



# HANNAH ARENDT

A FILM BY  
MARGARETHE  
VON TROTTA

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international  
film festival®

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2012

BARBARA  
SUKOWA

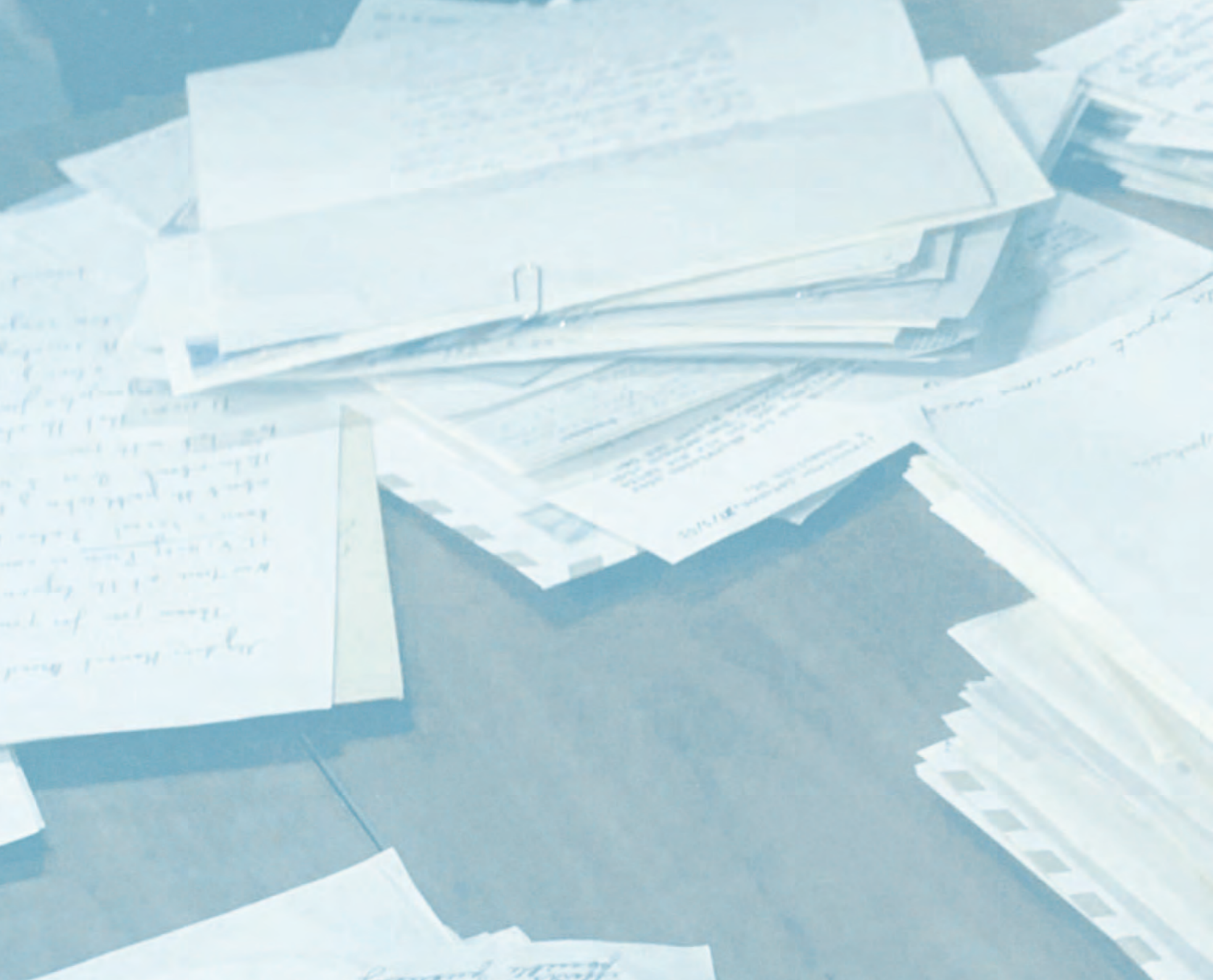
AXEL  
MILBERG

JANET  
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JULIA  
JENTSCH

ULRICH  
NOETHEN

MICHAEL  
DEGEN



## SYNOPSIS

HANNAH ARENDT is a portrait of the genius that shook the world with her discovery of “the banality of evil.” After she attends the Nazi Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem, Arendt dares to write about the Holocaust in terms no one had ever heard before. Her work instantly provokes a scandal, and Arendt stands strong as she is attacked by friends and foes alike. But as the German-Jewish émigré struggles to suppress her own painful associations with the past, the film exposes her beguiling blend of arrogance and vulnerability — revealing a soul defined and derailed by exile.

