

## **Circular Politics: Potentials, Limits and Boundaries of an Arendtian Nature-Politics**

*Marie Wuth*

PhD candidate at the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Early Stage Researcher at the Centre for Citizenship, Civil Society and Rule of Law at the University of Aberdeen

### **Introduction**

Turning to Hannah Arendt for questions concerning the relation between Nature and politics and more precisely environmental issues, sustainability and ecological politics may be surprising.<sup>1</sup> Neither does she offer a philosophy nor a politics of Nature and is rather known for her demand for a politics that is public, free and intersubjective (Schaap 2007, 65-66) and accompanying attempts to delineate the political from the social and private realm than for her preoccupation with natural matters. Any claims concerning Nature-Politics and how Arendt would have replied to our current environmental crises, are therefore merely speculative. *Prima facie*, Arendt rejects Nature as a site of politics and area of action. Moreover, the purpose of politics, namely freedom, and the meaning of action, that is to make a new beginning, are diametrically opposed by the necessity and irresistible, incessant cycles that Arendt associates with Nature.

There are yet rich discussions on Arendt's possible critique and position on the climate crisis, environmental politics and the future in the Anthropocene (Chapman 2007, Cannavò 2014, Weißpflug 2019, Belcher/Schmidt 2020).<sup>2</sup> Consonant with contemporary environmental activists and theorists, Arendt was profoundly concerned about the rampant consumption, exploitation of natural resources and predominantly violent posture toward Nature that she observed. She anticipated the sinister consequences of an estranged relation to the planet paired with rapid technological development under the sign of Nature's subjugation. In this article I echo the conviction that Arendt is a valuable interlocutor for conversations on Nature-Politics. I shall demonstrate that Arendt helps us to argue for a sustainable model of Nature-Politics against the background of the climate crisis.

---

1 I am grateful to Maxim van Asseldonk for his response to an earlier version of this text, and to Henrike Kohpeiß, Vicky Kluzik and Jason Bustos for helpful comments. I am especially indebted to Julian Ahlers for sharing his knowledge and care for our natural environment with me.

2 The term Anthropocene describes the current geological era where human beings have become one of the most powerful geological forces. As coined by Crutzen and Stoermer, this age began with the Industrial Revolution and is characterised by the anthropogenic climate change and human-induced impact on Earth (cf. Trischler 2016).

As Bonnie Honig proclaims, Arendt is a theorist of dynamic and potentially activist politics well suited for addressing the question of how one can counteract current environmental catastrophes (1992, 215). Her emphasis on action and tireless efforts to uncover the conditions of this uniquely political activity in order to preserve it, can provide guidance in times of crisis like these, which poses an imminent threat to the basal conditions of actions and politics respectively. I shall argue, that in order to sustain the possibility for future action and politics, our earthly habitat as well as the natural processes and natural cycles of our Earth Systems need to be preserved and cared for. Therefore, it is pivotal to acknowledge the environmental crisis and the part human beings play in destroying Nature. The pressing circumstances in which human beings find themselves today urge them to take a new posture toward Nature and change their relation from exploitation and domination to respect and care.

To set this forth, I will appeal to what one could call Arendt's conservative side which I detect in her posture towards technological development and emphasis on the necessity of "a stable and lasting environment for the enactment of freedom" (Buckler 2011, 107). I shall draw upon Arendt's conservative posture regarding technological progress since it can provide the ground for an environmental conservatism in her thought which can lead the way towards a sustainably progressive Nature-Politics. Thereby, I do not deny Arendt's radical insights and, importantly, I do not claim Arendt's position to be ideologically or politically conservative. With and against Arendt, I will argue that the necessity for a stable natural environment enables one to regard Nature not only as a site of labor and external to public life but as a theme of political action. In an Arendtian manner, I will argue that this endeavor can only succeed if human beings orient themselves toward boundaries. Boundaries play a vital role in Arendt's thinking which, one might say, is shaped by and enfolds around boundaries. For Arendt, boundaries demarcate limits and potentials, they can be concrete such as the temporal boundaries of birth and death that mark a lifetime or like the local boundaries between the *agora* and the *oikos*. Furthermore, they can be more abstract and of conceptual nature such as the boundaries between the private, social and political. In this paper, I shall critically engage with the latter but especially with her demarcation of "the World" and Earth or Nature, respectively.<sup>3</sup> I shall demonstrate, that boundaries may be softer than they appear, that they not only separate but connect things, and that they are contestable. However, I will not replicate Arendt's sharp conceptual boundaries but instead introduce a sustainable ecological concept into her theoretical framework: that of "Planetary Boundaries." I suggest, that in times of climate crisis Planetary Boundaries are suitable to demarcate what Arendt hoped to protect with her boundaries: a safe space for action. Eventually, the Planetary Boundaries concept may lead us toward a new vision for politics and for how

---

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the text I use capitalization for names, such as Earth, and for concepts, which I introduce in combination with quotation marks, and they should be assumed afterwards. I do so to make concepts, such as Circular Politics, visible and, furthermore, to pay attention to specific configurations and momentous implications. Probably the most important case in this text is the notion of world. I use "the World" to mark Arendt's specific understanding and conceptualization which should be understood as a (im-)possible world that is neither a neutral term nor free from presuppositions or mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, domination and oppression. Thereby I follow, at least in part, Tyron Palmer's way of capitalization and usage of quotation marks (Palmer 2020, 273).

coexistence in and with Nature can be possible in times of climate change and environmental crisis. By means of this concept and with reference to Arendt's understanding of Nature, I shall propose a model of Circular Politics that is oriented towards said Planetary Boundaries in order to preserve leeway for action and agency, respectively. Thus, despite its aim for circularity and appeal to Nature's urgency, Circular Politics pursues to sustain the conditions for the possibility of action and thus remains true to the meaning of politics, which is freedom.

### **World, Earth and Nature**

The launch of Sputnik 1 into space was a sensation of such rigor it gave rise to a period of public anxiety referred to as the Sputnik Crisis. Only a few months after it had started its journey in Kazakhstan, at that point part of the former Soviet Union, the first manmade satellite fell back into atmosphere. The sheer excitement and tension it had caused, especially in the context of the ongoing Cold War, was not marred by Sputnik's short appearance (Andrews/Siddiqi 2011). Arendt's opening remarks in *The Human Condition* shed light on the reasons for the sizeable responses toward Sputnik, stating that it was humankind's possible release from Earth which Sputnik announced. Humankind, Arendt claims, perceives the Earth as a prison, and so the appearance of Sputnik on the horizon was associated with relief, because science finally seemed to confirm that outer-spatial dreams need not to be fantasies and that the emancipation of man from the Earth was no megalomania but a possibility. Arendt sees this endeavor, the emancipation from Earth, as striking for the 20th century because that is the time when men, in an attempt to visit the Moon, started to become alienated from themselves, the Earth and their common World. Her writing is driven by the man-made atrocities of her time and her concern for the World in its modern form which, according to Arendt, politically began with the first atomic explosions at the beginning of the 20th century. To counter the alienation characteristic of the modern World she aims to decipher how human beings relate to their environment, to the planet they inhabit, to the Nature they are part of and to the space they enter when they come into the World.

