

# Revisiting the Polis amidst shifting sands. The places and spaces of citizenship and the public in the new global era. Current predicaments, debates, and implications for thinking “a world in common”\*

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is two-fold: to interrogate the place of “a world in common” in an unlikely-hospitable present, and to offer a reading of citizenship and public space that recovers the idea of the *polis* as relevant theoretical -and practical- pursuit. Two points are advanced in the pages that follow. First, that far from a nostalgic yearning for things past -grealh or imagined-, the idea of the polis commands the staying-power earned through the hospitality it has granted across time to a diversity of conceptions, debates and searches centered on citizenship: its elusive and ever-changing, though stubbornly enduring, conceptual guest. Second, that understood as *discursive space* anchored on plurality-and-egalitarianism, the idea of the polis may be deployed to catch a (strategic) glimpse of the collective trials, tribulations, achievements -and stakes-involved in the crafting, re-crafting, and defense of a world in common in the new global era.

A few ontological preferences, normative commitments, and premises should be declared at the outset.<sup>1</sup>

\*An earlier version was presented at the World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Santiago, Chile (July 2009). The paper draws on a chapter from a book-length manuscript I am currently completing (“Memories of Citizenship. A Story of An Embattered Polis. The Uruguayan Experience, 1950s-2010”). In the preparation of that chapter I benefited from endless conversations with Paulo Ravecca, who coordinated my research-team in Uruguay, and Kalle Dalhquist, who traveled from Sweden to join it. My appreciation also goes to Wayne Gabardi and José Rilla for their thorough and insightful comments to that chapter; and to Laurence Whitehead for his observations to this paper’s earlier version. I am greatly indebted to Rafael Paternain, Angélica Vitale and, again, to Paulo Ravecca for their illuminating thoughts

<sup>1</sup>Fred Dallmayr has made an important point when suggesting that “members of my generation -and probably of the next few generations- find themselves enmeshed in the transitional status of our age and hence in the agon of ontology and critique, regardless of what avenues are chosen to ‘resolve’ the conflict” (Dallmayr 1991, vii-viii). My points of departure stand in affinity with strands of critical theory (broadly understood as encompassing neo-marxist theory, the Frankfurt School strand of critical theory, critical constructivism, and poststructuralism). I also draw from several fields -political theory, comparative politics, international political economy, (post) international relations theory, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies-. It goes without saying that these compartmentalizations are merely indicative. Distinguishing between fields of study seems an increasingly arbitrary exercise, considering that in recent decades disciplinary boundaries have been persuasively challenged, on a diversity of grounds. To be sure, it is my understanding of “our present condition” as member of those generations Dallmayr refers to, what underpins my points of departure.

First: The motions of citizenship .namely, being with, amongst, or against others- define the meaning and meaningfulness of “things public” in any milieu, that is, the place and space afforded to the pursuit of myriad life-projects which must acknowledge -whether to celebrate or lament it- that, short of major cataclysms, they are a datum of experience which cannot be easily hidden or erased. My inquiry is thus premised on the very basic notion that the interactions between the self-and-others matter as central political datum. Thus understood, the interactions that interest this inquiry are those which take place beyond the realm of “easy-choice”, understanding the latter as those the self may choose to engage in within the privacy of her own home or the relative comforts of restricted or exclusive access to faces, places, and things. The name assigned by the motions of history to the site for the former is public space<sup>2</sup>. In this paper I shall argue that meaningful public space(s) entail living together amongst strangers: a far from gnaturalh moment which does not “just happen” unless the conditions for its enactment are produced, granting the polis a pivotal place as the discursive space where that (relational) moment may become available.

Second: This inquiry is also premised on the notion that understanding, acting upon, envisioning, and crafting the place of the self-and-others in shared milieux is an intractable problem. Thinking those interactions requires taking a stance which, inevitably, lies in the normative sphere. Citizenship, understood as a basic two-fold sense of co-entitlement and mutual acknowledgement amongst people who share an emplacement in time and space that is not of their choosing<sup>3</sup> seems a fundamental normative point of departure for inquiring into public life with concerns about its quality and texture, its crafting, re-crafting, and endurance.

Third, I start in stark awareness that any political milieu is fraught with contradictions. Different logics coexist. Contexts of exclusion seldom lack inclusionary agency, while highly-inclusive milieux anchored on egalitarianism are unlikely to lack pockets of infirmity which stand in denial of such anchor. What may authorize to make plausible statements about the condition, more (or less) egalitarian of a concrete milieu is the quality and texture of public life, and whether the enactment of the commons has permeated it for sufficient time and with sufficient staying-power to achieve discursive hegemony<sup>4</sup>.

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Acknowledging such membership may also account for my affinity with Gabardi's representation of “our present condition” as “a complex intertwining of late modern and postmodern forces pulling us in different directions” (Gabardi, 2001: xii). Having said that, I stand fully aware that my concerns may be regarded as thoroughly modern, given my emphasis on territorial embeddedness as worthy problematique and strategy of resistance to confront what I regard as some of the most perilous forces commonly associated with the postmodern side of “the late-modern/postmodern transition”, namely, the loss of “a common world” as thinkable possibility for imagining the place of the self-and-others in concrete territorial milieux.

<sup>2</sup>These points of departure are underpinned by my understanding of space as politically constituted, and the political as spatially configured. I derive these ideas from Henri Lefebvre's by now familiar emphasis on the social construction of spatiality ([1974]1991), and Doreen Massey's emphasis on the spatial construction of the social (1994). My understanding of the political relies on Claude Lefort's (1989) distinction between *la politique* and *le politique*, where politics “is about the specific behaviours, strategies, and policies of political actors and institutions” (Gabardi, 2001: 95), and “the political is the constitutive framework and sociopolitical space within which politics happens and through which meaning is assigned to events” (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup>To paraphrase yet again Karl Marx's famous words in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, humans do not make history under conditions of their own choosing.

<sup>4</sup>But what happens once the moment of hegemony has passed? Drawing on the gramscian notion of hegemony and its later re-working by neo-gramscian scholars- the study on which this paper is based attempts to grapple with that question, telling a story about the struggle staged in post-1985 Uruguay between the intertwined logics of neoliberalism and authoritarianism-and-its-sequels, on the one hand, and the legacy of the polis (in its post-hegemonic moment), on the other. That confrontation is posed therein as a protracted

Since I am wary of standing in denial of that which makes the representation of my case possible, I begin by making explicit reference to some current predicaments and debates that defy the idea of territorially-based formations for framing the meaning and meaningfulness of public space, thus de-stabilizing the aim of my inquiry at its very core. I shall then attempt to re-stabilize that aim, by arguing forth the pivotal importance of territorial-grounding for enacting the commons (Part 1). After brief reference to how the idea of the polis, citizenship, and public space has functioned in recent debates, three major contributions are engaged (Part 2). Hannah Arendt's political theory, whether provoking rejection or acclaim (it has elicited plenty of both) remains the leading reference when invoking the idea of the polis. In turn, Jürgen Habermas's public sphere remains, arguably, the most influential. And Enging Isin's *Being Political* (2002), an empirically detailed and theoretically sophisticated deconstruction of received notions of citizenship, is bound to challenge citizenship studies for many years to come. For present purposes, these are three major thinkers of plurality<sup>5</sup> whose ideas I have chosen to engage for they either inspire (Arendt, Isin) and/or seriously challenge my ontological preferences, normative commitments (Habermas), and methodological choices (Isin). The set of arguments that frame my own understanding of the polis, citizenship and public space is disclosed in Part 3. Some parting thoughts are offered in Part 4.

## **1 Under Cross-fire: The Place(s) and Space(s) of “a World in Common”**

Does it make sense, as the second decade of the 21st century begins, to insist upon the importance of territorially-emplaced collective abodes and states- as still central for thinking the place and space of “a world in common”? After all, persuasive arguments to the contrary have been around for some time -considering the insights of a vast and growing literature about the sweeping transformations implicated in the era of “time-space compression” (Giddens 1981, 1991, Harvey 1990) the “information revolution” (Castells 2000, Lessig 2001), “digital capitalism” (Schiller 1999), shifting patterns of international migration (Portes 2001), “blurred boundaries” (Bleiker 2000), “glocalization” (Robertson 1995; Baumann 1998) et cetera.

As leading cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai commented over a decade ago, these transformations are intertwined with “a sense of compromised sovereignty”, which remains “the subject of intense debate among political theorists and analysts”, with “a significant number...conce[ding] that momentous changes in the meaning of state sovereignty are under way” (Appadurai 2000, 16). The sea-changes implicated in the restructuring of world capitalism since the 1970s, most notably the internationalization of capital and labor markets (Sassen 1996, 2001) as well as the state (Cox 1981, 1996, Strange 1996, 1997), have loomed large in such debates. As socioeconomic and cultural

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“war of two worlds” which, as the second decade of the 21st century began, had reached a threshold-moment critically threatening the latter's meaningful survival.

<sup>5</sup>Other scholars have also produced major works on the question of plurality in the past few decades. To name but a few, it is the case of John Rawls (1971, 1993) within the liberal tradition; Michael Walzer (1983), among the communitarians; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's post-marxist theorization of radical democracy (1985); and, among postmodern thinkers, of Jean-Francois Lyotard's idea of multiplicity and the impossibility of consensus (1984, 1989). On Rawls's account of justice and its exclusionary implications see Mouffe (1996: 9-11).

polarization escalated “in an overall climate of increasing uncertainty and decreasing legitimacy of governments everywhere” (Isin 2002, 251), political life became the site of sweeping transformations with far-reaching consequences (Baumann 1999), the rise of “transversal dissent” (Bleiker 2000), among them-.

Three fronts are illustrative of the boundaries, places and spaces under challenge in recent debates about “the actual”, “in the process of becoming”, or envisioned framings of political life. One front is citizenship. If citizenship is understood as “membership in some public and political frame of action” (Pocock 1998, 35), in the past few decades modern framings have been unsettled at their very core. By the 1990s, “[o]n top of the still ongoing debates within many countries between adherents of the Enlightenment’s liberal and Romanticism’s *volkisch* versions of nationhood and citizenship, the diversification of industrial nation-states populations” had produced “new demands for the extension of the rights of citizens in yet new directions” (Shafir 1998, 18).

Such new directions were post-national. As illustrated most prominently by Will Kymlicka’s (1998, 2001, 2007) concerns with ethnic citizenship, one was territorially emplaced<sup>6</sup>. As illustrated by Soysal’s pioneer thematization (1994) of global citizenship rights, the other pressed beyond territorial formations.

The wobbly terrain for thinking “a world in common” is further illustrated by debates on the relationship between territorial formations and “the public sphere”. In a superb essay a propos Habermas’s public sphere, Bartolovich sought to consider “what sort of ‘publics’ might be imagined that are neither ‘national’...nor dependent upon territorial state forms”, and “what the implications of this imagining might be for understanding capitalism and for resisting it” (Bartolovich 2000, 19), to then suggest that “global justice may call for a new understanding of ‘public spheres’ as trans-statist...” (Ibid., 21)<sup>7</sup>.

A third front revolves around the perennial question of democracy. Some authors have raised important questions about the adequacy of states to manage consent, relocating in the process the place for democratic accountability<sup>8</sup>. By the early 1990s Held had already issued his, by now familiar, query: “Whose consent is necessary and whose participation is justified in decisions concerning, for instance, AIDS, or acid rain, or the use of non-renewable resources? What is the relevant constituency: national, regional, or international?” (Held 1995, 26-27). Meanwhile, poststructuralist critics were posing the inadequacy of the logic of state-sovereignty for democracy (Campbell 1998b), calling for a “disaggregation of democracy” (Connolly 1991: 476) or its “de-territorialization” (Ibid., 479)<sup>9</sup>.

These issues and fronts are by no means foreign to Latin America. In the past two decades or so -and amidst unprecedented transformations (Smith and Korzeniewicz

<sup>6</sup>There are, of course, more radical versions of multiculturalism than Kymlicka’s. For radical multiculturalism ‘... Western societies... must allow ... each ethnic group’s right to develop its own culture, and, in the process, accede to the reduction of its Western-centrism’, abandoning ‘... the very notion of a majority culture’ (Shafir 1998, 19).

<sup>7</sup>See also Arneil’s (2007) discussion of an alternative theory of global citizenship.

<sup>8</sup>David Held and Daniele Archibugi have been engaged along with other scholars in a collective project they have termed “cosmopolitan democracy” (see, for instance, Archibugi and Held eds, 1995, and Archibugi, 2003, 2008). On postnational democracy and justice see Bleiker, (2008) and Fraser (2005), among others.

<sup>9</sup>Poststructuralist political theorists do not necessarily disavow the state. Some advocate for trans-statist mobilization around issues of global concern to pressure the state. See, for instance, Campbell and Schoolman’s edited volume (2008) on the thought of William Connolly.

