Episode 3. Eros: Dylan Mattingly

Samantha Rose Hill: (00:13)
This is Hannah Arendt: Between Worlds, a podcast produced by the Goethe-Institut and the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research. I'm your host, Samantha Rose Hill.

Samantha Rose Hill: (01:03)
When I began talking with the Goethe-Institut about this podcast last spring, I knew immediately that I wanted to commission the composer Dylan Mattingly to write music inspired by Hannah Arendt's conception of thinking. The music that you are hearing at the beginning and end of this podcast was composed by Dylan. I like to tease Dylan and say that he's the Walt Whitman of new music, because there's something profoundly democratic in his work. It commands the listener to stop everything else they are doing and give their attention to what it is they are hearing. And in our world today, which is so busy and full of noise, Dylan is writing compositions that demand our attention.

Dylan Mattingly: (01:59)
Thinking along, along the lines as well with the, the question about silence is that it gives you a sense of like perking your ears up to listen to something, because you immediately say, “Oh, I've never heard this before!” Like I, I mean, literally you hear a note and you're like, I've never heard that note before. That's not on my piano. It helps put you in a state of kind of extra attentiveness.

Samantha Rose Hill: (02:19)
In this episode, we talk about his composition, winter solitude, intensity, quiet, the need for silence, dialogue, and eros. We explore the erotics of thinking and the importance and need for silence to know the space between people. The music that you're hearing, in typical Dylan fashion, reflects Hannah Arendt’s axiom that we must stop in order to think, because he has composed music that cannot physically be played or appear in public space. Instead, it can only appear in the private realm and be played for a public audience.

Dylan Mattingly: (03:11)
You are, are coming to this experience. You are giving that time, that precious time that, you know, makes up the stuff of life to this experience. What do I want for you to live? The answer is, is joy. Art is, uh, it's like a fundamentally utopian like endeavor. You know, uh, you have this like capacity to create a world.

Samantha Rose Hill: (03:33)
Dylan Mattingly is the executive and co-artistic director of the New York based new music ensemble Contemporaneous. Among the ensembles and performers who have commissioned his music are the LA Philharmonic, the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, the Berkeley Symphony, John Adams, Maria Alsop, and many more. please join me in welcoming Dylan Mattingly to Between Worlds!

Samantha Rose Hill: (04:17)
When the Goethe-Institut approached me about doing this podcast, one of the first thoughts that I had was music. I really wanted to find a composer and see what they did with Hannah Arendt's conception of thinking. And that's not even really fair to say, because I specifically wanted to see what you would do with Hannah Arendt's conception of thinking. And let me just start this conversation with a caveat; I am not a musician despite the eight years of piano lessons my parents made me take as a child. So I'm counting on you to talk us through what it is that you've done. And perhaps we can get started by hearing a bit of the music that our listeners have been hearing over the course of these episodes that you have written for our podcast. Can you play some for us?

Dylan Mattingly: (05:20)
Yeah, absolutely.

Samantha Rose Hill: (06:23)
Dylan, can you tell us a little bit about the music that our listeners are hearing? Maybe talk a bit about the tuning and what you've done with these beautiful chords.

Dylan Mattingly: (06:33)
Yeah, absolutely. So one thing many of you will notice when you're, when you're listening to this music in the podcast is that there are lots and lots of notes that are not in the standard keyboard on the piano. And one thing that was really fun actually about writing this music is that be, cuz it was going to be something that was just for the recorded experience and not something that was gonna be performed. There were really no obligations to any sort of practicality. And so the instruments that are created for this, there are, there are eight different pianos and eight different tunings and there are eight different vibe, phones, and eight different tunings, which is not something that, I mean, maybe you could saw off the little, uh, uh, bits of the vibraphone and change their tuning, but you basically cannot possibly create eight, uh, retuned vibraphones and get them all in the same room together.

Dylan Mattingly: (07:19)
So it, it's almost something that like cannot possibly be, uh, experienced in real life and can only be heard in this way. So part of what that does and thinking, thinking along, along the lines as well with the, the question silence is that it gives you a sense of like perking your ears up to listen to something because you immediately say like, I've never heard this before. Like, I mean, literally you hear a note and you're like, I've never heard that note before. That's that is not on my piano. It helps put you in a state of kind of extra attentiveness that gives you in turn the capacity to hear things that you might already know to some degree, uh, things you might already love and hear them as if you're hearing them for the first time. And so you hear that you, your brain says, this is new.