To grasp the complex ways human beings relate to their surrounding Arendt distinguishes between Earthly Nature and the common World and, in that context, natural and worldly activities that represent the very modes human beings interact with their environment. A preliminary note should emphasize that there is no clear and conceptually sharpened distinction between Nature and Earth, and the terms partially coincide in her writing. By Earth, or Earthly Nature, Arendt refers to the natural environment of human beings. In *The Human Condition* Arendt emphasizes that human beings, at their very core, are earthbound creatures. Therefore, the Earth is the very quintessence of the human condition (HC 2). Life on Earth, Arendt further explains, is only possible by virtue of three fundamental activities: labor, work and action. Through labor human beings provide the necessities of life that are the things required to satisfy

their physical organism's needs. To an extent, and in her own idiosyncratic manner, Arendt follows Locke's and Marx' understanding of labor as an eternal necessity which is the mediating link between Nature and man. Marx discusses this basal notion of labor in the beginning of *Capital*, emphasizing that this understanding of labor stands independent of all forms of society as well as political and historical processes (MEW 23, 49-59). In this understanding Marx, and subsequently Arendt, echoes Locke, for whom the labor of one's body is an inalienable part of the life process whereby natural goods are transformed to fulfil the most basic biological needs of the human body (Locke 2003). Following this line of thought, Arendt determines the essence of labor to consist in material reproduction and thus in the maintenance of the natural organism. As part of the ever-recurrent cyclical movement of Nature, it is the most "immediately life-bound activity" and in this sense the most "natural" of all the human activities that compose the *vita activa* (HC 110). Consequently, the products of labor, just as natural things in general, have no durability because they almost immediately return into the natural process of life and decay (HC 96). Thus, in their role as *animal laborans* human beings pay their tribute to Nature and the human condition of life itself.

In order to not merely languish on Earth but to make a home, give meaning to their existence and, furthermore, to be able to respond to the other fundamental existential conditions, human beings need to build a world through work and action. The material foundations of the common World are the objects that man produces through work, the activity that corresponds to the human condition of worldliness (HC 7). Work designates all those activities whose products represent the reification of an artistic, technical, or craft activity and whose appearance is permanent as they escape natural wear and tear to a certain extent. The relative permanence of their existence, which likely exceeds the duration of their production and lifetime of their authors, lends them the objectivity that presupposes the constitution of the World. Arendt claims, the reality and reliability of the artifice that is the human world stems from continuous processes of reification and the worldliness, that is the degree of permanence, of human-made things (HC 95-96). According to her, the World of artificial and durable things is humankind's home on Earth that houses each individual life and, concomitantly, outlasts it (HC 7). The material production and constitution of the World is the basis for the emergence of the immaterial space of appearance in which people can act. Consequently, to be in the World is necessarily both immaterial and material.

Arendt states that action is the only primary activity in which people are actually engaging with one another and the only specifically human activity of the *vita activa*. In contrast to production and work, activities in which people to an extent also engage with one another e.g. through cooperation, action is not bound to a purpose and takes place between people. Because action is a mode of human togetherness, it is tied to the condition of human plurality (HC 175). When humans act, Arendt elaborates in her iconic interview with Günter Gaus, they weave a thread into the web of human relations (1964). By speaking and acting, with words and deeds, human beings reveal who they are, take initiative and bring something new into the common World (HC 176-177). Because action

takes place in the web of human relationships, “with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions”, and holds the possibility of starting something new, it is to an extent out of the control of the agent and, thus, unpredictable (HC 184): Each action affects other people, causes another action and sets off numerous processes which cannot be undone (HC 190). At the same time, there is an implicit requirement for actions to be comprehensible, as Weißpflug highlights (2019, 244). This requirement is not only laid bare by the necessity for actions to be accompanied by words, but also by the human capacities to forgive and to promise, without which the unforeseeable and irreversible consequences of action would be unbearable.

Connected to this is another aspect Weißpflug points out, which is that understanding our actions is essential to retain confidence in the World and to not fall prey to a radical loss of meaning—a development Arendt especially fears in the face of technological and natural scientific progress. Eventually, Arendt suggests, the progress in natural sciences not only surpasses the progress of humanity, but heralds the end of humankind and Nature altogether (OV 30). Arendt’s sometimes conservative posture towards technological and scientific progress needs to be read in the context of the disturbing impact and usage of technological innovations in modern capitalist societies, especially in regard to the imminent threat they pose to freedom and human dignity. Her conservatism, however, is not a simple rejection but a defensive gesture that stems from her concern with the fatal consequences of unleashed processes of change. Nuclear weapons, to take one of the most prominent examples in her texts, encapsulate the double threat toward the World and to Earth connected to the overtaking of humankind’s progress by natural scientific progress. The danger of nuclear power, from this perspective, consists in the unpardonable devastation it can bring to interpersonal relationships as well as the relation to Nature and humankind’s bond to Earth. On the one hand, Arendt’s demurs regarding the pace of technological progress allude to the asynchronous technological development and the simultaneous inability of people to keep up intellectually and ethically. On the other hand, her remarks also refer to the fast-moving and short-lived nature of things, which only allows one to assign significance to them to a limited extent. Only if human beings can ascribe meaning to the things surrounding them is it possible to maintain the material and immaterial conditions of the World and, thus, to account for the condition of worldliness. Increasing meaninglessness and growing incapacity of understanding, however, inevitably lead to a state of alienation not only from the world, but also from the consciousness of our earthboundness, as the example of Sputnik illustrates.

Securing the inheritance of the past and leaving a legacy to the future in a stable and lasting World, requires change that preserves, to echo Chapman (2007, 436). Not the sheer number of things, but their meaningfulness and intelligibility is what human beings require to not become alienated from their World and to be mindful for the condition of their existence, that is their bond to Earth. Arendt is indeed wary of the dissolution of the World as a consequence of incessant cycles of appearance and disappearance of things in a total consumer society (Cannavò 2014, 264-265).

These transformations of humankind, the progressive alienation from Earth and annihilation of the World, are linked, as Belcher and Schmidt correctly observe, “to the transformations wrought by acting into nature under the dual pressures of capitalism and technoscience” and thereby “nullified modernist conceits separating humans from nature” (2020, 1-2). To act into Nature, which according to Arendt humans only began in the modern World (BPF 58), is decisive in this context. What changed once men started acting into Nature under the pressure of technoscience and capitalism was the mode of social reproduction whereby human-induced natural processes were unleashed (Belcher/Schmidt 2020). As Arendt elaborates, the formerly linear and purposeful manufacturing of artifacts has turned into cyclical processes of wasteful consumption and production. Thus, when human beings started acting into Nature they began to severely endanger the permanence of the World but the Earth as well (HC 150). We have come to a point where we “look upon ... every tree as potential wood” (HC 158). In other words, we treat natural resources as well as artifacts without care, but as things free for our own disposal. It is this posture towards Nature and the world that “harbors the grave danger that eventually no object of the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption” (HC 133). This profit-oriented capitalist way of living is accelerated by modern natural science and technology. When humans started acting into Nature they “carried irreversibility and human unpredictability into the natural realm, where no remedy can be found to undo what has been done” (HC 238).