1997, Portes and Hoffman 2003, Portes and Roberts 2006)-, transnational networks of indigenous peoples (Andolina, Laurie, Radcliffe 2009), “transnational advocacy networks” (Keck and Sikkink 1998), “feminisms gone global” (Alvarez 1998); not to mention transnational migrants (Portes 2001) and “cybercultural politics” (Lins Ribeiro 1998) have loomed large, as academic efforts and concrete grass-root struggles intertwined in re-thinking and re-locating the place(s) and space(s) of citizenship.

In sum: for well over a decade a compelling body of literature has been pointing in the direction of “cosmopolitanism” or some sort of “global commons” as the road participation, resistance, and emancipation “is taking” and/or “*should take*” -the underlying premise of those who see a global sphere and global citizens emerging out of the kind of practices of dissent and emancipatory politics which have been staged, most prominently, by human rights, Green, ethnic, and gender rights movements, with the function of ICTs acquiring increasing attention since the “Arab Spring” (Allagui and Kuebler 2011)-.

That caution as well as less-than-great-enthusiasm or sheer skepticism about the emancipatory potential of “the transnational” and “the global” has hardly been bereft of authoritative voices<sup>10</sup> should not go unmentioned. My task here is to take due note, however, of the by no means minor warning-signals that flash-out as I stand before my topic.

With the boundaries of the “actual”, “in the process of becoming”, or envisioned framings of political life under cross-fire and, especially, with the emplacement of the terrain of the battle in the concrete places that we inhabit critically challenged, which way to go? One’s dubitations and concerns about choosing may be somewhat eased by remembering that while it is not conceptually necessary that citizenship be equated to membership in a territorial community since the Romans, the idea of “universal community” is hardly a novelty of “post-modern times” (Pocock 1998, 38, 39). Posing the place(s) and space(s) of political life as either limited to or transcending any level of experience would seem, at least for the time being, methodologically –as well as strategically- unwarranted. Amidst cross-fire, however, I find it warranted to move towards territorial grounds.

As Keck and Sikkink’s pioneer study of transnational advocacy networks shows, their strategies “can project and amplify their concerns into an international arena, which in turn can echo back in their own countries” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, x). To my mind, the point remains: transnational publics and strategies neither exhaust, nor fully encompass, the range of claims and publics that thinking “a world in common” demands. It is not only a matter of a still-in-the-process-of-emerging locus for the global emplacement of dissent but, more basically, of the likelihood, perhaps, that some issues and collective struggles do not lend themselves as readily as others to that kind of ‘transcending’ the state. Hence, I am not persuaded that collective empowerment ought to be predicated on expectations about the promises the transnationalization of dissent may hold, *if those* expectations slide into subsidiarizing attention to the concrete

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<sup>10</sup>Consider, for instance, Brennan (1997, 2003) and Kohler’s (1998) skepticism about the emancipator potential of “cosmopolitanism” and “cosmopolitics”, or Calhoun’s sympathetic though sobering assessment of “cosmopolitan democracy” (2004), and his more recent re-affirmation of the idea that “nations matter” (Calhoun, 2007). See also Guarnizo and Smith (1998) on the chiaroscuro of transnationalism as empowerment strategy.

places we inhabit and the context-bound strategies that confronting pressing issues may demand –the “planetary scale” of those issues, as well as the normative importance of the solidarity principle beyond borders notwithstanding–.

To be sure, de-politicization, privatization of policy-making, and the seduction of “privatized consumerist slumbers” (Young 1998, 265) have become forces to be reckoned with at a planetary scale. But, then, if as Walzer has convincingly argued “[t]he Hobessian account of society is more persuasive than it once was”, it would seem rather perilous to detract attention from the “crucial formations that we inhabit” (Walzer 1998, 291).

As prosaic as the point may seem, “being somewhere” is still experienced by an overwhelming number of humans as a basic feature of their lives, and no actuality or project that lifts-them-off-inhabitation is thus far eliminating the need to think about what the complexities of dwelling and “being settled” along with others politically entails. Ordinary men and women everywhere have to face the daily motions of inhabitation as neighbors and workers –fully, precariously employed, or unemployed; as claimants to poor, run-down, or nonexistent public services; and as stoic endurers of increasingly unavailable conditions of safety in the streets of concrete squares, zones, and cities of their territorial state. They still have to make a living, and may wish to raise a family; and not all can or wish to become migrants. They still have to make “minor” (“Should I walk to the corner-store? What if I’m mugged?”; “Should I let the kids go out to play with the new neighbors?”; “Should I pay the doctor’s bill or the dentist’s? Surely I can’t pay both at the same time...”; “...I can no longer afford to live here now that rent-control is over ... there is no affordable housing any more... where can I go?... What if I’m evicted as my neighbors were last week?”), and “momentous” decisions (looking for a job while fearing rejection every step of the way at being declared either over or under qualified; facing mandatory retirement without a meaningful safety-net available; joining a workers union, if one is available; going on strike; and, yes, electing officials, whether or not a strong party-system and accountable state-institutions are in place), all of these while hoping for attaining or maintaining a dignified place in the concrete spaces they share with others –*beyond* family and kin–.

My emphasis on the pivotal importance of territorial-grounding for thinking “a world in common” strives to stay clear from the realists’ naturalization of the state (Cox 1981, Burchill, 2001b, Ashley 1984, Ferguson and Gupta 2005). And I concur with Isin (2007, 211), that “[s]calar thought conceals the difference between actual (physical and material) and virtual (symbolic, imaginary, and ideal) states in which bodies politic exist”. Nevertheless, and for present purposes, I find it more pertinent to underline his comment, *passim*, about the “existence” of states in their very tangible representations and effects (Ibid.).

I also start mindful of the historically-contingent emplacement of citizenship. To be sure, that political and territorial frameworks have changed in antiquity from the Greek polis to the Roman Empire; in the middle-ages from the Roman Empire to towns; and in the modern era from towns to nation-states, makes plausible to pose a “fourth transition in the site of citizenship” (Shafir 1998, 20-21), from the nation-state to a transnational or global thrust and, eventually, to a world (as much as I try, unimaginable to me) where scalar thought might become “a thing of the past”. Yet, I do

not find that a certain awareness of either historical contingencies or future possibilities for realizing commendable aspirations for a more hospitable world provides sufficient basis for subsidiarizing or withdrawing serious attention from the territorial –and state-grounding of public life, if that assessment is somehow construed as suggesting that attention to thinking the place and space of “things public” should be redirected to some sort of emerging or envisioned “global commons”. In this sense, keeping in mind that “[t]he sovereign state still remains the sole institution that administers and enforces rights, even those conceived as universally held. . .”(Ibid., 21) seems called for. As Soysal persuasively argued some time ago, post-national and national frameworks remain concurrent (Soysal, 1994). And, to my mind, present trends suggest “concurrence” for some time.

The persuasiveness or tenuousness of my arguments aside, I hope to have advanced, with a modicum of clarity, the considerations that underpin my adherence to the notion that thinking “a world in common” and emplacing one of its fundamental layers (if not the primordial one) in territorially-grounded abodes -countries<sup>11</sup>, cities, small towns, neighborhoods, streets, public schools, work-places, and other (context-bound) relational spaces–, remains a central task.

## **2 Thinking the Polis, Citizenship, and Public Space. Three Major Contributions**

Invoking the idea of the polis has been attributed to yearnings for paradise lost<sup>12</sup>. Such widespread view tends to overlook how the idea functions in ongoing debates where, arguably, considerably more than “longing” is at stake. To be sure, the deployment of the notion has served to counter individualistic conceptions of citizenship. As noted in a learned review of the citizenship debates which remains current to this day, “[i]f the utilitarian version of liberalism, and. . . even Rawls’ revisited liberalism, resemble in their individualistic accent and legalistic framework the Roman, imperial conception of citizenship, many of their opponents derive their inspiration from, and seek to make relevant to modern life, the Greek’s polis citizenship ideal” (Shafir 1998, 10). Comparing both experiences thus “suggests many of the issues we will encounter in contemporary citizenship debates” (Ibid, 5)<sup>13</sup>.

For immediate purposes, a basic point to bear in mind concerning the polis is its simultaneous emergence as a political and spatial order (Isin 2002: 70). As for citizenship, two points seem warranted. First, if the polis emerges as “a named political space” (Ibid, 63) citizenship emerges “as some kind of claim to such space” (Scully 1990, 1-2, represented in Isin 2002 63). Second, the complex itinerary of citizenship –both as concept and as concrete realm of experience– is linked to the strategic questions it seeks to address. That is, regardless of the contents attributed to the notion or the dimensions emphasized to define it at any given moment –legal, territorial, functional, moral and so forth– its strategic importance rests in the narratives

<sup>11</sup>Here I am deliberately avoiding the nation-state trope, for “the nation” or “nationalism” is alien to my emphasis on territorial-grounding.

<sup>12</sup>For instance: “[t]he idea of the ancient Greek polis often functions in both modern and contemporary discussion as a myth of lost origins, the paradise from which we have fallen and to which we desire to return” (Young 1998, 288, Note 4).

<sup>13</sup>Shafir further notes that, ‘in fact. . . the liberal-communitarian debate might be fruitfully seen as modern re-enactment of the imperial-polis division’ (Ibid.).

it furnishes for understanding and constituting –thus “resolving”– the place of the self-and-others in tacitly shared milieux –to regulate, contest, or transform them-. Hence its diversity of meanings –ranging from “restriction” (insiders/outside) and “closure” (national/alien); to “conquest” and “expansion” of individual and collective rights; and senses of “belonging” and “community”, et cetera (Menéndez-Carrión 2007, ch.9)-. Bearing these points in mind, what interests my inquiry is how different narratives of citizenship “resolve” the place of things-public (their meaning and meaningfulness); and whether and how such narratives are linked to the enactment of “a world in common”.

As for “things public”, it should be born in mind that the notion has been “claimed and reclaimed for a great variety of purposes and susceptible of a considerable variety of constructions” (Baker 1992, 189), alternatively, “the public”, “the public sphere”, “the public realm”, “public space”, and their various understandings. Significantly, “[t]he word public’ has long served as the placemaker for the political ideal of open, inclusive, and effective deliberation about matters of common and critical concern” (Ryan 1992, 259). And in leading scholarly debates the public is regarded –following Jürgen Habermas’ immensely influential work- as the basis for engaging a multiplicity of concerns about modern/postmodern arrangements and their intersections –as a “sphere” of “communication”, and also as “communities of interest” or “publics”.

When summoning the polis, citizenship, and/or public space, the moment of plurality, I would surmise, stands as primordial question<sup>14</sup>. Habermas “resolves” plurality in the search of consensus through rational debate, Isin destabilizes the claims of received knowledge about how pluralities are historically constructed – claims that, as he contends, conceal their need of alterity-. Meanwhile, Arendt’s plurality does not rest on the need to resolve consensus or to acknowledge alterity. It stands, rather, as a fundamental condition which cannot be escaped. As shall be seen below, these three alternative theorizations of plurality bear a number of implications germane to my inquiry.

**(1) Plurality as Rational Critical Debate. Habermas’ Public Sphere** Jürgen Habermas’s rendition of the public sphere was first posed in his *opera prima*, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962). In what follows I briefly consider the thrust of Habermas arguments in that pioneer study, and discuss some later developments in his theorization of the public sphere. I conclude by posing a few queries a propos my reading of Habermas and some of his critics’ insights and re-workings of the notion.

Habermas’ arguments in *The Structural Transformation* (ST from now on) are widely familiar. Briefly, the first half of the book depicts the emergence of the public sphere –which is, for Habermas, the public sphere of bourgeois society, emplaced in 17th and 18th century European sites (French, and German, though mostly British, in his account): coffee- houses, salons, and meeting places where people came together to exchange opinions about public affairs. In Habermas’ words, “[t]he bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public

<sup>14</sup> My understanding of the relationship between egalitarianism and plurality is disclosed in Part 3 (39-41) below.

authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor" (ST, 27). Why was its rise significant? Habermas is definitive: "The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason" (Ibid).

The second half of the book focuses on the breakdown of the classical bourgeois public sphere. Mass democracy and the welfare state impaired democratic consensus by turning citizens into clients of the state, making them prone to state manipulation of information, and precluding autonomous deliberation. Electoral participation (and opinion polls) could no longer be grounded on an informed and reasoning public.

For Myriam Hansen (1993) Habermas' conception of the public sphere contributes two important points, namely, his insistence on its distinctiveness from state, market and the domestic realm; and on the historicity of the public sphere. Eley, in turn, remarks that Habermas'

... own vantage point as the legatee of the Frankfurt School, who resumed their critique of mass culture at the height of the Christian Democratic state and the postwar boom and at a low eb of socialist and democratic prospects, is crucial to understanding the book's motivating problematic. Habermas affirmed the critique of the present... while he specifically retrieved the past (the Enlightenment as the founding moment of modernity). In contrast to Horkheimer and Adorno, he upheld the Enlightenment's progressive tradition (Eley 1992, 292).

