

Samantha Rose Hill: (01:09)

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

At the heart of Hannah Arendt's 1958 masterpiece *The Human Condition*. She writes about the distinct ancient between public and private life. For Arendt this distinction is necessary to living a fully human life where we're free to move between the private realm of the home, where we can experience solitude and the two-in-one dialogue of conversation that I have with myself, and the public space of appearance, where we can be recognized by others, for who and what we are. But Arendt worried that this distinction was being lost to what she called, the rise of the social, or what we might today call the rise of modern mass society. Arendt was worried that everything made was becoming an object of consumption to be used and thrown away. And unlike Karl Marx, who she was criticizing, who had been concerned with the alienation of the laborer, Arendt was concerned with the alienation of objects, and what she comes to call modern worldly alienation.

For Arendt all thinking moves from experience and the things and objects we encounter in the world that give structure to the spaces we move between mediate, the experiences we have. So how has space changed the way that we think? When I began curating this podcast for the Goethe-Institut, I knew that I wanted to talk with an architect to explore the dimensions of public and private space, to begin to understand how the shapeliness of the world around us is informing our thinking today.

Hans Teerds: (03:06)

Politics is imagination, how things also can be different. Well, that's, that's, that's my daily practice. That's what I do as an architect. I try to think how things also can be different

Samantha Rose Hill: (03:17)

Architect Hans Teerds and I discuss the importance of public spaces, where chance meetings and new ideas and strangers can bump into one another. At the same time, we discuss the essential need for private space where solitude reflection and critical thinking can happen. And we talk about how that space can be made available to everyone in society today. Even the unhoused,

Hans Teerds: (03:51)

In the United States, most of these sidewalks are concrete laps, but in, uh, Europe, it's often tiles just lift a few and put trees in it below the surface. There's the beach.

Samantha Rose Hill: (04:03)

Renegade tree planting.

Hans Teerds: (04:05)

Yes. So making it more green, this appropriation of these spaces or making it ambiguous, more ambiguous is just recognizing the potentials of a particular space in it.

Samantha Rose Hill: (04:17)

In this episode, Hans Teerds and I talk about how private and public spaces are designed and how these spaces affect our daily lives.

Hans is a Dutch architect and urban designer who has spent a lot of time thinking *with* Hannah Arendt about the ways in which we make the world in common. And in addition to his private practice, he is also senior scientific assistant and lecturer at the chair of the university in the theory of urban design at the department of architecture at the ETH in Zurich, Switzerland. please join me in welcoming Hans Teerds to "Between Worlds", to think with Hannah Arendt.

Samantha Rose Hill: (05:08)

It's nice to be talking with you, Hans. And I want to jump right in. I wanna actually read you a quote from *The Human Condition* that you put at the beginning of *Reflections on Architecture with Hannah Arendt*. She writes, "To live in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common as a table is located between those who sit around it and the world like every in between relates and separates men at the same time." Can you talk to us a bit about how you think with Hannah Arendt and why this quote is at the beginning of your, of your journal on, on architecture and Arendt?

Hans Teerds: (05:50)

Yeah. Um, that was, um, a very enlightening, um, quote from Arendt for me. And also for, of course the other editors with one, I made this issue when Arendt is writing quite a bit about things. You already said that in your, in the introduction, but these things well, that's, that's rather rare for political field so far, I have the idea. There's not so much, at least not to my attention, political, uh, scientist that really discusses the things and how they, what our relationship with that is in relation to the political realm and political life. And then the, uh, example of the, uh, of, well first say this Arendt does not really mention architecture much, but table, as an example is a really revealing what he is talking about to my mind. Because when I think of a table, of course, I first has a have a physical object in mind, an object where we can sit around and where the people have a particular position.

Hans Teerds: (06:55)

So that's, uh, to my mind already an image of what she's arguing, that it unites, it collect us around the table as well as it separates us. So we have a particular position around the table. And from that position, we take part in the dinner or in the conversation. But as an architect, of course, I also, I, I think not just the table, but I think of tables indeed, a dinner table or a table for, uh, what, what you have in, uh, in a cafe or, or at home that are different tables, of course. And they invite you for different meetings. You can say, or different events can take place around, uh, that table. There's really an, an image that as an architect, you can think in several ways about it because it's the objects, it has a particular form. The form really helps you, how you sit.

