

RESPONSIBILITY AND SPATIALITY: OR CAN JEAN-LUC NANCY SIT ON A BENCH IN HANNAH ARENDT'S PUBLIC SPACE?

Kathleen Vandeputte
Ghent University
Belgium
Kathleen.Vandeputte@UGent.be

Ignas Devisch
Ghent University
Belgium
Ignas.Devisch@ugent.be

Abstract

Although Jean-Luc Nancy subtly criticizes Arendt's notion of public space, he, nor anyone else has not laid bare the reasons for his critique. Our goal is to elaborate Nancy's reticence on Arendt's notion of public space, exploring their different historical, political and ontological outlines. Although they have in common a Heideggerian framework, their attempts for detotalization and their plea for taking up responsibility for the world, they both have their very own notion of public space and its concomitant political significance. This inquiry results in claiming that Nancy's socio-ontological notion of being-together in public leads to a necessary deepening and broadening of Arendt's notion of public space and our responsibility for others and for the world. Since for both philosophers a public space safeguards our very responsibility for the world, it is crucial to elaborate the implications of different notions of public space for our responsibility. In doing so, we offer a more profound insight into the meaning that politics and the interpretation of a public political space might have for us today.

(Key-words: Public Space, Hannah Arendt, Jean-Luc Nancy, Detotalization, Responsibility, Ontology, Worldliness).

INTRODUCTION

'There is no public space!'

This article explores the implications of different ontological perspectives on public space. We perceive two major lines of reasoning in contemporary political thought. Either a public place is perceived as something to be created, or it is thought as what we are always already thrown into, even before any creation of a space. Not only the divergence between these two notions on public space reveals a different conception of relation to others and to political community in general; it also coincides with the political views of philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Hannah Arendt. While Nancy puts our ontological being-together on the foreground, Arendt claims the need for the creation of a free and plural public space. In this article, we discuss the two different ontological perspectives on public space out from the theories of Arendt and Nancy. Despite their different ontological stance, their works are quite related in their political conclusions. Finally, our exploration of Arendt and Nancy attempts to show a notion of public space that is capable of coping with the challenges of our present post-totalitarian societies.

Nancy and Arendt have much in common and yet, in his works, the former rarely mentions the latter. Although Nancy is certainly familiar with her works, he quotes it only rarely and never really explains their relation with his own thoughts (Nancy, 1990a, 14, 56, 238, 269; 1982, 21, 28, 30; 1988, 89; & 1991, 99, 187). The closest he comes to doing so is in this quote from a 1999 interview:

I like Arendt very much, but there is the constant reference - not by Arendt herself, but by Arendtians, to Athens and to the agora. People ask: "where is the agora? We need a new agora." The cry goes up: "There is no public space!" Well, there is; there is a public space. Instead of thinking of finding or rediscovering a new space, we should be able to think of what is already here at stake, but not simply by accepting everything that is going on (Nancy, 1999, 221).

Our intention here is to explore Nancy's criticism of Arendt's notion of public space. In order to analyze the accuracy of his criticism, we first have to confront his 'reading' of Arendt with a more detailed analysis of Arendt's notion of public space. After having elaborated both of their notions of public space, as well as the ontological and political-philosophical registers from which they arise, we will attempt to offer a more profound insight into the meaning that politics and the interpretation of a public political space might have for us today.

ARENDRT'S PUBLIC SPACE

We start out by asking ourselves the following questions: is Arendt's thinking on public space indeed an attempt to nostalgically reinstall an Athenian polis, as Nancy has suggested? Or is Arendt's main concern not necessarily with the establishment of some outmoded polis *per se*, but rather to formulate an answer to the devastation of totalitarianism, to rethink politics in post-totalitarian times? Our response, as we will explain in what follows, falls clearly on the side of the second proposal. We therefore assert, with Canovan, that "the central point of her theory of totalitarianism has largely been missed; that her theory of action, like the rest of her political thought, is rooted in her response to totalitarianism and is not an exercise in nostalgia for the Greek polis . . ." (Canovan, 1992, 2). Consequently, for example, instead of reading *The Human Condition* as an unambiguous glorification of the Athenian polis, we believe there are substantial arguments for reading it as a political theory that is thoroughly engaged with questions of human plurality and freedom, with public action, the space for that action, and thus with their corruption by totalitarianism. That totalitarianism is corruptive of freedom, is beyond question. But does it corrupt for the reasons we typically believe?

