

Art, Cinema, and the Berlin School

Jasmin Krakenberg

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2017

Reading Committee:

Eric Ames, Chair

Richard T. Gray

Richard Block

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Germanics

©Copyright 2017

Jasmin Krakenberg

University of Washington

Abstract

Art, Cinema, and the Berlin School

Jasmin Krakenberg

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Eric Ames

Department of Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media Studies

This dissertation argues that the Berlin School—the most important development in German cinema since the New German Cinema of the 1970s—explores the relation between cinema and traditional art genres. The four genres that organize my dissertation—portraiture, landscape, still life, and history—also provide the key categories for analyzing their work. Each genre provides the cinema with historical forms of seeing and representation. The films, for their part, take up these forms and rework them in a new context. In my exploration of the films, I draw on a variety of texts (student work, non-narrative films, experimental films, narrative films, painting, photography, and video installation). This study does not provide a single “reading” of the films, nor does it simply classify them as a portrait films or landscape films, for example. Films can obviously cut across genres, creating a visual and referential richness that allows for even deeper engagement. I build upon discussions of the aesthetic context of the pictorial arts, drawing from art historians, as well as from literary and film scholars, to show how “ways of seeing” specific to these genres of art suggest a way of dealing with the problem of stasis in film. Consequently, this study suggests a revised understanding of the genres that emphasizes mobility and dynamism in relation to the stories being told. This dissertation offers a conceptual framework through art for exploring both the history and aesthetics of the Berlin School. It suggests an understanding of the Berlin School not just as art cinema, but cinema as a reflection on the history of art. Going further, it expands our understanding of film’s visual language and of cinema as an art of seeing. In doing so, it also demonstrates how narrative film is currently redefining the cinema’s relation to the arts. Ultimately, I argue that an understanding of the current German cinema through the framework of art history allows us to connect beyond the German context to film and visual arts more broadly.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the continuous help of a number of people. I am grateful to my adviser, Eric Ames, whose seminars on Werner Herzog and Film Noir opened my eyes to film, and whose mentorship helped me see this project through to the end. His writing has set a standard I cannot pretend to approach. I extend similar gratitude to my reading committee, Richard Block and Rick Gray, from whom I have learned in numerous ways. A special thank you goes to my friends and colleagues: Olivia Albiero, Tommy Bell, Tim Coombs, Tobi Gruenthal, Verena Kick, Ungsan Kim, Kristina Pilz, and Joel Strom, who discussed the films with me and whose comments on portions of the dissertation were invaluable during the process of revisions. I am particularly grateful to Stephanie Welch for her encouragement, editorial generosity, and our ongoing conversations about film. The faculty in Germanics deserves many thanks for being a constant source of inspiration. A special acknowledgment goes to Rebecca Cummins, who gave me the opportunity to share key ideas from my dissertation in her photography seminar. I am fortunate to have received financial support for this study from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, to conduct research at the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin, and from the Joff Hanauer Excellence in Western Civilization Endowment. Finally, I want to thank my family for supporting me in my endeavors. Mostly, I thank Patrick Broz, who generously provided the soundtrack to this journey.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter One: Imitating Portraiture..... | 16 |
| Chapter Two: Expanding Landscapes..... | 58 |
| Chapter Three: Moving Still Lives..... | 92 |
| Chapter Four: Framing History..... | 127 |
| Conclusion..... | 171 |
| Works Cited..... | 176 |

Introduction

“Man muss das Sehen lernen, darum geht es.”

(One has to learn to see, that’s what it is about.)

Christian Petzold (in Zander, 2016)



Fig. 1. Tacita Dean, *Fernsehturm* (*Television Tower*, 2001).

Fernsehturm (*Television Tower*, 2001) is a forty-four minute film by British artist Tacita Dean, looking across the revolving restaurant interior of the Berlin Television Tower. The static camera points towards the curved wall of windows that allow diners to observe the city from above while they eat. Dean filmed the inside of the restaurant as day turns to night, recording both the slowly changing light and the restaurant’s thirty-minute rotation, to show a complete panorama of the city. But the outside remains indistinct. Instead, we witness a moment of time as a result of the shot’s duration and the camera’s stasis. As colors in the sky change and fade, from

the blues and greys of day, to evening's warmer hues of yellow and reds, the mood changes as well. Though the details of the building's exterior are obscured and hazy, the general contemplation of light and colors carries qualities of nineteenth-century landscape painting. As the sun sets, the restaurant interior fluctuates between visibility and obscurity until the fluorescent lights are switched on to illuminate the space at night, transforming the window surfaces from transparent glass to reflecting screens. Less interested in the representation of the restaurant's interior, the film is preoccupied with painterly composition of the image.

Fernsehturm explores the role of stasis in art, motion in cinema, and the interrelation of both. The circular motion and stasis of the tower presents the structure of the film as an endless loop. Using an anamorphic lens, not unlike the old Cinema-scope format, results in an elongated rectangular view that constitutes a crop of the spherical space. The architectural features of the windows mimic the material structure of celluloid film – a series of frames or still images. In addition, the film aligns itself to a cinema of earlier generations. Early cinema characteristically displayed a fascination with the motion of everyday life. For example, one of the Lumière brothers' first films showed workers leaving the factory (1895). Soon, allusions to the "high" arts doubled as a means of validating the new medium and underscoring its roots in painting and the "legitimate" theater. By the 1920s and '30s, film no longer simply borrowed from the pictorial arts, but rather converted modern art into popular culture.¹ As an independent art form, and due to its own dual nature consisting of static and moving pictures, film helped break down the barriers between art and entertainment. The difference, however, lies in the fact that Dean's film

¹ Here, we might think of Busby Berkeley's musical choreographies of dancers and kaleidoscopic on-screen performances in the 1930s and '40s and expressionistic set designs in Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920), Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Josef von Sternberg's *Der Blaue Engel* (*Blue Angel*, 1930).

is meant to be exhibited at galleries and museums, and not at a movie theater. The film apparatus itself becomes part of the painterly question of what can be seen, as an installation of pictures.

Dean's film is but one example of the crossover between art and cinema in recent years. Ever since the advent of the video camera in the 1970s, moving pictures in galleries or museums have mainly consisted of video and its capacity for real-time recording. Recently, however, just as artists have turned to film techniques to expand the notion of time-based art, so filmmakers have shifted film towards the visual arts to embrace notions of stasis, while gaining considerable presence in museums and art galleries. Many filmmakers today exhibit film stills as free-standing art works, screen experimental work in galleries, and use museums to distribute their work on DVD. In 2013, a group of independent German filmmakers was honored with a retrospective organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The filmmakers share an apparently cold emotional register and a bone-dry approach to drama. Their storytelling tends to be patient and deeply rooted in observation. Faces, landscapes, and objects appear in luminous compositions and subtly framed shots. This group of filmmakers includes, most notably, Christian Petzold, Angela Schanelec, and Thomas Arslan. A younger generation of filmmakers from Hamburg, Munich and Vienna—including Christoph Hochhäusler, Maren Ade, Ulrich Köhler, Benjamin Heisenberg, Maria Speth, Valeska Griesebach, Jessica Hausner, Henner Winckler, and Nicholas Wackerbarth—continues in this spirit of narrating everyday life by means of observation.

Journalists first called this group the “Berlin School” (*Berliner Schule*), and this catchy term now belongs to the vocabulary of film fans, critics, and scholars alike. The most important development in German film history since the New German Cinema of the 1970s, “the Berlin School” is somewhat misleading, for it represents neither a school nor a movement, nor is Berlin

the center of production or training. Rather, it is a loose affiliation of German and Austrian filmmakers whose work first emerged in the early 1990s. They share certain aesthetic sensibilities to depict unattached, wayward protagonists and to reflect on the activity of film viewing itself. It is a heady cinema of artists, intellectuals, and cinephiles, and this mix becomes a problem for some viewers. Criticized as too serious, artsy, even boring, the films collide against conventional viewing expectations. But these very films also meet with good success at international film festivals. This key development in German cinema, which cannot adequately be described in terms of a Berlin School, has nevertheless achieved international significance by that name.

I was struck early on while watching the narrative films associated with the Berlin School by how much their cinematography gestures to aesthetic qualities of the other arts, such as painting and photography. This became the impetus of my research. Several of the filmmakers in fact received formal academic training in art and design. Others draw on their educational background in theatre (Schanelec, Petzold), literature (Petzold, Arslan, Grisebach), architecture (Hochhäusler), sculpture and art history (Heisenberg), philosophy (Köhler, Grisebach), as well as visual communication (Köhler). Petzold, Schanelec, and Arslan studied at Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB), founded in 1966 as West Germany's first film school and recognized for its independence from the influence of commercial interests. Their mentors included filmmakers, media artists, and media theorists Harun Farocki and Hartmut Bitomsky, who are both known for their non-narrative films, video work, and film installations in galleries and museums. Likewise, Henner Winckler and Ulrich Köhler received their training under Rüdiger Neumann, a filmmaker and Professor for Experimental Film at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, known for his experimental work. The influence of their mentors

is most obvious in the student work of Petzold, Schanelec, and Arslan. Farocki's theoretical discourse on images met with response also on a fictional level when collaborating with Petzold on feature films, such as *Barbara* (2012). While working on various projects, several of these filmmakers also teach production. Both Schanelec and Arslan now hold teaching positions at art institutes, the former at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, the latter at Universität der Künste in Berlin. In addition, Petzold and Hochhäusler hold teaching appointments at the DFFB. Here, they continue to provide an educational focus for the production and viewing of images, which in turn affects their way of filmmaking.

Many filmmakers now associated with the Berlin School have for years veered between the visual arts and film. Benjamin Heisenberg's video and drawings, for example, have been shown at international exhibitions. Most recently, Heisenberg and his brother Emanuel, in collaboration with Elisophie Eulenberg, unveiled the permanent video installation *Brienner 45* at the Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism. In addition, many of the filmmakers write about their appreciation of the visual arts. Christoph Hochhäusler, for instance, reflects on film as portraiture and self-portraiture in his online-platform *Parallel Film* as well as in *Revolver*, a film journal created by Hochhäusler, Heisenberg, and others in 1998 as a forum for exchange among filmmakers, editors, cinematographers, actors, artists, critics, and viewers. The journal is inspired by the influential and respected French film publication, *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Related, the editors of *Revolver* regularly host "Revolver Live!" sessions at the Volksbühne Berlin as platforms for discussions and film screenings. Hochhäusler also contributed an essay on taking images of people and taking images of video, to accompany Katja Stuke's book of portraits, *Könnte Sein* (2008). Stuke is a German artist whose portraits of athletes are also featured in Hochhäusler's film *Unter dir die Stadt* (*The City Below*, 2010). On

the related topic of portraiture, Petzold conducted an interview with German photographer Tobias Zielony, published in *Story/No Story* (2010), a collection of portraits featuring young adolescents, whose poses resemble those of movie stars and pop icons. It is within this nexus of film and art that the Berlin School needs to be seen.

Indeed, the Berlin School represents a group of filmmakers who are versed in the history of art. Asked to name the major “influences” on their work, the filmmakers often refer to a wide range of painters and photographers. For example, Jessica Hausner refers to Renaissance paintings as a source for her visual style (Hausner, 2014).² In interviews, Petzold acknowledges that his films are informed and shaped by the work of Edward Hopper, Gerhard Richter, and others.³ According to the press release, Maria Speth reworks American photographer Richard Avedon’s portrait series *In the American West* (1979-84) as a visual source for her crisp monochrome images of street kids in the documentary film *9 Leben* (*9 Lives*, 2010). As for *Milchwald*, a collaboration with Heisenberg, Hochhäusler cites the influence of the serial landscape views of German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher and the American landscape photography known as “New Topographics” (named after the “New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape” exhibition, from 1975, a pivotal moment in American landscape photography) (“Re: Fragen zu Filmen und Arbeit bei Revolver,” 2015). It is striking that, with few exceptions, the work of all these artists connects to the late twentieth-century art movements

² Jessica Hausner is the daughter of the painter Rudolf Hausner, representative of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism known for its emphasis on the techniques of Old Masters that gave a grounding in realism, combined with religious and esoteric symbolism.

³ On the use of Gerhard Richter’s *Betty* (1988) in Petzold’s *Die Beischlafdiebin* (1998), see Abel, “The Cinema of Identification Gets on my Nerves: An Interview with Christian Petzold.” *Cineaste*, vol. 33, no. 3, Summer 2008, <http://www.cineaste.com/articles/an-interview-with-christian-petzold.htm>. On Petzold’s relation to August Sander and Tobias Zielony, see Petzold “Eingetrübte Romantik,” Interview with Jens Hinrichsen. *Monopol Magazin für Kunst und Leben*, 6 Mar. 2012, <http://www.monopol-magazin.de/eingetrübte-romantik>.

of minimal, pop, and conceptual art. Their methods, however different, are generally concerned with sobriety and anonymity, rigidity and objectivity. Large in scale and exhibited on white walls in galleries, their works test the boundaries of photography and sculpture. Often, they work in series of older, half-forgotten traditions of portraiture, landscape, and still life—genres that have a peculiar relation to storytelling as they traditionally have been considered non-narrative. Presenting their work in series, they move the photograph beyond the individual work: the viewer can never see everything at once, as the eye is constantly moving between the detail and the larger view or series of views. How interesting, then, that the films associated with the Berlin School display similar characteristics of artists who are roughly their contemporaries.

Scholarship

With all the recent attention given to the Berlin School came a virtual explosion of scholarship. Four very different publications have recently tried to gather up much of this material and present it to Anglo-American readers. *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule* (2013), an illustrated catalog for the MoMA retrospective, edited by the museum's curator Rajendra Roy and German journalist Anke Leweke, provides an accessible introduction to the Berlin School. The strength of the catalogue lies in the colorful selection of essays, interviews, and images from forty-four films—a diversity that also characterizes the Berlin School. *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema* (2013) is a collection of short essays from twenty-three contributors working in the field of German Studies. The essays focus on themes and formal strategies in films ranging from 1997 to 2010. Arranged by keywords, such as “Ambient Sound,” “Cars,” and “Violence,” the collection displays an unusual degree of breath and creativity that is by no means exhaustive, setting useful parameters

and leaving much room for future research. In his first book-length study on Christian Petzold, German film scholar Jaimey Fisher places Petzold's films in the context of genre cinema to explore themes like terrorism, globalization, and immigration. Lastly, Marco Abel's *The Counter Cinema of the Berlin School* (2013) offers the first monograph devoted to the Berlin School. Following recent trends in film scholarship, Abel frames his discussion in terms of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière. As the title suggests, his study treats the Berlin School as a grouping of films and filmmakers that juxtaposes the formalist and ideological domination of mainstream Hollywood with its German counterexample. The discussions of filmmakers and their entire body of work to date of the publications centers around categories similar to the glossary, ranging from "genre" in films by Petzold, Arslan, and Heisenberg, and "communication" in films by Schanelec, to "irony" in films by Ade, and "resistance" in films by Köhler. Abel suggests that the question of Germany is the shared concern of all Berlin School filmmakers. Rather than "represent" contemporary Germany, the films anticipate a Germany that may not yet exist. Indeed, Abel turns the Berlin School into a "cinema that is engaged in the difficult task of improving Germany's reality in the age of post-wall globalization by providing better images for it" (23).⁴ Taken together, these publications make important contributions to those they consider to be the most significant filmmakers of the current German cinema.

Throughout the scholarship, the filmmakers of the Berlin School have been distinguished in terms of their penchant for static images. And yet, these discussions treat the films as cultural texts that either reflect or point to the realities of reunified Germany in terms of their

⁴ In making this claim, Abel is not alone, as the filmmaker Ulrich Köhler provoked some controversy by dismissing overtly political, plot-driven films in favor of politicizing the process of filmmaking, privileging form over content. In his statement "Why I Don't Make Political Films," Köhler explains that his films ask the viewer to consider what a film does, not what it means (10-13).

representation of social and economic mobility and issues of transitional zones and representations and venture capitalism. Only a few have chosen to push disciplinary boundaries.⁵ To some extent, the films are obviously preoccupied with Germany today. And yet, these experiments in formal rigor and observational style are by no means uniquely German. Rather, they benefit from ongoing reciprocal exchange with many other international filmmakers including American filmmaker Kelly Reichardt, French filmmaker Claire Denis, Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Canadian filmmaker Denis Côté, and Chinese filmmaker Jia Zhang-ke. The practice of close observation that transforms narrative into a meditation on the depiction of characters and places and, by extension, on the act of viewing the films itself, represents an important strategy of independent filmmaking across the globe. For example, in his recent study, *Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (2015), Justin Remes explores a vast body of avant-garde films that offer little or no movement at all, in favor of foregrounding issues of stasis and duration. Such experiments, according to Remes, challenge the received idea of film that presumes motion to be its defining element. None of the studies have considered situating the Berlin School within larger international crossovers between art and cinema. Lutz Koepnick notes on the current state of German film studies that, “as invigorating as the work of the Berlin School has been for scholars of German film, it has done very little to encourage German film studies to connect its itineraries to larger debates in international art cinema studies” (660). Heeding the call from Koepnick to open up the films to a broader perspective, my project puts them in dialogue with the visual arts. The Berlin School’s critical success is partly a result of its self-conscious positioning in relation to film history. But it also comes from the self-conscious

⁵ For a discussion of the Berlin School through the lens of performance, see Olivia Landry, *The Performance of Berlin School: Movement, Affect, and Presence*. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2015.

integration of visual sources and genres spanning the history of Western art. While a few commentators have acknowledged the Berlin School's interest in specific artists, none have yet explored the films in relation to larger genres of art or to the history of art more generally.

The dissertation turns to the visual tradition, because that is precisely what the filmmakers of the Berlin School are doing. As I argue, the four genres that organize my dissertation—portraiture, landscape, still life, and history—also provide the key categories for analyzing their work. My study does not aim for a didactic side-by-side comparison of different forms of cultural production. Nor does it trace the extensive links between specific paintings or photographs and films, even though it often nods in this direction. Instead, it uncovers the half-hidden affinities between current cinema and the visual arts in terms of their shared responses to social and cultural tensions. In so doing, this project also explores the aesthetic issues that travel from one medium to another. Each genre thus provides cinema with historical forms of seeing and representation. The films, for their part, take up these forms and rework them in a new context.

In addition to work in German studies, this project also contributes to the growing body of film scholarship on art and cinema. Issues relating stillness and stasis in the cinema have also been a focus in Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006) and the anthologies *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Karen Beckmann and Jean Ma, 2008) and *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms* (Elvira Rössak, 2011). As the titles indicate, the primary focus on these studies lies on the relationship between cinema and photography. Within the last few years, the notion of "slowness" as a particular cultural phenomena that tries to rescue extended temporal structures from the accelerated tempo of late capitalism and a constitutive feature of recent filmmaking has gained critical attention, with three

publications appearing in 2014 alone: Ira Jaffe's *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action*, Song Hwee Lim's *Tsai-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*, and Lutz Koepnick's *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*. Whereas Jaffe and Lim both focus their analysis of slowness on temporal aspects of the films, such as the aesthetic of temporal drifting (Lim), Koepnick proposes to examine slowness not in terms of cinematic duration but rather in relation to a variety of contemporary art practices premised upon the operation of slow-motion photography. His approach accounts for the interrelations between art and cinema, which leads to questions of stylistic history.

Inasmuch as artists have made film an integral part of their practice, art historians have written formative essays on art's relation to cinema. For example, the contributors to the *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies* (2010) revisit the works of art and film theorist Rudolf Arnheim, including his seminal *Film als Kunst* (*Film as Art*, 1932). In it, Arnheim envisioned a visually literate film audience, interested not in simply following stories but in considering *how* the story unfolds in time. Like any film educator, he aimed for engendering critical thought about popular images. Arnheim, writing about the advent of sound and increasing use of color in film, had argued that film could only remain art if it retained a sense of its own basic properties: montage, camera movement, and dynamic compositions. Only a few scholars work across film and art history, and those who do tend to focus on the historical avant-garde, the American avant-garde of the 1940s and 50s, and the international New Waves of the 1960s. There, they find an agenda of formal issues (structural, representational, and self-reflexive) common to both pictorial forms. In her seminal study of comparative arts, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film* (1996), Angela Dalle Vacche explores how mainstream film uses "high art" in particular to comment on the interplay between the word and the image, on the relationship between artistic

creativity and sexual difference, and on the tension between tradition and modernity. In a similar vein, Steven Jacobs discusses some of the encounters between art and cinema in *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (2011). His study deals first and foremost with the cinematic visualization of art (painting, photography, and sculpture) in art documentaries and artist biopics. It also discusses museum scenes in narrative films and the use of *tableau*-like compositions in films and publicity stills.⁶ The relative scarcity of analytical writing relating the visual arts to more-or-less mainstream narrative film would seem to suggest an unspoken assumption that art and cinema have little if anything to do with one another. And yet, there is so much to be explored, if only we collapse the boundaries between cinema, photography, and painting to explore their mutual pictorial affinities.