Hans Teerds: (07:45)

So a table in a meeting room where you have a meeting, uh, in a more business-like meeting, let's say that's rather a different table than, uh, a cozy place in, in a restaurant. Uh, of course, but then also of course, when you of the room and you see the table and it's nicely clothed, and what is on the table that already reveals, let's say the, what, what will happen there around that, that table in a way, as well as let's say, when you leave the table, you see quite a lot of traces, of course, what has happened around the table.

Samantha Rose Hill: (08:16)

The pleasure of cleaning up after the dinner party. The debris.

Samantha Rose Hill: (08:20)

I was wondering if you could maybe draw this to Hannah Arendt's conception of plurality in thinking about how none of us exist alone in the world. We all exist with others, we're all different. And how this informs the way that you're thinking about this table and the, the way ways in which we invite people in, or prevent them from coming in or say, keep out.

Hans Teerds: (08:47)

Yeah. The, uh, in that sense, the table is of course, a very physical, uh, example, uh, the way you sit around the table. I, I really take that rather, literally, that you are sitting on a particular place when there is a conversation you actually take part in that conversation from that position. That's rather literally, but when I, when I let's say transfer that to a more intangible, let's say position it's the, the world is our, let's say arranges and organizes our position in this world that we have in common. I do think that Arendt really argues that the position where we grow up and how we are, let's say, related to the world really condition us. So that means that that's actually preparing experience that you mentioned so that our thinking come from that experience, but that experience is really related to this well to many things, of course, to what happens, but also to where you, where you live and how you from there really experience this tangible world as an architect. Of course, then I think how I actually enter the public world going from the public to the private, it, that's already a way of, um, experiencing things, common world, or preventing the, of an experience of the common world

Samantha Rose Hill: (10:04)

And how you relate to yourself and to others. I think importantly, for Arendt the, the title, *The Human Condition*, that word *condition* there is doing a lot of work for her, or it refers to the conditions under which life is given to us, this condition of plurality that we appear in the world with others. But it, she's also thinking about the ways in which we are conditioned by the world around us and the things in the world around us and how everything we come into contact with immediately turn into a condition of our experience and our existence.

I wanna just kind of follow up on, on part of what you were saying about attending to this in between space, the interezza, that it goes on between us, that Arendt talks about. So we're living in a time of increasing social isolation, and I'm wondering how you think about plurality when it comes to design, how do the buildings, the streets, the sidewalks, the parks, the play

spaces, the tables, the kind of material artifice of the world around us. How does that affect the ways in which we relate or don't relate to one another?

Hans Teerds: (11:18)

I think it has a, a real big impact on the, on this relationship on the, on one another, the way the city is organized, the particular strong figure is just an urban street and the urban street that's of course, a common figure in Europe, more than in America, I have to say, but a street, for instance, it's of course an infrastructure space, but it really organizes a mixed, uh, use an urban space really in a, in a downtown area, has shops has indeed also public, uh, buildings. It has dwellings. It has, uh, restaurants and cafes as well, which attract quite a mix of public in a rather concise area. So it's a, a street is a rather small space, but it has a lots of function. And this attracts quite a bit of people, different people, which is, uh, then a space that you are, then you have close relationships, you have to deal with the different, or with other people in that space.

Hans Teerds: (12:14)

But when you think of the more broad spaces where actually car traffic is dominating and, um, then you see that there's actually no reason to really relate to one another less pedestrians probably over there. Uh, and there's not a, an, a pressure or a density in this space, so you can really neglect one another, you could say. It's not that in the, in the city street, you will have conversations or so, but the awareness that you see, one another, that's a figure of, of public space, I think, which is important just to know that there are others with very different ways of living or experiences or whatever. Uh, that's the importance. I think

Samantha Rose Hill: (12:55)

The public space becomes a space for recognition for being seen by others.

