THE CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC PLACE
NORMATIVE AND SPATIAL IMPLICATIONS OF CYBERSPACE ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE PUBLIC REALM

by

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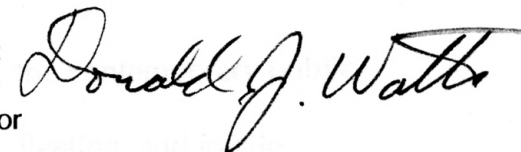Department of Architecture
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ABSTRACT

Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition* (1958. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press) suggests that the human condition and the normative and spatial principles underlying a public place are inextricably related. The human condition can be defined as a convergence of technology, ontology and epistemology. Further, public place can be defined as a space of human appearance where common concerns are communicated and discussed.

The Greek *agora* has always been considered a paradigm of public place. At the normative level, it was defined by the various dimensions of the human *vita activa*, namely labor, work and action, and their respective dignity in the Greek *polis*. Spatially, it was defined by the understanding and the relationship between the dimensions of body, activity, space and time.

Cyberspace technologies engender a new human condition based on human ontology and epistemology radically different from that of the Greek *polis*. The new human condition is characterized by the human coexistence in the physical space and cyberspace - in *hybrid space*. Such coexistence engenders a new understanding of the *vita activa*, and of body, activity, space and time. Consequently, the normative and spatial principles underlying a public place are altered.

The public places as in the Greek *agora* were architecturally formalized. However, the contemporary public places appear and disappear in the *hybrid space*, and tend to be more and more informal, fleeting, and fragile.

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims at developing an understanding of the normative and spatial implications of cyberspace (in its capacity as a mode of communication and interaction, and as a mode of existence) on the contemporary public place.

Traditionally, the public place is regarded as the most important focus of a city's political life. It is perceived as serving three purposes. First, it provides for the basic needs of communal and individual life. Second, it gives life a social meaning. Third, it shapes and mirrors the general structure of life. There are various approaches that can be adopted for the study of the public place. Hannah Arendt's (1958) argument that the "objectivity of the world - its object - or thing character - and the human condition supplement each other" forms the point of departure for this thesis. It is based on two presuppositions:

- the formal and spatial making of the city is a reflection of the human condition; and

- the human condition is determined by the way the community communicates with its constituents.

Further, the human body, its activity, the space in which its activity is performed, and the time in which it is performed is fundamental to human existence. In this context, I propose that space is *a conceptual proposition to define, and to organize, an activity in an environment - any environment*. It can also be argued that neither the body, the activity, the time, nor the space exists by itself. Each becomes possible only in its interaction with the other three.

There is nothing like the free body, or the free space. One always compliments the other. I therefore also propose that a *place comes into existence when the human bodies appear in space and communicate and interact in time.*

Further, "space" and "place" require each other for definition. "Space" is more abstract than "place." "Space" is the realm of freedom. It invites action. On the other hand, a "place" is institutionalization of "space." "Space" becomes "place" when it acquires a definition and a meaning. "Place" is a locus, a territory within which a controlled, defined set of events take place.

The propositions above provide us with a conceptual framework - *of body, activity, space and time as the determinants of human condition* - to formulate normative and spatial principles underlying a place. This thesis makes use of the above framework to study "public place." *A public place is understood as a space of appearance that exists between humans formally assembled to talk about common concerns.* This thesis is a study of the public place in the Greek *polis*, and the public place as it exists in cyberspace today. The study is based on an understanding of the human condition in the Greek *polis* during the fifth century B.C., and in the contemporary times. Finally, this thesis examines the normative and spatial principles underlying the contemporary public place.

The Greek *polis* has always been acclaimed by the western political theorists as a model for the organization of public life, and as a paradigm of the meaning and significance of politics as a human pursuit. Based on the experience of the classical Greek *polis*, Hannah Arendt, a widely acclaimed political philosopher of the twentieth century, has

developed a novel vision of human life articulated in terms of such concepts as space of appearance, public space, public freedom and public happiness. Her investigation has been constantly guided by three basic propositions:

- modern man has lost freedom as it was once experienced in the ancient Greek polis;

- man's political life and its traditional values have been destroyed; and

- to achieve a model of an order compatible with human freedom a return to the Greek model of politics is absolutely essential.

Like other political theories, Hannah Arendt's political theory is rooted in and constantly refers to her understanding of the human condition, which she has articulated most fully in her book of that title. The first chapter of this thesis is a discussion of the human condition in the Greek *polis* - the ideal political community of Hannah Arendt, and the nature of its public place - the *agora*. Existing in the rigid dichotomies of public and private, freedom and necessity among others, it was a community of those who acted in concert and undertook their actions within the public place in reference to one another.

The second chapter is a discussion of the new medium of communication - cyberspace. Today, cyberspace has transcended the realm of science-fiction as it *displaces* the human existence based on Cartesian physical space. It is slowly becoming an immensely potent paradigm of our epistemological, ontological and existential reality. In the

second chapter I will discuss the nature, structure, and the biases of cyberspace.

In the third chapter, I shall try to ascertain the new human condition based on human existence in cyberspace. Such an understanding leads us into the discussion of the structure of *the cybernetic agora* - the public place in cyberspace.

In a comparison of the classical and cybernetic public place, the fourth chapter makes use of the template - of body, activity, space and time as determinants of human condition - to ascertain the nature of public place as it today exists in a cyber-mediated human existence.

A Disclaimer

This thesis is not about specific guidelines for the design of a particular public place in a particular context. Instead, it is about understanding the universal normative and spatial dimensions underlying a public place. Such an understanding, when placed in the context of a particular design project, can however promote project-specific design guidelines.

CHAPTER 2 : THE CLASSICAL MODEL OF PUBLIC PLACE - THE GREEK *AGORA*

In this chapter, I aim at developing an understanding of the term "human condition" as discussed in Hannah Arendt's text *The Human Condition* (1958. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press). Next, I intend to examine its impact on the formal and spatial structure of the Greek public place - the *agora*. This understanding will lead to the later discourse of my thesis where the contemporary human condition permeated by the developments in media and technology will be discussed to ascertain its normative and spatial implications on the ordering of the contemporary public place.

1.0 Understanding Arendt's Human Condition

The human condition can be understood as the sum total of whatever is natural to our human existence, and whatever we create out of our efforts during the period of our natural existence.[1]

To elaborate, the fact that *we exist* is a human condition. The natural component of the human condition comprises of the biological process of procreation, life and death. Also, what *we make* becomes a part of human condition. The products of human endeavor during our natural existence become a part of the human condition by

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1 Also refer Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition.* Chicago : The University of Chicago Press. pp. 9

virtue of their ability to condition the way we live. For example, the automobile is a *thing* brought into the realm of human existence through our endeavor, and has demonstrated its ability to condition the way we live and design.[2]

To summarize, we can say that "human condition" is an all encompassing term that refers to everything, natural or artificial, that belongs to the realm of human life and has an ability of effecting, or transforming the way we live.

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt is concerned with various modes of human activity and their respective dignity. She explains the human condition as a function of three fundamental human activities - labor, work and action. [3]

Labor, Work, Action

Let us examine the meanings associated with the terms labor, work and action.

Labor is the range of activities essential for the survival of the individual, and also the entire human species. It refers to the biological process of the human body - the cycle of procreation, life and death. It is an activity shared with animals, and is characterized by necessity and futility. An engagement in labor ends only with the end of life, and yet its products are consumed as soon as they are produced. It leaves nothing permanent to show for the human effort that

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2 The Modern Movement in Architecture bears a testimony to the fact. For example, Frank Lloyd   Wright proposed the Broadacre City with automobile as its basis. For further reference: Fishman, R.(1991). *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge : The MIT Press.
3 Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press. pp. 7

has gone into them. "The human condition of labor," therefore, corresponds to "life itself."[4]

Work refers to the production of "artificial" world of things, that is, the object character of the world. This artificial world arises out of the human pursuit for creation of things in which he seeks comfort, and pleasure. "The human condition of work is worldliness."[5] It is essential to note that the product of work, the *thing*, transcends the time span of individual human life, and thus bestows permanence to its mortal creator.

Action, on the other hand, refers to the interrelationships between humans at the political level. It arises out of the fact that humans don't exist alone, rather, they inhabit the world with other humans. It gains significance as an individual discards his solitary existence to live in a community, which permeates the necessity, among others, for rules of interaction, organization, transaction and communication. It deals with the ordering of community life through founding and preserving political bodies. Essentially, it refers to the act of political negotiation in a community.

Vita Activa and the Human Condition

The three fundamental human activities essential for the sustenance of human life - labor, work, and action - constitute the *vita activa* of any community. *Vita activa* is always rooted in a world of humans and human-made

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4 Arendt, H.(1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp.7
5 ibid. pp.7

things.[6] The human condition in any community can be attributed to its *vita activa*.

The notion of *vita activa* undergoes various mutations with the changing notions of reality in different stages of human evolution : political, social, cultural, economic, or technological.[7] An entirely new human condition is created as the meaning and importance associated with the activities of labor, work, and action change over time, giving rise to totally new structures of civilization. We shall now consider the human condition that arose out of the status accorded to these activities in the Greek *polis* of fifth century BC. Next, we shall try to ascertain the effect of that human condition on the formal and spatial nature of the Greek *polis*.

2.0 : The Greek *Polis*

The Greek polis of 5th Century B.C. is unique both in its purpose and spatial nature. Victor Ehreberg (1960) defines *polis* as "a community, self absorbed, closely united in its narrow space and permeated by a strong political and spiritual intensity that led to a kind of special culture of every *polis*."[8] An understanding of the purpose and nature of the *polis* can be based in the Latin terms *civitas* and *urbis*. Fustel de Coulanges in his Introduction to *The Ancient City* (Anchor ed.; 1956) defines *civitas* as specifically referring to a social organization : a group of families or

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6 Also refer ibid. pp. 13
7 Also refer ibid., pp 7-8
8 Ehrenberg, V. (1960). *The Greek State*. London : Basil Blackwell. Pp.94

tribes who join together to establish a community, sharing the same gods, form of government, modes of production, social organization, and so forth. The significance of *civitas* lies in the ideological alliance between its members and is not related to any particular place or construction. The *urbis*, on the other hand, refers to the particular geographical site where a *civitas* decides to dwell. The spatial configuration of the *urbis* is structured by the ideology of the *civitas* . In this light, the *polis* can be understood as:

- A *civitas* - a politically organized *community of people* that came together for common concerns over individual interests and family matters; and

- An urbis - *a community of place*, as it was an area where people with common interests resided, and it was the particular features of the territory that influenced and directed the nature of the *politically-organized body* of people.[9]

Let us now examine the human condition in the Greek *polis* in the light of Hannah Arendt's definition of vita activa.

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9 Thomas, C. (1981). "The Greek Polis." Griffeth, R. & Thomas, C. (Eds.) (1981). *The City- State in Five Cultures*. Santa Barbara : ABC- Clio, Inc. pp. 43

Vita Activa in the Greek Polis

Arendt argues that out of labor, work and action, action alone is the exclusive prerogative of humans; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is entirely dependent on the constant presence of others.[10] This becomes our point of departure for understanding the human condition in the Greek *polis* (Fig. 1).