Approach

In order to investigate the processes of mediation, interpretation, and construction that define this material, I combine interviews with filmmakers and archival research of the body of student work at the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin with close readings and theoretical grounding in the context of film aesthetics and representation. Statements by filmmakers and artists can be helpful in the same way that a film review can be helpful, that is, as something to dispute or develop, rather than the key to a final reading. Each chapter is organized around a particular genre and groups together many different films, including Berlin School student work, non-narrative shorts, and experimental films associated with the American avant-garde that developed outside the awareness of commercial history of film and remains, for the most part,

⁶ For another publication that explores the relation of art and cinema, see Brigitte Peucker's *The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film*. Stanford UP, 2007.

outside the awareness of both viewers and scholars alike. But these films are nonetheless interesting for their connection to pictorial art genres. British film scholar A.L. Rees observes that the avant-garde “has sought ‘ways of seeing’ outside the conventions of cinema’s dominant tradition in the drama film and its industrial mode of production” (1), and further, “has taken over the traditional genres of art—rather than those of the cinema itself. These have been central to the language and rhetoric and have shaped its subject-matter. They include still lifes (Hollis Frampton’s *Lemon*, 1969), landscape (Michael Snow’s *La Région Centrale*, 1971), and portraiture (Andy Warhol’s *Screen Tests*, 1964-66)” (2). In my dissertation, these very films mediate between traditional art genres and contemporary approaches, as well as between painting and photography and narrative films. This study does not provide a single “reading” of the films, nor does it simply classify them as portrait films or landscape films, for example. Films can obviously cut across genres, creating a visual and referential richness that allows for even deeper engagement. In my exploration of the films, I build upon discussions of the aesthetic context of the pictorial arts, drawing from art historians as well as from literary and film scholars, to show how “ways of seeing” specific to these genres of art might suggest a way of dealing with stasis as a problem in film. Consequently, my study suggests a revised understanding of the genres that emphasize mobility and dynamism in relation to the stories being told. My research thus offers a conceptual framework for exploring both the history and aesthetics of the Berlin School through that of art. In doing so, it also demonstrates how narrative film is currently redefining the cinema’s relation to the pictorial arts.

This study advances our aesthetic and historical understanding of contemporary German filmmaking by resituating it in the visual culture from which it emerged. Going further, the dissertation also expands our understanding of film’s visual language and of cinema as an art of

seeing. Each chapter asks us to recalibrate our own habits of perception. I argue that the Berlin School of filmmaking secretly explores the relation between cinema and traditional art genres. Understanding the current German cinema through the framework of art history allows us to connect out, beyond the German context, to film and the visual arts more broadly.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter, “Imitating Portraiture,” looks at cinema’s relation to portraiture. Traditionally, portraiture has been understood as a form of representation, memorialization, and immortalization of the sitter as type. Today, by contrast, artists are using portraiture to explore the complex issues and challenges of identity that reveals itself over an extended period of time. These pictures are increasingly conceptual rather than representational. In that respect, I look at the usage of portraiture in Arslan’s *Der schöne Tag* (*A Fine Day*, 2001) and Petzold’s *Barbara* (2012) as means to prolong moments of observation and to strengthen the film viewer’s affective responses to the depicted character. The second chapter, “Expanding Landscapes,” builds on the argument of affective experience. If landscapes in film typically create an atmosphere and a setting for the narrative, then the films of the Berlin School treat landscape as a subject in its own right, a view worth seeing and momentarily inhabiting. I use the early student work produced at the DFFB around the time of German reunification as an evocative point of departure to consider landscape in the narrative films of the Berlin School, with Christoph Hochhäusler’s *Milchwald* (2003) providing a key example. I argue that the cinematic landscapes of the Berlin School tell the viewer little, if anything about their referential context and place (which is different from the function of landscape in painting), even though the films are shot on location. And yet, the films place the viewer vis-à-vis landscape in ways that foreground affective experiences, and they do

so however subtly by way of art historical allusions. By approaching and visualizing the film's locations through earlier landscape views, the films shift the relation between site and representation and appropriate the principle of an older, half-forgotten tradition of the picturesque. The third chapter, "Moving Still Life," explores the relation between film and still life. Both share the deceptive qualities and the paradox of movement and stasis, narrative and description. I emphasize the movement of still life from painting and photography to the filmic examples by Harun Farocki, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Angela Schanelec, where it guides the viewer through a range of emotions. Ultimately, the films show the still life's ability to move the narrative and in effect the viewer. For the last chapter, "Reframing History," I look at the Berlin School's recent turn to history. This chapter traces the continued relevance of the *tableau* form and related conventions of history painting and Dutch interior paintings in the context of film. Turning to the representation of women who have been historically overlooked, Jessica Hausner, Christian Petzold, and Thomas Arslan combine low-key realism (characters absorbed in conversations and daily tasks) with a high degree of stylization in the image. Finally, the conclusion gathers up main threads of my argument and reflects on their implications for the aesthetic and art historical understanding of contemporary German filmmaking as a cinema of art.

Chapter One

Imitating Portraiture

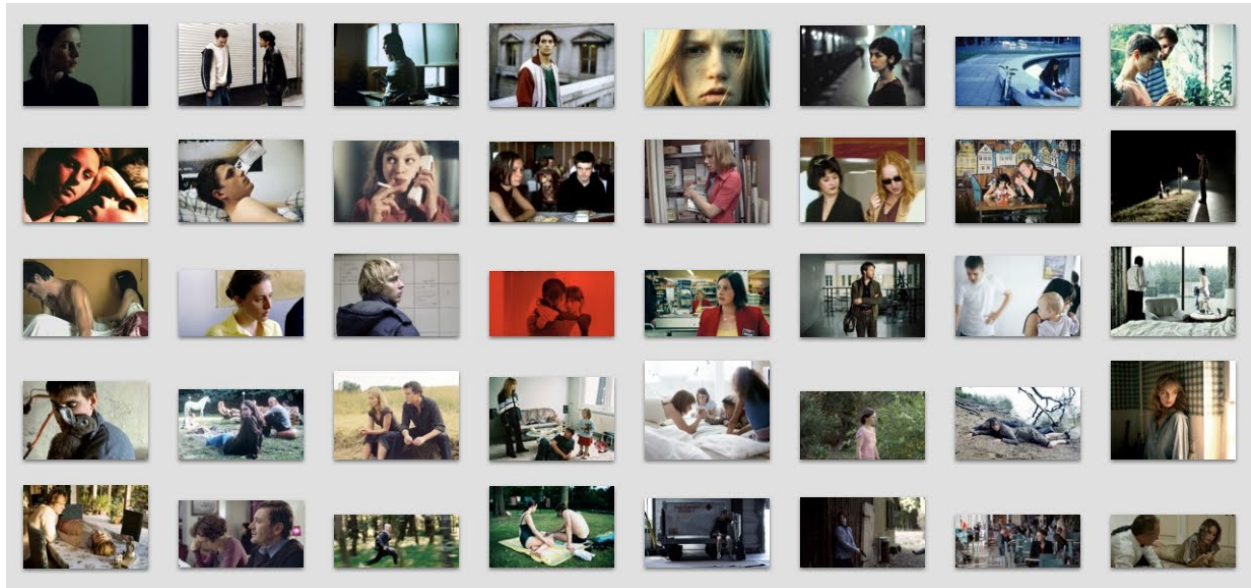


Fig. 2. A gallery of Berlin School portraits, published by Christoph Hochhäusler. *Raumsprache*. 20 November 2010.

For a 2010 entry concerning the Berlin School on his online blog *Raumsprache*, Christoph Hochhäusler published a chronological collection of film stills and posed the following question: “What kind of image of Germany emerges, of presentness and humanness, when we assemble the films of those filmmakers who are, to some extent, friends, elective affinities, and unwilling associates?” (my translation). Each film still represents one of the films associated with the Berlin School between 1985 and 2010, and shows the protagonist, either alone or with another character, gazing directly at the viewer or contemplatively at something outside the frame. The frontal midrange composition, privileging the subject’s face and pose, recalls formal elements of portraiture. Presenting the film stills together, Hochhäusler turns the film stills into a gallery of portraits. Indeed, his notion of collecting, assembling, and comparing

the films and film stills as portraits is telling in that it aligns him with famous chronologists of the twentieth century. The most notable chronologist was German photographer August Sander, who, in 1922, embarked upon his lifelong photographic project *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*People of the Twentieth Century*), which he envisioned as a comprehensive record of German society. In many ways, Hochhäusler imitates Sander's venture in that his own project of creating an image of Germany is cumulative and open-ended. The difference, however, lies in the represented subjects. Whereas Sander photographed existing people, the Berlin School depicts fictional characters. Nevertheless, Hochhäusler seems to make a case for filmmaking—and specifically the Berlin School—as an art of portraiture. Elsewhere, he makes this more explicit: “Understanding the plot as an arc that intensifies the characters to a point that they become visible. Creating a three-dimensional picture within the relief of motion, gesture and language. Film as a portrait” (*Revolver* vol. 26, 59). In that sense, he aligns the Berlin School films in the long tradition of portraiture and typological depiction that draws attention to observation, presence, and narration.

The promise of realism and authenticity, however illusory, compels scholars and critics who connect the Berlin School films to film history, and to Italian Neo-Realism with its use of “everyday protagonists” in particular. They emphasize the Berlin School's immediate, detailed, and presentist approach, which avoids manipulative effects like plot-point-oriented storytelling and musical soundtrack. Commentators describe many of the main characters as somewhat lost and adrift in a country in which neoliberalism and globalization clash with national history and tradition (Fisher). For some, the seemingly earnest or sincere treatment of the characters also has a great deal to do with the issue of identity in a newly reunified Germany. Characters seem to be in a constant search for a new identity in a time of societal change (Roy 11). Berlin School scholarship approaches films by employing questions regarding the social

history of identity formation in order to investigate the narrative and psychological qualities of the subject. Films, according to Marco Abel, do not ask whom the characters represent; instead, they confront the viewer with images that bring about a momentary suspension of habitual readings through the framework of representational realism (19). He concludes that the films should be regarded as “counter-cinema,” not because they are message-driven films but because they perform what French philosopher Jacques Rancière calls a “redistribution of the sensible” through vision and sound (1). Indeed, this notion is closely related to the conceptual work associated with the American avant-garde of the 1960s and art photography of the 1980s—a relation that has yet to be acknowledged and explored.⁷

What distinguishes the films from other filmic treatments of Germany at the time is that they neither simply illustrate present-day Germany and its inhabitants, nor expose it as fictitious. Rather, they explore it in terms of duration, vision, and sound. Art and stylization assume a prominent place in the films associated with the Berlin School. This is particularly evident in how the static camera frames its subjects for extended periods of time and how the static and silent subjects in front of the camera imitate the stillness of painting and photography most noticeable in portraiture. For example, the characters in Angela Schanelec’s *Mein langsames Leben* (*Passing Summer*, 2001) and *Nachmittag* (*Afternoon*, 2007) often sit in silence and stare at something outside the frame. The stasis and duration registered by the camera interrupts the narrative flow and consciously suggests that the genre is of a non-narrative, descriptive, and representational quality. These shots consistently deny their viewer the subject’s motivations for, and explanations of actions and behavior. Instead, they activate aesthetic distance rather than emotional involvement and identification. This denial leaves the viewer either in a state of

⁷ I use the term avant-garde in regards to P. Adams Sitney’s *Visionary Film* (2002) as a definitive account of a particular phase of American avant-garde filmmaking.

fascination or utter frustration and boredom. Film reviews are important evidence of what viewer's found compelling. One of the most frequently discussed reactions to the Berlin School films stems from the observation of the physical appearances of the subjects' bodies for extended periods of time. After the world premiere of Thomas Arslan's film *Gold* at the Berlinale Film Festival in 2013, German filmmaker Dietrich Brüggemann published a blog entry entitled "Fahr zur Hölle, Berliner Schule" (Go to Hell, Berlin School) and provoked a variety of responses, including those from Christoph Hochhäusler, filmmaker Uwe Janson, and actor Hartmut Becker. In his entry, Brüggemann writes: "Gekünstelte Dialoge. Reglose Gesichter. Ausführliche Rückenansichten von Leuten. Zäh zerdehnte Zeit. Willkommen in der Welt des künstlerisch hochwertigen Kinos, willkommen in einer Welt aus quälender Langeweile und bohrender Pein. Muß man das eigentlich einfach so über sich ergehen lassen und fraglos akzeptieren, daß es anscheinend anders nicht geht?" His review is but one reaction that demonstrates the film viewer's struggle to endure duration, to accept the acting and the stillness, and to face the artifice in narrative films.⁸ But narrative, as pointed out by Rick Altman, is as much an act of stasis as it is of change (15). For those writing on the effects of visual representation, boredom is a problematic term, especially when used to express dissatisfaction with work that runs counter to the viewer's expectation. If the ultimate purpose of art is to give pleasure, as Susan Sontag states in her work on boredom, then the viewer must derive pleasure from components of the viewing experience that offer little action, narrative development, and movement (303). This, however, may take time. Rather than dismiss the way the film portrays its subject, we can explore it by

⁸ Likewise, German filmmaker Oskar Roehler in an interview with *ZOO* magazine characterizes the films as being depressive and boring ("austauschbar, depressiv und langweilig"), simply driving people out of the movie theaters (quoted by Hochhäusler in a blog entry from 17 February 2008). See Marco Abel for a list of box office numbers (2013, 11-2).

analyzing the way the camera depicts subjects and faces and connects that portrayal to issues of presence, performance, and affect.

Faces are the motifs of portraits. And even though faces are present in all mass media of our current “facial society,” portraits are not taken seriously anymore (Belting 118). However, the face is not obsolete. We still communicate via faces, even when we replace face-to-face conversation by communication via emoticons. And portraiture is not simply the genre but the privileged medium to think about faces and attach meaning to them. Portraiture not only remains a component of everyday life, but also a crucial way to relate to larger issues of identity and storytelling. The immense success of international exhibitions and retrospectives confirms our ongoing fascination with faces and portraits.⁹ In addition, the face as image has received the attention of scholars, particularly with regard to media-related crises.¹⁰ I am interested in the idea of imitating portraiture and the construction of identity, more generally, the filmic construction and perception of a subject on screen. Of foremost interest to me are the formal elements and stylistic choices by which the films imitate portraiture. What are the promises and possibilities associated with portraiture? And, what are the aesthetic effects created through the juxtaposition of movement and stasis, the cinematic body of the subject and the frame as closure? To answer the questions, I will reference both art and film theory. My investigation will be twofold. First, I will assess how the concept of portraiture in art as a particular form of representation, sensitive to changes in the perceived nature of the individual in Western society, has informed the Berlin

⁹ In 2012, the Haus der Künste in Munich showed the first retrospective of large-scale portraits by German photographer Thomas Ruff. And most recently, Cindy Sherman’s *Imitation of Life* was held at the Broad in Los Angeles. Sherman is known for being an artist as her own model, playing out media-influenced female stereotypes in a wide range of portrait photographs.

¹⁰ Hans Belting discusses the face as image in his recent publication *Faces: Eine Geschichte des Gesichtes* (2014). Anthologies include *Das Gesicht ist eine starke Organization* (2004) and *Blick, Macht, Gesicht* (2001).

School practices. Second, I will evaluate how the filmmakers, in return, respond and contribute to a history of portraiture rooted in realist principles of presence and observation.

Image of Humankind

Although scholars discuss portraits as authentic, truthful representations that give insight into the subjects depicted, the earliest examples of portraiture show that realistic depiction, physical resemblance, and psychological content were not necessarily the goal. Medieval and Renaissance European portraiture focused on demonstrating its subject's political position, social status, and especially religious convictions. The Renaissance tradition was based on the view that the individual human being takes on significance within the wider community (Gierstberg 11). It often distinguished individuals more by functional typology—like their dress and their association with significant objects—than by likeness or physiognomic resemblance. Many portraits were in fact painted without so much as a physical description of the subject's face—unaffected expressions of feelings that were usually taken as something other than true. Richard Brilliant explains that most portraits displayed a formal stillness, a heightened degree of self-composure that responded to the formality of the portrait-making situation (10). Before the invention of the photograph, painting was a significant medium for recording human presence and a sense of duration, because other images of the human face, like the reflection caught in water or a mirror, were transient. To put paint on canvas was to render a person immortal and, in many cases, gave the sitter authority, status, and power. Regarding the function of portrait painting, John Berger writes, “it was to underwrite and idealize a chosen social role of the sitter. It was not to present him as ‘an individual’ but, rather, as an individual monarch, bishop, landowner, merchant and so on [...] The role was emphasized by pose, gesture, clothes and background [...] they were thought of and were meant to be read as the accepted attributes of a

given social stereotype” (43). Portraits establish a vocational presence and mediate cognition and remembrance. Contrary to common assumptions, Berger sees the decline in painted portraiture in the changed notion of identity, rather than in the invention of the camera and its ability to produce an immediate and naturalistic copy of the subject. His belief in the unlikelihood “that any important portraits will ever be painted again” (41) relies on a historically defined role and understanding for portraiture, rather than on the treatment of individuals as subject matter for art. Because of the technological, political, artistic, and economic changes associated with modernity, people no longer accept the stability and value of social roles (45). An individual’s identity consists of multiple, intersecting factors, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. In fact, some prefer speaking of the plural form – ‘identities’ – emphasizing that identity is fluid and ever-changing. As a result, we no longer seem to understand and accept identity as something that can be adequately established by preserving and fixing the way someone looks from one single, static viewpoint, rendering him or her legible in only one single, fixed way. And yet, we still have portraits in painting, photography, and film.

Berger identified the decline of “important” portraits in the increasing popularity and embrace of portraits as psychological investigations (41). By the end of World War II, picture magazines emerged and gave rise to photojournalists, most notably Robert Capa and Henri Cartier-Bresson, who brought the viewer face-to-face with world events. In opposition to this outward view of documentation, the movement known as *Subjektive Fotografie* led by Otto Steinert emphasized the photographer’s ability to imbue her subject with personal and aesthetic meaning through point-of-view shots, the use of close-ups, tonal renderings, and experimentation with time exposure. The subjective tradition that had emerged in the 1940s and early '50s became a lens through which American photographers like Robert Mapplethorpe, Richard Avedon, and Diane Arbus looked at their subjects in the sixties. During this period of tumultuous

cultural tension and high demand for inclusion, women, gays, lesbians, and racial minorities sought autonomous bases of cultural authority. Portraiture for them became a way of addressing identity debates around shared cultural characteristics such as class, gender, and race. While the subjective tradition captured people in candid moments, Mapplethorpe, Avedon, and Arbus collected subjects within predefined groups under a narrow heading of people at the margins of middle-class American society and strategically positioned them in front of the camera.¹¹

Avedon, for example, made stark portraits of cultural figures that are now famous for their minimalist style. At times, he would intentionally evoke emotions and reactions from those posing, as they sat in front of a white background and looked directly into the camera. Such flexibility allowed the photographers to challenge the viewer's assumptions about what is fact and fiction. It also allowed them to raise critical questions about how willingly a viewer accepts any one photo as a reflection of authenticity.

For inspiration, many photographers looked to August Sander, who, a few decades earlier, set out to portray a whole society. Sander is most known for his series *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*—an imposing project at the convergence of ethnography, historical documentation, and sociology of the time. In the late 19th century and into the 20th, photographers, scientists, and social historians gathered photographic images into archives, cataloguing people, places, and natural phenomena according to the belief, suggested by Wolfgang Brückler, that cultural and social conditions could be read on the surface, such as the face (4). At the time, typology was a troubling obsession in the political context, particularly evident in the global development of an interest in eugenics, physiognomy, and the classification of facial types as a mode of surveillance

¹¹ In contrast to Avedon, reactions to Arbus's approach to portraiture is much polarized. Whereas some scholars and critics are seduced to participate in her pleasure of looking at people (Butler, 2004), others, unable to escape similar temptation in spite of themselves, have accused her of creating portraits that are cold and voyeuristic, pessimistic and exploitative (Sontag, 1973).

and social judgment that began in the long 19th century and took on particularly sinister forms in Germany under the Third Reich.¹² In the milieu he knew best, the area around Cologne where he was born, August Sander endeavored to find archetypes to represent every possible type, social class, and vocation and to remain sensitive, rather than sentimental, to the ways individuals reveal themselves in little personal details (Berger, 1991, 31). Sander defined a system of classification by social groups that he sorted according to social type as urban, rural, class, trade, and gender—types or models of individuality that at the time Sander took the photos were already considered obsolete. Each individual subject confronts the viewer with a direct gaze, holding a tool to mark her trade. The informative influence of the sitter's public social type and occupation—from laborers to circus performers, businessmen, and aristocrats—is inseparable from her private identity. This makes itself felt in the equal treatment and intimate nature of being photographed by Sander. The result is a depiction of social types, including the elderly and unemployed, which had previously not been given serious consideration in portraiture. Those who had been depicted were seen in a new light. By treating everyone equal in front of the camera, focusing on posture rather than physiognomy, Sander gives each sitter an austere presence that attempts to avoid, even mock, stereotypes, for example, the anti-Semitic one that, at that time, dominated the newspaper photography and paintings by Otto Dix and the photo-books by Tim Gidal. In that sense, Sander's approach is much closer to the traditional understanding of portraiture as a depiction of identity as type and presence, rather than the modernist notion of identity as individuality, transience, and transformation.

¹² Karl Jasper's *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (1931) critiques this obsession with physiognomy as an adoration of an aristocratic idea of man that led promoters of physiognomy describe the races, professions, and bodies objectively and without sympathy. In Christian Petzold's most recent film *Phoenix* (2014), injured Holocaust survivor Nelly is given charts of facial features before her reconstructive facial surgery.