Arendt argues that perhaps the most fundamental feature of mankind is our capacity to act and speak in a free space, a space where one can deliberatively speak out one's judgment in public, thereby creating a web of human relationships. And insofar as totalitarianism destroys this space, Arendt sees totalitarianism as destructive of our most human capacities along with it. Nevertheless, her view of public action—as free speech in a free space—serves as the *conditio sine qua non* for a political theory of action that is capable of dealing with the political calamity of totalitarianism. Arendt, however, not only defines the conditions or potentialities of action and speech, she also delineates the limits of action and speech in order to come to terms with the hubristic danger totalitarianism carries within itself. Totalitarianism has disclosed its destructive character on human nature, as well as the conditions of human nature, by claiming to be able to alter human nature endlessly. Consequently, this danger is grounded in propagating the optimistic view that 'everything is possible' (Arendt, 1986, 134 and 138). This totalitarian revolt against human limits springs from the idea that we can treat humans as part of nature - nature understood as inherently violent, endless, passive and formless - and that we can mould the entirety of history and its outcome to our will. Arendt's well-known tripartition, labour-work-action, which she believes to be constitutive of our human condition, is completely undermined in times of totalitarianism insofar as totalitarianism reduces the free, inherently

spontaneous, fragile and uncontrollable domain of *action* to the violent and teleological act of work or even labour.

The combination of this constrained view of action, together with the idea that anything and everything is possible leads to the ideology of totalitarianism, where the loss of a free public space and the annihilation of the plurality necessary for the public domain are striking. Against this ideology, Arendt's double moral of delineating the conditions or potentialities of action, as well as its limits, establishes the lines of our responsibility for the world and public space since it both overcomes totalitarian destruction and creates a deep affiliation with our sense of humanity.

The main reason for her political elaboration of a theory of action - which, again, does not spring from mere nostalgia, even if it is *inspired* by the ideal Greek city - is her solicitude for the world. She wants to reevaluate our sense of *amor mundi* and the exigency to take responsibility for the world, as well as the fragile plurality of public space, by focusing on the effects that dark times have on our understanding of worldliness, political action and public space. The concepts of world and space are intertwined in the sense that "the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves (and) our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm" (Arendt, 1998, 50-51). It is only in plurality, which forms the basis of our human condition, that a space or an in-between can be created that relates and separates men at the same time. It separates us because we are all different individuals with our own capacities, individuality and uniqueness; and it relates us because in it we share our capacity to act and speak freely, thereby creating a community on a public platform, and because, in it, we also share the same set of perceptible objects. Public space is perceived as a stage upon which political actors disclose their identity in words and deeds while sharing the same set of objects, and this results in the perception of a having a shared world.

AN 'ONTOLOGY OF DISPLAY'

The previous reflections on Arendt's political framework prompt us to elaborate her ontological attitude towards the notion of public space. Our intention is not just to compare it with Nancy's ontological stance, but also to gain insight into the reasons why Arendt, like Nancy, propagates we have an immense responsibility for the world and plurality. Her much-discussed distinction between the public, the private and the social also cannot be left unnoticed since it points to the divergence with Nancy's idea of public space. Arendt's interpretation of the public space is twofold:

The term 'public' signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena: It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. . . . Second, the term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it' (Arendt, 1998, 50 and 52).

This fragment reveals the special relation between action and being in Arendt's political thought. Action is dependent upon and receives its meaning from the presence of others, and it is this very plurality which is the *conditio sine qua non* for political life. To put it differently, there is only a public space in so far as there is plurality. Through them, we disregard the pre-given norms or habits which not only hinder our critical reflexive thought and judgment, but which were even, according to Arendt, the conditions for the banality of evil.

