 1998: 182) but no less real. Though it may be comprised of invisible threads, this second in-between, which consists of the push and pull of intersubjective relations, contributes equally to Arendt’s concept of world. The second in-between, therefore highlights how these relationships are *constitutive of the world*.

Implicit in this third concept is Loidolt’s claim that Arendt’s commitment to phenomenology means that she affirms the view that the world is comprised of individual first-person perspectives, a point which she suggest protects the plurality of the world

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<sup>5</sup> Although it is also worth noting that it has been convincingly argued that Arendt misrepresents Husserl on this point. See Loidolt 2018: 26.

from falling into a mere superficial plurality (which could just mean the diversity of political opinions or positions in a given discourse). Instead Loidolt suggests that the phenomenological commitment to the first-person perspective is a prerequisite of the experience of genuine political plurality (Loidolt 2018: 83-4). Additionally, this phenomenological emphasis also heavily colours the way that she interprets Arendt's description of the 'common world' as an '*in-between*'. The effects of Loidolt's interpretation can perhaps be best seen by considering Arendt's metaphor of the table for the commonality of the world,

To live together in the world means essentially that *a world of things is between* those who have it in common, as *a table is located between* those who sit around it; *the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time*. The public realm, as the common world, *gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other*, so to speak. <sup>6</sup> (Arendt 1998: 52)

When read through the phenomenological commitment to the first-person perspective, the table quite clearly here stands in for the distance that is maintained between the individual experience of the inhabitants of the common world. This is an important point to consider as it will be crucial for the definitions of freedom and dissent that I will explore later. Whilst we will return to this point, we should note how this commitment to the first-person perspective characterises the way that we understand the artificial fabric of the world and how it maintains a notion of distance that is crucial to Arendt's understanding of the term, a point which is seemingly absent in Heidegger's notion of a '*people*'.

As Loidolt further points out, "these three notions of 'world' do not point to three different 'worlds,' but designate two interrelated fields of meaning within the one appearing world" (Loidolt 2018: 99). It is this nested understanding of world which presents Arendt's unique contribution to phenomenology, as,

She conceives of human beings neither predominantly as world-constituting beings (Husserl), nor predominantly as equipment users in the world (Heidegger), nor predominantly as artists interwoven with the flesh of the world (Merleau-Ponty)—but in *all of these dimensions* with an additional strong emphasis on the worldliness of acting together and appearing before one another. The world in its different dimensions is thus kept alive and made tangible by [...] human activities, and especially by the combination of *poiesis* [Work] and *praxis* [Action]. The latter provides the necessary components for the constitution of a cultural and historical world, which specifically describes the second in-between. (ibid., 99)

Phenomenology here helps us to break apart Arendt's definition of world, in order to see the complex composite space that it refers to. This refined definition allows us to

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6 Emphasis added.

understand how Arendt frames her concerns about the degradation of the world in a way that goes beyond Heideggerian and other previous phenomenological attempts to explore the consequences of such a loss. In one direction she leans into Heidegger, appropriating his point that where “Dasein’s facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed [*zerstreut*] itself or even split itself into definite ways of Being-in” (Heidegger 1962: 83). When Arendt claims that the modern world is increasingly worldless, this permits her, to make an existential claim rather than a categorical judgment, which is to say “it is not just a psychological ‘feeling’ people have which is caused and hence explained by some prior series of events” but “a shift in what it means to *be*, a shift in the underlying *experience* that we have of human existence” (Sandra & Lewis Hinchman 1984: 198). However, in a separate direction, her concept of world goes beyond this because it sets up the task at hand for her, “the necessity for a new political philosophy” which overcomes the “philosophers [...] estrangement from the everyday life of human affairs” (Arendt 1990a: 103). This stems from the realisation that the world consists of intersubjective action, which provides both the stability and durability of the ‘first in-between’ but also appeals to the “actualized plurality”<sup>7</sup> (Loidolt 2018: 189) of political action that characterises the ‘second in-between.’ Arendt’s historical analysis of modern society and the forms of expropriation and wealth accumulation that leads to world alienation is therefore attentive to both of these claims, as it points out that the loss of the world is also a loss of our capacity to make and re-create the world through intersubjective relations. This comes to be seen as a space which, if we follow the phenomenological analysis, mediates our commonality through a notion of distance. Phenomenology, therefore helps us to see what is distinct in the modern loss of the world, which is separate from our alienation from the earth. In the remaining sections, I would like to explore how phenomenology too can help us to understand how Arendt’s more overtly political work may, in the face of the environmental crisis, preserve the world.

