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Vikki Bell

Chapter Four

Appearance: Thinking Difference in the Political Realm with Hannah Arendt

'[T]he only polity that truly advances the freedom and plurality human beings are capable of experiencing, not to mention the conditions of existence they value and defend, is the polity that exhibits widespread participation in the public realm...politics unfolds as the communicative interaction of diverse equals acting together as citizens.' (Arendt, quoted in Dietz, 1994:247-8).

Hannah Arendt's relationship to feminist theory is one that has recently received much belated attention, focussing mainly on her declared non-allegiance to a politics which displayed facets of the forms of collective demand that she rallied against from her oftentimes controversial perspectives. One of her objections concerned the place of 'the body' and 'identity' in the political realm, since so-called 'life' issues, Arendt insisted, had no place in the realm of proper political debate; feminism constituted just the sort of assertion of a collective identity that signalled both a lack of engagement in political issues and an abuse of the possibility of true political debate. However, as Honig (1995) has commented, the feminism of the late twentieth century is one that is markedly different from that which Arendt dismissed so vehemently, and is one that concerns itself more with the issues that Arendt herself devoted much thought. In this chapter, however, the intention is less to find the utility of Arendt's thought for feminism, but to consider the constellation of issues that Arendt addressed in her explorations of the notion of 'the political'.

I want to use Arendt to explore further the notion of the political imagination because her work, whatever we may feel about its logic and conclusions, had a scope which was exactly about the *limits* of the political, that is, what was to be included within politics, what was outside, and what was 'at the edge' of politics. Not just for historical and geographical reasons were these questions

configured by Arendt in ways that brought the concerns of identity, the place of certain personages within 'the political', 'proper' forms of political argument and the dangers of totalitarianism centre stage. In Arendt's work these issues move into one another and relate back and forth to one another, conceptually entangled in ways that are denied by contemporary reflections that seek to 'relate' them together as if their entanglement were never the case.

Arendt's work addresses several themes that occupy contemporary feminist reflection: in particular I want to focus on what I am terming embodied participation. To get to this idea, however, I will focus on the concept of *appearance* as a concept which informs Arendt's work and which links it with contemporary work on the notion of the 'public sphere'. These themes are famously addressed in Arendt's work to a large extent through the dual notions of the parvenu and the pariah. I will discuss them, however, through a lesser known article of Arendt's - 'Reflections on Little Rock'(1959) - because in this controversial piece, Arendt is taken explicitly into a discussion of identity and 'race' in relation to the nature and boundaries of 'the political'. Maintaining a focus on the concept of appearance allows one to stress this set of connections; it also allows one to emphasise the philosophical trajectories at play. The concern with appearance, for Arendt, was one with a profound philosophical impulse; it is one that she is deeply implicated in her vision of democratic politics.

Approaching Arendt's work as a way to move back from and to rethink current feminist concerns, one is struck that feminist thought has in some senses been attracted in recent years to think issues of identity and appearance with Foucault in his most Nietzschean cast. But another important intellectual influence on Foucault was Heidegger, and the concept of appearance is one point at which we can read the influence of Heidegger's thought upon Arendt, giving us a counterpoint by which to think through the concept of appearance as it relates to present debates. Arendt took the concept of appearance from the same intellectual trajectory as both Foucault and Butler - especially from Nietzsche and Heidegger - and incorporated it into her political theory in a way that is markedly different. Here, I want to explore Arendt's troubling invention around 'Little Rock', and the way in which it treats the relationship between democracy and difference, in order both to

provide a commentary on her vision of the political, and to provide a way of recasting certain questions that occupy feminist theory at the end of the twentieth century.

'Little Rock'

In 1959 one of Arendt's articles appeared in the journal Dissent having been held back for a year because the critique she levies within it was thought too controversial to publish immediately. It concerned the Supreme Court's decision (*Brown*, 1954) to make the racial segregation of schools illegal, and the resulting events in Little Rock, Arkansas, one of only two southern states to comply with the ruling that year. The school board proposed a gradual, phased plan of integration. The decision to integrate schools, however, led to a vehement display of white segregationist fear and hatred in a state that had until that point seemed, in contrast to many southern states, relatively racially integrated and harmonious. Desegregation was delayed until 1957, and the number of black children who were accepted into the high school chosen for integration was pared down to a minimum - the nine children who became known as the 'Little Rock Nine'. Amidst political wranglings between the Governor, who had grown nervous about the lack of white support for desegregation plans, and tried to halt the process, and the courts, who asked Governor Faubus to go ahead with the school board's plans, the first black high school students attempted to attend the school, Central High in September 1957. Arkansas National Guardsmen were placed at the school's entrance, allegedly there to maintain order, they prevented the black students entering. A white crowd had gathered to intimidate the black students, jeering and hurling abuse at them. One of the students, Elizabeth Eckford was alone, and was surrounded by the crowd, who threatened her with lynching and causing her to flee; the others, as a group, were similarly not granted access, and were forced to turn back through the hostile white crowd. The situation became a struggle between federal and state government, and Faubus was eventually ordered to remove the guards who were still blocking the black students' enrolment. When the students finally did gain entrance, some three weeks later, the crowd again swelled outside the school, attacking journalists, and shouting at the school. Eventually, for their safety, the children were removed from the school. Reluctantly President Eisenhower sent troops to Little Rock, and mobilised the Arkansas National Guard, this time with orders to protect the black students; paratroopers lined the streets around the school, and the children were escorted there in convoy. With helicopters overhead, and surrounded by soldiers with bayonets drawn, the Little Rock Nine were eventually able to begin their attendance at Central

High. The troops remained, and their presence became a source of political dispute surrounding the position and power of the Governor, who maintained that he was opposed to forced desegregation. Faubus was re-elected in July 1958, and allowed schools to close for a year, until the Supreme Court ruled the closures unlawful attempts to evade integration, and the schools were opened again (in August 1959) and integrated as federal government required (Williams, 1988).

Arendt's position in 'Reflections on Little Rock', written in 1957, is fuelled by her notion of the political as a realm that is separate from the social and the private, and her argument brings with it, as we shall see, all the troubling questions that surround these distinctions as she presented them in her wider works. More than this, however, I want to suggest that the position developed in relation to education and desegregation has to be understood against the backdrop that also informs her development of those distinctions, that is, her personally and historically formed concern that the conditions of freedom be preserved and that the conditions that allow totalitarian rule be challenged. Her impulse is thoroughly and sincerely democratic. The curious and worrying feature of Arendt's polemic essay becomes, therefore, how the author of The Origins of Totalitarianism, a writer who, she herself says in the added preamble to the finally published piece, 'as a Jew, takes her concern for all oppressed peoples for granted', could use her distinctive voice and judgement to speak out, like 'a poor joke', as one commentator at the time put it, *against* the decision to integrate schools in the South.