If Habermas' aim was to uphold the Enlightenment's progressive tradition, however, then Fraser's point about one of the basic limitations of ST comes immediately to mind. In her words, "[o]ddly, Habermas stops short of developing a new, post-bourgeois model of the public sphere. Moreover, he never explicitly problematizes some dubious assumptions that underlie the bourgeois model". Thus, she concludes, "we are left at the end of [ST] without a conception of the public sphere that is sufficiently distinct from the bourgeois conception to serve the needs of critical theory today" (Fraser 1992, 111-112).

In his learned introductory essay to the volume put together to celebrate the publication in English of ST, Calhoun noted that its significance remained in its aim: reaching beyond "the flawed realities" of the bourgeois public sphere of the 17<sup>th</sup> through mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries "to recover something of continuing normative importance", namely, "an institutional location for practical reason in public affairs and for the accompanying valid, if often deceptive, claims of formal democracy" (Calhoun 1992, 1). With the benefit of hindsight, the major significance of Habermas' public sphere might be better placed, perhaps, in the impressive body of work it inspired –not to mention the impact it had, via transnational networks of scholars and grass-roots activists, in the institutionalization of international forums of "subaltern publics", to use Fraser's expression (1992, 123), where the idea of dialogue and consensus-building as strategy to influence local, national and international policy-makers as well as "world public opinion" is rendered pivotal–.

To my mind, the main points made by his critics are basically three. First, Habermas'

failure to acknowledge the historical significance of other, concurrent, “public spheres” as well as their makers –women and plebeians, prominent among them-. Second, his unsatisfactory account of the power terrain which undermines, in turn, the strength of his argumentation about the conditions and dynamics entailed in the emergence –and function- of the bourgeois public sphere. And, third, the conceptual flaws and problematic implications of restricting the public sphere to “rational critical exchange” to the detriment of other crucial features of (public) interaction – contestation, for one, and associational practices beyond those involved in opinion formation, for another-.

To be sure, acknowledging “the existence of competing publics not just later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Habermas sees a fragmentation of the classical liberal model of *Öffentlichkeit* but at every stage in the history of the public sphere and, indeed, from the very beginning” (Eley 1992, 306)<sup>15</sup>, takes us far beyond the theoretical confines of Habermas’ rendition of the public sphere. For one thing, it takes us beyond rational critical exchange to associational life and its spaces –a feature of public life that in Habermas’ public sphere remains backstage. That is, the centers of sociability and the new infrastructure of social communication Habermas describes in ST are not part of his “political realm”. This stands as a major blind-spot in his account for the very same “deliberate voluntary activities” underpinning the sites of that emerging sphere “in parks, coffeehouses, discussion groups, literary society and the like”, as Boyte notes, ‘involved direct popular authority and responsibility for maintenance’ (Boyte 1992, 346). As he further comments, the “wide array of voluntary activities” suggested by social historians such as Ryan and Eley in their critiques of Habermas’ public sphere “makes impossible any simple distinction between ‘acting in common’ and ‘public debate’ ” (Ibid.).

In the process of destabilizing and reworking the notion, critical theorists freed Habermas’ public sphere from its epistemological chains and turned it into an empowering theoretical space for re-envisioning the public. The notion of “multiple, sometimes overlapping, or contending public spheres” (Calhoun 1992, 37) was convincingly posed in the process. As Jamie Owen Daniel (2000) ably notes, the meaning of the public sphere also expanded beyond the idea of the public forum for deliberating and reaching consensus –whether bourgeois as in Habermas, or counter-public, as in Fraser-. Fraser’s work, however, as well as Negt and Kluge (1993), Young (1990), and Mouffe (1993), “not only pluralized the concept but... extended its call for equality to the demands of marginalized groups and cultures in order to make visible the relationship between social equality and cultural insights” (Giroux 2000, 252).

Habermas did not remain impervious to the re-working of his original concept by leading critics. As the 1990s came to a close his public sphere was “no longer ‘bourgeois’ either in its origins or in its actual functioning” (Hill and Montag 2000, 3). It was also re-replaced globally, becoming “an international public sphere, the global totality not simply of national public spheres, themselves composed of multiple spheres, but also of transnational public spheres” (Ibid: 4). Summarizing a point eloquently made by these

<sup>15</sup>In line with Eley’s point, Calhoun (1992:39) notes that “. . . important parts of the struggle to establish some of the features that Habermas describes as integral to bourgeois publicity, like freedom of the press, in fact were carried out largely by activists in the so-called plebeian public sphere”. Calhoun then moves to make a major point, namely, that “[t]he hegemony of bourgeois publicity was always incomplete and exercised within a field constituted partly by its relation to other insurgent discourses” (Ibid.)

authors, “differential property and power relations” had “disappear[ed] from view” (Ibid). Habermas “ha[d] borrowed from his critics the notion of a world of innumerable vital public spheres, debating and discussing, unencumbered by what once appeared to be the inescapable constraints of material inequality” (Ibid, 5).

To my mind, pluralizing his rendition of the public sphere did not suffice to render Habermas’ account (1998a, 1998b) more persuasive. His reworking of the notion continued firmly anchored on “informed” and “rational” communication. Too many potentially meaningful realms remain “severed from”, or are rendered too subsidiary and thus not qualified for serious theoretical engagement in Habermas’ reworking of the public sphere. In the final analysis, his theoretical project renders that sphere unfit for the task of thinking spaces, places, practices, and structuring features of power and things public within/and beyond politics-as the-rational-pursuit-of-agreement.

The basic problem stems from his model of rationality. Making Gabardi’s words mine,

Reasoning is indeed intersubjective and social, as [Habermas] points out. Yet, it is also equally embodied and driven by contextual forces that cannot be formalized into a logic of human action...Habermas wants our experiences, the product of highly nuanced contextual environments, to be streamlined and channeled into a very formal, procedural model of rationality. The result is a linguistic model of rational intersubjectivity that is both too narrow and too demanding a medium for effective social integration and political action. In effect, it instrumentally colonizes the existential lifeworld. It denigrates the experiential complexity, diversity, and potency that gives life its more profound meaning. . .” (Gabardi 2001, 30-31)<sup>16</sup>

Two other considerations lead me to view Habermas’ public sphere as an implausible proposition. For one thing, with Mouffe (1993), I regard rationalists’ pursuit of undistorted communication -and of a politics based on rational consensus- as profoundly anti-political. Such pursuit does not make room for the decisive place (welcomed or unwelcomed, though still a basic datum) of passions and affections in politics<sup>17</sup>. Mouffe reminds us about the “inerradicability of antagonism” in democratic politics, which, as she notes, “is precisely what the consensus approach is unable to acknowledge” (Mouffe 1996, 8-9)<sup>18</sup>.

Still, some interesting queries arise for present purposes, a propos Habermas’ public sphere. One has to do with the place of conversations for thinking “a world in common”. Though Habermas’ rendition of the public sphere brings “conversations” to center-stage, his public sphere leaves no room for granting some sort of place, conceptually, to conversations about matters that interest the talking parties enough to engage in them –however those matters may be defined by the participants in those

<sup>16</sup>See also Dallmayr (1991, chs. 1, 4, 5) and his critique of Habermas’s conceptualization of reason and the life-world.

<sup>17</sup>The rift between “rationality” and action in Habermas’ public sphere, with some disturbing implications for the practice of justice-seeking contestation and resistance, are brought into stark relief in “The pressure of the street: Habermas’s Fear of the Masses” (Montag, 2000).

<sup>18</sup>It should be mentioned, albeit in passing, that Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty are two major thinkers whose divergences aside, stand together in their radical confrontation with rationalist theories. For illuminating discussion of Derrida’s deconstruction and Rorty’s pragmatism are Mouffe (1996) and Jacques Derrida (1996)

conversations-, above and beyond the presumed “rationality” of the exchanges and their “opinion forming” mission. In rationalist eyes, it might seem meaningless, at best, and nonsensical at worst, to make conceptual-room for the function of ‘inconsequential’ encounters as part and parcel of the public. Casual, unexpected, fleeting exchanges among strangers are quite likely candidates, rather, for the box of trivia in rationalist eyes.

Unburdened by rationalist premises, is it plausible to grant a theoretically meaningful place to casual conversations in being political? Do coffee-houses, squares, park benches, corners and sidewalks –in cities, neighborhoods, villages and towns-matter for thinking the polis, citizenship and public space, above and beyond the ‘rational exchanges’ enabled by its “infrastructure” –news-stands, tables and chairs, stools, and opened doors - and needless to say, above and beyond viewing the enactment of such encounters as mere ‘sociability’? Moreover, once the notion of multiple, concurrent, sometimes overlapping public spheres is acknowledged as conceptually sound, is it plausible to think of moments when these might not only function concurrently and in stark tension with each other, but trespass their boundaries, inter-relate, and configure multiple spaces of encounter where –without losing their relative autonomy- both their simultaneity and articulation are rendered meaningful?

Without falling into the romanticization of complex interactions, and without dismissing the historicity of antagonism or bracketing the struggles among contending political projects, is it plausible to think of certain moments of “being political” where “non-official” public spaces are neither blocked nor marginalized? How would a public space where the “denial of cultural authority” (Daniel 2000, 73) *does not* hold, function? How would the conversational, understood as a collective encounter of myriad rationalities (with their dissonances, tensions, and always provisional, though no less authentic or “effective” resolutions for that matter), rather than an abstract and objectivist “triumph of reason” *appear in public*, thus enacting “a world in common” in concrete historical abodes?

In other words, is it plausible to imagine “actually existing” places and spaces where people “respecting each other as equals” (Ibid, 74), do not only form consensus but acknowledge each other’s entitlement to “be there” in public –as publics- to mingle-and-agree, or to dissent-as-they-mingle, or where neither agreeing nor disagreeing but just “being there” as equally entitled selves-and-others, rather, is what matters? I guess what I am trying to formulate is the following query: how may the concrete experience of a public space where an egalitarian principle holds –rather than a metatheoretical “full material and cultural equality”- be posed to function?

Before the plausibility of these kinds of queries can be entertained, the question of alterity should be addressed, however briefly. Engaging Isin’s path-breaking theorization and the challenges it poses to the very formulation of those queries seems required for the task.

**(2) Engin Isin’s Being Political. Unsettling the Locus of Plurality** Conceived as a series of genealogies of citizenship, *Being Political* (from now on, BP) provides a masterful deconstruction of received notions of citizenship -from the Greek polis to the “cosmopolis” of today, unsettles established notions of citizenship at their very core,

elicits questions, and opens new paths for the study of citizenship and public space. At the risk of reducing to a bare minimum the analytical riches of this major work, I will briefly outline some of its leading emphases, arguments, and conclusions, and draw some implications for purposes of my inquiry.

BP takes as point of departure one basic concern, namely, that “[t]he ‘history’ of citizenship has often been narrated by dominant groups who articulated their identity as citizens and constituted strangers, outsiders, and aliens as those who lacked the properties defined as essential for citizenship” (BP, ix). Isin’s interest is thus to consider “certain categories of otherness that make citizenship itself possible” (BP, 30). Those categories he conceives as “three overlapping but distinct forms: strangers, outsiders, and aliens” (Ibid).

To my mind, one of the major strengths of the study lies in Isin’s point of departure: an understanding of politics and the political that allows him to emplace citizenship and its otherness as a new field of inquiry. As Isin declares from the outset, BP is not about politics; “[i]t is about citizenship and otherness as conditions of politics” (BP, x). Assuming “an ontological difference between politics and the political”, allows Isin to place “citizenship and otherness”, from the start, not as “two different conditions” but, rather, as “two aspects of the ontological condition that makes politics possible” (Ibid.).

In Isin’s formulation citizenship is considered “as that kind of within a city or state that certain agents constitute as virtuous, good, righteous, and superior, and differentiate it from strangers, outsiders and aliens who they constitute as their alterity via various solidaristic, agonistic, and alienating strategies and technologies...” (BP, ix, 35-36). Isin persuasively argues that “being political” is best understood as “a contested space. . . configured by various groups and forms of otherness”, rather than as “restricted or exclusive space of citizens” (BP, 111). He also argues that such contested space is “negotiated by invoking various forms of capital and strategies that assemble. . . specific technologies of citizenship” (Ibid.). Thus, “being political” means “to constitute oneself simultaneously with and against others as an agent capable of judgment about what is just and unjust” (BP, x). And what interests Isin’s program is recovering “those moments of becoming political, when strangers and outsiders question the justice adjured on them by appropriating or overturning those same strategies and technologies of citizenship” (Ibid).

Isin’s basic contention a propos the Greek polis and the Roman civitas -that “[b]eing political was not an exclusive domain of being a citizen”, and that “[t]his association of being political with being a citizen and conducting oneself in the council and assembly is precisely the image of citizenship that the ancient citizens themselves would have strangers and outsiders believe”, BP, 77-78)-, is extensive to later moments of his story. That is, the logic of exclusion “based on establishing opposite others”, where, in short, the excluded have no property of their own and express, rather, a lack of the properties of the other (conceived as “essential”), analytically impoverishes the moments of destabilization of dominant categorizations (BP, 3). Isin’s study recovers those moments. It also succeeds in showing how “[t]he closure theories that define citizenship as a space of privilege for the few that excludes others neglect a subtle but important aspect of citizenship: that it requires the constitution of these others to become possible. . .” (BP, 4; emphasis added). That is, both the logics of “exclusion”

and “closure” impoverish an analytics of “being political”.