Arendt's public space, interpreted ontologically, is a space of appearances where reality is constituted and confirmed in and through our relations with others for only that which appears or can be perceived is real. Consequently, insofar as plurality guides our public, and insofar as our activities become real by appearing in public, then the loss of plurality would lead to the loss of reality. Thus, in Arendt's

view, public space presupposes and guarantees plurality and it provides the opportunity for a politics based on mutual recognition and respect for difference, although it does not necessarily lead towards a conception of politics as argumentative and consensual.

This account of reality is astutely circumscribed in Curtis' book on Arendtian ontology, where she characterizes it as an 'ontology of display' (Curtis, 1999). Very briefly, her point is that we need a public realm, a space where we can excel and display ourselves; where we can experience the world from different standpoints and intensify our awareness of reality. In so doing, we create a vast responsibility for the plurality of diverse others as well as for the world. This responsiveness to plurality, our responsibility to safeguard different standpoints against oblivion and our responsibility to the world - also a topic of constant concern for Nancy - gives us our sense of reality. The intensification of our awareness of reality is an urgent ethical need since, without this awareness, we can neither belong properly to a world of others, nor care well for them. And since reality is only constituted in appearance on a *plural* public space, it is crucial to estimate this plurality at its true value. In this respect, the activity of judgment proves utmost important, for it is the only mental activity that requires the presence of others. Judging serves as a solicitation towards others to respond, to act in public, and thus to both bring into existence and maintain a world sufficiently in-common for human particularity to appear, for its standard is exactly the plural perspectives of others (or what Arendt, in keeping with Kant, calls *sensus communis*). We will not withhold from you an essential quote from Curtis on this matter:

The very essence of the public sphere is to arouse the impulse to freedom and to let shine, and this it does, in contrast to other forms of social existence and private experience, as an open and extended domain of human plurality. As such, it offers a space in which the unrelated, the new, and uncertain events and developments can become relatable . . . and meaning can be born. Through the fragile, uncertain, often foreboding encounters between multiple, particular perspectives, our sense of a common world is won. When these encounters diminish, so, too, does our sense of the world on a specific, shared and ongoing human project (Curtis, 1999, 74).

The fundamental mode through which things can be acknowledged is how they appear and seem *to me*. Consequently, reality is structured by a frame of finitude, since things can only appear perspectively. We therefore depend both upon others and on our capacity to imagine or represent other perspectives—or 'to go visiting', as Arendt describes this enlarged mentality—to stimulate our sense of reality.

This nexus of reality, publicness and plurality raises the question of how real those activities that are not shown in public really are. Do they lose their sense of reality? Just how much reality is left in those things that remain hidden from the public domain? This question is of major importance since it is entangled with our feeling of being together or, more specifically, the *sensus communis* Arendt has in mind when focusing on her reevaluation of worldliness and plurality against the dark background of totalitarianism—its conversion of the *sensus communis* into a *sensus privatus* experienced in isolation, the expansion of which results in the effacement of our uniqueness (Arendt, 1968). As Curtis writes, "If we are to take responsibility for our presence and accept the burden of freedom, it is to one another we must turn, and judging is the key form of this turning" (Curtis, 1999, 115). This sociability, this sense of community, embodied in and serving as a standard for judging, is therefore both the origin and the heartbeat of the public sphere for it enhances our sense of plurality, reality and freedom (Curtis, 1999).

It is therefore that Arendt abominates the modern rise of the social for this blurs what was once a distinction between the private, what must remain hidden and is characterised by necessity and the public, what comes to light and is constituted by freedom. Since social issues are merely ways to regulate questions of necessity, excluding the very possibility for unbounded and unpredictable action, the rise of the social both destroys every reliance upon a *sensus communis* or a common feeling for the world, which Arendt refers to as worldliness (Arendt, 1970, 1982) and reduces the free public space and its political capacities to

mere conformism and one unanimous opinion. Arendt's motive for the distinction between the political and the social lies in her desire to awaken our responsibility for the world, to stimulate the safeguarding of public spaces and the diversity of others from any intermingling with claims of social necessity or totalization in order to sustain the most free and plural conditions of our humanity—namely political action in a public space. Strictly speaking, we could argue that for Arendt we can never be politically plural in the private sphere and that we have to *create* a public space in order for us to 'become real', to attach value to our humanity, to become part of the network of human relationships and to detach ourselves from a merely private and thus not fully human existence. Is our being indeed this divided and schizophrenic as Arendt seems to indicate by her theory on public space and by its strict separation between our being in the public and our being in the private and social spheres? Or could Nancy provide us a more coherent image of our being when interpreted as essentially social? And what are its implications for our responsibility for the world and for others?