Dylan Mattingly: (08:01)
And the other part of your brain says, I love this. And your brain doesn't say, this is old., I already love this. Your brain says, this is new and I am falling in love. And so, um, that tuning,

especially with pianos and, and vibraphones where your brain already knows, like, okay, they're not playing out of tune because they've been tuned. Whereas if it was a violin, you hear a violinist play a, I know it's not on the keyboard. You're like, oh man, they, they screw it up. But you go in and you're like, this is correct, but this is totally new. And then you something that in fact you already love, and then you say, this is totally new and I love it. And so, that's the trick.

Samantha Rose Hill: (08:40)
It, well, it is a trick in a way and it's an invitation and it's also an unsettling. And as you are describing this auditory experience that you've composed, which is not possible to hear in person in the world, that can only be heard in the way that you've written it, the lines from Wallace Stevens's "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction" burst into my mind that it's, it is possible, possible, possible. It must be possible, right? It must be possible. And you are capturing, I think the space between the possible and the impossible, but you're giving the possible a possibility.

Samantha Rose Hill: (09:49)
Dylan, when I first heard this, and you sent it a few days ago, the first immediate word that came to mind and it, was arresting to me, was winter. Icy, blue, gray, kind of white, this kind of color palette. But then I thinking about what winter is. And I started thinking about that retreat, the space of quiet, the time to be at home, the time to be with one's self, with one's family to turn inwards, and then it started it to kind of make a little bit, sense making isn't the right word. But I started to think about the connection between that inwardness that I was hearing in the, the music and thinking and Hannah Arendt's conception of thinking. Am I totally off? Can you tell us what you were thinking when you were thinking with Hannah Arendt and what we're listening to?

Dylan Mattingly: (10:54)
If you're listening to this podcast, I don't know exactly what time and place you were in, but right now, certainly writing this music. It is it's the beginning of winter and it can't be extricated from that temporality. I think it, you know, it is this place. It is this time. So, uh, I like the idea that that shows up in, in that way. And I also, I think you're, you're onto something definitely about the idea of that, that experience of winter, the kind of clarity of the winter clarity feeling present in this idea of stopping thinking. One of the great challenges here is I wanted to create some music. That's not descriptive of the act of thinking, you know. It's not music that you could listen to be like, ah, yes, this is, this is about thinking! That doesn't work to the strengths of what music can do.

Dylan Mattingly: (11:37)
I would say. And the, the goal was to create something that could really help create that experience, or at least stimulate that sensation of the way that Arendt talks about thinking of that ability to remove from the, the continuity of, of everyday life. And to be able to look with some sort of perspective as you step outside. And that's a hard thing to do. And it's something I'm thinking about a lot and one that you'll hear that's very prominent in this music. And I think it's, um, it wouldn't necessarily have been the obvious move in something that's, that's short, you know, the beginning of, uh, music for a podcast a minute long, but silence is very prominent.

And I think that that's really important. It's something I was thinking about as I was walking outside on these very cool winter days when everything is still after the rain. And to be in that state of kind of, uh, extreme receptivity, it requires a kind of silence for you to be able to take things in.

Dylan Mattingly: (12:39)
And so I think that that felt necessary as something to help, uh, to help listeners feel that way to be able to actually enter into that mindset is to actually feel the silence. And so the music, uh, tries to, uh, obviously it, it, it throws you in it doesn't start from silence, but that I, in some sense, I also pulls you out and as it fades away, then in those moments of silence, first, you think about what you just heard you think like, oh, like what was that? There are notes I've never heard before, and I don't recognize this and you start to think about that. And in that silence, you have, I think, at least ideally you have some of that Arendt experience of thinking. Of like hopefully compels you to this feeling of like, you wanna take out your notebook and a pencil and be like, oh, what was that I just heard? And then it happens again and it's a little bit different, but similar it's like, oh yes. Okay. Yes. Uh, I remember there's this thing and there's, uh, this line. And so anyways, that's a, that's an opening statement about the way I was imagining it.

