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## **The loss of unpredictability - a new crisis in education**

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# **The loss of unpredictability – a new crisis in education**

*an Arendtian critique of the smartphone*



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## Summary

The development of communication technologies has increased man's ability to go beyond the limits of his own situation in the world. This modern phenomena becomes particularly problematic in education, given that children are the most assiduous generation on social media platforms. **What happens when a child is no longer limited by the authority of the four walls of the house?** The fact that a child who is yet not independent to wander in the world, can simultaneously by herself, through her phone screen, see or listen what is being said in a conversation by the owner of the café around the corner of her street, creates a situation in which the world can no longer reveal its most defining characteristic to our new generations – **unpredictability**. My purpose in this thesis is to understand through Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology how the phenomena of the use of smartphones among children/youth is affecting education as the activity responsible for the future of the world. As we'll see, the particular way *the world appears* in the smartphone is problematic not only because of its non-tangible quality or *virtual appearance* but also predominantly because of the customization of what *appears*. It is not only the abolishment of the walk to the café prescribed by the world's distance that hides the possibility of something new to appear but also the curated appearance of that specific café on the smartphone's algorithm that obscure the unpredictability of the world – a quality that in Arendt's terms is the *sine qua non* of all action.

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## Introduction

It would be troubling on our behalf to see the invention of the phone as a mere widening of the window through which we look at reality. It is as if we would say that the invention of the wheel did not change man's perception of distance, or that Galileo's telescope left our understanding of the cosmos untouched. But what is true is that man can never know what the consequences of his actions will be whenever he starts a new causal network. This is why Alexander Bell and Antonio Meucci could have barely imagined that what they first saw as a technological apparatus that conducted sound through electric signals would give birth to the modern version of the phone.

Since Steve Jobs announced the iPhone in 2007, in which the "I" non-coincidentally expresses the object's servitude to the personality of its user, the internet's promise for global connection was not only fulfilled as the massification/democratization of this connectivity launched a complete paradigm shift in communication technologies. Now, in a 2024 *The Economist* article<sup>1</sup>, it is announced that Mr. Zuckerberg's promise of social media as the digital "town square" where we can debate information and world events with-others has failed. Instead, "behavior-based"<sup>2</sup> functionalities have appeared more effective in making the iPhone live up to its name.

Nevertheless, this has given man the opportunity to feel at home in any corner of the world by navigating through the infinite possibilities of internet's offers. We somehow carry the world in our pockets, and we dwell into it every time we open our phone screens – an act that has become integrated into the routine of our daily lives.

It's a scientific fact that this assimilation of social media, translating itself into huge amount of phone use and dependence among every generation of individuals, deeply impacts the psychological and cognitive functions of the individual. Over the last decade, the circulation of a great amount of scientific and behavioral studies and

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<sup>1</sup> The Economist, "The End of the Social Network."

<sup>2</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

conclusions has been generating public consensus and calling upon us to reflect on the omnipresence of phones and their blow to the individual's well-being. But here lies the root of the problem that is to be addressed in this thesis: the public concern on the recent omnipresence of the smartphone in man's world revolves around individual well-being rather than being treated as a collective and political problem, in Hannah Arendt's sense of the word *politics*.

In order to problematize the invasion of the modern phone as a political phenomenon, Hannah Arendt's political hermeneutic is extremely prescient - her critique falls within modernity's incapability to see phenomenon beyond the realm of subjectiveness while revealing the essential conditions that safeguard man from losing the capacity for action, the human activity with the highest ontological degree possible<sup>3</sup>.

Not only the saturation but also the nature of the discourse around the negative impact of social media, focusing on statistical and scientific proofs; and showing that phones do indeed impact society's well-being, raising the problem in a way in which to act upon it depends only on the will and motivation of each individual. This transformation of action into an individual concern, which falls into Arendt's accusation of "*life as being the standard to which everything is measured and in which mankind's interests are always equated with individual life*"<sup>4</sup>, is an indicator of how the problematization of the smartphone's impact being confined to a question of well-being expresses how we are not considering it as political one, which determines our incapability of acting upon it collectively.

*But why is the smartphone's emergence a political problem instead?* The answer to this question is first expressed in the relation between two phenomena: the relation between the extreme use of the smartphone and education. These two activities have something in common: they are both responsible for how the human world is revealed to new generations.

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<sup>3</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, 119

<sup>4</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.312.

What turns the invention of the smartphone into a problematic phenomenon, in a political sense, is how its particular logic<sup>5</sup> of appearance interacts with education's logic of revealing the world. This relation, as we will see, not only falls into the same phenomena described by Arendt in *The Crisis in Education*, but it also exacerbates it by giving it a new dimension.

In Arendt's view, education deals with the phenomena of natality, where "*the faculty of action is ontologically rooted*"<sup>6</sup> – in other words, it presents and reveals the world of human affairs to the new generations. We will use and analyze this Arendtian understanding of education as the activity responsible for revealing the plural character of the world to the young and explore how its logic interacts with the omnipresence of smartphones among new generations.

But since it is also true that smartphone addiction is common among all generations in society, why are we addressing this phenomenon among younger generations only? Firstly, the present young generations are the most active users of smartphones, and they are also the first generation to know the world through a screen that gives tailor-made content. Secondly, because of the young generations' particular and fragile condition.

The smartphone's logic blurs the division that separates the world of adults (human affairs) from the contained world of children undermining education as what has been traditionally standing between the world of humans and new generations. This epiphenomenon is a manifestation of the broader modern political phenomena that Arendt describes as the fading division between the public and the private realms<sup>7</sup>.

Although education appears to take place in the public as much as in the private, since learning takes place in public schools and institutions, it's nevertheless

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<sup>5</sup> Loidolt uses the word 'logic' to demonstrate how Arendt's description of man's activities creates certain structures of meaning that need to be actualized in a particular way/or logic. Education, like other world revealing activities, needs a certain logic to be actualized.

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.247.

<sup>7</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chapter 2

an activity that should unfold “in concealment”<sup>8</sup>. As Arendt clarifies, the school “is by no means the world”, but the institution that mediates the home and the world<sup>9</sup>. Education, as we’ll see throughout the text, does not only regard the spaces where active education takes place, but the child’s process of becoming a human being – which includes both the formal experience of learning and the informal experience that unfolds whenever the child engages with the world around her.

Within these major modern phenomena described by Arendt, one can contextualize the invasion of the smartphone into the protected walls of the private space within which education takes place. Particularly, with respect to the limited condition of what children can see or hear regarding what takes place in the outside world. This contextualization will allow us to see the political nature of this phenomenon.

We ought to deal with this phenomenon beyond the individual level, and not through a mere natural causal explanation. As I pointed out earlier, we need to have a politicized and pluralized hermeneutic approach to it<sup>10</sup>. From this, we will recognize that the crisis in education, propelled by the virtual and curated appearance of the smartphone’s logic in children’s stable world, is actually a crisis of our world. For the crisis in education means that the activity through which new generations acquire responsibility for the world is not fulfilling its promise. Within the specific case of smartphone’s influence, as we’ll conclude, education fails to reveal ‘action’s’ most defining characteristic: the **unpredictability** of the world.

## Chapter Breakdown

In the first chapter we will engage with the key concepts of Hannah Arendt’s political phenomenology. For this, we will use Sophie Loidolt’s contextualization of Arendt within the phenomenological tradition of thought in her book *Phenomenology of Plurality*. Loidolt’s distinction between operative and thematic concepts<sup>11</sup> casts a

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<sup>8</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Education.”

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.9

<sup>10</sup> This flows from the interpretation of Loidolt.

<sup>11</sup> Operative and thematic concepts in Fink’s distinction of Husserl’s phenomenology. For more see Loidolt, p.52.

light in the relation between Arendt's specific phenomenological approach to historical experience and her general concepts of politics, action, and public sphere.

The phenomenological notions of appearance, world and experience are derived from Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's existentialia but reinterpreted in an Arendtian way. In this conceptualization of historical experience through the reinterpretation of basic phenomenological notions, Arendt not only creates a methodology that produces her own political phenomenology but also arrives at particular structures of conditionality<sup>12</sup> that define what man is in an open-ended determination.

In the *first section* we will understand Loidolt's operative concepts that will allow us to understand that both social media and education are responsible for how appearance, world and experience reveal the plural character of the human world.

In the *second section*, we will engage with Loidolt's account of Arendt's structures of conditionality and their respective activities to understand how these produce a certain logic that activities depend on to be actualized. From this we will see that the smartphone and education also need certain logics in order to be actualized – and the smartphone's logic undermines education's.

In the second chapter we will first analyze Arendt's text, *The Crisis in Education* using some of Loidolt's concepts, to describe what Arendt understands as the activity of education. For this, we will also engage briefly with Walter Benjamin's reflections on storytelling – to enrich our assessment of education's conditions. Secondly, Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* will provide us a conceptual basis to develop the description of the smartphone's logic.

In the conclusion, we will engage in a brief comparison between the two logics and the political phenomena their interaction generates.

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<sup>12</sup> Loidolt, p.109.

## **CHAPTER ONE: ARENDT'S POLITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY**

### **1. Section one: Arendt's operative concepts**

What Loidolt designates as operative concepts gives us a political understanding of phenomenon, for they make meaning only accessible through the presence of others. Which is what appearance, world and experience always refer to – the intersubjectivity of reality. Actualized plurality appears from a re-conceptualization of these three concepts. We need to follow this process described by Loidolt as it's the first step to understand that the smartphone's presence at such an early age is problematic. Considering that we are engaging in a political hermeneutic of the smartphone and education, we need to build our point of view.

Thus, for now, the first step is to describe the phenomena of the smartphone's impact on education as a problem of the "world of human affairs". We therefore need to understand each one of the operative concepts. *How does appearance, world and experience constitute a pluralized reality?*

#### **1.1.1 Appearance**

***How can appearance be a politicized concept?*** A phenomenon always depends on appearance but the truth of the phenomena or its logic can be interpreted in diverse ways. A political interpretation of appearance is what distinguishes Arendt from Heidegger and Husserl, which according to Loidolt comes from her redefinition of the relation between appearing and being.

The realm of appearance for Heidegger or Husserl coincides with being but Arendt nonetheless enacts a more radical entanglement between being and appearance than both these phenomenologists<sup>13</sup>. Heidegger's Dasein, for example, still relies on reflection over lived experience to affirm the being of an appearance or phenomena.

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the influence of Heidegger and Husserl, consult Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*

Within an ethic of concealment<sup>14</sup>, where Dasein withdraws itself from the world to get a hold of its being, appearance reveals itself as non-sufficient because it depends on Dasein's hermeneutic approach to its own experience. For Arendt, Heidegger's project of "saving phenomena against the subjectivism of modern age"<sup>15</sup> falls into the same error of relegating appearance to a lower ontological status.

As Loidolt affirms, the "hidden dimension" which for Heidegger appears to be the liminal space between being and non-being withdrawn from the world where a certain causation is attributed to appearance, still exists for Arendt but in "*plurality in its actualized state*"<sup>16</sup>. In Arendt's plural understanding of appearance, what appears for the subject is not decisive. What is decisive is how it appears to a multiplicity of subjects. Arendt turns the 'who' of what appears into an active and performing subject in the world that is witnessed and heard by others, instead of being away from the realm of appearance in consciousnesses (Husserl) or the existential hermeneutics of the Dasein (Heidegger). Because of this, it is the realm of appearance that has a primacy over the subject. Meaning that only what shines forth in being witnessed by others gains reality – ***being and appearing coincide***.<sup>17</sup>

The publicness of the world, where the Dasein engages with inauthentic forms of being<sup>18</sup>, that would represent the realm of tools and utility for Heidegger for example, constitutes an understanding that he shares with others. This, in Loidolt's understanding of Arendt, corresponds to the intersubjective sphere where everything gains its reality.