In the Greek *polis*, *vita activa* predominantly concerned itself with a life devoted to the public-political matters.[11] Political action was the main thing: it was for the sake of stepping forth from the darkness of the private into the light of the public that Arendt's ideal citizens lived.[12] According to Greek thought, the human life was strongly demarcated between what was communal, or *public*; and what was individual and related to the household, or *private*.[13] The public-life of the Greeks concerned itself with the political organization of the *polis*, and related to the search for a universal *good* of the Greek society. On the other hand, the activities of labor and work belonged to the realm of the household. [14]

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10 Arendt, H.(1958).*The Human Condition* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 22
11 ibid. pp. 12
12 ibid. pp. 22-28, 48-58, 175-81.
13 "The rise of the city-state meant that man received besides his private life a sort of second life, his *bios politikos*. Now every citizen belongs to two orders of existence; and there is a sharp distinction in his life between what is his own *(idion)* and what is communal*(koinon)*. It was not just an opinion or theory of Aristotle but a simple historical fact that the foundation of the *polis* was preceded by the destruction of all organized units resting on kinship, such as the *phratria* and the*phyle*." Arendt, H.(1958).*The Human Condition* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp.24
14 Also refer Arendt, H.(1958).*The Human Condition* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 13

Fig. 1. The Greek *Polis* : Athens in the
fifth century B.C. The distinction
between the public and private realms
is well illustrated in this plan. The
private parts of the *polis* are denoted
by the dotted areas, whereas the public
areas form the nuclii of the city.
[Source : Wycherley, R.E. (1962). *How
the Greeks Built Cities*. NY : W. W.
Norton & Company, Inc. pp. 6]
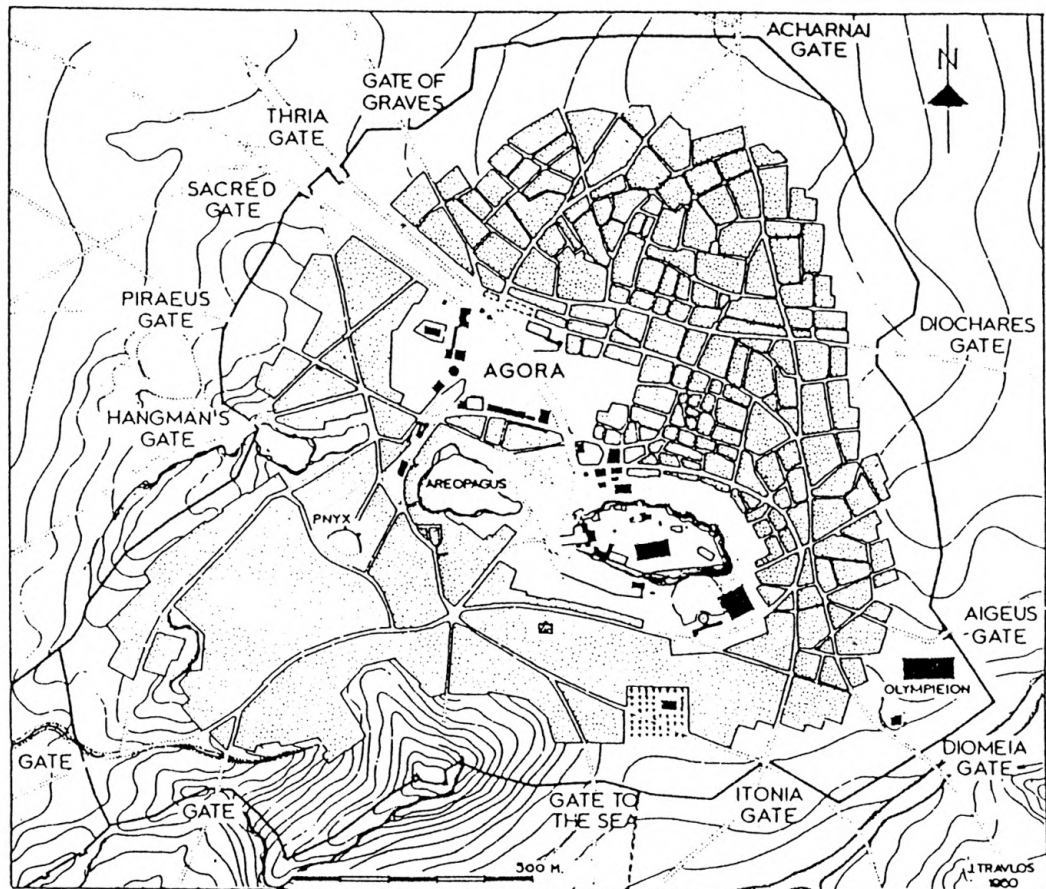
Moreover, according to Aristotle, from whose political theories Arendt draws, the state - the *polis* was by nature clearly prior to the household and to the individual, "since the whole is of necessity prior to the part" (1253a 19-20). He notes that "we must not suppose that any one of the citizens belongs to himself, for they all belong to the state, and are each part of the state, and the care of each part is inseparable from the care of the whole" (1337a27-33).

Aristotle's concept of state and good life are mutually complementary. He notes that the very *purpose* of the *polis* was the good life, or *eudaimonia* (happiness) of its citizens. At the very beginning of the *Politics*, he writes:

> Every state is a community of some kind and every community is established with a view to some good, for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which he thinks good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a higher degree than any other, and at the highest good. (1252a1-6)

Further, he notes that it is only as a citizen of the state that a man can achieve the good life, that he is naturally disposed to live in a state. In this is based his proposition that: *homo est naturaliter politicus, id est, socialis.* [15]

Action and the Public Realm

It is now obvious that action was the only regarded human activity in the *polis*. The *polis* was prior to the individual, and was predominantly concerned with the larger, common concern for the universal good of the Greek society. Its main concerns were to ensure the actualization of the conditions of:

15 ibid. pp. 23

- human *plurality*, that is, the uniqueness of each human being. In Arendt's view, who a man is in his singularity cannot be known, not even by man himself, except to the degree he attains concrete particularity as a man through interaction with men.

- human *immortality*. In Arendt's view, an engagement in action increases the chance that the doer of marvels - expressed through his words and deeds - could live through collective memory.

- human *freedom*. In Arendt's view, human encounter with the world ensures his freedom. Freedom is explained as the human ability to transcend what is particular to himself and engage in what is common to the species.

It is also obvious that action required a public place, because it was only in public presence that the conditions of human plurality, immortality, and freedom could be realized.

3.0 The Public Place - The Greek *Agora*

In Arendt's view, the distinction between the public and private place in the *polis* was both spatial, and normative. The distinction between the *agora* and the household was the distinction between the public and the private at the spatial level. At a normative level, this distinction is explained as the activities that were permitted in either realms. Truly public activities were considered to be the activities that:

- concerned all who stood within the public space; and

- engendered the manifestation of human uniqueness.

Further, *the public place was the site* where we were connected to one another as a political community. It was characterized by :

- *Appearance* . In Arendt's view, the materialization of the human condition of plurality requires bodily appearance in the public space. It is the space where people emerge from the darkness of the private realm into light to manifest their essence before darkness covers them again. It is the space of speech and action. Associated with the notion of appearance is the ontological implication that what enters the public space achieves a heightened measure of reality through the attention it receives from all who are gathered there.[16] In Arendt's view, only what appears and is spoken about in the public space is fully real, and establishes a common sense for the reality of the world even while it manifests the plurality of its citizens.[17]

- *Citizenship.* Appearance in the public place was the prerogative only of the citizens of the *polis.* Citizenship was based on the notions of equality,[18] and freedom.[19] The virtues essential for citizenship were wealth,

16 ibid. pp. 55-58
17 ibid, pp. 55-58
18 ibid. pp. 32
19 ibid. pp. 31

health, and courage[20], that guaranteed freedom from the daily necessities of life, and therefore, freedom from the bonds of the private realm. Only males were accorded the right to be fully enfranchised citizens. Though strongly distinct, both public and private aspects of human life in the *polis* were equally essential for its citizenship. The citizenship to the *polis* required as proof that an individual belonged to both - the community of people and the community of place.

The proof of the individual belonging to the community of people was provided by descent. Only the head of the household, or upon his death, his eldest son could acquire citizenship. Equally important was the fact that to be accorded the status of citizen, the individual had to, as a prerequisite, discharge his responsibilities towards the state and family completely, and competently.

The proof of community of place was offered through the means of ownership of property. The Greek economy was essentially agrarian. The ownership of property therefore implied self- sufficiency and freedom from the daily chores of labor and work, which was done by females, children and slaves. This freedom implied an opportunity to participate in the matters of the community via engagement in the political

19 ibid. pp. 31
20 ibid. pp. 35

discourse. Property also signified a location in the *polis*, which accorded the owner the right to participate in its matters.[21] The non-owners, that is, foreigners or slaves, on the other hand, had to spend their life engaged in the *vita activa* of labor and work for sustenance of life. The right to participate in the matters of politics was not extended to them.

Therefore, we can argue that the Greek *agora* was a spatially ordered place to accommodate the public-political life of the Greeks. It was shaped to facilitate :

- Physical appearance of the citizens in the public space - the physical BODY, for

- Action - a collective ACTIVITY, in

- A PUBLIC, POLITICAL AND PHYSICAL SPACE for the activity, where

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21 Arendt, H.(1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 29-30, Also pp. 61.: "Originally, property meant no more or less than to have one's location in a particular part of the world and therefore to belong to the body politic, that is, to be the head of one of the families which together constituted the public realm."
22 These concepts were first developed in the seminar course : "ARCH 715. The Metaphysics of Cyberspace" taught by Professor Mahesh Senagala at Kansas State University during Spring semester, 1997.

In other words, the *agora* (Fig. 2) was an architecturally determined *public place* for the enactment, validation, and stabilization of the political organization of the *polis*.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed Arendt's notion of vita activa and how it defines the human condition. The human condition in the Greek *polis*, where human life was divided between the individual and the community, gave rise to very distinct public and private realms. We have considered the normative and spatial implications of this human condition on the Greek public place - the *agora*. Further, we distinguished the various attributes that defined the *agora* - body, activity, space and time. We shall now explore how, with the emergence of communication media, essentially cyberspace, the traditional notions of public and private are redefined.

Fig. 2. The Greek *Agora* .Model of the agora with the acropolis behind. The agora was the place for the public-political activity of the Greek society. [Source : Camp, J.M. (1986). *The Athenian Agora*. London : Thames and Hudson Ltd. Pp. 13]

CHAPTER 3 : CYBERSPACE AND THE NEW HUMAN CONDITION

> Media of communication available to a culture are a dominant influence on the formation of the culture's intellectual and social pre-occupations . . . we must take into account the symbolic forms of their information, the source of their information, the quantity and speed of their information, the context in which the information is experienced.[1]
>
> - Neil Postman

The human condition, as defined in the previous chapter, refers to everything - natural or artificial - that belongs to the realm of human life and has an ability of affecting, or transforming the way we live. Aldous Huxley suggested that the clearest way to see through the human condition in a culture is "to attend to its tools for conversation."[2] Similarly, Marshal McLuhan observes that : "societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of communication."[3] In this chapter, we shall study the relationship between different modes of communication and the human condition. Next, we shall define the latest technological medium of communication and representation - cyberspace. This will lead to the discussion in the next chapter as to how cyberspace permeates a new human condition as it alters the notions of body, activity, space, and time. Finally, we shall examine the effect of this new, emergent human condition on the spatial and normative ordering of contemporary public place.