Samantha Rose Hill: (13:36)
There's two things that I wanna pick up on there. One is, you said, this is not descriptive music. And I completely agree with that. And one of the things that I love about what you've is that it prompted me to think. It set me down on a thought path as Hannah Arendt might say. And there's something that you're doing in there that I would like to get to. And thinking about how one makes, creates music, that isn't just descriptive, but opens up a space for thinking and an experience. Because in a similar way, Hannah Arendt's work is not about what to think. It's not descriptive. It's about trying to facilitate an experience of thinking. For those of us who don't know anything about musicology or music theory can you tell us a little bit about how you approach that as a composer?

Dylan Mattingly: (14:38)
Being a composer is a, it's an interesting thing because it's like, there are things that you can practice and there are things that you can learn. There's some things that you can perhaps get better a, but you can't really, step-by-step learn. And so for something like this, like there's the, and I think this relates to Arendt, but like the, the, the part of it that, uh, the part of it that you can practice,you can, you can figure out how to translate what you're imagining into music, and you can do that better and better. There are things that you can learn. There are ways that you can approach it. Some are better than others I'm sure, but in, in general, that's something you can get better at. You can find even better and better ways to convey the thing that you want to convey.

Dylan Mattingly: (15:21)
But the other part of it is figuring out what you want to convey and that's, uh, it's difficult. And I think it is something that it specifically requires that capacity to stop and think. To be able to really look with perspective at what you're trying to do or not even yet what you're trying to do.

Look with perspective at the world as it is, and it's totality. And figure out what it is that you want to create. What is the thing that makes sense for other people to experience for my life to, uh, to show and direct out of this like massive, super abundant world of, uh, tiny little idiosyncrasies? So that question is, that's a really difficult one. And in some sense, I think in the general path of composers, certainly in musicology and in the general education of, composers, it's probably talked about too little. Because my sense is the reason is, because it's really hard to teach somebody that. You can bring somebody into a class and teach them about orchestration, how to write for the various instruments. But it's really hard to teach someone how to come up with the thing that matters the most.

Samantha Rose Hill: (16:26)
Yeah. Well, I think, I think you're talking when you say with perspective and what's difficult to teach, you're not talking about skill you're talking. I think about having an aesthetic sensibility that attunes one's senses in a way to the world around them. Let's go back to silence because this is something that you were talking about in your introduction. And I think gets to this in another way, when we were listening to the music together, just now in those spaces of silence, my heart started beating a little bit faster, and these are really erotic spaces between swells of thinking. And I don't mean erotic in the sexual sense, but in the sense of eros of having eros. And there's just enough silence to begin to crave, to wonder if there's going to be a little bit more, and then you give it to us and then you take it away again. And there's that push and pull, you said it throws you in and it pulls you out. And so it's this wave. And I think in a way it's capturing what art describes as thinking out of order, but it's also centering the importance of those spaces of silence and what happens there.

Dylan Mattingly: (17:54)
Most of your life to some degree is spent in on the spectrum from silence to music it's spent in silence. I listen to a lot of music, but, uh, I would guess the most of the time there's no music playing and it is the world that is playing. And that is, uh, certainly it's abundantly not silent, but it is that feeling of non-music in some way. The goal here is to be able to create that fullness within this moments of silence. So you're not hearing it as the empty, but that somehow what the music is doing in, in this instance, is providing you with that yearning within the silence where suddenly you're listening to the same silence that was there you know, 25 seconds ago before you started hearing music, but you were hearing it with tentacles reaching into the past, into the future. And that has a lasting impact beyond what the music itself can do, because then you're hearing, hearing the world as it goes on.

Samantha Rose Hill: (18:50)
Who do you think *with* when you're writing? So I asked you to think with Hannah Arendt. I'm wondering who else you think with in conversation and the silent dialogue of your own imagination?

Dylan Mattingly: (19:06)
I would say that the prominent answer here is Darwin.

Samantha Rose Hill: (19:12)
You know, I should have been expecting that answer and yet I was not expecting that answer.

Dylan Mattingly: (19:19)
Um, so

Samantha Rose Hill: (19:20)
Tell me more!

Dylan Mattingly: (19:21)
So he's the second book on my stack here. That's holding up my phone, my, uh, audio device. But I'm writing a big piece that has to do with Darwin right now. But I've been thinking about this question in a similar light with respect to Darwin, as I'm reading *The Voyage of the Beagle* right now, which is, so wonderful. Darwin is extremely receptive to the world in a way that I just find endlessly wonderful. There are all sorts of things that you can see that he's clearly missing as a, you know, 20 something year old on this, uh, on this voyage in 1833. He looks at things and sometimes they're like, oh, Charles, you've got that all wrong! But that's like a very subterranean part of the experience because what you get overwhelmingly is that Darwin is the most interested person who's ever lived.