Of course, the understanding of a pen as an object that writes can be transformed according to the subjectivity of one's project, into a weapon for example. But what is decisive for Arendt is that what constitutes the pen is still the fact that multiple individuals understand it as a writing object. But this does not imply that the reality of the individual's subjective realm ceases to exist. Rather, it means that for the

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<sup>14</sup> See more on Heidegger's opposition of concealment and unconcealment in *Being and Time*.

<sup>15</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.62

<sup>16</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.65.

<sup>17</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p.19.

<sup>18</sup> See Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

individual to change the pen's identity as a weapon, he first ought to convince others to understand it as and thus use it as a weapon. The subject's understanding of the pen has little or less reality unless it's collectively actualized as such. It is this agreement between different subjects that determines the existence of a pen – the identity of the pen exists on it being actualized by many with a certain intentionality<sup>19</sup>.

Pluralized appearance is thus what constitutes the reality of things in Arendt's political phenomenology. But it is important to note that it's not only objects that depend on plurality of appearance but also subjects. If the *ontological dignity*<sup>20</sup> of the public is what grants the subject its reality, then for Arendt, rejecting an ethic of concealment where the "as it appears" is confined to the realm of appearance to many, the self's identity is revealed only when it gains an appearance for the many. To be a self, and have a notion of self, "includes (...) fundamentally our immediate, non-reflective, non-objective worldly self-appearance"<sup>21</sup> in in an intersubjective sphere.

This absolute primacy of the realm of appearance over the subject implies that the existential hermeneutic approach is applied to the actualization of the common realm that arises between intersubjectivity. This is, understanding oneself implies understanding how one appears in actualization in this pre-given structure of identity<sup>22</sup> that Heidegger understands as the realm of quotidian life and that for Arendt is the realm of human affairs. This structure of appearances is where historical and cultural processes grow and are formed or actualized and where a self gains its reality – by actualizing it(self) in the realm of appearances and revealing its identity in the *world*.

### **1.1.2 World**

***How can the world be a political concept?*** For Husserl and Heidegger, and particularly for Arendt, *the world* amounts to a "coherent style of appearance"<sup>23</sup>,

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<sup>19</sup> See Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

<sup>20</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.73.

<sup>21</sup> Loidolt, p.75.

<sup>22</sup> For more on identity, consult the first chapter of Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*.

<sup>23</sup> Loidolt, p.74.

according to which subjectivity appears. In a phenomenological sense, we can speak of a regularity of appearance that, contrary to Kant's idea of the world itself as deriving from the transcendental categories of reason, precedes any cognitive or reflective activity<sup>24</sup>. This is, the world is nothing more than the way it is given, systematically/regularly, in the appearance of worldly objects. The subject for Heidegger or Arendt is not a "wordless thing"<sup>25</sup> that relates to a universal idea of world that determines the being of objects, but rather a being that is already "in-the-world"<sup>26</sup>. From this phenomenological understanding of world as the particular way appearance is structured, a care-structure appears to Heidegger's Dasein as the structuring force of what appears. While for Heidegger this care-structure refers to the Dasein's existential project as constituting the world hood of the world – providing a meaningful context to what appears – for Arendt, the world hood of the world goes beyond the singularity of one Dasein's project<sup>27</sup>.

In Arendt's logic of pluralized appearance, as we've seen, being coincides with what appears for many. Accordingly, if we could talk about an existing care-structure in Arendt's political phenomenology, it wouldn't stem from Dasein's subjective vital project but from the common space that many subjects share<sup>28</sup>. "Being from the world" is radically different for Arendt, as she disentangles the notion of world from one subject's care-structure and collectivizes it. The "autonomy" of her concept of world<sup>29</sup> doesn't mean that the subject's individual project ceases to be relevant as providing a meaningful context to what appears. Rather it means that, just like the pen example, in an understanding of *being as appearing* in which the subject's reality depends on its appearance to others, the care-structure shifts into actualized plurality. This is, if the subject exists in the realm of appearance, then it's the common/intersubjective realm, "the being-with-others," what provides the subject with its meaningful context and understanding of it (self).

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<sup>24</sup> This idea can be found in Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason."

<sup>25</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.95.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

<sup>27</sup> Loidolt, p.96.

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

<sup>29</sup> Loidolt, p.97.

That being said, the *with-world*<sup>30</sup> gains a different leverage in Arendt - in fact the *with-world* is the world in Arendt's phenomenology. When the Dasein is faced with a disruption of its usual and embedded understanding of objects and everyday life, for example, in finding that the pen can be used as a weapon: for **Heidegger** what emerges is the Dasein's singular existential context, predicated through an "I" projected onto the object. Heidegger's focus is on the individual's existential engagement with the world, where the discovery of the pen's potential as a weapon exposes the individual's subjective interpretation and relationship with objects; for **Arendt**, what emerges is a plural predicate. The subject in Arendt never really withdraws from the world in order to situate its being, rather it's confronted with the "we" that relates with the pen as a writing object.

Thus, Dasein's background work as the world hood of the world that constitutes what appears, is the plural we for Arendt. This implies that the world, as the realm where the real is constituted, is where subjects can find commonality – firstly in what appears for everybody.

Loidolt deconstructs the concept of world in three distinct aspects which somehow foreshadow Arendt's "proto-normative" hierarchy of human activities. This makes sense since Arendt declares that some activities have more wordliness<sup>31</sup> than others – "having" more means that certain activities that Man engages with require/produce different degrees of appearance.

It is clear that everything that appears for the many already presupposes an intersubjective realm and its *per se* a world because it generates "a point of reference"<sup>32</sup>, but this notion doesn't cover Arendt's notion of world. The condition of possibility of an intersubjective realm is the stability that it can provide for the subject to situate itself in the world, and appearance is the basic ontological condition for such. However, for Loidolt we can only talk of world as a potential structure of

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<sup>30</sup> *Mitsein*, Heidegger's concept of being-with-others.

<sup>31</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*. "Having wordliness" signifies that the enactment of the activity depends on the presence of others.

<sup>32</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.99.

meaning when Arendt introduces the two activities that distinguish man from other living beings – *fabrication* and *action*.

Loidolt uses the word *in-between* to describe this common realm that results from a specific type of activity, and which is based on appearance. These *in-betweens*, generated by fundamental activities<sup>33</sup>, constitute themselves into different intersubjective realms with corresponding logics of appearance<sup>34</sup>. What differs in these activities is their ability to generate a common realm that has the stability required for man to feel at situated<sup>35</sup>. This is each activity produces an intersubjective common realm with more or less appearance.

The notion of world as an *in-between* that stems from a certain enactment/activity presupposes a “combination between praxis and poiesis”<sup>36</sup>. Even though any activity presupposes a certain degree of appearance, man’s ability to (apply the category of means and ends)<sup>37</sup> fabricate produces a tangible reality composed of objects and tools that subsist in time (*Dingwelt*). This shared space of materiality and functionality provides a structure for the intersubjective relations to appear (*Mitwelt*) and human intentionality to be revealed – the objective and tangible character of the world of objects gives reality to “speech and action” that organize and care for the world of objects.

In Loidolt’s scheme, this twofold notion of world reveals a “who” or a reference that in its turn produces what she designates as “space of meaning”<sup>38</sup> – a *quasi-transcendental* concept that she identifies with Arendt’s notion of world. In a logic of being as plural appearance, that which survives the “obscurity of the cycle of life and death”<sup>39</sup> is the common world as what determines the stability of what appears. This is why for Arendt, it’s not necessarily the durability of objects in the world that

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<sup>33</sup> A concept that will be more deeply explored in the next section.

<sup>34</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*.

<sup>35</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.99

<sup>36</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.100.

<sup>37</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.155.

<sup>38</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.99

<sup>39</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.8.

determines the quality of appearance but that which can “present and hold together” what lies *in-between* subjects.

In short, the common realm or the human world for Arendt is a complex and multilayered network of meaningful human interactions and agreements that somehow extends beyond mere appearance but is in absolute need of objects and stories in order to gain ontological status/meaning – the world is a “whole context of involvements”<sup>40</sup> between the world of tools and objects and the world of intersubjective relations. The quality of this world is accomplished in its ability to relate to different individuals while preventing them of “falling over each other”<sup>41</sup>.

The paradox of a *relating separation* in Arendt’s notion of world reveals once again the point where she departs from Heidegger’s notion of identity/reality. Identity is revealed against the background of a common world instead of being embedded in a singular existential context. The collective “we” and the common intersubjective realm where historical, cultural, and even natural processes move in time are what guarantees the subject its objective reality – they reveal the possibility of being to the subject, whenever it enters in contact with others by appearing and actively interacting with the common realm. This is *actualizing plurality*, as the activity through which man decides and conducts the future of the world that he shares with others; which enables each one to reveal and display their identities and personhood.

### **1.1.3 Experience**

How can experience be a plural concept? To answer this question, Loidolt goes takes a step back to demonstrate that Arendt’s concept of experience, which is at first rooted in a phenomenological-hermeneutic concerning narrative, storytelling, and historical interpretation, takes off from notions of “intentionality and subjectivity”<sup>42</sup>. Intentionality is a basic phenomenological concept that describes, as Loidoilt writes,

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<sup>40</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity*.

<sup>41</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.52

<sup>42</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*.

the “givenness” that occurs in experience while subjectivity is the “whom” of the experience. The interrelation between these two concepts puts experience at the core of phenomenology, but intentionality refers to the enactment in the world of appearance, where experience takes place. Arendt follows Heidegger’s notion of intentionality as a givenness that doesn’t occur from an objectification through thought that unfolds in a state of non-activity. Rather, intentionality results from the transcending movement that happens whenever the individual engages with any activity in the world<sup>43</sup>. Thus, the subject’s identity or being is actualized rather than thought of. Arendt shares with Heidegger and other classic phenomenologists the premise that being is given in a “verbal sense” – experience is the start, the source of meaning and the raw material of all phenomenological inquiry<sup>44</sup>.

However, as we have seen with Loidolt, being, for Arendt, coincides with appearance to many. Thus, the notion of plurality – being among others - as the highest ontological realm, is actualized and unfolds in a “verbal sense” – plurality as “being among others” is lived through and experienced. As Loidolt indicates, Arendt transposes Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity<sup>45</sup> into a space of plurality– by claiming that the facticity of experience is determined by a multiplicity of interpretations.

Just like the Dasein engages in a hermeneutic of its lived experience, the subject whose being is given in actualized plurality engages in a historical and plural interpretation of experience. This means that for Arendt, experience always carries a pre-reflective understanding as an interpretation that unfolds in motion, in an active relationship with the world. The world is already being used here in an Arendtian sense of the term – as a meaning-structure that presents and holds together appearance.

Loidolt points out that for Arendt, “there is never one true relation to the world, but many”<sup>46</sup>. This means that for Arendt, what results from engaging in a pluralistic hermeneutic of experience, instead of being the Dasein’s singularity established in the facticity of its own death, is the subject’s singularity established in

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<sup>43</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.76.

<sup>44</sup> Loidolt, p.77.

<sup>45</sup> See Loidolt, p.79 and Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

<sup>46</sup> Loidolt, p.80.

the facticity of the presence of others. In a logic of plurality, the subject's singularity is recognized and actualized in articulation, not only with the world but, most importantly, with the others. This is why the truth of a fact is established under a multiplicity of interpretations – the meaning of experience is accessed through the engagement and interpretation of different points of view<sup>47</sup>. In this sense, actualizing plurality is accomplished in the active relation between the subject and the common world, which as we have seen, depends on a synthesis between the object character of the world and the intersubjective world of human relations.

