



## Art, Public Sphere: An Effort to Understand Arendt's Philosophy of Art

Shahla Eslami\* | Mehrdad Behrad\*\*

Received: 00/00/2018 | Accepted: 00/00/2018

### Abstract

Hannah Arendt's philosophical thoughts have some theoretical proximity with her compatriot mentor Martin Heidegger and on the other hand are directly influenced by contemporary political events like the rising of new forms of regimes and the Second World War. Hannah Arendt is a political philosopher who understands art to be a way to achieve a type of political life and tries to revive a type of political social life which she believes has been corrupted and lost in the modern era by using a liberal foundation like art. Considering that Arendt has not written a distinct and compiled work under the title of political aesthetics or philosophy of art, in this paper we will try to understand her aesthetics which has been presented in the context of a type of political philosophy by collecting, compiling, reviewing and analyzing Arendt's scattered views in her books, articles, lessons and notes. In Arendt's philosophy, the disappearance and corruption of the political character of human life is closely related to the corruption and transmutation of the public sphere. Therefore, the public sphere and its maintenance can somehow be considered as Arendt's political philosophy ideal. The importance of this topic can be realized only when we understand how Arendt thinks the maintenance of the public sphere requires the existence of diversities and how the maintenance of diversity requires art. Due to the character of her philosophy we will review the philosophical foundations which were undefined in her works to make it possible to understand her aim of some kind of political aesthetics which is hidden in her philosophy.

### Keywords

Hannah Arendt, pluralism, public sphere, private sphere, phenomenology, bios politikos (political life).

\* Assistant Professor of Theology and Philosophy College at Islamic Azad University ,Science and Research branch, Tehran (corresponding author) | Shahla.eslami78@gmail.com

\*\* Ph.d in Philosophy of Art at Islamic Azad University, Science and Research branch, Tehran | mehrdadbehrad@gmail.com



## **Introduction**

This article seeks to find and establish an aesthetic theory which is discoverable through a systematic reading of Arendt's works. Art for Arendt has some political functions and dimensions but this political aspect does not take root from political content or theory like that of political or philosophical categories. A work of art is a phenomenon that creates a sphere which makes political life possible merely with its emergence. In this article we try to address the circumstances of the formation of this mechanism and study the relation between the sphere of manifestation of art (the public sphere) and artistic phenomena according to Arendt. This relation is a mutual one; everything that happens in the public sphere is political and everything that happens in the private sphere would be non-political, i.e., the public sphere and politics are interwoven. Our study on Arendt's scattered works, notes and lectures show us that artistic phenomena and even morality find some political functions only if they appear in the public sphere. Although, in this paper we will address only how the public sphere and works of art depend on each other and in order to do so, we have taken into account other key concepts - like plurality - in Arendt's thought.

## **Abstract Argument**

The main question is: if Arendt had dedicated a whole book mainly focused on aesthetics and art instead of scattered notes and letters, what hypothetical theories or assertions and standards would this thesis contain?

Arendt's principal proposition in this field is that art belongs to the public sphere. Artists display their works in the public sphere. We should mention that Arendt's understanding of public sphere is an environment in which all those present have come together regardless of any particular classifications or gender, nationality etc. This kind of plurality is not limited to human beings and the different forms of human life; but rather, also indicates the variety and number of forms of phenomena manifestation. The meaning of the world that Arendt has in mind also has clear and strong semantic relation with her idea of non-human phenomena like man-made artifacts. The "world", according to her, is something that manifests "among people" and art is also something that is among people.

The public sphere forms in circumstances conditioned to the presence of works of art; art is created in hopes of manifesting and appearing. The more the public sphere weakens, becomes smaller and unsound, works of art too increasingly address private and individual detail. One can conclude with certainty that if the public sphere did not exist, there would also be no art and without it, the plurality which is interwoven with existence would remain concealed and suppressed. Although, Arendt also looks at the issue from another angle; according to her, the public sphere could be more depraved and crumbling that it is without art.

## Conclusion

What allows Arendt to transform art into a sphere for the revival of the public sphere and therefore establish political life is a result of her revision of the notion of politics. Arendt finds man to be a political animal and she emphasizes that politics in essence refers to man's participation in a sphere which relates to issues concerning collective and social life. Arendt claims that as one of the most important phenomenal manifestations of human life, art is lifesaving because it holds on to politics and also revives the public sphere as it panders to plurality and also because it needs the existence of the public sphere to be seen and to emerge. Art doesn't need to directly contain any clear political messages or implications in order to establish this link between art and politics. Art is political in that it does not manifest except in the public sphere and in a domain that is determined without individual private needs. And according to Arendt, the public sphere is dependent on art because in the modern world there is no other phenomenon that could highlight plurality and therefore establish the public sphere like art does.

## References

---

- Arendt, H. (1968). *Between Past and Future*. New York: Viking.
- Arendt, H. (1960). Society and Culture. *Daedalus*, 89(2), 278–287
- Arendt, H. (1978). *The Life of the Mind*. (vol. 1). Willing, London: Secker & Warburg.
- Arendt, H. (1978). *The Life of the Mind*. (vol. 2). Willing, London: Secker & Warburg.
- Arendt, H. (2005). *The Promise of Politics*. (ed.) Jerome Kohn, New York: Schocken Books.
- Arendt, H. (2013). *Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Sjöholm, C. (2015). *Doing Aesthetics With Arendt*. New York: Columbia university Press.
- Villa, D. (1999). *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Villa, D. (2008). *Public Freedom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.