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[1] Postman, N. (19 86). *Amusing ourselves to Death : Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. NY : Penguin Books. Pp. 9
[2] Ibid. pp. 8
[3] McLuhan, M. and Quentin Fiore. (1967). *The Medium is The Massage : An Inventory of Effects*. NY : Bantam Books. Pp. 8

Technology, Modes of Communication and the Human Condition

Psychologist Julian Jaynes, in his book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of Bicameral Mind* suggests that the origin of civilization lies in the language. He argues that the social structures depend upon the system of communication between individuals, and it is the communication system that determines the size of the group. Further, he notes that "Each new stage of words literally created new perceptions and attentions, and such new perceptions and attentions resulted in important cultural changes . . ."[4] It can therefore be argued that our language and modes of communication determine the nature and structure of our political, social and cultural institutions by making possible a certain mode of human existence. For example, Neil Postman (1986), while discussing the altered state of affairs in America with the development of television, notes that :" It comes as the unintended consequence of dramatic change in our modes of public conversation . . . it is an ideology nonetheless, for it imposes a way of life, a set of relations among people and ideas . . ."[5]

Further, Martin Heidegger has observed that the essence of technology is that it pertains to the human act of revealing, that is, of truth.[6] The root of the word technology lies in the Greek word *techne*, which refers to the act of revealing, of bringing-forth the truth. He notes : "*Techne* is a mode of *aletheuein* (truth). It reveals whatever does not

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[4] Jaynes, J.(1990). *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. Pp. 132
[5] Postman, N. (19 86). *Amusing ourselves to Death : Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. NY : Penguin Books. Pp. 57

bring itself forth and does not yet lie before us . . ."[7] It is obvious that Heidegger is arguing that there is an inextricable relationship between the human epistemology (that is, the human understanding of reality), and technology. He is advocating the idea that the developments in technology, and the consequent developments in the modes of communication, generate newer definitions of reality as they make possible certain kinds of activities, and prohibit others. We can therefore conclude that technology, human ontology, and the human condition are inextricably related. We shall now examine how people communicated in the Greek *polis*, and how the future growth of technological media of communication have altered this discourse and the associated understanding of reality by providing a new mode for thought, and expression.

The *Agora* Revisited

Hannah Arendt suggests that *praxis* (action) and *lexis* (speech) constituted the basis for reality in the public-political life of the *polis*. To be political meant that all decisions were made through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. Action referred to "finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey." Speech, on the other hand, was "a means of persuasion" rather than

[6] Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. NY: Harper Touchbooks.
[7] Ibid. Pp. 13

rhetoric- "the specifically human way of answering, talking back and measuring up to whatever happened or was done." [8]

It suggests that speech and action formed the ideology of the citizens of the *polis* by imposing a way of life, and a set of relations among people and ideas. That is to say, there was a cause-effect relationship between the speech and action and the resulting human condition. Moreover, the act of seeing was inextricably related with action. The visual and aural space of the *agora*, therefore epitomized the human condition in the Greek *polis*. The *agora* was the realm where what was seen and heard constituted reality. Accordingly, the following can be said about the Greek *agora* :

- The space of the *agora* was visual, as action called for the physical appearance of the human BODY.
- the space of the *agora* was *oral*, as *lexis* and *praxis* constituted the two modes of public ACTIVITY done in the physical context of the state's institutions so designed as to reflect the understanding of their existence in the larger world, that is
- the SPACE of the *agora* was formally ordered to accommodate such human discourse.
- the modes of communication available - *lexis* and *praxis* - necessitated face-to-face interaction in synchronous TIME.

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[8] Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press. pp.26

Technological Media As The Mode Of Human Conversation

We have argued that the evolution of language and other means of communication can be attributed to the technological evolution of the human race. The epistemological and ontological shift[9] from oral cultures, like the Greek *polis*, to technology based cultures has been attributed to the invention of the printing press in the early 16th Century. The printing press changed the structure of public discourse from one based on action and speech to one based on print. I would argue that this shift resulted *in the commodification of action as information*. Consequently, the space of text displaced the space of the *agora* for the act of political negotiation. To elaborate, our traditional notion of reality was visually and aurally perceived in the public place of the Greek *agora*. Such a perception was instituted in the Cartesian duality of true-false, real-imaginary, referent-referred, and perceiver-perceived. However, the printed word made it possible to present knowledge of events in a time and a space different from the time and space of their actual happening. It can be argued that such a de-contextualization of knowledge radically diminished the importance of a physically instituted public place for the conception of reality.[10]

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[9] Our notion of truth, and our idea of intelligence is directly related to the nature and structure of the medium of our conversation. Neil Postman, in his book *Amusing ourselves to Death* presents a very interesting account of this fact.

[10] For example, the "public library" in the Greek polis was a part of the agora/ forum complex. It was essentially public, and important to the community as a storehouse of its knowledge. In the contemporary times, the growth of mass publication has certainly increased the library's holdings and number of users, however, it comes with a loss in its importance to the community as a public place.

The shift in the modes in which we conceive reality, and consequently the diminishing relevance of physically instituted public place for its conception, has been furthered by the newer, faster modes of transfer of information and communication. For example, the invention of the telegraph by Samuel Finley Breese Morse extended the idea of context-free information. The unprecedented influx of information made possible by telegraph was devoid of any social or intellectual context. The new epistemology it engendered was to know *of* a lot of things rather than to know *about* them[11] - in contrast to the Greek *polis*, where epistemology was based in knowing about things through an inextricable interaction between body, activity, space and time in the Greek *agora*.

The invention of the photograph by Louis Daguerre in the 19th Century added another dimension to context-free information by presenting the world as an object. The photograph presented *fragments* of the world in a visual format, thereby providing a pseudo-context to the context-free information. Imagery, as a result, became a part of our new epistemology, and ontology. As a result, *the bodily presence* of the human subject (an essential for the Greek epistemology) also receded in its importance as a constituent of the new epistemology. The idea of reality moved from one instituted in mental perception to one instituted in technologically reproduced imagery. Further, Paul Virilio argues that "the age of image's formal logic was the age of painting, engraving and etching, architecture; it ended with the eighteenth century. . . The age of dialectic logic is the age of photography and film, or if you like, the frame of the

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[11] Postman, N. (1986). Amusing Ourselves to Death. Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business. NY : Penguin Books. pp. 70

nineteenth century."[12] Where formal logic relates to the visually and aurally perceived reality instituted in the Cartesian duality as discussed above, dialectic logic brings in the notion of *actuality* - of how truthful, how real is the representational imagery - in the perception of reality. Reality no longer remains absolute. Such a condition represents yet another fracture in the perception of reality and the physical public place.

In the 20th Century, the television combined the capacities of radio, photograph and cinema to generate a simulated world of animated text and imagery. It legitimized the role of non-sequential, context-free information in structuring our public discourse as it became the new center for human epistemology. The television now became the center of all public discourse, it became the new public place. As Ellen Dunham-Jones argues :

> In the ever presence of media, architecture's delimiting of space and erecting of walls as a means of containing and controlling activity is rendered illusory . . . In only a seemingly dumb question, is public space still needed when we have public television and C-span?[13]

According to Paul Virilio, this was the beginning of the age of *paradoxical logic* :

> when the real-time image dominates the thing represented, real-time subsequently prevailing over real space, virtuality dominating actuality and turning the very concept of reality on its head. Whence the crisis in traditional forms of public representation (graphics, photography, cinema . . .), to the great advantage of presentation, of paradoxical presence, the long distance tele-presence of the object or being which provides their very existence, here and now.[14]

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[12] Virilio, P. (1994). *The Vision Machine*. Indiana University Press. pp 59-77
[13] Dunham-Jones, E. "Altered States : Architecture in Post-Industrial Society."
[14] ibid., pp.59-77

Underlying the above statement is the argument that the new modes of communication make possible a *virtual* presence of the object or of person, which make possible new sets of relationships that no longer dwell in the Cartesian duality. This *virtuality* now forms the basis of new reality. Jean Baudrillard calls it hyperreal. He argues :

> it no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. In fact, since it is no longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at all. It is a hyperreal . . .[15]

Implied above is the argument that there is no longer any relationship between the referent-referred. What is projected in the hyperreal is no longer a representation of real, it is the simulation of the real - a simulacrum.[16] The notion of simulacrum as reality is further being legitimized in the second half of the 20th century by a new technological medium of communication. This new medium erases the physical boundaries and brings the entire world together as a community of *cyborgs*.[17] It is commonly known as cyberspace.

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[15] Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Glaser, Sheila Faria (Tr.) Ann Arbor : The University of Michigan Press. pp.12
[16] Ibid. pp. 6. Baudrillard explains the notion of simulacra as the following phases of imagery :
-it is the reflection of a profound reality
-it masks and perverts a profound reality
-it masks the absence of a profound reality
-it bears no relation to any reality whatever : it is its own pure simulacrum
[17] "Liguistically and materially a hybrid of cybernetic device and organism, a cyborg is a science fiction chimera from the 1950s and after; but a cyborg is also a powerful social and scientific reality in the same historical periiod. Like any important technology, a cyborg is simultaneously a myth and a tool, a representation and an instrument, a frozen moment and a motor of social and imaginative reality. A cyborg exists when two kinds of boundaries are simultaneously problematic : 1) that between animals (for other organisms) and humans, and 2) that between self-controlled, self-governing machines (automatons) and organisms, especially humans (models of autonomy). The cyborg is the figure born of the interface of automaton and autonomy." Donna Haraway quoted in Gray, C.H. Steven Mentor, Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera "Cyborgsology : Constructing the Knowledge of Cybernetic Organisms" in Gray, Chris H. (1995). Ed. *The Cyborg Handbook*. NY : Routledge , pp.

The word *cyberspace* comes out of William Gibson's work of fiction - *Neuromancer* (1984. NY: Ace Books). He defined cyberspace as : "a unified conceptualization of space spanning the entire Net and exists only as a *consensual hallucination* on the part of the hosts and users which participate in it."[18] Gibson's space feels and looks like a physical space but actually is a computer-generated space containing digital data. It represents the space for the *vita activa* of a digital society (a society based in the space of computer networks)[19]. Today, cyberspace transcends the level of fiction and becomes the basis of our new reality as it furthers the idea of simulacrum as the fundamental truth of the digital society.