NANCY AND THE SINGULAR PLURALITY OF OUR EXISTENCE

Although both Arendt and Nancy are protagonists for claiming a public space that safeguards plurality and responsibility for the world, Nancy will assume a socially construed ontology, whereas Arendt refutes social issues in the space of appearances and focuses more directly on their political pertinence. This divergence has everything to do with Nancy's concerns for our existential ontological condition. It is not another politics, a new political philosophy or a reinvented public space that Nancy has in mind. Rather, he concentrates on the question of the *social*, the question of the ontological condition in which we find ourselves and the implications of this ontology for every form of being-with.

For Nancy, in order to think plurality and public space, we inevitably need an ontological perspective. He therefore explores what he calls a 'social ontology', an existential thought which should elucidate not only how we live, but how this existential condition is also a guarantee for plurality and multiplicity in the public space. Similar to Arendt, this ontology does not aim at conceptualizing the world in a totalizing, representational sense. Coexistence, or Being as what Nancy terms 'being singular plural', is the ontological fact that secures a place for multiplicity, where *being* always occurs in a multiple manner, at every moment and at countless places each time. There is not one single origin, a first cause or a divine creation that generates *being*. *Being* arises in the world, wells up with every *origin*, as Nancy portrays the *espacement* of every singular moment within the world. For Nancy, this experience of the *polymorphous* and *polyphonic* nature of everyday life attests to a fairly rudimentary but still unmistakable ontology. The surging forth of singularities always entails an origin that is a confirmation of the world as a singular plurality of origins.

The world wells up each time anew in different places and times (*locale-instantanée*). The *sense* of the world resides in the undetermined multiplicity of origins, in their *coexistence* (Nancy, 1990b, 1997). This is the point where Nancy approaches the thematic of otherness. Otherness intrigues us, he writes, because it always indicates the perennially different origin of the world. Every origin evaporates in its passing, it is always other and never appropriable. This is why co-existence, the irreducible coming and going of multiple origins, is the ontological foundation out of which Nancy thinks ontic plurality and the community. This plurality, this always already shared horizon in which we exist, is the simple and simultaneously difficult point of departure from which we must think community, says Nancy. It is a simple idea, because it seems to say nothing, because it says nothing more than what there is. At the same time, this is evidently the question of our time. That we are being-with, that there is just singular plural being, this is the triviality that we try so hard to deny, both in the discourse of the crisis of community on the one hand, and in the emancipatory narrative of the free individual, on the other.

We can link this with Arendt's thesis that through plurality and through our turning towards others in their diversity, we take up our responsibility for the world, increasing our awareness of its reality and

therefore giving it sense. Whereas for Nancy, sense is already there, pregiven within the world, for Arendt, sense and public space must be created. For both philosophers, the quest for public space is the quest to guarantee plurality and diversity, but their ontological stances assume different forms. After the devastation and concomitant loss of a political public space brought about by totalitarianism, Arendt incessantly seeks for a way to create such a public space, while for Nancy, public space is already there, without origin and given with the emergence of the world in its singular plurality and vice versa.

BEING SINGULAR PLURAL

Now that the status of social ontology has been brought more clearly into the foreground, it's content from the perspective of plurality demands for an exploration. The ontology of being plural singular or singular plural, a mere sequence of three words, indicates that being is never other than singular and plural, that being is in every singular origin and that this singularity is always plural and disseminated from the outset. *Singular plural* is not a property of being beside other properties, but is constitutive of *being*.

