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# **THE ETHICS OF PUBLIC SPACES**

IN BETWEEN THE LIVED AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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2024

DISSERTATION THESES

## **Abstract**

The thesis *The Ethics of Public Spaces: In Between the Built and Lived Environment* introduces different philosophical approaches, which elaborate upon the mutual conditionality between the lived and the built environment. In addition, it contrasts those attitudes not only with each other but also with real cases of active citizenship, interventions, and art in public spaces. In the first chapter, the thesis poses a question of how public are public spaces and what the notion of the public means in terms of built and lived environments, aligned with the thoughts of Hannah Arendt. This part argues for the public as an active agency based on one's perception of the common world. The second chapter stays with Hannah Arendt's ideas to dig deeper into our public appearance as an essence for revealing our who-ness to others. The author discusses there our mutual conditionality, invisibility, and body presence, as introduced by Judith Butler, in relation to public appearance and puts it in contrast with Arendt's thoughts.

To get a complete picture of the tension that appears within public spaces, the following chapters discuss the concept of power using the thoughts of Michael Foucault and his opponent, Michael de Certeau. Foucault shows how power turns inhabitants into subjects, and de Certeau's perspective outlines how people resist it. The core of this chapter is about the practices of everyday life that are tied to the built environment (such as walking) in order to understand the political level of our everyday lives. In the last chapter, the author deliberately shifts her focus from everyday life towards more visible events, such as the recent tearing down of statues worldwide. The main task is to introduce the built environment as a carrier of certain values, which can enhance the sense of belonging on the one hand; on the other, it can be read as a form of an explicit exclusion from participation in public life, which prevents one from dwelling with others.

**keywords:** public spaces, citizenship, power, resistance, built environment, public realm, space of appearance

## **Main Goals**

This thesis aims to draw a complex picture of what it means to build and dwell in public spaces in the presence of others. It highlights that public spaces are not only the visible material sphere but also the intangible realm of values, actions, and relations. It is not only our right to build, occupy the public realm, and stay in the *villé*, but it is also dwelling, being recognised within the space of appearance and participating in the *cité*.

This thesis presents its intersection framed with questions: What is public about public spaces? What role do public spaces play in our lives? And how do they shape the way we perceive the world? However, there are also subsequent questions that stem from the proposed framework and that I perceive as necessary to address when discussing public spaces, such as: Who am I without you? Who is excluded and invisible?

The problem that this work addresses is what Hannah Arendt outlines as alienation from the common world. In the context of public spaces, I frame it as a losing public space, not only in its tangible sense but also losing its meaning. This thesis proposes to examine this connection between build and the lived environment through the ideas of selected philosophers but also through real cases. Therefore, this thesis expands from the discipline of philosophy into urbanism and architecture by asking questions concerning the conditioned relationship between the built and the lived environment first on the theoretical level and evaluating it on the selected study cases.

## **The delineation of public spaces and its problems**

All of the key thinkers presented in my thesis touch upon the question of (urban) spatiality; however, they do not define public spaces itself. Hannah Arendt often refers to the Greek polis as a place where philosophy was born out of public spaces. As she writes in *The Human Condition*: “In the experience of the polis, which not without justification has been called the most talkative of all bodies politic, and even more in the political philosophy which sprang from it, action and speech separated and became more and more independent activities” (HC 26).

The polis is essential to her as a place where people can gather, share, speak, and acquire their political lives. “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence” (HC 26).

Although she does not deny its material essence when she describes it as a place “physically secured by the wall” with a “physical location“, as she claims later, “its true space lies for her between people living together” (HC 198). Since Arendt's thoughts are mostly related to an intangible layer of public spaces, I see it as necessary to intertwine her theories with other thinkers whose ideas are centred around the materiality of public spaces. One of them is Michel Foucault, who introduces the built environment as a tool of disciplinary mechanisms in his book *Security, Territory, Population* (1978). His writing provides a framework for the connection between power and architecture and their relation to society. While Foucault is interested in how power is exercised, other thinkers such as Michael de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey are interested in how we can resist it and how our everyday practices relate to the city as citizens and creators, not only as passive consumers. The problem for them is that the production of spaces (e.g., its material structure) is driven by those in power, who, through architecture, maintain their domination and status. In their writing, conditionality between how the space is constructed and its use comes to the fore. Overall, the framework of selected thinkers serves as a springboard for introducing public spaces as quite complex phenomena, as part of a bigger unit (cities but also society), highlighting its historical development and also unpacking several layers of what they consist of – namely, the presence of others, power relations, everyday practices, and actions.