The subject's possibility of enactment, because it's not given in the facticity of its own death, is actualized by engaging with the common world. The finitude of the subject is expressed in the fact that the others are unique and singular human beings that are consequently unpredictable – the realm of plural appearance is unintelligible because of the finitude and unpredictability grounded given the fact that its participants express a singular view of the world. Hence, whenever the subject engages with experience in the world, the pre-reflective understanding of phenomena arises from the impossibility of knowing how others will react, and which causal processes will unfold.

This is why for Arendt narratives, storytelling and historical remembrance are hermeneutic methods through which the subject establishes a relation to the common world and thus to its own being – in a narrative, meaning is never presented or revealed unless the subject engages in the hermeneutic cycle that the narrative proposes. Thus, Arendt's pluralization of the concept of experience implies that the subject enacts the collective meaning-structure that the common world represents and understand himself through it.

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<sup>47</sup> Loidolt, p.79

## **1.2 Section two: activities and their location**

In this section we will engage with Loidolt's account of Arendt's central activities, through which man actualizes its conditional structures. As we've seen, in Arendt's phenomenological perspective, any form of appearance already constitutes meaning. This is, whatever appears has already embedded a certain structure of meaning that enables the thing to appear. Arendt applies this classic phenomenological creed and further develops it expanding the notion of world and appearance in a pluralizing way. These structures of meaning condition man from a phenomenological standpoint – man becomes through the way he interacts with phenomenal reality – which for Arendt is mediated through activity. But how can we speak of the formation of specific conditional structures of meaning and their respective activities? And how can Arendt's theory of man's central activities be helpful for our purpose?

### **1.2.1 Activities and their logic: a theory of activities**

First, we need to understand the content in Arendt's notion of activity and its relationship with the respective *conditions* – for her, “*human life is being active*”<sup>48</sup>. Whenever humans engage in *vita activa* Arendt identifies structures that are generated by three different *modes of activity*<sup>49</sup> – labor, work, and action – which Loidolt compares to Dasein's “modes of being”. Even though the comparison is only partial because Arendt “does not give ontic descriptions of laboring, working and acting”, she “goes back to the ontological conditions through which these activities are made possible in first place”<sup>50</sup>. She deals with the characteristics a priori of these activities—whereby a priori does not mean innate but rather designates the respective antecedent understanding of being in which the respective activities dwell”<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.110.

<sup>49</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Braun, “Hannah Arendts Transzendentaler Tätigkeitsbegriff: Systematische Rekonstruktion Ihrer Politischen Philosophie Im Blick Auf Jaspers Und Heidegger.”

<sup>51</sup> Braun.

This reinstates that for Arendt, reality, or human life (not as bios<sup>52</sup>, but human life in general) is to be deduced from the particular way it appears in the world. The *who* and *how* of the subject is deduced from the *existentia*<sup>53</sup> - this is a premise that both Heidegger and Arendt share in their phenomenological twist of the Kantian notion that the conditions of possibility of the objects of experience determine the conditions of possibility of experience<sup>54</sup>. If we can say that the *modes of being* are for Heidegger an ontological structure that can be comprehended, not from an a priori knowledge of being, but from the object-character or facticity of being, then comprehending being is accomplished by enacting these ontological structures in the world.

This is the case with Arendt, to whom the “modes of activity” also refer to ontological structures that Loidolt designates as conditions – these structures aren’t necessarily limits to the possibility of enactment but rather attributes that enable man to actualize its own condition. That is, these conditions are what man *is*, not as something that restricts – which would imply that man compares himself with a total being that precedes appearance and therefore depends on a priori knowledge in order to act – but as “basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man”<sup>55</sup>. Being is given within the relation between the conditions and their respective enactment<sup>56</sup> - i.e., to be a biological being necessarily implies basic activities such as drinking water, eating, resting, and laboring; correspondingly, to engage in these activities depends on there being a body, cells etc.

Further, Arendt acknowledges three different basic conditions and their corresponding activities that produce different meanings: life as *laboring*; the world as *working*; and plurality as *acting and speaking*. I will designate this tripartition a theory of activities – a framework based on Loidolt’s analysis of Arendt from which we can deduce that certain activities need certain conditions to be met in order to produce their meaning.

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<sup>52</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.69

<sup>53</sup> See Heidegger, *Being and Time*

<sup>54</sup> Loidolt, p.112.

<sup>55</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> *Existentia* precedes *essentia* – Heidegger’s existential credo.

Regarding education, for example, the spatial composition needs to allow the teacher's voice to be audible to the students, the teacher needs to speak in a certain tempo. Obviously, there is a much greater complexity of conditions that need to be met first for education to take place, such as being able to hear. However, it is education as a capacity and activity what gathers all the spatial, temporal, and other conditions – it is the activity and capacity and the generated meaning-space what structures space and time. This means that education is an activity that produces a certain experience, which is in this case, as Arendt would say, that of revealing the world to the new generations<sup>57</sup>.

Therefore, even though these different activities that Arendt identifies in human *vita activa* correspond to different horizons of meaning and as much as we can see Arendt's division as three distinct zones of meaning, it is clear that these activities and their conditions not only overlap with each other as they absolutely depend on one another in order to be actualized<sup>58</sup>. I.e., learning and teaching depend on being focused, which can only occur if the students are not tired or hungry, that is, only if life's basic conditions are fulfilled.

But this interdependence of required activities doesn't imply that we can't distinguish activities from one another. In fact, activities that man engages with produce what Loidolt calls *meaning-spaces*<sup>59</sup> which indicates that Arendt reveals a certain phenomenological transcendentalism. Activities that take place develop a certain meaning-structure through which man understands himself as such. The relation between the gathered conditions and the activity informs space and time being orientating it in a certain rhythm, sequence and logic which gives birth to a meaning-space – a *quasi-transcendentia*<sup>60</sup> pre-given structure of meaning or a world that produces a "location" or a "who".

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<sup>57</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.13.

<sup>58</sup> Loidolt refers to "intrinsic interwideness of actualized conditions in each human being" to undercut the "normative status" in the idea that plurality is intimately more related with leading a human life in general.

<sup>59</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*.

<sup>60</sup> Loidolt, p.121.

But this transcendentalism is also the reason these different “modes” and *meaning*-spaces produce a certain hierarchy of activities<sup>61</sup> as they have “the tendency to present themselves as the one dominant means of world access and true subject-object relation to which everything else is reduced”<sup>62</sup>. This is why Arendt is so concerned with the loss of the human experience of action and plurality in detriment to the logic of life. And it’s also the reason why social media, as we’ll see, by being able to partially mimic the experience of revealing the world to new generations but under a distinct set of conditions, this is, by altering its logic of temporality and spatiality can generate a different experience/meaning-space that education has traditionally produced. Still, as Loidolt points out, “Arendt does not work only with spaces of meaning created by basic activities in order to describe dynamic historical forces, but that she fundamentally crosses and enriches this analysis with the dynamics of the spaces of the public and the private”<sup>63</sup>.

Further ahead, we will come to understand that education corresponds to an activity that reveals the world in its plurality, that is, reveals the political character of the world – an intersubjective realm generated by the chaotic interaction between multiple actors along time. But it’s crucial to understand that world-building, the expression Loidolt uses to refer to the *Homo Faber’s* capacity to produce tools and objects, is central to the unfolding of education. The ability to apply the category of means and ends and fabricate objects to establish the world that constitutes “the human artifice”, is framed by Arendt within the Greek concepts of *téchne* and *poiesis*<sup>64</sup>. Within this reasoning, we will come to see that this Arendtian notion of technology – as what results from the activity through which man produces objects that fix and stabilize man’s finitude in the world of appearance – gives the child’s world the necessary stability for it to become a human being.

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<sup>61</sup> World-disclosing based hierarchy of activities. See Loidolt, p.118.

<sup>62</sup> Loidolt on Jasper’s encompassing theory. See p.119.

<sup>63</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.132.

<sup>64</sup> Although Arendt does not use the two words (*techne* and *poiesis*) along *The Human Condition*, she does refer to the greek poet, the artist, and the craftsman as falling under the logic of the activity of homo faber in page 161 of *The Human Condition*.

### **1.2.2 Appearance and its logic: a theory of visibility**

Loidolt explores the blurriness that Arendt leaves between the separation of the private and the public as two different realms in which activities can take place and that refer to different degrees of visibility. Loidolt's suggestion that *the public realm doesn't necessarily imply the exercise of plurality or the private the exercise of life* reveals a theoretical move to free her analysis of Arendt from Benhabib's accusation of phenomenological essentialism; namely, that certain activities can only exist in a specific *location*, this being the condition for the existence of meaning-spaces<sup>65</sup>.

Further, Loidolt readjusts this relation between activities and their **conditions of appearance** by claiming that the only reason there seems to be a necessary relation between the institutionalized realms of private and public (locations) and the meaning produced by the different activities is because certain activities have different ontological status<sup>66</sup>. For example, the activity of acting and speaking, through which plurality is actualized has, in Arendt's terms, *a fragile ontological status*. This makes it necessary to consolidate the meaning-space produced by words and deeds (plurality), which are evidently more vane and easily manipulated than instruments and tools produced by world-building activities, in the public realm.

Thus, when we refer to conditions that enable activities to actualize the meaning-spaces they produce, we also need to address the **conditions of appearance** as conditions of visibility<sup>67</sup> that can enhance the meaning-space of activities. The basic fact of visibility is prior to any institutionalized realm of the private and the public – the presence of humans doesn't need to be necessarily tied to an establishment of a public realm because we can think of a pre-institutionalized public realm<sup>68</sup> where plurality unfolds without a proper space (it can happen in a café where a group of intellectuals discuss their views). Public and private, prior to being bounded or established locations where activities can take place refer to the presence of the many or the protection against the presence of the many – what Loidolt calls **visibility-based meaning-spaces**.

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<sup>65</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*.

<sup>66</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*.

<sup>67</sup> Visibility-based meaning-spaces.

<sup>68</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.135

Every activity, in the sense that it constitutes an *inner-worldly phenomenon*<sup>69</sup>, produces a space of appearance. However, Arendt makes clear in the second chapter of *The Human Condition* that certain activities belong to different realms - they require more visibility than others to produce their meaning (Loidolt, PP). The hungry man doesn't need the presence of his fellow humans to eat his meal; but the storyteller *needs* his audience to communicate his experiences – while life doesn't depend on the presence of others, plurality absolutely does. The need for certain conditions of appearance doesn't come from the fact that certain activities can only unfold in specific spaces of appearance with certain visibility characteristics, but simply that certain activities flourish when taking place with certain conditions of appearance<sup>70</sup>.

But there is still a normative distinction that Loidolt highlights in her combination thesis that we ought to use in our description of the phenomena of education and social media. The fact that certain activities flourish under certain conditions of appearance is not enough to say that they *should* be assigned to a location. That is, life's activities can flourish when taking place in the public realm, which is the characteristic phenomena unfolding in modernity. For Loidolt, the implicit normativity of Arendt's distinction between the private and the public appears in the fact that *the flourishing of certain activities can harm the conditions of appearance of others*<sup>71</sup>. If one activity invades the space of appearance and monopolizes or dominates the logic of visibility, then they might obstruct and undermine other activities' ability to fully take place.

The only activity in need for this protection is the exercise of plurality because it is the only condition that fully depends on the presence of the many and the existence of an intersubjective realm. In fact, the reason there seems to be a convergence between activities and locations in Arendt's work is because what results from the exercise of plurality – stories, words, and narratives – doesn't have an object-character in the world. Therefore, it needs to have a proper stable and protected<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Expression employed by Loidolt.

<sup>70</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.139.

<sup>71</sup> Loidolt, p.141.

<sup>72</sup> Protected from the invasion of other logics and not from the public as it is with the private.

space erected by humans. Hence, Arendt's quasi-normative claim is that conditions of appearance for the exercise of plurality need to be intentionally safeguarded in an erected institutionalized public realm e activity that is most fleeting and fragile by nature has a space where it can appear<sup>73</sup>.

