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The World is (Ge-)Mine

The Speculative Life of the *sensus communis* with Arendt and Hegel

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Abstract

By determining *sensus communis* as the "sensation of reality," Hannah Arendt invites us to take its *sense* character literally. If it is a sense, like the other senses, *sensus communis* must be vulnerable to blockage, disturbance, and even loss. This article argues that this vulnerability cannot be captured within an epistemological framework of "objective knowledge", because what is today at stake is the *object* itself, namely the world as an *in-between*. The question thus is whether there is a common world at all—i.e. whether the world appears as a political space. To pursue this question, I mobilize the speculative potential of the prefix *Ge-* in German *Gemeinsinn*: the word's internal tension between two poles, namely *gemein* as "common" and as "mean", points to a passing over of common into the privatized *Ge-mein* ("mine") that turns mistrust into the only – perverted – common sense today. The title "The World is (Ge-)Mine" names this dynamic: the world is shared, yet it becomes deceptive and unhomely where it is gathered as the mere availability of what each 'I' appropriates as its own. Reading Arendt along a diagonal to Hegel, I show that the realness of the world is neither a natural faculty nor a transcendental guarantee but an affirmative creation—ultimately bound to what Arendt calls the "supreme capacity of men": the capacity for beginning.

Introduction[1]

Heidegger once remarked that the fact that thinkers "may be 'better' understood" than they understood themselves is surely not a deficit that may be attributed to them retroactively, but rather a sign of their greatness (Heidegger 2018, 50).[2] This article takes up that license in a deliberately provocative way: it reconstructs *sensus communis* with

1 The idea of this article emerged from the workshop *Individual Universalism*, held in Freiburg and organized by Martin Baesler and Kevin Licht; I thank them for the invitation. I am also grateful to the participants of my seminar *Thinking Trust with Hannah Arendt*, held in Autumn 2025 at Masaryk University, whose discussions throughout the semester allowed me to test several ideas of the article and develop them further. Finally, I thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

Arendt by staging as interlocutor the thinker who would arguably have most displeased her: Hegel; and by pursuing an objective she could least tolerate: to uncover the speculative within it.

My conceptual point of departure is a passage in *The Life of the Mind*, where Arendt determines *sensus communis* as the "sensation of worldly reality" (Arendt 1981, 50). The guiding claim is simple: if Arendt's *sensus communis* concerns the sensation of reality, then this sense must be thinkable as exposed to blockage, disturbance, and even loss—much like the other senses. If our basic experience of being in the world depends on this sense, then it is likewise exposed to deception, mistrust, and loss of orientation. Taken as such, *sensus communis* goes beyond an epistemological frame of "objective knowledge", but points to the *object* itself, if one may say: the world itself as an *in-between*. It refers to the question of whether a common world appears—something that conditions the availability of any reliable knowledge.

In Arendt, world correlates radically with the factum of plurality, insofar as the world, both in human and in political terms, cannot appear to one man in singular but to men in plural (Arendt 1958, 234).[3] By dispensing with any guarantee of a grounding transcendental consciousness, Arendt also dispenses with the assumption that a common world is always present. *Sensus communis* gains its centrality precisely here, since it becomes the groundless vector of the appearance and disappearance of a *common* world as a political space. If *sensus communis* is a sensation of reality, it is vulnerable; and if it is vulnerable, then the realness of the world cannot be presupposed but must be politically instituted. I therefore propose to read Arendt's *sensus communis* as, albeit precarious, an affirmative creation, i.e. institution of politics through which a common world is brought into appearance as a political space, rather than as a mere tool for investigating epistemological or transcendental conditions of impartial spectatorship (Arendt 1989, 55). Thus, I argue that *sensus communis* is linked not primarily to the faculty of judgment but to what Arendt calls the "supreme capacity of men": the capacity for beginning (Arendt 1951, 629).

I proceed in four steps. First, I locate the speculative in *sensus communis* by showing the link between Arendt's *life* and Hegel's *phenomenology* as groundless pursuits of conceptual unity through appearances, and I reveal a post-Kantian agreement between them. Second, I unfold the speculative potential of the German word for common sense, *Gemeinsinn*, in which *gemein* oscillates between two poles, namely *common* and *mean*, and I use this ambivalence as a methodological tool for approaching the fragile reality of the world in the passing-over of appearance into disappearance. Third, I clarify why, for Arendt, world as a political space cannot be taken for granted, by showing how

2 Interestingly, Arendt mentions something similar in *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt 1981, 63), referring to Kant; and Kant mentions something similar, referring to Plato (KrV, A 314). Plato, as first master, is the absolute beginner of this tradition of "better understanding": since Plato's "parricide" against Parmenides in the *Sophist*, a certain "violence" to the word of the previous thinker has been a traditional, legitimate act in philosophy. See Plato 2015, 136 [241c].

3 This is not necessarily my personal preference in referring to human beings as "man" and "men". However, in order to follow Arendt's dictum of "man" and "men in the plural" (1958, 4), I will retain her idiom throughout the article.

plurality infiltrates and fractures the solipsistic register of transcendental consciousness. Fourth, drawing on recent phenomena of the loss of a common world—deep mistrust and growing susceptibility to conspiracy theories—I discuss how tendencies toward worldless visibility can come to be mistaken for worldly appearance, thereby contributing to the disappearance of the world as a political space. I conclude by returning to what I call the speculative aspect of *sensus communis*: the affirmative *there is* of beginning, as a minimal compass of reorientation under conditions of disorientation.

Locating the Speculative: A Post-Kantian Agreement between Arendt and Hegel

Arendt's hostility toward Hegel is particularly pronounced throughout her work, such that, in *The Life of the Mind*, she even explicitly omits Hegel from her considerations because of his "homesickness for another world" (1981a, 157–58).[4] Yet I propose that there is a striking post-Kantian agreement between them– one that brings them strangely close at the very point of their utmost distance, which I would like to open up briefly.

Referring to Kant's critical philosophy, Quentin Meillassoux famously coined the term "correlation", according to which "we only have ever access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (Meillassoux 2008, 5). Since Kant's transcendental revolution, Meillassoux notes, it becomes impossible to think an object independent of the subject, as well as a subject that would not always already be related to an object. Nevertheless, in Kant this "correlation" remains bound to a thing in itself that is thinkable without being knowable (i.e. "cognizable") (2008, 31). Here I locate the post-Kantian agreement between Arendt and Hegel: I propose to read both as radicalizations of Kantian "correlation" between thinking and being. Hegel's radicalization, in absolute idealism, consists in dissolving the grounding thing-in-itself through the idea of an object–subject unity in spirit. My claim is that, through an unusual reading, we can explore Arendt's *sensus communis* as the site of another radicalization: not in the direction of being, but in the direction of appearance—not by securing a stronger ground of being through rendering the thing in itself knowable (Hegel), but by disqualifying altogether a realm of being beyond appearances. In this sense, *sensus communis* is the tacit bearer of Arendt's radicalizing move that "dethrones" Kant's thinking ego as the last remnant of "two-world theories" (Arendt 1981a, 42).