Dylan Mattingly: (20:07)
It's just like everywhere. He looks, he is like, wow, like look at this. Uh, I, I cannot believe, uh, that I'm seeing this or whatever it is. And I've been thinking, thinking with Darwin as well about like, how do you capture that feeling, uh, and that experience and give that to other people or, or to yourself. And that felt like a very resonant question with the question of Arendt and thinking, because it, I think it is a similar sense of receptivity in that like, and that silence is, is also a prominent part of it because if Charles Darwin was, you know, walked out, walked out into Brazil and is looking at all the wildlife and there's music playing and like he's watching a movie or something like that sort of, uh, action that's being taken upon him would render him unable to look at every tiny, weird little like worm and be this blank slate. And so I think that question of like, how do you create this radical receptivity to everything in the world feels really prominent in both Darwin and Arendt.

Samantha Rose Hill: (21:07)
I think you're really getting out a fundamental distinction that Hannah Arendt draws in *The Life of the Mind* between knowledge and the work of understanding. Knowledge is this desire to grasp, to possess, to name. To have a knowledge that we can use about the world around us. And in many ways that accumulation of knowledge deadens curiosity, the curiosity that you're describing in Darwin's work and in Arendt’s approach to thinking, whereas the work of understanding is about how we tell stories. It's about how we create meaning. It's about opening up a space for thinking. I mean, I wanna come back to eros and I wasn't expecting to do that in a way, but I think that part of what you are describing is the ways in which music can open the mind to kind of erotics of thinking.

Dylan Mattingly: (22:13)
It is endlessly fascinating to me, the capacity that music has in that direction in relation to language, because certainly, you know, there is erotic capacity within language. Undoubtedly. There is something really interesting to me about what specifically, what music can do in that it has this physiological creative ability. And you can give people that change in feeling and you can affect their experience in a way that with language like it, it takes, it takes translation in several different ways in order to get to that spot. And music does have the ability to give you that instant feeling that can then point you towards the thing that you might think, but it, it, you're not, you're not getting there by going through linguistic comprehension first, you're there by like immediate feeling

Samantha Rose Hill: (23:04)
Arendt talks about thinking in terms of linguistics, in terms of language. She doesn't really write much about music. She doesn't mention it even in *The Human Conditio*n when she's talking about works of art and yet, and yet in her correspondence with Jaspers, she says that there is no power greater than music. That music is the greatest pleasure. And I think we often think of music as pleasure, as something that we take pleasure in, or that we turn on to escape, or to keep our mind busy while we're doing tasks or driving. But what you are describing is a different way of thinking about how we engage with music altogether. Music speaks. Music has a grammar. Music isn't about turning off thinking, it's about turning on thinking. Can you talk a little bit more about that distinction and how we form relationships to music?

Dylan Mattingly: (24:11)
Sure. Yeah. I mean, I think that, I think part of it is, is imagining a more Arendtian view of thinking than, well, you know, I guess capital T thinking in some sense than, uh, than we normally think about thinking. The musical experience does feel separate to me than the everyday thought that makes up most of the substance of our life. Mostly we live life thinking about that, you know, like I've gotta to send a bunch emails. The, the dog is hungry. You have to fed the dog. I like that sort of thinking is, uh, it's consistent and it's there and it's always playing. And I, I think that music, it does feel separate then, and maybe even separate than a, kind of like a baseline of, of reading and understanding, it does feel separate than reading an essay that makes you say like, okay, yes. Uh, good. I've I've learned now, now I know about this thing, but I think that music does feel very resonant with Arendt’s view of that capacity to disrupt, uh, with thinking to, to step outside of that straight line, that's carrying you through the day through thought and, uh, have you really truly think, and I, so I think that music, well, I think, yeah, go ahead. Yeah,

Samantha Rose Hill: (25:21)
No, I think you're capturing the ethical political dimension of Hannah Arendt’s work on thinking, which is not about the endless stream of thoughts that we have, but is about stepping out of the harsh light of the public realm into a space of solitude where we can engage in the two in one conversation that we have with ourselves. It's a space where the self consciousness can engage with the conscience. And then that opens up a dialogue in us that might change the way that we think. It might change the way that we relate to ourselves and the way that we act in the

world and relate to others. And I think that's part of what I personally love about your music. It always reminds me a bit of Walt Whitman "Song of Myself" that there's this reflective space that really opens up for the listener that you are giving them through composing. Do you think about your work as having an ethical and political dimension?

