Research about Hannah Arendts Life and Work
Pre-Doc Award 2019/20
Eyck-Marcus Wendt, M.A. / Dr Ringo Röser

Research

In correspondence with my tandem partner Dr Ringo Röser I shifted my research to Hannah Arendts thoughts on theater. This decision was the result of a long phase of reconsideration and was accompanied by a continuous adjustment of my exposé.

My research is still focussed on the methodological work of Hannah Arendt – how she perceived the world and how the world changed through that perception. The hypothesis revolves around the role theater played in Arendts thinking and which effect it had on her personal style of theorizing. Not only can we find a certain dramaturgy in Arendts writings. We also see a strong connection between the main questions of Arendts philosophy and the struggle of modern theater before and after World War II. The question for her and for the theater in a post-war era was, what can we do as mere spectators of the collapse of civilization? Or: „What shall we do, when the chips are down?”

In Arendts biography there are a number of connections to the theatrical world. Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and even Rolf Hochhuth are just the most important to name. Arendt questions the democratic tradition of ancient Greek tragedy in the wake of the post-war era. Similar Theodor W. Adorno pointed her to the changing role of art: after the Shoah it would be cruel to demand a catharsis in the audience. In her most controversial work „Eichmann in Jerusalem“ (1961) she takes the notion into account, that the trial is only theater played to simulate some kind of reconciliation. With my research I want to show, that theater is not a side note in Arendts work, but at the very center of her thinking.

Because Arendts thinking develops in connections to personal biographies – her work „Men in Dark Times“ (1968) is a great example of this notion – I want to point to constellations in which she accessed the world of theater. From her first touch with ancient Greek theater and her time with Martin Heidegger over her first play after World War II, Charles Laughton’s premiere of Brecht’s „Life of Galileo“ (1947), to the double controversy with Rolf Hochhuth’s „The Deputy“ (1963) I want to reconstruct her thinking about theater.

Collaboration

Hannah Arendt und ihr zweiter Mann Heinrich Blücher
(C © Hannah Arendt Blücher Literary Trust)

Funded by the Volkswagen Foundation Dr Röser researched at the Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson about the life and work of Arendts second husband, Heinrich Blücher. He could find archive material that sheds new light on the working process of the influential couple. Together we explored the material containing unpublished essays of Heinrich Blücher. We agreed that there is a strong connection between these early writings after the war and Arendts publication of „The Origins of Totalitarianism“ (1951). Some of the most controversial statements of this great work of Political Theory are also found in Blüchers short essays. We concluded that both had been working on a political analysis of totalitarian regimes. Both share similar conclusions on the role of race and police as well as the comparison between Nazism and Stalinism.

With the publication and analysis of these essays we want to contribute to the research on Arendts work. We think the publication can also bring light on some blind spots in the development of the term totalitarianism after World War II.

In Fall 2020 „Versuche über den Nationalsozialismus“ (Wallstein Verlag) will be published with a bilingual publication of Blüchers texts and an epilogue from Dr Röser and me.

Applications

During the Pre-Doc phase Dr Röser gave me the chance to network with fellow researchers and present my project in front of various audiences. In May 2019 I was invited to the annual Hannah-Arendt-Workshop in Berlin. This gave me the opportunity to discuss problems and prospects of my hypotheses with experts of the works of Hannah Arendt. Thanks to Prof Dr Ulrich Johannes Schneider I also presented my project in front of theater professionals which granted me a diverse perspective on my own research. The discussions and correspondences helped me take an advanced look on my personal and scientific approach to the project. I am especially thankful for the contact to PD Dr Wolfgang Heuer with whom I will visit a workshop of the International University Center in Dubrovnik, Croatia to get in touch with international scholars of Political Theory and discuss my findings so far.

Throughout the Pre-Doc phase I submitted some applications to graduate schools around Germany (Hildesheim, Lüneburg) which had unfortunately little success. In October 2019 I applied for funding from the Heinrich-Böll Foundation. Where I participate in the second round of the application process and had an interview with Prof Dr Ludger Schwarte from the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf. The contact to Prof Schwarte made a lasting impact on my own approach to the project. Unfortunately I couldn’t obtain an invitation to the final round of the application process.

Nevertheless I will submit another application to political foundations for the next funding phase in Fall 2020.

Sjöholm, Cecilia: Doing Aesthetics with Hannah Arendt.
New York 2015.

Pirollo, Robert: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Tragedy.
DeKalb 2000.

Wendt Eyck-Marcus
Fleischmarkt 26, 04107 Leipzig
cymawendt@gmail.com