In being-with-others, every being-there is a being-toward (*être-à*), not in others or in the Other but *toward* and *with* others (Nancy, 1998). Being-toward as an ontological condition precedes every ontic demarcation of a specific identity or community. Before a community that appeals to an exclusive territory or essence shared only by a particular group of people comes into being, we are already taken up in the structure of being-toward; we always already relate to others and to the world. Existing is co-existing, is always a being-exposed to..., being-outside-oneself, aiming at something other than itself. This projection toward the world that, as thrown, we have to be, precedes all self-constitution. Thus Nancy affirms Heidegger's idea of the *Transcendenz*, being-in-the-world as an existential structure that first makes every ontic relation to the other than self possible. Far more than Heidegger, Nancy emphasizes the co-existential condition in which all being-in-the-world occurs (Heidegger, 1978, 170 and 215).

Here, Arendt's distinction between the private and the public can explain her divergence with Nancy. The private, characterized mainly by its necessity, indicates a strict separation from the public plural world. In doing so, 'co-existing' for Arendt can only become a reality in public, while for Nancy *every* being is social and thus all being constitutes co-existence. Still, we have to add immediately that thinking for Arendt, although it takes place privately and in solitude, is directed towards the world and to others. At the same time, she warns us against sheer loneliness, where every bond with plural others is violated and will eventually lead to a *sensus privatus* and the impossibility to judge in a public domain.

In his text *La comparution/The compearance*, written on the occasion of the fall of communism, Nancy repeatedly talks about an ontology of being-in-common as the alternative to an ontology of community as substance or as origin. *Compearance* is both a juridical concept that means becoming a defendant, appearing before a judge, and more general notion of a gathering or meeting. Moreover, it is a linguistic relative of the Greek *parousia*, the anticipated (second) coming of the Lord and thus also with *dies irae*, the day of the Last Judgment (Nancy, 1985). The meaning of *comparution* thus circles around the appearance or arrival of something on the one hand, and around the multiplicity of that arrival on the other. It is literally a coming-together of a plurality, a coming not from but *as* a plurality, a coming that comes to pass as nothing other than 'com'. It is, according to Nancy, never a matter of appearance itself, but about an existential condition for every appearance (Nancy, 1992, 2001). There is no appearance, no coming to the world and to being in the world that does not take place as 'withness'.

Being-together is always being with others and signifies also simultaneity—that is to say, being at the same point in time—thus indicating its temporary character of being thrown into a specific place. Collective space and time is the condition of possibility for the social in general. Only as being-together does the being-with of *shared* existence take place. Nevertheless, the together also divides us because every one of us is incommensurable with others; not one of the others is reducible to me. This sharing (*partage*),

this double gesture of sharing and dividing, turns our existential condition into a social given. Whether one thinks the social as an a-sociality or as an instance that must be taken up into a political totality, one always appeals to the sharing of a space-time as the condition for every being-in-the-world. "What is not together is in the no-time-no-place of non-Being" (Nancy, 2001, 61). Every being is therefore being-together or being-with.

Being-together is 'more' than a gathering of subjects and 'more' than what one usually calls 'intersubjectivity'. The 'inter' only comes into being after a subject first exists and is only in a second moment gathered in a collectivity. Being-together is being-one-with-another, a we. Such a *we* can be a group, a network, a people, a couple, but it always denotes a contingent we, a we that appears and disappears in an ever singular manner. *We* arises with every origin in a different way and is thus no substantial and permanently existing whole. *We* stands for our co-existence in the world as such. The French phrase '*tout le monde*' gives a good expression of what Nancy means by co-existence: everyone as everybody but therefore not everyone and everything in an all-embracing way. *We* is one by one and one with one, as Nancy cryptically describes it (Nancy, 2001, 76).

Nancy's stress on the existentials 'time' and 'space' concerning togetherness and his thesis that every being is relational is pivotal in his distinction with Arendt. For Arendt, a public space is more a political *construction* functioning as the safeguard for plurality and for any degeneration into totalitarianism, and therefore a public space must be created in contrast with the private realm. For Nancy, on the other hand, 'public space' or togetherness is already there simultaneously with every welling up of being. Consequently, this thesis responds to the contemporary decline of thinking community adequately or the incapacity to form a political public space, exactly because we have forgotten our existential condition—namely, that our existence is co-existence (Esposito, 2000). Therefore, like Arendt, Nancy strongly endeavours to take up an archi-responsibility for the world and for our existence within this world.