Dylan Mattingly: (26:28)
Yeah, I think the answer to that is definitely yes. And definitely separating the possible ways that we could think about, uh, ethics and politics. Cause I think that very specifically my music has no capacity whatsoever to like argue for universal healthcare or make any sort of like specific political claims. Like I think if I wanted to do that, it would be in writing. I don't think my music has any special ability to do that. But I think that in terms of the cap capital P political and yes, in that ability to experience the private also, uh, as you're referencing, I think absolutely my, my music has that, uh, intention. And that, that is something that artistic experience can create. Cuz I think it can offer a window. That window doesn't have to lead towards self-reflection and doesn't have to lead towards incredible thinkings.

Dylan Mattingly: (27:17)
You know, sometimes it, it might indeed just lead towards pleasure, which I might argue does have indeed the capacity to pull you out of your, uh, everyday life. And it might lead in, in other directions. But I think that more than anything, it does have the ability, uh, like real, I guess, artistic experience with the capital E uh, as John Dewey might describe it like it does have that ability to take you out of the way that you're looking at the world and give you the chance. I don't know what you'll do with that chance, but it gives you the chance to then potentially rearrange things.

Samantha Rose Hill: (27:48)
I wanna talk about that chance. I wanna talk about the chance and I, I wanna talk a little bit more about pleasure. So according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American spends 16 minutes a day thinking. Now what people hear when they ask, how much time a day do you spend thinking, who knows? But I can tell you that people spend anywhere between three and five hours a day watching TV, and another four and six on the computer, and 16 minutes a day thinking. Your music in our age of inattention, of noise, demands attention. I'm going to say you intentionally compose music that demands attention, that demands one sit still. One opera that you're working on right now, *Stranger Love,* I believe is six hours. Is that right? Six hours. And the next project, which you've already mentioned on Darwin will be, I assume of equal or longer length, is that right?

Dylan Mattingly: (28:57)
Undetermined how long it'll be, but I'll certainly be outside of the norm of your experience,

Samantha Rose Hill: (29:05)
Which is what we're talking about. So can you talk to us a little bit about attention and maybe the relationship between attention, thinking and pleasure.

Dylan Mattingly: (29:17)
There are forms of art that aren't demanding in that way, which can be wonderful. I think about something like, uh, sculpture, for instance, where you could certainly see an incredible, uh, compelling sculpture and say like, wow, it's, this is, you know, demanding my attention, but for the most part, like it is there and you can walk past or not. And, uh, there's that possibility of this perfect alignment with, uh, what you're seeing and the, the feeling of your life and, and having an incredible experience with it. But it there's a kind of, what could be seen as almost a generous lack of demand from, uh, a physical object. Music is music is in time, there might be ways you can finagle that around the borders, but in general, music is a temporal experience. And so because of that, it is, I think, fundamentally more demanding than other art forms.

Dylan Mattingly: (30:05)
It is saying like, you will be here for this many minutes and throughout that time is an experience that, uh, I presumably have some imagination of what it will be like for you. And I am like putting you in that position. And so I think there is something, there's something significantly demanding about music in general. And I think that as a composer, it's a responsibility in some ways, uh, to use that, uh, to the greatest effect. And I think that at the same time, I wouldn't be a composer if I didn't wanna be. I think that there are incredible experiences that are available to you through that time. And that I, I would argue with a, you know, a six hour opera, I've heard people be like, oh man, that's so long. My counter argument to that is, what are you gonna be doing for those six hours? Like I've spent the last 10 years trying to figure out the absolute best six hours that you could possibly have. Like that's gonna be way better than whatever else you were gonna do for those six hours.

Samantha Rose Hill: (31:01)
It's a title of some future book, *The Best Six Hours*. That's the instrumental way to think about it, which is in many ways the opposite of what we were talking about. But I think what you are describing is an aesthetic experience and the truest sense of the term and in German, it's “ästhetische Erfahrung” and that actually has the word *to drive* in it. It's very much related to our drive, to our desire. And when we have an aesthetic experience, we allow the will inside ourselves to bend in a way that opens us up to transfiguration, and a great work of art can have that effect. One of the things that I'm always struck by in your compositions is the utter sense of joy. There's a kind of love, there's a kind of joy that there's not even the slightest hint of cynicism. And I was wondering if you could maybe just talk to me a little bit about the kind of affective element of the aesthetic experience that you design that you create and curate for your audiences?