Arendt suggests that her thoughts were crystallised by seeing a photograph of a young black girl¹ accompanied by a white friend of her father's walking away from school followed by a 'jeering and grimacing mob of [white] youngsters'(1959a:50). The photograph was indicative Arendt argued of what progressive education asked of children: the black girl to be a hero, the white youngsters - or at least those who grow out of 'this brutality' - to attempt to live down this image that 'exposes so mercilessly their juvenile delinquency.'(1959a:50). What the desegregation policy meant was an abdication of responsibility by adults of the world into which they had borne these children: 'how have we come to the point where it is the children who are being asked to change or improve the world? And do we intend to have our political battles fought out in the school yards?'

Arendt's argument suggests that she saw this burden on children as too easy a solution to entrenched political problems.

Arendt's position in 'Reflections' mobilises her belief in the idea of 'the social' or 'society' as a realm separate from both the private and the political realm. In the political realm, or the public domain generally, discrimination is unacceptable, as here the principle of equality reigns. But *only* in the political realm can we be equals, she argues, and 'what equality is to the body politic - its innermost principle - discrimination is to society.'(1959a:51). Within American society people group together, argues Arendt, and 'therefore discriminate against each other, along lines of profession, income and ethnic origin'(1959a:51).² Discrimination, she suggests, makes society possible; the freedom to associate and to form groups with whomever one wishes means that discrimination becomes for Arendt a right: 'discrimination is as indispensable a social right as equality is a political right.'(1959a:51). The task therefore is one of guarding the limits of these realms, since discrimination is destructive within the political and the personal sphere, but legitimate when confined within the social sphere (1959a:51). The role of the legislator, therefore, is to avoid following social discrimination - there society would have become tyrannical (1959a:53) - indeed, government is duty bound to ensure that discriminatory practices are not legally enforced (1959a:53).³

Free association, Arendt continues to explain, is that which she might herself exercise were she to decide to holiday exclusively in the company of Jews; she sees, moreover, 'no reason why other resorts should not cater to a clientele that wishes not to see Jews while on holiday.'(1959a:52). Discrimination has, she says, her language softening slightly here, 'greater validity than the principle of equality'(1959a:52) in the social realm. The formation of social groups was, she thought, an aspect of social *preferences* that was not to be legislated against, and is even a *desirable* aspect of social life, insofar as it promotes plurality rather than a sameness that would quash the ability for new thought and directions that would be positive for 'the common world'.

The private realm, Arendt believed, is ruled by neither the political principle of equality nor by discrimination but is based upon exclusiveness and the uniqueness of individuals to each other. Social discrimination lacks validity for the conduct of private life, and has no place there.

Moreover, the notions of uniqueness and exclusiveness that provide the private realm with its special atmosphere are the ones that are fitting to the needs of children, who should be shielded from 'the demands of the social and the responsibilities of the political realm' (1959a:55). The school is not an institution that fits easily into the distinctions that Arendt sets up. She argues her way around this by suggesting that although compulsory education is an intrusion into the rights of the parents to bring up their family as 'they see fit'(1959a:55), it is one that comes about because of 'the right of the body politic to prepare children for adult citizenship.'(1959a:55). The school is therefore the first environment through which the child gains contact with the social world, and this is what makes it a preparation for (political) participation, in the sense, it seems Arendt means, that it provides children with the tools by which to participate to the best of their ability, in democracy. But while the state's right to educate future citizens extends to the content of their education, it should not, according to Arendt, have any say in the social life and association that the child develops through schooling.

The enforced desegregation of schools in the South, Arendt argued, meant depriving parents 'of rights which clearly belong to them in all free societies - the private right over their children and the social right to free association'(1959a:55). The children are placed, moreover, in a situation of conflict between home and school, private and social life to which they *as children* should not be exposed. When parents and teachers fail children as guides in and to the adult world children tend toward conformity, Arendt believed, which can result in the sort of 'mob and gang rule' that, for her, the photograph of the white students presented. Children have neither, she argues, the 'ability nor the right' to develop public opinions of their own; it was exactly that demand that was being made of them in Little Rock, where the conflict between families and school demands effectively meant the abdication by both parents and teachers of their authority in and their responsibility for the world (1959a:56).

I want to argue that Arendt's position in the 'Little Rock' article is one that can be understood through the concept of appearance as a philosophical concept to which Arendt gives a political twist. For argument's sake I will divide my discussion into two levels of appearance, although as we shall see they are strongly and hierarchically related to each other. First, the

concept of appearance in the sense of ‘appearing’ in the political realm; secondly, the concept of appearing in the world, that is, birth, or what Arendt terms, for reasons that enable her to utilise the concept in her particular sense, ‘natality’.

Appearing in the Political Realm

Arendt’s concept of appearance has a route tracable back to Nietzsche and Heidegger, an inheritance recast within her theory of the different spheres. In this section I want to sketch this inheritance in order to understand how rich the concept of appearance is within Arendt’s thought, but more than this, to understand better how the essentially democratic impulse of her ‘Little Rock’ argument flounders on the tension between a concept of appearance and that of visibility. There is a complicated series of questions that follow such a moment, and I wish to pursue Arendt as they arise in her work because she reaches them with such a peculiar mixture of clarity and clumsiness.

The Nietzschean inheritance manifests itself in her argument that the public realm is fundamentally a space of appearance, and that furthermore, democracy should allow thinking persons to appear, an argument fuelled by a disdain for the mediocracy in which, Nietzsche thought, liberalism can result. Arendt’s argument that children should be offered the conditions to explore their individuality and develop their own thoughts and opinions is guided by the desire to base a democracy on a sphere in which an individual’s brilliance will be allowed to shine and inspire. Arendt’s distaste for the perspective that politics should target education and the young was due in part to the value she placed on allowing the young to develop their own, new and individual, thought. In ‘Crisis in Education’ she wrote that ‘to prepare a new generation for a new world can only mean that one wishes to strike from the newcomers’ hands their own chance at the new.’(1963a:177) a sentiment resonant of Nietzsche’s emphasis on individual heroic action that reaches beyond the herd mentality (see eg. Ansell-Pearson, 1994).

It is, however, possibly more pertinent to trace Arendt’s Heideggerian inheritance on this point. For Heidegger, the ‘forgetting’ of Being has left man in a state of absorption with what is readily available. Heidegger’s point is not that we are concerned with appearance while elsewhere

there are more profound or pure truths; rather, his point is that our existence no longer astonishes us as it did the Greeks. The fact that there are beings may give us the suspicion of Being; but Being is not located elsewhere, for appearance and being are the same. Beings stand out - such that 'to let beings be as the beings which they are'(1993:125) means 'to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself.'(1993:125) The notion of openness, the 'unconcealed', is an appearance that simultaneously involves a concealment: 'Letting-be is intrinsically at the same time a concealing. In the ek-sistent freedom of Da-sein a concealing of being as a whole propriates. Here there is concealment.'(1993:130). This concealment, however, is not to be thought as in opposition to unconcealment; indeed, Heidegger's point is that concealment 'preserves what is most proper to *aletheia* (unconcealment) as its own.'(1993:130).