The film portrays Hannah Arendt (Barbara Sukowa) during the four years, (1961 to 1964), that she observes, writes, and endures the reception of her work on the trial of the Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann. Watching Arendt as she attends the trial, staying by her side as she is both barraged by her critics and supported by a tight band of loyal friends, we experience the intensity of this powerful Jewish woman who fled Nazi Germany in 1933. The fierce, chainsmoking Arendt is happy and flourishing in America, but her penetrating vision makes her an outsider wherever she goes.

When Arendt hears that the Israeli Secret Service has kidnapped Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires and brought him to Jerusalem, she is determined to report on the trial. William Shawn (Nicholas Woodeson), the editor of “The New Yorker” magazine, is thrilled to have such an esteemed intellectual cover the historic process, but Arendt’s husband, Heinrich Blücher (Axel Milberg), is not so sure. He worries that this encounter will put his beloved Hannah back into what they both call the “dark times.”

Arendt enters the tense Jerusalem courtroom expecting to see a monster and instead she finds a nobody. The shallow mediocrity of the man cannot be easily reconciled with the profound evil of his actions, but Arendt quickly realizes that this contrast is the puzzle that must be solved.

Arendt returns to New York and as she begins to discuss her groundbreaking interpretation of Adolf Eichmann, fear ripples through her best friend, Hans Jonas (Ulrich Noethen). Her philosophical approach will only cause confusion, he warns. But Arendt defends her courageous and original perspective and Heinrich supports her all the way. After two years of intense thought,

additional reading, and further debate with her best American friend, Mary McCarthy (Janet McTeer) her German researcher and friend, Lotte Köhler (Julia Jentsch) and of course, constant consultation with Heinrich, she finally delivers her manuscript. The publication of the article in “The New Yorker” provokes an immediate scandal in the U.S., Israel, and soon in the rest of the world.

HANNAH ARENDT provides an insight into to the profound importance of her ideas. But even more moving is the chance to understand the warm heart and icy brilliance of this complex and deeply compelling woman.



# THE HISTORICAL FIGURES

## HANNAH ARENDT

Born on October 14th, 1906 in Hanover, Hannah Arendt grew up with social-democratic, assimilated Jewish parents. She studied philosophy and theology in Marburg and Heidelberg and her professors included Karl Jaspers, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger with whom she had a love affair. Her first marriage, from 1929 to 1937, was to the philosopher Günther Anders. In 1933, after being briefly imprisoned by the Gestapo, she fled via Carlsbad and Geneva to Paris. She worked for the Youth Aliyah, a Jewish organization that helped Jewish children emigrate to Palestine. In Paris in 1937 she met Heinrich Blücher, a former Communist and self-educated man from a working class background whom she married in 1940. After an internment and escape from the infamous detention camp in Gurs, she emigrated in 1941 with her husband and mother to the United States. For many years, she carved out a living by writing articles and working in publishing, until she eventually found a job as executive secretary of the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction organization. In 1951 she obtained American citizenship and in the same year her book "The Origins of Totalitarianism" – a comprehensive study of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes – was published. This became an instant intellectual classic and launched her career in America. After guest professorships at the universities of Princeton and Harvard, she received a professorship at the University of Chicago and at the New School for Social Research in New York. In 1958 she published her book "The Human Condition" and in 1961 she went to Jerusalem to report on the Eichmann trial for "The New Yorker" magazine, her articles were published in five parts in 1963. They triggered intense media coverage. She received fierce opposition and devastating criticism, both for her portrayal of the Jewish councils and her portrait of Eichmann. But her subsequent book, "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil", has achieved a highly respected, if always controversial, place in most serious discussions of the Holocaust. It is now regarded as one of her most important books. She died in New York on December 4th, 1975.