Sander's portraits enable the viewer to look at a portrait of a man and see a baker as well as a depiction of that trade beyond the portrayed man. German writer Alfred Döblin, in his introduction to Sander's portrait book *Antlitz der Zeit*, praises Sander for contributing great material for the culture, class, and economic history of the last thirty years (14). He explains that the photographs were not made for aesthetic purposes but were meant to be informative, calling the book a sociology of changes that reveals tensions among the types (14). And yet, the photographs of social types for Döblin leave much room for stories. He concludes: "Entire stories could be told about many of these photographs [...] they are raw material for writers, material that is more stimulating and more productive than many a newspaper report [...] Those who know how to look [...] will learn from these clear and powerful photographs" (15). Portraits, with their combination of faces, poses, and the indicated dates, convey a historical moment and raise awareness of social differences. More importantly, they enable a mutual encounter between subject and viewer. They invite the viewer to compare portraits with each other, with types, and with oversimplified stereotypes, and to make discoveries about others but also about herself. Like any "important" painted portrait, Sander's photographic portraits underwrite rather than question the social role of the individual subjects; yet, details, faces, and poses are also judged in light of that given type. Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that Sander's portraits have been important for succeeding generations of artists and filmmakers.

After Sander

Sander's work has had considerable influence on the evolution of photography in Germany, especially on the Düsseldorf School around Hilla and Bernd Becher. The Bechers' photographs of industrial sites of the economic crisis and reconstruction after WWII, devoid of

human presence, ordered according to types, take on a playfulness when comparing and discovering each photograph. Today, the question of cultural heritage has become a topic of public, scholarly, and artistic interest. The surge of European photographic portraiture in the 1980s and 1990s around the Bechers' students Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff, and Rineke Dijkstra, with their keen awareness of portraiture's typological approach, is a key context for the Berlin School. These artists work against the background of rapid changes within globalization, migration, internet, and economic unifications after the fall of the Berlin wall that triggered a collapse not only of political institutions, but also of many elements of German identity. They take on photographs and archives as subjects of their own work, re-examining and re-interpreting through methods like appropriation. In doing so, they seek to reveal biases, challenge accepted histories, undermine concepts of artistic originality, and construct new narratives. Instead of being representational, their portraiture has become increasingly conceptual. It addresses the complexities of individual identity through themes such as motherhood, childhood, loss, crime, gender, and race. The core of their work consistently centers upon the subject of memory. For example, Dijkstra's typological series of equally large, similar portraits of young adolescents at the beach, positioned in the middle of the image with the sea and the horizon behind them, expresses a humanistic view of the subject and thereby finds a link with traditional portraiture, and the Renaissance tradition in particular. That we look at the portraits and are reminded of something else is telling of the viewer's awareness and conditioning in which she views the world. Associations and comparisons with works by Renaissance artists Sandro Botticelli and Johannes Vermeer indicate the rich tradition in which her now iconic portraits stand. The strength of the portrait lies in the ambiguous use of photography. Her portraits document both a presence and an absence, a (collective) memory. They present the viewer with questions

concerning both the social history of identity formation and the art historical perspective concerning tradition, influence, and layers of interpretation.



Fig. 3. Rineke Dijkstra's *Kokobrzeg, Poland, 1992* (left) has been compared to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1482/5).

The link between memory and identity is perhaps less obvious in the portraits of Thomas Ruff. His conceptual program forms a bridge between artists who revived portraiture's psychological investigation in the fifties and sixties, and those from the nineties. In the early 1980s, Ruff began his series of portraits of fellow students, initially in black and white and later in color. He based these portraits on the identification system developed by the French photographer and criminologist Alphonse Bertillon, by implementing his ideas concerning the frontal close-up view, direct gaze, and blank background. His portraits can be understood as anti-portraits—a commentary on the interest of mere facial features that enable identification for control purposes, quite characteristic of this era of surveillance technology. About his conceptual program, Ruff explained in 1989: "I don't believe we can still make portraits in the conventional sense of 'representing a personality' today. At least I don't claim to do that. Which is why I

imitate portraits. Nonetheless, there is still a great deal of reality in my portraits” (26).¹³ The size of the portraits, sometimes as large as seven feet by five, and the use of Plexiglas to enhance the sheen are clear imitations of formal elements of painted portraits, denying the small photographic form. In the portrait of Gisela Benzenberg, for example, head and shoulders mostly fill the frame. The features are set against a neutral background. Although her hair is styled and she wears make-up, the blank background and expression, as well as the flat color tones, reveal little about her inner being. The portrait acts as a representation of the individual and as the standardized record of face and body. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze argues that the face invokes an affective response because it stimulates the viewer’s nervous system (87-8). Similarly, art historian Ernst Gombrich, discussing the visual power of the face, argues that we read the face for emotions and information (6). Gombrich suggests that the traditional history of the portrait consists of the symbolic transformation of an inner life onto an outer surface. In his recent study, he is interested in the face and mask, not the portrait, as a mirror of the sitter’s soul (118 ff.). Whereas a traditional portrait aims to establish the subject’s presence and mediates a social type, Ruff’s portrait consciously reveals the surface construction. Presented in large scale to reveal excessive detail of the face, hung in uniformity and removed from connotation, the portrait demands attention. Moreover, the portrait’s subject confronts the viewer with a direct, confrontational gaze, turning the viewer into the object of the portrait’s gaze. From this point of view, any interpretation or story of the sitter’s identity and character is merely speculation and projection on the side of the viewer, rather than presentation by the artist.

¹³ This underscores the notion that by its very nature, photography is unable to show anything but superficial appearance. While Walter Benjamin, for example, regrets this characteristic, Thomas Ruff exaggerates it in his photographic portraits.



Fig. 4 and Fig.5. Thomas Ruff's *Gisela Benzenberg*, 1985 (left) and gallery display of Ruff's large-scale portraits (right).

In contemporary art photography, the large-scale tableau image has found favor with artists who appropriate images, as well as formal and generic techniques of portrayal, to explore narrative qualities of their images. In order to tell stories, they have to rely on the viewer's ability to generate the images' narrative qualities by means of comparison, memory, and speculation. These portraits challenge the viewer to look without much context and speculate about *how* she knows that something or someone is really the subject. The viewers of Ruff's portraits do not, however, necessarily comply with this conceptual investigation. Instead of perceiving the image as part of a series that encourages openness and plurality in understanding, they perceive people with faces that do *not* tell, as the viewer confuses the photograph with reality. Ruff explains that the viewers "confused photography with reality, or even completely ignored the medium and looked right through it to what they took to be reality" (quoted in Werneburg). Whereas scholars embrace the work in ambitious investigations, the general audience who may expect some kind of story finds the work to be perplexingly blank, impersonal, and boring. According to Régis Durand, Ruff's portraits can frustrate the viewer due to their combination of clear, detailed

presentation and the removal of the subject's personal identity and expression. As Durand observes, the portraits "are perfectly and massively "realistic," and, precisely because of this realism, they undercut any attempt to look for clues that would allow one to go beyond them" (16). The blank faces double as visual opacity for projection and blockage of expression. In this sense, the realism of Ruff's portraits can be understood as a source of both their absorption for the viewer and their potentially alienating blankness.

Cinematic Portraits

Traditionally, the genre of portraiture, like painting, has approached the identity of its subjects as a timeless presence rather than a temporal unfolding. Static arts lack temporality and can only hint at narrative, unable to contain or confirm it. Painted and literary portraits can merely imitate temporality by adding narrations and descriptions. Photography arrests time. Film, however, as a time medium, does not have to compensate for the loss of the time dimension in one single appearance. Instead, film can strategically employ temporality – including duration and repetition. In fact, to the supposed inadequacy of stasis for capturing identity, cinema replies in any number of ways: by setting the image in motion, by adding voice, and by responding to static as well as moving images.

Storytelling and psychological crisis have become increasingly prevalent in the portrayal of a subject in an era that privileges spontaneity, living in the moment, uncontrolled self-expression, and personal idiosyncrasy. In his study of avant-garde cinema of the sixties and seventies, Paul Arthur proposed a new category of filmmaking: portrait films. He distinguished between non-narrative films associated with the American avant-garde, such as Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*, and films associated with the documentary tradition that emerged in the Direct Cinema and Cinéma vérité movement. According to Arthur, the latter promised to describe the

private lives of people already identified with a particular image, like politicians and celebrities, such as D.A. Pennebaker's *Jane* (1962) and David Maysles's *Meet Marlon Brando* (1965).

Focusing on individuals or groups whose identities and pursuits set them outside the mainstream, middle-class American culture, avant-garde portrait films, as Arthur put it, "draw their subjects from the social environment in which they live and work" (100). Akin to Sander's anthropological and sociological aspects of portraiture, these portrait films place the subject in a larger social context that includes colleagues, friends, and family. They also foreground the reciprocity between the act of filmmaking and a subject's presentation of self before the camera.

Arthur places presence and performance at the center of portrait films. In these films, time does not stop as in a freeze frame. Rather, the films focus on the cinematic subject, drawing attention not through action, but through the lack thereof. Rather than an unfolding of "microdrama of personal identity", as Arthur explains, portrait films are nonfictional character studies that exhibit "presentness" in a nondramatic form, eschewing biography in favor of a more presentational, but also performative immediacy (95-7). What emerges in these films, then, is a creative principle that combines different elements that film theory tends to keep apart: documentation and fiction, recording and staging, observation and artifice, and presence and change.

Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* are paradigmatic examples. The *Screen Tests*, of which there are around five hundred, were envisioned as an open-ended series of filmed portraits of visitors and regulars at his Factory, shot between 1963 and 1966, and screened either singularly or in arbitrary clusters. Scholars discuss them as a revision of French photographer Nadar's *Carte de Visite*, but also as an imitation of typology in the tradition of nineteenth-century police

mug-shots (Arthur 31).¹⁴ Warhol also organized a selection of films into compilations, entitled *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* and *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women*. In the various *Screen Tests*, the issue of time becomes a crucial and distinguishing element. In fact, Warhol called the screen tests “stillies” as opposed to “movies” to emphasize the temporal dimension of the moving images that is foregrounded when halting action within the frame and movement through the static camera. When asked to step in front of the camera, the visitors were lit and filmed by Warhol’s stationary sixteen-millimeter camera on silent, black-and-white film, often with Warhol leaving the camera or asking someone else to operate it (Angell 14). The rules, such as the use of a blank background in a well-lit space with the sitter in the centered position, carried conventions of passport photographs. By instructing the visitors not to move, and by recording without sound, Warhol broke with cinematic convention. Moreover, he shot the portraits at twenty-four frames per second, the standard speed for sound film, but projected them at sixteen frames per second, the conventional projection speed for silent films of early cinema, resulting in an extended unfolding presence of the subjects of four minutes each (Angell 14). Each *Screen Test* therefore approaches the sound- and time-based medium to emphasize silence and stasis. Warhol transposed the formal idioms of silence and stasis of one medium—that is painting and photography—to another—that is the moving image—to create a hybrid object that merges distinct genres such as experimental, non-narrative avant-garde, documentary, and narrative. The action in which the sitter participates, presenting herself to be observed, is typically reserved for self-portraiture.

By framing all *Screen Tests* in terms of performance, Warhol explores and anticipates what scholars in the social sciences, literary theory, and the arts would later study. Most notably,

¹⁴ In *Cinematic Chronotopes: Here, Now, Me* (2014), Pepita Hesselberth discusses Warhol’s filmic work as a remediation of the photographic processes of the daguerreotype.

performance theorist Richard Schechner identifies performance as “restored behavior” that marks identity. This action from the past previously done is prepared and rehearsed. Indeed, much of our daily life and identity consists of repeated behavior and imitation. Schechner writes that “the everydayness of everyday life is precisely its familiarity, its being built from known bits of behavior rearranged and shaped in order to suit specific circumstances” (23). Although the concept of performance as repeated, restored behavior seems authentic and expressive of stability, it does not necessarily support a static view of identity. Instead, performance indicates the ways in which actions and behaviors that we have seen before shape and constitute who we are, creating a sense of stability and continuity rather than constant change. Performance then points to the process and ability to shape behavior and identity over time. By foregrounding performance and presence in his film portraits, Warhol famously demolishes the claims of portraiture’s ability to illuminate psychological insight.



Fig. 6. Still from Andy Warhol’s screen test of Ann Buchanan (1964).

The most evocative and most discussed *Screen Tests* are those of subjects, who, following Warhol’s rules, do not move. The subjects hold still and pose in front of the static camera. By imitating certain qualities pertaining to static media, painting and photography, and not identity, the subjects turn themselves into a frozen image. However, in the portrait films, time does not freeze as in the freeze frame. Rather, they focus the viewer’s attention on the

cinematic subject, drawing attention not through action but the lack thereof. Raymond Bellour argues that inserting stillness in films “freezes” them, which “works against the movement of film, which depends on figures moving” (123). This produces a level of stillness that changes the consciousness of the viewer from “hurried” to “pensive” (123). Similarly, Laura Mulvey in *Death 24x a Second* describes the cinematic close-up as a “mechanism of delay, slowing cinema down into contemplation of the human face, allowing for a moment of possession in which the image is extracted, whatever the narrative rationalization may be from the flow of a story” (163-64). With the focus on the face and the subject’s gaze, time seems slowed.

Take, for instance, the filmic portrait of Ann Buchanan (1964). The close-up shot frames her from the neck up. The lighting is distinctly flat, leaving one side of her face and eye more prominent and brighter than the other side. She stares directly at the camera, and by extension the viewer, keeping her facial expression remarkably neutral and without ever blinking. Even though her throat and cheek move slightly, Buchanan never loses her concentration. After about ninety seconds into the film, a tear forms at the bottom of her eye. The image changes in front of our eyes. A tear falls, followed by another one seconds later. Her throat moves, and a third tear rolls down her cheek, while the other eye fills with tears as well. The tension of this subtle change over the course of the long take lies in the discrepancy between her controlled gaze towards the camera and the uncontrollable movement created by the tears. The duration of the recording prolongs the moment of observation and has the potential to strengthen an affective, even empathetic response. Using Juliane Rebentisch’s concept of encounter as a framework for talking about the aesthetic experience in relation to an object, Justin Remes explains that the aesthetic experience of Warhol’s *Screen Test* resides neither in the film nor in the viewer but in an open space characterized by experiential inexhaustibility between the two (26). This encounter as a space of illusionistic projection is always affective, unstable, and unpredictable.

“Cinematic stasis,” according to Remes, “does not produce a single coherent effect but rather an unstable and unpredictable series of effects” (28) by “challenging widespread essentialist conceptions of cinema and [thereby] broaden[s] the viewer’s conception of what a film can be or do” (29).¹⁵ Rather than conform to expectations, her portrait denies access to the world around and within her, which causes almost inexhaustible viewing experiences, ranging from the enjoyable to the painful and even the uncanny. This is precisely the reason why Buchanan’s non-narrative performance continues to provoke discussion and further imitations.

After Warhol

In the 1990s, at the very height of European photographic portraiture, Warhol’s observational camera finds its way into the filmic work of the Berlin School. Increased awareness of stasis and duration marks the body of work created during the Berlin School filmmakers’ time at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB). For example, Thomas Arslan’s repetition from Warhol’s script in his 1990 portrait film *19 Porträts (19 Portraits)* aligns him with the avant-garde tradition and simultaneously marks a difference. In the spirit of Warhol, who “only wanted to find great people and let them be themselves” (cited in Arthur 96), Arslan explains, “Theoretically, one could continue *19 Porträts* infinitely, like a giant archive. The idea was to give everyone one minute to do whatever they liked, without there being wrong or right. Basically: one minute in front of the camera” (Arslan, DFFB Online Archive, my translation). Akin to Ruff, Arslan places the subjects against a neutral

¹⁵ Benjamin Heisenberg, in an unpublished interview with Abel, emphasis a similar point. He remarks that what the films associated with the Berlin School have in common is “that the camera does not allow the viewer to identify with the characters, but it’s not really distancing us either. Instead, it creates and positions us in an in-between space that pulls us to and fro, ultimately holding us suspended in the middle space that is quite akin to the characters’ own subjectivity/subject position” (Abel 16).

background—expressionless, in relaxed posture and nondescript clothing, their gazes turned towards the viewer, breaking the fourth wall. What distinguishes them? Where are they from? What moves them? Like a detective, the viewer seeks visual clues in the portraits to understand and interpret them.

The film withholds the identity of the subjects, his friends and fellow students at the DFFB, including Christian Petzold, until the credits at the end. In many ways, the film reaffirms sociological aspects of portraiture by including those in the compilation who are part of a social group, much like the *Screen Tests* reaffirmed the subjects as being part of Warhol's Factory group. Unlike the mobility and openness of aesthetic encounter with the single films in Warhol, and more akin to Warhol's compilations and August Sander's portrait book, Arslan confined his subjects (the sitters) to succession into a twenty-minute long, sixteen millimeter black-and-white short film. Arslan extends Warhol's silent and collection practices by adding off-screen sound. While Warhol's fascination with the act of looking is still apparent in Arslan's portraits, the central difference is the way in which the film seduces the viewer into constructing a story around the subjects. Both choices, sound and succession, can be seen as steps toward narrative integration. Sanders demonstrated that the organization of the portraits based on the ordering of similarities and differences, combined with the sequencing of portraits, has the potential to represent a narrative in its own right. And yet, surface, sequence, and detail are no guarantee for providing knowledge about the sitter.

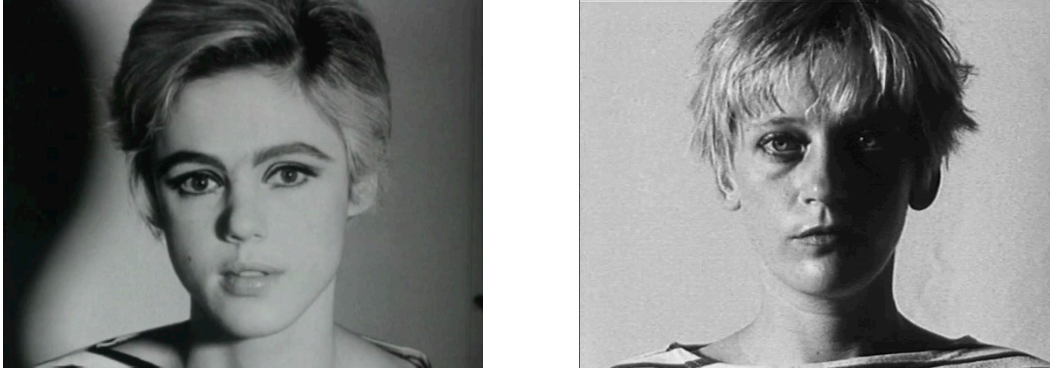


Fig. 7 and Fig. 8. Striking similarities between Warhol's portrait of Eddie Sedgwick (1965) and Arslan's portraits of Heike Langbein in *19 Portraits* (1990).

Like the *Screen Tests*, *19 Porträts* is interested in the construction as well as the deconstruction of the subject. The halted movement within the frame and the stillness of the camera foreground the temporal dimension of the film. In *19 Porträts*, the viewing process as duration in its purest form confronts the viewer. Similar to the *Screen Tests*, *19 Porträts* constructs filmic duration frame-by-frame, portrait-by-portrait, and thereby destroys a sense of cinematic movement and narration. Yet, the variety of portraits engenders comparison. The neutral expressions of faces engender projection on the side of the viewer and the direct gazes stimulate emotional responses. Take, for example, the portrait of Heike Langbein. Due to the similarities in hairstyle and shirt, one may be quick to see the portrait of Langbein as a simple copy of Warhol's now famous *Screen Test* of Edie Sedgwick. Sedgwick is very well known as one of Warhol's superstars. Now considered a sixties fashion icon, her markers of identity and recognition are the bleached, short hair and the striped shirt, both of which Langbein displays. Is the choice random? Bearing similarities to the deadpan portrait photographs of the Berlin School contemporaries in the art world, *19 Porträts* reflect the media-saturated environment the artists and the filmmaker had grown up with—television, advertisement, fashion, movies, and music. It explores a Western canon of beauty and art standards that have become universal types,

evocative of Hollywood and pop culture—signs of a dominant Western culture that imposes aesthetic standards on every identity and that have now become part of the collective memory.

Despite the similarities in appearance, Langbein's cinematic portrait constitutes a repetition of Sedgwick's performance with a difference. Going against Warhol's instruction to remain completely still, Sedgwick, conscious of the camera, blinks hypnotically with her heavily coated eyelashes and smiles occasionally as if posing for snapshots. Viewing her playful, affectionate gaze feels like an act of voyeurism. Her portrait is descriptive of who she is, a screen presence placed in the milieu of the real-life superstars of Warhol's Factory and the unattainable movie stars of Hollywood. On some level, Sedgwick is only "being herself" (Angell 14), and in that sense, her *Screen Test* comes close to John Berger's ideal of portraiture, because it reaffirms the subject and her social identity as a professional performer and constitutes a commemoration of a subject, place, and time that is no more. It also tells us about Warhol's casting. In one way or another, Warhol's sitters are all professional performers. Whereas Warhol records the subject's performance in front of the camera as a form of visual spectacle, Arslan records a subject that is rather still and gazes directly at the camera and, by extension, the viewer. Unlike Sedgwick, and more akin to Ruff's subjects, Langbein's gaze is much more confrontational, showing no signs of transient facial expressions. Her portrait seems to capture the intensity of real time—a moment with action that allows the viewer to observe and potentially connect with the subject. Most importantly, it raises the viewer's awareness of the time spent in the presence of the subject. Langbein's performance makes it difficult to distinguish between recording and staging, observation and artifice, imitation and original. Without the reference, however, Langbein, like the remaining subjects in Arslan's film, resembles an actress in a play without a script: emotionally empty and without any role or emotion to perform. Her portrait recognizes and

confronts the critical binaries that usually separate documentary from avant-garde, fact from fiction, and description from narration.