When humanity is turned away from the mystery and turned only toward beings, only toward the readily available, 'onward from one current thing to the next, passing the mystery by' then 'this is *erring*.'(1993:133). Humanity's ek-sistence proceeds in errancy, a leading astray from questioning, from the mystery that is forgotten; which is to say that humanity is subjected to the turning to and fro between the 'rule of mystery and the oppression of errancy'(1993:134). It is only when we turn toward that which is both nearest at hand and farthest from us - Being - with a 'resolute openness toward the mystery'(1993:134) that we ask the question more originally. It is 'the glimpse into the mystery out of errancy' which is itself a question 'in the sense of that unique question of what being as such is as a whole. This questioning thinks the Being of beings'(1993:135).

As Dana Villa (1996) has pointed out, Arendt is influenced by Heidegger's framing of disclosure in terms of concealment/unconcealment, and appropriates it for her 'disclosive theory' of action (1996:147). Moreover, in describing the profound interdependence between the public and the private, Arendt writes in The Human Condition that 'the most elementary meaning of the two realms indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all.'(1959b:65). In the 'Reflections' piece, Arendt's concern with the maintenance of the proper realm of appearance - the political - carries the Heideggerian notion of a

clearing, a disclosure, into a discussion of the boundaries of the political. Arendt's realm of appearance relies upon the more mysterious and unarticulated realms of the private and the social in ways that mimic Heidegger's concealment/unconcealment. The argument is complicated in the article on Little Rock, however, because Arendt is mobilising these concepts within a discussion of 'race' and segregation in the Southern States, and this leads her to an attempt to disassociate the notion of appearance from that which she terms 'visibility'.

Arendt begins her article in a way that sets up a tension between the 'equality' of all citizens as a principle of modern constitutional government and the *visibility* of difference:

'the Negroes stand out because of their 'visibility'. They are not the only 'visible minority' but they are the most visible one .. while audibility is a temporary phenomenon, rarely persisting beyond one generation, the Negroes' visibility is unalterable and permanent. This is no trivial matter. In the public realm, where nothing counts that cannot make itself seen and heard, visibility and audibility are of prime importance. To argue that they are merely exterior appearances is to beg the question. For it is precisely appearances that 'appear' in public, and inner qualities, gifts of heart or mind, are political only to the extent that their owner wishes to expose them in public, to place them in the limelight of the market place.'(1959b:47).

The problem of skin colour, Arendt seems to be suggesting, is that it has an unalterable visibility, that 'appears' as it were without the intention of the person, thereby marking a difference that disrupts a political realm that should properly be one of debate and deliberation, where one's distinctiveness is marked *only* through that debate. Alongside the distinction between the political and what lies 'outside' it, therefore, Arendt suggests a distinction that links on the one hand, personality with action and *appearance*, and on the other, the body and its attributes with non-action or mere *visibility*. Physical appearance 'appears' but it only appears in a weak sense:

'In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical

identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and the sound of the voice.’(1959b:159).

In The Human Condition Arendt’s argument suggests that the distinction between visibility and appearance that she makes in ‘Reflections’ is indeed one that is prompted by a notion of the greater profundity of appearance as rising from a darker place, whereas simply being always in view is another matter:

‘a life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground that must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense.’(Quoted in Villa, 1996a:147).

Arendt's argument posits physical differences as visible but shallow, as provocative and even likely to increase social antagonism. The conception of racial difference as physically marked is one that regards the visibility of skin colour as unproblematic, as given. In ‘Reflections’ Arendt suggests that the principle of equality ‘cannot equalize natural, physical characteristics’, and a danger point arises when educational and social inequalities have been addressed, because it is then that such ‘differences’ will be resented and ‘the more conspicuous will those become who are visibly and by nature unlike the others.’(1959a:48). This argument is one that had been prefigured in her discussion in The Origins of Totalitarianism in relation to anti-semitism. There, she argued that

‘Equality of condition, though it is certainly a basic requirement for justice, is nevertheless among the greatest and most uncertain ventures of modern mankind. The more equal conditions are, the less explanation there is for the differences that actually exist between people; and thus all the more unequal do people become.’(1973:54).

Arendt’s argument is not that steps to achieve such equality should not be taken but that ‘government intervention be guided by caution and moderation rather than impatience and ill-advised measures.’(1959a:48). Arendt suggests that while the legal enforcement of segregation obviously should have been removed from southern states, political equality does not *make* social

equality, that equality, as she suggests in The Origins, should not be thought as a social concept, because it is a political one.

Arendt struggles to keep her distinction between the social and the political intact in this discussion of racial desegregation, but despite her attempts she fails to convince, presenting a theory of the social as based upon spontaneous free association, underscored with a dubious psychology of 'like attracts like'. By contrast the political realm demands abstract or 'artificial' equality. In Little Rock, she suggests that the political was unfortunately disrupted by social - read, in this context, *bodily* - distinctions that have been illuminated within the political realm, where such 'life' issues do not have a place.

We know that Arendt's position was in part fuelled by an attempt to understand and avoid ever again the totalitarianism that Europe had witnessed. Her view of the political is that of a realm in which not ourselves, as individuals or as embodied, but 'the world' is at stake; the public realm 'can nurture our worldliness ... preserve the meaning and memory of action only insofar as it outlasts the life span of the individual.'(The Human Condition quoted in Villa, 1996a:151). Arendt's plea in the 'Reflections' article could be construed as merely an argument about the *pace* of change, that racial discrimination will not be removed in one swift move of government legislation; social integration will not be forced. Hope for the future of the world will be encouraged through the removal of barriers to the progress of integration, certainly, but she is arguing that it not be hurried through a pressure to integrate where the welcome is not there. It is for this reason that Arendt contends in the same piece that the miscegenation laws should be a priority, for they represented a shameful denial of an elementary human right to marry whomever one wishes.

However one attempts to understand the impulses that motivate Arendt's distinction between visibility and appearance, there is a need to critique the sense of 'permanent visibility' that she uses in the 'Reflections' piece. Arendt privileges speech against physical action and associates what Frantz Fanon will term in the next decade the 'fact of blackness' with an intrusive, bodily, physical appearance in the realm of the proper debate of the political, where action and courage appear through deeds and words. Thus in The Human Condition she writes:

'Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and an actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words ... though his deed can be perceived in its brute appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as an actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do.'(1959b:158-9).