## HEINRICH BLÜCHER

Born in 1899 in Berlin. Heinrich Blücher, the son of a factory worker, who died before he was born, was raised by his laundress mother. He was drafted into World War I before finishing school, and returned to join the rebellious soldier's council – one of the many Worker's Councils who rioted in the streets when the disastrous war finally came to an end. Heinrich Blücher joined Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacus League and soon afterwards, he became a member of the German Communist Party. Heinrich Blücher had a hunger for learning – but not for schooling. He also avoided gainful employment in order to read as much as possible. Although he was a Gentile, in his adventurous quest to educate himself, he even associated with a Zionist youth group, a section of the "Blue White." He read Shakespeare, Marx and Engels, and Trotsky. He also worked on various cabaret and film projects before fleeing the Nazi regime in 1933 to Prague and later to France. Here he met and fell quickly in love with Hannah Arendt. After one youthful marriage, and another which was a way to offer a girlfriend citizenship, Arendt became his third wife. Together they escaped via Spain and Portugal to the U.S., where Heinrich Blücher lectured at the New School for Social Research in New York; and from 1952, despite his lack of even a high school diploma, he taught at Bard College as professor of philosophy. Heinrich Blücher died in 1970. In one of his last lectures he anonymously invokes his relationship with Hannah Arendt: "... What counts now is the mutual insight of two personalities who recognize and respect each other as such; who in effect can say to each other, 'I guarantee you the development of your personality and you guarantee me the development of mine.' This is the basis of all real community thinking." After thirty-four years together, Hannah Arendt found it nearly impossible to imagine life without her husband.



## KURT BLUMENFELD

Born in 1884 in East Prussia. In 1904 he began studying law in Berlin, Freiburg and Königsberg. In 1909 he began his professional career as party secretary of the Zionist Federation of Germany, later becoming its president. As Secretary General of the World Zionist Federation from 1911 to 1914 he first visited Palestine, where he then emigrated in 1933. Already in 1926, he was the most influential proponent of Zionism in Germany. Hannah Arendt was taken to one of his lectures by her friend Hans Jonas, and although she didn't become converted to Zionism, she formed a lifelong attachment to Kurt Blumenfeld. They fiercely debated Zionism, politics, the diaspora, the Holocaust, assimilation, the return to Palestine and the general problem of Jewish identity. Hannah Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial and her theories about the "banality of evil" resulted in a painful rejection from her father-figure and close friend. When she learned that Kurt Blumenfeld was dying, she visited him again in Israel, but the two of them could not bridge their differences. It was one of the great distresses of Hannah Arendt's life that there was not enough time to achieve a reconciliation with Kurt Blumenfeld before he died on May 21st, 1963 in Jerusalem.



## ADOLF EICHMANN

Born in 1906 in Solingen. His father was an accountant. A high-school dropout who began but never completed his training as a mechanic. In 1927 Adolf Eichmann joined the Deutsch-Österreichische Frontkämpferversammlung (German-Austrian Front Fighters Association). Five years later he joined the Austrian Nazi Party and the SS. In 1935 Adolf Eichmann was transferred to the newly created “Jews Section”; becoming “Administrator for Jewish Affairs”. Ambitious and eager to succeed, he later became head of the Unit IV D 4/4 and IV B 4 which was responsible for the overall organization of the deportation of Jews from Germany and the occupied European countries. He oversaw all the logistics, from the compilation of the transports to the utilization of the railway trains. After the end of World War II, Adolf Eichmann fled from an American internment camp. Under a false name and with the support of Catholic monks, as well as a passport from the Vatican, he managed to escape to Argentina. After being tipped off by German Jews who lived nearby, the agents of the Israeli Mossad kidnapped him in 1960. The trial in Jerusalem drew worldwide attention. Over 600 journalists were present when Adolf Eichmann declared himself “not guilty as charged”. The ultimate verdict, however, was: “Guilty” and the punishment was “death by hanging”. After his legal appeal was rejected, Adolf Eichmann was hanged in Israel on May 31st, 1962. To avoid burying his remains on Israeli soil, he was cremated and his ashes were scattered in the Mediterranean.

## MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Born in 1889 in Meßkirch. Before he turned thirty, he became one of the most prominent philosophers in Germany. With his major work “Being and Time”, published in 1927, he established a new philosophical orientation regarding the fundamental concept of human existence, of Being. From 1923 to 1927 he was appointed professor at the University of Marburg, where Hannah Arendt was one of his students. A passionate love affair began. The relationship between the married professor and father of two sons, and his nineteen-year-old student, was naturally quite problematic. Martin Heidegger adored his brilliant student, but did not want to jeopardize his job and had no intention of leaving his wife. After Hannah Arendt left Marburg, their affair finally ended shortly before she married Günther Anders. Although they had been out of touch for several years, she suffered shock and disappointment when Martin Heidegger, her esteemed professor and first love, made the stunning decision to join the Nazi Party in 1933. Despite all, she renewed their friendship in 1950, and despite several lengthy interruptions, the relationship remained important to both of them for their entire lives. After the war, Martin Heidegger was widely shunned, and it was in large measure due to Arendt’s efforts that he was finally able to lecture and publish again. She did not forgive his behavior, but she believed he was one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century and that his work must be awarded a prominent place in the canon of Western thought.