Regarding the topic at hand, that is how to find an account of Nature-Politics with Arendt, I suggest interpreting her skepticism towards technological progress as a conservative posture that regards technology not unequivocally as a means of liberation but realizes the potential for destruction of our natural environment involved in technological progress. Paired with her accentuation on stability, her concerns regarding acting into Nature can be interpreted as a plea for environmental conservation.<sup>4</sup> Nature and Earth do not only precede human existence but are the condition for the constitution and maintenance of human existence in its material and immaterial dimension. As Arendt states, the quintessence of the human condition is to exist on Earth and to be part of Nature’s cycles. Nevertheless, it is also an imperative part of the human condition to transcend Earth and Nature. Cannavò argues, that humans have a torn relation to Nature since they must concomitantly transcend and resist as well as preserve and embrace their boundedness to Earthly Nature. Therefore, the way humans relate to Nature is characterized by care and violence (2014, 253). I echo the interpretation that the relation between humankind and Nature, understood as a mutual bond, involves care. But the case is more complicated regarding violence which, on my reading, should not be embraced as Cannavò suggests. The violence humans experience in form of fatal natural

---

4 In Environmental Sciences conservation is understood as a way of protecting Earth's natural resources. How environmental conservation can be achieved depends on the respective water, land, resources, and cultures as well as local and geopolitical contexts (Gadgil/Berkes/Folke 1993). I regard conservation of Nature as a regulation of human interaction and ways to be mindful about the coexistence with and in Nature. The term protection does not imply a dualistic relation between humans and Nature that would suggest an anthropocentric ecological approach. Rather, conservation is a way to care for the natural environment we are part of, to protect biodiversity, to respectfully interact with Nature and to refrain from exploitation and domination.

events is also caused by the dreadful way humans are acting into Nature. Undoubtedly, on Arendt's account, our relation to Nature should be characterized by stability *and* transformation. A stable natural environment is pivotal, but so is the transformation of Nature to make her inhabitable for human beings who are otherwise subject to the arbitrary powers and destructive forces of Nature. There is, however, a difference between these powers and forces and events in Nature that are caused by anthropogenic climate change and therefore violent.

For Arendt, the transformation of Nature is also necessary because human beings would not be able to give meaning to their existence without a world of durable things that provides a home and stage for words and deeds. But if the common World, the place where we are born, act and die, is built into Nature, then Nature is the prerequisite for the space of action. Therefore, the harmonious coexistence with and conservation of Nature is undoubtedly constitutive for the emergence, existence and maintenance of the common World. Thus, the necessary transformation of Nature needs to be kept within limits and conducted with care.

Adopting this posture would imply that our concerns today should be directed towards Nature and her conservation, which means to act into Nature guided by principles of care and sustainability. This can only be achieved if Nature becomes a site of politics and thereby issue of collective action. There are already examples for this like Fridays For Future protests or the Kyoto protocol. Collective actions can take different forms, sometimes minor, sometimes major, in different places. It is, nevertheless, crucial that actions are collective because power arises only when people come together to act in concert as Arendt notes. Thus, effective transformation for a more sustainable and environmentally friendly politics is best achieved when it is part of a collective agenda. In this regard, I suggest that Politics should especially learn from Indigenous and local knowledge for Nature's conservation and environmentally sustainable ways of coexistence. The ways in which Indigenous People care for Nature, connect to land, water, forests and especially protect biodiversity can serve as guidance for collective actions in sustainable Nature-Politics.

In order for Nature—and thereby I mean the natural environment, the Earth, and what is designated “natural”—to become topical for political action in an Arendtian framework, it is inevitable to first of all challenge her notions of the World and Earth. This challenge, however, is less radical than it might appear at first sight. Indeed, following Arendt, only what is part of the public sphere of appearance, that is the World and not Nature, can become a matter of politics. But, as Chapman's acute reading of Arendt demonstrates, Nature can be a part of the World and make an appearance when we give attention to it (2007, 437). To put it differently, Nature and World are not strictly separated from each other but inseparably connected. Similarly, Cannavò highlights that Nature is not merely a source of resources but can be a source of meaning in an Arendtian framework (2014, 261). Today it appears indisputable that humans attach meaning to Nature, when at the same time it is obvious that the way human beings have acted into Nature in a manner

that is more aptly described in terms of domination-driven exploitation than necessary transformation of Nature. Likewise, it is inevitable that Nature intervenes in the World with the greatest urgency and transforms this World in response to excessive human transformation. This is not only visible regarding inequalities, poverty, climate migration and the devastation of human habitats that are linked to environmental crises, but also to the immaterial aspects of the World that are the structures of feeling and thought. In contrast to the 'givenness' of the Earth, the Arendtian World comes into appearance through actions, thoughts, and artefacts (Chapman 2007, 437). This means, that the World to a great part is an accumulation of relations, actions and thoughts. With regard to environmental movements, concerns and action plans it is undeniable that Nature has become a pressing sorrow and viral topic of people's actions and thoughts. In respect thereof, Nature is a central part of the World or, to put it differently, the natural is part of the social and political. This assertion not only challenges what is considered political, but implies that Arendt's boundary between Nature and the World cannot be maintained. In connection with this observation the question arises which structures and mechanisms in Arendt's framework prevent this delineation and Nature as such from becoming topical, or more precisely politically topical, and to what end. In this course, Arendt's concerns for the common World become concerns about *the* World she portrays.

### **Concerns about *the* World**

Arendt's concerns in *The Human Condition* pertain to the permanency, durability and survival of the common World. Nevertheless, the World Arendt describes and the concept she develops cause serious concerns already, and part of the destructive powers she observes are built into the mechanisms and structures she enshrines herself. In order to demonstrate that Nature is in fact a site of politics it is crucial to critically reflect upon the World and its underlying constitutive mechanisms. Not least the current environmental crisis, which is indeed connected to other political, economic and social structures and problems, demands a critical engagement with the Arendtian concept of the World. This move proceeds with Arendt against Arendt, utilizing the basic structures and mechanisms her understanding of World is built upon and challenging her exclusionist and at times violent understanding. The possibility for this critical yet appreciative transformation is based on the observation that Arendt develops a sociogeny, to borrow Frantz Fanon's apposite concept (2008), of the World that understands this 'home on Earth' not in terms of a fixed, ontologically given entity but as a phenomenon bound to relational practices and mechanisms of Worlding. Consequently, there are possibilities to reconfigure the World and, in this context, what it means and how it feels to be earthbound, too.

The Arendtian World is a place under construction, full of artefacts, relationships and stories. It is meant to be open, to be home, and it is meant to be common. But for some it is a place with insurmountable borders whose rigidity stands in opposition to the vibrant web of words and deeds that makes this World a space of appearance for others. Arendt is



well known for the strict and rigid boundaries she drew between the private, everything natural, and the public realm, which is essentially the World, composed of the social and political. Thus, her distinctions of the public/private and social/political are directly linked to the activities and conditions of human life and conceptions of the World and Earthly Nature. In this context, the formerly mentioned differentiation between natural and worldly activities can be re-formulated as world-making and world-enabling activities. Since Arendt's understanding of the public sphere is tied to the World as a space of appearance and meaning, the world-making activities of work and action are situated in the light of the public. The only activity that escapes the public sphere and is performed in the private realm is labor, as well as all other activities related to the cycles of biological life.