Dylan Mattingly: (32:19)
That question is like, okay, you are coming to this experience. You are giving that time. That precious time that, you know, makes up the stuff of life to this experience. What do I want for you to live? The answer is, is joy. Art is, it's like a fundamentally utopian endeavor, you know, uh, you have this like capacity to create a world. It's like, okay, we're gonna enter a world. And what do you want that world to look like? They're endless answers to that question. Endless ways to think about it. I could spend a million lifetimes coming up with all sorts of different

answers to that question, different music. But what is better than the absolute most joyous experience? And, uh, I think more than anything, the thing I think about is, uh, how to kind of allow people to experience the things they really love about being alive in the world. Partially because they know better than I do. So like, you know, if I, if I create a musical experience, that's like, uh, okay, I, I love baseball. Uh, like not, everyone's gonna love that piece, but if you create

Samantha Rose Hill: (33:21)
Which you've done, haven't you?

Dylan Mattingly: (33:23)
Yes. I think, yeah, to some degree I've incorporated my love of baseball into music. But if you create a, if you create an experience that allows people to love the things that they already love, then that has a lot of ability to make people happy. And, uh, making people happy seems like a really wonderful goal. Along with giving people the capacity for that perspective, to be able to see their lives and to, and to truly think these are all things that, that can help fundamentally of a life, which also gets back to your previous question about the political and ethical capacity of what I'm trying to do, which is, uh, something I think about a lot in terms of politics. This question of like, okay, you know, politics very important. Why is politics important? One of the main reasons politics is important is because politics is a, a very useful and, uh, often efficient way of improving people's lives. Universal healthcare has the capacity to make people's lives better. And while writing a piece of music entitled universal healthcare is a great idea, like it's not gonna have any effect. Politically, there is the, also the capacity for writing music that makes people's lives better. And so it, it has a, it has a similar aim. It's looking towards the same thing, doing it a different way.

Samantha Rose Hill: (34:35)
Dylan, you've created the image in my head of forcing politicians to sit in a room and listen to your music, which I might start lobbying for.

Samantha Rose Hill: (35:00)
Arendt gets criticized a lot for separating the passions from politics. From separating emotion, from politics. But one of the things that you have brought up a couple times now is love. And Arendt's first book is on concepts of love, and she talks about love and eros throughout her work. And she's not talking about petty bourgeois romantic love or the feeling of falling in love, but she's talking about what she calls a *amor mundi*, which is a secular political conception of love that allows us to care for one another and the world around us, this idea that we have an ethical responsibility towards the earth, which we inhabit and that we build the world in common with one another. Have you thought about love and politics and love in Arendt? And I know this is a bit of a softball to use a baseball metaphor, but I just want you to tell our listeners a little bit perhaps about some of your work and how you think about love and your music.

Dylan Mattingly: (36:07)

This is right at the forefront of most of my thinking. And as, as you said before the title of the opera is *Stranger Love*. That can have a variety of meetings as well, but, um, it examines love, uh, it examines love between two people. It examines that love between oneself and people with capital P and between the love of oneself and life and the universe. That question is, is really fundamental. And they, the idea of this love of the world in all of its totality is at the heart of what I'm trying to do. I think in, in general. And it, it gets also what I was saying of allowing people to love what they, what they love and to experience the things that they already truly love.

Samantha Rose Hill: (36:52)
So Hannah a wrote a letter to James Baldwin and she said in politics, love is a stranger. What would you say to Hannah Arendt?

Dylan Mattingly: (37:03)
Um, well, I, I like that. She's s quoting for my work, you know, that's exciting. I can see the sense where like political action is a stranger to the emotional capacity of love, which is not rational. I say that in the most positive, uh, term, and I think, uh, I think I'm getting this right, that, Arendt says, the opposite of the beautiful is the useful

Samantha Rose Hill: (37:31)
Is not the ugly,

Dylan Mattingly: (37:32)
But the useful, not the ugly, but the useful. And this feels like a, this feels like a related concept to me. And that, that feels also very prominent in, in imagining what art is and can do. Certainly it is not there to provide a use value. It is not something that we can quantify based on what it is doing. It is there because that is a wonderful goal of human experience is to experience this beautiful thing and to provide that sort of, uh, beautiful love of the world into the life of each individual. And so I think that you can see that in a similar way with politics where you might imagine that politics is, is separate from love in a way like that, where they are doing different things, not necessarily that like a politicians cannot love.