Hans Teerds: (13:02)

For, yeah. For, for seeing and being seen. That's important for hearing and being heard. This, this is for me also a very important note of Arendt, in particularly, of course, designers like me. We often start with a real idea of public space that we will create a space where people really sit and talk to one another. And that there's an exchange of an idea, this, this real idea kind of ideal of, um, of political life. That's what we have in mind, but I think it's, it's important to already know that rather qualitative, good design of public space that people at least make use of it. Maybe not in a real conversation with one another, but the moment that, that there is a possibility to see one another, the possibility to bump into one another, that's a moment of conversation often. That's important I think.

Samantha Rose Hill: (13:55)

So I'm, I'm curious about two things here. One is the privatization of these public spaces, which is what Arendt is talking about when she's describing the rise of the social, uh, where everything suddenly has a use value. And I'm also, I'm wondering about the imagination in design. So on the one hand we have, we have use objects, the things that we use on a daily basis, whether that's a sidewalk or a coffee mug, have a certain use value for us, but at the same time, these

objects that we interact with have an aesthetic quality, they can also be art. And I'm, so I'm, I'm wondering about this tension between consumerism functionality use, uh, and, and design.

Hans Teerds: (14:48)

Yeah, I I've at least two, uh, responses there on two levels. Uh, because of course, architects they make use objects in a way they design spaces, they design benches, et cetera. But then of course you can do that in a very limited way. Yeah. So when I think of a bench, for instance, there's many ways to use a bench. So of course you can sit on it, you can lay on it, you can use it as a skateboard, uh, uh, venue, what you of course see in the city. And this is, let's say urged by of course, more safety, uh, measures of fear. Let's say fear shapes the city quite a bit. What you of course see is that benches that they are now designed in such a way that you cannot lay on bench to prevent of course, homeless, to stay on that bench.

Hans Teerds: (15:34)

Uh, and of course also the city is really not inviting skateboarders to make use of the spaces. They make it in such a way that it's really difficult or, or even dangerous to use these kind of use objects in other ways than actually thought of for me is this is really a limitation of these use objects, the ambiguous ambiguity that the use object can have. That's I think a quality and that brings us then also, I think, to the more the artistic side, but that's actually a quote from Arendt that I always am, am also a bit puzzled about, about it. So that's she's arguing that everything has a shape of its own.

Samantha Rose Hill: (16:13)

Yes. A shapeliness, the shapeliness of things.

Hans Teerds: (16:16)

Yeah. And on the one hand that's of course that reminds me of, uh, indeed a theater looks like a theater and a coffee mug is a coffee mug. You can see it it's a coffee mug, but this doesn't prevent it. Of course, that there is coffee mugs in many colors or in many shapes, we still recognize it as a, a coffee mug. That's I think the importance, because for me, this is part of the plurality of the world, and the plurality of the people.

Samantha Rose Hill: (16:41)

The kind of other side of the, the personal imagination and intuition that the architect is bringing to the design itself is then the experience that people have with the design, once it is implemented. And there's, there's an aesthetic idea that yes, that can lead to pleasure of some kind that we can take pleasure in the aesthetic qualities of the building, for example. But I think for Arendt it, there was also the idea that the, these things, these buildings, this artifice of the world helps us to create meaning. It's a form of storytelling to, to build these objects that then we navigate in our daily lives that give form to ordinary everyday existence. Do you think that it's possible to, I guess, two questions: is it possible to separate the aesthetic quality from the functionality? Would that be, no. Hans is shaking his head, No, at me, you can't see him, but I can. Um, okay. And the other question is; So then is there a kind of, I wanna say democratic promise in the relationship between what's possible aesthetically and the functionality of the

design as part of the plurality of the design itself, those benches that you were talking about that prevent homeless people from sleeping, for example.