For the purpose of this thesis, I narrowed the concept of public spaces to freely accessible places open to a wide society. This definition includes squares, parks, streets, etc. What is particularly interesting is the fact that those places, as opposed to, for example, libraries, theatres, or cafés that are in a certain manner also considered public spaces, are not institutionalised in the sense of written rules, membership or entrance fees. For that, they are dependent more on their users and their actions, which creates a certain fragility and ambiguity in public spaces.

Only a few books are dedicated solely to public spaces, most of which are presented as the intersection of architecture, urban studies, sociology, and political theories. One of them is *Public Space Design and Social Cohesion: An International Comparison* (2019), in which editors unpack a very accurate definition of public spaces in the introduction, contrasting the expectations and reality of public spaces. “Public space is the spatial component of the public sphere open to all....It is considered to be an inclusive, equitable and accessible space, in reality it is increasingly perceived, experienced and used differently” (Aelbrecht, Stevens, and Nisha 2019, 3). A problem emerges from such a definition that outlines my thesis and that is aptly summarised by Ceren Sezer. “There might be conflicts and tension between different

groups claiming their rights to use and shape the same places“ (Sezer 2019, 225). In another collection of essays called *Public Space Between Reimagination and Occupation* (2018), editors Svetlana Hristova and Mariusz Czepczyński briefly touch upon the result of tensions stemming from claiming one’s right to a public space. “The urban is then a constantly renegotiated compromise between diverse groups of urban users with their different social interests and claims, thus nourishing the resilient diversity in the face of composed unity as a fundamental part of the sustainable life” (Hristova and Czepczyński 2018, 1).

In *Ethics of the Urban: The City and the Spaces of the Political* (2017), the political theorist Chantal Mouffe introduces public spaces from the perspective of power as places of struggle since she sees them as “plural battlegrounds, where the different hegemonic projects are confronted without any possible final reconciliation” (Mouffe 2017, 227). Public spaces are thus filled with many contradictions, some of which are summarized by architect Adrian Blackwell in the conference collection *Public Space? Lost and Found* (2017), which he names affinity versus antagonism, representation of power versus appropriation of space, public versus private, materiality versus immateriality, etc. (Blackwell 2017, 31–34).

This thesis also highlights certain paradoxes like public and private, tangible and intangible, but not to divide them but to follow Arendt’s methodology and to find common ground for them. The idea of having something in common is central for me in Arendt’s thoughts related to our perception of public spaces since I summarise her own definition of public space as simply - a world between us.

The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them (HC 52-53).

Public spaces, for her, are therefore not only about discussion but also about action (e.g. the world between us is created not only by the material environment but also by intangible relations that take place within). As urban philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre might say, we build spaces but create places. However, we do not define them only from a perspective of legal ownership but also by activities that take place within them. Across five chapters, my thesis introduces public spaces not as a product but as a process, where things we cannot imagine today may appear tomorrow. The creation process of space seems to belong to no one, yet if there is a chance, everyone tries to claim their right to it.

## Thesis Overview

### Chapter 1

#### *Public as an Active Agency*

In the first chapter, “Public as an Active Agency”, I ask what it means to treat space as a public space. Therefore, the main research task for this chapter is to discover the nature of the public as proposed by Arendt and apply it to the notion of public spaces to outline an answer to the following questions: What does it mean to treat public spaces as public? And what does Arendt mean by a potential threat to humanity in the context of alienation from the common world?

To dig deeper into the word ‘public’ itself, I draw from the thoughts of Hannah Arendt as presented in her book, *The Human Condition* (1998, originally published in 1958), in which she elaborates on the distinction between public and private. The public for her (as in the context of private) does not lie only in the matter of possession but, even more importantly, it exists in the realm of shared values and interests or, very generally speaking, in two different modes of man's existence. “Throughout his life man moves constantly in two different orders of existence: he moves within what is his own, and he also moves in a sphere that is common to him and his fellowmen“ (Arendt 1977, 104). The public mode of existence is, therefore, for Arendt, strongly connected with one's affiliation to the common world. Also common in that sense, it differs from her notion of the public. The common is there; we become part of it once we are born. However, I read public as a practice which is not granted, but once it appears, it becomes part of the common. Therefore, I abstracted and further developed her notion of the public as an active agency based on one’s perception of the common world.

