

**Introduction to Cultural Studies**  
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**Lecture - 28**  
**Hannah Arendt - The Human Condition III**

So hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Introduction to Cultural Studies where we are looking at Hannah Arendt's The Human Condition. So we have already covered a couple of lectures on this particular text and we have covered some significant sections from this text as well. So last time when we were doing this particular book we were looking at the Arendt's notion of the private realm and the public realm.

And how the idea of private realm was initially, was originally associated with a punitive measure with someone being punished. So not appearing in the public realm was a form of punishment in ancient times and she had observed how that kind of a notion is changed in modern era where the private actually becomes more privileged. So if you have more privacy, if you have more private space you automatically have more agency in modern times in complete contrast to the ancient classical times where the public realm or the public presence was equated with prestige you know.

And a lot of agency and the private realm was given to slaves, to laborers and to women in another words people who did not have any agency, people who are not really citizens in the first place. So that notion is changed in modern times and that is something Arendt has been examining quite interestingly.

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What the public realm considers irrelevant can have such an extraordinary and infectious charm that a whole people may adopt it as their way of life, without for that reason changing its essentially private character. Modern enchantment with "small things," though preached by early twentieth-century poetry in almost all European tongues, has found its classical presentation in the *petit bonheur* of the French people. Since the decay of their once great and glorious public realm, the French have become masters in the art of being happy among "small things," within the space of their own four walls, between chest and bed, table and chair, dog and cat and flowerpot, extending to these things a care and tenderness which, in a world where rapid industrialization constantly kills off the things of yesterday to produce today's objects, may even appear to be the world's last, purely humane corner. This enlarge-

Now if you come go page 52 which should be on your screen highlighted in yellow in this particular book where she talks about how in modern times the entire you know the entire agency shifts towards the private. The entire idea of humanity, the entire idea of individualism is dependent on the design of the private space and how the private space alone can actually become a marker for agency in modern times where the grand narrative or the public space is beginning to collapse.

The grand narrative of the public space or the public presence is giving way to micro narratives and among this many micro narratives we have the narrative of the private space of home, the very (()) (02:06) interior which Arendt argues is something that is connected with intimacy and intimacy in this sense is connected with agency. So this is one of the really interesting things in this book how Arendt takes up certain effects such as intimacy, such as love, such as pain, such as privacy.

So all these so sentimental feelings, all this sentimental structures are given a discursive design in Arendt's analysis and this again is the idea of entangling the sentimental and the discursive is something Arendt does quite interestingly in this particular book which of course ties to our original hypothesis, the working definition of culture that we have for this course as an entanglement of the abstract and the material as an asymmetric entanglement of the abstract and the material components.

That is something that Arendt underlines here with specially with her reading of the private space in modern times. So and this is the quotation that I will read out from page 52 highlighted in yellow on your screen. What the public realm considers irrelevant can have such an extraordinary and infectious charm that a whole people may adopt it as their way of life without for that reason changing its essentially private character.

Modern enchantment with small things though preached by early twentieth century poetry in almost all European tongues has found its classical presentation in the petit bonheur of the French people. So she talks about the modern obsession with small things. The modern you know entanglement, enchantment, excitement with small things and small things over here obviously becomes signifiers of intimacy.

And intimacy becomes a discursive design in modern times according to Arendt where people collects small things, people set up design of intimacy, design of agency in the privacy of their home in complete contrast of the earlier times where the entire idea of agency was associated with your presence with a presence in the public space. But that palpability of the public space is given way to modern enchantment with small things, petit Bonheur, small pleasures, petit pleasures.

So since the decay of their once great and glorious public realm, the French have become masters in the art of being happy among small things within the space of their own four walls between chest and bed, table and chair, dog and cat and flowerpot extending to these things a care and tenderness which in a world where rapid industrialization constantly kills off the things of yesterday to produce today's objects may even appear to be the world's last, purely humane order.

So she talks about obviously an era of rapid industrialization where everything is normativized, everything is ritualized and everything is leveled away, every difference is leveled away, every order of uniqueness is leveled away. So where could we find uniqueness, where could we find individuality, where could we find humanity which is unique in color.

The only space where such uniqueness may be found according to Arendt is the private space between four walls in the bedroom, in the drawing room in the very private space of the individual, in very small things such as a chest, tables, flowerpot, cat, table, dogs etc. So again very very petit things, very small things, very micro things. So this entire idea of micro objectivity is something Arendt is foregrounding over here.