Ultimately, *19 Porträts* is not simply a sociological record, or a reconstruction of Warhol's *Screen Test*. Rather, it is both a documentary record of a specific group of people, time, and place, and a meditation on the film medium's capacity to create such an effect of a presence. It invites the viewer to investigate the layers of visibility a subject offers and to remain aware of the subject's performance. This requires an acceptance of Western culture and conservation of cultural memory to create a meaning or understanding to which only the viewer can claim full access. By doing so, *19 Porträts* illustrates some of the defining characteristics of parody: its ambivalent formal structure, its multiple effects, and its dual impulse to deconstruct and preserve its sources.¹⁶

Synchronization

What happens when the sitter gains a voice, stands up, and enters a diegetic universe? In his study of filmic portraits, Arthur dismisses embedded portraits in longer narrative portraits.¹⁷ Unlike Arthur's key examples, Arslan's feature-length film, *Der schöne Tag* (*A Fine Day*, 2001), is neither a documentary nor an avant-garde film. And yet, Arslan takes the question of film as a form of portraiture to be a starting point and takes it in a new direction, that of narrative fiction film. The film is restricted in that it shows little more than a workday in the life of the young voice actress Deniz. The camera spatially aligns the viewer to the character in the course of the scenes. It also offers access to her emotions and immediate perception or point-of-view. The

¹⁶ Linda Hutcheon calls this dual impulse the "paradox of parody" (93).

¹⁷ Arthur briefly mentions without further comment the portrait sequences in Warhol's longer narrative projects *The Chelsea Girls* (1960) that includes an entire reel of a woman combing her hair (29).

camera follows Deniz as she navigates her day. She moves from her work at a sound recording studio to meetings with her boyfriend, mother, and later in the day, her sister. She also attends a casting for a film. Arslan uses the backdrop of the cinematic, fictive narrative of a romance film as love story to exaggerate the artifice and to think about roles, types, and performances.

Thematically, the film evolves around questions of identity, and in particular the effect of social interactions in the form of ever-changing social relationships within groups, such as family, friends, romantic partners, and work colleagues. Without anything moody in the lighting or non-diegetic sound, the images appear “natural,” even documentary-like, and yet they are carefully arranged. Indeed, the film pays particular attention to the presentation of the subject’s body, face, and voice to highlight the descriptive and narrative qualities of presenting the subject as a scripted character.

In *Der schöne Tag*, casting, storytelling, and role-playing become metaphors for the main subject’s identity. Filmed in and around Berlin’s Kreuzberg, a borough with a large population of individuals of Turkish ancestry, *Der schöne Tag* compels scholars and critics with its promise of realism and authenticity. Scholars have suggested that the main subject is ethnically coded as Turkish or Turkish-German and “aimlessly wander[s]” through Berlin (Gallager 340). These observations lead to analyses of the social, cultural, and economic transformation of the Turkish migrant as a figure between two states, that is between inside and outside, German and Turkish, traditional and progressive, and familiar and unfamiliar. Evoking Homi Bhabha’s figure of the mute and passive Turkish worker in Germany, scholars call on filmmakers to tackle migration and cultural clashes with a sense of humor and irony (Göktürk). Grounded within a Eurocentric discourse oriented around Western ideas of European art cinema, scholars identify recent changes in the representation of culturally different identities in what they term “Transnational Cinema,” “Turkish German Cinema” (Hake, Mennel, eds.), or “Counter-Cinema of Migrant

Cinema” (Abel). This is certainly one aspect of Deniz’s identity depiction. The categories of portraiture and imitation, however, go beyond binary oppositional compartmentalization of identity and limiting analysis of the film next to migration or “Gastarbeiter” films. These discussions turn the subjects into representatives, even victims, of cultural and social principles and conventions. Instead, picturing and perception strategies of portraiture engender readings of Deniz as a more complex filmic subject that defies compartmentalization. At the same time, portraiture allows discussions about what the film does to our understanding of narrative.

From the start, the film challenges ideas of national identity, cultural assumptions, and filmic conventions of subject depiction. The viewer sees a subject and assumes she must look, sound, and act a certain way. But, the film neither properly introduces the character, nor provides clear biographical information or backstory for the main character and her current situation. The issues of identity, the characteristics of class, race, and gender that form each of us, are less exposed. Deniz wears gender-neutral clothes, plain shirts and blue jeans, no distinct make-up, and speaks without an accent. Rather than mark her as a representative of a specific social group, the film complicates the notion that image and voice are markers of distinction and personality and emblems of social interaction and cultural value. Change in voice tonality can certainly shed light on changes in the character or create tension between sound and visual surface depicted by the camera. And yet, *Der schöne Tag* rarely provides narrative detail or psychological insight into the main subject through vocal qualities. For example, when Deniz meets her mother, her mother speaks in Turkish, and Deniz replies in German. She does not change her way of speaking in this ethnically marked environment. Speaking High German without a distinct accent points to her assimilation rather than her distinction. Throughout the film, Deniz’s voice remains affectless, but stable, and thus powerful and anything but weak, which was one of the attributes that received criticism by Thomas Frizel after the film’s premiere at the Berlinale 2001. He

writes about the actress Serpil Turhan's apparent blank and inexpressive performance, suggesting that she "only plays an actress playing an actress." In his judgment, Frizel merges the film character with reality. This, however, is misleading when applied to fiction films that are not records of life, such as Arthur's portrait films, but constructions with a narrative set-up. In fact, his comment points to the assumption that the character must behave in a certain way and be in constant transformation and growth, rather than maintain her position. In addition, she should avoid the flat delivery of lines. His observation is actually too intriguing to leave unexamined, because it points to how the film approaches portraiture from the tradition of typological, depersonalized subject depiction by consciously employing duration, stasis, and imitation. And yet, the subject is narrated and fleshed out in the context of fictional film.

Deniz's performances, including the way she moves and talks, are consciously chosen as behaviors that imitate prior behaviors in the film. The film begins with the absence of Deniz's voice for a good six minutes, which constitutes a stylistic choice with emphasis on her visual depiction. The camera focuses on her face and her physical gestures. The only sound we hear is the ambient sound of the city, such as birds and cars in the distance. The camera follows her waking up in a bedroom, moving about the apartment, leaving the apartment, walking down the stairs, walking through a park, waiting at the subway station, and entering the subway. The camera remains static, with only a few pans at moments when she passes by, which add tension to her movements. With the next cut, the viewer hears her voice for the first time. Deniz appears in front of a microphone in a dimly lit room. In a medium close-up, standing next to a male colleague, the camera captures her repeatedly recording her voice in synch with the original recording of a French film, Eric Rohmer's *Conte d'Été* (1996), on a screen in front of them. Throughout this activity, a sound editor keeps track of her timing, corrects her intonation, which is too heavy, and her speed, which is too fast. She repeats the lines, only this time flatter and

tighter. The first time Deniz speaks, she gives vocal presence to a fictional character on screen talking about relationships. She repeats the following lines: “Du gehst auf Nummer sicher, mein Lieber. Geht das nicht mit der einen, dann gibt es noch die andere. Für dich sind im Grunde alle Mädchen austauschbar” (You are playing it safe, baby. If it doesn’t work out with the one, there’s still the other. For you, women are basically exchangeable.). The act of synchronization immediately establishes ambiguity in her subject depiction, questioning the assumption that her voice is her own, that statements somehow express who she is, and that voice is tied to identity. When synchronizing, she speaks “as if” she were in the given circumstances of Rohmer’s filmic subject, and not those of her own. Her imitation of Rohmer’s figure is both real and fictitious, denoting referentiality that is as authentic as it is deceiving.

Deniz’s performance of synchronization, the repeated act of replacing the original language (French) with another (German), forms the baseline for understanding the whole film. For the actress, voice is as important an instrument as facial expression or bodily gesture. Voice, as much as the body, acts as a transmitter of emotions. Synchrony builds on the ability to map one’s own body onto that of others, to make the other’s movement and voice one’s own. On a thematic level, Arlsan’s film takes on Rohmer’s film in the search for love and inability to articulate her inner feelings. But what do we make of the formal quality of the voice and the fact that it is a performance of a performance? Indeed, the echo or imitation of Rohmer is cinematic in every sense of the word. The rehearsal explores the interactions among the original and Deniz, and develops by means of imitation. It is the notion of imitation, the scene repeatedly synchronized and played out, and not Rohmer’s original film script as such, that provides a strategy to direct the viewing and understanding of the main character.

What is less obvious, and what has yet to be established, is that synchronization introduces the problem of characterization. The scene in the recording studio motivates a first

impression of Deniz and establishes the pattern for her performed behavior—a behavior that is made up of imitations of the previous rehearsal in the recording studio that reinforces and communicates who she may be outside of the studio, in the context of her own life. In the next scene, Deniz takes the conversation about love and relationship that took place in her work environment to a much more intimate social environment. Shortly after her recording session, Deniz meets her boyfriend at a coffee shop where they talk about their relationship. The difference in conversation, from love and relationship as a work matter to love and relationship as a personal matter, is also indicated by the change in filmic conventions. With both characters sitting at opposing ends of the table, one might expect a series of alternating static shot-reverse-shots of their faces to follow their conversation. However, the camera pans from time to time, delays, and even withholds reaction-shots. The camera thus undermines conventions and expectations. Additionally, a second disruption of viewing expectations occurs when the conversation changes to a much more personal, presumably emotional matter: the break-up of the couple. Deniz accuses her boyfriend of looking at other women. Surprisingly, this accusation recalls an accusation made by Rohmer's character in the synchronized film. Is she acting out a film scene? On a thematic level, Arslan's film obviously continues Rohmer's in a new context. Conditioned by Rohmer's film at the beginning, the viewer may expect a passionate exchange of thoughts. However, Deniz remains noticeably restrained. The tonal and rhythmic qualities of her voice are stable and flat, her answers concise. Surprisingly, her affectless way of speaking mirrors her performance in the recording studio. Rather than conform to expectations derived from narrative conventions to indicate inner turmoil, the repetition maintains her depiction as an actress.

Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* and Arslan's *19 Porträts* serve as clear reference points for the screen test scene in *Der schöne Tag* and merit comparison. In a further development, Arslan

translates and integrates the *Screen Tests* into his narrative film, making them part of the diegetic world. Deniz walks into a room where the casting crew greets her and seats her in front of a blue screen. In the manner of Warhol, the director asks Deniz to talk about herself. Deniz pauses for a few seconds, and then, for the next three minutes—the length of Warhol’s *Screen Tests*—recalls a scene from a film she had recently seen on television. Even though the three-minute recording is shot in color, the simple blue background, her white shirt and black hair *feel* black and white. As the video camera records her, she presents a monologue for the casting crew. This creates a triangulation of the crew as audience, Deniz as the storyteller, and her representation on the television monitor. The way the film viewer sees Deniz, however, is in a close-up image of the television screen that fills the film screen, creating a screen doubling of screens. In that moment, Deniz occupies the same space and time of both her presentation and representation. Her performance constitutes the ideal of portraiture, namely the seemingly non-narrative, descriptive representation of an actress on screen. And yet, unlike the portrayed subjects discussed so far, this subject finally has a voice and tells a story of her own.¹⁸

¹⁸ In that moment, the film separates it from the diegetic world of the film, and performs what Roland Barthes calls an act of decoupage, or cutting-out. These holes created in the diegetic world of the film allows the portrait to escape into a different sign system, that being art, and leave the diegetic world seeming more realistic. The function of this portrait is different from representations of Deniz within the rest of the diegetic world in that it reveals a never-ending production and deferring of subjectivities. Barthes best describes it in his own words in *Camera Lucida*: “in front of the camera I am the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art” (13). To this list of views, one may also add the expectations that the viewer might bring. Barthes calls this collision of point-of-views a “field of forces” (13).



Fig. 9. Still from the screen test scene in Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* (2001).

For the next three minutes, the film frames Deniz as a portrait to establish her presence. Deniz recalls a scene from Maurice Pialat's *A Nos Amours* (1983) that starts with a woman at a play rehearsal. She talks about the love affairs of a young woman and ends on a final note about a father telling his daughter she is not able to love. The story we hear merges with what we have come to know about Deniz. It connects to the way the film introduces Deniz in the recording studio scene. It also connects to the way the film previously showed her in conversation with her boyfriend, accusing him of an affair, and with her mother, questioning her own ability to love. At this moment, the film merges representation and presentation, and in doing so, makes explicit its mediation and staginess. It also incorporates storytelling as a decisive factor in the experience of Deniz's identity and makes it an explicit part of her filmic portrait.

In addition to her voice, Deniz gains a body and a gaze. As the film viewer's eyes connect with her eyes, the portrait becomes the object of our gaze at the same time as the viewer becomes the object of Deniz's gaze, thus giving the effect of both sharing the same time and space. This also heightens the testimonial quality of the scene, which is common enough for documentaries but not for narrative films. It invites us to look and listen. And what do we see and hear? Her flat, affectless voice, much like the blank faces in Ruff's portraits, creates ambiguity in the portrayal of the subject, because it can mask or hide who she is and at the same

time allows the viewer to encounter the subject. Whatever lies behind her voice and gaze, however, is left to the imagination of the viewer.

The film ends on a blatantly ironic note. Sitting in a coffee shop, Deniz starts a conversation with a professor of sociology.¹⁹ The scholar tells Deniz that even though we cannot live without language, only “gestures and gazes” can truly express something about a person. Ironically, she tells this to a voice actress who communicates with words, voice, and stories. And yet, neither the imitation of the voice nor synchronization, nor the gazes captured in her close-ups, fully conveying knowledge about Deniz. True to Warhol, Deniz is and remains a dazzling surface.

Moving away from representational to conceptual qualities of portraiture, *Der schöne Tag* addresses the complexities of personal identity in terms of storytelling. The film explores the way stories are created, told, and transformed in the act of telling, no matter what the emotional content. It also challenges the traditional understanding of narrative as a way of imagining the world and its characters in terms of difference and change. By displaying Deniz’s reluctance to change, the film creates a stable counter-portrait to traditional depictions of narrativized characters. It also creates a counter-portrait that demands more than a fleeting glance from the viewer in a world of ever-transforming media and social network spectacles. Deniz’s imitations work to show how memory operates in the viewer’s perception of a subject on screen. In doing so, they explore forms of identity, being, and belonging that go beyond making her a representative of societal change in a reunified country. By giving particular attention to Deniz’s

¹⁹ In an interview with Gabriela Seidel, Arslan explain that this scene was inspired by radio interview with German media theorist Friedrich Kittler. See “Interview with Gabriela Seidel.” *Peripherfilm*, 14 Jul. 2001, <http://www.peripherfilm.de/derschoenetag/dst2.htm#Interview>.

uncertain nature of identity, it appeals to a humanistic view of humankind and thereby, implicitly and explicitly, finds a link to the Renaissance tradition.

Empathy

Akin to Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold approaches the filmic portrayal of his subjects by means of imitation. In an interview with *Monopol*, Petzold explains that one needs empathy to approach a subject. What does that mean? In order to prepare the actresses and actors for their roles, Petzold explains, they create rooms full of portrait photographs. For his film *Barbara* (2012), for example, they created “August-Sander-Räume” (August-Sander-rooms) for the actresses and actors to step into, look at the portraits, and imitate. The effect of such imitation is twofold. It heightens the awareness of stasis, duration, and vision, and it also evokes a sense of empathy.

In terms of viewer responses to fiction, scholarship differentiates between emotional empathy, or involvement in the psychological aspects of the performance, and rational criticism. Bertold Brecht’s disregard of empathy in favor of estrangement (*Verfremdung*) has had a lasting legacy. Filmmakers nonetheless draw on empathy in the form of motor mimicry. One of the narrative techniques that offer viewers access to a character’s perception is the point-of-view shot. Adopting someone else’s perspective takes an act of imagination and a reach of understanding, and the depth of engagement with screen characters is an important aspect of this process. In his work on character engagement, Murray Smith argues that the divide between empathic and distancing work cannot be made, or at least not in the words that Brecht provides. Smith distinguishes between “imagining from the inside,” *as if* an experience happened to oneself or to a person or character with whom one has a close connection, and “imagining from the outside,” from a more impersonal, objective standpoint (18). In line with these imaginative

acts of emplacement and position taking, Smith notes that the “film also provides the viewer with visual and aural information more or less congruent with that available to characters and so are placed in a certain structure of *alignment* with characters. In addition, spectators evaluate characters on the basis of the values they embody and hence form more-or-less sympathetic or antipathetic *allegiances* with them [...] Allegiance, with its connotations of alliance and loyalty, refers to the audience’s ethical and ideological judgments concerning characters and their actions [...] It is a cognitive evaluation that does not involve replicating the character’s emotions” (20-1) Smith’s work offers a means of analyzing how the viewer is positioned in relation to characters on screen and how this affects ways of navigating through a film’s emotional terrain. However, his analysis is restricted to the conscious emotional understanding. Petzold, on the other hand, suggests an alternative way of understanding how the viewer might establish empathy with the characters on screen by means of imitating portraiture. Portraiture in filmmaking provides a technique for arranging bodies, faces, and looks within the frame. It also introduces stasis in movement, while stillness in turn calls the viewer’s attention to the physical and bodily rhythm of the subjects on screen rather than their emotional state – a state that cognitivists like Smith, who draws from cognitive psychology, deem necessary for empathetic engagement.²⁰

Petzold moves the portrait practice from straight photography and the avant-garde, where he found it, into a narrative cinema on the fringes of commercial mainstream. Storytelling and psychological crisis have become increasingly prevalent in the portrayal of a subject in an era that privileges spontaneity, living in the moment, uncontrolled self-expression, and personal idiosyncrasy. Petzold’s films approach portraiture from the tradition of typological depiction and

²⁰ In his cent essay, “Embodied Simulation, Empathy and Social Cognition: Berlin School Lessons for Film Theory,” Roger F. Cook focuses on discoveries in cognitive neuroscience to reassess the role of empathy and embodied social cognition in viewing films associated with the Berlin School (153 ff.).

draw attention to vision. For example, his film *Barbara*, a quiet but tense drama about an individual in an oppressive society, engages the problem of knowing in its relation to vision. Set in 1980, the film tells the story of a physician from a prestigious hospital in East Berlin who, having applied for an exit visa, has been banished to a small country hospital near the Baltic Sea. The department of pediatric surgery, where Barbara must now work, is led by chief physician André Reiser. In order to gain more knowledge about Barbara, the official state security service Stasi has ordered André to keep an eye on her. Barbara has a lover in West Germany who prepares her escape, and therefore she refuses André's advances and any emotional connection with him. The two physicians are nevertheless excited in their passion for their work and their dedication to their patients. Barbara takes special care of a young pregnant woman who has escaped from hard labor in a youth detention center. At the end of the film, Barbara abates her plan to escape and lets the young woman take her place. Commentators attribute this to her growing love interest in Reiser. For this reason, critics regard the film as one of Petzold's most accessible. And yet, it is told through an elaborate choreography of faces and looks that engage our own experiences as film viewers.

The film commences with a woman's arrival by bus. The camera captures her in a medium close-up standing on the bus, which is followed by a distant higher angle long shot showing her stepping off the bus. The next cut shows a physician standing at an open window, looking at something outside. Another cut. Through the higher angle, presumably the point-of-view of the physician, though now closer in focus than the first higher angle shot, we look at the woman walking up to a bench and sitting down. In a noticeably stylized gesture, she crosses her legs and lights a cigarette. This gesture is at once open and suggestive as well as closed and defensive. The next shot is again of the physician, this time in a two-shot with a second man sitting on a chair. The stillness of each shot recalls the formal qualities of portraiture that

foreground the physicality and performance as descriptive qualities of the subjects and their relations to the viewer. Within a few minutes and through the act of looking, the film establishes the central conflict of the film as the relationship between the three main subjects – Barbara, her new colleague, Reiser, and the Stasi officer Schütz – and the various viewpoints involved in terms of subject presentation, representation, and perception.



Fig. 10. The woman as object and subject of the gaze. *Barbara* (2012).

More specifically, the opening sequence establishes Barbara as the object of observation, yet quickly turns to make her the bearer thereof. Her dress, her vibrant blue cardigan, her shiny blond hair, her blue eye shadow, the crossed legs, and the cigarette create a pose reminiscent of iconic actresses of the golden age of Hollywood movies, most notably Marlene Dietrich, Lauren Bacall, and Rita Hayworth. For the viewer, the pose as cliché embedded in the cultural imagination triggers familiarity and recognition. The shot from the higher angle, Reiser's point-of-view (POV), establishes her position as a visual spectacle of Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze," popularized in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In this work, Mulvey proposes that mainstream cinema is profoundly patriarchal. And due to its patriarchal nature, the active gaze – that being the look of the subjects within a scene, the camera that captures the scene, and the viewer who watches the scene – is that of the male gender. "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance," she writes, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (11). Yet, the opening also reveals that Barbara is fully aware of

being watched. The pose gives her a certain confidence, rather than an expression of stubbornness as commented by Schütz, who explains that “if she were six, you would say she was sulky. Since her incarceration, her group of friends has been destroyed. She won’t come in a moment before it’s time.” When we look closely though, we actually see Barbara turn her head slightly to confront the gaze of her onlookers. This is an obvious inversion of Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze. The film, however, goes beyond the reversal of gender binaries. It quickly moves beyond that diminishing position of the woman as visual spectacle or “other” to become an expression of her precariousness and awareness of the historical backdrop of the social system and the monitoring that structures her life, and life in the GDR more general.