A few comments are in order a propos the preceding highlights of BP. The first one is in reference to the conceptual relationship between “being political” and citizenship. Isin convincingly argues that being political may transcend – and subvert- senses of citizenship. From the perspective of an inquiry such as mine, where both categories are intertwined, an unsettling query arises (especially considering the persuasiveness I attribute to Isin’s genealogies of citizenship): does his insistence in placing “being political” beyond the domain of citizenship suggest that, in his view, citizenship is a rather poor notion for capturing the riches of the former?

That does not seem to be the case. To be sure, at one point Isin refers to “becoming political”, precisely, as “making claims for becoming citizens” (BP, 75). If becoming political is conceptually –and strategically- articulated with “making claims for becoming citizens”, then citizenship –and its attainment- remains a powerful propeller of being political in Isin’s formulation. In my view, the challenge Isin’s nuanced rendition of citizenship poses is methodological<sup>19</sup>. It issues a warning concerning the conceptual pitfalls involved in both the logics of exclusion, which, among other things, place the excluded “in purely negative terms, having no property of its own, but merely expressing the absence of the properties of the other. . .”, or where “the properties of the excluded are experienced as strange, hidden, frightful, or menacing” (BP, 3); and closure, which renders citizenship a space of privilege.

I find Isin’s work extraordinarily enlightening in terms of how the narratives of citizenship have been deployed historically for the production of the alterities that makes those very narratives possible. And, perhaps my affinity with Isin’s thematization of citizenship resides in the persuasiveness of his attempt to recover the notion of being political from the narrow confines of politics<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, my research concerns lie elsewhere.

Given Isin’s own research concerns, BP does not consider that moment of citizenship when egalitarianism may achieve hegemony as anchoring principle of public life, rendering a relational space the quality and texture of which makes it collectively unacceptable to engage in active strategies for *the production* of strangers *as outsiders*, that is, as alien to citizenship (i.e., where citizenship as moment of closure and exclusion is rendered marginal). Nor does it consider the conditions under which “a world in common” may falter, thus making *the production* of strangers *as outsiders* no longer marginal. These are the kinds of moments I am interested in.

In other words: I am interested in how “being political” may be enacted in concrete milieux once the discursive space of the polis achieves hegemony; and on whether and how that discourse manages to endure as post-hegemonic moment. Thus, I am interested in (i) the logic of stabilization of a specific discursive anchor, (ii) the logic of destabilization of such discursive anchor once confronted with a powerful counter-logic, and (iii) the moment of confrontation of both logics, to interrogate the production of “otherness” (in this “third moment”) *as estrangement from* the polis’ discursive space. That is, the dynamics of “othering” –in Isin’s terms- become important, for my purposes,

<sup>19</sup>This is my reading of Isin’s treatment of alterity and it does neither represent his explicit arguments nor what he chooses to emphasize in his discussion of the logics of exclusion and closure.

<sup>20</sup>See Note 2, above.

mainly as an outcome of the erosion or loss of that discursive anchor (moment iii). And at that moment, Isin's persuasive arguments about alterity notwithstanding, the politics of exclusion -and "civic death"- may become a salient datum of political experience that, in my view, no "positive recovery" of alterity can afford to ignore.

Overall, my concerns stand in closer affinity with Hannah Arendt's. I thus turn to a discussion of the central components of her "world in common".

**(3) Hannah Arendt's Plurality: The *Conditio Per Quam* of Political Life** In what follows, and based mostly on my reading of *The Human Condition* (from now on, HC), arguably Hannah Arendt's major theoretical work (Benhabib 1992, 74), I endeavor to consider the elements that underpin Arendt's defense of a world-in-common and the contemporary relevance of her work.

The controversy surrounding Arendt's political philosophy should be noted at the outset. While for some scholars "Arendt remains the political philosopher of our time", for others, "her time has passed" (Gabardi 2001, 65). If Arendt's conception of the public realm has been branded "elitist" by some scholars (Alejandro 1993, 179), other equally authoritative voices have convincingly argue that she offers "a conception of participatory democracy that stands in direct contrast to the bureaucratized and elitist forms of political representation so characteristic of the modern epoch" (D'Entrèves 1994, 9).

It should also be noted that Arendt's work defies classification (Cruz 2004, i, vii). For one thing, her political philosophy resists categorization within a conservative-liberal-socialist-20<sup>th</sup> century-scheme. For another -and even though she has been claimed as source of inspiration by communitarian thinkers-, Arendt's political philosophy cannot be readily assimilated to communitarianism. To be sure, Arendt is critical of representative democracy, holds popular uprisings and revolutionary moments in high esteem<sup>21</sup>, and her views on living-together are at odds with individualist premises held by liberalism in high esteem. At the same time, she is critical of forms of political association premised on the integration of citizens "around a single or transcendent conception of the good", traditional values, customs, race, ethnicity or religion (D'Entrèves 1994, 1-2). It is not unusual, furthermore, to find Arendt's thinking subsumed within the classical tradition of civic republicanism<sup>22</sup>. Arguably, however, Arendt's recovery of public space takes us beyond "collective deliberation" and "civic engagement", transcending the republican tradition. I prefer to view Arendt as a radical theoretical loner<sup>23</sup>, whose personal experiences and painstaking search

<sup>21</sup>Including the American Revolution, the revolutionary clubs of the French Revolution, the Paris Commune/1871, the creation of soviets during the Russian Revolution and of councils during the Spanish Civil War, the French Resistance to Hitler in the 2nd World War, and the Hungarian Revolt of 1956.

<sup>22</sup>In the civic republican tradition -going back to Aristotle and embodied in the thought of Machiavelli, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and in the writings of 18th century American republican thinkers-, an authentic body politic obtains when a citizenry gathers together to "deliberate" and "decide". D'Entrèves, among others, views as central in Arendt's conception of citizenship "the connection between political action, understood as... active engagement... in the public realm... and the exercise of effective political agency"(D'Entrèves 1994, 19-20). Hence, he reasons, "[i]f there is a tradition of thought with which Arendt can be identified, it is the classical tradition of civic republicanism" (Ibid: 2). The frequent assimilation of Arendt's thinking to communitarianism goes hand in hand with the similarly frequent equation of "modern civic republicanism" with the (fairly-recently-revived) communitarian critique to liberalism. See that equation made, for instance, in Gershon Shafir (1998, 10).

<sup>23</sup>Incidentally, Cruz (2004, v, vii) finds Habermas' view of Hanna Arendt as a "radical democrat" warranted. Meanwhile, Arendt's biographer Elisabeth Young Bruehl suggests that the development of Arendt's philosophy

for understanding her epoch led her to achieve a keen understanding of the political dynamics of estrangement, and to uphold a relentless commitment towards thinking-through the tragic consequences of disavowing the condition of plurality. I regard her, most basically, as a citizen in search of an abode, one she seems to find in those moments of human experience when “worldlessness” comes to a halt through the power of acting –and *being*- “together”.

The over-riding concern that underpins Arendt’s theoretical corpus is the “loss of the world”. And for Arendt, such loss is what characterizes modernity. That Arendt’s injunction to mass society is an important component of her critique of modernity<sup>24</sup> is well known. Still, the core of that injunction is worth noting, yet again: if she finds mass society “so difficult to bear” it is not for “the number of people involved” but, rather, because “the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate, and to separate them” (HC, 52-53).

A word is also in order about the place of the past in Arendt’s political philosophy. The “common world” Arendt seeks to recover is not based on tradition, but on memory. Her hermeneutic strategy borrows, in part, from Walter Benjamin’s idea of a fragmentary historiography, one that searches for moments of rupture, displacement, and dislocation in history, so as to recover “the lost potentials of the past in the hope that they may find actualization in the present”( D’Entrèves 1994, 3)<sup>25</sup>. It is in that sense that “Arendt’s return to the original experience of the Greek polis represents. . . an attempt to break the fetters of a worn-out tradition and to rediscover a past over which tradition no longer has a claim” (Ibid, 5). D’Entrèves puts it well: Arendt’s recovery of the Greek polis idea should thus be regarded as a metaphor (Ibid, 76).

Bearing in mind that “authenticity”, rather than “tradition”; and “the forgotten”, “concealed”, or “displaced”, rather than “the authoritative”, is what her hermeneutic strategy seeks to recover, regarding Arendt’s vision as “a nostalgic return to the greatness of a past now irremediably lost” (Ibid.) seems unwarranted<sup>26</sup>. With these preliminaries in mind, my commentary follows.

might well be understood by resorting to the notion of pariah. See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1979).

<sup>24</sup>My outline of Arendt’s indictment of modernity neglects some important components, including her reflections on “earth alienation”, which underpins “the whole development of natural science in the modern age” (HC: 264), compounding, in her view, the problem of “world alienation” (HC: 278). For a comprehensive treatment of Arendt’s conception of modernity see D’Entrèves (1994, ch. 1). A path-breaking treatment of Hannah Arendt’s conception of modernity may be found in Benhabib (1996), where it is persuasively argued that Arendt “was no philosopher of antimodernity” (p. 138), but, rather, “a reluctant modernist, but a modernist nonetheless; who celebrated the universal declaration of the rights of man and citizen; who took it for granted that women were entitled to the same political and civil rights as men; who denounced imperialist ventures in Egypt, India, South Africa and Palestine; who did not mince her words in her critique of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism or in her condemnation of modern nationalist movements [and who] celebrated the revolutionary tradition, which she likened to a *fata morgana* that appears and disappears at unexpected moments in history” (pp. 138-139)

<sup>25</sup>Arendt draws, in addition, from Heidegger’s deconstructive hermeneutics in order to free inherited categories “from the distorting incrustations of tradition” so as “to recover those primordial experiences. . . which have been occluded or forgotten by the philosophical tradition” (D’Entrèves 1994, 4). For a superb reading of Heidegger’s influence in Arendt see Dana R. Villa (1996). For an illuminating discussion of Heidegger and Arendt see Gabardi (2001, ch. 3).

<sup>26</sup>It should be noted that in the course of comparing Arendt and Habermas’ stance on modernity, D’Entrèves finds that while Habermas’ is affirmative and “future-oriented”, stressing the “incomplete” project of modernity, Arendt’s is past-oriented, in the sense that modernity “appears as a deficient project that stands in need of redemption” (D’Entrèves 1994:27). I differ from that assessment. Since in my reading of Arendt the idea of continuity and change stand as false antagonisms –and this, to my mind, is one of the most compelling contributions of her political theory-, I find it warranted to view her project of recovery as “future-oriented”. I grant this point extensive attention in the study on which this paper is based.

Reference should be made, first and foremost, to the pivotal place of plurality in Arendt's political philosophy. For Arendt plurality stands not only as "the *conditio sine qua non*" but as "the *conditio per quam* of political life" (HC, 7)<sup>27</sup>. That plurality is emplaced as the backbone of her defense of a world in common<sup>28</sup> means that all her central notions –public space, freedom, action, power-, and the relationship between public and private, rest on the plurality premise.

There is, it seems to me, a first (three-fold) operation in Arendt's reasoning which enables her to (i) emplace plurality at such an over-riding place, to (ii) immediately proceed to formulate her notion of freedom, and (iii) to justify a world in common anchored on a space where freedom is, literally, made *in public*. That reasoning unfolds as follows:

First operation- Arendt's plurality premise rests "on the fact that men, not Man, live on the Earth and inhabit the world" (HC, 7-8). That is, humans are emplaced in a world which they share, regardless of their (more, or less, willing) disposition to acknowledge the condition of plurality.

Second operation- That basic, primordial datum (co-inhabitation) prevents humans from being free - if freedom is understood as the possibility of escaping the condition of plurality-. To be sure, Arendt's conception of freedom is alien to the idea of liberty as individual sovereignty, a notion she regards as a "basic error" (HC, 234)<sup>29</sup>. Note that Arendt does not emplace her rejection of the notion of self-sufficiency on individuals' dependence on each other (on shared weaknesses, as it were, or on need of aid) but on co-inhabitation: "No man can be sovereign, because no single man, but men, inhabit the Earth, and not, as maintained by tradition since Plato, due to the limited force of man, which makes him depend upon the help of others" (HC, 234).

Third operation - If humans passage on Earth is to be meaningful, that condition requires acknowledgement, for "[w]ithout being talked about by men, and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice, but a heap of unrelated things [to which each isolated individual would be at liberty to add one more object]. . . without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain as the wandering of nomad tribes" (HC, 204). There is no need to subscribe to Arendt's understanding of nomadism in order to recover the core of her insight: the flight from the plurality premise implied, say, in tyrannies, or in any form of living that disavows such premise<sup>30</sup> does not deny that some kind of order is required for living-together, lest humanity runs amok. In Arendtian terms, that order is realized through the enactment of a world in common. That enactment is what enables the realization of freedom -a point I shall come back to further below-.