Cyberspace

Cyberspace can simply be understood as the space that exists in the universal, networked environments of computers. It is denoted by the Internet, and the world wide web (WWW) of hypertext, stereoscopic images, stereophonic sound and high definition video. A comprehensive definition of cyberspace is:

> Cyberspace is a completely spatialized visualization of all information in global information processing systems, along system pathways provided by present and future communications networks, enabling full co-presence and interaction of multiple users, allowing input and output from and to the full human sensorium, permitting simulations of real and

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[18] Gibson, W. (1984). *Neuromancer*. NY: Ace Books

[19] Computer networks are collections of interconnected systems that have the ability to exchange information between one another. The number of computers on the network can be small, or large. The largest and most important computer network in the world today is the Internet.

virtual realities, remote data collection and control through tele-presence, and total integration and intercommunication with a full range of intelligent products and environments in real space.[20]

Cyberspace differs from the space of television in its capacity for a dynamic, though virtual interaction with its users. Cyberspace is a "virtual world" that can be experienced with virtual reality software and systems. Webster's dictionary defines virtual as "not actually, but just as if," and world as "a total environment for human involvement." Michael Heim (1993) defines "virtual world" as "a scene or an experience which in reality does not exist but with which a participant can interact using computer controlled input-output devices."[21]

Just as we function by seeing and interpreting spatial relationships between objects in our physical environment, virtual reality software and systems let us experience the "virtual world" of cyberspace through simulation, immersion, random interaction, tele-presence and robotic tele-presence using computer-controlled input-output devices.[22] Cyberspace is the new, immensely potent paradigm of space for contemporary society. It is also immensely important in its capacity as our new epistemological, ontological, and existential reality. With its promise of reaching one and all, it assumes the role of a mass- media, and can be a very effective source and instrument of contemporary public discourse.[23] It attempts to combine all knowledge of the world and presents it as information. It becomes our

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[20] Novak, M. 'Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace," in Benedikt, M. (1994) Ed. *Cyberspace: First Steps.* Boston : MIT Press.
[21] Heim, M. (1993). *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality.* NY: Oxford University Press.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Galbraith, John K. (1983). *The Anatomy of Power.* Boston : Houghton Mifflin Company

collective-consciousness.[24] *It represents a complete simulacrum in which a digital society matures.* As the medium becomes more affordable, its citizenship will extend to more and more people.

To understand the limits and potential of cyberspace as a medium of discourse, we must develop an understanding of its nature. In my view, cyberspace can be understood in terms of Deleuzean Rhizome (Fig. 3) :

> A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is an alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and . . . and . . . and . . .[25]
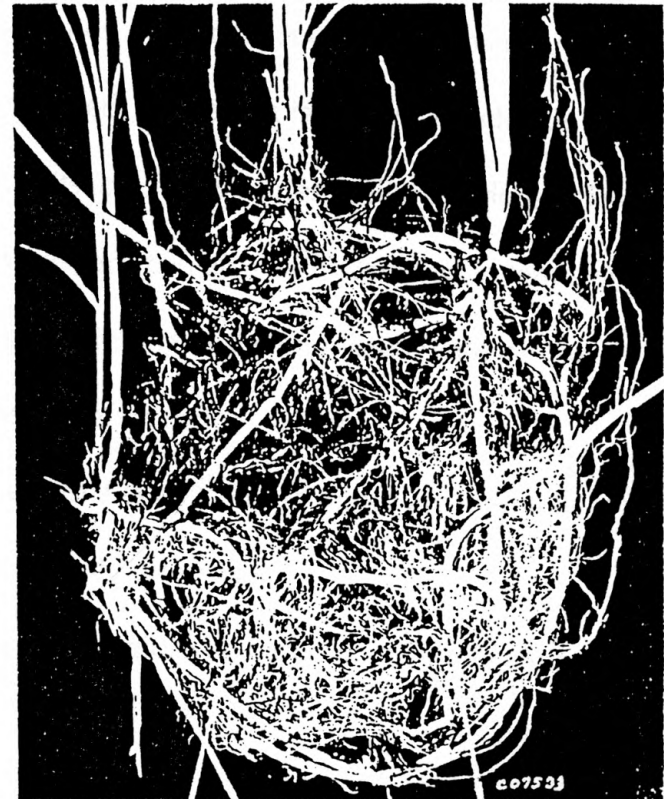
Fig. 3. Rhizome. The image of the rhizome above is indicative of the structure of cyberspace. [Souce : Appleby, A.P. (1958). <u>A study of the Development of Johnsongrass (Sorghum Halepense), Its Rhizome behavior when treated with various chemicals, and the residual effects of two recommended herbicides on crop growth</u>. Master's Thesis. Department of Agronomy. Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science.

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[24] However, as Paul Virilio notes, no information exists without dis-information. The tremendous amount of information on the net may have more to do with entertainment and emotional gratification rather than reason.
[25] Deleuze, G. and Felix Guattari. 1988 . *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis : The University of Minnesota .Press.

Unlike a tree or its roots, and the analogous conception of the Cartesian space, cyberspace is rhizomatic.

Cyberspace can be understood as a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable,

connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight. It doesn't have a

predetermined structure, rather, it is defined solely by its citizens. Cyberspace can also be understood in terms of

nodes and mesh, where the nodes are always in the middle, not in the beginning or the end. Each node can be

understood as analogous to a plateau: "a continuous, self vibrating region of intensities whose

development avoids any orientation towards a culmination point or external end."[26] These nodes are infinitely

interconnected by a non-linear, smooth mesh that offers no dimensions, only directions.

The implications of cyberspace on the new human condition can therefore be based on its implications on the

classical notions of body, activity, space, and time :

- In cyberspace the traditional fixity of "space" and "time" - of here and now is completely diffused. It is a
  space of immediacy and instantaneity. This results in a possibility of simultaneous, yet asynchronous human
  interaction in cyberspace unaffected by the physical separation in space and time.

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[26] Deleuze, G. and Felix Guattari. 1988 . *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis : The University of Minnesota Press.

- The Cartesian - physical space is defined in absolute terms - x, y, and z. Cyberspace, on the other hand, is multidimensional. It is user-defined. There is no absolute position of the body in cyberspace, just a position relative to position of other bodies, with the observer always at the center of things.[27]

- Cyberspace offers the possibility of tele-contact[28] - the possibility *to feel* at a distance, in addition to see at a distance and hear at a distance.

What is the nature of public place in such a medium of communication and existence? Based on the above outline of the structure, capabilities and biases of cyberspace as the new medium for public discourse, we shall now examine in the next chapter how cyberspace extends or transforms the meaning associated with the terms public and private in the *polis,* and how this new relationship with the world alters the relationship between the citizens themselves. We shall refer to it as the new human condition.

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[27] The relationship between different human creations in cyberspace becomes extremely complex due to a lack of congruence, and correlation. In this, the cyberspace is extremely fluid, acentered, and incoherent. Information in cyberspace therefore exists as fragments, rather than a whole.

[28] Virilio, P. (1996). "Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!" *CTHEORY - http://www.ctheory.com*

CHAPTER 4 : THE CYBERNETIC *AGORA*

> Cyberspace "preserves the privatized sphere of the individual - which Barker characterizes as raging, solitary, productive - as well as to escape to a position that is of the spectacle and incontrovertibly public. But this occurs under a new definition of public and private : one in which warrantability is irrelevant, spectacle is plastic and negotiated, and desire no longer grounds itself in physicality."[1]
>
> -Allucquere Rosanne Stone

While affordable, practical virtual reality systems that make cybernetic existence a reality are still a few years away, the emergence of a cybernetic community cannot be pushed aside. In this chapter, I shall explore the public place as it exists in the new, cyborgian human existence. We have already established that in the 5th century Greek *polis*, the *agora* epitomized an ideal public space where all activities that were carried out represented the then ideal human condition. The right to participate in such activities was accorded by appearance, and citizenship. Further, we have established the four major attributes that defined the Greek *agora* - the physical body, visual and oral activity, the physical space and synchronous time. We have also argued that the notions of body, activity, space and time are transformed in cybernetic existence - giving rise to a new human condition. In this chapter, we shall examine this new human condition and explore the structure of the *cybernetic agora* - public place of the cyborgian community.

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[1] Stone, Allucquere Rosanne. "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary stories about Virtual Cultures" in Benedikt, M. (1994) (Ed.) *Cyberspace : First Steps.* Cambridge : MIT Press. pp. 106

The Cybernetic Community

Let us develop a quick understanding of what we mean by a cybernetic community. Cyberspace is essentially collective, a "consensual hallucination"[2] - a technological simulacrum that exists in the web of human consciousness. Fundamentally, a cybernetic community is constituted by the citizens of cyberspace - the *cyborgs*. The term cyborg was first coined by Manfred E. Clynes, who co-authored, with Nathan S. Kline, the article "Cyborgs and Space" in 1960. He has a particular and precise definition of cyborgs :

> What are some of the devices necessary for creating self-regulating man machine systems? This self-regulation must function without the benefit of consciousness in order to cooperate with the body's own autonomous homeostatic controls. For the exogenously extended organizational complex functioning as an integrated homeostatic system unconsciously, we propose the term "Cyborg". The Cyborg deliberately incorporates exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments . . . The purpose of the Cyborg, as well as his homeostatic systems, is to provide an organizational system in which robot-like problems are taken care of automatically and unconsciously, leaving man free to explore, to create, to think, and to feel.[3]

For our purposes, we can understand cyborgs as techno-organic, electronically networked human beings. Cyborgs *talk* with each other in the digital, computer-generated cyberspace using sophisticated communication equipment, including computers, virtual reality systems, and software. Such cyborgian existence gives rise to a fundamental shift in the classical notion of the physical body, public activity, physical space, and synchronous time.

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[2] Gibson, W. (19 84). *Neuromancer* NY : Ace Books
[3] Clynes, M.; Kline, N. (1960). "Cyborgs and Space" in Gray, C.H. (Ed.) (1995). *The Cyborg Handbook*. NY: Routledge. Pp. 30-31

Physical Body vs. Assumed Body

In the Greek *agora*, appearance meant *bodily presence* (Fig. 4) and participation in its activities. A bodily presence was essential as the Greeks based their understanding of reality in the formal logic of both seeing and hearing. The *agora* constituted the visual and the aural space of the Greek epistemology. However, in the cybernetic epistemology based in hypertext and multimedia, which is developed in an aural and visual space of cyberspace, body takes on a different meaning.

As we have argued earlier, cyberspace is a visual and aural simulacrum of the Cartesian world. In cyborgian interactions, the body does not appear physically. Rather, it is simulated using simulation devices like virtual reality systems, hypertext, real-time video, and audio. Allucquere Rosanne Stone notes that "bodies in cyberspace are constituted by

Fig. 4. Greek Sculpture : The Human Body. The Greek sculpture of the classical era is indicative of the importance associated with the human body. [Source : Ridgway, B.S. (1970). *The Severe Style in Greek Sculpture*. Princeton : Princeton University Press. Plate 98 : Bronze from Cape Artemision.]

descriptive codes that embody expectations of appearance."[4] Further, she observes that the cyberspace citizens "construct bodies on-line by describing them, either spontaneously or in response to questions, and articulate their discourses around this assumption."[5] Therefore in cyberspace, bodies are assumed appearances. I am no longer identified by my physical appearance, or descent. I construct, that is, I simulate my identity. The examples of personal web pages attached herewith illustrate this point in great detail (Examples pages 35 & 36).

