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Save the Appearances! Toward an Arendtian Environmental Politics

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Drawing critical resources from Hannah Arendt, this article argues for a revaluation of the appearances of nature in environmental political theory and practice. At a time when pervasive anthropogenic contamination threatens the very survival of vulnerable communities and species, it would be wrong to revive the timeworn mythos of nature as an untrammeled beauty. Instead, with Arendt's help, I advocate an environmental politics rooted in an alternative aesthetic of nature, one that respects and seeks to protect earth's diverse lifeforms for the sake of their strange, disquieting appearances of otherness. Earth's living displays of alterity are valuable, I argue, for their propensity to upset the destructive logic of mass production and consumption and spur political action. In an Arendtian frame, we can better recognize interdependence between biological and political life and appreciate the role of nonhuman lifeforms in constituting spaces of appearance where human freedom and plurality may flourish.

Admiration for the appearances of nature no longer plays as significant a role in environmental political thinking and organizing as it once did. The conservationist movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was, as J. Baird Callicott (2008) puts it, "motivated by aesthetic rather than ethical values, by beauty instead of duty" (106). Modern environmentalism, by contrast, is motivated more by fear of death and extinction—and the duty to protect life—than desire for aesthetic experience. We can see this shift in emphasis, from appearances to survival, in environmental writing from each period: where conservationist icons like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Robert Marshall celebrated the beauty and sublimity of earth's (ostensibly) untouched wilderness,[1] modern environmentalist standard bearers, such as Rachel Carson ([1962] 2002), Bill McKibben (1989), and Elizabeth Kolbert (2014), recast "the environment" as a place where frightening contamination lurks beneath the alluring surfaces. Environmental justice advocates have made these life-or-death stakes particularly clear, from Wilbur L. Thomas Jr.'s 1970 speech, "Black Survival in Our Polluted Cities," to Elizabeth Yeampiere's recent comparison between air pollution and police assaults on Black lives (Gardiner 2020).[2] Climate change further raises these stakes; as youth activist Greta Thunberg (2018) pleas, "our lives are in your hands." This evolution from the pleasures of stunning landscapes to the duty to save lives is laudable. Certainly, it would be misguided to revive Romantic reverence for the "pure esthetic rapture" of supposedly undefiled wilderness (Marshall 1930, 145), an aesthetic that obscures the deadly reality of impure air and water and reinforces longstanding erasures of and violence toward Indigenous peoples.[3] Why, then, shouldn't environmentalists jettison aesthetics and devote our activism and scholarship more wholly to matters of survival? Why push, as this article will, for appearances to matter more, not less, in environmental politics?

My answer, in brief, is that nature's appearances have worth beyond beauty or sublimity, and greater attention to certain other aspects of aesthetic experience in the theory and practice of environmental politics would better serve the flourishing of both biological and political life. The problematic legacy of Romantic nature aesthetics is best displaced by an environmentalism that would revalue, not devalue, nature's appearances. This article advocates an environmental politics rooted in an alternative aesthetic, one that looks to earth as a precious and generous giver of strange, disquieting spectacles of otherness. This turn from beauty to alterity is a way of augmenting, not abandoning, the duty to protect life on earth, for the sheer variety, oddity, and spontaneity of life's appearances are distinctively well-suited to surprise, disturb, and animate onlookers. Earth's spectacles of life are valuable, I maintain, for their potential to upset the destructive logic of mass production and consumption and awaken relish for the degraded political experience of freedom. In other words, survival is not the only value at stake in modern environmentalism's quest to save lives: biological life, in its manner of appearing, also plays a role in the flourishing of political life.

Perhaps surprisingly, I find provocations to rethink the politics of earth's appearances and resources for inquiring into the political value of biological life in the work of Hannah Arendt. Arendt almost never thematizes the life-threatening strains on earth's ecosystems

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[1] On ideals of beauty and sublimity in the conservation movement, see Grusin (2004), Nash (2014), Oelschlaeger (1991), and Payne (1996).

[2] As Chad Montrie (2018) shows, environmental health movements by workers and people of color began in the nineteenth century, predating Carson's *Silent Spring.*

[3] For this reason, even Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune (2020) seeks to dethrone Club cofounder Muir, whose ideology of untrammeled nature he critiques as a "very dangerous idea" that shows "willful ignorance" about harm to Indigenous peoples. On the imbrications between conservationism and settler colonialism, see Cronon (1995, 79, 82), Solnit (2014, 294–308), and Spence (1999).

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that environmentalists started to publicize during her lifetime.[4] These omissions are not even the most challenging impediment to drawing her into a reconsideration of appearances in environmental politics. Moreover, she often depicts the freedom and plurality of political action in opposition to the monotonous, cyclical necessities of "life itself," her term of art for the metabolic and reproductive processes that sustain life on earth. "Life itself" was never meant to appear, she argues, and political life is threatened when "life itself" is forced into public view, as under the massified social conditions created by capitalism. Arendt's antipathy toward the politicization of "life itself" and her underlying conceptual distinction between "earth," as the site of biological cyclicality, and "the world," as the artificial home for politics, have convinced many readers that an Arendtian environmentalism would be a nonstarter (e.g., Connolly 2019, 3–5, 42; and Swift 2009, 136).

Yet I recover a more complicated conception of life from Arendt and show how it may be creatively elaborated to foster an appearances-first rethinking of environmental politics. Arendt is deeply protective toward life on earth and appreciatively awestruck at the fecundity of "life itself," even as she fears the consequences for politics when this fecundity is misappropriated by mass production processes. Furthermore, my reading reveals, she recognizes that there is *more* to life than the processes of "life itself." Particularly in *The Life of the Mind*, but also at key junctures in earlier works, Arendt expresses fascination with the seemingly superfluous diversity, morphological changeability, and alterity of life's appearing surfaces. Arendt's comments on the aesthetics of nature are neither systematic nor sustained, but I show them to consistently affirm the surprising generativity, peculiarity, and novelty of life's appearances, by contrast with the repetitious sameness she associates with the hidden organs of metabolism and reproduction. Building on Arendt's appreciation for the ways that biological and political life each reveal their vibrancy by appearing, I identify a crucial role for earth's diverse lifeforms in constituting spaces of appearance in which human freedom may flourish. My call to "save the appearances" presses environmentalists to inculcate receptivity toward and gratitude for earth's strange spectacles of life and to embrace a duty to augment the alterity that appears in nature with the plurality that appears in political action.