I now turn to Arendt's conception of the public, which, to my mind, takes us beyond

<sup>27</sup>In Arendt's thinking, the "human condition" does not mean "human nature". Her treatment of the human condition may be regarded as an exercise in phenomenological anthropology (D'Entrèves 1994, 35).

<sup>28</sup>Arendt's conditions are "life", "natality", "morality", "plurality", "worldliness", and "the earth".

<sup>29</sup>On her conception of freedom see also "What is Freedom" (Arendt, 1968, ch. 4).

<sup>30</sup>Arendt's treatment of tyranny, representative government, and her preference for direct democracy, are underpinned by her objection to any form of regime that exiles the citizen from the public sphere. Within this framework, she pronounces herself against the idea of the "philosopher-king" or the "wise-men", that "know how to govern". For Arendt, the problem with these forms of government is not that they are cruel since, in her view, most of the time they are not, but, rather, that they may function too well. Her objections are to forms of regime that favor the notion that citizens should concern themselves with their private affairs while governments attend public affairs, thus exiling the citizenry from the public sphere.

narrow definitions of politics; addresses the politics of time in a future-oriented manner -locating the future as unattainable without remembrance-; and accomplishes these tasks while acknowledging plurality, at every step of her reasoning, as an immanently fragile – and yet central, and feasible- project.

There are three components that I find at the core of Arendt's understanding of the public<sup>31</sup>. First, in Arendt the public is (i) a space of relationships; and (ii) a collective and (iii) trans-generational achievement, which (iv) renders humans' passage on Earth meaningful. Second, in her conceptualization of public space, freedom (embracing plurality), action (joining together), and power (acting in concert *and* being together), are inextricably linked. Third, the central place of two ideas, namely, "appearing in public" and "mutual acknowledgement" should be emphasized.

Note, first, that for Arendt, the word public means "the world itself", inasmuch as "it is common to all of us and distinguished from our place privately owned place in it" (HC, 52). Far from "natural", that world is an achieved construct.<sup>32</sup>

Note, secondly, that for Arendt public space is the site of freedom, understood as a *collective property* that emerges from embracing the condition of plurality. If public space is collectively produced, it requires action. Her words in "What is Freedom" are unequivocal: "[m]en are free –as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom- as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same" (Arendt 1968, 146). In Arendt's view, the very existence of the public realm is contingent upon power. And power emerges –and freedom realized- through a people's joining and acting in concert, disappearing the moment they disperse.

This brings forth a third central element. In Arendt's words, "reality, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearing", and "that what appears before all, we shall call Being", since "anything that lacks this apparition comes and goes like a dream, intimately and exclusively ours, but without reality" (HC, 221). The implication is two-fold. For one thing, Arendt's public space rests on mutual acknowledgement: it is the presence of others (*beyond family and kin*) what guarantees "reality" to the self. For another, if the testimony of one's own humanity – that is, one's place in the world- is granted by others, then humans need to explicitly appear in public.

I now turn to Arendt's notion of power. It should first be noted that such notion is alien to the instrumentalization of individual interest and will outside or against the commons. It should also be noted that even though Arendt's theory of power may be faulted for its lack of attention to the question of capitalism as a structure of power -a point addressed further below-, she does focus on the historical deployment, effects, and implications of "strength", "force", and "violence" – notions of power which she regards, however, as futile attempts to overcome the condition of "non-sovereignty" and

<sup>31</sup> Arendt works with several definitions of the public ("governing", "managing public affairs", "deciding", on the one hand; "appearing", on the other). Her deployment of the notion becomes elusive at times. The thrust of her thinking becomes more apparent if one does not take her explicit definitions at face-value but, rather, attempts to sift from her extensive paragraphs how her assessment of things public plays-out in framing the illustrations she provides.

<sup>32</sup> It refers "to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to the affairs which go among those who inhabit the man-made world together" (HC, 52). For, in Arendt's thinking, "to live together in the world means, essentially, that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (HC:72).

to compensate for the intrinsic weakness of plurality<sup>33</sup>.

While her conception underlines the limitless possibilities of power –as well as action–, plurality for Arendt is inherently weak: it depends upon many wills and intentions that are –by definition– temporary and not too trustworthy. Its sole limitation is (no less than) “the existence of other people” –a limitation that “is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the human condition of plurality to begin with” (HC, 201). The resulting space is thus potentially strong and yet fragile. It can be strengthened or weakened. Its plasticity is contingent upon the temporary agreements of those so engaged. The critical predicament resides in that any attempt to overcome the consequences of plurality result no so much on the “sovereign domination of the self” but on the arbitrary domination over the other, “or as in stoicism, the exchange of the real world for another, imaginary one, where the others would simply cease to exist” (Ibid.).

There is an additional point in Arendt’s view of power that should be born in mind, which immediately brings forth the place of the polis –and memory– in her thinking. Arendt’s conception of power is grounded: it is not thinkable without inhabitation. “Being political” and “living in the polis” are made coterminous. Invoking the Greek polis she notes, nevertheless, that “[t]he polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for that purpose, no matter where they happen to be” (HC, 198).

The Arendtian polis is the outcome of acknowledging plurality, and its tangibility is granted by the quality and texture of the (public) space resulting from the (collective) strength such acknowledgement enables. Even though such sense of place is territorially bound, in Arendt’s reasoning there is nothing peculiar to specific peoples that would make such space of relationships “exceptional”, that is, accessible only to certain kinds of human conglomerates with some sort of unique or intrinsic cultural or nation-specific attributes. This does not authorize, however, to readily brand Arendt’s philosophy as “universalizing”. Her thought, yet again, defies classification.

Having said that, in Arendt’s thinking one may find indications that the boundless quality of action (“The boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships. . .” [HC, 19]), entails the possibility of transcending bounded physical territories. As D’Entrèves points out, “the famous motto” that Arendt appeals to in HC, “‘Wherever you go, you will be a polis’, expressed the conviction among Greek colonists that the kind of political association they had set up originally could be reproduced in their new settlements, that the space created by ‘the sharing of words and deeds’ could find its proper location almost everywhere” (D’Entrèves 1994, 77).

The “universal” element in this deployment of the Greek polis metaphor does not

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<sup>33</sup>See her discussion of different notions of power in HC, chapter 5. See, also Arendt (1972, 143-55). Self-government initiatives, town-hall meetings, workers’ councils, demonstrations, and struggles for justice and equal rights are all part and parcel of Arendt’s notion of power. It should also be noted that in her view the loss of power cannot be compensated by material prowess, and it can become available to small and poor countries, providing them an advantage over ‘powerful’ and “rich nations”. Third, it should be born in mind that some of her passages in HC in reference to “the power of the weak” (those who “know nothing and can do nothing”), are quite elusive –aside from equating it with an ochlocracy (mob rule), there is very little else she says-. It is clear that for her if tyranny replaces power with violence, ochlocracy replaces power with force –in Arendt, a perverse form of “acting together” through the pressures and tricks of cliques.

rest, however, in the assumption that modes of being political can (or ought to be) somehow homogenized or arbitrarily transported elsewhere but, rather, in the idea that “living together” –a space of quality interactions anchored in the principle of mutual acknowledgement- is not contingent upon cultural specificities, national attachments, or material riches. Arendt conception of the polis affirms the centrality of space. And her emphasis is in the relational quality of space. Such relational quality is “neither the result of religious or ethnic affinity, nor. . . the expression of some common value system’ but attainable, rather, ‘by sharing a public space and a set of political institutions, and engaging in the practices and activities which are characteristic of that space and those institutions” (Ibid, 17).

A word is also in order about the place of memory in the Arendtian polis. If plurality is the *conditio per quam* of political life, the acknowledgement of plurality cannot be sustained without remembrance. Plurality and memory are intertwined. The polis “resolves” the problem of time: it insures a place for the past, present and future of the commons. At the same time, it insures the place of the individual in the commons –a place that cannot be understood in individualistic terms, unless one perilously dismisses the plurality premise on which it rests-. It can achieve those functions, however, because it stands as “a kind of organized remembrance” (HC, 198)<sup>34</sup>.

As the preceding paragraphs suggest, individual self-interest and the atomism of egotistical beings are ruled-out in the Arendtian polis, for these blatantly deny the human condition, imperil the meaningfulness of ‘living together’, and trump the monumental significance of its travails. Arendt’s conception of the public does not rest upon a denial of the private, however. As has been noted time and again, Arendt views the public (understood as the political realm) and the private (understood as the domestic realm) as strictly separate. For present purposes, I find it worth stressing, rather, that she views the public (understood as the space for being with-and-amongst others beyond family and kin) and the private (understood as the place of one’s own, where one can hide from “publicity”), as separate though mutually required realms.

Arendt’s public realm is the place for individuals to be amongst others –“equal”-beings. Arendt acknowledges, however, that no one can be there all the time, for “a life that occurs in public, in the presence of others, becomes superficial” (HC, 76). Thus, there is room for private property in the Arendtian polis, though not in the modern sense. If the public is the space that humans needs in order to appear, be testified –confirmed- by others, and thus, to “be” (present in public, and thus, political), possession is admitted in terms of having a place where one can “hide”(HC, 230). The four walls of one’s home constitute the only safe-haven to “hide from ‘the public common world’, from what happens there”, and also from its publicity – ‘being seen and heard’ (HC, 76)

Note, then, that if Arendt understands private property as “a place privately possessed for the purpose of hiding”, the greatest threat to such property does not

<sup>34</sup> . . . The organization of the polis, physically insured by the walls that enclosed it and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws –so that subsequent generations would not change its identity beyond recognition- is a kind of organized remembrance. It insures the mortal actor that his passing existence and momentary greatness will not ever lack of the reality that proceeds from one being seen, heard, and in general, appearing before a public of other men. . .” (HC: 198) Arendt’s references to the polis affording individuals a chance for glory has been the subject of much attention -and controversy-. I comment on that further below.

stem from the abolition of material possessions or wealth, but rather, from the abolition of “a tangible and worldly place of one’s own” (Ibid) This is because in Arendt’s thinking major deprivation is not linked to lack of material riches<sup>35</sup>, but to a lack of being “testified”/“confirmed” by others. Thus, if not emplaced in relation to a strong public realm, the private becomes the realm of deprivation, which for Arendt means “the absence of others” (HC, 67). This absence is what she attributes to mass society, to commodification, and to lives spent on the pursuit of egotistical pleasures or that withdraw to the privacy of the familial. This is what her conception of the relationship between public and private is at pains to highlight: the futility of hedonism<sup>36</sup>, the meaningless “thirst” for commodities - rather than for people-, the tragedy of alienation, as posed by Marx, which in turn underpins, in Arendt’s vision, the tragedy of human lives that show themselves solely in the privacy of their homes or in the intimacy of their friends.

Building upon –as well as departing from- some of the most interesting critiques raised by Arendtian scholars, a brief commentary on some basic shortcomings of her defense of a world in common follows.

For one thing, Arendt’s notion of the social<sup>37</sup> is highly problematic. Among the criticisms it has raised, one seems especially warranted, namely, that Arendt’s “identification of the social with the activities of the household” prevents her from acknowledging “that a modern capitalist economy constitutes a structure of power with a highly asymmetric distribution of costs and rewards” (D’Entrèves 1994, 8). This has led authors such as Sheldon Wolin -who otherwise acknowledges the significance of her theory- to note that Arendt

never succeeded in grasping the basic lesson taught not only by Marx but by the classical economists as well, that an economy is not merely work, property, productivity, and consumption: it is a structure of power, a system of ongoing relationships in which power and dependence tend to become cumulative, and inequalities are reproduced in forms that are ever grosser and ever more sophisticated (Wolin 1983, 9-10).

Two other aspects of her theory seem highly problematic. In Arendt’s conceptualization there is a strict separation between the public and the private spheres. And there is utter silence on the question of boundaries. That Arendt does not consider the blurred quality of boundaries, means that the immanent tension between the public and the private remain outside the scope of her theory. The early feminist critique<sup>38</sup> seems to

<sup>35</sup>For Arendt’s view on private property as opposed to wealth see her masterful analysis of the futility of material riches in HC, 58-67.

<sup>36</sup>Arendt views hedonism (private forms of life underpinned by an over-riding search for pleasure and “the absence of pain” as the most radical form of non-political life. Hedonism thus stands as the anathema of the polis in her thinking. See HC, ch. 3, section 15.

<sup>37</sup> It should be born in mind that in Arendt’s view modernity features the “victory” of animal laborans. And with such victory the “world of fabrication” and the “world of action” are replaced in favor of productivity and wealth. For Arendt the social realm encompasses those activities formerly regarded as belonging strictly to the sphere of reproduction emplaced in the household. As Benhabib notes, for Arendt modernity has brought “the occluding of the political by the social and the transformation of the public space of politics into a pseudospace of interaction in which individuals no longer ‘act’ but merely ‘behave’ as economic producers, consumers, and urban city dwellers” (Benhabib, 1992:75). Arendt states that “the utter extinction of the very difference between the private and public realms comes about with ‘the submersion of both in the sphere of the social’”(HC: 69).