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[4] Stone, Allucquere Rosanne. "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary stories about Virtual Cultures" in Benedikt, M. (1994) (Ed.) *Cyberspace : First Steps.* Cambridge : MIT Press. pp. 106
[5] ibid. pp. 106

Hello, you are now vistinig the one page soley dedicated to me and what I like. Concieded little bugger, aren't I? NO, I'm NOT!...this is here to let you lovely little peoples know a little about me. Because I know you're just itching to find out what my favorite colour is!

•Real name: [Oh, wouldn't you like to know? BUT, that info is for only the few really cool people who know me] Jenny Fish

•Age: 15

•Birthdate: August 3, 1981

•Sex: Female

•What's my sign?: Leo

•Place of origin: San Jose, California

•And where did this marvel spend most of her life?: San Jose, California

•Where is she now?: Living Hell, Arizona

•Hair color: Blonde

•Eye color: Blue.................ick

•Height: 5'5

•Favorite band: [Do you need to ask?] Type O Negative

•Favorite Type O band member: Well, I LOVE all of them but, my fave is Kenny

•Favortie people: Erin Lee Lucas and Cyril Manson!

•Least favorite people: All of those ignorant people who didn't understand this sentance........And if you did, then you are cool with me!

•Favorite colour: [Ha ha, you had to wait til the end!] It would be black and green [yes it is one.....okay, maybe not.......] if not them, blue

....and, for your info.....no, my name is not Angela..........

!!!!! Welcome to Michael Brown's WBS Homepage !!!!!

A brief biography of me

Hi, my name is Michael Brown. I collect basketball cards, play basketball, and enjoy surfin' the net. I live in Southern California, so naturally my favorite b-ball team is the Lakers. My second favorite team is the Sonics! I also like the Pistons. My five favorite players are Shawn Kemp(Reignman), Grant Hill, Juwan Howard, Eddie Jones, and Kobe Bryant. This may surpise you but I am only 12 years old. I star in basketball. I say that I star in basketball because I play NJB All-Net for my city, Brea. NJB stands for National Junior Basketball. All-Net is a more competitive level of NJB for the better players of each grade. I'm on the 6th grade team because I'm a sixth grader. You have to try out to make the team(only ten people are selected). We finished our season and our final record was 8-6. Then my team played in a All-Net tournament. Our team made it to the Elite 8 but then we lost to Sacramento, eliminating us from the tournament. I love video games! I wish I had Playstation but I only have Sega. My favorite games to play are games like NBA Live 97, NBA Shootout, things like that.

My Generalized Want List

* Grant Hill cards that I don't have
* Shawn Kemp cards that I don't have
* Eddie Jones cards that I don't have
* 96-97 UD Fastbreak Connections that I don't have
* 95-96 Hoops Top Ten cards that I don't have
* 95-96 TSC Beam Team cards that I don't have

Some cards that I have for sale or trade

* 96-97 Metal Power Tools #4 Juwan Howard
* 94-95 Finest #259 Juwan Howard
* 94-95 Emotion #98 Juwan Howard RC
* 95-96 Metal #200 Damon Stoudamire RC
* 96-97 Finest Bronze #66 Kevin Garnett
* 96-97 Ultra #16 Michael Jordan
* 95-96 SP All-Stars GOLD Juwan Howard

I also have many commons available from various sets, just send me your want list and I will look for the cards that you need. I will sell these cards cheap or I will trade them towards cards that are on my want list above.

Other Peoples Want Lists

Let me know if you want your want list posted on my web page!

Jared Rossi's Wantlist:
http://members.tripod.com/~Michael_Brown/jared_wantlist.html

Thanks for viiting my web page and please e-mail me if you have any offers, if you want your want list posted on my web page, or if you have any comments and suggesstions at **dbrown01@earthlink.net**

Please sign my Guestbook

Sign My Guestbook

View My Guestbook

email: dbrown01@earthlink.net

● **Personal Hotlist: My Tripod Homepage , My Wantlist , My cards that I have Available , Other People's Want Lists ,
My brother's web page**

Collective Activity vs. Digital Activity

We have argued earlier that the modes of communication form the basis of patterns of our activity and our epistemological reality.[6] Today electronic technologies transform the activity patterns as they transform the way in which knowledge is acquired, communicated and used. Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that in cybernetic communities, *only* knowledge that can be translated as information - as bits - constitutes epistemology.[7] Therefore, all activity in cybernetic community becomes bits-based, that is, digital (Figs. 5, 6 & 7). Consequently, the extent and speed of participation in digital activity becomes dependent not only on the personal competence and capability of the participant, but also on the modem's speed and the bandwidth available. Access to the

Fig. 5. Icon : Chat Group.
[Source : http:\\www.lycos.com]

Fig. 6. Icon : Digital activity.
[Source : http:\\www.lycos.com]

Fig. 7. Icon : digital Activity.
[Source : http:\\www.lycos.com]

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[6] Jean-Francois Lyotard has also observed: "knowledge constitutes research and transmission of acquired learning." Refer Lyotard, J-F. (1993). *The Post*
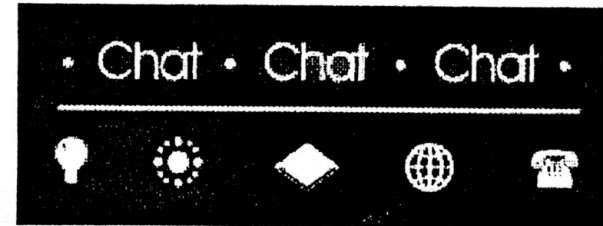
technological network now determines the prerequisites for citizenship of the cybernetic society.

Physical Space vs. Cyberspace

Cyberspace defies the traditional notion of *place*. For cyborgs, the place is not physically rooted, it is simulated. They *act as if* they were meeting in a physical place. The place goes wherever the cyborg goes. That is to say, the *cyberplace* comes into existence when cyborgs interact in cyberspace. Cyberplace is not place/ location specific in terms of it being physically rooted in a place, rather, it stems from cyborgian activity in cyberspace (Fig. 8).

To elaborate, let us take the example of the electronic mail. The E-mail does not come to a fixed place , but to a fixed
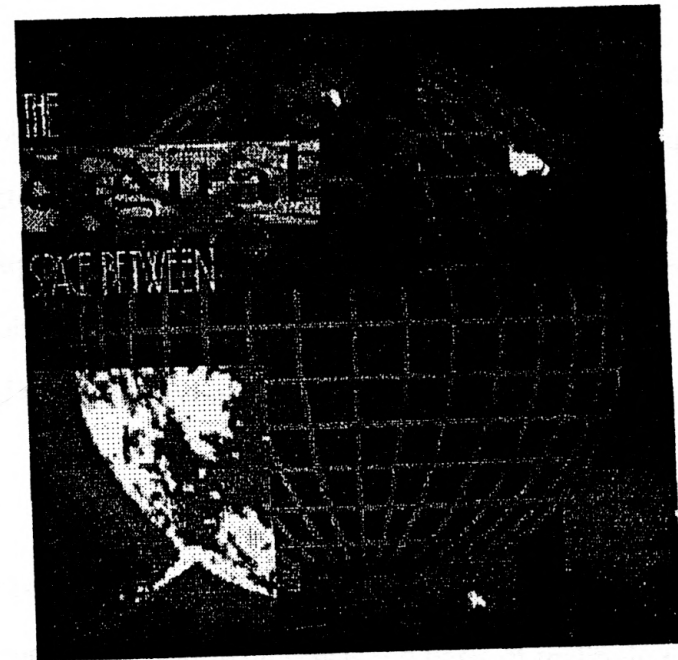

Fig. 8. Hybrid Space.
[Source : http:\\www.lycos.com]

Modern Condition A Report on Knowledge. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
[7] ibid.

address. For example, my E-mail comes to the address : rucks@ksu.edu. I can access it from anywhere in the world instantaneously by logging on to the computer network through a networked computer. The computer screen becomes my window to the world. From anywhere in the world, I can become a part of my chat group by just logging on. In contrast, my analogous mail comes to me at a fixed

street address - 363 N 14th Street, Manhattan, Kansas. The only way I can access it instantaneously is by being there.

Therefore, my cybernetic existence is independent of physical place. I acquire cybernetic existence by acquiring a networked account. The account becomes the place. Those excluded from cybernetic existence are those who don't have the account - an access to the network, irrespective of the large physical property they may own. The cyberspace becomes the realm of interaction - the public realm. Where one physically is, home or office or the Seaton Hall Computer Lab at Kansas State University - becomes just a point of entry into cyberspace.[8]

Synchronous Time vs. Technological Time

The constructed body interaction in cyberspace is made feasible and realistic because cybernetic interaction is not essentially simultaneous, or synchronous. The synchronous time interaction, which was the basis of reality in the aural and visual space of the Greek *agora*, is annihilated as cyberspace opens up the possibility of delayed interaction. This gives the cyborg an opportunity and the time to construct and project what he wants at his own leisure. Paul Virilio calls this phenomenon technological time which has "no relation to a calendar of activities, nor to a collective

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[8] The public-private distinction in cyberspace is independent of our existence in architecturally determined public or private places.

memory, except to that of computer. Contributing to the creation of a permanent present whose intense pace knows no tomorrow . . ."[9] It can therefore be argued that the technological time defies the formal, linear progression of time as past, present, and future by making possible the technological persistence of events - or their absence.

The Cybernetic *Agora*

It is now obvious that the cybernetic *agora* exists in an epistemology and ontology different from the times of the Greek *polis*. This can be best illustrated using an example - of the chat groups that exist and flourish in cyberspace. The chat groups can be understood to constitute the "public places" for the citizens of cyberspace - the cybernetic *agora*, just as the Greek *agora* constituted the public place for the citizens of the Greek *polis*. Though there are numerous chat groups that flourish in cyberspace, with a different set of concerns ranging from arts to politics to religion to lesbianism, I propose that each chat group is essentially public[10] in the sense that free people come together to form a "chat community" where they discuss matters that are of common concern to that community. This chat community is independent of the physical community. As Clynes and Kline have also argued, a cyborgian existence leaves "man free to explore, to create, to think, and to feel."[11] The cybernetic agora therefore becomes the new public realm. (Refer Example pp. 41: Transcript of a Chat).

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[9] Virilio, P. "The Overexposed City."
[10] The meaning associated with the term public itself has changed from the times of the Greek *agora*. We will discuss this issue in detail in next chapter.
[11] Clynes, M.; Kline, N. (1960). "Cyborgs and Space" in Gray, C.H. (Ed.) (1995). *The Cyborg Handbook*. NY: Routledge. Pp.31

Example : What do people talk about in chat areas?

Transcript of a Chat (Book Excerpt. "Lost in Cyberspace." Source : *Newsweek*. October 14, 1996. Pp. 86)

Most chat-area discussions revolve around the fascinating topic of who is entering and leaving the chat-area. A secondary, but equally fascinating, topic is where everybody lives. Also, every now and then the discussion is interrupted by a hormone-crazed 13-year-old boy wishing to talk dirty to women.