RESPONSIBILITY

If Being and only Being is what gives existence, and existing is to be open to this gift without attributing it either to pure immanence or to pure transcendence (Nancy 1993, 129), we can never fall back on a first principle or an origin as the source and thus guarantee of everything. Therefore, we are placed radically before our responsibility and our freedom.

For Nancy, we are ourselves responsible for existence, and evil is nothing other than the refusal of this categorical responsibility. Evil always comes down to a denial of existence, of the finite and shared condition to which we are exposed. In 'Responding for existence', Nancy returns to the question of freedom, evil and responsibility. Because the entities or totalizing systems that formerly took responsibility out of our hands have vanished, our responsibility is more real than ever. Such responsibility is what constitutes our existence (Nancy 1999, 2). The existence we are exposed to confronts us with the command to be responsible. The command to literally do justice to our existence is what Nancy also calls a *law without law* ('*loi sans loi*') or a *right before all rights* ('*a droit avant tout droit*'), a criterion for all criteria. This command is all the more pressing in a time where we are, as it were, confronted with a communal space, with a *naked* world that comprises our existence. Responsibility constitutes our *being* and since being is always *being-in-common*, it is comprised just as much of others and of the world. It always has a place in a shared space.

Our existential responsibility does not offer any guidelines as to how we should act. Rather, it resides very concretely in the way existence cannot shut itself off again in some moral or political project that relieves us of all forms of responsibility (Nancy, 1999). We must always be answerable to existence, to others and to the world. Nancy suggests that this would be the place to develop an ethics, although he never goes beyond this mere suggestion (Nancy, 2003, 17-18). In Nancy (1994, 257-261), he again points to this

being without measure, to the incalculable character of responsibility and duty. Since we *are* always already *there*, we cannot, as an open ek-sistence, deny this responsibility. The ontological elaboration of freedom thus entails an *engagement*, a practical freedom. As an event of singular plural existence, freedom is an affair or '*à faire*' of existence. The facticity of Dasein and freedom is not that of causality or an established fact; it is the facticity of what is to be done, of *praxis* (Nancy, 2001, 85-113, 2003, 172-195). Freedom is the finite affair of existence and in this way is identical to the disclosive character of existence.

It is not that, by anchoring freedom in this ontological condition, ontic violence between people or conflicts between different freedoms can be avoided. The initial relation towards others, implied by freedom, does not provide us with a ready-made morality or politics of freedom, and even less does it instruct us when and how we must respect the other. *Finite* freedom is simply that which makes it possible to respect or disrespect the other because freedom always takes place in-common, freedom always presupposes relationality. Freedom exists only *as* relationality and this relationality is nothing other than the fact of being both *shared* and *divided* in common, in being singular plural. Freedom does not precede existence but is itself the event of an always re-occurring 'free' coming into being. Freedom, according to Nancy, shares ('*partager*') existence as relationality. Freedom is not a free public space preceding existence. It takes place only as in-common and thus plural and the in-common takes place only as freedom.

For both Arendt and Nancy it is beyond dispute that a public space must guarantee the many-sidedness between people and our concern and responsiveness for the world where freedom, plurality, relationality and the orientation towards others are pivotal. Nevertheless, their different ontological and political stances spring from their varying historical context. Although they both countenance a Heideggerian frame of reference and its concomitant responsibility for Being, and while they both claim that politics has to become a site of detotalization (Nancy, 2002, 21), Arendt responds to the modern loss of traditions due to the totalitarian devastation, while Nancy, not less concerned about totalitarianism, is dealing with the contemporary call for a substantial community and the political dangers of this.

In a sense, we could argue that Nancy's approach forms an addition to Arendt's view on public space. It is not another politics, a new political philosophy or a reinvented public space that Nancy has in mind. Rather, he concentrates on the question of the *social*, the question of the ontological condition in which we find ourselves and the implications of this ontology for every form of being-with. This questioning is far broader than the question of politics in the strict sense of the word, and also precedes day-to-day politics. Nancy's focus on the social comes partially from his uneasiness with the fact that, now that the political has retreated, contemporary politics has become limited to a purely moral defense of human rights in the context of an international community. Rather than acquiescing with the status quo, the problem of community demands more profound reflection.