The purpose of my thesis is to operationalize this normative move implied in the protection of the public realm as a space where only plurality *should* appear, the only activity that is really *in need of visibility*, and apply it to the case of Education. But, as we'll see, education has a particular relation with plurality as it is understood by Arendt as a *special* activity that guarantees the existence of plurality in the world because it deals directly with the phenomena of appearance<sup>74</sup>.

But we ought to make this normative description using Loidolt's *combination thesis* which, to sum things up, admits that each conditional activity can unfold in the two different realms of the private and the public, meaning that there is no *essential* link between activities and conditions of visibility, except that some flourish in specific visibility conditions. If there is a normative claim made by Arendt it is due to the fact that plurality needs to be protected<sup>75</sup>. Only the activity that discloses the world as an intersubjective common realm needs to have an erected and maintained space of appearance.

It becomes clear in Arendt's writings that education is an activity that shares the same ontological fragility as activities of acting and speaking. Starting just with the fact that the child is by itself a fragile and unfinished being that needs to be protected – this being the reason for Arendt, education has *traditionally* been associated with the private sphere of the family<sup>76</sup>. But education has a much more ambiguous status regarding its proper location because it's not actualized plurality in the full sense of the word. It takes place in the private realm as much as in the public realm - from the parents' familiar voice inside the four walls of the house, to the school, where the teacher's distance brings children further into the world inside the classroom. And

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<sup>73</sup> Loidolt, p.134

<sup>74</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*

<sup>75</sup> Loidolt, p.144.

<sup>76</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education."

children do not have the status of full human beings as we cannot say that they express a view of the world yet, they're not full subjects yet.

Still, assuming it's an activity with political significance – a status that we should prove in the next chapter – it needs the conditions for the activity to occur and an intentionally erected and bounded space of appearance. Without which, children would be deprived of education's meaning-space, in which the world is disclosed as an interconnection of human thought, events, creativity and the unexpected<sup>77</sup>.

I believe we can make arguments for the protection of the meaning-space of education against other possible invading world-disclosing activities, especially regarding the use of the smartphone, which flourishes within the meaning-space of education.

Thus, our first goal in the second chapter is to prove that education, despite being different from actualized plurality, requires the same protection as plural activities, since we can draw a new quasi-normative claim for its protection. This will be done drawing on Loidolt's combination thesis while analyzing education's meaning-space from Arendt's essay *The Crisis in Education*.

## **CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA (APPLYING ARENDT'S POLITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY)**

### **2.1 Education**

In this first section we will try to understand where does Arendt place education regarding Loidolt's conceptualization of her condition of the activity and the space of appearance in which they can flourish. First, we will engage with the formal and general logic of these conditions following then to a more concrete resolution of

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<sup>77</sup> Loidolt, p.143.

the conditions that enable the activity – for this, we will make a comparison between Walter Benjamin’s storyteller and the adult. Benjamin’s description of the experience of storytelling, which he compares to craftsmanship, produces a meaning-space that, similarly to education’s, is oriented and crafted around the communication of experience. Benjamin’s reference to storytelling as a “craftsmanship” demonstrates the same dependence of the communication of experience from *techne* and *poiesis*, that is, from technology and man’s capacity to create. However, this being evident just from the fact that technology is a central concept in Benjamin’s work, his account of the storyteller focuses more on the specific technological conditions that arise from the communication of experience. In other words, Benjamin’s account of literary and oral traditions and their relationship with experience can bring us closer to the conditions under which education as a form of actualized plurality unfolds.

For now, the first step to characterize education’s meaning-space is to understand what Arendt means by a *crisis of education* in the modern world. The profound historical shifts taking place in modernity and its declared state of the crisis of political authority<sup>78</sup> have displaced education from its traditional understanding<sup>79</sup>, creating the opportunity for us to derive out the meaning<sup>80</sup> that education has always produced in “every civilization”<sup>81</sup>. This truth-statement is based in conditions that are by no means “self-evident”<sup>82</sup>, as Arendt declares, but rather grounded in the basic fact of natality, which we will unveil in the following chapter.

### **2.1.1 Education’s meaning-space and logic**

What is the meaning-space of education? And first, what is the basic condition without which the meaning-space of education cannot be actualized? What’s education’s relation with plurality?

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<sup>78</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*. See chapter on *Authority*.

<sup>79</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, p.8.

<sup>80</sup> This meaning is a product of a hermeneutic approach to the activity of education and man’s relation to it.

<sup>81</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, p.7.

<sup>82</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, p.7.

I believe that from the fact that Arendt reveals a certain concern with the place of education within modernity's historical shifts in her essay *The Crisis in Education*, gives us a first impression on the importance of this activity towards building her political phenomenology of plurality. Any activity deals with appearance to some degree, in the sense that it always unfolds in the world, but no activity is as close to the fact of appearance as education given that it deals with *the fact of natality*<sup>83</sup>. Arendt holds birth and death as the two major phenomenon through which appearance or non-appearance occurs in the world.

In some sense, education lies between both. The pre-Socratic principle<sup>84</sup> that being alive means to be immediately engaged in the process of dying is in some sense shared by Arendt in her conception of the world of appearance as being ultimately grounded in renewal. It's indeed common to all beings the fact that they appear and disappear from the world and it's also common that every being is brought to life in a state of incompleteness or becoming. But there is a twofold notion that determines the child's condition, as being the subject of education, which gives education its status of more than a preparation for the life of the species or the actualization of life's cycle. The not yet determined status of education as an ambiguous meaning-space first stems from the child's condition: *the fact that he is new in a world that is strange to him and he is in the process of becoming and the fact that he is a new human being and a becoming human being*<sup>85</sup>.

In spite of sharing the state of becoming with all other living creatures, children's state of becoming is given in another fact or condition that separates man altogether from other living beings: *man is born into a world*<sup>86</sup>. This is Arendt's first conditional structure of education, deduced from the infallible phenomena of appearance and non-appearance of human beings into and from the world. We've seen through Loidolt that *appearance* and *world* are phenomenological concepts that are used in a plural sense. The fact that man is capable of speaking and acting, of

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<sup>83</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.1.

<sup>84</sup> Heraclitus's expression of eternal fluidity.

<sup>85</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.7.

<sup>86</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.11.

experiencing a certain phenomenon and having “an implicit understanding of himself”<sup>87</sup> as being enclosed in a context or a world inhabited by other human beings<sup>88</sup>, lays down the ontological condition that separates man from other creatures on earth. Therefore, being a full human being corresponds to, in a logic of *being in activity*<sup>89</sup>, the actualization of this capacity/condition of speaking and acting.

In the first moment, it is the capacity for this specific phenomenological access to reality what determines the condition of children. That is, the child is a new human being and not just a new element of the human species, a living being that needs to learn and be educated on how to drink water, eat or any other biological activities and ensure the continuance of the species.

That the state of becoming is ultimately shared and so too is the the fact that man is fundamentally mortal, doesn’t necessarily reduce the new human being or the meaning-space of education to the actualization of life’s cycle. We’ve noticed previously in Chapter One that the different conditional structures that Arendt identifies do not exist isolated but rather as dynamic spaces of meaning that are interdependent. As sustained by Jaspers<sup>90</sup>, only certain conditional activities can sustain meaning – namely plurality. Yet, “realizing plurality is not possible without realizing life and work”<sup>91</sup>.

Education’s activity too is determined by the fact that the child is a fragile and dependent human being and thus requires the same care and protection that the animal has towards its new-born. But within the human world, this type of care and preparation only acquires meaning in the fact that the child will one day be a full human being that is capable of speaking and acting in the world<sup>92</sup> This is why education’s meaning-space, although needing the logic of life and of world-building in order to be *realized*, as children need to be well rested in order to be focused and

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<sup>87</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.127.

<sup>88</sup> Aristotle’s *logos* as what distincts man from other living beings.

<sup>89</sup> Loidolt’s analysis demonstrating that Arendt identifies being with movement and activity.

<sup>90</sup> Jasper’s influence in Arendt’s hierarchy of substance, which identifies being with movement and activity. For more see Loidot p.119.

<sup>91</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.119.

<sup>92</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”.

depend on a pencil or any other object to interact with the world around them and the process of learning, is ultimately a process through which children become full human beings. Every activity ensuring the development or becoming of the child has its meaning given in the fact that the child has the capacity for acting and speaking as a potence<sup>93</sup>.

Summing up, even though other logics belong to and determine the condition of the activity as man is *bios*, their meaning is sustained and integrated in the fact that child is or will one day become a human being – this is why education, in Arendt’s words, is responsible for ***introducing the young person to the world***<sup>94</sup>.

Given this, we can assume through Arendt’s phenomenological premise of *being coinciding with appearance* in the common world, that “becoming” a full human being implies that the meaning-space of education actualizes this state of becoming through a logic of acting and speaking, an inhabitant of the common world. But if this holds true, we’ll see in the last section of this chapter that it unfolds in a different way.

*But what does this definition of education as a preparation or activity through which the young are introduced to the world mean? And how can we identify education with plurality when Arendt specifically claims that education can take no part in politics?*<sup>95</sup>

Answering these two questions will lead us to the full condition or characterization of education’s meaning-space, which by now appears to be *the introduction of children into the world*.

Until now, we’ve briefly seen how the condition of children is not grounded on their inscription in the human species but in the fact that they will one day be capable of speaking and acting. But we have to make clear why we can rightfully claim that children have this capacity/potence given that Arendt rejects any form of essentialism and the possibility of knowledge independent from experience. The condition of children and the claim that education constitutes preparation for the world is given by

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<sup>93</sup> Aristotle’s notion of potence in *De Anima*.

<sup>94</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, p.13.

<sup>95</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”, p.3.

the existence of a world that was already there before they arrived<sup>96</sup>. Children are new in relation to a world that was established by the human beings that previously erected it. Hence, Arendt's emphasis on the *newness* of new human beings introduces a new element that gives yet another quality to the meaning-space of education.

In an Arendtian logic of being and appearance, where the world is the ontological structure capable of sustaining meaning, stating that children will one day be capable of acting and speaking – that is, of revealing their unique perspectives of the world – absolutely depends on the stability and continuance of this same world, which allows this statement to be true in first place. Because the world is erected by mortals<sup>97</sup>, education needs to be actualized to preserve the world from perishing with the generation who built it. It's education what assures that the vane result of human action will be passed upon to a new generation of human beings that, according to Arendt, might or might not want to keep it how it was but will nevertheless assume responsibility for their own world<sup>98</sup>.

In Arendt's reasoning, if there was not a common world upon their arrival, children wouldn't be either new nor prepared and educated as being capable of acting and speaking. For what informs the condition of children as beings that are capable of such activities is the sole existence of a world. Since children's development as human beings ontologically depends on their relationship with the world, education's second condition regards, not the children, but those who are responsible for the world – the adults. The adults also take part in education, setting out a second condition of what constitutes education's meaning-space, given in the fact that the adults are mortal (Arendt, CE). Arendt expresses what I take to be the second condition of education's meaning-space - the responsibility for the *continuity of the world*<sup>99</sup>.

Despite these two conditions, education remains an ambiguous activity. For Arendt, the condition of children which turns education into an activity that introduces their being into the world, and the condition of adults given in the fact that their world

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<sup>96</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.9.

<sup>97</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.11.

<sup>98</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.8.

<sup>99</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.8.

is threatened by its own mortality - are constantly conflicting with each other<sup>100</sup>. She expresses this opposition by writing:

In education the assume responsibility for both, for the life and development of the child and for the continuance of the world. These two responsibilities do not by any means coincide; they may indeed come into conflict with each other.

Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*

What Arendt is implicitly claiming is that education's meaning-space doesn't exhaust itself either in being an activity through which children become full human beings or in that of assuming and advancing the continuity of a world that needs to be passed on given the mortal character of man's actions in it. The actualization of each of these two opposing elements – the world of adults and the world of children – is incorporated in the *actualization of the meaning-space of education*.

If both the condition of children and of adults, of the new and the old, are to be actualized by education then it's clear that this activity is inscribed in a paradoxical activity which simultaneously changes and preserves the world<sup>101</sup>. Nevertheless, Arendt makes clear in her critique of modern education that its goal shouldn't be the actualization and fulfillment of one or the other (the condition of children or adults) – neither the desires and needs of the children which modern theories of education prioritize so much nor the hopes of the mortal adults that might seek to use the new generations to preserve their own common world<sup>102</sup>.

*But what does it mean that Education's meaning-space actualizes both conditions but none-directly?* From Arendt's words – that education protects the *new* from the *old* and vice-versa<sup>103</sup>- it seems that education can't unfold without being an unquestionable realm of tension between the established and the new. It appears to be the end of education to mediate this tension in order to preserve the world from

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<sup>100</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.8.

<sup>101</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.3.

<sup>102</sup> Typical of tyrannies the control over education – the youth movements.

<sup>103</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.11.

*destroying itself*– either in the hands of the new or of the old<sup>104</sup>. Thus, we can finally come to terms with our attempt to define the meaning-space of education and conclude that the actualization of education is education itself.

This is, as Arendt seems to understand, education as the enactment of this *quasi-transcendental*<sup>105</sup> meaningful *in-between* - what separates the world of children from the world of adults. Hence, the fulfillment of children's becoming process and of the continuity of the common world of adults both depend on there being something that separates them but relates them<sup>106</sup> – it's this *in-between* that education is supposed to actualize.

Arendt's thoughts regarding the nature of education leave us with the same ambiguity we sense every time we try to pragmatize Arendt's political thought: the question of how education should be conducted must be "left to the pedagogues"<sup>107</sup>. I believe Arendt's concern with education comes from the fact that without this *in-between* that education's meaning-space actualizes, the singularity of each new human being might be lost, and with that the possibility of meaning in the common world.

It's as if the *in-between* of education constitutes a meaning-structure that, instead of functioning as a public sphere that makes possible for the singularity of each individual to appear, instead is a limited and bounded space of appearance curated by the adults that makes possible for the singularity of each new human being to mature and for adults to protect their world from the abrupt change that occurs from the uniqueness of each new human being.

Everytime this basic condition is forgotten, whether because a specific society tries to use the new generations to perpetuate itself or the world of children becomes

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<sup>104</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.11.

<sup>105</sup> Loidolt uses this expression regarding meaning-spaces.

<sup>106</sup> Expression used earlier.

<sup>107</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.13.

too independent<sup>108</sup>, and the opposition between the two worlds disappears, the common world continuity is threatened, and so is children and man.

Whether a certain civilization understands the individual as a worker that becomes its member by learning a specific technical skill or as a moral agent that becomes one by learning virtue and wisdom, education is first responsible for actualizing and revealing the plurality of the world, without which no human being – technical engineer or philosopher – can become a full human being. Again, the reason Arendt refrains herself from pedagogic theories is not because she doesn't consider the development of the child's individuality and talent to be important. This similarly applies to why Arendt neglects subjectivity by throwing it into a seemingly contingent realm in relation with the intersubjective realm<sup>109</sup>.

The question of whether Arendt's accusation of modern pragmatic theories of education centering around the desires and needs of the children neglects the child's development is responded with the same phenomenological argument underpinning Arendt's thought - to become and be a self is to actualize plurality in the intersubjective realm of appearance<sup>110</sup>.

In conclusion, Arendt's thoughts on Education demonstrate that education's end must not be primarily focused on the desires and needs of children nor of the adults but in enacting the tension between the two conditions. This enactment is what constitutes the meaning-space of education.

### **2.1.2 The crisis in Education: authority**

In this section our purpose is to understand what structures are necessary, without which the enactment of the meaning-space of education's as we have described until now is impossible, giving another methodological step towards a to describe our phenomena, the presence of the smartphone. Arendt gives us a first

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<sup>108</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.5

<sup>109</sup> Example given earlier – the pen.

<sup>110</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.53

suggestion in her description of the crisis that is taking place in American education and modernity in general. The crisis unveils the one condition that is necessary for education to unfold as a meaning-space where the conflict between the new generation and the old one finds a point of mediation: the presence of authority<sup>111</sup>.

Arendt claims that whatever the political crises and processes occurring in our societies, education is nevertheless responsible for the actualization of man's common world and the mediation between the old and the new. In our current historical context, it is authority that is being overthrown in modernity as Arendt declares that "in public and political life authority either plays no role at all (...) or at most plays a highly contested role"<sup>112</sup>. What I take Arendt to say is that even though education is an activity that absolutely concerns the world in common, since it actualizes its renewal<sup>113</sup>, it must retain a certain logic that the common world no longer recognizes as being possible<sup>114</sup>— that is, authority<sup>115</sup>.

It's not that education cannot unfold without authority. Loidolt makes clear that if there is any link between activities and their inner-structuring (spatial and temporal conditions) and their location (the conditions of appearance) it is that activities need specific spatial, rhythmic, temporal conditions and specific degrees of visibility (Loidolt, PP) in order to flourish<sup>116</sup>. However, we have also seen that the argument of flourishing and excellence is not enough to assert a normative element in activities and conditions<sup>117</sup>. Only plurality requires protection given the *ontological fragility* of words and actions – only plurality *should* have an intentionally erected space of appearance<sup>118</sup>.

In the case of education, my interpretation from Arendt's writings is that the reason why authority needs to remain intact in the realm of education is equal to the

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<sup>111</sup> Arendt's account of authority loss.

<sup>112</sup> Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", p.10.

<sup>113</sup> Arendt uses this term but it's important to mention that renewal doesn't refer to a specific quality of a world but to the basic structure or phenomenological access that education is supposed to reveal.

<sup>114</sup> At least outside of the level of individuality.

<sup>115</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.13.

<sup>116</sup> The word flourishing is used by Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.53.

<sup>117</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p.113

<sup>118</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality* p.132.

reason why acting and speaking need to have a proper space of appearance<sup>119</sup>. Let us see why.

Children's condition of newness is potentially harmful for themselves, as they are in a "state of becoming"; in the same way, the adult's condition of oldness is potentially harmful to themselves, as they are 'disappearing'. Both, however, are potentially harmful to the world, and each other. Education actualizes the mediation of these two opposing forces – the old and the new – as we have seen, however, it must have a "predictable end"<sup>120</sup> – to renew the common world and save it from its ruin. According to Arendt, this mediation is accomplished through the exercise of authority. If children and adults have different conditions<sup>121</sup> that conflict with each other, authority generates and holds together the *in-between* that allows for both conditions to communicate with each other.

**Why do children need authority in the first place?** It is made clear by Arendt that it is children who cannot afford its loss. This claim is seemingly grounded in children's condition – but not so much because their undeveloped bodies and minds need protection from the dangers of the world. Arendt specifies that the crisis of authority in modern education concerns more "the young person, the newcomer and stranger"<sup>122</sup> rather than the child. It's commonly accepted and hard to defy the authority of the adults in protecting and guaranteeing the well-being of the child. However, what Arendt considers essential in this crisis reflects how she regards authority's role in education.

Newcomers don't have a *world* yet, as they lack the ability to act and speak<sup>123</sup>. This seems to be the sole reason why authority should not leave the realm of education – not necessarily because of the body's needs, but due to the fact that children need an external input of meaning-structure to grow upon. It is almost as though children, too fragile and incapable of rising towards the public sphere and the

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<sup>119</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

<sup>120</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.13.

<sup>121</sup> *Condition* is being used in the same logic as proposed in the first chapter.

<sup>122</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.9.

<sup>123</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*.

common world, need the common world to come to their protected, private, and bounded space, where they can be introduced to it. This is why authority should remain present for children, as a logic through which the meaning-space of education is actualized – authority is for the child a curation of appearance, of what she *sees and hears*, which is of the responsibility of adults.

This is the reason why Arendt highlights modern theories of education's assumption that children should be left to their autonomy and world to be emancipated from the "tyranny" of the adults' authority. This is only one element comprised in her more general critique that claims modern education is failing to introduce the young into the world<sup>124</sup>. Nevertheless, Arendt gives an account of how this emancipation doesn't free the child from authority as it subjects it to a new and much more problematic one – the authority of the majority of children<sup>125</sup>. Either way, it becomes clear through Arendt that while in the common world of adults' authority can be emancipated up to the individual level, this is not possible with children given that they are not capable of speaking and acting fully – the political activities *par excellence*. Lacking these capacities implies that, in a logic of plurality, children are incapable of constituting a reality of their own. This is why the exercise of constituting the reality of what appears and what does not, is given to adults.

What we now ask is **why that authority should be left to the exercise of adults?** According to Arendt, the interaction between the young and the world, that is new to them, should be mediated and it is of the responsibility of adults, given their condition of belonging to the common world that was already there and having the capacity for plurality.

If we regard education as the *in-between* that comes from an actualization of the relation between the new and the old, then authority also constitutes reality for adults, albeit in a completely different way. We can find in Arendt an argument for the why of adults' need for authority to remain stable in the realm of education, which reflects once again that education neither works for one or the other's condition, but

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<sup>124</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*.

<sup>125</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.5.

actualizes both according to the principle of plurality. Arendt's use of the term responsibility introduces a proto-normative argument for authority to remain present in education which falls back to Loidolt's argument for the protection of plurality.

We've seen that children need the presence of authority because, following my interpretation of Arendt's reasoning, they need their reality to be curated by adults. Adults also need the presence of authority in education for the same reason they need education in general – as noted previously, to ensure that the world continues to exist, mainly because the *new unique perspectives* of new generations pose a threat, if not articulated in the in-between that authority gives rise to.

In a certain way, adults actualize plurality whenever they take responsibility for the exercise of education. They constitute a reality that they lack given their condition of mortals<sup>126</sup>. But authority does not serve the interests or desires of adults to perpetuate their world. This is why Arendt uses the term responsibility to specify adults' relation with the exercise of authority in education. Responsibility for the world, being what enforces adults to exercise authority in the actualization of the meaning-space of education, denotes a capacity that Arendt refers multiple times in her works, which seems to be for her a political virtue – *courage*<sup>127</sup>.

Arendt uses courage in the same sense that the Greeks would use it: the actualization of the common world implies the act of renunciation to the private life of one's desires and needs<sup>128</sup>. Responsibility as an act *that demonstrates to what extent the adult loves the world*<sup>129</sup> also constitutes a political virtue that education requires in order to be actualized. This becomes evident in Arendt's belief that adults must accept that they are not educating to dictate how the world will look beyond their own mortality but to preserve the uniqueness of each new human being<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*.

<sup>127</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.36

<sup>128</sup> "In the Greek understanding, courage was the primary political virtue, as it enabled individuals to face the dangers and uncertainties of the public realm and to act in defense of the polis." (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.36)

<sup>129</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p. 13.

<sup>130</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p. 9.

Finally, we can now clearly understand that authority seems to be, both for the child and the adult, how the world as a structure of meaning grounded in plurality informs the contained reality where education takes place. From the child's absence of a world and the adult's condition of belonging to one, authority is established based on the principle of action. This is, the adult is placed as an active sovereign acting in name of the intersubjective realm that represents the world because he is *from the world, he is the world*. It's not only that the adult embodies and reveals the experience of the world, but he is also responsible and entitled to curate the child's world according to the same experience.