My turn to Arendt to theorize the value to politics of earth's aesthetic liveliness builds on a small subliterature of works on Arendtian environmentalism, beginning with Kerry H. Whiteside's (1998) pathbreaking article and extending through my own recent book (Ephraim 2018, 34–67; see also Bowring 2014; Cannavò 2014; Szerszynski 2003; Voice 2013).[5] But this article calls into question an assumption that pervades this literature and that my earlier work reinforced—namely, the view that the Arendtian earth is valuable primarily insofar as its cyclical, predictable regularities approximate the politically stabilizing durability of the Arendtian world. Framings of Arendtian environmentalism that domesticate earth's value to the qualities of humanly constructed, worldly artifacts misleadingly suggest that art preservation would be the appropriate model for environmental protections; as Bronislaw Szerszynski (2003) puts it, "environmentalism can be seen as the extension of culture to nature, the granting of worldliness to earth" (210). "Granting worldliness" to earth risks extinguishing, in the name of preserving, the *un*-world-like spontaneity, irregularity, and changeability that Arendt, I argue here, notices and cherishes in earth's spectacles of life.[6] Attending to Arendt's affirmations of life's shape-shifting displays helps me to theorize the involvement of nonhuman lifeforms in animating political life without miscasting nature as either a stabilizing ground for human agency, as Arendtian environmentalists tend to do, or as a source of agency in its own right, as new materialists tend to do.[7] From my idiosyncratic Arendtian perspective, the freedom that enlivens human politics is intimately interdependent with, but irreducible to, the spontaneous penchant to appear that characterizes biological life.[8]

My argument begins by revisiting Arendt's earth–world and labor–work–action distinctions, revealing how an ethos of gratitude toward earth's gifts of life both complements and complicates her efforts to protect the world as a sanctuary for politics. A second section reconstructs Arendt's critique of capitalism for eroding the differences between earth and world, and imperiling political freedom and plurality, by

[4] Arendt's ([1975] 2003) one explicit mention of environmentalism affirms "the recent sudden awakening to the threats to our environment" as a "first ray of hope" in redressing the "huge economy of waste" (262). But she seems to await a *second* ray of hope to protect "the world we live in" from the waste economy (262).

[5] Among Arendtian environmentalists, Anne Chapman (2007) best anticipates my turn to Arendt to revalue the alterity of earth: "the givenness of life" is one of several "ways that nature matters" in her reading of Arendt (441). But she specifically excludes nature's appearances from these gifts of givenness, arguing that our spectatorship imposes cultural constructions upon them: "We make them part of our world by paying attention to them" (437). By contrast, my reading of Arendt emphasizes the limits of our power to assimilate earth's alterity into the familiarity of the world's artifice.

[6] The "stereotypic" pacing of zoo animals is one example of how life's spontaneity is endangered by protectively containing it in museum-like settings, on the model of art (Pierce and Bekoff 2017, 1–30). On the other hand, the violent resistance of animals to such containment suggests the resilience of this spontaneity (Hribal 2010).

[7] My reading of Arendt thus contributes to recent efforts to theorize a more active role for nonhuman beings and matter in environmental politics (e.g., Alaimo 2010; Bennett 2010; Latour 2004; and Morton 2013) while resisting their tendency to flatten important differences between human and nonhuman beings by attributing "agency" qua efficacy to them all.

[8] Ella Myers (2013) similarly emphasizes the "dense interplay" among human and nonhuman beings in her Arendt-inspired conception of care for the world (129–30). But she sees this interplay as a reason to reject Arendt's earth–world distinction. My Arendt-inspired environmental politics couples care for the world with care for the earth while maintaining and refining Arendt's earth–world distinction in order to highlight and demand renewed respect for the distinctive alterity of the earth's unmade life-forms.

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unnaturally accelerating the metabolic and reproductive processes of "life itself." Extending and amending her critique, I show how a "waste economy" driven by fossil fuels mutually endangers both biological and political life. Third, I begin to elaborate a more complex view of life by excavating insights into its aesthetic qualities from Arendt. By attending to recurrent comparisons in her corpus between appearances of biological life and political action, I clarify and augment her underdeveloped discussion of the "intrinsic worth" of life's self-displays in *The Life of the Mind.* Fourth, I illuminate that text's provocative affirmation of life's "sheer entertainment value" through a close reading of Arendt's critique of the entertainment industry in "The Crisis in Culture." I recover from this essay standards of judgment by which I evaluate both the political risks of mass entertainment and the political promise of life's entertaining spectacles. Finally, my conclusion sketches the contours of an Arendtian environmental politics devoted to receiving, protecting, and imitating earth's appearances.

EARTH'S GIFTS OF LIFE

Arendt is an incisive critic of the material and political consequences of the changing relationship between human activity and earthly nature under capitalism. Yet her works are more vocally concerned about the dangers of these changes to the artificial world than to life on earth. Arendt may even sound misguidedly sanguine when she writes of "the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man," "providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice" (Arendt [1958] 1998, 7, 2; hereafter HC). One waits in vain for her to go on to mourn the deterioration of these basic conditions, to call for a more life-sustaining relationship with earth's habitats, or to address the conditions of life for earth's nonhuman species. But though Arendt largely overlooks the precarity of life as it is "given" on earth, she recognizes earth's givens to be *gifts*, and she insists on the planetary and political importance of this recognition. Arendt's well-known ethos of love of the world is coupled with an ethos of gratitude for earth's gifts of life, including astonishment at the incredible fecundity of "life itself." Although Arendt saw more in life than the metabolic and reproductive processes of "life itself," as later portions of this paper demonstrate, *even* her appraisal of "life itself" holds unlocked potential for environmental political thinking.

"Life itself" is something we cannot make, and Arendt warns us in *The Human Condition* not to try. She lambasts "scientific endeavors … toward making life also 'artificial,' toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature" (HC, 2). Biotechnology could backfire, destroying "life itself" in the quest to create it, but more is at stake here than fear of death: Arendt encourages appreciation for the given as such, casting "human existence as it is given" as "a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking)" (HC, 2–3). The earth exists despite the fact that no one (not even a god) made it, and Arendt pronounces it good—a generous gift—that it exists. She is dismayed at those who hope that the launch of Sputnik could herald mankind's "escape" from earth, as though our dependence on its gifts were a form of imprisonment (HC, 1). Instead, we should see our inhabitation of this planet as an awe-inspiring "infinite improbability," as she elaborates in "What is Freedom?": "Our whole existence rests, after all, on a chain of miracles, as it were—the coming into being of the earth, the development of organic life on it, the evolution of mankind out of the animal species" (Arendt [1961] 2006b, 168; hereafter WF). Contrasting with the anxious tone of contemporary environmentalism, fear of death is less prominent in Arendt's comments on earth than appreciation for the miracle ("secularly speaking") of life's existence. As she puts it in a different context, "there is such a thing as basic gratitude for everything that is as it is; for what has been given and was not, could not be, *made*" (Arendt [1963] 1964, 53–4).[9] The environmental political theory that I will be developing in dialogue with Arendt seeks to understand the complexities of what it means to cherish the earth's unmade gifts and to consider what can go wrong when human communities become unreceptive to them.

Arendt never lets us forget that "life itself" depends on earthly realities that defy the intentions and designs stamped by human makers on the artificial world. Where making pursues instrumental or aesthetic goals, the unmade phenomena of earth move through changing material states by virtue of intentionless forces, which Arendt calls "nature": "It is characteristic of all natural processes that they come into being without the help of man, and those things are natural which are not 'made' but grow by themselves into whatever they become" (HC, 150). She figures earth's generosity in terms of unrelenting fertility: natural processes continually cause life to grow, develop, extinguish, and decompose, thereby fostering further birth and growth. Unlike life's miraculous origins, these ongoing processes of replacing lost life with more life are not particularly—certainly not infinitely—improbable. They unfold in repetitive patterns, allowing a degree of prediction and control by those with a maker's mentality. But the remarkable generativity of "life itself," its propensity to quantitatively exceed itself through growth and multiplication, is like an echo of the astonishing event that first brought life into existence. We may hear this echo faintly in the very etymology of "survival," which, as Bonnie Honig (drawing on Jacques Derrida) notes, evokes life's tendency toward excess: *sur vive*, more life (Honig 2009, 10; see also Maxwell 2017). It echoes, too, in Arendt's efforts to remind us of our reliance on processes that exceed our creative powers.