Not everyone is affected by these categorizations, differentiations and connected exclusionary structures to the same extent. What is considered to be *the* World is, in fact, a question of belonging in and to this sphere of appearance, as well as a question of recognition and exclusion. Arendt's World is not the home of human beings but the home of those recognized as human, the home of those who are free from providing the means to satisfy their biological needs. It is *the* World of those who can afford to work and act, who are seen and heard and who want to insert themselves in the web of human relations. Not only who belongs to the World becomes a pertinent question, but also to whom the World allegedly belongs and who possesses it. Worlding presupposes labor and those who till the soil upon which this World is built have too often been deprived from the opportunity to work and act in it. Despite the fact that labor, understood as the activity that provides the necessities for maintenance of the biological life, is underdetermined as it disregards e.g. forms of immaterial labor (Hardt/Negri 2004), the most problematic aspect about Arendt's conception is the implicit exclusion of those who have been banished from their land, who have lost their worldly possessions, who were bereft from the possibility to acquire property, whose bodies were turned into tools and who thus lost the freedom to be active beyond Nature's urgency.

However, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri evince, labor does not solely consist in the production of material goods but comprises the constitution of social life (2004, 109). With respect to domestic work they further elaborate, "what has been traditionally called 'women's work,' which takes place in the private realm and requires repetitive tasks, "also involves producing affects, relationships, and forms of community" (110). In other words, labor enables forms of life and relations that go far beyond reproduction. It is neither an asocial nor an unworldly activity, but brings together knowledge, traditions and wisdom from the past while providing for the future. It is precisely in this regard, that labor is an intrinsically political activity and its exclusion from politics is deeply distorted. In other words, the relations between Earth, Land and World as well as the relations between those who enable the World through 'the labor of their bodies' and those who have a worldly appearance are part of the web of relations and affairs that determines a World.

In this context, it is evident that the critique towards resource exploitation and violent acting into Nature does not pertain to humankind as such just as much as the mechanisms and structures of worlding have had and still have very different meaning and consequences for different groups, actors and those confined or deprived of their agency. Arendt's World, in other words, is *a* World but not *the* World. It is a colonial, capitalist and white deformation of a World which, among other things, is already expressed in the definite article and implicit universal claim. *The* World has a self-evidence and givenness to it which conceals its actually artificial character. In his discussion of Blackness and the paradigmatic relationality of affect, Tyrone Palmer takes issue with conceptions of the world that depict world as an absolute, encompassing and immersive relational web. "This logic forecloses, by definition, an understanding of intensities that shatter and rupture relational capacity: intensities that do not register as worldly connection but point toward an essential expulsion from the World" (2020, 248). World, understood in these terms, coerces relations and, at the same time, "precludes a reckoning with the vicissitudes of Blackness" (248). Palmer carves out the unmarked whiteness and racial logics underlying processes and mechanisms of Worlding (251). "The World", he states, "is never a universally available conception. Being-in-the-World is articulated along the lines of race, and Blackness marks the limit, the constitutive outside, of the World" (259). The instrumental character of the World-concept, according to Palmer, consists in the abjection of Blackness "as a sign of the unworldly" (260). Whereas Palmer convincingly argues that the concept of the World is untenable, and the hope for another world and ways of worlding might be naïve, there might still be a chance to hold onto the concept to point out the axes of oppression and struggles it contains. Pointing out not only the web of relations that exist within the World but on which it is built upon, which relations are exploited and concealed as well as highlighting the relative, contingent character of world configurations, might be a first step in this direction.

The Arendtian World is not immune to this critical endeavor and its boundaries are a testimony to a colonial logic. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt's comments on 'savagery' attest to that: "If the tragedy of savage tribes is that they inhabit an unchanged nature which they cannot master, yet upon whose abundance or frugality they depend for their livelihood, that they live and die without leaving any trace, without having contributed anything to a common world, then these rightless people are indeed thrown back into a peculiar state of nature" (OT 300). The speech of 'rightless people' exposes a colonial racial perspective that goes along with a dismissal of other forms of life, formation of meaning and, above all, exclusion from the World. The implicit devaluation of Nature and what is designated natural, but most of all the rendering of human beings as worldless, were dreadful then and are intolerable today.

Another aspect showing that the boundaries of this World and its exclusion mechanisms cannot be maintained is the outdated definition of the World as a human artifice that separates humankind from their natural environment (HC 2). As Clark emphasizes, problematizing the Anthropocene is as much about stressing human beings and actions as geological factors as it is a move to decenter human beings (2014, 25). It is,

thus, vital to understand that the World is not detached from the natural environment and does not exclude non-human beings. In her *Denktagebuch* Arendt discerns two different approaches toward politics that have been prevailed: One starts from the nature of man, the other from the nature of power, and while the first was highly subjective from the beginning, the other was subjectivized (DT 21). With regard to natural disasters and connected social, political, as well as economic woes, neither the one nor the other approach is suitable for politics today, which should no longer be centered on the subject. Instead of aligning politics with the nature of something, a politics of Nature is what is urgently needed. To decenter the subject in politics is equivocal with focusing on relations—not only between subjects but between different beings, non-human and human, as well as their connection to Nature. Instead of focusing on an individual or subjective nature, Nature should be thematized as an all-encompassing meaningful source of life that does not merely host individual beings but is the condition of the plurality of being and provides the spaces to act and live.

### **Politics' Soft Boundaries**

The issue Arendt's boundaries raise for considerations regarding Nature-Politics is that Earthly Nature, from her perspective, is not a part of the public realm. Nature, according to her various placements of activities, categories and subdivisions, does not become topical in the realm of the public and is, thus, also excluded from politics. But, as mentioned earlier, Arendt is well aware of the circumstance that it is not within man's power to fully exclude Nature from human affairs. Moreover, as Honig accentuates, Arendt's understanding of politics and action offers the resources to contest and politicize her distinction between the public and private realm (1992, 215). Indeed, the aforementioned boundaries and demarcations are not absolute, and instead of solely focusing on what Arendt aims to exclude from politics and the public sphere, attention should also be paid toward what she aims to protect. Following Honig, Arendt's differentiation between the public and private spheres serves not only to exclude labor and all affairs connected to Nature, but also to protect activities that serve the immediate preservation of life from exposure to politics and action (223). For by removing all natural and world-enabling activities from the light of the public, Arendt also prevents them from being the subject of public debate and political decision-making.

Arendt's demarcations are an attempt to free the political from the grip of the social and the bureaucracy, but also from the ruins of totalitarianism. Symptomatic of these events and developments is the experience of alienation, coordination and equalization, resulting in the suppression of the possibility of appearing as who one is in the public sphere; an experience Arendt depicts as a central part of the modern World. Above all, however, for Arendt it was especially totalitarianism that not only heightened these trends to the grotesque, but also exposed the incapacity of political philosophy. The unprecedentedness and sheer incomprehensibility of this political experience exposed the

anachronous and inapt character of usual categories of political thought and traditional moral standards (BPF 26). Since antiquity, political philosophy has been shaped by the dictates of metaphysics. In Arendt's view, this not only had fatal consequences for the understanding and meaning of political action, but also plunged any thinking about politics into inauthenticity. The extrapolation of a "pure" and authentic concept of the political therefore requires an approach that departs from metaphysics and thus also from the western tradition of political thought.