And this obviously is relatable as you can perhaps have imagined by now already. This is relatable in a very interesting sense with Lyotard's idea of micro narratives which obviously he situates against the very Habermasian idea of the public space. So Arendt over here is giving a commentary. She is not taking any side. She is giving a commentary on the condition of modern times where the entire idea of the public space is disappeared essentially.

And what we have instead is a very the intimacy of the private realm, the intimacy of the private space where the individual can design his individuality, his uniqueness through an arrangement of, a unique arrangement of small objects, petit objects such as tables and chairs and flowerpots and other pieces of furniture, okay. And this is obviously some kind of a resistance against industrialization which is a great leveling machine that Arendt describes.

So industrialization is seen as a leveling away of all kinds of uniqueness, leveling away all kinds of individuality and essentially a machine for mass production, a machine for mass consumption. So again this massive mass consumption and production where does individual go, where does the individual find the uniqueness, their odd charm, their individual charm and the only space which is available for them is the private space as Arendt describes it.

So this this can be this appears to be the world's large purely humane order as against the massive industrial order on the outside.

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appear to be the world's last, purely humane corner. This enlargement of the private, the enchantment, as it were, of a whole people, does not make it public, does not constitute a public realm, but, on the contrary, means only that the public realm has almost completely receded, so that greatness has given way to charm everywhere; for while the public realm may be great, it cannot be charming precisely because it is unable to harbor the irrelevant.

Second, the term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the

This enlargement of the private, the enchantment as it were of a whole people does not make it public, does not constitute a public realm but on the contrary means only that the public realm has almost completely receded so that greatness has given way to charm everywhere. For while the public realm may be great, it cannot be charming precisely because it is unable to harbor the irrelevant.

So the ontology of the irrelevant becomes very important over here in Arendt's analysis. So what the public realm considers or ontologizes as irrelevant is that finds its home, that finds its accommodation in the private space and that becomes relevant in a discursive individual level, right. So the failure of the public space in a way is a failure to accommodate what it considers to be irrelevant. So the public space is essentially exclusive in quality.

It is essentially elitist in quality, is essentially discursive in quality in a hegemonic way and that hegemonic discursivity of the public space makes very many objects irrelevant and those objects which are attached to individuality attached to personal charm, those find a home in the private space right. So the idea of irrelevance becomes very important over here. So that degree of irrelevance, the ontology of irrelevance over here is a marker for the very exclusive elitist idea of the public space which causes its demise in the long run according to Arendt's analysis.

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owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together 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; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.

Okay, so the term public signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, again we are back to the idea of artifact.

If you remember Arendt started this discourse by mapping of 3 different kinds of activities, labor and work and action and work of course is the unnatural realm, the realm in which the unnatural artifact of culture is created and manufactured and maintained. So it is largely an artifact, the public space is an artifact that has to be preserved you know but of course that artifact keep going away, is receding, is disappearing because of its exclusive quality, okay.

And it is rather, related rather to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. So in other words the public space is a space where work and action happens, happen. So again, I am talking of work and action in a very Hannah Arendt kind of a definition. So work being the construction of artificiality, the construction of the artifact which is culture and action of course is that activity which goes on between men.

The intersubjective activity which goes on between men in that artificial apparatus amidst that artificial apparatus that environment which we call culture. The public space is relative of these 2

activities okay. To live together 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. The world like every-in-between relates and separates men at the same time.

So the world or the public space, it relates men as well as separates men at the same time. So there is simultaneous relativity or relatedness and separation is what distinguishes the public space. But of course the public space in modern times according to Arendt is losing its significance because of its kind of a intolerance towards what it considers to be irrelevant. So this intolerance towards irrelevance pushes the public space away.

And so the irrelevant which is unique, which is human, which is charming that finds its home, that finds its accommodation in the private space and the enchantment of the private space is basically generated out of the accommodation of the, unique accommodation of the irrelevant in the private realm. So you know this idea of the public space disappearing because it cannot accommodate the irrelevant is something that Arendt argues quite compellingly I think, okay.

So this idea of private and public, this idea of different kinds of effect, this idea of different kinds of human behaviour dependent on effect is something that Arendt talks about quite extensively.