<sup>38</sup>A good overview may be found in Dietz (1995). See also Pateman (1983).

have a strong point in this regard<sup>39</sup>, the relatively recent recovery of Arendt by some leading voices within feminist scholarship notwithstanding<sup>40</sup>.

Arendt's analytical blind-spots on the relationship between the public and the private seem quite intriguing to me. For one thing, Arendt would be the first to acknowledge that conceptions change over time -she calls attention to this time and again in her references to the Greek polis, to the Roman civitas, or to the politics of her time-. For another, she explicitly acknowledges the plasticity of public space (HC, 46). Furthermore, the anchoring notion of Arendt's world in common – the condition of plurality-, along with her insistence on the public sphere as a space for appearing, suggest that her thinking would not disavow the enrichment of the public through the personal (as understood by the LGBT movement) becoming political, and the public sphere making room for talking and acting upon those issues.

In the tenuous realm of mere speculation, I am inclined to regard her strict separation between the private and the public as an analytical blind-spot stemming from her deep-held conviction that those spheres are to be regarded as distinct, and must remain separate if (a) a strong public space is to become plausible -for “people cannot be in public all the time” and they need a place “where to hide”-; (b) the realm of the private is not to over-ride the energies and commitments required for producing and sustaining a world in common; (c) the realm of necessity (the means for survival) must be resolved in order for people to become available for “being public”. Within a theoretical effort where the leading concern is claiming a pivotal place for the commons, the private remains subsidiary to a fault in Arendt's thinking –which also leads her to serious analytical blind-spots concerning the question of equality and necessity, a point I will come back to further below.

A third problematic aspect of Arendt's defense of “a world in common” is her failure to address the tension between the agonal and the participatory components of action. Should Arendt's emphasis on the pivotal role of agonism in the Greek polis be construed to mean a condonation of public space as mere stage for individuals to distinguish themselves? Is “being political” for Arendt, in the end, no more than some sort of quest for achieving personal glory and immortality? To be sure, there is a strong emphasis on agonism, especially in HC, where a conception of action as striving for excellence, distinguishing oneself, etcetera, is highlighted time and again.<sup>41</sup> As Botstein

<sup>39</sup> The thrust of the early feminist critiques to Arendt's public space is ably captured in Mary Ryan's comment that given Arendt's definition of the public/private dichotomy she seems to “banish women” from the public (Ryan, 1992, 261). Meanwhile, Benhabib (1992, 95) noted that “Arendt's agonistic model is at odds with the sociological reality of modernity, as well as with modern political struggles for justice”. She further argued that “Arendt's persistent denial of the ‘women's issue’ and her inability to link together the exclusion of women from politics and this agonistic and male-dominated conception of public space are astounding” (Ibid, 96, Note 13). The Note appears in reference to Arendt's “associational view of public space” as that which “emerges whenever and wherever, in Arendt's words, ‘men act together in concert’ ” (Ibid, 78). Continues Benhabib: “The near absence of women as collective political actors in Arendt's theory (individuals like Rosa Luxemburg are present) is a difficult question, but to begin thinking about this means first challenging the private/public split in her thought, as this corresponds to the traditional separation of spheres between the sexes (men=public life; women=private sphere)” (Ibid, 96, Note 13). A few years later, in *The Reluctant Modernism* . . . (1996), Benhabib recovered the associational component of Arendt's public space as relevant for thinking social movements. Arendt's biographer Elisabeth Young Bruehl (1982, p. 273) has commented on Arendt's misgivings about the question of women becoming a movement separate from other political struggles. Markus (1987: 82) had also suggested that Hannah Arendt shared with Rosa Luxemburg the conviction that the question of women should not stand apart from other, more encompassing struggles.

<sup>40</sup> Since the mid 1990s feminist scholars began to recover Arendt's relevance to feminist theory. See, for instance, Disch (1994), Honig's edited volume (1995), and Benhabib (1996).

<sup>41</sup> I take slight exception to D'Entrèves view that in HC Arendt puts forth the agonal model of action, “more”

noted awhile ago, however, Arendt's "use of the notion of glory is ancient, not modern". She deploys it "in the Roman and biblical sense, which endows glory with ethical rather than narrow self-serving qualities" (Botstein 1978, 379)<sup>42</sup>.

Aware of her critics' cogent arguments about Arendt's stress on "words and deeds", and though mine is much less authoritative than more extensive and subtle readings of Arendt, I dare suggest that the "heroic acts" in the context of Arendt's thinking may be read as metaphors of the individual commitment required if a world in common is to be crafted and endure. In addition, it seems to me that describing the individual distinction sought by citizens in the Greek polis, as Arendt does, can hardly be construed as prejudice towards heroization -this, in light of the arguments she launches in defense of a world in common with the plurality premise as their backbone; that she is at pains to stress the collective elements of action throughout; and that for Arendt power means acting in concert<sup>43</sup>. It should be further born in mind, in this connection, that in her thinking "the revelatory quality of speech and action is contingent on plurality and solidarity, and is only fully realized, in Arendt's memorable expression [HC, 180] 'where people are with others and neither for nor against them -that is, in sheer human togetherness' " (D'Entrèves 1994, 73).

A fourth major shortcoming in Arendt's defense of a world in common, as authoritative commentators have pointed out time and again, is her failure to address the three-fold question of equality, necessity, and exclusion in a satisfactory manner. To be sure, references to problematic aspects of the Greek polis that often stand in Arendt's writings as descriptive accounts without further elaboration on her part -equality, necessity, and exclusion prominent among them-, may at times be construed as condonation and approving silence. The following passages are illustrative.

In her depiction of freedom in the classical Greek polis, Arendt notes at one point that "Being free meant not being subjected to the necessity of life nor under the command of someone and not commanding over anyone, that it, neither governing, nor being governed" (HC, 44). Fine. But then she states that "[n]eedless to say this equality has very little in common with our concept of equality: it meant living and dealing only among peers, which presupposed the existence of 'unequal others' whom, naturally, always constituted the majority of the population of a city-state" (HC, 52). Furthermore, the basic difference between the Greek polis and the family is that "the former only knew equals, while the latter was the center of the strictest inequality" (HC, 44).

These kinds of passages are highly problematic. The question immediately arises: if, as Arendt holds, the meaning and meaningfulness of a world in common rests in plurality, how can the quintessential example of "living together" be predicated on

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than the associational (D'Entrèves 1994, 10-11). Though she may have paid increasing attention to the associational component in later writings, I find that in HC the two models are put forth in a way that -unresolved tensions notwithstanding- leaves no doubt as to the significance she attributes to both.

<sup>42</sup>See Martin Jay's disturbing view of Arendt's existentialist affinities and Leon Botstein's counter-arguments, in Jay and Botstein (1978). To my mind, Botstein succeeds in getting the record straight about Arendt's lack of sympathy for mere "heroism" and egotistical searches for glory.

<sup>43</sup>There is no indication in Arendt's political theory that she valued action for action's sake, or that she dismisses the instrumental components of action. What Arendt is at pains to emphasize, time and again, is that the action-power-freedom triad cannot hold unless action transcends the merely instrumental. She thus acknowledges that action must concern itself "with the matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests". Worldly interests, for Arendt, "constitute, in the word's most literal significance, something which inter-est, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together" (HC, 182).

the Greek polis, sustained on the labor –and exclusion- of others –the overwhelming majority- who are not part of the public sphere? Her lack of further elaboration on those the Greek polis leaves out –women and slaves, most notably- is, again, quite intriguing, bearing in mind the thrust of her thinking.

Those kinds of passages may lend themselves to comments such as Michael Walzer's, who suggests that for Arendt, "among other republican theorists", "[i]deally, citizens should not have to work; they should be served by machines, if not by slaves, so that they can flock to the assemblies and argue with their fellows about affairs of state" (Walzer 1998, 294). If that were the case, Arendt's philosophy might, indeed, be construed as "elitist" and "unrealistic", at best, and at worst, as irrelevant for seriously thinking contemporary political life. In my reading of Arendt, however, the core of her insight leads entirely elsewhere, namely, to underlining that "expropriation" prevents the exercise of citizenship.

To my mind, it would seem exceedingly arbitrary to construe such kinds of passages as some kind of extravagant call for the formation of an exclusive coterie of (non-working/ male) citizens whom, insulated from the problems of daily life (trivial survival matters that are better left in the hands of non-citizens) may thus indulge in the exercise of impressing their peers with elaborate speeches and bold acts so as to confirm time and again the value of mutual acknowledgement, and to hope for immortality. Caricaturesque readings aside, such passages –as well as others in her Greek metaphor- point in the same direction: being (public) is not forthcoming unless vital necessities are resolved. It requires agents not "forced" by necessity. That seems, of course, a highly problematic idea, if construed to mean that unless one's vital necessities are resolved, and in the face of a lack in material resources and skills, the exercise of citizenship is precluded.

A reading of that sort would be unwarranted, however. Though her treatment of necessity becomes confusing at times, and her silences on the matter seem utterly unsatisfactory, within the overall context of her thinking it does seem warranted to read those passages as bits and pieces of the conversation Arendt holds with herself in the process of shaping the basic idea that underpins them, namely, that "being together", "a common world", and the meaningful enactment of the public is precluded by expropriation –understood by her as "the deprivation for certain groups of their place in the world and their naked exposure to the exigencies of life" (HC, 254).

Be that as it may, and granting that the notion that humans have to be "prepared" to be in public holds much interest, Arendt does fail to address the crucial question of how the enabling mechanisms might be understood. This is a major absence in her theory, particularly considering that for Arendt equality is not "natural", that is, it does not rest on a theory of natural rights, for rights are, in her view, political: they are made (and unmade) in the political realm<sup>44</sup>.

In that regard, a major weakness in Arendt's political theory is her treatment of the state, watered-down by her condemnation of the social, which prevents her from any meaningful theoretical attention to the state-market-society triad. Her unsatisfactory

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<sup>44</sup>In this connection see Arendt (1973, 269-284, 300), where she notes that no appeal to "natural rights" could be advanced before the Nazi regime. Exclusion from membership in the body politic meant, precisely, that the excluded had no rights. They lacked, for all intent and purposes, "the right to have rights".

treatment of capitalism as a power structure and her failure to address the complex relationship between the private and the public underpin, in turn, her failure to address the question of inequality and exclusion. These silences are tied, in the final analysis, to her insistence on the strict separation between the public and the private, leading to her indictment of the social which is, perhaps, given the major analytical dead-ends it leads to, the most critical flaw of her theory.

Flaws, silences, ambiguities and contradictions notwithstanding, Arendt's critique of modernity suggest a crucial point: no world in common is thinkable without basic enabling conditions –aside from individuals' commitment and will to struggle-. Within the context of her thinking, a world in common rests in action and power. And action and power are not forthcoming under conditions of expropriation. In my view, it is Arendt's profound dismay at "the deprivation for certain groups of their place in the world and their naked exposure to the exigencies of life" what ultimately propels her thinking. Her notion of expropriation stands, her problematic silences and assumptions notwithstanding, as a compelling idea.

In closing, a pivotal component of Arendt's defense of "a common world" should be underscored: the relentless defender of collective memory and endurance poses durability as an inevitably risky and untrustworthy enterprise. To be sure, Arendt's idea of "living together" is premised on the collective –and personal- risks entailed in anything we envision, work for, or produce. No generation can ascertain the success of its travails, for the test of durability lies in a future that transcends it. Incidentally, posing one of today's major predicaments by summoning the notion of "societies of risk" (Bech 1992, Giddens 1990), might appear rather banal within this framework, though not because Arendt's emphasis on durability ignores risk but, rather, *because* her *entire* theoretical corpus is *premiered on risk*. Permanency and change, thus, stand as false antagonisms: both point to the ungraspable quality of action, the trajectory and finality of which are inapprehensible to any "present", regardless of its posed thrust. To my mind, this stands as a major insight of Arendt's political theory.

In the final analysis, the befuddlement and frustration one may experience when grappling with Arendt's most trying and elusive passages should not stand in the way of one's effort to place them within the thrust of her theoretical project<sup>45</sup>. After all, it is that thrust what delivers her monumental legacy for thinking "a world in common".