LILBRISKET: Hi everybody
WAZOOTYMAN: Hi LilBrisket
TOADSTER: Hi Bris
LUNGFLOOK: Hi B
LILBRISKET: What's going on?
TOADSTER: Not much
LUNGFLOOK: Pretty quiet
(longish pause)
WAZOOTYMAN: Anybody here from Texas?
LILBRISKET: No
TOADSTER: Nope
LUNGFLOOK: Sorry
(longish pause)
UVULABOB: Hi everybody
TOADSTER: Hi Uvulabob
LUNGFLOOK: Hi Uvula
LILBRISKET: Hi UB
WAZOOTYMAN: Hi U
UVULABOB: What's happening?
LILBRISKET: Kinda slow
TOADSTER: Same old same old
LUNGFLOOK: Pretty quiet
JASON56243837: LilBrisket, take off your panties
LILBRISKET: OK, but I'm a man
(longish pause)
WAZOOTYMAN: UvulaBob, are you from Texas?
UVULABOB: No.
(longish pause)
LUNGFLOOK: Well, gotta run.

At this point, it will be appropriate to discuss the notion of action in the technologically mediated societies. In my view, Arendt's action refers to a visually and aurally perceived, almost *spontaneous performance* on part of the citizens in synchronous time with a hope that such a spontaneity will bring forth the essence of the human being. For her, it is this essence that ensures the conditions of human plurality, immortality, and freedom. It may be argued that the *cybernetic agora* becomes the new site of Arendt's action as it also is a space for performance, where human plurality, immortality and freedom can be realized. However, I would contest against such an argument. For example, in our above discussion of the chat groups, cyborgs may communicate in cyberspace as the Greek citizens would in the *agora*. But, the technological mode of communication - cyberspace - comes with its own biases. It no longer warrants a spontaneity of activity. As the cyborg personality gets constructed in the digital medium and interactions become asynchronous, the human essence is concealed as only what is projected is revealed. In other words, I would argue that the fragmentation of the body and the possibility of asynchronous interactions results in a loss of spontaneity of activity, thereby negating the possibility of Arendtian action in cyber-communities.[12]

Some people will also argue that the cybernetic *agora* does not constitute a public place because it comes together in a non-physical environment. In this context, I would contest that it is essential to realize that public place is the locus of public activity, and not necessarily grounded in a physical place. That is to say, we can define public

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[12] Also refer Villa, Dana R. (1996). *Arendt and Heidegger. The Fate of the Political.* Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press. pp. 260-267

place as a group not necessarily rooted in a physical place. As Margaret Canovan (1974) has also argued in *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*:

> . . . a public space may be defined by permanent institutions, but it may also spring into being in a completely informal way - most dramatically among those involved in a revolution; more humbly, among neighbors roused to demonstrate against the siting of an airport on their doorsteps, or among members of a community who grow exasperated with official inactivity over housing and begin to act together to change things themselves: the possibilities are infinite. In each of these cases, whatever the particular purpose or occasion that brought them together, those involved find themselves constituting a public space with its own communal life, within which they participate not as rulers and subjects but as equals who find their relative positions only by merit gained in the eyes of their fellows. Such public spaces can spring up unpredictably from nowhere and just as unpredictably disappear again.[13]

However, it is not to overlook the fact that in such public places, the idea of an architecturally determined place as the locus of public activity, like the classical *agora*, becomes insignificant. The implications of such a condition on the definition of the "public place" today are tremendous.

Conclusion

It is now obvious that cyberspace holds the potential of nurturing a public place. However, it does so under rules much different from the classical modes of interaction. Assuming the competence of cyberspace to engage a digital society in a prolific public discourse in the *cybernetic agora*, we can argue that cyberspace displaces the physical place in its function of the public realm.

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[13] Canovan, M. (1974). *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*. NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Pp.68 - 69

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This condition posits a fundamental question : Is there a need for architecturally delineated public place today? If so, what do we mean by this term? In the next chapter, in a comparison of the classical and cybernetic public place, we shall further develop the concept of body, activity, space and time as determinants of human condition to examine the notions of "public" and "public place" as they are transformed in cyber-mediated human existence. Finally, we shall try to ascertain the normative and spatial nature of the public place in such an existence.

CHAPTER 5 : THE CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC PLACE

We have argued that a public place comes into existence when the bodies appear in space and exchange ideas, arguments, or knowledge that concerns all in time. We have also observed that the *agora* - a paradigm of such place - satisfied such a vision both at the spatial and the normative level in the Greek *polis*. Next, we argued that a new form of public place can exist in cyberspace, characteristically different from the classical model of the public place. The conditions we have talked about are essentially ideal, and lie at two extremes of the cycle of human evolution (Fig.9, page 46). However, their impact on determining the intermediate condition - of the contemporary public place - is immense.

We have observed that the transition from the classical human condition to the cybernetic human condition involves a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of the concepts of body, activity, space, and time. It can also be argued that associated with such a shift is a new understanding of *vita activa* - of labor, work and action - the fundamental human activities essential for sustenance of human life. Consequently, the idea of "public," and "public place" gets redefined. In this chapter, we shall examine the cybernetic implications on the contemporary understanding of the terms above. Such an understanding can help us ascertain the normative and spatial principles underlying the contemporary public place.
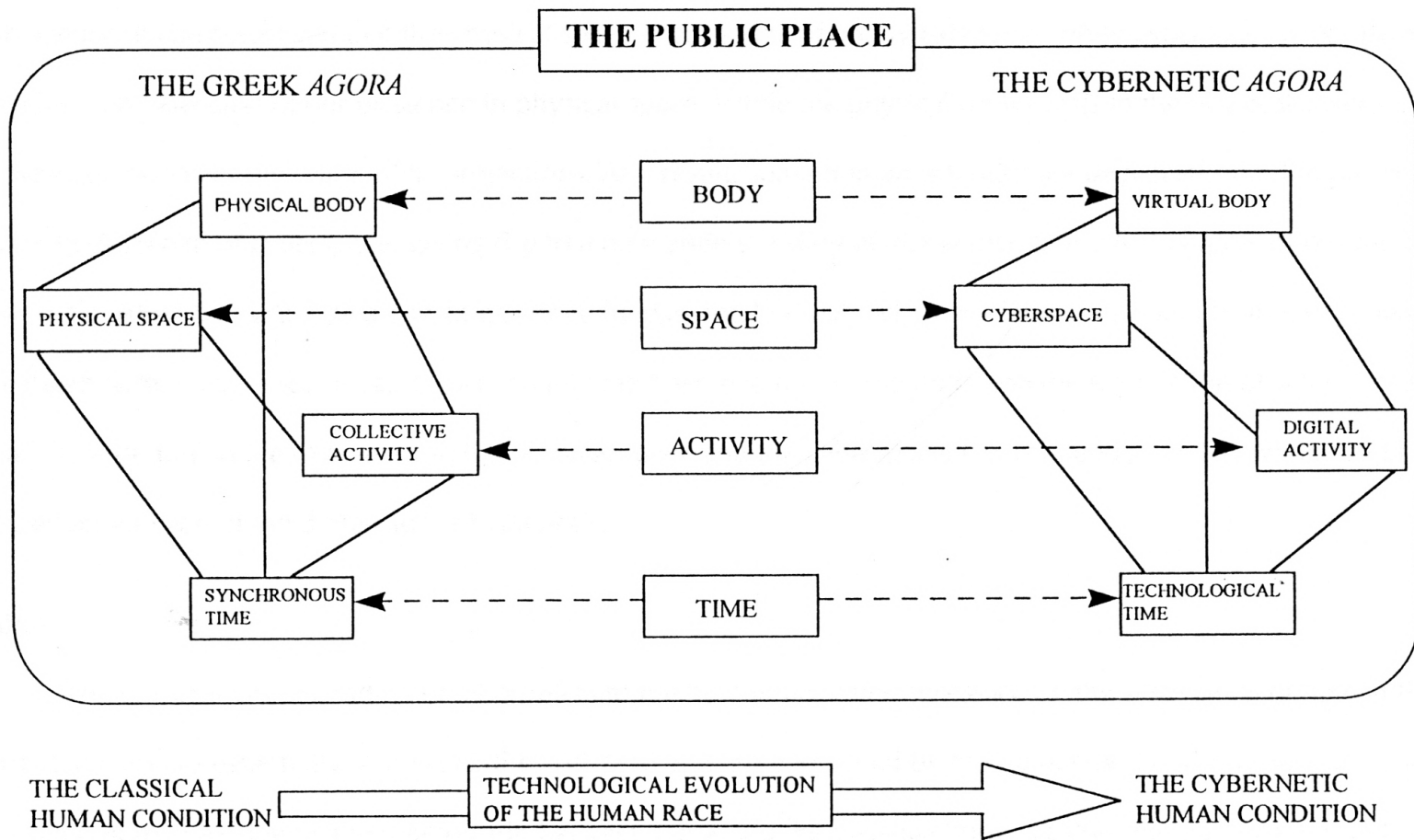
Fig. 9. The Public Place : A conceptual understanding of the normative and spatial principles underlying the public place

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The Cyber-Mediated Human Existence and the New *Vita Activa*

The present day human existence is characterized by its co-existence in the Cartesian physical space and the cyberspace. It can be argued that the physical space is our space of bodily existence, while cyberspace is our own creation - an extension of our existence in physical space. While the physical body exists in the physical space, cyberspace becomes the realm of its projections. As a result, some human activities are displaced from the physical realm to the realm of cyberspace, giving rise to a new understanding of *vita activa*. In the first chapter of this thesis we have established that *vita activa* constitutes three fundamental human activities - labor, work and action. In cyber-mediated human existence, it can be argued that the fragmentation of the body and the digitization of activity causes *vita activa* of human life to co-exist in the physical space and the cyberspace. Consequently, the following can be argued about each of the dimensions of *vita activa* :

Labor

The classical understanding of labor refers to the human activities necessary for the sustenance of human life. Such activities are essentially biological, they relate to and are performed by the human body. In my view, in cyber-mediated human existence, the relationship between labor and the physical body is extremely significant as out of the three fundamental human activities, it is only labor that is inextricably related with the physical body. As the physical

body can exist only in physical space, the activity of labor is performed only in the physical space. Consequently, it can be argued that the physical realm becomes dominated by the necessities of life. It is the realm where we are born, where we die, and where we labor to sustain our biological life between birth and death.