This entitlement, which Arendt declares to be temporary and only confined to the realm of education<sup>131</sup>, is as strong as the adults' willingness to care for the world they inhabit. The *in-between* that separates the old and the new is in a certain sense the common world, which *in the realm of education takes the form of authority*<sup>132</sup>. Following this reasoning, the quality of the *in-between* and the actualization of education as a meaning-space that ensures man's common world is determined by the level of responsibility that the adult is willing to assume in the educational process of the young. The more the adult holds this responsibility, the more stable is education's *in-between*.

For authority to remain present, holding together but simultaneously separating the new and the old, it is implied that adults are actualizing their own political virtues and common world. The adult represents and embodies, in the controlled and protected realm where the meaning-space of education unfolds, his own experience of the world. However, it is not sufficient for the adult to participate in education; he needs to have in himself an understanding and experience of the common world that assigns this authority to him.

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<sup>131</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.9: "But this holds good only for the realm of education, or rather for the relations between grown-ups and children, and not for the realm of politics, where we act among and with adults and equals."

<sup>132</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.9.

### **2.1.3 Authority's conditionality: spatial, temporal and visibility logic**

Until now, it seems that our description of education's meaning-space has remained a description of its formal logic. This is not sufficient – we must describe how this logic informs and orients more specific spatial, temporal, and most importantly visibility traits of the meaning-space, which compose the conditions that disclose the world in a certain form of intersubjectivity. This is our final step towards a methodology that links Loidolt's combination thesis and its normative twist to the specific conditionality of the actualization of education. This shall lead us to the phenomenological implications of the smartphone's interaction with education.

As we have seen, the meaning-space of education appears to reveal the world as an intersubjective *in-between* that resembles the actualization of plurality, given that authority is the manifestation of the common world within this realm. However, Arendt indicates that the actualization of education should be protected from the public sphere because children “*by nature require the security of concealment in order to mature undisturbed*”<sup>133</sup>. Because children and adults are not equals<sup>134</sup>, speech and action unfold in a one-sided way – authority imposes a hierarchical structure between adults and the children that as we have seen is based on their distinct conditions.

How does the logic plurality inform the inner-structuring of education's meaning-space if, according to Arendt, education should unfold in the private sphere? The answer to this question leads to an encounter with the concrete phenomenological arrangement that the presence of authority implies. Arendt does not specify how the *in-between* erected by authority actually unfolds, as that would imply her to dive into theories of pedagogy. However, her reference to the private sphere is a starting point to develop the specific worldly qualities that the activity requires to produce its meaning. This need for boundedness given in children's condition is rooted in the fact that on some occasions, like Loidolt notes, the revealing qualities of speech are intensified in bounded and closed spaces<sup>135</sup>.

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<sup>133</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p.9.

<sup>134</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*.

<sup>135</sup> Loidolt, p.142.

At this point I would like to invoke Walter Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* (1936), in which Benjamin tries to reveal the temporal and experiential modalities that the act of storytelling implies. Benjamin and Arendt share the concern with modernity's problematic relation with experience. While for Benjamin this manifests in the idea that experience can longer "be sustained, shared and articulated by means of literary narrative", for Arendt it is expressed in her concern with the loss of plurality (action) in modernity's attack on the experience of the political. Their mutual recognition that modernity – in the historiographical formalization of time as an endless cycle<sup>136</sup> - shuts down the possibility of history or the past being a source of meaning for the present and future, is accomplished in the idea that communication of experience has deteriorated. The revealing quality of speech and action, of narrative and storytelling, lose meaning and become incommunicable if disconnected from the life span of human life<sup>137</sup>.

The reason why Benjamin might be useful to derive out our conditions is grounded in this connection with Arendt's thought but mostly in the fact that, as Sarah Clift writes, he goes a bit further than Arendt "by taking the notion of life span beyond its objective representation in language - that is, beyond the notion of life span as seen from the perspective of its completion"<sup>138</sup>. This means that Benjamin, by analyzing how literary forms of storytelling "negotiate the question of their own ending"<sup>139</sup>, introduces in his analysis the material and worldly situation in which the encounter between experience and human finitude has produced a specific experience in history. Benjamin, more than Arendt, focuses on the technology that humans developed, which reflected the authority of the singularity of human life, in order to communicate their experiences<sup>140</sup>. Education to relies on the same logic of authority, and education to faces the same transformation as storytelling in modernity: the presence of the smartphone as a new technology and curator of experience, as we'll see in the next

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<sup>136</sup> Arendt formalizes this as the imperative of life's endless cycle of consumption and production.

<sup>137</sup> Clift, "Committing the Future to Memory: History, Experience."

<sup>138</sup> Clift, p.34.

<sup>139</sup> Clift, p.34.

<sup>140</sup> Technology is used in the same sense as Arendt: as a tool that discloses the world.

chapter, introduces a new logic by replacing the adult's authority with a new one: the child's.

While for Arendt this historical situation is the Greeks polis and their conception of narrative, for Benjamin it is the literary form of the epic and its root in the oral tradition of telling stories. Storytelling resulted from a particular experience of time and space that modernity no longer seems to have access to, which was the belief in what Arendt designates as immortality. This is why Benjamin brings out the advent of the novel as the first manifestation and possibly one of the factors that lead to this change. The fact that the reader of the novel must "isolate himself"<sup>141</sup> from others and the world in order to access its meaning reveals how lived experience had already in early modernity started to lose its meaning and how the belief that speech and action, on what was achieved by mortal hands, could be meaningful.

The reason why this is relevant for our endeavor is firstly because Benjamin, similarly to Arendt, identifies the relation between the loss of authority of lived experience with modernity's inability to communicate with the past – which is another way of referring to the crisis of education we have described until now. In a certain way, the adult's responsibility for education shares the same position with the storyteller – they both gain authority over their audience not only from the finitude of their lived experience but also from having shared this finitude with and from others. In other words, just like the temporary incomplete condition of the child in relation to the adult, the listener of the story becomes incomplete in relation to the storyteller, also for a temporary period of time (at least while the story is told).

The meaning-space of the storyteller, as Benjamin notes, requires time, presence, and a certain disposition that in the case of education seems to be the most indispensable of all: the ability to listen. What I'm referring to as the ability to listen is expressed by Benjamin as "a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer"<sup>142</sup>, that is *boredom*, that he refers to as "the dream bird that hatches the egg of

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<sup>141</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov", p.10.

<sup>142</sup> Benjamin, *The Storyteller*, p.5.

experience”<sup>143</sup>. It is clear that Benjamin, touching upon an element that is central in his work<sup>144</sup>, regards communication of lived experience in a logic of storytelling as being impossible in the over-stimulated modern life.

Revealing their experience of the world implies that the old rely upon the new generation’s ability to listen and retain what is being passed on to them. But as we have seen, in the case of education, this ability depends in first place on how the adult curates and protects the child’s realm. To *be responsible for educating the young*<sup>145</sup> implies that the adult protects what Benjamin considers to be a menace to the art of storytelling – the child’s boredom. This is why Arendt claims that some activities only thrive in concealment and education is one of them, in which resembling the meaning-space of storytelling, is expressed in the protection from the stimulation that for Arendt is represented by the public world.

The use of smartphone is an example of how a small apparatus, as we’ll address in the next section, is by its very nature extremely effective in the ability to ‘cure’<sup>146</sup> children from boredom, subtly altering the child’s ability to be a ‘listener’ and to properly engage with the world she’s born into.

Following this reasoning, Arendt and Benjamin suggest that for the young to properly engage and experience the world through adults requires a synchronization between that which Benjamin claims the novel by nature tends to separate: time and life. This confirms the idea that the adult is an acting and speaking agent within the realm of education – the adult reveals the world by revealing its own singular experience of it.

Arendt makes clear that authority is grounded in the fact that the adult holds the experience of the world, which similarly to the storyteller, “turns his experience of the world as the experience of those who listen to him”<sup>147</sup>. What is decisive in this

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<sup>143</sup> Benjamin, *The Storyteller*, p.5

<sup>144</sup> See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.

<sup>145</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*.

<sup>146</sup> I use this term because boredom, although so often seen as a negative psychological state is seen by Benjamin as an essential element of storytelling.

<sup>147</sup> Benjamin, p.3.

point is that authority as time, the *in-between* against which children develop their own singularity is accomplished through the fact that the world appears articulated in the adult's experience of the world, that is, the child is introduced to the world when articulated with the adult's singular experience.

Therefore, the synchronization between time and life creates a situation in which the world acquires a predicate, therefore creating a tension in which the child knows and engages with the world through the experience of the teacher. Benjamin is drawn closer to Arendt because this tension corresponds to the previously mentioned separation that prevents the old and the new from falling into each other.

The common world is not and shouldn't be revealed in a way that the child has a direct access to its meaning, for this would represent the absence of a structure through which the child relates to the meaning, that is, the absence of the *in-between* erected under the adult's experience of the world<sup>148</sup>. This is why Arendt, for example, refers to the substitution of doing for learning as an assumption that threatens the existence of the *in-between*<sup>149</sup>. In some sense, modern pragmatic theories of education assume that what is being passed on to the child only becomes meaningful if the child takes responsibility for it, as if knowledge didn't depend on the child engaging and retaining the teacher's experience. As if knowledge could be passed on without a predicate – in other words, without a meaningful context.

Finally, the parallel between Arendt and Benjamin, between the teacher and the storyteller (a comparison which Benjamin himself makes<sup>150</sup>) collects evidence that the "art of teaching", grounded in the same logic of storytelling and opposed to the isolated meaning-space of the novel, requires a specific rhythm, temporality and presence of others which, by virtue of time appearing articulated with human finitude and experience, is slow and organic.

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<sup>148</sup> Benjamin reinforces this: "Storytelling (...) does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller (...)" . p.5

<sup>149</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> Benjamin, p. 14.

However, the narrative or story obeys a structure of human finitude which, different from the novel's expression of finitude in the "virtual presence of the end"<sup>151</sup> throughout the story, is rather expressed in the finitude of the storyteller. This is, even though the novel and the story share the fact that their authority comes from death, the story has its authority in the storyteller itself as the one who has seen or heard about the experience he narrates. This is why Benjamin points to the relevance of "the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow"<sup>152</sup>. Because the world's continuity depends on it being enacted in the world, by the storyteller or the teacher.

This follows our previously viewed conception of experience for Arendt, in which meaning appears from a plural interpretation of an activity. In this case, it's children who engage in a hermeneutic approach towards the intentionality in the adult's performance as a teacher (and this includes the surrounding space that the adult orients). Thus, for "the world to appear articulated with the adult's experience of it" and give the child a meaning structure<sup>153</sup>, physical and object character of presence is a necessary condition. Both the storyteller and the teacher are in some sense, engaging in the activity of world-building. Not because the child becomes means to an end and thus instrumentalized by the adult, but rather because the surrounding world of the child becomes instrumentalized by the adult's experience – just as the storyteller crafts the experience of the listener according to his own. The responsibility that Arendt declares the adult should have towards the child's world is then expressed in mastering a technique just like any other artist or craftsman does – the adult masters and composes sound, space, time, rhythm, voice, and words to curate the child's world. The adult becomes the tool "serving" and thus stabilizing what is new in each human being that comes into the world<sup>154</sup>.

As Benjamin points out, *the hand, the voice*, and the surrounding space – the senses – play a crucial role in revealing lived experience. In the exercise of storytelling

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<sup>151</sup> Clift, p.38.

<sup>152</sup> Benjamin, p.5.

<sup>153</sup> Explained previously in section 2.1.2.

<sup>154</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 193.

and teaching, the listener and child's contact with meaning is given on the performance of the adult that animates the surrounding space and makes his experience their own. The child becomes a participant and actor in the world whenever it engages with the realm of education, thus the world reveals itself in activity.