## HANS JONAS

Born on May 10th, 1903 in Mönchengladbach. His father was a textile manufacturer; his mother was the daughter of the Chief Rabbi of Krefeld. Against the wishes of his father, Hans Jonas became involved in Zionist circles. He also began studying philosophy and art history in Freiburg and Marburg under Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. He met Hannah Arendt when both were young students and with one bitter but temporary interruption, they remained friends for the rest of their lives. In August 1933 Hans Jonas immigrated to London. In 1935 he went to Jerusalem where in 1944 he joined the Jewish Brigade of the British Army and fought against the Germans; in 1949 he moved to Canada and then in 1955 finally to New Rochelle, near New York where he had a joyous reunion with Hannah Arendt and joined her circle of friends. He took on guest professorships at various prestigious universities in the USA, mainly lecturing on the history of philosophy and the humanities. Hannah Arendt’s published book and articles about Adolf Eichmann led to an intense personal conflict between them that heavily strained the friendship. They didn’t speak for two long years, until finally his wife Lore helped Hannah Arendt and Hans to overcome the rift between them.

## MARY McCARTHY

Born in Seattle in June 1912. She is orphaned at the age of six. Changing foster parents exposed Mary to Catholic, Protestant and Jewish backgrounds. She published by the age of 30 and quickly became a recognized writer and feminist. Her most famous book is a novel titled “The Group” which was published in 1963. The book was an enormous commercial success, but she was savaged by many male critics and commiserated with Hannah Arendt as she was being simultaneously attacked for her articles about Adolf Eichmann. McCarthy wrote an impassioned and articulate essay defending Hannah Arendt’s work – and supported her faithfully during the long months of anger and hostility that filled every crevice and corner of Arendt’s private and public life. Her friendship with Hannah Arendt was committed and passionate – together the European and the American embodied all that was most admirable in powerful intellectual women. The publication of their correspondence “Between Friends: The Correspondence 1949 - 1975” achieved worldwide fame. With her outspoken and spirited boldness of expression, Mary McCarthy took part in many literary and political disputes. When Hannah Arendt died unexpectedly in 1975, it was McCarthy who was entrusted with the responsibility of completing her unfinished book titled “The Life of the Mind”.



# THE CAST

## BARBARA SUKOWA (Hannah Arendt)

Through her years of collaboration with Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Margarethe von Trotta, Barbara Sukowa has come to embody the essence of German film history. Born in Bremen, she started her career at the famous Max-Reinhardt-School in Vienna and then performed extensively on the theatrical stage.

She worked with R.W. Fassbinder on his legendary mini-series *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and his film *Lola*. With Margarethe von Trotta, she performed *Marianne and Juliane*, *Rosa Luxemburg*, *L'Africana*, *The Other Woman* and *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen*. She has worked with several renowned directors such as Volker Schlöndorff (*Homo Faber - Voyager*), Lars von Trier (*Europa*), Tim Robbins (*Cradle Will Rock*), Michael Cimino (*The Sicilian*), David Cronenberg (*M. Butterfly*) and Hans Steinbichler (*Hierankl*). In the early 90ies Barbara Sukowa moved to New York and pursued her career as a singer, working with some of the world's outstanding orchestras and conductors including the Berlin Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Vienna Philharmonic, LA Philharmonic, Schoenberg Ensemble conducted by Claudio Abbado, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Reinbert de Leeuw, Concertgebouw, Carnegie Hall.

She received acting awards for her work in Cannes and Venice, three German film awards in Gold, the Adolf Grimme Award in Gold, most recently Best Actor Award in Montreal for *The Invention of Curried Sausage* in 2008. In addition to classical music Barbara Sukowa performs concerts with her rock band "X-Patsy".

## AXEL MILBERG (Heinrich Blücher)

A graduate of the prestigious Otto-Falckenberg-Schule in Munich, Axel Milberg was ensemble member of the Munich Kammerspiele from 1981 to 1998 and worked with directors such as Peter Zadek and Dieter Dorn. Axel Milberg gained popularity with cinema and TV audiences through the movie *After Five in the Forest Primeval* directed by Hans-Christian Schmid. For his audio book reading of Henning Mankell's "The Chinese", he received the CORINE International Book Award. He has received several awards for his theater and television work, notably the Grimme prize, the Bavarian Film Prize, and the North German Film Award.