Fig. 11. Looking at Rembrandt’s painting. *Barbara* (2012).

Vision is particularly stressed in the following scene. Shortly after her arrival at the hospital, Reiser involves Barbara in a conversation about Rembrandt van Rijn’s group portrait depicting a public dissection of a dead body in *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632). He asks if she notices any peculiarities. Barbara identifies a number of inconsistencies. She points out that Dr. Tulp has not, contrary to common practice, begun the dissection by taking out the intestines. Instead, he started with the hand, which is also disproportionate. Rather than seeing the inaccuracy as a mistake, Reiser reads this inaccuracy as a clue intentionally placed by

Rembrandt to indicate the violence done to Aris. He points out that if we trace the eye lines of the seven physicians, they seem not to see the body at all; instead they look toward the anatomical atlas in the bottom right corner of the painting. It is because of the physicians' curious visual relationship to the atlas that we notice something else: the "doctoring" of the left hand of the corpse. We come to realize that Rembrandt has taken an anatomical picture from the atlas and superimposed it directly on the left hand. Reiser remarks: "Rembrandt paints something into the painting that we cannot actually see." The "we" can be understood as including all the viewers, within and outside the diegetic world. The inclusion of address is undefined by the fact that the viewer looks through the eyes of Barbara and Reiser both literally – we share their position and point-of-view at mutual eye level – and symbolically – we see the body, unlike the physicians in the painting. And here Reiser adds a moral aspect: "Due to this mistake we no longer look through eyes of the physicians', we are with him, Aris Kindt, the victim." This isolated moment contains the fundamental moral question contained within Barbara's plan and at the same time encompasses the values and systems that structured life in the GDR. Taking over the didactic role held by Dr. Tulp in the painting, Reiser explains Rembrandt's intention, yet remains enigmatic about what the painting means. Barbara leaves the room without much reaction to it. Nevertheless, the viewer understands that Reiser invites Barbara not to act like the physicians in the painting who choose to look at the anatomy atlas rather than at the body. The fact that we see physicians in the painting highlights the likeness to Barbara and André. In the GDR, everyone watches and monitors everyone, and no one actually *sees* the other, leading to isolation. This can be seen as an allegory of the dictatorial ideology in the GDR, where a system of rules neglects and represses the individual. In this respect the painting works as a *mise-en abyme* both within the diegetic world, where Reiser wants to open Barbara's eyes to see human beings beyond the system, unlike the physicians in the painting, and also for the film viewer,

giving her a key to understanding the characters. The fact that the Rembrandt painting now hangs in a laboratory of a hospital still highlights humanistic values and moral agency. It parallels Barbara's situation and suggests what she should do: instead of escape to the West, she should stay and acknowledge the meaningfulness of her labor. And yet, folding the scene into a situational context dictated by the narrative cannot do full justice to the film's formal choices.



Fig. 12. Close-up of Rembrandt's spectator addressing the film viewer. *Barbara* (2012).

The Rembrandt scene takes its cue from W.G. Sebald's travelogue *Die Ringe des Saturn* (*The Rings of Saturn*, 1995). In the novel, the narrator asserts that the physicians overlook the body in favor of theory, to the point that they mentally superimpose the drawing from the atlas onto the left forearm of the body on the table. The physicians' determinedly theoretical view of what the body represents ends up causing the body to vanish altogether. Rembrandt critiques the faulty vision and values of the scientific gathering that reduces the body to a machine or scientific diagram. That the physicians portrayed look past the body is evidence of their moral failure. And yet, the body does not disappear for the reader of Sebald's work. At the end of the chapter we see the painting again, this time without commentary. The reproduction simultaneously zooms outward and crops Dr. Tulp, the physicians, and the atlas out of the image, as if taking a step backward and narrowing the viewfinder on the camera. The image of the body is, to say the least, complicated; it is now reduced in size, Xeroxed, in black and white. When

Sebald cuts, he distorts the image even further and, as Carol Jacobs rightly observes, thereby “unsettles the analysis of representation he has offered in relation to moral conscience. While professing the thoughtful gaze, the narrator practices distraction” (xvi). The film does likewise. While we listen to Reiser analyze the painting through a montage of point-of-view shots, the film shows a series of extreme close-ups of the painting. When he points out that *every single physician* in the painting looks at the atlas, the film isolates faces from the group into a series of separate portraits. Having gained autonomy from the group, one physician in the image looks straight at us, the film viewer. Rather than imitate the verbal description, the film marks a distraction. Is this Reiser’s point-of-view? Barbara’s? A third perspective? Detour and distraction in the form of narrative wandering is, of course, the path of Sebald’s prose, when one thing leads to another. But what about the film? Even though the camera seems to enter the perceptual vision of Reiser, it never clearly confirms it. The strength of this scene lies in film’s affective power to shift the viewer between different perspectives to experience a complex form of inter-subjectivities and points-of-view. The films confront the viewer with various levels of viewing; we contemplate the scene and inevitably observe the characters contemplating art. Thus, the film prompts a reflection on how we deal with art and its history, with seeing and not seeing.



Fig. 13. Barbara’s final moving portrait. *Barbara* (2012).

The scene has no connection to any other, with one exception. The film ends with a series of shot-reverse shots of Barbara and Reiser following her return to the hospital. Now at eye level to suggest a mutual awareness, the camera separates both into single shots, rather than a double. The fact that both remain silent underlines the non-significance of dialogue, emotion, intent, and explanation for the character and narrative. Instead, the last shot directs the viewer's attention to the frame composition. Her portrait resembles the Rembrandt painting. Closer in focus, she appears to be looking straight at the film viewer. The image of Barbara maintains a certain autonomy – open enough for the viewer to see with new authority. Why did she return? The strength of this last portrait lies in its meditative and critical quality of not-knowing and how “moving” that can be. And yet, the image is still structured and regulated, containing determination. Above all, it is controlled by the generic characteristics of a traditional picture type, bringing her portrayal close to painting, and Petzold's filmmaking close to the art of portraiture.

In their films, Petzold and Arslan approach portraiture from the tradition of typological depiction. At times, the faces of characters resemble expressionless surfaces and thus resemble projection screens for the viewer. The serial juxtaposition of individual portrait shots of characters within the narrative structures of their films turn the faces into interchangeable motifs somewhere between person and typology—types or stereotypes that the films call into question. By means of imitation and introduction of minor changes they consciously play with perception and draw attention to the mechanism of picture production. In nascent form, this approach is already present in the typology of August Sander in photography and suggested by Hochhäusler in his collage of Berlin School films that introduced this chapter. The filmmakers move the

portrait practice from photography and the avant-garde, where they found it, into a narrative cinema on the fringes of commercial mainstream.

Chapter Two

Expanding Landscapes

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the German Democratic Republic opened up spaces previously inaccessible to the public and to visual scrutiny. In a 2014 interview about his experience at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB), Christian Petzold tells how the students at the time were instructed to go out and film their newly accessible surroundings. The instructions were simple: “Kinnerns, hier liegen Kameras rum, macht was” (Here are cameras, do something). The result of Petzold’s exploration is *Ostwärts Fernverkehrsstrasse 2* (1990), a short film about abandoned places along Germany’s longest federal highway, which runs from the Polish border in the northeast to the border with Austria in the south. The title is a nod to Rolf Dieter Brinkmann’s collection of poems *Westwärts 1 und 2* (1974). Brinkmann found freedom from expectation and demands in the American Beat poetry of the 1950s. He used everyday speech geared to the senses to describe the transitory, vanishing occurrences and impressions of daily life. Petzold takes the repetition and spontaneity from Brinkmann (and the American avant-garde tradition), to focus the viewer’s attention on snapshots that are marked by an unexpected repetition. The film opens with a series of landscape views: a road sign, a tracking shot of the road from inside a moving car, a junk yard, a gravel road, an intersection of streets, and a road alongside empty factory buildings. In the wake of German reunification, the images reveal the process of erasure, transformation, and abandonment of the rural areas of the former East. The shots of the desolate countryside are interspersed with three brief interviews. The interviewees state their memories of the former GDR and their hopeful future plans in terms of vocation. A young woman who moved from West Germany hopes to open a face-painting salon in the East, a region she believes is more open to new ideas.

Her business partner imagines establishing galleries, hair salons, and fashion boutiques in the abandoned factory buildings. And the third interviewee, a former factory worker whose factory was bought out by a West German company, dreams of opening up a typical “Western” fast food stand. In using visual metaphors such as images and eyes to describe their experiences of displacement following reunification, the film expands on a visual exploration of place. In *Ostwärts*, the parallelism of the visual and verbalized view of the locations leads to a metonymic connection that marks the vanishing point of the GDR—a paradoxical place that is at once topographical and imaginary.



Fig. 14. Abandoned places in Petzold's *Ostwärts* (1990).

The vanishing point serves as a powerful metaphor for thinking about place in Petzold's work, but also in Thomas Arslan's short film, *Am Rand* (*On the Edge*, 1990). Artists, and landscape artists in particular, have long used the technique of the vanishing point to achieve the illusion of parallel lines coming together at the point where they disappear. This technique generates the viewer's perspective and orientation but it also limits knowledge. Arslan uses the effect of the vanishing point by focusing the camera at an object no longer observable. Remaining within the city limits of Berlin at the end of 1990, he filmed the former

‘Todesstreifen’ (death strip), the former locations of the dividing wall in four inner-city border regions of Berlin: Neukölln/Treptow, Moabit/Mitte, Wedding/Prezlauer Berg, and Märkisches Viertel/Wilhelmsruh. The film employs a series of static long shots and slow pans to capture the physical changes that occurred in Berlin—the demolition and construction—and to expose the apparent contradictions between periphery and center. The film engages with places forged in the collective memory of the viewer but that are now gone or at least changed beyond recognition. If the term afterimage refers to an image that persists in the viewer’s mind after the exposure to the original image has ceased, the Berlin Wall is the afterimage par excellence. Although the visible, physical barrier between East and West Germany is long gone, Germans still speak of its lingering mental image and metaphorical barrier (“Mauer im Kopf”). In *Am Rand*, the absence of commentary and the strict pictorial symmetry and focus on dividing lines on the picture plane opens a space for association. In its depiction of absence, of the physical wall that is no longer observable, it appeals to the viewer’s memory and imagination.



Fig. 15. View of Berlin’s Mauerpark (Wall Park) in *Am Rand* (1990).

“Anonymous Sculptures”

With their serial views of banal buildings, prospects of streets, and construction sites, both films refuse to indulge in the spectacular. Instead, Arslan and Petzold adopt a more critical and conceptual stance that renders each shot equal. Historically, these are characteristics and concerns that represent the most recent expression in landscape photography practice that can be traced back to the late 1960s. The 1975 photography exhibition at the George Eastman House in Rochester, NY entitled *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* was one of the first exhibitions to mark a shift in the way that landscape was conceptualized and represented. This group, including American photographers Stephen Shore, Robert Adam, Lewis Baltz, Frank Gohlke, and German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, among others, was decidedly uninterested in the recognition of a pastoral or sublime element in landscape that relied on an emotional response, a practice made explicit with Romanticism in the nineteenth century. The culmination of the pastoral tradition can be found in the paintings of British artist John Constable. His peaceful, tame scenes celebrate the dominion of mankind over nature and depict gardens, harvests, and livestock. The vanishing point leads the viewer's eye to houses, the familiar image of a shared past and the long tradition of rural labor. The sublime tradition marks a much more radical change in the attitude towards nature. The motifs and themes of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings of inner landscapes of alienation and crisis quickly became visual clichés that are still seen today as part of the German landscape: the contemplative figure silhouetted against the sky, a world concealed by morning mists, the filtered light of dawn or dusk, starkly barren trees, and the familiar forms of Gothic ruins. In the Romantic landscape, the vanishing point exists in the sea or sky, where it serves to stage an encounter between the viewer and the sublime infinity; it is a reminder of what is ultimately unknowable. Friedrich's

landscapes, with their repeated and familiar motifs, became a sort of enduring national code. Romanticism's discourse on landscape developed in literature and painting and displayed a fascination with wilderness and nature in contrast to city life and urban architecture. Rather than permanence and stability, the Romantic concept offers nature as a chaotic and sublime power that engages allegorically with history and myth. This notion was later adapted by the American photographer Ansel Adams for his landscape photographs of national parks.

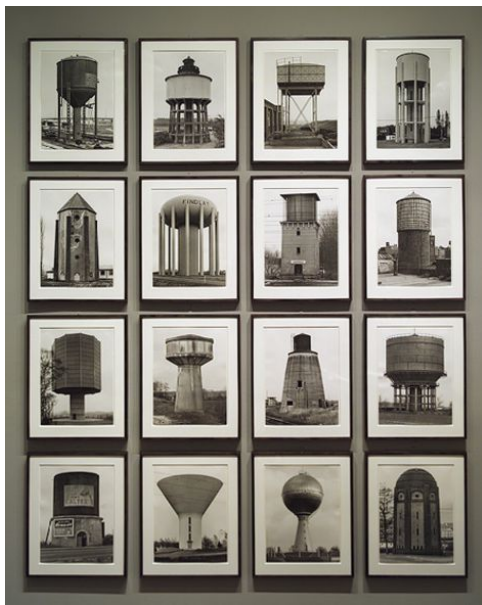


Fig. 16. Installation view of Bernd and Hilla Becher's *Water Towers* 1967-80.

By contrast, the *New Topographics* sought to revisit and re-envision prior landscape traditions by breaking from the idealized depiction of the West as a place of pristine wilderness. Their subjects included banal objects like construction sites in the middle of the desert and bottles and graffiti in seemingly untouched terrains – the very things that were previously excluded from landscape photographs were instead emphasized to indicate they were anything but ordinary when framed with sensitivity. For example, the Bechers' *Water Towers* shows the

same subject in sixteen different types. From an elevated vantage point and positioned centrally in the picture, they show details and total views of the buildings. The stark black and white contrast and the neutral light background conveys a sense of documentary and objectivity. Removed from their original contexts, form becomes more important than function, which turns the buildings into aesthetic objects with a sculptural characters. In fact, at the 1990 Venice Biennale (the same year when Petzold and Arslan made their films), the Bechers received the Golden Lion sculpture. Already in 1969, they called their first exhibition “Anonymous Sculptures,” just like their first volume of photographs. The exhibition coincided with an art exhibit on American minimal art. Minimalism is characterized by simple, predominately geometric structures, often in serial repetition and concerned with banning personal and illusionist concerns. Considered in the context of their surrounding spaces, minimalist art works engage with questions about perception and how the work changes according to light, space, and vantage point.²¹ The photographs propose something anterior to the pictorial, that being the view of ordinary countryside and disused building as situated between grand themes of painting and the shabbiness of the everyday—all of them testimonies of a declining industrial culture. In the films of Petzold and Arslan, we can find a similar notion of renovating older aesthetic values. Here, series of shots of streets and buildings also suggest types and a single shot recalls traditional landscape paintings, which suggests that the *New Topographic*’s proposal for

²¹ The photographs of fellow *Topographics* are of the American countryside, but also *about* a series of aesthetic issues (the aesthetic discourse of landscape painting and photography) and the man-made wilderness, that is, the American myth of the West, the suburban expansion, the American dream, and the exploitation and literal destruction of natural resources as conditions of the cultural, discursive construction of landscape. In the years following the *New Topographics* exhibition, landscape practices in North America were shaped by ideological critique. In *Landscape and Power* (1994), W.J.T. Mitchell explores landscape as a process and an ideological medium. He writes, “landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness, etc)” (14). This implies that representation is prosperous to some external form, whereas the etymological derivation of landscape suggests aesthetic and pictorial form.

aestheticizing mundane environments has grown in importance and has found its way into the filmic work of the Berlin School.

Picturesque

The *New Topographics*' exploration and appreciation of landscape through a meditation on art renovates another fascinating phenomenon of the nineteenth century: the cultural debate on the picturesque. Edmund Burke proposed in *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1755) that there was also a middle ground in the dialectical aesthetic of the appreciation of nature, between that of the instantaneous beautiful or pastoral, and the infinite sublime. The picturesque as an aesthetic category was based on formalistic qualities of the picture plane that were capable of emphasizing temporal disjunctions and stimulating intellectual exercise. British writer and painter William Gilpin put Burke's theory into practice. He presented the picturesque as a separate and autonomous aesthetic category alongside the pastoral and sublime in his book *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (1770). The book instructs artists and travelers to go out into nature and look for scenes that remind them of paintings, as a way to appreciate through looking for composition, contrast, and movement. Artists and travelers used small pocket mirrors called "claudef glasses" that abstracted the subject reflected in them from its surroundings, reducing and simplifying the color and tonal range of scenes and scenery to give them a painterly quality. The notion of the picturesque developed in the nineteenth century as a critical inquiry focused less on moral effect and emotional response of a work upon a viewer and more upon the

intrinsic, compositional qualities of a work itself.²²

Early twentieth-century avant-garde practices, in particular the “new visions” of Cubism, Dadaism, and Constructivism, increased interest in the picturesque’s avowed symmetric, proportional, and iconographic classicism through the paradoxical use of asymmetry, non-hierarchy, irregularities, and unpredictable syntax. The urban conditions confronted landscape artists, photographers, and filmmakers with new social and spatial formations that complicate characteristics of binary oppositions, such as center and periphery, as well as city, suburb, and countryside. Theorists alternatively describe these new spaces as a “nonplace urban realm” (Melvin Webber, 1964), “middle landscape” (Peter Rowe, 1991), or “Zwischenstadt” (Thomas Sieverts, 1997), to name only a few. Instead of falling into a confusing plethora of neologisms, Italian urban planner Mirko Zardini more recently argued for a revaluation of the notion of the picturesque as a tool for understanding the contemporary, fragmented, and hybrid environments. He explains:

only the sensibility of the picturesque allows us to observe the territory with new eyes: to understand the differences, the mixtures, and the nuances, and to appreciate them. This sensibility leads us to observe the edges, the borders, the lines of contrasts or superimposition of different worlds, more than the homogeneity that is to be found within each of the elements, small or large [...]. It blurs traditional distinctions between natural and artificial,...a quality with which to define a new landscape. (436)

²² Ernst Gombrich suggests that the idea of the picturesque is already evident in 1548, in the writing of Paolo Pino (“The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape,” 116).

In that sense, “picturesque” refers to both a landscape as a subject for representation and a fragmented environment to be viewed as if part of a representation.²³ This includes the very notion of landscape and its double meaning as a piece of land and an image representing that piece of land. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the English “landscape” was borrowed from the Dutch “landschap,” which stood for a picture representing natural inland scenery from a single, coherent view. It was therefore perceived as an artifact before it was valued in nature. Landscape is then not merely a constructed picture of nature, but also a view we perceive from a distance.²⁴



Fig. 17. Bernhard Kretzschmar’s idyllic border region in Saxony. *Eisenhüttenstadt* (1955).

How do Petzold and Arslan confront and represent the “new” landscapes of unified Germany? Like the nineteenth-century theorists of the picturesque, they approach and visualize nature indirectly, through earlier representations of landscape. For his film, Petzold draws on the fascination with a region that could now be encountered beyond the Iron Curtain. But the film

²³ Steven Jacobs in “Blurring the Boundaries between City and Countryside in Photography” (2012) explains, with reference to George A. Tobey’s *A History of Landscape Architecture* (1973), that the English landscape gardens were designed to be viewed as a painter like Salvator Rosa or Claude Lorrain might paint them (3).

²⁴ According to the *Grimm Wörterbuch*, the German “Landschaft” stands for an area or environment and its natural conditions, as well as the impression that such an area leaves on the onlooker’s sight. (“den Eindruck, den eine solche Gegend auf das Auge macht”)

also uses representations to connect to knowledge of the region, including the integration of its inhabitants, its history, and its economy. Landscape paintings created inside former East Germany have long been dismissed as a mere product of the socialist regime, and much of it has remained unseen by the public. Only recently have exhibitions rehabilitated artworks as an expression of the failed utopian ideal on which the former GDR was founded. During the eastern bloc, official photography produced colorful images that showed the GDR as a country of surplus that in many cases obscured reality.²⁵ In contrast, the unofficial, “democratic” artworks that emerged during the last two decades of the GDR focused on portraying the darker sides of reality of the utopian social and cultural projects. One early example is a 1955 painting *Eisenhüttenstadt* by Bernhard Kretzschmar. The title identifies a town on the border with Poland. Much of the picture is green and blue, with factory smokestacks billowing in the distance to convey the idyll of productivity. Later examples include paintings by Wolfgang Mattheuser that depict workers in the surreal emptiness of a brown coal mining area. These paintings feature illusion and disillusion, along with the utopia of a better nation, rather than displaying an interest in the indexical quality of recording the landscape with a detached eye. Additionally, in numerous films produced in the 1990s, such as Stanislaw Mucha’s *Absolut Warhola* (2001), the connection between landscape image and downward social mobility serves to characterize and generalize the regions as underdeveloped, rural, and hopelessly regressive.²⁶ The East in

²⁵ The past years have seen an increasing number of national and international exhibitions of East German art. Most recently, the Martin-Gropius-Bau Berlin displayed *Gegenstimmen. Kunst in der DDR 1976–1989* (*Voices of Dissent: Art in the GDR 1976–1989*), which opened on July 16, 2016. The online database *Bildatlas: Kunst in der DDR* (*Picture Atlas: Art in the German Democratic Republic*) holds over 20,000 works created in East Germany. The database is available at www.bildatlas-ddr-kunst.de.