[9] Arendt writes here of the givenness of her Jewish identity, a reminder that "life itself" does not exhaust the category of the given.

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Our dependence on earth's unmade givens to *sur vive* binds us to the rest of nature's children, a kinship born of having been born or otherwise grown into being. Human beings are, if anything, the most involved, hands-on of nature's progeny, for our "metabolism with nature" is intensified by the distinctively human activity of labor.[10] When we cultivate, harvest, and consume, we move with, not against, nature's cyclical, life-giving motions. Laborers are, for Arendt, quite literally forces *of* nature: as "Marx's consistent naturalism" enabled him to discover, "'labor power'" is "the specifically human mode of the life force" (HC, 108). The givenness that Arendt associates with earth, unlike the Romantic mythos of untouched wilderness, is not abrogated by contact with human activity: labor, our "metabolism" with nature, always already participates in the earth's processes. Far from sanctioning a view of "the environment" as a reality originally or ideally apart from human activity, Arendt describes labor as our intimate interinvolvement with life on earth, "the human way to experience the sheer bliss of being alive, which we share with all living creatures," and an "elemental happiness" that confirms for us the reality and goodness of life on earth (HC, 106, 108). "Life itself" is neither an end nor a means —"the very distinction … does not make sense" when it comes to purposeless processes (HC, 145). But "life itself" is good, not merely necessary, because it is given.

"The world," on the other hand, is Arendt's name for phenomena that were not given by earth but made "by human hands," the activity she calls "work." This difference between the principles of origination of earth and world, respectively, creates some unavoidable tensions between them. Workers destroy earth's givens to create raw materials for their constructions, as a tree, for example, must be taken "out of nature's hands" to build a table, whereas an apple harvested in labor is "given back to her in the swift course" of metabolism (HC, 100). Once made, worldly things are in danger of being reabsorbed into earth's life-giving processes of growth and decay. Even a well-constructed table will eventually rejoin the apple in the soil: "Life is a process that everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear" (HC, 96). As Arendt describes these tensions, she reserves her advocacy primarily for the world, but not from any lack of gratitude for earth's gifts of life. Rather, precisely because she admires nature's astonishing power to create, decay, and regenerate ever more life—*sur vive* —she sees the worldly artifice as the underdog in their antagonisms. The world, not the earth, *requires* "the help of man," both to come into being and to *last.*

Arendt's selective advocacy reflects not a devaluation of earth, then, but a peculiarity in her evaluation of the world: human artifacts are *politically* valuable not for their utility but for their potential longevity. "If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men. Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm is possible" (HC, 55). The world provides a quasi-permanent *inter-est*, or in-between, around which plural men and women may assemble across time and space to address themselves to matters of common, enduring concern (HC, 182). The durable world allows for the emergence of a "space of appearances" where human beings may reveal the utter uniqueness of their characters by undertaking and collectively carrying through action (HC, 175–88).[11] Insofar as the processes of "life itself" are permitted to "disappear" the durable world, their remarkable generativity diminishes space for action, the most political of Arendt's trifecta of human activities.

Arendt describes action as an expression of "the faculty of freedom itself, the sheer capacity to begin" (WF, 167). For freedom to spill forth in inaugural bursts of action, the world must stay put, resisting nature's own irruptive, life-giving, but table-destroying tendencies. Political actors require a durable worldly milieu much as dancers need a floor: the spontaneity and ephemerality of the performance presupposes a stable material context. And for freedom thus enacted to be remembered requires memorialization in enduring works. Grateful though Arendt is for earth's unmade gifts of life, she also considers it a political responsibility to take from earth to make a world and to protect the world's artificial fixity against processes of growth and decay. For the sake of politics, Arendt asks us to be conservationists not of the earth—whose dynamic fecundity is not susceptible to "protection" qua preservation in any case—but of the world. Earth gives our bodies life, but it gives the world grief, rotting and overgrowing its timbers. Unless we protect the world against "the natural ruin of time" (HC, 55), this artificial sanctuary for freedom will fall into the churning processes of "life itself," depriving human plurality—the fact that women and "men, not man, live on the earth and inhabit the world"—of a stage on which to appear (HC, 7).

THE WASTE ECONOMY

In light of these tensions between the fecundity of "life itself" and the stability of the world, we can better construe some environmental implications of Arendt's critical evaluation of capitalism. She warns that the techniques and orientations of mass production hasten "the natural ruin of time," deteriorating the world and depriving freedom of its artificial environment. Arendt makes this argument with and against Marx. On her reading, he was the first to grasp the internal connection between "laboring and begetting as two modes of the same fertile life process" and to recognize how capitalism exploits that connection:

[10] Words Arendt borrows from Marx, e.g., HC, 98.

[11] On the interdependence between political action and the products of work, see Markell (2011).

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> The true meaning of labor's newly discovered productivity becomes manifest only in Marx's work, where it rests on the equation of productivity with fertility, so that the famous development of mankind's "productive forces" into a society of an abundance of "good things" actually obeys no other law and is subject to no other necessity than the aboriginal command, "Be ye fruitful and multiply," in which it is as though the voice of nature herself speaks to us. (HC, 106)

Weaving together strands from Marx, Arendt theorizes capitalism as the organization of labor's astonishing fecundity to enable the accumulation of wealth. Capital, in this view, is surplus fertility, the excess begotten by labor and left over after laborers have metabolized what they need for sustenance and reproduction. Life begets more life, *sur vive*; capitalism builds machines to maximize the self-multiplicative potential of "life itself," converting this biological *sur* into appropriable surplus value. It transforms the world into such a machine, grinding down the bodies of individual laborers while accelerating and venerating the forces of life that they embody.

Applying this idiosyncratic Marxist critique to her own earth–world distinction, Arendt warns of terrible consequences for the world of this "unnatural growth, so to speak, of the natural" (HC, 47). Capitalism makes nature's "aboriginal command" to fruitfully multiply into the organizing principle of every aspect of the human condition, including work, the world it builds, and the politics this world houses. At this point, Arendt becomes critical, too, of Marx: lacking a distinction between labor and work, he fails to recognize how capitalism's acceleration of the metabolic and reproductive processes of "life itself" endangers the world. This danger emerges as capitalists learn to overcome a primary impediment to wealth accumulation: how to ensure that consumption is as boundless as production? "The solution … consists in treating all use objects as though they were consumer goods, so that a chair or a table is now consumed as rapidly as a dress and a dress used up almost as quickly as food" (HC, 124). Mass production requires mass consumption, which in turn requires making products to be "used up" so that even tables are consumed in a quasi-metabolic fashion. This "solution" thus creates a catastrophic problem: "Our whole economy has become a waste economy, in which things must be almost as quickly devoured and discarded as they have appeared in the world" (HC, 134). Capitalism's artificial acceleration of natural processes spells ruin to the worldly "in-between," melting all that is solid—the proverbial table—into the churning digestive and reproductive materiality of "life itself."