Only a Paraphrase Away: *The Life of the Mind* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

This tacit post-Kantian agreement can help illuminate a strange nearness in the utmost distance. Indeed, is Arendt's posthumous masterpiece, *The Life of the Mind*, not just a paraphrase away from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*? Do not both thinkers, each in their own idiom, pursue *life*—Arendt through the appearances and faculties of the

4 The list of Hegel's "vices" is long: Arendt associates Hegel with "world alienation" in modernity (Arendt 1998 [1958], 300–301), with the consummation of solipsism turning into loneliness (Arendt 2017 [1951], 627), and with a "homesickness of the spirit for another world" (Arendt 1981a, 158).

mind, Hegel through the appearances of the spirit? Yet how exactly do life and phenomenology relate?

Let us linger with "life" in Arendt for a moment. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt remarks clearly that "life" in human and political terms must not be confused with the biological category of mere livelihood. She articulates a conception of life that intertwines the phenomenological with the political. In doing so, she distinguishes mere being-alive (*Lebendigsein*) and its corresponding "feeling of life" from being-real (*Wirklichsein*) and its "feeling of realness" (*Wirklichkeitsgefühl*) (Arendt 2021 [1967], 280). "Humanly and politically speaking", she writes, "*Wirklichkeit* (realness/reality of the world) and appearance are one and the same" (2021, 280). Her point is that being-alive could be sustained even in an empty space, without needing any common world; however, a life in human terms—without appearing in the common world of others—is unthinkable (*ibid*). This distinction is crucial for understanding her warning that one must not assume that "a political space of appearances is always present" simply because human beings have the capacity to act" (*ibid*). The question of life thus reveals itself as one and the same with the question of reality and appearance, which together constitute the *worldliness* of the world.

Yet, precisely here the speculative underside of this conception of life begins to show itself. If life in human and political terms is fundamentally bound to appearance, and if it cannot be regarded as a permanent presence, then it must be thought with the possibility of retreat, distortion, and loss. Life in this sense is therefore exposed to a passing-over: from appearance into disappearance, bearing the possibility of deception and mistrust. Our very capacity for trust simply entails a proneness to deception. This belonging-together of trust and deception has to do with the fact that, for us humans, there is no other vector of realness or unreality than the appearance or disappearance of the world as a political space of action and speech—one that is not always "there". In this sense, Arendt's *sensus communis* is not a steady possession, not a static property, not an inner quality of the species, nor a telos deductible from a transcendental structure but a vector of life in human and political terms. Such a life is speculative insofar as *sensus communis* concerns realness—i.e. the sensation of reality—which cannot be found in *res*, that is, in the world understood as a mere aggregate of things, nor in the transcendental structure of the world, but in our capacity for beginning, i.e. our inexhaustible and contingent capacity to break with necessity and (re)create a common world.

What if, then, "speculation" were not merely the signifier of a "pseudo-kingdom of disembodied spirits working behind men's backs" (Arendt 1981a, 157), but could also name the pursuit of life as this passing-over from one appearance to another—where what is at stake is the attempt to gather the common which is nowhere given?

A Shared Predilection for Words that Delight Thought

At the beginning of the *Logic*, Hegel makes an interesting remark on the peculiarity of German words. "Many of them," he observes, "carry not only different but even opposite meanings". He describes it as "thought delighting" to encounter such words— "to discover in naïve form, already in the lexicon as one word of opposite meanings" (Hegel

2010, 12). What delights thought here is surely not a lexical curiosity. It is the language's "speculative spirit": the possibility it provides for thinking what is not given in a word's sheer meaning, but only in the passing-over from one opposite to the other. When Hegel thus speaks of "grasping opposites in their unity" (2010, 35), the point is not a hidden, natural, sensuous, or transcendental unity that would direct thought, but a unity that is not—and that can nevertheless be thought.

Even if Arendt is clearly averse to the term speculation, she indisputably shares a predilection for words with Hegel that can "delight thought"—words that carry tensions, oppositions, and transitions within themselves.[5] It is in this spirit that I turn to a German word whose semantic structure is itself instructive: *Gemeinsinn*. Often translated as "common sense", *Gemeinsinn* carries more than a stable meaning; it stages an internal tension in the *common* itself. Precisely this capacity—to carry opposing determinations within a single word—provides an uncommon insight into Arendt's thinking of *sensus communis*.

Gemeinsinn and the speculative Prefix "*Ge-*": Gathering the Common from the Private

Let us open up this thought-delighting word a little. *Gemeinsinn* consists of "common" (*gemein*) and "sense" (*Sinn*). The peculiarity of this word lies in the somewhat mysterious prefix *Ge-*, which we might call the *prefix of speculation* in German. This label is justified insofar as *Ge-* forms collective nouns through a gathering that collects particulars in such a way that it produces plurality in a singular form. This can take the shape of a straightforward collectivization, as in *Gestein*, which denotes a collection of stones. Yet the gathering effect of *Ge-* can also transform meaning in striking ways, even into the opposite of what it "gathers". Take, for example, *Rede*, meaning speech: *Gerede*, however, denotes idle talk. This is only to say that there is no logically deductible necessity in the passing-over of a meaning into its opposite through the gathering effect of *Ge-*; yet precisely the passing-over opens up a space for thinking. In the case of *Gemeinsinn*, this is instructive. Here, the ambivalent gathering in *gemein* opens up a field of thought that reaches beyond the mere lexical unity of the word—and that allows us to pursue the "life" of *sensus communis* with regard to the appearance and disappearance of a common world understood as a political space.

Kant already noted the strange character of the word *Gemeinsinn*, uniting both the highest and the lowest in itself. This comes to expression when he mentions the "doubtful

5 Arendt literally "listens" to words. The discrepancies between the original meanings of words and their uses do not merely remain anecdotal details in her train of thought but play a significant role in her conceptual distinctions. The examples are many; just to name a few: her conceptual elaboration of the distinction between work and labor relies heavily on the meanings of these words in English, German, and French (Arendt 1998 [1958], 48); likewise, Arendt thinks the difference between "loneliness" and "solitude" (Arendt 2017 [1951], 625–626) meticulously. For other moments where Arendt clearly appreciates words that delight thought (see Arendt 1981, 100–105 and 177–181). Here it is important to note that for Heidegger "listening" as a sense has a primacy over "seeing", since "to listen" has a direct relation to *Vernehmen* in German, which in turn relates to λέγειν (*legein*) as gathering, that is, the "original" meaning of λόγος (*logos*) (see Heidegger 2018, 186–192). This ability to gather what is not given in a word is a speculative undertaking in Hegel's sense; and when it comes to this, Arendt is definitely not less speculative than Hegel.

honour" that "common human understanding has, of having the name of [...] *sensus communis* bestowed upon it; and bestowed, too, in an acceptation of the word common" (Kant 1790, AA 5: 294). Here he remarks that the word "common" has a double meaning in German: it names not only the noblest sense, i.e. *sensus communis*, but at the same time "amount[s] to what is vulgar, what is everywhere to be met with—a quality which by no means confers credit or distinction upon its possessor" (AA 5: 294). The double meaning Kant highlights thus the highest and the lowest carried in the same lexical unity of the word. Yet, Kant's remark presupposes the givenness of a steady "common sense" that "is everywhere to be met with"(*ibid*), without clarifying why it should also entail a potential for vulgarization. What I want to attempt is to delve into these *passings-over*, that is, into the different appearances of *sensus communis* through the speculative capacity of *Gemeinsinn*, so as to illuminate how the highest common can pass over into the lowest.