### **Freedom and the world: ‘the paradoxical plurality of unique beings’**

If a renewed phenomenological appreciation of Arendt’s concept of world helps us to see how it is distinctive from the earth, then her political works provide further clarifications about how eco-political formations can remain mindful of preserving such a space, ensuring that it is not drowned out in the pursuit of a more sustainable form of life on the planet. The main thrust behind this interpretation is, I believe, the connection between the concept of world and the ever-present possibility of dissent which can be found via the notion of freedom that she endorses. Arendt describes freedom as “the

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<sup>7</sup> This is the term used by Loidolt to refer to the uniquely political form of intersubjective interactions that Arendt’s phenomenology creates the space for. By keeping politics in the mode of *praxis*, away from teleological conceptions of politics and away from a form of *poesis*, she argues this preserves a form of encounter between first-person perspectives which both maintains alterity at the heart of intersubjective relations and which evades falling into the trap of seeing the Other as a ‘what’ as opposed to a ‘who’. Loidolt draws out many of the ethical significances of such an interpretation and considers this to be a novel contribution to the field of phenomenology.

*raison d'être* of politics” (Arendt 1968: 146), as a complex notion which is vital to her understanding of political intersubjectivity and politics as occurring in a space of appearance; I suggest that this means that the concept has both political and phenomenological significance. She takes great pains to distinguish her notion of freedom from any definition that equates it with an “inner feeling” considered as “the inward space into which men may escape from external coercion and *feel free*” (ibid., 146)—a point which is reflected in her view that the individual will has nothing to do with political freedom.<sup>8</sup> Instead she suggests that such interpretations of freedom are derivative of a more originary public sense of the term, explaining how,

We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves. Before it became an attribute of the thought or a quality of the will, freedom was understood to be the free man’s status, which enabled him to move, to get away from home, to go out into the world and to meet other people in deed and word. (ibid., 148)

This means that for Arendt, freedom operates as a kind of enabling condition of politics rather than a particular theme within political discourses. Freedom is vital to the very occurrence of politics, as opposed to being “one among the many problems and phenomena of the political realm properly speaking, such as justice, or power, or equality” (ibid., 146). In contrast to descriptions of politics that centre around the goal of liberating oppressed groups, she claims, “freedom [...] only seldom—in times of crisis or revolution—becomes the direct aim of political action” as it is “actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all” (ibid., 146).

Freedom for Arendt requires consideration as an integral part of a conceptual web that she constructs, that links to her discussions of “action, politics, public space, speech, plurality [...] equality or isonomy, and power” which are “all interwoven [...] into an integrated whole” (Bernstein 1983: 207). Each of these parts refer to different characteristics of the type of space and web of intersubjective encounters that typify her understanding of politics. Moreover, freedom is linked to the concept of world because it implies a certain logic, which configures the abovementioned network of concepts in such a way that political intersubjectivity can occur. This is reflected in the fact that “not every form of human intercourse and not every kind of community is characterized by freedom” and that “where men live together but do not form a body politic [...] the factors ruling their actions and conduct are not freedom but the necessities of life and concern for its

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<sup>8</sup> This is an incredibly important point which has implications for her definition and defence of dissent. Arendt’s definition of dissent is fundamentally different in kind to more traditional liberal arguments which stress the importance of the capacities of the individual, basing their defences of rights and freedoms around such a notion, for example Isaiah Berlin’s concept of negative liberty. As the will is apolitical for Arendt, the ability to dissent cannot come from some kind of inner conviction but only from a form of collective phenomenon. Here I suggest that the most profound way that this collective phenomenon can be understood is by considering the ways in which it plays on the fragility and non-foundational nature of her understanding of the world. The right to dissent is not simply the right of an individual to withdraw from or object to politics but is a condition of worldly political life, in the sense that it serves as a criterion of the world—the present possibility of dissent maintains the world’s fragility, its openness and its incompleteness.