## JANET MCTEER (Mary McCarthy)

Janet McTeer attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London in 1986 and gave her film debut in *Half Moon Street* playing opposite Sigourney Weaver and Michael Caine. For her performance in the Broadway performance of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* she received the Tony Award, the Laurence Olivier Theatre Award for "Best Actress" (1997), and the London Critics Circle Theatre Award for "Best Actress" in a Drama (1996). In 2000 she was nominated for an Oscar as "Best Actress" for *Tumbleweeds*, a role that also earned her a Golden Globe for "Best Actress" and the Gotham Independent Film Award for "Best Newcomer". In 2005, she played a starring role in Terry Gilliam's film *Tideland*. In 2009 she received an Emmy nomination for her role of Clementine Churchill in the television film *Into the Storm*. In 2012 she was nominated for an Oscar as "Best Supporting Actress" for her role as Hubert Page alongside Glenn Close in *Albert Nobbs*.

## JULIA JENTSCH (Lotte Köhler)

Julia Jentsch was born in 1978 in Berlin. She studied at the Ernst Busch drama school and began her career first on the stage. She was named "Most Promising Actress" in 2002 by "Theater heute", a leading German theatre publication. From 2001 to 2006 she was ensemble member of the Munich Kammerspiele where she has played the roles of Antigone, Desdemona, and Gretchen, and performed in both classic and modern plays.

In 2007 she accepted the challenge to play the role of Effi in *Effi Briest*, the fifth actress to do so after Marianne Hoppe (1939), Ruth Leuwerik (1956), Angelica Domröse (1970) and Hanna Schygulla (Fassbinder's version of 1974).

In 2004 Julia Jentsch won the Bavarian Film Award for "Best Young Actress" for *The Educators*. For *Sophie Scholl - The Final Days* she received the Silver Bear at Berlinale in 2005, the German Film Prize and the European Film Award.

## ULRICH NOETHEN (Hans Jonas)

Ulrich Noethen was born in Munich in 1959. He completed his acting training in Stuttgart and worked on stage in Freiburg, Cologne and Berlin.

Noethen was discovered by Dominik Graf in 1995 and starred in *Der Skorpion* opposite Götz George. Ulrich Noethen has played a number of impressive and selected film roles, becoming one of the leading character actors in film and television. He won the German Film Award for "Best Actor" in 1998 for *The Harmonists* and the Bavarian Film Prize in 2001 for *The Slurb*. He received the Golden camera in 2006 for his TV work to which he added the prestigious Grimme award in both 2009 and 2010.



## MICHAEL DEGEN (Kurt Blumenfeld)

Born in Chemnitz, he studied acting at the Drama School of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, where he also made his stage debut. After two years in Israel, with performances at various theatres in Tel Aviv, Bertolt Brecht asked him to join the Berliner Ensemble in 1951. Since then, Michael Degen has performed in all major German-language theatres where he worked with some of the most important stage directors including Ingmar Bergman, Peter Zadek, and George Tabori.

As early as 1978 he performed in Franz Peter Wirth's adaptation of Thomas Mann's "Buddenbrooks". This was followed by several major roles including the lead in Claude Chabrol's adaptation of Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (1981) and one of the title roles in Egon Monk's Feuchtwanger adaptation of *Oppermann Family* (1983). Today Michael Degen is one of the most renowned performers in the German film and television landscape. Alongside his impressive film and television career, Michael Degen has also remained faithful to the stage.

His autobiography "Not all of them were murderers. A childhood in Berlin", published in 1999, became a bestseller and was filmed and directed by Jo Baier. In March 2011 he published his critically acclaimed novel "Family Ties" about the youngest son of Thomas Mann.



## MARGARETHE VON TROTTA (Director & Writer)

Von Trotta was born in Berlin in 1942, and studied German and Romance languages and literature in Munich and Paris. She was a sought-after actress in the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Herbert Achternbusch. She worked on her former husband Volker Schlöndorff's scripts and was the co-director on the film adaptation of Heinrich Böll's *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*.