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Under modern circumstances, this deprivation of "objective" relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them has become the mass phenomenon of loneliness, where it has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form.<sup>62</sup> The reason for this extremity is that mass society not only destroys the public realm but the private as well, deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world and where, at any rate, even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth of the hearth and the limited reality of family life. The

So if you come to this section which should be on your screen of page 58 moving on to page 59 the highlighted section in yellow, the last sentence in page 58 where she says, under modern circumstances this deprivation of objective relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them has become the mass phenomenon of loneliness where it has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form.

So she is obviously over here examining modern loneliness and modern alienation. Now what is this alienation? Is it alienation from the public space? Is it alienation between men. Is it alienation at an existential level or is a very asymmetric combination of all these categories. So this is what she says over here. The reason for this extremity is that mass society not only destroys the public realm but the private as well.

Deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home where they once felt sheltered against the world and where at any rate even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth of the hearth and the limited reality of family life. So she says over here that the entire idea of mass society, mass production, mass consumption, mass reproduction so that that kind of a massive scale of production and reproduction and consumption it basically invades not just the public space but also the private space right and that generates loneliness.

So loneliness over here becomes not just a phenomenal feeling but also a discursively designed feeling. So it is something, it is a feeling which is you know caused due to certain external physical material conditions but at the same time is obviously a feeling so it is inward looking as well. So there is a degree of melancholy about the modern loneliness. The degree of melancholy in the sense that the sense of your self begins to go away.

The sense of your self begins to recede away right. being constantly bombarded, being constantly invaded by the material apparatus by the you know the different kind of apparatus of the mass industry which we consume around us. So again we are looking at loneliness not just as an existential inward feeling but also as an epiphenomenon as a fallout of something which is discursive, something which is outside, something which is sort of physical in quality.



So again we are looking at the blurred borderline between the inside and the outside which is something that we should keep in mind constantly when we look at culture and not least when we are doing cultural studies. So Arendt is one of those very interesting philosophers who look at effect as a discursive category, who look at effect as a phenomenon which is caused because of certain kind of material conditions, certain kind of discursive conditions.

So effect becomes discursive design etc., right. So you know the whole idea of effect becomes very important in Arendt's analysis and she looks at things such as intimacy, loneliness, alienation, not just as existential emotional feelings, emotional categories but also categories which are equally informed by material changes by discursive changes by the you know changes in apparatus around us.

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Seen from this viewpoint, the modern discovery of intimacy seems a flight from the whole outer world into the inner subjectivity of the individual, which formerly had been sheltered and protected by the private realm. The dissolution of this realm into the social may most conveniently be watched in the progressing transformation of immobile into mobile property until eventually the distinction between property and wealth, between the *fungibles* and the *consumptibles* of Roman law, loses all significance because every tangible, "fungible" thing has become an object of "consumption"; it lost its private use value which was determined by its location and acquired an exclusively social value determined through its ever-changing exchangeability whose fluctuation could itself be fixed only temporarily by relating it to the common denominator of money.<sup>76</sup> Closely connected with this social evapora-

Okay, so on page 69 on your screen again highlighted in yellow is Arendt's examination of the modern discovery of intimacy, okay. So she says the modern discovery of intimacy seems a flight from the whole outer world into the inner subjectivity of the individual which formally have been sheltered and protected by the private realm.

The dissolution of this realm into the social may most conveniently be watched in the progressing transformation of immobile into mobile property until eventually the distinction

between property and wealth between the fungibles and the consumptibles of Roman law lose all significance because every tangible, fungible thing has become an object of consumption.

It lost its private value, private use value which was determined by its location and acquired an exclusively social value determined through its ever-changing exchangeability whose fluctuation could itself be fixed only temporarily by relating it to the common denominator of money. Now this is a remarkable section over here because like most great thinkers Arendt seems to be quite prophetic on what she is saying and what she says over here is quite interesting.

She says that and this constant bombardment of mass consumption, mass production, and mass reproduction the borderline between private and public goes away. There is no private, there is no public space left but the private space equally is invaded and human being goes further inside in the public in the private space. However, this illusion of the realm of private and public also creates a further dissolution between what between property and wealth right.

So the whole idea of consumption becomes important over here, right. So consumption becomes all in all the meta category over here. So you know the whole idea of you know private property and wealth begins to blur away and now what we have instead is the blurring of borderline between the fungible and the consumptible which was the ontological difference that Romans made between what we have as a permanent thing as something that is tangible and something that will go away because you consume it.

That kind of a distinction goes away because we are consuming everything. Everything is consumable in other words in modern times. Thanks to the idea, thanks to the design of the mass industry, the mass production principle, okay. So how does it happen? It happens because of the ever-changing exchangeability whose fluctuation could itself be fixed only temporarily by relating it to the common denominator of money.