Skin colour is too readily associated by Arendt with this form of 'brute appearance'. The tension that I highlighted at the beginning of this section - between visibility and equality - is far too crudely drawn by Arendt, ignoring as she does the role of racialised discourse in training the way in which bodies are seen (see Bell 1996). Or, differently argued, she ignores the role of 'historicity' about which Fanon will write (and I will discuss in the Chapter Six), suggesting a debt to Jaspers at that point, and to which Arendt herself alludes in Between Past and Future where she argues that 'automatic processes' are historically constituted:

'Our political life, moreover, despite its being the realm of action, also takes place in the midst of processes which we call historical and which tend to become as automatic as natural or cosmic processes, although they were started by men.'(1963b:168).

It seems that this champion of democratic processes was arguing that in a racist society black people cannot 'appear' or 'act' in the political realm because of their 'visibility'. On most sympathetic reading, one might argue that she is only *describing* a racist response that has been historically constituted in the South, this place that she herself avoided: 'I have never lived in the South and have even avoided occasional trips to Southern States because they would have brought me into a situation that I personally would find unbearable. Like most people of European origin I have difficulty in understanding, let alone sharing, the common prejudices of Americans in this area.'(1959a:46). Arendt's argument, while it purports to be an analytical argument of political description, relies upon the racist responses of white people in the South, historically and geographically constituted. The argument presented in 'Reflections on Little Rock' brings into sharp focus Arendt's inheritance of the ideal of disembodied political action, a line of argument that challenges the depiction of the realm of the political, as a realm of appearance, of rising, in the

course of her argumentation since in an attempt to take on board different skin colours forces a distinction between appearance and visibility that is highly questionable.

I shall return to this conception of the 'space of appearances', the political realm, as one that involves, indeed, requires the appearance of abstracted or artificial equality as a condition of democratic participation below. Before I do so, however, there is another sense in which Arendt's argument is 'about' appearance, which is the stronger sense of appearance 'in the world' or natality.

Appearance and Natality

Throughout her work Arendt argues that the fact of natality prompts action and is thereby a source of freedom and hope. In 'What Is Freedom?', for example, drawing on Augustine, she argued 'because he is a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom.'(1963b:167). In 'The Crisis of Education', she wrote that it seems 'natural' to start a new world with those who are by birth and nature new'(1963a:176), for politics to focus on the education of children. However, this is a misconception, Arendt argues, because politics should involve the effort of persuasion and run the risk of failure; to base politics on 'the absolute superiority of the adult', to 'attempt to produce the new as a *fait accompli*' is a 'dictatorial intervention'(1963a:176). In 'Reflections' Arendt argues that it was wrong to ask children to work out a problem which 'adults for generations have confessed themselves unable to solve'(1959a:50).

In The Origins of Totalitarianism Arendt had suggested that totalitarianism has to deal with the 'the fact that men are being born and that therefore each of them is a new beginning, begins, in a sense, the world anew.'(1973:466) All forms of political government have to deal with this fact, of course, but for totalitarianism, because it attempts to 'still' action through terror in order to pursue the suprahuman law of Nature or History, birth is an 'annoying interference with higher forces'(1973:466). In the last chapter of The Origins Arendt argues that totalitarianism differs from tyrannical lawless government because 'far from being lawless', it claims to go 'right to the sources of authority from which positive laws received their ultimate legitimation, that far from being

arbitrary it is more obedient to these *suprahuman* forces'(1973:461, emphasis added) such that 'far from wielding its power in the interests of one man, it is quite prepared to sacrifice everybody's vital interests to the execution of what it assumes to be the law of History or the law of Nature.'(1973:461-2). Totalitarian politics took from the recipes of nineteenth century thought, argues Arendt, which saw a reconception of law as *motion* - Darwinian and Marxist accounts shared a sense of history as movement - and totalitarian politics adopts this idea in order to pursue the law of movement. Spontaneous human action cannot be allowed to interfere with the force of nature or of history that totalitarianism obeys; thus terror, the 'essence of totalitarian domination'(1973:464) is employed to 'stabilize' men, to disallow any free action, and to 'liberate the forces of nature or history'(1973:465). Terror is the execution, then, of a 'law of movement whose ultimate goal is not the welfare of man or the interest of one man but the fabrication of mankind' so that it 'eliminates individuals for the sake of the species, sacrifices the 'parts' for the sake of the 'whole'(1973:465).

Nativity is a source of freedom and an interference to totalitarian regimes in the sense that have to quell that potential for new beginnings by bringing each generation under the control of the regime. The source of freedom that comes from the possibility of new beginnings, from nativity, is at the heart of Arendt's theorization of action.

In The Human Condition Arendt argues that the sense in which humans distinguish themselves - as opposed to being merely distinct - through speech and action recalls nativity: 'with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance.'(1959b:157). The impulse to act is an impulse that is a response to the beginning that was our birth: 'Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action.'(1959b:156) The fact of nativity, then, is the source of the possibility of beginning, and as such, Arendt argues in 'What is Freedom?', is not only a disruption to totalitarianism but is why we can say humans are free:

'Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free because he is a

beginning and was so created after the universe had already come into existence'
(1963b:167).

The value that Arendt places on uniqueness, and the extension of that into a concern that childhood be spent predominantly in the atmosphere (ideally) provided by the private realm, where human uniqueness is a guiding principle, is a concern that she expresses in The Human Condition as follows:

'The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world.'(1959b:158).

As Jean Elshtain has argued, Arendt's argument that children should not appear or be made to appear in the public realm, that their place was the private realm, was fuelled by a strong sense that this politicisation betrayed the newness of childhood. Elshtain points out that Arendt's memories of Hitler youth, and her notion of the parvenu who assaults her own dignity in order to go where she is unwanted, underlie her attitude in the 'Reflections' piece (1995:269). Pushing children into a situation where they were unwanted, she argued, was humiliating and psychologically disturbing, and 'psychologically, the situation of being unwanted (a typically social predicament) is more difficult to bear than outright persecution (a political predicament) because personal pride is involved.'(quoted in Young-Bruehl, 1982:312).

Such concerns find an echo where feminist critic bell hooks has written of her experience of desegregation, since she remembers the events as a sudden loss of the innocence that had existed previously. Illustrating exactly the core of the issue here, hooks writes that, prior to desegregation, there was enjoyment in being segregated - 'we loved going to school then, from the moment we rushed out of the door in the morning to the lingering strolls home. In that world, black children were allowed innocence'(1991:33) - but it was enjoyment in the context of an innocent ignorance of the situation of apartheid: 'We did not really understand the meaning of segregation, the brutal racism that had created the apartheid in this society, and no one explained it.'(1991:33). As a

schoolgirl, hooks remembers, that was a time of bewilderment at the actions of the 'grown up black folks':

'It hurt to leave behind memories, schools that were 'ours', places we loved and cherished ... I sat in classes where there was mostly contempt for us, a long tradition of hatred, and I wept. ... I wept and longed for what we had lost and wondered why the grown black folks had acted as though they did not know we would be surrendering so much for so little, that we would be leaving behind a history.'(1991:34).