Hannah Arendt notes :

> the body becomes the quintessence of all property because it is the only thing one could not share even if one wanted to. Nothing, in fact, is less common and less communicable, and therefore more securely shielded against the visibility and audibility of the public realm, than what goes within the confines of the body, its pleasures and its pains, its laboring and consuming.[1]

It is obvious from above that the body, and consequently, the activity of labor, ideally belong to the private realm. Associated with this idea is that hedonism, the doctrine that only bodily sensations are real, is but the most radical form of a non -political, totally private way of life. It is however not to overlook the fact that as we evolve towards a cyborgian existence, our organic body depends more and more on prosthetic technological devices for its survival. Cyborgian existence implies :

- a commonality in the technologically-mediated processes within the confines of the body. The bodily sensations of pain and pleasure, among others, can today be technologically *felt*. For example, cyber-sex simulates the real thing using virtual reality machines. Studied in the realm of technology and medicine,

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[1] Arendt, H. (1958). The Human Condition. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press. pp. 112

the processes within the confines of the body therefore begin to become technologically shared knowledge, and thereby lose their essentially private character; and

- technology is now used to enhance an understanding of the processes of the organic body. It signifies a desire to understand the organic body through technological means. As a result, nothing about the body remains esoteric. The confines of the body get projected in the technological space, and thereby break the bounds of the private realm.

As a result of the reconfigured body[2], we experience a blurring of the public-private distinction posited by Hannah Arendt in terms of the processes of the body. The body begins
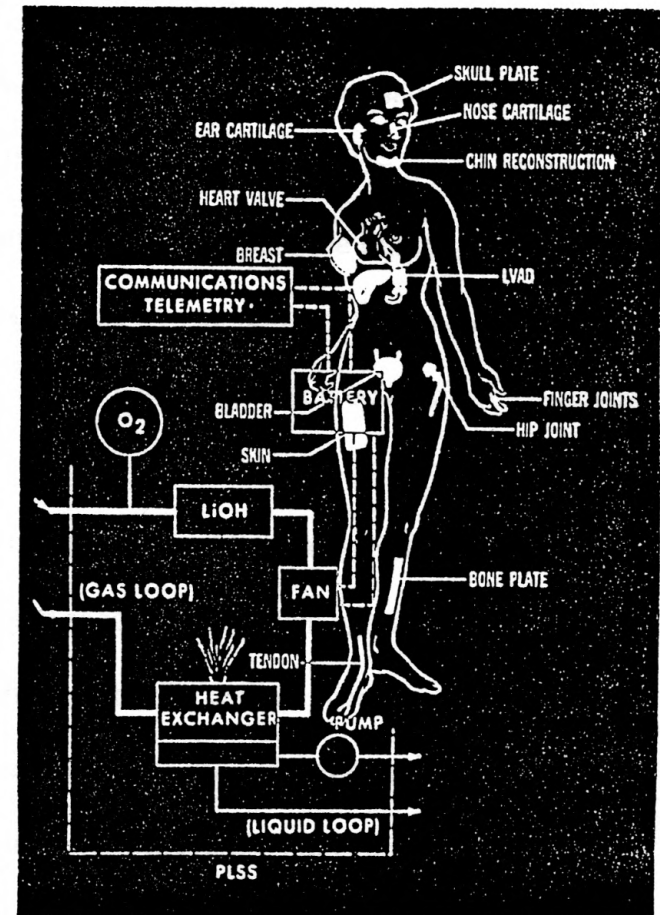

Fig. 10. The Cyborg Body.
[Source : Gray, C.H. (Ed.) (1995). The Cyborg Handbook. NY : Routledge]

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[2] Stone, Allucquere Rosanne."Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? : Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures" in Benedikt, M. (Ed.) (1994) Cyberspace : First Steps. Cambridge : MIT Press. pp. 108-109

to exist in fragments : in the privatized sphere of the individual that exists in the physical space, and in the public sphere of spectacle that exists in cyberspace.[3] Consequently, it can be argued that labor, the human activity performed solely to sustain our bodily existence also no longer remains essentially private. It is performed in a new kind of realm, a new kind of space where rigid boundaries between the biological and the technological, the human and the mechanical, the natural and the artificial, the public and the private as posited by Hannah Arendt no longer exist. It also means that the body is no longer contained in the physical space in the classical sense, it *co-exists* in the physical space and the cyberspace. Let us call it *hybrid space*.

Such a condition raises an important question regarding the contemporary public place. Hannah Arendt sees the public place as a place of appearances. The architecturally delineated space of the Greek *agora* was an ideal place of appearance for the classical body. Here, the reality was perceived through bodily actions which were shared by other bodies. However, it can be argued that in the contemporary condition of the reconfigured body, reality is no longer perceived through bodily actions. In this condition of the reconfigured body, are architecturally formalized public places like the Greek *agora* anymore suitable?

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[3] ibid.

Work

In Arendtian parlance, work refers to the production of "artificial" world of things, that is, to the objectivity of the world. These things are characterized by durability, and they bestow stability, solidity, and permanence to the otherwise mortal nature of man. Associated with the idea of work is the idea of violence : " . . . violence is present in all fabrication, and *homo faber*, the creator of the human artifice, has always been a destroyer of nature."[4] That is to say, *homo faber* acts into nature and transforms it into something stable and solid - an object. The human life acquires meaning and permanence on the basis of this object. However, as we have argued earlier, a cyber-mediated society is characterized by the digitization of activity. As a result, the activity of work begins to shift to the realm of cyberspace. Alan Wexelblat notes : "Cyberspace, or virtual realities, provide us with a number of powerful tools. Chief among these is the ability to create and directly interact with objects not available in the everyday world.[5] Wexelblat's statement points at two conditions of cyber-mediated human existence :

- cyberspace is the space where objects are created, that is, the activity of work shifts to the realm of cyberspace; and

- the objects that cannot be created in physical space are now created in cyberspace.

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[4] Arendt, H. (1958). The Human Condition. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press. pp. 134
[5] Wexelblat, Alan. "Giving Meaning to Place : Semantic Spaces" in Benedikt, M. (Ed.) (1994). *Cyberspace : First Steps*. Cambridge : MIT Press pp. 255

What is the nature of these objects? Do they bestow permanence to the human life? I would argue that there are no objects in cyberspace. They are just a collection of attributes that are easily modifiable, and therefore temporary. As a result, they don't qualify, in Arendtian parlance, as products of work that bestow permanence to human life.

However, more and more work is today performed to create "objects" in cyberspace. Architectural simulations and walk-throughs are one example of objects in cyberspace that can be experienced *as if* they were real renditions. Moreover, *works* of architecture now take place in the realm of cyberspace.[6] Let us take the example of the 1996 crash of the TWA flight 800. Classically, a memorial could have been erected in physical space, using physical building materials, in remembrance of the victims of such an unfortunate event. However, today we erect memorials of bits in cyberspace (Example page 53).

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[6] Various reasons can be put forward to explain such a condition, which range from the inability of architects to build in real space due to economic constraints to the perverse desire of the cyborgian body to continually inhabit ever-shifting, ever-modifiable space. Also read Novak, M. "Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace" in Benedikt, M. (Ed.) (1994) *Cyberspace : First Steps*. Cambridge : MIT Press

This web site has been dedicated to the friends and relatives of those who lost their lives in the explosion of TWA Flight 800 on July 17, 1996.

TWA flight 800 Memorial @ NYSTATE.COM

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[Chat Server] [About this Server] [Theory Posts]
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Post and **Read** thoughts and feelings!.

Father and mother of Passenger express sorrow.

A message from a U.S. Navy diver

The TWA Flight 800 **LIVE** Memorial Chat room

About our Memorial Chat Room

Memorial Message Board @NYSTATE.COM
Where visitors can Post condolences, thanks, and other messages

Theory Message Board @NYSTATE.COM
For those visitors who wish to Post theories and related messages
Essays, Poems and Stories about flight 800

Passenger list
Memorial home pages.

Links to Other Servers

Flight 800 and Montoursville, PA
Boeing 747 fact sheet

News Coverage of investigation

CNN
MSNBC
Newsday
The Washington Post
USA Today

FBI NOTICE:

On the evening of Wednesday, July 17, 1996, TWA Flight 800, carrying 212 passengers and 17 crew members, exploded and crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Long Island shortly after taking off from New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport en route to Paris. There were no survivors, and at this time the cause of the crash has not been determined.

Where does this memorial belong : in the public realm or in the private realm? Classically, such a memorial would be erected in physical space. It would become a public place. People visiting the memorial would have to physically leave the private realm of their homes to visit this memorial. This would require a certain etiquette of appearance, a certain mode of behavior. However, today, though the memorial remains essentially public, I can visit it from a console installed in my bedroom. As a result, my body simultaneously begins to exist both in the private as well as in the public sphere, or, as we have argued earlier, in the *hybrid space*. Also, I can fabricate this digital memorial - a public object - either from the space of my bedroom, or from my desk in my architectural office. Therefore, the activity of work, which corresponds with the fabrication of the object, also no longer remains essentially private, or public. It also moves to the hybrid realm.

We have already argued that the distinction between the public and private realms based on the activity of labor, and therefore the body, no longer exists. Also, from above, it can be argued that the distinction between the public and the private realm no longer exists as far as the activity of work is concerned. Therefore, it is no longer valid to consider work as the basis for classification of the public and private realms.

Action

According to Hannah Arendt, action was inextricably related to the ideal political life of the Greek society, and was therefore the only activity worthy of being performed in the public realm. Political action for the Greeks was not a means to life, but the embodiment or expression of a meaningful life. Therefore, ideal political life excluded any action that was primarily purposive. Action was not defined by its results, success, or failure, or otherwise it ceased to be genuinely political. However, as Arendt also argues, the public realm and the freedom specific to it are today overwhelmed by the torrent of unmet human needs released from their place in the ideally private realm. The political activity today is relegated to the level of necessity. Such a discourse has been nurtured by the modern political theories including Karl Marx's, which combined the Greek public and private by bringing the economic concerns of the household in the public arena. It is as Arendt notes:

> The point then is not that there is a lack of public admiration for poetry and philosophy in the modern world, but that such admiration does not constitute a space in which things are saved from destruction by time. The futility of public admiration, which daily is consumed in ever greater quantities, on the contrary, is such that monetary reward, one of the most futile things there is, can become more objective and more real.[7]

Moreover, such political activity is today performed in cyberspace. Cyberspace legitimizes newer modes of political organization as it supports newer kinds of exchange irrespective of geopolitical boundaries. For example, "Tunghat" (Example page 56) is a web page which serves as a political platform for the "Tuareg" - a nomadic tribe that has

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[7] Arendt, H. (1958). The Human Condition. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press. pp. 57

TUNGHAT is a name of non-benefit and non-political actions that I and my wife are doing with support of many friends. TUNGHAT aims to work and think together with people of Sahel area, especialy with people called Tuareg, for their future (and of course it is also for our future).

TUNGHAT has started his activities since 1992.

In Senegal, TUNGHAT had taken care of refugees from Niger and Mali who have been forced to leave their country because of "the problem of Tuareg".

But "TUNGHAT on the Web" is not a propaganda of his activities.

Here on the Web, we just wish to propose a platform of various information concerned with Tuareg who are suffering from enviromental, social, economical, and political problems.

<center>

20 February 1996

Yusuf Yoshinori FUKUI (Japanese)

Khadijatou WALETT MAHMOUD (Malian)

</center>

"TUNGHAT" means *brotherhood* or *philanthropy* in Tamashek.

VISITORS since March.1st, 1996

This counter is offerd by *The Web-Counter*

General information

Tuareg is not an ethnos

Problem of Tuareg

Tuareg on Internet

Address of associations concerned with Tuareg

List of Associations concerned with Tuareg

Field NGDO in Tuareg area

More information (books, language, culture, etc.)