The passing-over of the "highest" and the "lowest" meaning of common (*gemein*) lies in the ambivalence of commonness that *Ge-* gathers in and through the utterly private: *mein*, i.e. the possessive determiner "my." Read as *Ge-mein*, the word can denote, first and foremost, the gathering of what each particular "I" claims as its own. If we hear *sensus communis* under the name *Ge-meinsinn*, the *common* remains at the level of an abstract universal in Hegel's sense: a mere commonality, a general collective name for a sheer private sensation that comes as an alien, external addition to particular private sensations. Or we can say with Arendt that, read as *Ge-meinsinn*, *sensus communis* is a mere property of the species, a common structure of the mind (Arendt 1958, 283), which can signal the decline of a common world. Given that *gemein* also denotes *mean* (ill intended), the gathering effect opens up yet another passing-over: when world alienation stiffens and the private sense claims to be the sole determiner of worldly reality, *Gemeinsinn* lapses into a perverted commonness and passes over into the *gemein* ("mean") sense—a *common* mistrust. In short, the speculative potential of *Gemeinsinn* can shed distinctive light on the creation, distortion, and loss of common sense.

Let us begin by delving into the life of *sensus communis* by revealing how Arendt conceives the sense-structure underlying sensation in general, and how she can determine *sensus communis* as a sense even though, strictly speaking, it has no sense-object.

Appearance and *Sensation* of the Realness: Taking *sensus communis* literally as a sense

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt emphasizes the sense-character of *sensus communis*, i.e. she places it decidedly alongside the other five senses. This becomes clear in the following passage:

> To each of our five senses corresponds a specific, sensorily perceptible property of the world. Our world is visible because we have vision, audible because we have hearing, touchable and full of odors and tastes because we have touch, smell, and taste. The

> sixth sense's corresponding worldly property is *realness*[6], and the difficulty with this property is that it cannot be perceived like other sensory properties (Arendt 1981, 50).

Striking as it may be, this emphasis does not express a mere analogy; it ought to be taken literally. Arendt means it when she stresses the sense-character of *sensus communis*.[7] This is why she italicizes the word *sensation* when she determines the role of *sensus communis* as the sensation of reality:

> The five senses, utterly different from each other, have the same object in common; members of the same species have the context in common that endows every single object with its particular meaning; and all other sense-endowed beings, though perceiving this object from utterly different perspectives, agree on its identity. Out of this threefold commonness arises the *sensation* of reality (Arendt 1981, *ibid*.).

This impression becomes even stronger when Arendt places *sensus communis* explicitly in the context of the other five senses and says that this sense "fits the sensation of my strictly private five senses [...] into a common world, shared by others" (1981a, 50). Yet the ambiguity of the "sensation" of reality becomes all the more apparent when she explicates the difficulty of this property: "it cannot be perceived like other sensory properties" (*ibid*.). If it cannot be perceived, does this not mean that it cannot be sensed, in the strict sense, either? With this question, we enter into the realm of Arendt's radicalization of the Kantian transcendental aesthetic.

Is there a place for *sensus communis* in Kant's transcendental aesthetic?

It is important to understand that, for Arendt, the sensation of reality and being-in-the-world belong together. We can indeed regard this sensation as a perception—if we understand perception here as *apperception*, that is, as an originary perception which precedes any perception of what is sensibly available to the five senses. In order to unfold

6 This word is italicized by Arendt in the original text, and this has a meaning. "Realness" is a difficult property, not least because it is not the same as what is usually meant by "reality". Arendt's German readers probably recognize easily the slight but striking conceptual differences in *The Human Condition*. This often gives the impression that, in passing over from the thinking mood of German into English, Arendt almost naturally adapts her concepts as well—without explicit deliberation or systematic decision. This adaptation, however, gives a new shape to her thought. Interestingly, these implicit decisions often shed quite a different light on Arendt's concepts and reveal retrospectively distinctions that she never explicitly thematizes. Arendt uses "reality" in English interchangeably for both *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität*. Yet one recognizes that she is at odds with "reality" in English when she has in mind *Wirklichkeit*, so that she makes us recognize it. Sometimes she adds the adjective "worldly" to reality; sometimes, as it seems to me to be the case here, she hints at it by italicizing the word. The German edition of *The Life of the Mind* supports this interpretation: Hermann Vetter translates "realness" as *Wirklichsein*, instead of *Realität* (see Arendt 1998, 60). In a previous article for Hannaharendt.net, I attempted to give an account of the difference in Arendt between "reality" and *Wirklichkeit*. See Akin 2024.

7 This should not be confused with Jacobi's sensualism, that is, a super-sensuous attribute to sensation, such as a "feeling of truth" or "God". Jacobi attributes an exclusive ability to the senses that "reason lacks", namely the perception or gathering (*Vernehmung*) of God and the feeling of truth (see Jacobi 1994 [1799], 497–591). Arendt's emphasis on the sense-character of *sensus communis* has nothing to do with Jacobi's (or similar) zealous super-sensuous attribution to the senses. In fact, along with "modern puritanism" and "hedonism", Arendt relates such "sensualisms" to the reduction of *sensus communis* to an inner sense (Arendt [1958, 310–311).

this claim, we must engage with Arendt's interpretation of Kant and, accordingly, with Kant's transcendental aesthetic.

As is well known, for Kant human cognition is limited to appearances, that is, to the experienceable world. Nevertheless, he does not give up otherworldliness completely, insofar as he acknowledges a realm of things in themselves which—although inaccessible to cognition—remains thinkable as the source of the sensible. Here, Arendt offers a remarkable interpretation that we should unfold. She claims that the "thinking ego" in Kant is, in fact, the thing in itself (Arendt 1981a, 42). It does not appear to itself (1981a, 43)—nor, one must add, to others—and must be regarded as the ground of appearance. As such, the thing in itself can be seen as a remnant of two-world theories: theories that regard *being* as the ground of appearance, give primacy to the supersensible as the "true" world, and claim to do away with worldly appearance (1981a, 42).

Arendt, by contrast, intends to overcome two-world theories by extending the scope of Kantian limitation to the point of disqualifying any realm of being beyond appearances altogether. In this way, she paradoxically exceeds the Kantian framework by liberating appearances from dependence on an "otherworldly" thing in itself (Arendt 1958, 274–75). *Sensus communis* plays a crucial role in this undertaking, insofar as Arendt elevates it to a far more central position than it has in Kant. In Arendt, *sensus communis* takes over the grounding function that Kant assigns to transcendental consciousness, i.e. to the unity of apperception attributed to the thinking ego that is stripped of any *ground* in Arendt.[8]

The Unity of Apperception: The solipsistic transcendental ego, or the fact of plurality?

In order to understand how Arendt legitimates her radical thesis, namely, *Being = Appearance* and the role that *sensus communis* plays in it, let us turn to the *First Critique*. According to Kant "the *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations" (KrV, B 132). This means that all the manifold of intuition has a relation to the "I think", in which the manifold is encountered. However, Kant insists that this representation is an act of spontaneity and does not belong to sensibility. This simply means that the manifold of sense-data is always-already unified, i.e. this *unification* exceeds experience. We can infer this unification only retroactively: the reflection that things appear to me as a coherent unity in my consciousness must reveal to me that my consciousness of myself as the *place* of the unification is a primary unity, or the condition of possibility for the unification of sense-data. Kant thus states explicitly that "all empirical consciousness […] has a necessary relation to a transcendental consciousness (preceding all particular experience), namely the consciousness of myself, as original

8 One must not mix up this groundless creation with the post-foundationalist frame of de-grounding as grounding (Marchart 2010). The vice of the merely negative succumbs to this post-foundationalist frame, from which Arendt's fundamental affirmative gesture must firmly be distinguished. For a recent phenomenological account that comes quite close to "groundless grounding" as *Gründung ohne Grund* (see Bedorf 2025, 152).

apperception" (KrV, A 117). [9]Taken together, the *a priori* synthesis of sense data is called "the original synthetic unity of apperception" (KrV, B 136).