Margarethe von Trotta ranks among the world's most renowned auteurs. After her first independent directorial work *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages* (1978), she went on to make important and controversial films such as *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986), *Rosenstraße* (2003) oder *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen* (2009). Over the years she has created an extensive oeuvre of dedicated and impressive filmmaking that never fails to confirm her pronounced talent for fusing the personal experience with the political theme, developing a distinctive form that is emotionally rich and enjoys wide public appeal. She has made films for both cinema and television, and earned great successes in her second home of Italy with films like *Marianne and Juliane* (Golden Lion Venice 1981, the most awarded German film) and *Rosenstreet* (Coppa Volpi for "Best Actress" for Katja Riemann 2003).





# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

*The light that comes from a person's works enters directly into the world and remains after the person dies. Whether it is large or small, transitory or enduring, depends upon the world and its ways. Posterity will judge.*

*The light that comes from a person's life – spoken words, gestures, friendships – survives only in memories. If it is to enter into the world, it must find a new form. A story must be made from many memories and stories.*

(Elisabeth Young-Bruehl; Author of the Biography “Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World”)

## A Film about Hannah Arendt and Why

The light that Hannah Arendt's work brought into the world still shines. And because her work is invoked by an ever increasing number of people, it becomes brighter every day. In a time when most felt obligated to adhere to a specific ideology, Arendt was a shining example of someone who remained true to her unique perspective on the world.

In 1983 I wanted to make a film about Rosa Luxemburg because I was convinced that she was the most important woman and thinker of the last century. I was eager to comprehend the woman who was behind this fighter and revolutionary. But now, as we begin the 21st century, Hannah Arendt is an even more important figure. Her foresight and wisdom are only just beginning to be fully understood and addressed. When she first formulated the concept of the “banality of evil” – a term she coined in her report on the Eichmann trial – she was sharply criticized and attacked as if she were an enemy of the Jewish people. Today, this concept has become an essential

component of any discussion which seeks to judge the crimes of the Nazis.

And once again, I was interested in finding the woman who was behind this great and independent thinker. She was born in Germany and died in New York. What brought her there?

As a Jew she certainly hadn't left Germany voluntarily and for this reason, her story raises a question I have asked in many of my other films: how does a person behave in the face of historical and social events that he or she cannot influence or change? Like many other Jews, Arendt could have been a victim of National Socialism. But she was quick to recognize the danger and fled from Germany to Paris. When France was invaded, she left from Marseille and made her way through Spain and Portugal, and finally to New York. As she fled, she thought bitterly of the many friends who had chosen to remain behind and support the Nazis. She was deeply disappointed to

see how quickly they adapted to the “new era,” and described this phenomenon in an interview as: “Zu Hitler fiel ihnen was ein.” This means that in order to justify their decision, “they made up ideas about Hitler.”

Exile was her “second awakening”. The first transformation in her life came when she studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger. At that time, she was certain that her life's vocation would be in the pursuit of pure thought. But after her forced exile, she had no choice but to engage with the events of the real world. By 1960, when she finally felt settled in America, she was ready to take on one of the most tragic chapters of the 20th century. She would look directly into the face of the man whose name evoked the murder of millions of Jews: Adolf Eichmann.

Our film concentrates on the four turbulent years when the lives of Arendt and Eichmann crossed. This focus offered the opportunity to tell a story that would lead to a profound understanding of both the historical and highly emotional impact of this explosive confrontation. When the uncompromising and unconventional thinker faced the submissive and dutiful bureaucrat, both Arendt and the discourse on the Holocaust changed forever. In Eichmann, she saw a man whose fatal mixture of obedience and an inability to think for himself (“Gedankenlosigkeit”) was what enabled him to transport millions of people to the gas chambers.

Portraying Hannah Arendt almost exclusively during the period which begins with Eichmann's capture and ends shortly after the publication of her book, “Eichmann in Jerusalem – A Report on the Banality of Evil,” made it possible to not only investigate her groundbreaking work, but also to reveal her character and personality. We get to know her as a woman, as a lover, and most important to her, as a friend. There are only few flashbacks which take us back to the twenties and then the fifties – showing the youthful Hannah's passionate love affair with Martin Heidegger – as well as their reunion years after the war ended. She never managed to let go of her connection to Heidegger, despite the fact that he joined the National Socialist Party in 1933. These flashbacks are important to understanding Arendt's past, but the film is principally concerned with her life in New York, with her husband Heinrich Blücher, whom she had met in exile in Paris, and

with her German and American friends, especially the author Mary McCarthy, and her oldest friend, the Jewish-German philosopher Hans Jonas.