Bibligraphy of Tuareg

Tamashek (Language of Tuareg)

University & Institute studying about Tuareg

Culture & Tradition

Letters

<center>

Please send us your comments, sugestions, and criticisms
in English, in French, in Tamachek or in Japanese.
We also weleome yourt informaion for making this site better.

Click here to send your E-mail to TUNGHAT

</center>

been distributed across Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, Barkino Faso and Mauritiana as a result of colonization. Before colonization, the Tuareg people based their political organization on a system of confederations that allowed a rational management of their territory. With colonization, the Tuareg territory got dispersed within the geopolitical boundaries of the above mentioned nation-states. Consequently, today the Tuaregs are left with no physical territory of their own where they can organize their political organization. Tunghat now becomes their public place - where they come together to organize their political, social, cultural and economic life.[8] Similarly, there are more and more examples of communities coming together in cyberspace for their public activity. Such examples are indicative of the displacement of public place from architecturally determined spaces to cyberspace.

Once again, it becomes essential to realize that action today depends on simultaneous existence of the physical body in the physical space, and its deliberations in cyberspace. Therefore, we can argue that in today's cyber-mediated human existence, action as an activity takes place in the hybrid space. Consequently, as we have argued earlier, the idea of action as a spontaneous performance on part of the citizens, with the Arendtian hope that such spontaneity would bring forth the essence of the human being and thereby ensure the conditions of human plurality, immortality, and freedom, no longer remains valid. The performance of action in the hybrid space, which is associated with the fragmentation of the body and the possibility of asynchronous interaction due to digitization of activity,

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[8] http://www.imaginet.fr/~yusuf

results in a loss of spontaneity. I would argue that in such a condition, the Arendtian idea of public realm as the realm where human essence is revealed though spontaneous, bodily action is no longer valid.

The Hybrid Space

To recapitulate, we have observed that the *vita activa* of cyber-mediated human existence takes place in the co-existent physical space and cyberspace. Such a *vita activa* is characterized by a fragmented, reconfigured body, digital activity, and technological time interactions. We call the space of such *vita activa* as the *hybrid space*. In the *hybrid space*, the rigid boundaries between the biological and the technological, the physical and the non-physical, the human and the mechanical, the natural and the artificial, the public activity and the private activity are blurred. It is characterized by a simultaneous persistence of all of the above, which is also a characteristic of the contemporary human condition. I would argue that in such case, the Arendtian idea of self-contained public and private realms no longer remains valid. Consequently, the idea of physically rooted, architecturally delineated public place, like the Greek *agora*, as the centers for public activity becomes insignificant. This brings us back to our critical question: What do we mean by public place today?

The Contemporary Public Place

From our discussions above, we have observed that in a cyber-mediated human existence, more and more epistemological and ontological exchange takes place not in real-world-face-to-face-interaction, but in cyberspace in form of digital symbols of information. As a result, it can be argued that in cyber-mediated societies, whatever is not projected in cyberspace is not shared, and therefore becomes private. By the same token, whatever is projected in the cyberspace is now public. We have argued that public place is created by formally or informally organized presence of bodies to talk about subjects of common interest. In view of our discussion of the cyber-mediated human existence, it can be argued that our new public place exists in the *hybrid space*. The public place as in the Greek *agora* was architecturally formalized, however, the contemporary public place tends to be more and more informal, fleeting, and fragile. It appears and disappears as the reconfigured human bodies appear and disperse in the *hybrid space*. The computer screen displaces the *agora* in its function of the public place. As has been argued earlier, such a public place is characterized with annihilation of spontaneous bodily actions as a way of revealing human essence, and therefore its ontological reality. It is as Poster (1995) argues :

> The issue of the public sphere is at the heart of any reconceptualization of democracy. Contemporary social relations seem to be devoid of a basic level of interactive practice which, in the past, was the matrix of democratizing politics : loci such as the *agora* . . .Many of these places remain but no longer serve as organizing centers for political discussion and action . . . electronic communications isolate citizens from one another and substitute themselves for older spaces of politics.[9]

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[9]http://www.gbar.dtu.dk/~itsjg/democracy.html

Implications on Architecture

> . . . buildings will become computer interfaces and computer interfaces will become buildings . . . Architects of the twenty-first century will still shape, arrange, and connect spaces (both real and virtual) to satisfy human needs. They will still care about the qualities of visual and ambient environments. They will still seek commodity, firmness, and delight. But commodity will be as much a matter of software functions and interface design as it is of floor plans and construction materials. Firmness will entail not only the physical integrity of structural systems, but also the logical integrity of computer systems. And delight? Delight will have unimagined dimensions.[10]
>
>   - William Mitchell

As the public place moves out of the Cartesian, architectural domain into the *hybrid space*, it becomes important to ascertain the nature of designed public place in the *hybrid space*. Classically, as was also the case in the Greek *agora*, public places were designed by organizing the permitted activities in a hierarchy of architecturally delineated spaces. Such places were structured like a tree.[11] However, the cyber-mediated human existence places new demands on architectural design of contemporary public places. Fundamentally, it raises the following questions for the nature of designed space :

1.0 The Physical Space

- How does physical, public architecture react to the new understanding of the human condition brought about by the technology of cyberspace?

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[10] Mitchell, W. J. (1995). *City of Bits:Space, Place and the Infobahn*. Boston : MIT Press. pp. 105
[11] Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, F. (1988). *A Thousand Pleatues : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press.

- Is it any longer possible/ relevant to design physical public place based on classical, Arendtian human existence?

- If so, how?

  If it is no longer relevant/ possible to do so, what are the design implications of such a condition for physical architecture?

2.0 Cyberspace

- How does the space of cyberspace react to the new structures of community and their public institutions brought about by its own technology?

- If cyberspace does not support an Arendtian human existence and their public institutions, what becomes of the spatial and formal character of the public institutions it supports?

3.0 The Hybrid Space

- If the contemporary human condition is characterized by its co-existence in the physical space and cyberspace, is there a new, hybrid space?

- Conversely, if there is a hybrid space, does it support the coexistence of the public place in the physical space and cyberspace?

- If so, what is the spatial and formal character of this hybrid space?

Broadly speaking, the hybrid space promises to be the new paradigm of space for the contemporary, cyber-mediated human condition. Consequently, the new public places need to be designed to organize public exchange based on reconfigured body interactions in the *hybrid space*. The physical space may then be architecturally programmed as an entry into the digital space of interaction - much like computer screens.[12] (Fig. 11)
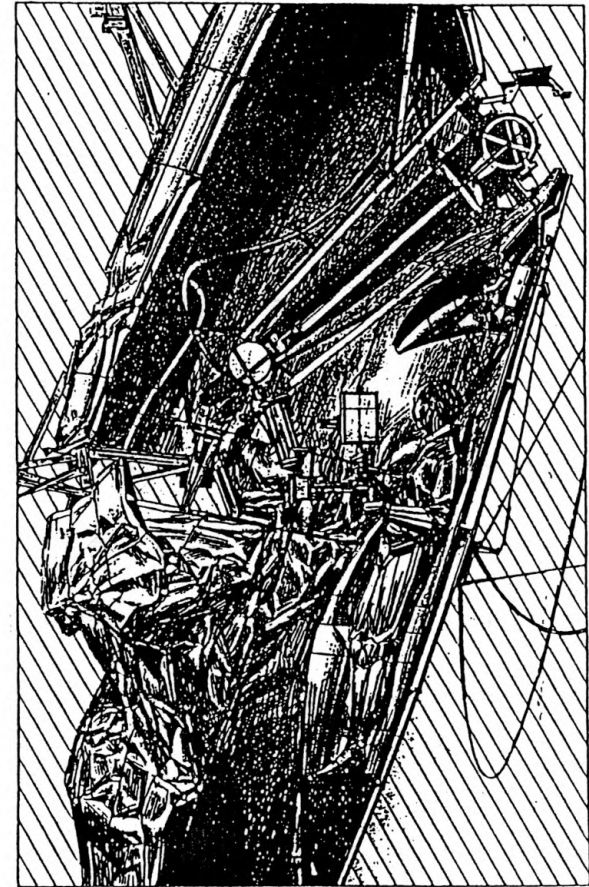

Fig. 11 : Self-Referential Architecture : Lebbeus Woods. New environments that encapsulate robotic actions of the *vita activa*. It is simultaneously private and public. [Source : Papadakis, A. C. (Ed.) (1992). *Free Space Architecture.* Architectural Design Profile No. 96. Page 42]

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[12] Currently, there are various research projects going on at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center in California that recognize social aspects of digital technology. The idea of the *space in-between* can become potent in some of these experiments. For example, the research in support of "Digital Libraries" examines issues like the social role of documents, role of state-of -the- art technology for finding documents, and "overviews of relevant technologies that support the creation, capture, use, search, synthesis, and presentation of documents and information." The place for such an experience of information can potentially be the *space in-between*. Refer http://parc.xerox.com

CHAPTER 6 : CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This thesis was an endeavor to conceptualize the normative and spatial nature of public place in general, and of the public place in the cyber-mediated society in particular.

Classically, architectural ideology was inextricably related to the human condition. The architecturally delineated public places were the places for the enactment, validation and stabilization of the political, social, cultural, economic and religious institutions of a society. However, as we have observed in this thesis, in technologically mediated societies, the capacity of architecture to structure the public discourse not only becomes insignificant, it also becomes unnecessary. The public discourse is now structured in the technological space of the media. As a result, architecturally delineated places no longer uphold public institutions. In such a condition, the classical distinction between public and private places as instituted in architecture also no longer remains valid.

Such a condition inspires the search for new concepts, a new basis to define what is public and what is private. In this thesis, the dimensions of body, activity, space and time as determinants of the human condition were developed and successfully used to understand and redefine what is public and what is private. These concepts, along with Hannah Arendt's *vita activa* of labor, work and action provided an effective matrix to analyze and define the normative as well as spatial aspects of the classical as well as contemporary public place.

For example, at the normative level, it was argued that the contemporary public place exists in a *hybrid space*, is characterized by reconfigured human bodies and digital activity, and is informal, fleeting, and fragile. At the spatial level, it was argued that these places will have to be designed to accommodate new modes of human interactions, and therefore will be characterized by a synthesis of traditional building envelopes and computer screens.

These dimensions can be site, situation and context specific. Consequently, in my view, the value of this thesis lies in the development of these dimensions as a new mode of understanding the human condition, including an understanding of what is public and what is private. In view of the failing relevance of architecture in determining the human condition, these concepts may lead to a rejuvenated approach to architecture appropriate to the emerging human condition.

Further, this work can provide a basis for a more critical analysis of the cyborgian human condition, thereby providing specific guidelines for the development of the cybernetic technologies. In this manner, this thesis would appeal and contribute to a more rational evolution of human race.

The value of this thesis would also lie in the discussion it could potentially generate - thereby becoming a reason for public interaction - classically or cybernetically. The author hopes that such public forums would provide for the utmost public good.

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