This crisis of durability is also catastrophic for politics, Arendt warns. When everything is made to be "devoured and discarded," nothing stands firmly enough to gather us into a common world. The spaces and occasions for actors to make their appearances are diminished and any actions that are undertaken cannot be memorialized, so their meaning dies with their witnesses. People in this condition would have nothing in common but a process: the intensified metabolization of their increasingly consumable surroundings. This fellowship of stomachs is what Arendt calls "society," "the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public" (HC, 46). As this quote suggests, Arendt's concern about consumer society has a lot to do with how it looks: "life itself" isn't fit for public appearance because it is almost boring in its sameness, by contrast with the revelation of each person's uniqueness and the plurality of the human condition in political action. When metabolism appears in public, plurality disappears, "as though individual life had actually been submerged in the over-all life process of the species" (HC, 322). Instead of organizing diverse men and women across difference, as the world once did, mass production and consumption organize mass society, where individuals appear more as specimens. The waste economy's artificial acceleration of "life itself" is fatal to political life.

Arendt distinguishes between earth and world, then, not because she naïvely believes the differences between the given and the made to be irrevocable but on the contrary to mark as the crisis of our time the planet's transformation into a new and treacherous hybrid. In some respects, her alarms anticipate contemporary discussions of the Anthropocene, a term borrowed from stratigraphy to theorize the impossibility of distinguishing between natural processes and human activity when the latter has itself become a force of nature.[12] But where the Anthropocene literature is sensitive to the diminished prospects for biological life under these circumstances, the question of political life is far less prominent than it appears in an Arendtian frame. Freedom and plurality cannot survive when "life itself" is all that matters: this is the knife's edge of Arendt's critique of capitalism and a good starting point from which to develop an Arendtian environmentalism. But Arendt is insufficiently attentive to the risks to "life itself" under conditions of mass production and consumption; she even estimates it to be "quite probable" that the waste economy will "reliably and limitlessly provide the species man-kind with the necessities of life," even if it "may very well destroy the world qua world as human artifice" (HC, 152). Arendt did not see that biological life is *also* imperiled by capitalism's veneration and acceleration of "life itself." While she recognized the mortal threat of nuclear technology (Arendt 2005, 105–14), the dangers of fossil fuels—the raw material for plastic and the primary energy source for the waste economy—evaded her attention.

Still, redeploying Arendt's concepts of earth and world can help bring to light the mutual endangerment of biological and political life under carbon capitalism. This mode of production and consumption renders the earth–world distinction even more plastic—pun

[12] For a recent intriguing reading of Arendt as a proto-Anthropocenic thinker, see Hyvönen (2020).

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intended—than Arendt recognized. She took for granted that consumption contradicts durability, but mass-produced plastic goods are dangerous precisely because they are both durable *and* consumable. We toss plastic cutlery and lunch scraps into the same bin, but only the food bits will "return into the natural process which yielded them" (HC, 96). The plastic bits will outlast many wooden tables, but that does not mean they provide an enduring in-between where a space of appearances may coalesce. Disposable plastics *dis*appear after they are used up, ideally to be recycled, but often to become landfill or drift into the ocean. There, they deteriorate without decomposing, out of sight, but not out of body: many lifeforms carry invisible plasticine body-burdens, particles in the stomach and persistent organic pollutants absorbed, but not metabolized, by the body. Invisibly permanent, plastic waste worsens the prospects for both earthly sustainability and worldly durability, undermining both biological and political life.

Anthropogenic climate change also erodes the differences between the Arendtian earth and world, harming each in ways that Arendt did not anticipate. Fossil fuels are among earth's unmade gifts, created hundreds of millions of years ago as tremendous geological pressure transformed decaying sea life into petroleum and coal. When this naturally compacted energy is extracted and burned to power the waste economy, an "unnatural growth of the natural" gas carbon dioxide accumulates in the atmosphere, trapping solar heat and skewing the climate. Consequently, many of earth's formerly cyclical, predictable processes are prone to dramatic interruptions: cities and ecosystems flooded or burned, extreme weather events to be written in the newly combined annals of natural and political history. These events destroy not only biological life but also the stable material context in which action thrives and may be remembered. As I emphasize elsewhere, politics becomes dangerously wobbly when we can no longer depend on either the regularity of the seasons or the durability of buildings (Ephraim 2018, 133–4). Bruno Latour (2017) argues that the earth itself has become a political actor under the tremendous pressures of carbon capitalism (59–63), but in an Arendtian frame, climatic events seem more like action's inverse, revealing not human freedom and uniqueness but rather the awesome unintended consequences of mass behavior—spectacles of mortality, not natality, that are paralyzing in their sublimity.

Clearly, Arendt lacked prescience with her confidence that the waste economy probably would not undermine human life on earth. But her own categories of earth and world can be refashioned as corrective lenses to clarify how "life itself" and political life decline in tandem when mass production and consumption cause the cousins, earth and world, to become more like twins. A disposable, wobbly world cannot sustain political life any more than a polluted, warming earth can sustain biological life. In this sense, my reading of Arendt adds responsibility for a second domain to environmentalism's agenda, coupling care for earth's biological life with care for the world's political life. Together, this pair of imperatives pushes us to decelerate production and consumption, reduce reliance on fossil fuels and plastics, and otherwise dismantle the machinery of the waste economy. At a minimum, reading Arendt alongside contemporary environmental crises adds urgency to existing movements against carbon capitalism by showing that, along with survival, political values like freedom and plurality are at stake.

GIVING LIFE A SECOND LOOK

But we cannot stop there. The notion I just floated of two separate items on environmentalism's agenda—one biological and earthly, the other political and worldly—too quickly discounts the possibility that biological life could itself contribute to sustaining political life. What, if anything, do earth's gifts of life give to politics? Could it be that the enabling conditions of possibility for freedom and plurality include not only a durable world but also a vibrant earth?

It might seem that we would need to part ways with Arendt to open an inquiry into the political value of biological life. As we have seen, she defines the freedom and spontaneity of politics in contrast to the cyclicality and necessity of "life itself" and fears the consequences of admitting metabolic and reproductive processes into public life. But we should not assume on this basis that she reduces all of life to "life itself." In the remaining pages, I draw out of Arendt a more nuanced view of life, one that embraces both the survival value of "life itself" and the aesthetic value of life's appearing surfaces. Foregrounding several important but underdeveloped—and oft-neglected—passages from *The Life of the Mind*, I use them as a retrospective spotlight to illuminate currents of thinking about the aesthetics of nature running just under the surface of her prior works. This interpretive strategy shows that Arendt is impressed not only by life's quantitative powers of growth and multiplication but also by life's tangible qualities, the surfeit of sights, sounds, tastes, textures, and smells given to our senses by earth's diverse lifeforms. Much as Honig finds in Derrida (and finds lacking in Arendt) a second kind of *sur vive*, a "surprise extra, the gift that exceeds rightful expectations, the surplus that exceeds causality" (Honig 2009, 10), I find in Arendt a qualitative version of the *sur* that exceeds even the quantitative, self-multiplying excessiveness of "life itself." By tracing Arendt's recurrent comparisons between the appearances of life and of action—and augmenting her aesthetics of nature by drawing some connections she did not—in this section, we will be prepared, in the next, to inquire into the role of life's appearances in sustaining freedom and plurality in politics.