This is a film that shows Hannah Arendt as a person caught between her thoughts and her emotions – one who often has to disentangle her intellect from her feelings. We see her as a passionate thinker and professor; as a woman capable of lifelong friendship – she was even hailed as a woman who was a “genius of friendship” – but also as a fighter who courageously defended her ideas and never shied away from any confrontation. But her goal was always to understand. Her signature declaration, “I want to understand,” is the phrase that best describes her.

And it is precisely in her quest to understand people and the world that made me feel overwhelmingly drawn to her. Like Arendt, I never want to judge, but only to understand. In this film, for example, I want to understand what Hannah Arendt thought about totalitarianism and the moral collapse in the last century; about self-determination and freedom of choice; and finally, what she managed to illuminate about evil and about love. And I hope that the audience will come to comprehend, just as I did, why it is important to remember this great thinker.

The key to understanding her life is in Arendt's wish to sustain what she called “amor mundi”, the “love of the world”. Although her forced exile caused her to experience both vulnerability and dire alienation, she continued to believe in the power of the individual to withstand the cruel force of history. Her refusal to be overwhelmed by despair and helplessness makes her, in my eyes, an extraordinary woman whose “light still shines today”. A woman who can love and be loved. And a woman who can, as she dubbed it, “think without banisters”. That is to be an independent thinker.

In order to offer an authentic vision of Arendt as a human being, we ultimately had to move beyond the mountain of written and archival audiovisual sources. Therefore, after a long period of traditional research, we conducted extensive interviews with contemporaries who had been a part of Hannah Arendt's life and work for many years.

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Your films almost always offer an intense confrontation with significant historical figures – Rosa Luxemburg, Hildegard von Bingen, the Ensslin sisters... What excited you about Hannah Arendt?

The question of how to make a film about a woman who thinks. How to watch a woman whose main action is thinking. Of course I was also afraid I wouldn't do her justice. This made the cinematic portrayal far more difficult than, for example, with Rosa Luxemburg. Both women were highly intelligent and unique individuals, both were gifted in their capacity for love and friendship, and both were provocative thinkers and speakers. Hannah Arendt's life was not as dramatic as that of Rosa Luxemburg – but it was important and moving.

To find out more about her, I not only read her books and letters but also tried to find people who had known her. Through these many conversations, I gradually discovered what I wanted to say about her, and which time in her life would best serve my intentions. Sometimes I was actually quite afraid of her. She would suddenly appear so abrasive and arrogant. Only after the famous conversation between her and Günter Gaus did I finally become convinced that Hannah Arendt was truly a charming, witty and pleasant person. After watching them together, I understood what Gaus meant when he said later in an interview, that she was the kind of woman for whom you instantly fell.



Your ongoing exploration took place while working on the script that you began writing in 2003 together with the American screenwriter Pam Katz. By 2006, you decided to focus the film, HANNAH ARENDT, then under the working title “The Controversy” – on the four years around the Eichmann trial of 1961.

We wanted to tell Hannah Arendt's story without reducing the importance of her life and work, but also without resorting to the all too sprawling structure of a typical biopic. After *Rosenstraße* and *The other Woman*, HANNAH ARENDT is my third collaboration with Pam Katz. We were therefore able to write the script in a sort of “ping-pong” technique, continuously discussing the work via email, telephone and in person, in New York, Paris and Germany. Our first question was: what should we choose to show of Hannah Arendt's life? Her love affair with Martin Heidegger? (Which many probably expected). Her escape from Germany? Her years in Paris or her years in New York? After wrestling with all of these possibilities, it finally became clear that focusing on the four years where she reported on and wrote about Eichmann was the best way to portray both the woman and her work. The confrontation between Hannah Arendt and Adolf Eichmann allowed us to not only illuminate the radical contrast between these two protagonists, but also to gain a deeper understanding of the dark times of 20th century Europe. Hannah Arendt famously declared that “No one has the right to obey”. With her staunch refusal to obey anything other than her own knowledge

and beliefs, she could not be more different than Eichmann. His duty, as he himself insisted, was to be faithful to his oath to obey the orders of his superiors. In this blind allegiance, Eichmann surrendered one of the main characteristics that distinguishes human beings from all other species: the ability to think for himself. The film shows Hannah Arendt as a political theorist and independent thinker set against her precise opposite: the submissive bureaucrat who does not think at all, and instead chooses to be an enthusiastic subordinate.