It is on these questions of pride and sacrifice that Ralph Ellison differed from Arendt. In an interview with Ralph Warren, collected in Who Speaks for the Negro? Ellison argues 'one of the important clues to the meaning of [American Negro] experience lies in the idea, the *ideal* of sacrifice.'(1966:343). Arendt had failed to grasp this in the 'Reflections' article, he argued, positioning her in much the same positioning as hooks describes herself, the bewildered schoolgirl in the desegregated school, not comprehending the actions of the grown up black folks. Ellison insisted:

'she [Arendt] has absolutely no conception of what goes on in the minds of Negro parents when they send their kids through those lines of hostile people... they are aware of overtones of a rite of initiation which such events actually constitute for the child, a confrontation of the terrors of social life with all the mysteries stripped away. And in the outlook of many of those parents (who wish that the problem didn't exist), the child is expected to face the terror and contain his fear and anger *precisely* because he is a Negro American. Thus he's required to master the inner tensions created by his racial situation, and if he gets hurt - then his is one more sacrifice. It is a harsh requirement, but if he fails this basic test, his life will be even harsher.'(1966:344)

According to her biographer, Elisabeth Young Bruehl, Arendt felt that the parents of the children entering the hostile environment were forcing the child to treat education as a means for social advancement, denying the child the 'absolute protection of dignity' that her own mother had given her, instructing her to leave social situations where she was unwanted (1982:311). Arendt wrote to

Ellison, agreeing that she had not understood this ideal of sacrifice, that she had been unappreciative of the 'element of elementary, bodily fear in the situation' as an initiation into the realities of a racist society (Young-Bruehl, 1982:316).

Despite this acknowledgement to Ellison, Arendt's position was and remained concerned with the preservation of distinctions between the different realms. In terms of dignity, it was the dignity of the realm of politics that was uppermost in her mind. It is this that makes her position rather different from that of Zora Neale Hurston, who also objected to desegregation, but whose argument was directed against what she considered the pathologising 'tragedy of colour' school of thought, that suggested that black people lived in deprivation, that it was a tragedy to be black, and that 'black students would only learn if they sat next to whites'; her position, directed against that NAACP's involvement in the Brown decision was that one should instead direct efforts into the recognition and celebration of black people as dignified creators and black traditions and institutions that had a long and proud history (see Hemmway, 1986:329-37).⁴ Arendt's concern with dignity was less for pride in Hurston's folkloric sense, and more in the preservation of the political realm, about the achievement of which there should be a collective pride. It has been argued that Arendt felt a gratitude for the citizenship granted her as an immigrant Jew escaping persecution in Europe to come to America (Benhabib, 1996:154-5), such that her motivating impulse in 'Reflections', stronger than any sense of empathy with African Americans, was to preserve the merits, actual and potential, of the form of democracy she found there, a form in which the public realm was, Arendt believed, to be thought as a 'space of appearances'.

Difference and/in the Public Realm

This discussion of appearance in relation to 'Reflections' has suggested that the notion that appearance has philosophical bases in Arendt's thought concerning both the sense of 'rising' as the profundity of appearance in the public realm and that of appearance as the creative force of freedom cast as natality and the capacity of *beginning*. What emerges from the discussion is that Arendt's wish to preserve a public space of appearances led to some rather disturbing conclusions in

her comment on the Little Rock events. Principally, I have wanted to show how the notion of disembodied participation cannot be sustained. While one may find the arguments presented in 'Reflections' thought-provoking and in places highly persuasive, there is a slippage in Arendt's argument which collapses appearance into visibility where she attempts to address the question of skin colour. It is as if the possibility of appearance in Arendt's thinking requires a disembodied participation; in part this is as a result of Arendt's privileging of speech as the modality of appearance whereby an actor 'identifies himself'(1959b:158, see quotation above). Bodily difference is positioned as an obstruction to participation as equal citizens in the public realm. As I have argued above, this might be an accurate description of the political situation in the South (and elsewhere), but Arendt seems to elevate the argument away from description and onto a level of analyses which is highly problematic.

Arendt's theories posit a world in which social discrimination takes place, allowing a social plurality that somehow benefits the political realm, but her argument is that such discrimination cannot be allowed to *structure* that realm. Forms of free association, however, frequently have a relationship to forms of exclusion and political discrimination; the idea that spontaneous social discrimination has an innocence that is unrelated to forms of political discrimination is a utopian aspiration in Arendt's vision of an ideal political world. She writes as though this ideal situation were already the case, such that, and here I agree with the arguments put forward by James Bohman (1996), she denies the way in which there is unequal access to the 'space of appearance' within which political decisions are taken. Moreover, the ability to challenge those decisions, or avoid their implications, means that the concept of political equality is assumed rather than its failure critiqued by Arendt.

Even as an ideal, however, there remain problems with Arendt's vision of the political realm. With the benefit of our contemporary perspective, and in relation to more recent theorising around the idea of public spheres, we are able to provide a critique of the way in which Arendt sees social plurality in relation to the political realm. There is an honouring of a form of authenticity in Arendt, which also informs her arguments around the pariah and the parvenu. Seyla Benhabib notes how Arendt, borrowing her terms from the French journalist Bernard Lazare, utilised these

terms as a way of understanding different strategies by which individuals maintained or denied their difference. Here her thought was, once again, informed more by reflection on European totalitarian regimes than by racial politics of the United States. Benhabib puts it succinctly:

'while the pariah is the one who is cast aside, marginalised and treated with contempt by society because of his or her otherness, the parvenu denies her otherness so as to become accepted by the dominant society. As the twentieth century progressed, the sociocultural paradoxes of maintaining particularistic identities gave way to a politics of annihilation of otherness through the racial policies of extermination in the hands of National Socialism.'(1996:xxvi).

The same ideal of authenticity, however, sits uneasily when placed in the different context that has been the focus of this chapter. The figure of the parvenu is one that Arendt implies was being sought by those African Americans seeking access to previously all white schools; yet, on the other hand, she denies African Americans the possibility of appearing in the political realm without being reduced to their group identification literally 'on sight'.