The passages we've considered from *The Human Condition* thus far have sensitized us to differences between earth and world, especially the processual growth and decay of the former versus the durability of the latter. The opening lines of *The Life of the Mind* draw attention to commonalities that cut across these

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differences: "The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs" (1978, 19; hereafter LM). Living organisms, for all their transience, share a purpose with the enduring artifacts of human work, Arendt asserts: they are meant to appear. And we, among other creatures, are meant to receive these appearances. Sentience is nature's way of bringing to fruition the potential to appear that inheres in all artificial and natural phenomena, granting them a "realness" they would otherwise lack (Ephraim 2018, 37–48). Biological life seems purposeless when understood in terms of repetitive processes of digestion and reproduction, as Arendt does elsewhere. But attending to the sense organs and the appearing surfaces of living bodies, as Arendt does here, reveals our involvement in a meaning-laden, interspecies quest "to see and be seen" (LM, 19).

Arendt sharpens this contrast between the monotony of biological processes and the meaning of biological surfaces with the help of the zoologist Adolf Portmann, who argues that surface organs have significance beyond their contributions to survival and reproduction:

> Portmann demonstrates with a great wealth of fascinating example, what should be obvious to the naked eye—that the enormous variety of animal and plant life, the very richness of display in its sheer functional *superfluity*, cannot be accounted for by the common theories that understand life in terms of functionality. Thus, the plumage of birds, "which, at first, we consider to be of value as a warm, protective covering, is thus in addition so formed that its visible parts—and these only—build up a coloured garment, the intrinsic worth of which lies solely in its visible appearance" (LM, 27–8).

While feathers serve the functions of "life itself" (e.g., catching food, staying warm, and attracting mates), their "intrinsic worth" as visible appearances exceeds this functionalist frame, for Arendt as for Portmann, whom she is quoting. They understand surface organs as participating simultaneously in two irreducible registers of value: form *and* function.[13] By contrast, Arendt argues, "the inside, the functional apparatus of the life process," lacks the formal appeal and variety of life's surfaces; as she notes wryly, it is difficult to distinguish individual bodies or even species "by the mere inspection of their intestines" (LM, 29). It is something of a mystery what, exactly, Arendt considers to be the "intrinsic worth" of life's appearances, but clearly she shares Portmann's fascination with the rich *variety* of the colors and shapes presented to our senses by the "visible parts" of earth's diverse organisms.

Looking back at *The Human Condition* from this vantage, it is easier to recognize that, even in a work where Arendt's focus is "life itself" (the need to sustain it, the risks of accelerating it), she still keeps an appreciative eye on life's aesthetic qualities. *The Human Condition* considers trees not only as raw material for tables but also as living, growing spectacles: "the tree *given in sight and touch*," Arendt writes, is "an entity in itself with an unalterable identical shape of its own" (HC, 282, my emphasis). Where tables are made to look the same over time, the tree is a shape shifter: "Unlike the products of human hands … the natural thing's existence is not separate but is somehow identical with the process through which it comes into being: the seed contains and, in a certain sense, already *is* the tree, and the tree stops being if the process of growth through which it came into existence stops" (HC, 150). The "unalterable identical shape" it presents to the senses at one moment immediately transforms through growth, decay, wind, and sun into a different, equally unalterable and self-identical shape—a new gift to the senses at every moment. The very processes that allow living organisms to grow in size and number (the quantitative dimension of *sur vive*, more life) also ensure that they will display, while alive, a superfluity of irreducibly unique colors, shapes, and textures (the qualitative *sur*).[14] Where human works are politically valuable for the stability and parsimony of their appearances, earth's gifts of life impress with their morphological changeability and diversity. Could life's aesthetic fecundity hold its own "intrinsic worth" for politics?

The Human Condition yields no easy answers, but it does invite comparison between the modes of appearance of earthly life and political action, respectively. Arendt's term of art for the inaugural quality of human action, "natality," implicitly links action to "nature," whose "authentic meaning," comes "from its latin root *nasci*, to be born" (HC, 150). This link between the emergence of life in biological birth and the emergence of an actor into a space of appearances becomes explicit in one of *The Human Condition*'s best-known passages: "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" (HC, 176–7). Arendt's comparison establishes the revelatory, interruptive qualities not just of action, as is widely appreciated, but also of life and its physical disclosure in birth. She seems to shine her own retrospective spotlight on this passage, highlighting its significance for rethinking life beyond "life itself," when she draws the converse comparison in *The Life of the Mind*: "To be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display which answers the fact of one's own appearingness. Living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them" (21). The two passages connect the

[13] Arendt even experiments with subordinating function to form: "Could it not be that … the life process is there for the sake of appearances?" (LM, 27).

[14] At the same time, the process of evolution ensures that new species will continually emerge on earth and the "same" species will appear differently over time.

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spontaneity and freedom of action with the actorly self-displays of living beings, as Diego Rossello (2021) also notes in his study of the "animal condition" in Arendt.

We should neither over- nor underestimate the likeness Arendt is drawing between the appearances of life and of action: the natality of action has both a familiar and (more than Rossello allows) a foil in the self-displays of living bodies, as Arendt further clarifies in "What is Freedom?" There, she compares action's inaugural qualities not with the appearance of *a* life in birth but with the appearance of *life* tout court. Recall that Arendt views "the formation of organic life out of inorganic processes" as one of three "'infinite improbabilities'" on which existence depends, part of a "chain of miracles" that also includes the beginning of earth and the evolution of man (WF, 168). She theorizes the freedom of action as on a par with these cosmic marvels: "Every act … is a 'miracle'" (168). Like the process-shattering and reality-initiating moment when life emerged from no life, each action "breaks into the world as an 'infinite improbability'" (WF, 168; cf. HC, 177–8). If, as Arendt herself repeatedly suggests, the more mundane occurrences of bodies emerging in birth and shape-shifting in life *resemble* action, perhaps this is because they palpably remind us of the infinite improbabilities from which even inexorable processes originate. Recalling the metaphor I introduced earlier, it is as though life's ongoing appearances constitute a second kind of echo of the infinitely improbable moment when life first emerged, a more melodic reverberation than the steady drumbeat of life's quantitative self-multiplication. To extend Arendt's playfully paradoxical mathematics, we might say that life's appearances are *almost* infinitely improbable.

Almost, but not quite. Arendt still attributes the *infinite* improbability of action exclusively to human beings: "In the realm of human affairs, we know the author of the 'miracles.' It is men who perform them—men who because they have received the twofold gift of freedom and action can establish a reality of their own" (WF, 169). This is the "decisive difference" between the miracles responsible for biological versus political life: we *don't* know the author of the former. Life's unmade apparitions manifest givenness while leaving a conspicuously empty space where the giver would be. But this decisive difference still accommodates consonance between the freedom appearing in action and the givenness appearing in life. As Arendt explains in *The Human Condition*: "All organic life already shows variations and distinctions … but only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself… . In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings" (176). Arendt puts otherness ("the curious quality of *alteritas* possessed by everything that is"), distinctness, and uniqueness on a continuum as three different, though connected, *versions* of difference (176). Only human action reveals "who," rather than "what," the actor uniquely is, presenting in a single event both a new beginning *and* its beginner (HC, 178–80). But human and nonhuman life, without acting, still has the capacity to awaken our senses to the miraculous qualities of existence. Indeed, the unknowable enigma of life's unmade origins makes its ongoing "shows" of "variations and distinctions" particularly strange to behold, both beguiling and disquieting. Anticipating Arendt's provocative turn to Portmann in *The Life of the Mind* to affirm life's functionally superfluous aesthetic variety, her earlier work already asks us to hold two contrasting pictures of life to be true, though in tension: earthly life is *both* the monotonous metabolic necessity of "life itself" and *alteritas* incarnate, unbidden and unauthored and thus—as miracles go—all the more "curious."