Hans Teerds: (18:19)

I will come back on that, on that later question, but I do think also that the first question that you, uh, that you mentioned is very important in our profession, particularly in early modernism that was of course, quite a revolution in architecture. And then there was actually the idea, for instance, by the architect Corbusier, that architecture also should be like a machine so that there is a kind of logic in the architecture, and that brings the new form or how we did it was rather poetically, I think. But of course, some of the, that turned into modern architecture. Sometimes it was indeed the idea that it was just form follows function. Now that slogan never really was meant to be like that. So there was always this kind of poetic, uh, idea I think, behind, but of course when cost needed to be reduced or, or in a kind of more dogmatic way, there was the idea that I dunno, maybe the idea was that the, the poetic or the, the artistic was part of the functional.

Hans Teerds: (19:17)

However, I, I do think that we have learned, let's say that that even a slogan, like that turned quite quickly in a more stylistic, uh, program. So the, the kind of modern architecture became stylistic, uh, uh, the function was less important than the, uh, than the appearance in the end. So in that sense, there's always been an challenge there. And I do think also that now with the new computation models, as well as algorithms, that there is still an idea, or again, an idea that we can objectify in the end architecture so that you can put it in the computer and the computer makes them the design. Yeah, well, you generated, and I don't believe in that in the end. I, I believe that there's always that even in the programming of the computer, there is a moment of choice and that's more or less the moment of aesthetics.

Hans Teerds: (20:07)

Uh, then so even in the end design never will be too, uh, generated by, by a computer. I think, well, at least I would also argue we should not do that. For me that's really an important aspect because for me in design, what comes together is actually the moment of judgment. So in design, you have to value the different, um, interests of course. And so it, it can never be the interest only of the developer or the commissioner. You always have to have people that have to live there or actually live in the opposite, uh, app opposite, uh, part of the street or that walk past it every day. It has an effect on the city. It has an effect on our climate. So there is many levels that you have to make a decision on it, and you can try to objectify that in a computer, but then you cannot explain it anymore to then you lose the political aspect.

Samantha Rose Hill: (21:00)

And it, and it strikes me that it becomes incredibly dehumanizing.

Hans Teerds: (21:04)

Yes, exactly.

Samantha Rose Hill: (21:05)

There's a quote that I'm reminded of from Hannah Arendt's note cards where she writes, I think it's a little kind of memo to herself, "The opposite of the beautiful is not the ugly, but the useful, the good for."

Hans Teerds: (21:21)

Oh yeah. Yeah. That's a nice, nice one. Yeah.

Samantha Rose Hill: (21:46)

Can I, can I read you a quote from "The Crisis in Education," and I wanna keep talking about the home for a second and, and then maybe go back to the public. So Arendt writes, that these four walls, and she always described the home as the "four walls", and that's also how she described her second husband Heiner as her "four walls". So these four walls within which people's private life is lived, constitute a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world. They enclose a secure place without which no living thing can thrive. I'm really struck by the end of that quote, this idea of an enclosed secure place that's necessary to not just to live, but to thrive as a person. Can you maybe unpack this a little bit?

Hans Teerds: (22:39)

Well, it relates back there of course, to the kind of holiness that she, that Arendt also attaches to the private realm in, um, in the, um, condition where she's really describing the wall as preventing, uh, a moment of prevention of the private, uh, there for my mind, there's, there's at least two levels. So there's life in public. It's really, it's of course, a harsh light. She's really valuing it and she's engaging with it, but she's also aware that a life cannot be, you lived only in public. So there is always a moment that you need to step back withdrawal from the, from the light and well go back to yourself or to the members. Let let's say that, uh, uh, you don't have to wear your mask, uh, in a, in a way I, I think this moment of recuperation of also accessing your experiences thinking, uh, is also a way of, uh, you, you need this kind of solitude, uh, for that.

Hans Teerds: (23:35)

So that's this kind of withdrawal from the public space. I do think. Yeah, yeah, no, uh, I only wanted to add to that, that Arendt also argues that this private space that is within the, these four walls, she argues that it's also the space of love and mourning and, and things that you need to go through in Soli, maybe because it's also, it's not something that you can easily describe in words, I think because the, the public domain is of, or that pays off the, of words and actions and, uh, and these things, and some of these kind of personal experiences, they are, they are, they make you speechless. So that's not part of the part of public space, and it should be experienced in the private realm, uh, there, but this needs then protection, of course, from this kind of I, the public space that makes everything transparent for me, that's really also the figure of the homeless, uh, at the unhoused.