So let us see, let us take example of the mobile phone today, of the smartphone today. The smartphone obviously is something that you own privately but at the same time it is used increasingly for public purposes. So you can take photos of public programs, you can make

public statements over smartphone. You can post something in a social media using a smartphone. So smartphone becomes a very good example of what Arendt is saying over here.

And again obviously Arendt did not know smartphones as this is way before smartphones appear anywhere even in imagination but like most great thinkers she appears to be quite prophetic in what she is saying over here in the sense that smartphones and many other gadgets that we use today, Bluetooth, smartphones, cards, you know all kinds of things that we have today, they blur the borderline between the inside and the outside.

Between what we have as a property and what we possess as wealth, between private property and public wealth. So you know this entire you know borderline between public and private goes away because everything becomes consumable, everything becomes consumed or consumable commodity which just has one common denominator which is money okay. So again this becomes a very important argument in Arendt's analysis over here.

And you know like as I mentioned this is one of the prophetic things that Arendt does in this particular book, okay. Now she comes to page 72. Again, this is highlighted in yellow on your screen for your visibility.

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things that should be hidden. Only the modern age, in its rebellion against society, has discovered how rich and manifold the realm of the hidden can be under the conditions of intimacy; but it is striking that from the beginning of history to our own time it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy, all things connected with the necessity of the life process itself, which prior to the modern age comprehended all activities serving the subsistence of the individual and the survival of the species. Hidden away were the laborers who "with their bodies minister to the [bodily] needs of life,"<sup>79</sup> and the women who with their bodies guarantee the physical survival of the species. Women and slaves belonged to the same category and were hidden away not only because they were somebody else's property but because their life was "laborious," devoted to bodily functions.<sup>80</sup> In the beginning of the modern age, when "free"

And she goes on to say, only the modern age, in its rebellion against society, has discovered how rich and manifold the realm of the hidden can be under the conditions of intimacy. So intimacy becomes almost a subversive effect in modern times where you are constantly bombarded by this mass production of things, mass consumption of things. So where do you find individuality. Where do you find your own true self.

Where do you find your own agency which is not bombarded by the material apparatus around you. The only space, the only feeling that you can go to, to protect and preserve and articulate your individuality is the intimate feeling, the intimate space. So intimacy becomes a very important ontological condition, a very important effective condition in modern times and you know Arendt argues it quite convincingly.

So the hidden conditions of intimacy and she says it is no wonder, no surprise that the modern French, I mean she takes example of French people over here, they are enchanted with intimacy, they are enchanted with the private space which produces and which offers an intimacy right as a recourse for the individual inside you as a shelter against the constant bombardment on mass production and mass consumption okay.

But you know this obviously was not the case in earlier times. In earlier times, the private space or the intimate space was a space inhabited by the non-privileged the laborers, the slaves, the women who did not appear, did not have access, did not have access in the public realm, in the public space which was largely male, largely patriarch and largely phallogocentric. That is where political evils happens, that is where political activities took place etc.

But now the private space becomes equally discursive in quality because even the private space you can have your private effect, your private individuality. At the same time you can also perform public functions from the private space and that is more true to our times than it was perhaps when Arendt was originally writing this book, okay. But she says over here but it is striking that from the beginning of history to our own time it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy.

All things connected with the necessity of the life process itself which prior to the modern age comprehended all activities serving the subsistence of the individual and the survival of the species. Hidden away were the laborers who with their bodies minister to the bodily needs of life and the women unsurprisingly who with their bodies guarantee the physical survival of the species.

So we look at the two nonagentic categories, the two noncitizen categories in modern, in ancient times; the laborers, the slaves, and the women, the unpaid people, the unwaged laborers, people who did not have any agency because whose only work was biological and hidden. So you know it was women and the slaves who were kept inside the private space whereas the privileged citizens, the politicians, the speakers, the rhetoricians, the statesman they all inhabit to the public space in ancient classical times.

It was a very neat mapping, a privilege which is operative at that time and that of course has been reversed in modern times due to the demise of the grand narrative of the public space as Arendt had just argued and we just saw, okay. So women and slaves belonged to the same category and were hidden away not only because they were somebody else's property but because their life was laborious, devoted to bodily functions.