For Arendt, the notion of the public itself bears “two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena” (HC 50). The first is “that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity” (HC 50). The first notion of “public” then involves the plurality of the public, the presence of others, and the visibility and ability to act. The second notion of the public is connected to her understanding, as well as the creation of the world. As Arendt writes: “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” (HC 52). The public, in that sense, is for her related “to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together” (HC 52). In general, Arendt’s notion of the public includes the

material essence of a space but also the realm of metaphysics, which refers to the world of affairs or an intangible notion of the public bound to values and transcendental. The potential conditionality between the two notions of public, as mentioned above, is expressed by Arendt with a powerful metaphor picturing the public realm as a table with people sitting around it. The table could have arbitrary shape and colour and could be made from whatever material one can think of. Still, the crucial point lies in the question: Do we perceive the table as something which binds the people sitting around it together, or rather as something that creates distance and divides them?

What Arendt sees as a possible threat is our alienation from the common, which is manifested by not taking the public as an active agency but rather as a form of consumption. Arendt is concerned that the modern world is a place where objects prevail over action and where people gather together, but only for consumption, not for action itself. She highlights the necessity of public spaces for exercising common values, which one could never achieve within private life. “Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; (...) and no activity can become excellent if the world does not provide a proper space for its exercise” (HC 49).

To support my argument, I use the study case of my research stay in the well-known Czech spa town Luhačovice, for which I created an alternative guide based on interviews I carried with local residents. The problem of Luhačovice was not the lack of public spaces in its materiality but the absence of the public in its intangible sense that stems from them. This resulted not only in alienation from the place but also from each other. The first part leads to the conclusion that we need to explore what it means to have something in common in its intangible sense, which exceeds the material possession of things. By that, I state that the public implies a certain active agency. The second part of this chapter explores different motivations for attachment or alienation from the public through the Not In My Back Yard movement. I ask what motivation might spark our active presence in public spaces and connect it with a form of responsibility and public freedom.

## Chapter 2

### *Public as a New Beginning*

The second chapter, “Public as a New Beginning”, stays with Hannah Arendt's ideas to dig deeper into her different notions of spatiality, namely the space of appearance and the public realm. For her, anchoring human actions to a space is important as a base on which political actions could grow. She often refers to the fact that having a place to appear is necessary and vice versa. For Arendt, the former has symbolic meaning and is created by the presence of others, which is distinct from the latter, which relates to the built structure of a city and depends on the various forms of power relations. The space of appearance is considered to be a contingent space for action. It provides men with the power or capacity to appear. On the other hand, the public realm serves as a form for the content of action and speech. It is ubiquitous, organised, durable, and created or/and shaped by man and their work. Therefore through these two categories, the conditioned relationship between the built (the public realm) and the lived (the space of appearance) environment starts to wave together. Additionally, I read that intersection as the essence of public spaces.

That connection is further developed in the subsequent chapters. For Arendt, appearance is crucial to her concept of natality, the capacity to begin and set things in motion. And just as the new-born appears to the world, we as citizens make public appearances to reveal who we are, which Arendt introduces as our second birth. Within the second birth, one appears to others as a citizen. However, this chapter balances between thinking with and against Arendt since, in the light of natality and new beginnings, it further introduces three concepts in order to push their boundaries and examine them with real cases in public spaces. Namely notions of action, invisibility and the body. In each subchapter dedicated to one of these particular topics, I stem from Arendt's thoughts. Still, with the support of secondary literature, I progress towards current examples of public space activities.

Action is a central term for Arendt's philosophy, which is rooted in natality. The action goes directly between men, and by acting, men are able to reveal themselves. That disclosure is, according to Arendt, an answer to a question: “Who are you?” (HC 178) My critique of action is that this who-ness can be revealed only through speech, but it also aims to point out that one does not have to be born for the second time only through one's own actions but also through the actions of others. Together with a study case of White crosses happening, I am asking who was born in that case.

The second point addresses the lack of Arendt's attention towards invisibility and recognition. For that, together with Judith Butler, I expand Arendt's question – who are you towards Butler's - who are you without me to see and hear you? I introduce the concept of invisibility and recognition as a liminal state of being born and recognised as a citizen. When we refer to someone as invisible, it is not caused by the impossibility of entering the public realm. We all (more or less) have the same access to enter a street, a square or a park but what is at stake in the case of invisibility is the space of appearance created by one's action. On that account, Judith Butler points out that “the street cannot be taken for granted as the space of appearance, to use Hannah Arendt's phrase, the space of politics, since there is, as we know, a struggle to establish that very ground” (Butler 2016, 13). In the next section, I defend the claim that we are not equally but mutually invisible with respect to action. To do so, I use the concepts of plurality and conditionality outlined by Hannah Arendt.