Hans Teerds: (24:31)

It's really hard for them. I think to keep up their dignity, if you always have to be aware of that, you are not safe, that you are even in shelters, uh, and how good they, they can be. But even

then you are, you are not on your own little moment. You cannot withdraw. I think it's, uh, Seyla Benhabib that writes in her book, that's, uh, homeless that this experience that they sometimes are, are ghosts in our street. It's, it's maybe part because they don't have a place where they, where there's a real stable place in their life where they can just be safe. That's I think part of these poor walls that really are needed in the world

Samantha Rose Hill: (25:13)

When you're reading Arendt in *The Human Condition* on, on this distinction between private and public and the necessity of both to live a fully human life. Do you read that as an ethical command in a way as a designer to build spaces that allow for both private life and public life? And I'm curious more generally about the contemporary state of architecture and the ways in which streets and parks are being designed to, or intentionally exclude unhoused peoples.

Hans Teerds: (25:53)

For me, it's, it's an important lesson that people need home. So in that sense, it's when I think ethical and I think, yes, uh, the question is here, housing, can we really make that into kind of commodity? So real estate as a speculate speculative if, um, financial instrument that's, that's really a challenge. I think because that, that makes it, uh, that makes these high private houses with all their emotional aspects into commodities and that's a difficulty. And then the other thing is, of course, when I think of the unhoused, so that will be a problem of, it's not easily solved because there's lots of, um, uh, problems coming together there for me. First, of course, it'll be a challenge to create real good, on the one hand, shelters on the, the other hand programs. And in that sense also spaces to get them into houses that really needs guidance and, and social work architects.

Hans Teerds: (26:56)

We can, we can of course design these spaces, but that it's not the end of the problem. Uh, I, I, I have to acknowledge. And then of course, I also think that the city needs spaces where those people that really cannot live in houses that, or, or one of, or the other reasons are on the streets, that they can be safe as well, that they can appropriate for a while. And so these kind of programs that when you are in house and you get a fine, because you sleep on the bench or park, or, or you have your set your tent in a kind of, uh, green space somewhere, that's not a way to go, I think because that's only creating more problems. And so of course, we need to reach out, we need to help programs, but, but there will be people that, that in the end will still on the street and they have to be able to set up their private spaces. And then of course, I think of, but that's, that's of course more in the margin of architecture, there is also ways of providing little shelters, giving them a cart that they can turn into a tent or whatever. Uh, so to make their space a little bit more stable and safe and, and, uh, and private that that's important to me, these three levels.

Samantha Rose Hill: (28:10)

Yeah. I, I think that you're, you are describing the political stakes and the political importance of having these conversations in a public space to ensure that everybody has a right to privacy, a right, to a private home where they can have these experiences that you, you were talking about

before so beautifully of intimacy of solitude that's necessary for thinking and of those experiences that we can't find words for. You know, I'm reminded of in 1972, there was a panel on Hannah Arendt that she participated in. And at, at the very end of the panel, Hans Morgenthau says to her, All right, so the social question, you don't really mean that, do you, what do you mean by that? And she says, of course, I mean, it, you know, let me give you an example, housing, the question of whether or not everybody, a home is not a political question.

Samantha Rose Hill: (29:09)

She says, this is not up for debate, but it is a political question of how we distribute housing. And I thought that was an interesting example that she went to in particular, because she spent so much of her life as a stateless and homeless refugee, eighteen and a half years. And when she's talking about home and *heimat*, which is not, doesn't quite translate to home in English, but includes all of the other elements of being at home in the world, like language and comfort in one's manners and disposition, she talks about durability and the need for durability, while thinking about the fragility of the buildings and streets and lives in which we live. Can you talk a little bit about home and durability and public space?