Let us now return to Arendt's claim that Kant's thinking ego is the thing in itself that grounds the being of appearances. Kant says, indeed, that "I […] have no cognition of myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself" (KrV, B 158). This provides a stronghold for the Arendtian radicalization of the correlation between being and appearance. Arendt thus asks why Kant needs to assume a being that grounds appearance if, in human terms, we cannot speak of any "being" that does not appear (Arendt 1981a, 42–43). For Kant, the answer is relatively straightforward: sensibility must be grounded by something radically external to sense. This externality must be thought radically in order to maintain the "transcendental distinction" (KrV, B 63). In other words, Kant needs a strict distinction between things in themselves and appearances both to save the reliability of experience from skepticism and to prevent the dogmatic claim of cognizing noumena—i.e. of cognizing what exceeds possible experience. This distinction also sustains a "room for faith" (KrV, B XXX).

Evidently, Arendt cannot accept that a worldless and solipsistic transcendental consciousness is taken as the *real* ground of appearances. She radicalizes the Kantian transcendental schema by shifting the *a priori* of possible experience from the thinking ego and its transcendental consciousness to the givenness of the world to *men in plural*. Only this givenness can institute the world's *realness* (*Wirklichkeit*)[10], without, however, constituting a ground in the strong sense, i.e. without guaranteeing the appearance of a *common* world as the space of the political.

Having shown how, in Kant, the transcendentality of original synthetic apperception presupposes the thinking ego—qua thing in itself—as the ground of sensation, we are now ready to trace Arendt's subtle move of dethroning the thinking ego from its otherworldly kingdom.

9 Alain Badiou has an important point regarding apperception in Kant that may help the reader make more sense of my claim that in Arendt *sensus communis* takes the role of apperception. Badiou suggests that original apperception in Kant is a "presentation of being" (Badiou 2023b, 173), which—strictly speaking—presents nothing but presentation itself, that is, the unity of representation that guarantees the unity of the object. The transcendental subject is accordingly the "place" of representation, which itself must be regarded as unity, namely as the original unity in which manifold sensuous data are unified. Similarly, if there is a factual unity of all our five senses when we perceive any sense-object, then we must presume that there is an instance, a place, where all the senses are gathered. *Sensus communis* thus becomes the structure of the unity of all sensation. Its synthetic character in Arendt, however, lies in the fact that *sensus communis* co-propriates (Meillassoux 2008) "men in plural" and the "world," such that *sensus communis* can be thought as the concept of this correlation. The realness of the world depends on this belonging-together, which Arendt determines as "the threefold commonness" in *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt 1981a, 50).

10 In fact, this is a similar move that we see in Heidegger's conception of *Ereignis*, namely the appropriation of Being and man unified in the givenness of the world. In the "there is" of the world, Being and man are appropriated to each other, such that one can neither think "man" without thinking Being nor think Being without thinking "man" (see Heidegger 1969, 31–33).

A speculative move of inserting Plurality into *a priori*: *Con*sciousness as knowing *with* myself

Arendt does not oppose the primacy of the thinking ego in Kant's transcendental consciousness from a merely moralizing plea for plurality; rather, one might say, she works from within the Kantian transcendental structure by exploring[11] plurality in consciousness itself.

In the word *con*sciousness, Arendt directs our attention to the prefix *con*—meaning *with*. Thus, she notes, *con*sciousness literally means "to know with myself" (Arendt 1981a, 183). Yet, the speculative riddle begins precisely here: what does it mean to "know with myself"? If I can know *with* myself, does this not presuppose that I am not simply *one*? Indeed. If I am not only for others but also for myself, then "a difference is inserted into my Oneness", as Arendt remarks (Arendt 1981a, 183). If a difference is inserted even into my solitary consciousness, then "nothing indicates more strongly that man exists essentially in the plural than that his solitude actualizes his merely being conscious of himself" (Arendt 1981a, 185).

But how can solitude actualize consciousness? The answer is: by opening a space of a split—of being two-in-one—in which the ambiguity of *two-in-one* is sustained. Thinking is not the activity of a solipsistic ego. For Arendt, the activity of thinking is nothing more—but also nothing less—than the realization of this split in solitude, where the silent dialogue between me and myself emerges.[12] At this point, it is important to note that, for Arendt, the *I am*, contrary to Kant's indication, is not an intuition but a thought. If it is a thought, then even the apparently most worldless declaration grounding modern philosophy—namely, *I am*—is infiltrated by the fact of plurality. The condition of thinking, insofar as thinking is a silent dialogue of the I with itself (Arendt 1981a, 74–75), is plurality: the two rather than the one.

One could argue that the plurality of the silent dialogue between me and myself remains obscure. Does the two-in-one mean that I artificially double myself, i.e. that there is only *one* that pretends the *two*? Or is the split experientially real rather than merely metaphorical? The subtle point about the two-in-one is that it has nothing to do with either of these alternatives. This becomes clear in a well-known passage from Ideology and Terror, where Arendt remarks that plurality—the 'two'—is inserted into my oneness, that is, into my consciousness: the two-in-one, she says, "does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought" (Arendt 2017 [1951], 626).

11 This "exploration" is in fact a creation, insofar as we can accept that plurality is not concealed in the essence of consciousness, as if this essence were a treasure slumbering in a shipwreck.

12 Two interesting results emerge from this determination: first, for Arendt thinking is not the privilege of professional thinkers. Secondly, and perhaps more drastically, it implies that whether professional thinkers or "common men", we are all prone to thoughtlessness (Arendt 1981a 14). This means simply: we all sometimes think, sometimes do not. What we need to maintain here for our purposes is that whenever thinking emerges, this must be taken as a silent proof of the Arendtian idiom that "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" (Arendt 1958, 7).

The silent accompaniment of Others and the sensation of *thereness*

How does the fact of plurality affect the way we conceive of appearance and sensibility? If the thing in itself does not ground sensibility, then what does? If the fact of plurality becomes the ultimate condition of any experience, replacing solipsistic transcendental consciousness, does Arendt not need to find a way of inserting plurality into *sensation* as well? But how could we think *a priori* plurality in sensation?

Arendt's distinction between solitude and loneliness can provide a great insight here. According to Arendt, solitude has its ground in plurality. Being in solitude, i.e. being alone without falling into loneliness presupposes a silent capacity, namely my capacity to keep my "contact with the world of my fellow men" (*ibid.*). Interestingly then, the condition of possibility for being alone is thus our being two-in-one, meaning our inner connection to others whom we carry with us in *con*sciousness. Without others that we carry in consciousness, we are lonely: deserted and without orientation. It is the silent company of others that sustains a consistency even in our basic experience of being in the world. Indeed, if all our senses are coordinated by an accompanying feeling of realness this must retrospectively show that it is not solipsistic transcendental consciousness that provides this sensible consistency, but our sensation of *thereness* (Arendt 1981, 51). It is this *thereness* which conditions the coherent unity of the sense-data that accompanies our sense-perception. Only because *thereness* precedes all sensation, we can smell, taste, hear, touch, and see within the *unity* of a shared sense-structure.[13] This unity is the gathering of the realness of the world that has no ground and no telos, other than being in a common world with others testifying the *there is* of beginning.