²⁶ Fred Truniger, in his analysis of landscape in Mucha’s film, includes alcoholism, familial violence, and deep ignorance of world politics and culture (242).

Petzold's short seems to be both the desolate space of migration and displacement and the thriving location of opportunities.

“Unconscious Places”

Less interested in the depiction of the East as a “moving” transitional space, Arlsan's camera focuses on repetition and resemblance in the manner of typology. The serial views of buildings and construction sites in the inner-border regions of Berlin evoke street photography in the 1980s and '90s, in particular the pictorial aesthetic of the Düsseldorf School around Bernd and Hilla Becher. They conceive of their photographs of vanishing industrial sites serially, often including six or more shots as multiples within the space of a single picture. Arslan's approach is less rigorous. His shots of the vanishing border region and construction sites take on a more varied appearance. Few pans and close-ups of street lamps and construction vehicles interrupt the rhythm and symmetry of the otherwise static shots of the inner-city border region. They recall the ongoing series of street photographs, *Unconscious Places*, of Becher student Thomas Struth. The title is a reference to *Uncommon Places*, Stephen Shore's seminal photo book of 1982.²⁷ From 1973 to 1981, Shore frequently returned to the roads of North America to create a set of photographs that focused on the mundane American vernacular: the American landscape and its transformation at the hands of the twentieth-century consumer culture. Dominant edifices loom high within the photographs, roads often divide the frame, and oversized billboards fill the skies.

²⁷ Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940) was a key text for Struth's ongoing series of empty streets in the desolate urban landscape. His photographs evoke the qualities of Walter Benjamin's “optical unconscious,” showing things that cannot be shown and revealing that which cannot be seen (Brett 78 ff.). Much of Benjamin's writing on the city is from the perspective of the walker. The abandoned site becomes the space of Walter Benjamin's vagabond who, as an exile, possesses the marginal vision that transgresses boundaries and turns them into thresholds. Struth's strictly composed representations of the streets are made from the point of view of the photographer. He situates the viewer as an observer, even a stranger, rather than as Benjamin's strolling flâneur,

And even the national parks that were famously romanticized decades earlier by the black-and-white photography of Ansel Adams are now invaded by tourists and brightly colored cars. In a similar manner, Struth photographed the streets in New York City, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Munich, Brussels, Charleroi, and Paris. His aim was to identify locations that summarized and expressed most clearly the nature of the city. Shot mostly in black and white, Struth presents large-scale, frontal, eye-height views of city streets without obvious signs or suggestions of human activity. The deserted streets look unremarkable at first sight. And yet, the disembodied, objective photographs produce the opposite effect in the viewer: an uncanny intensity of vision and a desire to read more into the representations.



Fig. 18. Thomas Struth, *Bernauerstrasse, Berlin, 1992*.

Germany's history and traditional tropes of landscape painting and photography also inform Struth's work. Upon closer examination, we see the omnipresent signs of time and history. Buildings from different periods stand next to recent constructions that have presumably replaced the older buildings. The photographs' large format and clarity of detail enable the viewer to read into the urban fabric various notions of temporality as well as traumatic events such as war and economic crisis. Take, for example, Struth's *Bernauerstrasse, Berlin 1992*. The street was once a major site of contestation in the erection of the Berlin wall and is now a place

of documentation. The positioning of the camera at eye-level—a method resembling that of the Bechers—creates an unusually symmetrical perspective. The formality of the composition makes informal development of urban spaces appreciable. Unconscious places can also be thought of in a way in which the history of place inscribes itself both into the landscape and subsequently onto the image itself.²⁸ In that way, events of history mark the surface of the place and the surface of the image to create depth. This engagement with place as a palimpsest of memory and history can also be seen in Arslan's film. The long takes, much like Struth's photographs, render the street as void, yet present the void as concrete visual experience.²⁹ The film, much like Struth's photographs, situates the viewer as observer, even stranger, as she watches the fleeting impressions of the landscapes. One view replaces the next without explanation or particular emphasis. The "anywhere-and-nowhere-quality" of the shots is both familiar (*heimlich*) and unfamiliar (*unheimlich*). This process of recognition and misrecognition becomes a distancing device that plays with visual perception and consciousness of place and time in such a way that perception itself becomes lost. Looking at the various shots with the hope of identifying a familiar signifier, the viewer becomes displaced from the time and history of place and its image to arrive at a point where they imagine somewhere and sometime else entirely.

²⁸ In his interview with Gil Blank, Struth comments on his interest in photographing the postwar German landscape and the relationship of individual to historical time. Further, he explains that he sees the city as witness to the symbolic structure of postwar Germany (2007). Struth also cites *Gestalt Psychology* (1929) by Wolfgang Köhler. In Gestalt psychology, the unconscious is considered more as something physiological than psychological. It follows that attaining a coherent view is a matter of bringing to attention that which has previously escaped it by means of translating sensation into seeing through pictures.

²⁹ When Arslan speaks of the use and perception of the settings in his films, he speaks of creating an "optical and acoustic experience of space" for the viewer "to visualize" the topography of a place and the subject's relation to it, rather than merely perceive filmic space as a backdrop or "picturesque motifs" (quoted in Herrmann's "Geisterlandschaften," 163).



Fig. 19. Landscape views of the inner-border region in Thomas Arslan's *Am Rand* (1990).

The renewed relevance of landscape and the pictorial tradition is also noteworthy when looking at a later short film by former DFFB student Angela Schanelec. *Erster Tag*, a short film she created for the omnibus project *Deutschland 09* (2009), aimed at exploring “the state of the nation” twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The film is composed of a series of static views of inner-city life and rural environment. It starts formalistically with a shot of a skyline at dawn. Although a view of a man-made environment, the wide-angle shot has landscape qualities and is similar to a landscape in scale and distance depicted. The shot is shown for several seconds before giving way to shots of various places inside and outside the city, which typify the film's programmatic development: out of the urban space into the natural environment and towards storytelling.



Fig. 20. A city view opens Schanelec's *Erster Tag* (2009).

More importantly, historical precedents rather than topographical place mark the landscape views in her film. When *Undercut*—the UK journal dedicated to artists' film and video between 1980 and 1990—devoted its spring issue in 1983 to landscape in the visual arts and film, A. L. Rees stressed the historicity of landscape in films, declaring that landscape “is already coded for us, not only by the technique and material we use, but also by the sheer volume of images which precede us and which we know” (3). In *Erster Tag*, key iconographic images serve the narrative and emotional purpose of the film. With dawn constituting the prominent theme, the compositions and iconography of the landscape views closely resemble those of painter Caspar David Friedrich. Fields, trees, and rivers conjure up evanescent images of indeterminate, yet vaguely familiar landscapes, experienced at moments of sublime transitions like dusk and dawn.³⁰ But instead of intimating a higher, spiritual meaning, Schanelec's moment of transition is marked by the daily routine of work. The following static shots depict a woman in the hospital talking to her daughter, the daughter answering the phone in a kitchen, a train

³⁰ In addition to borrowing recognizable images from the art world, the film also recalls the connection to German aesthetic tradition and Romanticism with Joseph Eichendorff's poems about the German landscape, and *Morgendämmerung* in particular.

outside of town moving through the image, a courtyard of a farm, another train, the outside of a school with light shining through a few windows, and a heavily trafficked street in front of the train station. Despite the seeming calmness and romantic beauty, the views of the various spaces are always interrupted by the suggestion of human presence: the ambient noise of the phone ringing, the train speeding, and the dog barking. The last landscape, however, is different. Music (*Sonata No. 2* by Romantic composer Robert Schumann) transforms the seemingly descriptive image of a lake with mist around it into a suggestive, dramatic moment that is unfamiliar and strange compared to the sober perspective of the early morning that characterizes the rest of the film. The film about movement now moves the viewer emotionally. It seems to celebrate the calm landscape and to show that, if only for a brief moment amongst the busy daily routine that the film emphasizes, nature is marvelous in form and color. Yet, Schanelec's revaluation of the picturesque is far from nostalgic or glorifying. In fact, the last landscape rejects the nostalgic dimension of the dramatic by, paradoxically perhaps, not excluding drama but heightening it through music. Here, Schanelec's landscape view pulls back from the referential world, which has now vanished, to represent it from a position of distance and detachment. The landscape provides a visual form for mimicking Romanticism's "inner landscapes" and, at the same time, for staging its failure. As a result, the film becomes an investigation of landscape representation and perception through artistic precedents and clichés – references that are not restricted to the German tradition and do not always work to visualize an absence. Through their specific stylization by means of framing and editing and reflection on pictorial strategies, Arslan, Petzold, and Schanelec make landscape, rather than topographical place, the subject of their filmmaking, which aligns them with the practice of the picturesque tradition.



Fig. 21. Picturesque landscape view in Schanelec's *Erster Tag* (2009).

Cinematic Landscapes

What is landscape in narrative film? An important difference with regards to landscape in painting and photography is the fact that landscape in film is above all able to record movement in time and space as well as sound. According to David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), narration always privileges story over space. A location is accordingly defined by its function to authenticate and settle the drama, and to whatever it might contribute in terms of atmosphere. If a location is emphasized, it is to advance plot and characterization. They claim “to read space as story space” (54), the space “is rigidly codified by the scene’s flow of cause and effect” (66). Subordinated to the key elements of narration, continuity, and closure, the meaning of story-space is determined within the narrative world of the film. Landscape, when gaining significance of its own, would involve excess. Matthew Gandy briefly reflects on the reluctance to engage with cinematic landscape: “The very idea of the cinematic landscape as a critical inquiry consequently faces a degree of ‘dislocation’ in which the cultural and historical coordinates behind the production of film may be occluded from critical analysis and theoretical speculation” (317). To identify, analyze, and

interpret something requires abstraction and isolation. For early film critics like Béla Balázs, landscape only served the scenic design of a studio film. In this function, landscape takes on a highly poetic quality that sets the emotional tone of the film's narrative. Lotte Eisner later takes up the idea of a "landscape of soul" in her analysis of Weimar cinema. Eisner was particularly interested in the constructed, artificial nature of studio landscapes, which she saw as an integral part of the filmic "work of art" that symbolically functions to enhance what is occurring in the narrative. In her study of Expressionist cinema, for example, she argues that shadows present the dark side of the soul (134). And further, "it is reasonable to argue that German cinema is a development of German Romanticism and that modern technique merely lends a visible form to romantic fancies" (113). Eisner shows how images in the film are not directly part of the narrative, but at the same time symbolically function to enhance or enlarge what is occurring in the drama. In many ways, she renews a viewpoint of landscape that has its roots in the pictorial arts and in theoretical writing on the picturesque. Yet, her remarks are often used to extend Romanticism into film, which may enrich film scholarship but also restricts the frame of analysis to the point where the relationship between landscape and emotion as interior spaces becomes either overdetermined or self-evident.

The connection between film and landscape as genre deserves further attention. Sam Rohdie remarks on this in his essay on film and landscape: "Essentially, landscape in film is an atmosphere for story, a setting for action, there but in the background. There is no film genre called landscape, as there is in painting" (2). But the assumption is not as self-evident as it may appear. The very lack of "pictorial" film genres, for example, was what originally motivated Canadian filmmaker Michael Snow to make films. In an interview in 1971, he explains: "portraiture, landscape, still life, etc. there are good reasons why those divisions are still used. It's like animal, vegetable and mineral—those things do exist. And I thought about

how you could make a landscape film.” Furthermore, P. Adams Sitney outlines the growing versatility of landscape in the history of cinema. In his 1993 essay “Landscape in the Cinema,” he describes the sound, color, camera movements, and editing that add formal and thematic expression to landscape. In fact, he states that landscape emerged in the late 1960s as a recognizable genre associated with the European and American avant-garde.³¹ Chris Welsby, instigator of the short-lived “Landscape Films” movement in Great Britain in the 1970s, explained: “Landscape is a subdivision of nature as a whole. The degree to which we call it landscape is the degree to which mind has had an effect on it, the degree to which it is structured and modified by ideas and concepts” (126). Landscape is not merely a picture of nature, but also a view and a form of representation.³² This emancipation, invoked via analogies to the pictorial arts, has an interesting parallel in the Berlin School.

The short films of the Berlin School provide an evocative point of departure when considering landscape in the feature films. They demonstrate an awareness of art history and its relevance for filmmaking today. They also provide the framework for understanding landscape in their narrative film projects. The Berlin School’s recent transition from urban settings to rural areas suggests a renewed interest in landscape as a longstanding theme in German art, literature, and film. In Ulrich Köhler’s *Montag kommen die Fenster* (2006) and *Schlafkrankheit* (2010), the audience views the setting at a remove, the Hessian forest in the former and the African

³¹ P. Adams Sitney lists, for example, Jonas Mekas (*Walden*, 1968/69), Michael Snow (*La Région Centrale*, 1970/71), and Larry Gottheim (*Fog Line*, 1970). In his exploration of experimental and independent film, Scott McDonald points to the rise of landscape films as cultural critique, but also a desire to return to “simplicity and directness” of early cinema (6-7).

³² Until recently, writing on landscape in cinema has presented a rather disparate miscellany. In 1993, P. Adams Sitney’s claim that “the topic is virtually an unconscious issue of film theory” (103) was refuted in two anthologies, *Moving Landscapes: Landschaft und Film* and *Landscape and Film*, both published in 2006. In the former, the editors list the expressive potential of cinematic landscape as background, spectacle, narrative agent, symbol, testimony, palimpsest, and material for experimental film. In the latter, Martin Lafevre distinguishes between setting for action and events and spectacle and attraction on the other.

countryside in the latter. Indeed, Köhler's films are often deliberately filmed as if through a foreigner's eyes, and sometimes the camera seems to have an eye of its own, as it goes roving along the overgrown vegetation of forests or dusty rural roads. Rather than simply represent the locations as exotic or foreign, the films make everyday environments visible and perceivable for the film viewer.³³ For example, in the three-part, three-director film project *Dreileben* (2011), the Thuringian forest is the hiding place for a criminal. The engagement with forests in the films is not in isolation from collective cultural memories of the Grimm's fairy tales. The fairy tales are often played out in the liminal spaces between childhood and adulthood, male and female, good and evil, life and death, *heimlich* (the house situated in the town at the edge of the forest) and *unheimlich* (the cottage found deep in the forest, usually associated with evil). Nor is the engagement from forests free from the collective cultural memory of Nazi ecological policies. Simon Schama outlines the history of the German forest within a cultural and social framework. During the Second World War, as Schama amply demonstrates, forests became not only a hiding place but also a colony of death, "a place of mass execution, dispatched close to the roadside parameter of the dark forest; a dirty business of hasty entries and exits" (71).³⁴ Indeed, by turning to the forest as setting, the films confront the viewer with a space of representation, a landscape,

³³ Köhler was a student of German filmmaker Rüdiger Neumann, professor for Experimental Film at the Hamburg Arts University. His nature films are structurally focused, delegating the choice of location and the type of shots to a chance system in hopes for an unintentional, non-instrumental gaze by means of repetition, habituation, and mathematical chance principles. Köhler's three-minute super-eight short film *Feldstraße* (1994) serves as an example of a film that resists the metaphoric humanization of the camera and, by extension, the environment. The film is akin to Neumann and British/Canadian filmmaker Chris Welsby's experiments with the apparatus of filmmaking as a more mechanical means of depicting landscape with the use of camera, film stock, and soundtrack.

³⁴ To this, Ulrich Baer adds that the Nazis instigated tree planting for the purpose of concealing the concentration camps during the implementation of the Final Solution and in an attempt to erase evidence from the sites (77-8). Along with the myth of blood and soil, so Baer, forests became "part of the Nazi deceptions and their symbolic significance as silent witnesses and anthropomorphic placeholders for Europe's murdered Jews" (78).

which oscillates between presence and absence, history and myth, and place and no-place. To use the concept of landscape before setting, space, and mise-en-scène is to invoke an aesthetic tradition with different ramifications. Rather than detachment from cultural and historical coordinates, the Berlin School films suggest their vitality for the understanding thereof. The act of engaging with landscape in Berlin School feature films involves a form of displacement, by bringing something from the background to the foreground and from the periphery to the center.

When other scholars talk about the landscape views of the Berlin School films, and Petzold's work in particular, they are primarily referring to the setting and place in order to focus attention on the topographical view and the indexical quality of a specific location, which gives the films a certain documentary quality similar to reportage. The images of Berlin's city center and the thick forests of Thuringia are culturally coded and evoke collective memories. Commentators echo the directors' claims that the landscapes and cityscapes contain traces of German history and societal change, and should be read politically. Mareike Herrmann, for instance, suggests that Petzold employs space most symbolically because the camera lingers on it. This temporal prolonging promises symbolic meaning beyond referential qualities. And Marco Abel argues that the films focus on the present moment, but suggests that "ghosts from the past and present" haunt the urban places, particularly the cities in Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007) and *Gespenster* (*Ghosts*, 2005). Both accounts tie space to memories of the past and look to place for symbolic meaning. But I believe the act of holding on landscapes also offers a means to investigate them in other ways, beyond the symbolic.

While some Berlin School features are set in identifiable cities (Berlin and Frankfurt), most of them are set in the hinterland of provincial Germany. Much of the action takes place inside hotels, parking lots, parks, and on the streets. With respect to desolate places without a

clear history and geographical location, scholars are quick to revisit discussions of Marc Augé's "non-places" (1995). In fact, Petzold has repeatedly emphasized the influence of Augé on his films. The term "non-place" is negatively nuanced, dislocating the embeddedness of national and cultural signifiers due to its anonymous qualities. In his study, Augé describes the production of "non-places" as the most conspicuous characteristic of the modern age and globalized society. He argues that we have lost the sense of place due to the loss of symbolic ability to create place: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (77).³⁵ Conceptualizations of what a non-place may be include sites of transition and movement such as generic chain stores, hotels, airports, and gas stations. In such places, people are unable to communicate or interact with others, and instead become solitary figures in an alienating landscape. Such places, according to Augé, do not contain individual identities, nor do they create social relations or meaning.

Scholars have since questioned the usefulness of Augé's term. Globalized society actually encourages travel as a means of personal development. In many ways, it turned the border-crossing migrant into a present-day iconic figure. A sense of displacement (temporal, historical, and spatial) is now part of the social and collective experience and memory. Rather than subject places to a doomed fate, art historian Lucy Lippard suggests this sense of displacement and "placelessness" may simply refer to places that are taken for granted and overlooked because our repressed, ignorant consciousness renders them invisible (9).

The anonymity of non-places, or places that have lost their sense of identity due to heavy

³⁵ Herrmann's and Abel's responses indicate a tendency of scholarship to look for social and political significance first, without careful consideration of the aesthetic formation and mediation. Theodor Adorno argued that if a work is artistically successful (or in Clement Greenberg's words, if a work convinces "aesthetically"), it will condense significant social experience in some way.

commercialization and new housing estates, now offers comfort and familiarity to those on the move. Although not comprised of the traditional qualities of place, a so-called non-place, with its signs and texts, is now able to evoke memories and meaning, allowing us to connect the unfamiliar with something familiar. Indeed, non-places have become layered and historical, carrying with them indexical and imaginary quality as well as political and social dimension precisely through their apparent liminality and decenteredness. Most importantly, as visible features of the land, they have long been the subject of landscape painting and photography, which provides an important element of abstraction and specificity. Like the shorts and experimental films, the feature-length narratives of the Berlin School are filled with allusions to the history of Western landscape in painting, photography, and film. They seem to present landscape for the analysis of aesthetic effects, of the formal compositions within a frame, and of the way they draw on intertextual references such as art-historical sources and concepts. This analysis includes the various aesthetic experiences associated with landscape. The picturesque offers a model that is theoretically interesting because it requires an exploratory relationship to the landscape images. Rather than a direct historical influence, the comparisons to traditional forms of art suggest a shared sensibility and a common approach to composition and subject matter. Christoph Hochhäusler's *Milchwald* (2003)—a variation of Grimm's *Hänsel and Gretel*—offers an interesting example of a Berlin School feature that prioritizes vision in order to recognize landscape as more than a simple backdrop. The analysis here expands on the theme of displacement first addressed in the short films in order to explore concepts of place, history, and the processes and limitations of filmmaking itself. Within the artistic model and practices of the tradition of the picturesque, the filmmakers place themselves into the history of place and art, adding to it their cinematic landscapes while informing the viewer's perception of a place.

Displacement

Milchwald's opening works to establish a dynamic relationship between figure and ground. The asynchronous electronic music over a static long shot of a desolate road makes an eerie impression. The omniscient view of the camera holds on the landscape for about two minutes, slowing the opening shot to the stillness of a photograph. It conveys the experience of time as duration. The image is divided by the horizon, with the grey and blue sky in the upper region, and the empty, grey asphalt road and dusty fields below. Color gives the image an ephemeral quality, which is enhanced by non-diegetic music and the wavy structure of the road. Telephone poles along the roadside cut through the deserted landscape. At first sight, there is not much movement in the sense of mobility that the image of the road might suggest. But the shot is also not about stasis. Clouds are moving, birds are flying, and at the distant vanishing point where the lines of the road converge, something else is moving. The landscape rearranges itself before the viewer's eyes. Two figures emerge and walk along the road. The figures are insignificant in comparison to the vastness of the desolate country, yet they become more significant in size as they approach the lower center of the image. The limits of the frame indicate what cannot be shown when one of the figures, Leah, continues walking along the street, disappears from the frame, and then reenters it. As the camera holds, the figures become larger. A car arrives and the music increases in volume. The music creates a narrative structure of intensification and danger. It mobilizes landscape to elicit an emotional response in the viewer, as if to fill the emptiness in the image. The opening tells of landscape transformation and offers the idea of intrusion into the seemingly static landscape view.