Hans Teerds: (30:02)

Yeah. Um, sometimes I think it's also important to maybe call it now permanence because durability has, well, at least in my profession, uh, really this connotation of, um, sustainability, uh, as well. And of course it's, it's all related that's of course. Um, when I think of sustainability, then of course, I, I, I sometimes think of, of buildings that they make from, uh, from carton, for instance, paper, you can, you can have it for two, for two years and easily replace it by something else. And then you still have no waste because you can reuse it or make other, uh, boxes from it. But for me, the importance is indeed the permanence that you really can root somewhere. It starts just by little experiences. I think when you be at home somewhere, you have these kind of parts that you always walk in your house, or so that even you can walk around with blinded eyes and you still can grasp, uh, something from the, from the fridge or, or, you know, let's say how things.

Hans Teerds: (31:02)

And, and so that attaches you, I think, to a particular place. This is not only in your house, but also you have that, these kind of paths outside of your house to the bakery or to the particular cafe or to you, the Metro station, or so that's, that's, let's say ways of embedding yourself in the world. I think, uh, that's making your, also getting to know the world through your own paths. And permanence is sometimes I think, long term. But I experienced this myself as well when I was at Bard and we lived in New York and we had a, and my, my oldest son was one year old and we walked with him to the bakery every day. And just by doing that, and by, by getting to know all the shops and, uh, cafes, and, uh, in the end at the bakery, they recognized her. So of course, with the baby that happens even in New York, but that makes yourself at home. So even in a city like that, you can have these kind of, uh, paths. It's of course, extremely difficult I think in, in our current, uh, is in cities, but it's possible. I think that that's the, I think also the, that's the power of permanence that you are on a particular place and that you really try to adapt there, adapt and be yourself in that particular place

Samantha Rose Hill: (32:19)

And that, and that you can form habits, habits. Yes. And it's such a, it's such a beautiful example of thinking about how architecture mediates our experience of everyday life, because the design of the town or city we live in is going to give form to those walking paths, to those habits, to the bakery, to the coffee shop, to the dinner place, to the park. Do you have any advice about how to think about designing public spaces that can invigorate community while nourishing the need for solitude in privacy?

Hans Teerds: (32:56)

When I started my, uh, PhD in research, I actually thought that I would create a toolbox for architects to design public spaces. But that's of course not knowable like that. The thing is, uh, yeah, so the thing is, of course I have learned that we as architects, we can, we, we only create conditions. So the moment that we make a fantastic public space, but no one appropriates it, and it's an empty space in the end. This is of course, uh, the end of my job, you could say, because I know also really bad spaces, but since they are on the right location, they're fully occupied by people and they enjoy life there and they meet one another. And so, uh, in that sense, bad spaces can be appropriate and still a good, uh, in, in the end, it's a, it's a lively, vital public space.

Hans Teerds: (33:47)

What we can do is create the conditions so architects can create the conditions. And I do think that it's in, in that sense, I, I see quite an attention on public space right now. Meaning that there is more quality is more eye for detail. So there is when I think of public spaces from the nineties of last age, then it was all let's say on a, on a very tight budget, but there's now quite a bit of budget to create more nice spaces. The difficulty here is the moment that you create more nice spaces. Often also smoothening the public life. So these spaces are not meant. These are rather exclusive in the end. So a little bit roughness, the

Samantha Rose Hill: (34:25)

Highly aestheticized places become exclusive.

Hans Teerds: (34:29)

Yeah. Yeah. So it's all, it's a fine line. Sometimes you, you need to leave it rough so that people can really appropriate it themselves. It doesn't have to, sometimes you need more, bigger spaces. Sometimes you need smaller spaces. It's, it's all, depending on the conditions on the circumstances, that's the difficulty here.

Samantha Rose Hill: (34:47)

You have me wondering how we can go out and appropriate the sidewalks for more ambiguous use?