preservation” (Arendt 1968: 148). The establishment of a space for freedom supposes certain conditions to be met, so that such interaction can occur between genuinely equal perspectives.<sup>9</sup> For Arendt this requires the construction of equality, hence the root concept of *isonomia* that she draws on so that there is a reciprocity between the speech and action of those inhabiting the space. Étienne Balibar describes this point as “Arendt’s institutionalism” which is “not of the standard version” but is a reinforcement of the point that “rights are not, or not primarily, ‘qualities’ of individual subjects” but “qualities that individuals grant each other [...] whenever they form a ‘common world’” (Balibar 2007: 333). Freedom plays a key role in this unorthodox understanding of institutionalism, as for Arendt it is embedded into the logic of equality. The equality established between the members of the polis requires freedom because it must be mutually and freely granted between them. It is this dual interplay of freedom and equality through the notion of *isonomia* that guarantees the freedom of the world that Arendt describes.

It is worth pausing here to consider further how this definition of freedom shapes our understanding of her concept of world by returning to the phenomenology. As Loidolt has noted, the network of these concepts (of which freedom is of vital importance) points towards,

A special perspective, which is neither a ‘classic’ phenomenological first-person perspective (singular), nor an objectivist third-person perspective. Rather, it is a genuine perspective of *intersubjectivity*—the perspective from which social facts, stories, and histories can be conceived. [...] Arendt therefore approaches the issue differently, which does not mean giving up on [the] first-person or second-person perspective, but [...] integrating them into the starting point of the publicness of appearance. What results are the plural perspectives of all those who share a world where *doer/s* and *deed/s* appear. This pluralized perspectiveness of a shared world is primordial in character since it can never be derived from an addition or fusion of single first-person perspectives. Rather, it forms an *in-between*, which is filled by stories [...] all perceived in this arena of multiperspectival public appearance. (Loidolt 2018: 200)

This means that freedom occupies a somewhat strange but vital position within Arendt’s thought, as it can be said to have a tangible worldly reality under certain circumstances *when it is made to appear* in the world through action. Freedom therefore does not itself appear as a political concept but is made to appear in certain

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<sup>9</sup> In her response to Seyla Benhabib’s criticism of Arendt’s “phenomenological essentialism”, Loidolt explores the idea that her descriptions refer to differing dynamic “spaces of meaning” rather than a prescriptive account of human activities and their proper place in the world. Her use of the term spaces of meaning is intended to capture how “certain conditions have to be met to make an activity possible” so that these spaces develop “a certain logic [...] which functions in an orientating and structuring way.” Plurality is one such “meaning space” that Loidolt describes and the logic it entails requires the suppression of urgency and necessity, “in order to unfold as a space of freedom, creativity, and the unexpected.” Though I do not have space here to lay out this argument in full, it is on this basis that Loidolt argues that Arendt’s commitment to phenomenology is not different from the approaches of other philosophical schools of thought in that she aims to “state more than contingent facts” by exploring these “quasi-transcendental” spaces of meaning which interpret “the phenomena of history, sociology, and culture” as *world opening*” (Loidolt 2018: 124-43).

configurations of intersubjective relations. It consists of a blended space, which is neither entirely comprised through the action and speech of individuals nor the composite resulting tapestry of these words and deeds. Put differently, the artificial fabric of the common world integrates the first and second person perspectives by emphasising how these positions are both equally present in the process of actually appearing in a genuinely common in-between space which characterises freedom. The reality of the world consequently cannot be said to be weighted in favour of either side of this equation, it is neither the product of multiple first-person perspectives looking on the same space and neither does it efface the constitutive role that the first-person perspective plays on it.