Again, this is a very nice connection that one can make between Arendt's opening of the human condition where she had clearly mapped out the 3 conditions, labor, work, and action. So labor belong to the purely biological realm. Labor belong to the necessary realm which is produced, which is necessary for production of the species for preservation of the species.

But it is only in work and action that culture was created and constructed and reconstructed and lift at an existential, political, discursive level. So again if you map out the 3 categories, labor obviously is where the women and the slaves inhabit because labor is not culture, labor is pre-culture in quality, labor is something which does not really come into culture at all. So culture, the hegemonic idea of culture, the dominant idea of culture according to Arendt does not take labor into account.

Labor is something which happens elsewhere hidden away at a subterranean level at subliminal level sometimes, not visible but spectacularly invisible and therein lies that is where noncitizens such as women and slaves inhabit lie. They do not appear in the public realm because public realm is an exclusive realm, is an agentic realm, is an agentic space where activities and work take place and where culture is formed, reformed and so protected.

So that, again we are looking at culture, looking at it from a sort of ancient classical perspective as a very exclusive activity, as an activity which is not really all inclusive but of course it is very exclusive and very elitist in quality as well. So culture is protected and maintained and created by a handful of men who are the privileged citizens whereas labor, the biological labor, the manual labor, the noncultural labor takes place in the private space.

That is where how the mapping happened in ancient times which is obviously the way you know they are exchanged now because of the idea of the public space, dying a natural death, right. So the idea of the public space going away, the idea of the unified public space disappearing and instead we are having different micro spaces which are the intimate spaces of our home is something Arendt argues quite convincingly, describes quite convincingly.

And again, one can relate this to Lyotard's contention, Lyotard's argument against Habermas by looking at the micro narratives of the intimacy you know privacy etc., which obviously situated against in resistance to the meta narrative of the, the grand narrative of the public space, okay. So now we move on to the next section where Arendt talks about, she is so critiquing Marx over here and this is the section where you know she talks about how the Marxian analysis, the Marxist analysis of labor and activity and culture needs to be revised in modern times.

We cannot just draw on blindly from Marx. That is something that she argues quite interestingly in the section called labor in this book and again we are looking at among the many things which this book does, it offers revision in Marxism, it gives a recontextualize analysis of Marxism and it so rescues Marxism in my view from being a grand narrative and looks at Marxism as a micro narrative which needs to be relooked at.

And relocated in a micro conditions of modern times rather than looking at Marxism as some kind of a meta discursive formula that can be applied anywhere without any respect to the context, okay. So like most postmodern philosophers, like most philosophers we anticipate postmodernism in a healthy way Arendt is very suspicious of a non-contextual understanding of Marxism, a meta discursive understanding of Marxism.

And instead she redirects attention to the micro narratives that Marxism can relate to in terms of looking at the different configurations of labor, work, and action in modern times, okay. So when he comes to work because work is the cultural activity that Arendt describes, work is a artificial activity which creates the artifact which we call culture and when he comes to work and relationship between work and spaces over here, she argues quite convincingly that how culture is created no longer not just in a public space but also in different micro activities which takes place in the intimate spaces.

The intimacy also becomes cultural phenomenon. Intimacy becomes very interesting subversive phenomenon in Arendt's contention, okay. So all these categories are very important to look at and you know again we are looking at the blur borderlines between effect and discourse, between discursivity and corporeality, between embodiment we are looking at embodiment really as a discursive condition as well as an effective existential condition as well, okay.

So this basically brings us towards the end of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, which is a very complex text but among the many things which it does, it gives a very fresh idea especially given the time in which it was written and it gives a very fresh idea to the idea, to the understanding of culture, culture as an artificial activity, culture as a discursive activity, culture as a discursive design which takes place through work and action.

And how culture is not always an inclusive activity. It can oftentimes become exclusive activity especially when it comes to the patriarchal component of culture, the racial component of culture, and the phallogocentric component of culture and this is what makes Arendt such a complex philosopher in our times today because lots of people draw on Arendt today, lots of different kinds of thinkers draw on Arendt today.

We have the feminist who draw on Arendt quite clearly, the postmodernist draw on her quite clearly, and the post humanist draw on her quite clearly and Arendt remains I think one of the classical thinkers of her times chiefly because of her very complex definition of culture that she offers to us as students of cultural studies. So this concludes this particular text Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*.

I hope you find this interesting and complex enough to in special relation to our course and I request you to go back and revisit the sections that we looked at in close details and we will obviously carry on interaction in this course. We will move on to the next text in the next lecture. Okay, thank you for your attention.