**You were able to incisively capture Eichmann's “not-thinking” character through the black and white archival footage from the trial.**

You can only show the true “banality of evil” by observing the real Eichmann. An actor can only distort the image, he could never sharpen it. As a viewer, one might admire the actor's brilliance but they would inevitably fail to comprehend Eichmann's mediocrity. He was a man who was unable to formulate a single grammatically correct sentence. One could tell from the way he spoke that he was unable to think in any significant way about what he was doing. There is only one scene with Barbara Sukowa that takes place in the actual courtroom, and there, because it had to be an actor, you only see Eichmann's back. We filmed all the other courtroom scenes in the pressroom, where the trial was actually shown on several monitors. This was a way of being able to use the real Eichmann, via the archival footage,



in all the important moments. But we had also come to believe that since Arendt was a heavy smoker, she would have spent more time in the pressroom than in the courtroom. That way, she could follow the trial and smoke at the same time. Many of the other journalists also watched the trial on the television screens and filed reports at the same time. By the way, long after writing this sequence, we were finally able to speak with Arendt's niece, Edna Brocke, who was with her in Jerusalem at the time. She confirmed that "Aunt Hannah" had indeed spent most of her time in the pressroom because she was allowed to smoke there!

**HANNAH ARENDT would not be a Trotta film if we failed to also see Hannah Arendt as a woman, lover and friend. If we didn't get to better understand the complexity of this great thinker.**

The film is also about her life in New York, her life with friends, her love for Martin Heidegger – even if we were convinced that Heinrich Blücher was a far more important figure in her life. She called Heinrich her "four walls," meaning her one true "home". Heidegger was Hannah's first love, and she remained connected to him despite his affiliation with the Nazis. At the very beginning of my research Lotte Köhler, Hannah Arendt's only remaining living friend, gave me the book of published correspondence between Heidegger and Arendt. But she made sure to let me know that Arendt had kept all his letters in her bedside drawer. In a flashback, we show Arendt meeting Heidegger during a visit to Germany. This meeting actually took place, although just several weeks before their encounter, she had written a letter to her friend and mentor, Karl Jaspers, in which she called Heidegger a murderer. Arendt's niece, said that her aunt explained her ongoing relationship with Heidegger by insisting that "Some things are stronger than a human being."

**For the role of Hannah Arendt you again chose to cast Barbara Sukowa. Why?** I saw Barbara Sukowa in the role of Hannah Arendt right from the very beginning, and fortunately managed to overcome any initial resistance to casting her. I would not have made this film without Barbara. I needed an actress that I could watch while she was thinking. Barbara was the only one who could be relied upon to meet this difficult challenge.

**How well Barbara Sukowa succeeds is evident, among many scenes, in the eight-minute speech at the end of the film. Not many directors would have taken the risk of trying to hold the attention of the audience for so long. Why did you make this decision?**

Many felt that a film about Hannah Arendt should actually start with a speech. But we begin with a conversation between girlfriends talking about their husbands. We wanted the final speech to be the moment where the audience finally understands the conclusions her thinking has brought to light. Only after one has watched her as she gleaned her insights about Eichmann's character, and seen how she was so brutally and often unfairly attacked for them, are you then willing to listen to her for so long. By then, one has fallen in love with her, as well as her way of thinking. And Barbara's performance is both so intelligent, and so emotional, it takes your breath away. We have moved gradually towards this moment, slowly giving the audience the opportunity to understand the building blocks of Arendt's complex thoughts and to comprehend what she meant by the banality of evil. The speech is both the intellectual, and the emotional climax of the entire film.

**The crew is bursting with powerful women: Pam Katz as co-writer, Bettina Brokemper as producer, Caroline Champetier as cinematographer, Bettina Böhler as editor... Coincidence or a conscious decision?**

I didn't plan it that way, it just happened. But then again perhaps it wasn't a coincidence. But Hannah Arendt was the opposite of a feminist and HANNAH ARENDT is also not a typical "woman's film." It is a film made by highly dedicated and professional people committed to telling a story that does justice to the life of Hannah Arendt.

**According to Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt's teacher and friend, "the venture into the public realm is only possible when there is trust in people". Each one of your films is such a venture. How does this apply to HANNAH ARENDT?**

In the spirit of Hannah Arendt: Trusting the audience to move through ignorance and amazement to the desire to understand, and ultimately to arrive at such an understanding.

## PRODUCTION COMPANY

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## TECHNICAL DETAILS

Ratio: Cinemascope  
Sound: 5.1 / Dolby-SRD  
Length: 113'30 / 24fps / 3260 meters, 6 reels  
Languages: german and english

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