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REVIEW OF ERIC B. GORHAM'S *THE THEATER OF POLITICS*:

Hannah Arendt, Political Science and Higher Education

Elizabeth Heffelfinger

Hannah Arendt, although a woman of letters, a political commentator, and an influential observer of the post-war era (when public intellectuals were a national treasure), is arguably an under-appreciated, under-utilized cultural theorist. Arendt certainly finds her way into the academy via history and political science debates; her best-known works, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *On Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition* were seminal texts in mapping the terrain of the post-war, cold war landscape. In the last decade, Arendt has appealed to a different audience with the publication in English of her correspondence with Karl Jaspers and Mary McCarthy, and accounts of her affair with a professor, Martin Heidegger.

Yet even a prolific writer such as Arendt can fail to interrogate every subject, and one topic that she did not rigorously investigate is "higher education." For those who know Arendt's work, then, Eric B. Gorham's *The Theater of Politics: Hannah Arendt, Political Science and Higher Education* signals a series of relationships that Arendt herself did not construct. Gorham is quite clear that his incorporation of Arendt is a personal, pedagogical exploration: "I have learned a great deal about learning from Hannah Arendt, and I employ her ideas in this spirit" (xiv). Yet Gorham also does the harder work of applying Arendt's concepts—the "space of appearance," for example—to the political structure of the university.

Gorham's argument is this: universities are political sites because they are public spaces in which people not only learn but learn about the process and politics of learning by engaging identity politics, arguing for policy, and promoting community interests in the public sphere. Gorham argues that universities have lost their *raison d'être* as a *political* public space for the exchange of ideas and focuses now on administrative and bureaucratic functions. A meaningful political site can be recovered through an engagement with Arendt's "space of appearance" *as* theater.

Arendt's "space of appearance" marks a site where there is a consciousness between participants of their rights of expression and the acknowledgment that the site of this engagement, the public space, produces an expectation of performance. The space of appearance can be interpreted, argues Gorham, as a theater, with political candidates, for example, taking the role of actors and the political moment—a meeting of the Canadian parliament, the organization of the European Community—as the venue, or political "stage." The university is also a dramatic space and Gorham argues that both the university and social science disciplines, specifically political science, can benefit from his interpretation.

Gorham is most concerned with what Arendt's "space of appearance," as a heuristic, can bring to the university setting, and he promotes the possibilities of this model in a number of contexts. First, Gorham argues that students should be taught to report, as critics, on the drama that is the university. Employing examples from many of Arendt's essays, Gorham argues that a critic pursues a culturally-situated "truth"

which strives for objectivity in its privileging of witnessing (and here the reference to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is clear) over poetic interpretation or historical renderings. While the reporter has an opinion, of course, her responsibility is to "facts" which provide the citizen with an "enlarged mentality," the foundation for the possibility of judgment. An "enlarged mentality" is a concept gleaned from Arendt as well, and might best be defined as "empathetic, critical spectatorship." Gorham argues persuasively for a spectatorship that is not merely observational, but participational as well; a spectator identity—the theater critic, for example—which combines observation with participation in, and construction of, the discourse of theater.

Within the university, Gorham argues that it is the political scientist, both instructor and student, who should train and be trained for this position of "theater critic." While the position of spectator seemingly evacuates the spectacle of political import, Gorham is right to focus on the ability of professors to construct the university as a political site. Gorham argues that students should observe the university as a "space of appearance," undermining the university-as-bureaucracy paradigm and replacing it with the space of appearance as a site of contestation in which students are expected to think critically about, for example, academic research in which questions of cost and benefits are asked and answered. However, the strength of the "politics is a spectacle is a stage" analogy becomes mired in its very articulation. In the chapter "The Acting Class," Gorham seems to argue that professors should provide their students with a more theatrical classroom experience that focuses on the contemplative and expressive rather than the critical and analytical. As a result, it is unclear how students would learn the skills of rhetorical analysis and critical thinking that one might argue are central to political participation, or at least a political participation willing to question the assumptions of power: privilege, its manifestations and consequences.

It is not at all clear that Arendt's work has any *necessary* connection to the issues Gorham raises and, in fact, her integration requires Gorham to consistently qualify her contribution. More problematically, a reliance on Arendt requires Gorham to gloss some claims that required additional analysis. For example, in order to respect Arendt's privileging of the Greek polis as a democratic space and a model for the "space of appearance," Gorham is forced to subsume the very real problems of access to this space—political participation in ancient Greece was hardly democratic—in the service of an abstract potentiality. The political space of the university is fraught with similar inequalities: of access, of labour, of representation, of advancement. There is nothing more political than the questions of participation raised by the assumptions of equal access to the public sphere. It is these questions of participation that Gorham consistently overlooks.

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