The greatest shortcoming Arendt discovers in the Western political tradition is its narrow focus on the individual and its ignorance of "the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" (HC 7). Thereby, she acknowledges plurality, the primal diversity of all men, as the "*conditio per quam* of all political life" (HC 7) and her critique of the Western tradition of philosophy, specifically political philosophy, adheres to the widely spread ignorance regarding this fact. Human plurality demands organization and thus makes politics necessary, but it is also the condition of politics since it is *the condition sine qua non* for the public realm (HC 220). The public realm, a room of appearance, is the space where people have the possibility to come and act together. In this vein, plurality is at the same time the condition not only to politics, viz. the political but also to action: "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (HC 8). For Arendt, plurality is more than a mere fact; it attests to the equality and distinctness of human beings (HC 175). Concomitantly, Arendt's relational conception refuses any individualistic narrowing and has no resemblance to a loose collection of unique, atomistic individuals. Plurality is bound to interaction, communication and living in the presence of others (HC 201). For Arendt, it is "the acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization" (HC 202).

Her critique of the Western philosophical tradition also pertains to the predominant relation between theory and practice, and philosophy and politics respectively, which she perceives as a relation of domination of theory over practice (Promise 2005). This critique reflects her quest for a politics that is not characterized by relations of subordination and domination, as also highlighted in Arendt's emphasis that the principle of the political is equality (HC 33). Arendt aims for a horizontally organized political community of equals who can act together in concert and concomitantly reveal their unique characters with words and deeds. Next to equality and plurality, the other condition vital to political life is natality which encapsulates the possibility of new beginnings, and which is performed when people are speaking and acting (HC 176). As plurality, natality is so crucial for Arendt's model of the political because it is closely interlinked with action and thereby also with plurality. She elaborates, that with the birth of each human being something entirely unique enters the stage of the world and it is this unique beginning that action corresponds to. Analogously, speech answers to distinctness and actualizes the human condition of plurality (HC 178). By acknowledging natality, plurality together with equality as the conditions of political life Arendt's vision of politics proves to be rooted in

human experience instead of abstract notions. In order to ask about the conditions of political life, it is inevitable to affirm and turn to the common World. Not least, her critique of metaphysics therefore concerns a certain posture and referral to the World and theorizing of being which prevents metaphysics from reflecting and including experiences in theory-formation. This becomes particularly problematic when applied to political theory, because it introduces a hierarchical relation of theory over practice that not only risks to blindside struggles but also hampers the possibility to understand and address them.<sup>5</sup>

Arendt's boundaries were built upon the experiences of her time and responded to a specific crisis and context. However, if the boundaries Arendt drew between the political and the social, the public and the private, were already controversial in her lifetime, they are no longer tenable today. It is, nevertheless, crucial to remember that Arendt's boundaries are not absolute: they are products of agonistic exchange and not ahistorical. Thus, they do not establish indefinite separation. As Honig mentioned regarding the separation of the public and private, Arendt's apparently rigorous distinctions resist any a priori determination and are indeed up for politicization, alteration and amendment (1992). Arendt is a thinker of boundaries, but these boundaries cannot be irrevocable and eternal if they should respond to the changes and consequences of human action to simultaneously protect and enable action. That is, limits become counterproductive the moment they endanger rather than enable action and politics respectively. Arendt's boundaries are thus not aligned with metahistorical truths and metaphysical structures, but with the realities of a world and living planet. Therefore, it is not only up for debate where boundaries run, but also their conceptual nature and the scope of what they demarcate needs to be revalorized. Arendt's distinctions are inherently contested, and it is the deliberation and negotiation about what belongs to and characterizes the political that is crucial for politics.

### **Planetary Boundaries**

Arendt set the aforementioned boundaries in order to better understand the events of her time and to find orientation based on these demarcations. Given the current circumstances it is indeed uncertain whether Arendt would draw the same boundaries today, continuing to exclude social and natural issues as well as private matters from the realm of politics with the same rigor. Thus, instead of reaffirming the specific boundaries that Arendt drew in her time, it would be a matter of problematizing boundaries and rather understand them as conceptual figures for thinking about a world and the coexistence in and with Nature. For Arendt, it was clear that social questions and bureaucracy had stretched the boundaries of politics to a degree where politics became unauthentic. Today, it has become apparent that humankind is stretching the boundaries

---

<sup>5</sup> Arendt is undoubtedly neither the first nor the last political thinker to whom this criticism applies. Similar problematic and oppressive structures and patterns of thought can be found in the works of her theoretical reference figures such as Aristotle, Hobbes, or Locke.

of the planet to a point where it is not only perilous but inevitably damning. Taking into account the issues and challenges of the Anthropocene, scholars have pointed out that the human-induced transformations of the Earth and the increased frequency and scale of environmental disasters have put the continuation of political life at stark risk (Clark 2014; Belcher/Schmidt 2020; Honnacker 2021). This insight cannot avoid naming the influence of growth-oriented capitalism and technological progress delusion in Western industrialized countries as essential stress factors. As Honnacker (2021) shows, it is the way of life in capitalist Western industrialized countries, which for too long was considered a desirable model of success, that has been revealed to be dysfunctional and destructive on both local and global levels. It is therefore a certain form of world-making, material and immaterial, which threatens the bond to Earth as well as the very basic existence of Nature. Thus, it is possible to say that the world-making activities have acquired a dual state as they have become increasingly destructive regarding their natural conditions and the requirements of worldliness. Considering the ecological crisis, and connected social, economic but also political struggles and tilts, in the Anthropocene it is about time to reevaluate the conditions and possibilities of action as well as the realm and scope of politics. In light of the dawning nuclear threat to all organic life Arendt acknowledges the need to alter political concepts and conceptual tools indeed (Promise 2005, 145). Furthermore, as Belcher and Schmidt emphasize, for Arendt science was a political matter and arena of human action and her concept of the political is indeed open for scientifically informed approaches since she “considered science politically, as domain of human action, while remaining alert to its tendency” (2020, 4).

In light of the devastating consequences that humankind’s acting into Nature in a heavily transformative, exploitative manner brought about, the political landscape is in need of new boundaries that adjust and protect a safe scope of action within the limits of the Earth. Therefore, I shall turn to a concept which focuses on the planetary boundaries of the Earth System to explore humanity’s safe operating space (Rockström et al. 2009; Steffen et al. 2015). The concept of Planetary Boundaries denotes a sustainable ecological and social concept that offers a global approach toward environmental change due to anthropogenic impact on the Earth System. This concept aims at providing an orientation for a different governance and management to combat and stop human induced irreversible change on the ecosystem and climate of the Earth. For this purpose, environmental science has identified nine boundaries that relate to nine processes regulating and stabilizing the resilience of the Earth System. These boundaries are climate change, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone, biogeochemical nitrogen cycle and phosphorus cycle, global freshwater use, land system change, chemical pollution, atmospheric aerosol loading and the rate at which biological diversity is lost. Their selection is premised on what research has found to be the most serious consequences of human induced environmental global change. Based on calculated dangerous thresholds, or estimated dangerous levels, as indicated by control variables specific to the respective processes of the Earth System, researchers have positioned Earth’s boundaries.<sup>6</sup> However,

<sup>6</sup> In this context, thresholds are understood as “non-linear transitions in the functioning of coupled human–environmental systems [...] such as the recent abrupt retreat of Arctic sea ice caused by anthropogenic global warming” (Rockström et al. 2009, 32).