Does this mean that we have solved the riddle? If it were merely a replacement of solipsistic transcendental consciousness by the fact of plurality—without the slightest change in the assumption that a common world is simply given as a political space—the answer would be yes. However, the crux of Arendt's thinking lies in the fact that she shifts the very status of *sensus communis*: from being a transcendental structure of the unity of sense-perception to being a vector of a political institution—namely, whether there is a *common* world at all. This becomes visible in a productive ambivalence. On the one hand, Arendt wants us to take the sensory nature of *sensus communis* seriously. On the other hand, she vehemently warns against reducing it to an inner sense that human beings could possess within themselves. Arendt even notes a retreat of *sensus communis* as soon as it is treated as an inner sense with the onset of modernity. This remark paves the way for a decisive passing-over of appearance in our pursuit of the life of *sensus communis*, which I take up in the next section.

The passing over to *Ge-meinsinn*: The subject in pain and the privatization of common sense

13 We nevertheless should not forget to give credit to Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein*, i.e. Being-with. It was Heidegger, as one of the major radicalizers of Kantian "correlation", who first opposed the conception of a solipsistic "being" in human terms. For Heidegger, only "objects," i.e. present-at-hand things (*vorhanden*), can be solipsistic. Being in human terms, however, is always Being-with (see Heidegger 1996, 108–109).

Arendt emphasizes in many instances that it is "the inter-subjectivity of the world, rather than similarity of physical appearance, that convinces men that they belong to the same species" (Arendt 1981a, 50). This means that we cannot treat *sensus communis* as "an inner faculty without any world relationship" and reduce it to "the structure of the minds of men", which is regarded as the same in everybody (Arendt 1958, 283). If the realness of the world depends on *sensus communis*, but *sensus communis* cannot be treated as a property belonging to the human species, then it must become clear that the realness of the world cannot be guaranteed. For, just like any other sense, *sensus communis* is prone to disturbance. This is a delicate point that needs elaboration.

From simple experience, we know that each of our five senses can be blocked or distorted. For instance, for many of us who contracted the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the pandemic, the world simply stopped smelling. After being exposed to extreme noise for quite some time, we barely hear anything. In such cases, if we do not become absorbed in our immediate sensory perceptions and are able to recognize that the world still has smell and sound, it means that we transcend the immediacy of perception and identify a sensory disturbance causing misperception. This raises the following puzzling question: in the case of a disturbance in one of the five senses, we can rely on the assistance of other senses to assure us of the realness of the world and to avoid being absorbed in the immediacy of misperception. However, what if *sensus communis* itself could be exposed to such a disturbance? There is, indeed, a striking passage in *Vita Activa* where Arendt considers precisely such a case and determines clearly what happens to the realness of the world:

> Ein merkliches Abnehmen des gesunden Menschenverstands und ein merkliches Zunehmen von Aberglauben und Leichtgläubigkeit deuten […] immer darauf hin, […], daß der Wirklichkeitssinn gestört ist, mit dem wir uns in der Welt orientieren (2021 [1967], 296). [14]

Yet how can common sense "decrease"? Before unfolding the contextual-political answer that is already present in the passage, let us first consider the historical answer that prepares the underlying political dimension.

Arendt's historical answer reveals a striking tendency that she shares with Heidegger: the vision of modernity as a history of "loss."[15] A significant chapter of this history is the loss of the world; and Arendt, like Heidegger, blames this loss on Descartes. She believes that, in Descartes, common sense is exposed to a disturbance from which it never fully

14 The English version is slightly modified as follows: "It is by virtue of common sense that the other sense perceptions are known to disclose reality and are not merely felt as irritations of our nerves or resistance sensations of our bodies. A noticeable decrease in common sense in any given community and a noticeable increase in superstition and gullibility are therefore almost infallible signs of alienation from the world" (Arendt 1998 [1958], 209). It is interesting to note that where Arendt speaks of *Wirklichkeitsinn* [sense of realness] in the German version, she speaks in the English version of what it "amounts" to, namely "common sense". Or, instead of speaking of *[Des]orientierung* [disorientation], as in the German version, she determines the "decrease in common sense" as an "alienation from the world". Similarly in *The Life of the Mind* , she repeats the link between orientation and *sensus communis*, where she states that we lose the "sense of realness inherent in the sensus communis by which we orient ourselves in this world" when the "thinking ego has withdrawn from the world of appearances" (Arendt 1981a, 201).

15 In this sense, it is perhaps with good reason that the German edition of Seyla Benhabib's *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* bears the title *The Melancholic Thinker of Modernity* (see Benhabib 2006).

recovers. According to Arendt, in order to speak of a healthy sensation of the world I must not be in pain. In pain, I am worldless and thrown back on myself: I sense nothing but my own senses. Arendt's point is that Descartes's *cogito* corresponds precisely to the permanence of such a borderline situation: sensation in pain. The historical result is drastic: the loss of worldliness. The following passage from *The Human Condition* is crucial for understanding this point:

> In any event, pain and the concomitant experience of release from pain are the only sense experiences that are so independent from the world that they do not contain the experience of any worldly object. The pain caused by a sword or the tickling caused by a feather indeed tells me nothing whatsoever of the quality or even the worldly existence of a sword or a feather. Only an irresistible distrust in the capacity of human senses for an adequate experience of the world—and this distrust is the origin of all specifically modern philosophy-—can explain the strange and even absurd choice that uses phenomena which, like pain or tickling, obviously prevent our senses' functioning normally, as examples of all sense experience, and can derive from them the subjectivity of "secondary" and even "primary" qualities. If we had no other sense perceptions than these in which the body senses itself, the reality of the outer world would not only be open to doubt, we would not even possess any notion of a world at all. (1998 [1958] 114-115)

If we consider that, according to Arendt, Descartes's thinking ego is withdrawn from the common world into a "desert" (Arendt 1981a, 47), this means that what this ego senses is no longer the common world and its reality. This shift of commonness from the world to an inner sense can be understood as the moment of a passing-over from *Gemeinsinn* qua *sensus communis* to *Ge-meinsinn* qua the generalized private sensations of the *I*. From that moment on, common sense becomes merely that which human beings have in common, namely the same inner structure of the human mind, without qualitative difference: "Whatever difference there may be is a difference of mental power, which can be tested and measured like horsepower", as Arendt drastically indicates (Arendt 1958, 284).

Unlike Arendt's strictly one-sided genealogy—which attributes the loss of common sense solely to the primacy of the thinking ego—we may also note that Descartes's withdrawal from the common world can be read as an attempt for orientation under conditions of disorientation, in a time of a widening gap between scholastic metaphysics and the newly emerging sciences at the beginning of the modern era[16]. Thus, rather than treating this methodic withdrawal like an "original sin" that curses modernity as a history of loss, we can also regard it as an attempt at reorientation by bracketing the world.[17]

Yet, what if we could trace the vulgarization of common sense back to another source, namely the rise of opinionating? With reference to Arendt's coinage of the thinking ego, I

16 On this point, see Badiou 2002, 12–13.

17 Descartes' "second maxim" in *A Discourse on the Method* is noteworthy in this regard, since it advises us "not [to] wander in circles […], but [to] walk as straight as possible in one direction" if we find ourselves lost in a forest (Descartes 2006, 22). This metaphor can be taken as a perfect description of a guide in the case of "disorientation", from which Descartes, as a philosopher of his time, tries to provide a way out.

would like to dare a neologism and claim in the next section that perhaps it is not the thinking ego, but the rise of the *opinionating ego*, that deserves the blame. In order to open up this claim and interrupt Arendt's narrative of loss, let us turn to Hegel for a moment.