Both the question of authenticity - in the sense of a refusal of the position of the parvenu - and the question of how social discrimination feeds into the political realm are approached somewhat differently by those theorists of public spheres who have recently suggested that social diversity has produced what are in effect several, multiple, public spheres or 'counter public spheres' (Felski, 1990; Fraser, 1991; Gilroy, 1994). Arguing in terms of feminist or of 'black' counter public spheres, these arguments acknowledge the sense in which, in Arendtian terms, social discrimination *creates* political arenas that are public spaces of appearance. Rita Felski has promoted a notion of a feminist counter public sphere as a model for theorising 'the features and institutional locations of the feminist discursive community in late capitalism'(1990:44). She suggests that the emergence of a feminist counter public sphere reflects women's greater, if still unequal, access to networks of communication and interpretation; such that in these discursive spaces dominant definitions of femininity are contested and redefined, such that whilst questions of the nature of female identity will not necessarily be resolved, they are addressed as 'a problem'(1990:46). In a somewhat similar vein, Nancy Fraser (1991, 1997) has argued that the

Habermasian concept of the public sphere is a useful one because it separates out the state and state apparatuses from what she describes as 'a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk ... an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction ... for debating and deliberating.' (1991, 1997:70). Such a theatre of talk, however, has to be conceived within a context of inequality. Fraser suggests that certain theorists have developed and utilised a concept of the public sphere in which social inequalities are bracketed. Because the public sphere exists within a social context of inequalities, however, to depict the public sphere thus is to engage in a conceit in which interlocutors are depicted *as if* they were social peers in this arena (1997:79). Fraser's worry is therefore parallel to the concern expressed above in relation to Hannah Arendt, and her suggestion is that we might think and seek to protect a democratic society in which there are multiple publics, in which what she terms 'subaltern counterpublics' (1997:81). The fact that these counter public spheres are *publicist*, Fraser argues, means that they are by definition 'not enclaves' (1997:82), although they might have tendencies toward enclaving themselves from within as well as the threat of being enclaved from without. It is the dialectic between their dual functions of regrouping and withdrawal, on the one hand, and as bases and training for agitational activities toward the wider publics, on the other, that gives, for Fraser these counterpublics their emancipatory potential (1997:82).

Arendt's position, exemplified in the comments in 'Reflections', attempted to preserve the political realm separately from the social in an elevation of political principles above both the discriminatory practices of the social realm and the 'interior' concerns of the private realm. Bodily differences were assigned by her, as we have seen, to the later grouping. Arendt's attitude toward the feminist movements of her time arose from this conviction that the political realm be shielded from 'social' issues and 'life' questions. I have argued above that her attempt to maintain this distinction in relation to the Little Rock events floundered at exactly the point when Arendt made the decision to posit as 'social', and therefore as non-political, issues of visibility (in this case skin colour) or, put in more general terms, of embodiment. Recent work on counter public spheres enables a challenge to Arendt's distinction between the social and the political insofar as it illustrates the routes by which social identities and social occasions can be both generative of political concerns and the vehicles for voicing those concerns. For feminism, specifically, this work

enables one to expose the masculine nature of 'the political' both in terms of the ideal that Arendt describes (Cornell, 1997) and in terms of the inequities of realistic access. Moreover, it escapes the grandiose overtones by which Arendt links the realm of the political to the 'world at stake' through the quiet indication that there are several public realms and, in a certain sense, several different 'worlds' at stake. However, it is not altogether clear that one can use this work to refuse all that Arendt says nor to resolve all the issues that the above discussion has raised. Before I conclude, I want to raise some of the questions that remain in thinking difference and/in relation to 'the political'.

The question that I have highlighted above concerning the relationship between appearance and visibility is one that needs some more excavation. For however poorly Arendt draws the distinction in relation to the events in Little Rock, there remains the question that her terms appearance and visibility were attempting to capture. That is, there is a tension between public spheres and publicity that remains in the work on counter public spheres and that turns on Arendt's point that profound participation is distinct from the shallowness of 'being seen'. The profundity of appearance seems a crucial facet of her argument, one that she trips over in relation to the Little Rock article, but which remains, nevertheless, an intriguing and important conceptualisation of the political.

Arendt's arguments seem to suggest that merely making a group visible through the creation of communicative networks or through embodied display, whatever forms they might take, is not necessarily profound, dignified, political *participation*. Moreover, since Arendt's comments, history has illustrated how mere visibility even as an initial strategy can have a complicity with a visually dominated consumer capitalism (see Hennessy, 1995; Fraser, 1999) that undercuts the profundity of what is being said on a political level. Of course the use of visibility *can* be and has been a political strategy. The occupancy of public space through demonstrations and marches, for example, has been a mode of making social discriminations visible through physical participation in the public realm (for example, one might point to the cases of the suffragettes, American civil rights movements or Gay Pride marches). The challenge to Arendt's theory here is that the visibility of a grouping - even a grouping around a 'shared identity' - need not be dismissed as merely social, an

'association' comparable to those of 'free association'. The counter public sphere might be seen, rather, as an acting in concert, a beginning, even, that brings it closer to an exercise in freedom in Arendt's sense. Furthermore, other forms of embodied participation might be seen in less overtly politicised public spaces, such as those created, for example, through musical communication or dance (Gilroy, 1994). However, such embodied participation cannot speak for itself. Its political message, in other words, has to be abstracted from the multiple bodies and the multiple ways in which that visibility might be understood. Another way of posing this debate, to borrow from Arendt's vocabulary, is to say that the issue at stake is how to maintain a profundity of appearance alongside or even *through* visibility.

There is not space to discuss here the various modes and languages by which theorists are entering this debate, for several positions and concerns crystallise at this point. It is necessary, however, to say that communication between 'counter public spheres' on the one hand and other spheres or a wider political sphere on the other (the difference is one of conceptualisation) can take many forms, but without some form, some sense of a communication 'out' - what Fraser (1997) considers to be a dialectic relationship between the tendency to become enclaves and the tendency to agitate beyond the counter public sphere's own bounds - the *political* impact is lost. This is the tricky step, for with this step, counterpublic spheres have to engage in a 'wider' language, and take the risk of communication which may not necessarily be heard or heard in the way the speaker would wish (Bickford, 1995). Whilst the emphasis on 'the political' in Arendt and the public sphere in Habermas as well as in work such as Fraser's (1997) may seem to abstract away from embodiment and consequently elevate speech and rational debate above the actual existence of the speakers themselves, there is a sense in which such a manoeuvre - to the question of communication - is unavoidable. In Arendt's work, as Bohman (1996) argues, the step to wider audience involves an implicit principle of compromise, and in these notions of counter public spheres, similarly, there seems to be a required model of democratic fora and compromise, lest the counter public spheres become hermetically sealed discussions that have no impact on any other except their own. The question then becomes how to make the movement 'out' to a wider public sphere in a way that does not involve a denial of that difference that each counter public sphere was designed, or formed, to support.

But this is surely a welcome challenge, and one that returns us to the notion of profundity. Several feminist theorists have worried - in a way that Arendt seems to have done - about the presentation of womanhood as a homogeneous group. The notion of a feminist counter public sphere runs such a risk in that, as in a crude model of multiculturalism, it can work to seal each 'counter' group into itself, imposing a homogeneity that may not exist. The status of the sphere as political as opposed to the merely publicist, then, is guaranteed only to the extent that the profundity of the issues raised are challenged and debated. Have these issues 'merely' been raised into the realm of the visible or have they 'arisen' in the stronger senses that Arendt wrote about?