in some cases, due to inevitable uncertainties and lack of research, thresholds cannot be calculated precisely and we rely on estimated dangerous levels and zones of uncertainty.<sup>7</sup>

The Planetary Boundaries, which inevitably involve normative judgments regarding societal life in times of risk and uncertainty, are set at a safe distance from these dangerous levels or global thresholds. According to Rockström et al., the position of a boundary serves a dual function. On the one hand, it depicts “the degree of risk the global community is willing to take, e.g., how close to a uncertainty zone around a dangerous level or threshold of an Earth System process humanity is willing to place itself [...]” On the other hand, it is “a function of the social and ecological resilience of the impacted societies.” (2009, 32) The latter may include the ability of certain communities to cope with consequences connected to the transgression of a boundary that may threaten their local agricultural or economic supply structures. The concept, thus, takes the self-regulating power of Earth System processes into consideration, but also the social-ecological resilience and consequences at both a global and local level. Undoubtedly, these boundaries are quantitative and, to a certain extent, hypothetical. Therefore, they cannot account for specific circumstances and power constellations present in local communities and global networks that might hamper resilience or built upon the marginalization and oppression of groups.

The concept does, however, see the intersection of global and local changes on an ecological-environmental level and can serve as an orientation for a shift in governmental practices. Although the concept itself does not make specific governmental proposals and, moreover, takes a holistic approach, there are examples of approaches that attempt to adhere to the limits of Earth System processes such as Circular Economy Action Plans or Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets. Nevertheless, Rockström et al. put pressure on the circumstance that undeterred by the proven and increasing disastrous anthropogenic impact on the Earth System most governance is too ignorant toward the planetary risks and intertwinement of global and local ecological developments (32).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, I contend, it is crucial to acknowledge, that the global ecological disasters we face nowadays are entwined with ongoing colonial, capitalist structures and it is vital to tackle exploitative governance and unsustainable development. Indigenous knowledge has been recognized as an invaluable contribution and complementation to forestall and counteract the collapse of forest ecosystems, wildfire and biodiversity loss (Lambert/Mark-Shadbolt 2021). Nevertheless, to find political agendas and governmental

---

7 Planetary boundaries are, to a certain extent, responsive and flexible due to their interconnectedness and the self-regulating powers of Earth System processes. This implies that transgressing a boundary may severely impact other boundaries and endanger the safe operating space for humanity. At the same time, if the transgression does not endure for too long, there are possibilities for regeneration. But no boundary can be exceeded for too long. Hence, the perils of severe social and environmental impairments may be averted if humanity is devoted to operate within all planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009, 32). Thus, it is vital to be mindful about the limits to human induced transformation as well as the boundaries of the Earth which, as Arendt reminds us, is the very source of our existence and the bond that connects each individual being.

8 Since the introduction of the concept, further research has provided evidence that global and subglobal dynamics have contributed to an increasingly critical position in relation to three boundaries: biogeochemical cycles (encompassing phosphorus and nitrogen cycles), land-system change, and freshwater use (Steffen et al. 2015).

strategies that strengthen ecological but also socio-political resilience it is pivotal that indigenous knowledge and practices of coexistence, resource, land and water are integrated respectfully and appropriately (cf. Irlbacher-Fox 2014; Lambert/Mark-Shadbolt 2021). In other words, it is crucial to find decolonial approaches to conservation so that the means and ways for Nature conservation are not perpetuating socio-political relations of domination, exploitation and violence (cf. Gadgil et al. 2000; Popova 2013, Maldonado et al. 2016).

Becoming and living out our boundedness to Earth is a way of acknowledging the relations we have to our social, political and natural environment and affirming that only collectively we are able to persevere. Being aware and remaining within certain boundaries of the Earth should not be interpreted as a restriction of or impediment to human action, but as the facilitation to live in a meaningful and lasting world that can be a home for future diverse generations. Given the evidence of the Earth System's resilience and stability in the Holocene, the concept highlights, that "humanity appears to have freedom to maneuver in the pursuit of long-term social and economic development" if the planetary boundaries are not surpassed for too long (Rockström et al. 2009, 32). The call associated with this concept is predominantly targeted at politics, especially in Western dominant industrialized countries, and is not intended primarily to contribute to the moralization of individual decisions. However, it should be evident that people can act most effectively in collective association because, as Arendt elaborates, power solely arises when people act together (OV 44). Thus, cooperation is the only way human beings can actively contribute to the observance of Planetary Boundaries. The governmental measurements and targets that serve these purposes won't guarantee any success or security, but these collective efforts at least carry the promise to try to enable other people to live on this planet.

### **Circular Politics**

To meet the challenges and profound problems posed by the urgency of environmental change, a political practice is needed that is oriented toward the boundaries of the planet. Such politics must be committed to the circularity of Nature, that is in Arendt's words "the circular movement of biological life" (HC 19), and actively seek to contribute to the resilience and stability of the Earth System. With reference to the concept of Planetary Boundaries, I would therefore like to propose another concept linked to the goal of sustainable ecological practice, that is "Circular Politics". This is a telluric concept oriented toward Nature's force flows, pursuing an immersive politics that enfolds within Nature, on and underneath the earthly surface. Not to overcome or dominate Nature and Earth but to be mindful about resources, transformative thresholds and capacities of regeneration is key for a Circular Politics that moves in ante-expansionist processes oriented toward Planetary Boundaries. Instead of boundlessness, Circular Politics strives for mindfulness about the bonds between beings, human and non-human, as well as to



land, water and Earth's natural resources. By orienting politics and political action toward Planetary Boundaries the circularity of Earth System processes becomes the core principle of this Nature-Politics that emphasizes a way of living with and acting into Nature in accord with her circular movements.

To align politics with Nature's circular movements seemingly annihilates the basic conditions Arendt defined for action and politics, namely to be spontaneous and make new beginnings. Furthermore, Circular Politics seems to rather contribute to the concerns Arendt articulated, namely the collapse of a permanent and durable world. At times, Arendt presents Nature's cyclical movements as threatening, pulverizing forces of pure necessity that are opposed to any change, awakening or ending (HC 96). The monotony of repetition connected to Nature's dynamics seems to make it impossible for human beings to reveal their unique selves with words and deeds. It is precisely the circularity of Nature which agents try to escape and to oppose by creating a world and setting new beginnings. In this regard, Circular Politics appears to be opposed to the purpose of politics, that is freedom. The urgency and necessity of Nature's demands are not only contradictory to politics but render it impossible in Arendt's view. Her distinction between necessary demands and the practice of freedom, as her discussion on poverty and the French Revolution testifies (OR 54), stems from her conviction, that bodies and their urgent biological needs jeopardize the conditions of freedom once they enter the public sphere (Landes 1995, 200-201). As Honig elaborates: "When demands are made publicly on behalf of the hungry or poor body, then the one individuating and activating capacity that humans possess is silenced. There can be no speech, no action, unless and until the violently pressing, indeed irresistible, needs of the body are satisfied" (1992, 218). The body is a helpful example in this context as the most powerful necessity human beings can be aware of is the life process flowing through their veins (OR 59). The body is one example to demonstrate the extent to which it is essential to meet the needs of Nature and to transcend the boundaries between the natural, the social and the political in order to make political life possible at all, which is the goal of Circular Politics. Otherwise, if the basic needs of a body's organism cannot be met, if bodily integrity cannot be safeguarded because of famine, homelessness, lack of resources or lack of work, the possibility of political participation is unachievable. At this point, the biological and natural come into the political in the shape of social and environmental issues. This is a movement Arendt might have feared or seen, according to Linda Zerilli, as a flow that "sweeps away the solid, common world of citizens" (Zerilli 1995, 176). However, it is not these problems that endanger *the World*. Rather, they point to the problems that can be attributed to the tension between the fact of being earthbound on the one side and the structures and mechanisms of worlding and a particular way of life on the other. Hence, instead of banishing these issues from the political, the task would be to carve out the inherent misalignments and dynamics of a world that threaten political life by endangering the livelihoods of people and destroying the habitat common to all, which is at the same time the conditional space of politics, namely Earth.