Hegel on the Enlightenment zeal for self-thinking: the triumph of the *opinionating ego*

Hegel was one of the philosophers who could never come to terms with Kant's empty formalisms, nor with his Enlightenment zeal for *self-thinking*. Already early on, he claimed that the Enlightenment ideal of *self-thinking* is, in reality, a zeal for opinion formation—hence my neologism: the *opinionating ego*—which undermines this ideal from the beginning. Thus, unlike in Arendt's Kant reading, he saw that the underlying dynamic in the formation of opinions was not primarily the object of whatever one wanted to "propagandize" (Arendt 1989, 39), but rather the subject of the opinion, i.e. each particular *I*. In other words, Hegel suggests that in opinion-forming what matters is less what the opinion is about than the fact that *I* am the one who expresses it. To elaborate on this, let us briefly refer to the section on "sense-certainty" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This section illustrates how the primacy of opinion can become the emblem of *Gemeinsinn* passing over to *Ge-meinsinn*, thereby paving the way for the loss of orientation in the world.

Meaning speculatively: *Meinung* as what I make mine and Worldlessness

The German word for opinion, *Meinung*, is derived from the verb *meinen*, which corresponds closely to *to mean*. We can thus say that *Meinung* is "what I mean to say" (Hegel 1977a, 60-61). Hegel conceives *meinen* as the verbalization of *mein* (my). Taking the risk of vulgarity, one may say that Hegel thinks *meinen* literally as *my-ing*. More precisely: *Meinung* has its ground in the perception of my self-certainty in the sensuous object, that is, in making the object mine by projecting onto it, my simple certainty of being *this I*. Put differently, Hegel understands *meinen* as holding on to a particular object through the sheer certainty of being *this* particular *I* when I say *I*. Thus, my opinion is what *I* mean to say when I relate myself to a sensuous object.

Opinion, taken as a category of sense-certainty, builds an immediate relation—for instance, when I say, "now is daytime" or "here is a tree", I can say the same at night ("now is night"), or in front of a house ("here is a house"). If what I mean always seems to hold true, this shows that this is only possible as long as words such as "now" or "here" are sustained by my simple certainty of being this particular *I*. Each time I say *I*, I mean *this* I that I am; and each time I say "now" or "here", I mean *this* particular now and *this* particular here. Yet in both cases what I *say* is universal—namely "now" and "here". This is the point: I cannot say *this* now or *this* here; I can only *mean* them. This is why Hegel underlines that "the truth [of sense-certainty] is in the object as my object, or, in what I mean; the object is because I know it" (Hegel 1977a, 61).

What Hegel makes manifest here is nothing less than the essence of an opinion: it does not lie in *what* it is about—in its object—but rather in "this I which limits itself to a *Now* or to a *Here*" (Hegel 1977a, 62). If we consider that in *Meinung* there is an urge to possess an object, i.e. to perceive the self-certainty of *I* in it, we can see how meaning as *my-ing* can be understood as a way of sustaining the life of the self-certain *I*. Each time I mean what I mean—that is, each time I make something mine by meaning it—I enjoy being *this I* through the sense-certainty of the object that I am *my-ing*.

The primacy of the 'sense' and the lapse of Knowledge into Opinion

It is striking that the language relates knowledge to thirst, as evidenced by the expression "thirst for knowledge". Similarly, if we were to find a fitting metaphor for opinion, it would probably be hunger.[18] The immediate self-certainty we gain from having our own opinion on various matters creates an insatiable appetite to devour everything as an object of opinion. This subjugates the object of my opinion to the enjoyment of the saying-of-*I*, and it may offer insight into the unquestionable primacy of individual opinions in the course of modernity.

In the face of the growing retreat of the sensuous in later modernity, Hegel's point may sound provocative—yet it remains dialectically productive. He traces self-assertive opinions back to the primacy of the sensuous in the Enlightenment zeal. This primacy results in *sense* as the simplest self-assertion in "understanding" things autonomously—for instance, by putting faith only in what *I* can attest to with my own five senses.[19] We can draw a diagonal from here to the self-assertion of our age of conspiracy theories, which refuse to ground knowledge anywhere other than in one's own (often virtual) "testimony", residing in one's capacity to form one's own opinions. This lowest possible *common* criterion for autonomous testimony—or judgment—becomes a mere common feature of the species, thereby paving the way for the triumph of the *opinionating ego*. Finally, the following passage allows us to disclose the lapse of knowledge into opinion as the lapse of *Gemeinsinn* into *Ge-meinsinn*.

> Turned against reason, […] understanding behaves in the manner of *ordinary common sense*, giving credence to the […] view that truth rests on sensuous reality, that thoughts are *only* thoughts, that is, that only sense perception gives filling and reality to them; that reason, in so far as it abides in and for itself, generates only mental figments. In this self-renunciation of reason, the concept of truth is lost, is restricted to the knowledge of mere subjective truth, of mere appearances, of only something to which the nature of the fact does not correspond; *knowledge* has lapsed into *opinion*. (Hegel 2010, 25)

18 This hunger seems to me closely related to what Arendt calls "hunger for public admiration," as it is driven by the same urge to reinforce the certainty of being "this I": "Public admiration, too, is something to be used and consumed, and status, as we would say today, fulfils one need as food fulfils another: public admiration is consumed by individual vanity as food is consumed by hunger" (Arendt 1998 [1958], 56).

19 On this point, see especially Hegel's polemic against Jacobi (Hegel 1977b).

We must avoid the trap of pitting Hegel against Arendt here. Hegel's diagnosis presupposes what we have already identified with Arendt, namely the shift of *sensus communis* from the world to the thinking ego. What Arendt can add to this diagnosis, in turn, is something remarkably dialectical as well: it is the worldless subject—the *opinionating ego*—which, by putting the world at its disposal, loses it completely. In the following section, I want to unfold this paradoxical loss in possession.

The Triumph of the *opinionating Ego*: An Equivocal *Over*-worldliness and The World as an Image

The result of the shift of the *common* in *sensus communis* from the *world* to my inner faculty of sensation is an equivocal over-worldliness that culminates in the loss of world in later modernity: By becoming over-worldly, the opinionating ego becomes other-worldly. Bound to the sheer biological cycle of labor and consumption, which recognizes nothing but the petty pleasures[20] that the things of short-duration can daily provide, the *opinionating ego* becomes overly-worldly in the sense of being too mundane. However, precisely because this mundanity recognizes nothing permanent—nothing that can "transcend the life-span of mortal men" (Arendt 1958, 55)—the *opinionating ego* becomes at the same time *over*-worldly in another sense: in a transcendence of the common world, it lives as if the world were just another thing of short-duration to consume, and as if it were not inhabited by *men* in the plural but by one *man*, namely by itself. In a world marked by *Ge-meinsinn*, the realness [*Wirklichkeit*] of the world is replaced by the sheer virtuality of the impact [*Wirkung*] of each and every *opinionating ego*. In this way, the common world fades and gives way to the triumph of the *opinionating ego*, which loses the world precisely where it believes most to have it at its disposal.