Fig. 22. Deserted landscape view in Hochhäusler's *Milchwald* (2003).

Milchwald uses the well-known fairy tale *Hänsel and Gretel* as the story's primary intertext and situates it at the border region between Germany and Poland. Real conditions (historical past) and mythical exaggeration (fairy tale) equally nourish the tale of brother and sister abandoned by their parents in the woods, where they face starvation and a cannibalistic witch. As the children encounter struggle and danger in the tale, the viewer confronts her inner feelings that threaten her sense of place in the world. The film spends a great amount of time showing the children either walking along or driving on the roads and highways. The open road introduces events and allows figures to meet.³⁶ In *Hänsel and Gretel*, the road is a way home. Yet, home is not a hopeful place but rather a place of hunger and despair. In *Milchwald*, the parent's inability to provide food, as told in the original fairy tale, is now replaced by an inability

³⁶ The myth of the road is as old as Homer's *Odyssey*, and features prominently in fairy tales. In the latter, the road is a hopeful passageway that offers the traveler new possibilities. Particularly in the American consciousness, both the road, with its figure of the tramp, and the wide-open spaces of the American western landscape have become complex and mythical constructs, rather than non-places. Their understandings reach from representations of the romantic dream of pristine wilderness to "the repository of the vestiges of the frontier with its mythical freedom from rules and strictures of civilization" (Bright 4). The same landscape image can accommodate different, even opposing ideas.

to provide care for lack of communication. The children get lost on their way and find the witch's house, or in this case, the house of a migrant worker. Though initially a place of care and nurture that later transforms into a place of danger, it is above all else a place far from the familiarity of home with its own set of rules. In their new circumstances, the children are exposed to a foreign language that is translated neither for them, nor for "us" as viewers. The film begins with the siblings Lea and Konstantin on their walk home from school, when their stepmother Silvia picks them up for a shopping trip across the border. Their car trip is cut short, however, when Lea antagonizes Sylvia over the fact that she is not the children's real mother. Sylvia abandons the children on a rural road and drives off. Upon returning, she is unable to find them. The tale then unfolds as two parallel stories with the parents at home on the German side of the border and the children roaming the forest on the Polish side, where they meet a traveling salesman named Kuba. Simply put, this border setting allows the film to draw a line between two cultures. The sterile white surface of the family's home in the "Neubaugebiet" on the one side of the border is set against the rural, decaying buildings in the village surrounded by green, thick woods on the other side. The dialectical aesthetic shows the central conflicts: the children's journey as displacement from home, including their encounter with an unfamiliar location and language, and the journey as border crossing, both in terms of crossing the line between topographical places and the line between transient spaces, and from crossing childhood into adulthood. Their journey as an exploration of landscape is paralleled by the viewer's virtual journey through the cinema.

Other scholars seek to find a significant contribution to German cinema by focusing on the film's Romantic notion of privileging the countryside over the city. Kristin Kopp notes critically of *Milchwald* that the children's journey is a move outside of Germany into a non-place "onto which childlike fantasies of the 'Wild West' as well as visions of fairy-tale enchantment

are projected” (302), even though Poland is a real place with a history. Kopp sees a critique of Germans as cold materialists and their struggle to pursue wealth offered by “neo-liberal society,” which seduces the innocent Pole Kuba in the form of reward money for the children. Randall Halle rightly questions this figure of sympathy since Kuba is positioned as the witch (117). He also observes that the film functions as national allegory, in that the space becomes Germany and characters become Germans only because the narrative travels into a fantasy of Poland (118). The film “exhibits a homogenizing strategy of community, making distinct and separate the German and Polish worlds” to show the borderland as “place of danger,” with contact between citizens posing “a threat to the individual and even to the communities at large” (119). Halle sees the film’s problem in the alignment of Poland to “the darkest forest of the Grimm’s fairy tale” (116). The idea of the threatening romantic forest is linked to the postwar stereotype of Poland as a backwards fantasy marked by desolate, decaying buildings and a brief depiction of Catholic rituals. For Halle, these images dissolve into and confirm imagined stereotypes and clichés without intentional comedic qualities (120). It is significant that he speaks of imagination and stereotypes, because as mental images they can be seen to add to the layers of representations, and of landscape in particular. In fact, the film draws upon various images: the history of Romantic landscape painting, the landscape photography of vast spaces of North America, German tales and myths, and the forest as national symbol of the German “fatherland.”

Ultimately, scholars accuse the filmmaker of failing to historicize his subjects and of neglecting to articulate a social critique. Yet, the title “Milchwald” (milky woods) implies a representation of vagueness and fogginess rather than a story of a specific and defined location.³⁷ “Milchwald” denotes the spatial experience of the children’s journey through a forest where

³⁷ In Dylan Thomas’s 1954 radio play *Under Milk Wood*, citizens of a small Welsh town tell of each other’s dreams under the milk wood.

paths are confused and vision and knowledge are obscured. It also corresponds to the feeling of disorientation that the children experience on their journey. Once Sylvia leaves the children in the middle of nowhere, they are on their own and start walking. Sylvia knows the location of the children and marks it on a map. The film grants the viewer this topographical view and orientation, yet this knowledge does not advance the narrative in terms of the search, because she takes the map and conceals it from her husband's sight. The concealment leaves the viewer with knowledge that now seems useless.

The English title of the film "This Very Moment" suggests the children's journey and perception of the landscape in time. In fact, time and again, the film eschews linearity and movement, in contrast to the linear trajectory of the road, and seeks instead to uncover the implications and the multiplicity of the single moment. The static, self-contained quality of the single moment is commonly associated with photography. In this respect, the film invests in a temporality distinguished by the cut and the montage, as well as in the temporality of the static long take as durational distinction. This conjunction of setting, framing, and timing speaks to an understanding of cinema that reaches beyond conventional cause-and-effect narrative structures. The removed point-of-view implements a sense of seriality while also emphasizing the disconnect between cuts, just as the children's journey conveys a series of in-between moments. For example, the arbitrary nature of their wandering reflects the seemingly arbitrary connection between images through montage. As if caught at random, the scenes do not build to any decisive moment. Likewise, the parents are left unaware of what is going on. Lingered without events, shots of the stepmother in the bedroom and shots of the house place the viewer in the same off-balance mental space as the children who are off roaming the country roads without clear direction. In those moments, the film resists the symmetrical view prescribed by space and communicates the spatial experience of characters.



Fig. 23. Arbitrary nature of the children's wandering. *Milchwald* (2003).

The slow-paced rhythm of editing and the repetitive approach to framing lends each location, on both sides of the border, equal weight and presence. In this regard, the film can be compared to the serial photography and photo books of the *New Topographics*, such as Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958), Robert Adams's *New West* (1973), Stephen Shore's *Uncommon Places* (1982), Joel Sternfeld's *American Prospects* (1987), and later Thomas Struth's *Unconscious Places* (2012), all of which depict variable conditions of the same location. These landscapes are products of cross-country journeys, showing the conflict between the frontier spirit of traversing the vast countryside and the stark reality of the pale sprawl of motels, shopping strips, and housing projects.

That the film's opening alludes to a range of landscape traditions is crucial for the perception of displacement. Like the landscapes of the *New Topographics*, the filmic landscape

in *Milchwald*'s opening does not resort to sentimental environmentalism or condemn the distinction between nature and culture. Rather, it suggests the discursive construction of landscape, the structures of landscape's painterly and photographic reproduction that is the organizing principle of the film. While the road reinforces linearity, the editing incites seriality. By calling attention whose placement in the larger framework on landscape, it resists the equation between story and space. Landscape thus emerges as a function of time rather than a manifestation of static identity or topography (either Germany or Poland).



Fig. 24. View of the children evokes Friedrich's *Mönch am Meer* (*Monk by the Sea*, 1808-10). *Milchwald* (2001).

In its representation of sites, the film utilizes Romantic clichéd motifs, such as depictions of ruins and Caspar David Friedrich's *Rückenfigur*, while at the same time displacing them from their original significance. It also draws from the urban environment as a resource of pre-existing imagery. The view of the children on the roof evokes Friedrich's *Mönch am Meer* (*Monk by the Sea*, 1808-10). The film also uses road signs, street lamps, and corporate logos; objects that are now as pre-coded as the quintessential iconography of Romanticism. Signifiers of capitalism are inserted without higher meaning. For example, when Kuba talks to the parents on the phone, he does so in a phone booth next to an outdoor amphitheater, which creates an image that

communicates a clear defiance of architectural hierarchies. Towards the end of the film, the pastoral is brought into a post-urban wasteland. When the father fails to secure a meeting point while speaking with Kuba by phone, and therefore must continue his search for the children, the film presents us with a striking view of the father standing in a “sea” of streetlights in an empty parking lot. Again, the landscape is a recognizable rendition of Friedrich, but also the *New Topographic*’s Americana, with its depictions of small town life and open road shaped by iconic views and then forged into a mythical American landscape. This rendition reinforces the notion that Hochhäusler’s fascination with landscape stems not necessarily from the metaphysical, Romantic view of nature, but rather from an interest in examining the way landscape pictures can serve narrative and emotional purposes. By exchanging the sublime and the pastoral for a stark postindustrial landscape, and through the framing of situations that have a humorous or surreal quality, the film creates views of cinematic landscapes that provoke a sense of strangeness and displacement in the viewers.



Fig. 25. Man-altered landscape.



Fig. 26. Industrial landscape.

The film does not simply represent the socio-political and economical reality of post-wall Germany and Poland. It offers alternative, ambiguous, and exploratory views of the border region that emphasize the perceptive qualities of displacement as a way of viewing landscapes that correspond to everyday visual practices. The cinematic landscapes position the film within a

significant, ironic dimension in the depiction of East and West—a notion that Halle dismisses.³⁸ Over-determined spaces like the road, the woods, and the amphitheater are highly functional and laden with cultural and psychological symbolism and mythical references. In *Milchwald*, these places and idyllic attributes are continually interrupted and reject a clear dichotomy by simultaneously showing signs of urbanization: pedestrians walk on the highway, heavy tractors cut through the idyllic countryside, and cars park in the woods. Additionally, elements seen earlier in the film of the darkened, sparsely decorated home and the roads and power lines on the German side of the border, which cut through the dusty and desolate land, are also present in the featureless backdrops seen later on: an empty parking lot, a deserted service station, and an abandoned amphitheater. Urban culture has invaded rural areas and nature has become littered with human artifacts. These man-altered landscapes with roadway and power lines formally refer to, yet also ironize, the nineteenth-century image of idealized, mythologized wilderness. The locations are everyday environments for the viewer rather than exotic, mythical, or othered spaces.

³⁸ In order to historicize the locations and subjects, which is Silesia, the study would have to include the border region in all its complex development (including German, Polish, Lithuanian, Slovakian, Hungarian, and Bohemian history), rather than spatial and timely generalization as representation of Germany (or what Berlin School scholars refers to as the “neo-liberal West”).

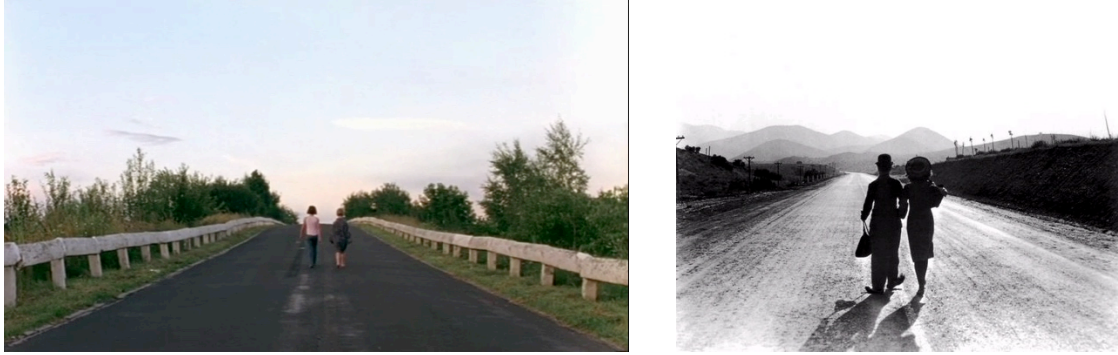


Fig. 27 and Fig. 28. Déjà-vu: Vanishing points in *Milchwald* (2001) and Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936).

The film ends with the unresolved disappearance of the children. Kuba abandons the children after they try to poison him. The film returns to where it started. With the children's return to the open road, the film imbues the landscape view with a subtle ironic notion through visual juxtaposition. In the opening, the vanishing point of the picture plane was also the point of appearance of the children. In the end, they return to that place. But the vantage point of the viewer has changed. The children walk in the middle of the road, away from the viewer and towards the horizon. The closing image corresponds with and amplifies the actual meaning of what they are doing. Not only do they walk into the vanishing point in terms of perspective, but they also vanish into thin air. The musical score ascends in octaves and descends in scales to elevate an uncanny feeling reminiscent of the opening, as if to fill the emptiness of the image. The viewer watches for about two minutes until the children disappear from sight in the middle of the picture plane, before the screen turns black. And yet, this last landscape view of the street is neither non-place, nor anonymous sculpture, to recall the Bechers. *Milchwald's* ending nods to the open road and the cinematic figure of the tramp at the end of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), as he and his companion waddle off down a dusty road in the American West. The film extends the image of the material street in an immaterial version as an idea, placing the

viewer in the realm of pictures. This has also a temporal dimension, when we apprehend the idea behind the image. By holding onto the external world, the camera in *Milchwald* renders a changing landscape to offer an exploratory view of place. Indeed, this is where the film thrives. The displacement of the American West to the eastern border region of Germany—a movement that is also a transition back in time—indicates that it is not a physical site to be discovered. The film locates the notion of the timeless West within the various traditions, including Hollywood, where it has been reinvented as a site of origin. Ultimately, the landscape views in *Milchwald* transcend local geography and take on the significance of openness and new beginnings.

The cinematic landscapes of the Berlin School tell the viewer very little about their referential context and place, even when the film is shot on location. And yet, the film positions the viewer vis-à-vis landscape in ways that foreground affective experiences and their mediation through landscape tradition. “The history of landscape painting,” according to W.J.T. Mitchell, can be described “as a quest for a pure painting, freed of all literary concerns and presentations” (“Imperial Landscape,” 13). The films of the Berlin School also fit into that tradition. By approaching and visualizing the film’s setting through earlier landscape representations, the film shifts the relation between site and representation (contained in the etymology of the word ‘landscape’) and appropriates the principle of the picturesque, which was developed in close proximity to artificial scenery. The film can then be seen as an equivalent of the “claude glass,” the optical device that enabled travelers to observe landscape as a picture that could then be contained, described, and copied. Without glorifying or harkening back to ideas of sublime or pastoral nature, the films attempt to chart the contemporary landscape and to create new and unexpected views with the help of the practices of the picturesque tradition. In doing so, the Berlin School extends that tradition into narrative film.

Chapter Three

Moving Still Life



Fig. 29. Series of stills taken from Christoph Hochhäusler's *Séance* (2009), published in *Liebling*, Nov./Dec. 2008, pp. 36-7.

For an editorial “Eine Sekunde aus dem Leben von” (One second in the life of), published by *Liebling* magazine in 2008, Christoph Hochhäusler contributed a series of 24 images and a short text. The text explains that the images—private photographs from the 1940s—are part of a stroboscopic memory sequence in his short film *Séance*. Films do not technically depict motion, but rather make use of the stroboscopic (flicker) and afterimage effects as a result of showing a series of individual images in quick succession to deceive the viewer into perceiving movement. Hochhäusler evokes this idea in his still image series. The repetition of images creates a rhythmic collage that challenges the idea that film is solely the domain of the moving image by focusing the viewer on the stillness of the single image.

Séance is Hochhäusler's contribution to the omnibus film project *Deutschland 09: 13 Kurze Filme zur Lage der Nation* (*Germany 09: 13 Short Films About the State of the Nation*, 2009), proposed by German filmmaker Tom Tykwer who asked fellow filmmakers: What is the state of Germany today? The idea behind the collaborative venture is intriguing. Thirty years after members of the New German Cinema joined forces to respond to the shocking events related to RAF terrorism and the social atmosphere of the time in the omnibus film *Deutschland im Herbst* (*Germany in Autumn*, 1978) and twenty years after the fall of the inner-German border, thirteen filmmakers contributed their perceptions of Germany. Without a controversial issue like the RAF terror of the seventies to comment on, they must present their views of a country that, at least on the surface, appears to be in good shape. The blend of biting satire, dramatic vignettes, and essayistic episodes is as diverse as the themes explored. For example, Dominik Graf's poetic photo-film on Berlin architecture reveals the pseudo-transparency of new buildings. Romuald Karmakar interviews an Iranian pornographer living in Germany. Hans Weingarter reflects on anti-terror laws. Nicolette Krebitz stages a fictive meeting of leftist intellectuals Susan Sontag, Ulrike Meinhof, and Helene Hegelmann. Wolfgang Becker depicts Germany as a run-down hospital. And Tom Tykwer looks into the life of a world-travelling businessman. Most contributions aim at the depiction of the social and political situation of present-day Germany, transitioning to the globalized world of the twenty-first century. Christoph Hochhäusler's contribution is different. Rather than focus on the depiction of German identity at a time of globalization, Hochhäusler's film takes memory, time, and space as its subject, making *Séance* one of Hochhäusler's most unusual films.

Much like the printed collage that appears in *Liebling*, the film unfolds in a series of discrete shots. Simply put, the film is a science-fiction story about relocating the earth's human

population after a nuclear catastrophe and the consequential loss of possessions and eventual and purposeful erasure of memories. It consists of alternating static shots and pans of countless inanimate, still objects in an apartment. The human figure or owner of the apartment is absent. The film begins with a black screen. We hear a gong and an eerie-sounding musical score. The sound transitions into the next frame, an abstract image with light and dark spots that seems to be an out-of-focus shot of a living room. The camera moves towards the center of the room and at the same time focuses in on a glass vessel with brown liquid into which a lighter colored liquid is poured. The camera movement stops. The frame of the static camera is now filled with the sloshing liquid browns, creating an abstract moving painting of sorts. Stylistically, the opening is a perfect example of what one might think of an experimental, non-narrative film in the tradition of the American avant-garde: images move in a series of abstract shapes and colors and a sense of meaning latent in its abstractness replaces a clear sense of plot. The opening also serves as an introduction to some of the central ideas and pleasures of experimental-film viewing, such as pushing the boundaries of film language, exploring new perspectives, defamiliarizing the seemingly familiar, and examining the medium of film itself. Indeed, the film's beginning encourages us to look more attentively.

What follows the opening are detailed depictions of inanimate objects—desks, books, photographs, bric-a-brac, tableware—all bearing testimony to the quotidian and uneventful. Writing in another context, Norman Bryson calls this type of focus *rhopography* or “the depiction of those things that lack importance, the unassuming material base of life that ‘importance’ constantly overlooks” (61). Bryson explains that the term derives from “*rhopos*, trivial objects, small wares, trifles” (61). He uses the term in order to characterize still-life painting—an art genre that directs attention away from the human figure and towards inanimate

objects for the viewer to contemplate. Further, Bryson describes still life in contrast to history painting: “While history painting is constructed around narrative, still life is the world minus its narrative or, better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest” (60). He links narrative’s capacity to the human subject, not the object. The object is silent. This silence also involves a lack of movement to create a sense of stillness that is, as Bryson argues, fatal to narrative: “The law of narrative is one of change: characters move from episode to episode, from ignorance to knowledge, from high estate to low or from low to high. Its generative principle is one of discontinuity: where states are continuously homeostatic, narrative is helpless. But still life pitches itself at a level of material existence where nothing exceptional occurs: there is wholesale eviction of the Event” (61). Bryson underscores that still life and narrative prove incompatible because still life attends to material details and eschews the human figure. Svetlana Alpers, in her landmark study of seventeenth-century Dutch art, contends that the Dutch still life offers “an art of describing,” in which “attention to the surface of the world described is achieved at the expense of the representation of narrative action” (xx-xxi). For both, Bryson and Alpers, the narrowness of still life’s scope and the superficiality of its attention disable any narrative potential. Roger Fry, in his discussion of Cézanne’s still life, goes even further. He argues that still life is purely aesthetic, containing no idea, interest, or emotion whatsoever, commenting that “it would be absurd to speak of the drama of fruit dishes” (42). And yet, recent art-historical scholarship on the still life, much like that on portraiture, explores how the former may in effect be dramatic and even hint at narrative. Peter Schwenger, for example, insists that still life is able to “generate narrative, be bound up with narrative,” arguing that the stillness of an object does not necessarily exclude the possibility of it representing time and narrative (141). In his analysis, he looks at literary narratives that are built up on the protagonist’s relations to still objects, thus contain narrative significance.