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE?

What, then, is the "intrinsic worth" of earth's diverse displays of living alterity, and what is their significance for political values like freedom and plurality? Another passage from *The Life of the Mind* will inch us closer to an answer, but in terms that may create as much perplexity as they resolve: "Nothing perhaps is more surprising in this world of ours than the almost infinite diversity of its appearances, the sheer entertainment value of its views, sounds, and smells" (20). Could it really be that Arendt values life's appearances as *entertainment*, a term so strongly associated with triviality, conformity, and commodification that it would seem to devalue any phenomenon to which it is applied? "Entertainment" carries some of these negative connotations for Arendt herself, as we know from her critique of "the noisy futility of mass entertainment" in "The Crisis in Culture" (Arendt [1961] 2006a, 206; hereafter CC). There, she casts the consumption of entertainment as a metabolic process, more akin to feeding than freedom: "*Panis et circenses* truly belong together; both are necessary for life, for its preservation and recuperation" (CC, 202–3). Consistent with her broader concerns about capitalism's intensification of metabolism, Arendt laments mass society's "gargantuan appetites" for entertainment and warns that the entertainment industry, in its desperate efforts to fill them, will "ransack" culture for raw material (CC, 207). If we assume that the phenomenon of entertainment is coextensive with the mass-produced amusements critiqued in "The Crisis in Culture," then Arendt's affirmation of entertainment *value* in *The Life of the Mind* reads as an oxymoron, if not a cruel joke. Alternatively, if we read this affirmation as a provocation to suspend the familiar prejudices against entertainment and fundamentally rethink its scope and worth, and then look back at "The Crisis in Culture" and other works with this provocation in mind, this might help us to work with and beyond Arendt to construe whether, how, and why life's diverse appearances could hold value for politics. This section pursues the latter possibility.

Even in "The Crisis in Culture," Arendt neither reduces life to "life itself" nor reduces entertainment to the narcotizing products of the mass-entertainment industry. Considered carefully, her argument that our bodies hunger for both nutritive substances and entertaining spectacles posits a surprising aesthetic register

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within biological experience. Where bread fills empty stomachs, entertainment fills what Arendt calls "vacant time," "a hiatus in the biologically conditioned cycle of labor—in the 'metabolism of man with nature'" (CC, 205). "Life itself," in this view, contains its own hiatus, an opening within biological time that suspends, without disrupting, the metabolic cycles swirling around it, like an eye in the storm.[15] Although this essay's claim that life *needs* entertainment to fill this opening should not be equated with the claim in *The Life of the Mind* that life *provides* "entertainment value," in each case Arendt casts life as including aesthetic sensibilities that exceed, without escaping, the processes of "life itself."

And although Arendt disapproves of *mass* entertainment in "The Crisis in Culture," she also theorizes "entertainment" as a domain of value that precedes and exceeds its historically specific massification under capitalism. She has no patience for educated philistines, who value social advancement above all else, and therefore "despise entertainment and amusement, because no 'value' could be derived from it" (CC, 206). Far from denying the value of entertainment, Arendt teaches us how to evaluate it: "the standards by which both [food and entertainment] should be judged are freshness and novelty" (206). In other words, entertainment has standards of value that are *distinct* from culture, which should, by contrast, be judged by the worldly standards of beauty and longevity. The *crisis* in culture at the center of this essay is the perverse merger of these two, incommensurable value systems: mass society looks for freshness and novelty in culture, and the entertainment industry seeks to feed these appetites by tinkering with cultural works to make them easier to consume (207). Arendt's efforts to distinguish cultural value from entertainment value and her concerns about their conflation should not be misunderstood as repudiations of the value of entertainment per se.

Might massification also create a crisis *in entertainment*? How well do mass-produced entertainments satisfy Arendt's own "freshness and novelty" standards, and (drawing in concerns from *The Life of the Mind*) how do they compare with the "sheer entertainment value" of life's unmade self-displays? "The Crisis in Culture" begs without broaching such questions, for here Arendt is more concerned with prying entertainment apart from culture than with drawing comparative judgments among various forms of entertainment. Still, entertainment (and food) "*should* be judged," and so we shall, synthesizing and augmenting Arendt's insights. Like almost-identical loaves of Wonder Bread, exuding an artificial air of freshness after weeks on the shelf, mass entertainment repackages standardized images and storylines to convey a specious impression of novelty. By contrast, as Portmann's zoology suggests, "the sheer entertainment value" of earth's organisms consists in their astonishingly diverse profusion of colors and shapes—a novel entertainment with each flick of the feather. Perhaps this is why the entertainment industry, to feed mass society's enormous appetites, ransacks not only culture but also nature, borrowing from "its richness of display" while domesticating its alterity, as Arendt's example of circuses illustrates nicely. A diet of mass-produced bread and mass-produced entertainment might afford enough nutrition and recuperation to keep life minimally alive but not for it to thrive. Arendt's "freshness and novelty" standard in "The Crisis in Culture" sets a higher bar than mere survival, according value to some of the very aesthetic traits—the qualitative *sur vive*—that she goes on to associate with life's appearances in *The Life of the Mind.*

Working with these two texts to theorize life's special entertainment value enables us to push beyond the starting point for rethinking the phenomenon of entertainment that they provide. The analogy between nutrition and entertainment that Arendt draws in "The Crisis in Culture," with mass entertainment in mind, needs to be complicated to fully appreciate the value of earth's living entertainments. Crucially, organisms do not disappear when they are consumed as entertainment as they do when they are ingested as sustenance. Eating does entail much more than ingestion, providing occasions for those gathered around the dinner table to find entertainment value in the sights, smells, and tastes of their shared meal, but the "freshness and novelty" of food—and its sharedness—quickly dissipates once it is swallowed and dissolved into the familiarity of one's own flesh. Secreted into the digestive organs, food becomes, instead, a source of the "elemental happiness" that Arendt associates with metabolism, the pleasurable attunement of a satiated body to the forces of life coursing within itself. By contrast, the experience of being entertained by the sights, sounds, smells, and even tastes of life pulls the body out of this private loop and attunes it to something outside of and other to itself. This otherness, Arendt has helped us to notice, is enhanced by the mystery of life's authorless origins. The strangeness of the unmade tinges the entertainment value of life, provoking a startling, engrossing, salty-sweet mixture of fascination and can't-look-away apprehension. This strangeness differentiates the "freshness and novelty" of life's appearances from the familiarity of mass entertainment products, whose origins are all too familiar: no miracle, but the humanly constructed machinery of the waste economy. The freshness of life's unmade apparitions is alluring but disquieting; to consume life as entertainment both satisfies and animates.

