The Figure of Knowledge

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In the rise of contemporary architectural theory, Kenneth Frampton (b. 1930) and George Baird (b. 1939) were among the key theorists and critics who sought to grasp and recover the meaning of architecture in terms of its sociopolitical relation to the public realm. For Frampton and Baird, modern architecture’s crisis of meaning stems from the loss of an inherent relation to the public realm, and therefore to the possibilities for an affirmative human politics at once critical of, and alternative to, the hegemony of capital. Yet, while drawing inspiration from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, both Frampton and Baird look to the phenomenological political philosophy of Hannah Arendt to understand how architectural making, in so far as it contributes to the constitution of a common world, is a precondition for the possibility of acting politically and thus a means of potentially recovering an authentic public realm. At the same time, in adopting Arendt’s political philosophy to envision a theory of architectural making aimed at the political possibilities of others, Frampton and Baird tacitly interpret her critical analysis of politics in modernity as the basis for a projective and productive theory of architecture. In so doing, they elide the fundamental distinction that Arendt makes between work, the productive activity of making, and action, comprising the activities of creating and sharing a public realm and political life as the realization of human freedom. Although Frampton and Baird traverse the divide between making and acting in different ways and to varying degrees, I argue that they both induce a potentially fatal contradiction between the necessity inherent to making and the freedom essential to politics, which threatens to defeat in advance the recovery of an authentic public realm in Arendt’s terms. Frampton’s and Baird’s architectural theories are therefore marked by a profound ambivalence as to architecture’s
capacity to take what Baird calls the “ethical risk” of acting towards the political possibilities of others.²

Accordingly, in this essay, I examine Frampton’s and Baird’s adaptation of Arendt’s philosophy to architecture in order to reconfigure the bases of architectural knowledge to take account of architecture’s relation to the public realm, and how contradictions arise between making and acting in their respective theories that threaten to compromise the freedom at stake within it. I then show how the development of their theories can be understood as attempts to reconcile such contradictions, and how they both ultimately come to sacrifice either action or making and to negate their inherent interrelationship. I conclude, however, that the ambivalence of their Arendtian architectural theories does not signal the failure of architectural theory, as such, to reconcile disciplinary knowledge with philosophical insight but rather reveals the fundamental ambivalence of architecture itself as a projective, productive practice in late modernity, as well as the potential limitations of architectural agency in addressing the political dimension of human life.

As architectural critics, historians, and theorists, Frampton and Baird are heteroclitic thinkers who marry complex and sometimes contradictory sources of thought within a theoretical conception of architecture’s public dimension that takes its primary impetus from Arendt’s seminal work of political philosophy, The Human Condition (1958).³ In this treatise, Arendt reaches back to the origin of the Western political tradition in ancient Greece to recover key concepts by which to critique the development of politics in modernity and the loss of a meaningful public realm. Central to this critique is her original concept of action as the actualization of human freedom in speaking and acting for the sake of a shared, public world of human affairs.⁴ For Arendt, action is the constituent activity of politics and the public realm. It is categorically distinct from the activities of work (the constructive and reifying activity that produces the tangible human world) and labor (the productive activity to sustain human biological life), which are both governed by causality and necessity.⁵ In speaking and acting publicly, according to Arendt, men and women appear to each other freely by virtue of their concern for what is truly public, and disclose who they truly are as individuals by transcending the exigencies of their private lives. For Arendt, a “space of appearance” arises between men and women whenever they speak or act together, which comprises the essence of the public realm in which human freedom can obtain the fullest, most tangible worldly reality.⁶

Key to Frampton’s and Baird’s adaptation of Arendt’s philosophy is the inherent relation she posits between action and the products of work. The work of fabrication constructs the common world of things that is the concrete precondition for the public realm, and thus the very possibility of politics.⁷ By virtue of its commonality, the world allows for the objective sense of reality necessary for speaking and acting to
become meaningful, arising out of the plural and diverse perspectives that individuals have of it.\(^8\) But the world is also the communicative context of art and architectural monuments that testify to, memorialize, and orient human action, and whose sheer durability allows it to transcend individual lifespans to become an enduring frame for, and testament to, otherwise ephemeral speech and deeds.\(^9\) The common world thus sustains, conditions, and gives reality and relative permanence to the opening of a meaningful public realm in which people can reliably and freely appear to one another in action and speech. In turn, the meaning of the world of things depends upon its being the concern of action and speech taking place within it.\(^10\) The love and care for the world, as both the concrete environment and the realm of human affairs inhering within it, is thus the central concern of politics for Arendt.\(^11\)

With the rise of contemporary mass society, however, the durability and meaningfulness of the world have dissolved into the totalizing processes of production and consumption as modes of labor.\(^12\) The original distinction between public and private has been lost in the rise of what Arendt calls the social realm, in which once private concerns for biological life, such as economic interest and well-being, assume public significance as the object of politics.\(^13\) With the loss of the common world and an authentic political culture came that of a properly political public realm, in which one could appear other than as a producer or consumer for the sake of life. For Arendt, a world of processes, rather than things, cannot sustain the common, objective reality born of plural perspectives necessary for politics, nor can it testify to, memorialize, or give orientation to action. Without such a shared reality and meaningful frame, the very possibility of action as Arendt understands it comes into question. The space of appearance so vital to authentic public life cannot reliably come into being, nor can human freedom, as the essence of politics, obtain worldly reality.

Frampton and Baird both take Arendt’s philosophical theory and account of the loss of a shared world as the basis for critically analyzing modern architecture’s crisis of meaning in their primary Arendtian works, including Frampton’s “Labour, Work, and Architecture” (1969), “Industrialization and the Crises of Architecture” (1973), and “The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects” (1979) and Baird’s The Space of Appearance (1995) and other essays.\(^14\) Both look to her theory for an intrinsic relation between architecture and an otherwise intangible public realm as the sphere of political life. In so doing, Frampton and Baird go so far as to interpret Arendt’s “space of appearance” and the public realm itself as integral to architectural space. Architecture embodies the public realm by giving durability, form, and expression to man’s “public being” in monuments, civic buildings, and urban spaces and articulating the distinction between the public and private realms.\(^15\) In their view, architectural language expresses cultural values to provide the meaningful setting and ground for Arendtian action as public, civic life. In particular,
Frampton draws upon Arendt’s theory to define “architecture” according to its public role as the product of work, in contrast to mundane and vernacular “building” as the product of never-ending construction processes, akin to those of labor for the sake of merely living.\textsuperscript{16} He goes so far as to assert that a “political reciprocity … must of necessity maintain, for good or ill, between the status of men,” as the capacity to live fully human lives through action, “and the status of their objects,” in which the role of communicative architectural form is paramount.\textsuperscript{17} Baird, on the other hand, emphasizes architecture’s expressive and framing relation to public space in terms of its potential to accommodate human action within it. He writes that “the form of the built world … [should] become an architectural analogy of the plurality of the human condition itself,” prioritizing architecture’s capacity to embody human plurality, Arendt’s essential condition for political life, and the common sense of “worldly reality” inhering within human social situations.\textsuperscript{18}

Following Arendt, Frampton and Baird see modern architecture’s crisis of meaning in the loss of the common world, and above all in the loss of a political, public realm as its proper object in the rise of mass consumerist society. They take up Arendt’s critique of utilitarianism to condemn the dominance of functionalism, technological instrumentality, and aestheticism in modern architecture culture, which they blame for the incapacity of architecture to express cultural values other than those of a universal, industrialized consumer society. Yet, in so doing, Frampton and Baird tacitly implicate modern architecture culture in the loss of the public realm through its failure to sustain architecture’s inherent reciprocity with public life. Their response to architecture’s crisis of meaning is then to recognize and recover the former’s responsibility for the public realm, and thus for the possibility of political life. The reconstitution, as it were, of a vital public realm by giving form, expression, and reality to the latent potentiality of public life – the possibility of Arendtian action in a democratic society – thus becomes the central task of architectural making.\textsuperscript{19}

Frampton’s and Baird’s implicit project to recover the public realm as the object of architecture represents in turn a tacit translation of Arendt’s critical theory of politics in modernity into a projective and productive theory of architecture. In looking to political philosophy to understand the relation of architecture to sociopolitical reality, they seek to actualize this new self-knowledge in architectural practice. Thereby, they depart significantly from Arendt’s thought to posit a theory of making that is also a theory of acting politically – to achieve through making what she reserves exclusively for action, namely, constituting the sphere of common concern, meaning and potential appearance that is the public realm. This shift is especially evident in their earliest writings, where Frampton and Baird both figuratively characterize how architecture “acts” with respect to the public realm to give it form, substance, and reality, as a precondition for political action. They each
identify architectural making with acting in different ways, and to different degrees. For Frampton, architecture is a concrete and expressly political act of making, whereby the meaning of the public realm as fundamental cultural values is given tangible, expressive architectural form. For Baird, on the other hand, architecture imbues a certain tangibility and durability to the worldly reality of action itself, by reinforcing and formalizing the social conditions and relationships in which it consists. Yet for both, the meaning and reality of the public realm itself becomes subject to the projective and productive agency of architectural making. As a result, architectural making and architectural objects threaten to supplant the agency that Arendt reserves solely for human actors to collectively constitute the public realm through their own speaking and acting.

Frampton’s conception of making-as-acting appears throughout his key, early Arendtian texts, wherein he develops his view of the “political reciprocity” between making and acting in such a way as to confer a near equivalency upon them. In “Labour, Work, and Architecture,” he refers to architectural making as a “building act” existentially predicated on properly political action in Arendt’s sense, but on whose “inherently public character” and “agency” in creating a permanent human world “the very act of human public appearance depends.” In “The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects,” he goes on to describe how architecture actualizes this reciprocity between architecture and politics by reifying the space of appearance itself – the essential space of politics, and of meaning – in order to physically manifest man’s “public being” in built form. Architectural making for Frampton thereby not only prepares for and memorializes public action through representing collective values in civic form but also effectively becomes the medium of action itself, thus assuming its originary capacity and significance. The creation of an architectural “space of public appearance” expressing the reality and meaning of the public realm here appears as an expressly political act of making that threatens to displace the role of human actors itself.

Baird is much more circumspect than Frampton in identifying architectural making explicitly with acting, asserting instead an analogy with speaking. In “La Dimension Amoureuse in Architecture” (1969), Baird draws upon Saussurean semiology to characterize “design acts” as communicative gestures, which as “parole” articulate particular instances of the deeper cultural “langue” of architecture. Here, architecture itself is an inherently meaningful “language,” spoken through form rather than by human actors in order to embody and express cultural meaning and values and evoke the public realm in which actions and speech attain significance. If for Frampton the meaning of the public realm is reified in fabricating the common world, for Baird worldly reality itself is reified through design acts as the condition for human action. In “The Dining Position: A Question of Langue and Parole” (1976), Baird takes up Arendt’s conception of the common world as
analogous to a table separating and relating people within a shared, objective, and political sense of reality and calls upon architecture to reify the relational structuring of social situations in communicative form and space as the common world. He charges architecture to foster the qualities of publicity that Arendt demands of the world and the public realm—its capacity to be seen from a plurality of perspectives—such that it becomes an “analogy of the plurality of the human condition itself.” In so doing, however, Baird would have architects assume the reality-forming role otherwise reserved by Arendt for acting men and women themselves from their diverse perspectives on the common world, and architecture becomes the concretization of human relations otherwise constituted plurally through action.

By conceiving of architectural making within the domain of Arendtian action, whether explicitly or implicitly, and supplanting human action with that of architecture, Frampton and Baird risk the very freedom at stake in the public realm and invite defeat in advance of their project to recover it. At first glance, associating architectural making with political action would seem to be unremarkable in contemporary theory, having been de rigueur for the strand of modern architecture extending from Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in the late 18th century through the early modern avant-garde, and remaining all but unquestioned throughout much of the 20th century. For Frampton and Baird, architecture’s presumed capacity for political making falls well within their general orientation to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. But acting in the mode of making is cataclysmic for Arendt. The radical freedom of action distinguishes it from the making of work. According to Arendt, work entails a single actor who controls the process of making to culminate in a preconceived result, within the ineluctable framework of causality, means, and ends. Making in the realm of politics denies the freedom of plural actors to constitute the world of human affairs and its meaning through their own actions by applying its singular, non-plural conditions of making to politics: one actor, one perspective, and one reality. Furthermore, subjecting action to the causality and instrumentality of making destroys the essential freedom of action and its potential meaning, which is axiomatically undeterminable. To the extent that Arendtian concepts are fundamental to Frampton’s and Baird’s theory, their framing of the public realm as an object of architecture—a condition to be intentionally achieved, if not actually made, through an exercise of architectural making—jeopardizes, in principle, the very freedom it depends upon. According to a strict reading of Arendt, merely positing the recovery of the public realm as a goal entrains it within the framework of ends and efficient means, cause, and necessary effect and condemns it to failure. In light of the danger posed to freedom through the identification of architectural making with acting politically, Frampton’s and Baird’s theory appears profoundly ambivalent and places architecture’s intentionality and agency in the realm of politics squarely in question.
The radical yet highly conditional freedom that Arendt ascribes to public life has become all but untenable in modernity. Although Frampton and Baird do not acknowledge the contradiction between making in acting implicit in their approaches, they do recognize the danger of acting through architecture upon the political lives of others. Both reject the stridently utopian strands of modernism along with much of the tradition of the modernist avant-garde. Frampton bleakly acknowledges the limits of architecture given the loss of an authentic political culture and public realm in late modern consumer society: “Whether architecture … will ever be able to return to the representation of collective value is a moot point. At all events, its representative role would have to be contingent on the establishment of a public realm in the political sense.”

For his part, Baird stresses both the dialogical contingency of architecture with respect to the cultural ground and the danger that attempting to manipulate the experience or meaning of architecture poses to its collective validity. In criticizing Eliel Saarinen’s CBS Building as a ruthlessly simplified Gesamtkunstwerk and Cedric Price’s Potteries Thinkbelt as a “life conditioner” in which students become part of the “servicing mechanism,” he decries the “dictatorship of designers” – through either presumption or indifference – in which attempts to manipulate consciousness inevitably fail and impoverish the public realm. “Design acts,” Baird writes, are “inescapably partisan.” However, he commends architects such as Machado and Silvetti for negotiating architecture’s inherent “ethical risk” of presumption or domination by refusing to directly manipulate experience and meaning.

In spite of architecture’s limitations and risks, the recovery of aspects of an Arendtian public realm, in some fashion and to some degree potentially latent in contemporary social life, remains the tacit object of Baird’s and Frampton’s theories as they were subsequently developed over their careers. This development, in fact, can be understood as the attempt to overcome the political ambivalence between architectural making and acting in their thought and to resolve the contradiction between them. In this endeavor, both Frampton and Baird look beyond Arendt to other theorists for help in reconciling her thought to both the potential and limitations of architectural practice. In “On Reading Heidegger” (1975), Frampton locates the public realm in a conception of place that takes its departure from Martin Heidegger’s notion of world, and in which the particular forms and values of a culture emerge out of a historical, dialectical relation to natural environment through building. But it is only with “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance” (1983) that Frampton concludes that architecture can attempt to compensate for the loss of an authentic underlying political culture and supply new “permanent values” of society for the work of reification. Through resistance to the universality of technology and late capitalist consumer society, architecture can recover a meaningful public dimension and potentially
instigate a new political culture. Frampton theorizes how the Heideggerian cultivation of autochthonous “place-form,” now in a dialectical relationship with universal technology, allows for an authentic embodiment and expression of particular cultures within globalized society. Through its formal and constructive logics, architecture effects and expresses the identity and values of a people, manifesting their transformative engagement with the natural environment over time, while the boundedness of public place-form is now what allows for and shelters the space of appearance. Architecture “acts” by giving form to the relationship of a people and their way of life grounded in natural needs and modulated according to topography, climate, and light, against the alienating meaningfulness of techno-scientific consumerist civilization.

Here, architecture as fabrication assumes an autonomy for Frampton that, in direct contradiction to Arendt’s theory, aspires to the freedom of properly political action in which making – as the transformation of nature according to human needs – possesses an inherent meaning. In this view, architecture is in effect the reification of itself as work, and the public realm is constituted in relation to natural necessity, rather than freedom. Frampton likewise returns human action to a natural basis in order to recover pre-alienated political experience. He asserts that the sensual, bodily experience of material and constructed place-form, as exemplified in Alvar Aalto’s Säynätsalo Town Hall, can provide the basis for cultivating an authentic, if resistive, civic and political culture and public realm. Yet it is architecture that finally realizes the meaningful autonomy of action for Frampton in his conception of tectonics as capable of opening a human world through symbolic, constructed form. In “Rappel à l’Ordre: The Case for the Tectonic” (1990) and Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture (1995), Frampton draws upon the philosophy of Giambattista Vico and the architectural theory of Gottfried Semper, among others, to invoke the “critical myth of the tectonic joint” embodying the “existential truths residing in the human experience.” To the extent that these “truths,” as cultural values, embody the memory of Arendtian work, rather than action, and remain determined and fixed through their tectonic specificity outside of the capacity of actors to freely inflect, transform, or disregard, the ambivalence between making and action is abolished in architecture only for it to become all-acting in constituting the underlying reality and meaning of the common world, effectively leaving human actors to dwell passively within its mythic aura.

While Frampton propounds the agential potential of form, Baird remains wary of architecture’s “ethical risk” of impinging on the freedom of action through imposing too strong a form and determinate meaning onto public life. In “La Dimension Amoureuse,” he writes that architects should rather “offer … ‘ideal’ images of human existence, ‘ideal’ frames for human action,” seeing them as
orientational settings for public life that at the same time tangibly reinforce and manifest the relational structure of social reality. Consequently, Baird’s theory and criticism into the 1990s turns increasingly towards urban public spaces, framed within a communicative architecture that evokes a potential public realm. He lauds Machado and Silvetti’s unrealized projects for public squares in Genoa, Houston, Providence (Rhode Island), and Leonforte (Sicily), proposed in the late 1970s and 1980s, for their “aspiration to civitas” and invocation of a shared public life, through a nuanced, abstract language of monumental form and everyday urban “object-types.” Baird notes how Machado and Silvetti utilize traditional urban type-forms such as stairs, colonnades, walkways, bleachers, overlooks, and plazas to create “apparatuses of possible urban exploration,” which multiply and elaborate the conditions in which a mass public in Benjaminian distraction might attain revelatory, plural perspectives on itself. Architecture here “amplifies the expansive, public potentialities of the subconscious, sensory mobility of bodies in space” to induce a “delirious” provocation of momentary self-awareness. The potential public realm evoked within these projects is not fixed formally or visually but is rather left open to the unfolding of action itself, promising to be, as Baird writes at the conclusion of The Space of Appearance, one of “passionate symbolic reinterpretations, the precise social meaning of which we will not be able to determine by ourselves, or in advance.”

Yet Baird’s tentative optimism fades as he turns increasingly to Walter Benjamin’s notion of “distraction” to account for the nature of architectural experience in relation to contemporary mass society, in which action alone can no longer resuscitate a viable public realm. But architecture’s power to affect the public unconscious and condition its behavior now presents a heightened danger of manipulation, and Baird eschews any assertion of instrumental or ameliorative agency for it. He instead focuses his theory on the nature of public space itself, conceiving it in terms of a perceptual and experiential spectrum that spans between the poles of distraction and Arendtian action to account for the sheer variety of public social life and behavior. In Public Space: Cultural/Political Theory: Street Photography (2011), Baird calls upon art, rather than architecture, to “act” — instrumentally and amelioratively — within public space. He cites the public and gallery installations of artist Dennis Adams and architects Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio for their capacity to manipulate the “thresholds of consciousness” of a distracted public to provoke moments of self- and other-awareness in which political action may be possible. Architecture, on the other hand, is relegated to the formal role of mutely ordering and conditioning urban social space to allow for varying degrees of visibility, propinquity, and spatial continuity, and ceding priority to the lived dynamic of a potential public life that can only be discerned, and remembered, through photography. The public realm now appears in his
theory beyond architecture’s capacity to evoke, let alone propose or recover. Baird ultimately overcomes architecture’s so-called ethical risk, and the ambivalence of making and acting, by effectively giving up making itself for the sake of the potential action of spectators that may never be actualized.

Frampton and Baird are finally unable to fully overcome the inherent ambivalence of their Arendtian theory without one side of the making-acting dichotomy prevailing over and nullifying the other. For Frampton, architectural making becomes an expressly political act of resistance, capable of supplying the permanent, authentic cultural values within industrialized, consumer society by becoming their source. Tectonics comes to triumph, however, over all properly political action to constitute the cultural meaning of the public realm as embodied by architecture. Baird reasserts the primacy of action in social situations and relationships over an architecture that becomes increasingly formal, passive, and mute, while ceding its provocative and communicative role to the practice of art. Architectural making eventually retreats from producing things to formally conditioning public social space, ultimately yielding its communicative agency wholly to action. In sacrificing either action to making, or making to action, the development of Frampton’s and Baird’s theories ultimately fails to sustain the interdependence that Arendt sees between the two, the “reciprocity” between architecture and public political life that they originally discovered in her philosophy.

In responding to the crisis in architectural meaning by appealing to Arendt’s political theory, Frampton and Baird reconfirmed the intrinsic relation between architectural making and sociopolitical reality that had long formed a part of traditional architectural knowledge but had little support in modern social and political theory. As David Leatherbarrow has written, the embodied practical knowledge of the structure and patterns of human life had historically comprised what he calls architecture’s “ethical reason.”50 Furthermore, self-reflective architectural knowledge, or theory, had always accounted for architecture’s disciplinary capacity to accommodate sociopolitical life as a technical, fabricative practice.51 Addressing the challenges to the historiography of Vitruvianism, Dalibor Vesely has written that “creative architectural thinking is possible only in collaboration with other disciplines, such as philosophy, astronomy, music, geometry, and rhetoric,” so that architectural theory’s relation to the primary cultural tradition can be illuminated.52 In appealing to Arendt’s political thought, Frampton and Baird renew this longstanding relation, albeit through a critical, analytic framework of knowledge. They rely upon her thoroughgoing critique of political modernity, and of the modern subsumption of political action within the mode of making, for the means by which to reconcile architectural knowledge with the reality of modern political life and the public realm. Yet the development of modern architecture itself was predicated on this very political modernity, in defining itself to various
degrees since the late 18th century by presuming a sociopolitical agency of making. In spite of Frampton’s and Baird’s critical rejection of many aspects of modernist architectural ideology, this agential capacity of architecture remains a latent, if understated, intuitive premise of their theories that is nonetheless refuted by the very philosophy they turn to in order to confirm it.

If the historiography of architectural theory can trace the dialogue it enters into with other forms of knowledge, a key historiographical challenge lies in comprehending and clarifying the points of intersection and exchange so as to contribute to the ongoing project of architecture’s disciplinary self-knowledge. The tracing of Frampton’s and Baird’s engagement with Arendt’s thought reveals neither a failure of architectural theory nor a failure of the sociopolitical aspiration of architectural making, per se. To some extent, it reveals how Arendt’s understanding of the capacity of making to account directly for, and bear creatively upon, political life may not be as rich or complete as the disciplinary tradition of architectural theory has long held. Arendt’s conception of making in *The Human Condition* stems largely from a critical reading of Plato and the ideal city of *The Republic*, rather than other thinkers such as Aristotle; for instance, whose revelatory, poetic, and worldly conception of making was championed by her former mentor Heidegger. Yet Arendt’s critique of acting in the mode of making from Plato through the modern era has much to do with her rejection of the remedy it would seem to provide for the unpredictability of action and the chaotic uncertainty of the world of human affairs by controlling action to produce determined ends. However, Arendt acknowledges that architecture, as a public art, in fact requires *prudentia*, the politician’s wisdom and foresight with respect to human affairs, and thus is capable of negotiating their relative unpredictability while preserving the essential freedom of action. As such, it is the certainty with which architectural making presumes to address the structure and meaning of human sociopolitical life, let alone the utopian impulse to act directly on this life, that is in turn revealed through Arendt’s thought as a limitation of architecture in modernity.

In light of this view, it may be fruitful to conclude by turning yet again to Arendt for an alternative remedy for the unpredictability of action that may further inform architectural knowledge. Against the “frailty” and uncertainty of human affairs she poses the making and keeping of promises, which she argues establish “islands” of relative stability amid the boundlessness of action. Arendt’s notion of the promise freely made – and freely kept or abandoned – may offer ways to reconsider the agential dimension of architecture and its potential to address political life without recourse to the aspiration for certainty inherent in the mode of making. Within this new Arendtian framework, architecture might overcome the ambivalence of making and acting only by foregoing any presumption of sovereignty or emancipatory claims, for the sake of the much more radical freedom of others to act.
Notes

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1. I use these terms in their general senses to distinguish Frampton and Baird’s architectural theory from Arendt’s analytic and explanatory political theory.


3. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). All subsequent citations refer to the second edition, published in 1998 (see note 4). Frampton and Baird were both active in the extraordinary intellectual architectural scene in London during the 1960s, which along with that of Venice, according to K. Michael Hays, played a central role in the emergence of contemporary architectural theory as it is known today (Francesco Garofalo, Introduction to Baird, Writings, 8). They both made seminal contributions to Meaning in Architecture (1969), edited by Baird and Charles Jencks, along with other important critics and theorists such as Françoise Choay, Reyner Banham, Joseph Rykwert, Alan Colquhoun, and Christian Norberg-Schulz. In addition to Hannah Arendt, Frampton and Baird have been similarly influenced by the key figures of the Frankfurt School such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas, and the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.


8. Ibid., 57.


10. Ibid., 204.
13. Ibid., 38-49.
19. It should be made clear that nowhere do Frampton or Baird express what they would be the first to denounce as the “naïve” intention to recover or reconstitute the public realm solely through architecture, or indeed, to recover a lost political culture. They are all too aware of Arendt’s own view on this, in her writing that “the activity of work...although it may not be able to establish an autonomous public realm in which men qua men can appear, still is connected with this space of appearance in many ways” (Arendt, The Human Condition, 212). Yet Frampton and Baird also recognize that the fabricated common world must be “fit for appearance” (Arendt, The Human Condition, 173, 204) and that absent an authentic political culture in contemporary consumerist society, this fitness can take an anticipatory, evocative, provocative, and invocative – if not exactly productive – stance in their theory with respect to the ever-present potentiality that Arendt reserves for action and the space of appearance itself. In addition, both Frampton and Baird trained and worked as architects; they have also spent their careers educating architects. They remain dedicated to the critical, but “operative,” role of architectural history and theory in support of contemporary practice, and the critical capacity of architectural practice itself to constructively engage the political realm (see, for instance, Baird’s “Criticality and its Discontents,” Harvard Design Magazine 21 [Fall 2004/Winter 2005]: 16-21). Their Arendtian critiques of modern and contemporary architecture can only be seen as serving the wider ambition to recover, albeit with some ambivalence, a properly public, and truly political vocation for architectural practice. In this ambition, architecture’s own public address of a potential public life could plausibly be understood as constituting a tentative, provisional public realm, according to its more conventional understanding as socially invested, public space. It is for these reasons that I claim that Frampton’s and Baird’s theories effectively, if not expressly, aim at the recovery of the public realm.
as the object of architecture, and that this recovery amounts to the reconstitution, in
some fashion and to some degree, of a public realm from the latent potentiality of
Arendtian action.

20. On this point, see also Jorge Otero-Pailos, *Architecture's Historical Turn: Phenomenology
and the Rise of the Postmodern* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010),
224-26.


23. Properly speaking, there can be no “space of appearance” that arises out of and
through architecture for Arendt, as it only comes into being “wherever men are
together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all
formal constitution of the public realm” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199). Arendt
furthermore states that the public realm itself is “the potential space of appearance
between acting and speaking men” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 200), whose
meaning does not consist of cultural values but in being “the realm where freedom
is a worldly reality” (Arendt, “What is Freedom?” 153). Lastly, there is no properly
political – i.e., truly free – agency that can be ascribed to nonhuman actors, as action
is “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of

24. George Baird, “*La Dimension Amoureuse* in Architecture,” in *Writings on Architecture and


29. Ibid., 220-30. Arendt emphasizes that the attempt to do away with the plurality of
actors – as when action is subsumed within the mode of work – “is always tantamount
to the abolition of the public realm itself” (ibid., 220).


32. Ibid., 28-29.

33. Ibid., 43.


36. Kenneth Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of

37. Ibid., 83.

38. Ibid., 88-89.

40. Baird, “La Dimension Amoureuse,” 34.


43. Ibid., 244.

44. Ibid., 243-44.


47. Baird, Public Space, 52.

48. Ibid., 133.

49. Ibid., 94-131.


51. Ibid., 95.


55. Ibid., 243-47.