NANCY AND DERRIDA

For Nancy, since today our basic conditions of living together are no longer evident or clear, we should first of all think existence as such. Even more important is the contemporary forgetfulness of politics' major and central presupposition, namely, our co-existential stance. Nancy's broader goal is to put the social-ontological presupposition on the political agenda in order to delineate the conditions that make political acting and speech possible and to make us attentive to our archi-responsibility for these fundamental conditions, anchored in our 'being with-here'. Clearly, the task of a political philosopher is not to set up a political agenda, such as also Derrida claims, but to understand and reinvent what the political means for us today. Despite this convergence, Derrida (2005, 304) criticizes Nancy's view on community, on being-together and on the concept of 'community' *tout court*, for it would indicate a fraternal being-together, a collective identity and well-defined 'we' (Borren, 2008, 62-78).

We disagree with Derrida because he seems to confuse difference (in difference we are together/being together in difference) with plurality (in togetherness we are different/being different in togetherness); and secondly, he seems to link this contested politics of fraternity to Nancy's notion of social ontology, as if the being-together indicates a 'natural', familiar bond between human beings. We do not interpret Nancy's co-ontology as an intimate, communal, fraternal bond, but as a fundamental directedness towards others that urges us to rethink our political stance and to deal with the paradox of being at the same time different and equal in public space (Borren, 2008). For Derrida this is not a paradox but an aporia, an indecisiveness that constitutes his quite fruitless view on politics as 'always to come'. It is a community that can be called 'worldless' in Arendt's words, because it remains to come and therefore cannot indicate a responsibility for the world nor an *amor mundi*. Where Derrida seems primordially interested in our care for the fundamental Other, Arendt and Nancy are fundamentally interested in our care for the world. A politics based on the latter concept leads to a fundamental being-together that safeguards politics from any form of annihilation of a public common space, be it in its totalitarian version as never possible or in its Derridian manner as always to come.

CONCLUSION

In what way does Nancy's notion of responsibility fit with Arendt's thought concerning public space and plurality? Is his notion capable of countering Arendt's failure to recognize the social in her political theory of action? If we think less of public space as a construction where commonness or community is created, as Arendt does, and consider our being immediately as being together, our responsibility for these others becomes more fundamentally intertwined with our socio-ontological stance, with being-with itself, for it is not restricted to the political domain. As a result, the social would equally have political significance and should therefore be put on a political agenda. In this way, we can deal with the critique passed on Arendt's notion of public space as being bitterly empty because devoid of all sociality. Putting Nancy on the bench of Arendt's public space would therefore mean a broadening of its content and a deepening of our responsibility.

The revolutionary force of Nancy's theory is revealed in the elaboration of a fundamental ontological responsibility. On the one hand it counters individualism out from the conception of being as always already singular plural; on the other hand, it deals with the risk of totalitarian being-together because the boundaries of public space are not thought as a collapse with sharing an essence or an origin, but as something which is every time again singular and temporarily. To Nancy, responsibility is profoundly impregnated in existence as such and goes beyond the boundaries of a constructed political space.

For us, responsibility for others and the world is as important on a political level, as on a social and private level. We would not claim that Arendt misrecognizes the importance of our responsibility as private or social beings, but her idea that public space must be 'created' leads to a notion of responsibility that is only relevant when it is revealed in a political public scene as divided from our being in the private and social scene. In other words, although we have to take up our responsibility on a private or social level, for Arendt, this only receives its significance from a political perspective.

Therefore, we claim the need to rethink the political in democracy out from the question of our being-together. Nancy points the urgent need to reconsider political action and speech, in order to guard politics from a totalitarian destruction of plurality and being-togetherness. On the other hand, we could question Nancy's concrete or practical political significance or the degree of utopia in his political theory on public space (Wagner, 2006:89-109 and Norris,2000:272-297), albeit, as also Derrida claims, that the goal or task of a political philosopher is not to set up a political agenda, but to understand and reinvent what the political means for us today. The possible application of Nancy's ontology in a concrete political practice, asks, however, for another article.

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