Because earth's gifts of life may be received as entertainment without killing or disappearing them, they can entertain more than one spectator at the same time. Earth's lifeforms may appear *between* men and women, in the plural, opening a shared space of appearances. In this respect, as Whiteside and others emphasize, earth offers an approximation of the political value that Arendt attributes to the world: both artificial and natural phenomena may serve as objects of common interest, separating and connecting spectators. There is even an etymological connection to be drawn between

[15] By contrast, Arendt describes the "leisure time" devoted to culture as freedom *from* metabolism (CC, 205).

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the *inter-est*, or between-being, of the world and the entertainment—*inter-tenere*, or between-holding—of the earth. Reading Arendt through the lens of this etymology suggests that life's "entertainment value" consists, in part, in its potential to hold the mutual attention of plural spectators by cascading a succession of colors and shapes, each stranger than the last, before their senses. Extending an insight that Honig draws from Arendt and Donald Winnicott, we might say that earthly lifeforms, like worldly things, contribute to a "holding environment" where public life may thrive (Honig 2017, 37–57).

But the two betweens, world and earth, are not perfect analogs: where the "gift of things" for Arendt (and Winnicott and Honig) is "their capacity to provide the stability and durability necessary to the stable and durable relationships that constitute human flourishing" (Honig 2013, 61), earth's gifts of life refuse to hold still. If we were to hold earthly life to the same standards as worldly things, as existing studies of Arendtian environmentalism largely do, it would be difficult to see what, if anything, these entertaining wiggles stand to contribute to the flourishing of politics; we might even find ourselves wishing that birds and trees would be less entertaining and more stolid, like a well-made table. From a worldcentric vantage, the freshness and novelty of the earthly *inter tenere* looks, at best, like a poor substitute for the stability the worldly *inter est* provides to politics. Or, the world *used* to provide that stability, before mass production and consumption laid it to waste, rendering its formerly firm artifacts disposable and wobbly. Today, when a single bird in flight may appear for longer and attract more eyes than many single-use plastics, the potential for the earthly *inter tenere* to serve as an ersatz *inter est* looks tempting even from a worldcentric perspective. Where a society organized around mass consumption replaces political commonality with metabolic uniformity, a public realm organized to receive earth's entertainments could hold plural spectators together indefinitely, if not perpetually, around kaleidoscopic displays of diversity. Even by the standards of the world, earth's appearances promise, in the face of our present crises, a precious antidote to the crushing oblivion of mass society.

But held to the standards for earth's "intrinsic worth" that Arendt has helped me to elaborate, life's penchant for ever-changing, entertaining alterity also has value for politics that differs from and complements the artificial stability of the world. First, the fact that we do *not* know life's author allows the ongoing displays of birds, trees, and other lifeforms to serve as palpable reminders of how much on this planet is "outside the range of purposeful interference" by our species (HC, 151). Yes, we can destroy life, but we cannot create it, a limit made visible even by endangered species and altered habitats. Where action reveals human freedom and work reveals human intentions, earth's givens, in their fragility and resilience, make a show of flouting anthropocentric principles, purposes, and designs. Appearances of life are born of nature, *nasci*—a beginner, like us, but also a stranger, who doesn't depend on our initiative to create life as we depend on "her" initiative to survive. Moreover, we also depend on nature to show us what we are not—to give us a feel for otherness by parading before our eyes phenomena that exceed our powers of creation and control. The feeling of being riveted by a wonderous display of life is a way of sensually encountering the limits of human mastery, provoking both pleasure and uneasiness. Cultivating receptivity to earth gifts means, in part, discovering the pleasures *of* uneasiness in the face of life's unbidden appearances, suspending our appetites, interests, and instrumental designs often and long enough to allow our pretentions to mastery to be punctured. In this respect, earth's appearances contribute distinctively to the flourishing of politics by discouraging us from mistaking and renouncing freedom for sovereignty (WF, 163).

Second, where tables lend to public affairs a salutary stability, the freshness and novelty of life's appearances push us in a more animated, disruptive, inaugural direction. Earth's spectacular surfaces gives us a taste for spontaneity and an invitation to enact our freedom and realize plurality. Political action is a way of giving back, showing gratitude for the superfluity of appearances we receive from nature by adding our plurality to "her" alterity. It is a good thing, politically speaking, that the ephemeral holding environment of earth, unlike the durable worldly version, can only hold us for so long, for life's refusal to stay still may inspire imitation. Perhaps Arendt has something like this in mind when she writes that "plurality is the law of the earth" (LM, 19). To say that plurality is earth's "law" suggests, in part, that earth compels those whose attention it holds to step out of the audience and into the fray, revealing "who" they are by acting. At the best of times, the entertainment value of earth's shape-shifting lifeforms may contribute flexibility to political relationships that could become too brittle if they were anchored exclusively to the world's stable forms. At the worst of times, when the machinery of the waste economy deteriorates the world and deadens plurality, earth's surprising appearances have the potential to enliven political action. When we comply with the earth's call to action, imitating and augmenting nature's "richness of display" with our own appearances, we are, as Rousseau puts it, forced to be free.

When we are not acting, we still appear, participating as colorful fragments in earth's kaleidoscope. Like the rest of nature's sentient children, we are meant to see and be seen, to *sur vive*, for as long as we are alive. Human action springs from and surpasses the superfluous appearances of human and nonhuman biological life, adding to earth's appearances something *more* than more life: *sur sur vive.* In action, we use the bodies we were given at birth to insert ourselves into established realities and initiate new ones; we imitate the *infinitely* improbably origins of life by listening and dancing to their echoes in the *almost* infinitely improbable appearances of life in our midst. The "second birth" of action imitates nature's aesthetic excessiveness by exceeding it, much as the founding figures celebrated by Machiavelli break from precedent precisely by emulating examples of inimitable *virtù* from

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the past, becoming thereby equally (infinitely) inimitable. Emulating nature for its aesthetic superfluity, the second birth of human action creates a second nature, an "intangible" overgrowth (*sur sur vive*) of words and deeds (HC, 183).

Political life is the preternatural growth of the natural, a vine that requires both enduring artifacts and shape-shifting lifeforms to thrive.

TOWARD AN ARENDTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

This article enlisted and augmented Arendt to highlight underappreciated dangers to biological and political life in a political-economic context that organizes human activity around the promotion of "life itself" above all else. Capitalism's acceleration of earth's life-giving but world-eroding metabolic and reproductive processes produces a pernicious version of earth–world hybridity, an environment where it is difficult for earth's diverse lifeforms to *sur vive* and for freedom and plurality to *sur sur vive.* But Arendt also helped me to theorize another mode of hybridity, one that serves the flourishing of political life and promotes respect and protection for biological life—namely, the imitation of earth's superfluous and strange appearances by political actors and the consequent overgrowth of earth and world by political life. Politics, I argued with her aid, requires not only the stability and beauty of the world's durable artifacts but also the freshness and novelty of the earth's shape-shifting organisms. At a time when the waste economy has devalued *all* appearances—those given by earth, fabricated by human work, and initiated by human action—biological and political life must be revalued and renewed together, or not at all. In pursuit of that mutual renewal, I call to "save the appearances."