Therefore, freedom is intrinsically connected to her discussion of plurality as it is conditioned by the very appearance of pluralised perspectives, at once disclosing them as the perspective of an individual but at the same time passing them through the prism of pluralism, of appearing amongst others; thus framing them as each unique in relation to their plural context. It therefore “comprises the paradoxical characteristics of equality and distinction, implying a plural uniqueness” (Loidolt 2018: 156). This is what distinguishes the political condition from others: our otherness from everything else that exists and our distinctness from everything else that lives is transposed into uniqueness, by the “paradoxical plurality of unique beings” (Arendt 1998: 176). The interplay of equality and distinction is of vital importance here because it prevents the form of “levelling” equality that Arendt is explicitly concerned about in her engagement with Marx and modernity (Arendt 2002: 300-307). Furthermore it is for her the paradox of plurality that constitutes the fabric of the free world because it relates individuals to one another whilst simultaneously respecting that there exists a distance between them; the in-between is the scene of this play of equality and distinction. Freedom is therefore concerned with how we appear and refers to a configuration of politics which is realized in its own unfolding, as it “expresses precisely this enactive quality in contrast to a static and substantive indication like ‘house’ or ‘stone’” (Loidolt 2018: 51). As Arendt explains, this means that “man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom” (Arendt 1968: 167). The immanent logic of political action that she describes where a ‘principle’ which is “much too general to describe particular goals [...] becomes fully manifest only in the performing act itself” places the emphasis of freedom in its actualization. The appearance of freedom therefore coincides with the political act (ibid., 152-3). As Loidolt has further noted, this amounts to the fact that freedom, plurality and the configuration of intersubjective relations entail “a contingent, non-necessary event” and that this state of “actualized plurality is thus always faced with the spectre of it sliding back into mere possibility.” Or furthermore it is “severely threatened by those who seek to destroy even this possibility” (Loidolt 2018: 51). When Arendt warns of a world where freedom has been suppressed, where “freedom lacks the world space to make its appearance” (Arendt 1968: 148-9) she warns of the effects of political attempts to contract the complex artificial fabric of intersubjective relations that constitute the world. I suggest that the loss of Arendt’s common world can be equated with the loss of this distance which is required by her mutual concepts of freedom and plurality. As freedom does not exist in something so tangible, the question

is: how can Arendt's understanding contribute positively to politics and to movements that wish to respond to the contemporary environmental crisis?

### **Eco-politics: preserving a world of dissent**

In order to answer this question, I would like to draw on Arendt's claim that "freedom always implies freedom of dissent" (Arendt 1972b: 78) to suggest that the task of protecting the artificial fabric of the world might amount to preserving our capacities to dissent from its givenness. I argue that this ever-present possibility of Arendt's world, orients it towards the contingency that she suggests politics proper entails. Dissent therefore can operate as a critical dimension of Arendt's phenomenology of world, which may serve as a useful concept for eco-political movements who wish to build a more just and sustainable world, who would be hesitant to utilise a reference to an organic or naturalistic tie, that can be used to re-anchor our existence on the planet. Instead, I suggest that preserving a world of dissent may constitute a kind of parallel re-enchantment with the artificiality of the world as an inexhaustible reserve, analogous to the earth, which demands politics for its deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction, and which furthermore acknowledges the groundless task of instituting a community.

Arendt most thoroughly sets out this aspect of her thought in the essay on "Civil Disobedience." Whilst towards the end of the essay she turns her attention to focus specifically on the phenomenon of American civil disobedience, what I would like to draw out of her argumentation are the ways in which she links the question of world to the possibility of dissent (which is a distinct aspect of her concept of freedom). In this regard, the essay contains a fascinating meditation upon the necessity of both change and stability for her account of the human condition. Supporting her claims about the accelerating rates of expropriation, Arendt maintains that "change is constant, inherent in the human condition, but [that] the velocity of change is not. It varies greatly from country to country, from century to century" (Arendt 1972a: 102). She asserts that it is only in the modern age where we developed a notion of "change for change's sake, under *the* name of progress" and further that "ours is perhaps the first century in which the speed of change in the things of the world has outstripped the change of its inhabitants" (ibid., 78). In such remarks Arendt seems to be critical of accelerationism, suggesting that we may be becoming fundamentally unable to adjust to the rate of technological and economic development that extends through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This would align her with a more conservative tendency to call for a project of restoration which seeks to reinstate and preserve historical values. However, when we return to the phenomenological content of her account it becomes clear that she is attempting to establish a more nuanced position. Rather, what interests her primarily is how the political dimensions of our worldly existence traverse between these two tendencies. As she describes,

Man's urge for change and his need for stability have always balanced and checked each other, our current vocabulary, which distinguishes between two factions, the progressives and the conservatives, indicates a state of affairs in which this balance has been thrown out of order. No civilization—the man-made artifact to house successive generations—would ever have been possible without a framework of stability, to provide the wherein for the flux of change. (ibid., 79)