Such a role, one of challenge and debate, would be one fitting for the public realm of appearances as Arendt conceived it. In much of Arendt's work she writes in awe of the political realm as the realm of dignity and action; the world of appearances is the world in which profound thought will appear, and indeed, should appear, for if it remains within the individualised intimate realm of the private, it constitutes a negation of the possibilities offered to humankind. The public realm, therefore would indeed be the place where it is decided, in this new casting of Arendt's position, whether the concerns expressed or displayed in counter public spheres, were merely publicist (simply made visible) or profound; this would also be the moment that any portrayal of 'interests' would be challenged (in terms of an assumed homogeneity, for example). As with Arendt's distinctions, these are ideal spaces and processes rather than descriptions of the presently existing contexts; but nor are they removed from the realities of the present.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I want to emphasise how Arendt's oeuvre maintained a relationship to the horizon that political limits form in the way that I suggested in Chapter Two, feminist politics implicitly does, and indeed, should. There I argued that the debates that have ensued around the perceived threat of 'post-structuralist' theory for feminism and feminist thought, might be approached not via the route of seeking to justify claims on either side, but by unpacking what this idea of 'danger' implies. For although much of these debates are based upon miscalls and

misunderstandings, what they offer up is the opportunity to discuss feminism's 'political imagination' and *its* genealogy. The fear of 'post-structuralist thought', I suggested, felt most acutely in terms of the perceived lack of normative criteria and the relativising of Truth, is that in pursuing modes of thought that are intriguing or challenging, feminists might be seduced into a position of defenselessness when faced with the most extreme forms of right wing politics. The 'threat' of post-structuralism, therefore, becomes transmuted into the threat of extremism.

For Arendt, the political limit that was the Nazi Germany that she fled, is everpresent in her work.⁵ Her position in the 'Reflections' piece, even, resonates with a concern to maintain democracy, even as she is led to the peculiar position that makes her echo the position of Governor Faubus, calling for a slower response that would await social change before political ideals are 'imposed' on children, and before children are able to 'begin' themselves. Arendt's articulated fear was that thought would be quashed were all moral considerations imposed from above. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, published in 1963, Arendt's controversial book that was composed of her newspaper reports on the trial of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, Arendt wrote that the banality of his character was signalled in his evident inability to *think*. "The longer one listened to him", she wrote, 'the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else.'(1977:49). He was not a 'monster', certainly, 'but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown.'(1977:54); content with the elation that his cliches gave him, he consoled himself without any apparent awareness of his own glaring inconsistencies (1977:55). The ability to think for oneself, to have independent critical thought, was necessary, Arendt suggested in relation to Eichmann, if not sufficient, for the exercise of political judgement and perhaps even for recognising justice (see Bradshaw, 1989:67). Thinking one might say, therefore, is a prerequisite for *profundity* in political judgement, and a guard against totalitarian regimes' ideological impositions. The increasingly automatic nature of judgement in mass society, where most are not involved in judging but form opinions without independent thought, was a signal of increasing and worrying thoughtlessness, for Arendt (as Villa 1996b argues). One might see her response to desegregation in Little Rock as a fear that the judgement was too 'automatic'; and one might see, moreover, her response to Ellison as a consequence of thought on her part, a reflection (if not a retraction) on her

own 'Reflections'. As Villa writes, Arendt's 'Thinking and Moral Considerations' (1984) sought out Socrates as exemplary of a man who forced his conversational partners to think. In that article, she admires Socrates not for his teaching but for infecting others with his own perplexity (1984:22); her attachment to thinking is due to the sense in which a consideration from a 'distance' awakens conscience in that thinking involves a relationship to oneself whereby one bears witness to oneself and judges oneself (1984:35).

It is arguably because Arendt had the political limit of totalitarian regimes firmly 'in view' that her later work took this turn toward the value of thinking as profound withdrawal, diminishing her previous elevation of public debate above individualised 'interior' activities and reversing her previous argument that regarded truth as coercive where politics is persuasive (Bradshaw, 1989:68). Arendt's disdain of solitary withdrawal in The Human Condition is lessened then, as she considered Eichmann as thoughtless, as not having that 'twoness'. His inability to think meant he would not mind contradicting himself, would not be perturbed by his inability to account for his actions except through clichés; it was not an inherent wickedness that Arendt saw in Eichmann but an inability to think that made him 'capable of infinite evil.' (1984:36). Further, as she considered the life of Martin Heidegger, her previous mentor and lover, whose support for Nazism she attempted to understand in relation to the occupation of the philosopher, she presents her arguments for an understanding of thinking as an activity that requires some withdrawal from the world of appearances where one 'is never alone and always much too busy to think'. Arendt's (1978b) 'apology' for Heidegger, an essay written for his eightieth birthday, was one that depicted him as erring in his attempt to move into the public world of human affairs.⁶ Heidegger's retreat to the seclusion of his thinking was an entirely appropriate response to his 'collision' with the public world, for thinking requires 'essential seclusion from the world.' (1978b:299). Arendt's position seems to be that, unlike Eichmann, Heidegger recognised his error and restored his capacity for judgement by retreating and thinking in the 'place of stillness' appropriate for thought (Bradshaw, 1989:70), concurring with Heidegger's own position in his 'Letter on Humanism' that thinking must not be inscribed in a 'technical horizon' - as a means toward acting or making - but may be regarded as the pursuit of thinking Being, that which is 'farther than all beings and yet nearer to man than every being' (1993:234). For the Arendt of 'Thinking and Moral Considerations', and of

The Life of the Mind (1978a), thinking can prevent immoral action in the world, and therefore it has to become 'ascribed to everybody; it cannot be a privilege of the few'(quoted in Bradshaw, 1989:73). In The Life of the Mind (1978a) Arendt suggests that every one has conscience and that everyone acts, and that the conflict which can arise between these two makes the experience of the 'two-in-one' of thought a common experience. This 'two in one' of thinking connects thought to the performance of deeds, action in the world. In 'Thinking and Moral Considerations' Arendt concluded that judging is the by-product of thinking, and judging makes thinking 'manifest in the world of appearances.'(1984:37), especially important in those times in history when 'things fall apart', when the majority are swept away unthinkingly. At these times, 'those who think are drawn out of hiding' and then thinking, while never the same as judgement, facilitates judgement, the 'most political of man's mental abilities'(1984:36).⁷

Thus, despite the fact that Arendt's turn to thought, withdrawal, solitude and truth in her later work seems to contradict some of her earlier propositions, in the light of this chapter I would argue that it can be seen as an attempt to give a route to profundity. That is, as we have seen, Arendt's concern is that appearance in the public realm should not be merely a case of deeds and actors being 'seen', but that deeds and actions should have 'arisen'; they should have some profundity about them. While great thinkers are a rarity, thought is a human capacity which should be developed in all. Her concern was to counter-act the tendencies of a world of automatic thought that relied upon the 'bannisters' provided for it, by arguing that thinking, whilst necessarily a solitary and still activity, is required by a public realm of appearances that, in its absence, would be merely publicity and dangerously without gravitas.