For this, the child and its senses need to be cleared from anything that is not the adult's performance. The claim to locate the activity of education in a bounded and limited space of appearance – in the private sphere – is, from a more concrete point of view, accomplished in the fact that the act of revealing experience to the new human being in the described logic, needs an intimate and limited accessed space where the adult can use and control the revealing quality of the child's surrounding world. It's almost as if the adult needs to hide the child from what he's trying to communicate, in order to generate the tension that turns the child into a curious and avid listener. It's not a coincidence that imagination and creativity can only thrive in a quiet and relaxed mental and physical space – in the private sphere. For Arendt, there are certain "dimensions of consciousness" that do not and even cannot appear in the world<sup>155</sup>. Some of these faculties (creativity, imagination etc.) are inscribed in the same dimension as they unfold in the "obscurity" of the mind where the individual speaks to himself. This reinforces the need for a protected and calm realm where these feelings can unfold and be developed.

In spite of this, we will see in the end that the meaning-space of education brings forward an activity which I claim to be actualized plurality, although in the private sphere. Which Loidolt's combination thesis demonstrates it needs to be protected, even though it doesn't belong to the public.

## **2.2 Social Media**

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<sup>155</sup> Loidolt, p.136

In this section, we ought to compose a sketch of the smartphone's logic. First of all, it's important to note why we can refer to the smartphone as an activity with a specific logic – because whenever human beings participate in its logic, the world is disclosed “as-something”. That is, the smartphone discloses the world for the child, orientating the child's experience, world, and appearance – accomplished in a composition of space, time, rhythm etc. – in a way that the child's phenomenological access to reality loses its plural character. The relevant question to ask is, *what is then the nature of the meaning-structure that is revealed in the smartphone?*

With respect to this, Shoshana Zuboff offers in her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, a complete description of the incentives behind the algorithm that organizes the experience enacted by social media. Zuboff describes the “logic of surveillance capitalism”<sup>156</sup> more from the point of view of the broad historic, economic, political, and social processes that brought information technologies to this logic. She inscribes herself in the same vast category of thinkers that consider the rise of society and the Cartesian Ergo Sum as a problematic feature of modernity. At the face of new technologies, Zuboff describes the specific relation that society's logic establishes with the human reality: which she designates as *instrumentarianism*<sup>157</sup>. Social media is a technology inscribed in this set of relations. But within our selected realm of education, it replaces the in-between we've described until now because of two major factors that alter its conditions of appearance and activity: the fact that it transcends the surrounding space and the logic of the algorithm itself.

But first of all, we need to demonstrate the statistics that bring social media and education to the same debate. As I mentioned in the introduction, children ranging from child age to young-adult ages are the most assiduous and dependent generation on social media. Statistics from various sources agree on the fact that teenagers spend around 6 to 7 hours per day looking at screens, navigating on their smartphones. The proportion of smartphone use in the lives of children makes evident that education, pointing out to a temporary phase of life rather than hours spent in the

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<sup>156</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, chapter 1, VI.

<sup>157</sup> Zuboff uses the term instrumentarianism to describe the technology that subjects human experience to the rendering algorithm in Chapter 12.

classroom or explicitly learning something, at least in our society, is dealing with a new technology in its practice.

Though, how can the actualization of education be deformed by the constant presence of this small apparatus? The answer is first given in the formal logic of the smartphone which consequently orients activity and visibility-based conditions in a way that conflicts with Arendt's description of education's meaning-space.

### ***2.2.1 The smartphone's meaning space: from experience to behavior***

Shoshana Zuboff notes that Arendt anticipated the "destructive potential of behaviorism (...) when she lamented the devolution of our conception of "thought" to something that is accomplished by a "brain" and is therefore transferable to "electronic instruments"<sup>158</sup>. The invention of the smartphone marked the first time the same logic that Arendt and Zuboff are referring to was made accessible to every human being that could afford one. It is an "electronic instrument" that, as Arendt noted, by its own logic rejects the principle that experience is the subject of our own thoughts.

Of course, the logic that both authors are referring to is society's logic, as we will see at the end of this description. But in this apparatus' logic, the specific experience that unfolds in the world, especially in the world of children, is marked by a total submission of the educational process to the children's desires and needs. What Arendt criticizes as "the independence that the world of children gains from the world of adults," is further enhanced by the fact that social media "renders experience into data"<sup>159</sup>.

If this "conversion" is problematic, the logic that operates this rendering is even more so. That is, the smartphone not only deprives the child from the experience of his surroundings, on which the experience of the common world is given and depends on.

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<sup>158</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, chapter 13, II.

<sup>159</sup> Zuboff, Chapter 8.

But most importantly, it transforms the new experience the child has through the smartphone itself, if that can be called experience, into behavior prediction.

Certainly, the smartphone can only abstract the child's experience of the world in first place because it unfolds in an apparatus that reveals reality virtually. This is what is new in our current context in education – there is a new single and competing source of authority that is physically present in the hands and rooms where the child goes through the process of education. The adult is no longer alone in the world of education, even though he still has the power to change this fact. In some sense, the presence and control of the small apparatus of the smartphone over education is a physical embodiment of Arendt's described phenomenon of authority being given to child<sup>160</sup>. It's as if the virtual presence of the assumptions, that Arendt denounces modern theories of education engage with, are so entrenched in the realm of education that they have been updated in the real presence of an object, with which almost no child can no longer throw away while growing up – the smartphone.

If in the actualization of education, grounded in the adult-child relation, the adult is partially substituted by the smartphone, then instead of being the responsibility of the adult, the revelation of experience becomes the responsibility of the child. The word smart(-phone) stands for an intelligent machine that functions under an algorithmic model that Zuboff indicates as being based in a behavior prediction model. The smartphone is a screen that reveals images and sounds in such a way that it is able to simulate every aspect of experience – it's able to communicate experience just as a traveler is able to tell his stories to the ones who weren't there to see. But what is the difference between the two?

The behavior prediction model<sup>161</sup>, results from a series of technological advances and improvements that Zuboff describes in her book, which follow the underlying process of capital surplus of capitalism, which Arendt would describe as advancing life's cycle<sup>162</sup>. It's not by coincidence that Arendt's reference to society's

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<sup>160</sup> Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*

<sup>161</sup> Zuboff develops and uses this concept throughout her book.

<sup>162</sup> The comparison between capitalism and society's is a complicated one, but what matters is the logic of consumption-production that is on the basis of Zuboff's description of the algorithm's logic.

imperative of driving individuals closer to each other<sup>163</sup>, abolishing what separates them, resonates with the behavior prediction model's logic of driving the user closer to its own preferences.

Every time the child engages with its smartphone, the smartphone learns by the experience revealed in the child's interaction. The way this data is used follows Zuboff's description of the business model of capital accumulation that stands behind it. Every click, scroll and image that mediates the interaction with the smartphone generates a product – a data product that can be exchanged with other businesses and actors of this market. This exchange has in view the knowledge provided by the collected data: a prediction and patronization of the “desires and needs” of the user. What is crucial here is that the more data is collected the more the business model thrives, and the cycle of consumption and production is advanced – experience is constantly and increasingly rendered into data to generate new consumption preferences. This is why Zuboff refers to the behavior model as *loop cycle*<sup>164</sup> which encloses the user in its own subjectivity.

Falling back to Arendt's metaphor of modernity's mythologization of “thought” as a “brain” that behaves like a machine – the smartphone assimilates the experience of its user transforming it into data and behavior patterns that predict and thus design the experience of the user according to its “taste.” To engage with experience through the smartphone (although this type of interaction is not confined to the smartphone but to what Zuboff calls interface<sup>165</sup>) or through the process of being “connected,” offers an alternative actualization of the child's condition.

We can certainly claim that children have never been able to access so much knowledge as they can in our present days through the experience enacted by smartphones and the internet. However, the interaction with smartphones appears to communicate knowledge that is devoid of experience. The logic of experience enacted through a smartphone counters the principle of experience that the actualization of

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<sup>163</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.38 - 49

<sup>164</sup> Zubbof on “closed loops”, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, chapter 16

<sup>165</sup>The logic of the smart interface is applicable to every object in the world.

education is based upon, and which is the common world's defining quality: *plural experience*.

The experience mediated through the smartphone is no longer engaging the child with the realm of plural appearance that constitutes the common world, which only the adult, as far as he has experienced it himself, can communicate. The behavior prediction model constitutes experience as a "man-made" phenomenological horizon which is controlled and predicted by the datafication of the child's experience. In other words, experience is mechanized and predicted. This gives rise to a situation in which the child becomes the absolute master of its own world, but not as a child, where Arendt would claim that tyranny of the majority is a threat, but as a subject.

The constant presence of the smartphone unfolds in the logic of the child's desire, as though a medium that refines and maximizes reality according to the same desire, informs and orients the spatial and temporal conditions of the child's world. That is, it alters education's meaning-space as the child's world is "emancipated" from the adult's authority and logic. The consequence is that the hermeneutical understanding of her own experience, as the reflective process that situates and gives meaning to experience itself<sup>166</sup>, appears against the background of the subject instead of a plurality of subjects – the child's horizon does not go beyond its own totality, becoming a wordless being. The perception of "thought as brain" automatically implies that the reflective and hermeneutical process through which experience becomes articulated with the subject is transferred to the smartphone. The behavioral model's rendering of experience, as Zuboff argues, *dispossesses*<sup>167</sup> the individual from its own experience by presenting it already rendered and personalized.

The term *rendered* very much resembles Benjamin's reference to *information* in which the world appears "understandable in itself"<sup>168</sup>. The smartphone offers to the child something that the narrative, the story, and the adult's experience of the common world cannot offer – it presents the world as a timeless and thus fragmented

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<sup>166</sup> Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, p. 79

<sup>167</sup> Zuboff, chapter 9, I.

<sup>168</sup> Clift, p. 31

phenomenological horizon. This allows for the child to have the same control and modification that Zuboff claims the algorithm relies upon to orient and enact its own world. No wonder that through a screen, a child can navigate instantly from the pyramids of Egypt to the colosseum in Rome. But most importantly, the child can compose a free and limitless world because of the rendition process of experience (or datafication), which makes experience itself a finished and thus consumptive object of the “brain”. Thus, the child’s experience is enacted in the same logic through which objects are appropriated by life’s cycle of consumption and production – experience becomes information, and appearance becomes as durable and stable as a loaf of bread<sup>169</sup>.

As I’ve clarified until now, education’s *in-between* is rather enacted as an *open-ended* and unexpected experience that can have no desirable or predictable end. Arendt specifically mentions that unpredictability is an inherent condition of all action as “the reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome and end of any action is simply that action has no end”<sup>170</sup>. The behavior prediction model, as far as it assures that every new “experience” is desirable and “known” for its user, never allows for the child to be confronted with the required finitude of her own presence in the world. That is, singularity doesn’t reveal itself without the child engaging in a pre-reflective experience, in which the quality of unpredictability reveals itself. In this case, the pre-reflectiveness of experience is taken away by the algorithm.

Therefore, the world’s experience mediated through the adult’s input differs fundamentally to the smartphone’s insofar as (i) by appearing as a finite and limited structure, leaves meaning inaccessible and only attained by the child’s active engagement with experience; (ii) by being freed from experience’s object and time character, reveals experience in a conceptualized and self-sufficient form, relegating the active engagement with the world to contingency.

But what if we claimed that the presence of books and stories have always disclosed the world as the second type of phenomenological access to experience

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<sup>169</sup> Example from Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.94

<sup>170</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.233

because the child could transcend and navigate beyond the boundaries of time and space imposed by the world? Both Arendt and Benjamin would reply that the book or the story still depend on a finite mediation agent introduced in the child's world: whether it's adult's experience or the object of the book. A book or a story's meaning is only revealed when the reader or listener suspends their own subjectivity and engages in an experience which can only be revealed when the story reaches its end.