### **3 A Place for the Polis, Citizenship, and Public Space Amidst Shifting Sands**

Why lend credence to the idea of the polis for thinking the pressing dilemmas of citizenship and the public in concrete 21<sup>st</sup> century milieux? How may the notion be deployed while at the same time making a credible move to keep one's inquiry safely

<sup>45</sup>Arendt has this to say a propos Foucault de Coulanges' comments in *The Ancient City* in defense of a statement by Aristotle: "Unlike other authors, Coulanges highlights the time and effort required by the activities of a citizen in antiquity, and adds that the Aristotelian statement that no one that had to work for a living could be a citizen, is the simple confirmation of a fact and not the expression of a prejudice" (HC: 72, Note 68). At the risk of belaboring the obvious, Arendt's own problematic passages, descriptions, and silences should be construed within the wider logic of her thinking. To bear in mind Arendt's remarks on Coulanges's defense of Aristotle when confronting some of her most trying depictions of the Greek polis, may be of some use as one searches for the crux of her metaphor.

away from romanticizing any 'originals' or their eventual 'replicas'?<sup>46</sup> I start mindful of some very basic warning signals to anyone who seeks to deploy the notion without falling into the futile traps of nostalgia. I thus take it as premise that in the realm of concrete experience the polis, its space and its citizens can hardly be invoked as imaginaries of "harmonious", "complete", or "safely settled" constructs. I also start mindful of the very basic datum that in the realm of concrete experience citizenship has been framed and re-framed, made and unmade. It has lodged practices and rights that may be acknowledged, with T. H. Marshall, as simultaneously "cumulative and contradictory" (Shafir 1998, 14). Moreover, "in most societies alternative discourses of citizenship coexist with and constrain one another" (Ibid, 2). In addition, citizenship can be rendered meaningless as site of collective well-being, though formally and universally granted.

To my mind, however, these very reminders underline the formidable persuasiveness of the polis –along with citizenship and public space- as enduring grammars for confronting the intractable yet unavoidable task of understanding, envisioning, and crafting the place of the self-and-others in shared milieux. Being political -for present purposes, "being" and "becoming" of the polis- has been at the basis of human struggles for emancipation. Whether more or less explicitly, the idea of the polis -its frailties, tentativeness and contradictions in the realm of experience notwithstanding-, has enabled a discursive terrain for the claiming and re-claiming of entitlements in myriad struggles to press its limits further –with all the historical dilemmas, enigmas, and risks of failure entailed, perhaps not captured by the mere notion of a "progressive expansion", but, rather, by the very incompleteness and risks of failure and reversals involved in the search itself-.

Resorting to Isin -and slightly redirecting his point in the passage below- the struggles in reference stand, to my mind, as empowering legacies made available by the discursive space opened by the emergence of that "named political space" of antiquity, with citizenship "as some kind of claim to such space"<sup>47</sup>:

... when the ancient Greek women questioned the concept of masculine nobility as the natural attribute of warrior-aristocrats and instituted new ways of being citizens, when Roman plebeians questioned the alleged superiority of the patricians and conducted themselves as citizens in their own assemblies, when the medieval popolo challenged the patricians and constituted the city differently, or when the sansculottes claimed themselves as legitimate citizens with and against the bourgeoisie, these acts were being rendered political, not in the name of establishing their natural superiority, but in exposing the arbitrary foundations of such superiority' (BP: 275).

In other words, I find it worth underscoring that 'exposing the arbitrary foundations of such superiority' was made possible by the very idea of the polis and its formidable legacy to future generations: a named political space, opening the discursive possibility

<sup>46</sup>Here I am bearing in mind Isin's sobering reminders: "[t]hat which we now call 'polis' was never defined with the transparency and consistency we demand of it from the Greeks themselves" (BP: 64); moreover, the classical age of the Greeks was 'fragile, short, isolated, and tentative. . .' (BP: 55); and 'even within that very short span, citizenship was contested and questioned' (BP: 78). I also bear in mind the flaws of that 'original', Arendt's masterful recovery notwithstanding.

<sup>47</sup>See Part 2, above.

for anchoring the very notion of “making claims to that space”. It is thus the *polis-as-discursive-space* what has shown remarkable resilience in the always unsettling terrain of collective experience. The historical “original” may not have been that unified, inclusionary, and enduring -and perhaps it could not have been, bearing in mind Arendt’s insightful warnings about the frailties of any human artifact-. Nonetheless, the idea has shown remarkable staying-power, and freed from the entrapments of “tradition” it has functioned as propeller of emancipatory projects and, to be sure, for envisioning “a world in common”.

Contingent upon action -understood in Arendt’s terms-, the polis can never be “complete”. It thus seems warranted to detach from its meaning anything akin to a state of completion – that is, “full harmony”, “full unity”, et cetera-. It seems best to reclaim the polis as an orientation, a thrust, or, better yet, as discursive space that may achieve salience in certain moments which warrant theoretical attention for the transformations –and durabilities- they may bequeath.

The (eight) points that follow round-up my understanding of the polis, citizenship, and public space.

**(1) Embedding the commons, unleashing the polis** As argued forth in the preceding paragraphs, my notion of a-world-in-common is territorially emplaced. In my deployment of the notion, however, the polis does not stand as *coterminous* with the concrete territorial address –be it “the city”, “the country”, or “the nation-state”- where it may find its abode. Nor do I understand the polis under the guidance of Plato’s utopian conception, that is, as some sort of “enlarged family”. To be sure, historical experience -and Arendt’s compelling rendition of the plurality premise- authorizes de-linking the notion from “community”, “nationalism”, or “ethnic unity”. The polis is not deployed here as interchangeable rubric with civic republicanism either since, to my mind, if the idea is to be recovered as relevant to the complexities of today’s human conglomerates we need to look at the sites and ways of being political it may enable far beyond “the political system” and the “strength” of the “civic culture” that may be purported to sustain it.

**(2) A discursive and performative polis** Freed from those kinds of conceptual chains, the polis may be understood as discursive space whereby/wherein the enactment of a world in common’s two-fold anchor –plurality (in Arendt’s sense) and egalitarianism (see pp. 39-41, below)- becomes available. The polis functions here as discursive moment that enables the crafting and re-crafting of meaningful spaces and modes of “living together”/“being there” in concrete relational spaces premised on mutual acknowledgement.<sup>48</sup> The availability of the polis as discursive space is made to rest

<sup>48</sup>My deployment of discourse draws from poststructuralist theory, thus referring “to a specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible” (Bialasiewicz, Campbell, Elden, Graham et. al., 2007, 406). Along with Bialasiewicz, et. al., it should be stressed that the belief that “everything is language”, that “there is no reality”, and that no politico-ethical stance can thus be taken due to a presumed “linguistic idealism” fails to represent poststructuralists deployment of discourse, which “. . . does not involve a denial of the world’s existence or the significance of materiality” (Ibid.). A useful overview of the itinerary of “discourse analysis” for those unfamiliar with the major differences among its strands may be found in Torfing (2005), where socio-linguistics and content-analysis are referred to as a “first generation”, critical discourse analysis as the second, and poststructuralists’ use (as is well known, with Jacques Derrida,

herein on the senses of citizenship it enables to perform; and the (more/or less ample) range of performativities<sup>49</sup> is made to rest, in turn, upon the space granted to the polis' two-fold anchor in concrete moments and milieux.

**(3) At stake, discursive hegemony** I view the space for enacting the polis as contingent upon discursive hegemony. Since I take it as premise that understandings of that which “actually is” (or “ought” to be) “held in common” change over time, and that, moreover, different conceptions overlap in concrete settings and moments, discursive hegemony acquires central analytical value for understanding how the meaning(s) conferred to citizenship and public space may be stabilized in concrete moments and milieux.

I cannot proceed without underlining that the space of “a common world” is understood here as imagined place of unity. As in the Athens so compellingly problematized by Isin, “[u]nderneath [such] imagined unity there [may be] difference, strife, and agon” (BP, 69). In my argument, discursive hegemony is what makes “fixing” that imagining possible, allowing it to acquire a “reality” of its own through the performativities that constitute it.

If different meanings of citizenship are viewed as major stakes in struggles for discursive hegemony, then problematizing the contentious meanings implicated in concrete struggles to define who are actually included (or denied) “membership in some public and political frame of action” (Pocock 1998, 35), and how that struggle unfolds, becomes part of the researcher’s task.

**(4) Citizenship as relational space** Within this framework being of the polis is made to rest on citizenship, understood as a basic two-fold sense of mutual-acknowledgement and co-entitlement amongst people sharing an emplacement in time and space. In this definition, little does it matter if actual or potential citizens were actually born, carry documents attesting to their formal political rights, or permanently inhabit a specific territorial milieu. This does not mean a notion of citizenship predicated upon some sort of blanket rejection of legal formalities. It does mean to emphasize that meaningful senses of citizenship do not primarily rest on individuals’ legal status, but on the space provided by the polis-as-discourse to lodge within its core parameters the relational practices of those who happen to be emplaced under its purview.

In other words, the senses of citizenship that matter for thinking the polis are not regarded here as attributes of individuals, or groups of individuals. Again –this does not mean posing the ludicrous notion that individuals’ sensibilities, dispositions, and actual practices are empirically “separate from” any conceivable set of macro-discursive parameters –hegemonic or otherwise-. It means to view as methodologically warranted to place senses of citizenship as a landscape of performativities anchored in a concrete

Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault at the forefront), as the third.

<sup>49</sup> My use of performativity draws from Weber (1998) and Campbell (1998a, 1998b). The thematization of how the state is rendered “real” stands at the core of these authors’ recourse to Judith Butler’s notion of performativity (see, for instance, Butler, 1999). Resorting to performativity frees me from the perils of reifying the polis, citizenship and public space, allowing to posit that there is no “identity” –in any meaningful sense- “behind”, “prior to” or “aside from” their performative enactment. That is, the polis, citizenship, and public space become “real” through performativity. See also Note 50, below.

milieu's "exemplary model" (Ashley 1989)<sup>50</sup>, where the hegemonic relational space is what matters considering for understanding the quality and texture of public life, more than individuals' or set of individuals' views, values, or dispositions. In other words, what matters about "living together" -the quality and texture of public life- is viewed here as contingent upon the availability of a *discursive anchor* stabilizing the free flow of implicit parameters that enable the self to safely "be there" -before, amongst, alongside, as well as against, equally-entitled others-.

Since my understanding of living-together is premised on the idea of "being present in public" as pivotal component of citizenship, my inquiry is interested in the senses of citizenship enabled by the polis for performing "a world in common". This understanding of senses of citizenship encompasses an ample range of practices, from conventional involvement in politics (voting, organizing, contesting), to parents school-committees, neighborhood activities, mutual-aid societies, housing cooperatives, etcetera; to simply "being there" at the sidewalk, mingling with strangers -paraphrasing Hannah Arendt, in sheer human contiguity-. To be sure, a panoply of ways for "being present in public" may be enacted in a number of specific arenas and modes that also warrant attention -including (non-profit) theater, its actors and its publics; neighborhood stores, pubs and coffee-houses; poetry readings and music festivals; the daily routines and dispositions of public school teachers, independent film-makers, musicians and artists; the quality and texture of city life in the streets, its corners and its squares, and the motions of passers-by as they casually mingle with strangers-, for these may constitute intertwined performativities central to the polis' exemplary model's continuing capacity to claim and reclaim the hegemonic emplacement of its "fundamentals" (i.e., plurality and egalitarianism). Such arenas, as well as the rituals and dispositions that configure their motions -whether deliberately or not- may signal, in very tangible ways, collective resistance to the narrowing of public space at critical junctures of the polis' itinerary, namely, at her post-hegemonic moment.

**(5) Plurality, "durable inequality", and the place of egalitarianism** Sometime ago Nancy Fraser articulated a hypothetical definition of egalitarian societies which -viewed as a thrust of contemporary emancipatory politics- seems unobjectionable to me:

By 'egalitarian societies' I mean nonstratified societies, societies whose basic framework does not generate unequal social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination. Egalitarian societies, therefore, are societies without classes and without gender or racial divisions of labor.

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<sup>50</sup> I am taking an admittedly risky step in subverting Weber's and Campbell's use of performativity (Note 49, above), as well as Ashley's "exemplary model" by re-directing the deployment of both to the discursive practices implicated in the enactment of senses of citizenship and the stabilization of the discursive space of the polis -that is, bereft from the worrisome ethical correlates implicated in the naturalization of arbitrary identities and regulatory powers (these scholars' concern). I find the conceptual risk worth taking, in light of the theoretical possibilities opened by Weber and Campbell's insightful deployment of performativity, as well as Ashley's use of "exemplary model". In Ashley's formulation hegemony becomes "an ensemble of normalized knowledgeable practices", "a practical paradigm" of "political subjectivity and conduct" (Ashley 1989, 269). To my mind, if an exemplary model is implicated in any discursive arrangement's moment of hegemony, it follows that such model needs not be disempowering and bent on dominations associated with inequality and exclusion as central features. I am particularly interested in understanding how an exemplary model anchored on plurality-and-egalitarianism may function at different moments of the discourse's trajectory, during and after its hegemonic moment -the assumption being that, at any point in time, discursive logics operate within a power-field configured by contending discourses-.

However, they need not be culturally homogeneous. On the contrary, provided such societies permit free expression and association, they are likely to be inhabited by social groups with diverse values, identities and cultural styles, and hence to be multicultural.” (Fraser, 1992, 125)

A sophisticated thinker such as Fraser is fully aware, of course, about the distance between that “ideal” situation and the concrete problems she is seeking to address in her critique of “actually existing democracy”, to paraphrase the title of the essay where that hypothetical definition is offered. For present purposes, Fraser’s passage helps me preface the four premises that underpin my understanding of egalitarianism, which follow.

