



"ANDERSCH, Alfred. 1914-1980." in Encyclopedia of the Essay. ed. Tracy Chevalier, London, Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997. 25-26.

Alfred Andersch had a prolific career as an essayist: besides composing a lengthy treatise on the state of German literature on the heels of two world wars, he published four volumes of collected essays, produced and hosted numerous radio programs (among them the "radio-essay") for West Germany's leading broadcasting companies, and founded two important journals --Der Ruf. Unabhängige Blätter der jungen Generation (The Call. Independent Journal of the Young Generation, 1946 - 1947) and Texte und Zeichen (Texts and Signs, 1955 - 1957), which nurtured the essay tradition among the postwar generation of German writers. The scope and depth of his essays are as diverse as the roles he took on as author, editor, journalist, publisher and radio man. Scattered among his many literary essays are astute social and political commentaries, art, film and theater reviews, travel prose, author portraits (Thomas Mann, Ernst Jünger), aphorisms and short philosophical glosses. The recent critical attention being given to Andersch's essays and radio work not only provides a glimpse into a brilliant career as a non-fiction writer, but also demonstrates in Andersch an important media figure and cultural talent scout (as editor of Texte und Zeichen and producer/host of the "radio-essay"). While foregrounding Andersch's interest in issues concerned with writing, cultural literacy and aesthetics, the essays reveal a dynamic style that seeks to continually mediate between the historical, political and socioeconomic contexts of modernity.

Andersch's capacity as editor and journalist for Der Ruf sparked his foray into essay writing. Along with Hans Werner Richter, Andersch sought to produce a journal that would capture the incredible energy of the new generation of postwar writers and intellectuals. Throughout his career as an essayist, Andersch published essays in some of West Germany's

principal literary and political journals, including Frankfurter Hefte, Merkur, konkret and Kürbiskern. With the first meeting of the "Gruppe 47" in 1947, which he organized, and the publication of the treatise "Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung" ("German Literature at the Turning Point") in 1948, Andersch established himself as a perceptive critic of German literature and advocate of Germany's younger generation of writers. When he began work in broadcasting at Radio Frankfurt (later Hessischer Rundfunk) in 1948, these convictions became guiding forces. Andersch spent the next ten years of his life working for the leading broadcasting companies in West Germany. His creation of such programs as the "Abendstudio" and the "radio-essay" expanded the role of radio beyond reporting to include literary and artistic productions. In the Funkkurier (1955) Andersch described the "radio-essay" as a "poetic document of the reality of our world and of the life of men in that world" (quoted from M. Liebe, 1994). The unique synthesis in the "radio-essay" of artistic and political expression, musical and literary pieces, forged such critically-acclaimed endeavors as the series entitled "Die Professoren" ("The Professors"), which invited scholars like Walter Jens, Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Muschg and Max Bense out of the classroom and into the studio to perform their ideas and to put their theories into practice. The popularity of these talk-based programs stemmed from the expertise that they assumed of their audience, and made Andersch a household name. It is from his development of the "radio-essay" that his conception of the essay is brought forth. Influenced by Adorno's notion of the "constellation," Andersch's inclusion of music, literature, criticism and politics into any one broadcast allowed for a montage of constantly shifting discourses, thereby illustrating the multifarious nature of the modern world. Andersch himself emphasized the word *trial*, seeing the essay component of these radio broadcasts as providing for "the lively character of the trial or attempt, which remains continuously open to all possibilities" (quoted from M. Liebe, 1994). This intriguing definition of the "radio-essay" acts as an underlying premise for Andersch's written essays, and thus suggests some motifs common to his essays, radio broadcasts and editorial ideals.

The essays highlight an attempt to reanimate the spirit of German modernism, which had

fallen victim to the Third Reich. The treatise "Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung," the essays "Thomas Mann als Politiker" ("Thomas Mann as a Politician," 1955) and "Achtzig und Jünger. Ein politischer Diskurs" ("Eighty and Jünger. A Political Discourse," 1975), and the review essays of work by young artists like Heinrich Böll, Arno Schmidt, Pierre Claudel, and Elio Vittorini speak to Andersch's desire to reconcile the tradition of German modernism (Mann, Jünger) with the postwar generation's resuscitation of an avantgarde style attested to in Europäische Avantgarde (European Avantgarde, 1949). Working closely with the technological medium of the radio influenced the pieces Andersch wrote/produced for his weekly features. Andersch's realization that his capacity as both radio broadcaster and author magnified the intensity of consumerist culture prompted such radio features as "Denk-Zettel für Kulturkonsumenten" ("Thoughts for Cultural Consumers," 1959) and written essays like "Die Blindheit des Kunstwerks" ("The Blindness of Art," 1956), "Notiz über die Schriftsteller und den Staat" ("Note Concerning Writers and the State," 1966) and "Literatur in den schweizerischen Massenmedien" ("Literature in the Swiss Mass Media," 1977[-]78).

Through Andersch's editorial ingenuity, which resulted in the newspaper/journal Der Ruf, the anthology Europäische Avantgarde, the brochure-series "studio frankfurt" (1951), and the literary journal Texte und Zeichen, young poets, artists and essayists were given an intellectual venue where they could showcase their talents. The constellation of ideas set up by Andersch's role as essayist, radio figure and editor sketches a trajectory between the height of German modernism and the birth of a postwar literary tradition, between the machinations of the Third Reich and the economic miracle of the 1950's. The import of these essays, the care and detail with which they were written and their perceptive analyses of contemporary German culture demonstrate in Alfred Andersch an essayist of great significance in a continued and lively tradition of essay writing in Germany.