The final point I draw with respect to natality is to explore the role of the body in light of action. The term ‘natality’ itself bears a strong corporeal significance connected with dependency and vulnerability, to which both mother and child are exposed. However, Arendt does not consider the body capable of revealing one's who-ness. I, together with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, defend the active presence of bodies as an equal contribution to public spaces since “without a body that we take time to nourish, care for, and cultivate, as subjects we would have no worldly reality” (Weinman and Robaszkiewicz 2023, 16). In conclusion, this chapter aimed to explore liminal cases of actions and to compare them with the philosophical insights proposed by Hannah Arendt. The understanding of action helps us to enlarge our perception of the lived environment of public spaces based on mutual relations, freedom, and plurality.

### **Chapter 3**

#### *Public through the Lens of Power*

To get a complete picture of the tension that appears within public spaces, the following chapters shift the focus from the space of appearance towards the notion of power and its exercise within public spaces using the ideas of Michel Foucault and his opponent, Michel de Certeau. In chapter three, “Public through the Lens of Power”, I use thoughts of Foucault to demonstrate how power turns inhabitants into subjects; however, aligned with Foucault, power is not introduced as a repressive but as an enabling source that allows all

inhabitants to take part in the mutual web of power relations. The part of Foucault's work related to my research is how power is manifested and distributed through the built environment as a part of the disciplinary mechanisms. Hence, I trace his writing in the book *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* (2009) to the genesis of towns as a tool to maintain society's order. Foucault takes the city's design as exemplary because, according to him, all those forms of power are dissolving and visible within it. Foucault highlights that at the end of the 18th century, a new form of the modern state appeared in response to distinctively urban problems, which also brought a new form of power. In *STP*, Foucault lectured on the genesis of power, from the sovereign power of the monarch to the modern art of governance, which relies on a complex web of governing institutions and practices. As more and more people moved to cities, it was no longer possible to maintain them through the sovereign's power over life and death. This chapter traces the constitution of a town from a historical perspective to call for its connection with power. What I am interested in is how the problem of a growing population was solved through the built environment since I claim that the power mechanisms inscribed within the built environment and lived environment are one of the possible angles from which to approach its conditionality.

Foucault not only portrays the relationship between architecture and power but also highlights individuals as a part of society in his later work. While Arendt focuses on life as a new beginning, Foucault further asks how life is maintained. In his essay "The Subject and Power" (1982), Foucault argues that we usually tend to resent power as mysterious and fatalistic by asking the wrong questions about "how" power limits us. He suggests that "how" should not be perceived in the sense of "How does it manifest itself?" but "By what means is it exercised?" and "What happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?" (SP 786). Foucault stresses the importance of power being exercised on the free subjects, which provides the reader with the connection to Arendt's notion of public freedom, which Foucault enlarges with his term self-governance. In my reading, Foucault stretches Arendt's ideas about public freedom by approaching it from the standpoint of individuals and their relations instead of the common world. He emphasises that we are a part of a particular culture, which is not individualistic, but as subjects, we depend on it. Foucault outlines the role of others as an essential element within which space and its inhabitants are defined.

For this chapter, I trace the appearance of power mechanisms in the example of a Norwegian art project entitled "Crossroads" where three artists change the perspective of public space for the inhabitants of a tiny village. Even more importantly, this example

highlights the changing relations not only towards space but also of individuals towards themselves to show and uncover power mechanisms and their influence on the built environment and the lives of individuals. Although Foucault does not directly address public spaces, he offers one of the possible approaches towards them by observing and analysing power relations manifested within. He portrays power with regard not only to the presence of others but also to oneself and the role of the built environment because architecture “is not only considered as an element in space, but is especially thought of as a plunge into a field of social relations in which it brings about some specific effects” (SKP 253).