In art, the analysis of Laura Letinsky's still lifes, for example, introduces narrative to a place where, according to Bryson and Alpers, it does not belong. Letinsky's *Morning, and Melancholia* (1997-2002) is a series of still life photographs of the leftovers of daily meals, such as half-eaten sweets, dirty glasses, and wilted flowers abandoned on rumpled, stained, and crumb-strewn tabletops. Letinsky transforms these ordinary items into minimal, carefully balanced, but flatly understated object arrangements that evoke the pleasure of eating. Art historian Hanneke Grootenboer claims that Letinsky extends the still life genre by bringing in time (7). Whereas still life painters aim at conserving the object in an idealized state, Letinsky depicts duration and change in oxidized fruit peels to show the effects of time. She also visualizes the irreversibility of decline in contrast to the desired eternal life promised by the didactic and moralizing *vanitas* and *memento mori*—subgenres of still life as reflections of vanity, pleasures, goods, and obsessions with death. The painterly quality of her still lifes, with its subtle hues of color, is a result of long exposure time (around twenty minutes) and slow film speed (7). As a reflection of decay, according to Grootenboer, Letinsky's still lifes can then be understood as opposites of snapshot photography that aim at freezing time. But time and narrative, the sequence of events unfolding over time, are irreducibly durative. As a single slice removed from a timeline, a photograph is non-durative.



Fig. 30. Leftovers as photographic still life in Laura Letinsky's *Morning and Melancholia* #12 (1997).

Narrative in photography depends on context and discourse. The title of Letinsky's series, taken from Sigmund Freud's essay *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), creates a linguistic relationship with a theory or intellectual thought that is meant to cue the viewer when looking at and reading the work. In his essay, Freud discusses the two primary responses to loss: mourning, as a process of working through and letting go after the loss of a person or object, and melancholia, as a means of clinging to a lost object and one's internalization of that loss as personal failure. The melancholic embraces the mourning and its pain without letting go. This embrace turns the pain into a substitute for the lost object. The photograph of the leftovers alludes to the human absence after an event. It is a substitute that allows the release of an object. But the photograph is also an inadequate substitute because it is not real, but a representation on paper. In that sense, Letinsky's still lifes embody both of these responses to absence, mourning and melancholia. At the same time, the still lifes contemplate ways of seeing. They create and reform vision through a desire to produce a narrative, rather than a mere reflection of it.

Cinematic Rhopography

What happens when we bring the still life into a temporal structure like film? Indeed the logic of the still life implies the supremacy of stillness over movement, and that in turn requires the aesthetic power of contemplation. The choice of subject matter enhances the timelessness of the form. The still life in film as moving picture becomes a work of art in its own right, providing narratively a wealth of information about the material culture that characterizes a particular community (Tweedie 296). As Angela Dalle Vacche notes, however the still life also blocks those outside the frame: both the viewer and the characters in the film. Her discussion of Alain Cavalier's *Thérèse* (1986), a film about Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's life in a cloister, links the genre of still life painting to the humility of servants and the subordination of femininity—a reading that stems from a psychoanalytical point-of-view that makes the still life a space of women that is, in turn, uncanny for the male characters as well as for the viewer of the film. Dalle Vacche notes that the close-up shots in the film find pictorial equivalents in the work of seventeenth-century Dutch still life. She notes their significance to the exclusion of the viewer and suggests that “Cavalier's simple images acquire the richness of painting because the absence of complex actions allows the spectator's vision to linger over the surfaces.” And further, “the screen's frame is the only point of reference, just as a painting's frame regulates the composition from within. Cavalier's space is not a slice of a world that continues beyond the frame; rather, it announces itself as a self-contained area the spectator can only look at and never penetrate” (235). And yet, some filmmakers find strategies to encourage just the opposite. They enable the viewer's participation rather than observation, thus inflicting anything but a dissociate status on the viewer.

Harun Farocki's *Stilleben* (*Still Life*, 1997), for example, suggests an alternative to Bryson's and Dalle Vacche's understanding of still life as a genre that represents a world of autonomous objects that produces sensuous rather than mental pleasure. Film, like theoretical discourse, has mainly focused on human figures, themes, and conflicts (love, crime, and politics) rather than on the inanimate object world. There are many exceptions, especially in documentary and avant-garde cinema.³⁹ Farocki's film is one example. His filmic exploration of traditional still life is interested in the narrative qualities and the formal possibilities and limitations of the filmic image. His film explores still life and its inanimate objects as a continuation of today's advertisement. It thereby foregrounds what Alpers in her study sees as still life's growing interest in optics and ways of seeing – reflecting surfaces, frame-within-frame, world-within-world images, and the *tromp l'oeil* as strategies of deceiving and disorienting the viewer.

Stilleben opens with a series of extreme close-ups of two paintings by Dutch painter Pieter Aertsen, titled *A Meat Stall with the Holy Family Giving Alms* (1551) and *The Vegetable Seller* (1576). From the opening, these fragmented images charge the viewer with not merely accepting what is placed in her line of vision. In view are art-historically and religiously charged objects – fish, glasses filled with wine, and bread – and the symbolic relations among them. Each view emphasizes the displacement of human figures and the obsession with details of inanimate objects, while directing the viewer's attention to the production of meaning through filmic representation. A female voice-over narrator comments on the paintings and the details, which the camera singles out through extreme close-ups. For example, in the first part, the film

³⁹ One finds exceptions in 1920s "Querschnittsfilme"—films that describe daily lives, such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis*, 1927) and Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer's *Menschen am Sonntag* (*People on Sunday*, 1929)—and films associated with the American avant-garde, such as Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964) and Michael Snow's *Breakfast (Table Top Dolly)*, 1976).

formulates its central question through a reading of *The Vegetable Seller*, the painting of a woman next to a market stand of vegetables: “Was hat es damit auf sich, dass die unbelebten Dinge zur Hauptsache der Bilder werden?” (Why make the lifeless objects the main focus of the image?). Indeed, this is precisely the question of representation in still life: Do the objects stand for themselves or do they stand-in for something else? In the film, the narrator questions the symbolic charge of objects and she claims this rejection of transcendental ideas: “Ein Gefäß als Gefäß, ein Brot als Brot” (A drinking vessel as a drinking vessel, a bread as a bread.). And yet, how could even the most neutral depiction of an object prevent the viewer from interpreting and allegorizing it? We might understand the blatant profanity of the objects, and its refusal to stand for something else, as an act of deception.



Fig. 31. Close-up of a painted still life in Harun Farocki's *Stilleben* (1997).

As the film moves the viewer between close-up images of still-life paintings and behind-the-scenes footage of advertising shoots (for cheese, glasses, and a watch), the initial art-historical discourse gives way to a critique of advertisement and its use of painterly strategies. Danica van de Valde observes that the narrator's commentary follows John Berger's landmark 1972 television series and book *Ways of Seeing*, and yet immediately dismisses such readings.

Just as Berger was unable to look at a landscape painting by the British painter Thomas Gainsborough (*Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, 1750) without seeing the endorsement of property rights and the public whipping of potato thieves, so too is Farocki's narrator unable to dismiss the origin of still life painting in trade, scientific progress, colonial exploitation, and the bourgeois desire to mark status through the display of objects.⁴⁰ In order to make these claims, the narrator collapses the still life into a homogenous genre, reads it through the language of 20th-century advertising, and ignores variations in subject matter, regional emphasis, and patronage, which would distract from the film's neat line of analysis.⁴¹

The film continues to juxtapose the meticulous process of placement, lighting, and construction of the photo shot through repetitive, slow, semicircular tracking shots to repeatedly return the viewer to the painting. Aertsen's *Meat Stall* is an example of the so-called "inverted still life"—a painting in which the inanimate objects are placed prominently in the foreground, while the narrative elements and human figures of a religious scene are relegated to the background. Rather than reduce, replace, or eliminate the religious and symbolic charge in the painting, the film displaces it. The camera fragments the painting to the point of fetishization. As the narrator remarks, "The word fetish has returned and can now haunt any object." The film turns to the ethnographical writing of Marcel Mauss (1906), rather than the writings of Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud, who base their understanding of a fetishized object on its response to an absence. Even as the photographs work to psychologically connect the viewer (or consumer) to

⁴⁰ One sub-genre of the still life was even called "pronkstilleven"—the still life of ostentation.

⁴¹ These include, for example, the fact that the landscape genre also used the strategy of minimizing religious narrative to the background. It also ignores the fact that the still life was considered to be the lowest genre within the academic hierarchy of genres, that its origin can be traced back to Egyptian funerary images, and that avant-garde artists in the early 20th centuries appropriated the still life genre in order to destroy the image and value systems on which traditional painting was based.

the represented product as commodity, the actual work of the photographer follows religious rituals and enacts an obsessive devotion to an object, and that is precisely what the film aims to show. However, it does not simply submit to the allure of the fetishized object. Instead, the fragmented, close-up vision of the camera asks the viewer to consider the object as a provocation to thought and to question her own relationship with objects she consumes.

Stilleben is not simply a lesson in art history, nor a documentation of the advertisement process.⁴² Rather, the film highlights the complicit role of the film viewer and her way of seeing. Randall Halle calls Farocki “a metacritic of both the image and the society that produces these images” (58). Farocki began working as a filmmaker during the student unrest of the late 1960s. He also became involved in editing and writing for the acclaimed film journal *Filmkritik* in the 1970s, when filmmakers and scholars rediscovered the writings of Walter Benjamin and explored the loss of aura in art and the replacement of human identity and society with what Jean Baudrillard calls simulacra. So it is easy to see the still life’s appeal for the ever-didactic Farocki. It is a genre that produces repetition and a close-up view of a narrow range of motifs, while revealing interests in optics and picture theory as well as strategies for deceiving and disorienting the viewer.

Memory

Like *Stilleben*, *Séance* flouts a simple documentation of a process or place and representation of narrative. What begins in *Séance* as a science-fiction story about life on the

⁴² Thomas Elsaesser writes about Farocki’s approach to film that “the act of ‘documenting’ the contemporary world is guided also by different kinds of authorship, different strategies of probing and testing, and an agency that is at once forensic and pedagogic” (56).

moon becomes increasingly striking as a dogmatic narrator sentimentalizes the impact of material objects and memories. The centrality of language and narration in *Séance* challenges the notion that images are the film's primary focus. Certainly, voice-over narration in film is nothing new. It is most frequently used in documentaries to provide the viewer with relevant information. In narrative film, voice-over narration often works to convey a character's unspoken thoughts. Indeed, one way of understanding the connection between objects in *Séance* may be found in the voice-over narration. After the opening, a male voice recalls a chain of events about the resettlement of the world's population to the moon after a catastrophe. Omniscient and with an overarching point of view, he talks about past events in the future past tense. The narrator tells us: "So oft war das fünf vor zwölf zu hören gewesen, so oft die Katastrophe an die Wand gemalt, dass sie, als sie kam, leise und mit einer Macht, jenseits aller Vorstellung, stillschweigend dahingenommen wurde" ("The eleventh hour had so often been proclaimed, impending doom so often announced, that when it actually occurred, silently and powerful beyond all imagination, it was accepted quietly"). The use of visual metaphors ("gemalt, Vorstellung" in German; "painted, imagination" in English) expands the narration of catastrophe into the visual realm. But what catastrophe? The film's opening line introduces the story but also a sense of ambiguity. It also constitutes the visual construction of the film from static and moving picture.

Coinciding with film studies' recent preoccupation with the disappearing cinematic image, *Séance* is sensitive to a rich cultural history of the static and the moving images.⁴³ The film juxtaposes static shots of rooms in an apartment and arrangements of objects on tables and shelves that resemble compositions of painted still lifes with slow pans over and close-ups of

⁴³ See, for example, the apocalyptic announcements of the death of cinema in Godfrey Cheshire's *New York Press* article "The Death of Film/The Decay of Cinema" (1999), the "Death of Cinema" roadshow at MOMA in 2000, and Paolo Cherchi Usai's *The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age* (2001).

inanimate objects in the apartment, and photographs and photo books in particular. Rather than linger, the camera acknowledges the pictures in the apartment as if giving a brief overlook of what is present. The pictures include black and white photographs of concentration camps, film stills, scientific brain scans, photographic portraits by German artist Katja Stuke, landscape photographs by Italian artist Massimo Vitali and German artist Florian Maier Aiden, among others.⁴⁴ The camera pans over the various pictures, while the montage creates a series of images within images. Different camera angles, focal length, and overlays add distortions for an effect: to irritate the viewer's brief encounters with memory and death.



Fig. 32. “The ship containing all cultural goods that were considered worth saving had gone missing somewhere in outer space.” *Séance* (2009).

In its image-within-image series, *Séance* recalls the visual aesthetic of Chris Marker's seminal *La Jetée*, a short science fiction film made in 1962 and released in 1964. Marker identified the film as a “photo-roman,” a term that evokes its complex narrative structure. Simply put, the film is about a man marked by an “image” from his childhood. This lure of the memory-image, visualized in the film through a photograph of a woman, compels the man to return to the past. Only later does he understand, as the narrator tells us, that the image is of the

⁴⁴ The film provides a list of sources and artists in its credits at the end.

man's own death at the airport pier. Rather than relate death to the photograph as object, the film relates death to the act of seeing. The image-track consists primarily of still photographs that the film connects through straight cuts, fades, and dissolves. These filmic strategies deceive the eye of the viewer into perceiving movement within stillness. This impression of movement is further reinforced by the soundtrack, which consists of music, sound effects, dialogue, and voice-over narration. Hochhäusler explicitly brings the two films together, when the camera pans over *La Jetée*'s iconic image of the man wearing blinders with dangling electrodes, which immediately evokes the idea of time-travel experiments.⁴⁵ The blinders strip the man of his present, according to the narrator in *La Jetée*, allowing him to see differently, through a "third eye." Of course, this other way of seeing also exists for the film viewer. The viewer too is invited to remove herself from the present and travel through the time of the film.

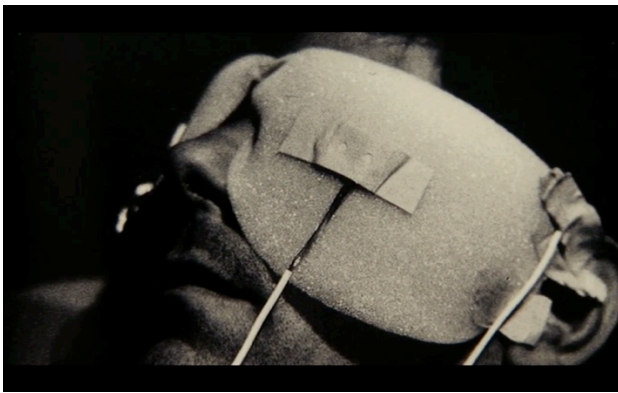


Fig. 33. "All moon-men and -women had to report to the Ministry of Reconstruction and undergo a complicated procedure." *Séance* (2009).

Instead of isolating a specific moment in time (the idea of the omnibus project), *Séance* presents a jumble of times and places where new selections and combinations are constantly

⁴⁵ The recent growth of critical literature on *La Jetée* suggests that the film continues to compel its viewers. See, for example, Victor Burgin's *The Remembered Film* (2004), Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (2005), Nora M. Alter's *Chris Marker* (2006), and Janet Harbot's *Chris Marker, La Jetée* (2009).

being made. This is a dynamic process. As the narrator connects the events into one linear reading, the camera pans over objects, moves from one object to the next. It mimics the way the narrator connects the events, which creates an illustrative adherence. For example, as the narrator tells of the constructions of the moon colony, the camera pans over book and photographs of construction sites. The camera, as if taking pleasure in the act of looking, explores the plasticity of the photographs as objects. Perusing the objects, the camera acknowledges various pictures by making them visible for a brief moment. Its play with presence and absence is also a play with the pleasure of the fetish. At one point, the camera even captures the bodily engagement with the pictures when it shows a hand turning the pages of the book. At the same time, the film insists on the fact that they are pictures—photographs and works of art. The pictures, like the objects in the apartment and the photographs are controlled and arrested by the attention of the camera and the narration.

About halfway through the film, the story takes memory and death as its subject by turning to one character in particular. One day, the narrator tells us, a woman wrote the word “Deutschland” in the lunar sand—a written representation of a memory—and died shortly thereafter. The narrator continues: Memories, like objects, become “useless” in the new technocracy, and therefore systematically controlled and erased in so-called séances. To the surprise of others, the woman had not attended the séances, and was thus the last person with memories of the past and life on earth. She refuses to take the path offered in favor of lingering in the nostalgic illusion of the past. For Svetlana Boym, nostalgia “is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” (xxii). This yearning for a home is also a yearning for a different time, “the time of our childhood” (xv). It involves a “rebell[ing] against modern idea of time, the time of history and progress” (xv). *Séance* certainly rebels against linear progression.

The static shots of object arrangements in the apartment and pans of various pictures transcend the notion of chronological time and produce instead a coexistence of past, present, and future. At this point, we see a striking arrangement of objects against a flat and dark background: a basket filled with chestnuts and a box filled with paper cases and a watch. As material reminders of death, clocks and shells are *memento mori*. The straight perspective of the static camera mimics photography, and more specifically a photograph of a painting. Its composition stands in direct lineage to the compositions of inanimate objects in the traditional still life, depicting timeless objects set against a plain background. The static camera creates an image within an image, marked by the absence of the human figure and, for a few seconds, by the absence of sound. But are we looking at a photograph or a painting? And what is the connection between “Deutschland” and the image? Rather than link memory and image, the film marks their disconnect. While the woman refuses to let go of her past and memory, the camera refers to the pictorial past and tradition and gives us a renewed look at the still life, that is, a cinematic still life.

Critical theory largely considers the similarity between memory, photography, and death. For example, Susan Sontag relates photography to still life’s *memento mori* tradition. She argues: “All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (15). Whereas Sontag addresses the act of taking the photograph, Siegfried Kracauer, 50 years earlier, relates the associations of photography, memory, and death to the viewer as a way to emphasize the stark contrast between information retained through memory, and that recorded as data in a photograph. In “Photography” (1927), he claims that a picture (and in his case a photograph of his deceased

grandmother) is unable to serve as a honest representation of the past the way a memory-image does, because a photograph shows either the eternalized living present or unselected information from the past: “Memories are retained because of their significance for that person. Thus they are organized according to a principle that is essentially different from the organizing principle of photography. Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory-images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance” (425). Likewise, *Séance* includes a connection between memory and the act of looking at objects. The woman’s memories, kept for their significance to her, are organized according to a principle that is essentially different from that of the photograph.



Fig. 34. “No one really knew what the strange word ‘Deutschland’ actually meant.” *Séance* (2009).

Séance explores memory and still life not only as a set of objects that testify to the past, but also as a way of seeing. The latter represents an inquiry into what is lost in the gaps between images as well as in the gaps between the image-track and the soundtrack. As the narrator seems to impose words onto the images, so the viewer connects the images with the words. In the text

accompanying the *Liebling* collage, Hochhäusler explains the viewer's responsibility in viewing the film and putting it together: "Trotz der entlegenen Prämisse wird der Film (nur) mit Bildern und Gegenständen der Vergangenheit erzählt, die sich in einer Berliner Wohnung angesammelt haben" ("Despite its remote premise, the film is told through pictures and objects from the past, accumulated in an apartment in Berlin") (36). While putting the burden of narrative on images and objects, he also stresses the narrator's role as a guiding voice in the very next sentence: "Den Mann, der dort wohnt, sehen wir nie, aber seine raunende Stimme führt uns durch die Geschichte und beleuchtet so einen geheimen Zusammenhang der Dinge. Er spielt Gott im Universum seiner Bilder und Objekte" ("We never see the man who lives there, but his murmuring voice leads through the story and illuminates a secret connection between things. He plays god in the universe of his pictures and objects") (36). Hochhäusler adds a final complication by placing the viewer in a more active and thoughtful relation to the film: "Aber am Ende sind es die Zuschauer, die den Film erschaffen" (In the end, it is the viewer who creates the film. 36). Tainted by his own subjectivity, the narrator is involved in recollecting and narrating the images and voices of those absent. The film manipulates the viewer into engaging in a similar process. The purpose of voice-over narration in *Séance* is not simply to provide discursive support to the images of inanimate objects on screen, but also to challenge the viewer's investment in what she sees.

Thematically, the relationship between *Séance* and *La Jetée* seems clear. Both films revel in the constructed nature of memory, cinematically represented through still lifes and voice-over narration. Both ground the viewer to the construction of the film and to the construction of narrative and nostalgia as opposed to the mere reflection thereof. Both shape the viewer's conception of how memories operate. What matters is what the viewer remembers and not what "really" happens. This aspect of memory influences the film's approach to images, especially

those images that do not clearly carry iconographic elements (when compared to *Stilleben*, for example). Deciphering and exposing their underlying meaning is less of a concern than the engagement of memory generated by the encounter between the image and the viewer's curiosity. *Séance* creates a series of open-ended still lifes that provide the viewer with the impetus and space necessary for constructing their own interpretations of present and future events.

The prominence of inanimate objects as mental space is also evident throughout the narrative features associated with the Berlin School. In Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag* (2001), for example, when the static camera fixes its view for extended periods of time on an empty bench surrounded by backyard greenery, or in the mirror-like surfaces of the pool and window fronts of a vacation home in Nicholas Wackerbarth's *Halbschatten* (2012) (appropriately entitled *Everyday Objects* in English), the narrative may seem to come to a halt. The sense of human absence in these shots activates a latent yet productive ambiguity. They indicate an inversion of hierarchies that makes the objects appear bigger and more significant than the characters, and thereby signals a sense of indifference towards them. In many ways then, they recall the careful arrangements of objects that we associate with the still life. The immobile camera and the lack of motion within the mise-en-scène provide an impression of stasis rather than movement. