

The Philosophy of Hannah Arendt: Applied to the Systemised Self

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Abstract

Hannah Arendt's political philosophy begins where prediction cannot: with people who appear before one another, speak, act, and initiate what no model can foresee. This essay brings Arendt's distinctions between labour, work, and action, and her accounts of plurality, natality, judgment, and the public realm, into conversation with the Systemised Self. In a fictional city council, our character Leila relies on an AI service to summarize residents' submissions and propose responses. The tool increases access and reduces work, yet reliance may turn political claims into administratively settled preferences. Arendt's concern is not that assistance itself destroys freedom; it is that the conditions for public appearance and disagreement can be weakened when a system presents its classifications as the people's voice. The essay separates her critique of thoughtlessness from any claim that algorithmic governance is totalitarian, and it recognizes critiques of her distinction between social necessity and political action. Empirical studies of inference and ranking motivate questions but do not prove the Systemised Self or validate the proposed Algorithmic Alienation Index. The argument is conditional: digital mediation can support critical social thought when affected people can contest its categories, introduce unexpected concerns, and remain authors of decisions rather than outputs of a predictive account.

Keywords: *Hannah Arendt, plurality, natality, political action, judgment, public realm, Systemised Self, Algorithmic Alienation Index, The Hollow Absolute, Algorithmic Alienation*

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A – LIMITATIONS

This essay is speculative, commentative and a philosophical application, not a claim that Arendt anticipated artificial intelligence. Furthermore, this essay is not claiming to be a proof of concept. The fictional council service is not equivalent to totalitarianism, and the proposed Systemised Self (SS) and Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI) are not validated diagnoses. Arendt's accounts of the social and political also require scrutiny for what they exclude. Digital studies cited below establish bounded findings, not effects on this fictional council or proof of alienation. Calhoun's Universe 25 mouse experiment cannot predict human civic life. Neither using a tool nor delegating routine work is, by itself, alienating.

1. Introduction

The essays character Leila works for a fictional city council. A new AI service sorts residents' submissions, produces concise summaries, groups similar concerns, and proposes response language. It helps staff manage a large volume of correspondence; residents can submit in several formats, and fewer contributions disappear unread in an administrative queue. On a contentious redevelopment proposal, however, the system labels submissions as 'support', 'opposition', or 'traffic concern'. Residents have written about displacement, care networks, public memory, and what they want the neighbourhood to become. Those arguments are compressed into positions the council can count.

At first Leila treats the summary as a starting point. Under pressure to close cases quickly, she begins to regard clean summaries and high closure rates as evidence of good participation. The system has not silenced residents. It has made their speech easier to process, and potentially harder to encounter as speech that might change the question.

Hannah Arendt helps distinguish making administration efficient from sustaining political freedom. Her account of action does not define a public as a collection of preferences awaiting accurate measurement. People act among plural others, disclose perspectives, and initiate processes whose outcomes cannot be fully predicted in advance (Arendt, 1958). A model may organize a record of what residents have said. It cannot thereby become the people's voice or settle what they ought to do together.

The claim is conditional, summaries may broaden access and free time for discussion. The risk begins when their categories become final, the people affected cannot revise them, and staff are rewarded for closure rather than judgment. Arendt's work illuminates that risk without implying that the modern council is totalitarian or that administrative tools are inherently hostile to freedom.

2. Arendt's Intellectual Outline

Arendt's work spans political theory, historical analysis, and reflections on thinking and judgment. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) examines the historically specific conditions and institutions of Nazi and Stalinist rule. *The Human Condition* (1958) examines human activity and political life; *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) reports on a trial and provoked enduring disputes about responsibility; *On Violence* (1970) distinguishes power from violence. Her late work, *The Life of the Mind* (1978), investigates thinking and willing. The third planned volume, on judging, was never completed. Ronald Beiner's posthumous edition of her Kant lectures supplies important material for interpreting her account of political judgment, not a finished treatise by Arendt (Arendt, 1982; Canovan, 1992).

These works do not combine into a single technical system. Arendt often returns to the conditions under which people can appear and act together, and to the danger of treating

thought, plurality, and responsibility as dispensable. Her distinctions are interpretive and contested (Canovan, 1992; Disch, 1994).

3. Arendt's Key Theoretical Contributions

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt distinguishes three activities of the *vita activa*:

Activity	Arendt's distinction	Relevance and limit - for Leila
Labour	Recurrent activity tied to bodily maintenance and life's necessities	Processing routine correspondence may resemble repetitive work, but an occupation cannot simply be classified as 'labour'.
Work	Fabrication that makes a relatively durable human world of artifacts	A records system may build shared administrative infrastructure; political institutions also require people to sustain them through action.
Action	Speech and deed among plural people, through which beginnings arise and identities become visible	A meeting can enable action; a count of submissions or an AI generated summary is not equivalent to it.

The distinctions describe different dimensions of activity, not three job categories or a ranking where automation frees everyone for politics. A single council process may involve necessary repetitive tasks, the design and maintenance of durable tools, and moments of public action.

Plurality is the condition that people are equal enough to understand one another yet distinct enough that no one perspective can replace all the others. It is more than demographic diversity, a large set of opinions, or variation among data points. Natality names the human capacity to begin; it is not a birth rate. Action has unpredictable consequences because others respond and carry it forward in ways no initiator controls (Arendt, 1958).

Arendt distinguishes power from violence and from possession. Power arises when people act in concert and persists only while their association is sustained; it is not a resource owned by a platform, a council, or a leader. Institutions can preserve spaces for action, but a service that

administers participation cannot manufacture the power that participants create together (Arendt, 1970).

Finally, thinking and judging are not simply slow processing. Arendt's reflections on judgment, developed through her engagement with Kant and published posthumously, consider how a person might judge particulars with an enlarged perspective. Their interpretation remains contested. Neither deliberation time nor an explanation attached to an AI response is proof of political judgment.

4. A Genealogy of Preceding Theory Informing Arendt

Arendt's thought develops in conversation with traditions rather than along a single line of descent. Ancient Greek accounts of the polis and political action provided a powerful reference point, especially for her distinction between public action and household necessity. Her use of that reference is not an uncomplicated reconstruction of ancient democracy: the historical polis excluded many people from political membership (Canovan, 1992; Villa, 1996).

Augustine's reflection on creation and beginning informed Arendt's language of natality (Arendt, 1958). Kant's account of reflective judgment became important to her late thinking about how one judges without applying a rule that mechanically determines the answer (Arendt, 1982). The posthumous lectures reconstruct an unfinished inquiry; they should not be treated as Arendt's completed third volume. Her essays in *Between Past and Future* also show how she approached inherited political concepts as problems of interpretation rather than as fixed instructions (Arendt, 1968).

Heidegger's phenomenology and Jaspers's thought and practice of communication belong to her intellectual formation, but she developed her own political account rather than simply transferring their concepts. Marx's analysis of labour and social necessity forms a major

interlocutor in *The Human Condition*, which questions the dominance of labour and production in modern political life. Arendt's rereading is itself disputed, not a neutral summary of Marx. These engagements help explain her vocabulary; none predicts algorithmic mediation or makes it a contemporary version of an ancient problem.

5. The Systemised Self: Context and Definition

Algorithmic Alienation (AA) has recently been theorized and explored in qualitative research (Kanbay et al., 2026; Arkan et al., 2026). The Systemised Self is a separate sociotechnical hypothesis about a possible terminal condition of advanced AA: system mediation becomes structurally consequential to identity, preference, and agency, while dependence may be experienced as authentic self direction (Galu & Kairos, 2026a). It is not ordinary technology use, a digital profile, or a clinical diagnosis. The newer AAI (Galu & Kairos, 2026c) is an unvalidated proposal to operationalize selected AA dimensions, not the source of the published construct.

Our character Leila's example is not evidence that she has become a Systemised Self. It asks whether a feedback process might occur: the service classifies residents; institutional attention follows the classification; Leila's performance is measured by throughput; and, over time, she comes to regard whatever the service can summarize as what meaningful participation looks like. This could happen, fail to happen, or be reversed by organizational practices. Agency is shaped by institutional incentives, not only by a worker's attitude toward technology.

6. The Hollow Absolute: Context and Definition

The Hollow Absolute (Galu & Kairos, 2026a) is a Hegelian socio-critical term for an order that appears comprehensive while mutual recognition and collective agency weaken. It is not an Arendtian term, nor a description she used for administration or AI. It can be contrasted

cautiously with Arendt’s emphasis on plurality: apparent totality becomes suspect when an institution’s representation is treated as the whole political world.

Three related project terms mark different scales. Neurocratic Determinism (Galu & Kairos, 2026b) names proposed governance through prediction and conditioning of preference formation, not biological inevitability. Hollow Demos names the proposed condition in which citizens are reduced politically to data and predicted preferences. Aligarchy refers to an elite controlling the platforms, data, models, infrastructure, or standards that enable such an order. These are proposed theoretical concepts, not findings established by Arendt or by empirical studies cited here.

7. Contemporary Empirical Context

Research establishes limited propositions relevant to the example, not its entire political interpretation. Digital records have been used to predict selected attributes in particular samples; such prediction is not complete knowledge of a person (Kosinski et al., 2013). The Federal Trade Commission’s review of major social-media and video-streaming companies describes extensive data collection and use by those firms (Federal Trade Commission, 2024). In a U.S. election experiment, changes to feed ranking altered participants’ exposure and platform activity, while several short-term attitudinal measures changed little (Guess et al., 2023).

Evidence	Supports	Does not establish
Digital-trace prediction (Kosinski et al., 2013)	Selected attributes may be inferred from recorded behaviour	That a profile captures a person’s full identity or political judgment
FTC review (2024)	Major platforms engage in extensive data practices	That every service or user experiences the same effects
Election-feed experiment (Guess et al., 2023)	Ranking can alter exposure and activity	Inevitable, lasting transformation of civic agency

None of these studies examines AI assisted municipal submissions, tests Arendt's concepts, or validates SS. They are intended to motivate questions about classification and visibility. The proposed mechanism in Leila's workplace remains a hypothesis requiring direct study.

8. Formula and Boundary Conditions – Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI)

Published work has developed AA theoretically and provided partial qualitative grounding; that does not validate the proposed index (Arkan et al., 2026; Kanbay et al., 2026). The project's unvalidated formula is set out in The Systemised Self: Research Hypotheses, Empirical Grounding and Boundary Conditions (n.d.):

$$AAI_base = 0.30(DAu) + 0.25(IAm) + 0.25(EDm) + 0.20(EDc)$$

$$AAI_adjusted = AAI_base \times (1 - RA)$$

- *DAu is Diminished Autonomy,*
- *IAm Identity Ambiguity*
- *EDm Eroded Decision-Making*
- *EDc Emotional Disconnection*
- *RA Algorithmic Resistance*

Each variable is provisionally scaled from 0 to 1. The proposed candidate boundary, adjusted $AAI \geq .95$ and $RA \leq .05$, is a restrictive theory derived hypothesis, not a validated threshold. Report the base score, adjusted score, and each dimension; the resistance multiplier can otherwise hide a high base score. Do not use an individual score to diagnose a citizenry or infer the quality of a public.

Dimension	Question raised by Leila's example	Boundary
Dau	Can she question or alter how contributions are classified?	Her authority depends on institutional rules, not only personal choice.
Iam	Does she experience the system's definition of participation as her own?	Professional identity is not reducible to a preference score.
Edm	Can she consider the original submissions and alternative framings?	Fast processing is not evidence of impaired judgment.
Edc	Does the work feel disconnected from residents and consequences?	A feeling alone cannot establish alienation.
RA	Can she correct, challenge, or bypass a summary?	Low resistance may reflect workload or lack of authority.

A candidate SS classification would require subjective evidence alongside independently verified behavioural dependence and response to friction, not an AAI score alone. The possibility of 'phenomenological inversion' is a hypothesis, not a reason to dismiss someone's report that a tool is useful. The index, weights, items, and boundary conditions require validation and should be revised or rejected if results do not support them.

9. Arendt, Calhoun, and the Digital Behavioural Sink

Calhoun's Universe 25 report on a crowded, provisioned mouse population raises at most a narrow question: whether material provision alone ensures a viable social environment (Calhoun, 1973). Mice in an experimental enclosure are not a model of human political communities, public speech, or city administration. The study cannot prove that algorithmic systems cause civic collapse or that humans require a particular form of political life. Its use here is explicitly limited and our fictional character Leila's case must be examined on its own terms.

10. Direct Synthesis: Arendt and the Systemised Self

The critical issue is not whether an AI service can summarize accurately in general. It is whether the summary remains subordinate to a political process in which residents can appear as people whose speech may alter both the decision and the question being decided. Arendt helps make this distinction because action is not simply activity, preference expression, or a countable input. It occurs among plural people, through speech and deed, and begins processes whose consequences cannot be fully controlled (Arendt, 1958).

Leila's council needs to distinguish at least three stages:

Evidence and summary → public decision → political action
What was said? What should be done? What new beginning is possible?

The stages inform each other but are not interchangeable. A summary may identify recurring concerns. A council must still judge which obligations follow, how conflicting claims should be addressed, and what remains unanswered. Public action is not exhausted by the official decision: residents may organize, contest the framing, propose a new alternative, or change the meaning of the issue. Treating a summary as a proxy for all three stages converts a tool for handling speech into an account of what the public is.

This yields a practical distinction between summarizing contributions and settling their meaning. It is useful to know that many submissions mention traffic, but the label alone cannot show whether residents object to dangerous crossings, through traffic, inaccessible transport, or the displacement of a shared place. These meanings may coexist or conflict within one letter. The model's categories may help staff navigate a record; when its categories become the only route into deliberation, the institutional process stops learning from what it has classified.

Arendt's idea of plurality gives this concern greater force than the simple demand for a more diverse dataset. More demographic representation is important, but plurality is not satisfied by sampling every group and then producing a single final preference vector. The political

significance of distinct perspectives is that they are not interchangeable units. Participants can respond to one another, disclose aspects of a shared world, and revise what they are asking for. A system may identify patterns across statements without preserving the relation among speakers or their capacity to answer each other.

Likewise, natality names the possibility of beginning, not innovation as a market feature or model novelty. A resident might offer a proposal that has no close match among previous submissions: repurpose the site, hold a public walk, recognize a historical claim, or pause the process until displaced tenants can participate. The politically important question is not whether the service predicts the proposal, but whether the council can hear and act on a contribution that escapes its existing labels. An unexpected proposal need not be wise or prevail; its emergence must remain possible.

The parallel risk for our fictional character Leila is subtler than simply obeying a machine. She may use the tool well while the organization gradually defines competence through what it can measure: summaries reviewed, cases closed, and response language standardized. Repeated reliance might shift her attention from the substance of residents' accounts toward producing a clean record. That is the hypothesized feedback path from institutional classification to the worker's next act, and from that act back into what the organization records as participation. But the same tool might reduce drudgery and give her more time to read submissions in full. Which direction obtains depends on workflow, authority, training, resources, and the ability to override or reframe the service.

This is why equating 'AI summarization' with loss of agency would be a mistake. In Arendt's account, not every necessary or instrumental activity is political action, and the existence of a tool does not eliminate the conditions for action. A service can translate, organize, and surface voices that would otherwise be missed. It can also lend administrative categories an authority

they have not earned. The normative test is not whether technology exists, but whether its use preserves a space where people can disclose differences, dispute the meaning of their claims, and act together.

A system that supports that space should make its own limits visible: quote or link summaries to the original submissions; distinguish model generated groupings from residents' self described positions; mark uncertainty and omissions; allow residents to correct their records; and preserve minority or novel claims rather than dropping them for lack of repetition. Staff should have time and authority to read beyond the summary, explain changes, and challenge the proposed response. Public reporting should show how categories influenced decisions and whether appeals or reclassification changed an outcome.

Even these safeguards cannot turn a technical interface into a substitute for political power. Power, for Arendt, arises among people who act in concert; the service provider does not own it, and a council cannot claim it merely because the process is formally open. Nor does recording dissent guarantee participants influence. The question is whether institutions make meaningful room for collective action and accept that a public decision may be revised by those affected.

The Arendtian application therefore stays narrow: do not mistake the model's representation for the public, do not mistake orderliness for agreement, and do not mistake administrative speed for judgment. The project's SS can pose an additional, testable question: might sustained reliance shape how workers understand their own competence and the scope of possible action? Arendt's concepts sharpen what is at stake in that question, but do not confirm it. Evidence would have to show that the feedback process occurs and distinguish it from rational delegation, workload pressure, and the tool's genuine access benefits.

11. Main Critics and Key Critiques of Arendt

The separation of social necessity and political action is contested. Arendt's distinction can imply that bodily need, economic life, and care belong outside the political realm. Feminist critics argue that this separation risks obscuring how household labour and unequal material conditions shape who can enter public life. Leila cannot invite residents to appear as political equals if time, housing, disability, language access, or care obligations systematically limit their participation. The distinction is useful only if it does not conceal the conditions required for public action (Benhabib, 1996; Pitkin, 1998).

Arendt's historical account and exclusions require scrutiny. Her writing on race and the United States has drawn sustained criticism; a contemporary application should not treat her framework as an unmarked universal vantage point. Gines (2014) examines Arendt's engagement with the 'Negro question' and the limits it reveals. Who can appear publicly, whose speech counts as political, and who bears the cost of remaining visible are questions the theory itself must face.