Though Arendt here writes about customs, manners, habits, regulating legal systems and institutions, these aspects of human life correlate to the notion of world; they are the 'man-made' elements which allow us to dwell upon the earth. Pushing against theorists who would maintain that the law is a wholly restraining force, she re-affirms her commitment to human disclosivity claiming that such a misconception comes from the perception of those living in a society of rapid change, where the law appears to be out of date or outmoded for the society it governs over. Instead she places the emphasis of change firmly within the sphere of political action, pointing out that it is due to years of collective action, organizing, striking and often violent disobedience that we have established bodies of labor legislation. On the basis of these observations, she re-affirms that laws only "stabilize and legalise change once it has occurred" because "the change itself is always the result of the extra-legal action" (ibid., 80). Change here refers to an inherently political phenomenon; namely political action's capacity to bring about a change in the constitution of the world, a point which establishes a certain fluidity to the artificial fabric of the world.

This claim goes against more common interpretations of Arendt's concept of world, associated with stability and a conservative tendency, by inserting dissent into the heart of it. It is of crucial importance for the defence of disobedience that she offers, and her argument that the consent required to establish a political community always implies dissent.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, it is an aspect of key significance for the form of world that she endorses, writing,

One who knows that he may dissent knows also that he somehow consents when he does not dissent. Consent as it is implied in the right to dissent [...] spells out and articulates the tacit consent given in exchange for the community's tacit welcome of new arrivals, of the inner immigration through which it constantly renews itself. (Arendt 1972a: 88)

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10 Arendt provides a good description of the type of 'fictions' which bind social groups and communities together in *On Revolution*, where she distinguishes between a contract of reciprocity and presupposed equality established between the mutual promises of members and the type of contract that is established in the constitution of a new government. In the former power is replayed back to the members of the contract as "such an alliance gathers together the isolated strength of the allied partners and binds them into a new power structure." In the latter, vertical contract however, each member "gives up his isolated strength and power" over to the delegated ruler. Such a description helps us to further see how dissent is operative in relation to consent; each term implies the other because both pull on the reciprocal connections that allow a collective 'fiction' to be constructed through the mutual promises and equalities that establish the political community. As we shall see further dissent is the ever-present possibility of that community to call into question its own fictional origins. See (Arendt 1990b: 170).

Therefore it is the ever-present possibility of dissent which actually assures the openness and contingency of the free world for Arendt, as it takes an intersubjective construction that prefigures or sets the conditions of its own undermining. I suggest that the possibility of dissent is a key part of the artificial fabric of the world that she seeks to protect because its presence relies on the fact that there is freedom, distance and plurality, allowing the world to exist between our tendencies for change and stability. Drawing such a conclusion does not downplay the role of consent in Arendt's account of politics, which occupies a place of key theoretical significance, meaning that people can "act in concert" (Arendt 1998: 179). Furthermore, consent is also vitally important practically speaking for the formation of political movements, which must harness the power of consensual political action in order to form the kind of coalitions necessary for politics. Rather, my focus on the linkage between her descriptions of dissent and her concept of world is to suggest that an openness to or presence of the possibility of dissent plays a democratically constitutive role, in that it can act as a kind of negative barometer which can be used to measure the presence of plurality within our political institutions—something which is a prerequisite of genuinely democratic society. In order to experience the world as free we need to experience the sense that it could be different, that it implies a plurality of possibilities and that we have a practical openness to these possibilities. It implies that a key ingredient in Arendt's understanding of world is its fragility—it needs to remain acutely aware of its own precariousness. The protection of the free world necessitates the preservation of dissent as an ever-present possibility. This fragile world implies something fundamentally different to the 'world' discussed by Heidegger, as the world is not just a founded space in which a 'people' can commune but is instead a space permeated by difference and distance.