An environmentalism in this spirit would care for both earth and world and therefore be inhabited by the tensions between these two in-betweens. A tree could supply wood to construct a durable table or appearances to provide entertainment value to generations of spectators. Should we build, for love of the world, or forbear, for love of the earth? Additional dilemmas ensue from maintaining concurrent commitments to multiple forms of life: biological and political, metabolic and aesthetic, human and otherwise. A bird could be received by either the stomach or the eyes, supplying nutrition to sustain the body or entertainment to sustain the body *and* the body politic. To receive nature's gifts of appearance, we must sometimes resist the urge to ingest and suspend work, leaving some of earth's givens to be what they are: *alteritas*, that which is outside our bodies and beyond our intentions. To save the appearances, we must let earth entertain us. This receptivity to earth's superfluous self-displays is an integral part of the ethos of "basic gratitude for everything that is as it is" that environmentalists should inherit from Arendt. "Everything" means survival *and* appearance: nutritive, instrumental *and* entertainment value. When these values come into conflict, which they will, Arendt offers environmentalism clarifying complications while withholding final resolution.

But an environmental *politics* in the spirit of Arendt should put appearances first. Opening the eyes instead of the gullet nourishes political life, providing inspiring examples of freshness and novelty to help us feel freedom and natality to be real and tempting possibilities. Politically speaking, we should save earth's appearances because these displays of alterity may be the only way to save human plurality from the flattening conformity of mass society. An environmental politics in this loosely Arendtian sense is not just about political action to save the earth from capitalism's deadly reorganization of production and consumption. It is also about looking to earth to remind us why appearances matter and to offer a stage on which to present ourselves. At a moment when the world is being laid to waste, saving earth's appearances is a matter of political life and death.

An Arendt-inspired undertaking to save the appearances would affirm modern environmentalism's turn away from the Romantic mythos of nature as an untouched beauty while turning back to earth's appearances with a different set of aesthetic expectations in mind. By helping us to glimpse and value the strangeness of life's displays, Arendt's writings discourage us from conflating the "intrinsic worth" of nature with the beauty and sublimity sought by conservationists like Thoreau, Muir, and Marshall. An Arendtian sense of gratitude for life's palpable alterity and variety can also help us to notice similar aesthetic proclivities among some of the very writers who did the most to move issues of survival to the center of modern environmental politics. Most notably, as Lida Maxwell (2017) shows, the works of Rachel Carson frame "environmental loss as affective *and* existential" (701, my emphasis), soliciting "a public motivated by the pleasure of wonder" (694). Carson delights in natural beauty while also remaining open to the bracing, unsettling surprise of life's peculiarity and inexplicability.[16] It is easy to imagine Arendt nodding along as Carson describes with relish the wonderous appearances of "strangely colored fungi," the "green and silver freshness" of lichens and mosses, and "the mystery of a growing seed," "a life so various and unfamiliar that it seems hopeless to reduce it to order and knowledge" (Carson 1965, 30, 49, 45). Arendt helps us to see that the freshness and novelty of such appearances would be stifled, not saved, by efforts to preserve life on the model of art, as if under glass, as some suggest in her name. Respecting earth for its wonders, in Carson's terms, or entertainment value, in the terminology Arendt borrows from Portmann, calls us to encourage life's flourishing without domesticating its alterity.

[16] Carson, a trained scientist, exemplifies John O'Neill's (1993) point that involvement in the sciences can enhance "the capacity to perceive and feel wonder at the natural world" (155), contrary to Arendt's own expectations: as I detail in *Who Speaks for Nature?* Arendt casts scientific training and instrumentation as means of alienating spectators from earth's appearing qualities (Ephraim 2018, 34–67).

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This call is consonant with the life-and-death agendas of contemporary activists confronting the Anthropocenic reality of a planet irreparably marred by human activity. Demands by Yeampiere, Thunberg, and millions of others to protect vulnerable communities, species, and ecosystems valuably contribute to sustaining what remains of the "almost infinite diversity" of life on earth. My Arendtian frame also shows their claims to survival to be legible and valuable as enactments of freedom—political actions that at once emulate and exceed the resilient aesthetic excessiveness of the human and nonhuman lives to be saved. Occasionally, such actions imitate nature's appearances quite openly, as when Yeampiere and her Brooklyn-based environmental justice group UPROSE festooned hundreds of signs and banners for the 2014 People's Climate March with images of colorful sunflowers (Grassroots Global Justice 2019). But actions undertaken in the name of survival need not be overtly flowery to reveal respect for and contribute to earth's lively appearances. Arendt helps us to notice what participants in movements to stop death and extinction *begin*—their natality—and thus their affinities with nature, *nasci*, and its miraculous gifts of life. Political action, thus conceived, is not an escape from nature, but a distinctively human way of participating freely in nature's fertility: where labor fruitfully multiplies "life itself," action fruitfully pluralizes appearances. As it turns out, "nature herself speaks to us" in more than one voice: her "aboriginal command, 'Be ye fruitful and multiply'" is coupled with an equally emphatic call to be free and act.

It is difficult to hear earth's call to action over the din of the waste economy and easy to succumb to a view that reduces life to a mechanism for its own propagation. Capitalism's noisy affirmations of "life itself" threaten to drown out nature's second voice—or did this voice come first? We can work on learning to hear and heed earth's call to act in forests, deserts, general assemblies, community gardens, and other indoor and outdoor locations. While wilderness preserves receive renewed relevance in an Arendtian environmental politics, we overlook much of their entertainment value when we treat them as escapes from other people. We also miss much that is strange and unmade if we overlook the alterity of the bug crawling on the sidewalk, the invasive weed sprouting from its cracks, or the vegetables cultivated in its besidewalks.[17] As urban garden activist Ron Finley puts it, "possibilities, solutions, freedom—that's what I'm growing" (Kynala 2020). The plants cultivated by Finley and other community gardeners address problems of life and death—hunger, the carbon emissions of industrial agriculture—but in addition to nutrition, they also provide entertainment and provoke enactments of freedom. Such possibilities are not as visible if we assume, as Paul Voice (2013) does (extending Whiteside's reading of Arendt), that humanly altered, cultivated "nature then is worldly and not other" (187). My reading of Arendt instead amplifies Paul Wapner's (2010) point that, "underneath the alteration, otherness still exists," pressing us to make the edge of our mastery into "the center of our politics" (218). Domestication, commodification or contamination may mute, but cannot extinguish, life's alterity, excess and surprise—the qualitative *sur*—ready to humble our pretentions to sovereignty and spur us to revive freedom.

This resilient alterity is a rare bit of good news in the Anthropocene, when nothing on earth evades human influence but so much evades our control. My Arendt-inspired environmental politics seeks out the strange in the familiar while also mourning and resisting the loss of life caused by humanity's pervasive modifications to the environment. Even the dinner table offers opportunities to taste the alterity of our food before we swallow, so that we may derive entertainment *and* nutritional value from each bite. Even the grinding routines of labor under capitalism create occasions to encounter the unexpected otherness of life's givens. This is a silver lining of the waste economy: when so much human activity is organized around proliferating "life itself," eating and laboring become especially prevalent, promising opportunities to see (and taste, and touch, etc.) life, itself, anew. Every nutriment is also an entertainment if you hold (and view, and taste) it right. You'll know you're holding it right when it holds you, together with others—*inter tenere*—and moves you to act in concert.

[17] In a similar spirit, William Cronon (1995) remarks that "the tree in the garden is in reality no less other, no less worthy of our wonder and respect, than the tree in an ancient forest that has never known an ax or a saw" (88).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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