Judgment is not a ready made solution. Arendt's Kant lectures are unfinished and posthumous. Enlarged mentality and reflective judgment can inform discussion, but they do not specify a complete procedure for a council or guarantee an inclusive decision. Institutions still need rules of access, accountability, and appeal.

Thoughtlessness must not be equated with AI or ordinary delegation. Arendt's phrase 'the banality of evil', developed in the context of Eichmann's crimes and her controversial report on his trial, must not be trivialized into a metaphor for an automated workflow. It does not mean evil is merely routine. One may ask whether people avoid judging consequences while following administrative categories; that question is not a moral equivalence (Arendt, 1963; Gines, 2014).

Feminist engagement with Arendt has also drawn on her account of action and freedom to reconceive political practice rather than treating her work only as a source of exclusion (Zerilli, 2005). Finally, describing algorithmic bureaucracy as totalitarianism would flatten the distinctive histories of totalitarian regimes and misuse Arendt's analysis. A ranked summary, a coercive state, and a public council are not the same political form. The comparison is about the narrower danger that a representation can displace judgment, not a diagnosis of the present as totalitarian.

12. Discussion and Future Work

The next step is empirical study of actual public sector systems, not a retrospective diagnosis of our character Leila. Researchers could compare original resident submissions, AI generated summaries, staff summaries, and final council decisions. Independent coders could identify which claims, minority positions, uncertainties, and new proposals survive each stage. Interviews with residents and staff could examine whether they can recognize and correct misrepresentation, whether correction changes decisions, and how workload incentives shape reliance.

Any study should examine accessibility and benefits alongside harms. Automated translation or synthesis may make participation more feasible for residents and staff; that counts as a genuine benefit. Researchers must not infer alienation from usage rates or assume low resistance means dependency. Data governance should include clear disclosure, human review, routes for appeal, and protections against turning civic submissions into unrelated training data.

For the AAI, preregister its dimensions and hypotheses, test reliability and validity, assess whether measures work comparably across groups, and report both component and aggregate scores. Any proposed SS boundary should require subjective and independent behavioural evidence and remain falsifiable. Future work on Arendt should also address how historical

exclusions qualify the concept of appearance and what institutions must change for affected residents to share power.

13. Conclusion

Arendt's philosophy offers no prediction of AI and no shortcut to deciding whether a fictional council's tool is legitimate. It offers distinctions that help pose a question: when does an aid to handling public speech start standing in for the public itself?

For our character Leila, a useful summary can widen access, organize a crowded record, and free time for deliberation. It cannot complete the political work of deciding what residents mean, what obligations follow, or what new possibility they might initiate together. When classifications stay open to correction and residents retain the power to challenge them, digital mediation may support collective action. When staff are rewarded for neat categories and rapid closure, the system risks narrowing what can appear as a public concern, and what Leila can recognize as good judgment.

The safeguard is not to abandon prediction or demand that every task become a meeting, it is to keep the model answerable to speakers, preserve the original contributions, and refuse to let an administrative summary become the last word on what the public is or can do.

14. Glossary of Technical Terms

Action: In Arendt, speech and deed among plural people through which political relationships and new beginnings emerge.

Algorithmic Alienation (AA): A theoretical construct concerning forms of estrangement associated with sustained algorithmic mediation; its conceptual history is distinct from the newer proposed AAI.

Algorithmic Alienation Index (AAI): A proposed, unvalidated operationalization of selected AA dimensions and resistance.

Aligarchy: Project specific term for an elite controlling infrastructure that enables algorithmic governance; not synonymous with algocracy.

Hollow Absolute, the: Project-specific construct for apparent systemic completeness alongside weakened recognition and collective agency.

Hollow Demos: Project specific hypothesis describing a citizenry politically reduced to data and predicted preferences.

Labour, work, action: Arendt's distinctions among activity tied to life's necessity, the fabrication of a durable world, and public action among plural people.

Nativity: Arendt's term for the human capacity to begin; not a synonym for biological birth or novelty generation.

Neurocratic Determinism: Project specific account of governance through prediction and conditioning of preference formation; not biological fatalism.

Plurality: The condition of human equality and distinctness that makes shared political life and action possible.

Power: In Arendt's account, the capacity arising when people act in concert; not an asset owned by a platform or leader.

Systemised Self, the (SS): A hypothesized terminal condition of advanced algorithmic alienation, not an established diagnosis.

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