For contemporary feminist thought, this discussion indicates the complexity of imagining the political realm. Participation in the public realm might be generally considered positively, but this chapter has illustrated the sense in which imagining 'the political' involves one in considerations of philosophical visions and divisions.

As Honig (1995) has argued, although Arendt dismissed feminism, regarding 'the woman question' as one that it was inappropriate to pose politically (1995:135), feminism is very different now from the feminism that surrounded Arendt, and many of the concerns of current feminist

theory resonate with Arendt's work insofar as she was a theorist of an 'agonistic and performative politics'(1995:136). Honig argues that because Arendt poses 'an agonistic action in concert that postulates difference and plurality, not identity, as its base' (1995:160), she can be useful in thinking through the question of how feminism might motivate future action without postulating identity - or any other foundationalism - as its ground. In this chapter I have focussed on one aspect of Arendt - her use of the concept of appearance in the public realm - to illustrate the provocations and the problems in thinking 'the political' with Arendt. I would also wish to suggest that, as well as making an excellent counterpoint to current attempts to theorise the public sphere, Arendt makes for a thoroughly intriguing figure for the project of thinking through the feminist political imagination on a more general level. Reading Arendt makes one think about what feminism *is*.⁸

Thinking about what feminism is, as I have suggested in preceding chapters, involves considerations of temporo-spatial nature - where is the 'target' of the intervention? where is the audience? which forum will the intervention occupy? where are the boundaries of its constitution? when and how are we to measure success? - as well as considerations of enunciative positions, that revolve around issues such as who is speaking? for whom are they speaking? and how will they be heard?⁹ Here I have argued that Arendt's thoughts on the demarcations between different realms - political, social, private - provocative as they may be, are too rigid for contemporary feminism; but more subtly, I have wanted to suggest through the discussions in this chapter that her notion of appearance, along with the concepts I have appended to it above - notably, those of visibility and profundity - gathers around it a set of concerns that are central to thinking about feminist political imagination. Thus while other writers have often explored Arendt and feminism with reference to the way in which she deals with 'our' question of identity - particularly in relation to the question of using or denying difference (which is the issue behind the parvenu/pariah distinction) I have explored Arendt in order to show how even as her own interventions were flawed or, as I would argue in the case of 'Little Rock', deeply misguided, her work was centrally about how the political realm is imagined. There was an explicit quality to the horizons and limits in Arendt's life and work; and it is partly because of the fear of one positive evil - the repetition of totalitarianism - that it seems Arendt added a peculiar voice to another discriminatory practice - the continued racial

segregation of schools. For the purposes of this book, she is a thoroughly intriguing figure, a theorist who illustrates the connections between the philosophical and the political, between the embodied and the abstract, and between fear and the power of imagination. She illustrates the arguments that how we philosophise affects the way we articulate and target our politics, how we abstract 'the political' affects the way we consider and experience embodiment, and, perhaps most graphically, how we fear affects the shape and force of our imaginations.

¹Presumably Elizabeth Eckford.

²She believes that in Europe the groups tend rather to be along lines of 'class origin, education and manners'(1959:51).

³Religious institutions are the only public force that can fight social discrimination, Arendt suggests, and they can do so only in terms of the uniqueness of each person - churches are the only communal and public spaces in which appearances do not count, and discrimination within the churches would make them social rather than religious institutions (1959:53).

⁴Hememway argues that Zora Neale Hurston's politics were formed out of an individualism that sometimes bordered on egoism, a suspicion of the Communist Party and indeed any collectivist government, combined with a suspicion of social science's emphasis on 'cultural deprivation'. Her celebration of folk heritage should be seen in this light, as should her dislike of both Richard Wright's writings, whose involvement in communist politics and literary use thereof abhorred her, and the NAACP, who she felt pathologised black life. Her objection to desegregation (published in a letter to the Orlando Sentinel August 11, 1955) delighted segregationists who used it to argue that black people themselves did not want this; the letter was reprinted and she received a card from a white supremacist group praising her stand. Her own background had been in the proud, self-governing all black village of Eatonville, and while her views might seem by turns rather romantic or rather reactionary when applied as a general principle, they were based in that experience, and this enabled her to refute a pathologising of black life in social science that few were questioning 'from within' and to develop her notion of a black aesthetic.

⁵Even as her Judaism was a more complex and contentious issue (see Benhabib, 1995, 1996; Kaplan, 1995). Bat-Ami Bar On (1996) argues that although it is true that Arendt decentred gender in her analyses, this has to be understood in relation to her ethico-political commitment to her Jewishness. The decentring of gender, she argues, was a *traumatized* decentring that resulted from the way in which other issues - such as totalitarian regimes - were made central in her life.

⁶See Ettinger (1995) on the relationship between Arendt and Heidegger; Dana Villa's (1996a) book is excellent on the philosophical connections.

⁷Arendt is explicit that she has Kant in mind when she introduces judgement as dealing with things close at hand (as opposed to thinking which deals with invisibles). Her arguments around thought and around political debate are infused with this Kantian concern with judgement. Ronald Beiner explains that it is 'the faculty of judgement that fits us into this world of phenomena and appearances, and makes it possible for us to find our proper place within it. It is precisely because the political world is defined by Arendt as a realm of phenomenal disclosure [the realm of appearances] that the faculty of judgement assumes such importance for her.' (1983:14, see also pp15-9, and pp119-25 where Beiner discusses the Eichmann case in relation to those who criticised Arendt's cool analyses as betraying a 'lack of love for the Jewish people'). For feminist uses and critiques of Kant see Flax (1993), Schott (1997) and Hutchings (1996), who also places Arendt in relation to Kantian notions of judgement, explaining that Arendt was anxious to avoid the idea of judgement as law governed.

⁸ Young Bruehl, E. in May and Kohn (1996) argued that she did not consider Arendt's thinking as very helpful in current feminist projects that are attempting to integrate perspectives and find analytical categories to articulate the 'resistance of multiple victims' (sic). However, she argues that what she has done is to usefully make feminists think about feminism.

⁹Dietz's discussion of Arendt and feminism takes a different form from mine, but she similarly asks questions that concern the politics of speaking for and as women, of

maintaining, respecting, and challenging difference in the public realm: 'what constitutes an ethic of communicative interaction among citizens? How can the diversity of speech and speakers be maintained and allowed to flourish? do women bring a different voice of female consciousness to the public realm? how has it manifested itself?(Dietz, 1994:249).