Hans Teerds: (34:54)

Well, that's, that's of course what you see in the kind in the kind of reclaimed the streets, a movement, so that they pull out a, a few old banks in the street and they start, uh, barbecue there, or, uh, or they, or they, uh, appropriate and a parking a lot indeed with nice benches and some greenery or, uh, appropriate in the public space. It's as simple as that's a kid go out and create a painting in, on the, on the street or with chalkboard, for instance. So that's of course the, the sidewalk is, is mentioned for walking, but of course you can create, it's a converse as well, and you can put out your bench lamp and, uh, uh, you can, of course, I know that in the United States, most of these sidewalks are concrete laps, but in, uh, Europe it's often tiles. So what, what is mentioned, just lift a few tiles and put trees in it below the surface. There's the beach!

Samantha Rose Hill: (35:47)
Renegade tree planting.

Hans Teerds: (35:50)
Yes. Yeah. So making it more green. No, that's uh, so the, this appropriation of these spaces, it's, it's the, or making it ambiguous more ambiguous is, is just recognizing the potentials of particular space.

Samantha Rose Hill: (36:06)
Hannah Arendt was a very spatial thinker. And by that, I mean, she was a writer of space. She was interested in how we appear private, how we appear in social spaces, how we appear in public spaces and in *The Human Condition*, which was published in 1958. Uh, she talks about these different spaces that we navigate on a daily basis. And I think it's worth noting that when she's talking about these spaces, uh, the public, private, social they're in English, they're often read as sphere or realm, but when Arendt translated the book into German, she wrote *raum*. Raum, which means space. So in your work, you talk about turning to *The Human Condition* for a vocabulary of architecture. And you talk about four principles about how we think about space with Arendt. Can you walk us through that?

Hans Teerds: (37:08)
For me it has been very important that Arendt really writes space in the end. So before I started to read on Arendt, I, I was, I knew this concept "public space" of course, but also more the political side. And then I always had public sphere, public realm, public domain. So how does that relate to concrete space? And of course, I started to learn, let's say that public sphere is actually more the termed that Habermas use, but that Habermas has this, this, and the, kind of the idea of the rational and, um, that there might be a consensus in the, uh, in the end, the moment that we have a rational discourse and that Arendt has a more agonistic approach for me, that that has been very important because the, and of course we, we, I said, we only create the conditions of this kind of political life, but the idea that public space is not a space of, um, coziness.

Hans Teerds: (38:07)

And that's the common image. Of course, when you see projects, architectural projects, uh, presented, then it's, then these public spaces that, uh, people, of course they are all good looking people and they're shopping or they're dancing, or they're sitting on terras, so all nice. But of course, this is not our experience of public space. Indeed. You can have an accident, you can bump into someone else or fall from a, from a stair or whatever. It's important to acknowledge that. But also then let's say this creates a space also of plurality for me, this kind of idea of consensus or coziness that creates this kind of smoothening, the smoothening out everything that we don't like. It's hard to say, we, we need to design spaces for in-house people or, or young people that, that want to make noise or, or do it, whatever, uh, the teenagers that say that also need their meeting spaces, but it's important to acknowledge that, that we need spaces for these people.

Samantha Rose Hill: (39:02)

And we, we don't have to like everything that's going on in the public space to acknowledge that everybody has a right to be there.

Hans Teerds: (39:11)

No, but for, for an architect, it's really hard to say that you should not design everything, because our incentive is to design everything. So, uh, to, until, until the, the final nail, uh, let's say, in the woods. So, uh, but that's, that's so we, we also need to leave room for, for things that happen that, that, uh, that might happen, but that that's really, uh, difficult design question in the, uh, in the, to do that.