By bringing together Arendt's phenomenology of world, her entangled definition of freedom which implies plurality and equality, and finally this description of dissent, we can understand what contemporary environmental political movements may need to protect in order to preserve the world in the Arendtian sense of the term. Freedom implies dissent and in the more ordinary sense it also refers to something wholly other than the freedom of the individual will. The implication of this point is that the political phenomenon of dissent cannot simply be equated with the functioning of an individual's inner conviction to withdraw their consent or object, (Petherbridge 2016: 978-9) but with a more public and collective phenomenon. I suggest that Arendt's thought opens out into a unique interpretation of the term dissent by understanding it within the context of an intersubjective construction. The phenomenological interpretation of world that Arendt offers is much more complex than a simple space into which individuals can either opt into or opt out of; we are fundamentally both of the world and our political intersubjectivity serves to constitute the world. The world is a multiperspectival space of appearance, it is comprised of first person-perspectives and yet it transcends beyond a mere fusion of views. Additionally, it contains both a first in-between, consisting of an objective and practical world, and a second in-between, through which our plurality constitutes a with-world. This refined phenomenological understanding of the world helps us to see precisely how dissent operates for Arendt and how the world may exist

between the dual tendencies for stability and change. By relying on the first and third levels of the world—pointing to a phenomenal space of appearance and the manner in which we are bound together in the ways that we constitute the world—dissent can throw into question the second level by articulating how the objective world, which provides stability, may be under threat. The key point that I would like to emphasise is that the dissenter never acts alone and their desire “to change the world” (Arendt 1972a: 77) carries with it certain phenomenological conditions for their action. The dissenter necessarily pulls on the threads of the world which binds them to others. Dissenters manipulate the artificial fabric of the world in such a way that amplifies the distance between its inhabitants by appealing to the concepts of plurality and freedom. In this manner, political intersubjectivity serves as the motor which allows us to transcend the mere ‘givenness’ of the world, instead revealing its expansiveness, contingency and inexhaustibility.

This distinction between the materiality of the earth and the artificiality of the world may be a useful point to recall in contemporary debates concerning environmentalism. As the pressure mounts to transfer towards a global post-carbon economy, our attention turns to the ways in which we can reverse and bring to a halt the destructive processes of expropriation that have accelerated the present environmental crisis. To one degree or another, this involves fundamentally re-orientating our relationship to the Earth and imagining ways we can live on the planet beyond our present form so that we no longer unsustainably exploit natural reserves and produce increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions, resulting in irreversible damage to ecological systems. Within both the present tendencies to suggest that we need to fundamentally re-orient our relationship with nature, so that we may find a more sustainable way of living on the Earth, or the promise that we may overcome certain ‘natural’ limitations through the embrace of ‘clean’ tech and the digital economy, we construe the environmental crisis as a problem to be solved through the reconfiguration of human life. In doing this we may miss what is a more political problem, which has underwritten the modern era and led us to the present moment. The distinction between earth and world forces us to confront this question from the other side, starting from the premise that there is a measure of artificiality to this task which will necessarily involve political decisions about how we may want to live. As eco-political movements seek our re-enchantment with the earth, we may also need to be re-encharmed with the world, as a political space permeated by distance and openness to plurality and freedom, if we are to rechart the current trajectory. This is not to say that we need to deny our earthly existence if we are to embrace our political capacities but to recognise that human life, “earthbound”<sup>11</sup> as it is, is a complex weave of naturally given and artificial elements. Environmentalist movements sensitive to this point should be weary to consider the world in their endeavors to reconnect with the earth; meaning that they should embrace the contingency and incompleteness of the world, as opposed to the systematic closed network of interconnections that we may understand under the term ‘globe’.<sup>12</sup> The appeal of Arendt’s phenomenology of world is that it reveals the complexity

<sup>11</sup> For a further discussion of this term within Arendt’s thought see Belcher & Schmidt 2021: 105.

<sup>12</sup> Such a concern echoes what Oliver Marchart identifies when he discusses the distinction between “*globus*” and “*mundus*” in the context of anti-globalization political movements. Marchart warns of “the fatal notion of

of this artificial space, helping us to see what may be at stake if it is overlooked in contemporary discussions. Seeing the artificiality of the world as distinct from the materiality of the earth may prove to be useful for preventing a conflation of de-individuation and dehumanisation (Last 2017: 83) in environmentalist debates as it emphasizes how “the *same institutions* that create rights, or better said allow individuals to become human subjects by reciprocally granting rights to each other, also *destroy* these rights and thus threaten the human” (Balibar 2007: 734). Understanding how the fabric of the world is woven together in such a way that it permits the dissent of the inhabitants to call into question the constitution of this space may help us to see how the world persists through the moments of deconstruction and re-construction anew.

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