Therefore, it is essential that natural and environmental issues, which on one hand often impose themselves in a most intimate manner, preventing people from occupying themselves with more than bare necessities, and which on the other hand are always also social, economic as well as political, are addressed by politics. Yet, it would also be an illusion to believe that the grievances and catastrophes of Nature and structures of the World, in their material and immaterial articulations, could be kept out of politics. Referring to Arendt's formulation of the "unnatural growth of the natural" (HC 47), Zerilli posits in her discussion of the public exclusion of 'Arendtian body': "But like the mythical Pandora's jar that, once opened, could not be closed [...] there is no border that could possibly (re)contain such a body and put it back in its place. This body transgresses all human borders, including those between public and private, nature and culture" (1995, 177). The 'Arendtian body', that is the body of the laborer, worker, and agent, not only incorporates the tension arising from the separation of Nature and World but makes it untenable. Zerilli depicts this body as "the space where the Word fails" (177). Arguably, not only the Word, but the World itself fails when it denies a space to appear *or* forces to appear as a social issue, instead of opening up the possibility to be a political agent.

Circular Politics, in this respect, is also meant to stand for a political orientation that takes into account the necessities of Nature as we experience them most intimately. As Arendt herself notes, the inescapability of Nature is most vividly experienced in the affective desires and natural needs of our bodies in form "of an overwhelming urgency" (OR 59). Today, we cannot afford to ignore the urgency of Nature's demands in light of anthropogenic excessive transformation and increasing destruction of our planet.

In this context it should become apparent that if problems caused by environmental catastrophes such as famine, land destruction, climate flight and migration are taken into consideration as geopolitical issues, this yields a holistic approach that does not start from the isolation of certain spheres of life, but rather tries to take into account the interconnection of social, political, economic and ecological factors. In this perspective, boundaries appear to be blurry and shifting. As in the case of the Planetary Boundaries concept, the boundaries present in Circular Politics first and foremost denote connections. Here, too, we seem unable to do justice to Arendt's aspirations for a political that is segregated from the social and discrimination in this sphere. Against this, it can be argued that Circular Politics attempts to bring this into view and to strive for a condition that more closely approximates Arendt's vision of a horizontal community of equals. At the same time, the ecological aspect of Circular Politics is also only part of the picture, and more needs to be written about the concrete social injustices associated with certain mechanisms of world production and destruction, such as ongoing coloniality and exploitation, which are essential in a geopolitical approach.

The outlook that the concept wants to give is the promise for more participatory, non-hierarchical and collective practices that respond to the fact of human plurality and affirm the equality of different people. In this sense, Circular Politics is synonymous with adopting an Arendtian attitude towards Nature and world respectively. To the extent that

sustainable and environmentally friendly politics aims at sustaining and building an environment in which action beyond the present is possible, in which people can come together and make promises to each other, Arendt's activist politics and emphatic notion of action could effectively support such an agenda. In this sense, Circular Politics takes up on the spirit that underpins Arendt's writing, that is, a spirit that wants to actively care for and protect what is threatened.

The aim of this approach is the safeguarding of the natural preconditions of action and, concomitantly, to direct the way human beings act into Nature in a sustainable direction that is characterized by careful ecological transformation. In this regard, it echoes Arendt in condemning the fatal, wasteful cycles of consumption and production as exploiting natural resources and endangering politics. The latter, however, does not issue from the invasion of circularity into a world and politics but from threatening Nature's circular movements. In other words, wasteful consumption and production cycles imperil Politics *because* they menace Nature. Thus, it is crucial to differentiate between artificial, dreadful circles and natural, necessary circles since the latter enable and the former jeopardize our livelihood. Only attesting to the necessity of Nature-Politics can ensure the conditions of freedom.

Instead of reiterating Arendt's boundaries, this version of Nature-Politics incorporates Planetary Boundaries to secure the conditions of political life. Letting go of Arendt's boundaries between the social and political, the World and Nature, the public and private also widens the scope of political action and agency. In other words, to become an agent, to participate and influence political change is not bound to occupation, position or institution. Understood in terms of collective practice, Circular Politics may encompass social movements as well as covenants and governmental decisions as long as they are grounded in the pursuit for an ecological and sustainable way of coexisting with and in Nature.

One of the consequences of the climate crisis that Circular Politics seeks to counter is the narrowing of the scope for democratic politics. As Honnacker aptly points out, democracy is under double pressure in face of the climate crisis. On the one hand, the belief and trust in a democratically achievable ecological turnaround is deeply shaken and demands for authoritarian solutions are growing louder. On the other hand, the scope for democratically coordinated policies is becoming increasingly limited in the face of global warming (Honnacker 2021, 36). Honnacker emphasizes that democratic ways of life can only be sustainable if ecological issues become central topics of political decisions. Then, and only then, can it be guaranteed that there will be a scope for action in the future for future generations. However, in order to bring about the ecological and sustainable transformations that are needed regarding the ways of living and acting into nature, especially in dominant Western industrialized countries, these must be of a democratic nature. Honnacker convincingly argues that in order to avoid future constraints on action, a democratically legitimized social transformation is needed. Above all, this alludes to a form of problem and conflict resolution that aims for wide participation and deliberation,

and refrains from instrumental violence while recognizing the structural violence inherent to the denial of climate change and environmental crisis-related issues, such as poverty and migration (2021, 41-42). Against this background, the concept of Circular Politics would be an attempt to take the precarity of democratic forms of life seriously and to recognize the significance of political participation for sustainable ecological transformation.

## **Conclusion**

Arguably, to orient politics towards Nature, a decidedly non-political area for Arendt, crosses the boundaries she drew between the political, the social, and the private in order to find an authentic politics. But Nature also provides the ground for a common world, including the arenas and backrooms of politics. So we must overstep Arendt's boundaries if we want to maintain the conditions under which co-existence and collaboration on Earth are possible. The proposed concept is itself a response towards boundaries, more precisely Planetary Boundaries. The latter describe boundaries within which humanity can continue to exist when we ensure their integrity.