Samantha Rose Hill: (39:36)

The unpredictability not

Hans Teerds: (39:38)

Unpredictability. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But then for me, what, what has been important in the end is that public space is in, is, is, um, the space of appearance. So that brought me actually to the question of the, of the threshold. So this is, this for me is the most important design question. That's where actually the private and the public touches upon, uh, each other. So that's the tension where you, where you withdraw or where you appear again. So, but this, this is a moment also, um, also a physical moment. It's, it's, it's a, it's a real line. You, you go from one temperature to the other, there it's you go from your own, uh, safe, uh, surroundings and everything, you know, into the kind of unknown. So this, this is, this is an important moment. And then I think, um, so the, the facade, often we architect, well, there's many ways to design the facade, but there's moment of, of entry. The entrance is a very, very important moment. And also the window, of course, because then, and then, but that's about be well, not being seen, but, but seeing others, uh, in, in a way you can, you can say, but so, but of course the entry is not just a door. You have a canopy, you have a stoop, uh, maybe you have an entry in whole. So yeah. The threshold can be a space in its own. Um, yeah, that, that have been, that have been real important insights. Uh, for me, uh, this transition, this moment.

Samantha Rose Hill: (41:07)

I'm really reminded here of Walter Benjamin's quote, from *The Arcades Project* where he says we have grown poor and threshold experience.

Hans Teerds: (41:18)

Yeah, definitely.

Samantha Rose Hill: (41:20)

We've lost the threshold.

Hans Teerds: (41:21)

That's, that's also the modern, I think, in, in, in, uh, well, you, I cannot generalize it, but what you are seeing, particularly in the more poor, let's say modern architecture, everything was rather flat. So there was no room for, for an extra gesture, let's say at the entrance. Uh, so an extra canopy or, or indeed a little bit of a niche or, uh, but that's all, all really important to create this, this, this, uh, the is moments, this, this threshold experience. Yes. Uh, yeah.

Samantha Rose Hill: (41:56)

And spaces where the private can start to spill out a little of that threshold onto the street, onto the front yard, onto the barbecue on the sidewalk.

Hans Teerds: (42:05)

You can put your plants on the stoop. So that's, that's what happened. That's what's happening. Yes, yes.

Samantha Rose Hill: (42:11)

Yeah. So I have, I, I, now I have to, I have to add just one more question, because I think you're also touching on Arendt's distinction in *The Human Condition* between labor and work. Because there's the physical act of, of building and labor that goes into the construction of a design, but on the other is the kind of creative element that you are describing of, of imagining building of the aesthetic judgment. And do you, do you think about these distinctions in your own practice between the kind of homo factor, the hands that build and the design, do you think Arendt's distinction holds up or do we see it collapsing in architecture?

Hans Teerds: (42:51)

Well, building is actually then the more every day, uh, uh, environment, or that was that, that what actually is, is, is, is totally, uh, justified only by economic calculations, let's say. So that's the majority of the building environment. The end is not the building, but the profit. So that's, uh, when, when I just, uh, cut, cut the, cut the corners, let's say, quickly then it's, that's the, the distinction and the current condition. Do we still have architecture, right? Is there still an architecture that is able to unite the people, or is, is this kind of economical thinking also, uh, have, have a grip now on architecture? When I take serious Arendt's idea that the environment that, that they really, that is really conditions us, then I think this, this political idea that architecture unites us and separates us as, uh, uh, well to, to refer to the table again, this is also part and parcel of our everyday environment.

Hans Teerds: (43:53)

We should not lose that. Uh, we should not leave that to the market of economics, but we should, should see how important that is politically. So I would not, uh, I, I don't agree there with, uh, well, I see the, the division, but I'm afraid of this division because, because it easily neglect the things that, that to me are really important, the every environment, but then of course, the, um, had this, this artistic or, or, or the idea of imagination for me, that's indeed bringing in the action part. The, the idea that you can, that, that this brings us really close to, to what Arendt writes about politics. And so politics is imagination. How things also can be different. Well, that's, that's, that's my daily practice. That's what I do as an architect. I try to think how things also can be different. And I hope that I can do that for the people and not against the, with regard to gentrification processes, for instance, uh, yeah,

Samantha Rose Hill: (44:58)

The world can always be other than what it is. And we have wonderful people like you thinking about these questions on a daily basis with, with people like Hannah Arendt. Hans Teerds, I think that's a wonderful place to end our conversation. And I wanna thank you so much for being with us on this podcast. This conversation could, could keep going on.

Hans Teerds: (45:22)

My pleasure!

Samantha Rose Hill: (45:34)

"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!