Samantha Rose Hill: (38:14)
It just makes me think that we live in such a moment where we are busy, 24/7. Everybody is rushing from one thing to the next. And we live in such a commodity culture where we're taught to constantly sate all of our desires and that all of our desires can be easily sated. If we don't like it, we can swipe, turn, flip, change. And this to me seems, is very, I don't know, antithetical to the kind of aesthetic experience that we're talking about. Do you think that it's possible to, I'm gonna use the word teach reticently, do you think it's possible to teach or open people up to craving more instead of trying to just sate the immediacy of whatever desire it is that they're feeling?

Dylan Mattingly: (39:11)
Yes, I do.

Samantha Rose Hill: (39:14)
I think we're in the minority.

Dylan Mattingly: (39:16)
We might be in the minority of people who are trying to do it, but I don't, I'm not sure that we're in the minority, uh, of people who would, uh, agree if they really had the chance to think about it. It feels, um, related in some sense to, to a secular culture. Like I'm an atheist. Like I, I have no real religious connection. I guess I'm technically Jewish, but like I have no connection to religious tradition really. At least on a conscious level. And yet like that really just impulse, in some sense, like the desire for transcendence, the belief that there is more to this experience than we might I initially imagine that I do think is something that is very, very common. And so to imagine that there's religious space for that in many, many communities in the world, but there is also secular space where that is perhaps like not a supported, like feeling on its own. That feels like part of this question to me. That I do feel like, you know, there, there are places, there are places that many people go for that, and they get answers to various degrees and direction in their lives, uh, that like do different things. But for a lot of us living in a secular world, that's not actually part of the framework of, uh, of what we have set up. And so I think that it doesn't get a fair shake.

Samantha Rose Hill: (40:34)
It's the longing that brings us right back to this distinction between knowledge and understanding and shifting from a mentality of thinking that we can know everything to embracing the fact of the human condition, that we can't see the future, and we're never going to know everything. And so there's always that space and maybe that's part of the space of silence. I don't think I'd quite connected those two before, but maybe that brings us back to those quiet moments where

Dylan Mattingly: (41:04)
I have been thinking about this, uh, the, these two different ways that I imagine looking at the world for the last several years where I noticed at some point that I could like walk up to a beautiful view, look out at the ocean, islands beyond. I would, I would think it's beautiful. It would be great. And I also have a part of my experience that's like, I want somehow to absorb this view. I want there to be some way that it can become a part of me, and I can just like eat it. And I feel that as a, as one possible mode of looking at beauty and I, and I wondered in that moment, like, is there another mode here, uh, that I could possibly achieve, uh, where, like, just as a witness, just like through these two, like, you know, one inch slits of visible light, I could look at that same view and be like, this is all perfect.

Dylan Mattingly: (41:56)
I am standing here as a human being who will live, uh, you know, 30 to a hundred years out of the vast history of a life. And I will see it for this one moment. And, uh, that is like the totality of this experience that I love it all in exactly this way. That question I'm like, can you experience it

that way? Is, I would love to, I, I don't know exactly the answer, but it does feel like those two different ways of, uh, experiencing beauty are in some ways fighting an eternal struggle.

Samantha Rose Hill: (42:26)
There's an idea in there that perhaps making one self porous to beauty will in turn make us more beautiful, or allow us to create beautiful work. Dylan Mattingly. It has been an absolute pleasure. Thank you so much! And thank you so much for accepting my, my dare to compose while thinking with Hannah Arendt.

Dylan Mattingly: (42:52)
Thank you! The pleasure was mine. I, I would do this for like 24 more hours, at least.

Samantha Rose Hill: (43:14)
Hannah Arendt: Between Worlds is a co-production of the Goethe-Institut and the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research. It was produced and edited by Lisa Bartfai. Music by Dylan Mattingly. And it was hosted by me, Samantha Rose Hill. We have more episodes for you on thinking with Hannah Arendt now. Until next time!