On the contrary, any experience that is communicated by the smartphone is already "lived" because the temporality has been stripped off from meaning through the rendering algorithm described earlier. This is manifested in the constant and rapid switch between videos, news, and information that the child engages with through the smartphone which intentionally keeps the child in its own world. The child's desire, which for Arendt is only meaningful when articulated with the common world<sup>171</sup>, becomes articulated with her own subjectivity, expressed in behavioral patterns.

### ***2.2.2 The smartphone: activity and visibility based conditions***

Finally, we pose ourselves the question: how does the smartphone's logic interfere with the concrete activity and visibility logic of education's meaning-space? The newness that arises from the phenomena of natality is manifested and actualized every time the child rises from its condition as a being that is not yet capable of having a common world. We've seen that actualizing such condition implies to engage the logic of a bounded and finite surrounding space and temporality. The smartphone's logic is in some sense already present in Arendt's description of the crisis in America's education as she implicitly identifies the child's independence and the adult's unwillingness to impose its authority over the child's world as the underlying phenomena of the crisis itself.

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<sup>171</sup> In *Love and Saint Augustine*, Arendt declares in her analysis of Augustine that: "in desiring, man is never at rest, he is always becoming, never being". In fact, Arendt sees desire accompanied by thought as the synthesis necessary to attain meaning.

However, the smartphone, after all being in itself a technological apparatus that marks its presence in the child's hands, is a clear and concrete manifestation of all the conflicting logics at stake. The smartphone is, we might say, like the novel is for Benjamin – a technology that transforms the nature of communication and experience for human beings.

Whether the technology is the reason or the result for this imbalance or conflict between different general conditional structures of man's *vita activa*<sup>172</sup>, and in our case education, is not relevant for our purpose. What is in fact observable is that the smartphone advances the conflict because it deforms the spatial, temporal and visibility conditions of the meaning-space of education.

The meaning-space of the smartphone depends on and is enacted through an apparatus that virtualizes appearance, without which the described logic of a spatial and timeless experience is not possible. Thus, the condition of the smartphone's meaning-space is the apparatus' ability to transcend the surrounding world of the child. Whenever a child navigates around the internet, it must do so through a screen that implicitly claims its superiority over the world. Just like the immersion in the experience unraveled by the storyteller, the smartphone's meaning-space requires an abstraction from the spatial and temporal context of the child. The difference is that both the storyteller and the adult, that is, revealing the world's experience in the logic of education, simply cannot be actualized without using the world in their own favor<sup>173</sup>.

As we have seen, the presence of the adult, grounded in the responsibility of revealing the world to the children, is not, unlike the information revealed in the smartphone, only dependent on the transmission of knowledge. It becomes clear from Zuboff's description of the smartphone's meaning-space that the communication of experience is optimized the more it's emancipated from the object character of the world<sup>174</sup>. On the contrary, the quality of the experience that gives rise to education's

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<sup>172</sup> Arendt and the invasion of life's logic over the actualization of plurality described throughout *The Human Condition*.

<sup>173</sup> The relation between education and the world has been explained in section 2.1.2.

<sup>174</sup> "Rendering experience" means to transform real-world experience into data, maximizing its use for prediction algorithms. See Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

*in-between* relies on the maximization of the revealing quality of the world surrounding the child<sup>175</sup>.

It's not by coincidence that the smartphone requires the minimum movement of the body and the least possible engagement of the child with the world around her in order to engage with experience. Again, we might claim that the screen uses the same sensorial elements to compose a reality that strikes us as real and effective as the surrounding world. However, the crucial difference is that the world composed through the screen is fundamentally detached from the tangible and shared world of objects, which for Arendt appears to be essential for education's unfolding. It would be much more arduous to make such a claim if we were regarding the exchange of experience among adults in the public sphere. In that case, one could argue that smartphones and more specifically social media platforms compose a virtual public space where visibility can be expanded, and individuals can debate their unique views in a more democratic and inclusive way. This was indeed the promise made by the first Silicon Valley tech engineers which, following Zuboff's account of information technologies and the logic developed over time, was never accomplished<sup>176</sup>.

Despite this, it's children who specifically need the tangibility of the world to remain stable in the realm of education. In other words, it's children who more than adults need to be protected from the smartphone's abstraction of the world in favor of the transmission of knowledge. The fact that the smartphone interferes and inverts the relation between meaning and the world<sup>177</sup> – favoring the latter over the former – implies that the world around the child becomes meaningful only in relation to its constitution in the virtual world. This makes sense if we agree with Arendt's understanding of the child's condition, characterized by incapability to have a world. The logical consequence of the substitution of the adult's authority by the smartphone's is the world's constitution as "raw material" for the rendering process of the algorithm. The child's world being left to the smartphone's curation means that

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<sup>175</sup> Benjamin compares the storyteller or the teacher to a craftsman: "his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way". See *The Storyteller*, p.13

<sup>176</sup> The Economist, "The End of the Social Network."

<sup>177</sup> This inversion is described in the previous section.

the child's desires and needs become dominant, and in our present times this dominance is assumed through the smartphone's rendering process of experience.

Just like the adult's authority is revealed in the surrounding world and not only in its symbolic presence, so too is the smartphone's authority, but in the mentioned inverse way. It's common that we hear slogans around the idea that social media has almost become a medium that gives meaningfulness to the experience of the world. It has indeed become quite common and observable how our engagement with the world increasingly depends on the smartphone's presence as an authority that concedes meaning to our experience – there is a growing need to be connected<sup>178</sup>.

Beyond the transformation of the world from 'material to render', it occurs from the abstraction of the temporal and spatial categories of experience that the rhythm of information assimilated becomes immensely quicker. If experience is 'understandable in itself' and it can be assimilated with no physical or even intellectual effort, the rhythm according to which presented to the child becomes as frenetic as the incredible number of different videos and images and information that is presented in small time parcels. This over-stimulation, which appears to be the enemy of boredom – the virtue of the good listener or the student<sup>179</sup>- is fundamentally different from the required time and patience of education's *in-between*.

Finally, the apparatus' spatial and timeless logic of experience emancipates the child from the privacy of her world. The degree of presence of other human beings in education's *in-between* is limited by the superiority of the world over the child – of the body, the surrounding space, the adult, etc. However, the apparatus unbounded communication of experience gives the child the possibility of having access to the public world. This is true not only for the mere passive position as a listener but also as an active agent. Active engagement, even if we can't claim the smartphone allows for such interaction, unfolds as if the child is capable of speech and action.

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<sup>178</sup> Zuboff uses the term "connected" throughout her book to describe the specific interaction between the society and the individual.

<sup>179</sup> Benjamin, *The Storyteller*, p.5.

The degree of human presence and visibility is as intense as the infinite possibilities of navigation through the internet and social media platforms. The adult's authority as a filter and curator of the space of appearance of education is turned over to all the number of other smartphone users there is. The internet doesn't need to be considered a public sphere in order for us to recognize that the apparatus changes the space of appearance in a fundamental way for the child. It's enough to observe today's world, in which through the smartphone individuals can communicate and influence each other's thoughts and actions.

## **CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSION**

### **3.1 Smartphone and Education: the loss of unpredictability**

Throughout the text, it firstly becomes clear that education can accommodate different logics within its meaning-space and the world can be revealed in different ways. This is to say, as Loidolt affirms, meaning-spaces can be actualized under the transformation of their visibility and activity-based conditions. The smartphone is still revealing the world "as-something" for the child that spends most of her day navigating through it. Afterall, even storytelling, sharing the same logic as education, is actualized as a "techne" that instrumentalizes the experience of the world in order to present the child or the listener his own experience. However, Arendt makes clear in *The Human Condition* that the *homofaber*, man's capacity to disclose the world as raw material through which he can build a stable and durable human world, should not be applied to the realm of human affairs. This is evident in her account of the polis' attitude towards artists and craftsmen – they were not entitled to citizenship and their activities posed a certain threat to speech and action.

In education's meaning-space the same interdiction doesn't apply given the child's inability to act and erect her own world. In education's meaning-space, just like words serve the poet's ideal of beauty, the world serves the adult's singular experience

of it to compose the child's experience. The adult's ability to curate experience is in some sense the technology. Therefore, the adult's crafting of the child's world is a world-building activity that gives stability to action and speech that exist as a potency in the child – this is the peculiar relation between education and plurality. As much as world-building gives object to the child's singularity, therefore giving the world of humans the ability and freedom to start anew, the child is not instrumentalized and does not “serve” any purpose that the adult or the world might try to impose upon her.

We've demonstrated along the text that Education is composed of an *in-between* made out of the adult's experience of the world in which the child's world is presented in a concealed and therefore curated way – the adult's presence fixes the singularity and newness of the child. However, as much as Arendt claims the child is not yet a full human being given the absence of the capacity to act and speak, the child is nevertheless engaging with the plural character of the world. What makes the actualization of education the actualization of plurality is the fact that the adult is presenting what the world would normally present to the participants of the public sphere. But the decisive point is that in Education's meaning-space, for the sake of the individuality and singularity of each child, the world is presented and actualized in private.

As I pointed out, according to Loidolt, man's conditional activities can be actualized in the public or the private because there is no normative relation between activities and the space of appearance. As Loidolt writes, “activity based and visibility-based meaning-spaces can either add to each other by supporting an activity in its flourishing or they can negatively impact each other's logic of appearance”<sup>180</sup>. Therefore, not only plurality is not exclusive to the activities of the public sphere as its actualization in the private is indispensable for its unfolding in the public<sup>181</sup>.

Additionally, it has also been demonstrated through Loidolt and Arendt that plurality, contrary to the other two logics, is the only activity that requires specific and

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<sup>180</sup> Loidolt, p.141.

<sup>181</sup> Loidolt, p. 141.

intentionally erected spaces of appearance. It is not that plurality needs to be located in the public sphere but rather that it needs to be protected from the invasion of other logics. Thus, protecting and actualizing plurality implies that other logics are banned from the space where action and speech unfold. Moreover, the actualization of plurality, as Loidolt indicates, is in need of all three logics – the fulfillment of life’s necessities, the capacity to erect and build a human world of objects. Protecting plurality implies that these logics unfold and are oriented towards the protection and continuance of speech and action. In turn, as we have seen, it is only in protecting speech and action, where being and appearance coincide, that other logics can sustain meaning.

This is why protecting the logic of plurality in Education implies that world-building unfolds in a logic that simultaneously protects the singularity of each new child and the experience of the adult. Without erecting an *in-between* that is based on the presence of the world before the child, the *second in-between*, that is, the plural experience of the world that is being passed on to the child and which lacks an object-character.

The smartphone’s described logic is not problematic because of its technological character. The problem pointed out throughout the text is not a result of technology because as we have seen, education’s actualization needs the adult’s ability to erect and build a world – *homofaber’s* activity par excellence - where the child can engage with plurality in a protected bounded space. Rather, it’s a result of a specific logic that was sketched throughout the last chapter. Arendt describes in the last chapter of *The Human Condition* the Homo Faber’s subjugation to life’s cycle - as soon as mathematical and natural sciences adopted the principle of happiness as the highest good, the development of technology became a task to free man from the weight of the world.

The smartphone and its logic is the latest revelation of Arendt’s claim. The behavior-based algorithm gives the child the possibility of experiencing the world increasingly without ever encountering the presence of others, which in a logic of plurality depends on the unpredictability of experience. It is against the impossibility of

giving any absolute guarantee of presence and continuity in the world that the child develops her own selfhood, by relating with the intersubjective realm where the singularity of each new human being appears. As I demonstrated throughout the text along with Arendt, it is the responsibility of every adult that brings children to this world to understand the troubling consequences that the omnipresence of smartphones might have for our children and the world.

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