In a similar vein Heidegger coined "the age of the world image"[21] to describe the subjugation of the world as an object to the *man* qua subject (Heidegger 2002, 82-83). According to Heidegger, scientific and technical progress in modernity renders the world to a purely objectifiable and quantifiable entity. Nevertheless, since an object is always the object of a subject, a world which is subjected to human representation becomes a mere image of man.

The immaterial lived-experience-offers of our present—designed to be produced and consumed like any material commodity—are telling symptoms of the triumph of the *opinionating ego* in a "world as image". Strikingly, these offers share all one fundamental promise: to place the whole world at my disposal, in a mode of unlimited availability.

20 On this point, see Badiou 2010.

21 Here Heidegger uses the word *Weltbild*, usually translated into English as "world picture". However, I prefer the word "image". First, "image" relates more directly to the Greek εἴδωλον (*eidolon*). Second, I want to refer to Badiou's usage of the same term in his seminar *Images du temps présent* (2001–2003) (Badiou 2014), recently published in English as *Images of the Present* (Badiou 2023a). This seminar contains crucial diagnoses of our present, its "worldlessness", and disorientation. It not only bears a direct relation to Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture" (1938) but also furthers Heidegger's idea of a world that becomes an "image". Thus, I think it is important to build a conceptual bridge in order to emphasize the link.

Today I can taste wine while admiring Tuscany's vineyards; tomorrow I can marvel at Mayan temples somewhere in Latin America; next week, if my spiritual retreat in Bangkok begins to bore me, I can switch to a local Thai spa. The spontaneous availability of all these virtual possibilities seems to confirm that the dream of modern man has finally come true: the world is *mine*[22]—even at the cost of finding nothing but my deserted self in it.

To what kind of appearance does the life of *sensus communis* pass over in a world which contains nothing but the reflection of my own image and my hunger for self-assertion? Let us finally unfold this errant—and, in terms of our present situation, the most politically relevant—passing-over.

The Passing over to *Gemein-Sinn*: Mistrust and the Replacement of Appearance by Visibility

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt tacitly reveals the link between *sensus communis* and trust when she indicates that "our certainty that what we perceive has an existence independent of the act of perceiving, depends entirely on the object's also appearing as such to others and being acknowledged by them" (Arendt 1981, 46). Because otherwise, we "could not put faith" even in the way "how we appear to ourselves" (*ibid.*). In a time such as ours, marked by severe disorientation, the centrality of this statement cannot be underestimated. We must therefore reveal the centrality of the link between trust and appearance.

Trust tacitly accompanies our daily interactions without coming to the forefront—unless we encounter a *borderline* situation. A simple interaction such as exchanging names when people introduce themselves can serve as an example: when I introduce myself by giving a name that I claim to be mine, the other person usually acknowledges this name as *my* name and addresses me by it. This is such a self-evident experience that we barely feel the need to think about what grounds it. Yet things may change in a collective mood of mistrust, such as our present, where this ground fades and this question asserts itself: how could I convince a person in deep distrust that I really am who I claim to be? My ID cannot provide ultimate proof, because it could be faked. Even the testimony of my parents is not sufficient proof of my name, since they could lie. In effect, I can then realize that each time my name is acknowledged, it is an acknowledgment of sharing a *common* world: it is a sign that the world has some realness in it, much like when I greet someone on the street and they greet me back, confirming that I am still *there* and we appear to each other in a common world.

Trust is a silent acknowledgment that my experience of the world contains some realness: the world that appears to me is the same world that appears to others, even if we

22 Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, several "hit" songs across genres bore the title *The World Is Mine* (for a prominent example, see David Guetta: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13EsiCjsssY). They can be read as a kind of gospel for the rise of what Andreas Reckwitz somewhat boldly calls "hyperculture", namely the global appropriability of the local. This was a period of euphoria for the opinionating ego. In the 2010s, this euphoria increasingly passed over into a bitter competition for visibility and an overall fear of loss—a shift that can also be sensed, in a different register, in Reckwitz's move from *The Society of Singularities* (2020) to *Verlust* [Loss] (2024).

may see it in utterly different ways. In borderline situations, where we lose our sense of orientation, no *objective* proof but this basic trust can save us from mistrust. Thus, we can say that trust is the only immaterial incorporation of *sensus communis* that accompanies us even in the most basic daily interactions.

An important question arises here, though: in our present digital virtuality, we are more often *visible* in online networks than we *appear* in analogue interactions. We have social media accounts and profile pictures, which make us visible. But are appearance and visibility the same? What could distinguish appearance from visibility? Having established that trust is related to appearance, it is crucial to distinguish between appearance and visibility in order to reveal the peculiar nature of the mistrust of our present.

Visibility as the Principle of a World as Image and Mistrust

Visibility is the ultimate principle of a world as image: if we are visible, then only as *images*. This means that visibility subtracts difference. But what does it mean to say that visibility subtracts difference? In what follows, I briefly unfold this claim.

Visibility is not appearance. Appearance is the maintained identity in the multiplicity of perspectives in seeing—as Arendt indicates when she speaks of the sameness of the world maintained in the plurality of perspectives. Visibility, by contrast, concerns the fixation of seeing from the standpoint of *what* is to be seen. In other words: if we are visible, vision is always-already fixed, i.e. formed by what-is-to-be-seen. Thus the visible, by attracting and directing different perspectives, smoothly limits them to one certain perspective, which always-already forms sight by what-is-to-be-seen. In short, visibility is a sight-forming availability to being seen that cannot endure more than one always-already determined aspect. This should nevertheless not be misinterpreted as morally overvaluing *appearance* over *visibility*. As legal persons, for example—granted certain rights and duties by the state—we do not appear as *who* we are, but are made visible as *what* we count, namely as legal persons. As the word *person*, derived from *persona* (mask), indicates, our visibility—our limited availability for public sight as legal persons—allows us to enjoy certain rights, such as dwelling in a piece of world, receiving medical treatment, and so on, without disclosing *who* we are. As legal persons, we are not forced to reveal who we are. However, when we act or speak, we appear, i.e. we must take the risk of disclosing who we are, "although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word" (Arendt 1958, 179).[23]

23 This somewhat enabling effect of the *persona* comes to the fore from a very different perspective in Corinna Schubert's work *Masken denken - In Masken denken*. Schubert rightly directs our attention to the fact that wearing a mask should not lead us to believe that there would be an "essence" of the carrier of the mask that can be revealed if we rip the mask off from the wearer (Schubert, 2021). The striking point is that Arendt renders the problem of such an essentialism superfluous with her distinction between *who* and *what*, since an essence always refers to *quid est*, that is to *whatness*. The question *who*, however, operates in an entirely different register. Human beings, capable of action and speech, reveal themselves as 'who' and not 'what'. However, they are not fixed or traceable to any palpable unity that we could take as 'their real self'. The point lies in the capacity of 'beginning'. The *who* reveals me only as the radical beginning, the beginner who can act without knowing fully the outcomes of her or his actions. The 'who' cannot be fixed because human beings are always more than their deeds, and more than their deeds are they, since they can begin anew.