## **Chapter 4**

### *Public as an Everyday Battle*

The fourth chapter, “Public as an Everyday Battle“, is dedicated to Michel de Certeau's book *The Practise of Everyday Life* (1984), in which he, contrary to Foucault, portrays power as a repressive source. He aims to find a way for people to resist power oppression through the everyday practices tied to the built environment (such as walking) in order to understand the political level of our everyday lives. In PEL, he discusses the role of our everyday activities in relation to the imposed system in which we live. De Certeau introduces the ‘everyday’ as political, as a tool of resistance and liberation from a mass society. Under the ‘everyday practices’ umbrella term, de Certeau sees various actions, from cooking, wandering, and speaking to walking. If Michel Foucault is interested in how individuals became subjects of power mechanisms, de Certeau emphasises how individuals resist being reduced to subjects. To describe power mechanisms, he uses the framework of strategies imposed by institutions and tactics as manoeuvres by citizens. In his view, strategy is imposed by institutions such as the city or an enterprise. It inherently has a spatial logic or requires a space for its existence or definition, such as the city, which is defined by the space it occupies. The act of resistance, for de Certeau, lies in tactics, which are manoeuvres in the enemy’s field of view. He follows traces of the struggle and discrepancies in everyday practices, acts where inequity is mirrored and gains a political dimension. His theory draws from the assumption that one could express a certain political outlook through walking, reading, or cooking (things he considered everyday activities). Our everyday activities, therefore, have a tactical role. De Certeau argues that our relation to space is never neutral. There is always a kind of tension present, and the strongest one prevails.

Another dichotomy that de Certeau presents is tied to the linguistic framework. He develops the idea of the city as a narrative or a story, which allows him to describe the tensions through established linguistic nomenclature. His metaphor stems from perceiving power as language, as the ability to rule words. De Certeau depicts language as a system we live in, which helps us to orient ourselves within space and relationships and is maintained by institutions belonging to the order of power mechanisms.

Although I argue against his narrow definition of power, I stress how he digs deeper into the conditionality between built and lived environments, which I consider crucial for my thesis. Essentially, his ideas are scaffolded around the role of space as a part of our lives. Namely, the perception of spatiality is how one's relation towards architecture is built and maintained. The overarching question for Certeau can be formulated as follows: What do we, as citizens, do with given things such as streets, squares, etc? Certeau warns that passive consumption makes one a worker of creators who stand behind those pictures or, in the case of public space, behind architectures or designs imposed on parks or squares, etc. On the other hand, the critical reading of space, in which it is necessary to go beyond consumption and seek a different way of using space, is something Certeau is interested in. At this point, he draws on French sociologist, pedagogist and cartographer Fernand Deligny. In the collection of his essays, originally written during the 1970s and published as a book, *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, in 2015, Deligny introduces the concept of “wandering lines” and “net trajectories” (p. 38). In that experiment, Deligny follows the movements and trajectories of children with autism spectrum disorder. He aims to transfer the trajectories of walkers who are not bound by the imposed linguistic framework to paper and thus have, according to de Certeau, different perspectives considering the perception of space.

In the following example, I emphasise a way in which we can go beyond mere consumption into the perception of space as a new element enriching one's experience of public spaces. I assume that the material layer of a town (the built environment) is taken for granted and does not receive sufficient attention from its inhabitants; that is where I meet with de Certeau, and this is the point I claim that reveals an additional approach to discussion about public spaces. I argue that a better understanding of spatial dispositions prevents the mere consumption of space and our alienation from it. As a study case, I use my observation of one bench in front of my house that was suddenly orphaned from social activities due to COVID-19 restrictions.

## Chapter 5

### *Public and monumental*

In the last chapter, “Public and monumental”, I shift the focus from everyday life towards collective events such as the recent tearing down of statues worldwide. The main task is to argue that the built environment is a carrier of certain values, which, although it can enhance the sense of belonging, can also be read as a form of explicit exclusion from participation in public life. Within this chapter, the ideas of key thinkers are intertwined to introduce the built environment as a crucial part of the human condition and as a part of dwelling. In the first part of the chapter, I pose a question -why do monuments matter? In this part, I present several theories which describe statues as an allegory of a new social order (Naginski), symbolic bearer of values (Rigney), or pieces adoring and celebrating certain political or religious acts held by individuals (Shapshay). All theories underline that our existence is directly conditioned by the built environment in which our lives take place.

Together with Arendt and Sennett, this chapter introduces the built environment as a part of the dwelling based on the thoughts of Martin Heidegger. Dwelling is as important as belonging to a certain place and belonging to “men's being with one another” (Heidegger 1971, 147). In my reading of public spaces, dwelling plays an important role that is aligned with the Arendtian notion of the common world since we dwell with others in spatiotemporal conditions. While Heidegger reflects on the relation between man and space, I claim that statues and monuments have a specific position of indirect forms of discrimination. To conclude the first half of this chapter, the thoughts of Friedrich Nietzsche are presented. He reveals that by ripping out and glorifying only certain personalities from our history, we are running a risk in which we may mistake individual motivations for the general good. Additionally, Nietzsche criticises monumental history for its ability to create false narratives due to selectiveness favouring great events and individuals. Moreover, monumental history triggers the hope that great history may occur again. Nietzsche argues for the limitation of monumental history because it cannot have “complete truth” (Nietzsche 2010, 11).

To provide an answer to the initial question of why monuments and statues matter, this thesis presents the following arguments: statues and monuments carry values connected with strong emotions, they offer a false or at least fragmented picture of the past from which an incomplete narrative stems from, they are erected in order to maintain a certain power

discourse, they exclude people from public spaces and prevent them from a possibility of dwelling with others.

Within the second part, I dig deeper into the notion of the change, which includes the toppling of statues and monuments. Such as two lithospheric plates, the durability of a built environment and understandings of the past represented by people colliding together in public spaces. What equalises us in that earthquake situation is the possibility to participate in a political narrative. However, there is a difference between being represented (e.g. someone is speaking for us) or creating a condition for being able to speak for oneself. I observe several examples of temporary statue performances in order to describe the artist as someone who provides people with tools not to speak for them. I use an example of Krzysztof Wodiczko's temporal statues and Antony Gormley's fourth plinth project in Trafalgar Square to demonstrate how we can deal with the question of monumentality differently. As Wodiczko says art within public spaces should create the conditions for being heard and giving voice to the silenced. Only then might public spaces become a part of the "healing environment for free and open speaking" (Wodiczko 2017, 134).

In the last paragraph, this thesis introduces the case of Buddha of Oakland, where a statue was erected in order to unify the community and prevent a crime, not to celebrate or maintain power. In a broader view, this attitude diminishes the importance of so-called hostile architecture as something designed to out crime, for example, benches with spikes. The solution in that case is not only to banish people from certain places as a palliative solution but to educate them and offer common ground, which, as I see, together with Arendt, is the main purpose of public spaces. "The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire." (Harvey, 2008) Suppose we continue to be surrounded by hostile architecture or/and statues and monuments celebrating ultimate power and injustice as our common ground. In that case, there is a risk that we remain an imprint of it, which prevents us from creating places to dwell. A powerful moment of outmanoeuvring eternity brings hope that not only the built environment but also the values that statues represent may be changed.

The question of change, however, cannot be solved only by removing or erecting them. Their toppling is not a direct pathway to equality or social transformation, and racism does not disappear the very minute a statue falls. When we speak about tearing down the statues, we do not refer to a systematic change but a transformation of the narrative that the built environment has spread. To use Nietzsche's metaphor of a tree, I agree with Wodiczko

saying that public spaces play a role in the process of healing. Hence, I consider toppling statues as a way of collective healing, a process that does not deny or erase roots we stem from, only slightly shaping the way that its branches are developed.

## **Conclusion**

*What is public about public spaces?*

I read public spaces as places of active spatial agency that allow interaction with a built environment. However, this thesis defends the conditionality of those two elements. To explain it with the table metaphor proposed by Hannah Arendt (Chapter 1), there would be no place to sit and meet if there were no table. To re-frame it with proposed real examples, If there were no square, the white crosses (Chapter 1) would not connect strangers; if there were no statue in the little Norwegian Village (Chapter 3), people would be more likely to discuss the public space itself, same as in the case of the visual pollution (Chapter 1) etc. On the other hand, as said many times, this works vice versa as well; if there were no people, the table would remain empty; if it were not for Black Lives Matter and other activist movements (Chapters 2 and 5), we would live surrounded by an exclusive environment. If there were no active neighbours in Luhačovice, the place would not have had its community garden as a first seed of the common place (Chapter 1). If we take the table for granted, we not only diminish our role in fostering the tangible but also the intangible that exceeds it.

What threatens the publicness of public spaces, according to the intersection of selected thinkers and cases stated in my thesis, is the alienation of the common world (Arendt), the possibility of not being recognised (Butler), the indirect exclusion from the built environment (Foucault), the mechanisation of our movement inscribed into the mechanisation of one's behaviour (de Certeau) or its unification and closeness (Sennett).

Public spaces can be read as trigger points and results, such as the beginning and the end. For that, think of them as a process rather than a product based on plurality, actions, and different forms of power relations by which public spaces are defined but also conditioned. They are constantly filled with new content. The new content appears in the presence of others, in which the actualisation of plurality is the actualisation of our values. That creates a paradox: everyone tries to get their spot, but the public realm has its spatial limits. That is why we have to understand its mutual conditionality better.

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