



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (Vancouver Island University, 2014)

**“Between Nature and Artifice: Hannah Arendt and Environmental
Politics”**

Department of Sociology

August 25, 2017
11:00 A.M.
Cornett Building
Room A317

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Warren Magnusson, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. William Little, Department of Sociology, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Martha McMahon, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)

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Dr. Karena Shaw, School of Environmental Studies, UVic

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Dr. Patricia Cochran, Faculty of Law, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This thesis examines Hannah Arendt's phenomenological theory of action (*vita activa*) to assess its capacity to accommodate environmental politics within its conception of the public sphere. Critics have argued that *vita activa*'s triadic structure excludes social questions—in which Arendt includes environmental concerns—from political action. In fact, her writings explicitly seek to shield politics from social incursions—a phenomenon she terms “the rise of the social.” However, this criticism overlooks the distinction Arendt draws between politics and governance, politics being a manifestation of freedom and governance the management of necessity. By arguing for *vita activa*'s ability to accommodate contemporary environmental concerns, this reading seeks to promote Arendt's conception of freedom within the emerging green political tradition, for her understanding of politics recognizes its existential function in creating identities for both communities and individuals. To pose an environmental challenge to Arendt's thought, this thesis employs some of the key themes and conceptions from four prominent green theorists: John Dryzek, Robyn Eckersley, Andrew Dobson, and John Meyer. In relation to these theorists, it will be argued that *vita activa*'s form of politics carries the possibility of allowing environmentalism to appear within the public sphere's political *contents* without contradicting its triadic boundaries. To develop an environmentally sustainable society, political communities must create new narratives for bridging the divide between their built and natural environments, a process that requires the existential power of Arendtian politics.