

MAKING A DIFFERENCE *IN-THE-WORLD*:
A COMPARATIVE CRITIQUE OF HANNAH ARENDT, CORNELIUS
CASTORIADIS, AND PETER WAGNER'S APPROACHES TO THE
WORLD-ALTERING DIMENSIONS OF COLLECTIVE POLITICAL
ACTION

By Erin Carlisle

SUMMARY

The contemporary challenges of globalization, depoliticization and the experience of 'worldlessness' have given rise to a condition of declining political creativity, collective impotence, and the exhaustion of possibilities of world-formation. This calls for an urgent rethink of the meaning of politics and of the potential for political projects to make change. In light of this situation, this thesis posed the question: 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?' To address this question, two overarching tasks emerged: first, the elucidation of a notion of 'the world', in order to, second, analyse how collective political action alters the world.

In relation to the first point, the study leaned upon hermeneutic-phenomenological philosophy, which takes the notion of the world as a central question in its own right. However, these approaches have not yet systematically developed an understanding of the world-altering aspects of collective political action; this project spoke to this opening within the field. I adopted two interconnected modes of 'doing' (broadly speaking) from hermeneutic-phenomenological debates on the human articulation of the world-horizon, which were characterised as 'world-interpretation' and 'world-formation'. I argued that, alongside an understanding of the world as the under-determined and encompassing horizon of the human condition, these notions of world-interpreting and world-forming doing provide a framework through which to develop a theory of political action.

Concerning the second task, the project employed the hermeneutic-phenomenological understandings of world-interpretation and world-formation as a frame through which to analyse the political theory of Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner. The study employed a twofold method: critical hermeneutic reconstruction, and comparative critique. The critical comparison of the research findings was undertaken in order to reconsider collective political action as a world-altering project, which resulted in the development of a new theoretical approach to political action *in-the-world*.

The theoretical framework developed in this study offers an insight into the ways that collective political action opens the institution of the world through modes of problematisation, and alters it by giving form to the encompassing world-horizon through the articulation of new patterns of meaning and configurations of common bonds, to bring about a change in history. The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to political theory detailed in this project helps to think through the ways in which human beings shape and reshape socio-cultural worlds via political action—to begin the world *anew*—because the overarching world-horizon always remains open to the possibility of plural interpretations and further articulations. The central argument developed in this thesis is that the inherently unfinished or incomplete character of socially instituted worlds, and their interrelation with the encompassing undetermined and inexhaustible world-horizon that always calls for further articulation, provides the preconditions for collective political action to make a difference in the world. This new theoretical approach bridges the fields of phenomenological philosophy and political social theory to clear a path for a phenomenology of political action, which offers an important contribution to emerging debates within social theory, phenomenology, and sociology that seek creative solutions to the twin problematics of globalization and depoliticization.