The discontent with visibility begins when it becomes the sole determinant of a common world, as it comes to expression in the timeless maxim of mistrust: "nothing is as it seems". Interestingly, this maxim touches a particularly significant symptom of our present—what Alenka Zupančič, in her recent study on conspiracy theories, aptly calls a "denunciation of capitalism *by proxy*" (Zupančič 2024, 4). The point is that "irrational" mistrust "has a displaced rationale; it appears as a displaced mistrust of capitalism", i.e. as a denunciation of capitalism projected onto science and objective knowledge. Indeed, if one considers the shared discontent today, expressed in the suspicion that neither our favorite influencer on Instagram nor our dream apartment on a real-estate website is quite as it seems, Zupančič's point finds strong resonance. The implicit distrust of capitalism, i.e. the absolute primacy of the circulation of exchange, finds no political outlet, for there is no affirmative egalitarian initiative today that could create a point of excess and institute a politics capable of uncovering the denunciation of capitalism that is covered over as distrust in scientific knowledge. This lack of any affirmative political vision culminates in the worldlessness of the *opinionating ego* as fear of deception, such that today the only remaining *common* is a perverted common: the shared fear of deception under conditions of severe disorientation.

Yet this perversity of the common can provide an important insight into the unique character of today's mistrust. In a world in which only virtual (material or immaterial) commodity offers count, any reference to a common world or a common good is immediately associated with deception—a hidden pursuit of self-profit. This is why, at the root of our present mistrust, there lies the conviction that any reference to common sense or the common good is *mean*. This conviction rests on the desperate idea that profit-seeking is the only remaining ground of *objectivity* that we can all agree upon. This is a stronghold of the conspiratorial mindset in our disoriented world. In the absolute primacy of the circulation of things—i.e. in "the triumph of exchange value over use value" (Arendt 1958, 307)—nothing and no one appears; everything only circulates in an economy of visibility.

The clearest expression of the current mood of mistrust—namely conspiracy theories — contains a striking worldly involvement rather than a simple withdrawal from the world. In the last section, I would like to deliberate on the relation between this involvement and trace it back to visibility, which has become an ultimate economic principle of necessity in our present.

A noisy Involvement, instead of a silent Withdrawal: Indifference and Mistrust

The peculiar character of mistrust in our present is hidden in the primacy of visibility over appearance. Unlike previous forms of mistrust—which Arendt describes as radical withdrawals from the common world (Arendt 1958, 310)—present mistrust does not silently withdraw into one's own subjectivity, but rather shows itself as an offensive and literally noisy worldly involvement. The interesting point about this involvement is that it remains within the interiority of the principle of visibility: in a desperate search to reveal

the invisible, i.e. the alleged *real cause* behind the visible, mistrustful or conspiratorial involvement itself seeks nothing but visibility.

This dialectic points to what Alain Badiou, in astonishing resonance with Arendt, touches upon: Badiou remarks that no world comes to appearance if it is marked by the principle of visibility, which is always based on identity rather than difference. Mistrust—previous or current—is thus related to non-appearance. As Badiou indicates, for a world to appear, differences must be constructed within it (Badiou 2011, 10). This is precisely what Arendt emphasizes when she indicates that only utterly different perspectives can attest that the world appears to us as it appears to others (Arendt 1958, 57). By contrast, visibility cannot endure the multiplicity of perspectives that is necessary for any reliable appearance, simply because it does not relate to a world of long duration. Rather, its emergence as a common principle, hastily longed for today, tacitly reveals the discontent that nothing of long duration can exist anymore. What underlies the growing primacy of mere visibility? The answer lies in the principle of equivalence that has turned into a structure of indifference.

The principle of visibility presupposes a world in which quality becomes indifferent and only equivalence counts. This is to say that visibility, as principle, presupposes capital that turns every *thing of the world* that could transcend the life-span of mortal men into the *same* product of labor that can be exchanged and consumed (Arendt 1958, 133–34). As Marx indicates, this even implies "resolving personal worth into exchange value" (Marx 1976, 487). Therefore, we can say that the primacy of visibility seals what Arendt calls the principle of sameness (*Gleichartigkeit*) (Arendt 2021 [1967], 209). Things—or "men"—become visible in varying degrees only when they have already become the same: namely, *animal laborans*. We can see the noisy involvement in conspiracy theories, as well as the desperate competition over *impressive* achievements on social media, as symptoms of culmination of the triumph of *animal laborans* that elevates visibility in an ultimate economic principle of necessity. Thus, current mistrust can be seen as the absence of an affirmative political answer: a desperate reaction to the consummation of substitutability in the necessity to become visible and assert oneself. However, as Badiou—whom I have previously brought into dialogue with Arendt (Akin 2024)—puts it: "within a horizon in which everything is equivalent to everything else, no such thing as a world is discernible" (Badiou 2011, 10).

Conclusion: *sensus communis* as the Trust that There is a Beginning in the World

Today, a $50 million wedding of a tech oligarch in Venice, a five-day war that was almost live-streamed, and the brand-new holiday posts of an OnlyFans influencer on Instagram, all circulate globally as visibilities of varying degrees. This simultaneity tells something significant about the severe mistrust in our present: it is doubtful today whether we still can speak of a *world*, as this world increasingly consists of nothing more than a hodgepodge of events connected only by their virtual simultaneity. The constant global circulation of the cycle of consumption can reinforce a virtual sense of sharing a context, but it cannot replace a world—i.e. it cannot bring a common world to appearance.

The absolute primacy of self-assertion and the virtual equality implied by the equal claim to visibility simulate the eternal presence of a world. Yet this simulation stands in sharp contrast to the ever-growing depth of contemporary inequalities and to the increasing unreadability of a world heading toward self-destruction, which fuels the fear of *the end*. The very notion of world thus risks turning into a virtual potentiality of arbitrary offers: the object as an *in-between* disappears, and with it "objective knowledge" loses its ground.

If *sensus communis* is neither a natural faculty nor deductible from the transcendental constitution of sense perception, then it is neither destined to a historical loss nor to an eschatological end. If there is one thing that Hannah Arendt never loses sight of throughout her oeuvre, it is the supreme capacity of men for beginning—a political capacity of creation to which *sensus communis* testifies. That for Arendt *the end* is not destiny can be inferred by her striking remark in *The Life of the Mind* that creation is not godly but political: "men are capable of creating (*principium*) a world, in which the new can come to appearance", Arendt says, because simply they can begin (*initium*) (*ibid*.). Creation lies in the supreme capacity of beginning, which has no map and no predestined telos, that is no *end*.

A diagonal to Hegel can culminate this nearness in one fundamental point between Arendt and Hegel. Hegel remarks that it is "a misunderstanding" to claim that men are equal by nature, emphasizing that naturally "men are rather unequal" (Hegel 1986b, 332). Yet that equality exists—"and that not only particular men … but *men* are equal"—is the result of human creation: the creation of universality and the formation of consciousness of it (Hegel 1986b, 333). Hegel's point clarifies what Arendt radicalizes in another register: the common is not given but created—through an *initium*, a beginning. The trust in the capacity for beginning is the speculative dimension in Arendt's *sensus communis* that, like Hegel's absolute, is "with us all along" (Hegel 1977a, 47).[24] That is to say: in both Arendt and Hegel, not the *end*, but the trust that *there is* a beginning in the world accompanies thinking.

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24 For a remarkable interpretation of this expression, see Ruda 2018.

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