In this way, this approach follows a gesture by Arendt: in order to enable and preserve action and the space of the political, there is a need for boundaries to which activities and thinking are aligned. However, these are no longer the boundaries between the social and the political, the private and the public, but those of the Earth. In order to counteract human alienation, the loss of world and destruction of Nature we must orient ourselves to these boundaries and align our thinking and actions to them. Only then can we ensure that we can continue to give promises and come together in the future. To orient our political agendas towards these sustainable concepts enables a change of policy that considers human beings as earthbound and respects Nature's limits. The genuine Arendtian move is to refrain from domination and exploitation of Nature's resources and instead to refocus on the conditions under which we live and cohabit the Earth.

Circular Politics can take the form of agreements, covenants or treaties which can certainly not assure careful ecological transformation and respectful coexistence with and in Nature, but function as guiding promises in the attempt to build a world that can have a meaningful future for existing and coming generations. As Arendt elaborates, "binding oneself through promises, serves to set up in the ocean of uncertainty, which the future is by definition, islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships between men" (HC 237). Promises, and for Arendt this includes contracts, treaties and constitutions, may be contingent (Canovan 1958, xix) but also allow for a level of accountability that introduces some stability and direction. Circular Politics, in this sense, aims to enable future collective action in two ways: through certain agreements but also through the active attempt to care for and respect the ground upon which human beings exist. Nevertheless,

understood as collective political actions and practices, Circular Politics is neither limited to an institutional network nor bound to an agent's title or rank but it may well include environmental movements and forms of activism. As politics becomes a much more open and diverse interplay of forms in this concept, it pushes Arendt to the limits but emphasizes the potential of her relational, emphatic and plural approach towards political action.

As I hope to have shown, circularity, once included into a Nature-Politics agenda, can indeed help to abide by Arendt's conservationist stance and respond to the concern for the Earth and a common world. At the heart of Circular Politics is the conviction that instead of striving for domination and exploitation humankind should aim for a well-balanced relation between care and transformation of Nature. Circular Politics is a politics of relation and a call to acknowledge and embrace our coexistence with and in Nature. The demand to refrain from violence and for respectful interactions, and this is pivotal, also refers to our relations with others. Human beings can only persevere and flourish in concert and in accordance with Nature and her circular movements. It is crucial, as Arendt makes clear, that we keep and value our connection to the Earth, which also means that we align our attitude towards Nature with our position in Nature. For we do not stand opposite Nature but are part of it.

## Literature

Andrews, James T. / Siddiqi, Alif A. (Eds.): *Into the Cosmos. Space Exploration and Soviet Culture*. Pittsburgh 2011.

Arendt, Hannah: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951]. New York 1973, cited as OT.

Arendt, Hannah: *The Human Condition*. Chicago 1958, cited as HC.

Arendt, Hannah: *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* [1954]. New York 1961, cited as BPF.

Arendt, Hannah: *On Revolution* [1963]. New York 1965, cited as OR.

Arendt, Hannah: *On Violence*. New York 1970, cited as OV.

Arendt, Hannah: *Denktagebuch. 1950 bis 1973*. Ed. by Ursula Ludz / Ingeborg Neumann. München 2002, cited as DT.

Arendt, Hannah: *The Promise of Politics*. Ed. by Jerome Kohn. New York 2005, cited as Promise.

Arendt, Hannah / Gaus, Günter: "Zur Person" (28.10.1964). URL:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9SyTEUi6Kw>

Belcher, Oliver / Schmidt, Jeremy J.: „Being Earthbound: Arendt, Process and Alienation in the Anthropocene”. In: *Society and Space*. (2020), 1-18.

Buckler, Steve: *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory. Challenging the Tradition*. Edinburgh 2011.

Cannavò, Peter F.: "Hannah Arendt: Place, World, and Earthly Nature". In: Peter F. Cannavò / Joseph H. Lane Jr. (Eds.): *Engaging Nature. Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon*. Cambridge, MA 2014, 253-269.

Canovan, Margaret: "Introduction". In: Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*. Chicago 1958.

Chapman, Anne: "The Ways That Nature Matters: The World and the Earth in the Thought of Hannah Arendt". In: *Environmental Values*. 16 (2007), 433-445.

Clark, Nigel: "Geo-politics and the disaster of the Anthropocene". In: *The Sociological Review*. 62.1 (2014), 19-37.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952]. Trans. by Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto, 2008.

Gadgil, Madhav / Berkes, Fikret / Folke, Carl: „Indigenous Knowledge for Biodiversity Conservation". In: *Ambio*. 20. 2-3 (1993), 151-156.

Gadgil, Madhav / Rao, Seshagiri / Utkarsh, G. / Pramod, P. / Chihatre, Ashwini et al.: "New Meanings for Old Knowledge: The People's Diversity Registers Program". In: *Ecological Applications*. 10(5) 2000, 1307–1317.

Hardt, Michael / Negri, Antonio: *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. London 2004.

Honig, Bonnie: "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity". In: Judith Butler / Joan W. Scott (Eds.): *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York 1992, 215-235.

Honnacker, Ana: "Stressfaktor Klimakrise. Für eine ökologische Demokratisierung der Demokratie". In: Martin Dabrowski / Patricia Ehret / Mark Radtke (Eds.): *Demokratie - Gerechtigkeit – Partizipation*. Paderborn 2021, 35-43.

Irlbacher-Fox, Stephanie: "Indigenous Knowledge, Co-existence and Co-resistance". In: *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*. 3.3 (2014), 145–158.

Lambert, Simon / Mark-Shadbolt, Melanie: "Indigenous Knowledges of Forest and Biodiversity Management: How the Watchfulness of Māori Complements and Contributes to Disaster Risk and Reduction". In: *AlterNative*. 17.3 (2021), 368–377.

Landes, Joan B.: "*Novus Ordo Saeculorum*: Gender and Public Space in Arendt's Revolutionary France". In: Bonnie Honig (Ed.): *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*. Pennsylvania 1995, 195-219.

Locke, John: *Second Treatise of Government* [1689]. In: John Locke: *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Ed. by Ian Shapiro. New Haven/London 2003.

Maldonado, Julie / Bennett, T. M. Bull / Chief, Karletta / Cochran, Patricia / Gough, Bob / Redsteer, Margaret Hiza / Lynn, Kathy / Maynard, Nancy / Voggesser, Garrit: "Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and Honoring Traditional Knowledge Systems". In: *Climate Change*. 135 (2016), 111-126.

Marx, Karl / Engels, Friedrich: *Das Kapital. Band 1. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* [1863]. In: MEW, Band 23. Berlin 1983, cited as MEW 23.

Palmer, Tyrone: "Otherwise than Blackness". In: *Qui Parle*. 29.2 (2020), 247-283.

Popova, Ulia: "Conservation, Traditional Knowledge, and Indigenous Peoples". *American Behavioral Scientist*. 20.10 (2013), 1–18.

Rockström, Johann et al.: "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity". In: *Ecology and Society*. 14.2 (2009), 32.

Schaap, Andrew: "Political Theory and the Agony of Politics". In: *Political Studies Review*. 5.1 (2007), 56-74.

Steffen, Will et al.: "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet". In: *Science*. 347.6223 (2015).

Trischler, Helmuth: "The Anthropocene". In: *NTM Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin*. 24.3 (2016), 309-335.

Weißpflug, Maike: *Hannah Arendt. Die Kunst, politisch zu denken*. Berlin 2019.

Zerilli, Linda M. G.: "The Arendtian Body". In: Bonnie Honig (Ed.): *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*. Pennsylvania 1995, 167-193.