(i) I start by acknowledging, with Tilly, that “[a]ll social relations involve fleeting, fluctuating inequalities” (Tilly 1999, 6). These are not at the core of Tilly’s masterful theorization of inequality, however. The ones that concern him are “durable inequalities”, that is, “those that last from one social interaction to the next”, and that persist in the structuring of collective interactions and people’s lives “over whole careers, lifetimes, and organizational histories” (Ibid.).

(ii) I further acknowledge, with Tilly, that “[l]arge, significant inequalities” correspond to a panoply of “categorical differences” along class, ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, educational level, and “other principles of differentiation”, “rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities, or performances” (Ibid. 7, 9).

(iii) Since the pervasive structural incidence of “durable inequalities” cannot be ruled-out by virtue of desire, the “world in common” I seek to thematize must be thought within an “actual” world where such principles of differentiation loom large. More specifically, I acknowledge that contemporary projects of emancipation and resistance to inequality are necessarily thought and enacted within a capitalist world order and class-based societies, with no present or imminent possibility of erasure –regardless of their thrust towards alternative futures, and the potentially strategic significance of such thrusts.

(iv) For present purposes, it follows that posing egalitarianism as precluded by material and symbolic inequality is methodologically ruled-out. Egalitarianism may be understood, however, as major counter-force to the naturalization of inequality –be it through the big epics of major revolutionary moments, ongoing grass-roots struggles, or “small” day-to-day struggles. This inquiry is thus premised on the idea that, as anchoring principle of political interactions, the performativities egalitarianism enables can significantly destabilize and disrupt material and symbolic inequality.

My understanding of egalitarianism does not rest on a theory of natural rights, in the liberal sense. Nor is it regarded as inherent property of individuals<sup>51</sup>. I locate egalitarianism as a relational field enacted in public: a collective feature

<sup>51</sup>Still, I find Jacques Rancière’s anarchic conception of equality (Rancière, 2007, 2006, 1998) worth noting. Very sketchily, for Rancière equality is a point of departure, rather than a goal. As Peter Hallward notes in a splendid commentary on some of this major thinker’s (fascinating) works, for Rancière “equality is not the result of a fairer distribution of social functions or places so much as the immediate disruption of any such distribution; it refers not to place but to the placeless or out of place, not to class but to the unclassifiable or out-of-class” (Hallward 2006, 110). Rancière’s starting premise (“everyone thinks”) encompasses a notion of freedom as/for self-dissociation. That is, “there is no necessary link between who you are and the role you perform or the place you occupy; no one is defined by the forms of thoughtless necessity to which they are subjected” (Ibid: 110-111).

made up of senses of citizenship anchored in the acknowledgement of plurality -with Arendt, not only the *conditio sine qua non* but the *conditio per quam* of public life. This acknowledgement, incidentally, is poignantly captured in a colloquialism deeply embedded in the concrete milieu that prompted my searches: “naides es más que naides” (‘no one is more than anybody else’). Ultimately, I view the stabilization of egalitarianism as the political condition which makes citizenship meaningful. That is, in making the notion that “no one is more than anybody else” available as relational field, egalitarianism confirms a collective sense of being “amongst equals” because others confer the condition of equality to the self.<sup>52</sup>

If “being equal” is a political condition –made available through a relational field anchored in plurality- its meaningful unfolding rests upon iterative practices of acknowledgement. It is, then, performative enactment what makes egalitarianism politically available. A milieu wherein such acknowledgment is allowed to flow –through the operations of the polis’ “exemplary model”<sup>53</sup>- sustains collective well being. This has two implications. For one thing, and since I am not referring to “a family” but to a space of interactions that goes beyond “the people we know”, citizens are the strangers themselves. For another, rituals of acknowledgement do not suffice. The material structures for enabling the enactment of such rituals is required (see segment 8, below).

**(6) The place of strangers** In my understanding of ‘a world in common’, citizens and strangers are made coterminous. Again, bearing in mind the dynamics of citizenship as argued forth in preceding paragraphs, the idea of citizenship as “a given” constituted by legal-paper-carriers of “proof” of “belonging” to “a political community” with all its constitutional prerogatives and obligations, is not very useful for purposes of my investigative program.

Among other things, in complex milieux we are all foreign to circumstances and conditions that nonetheless we have to acknowledge as co-shared, that is, as public. It is as strangers that we have to coexist in any complex milieu. It is strangers who have to enact a world in common.<sup>54</sup>

I thus find it methodologically warranted to de-stabilize the distinction between “citizen” and “stranger”<sup>55</sup>, for without incorporating the notion of plurality amongst

<sup>52</sup>That colloquialism may also function, however, within possessive individualism and its narratives, with different implications than those I am emphasizing here. I address that issue in the study on which this paper is based.

<sup>53</sup>In my formulation exemplary-model(s) are far from formal codes scripting the realm of the permissible and the disallowed. More specifically, for immediate purposes, the polis’ exemplary model hardly stands for some sort of catalogue of “good citizenship” laboriously penned into a “civics manual” the citizenry should follow. These are unwritten codes embedded in the polis’ discursive logic, aimed at functioning to render co-inhabitation among strangers meaningful.

<sup>54</sup>By this I do not mean that meaningful personal relations –“friendships”- may not develop in the course of “being there” amongst strangers. Be that as it may, I do not find the friend-versus-enemy dialectic (famously proposed by Carl Schmitt [1966 [1932] as the driving force of politics) convincing, much less so the idea that “being together” encompasses or presupposes “friendship”. On this point see also Isin’s critique (BP, 32) of Mouffe’s attention to Carl Schmitt’s notion of the political. See Mouffe, 1999, especially 1-6).

<sup>55</sup>“The stranger” was brought to sociology by Simmel (see Georg Simmel in Levine, ed., 1971: 143-149). The larger inquiry on which this paper is based seeks to de-stabilize the absence of strangers in the thematization of public space –except under the rubric of “outsider”, or plain “enemy”. It also seeks to problematize the widespread gesture –fueled by the media, politicians, and other defenders of “the community” and its “values”- of summoning the stranger as that typically threatening “otherness” against whom “those who belong” may narrate themselves. Re-positioning the stranger, I would surmise, bears a number of potentially interesting

strangers, citizenship remains conceptually excluding. In this formulation, then, strangers are not the alterity of citizenship. They are the citizens themselves. How this category works and the implications it may hold for understanding political life cannot be determined a priori. Considering its eventual interest for an analytics of citizenship must await its deployment in concrete research terrains. For the time being suffice it to note, first, that within this reasoning the axis of differentiation at the stabilization-moment of the polis discursive space does not rest on categories such as “strangers”, “outsiders”, and “aliens”, as in Isin’s superb account of citizenship. And, second, that the destabilization of the polis as anchoring discourse of public life is, indeed, signaled at that moment when active strategies of “othering” –understood here as a shift *in the meaning* of “strangers” encompassing the simultaneous privatization of citizenship and the transformation of strangers into “outsiders”- come to the fore. In other words, Isin’s categorical distinction becomes relevant once the discursive space of the polis loses hegemony and the stranger-as-citizen-of-a-world-in- common loses central emplacement as form of citizenship, vis à vis other forms-. Again, the concrete citizenship formations such moment may engender cannot be determined a priori.

Suffice it here to note that, within my argument, if egalitarianism is performatively produced, so is inegalitarianism: it flows from relational dynamics that in the day to day encounters amongst people emplaced in shared milieux (regardless of regimes and systems in place that consecrate equality before the law), subsidiarize, dismiss or perpetuate strangers as alien to “one’s world”, or as outsiders to “a world of citizens”; and to anticipate that such dynamics are linked not only with the privatization of encounters but with the reframing of material scarcity as well -the meaning of “poverty” salient within it-.

**(7) About the place of “class” and “the state”** As declared above, my notion of egalitarianism is premised, with Tilly, on “durable inequality”. A key component of my argument –the polis’ egalitarian premise- might fall flat in its face, however, unless attention is granted to the material dimensions of equality/inequality. As posed herein, the configurative and hegemonic moments of the polis’s discursive space are not thinkable without acknowledging the central role of the state as the institutional assemblage of mechanisms for discharging distributive and redistributive functions and overseeing the common’s material patrimony –from its basic infrastructure to the protection of its natural resources, to the administration of prosperity and scarcity, to the distribution of the impact of scarcity during troubled times.

If paying attention to the question of necessity and material inequality is considered pivotal, leading to acknowledge both the central function of the state as the administrative embodiment of the commons and the methodological relevance of incorporating the question of class, several research-questions emerge. Here are a few basic ones: How does the state perform the polis? What form of state-market relations accompanies the itinerary of the polis’ discursive space from early configuration to its post-hegemonic moment? What is the relationship between the polis discursive space, once stabilized, with the material and symbolic dimensions of class? How do the organizational underpinnings of the state function when an egalitarian premise has implications for an analytics of citizenship (and its day-to-day practices).

achieved discursive hegemony without having erased the conditions that make-up for the persistence of class contradictions? How does that relationship function as the polis' discursive space shifts from stabilization to post-hegemonic emplacement? Under what conditions may a peripheral state sustain its discursive linkage with egalitarianism given, precisely, its peripheral condition, with all the implications that condition holds for the tenuousness of its emplacement within the international political economy?

**(8) The place of the public** My understanding of the public rests on the following premises.

First - no complex life setting is thinkable without a space of interactions configured by/and constituting "that which is held in common" at any point in time. Within my argument, "that which is held in common" and "things public" are made coterminous. "Things public" are understood here as the tangible and intangible threads (material and symbolic) that weave-together –more (or less) tenuously or firmly, in a more/or less encompassing, or in more/or less meaningful ways- the interactions amongst strangers in any concrete milieu, at any point in time.

Second- In any complex life-setting different narratives of the public coexist. One of the central concerns of my investigative program is the space granted to things-public in concrete societal milieux, that is, whether the prevailing discourse(s) render them significant, meaningful, or, conversely, feared, rejected or dismissed. Since "that which is held in common" and the logics of inclusion, exclusion and othering that the discursive terrain enables at any point in time varies across time and place, the space of "things public" in concrete milieux – that is, public space- may be more or less encompassing, weaker or stronger, of higher or lower density, more narrow or wider in scope.

Third- I suspect from the start that the space of things public will tend to approach either the strongest or the weakest end of a hypothetical continuum depending upon the quality and scope of the interactions that make up that space -to provide room, to group, relate and separate (in the Arendtian sense) those who share a physical emplacement in a specific milieu, at any point in time. While "strength" does not necessarily rule-out exclusion, a weak public space dovetails with narrow forms of citizenship, including its reduction to the highly-problematic arbitrariness of privatized forms of resolving the predicament of selves-and-others thrown-together in reluctantly shared physical spaces, occupying their energies in either escaping, secluding-themselves-from, or seceding from a public realm rendered, at best, subsidiary, and, at worst, a place of un-sought encounters (the "solution" of those who can choose to opt-out); or, alternatively, struggling to survive within the narrow confines of physical topographies and symbolic territories rendered meaningless as sites of a hardly-imaginable commons (the predicament of those who have no choice).

My deployment of the public ultimately rests on a hypothetical (ideational) blueprint of several things at once. It means a layered spatiality where multiple publics, their arenas, and their enabling conditions intersect. That layered spatiality is understood, in turn, as the connecting tissue of the myriad material and symbolic zones that provide a place for strangers to safely 'be' strangers. The multiple publics and their arenas encompass a wide range of performativities -from "issue-formation" (i.e., contesting,

organizing, debating, and deciding) to just “being there”, present in public, in sheer human contiguity without having to invoke one’s name in order to partake of a relational space that nurtures –through those performativities- “a common world”. This –inevitably ontological and normative- hypothetical blueprint, furnishes a point of departure for interrogating the place and space of things public in the realm of concrete experience.

#### 4 Parting Note

If, as argued above, the meaningfulness of citizenship rests on strangers (the makers of the commons), plurality-and-egalitarianism (the polis’ two-fold anchor), and “living together” (the aim of the polis) a crucial *problématique* may be posed: the crafting, re-crafting, and transformative-durability of *convivencia* amongst strangers amidst relentlessly shifting sands.

But... why *convivencia*? For one thing, there seems to be no single word in English to signify “living together”. For another, *convivencia* (and living-together) as deployed herein, are quite distinct from “conviviality” –which conveys “amiability”, “sociability”, a “harmonious milieu”. Surely, the aim of the polis could hardly be posed as “conviviality”. That would seem rather trivial for such a huge enterprise. It may be posed, rather, as *convivencia*, to signify a collective of citizen-strangers discursively enabled to wage (through the performative motions of the polis’ two-fold anchor) the daily battles and momentous struggles to make, upkeep, sustain, expand, and transform the complex milieux they co-inhabit, enhancing the quality and texture of public space as that very struggle unfolds.

The story I attempt to tell elsewhere –about the early crafting; stabilization; subsequent de-stabilization; and critically eroded state of the polis discursive space in post-1985 Uruguay–, endeavors to suggest the major stakes involved at the intersection between “that which still remains” of *convivencia*, and de-politicized (and thus meaningless) “remembrance”.

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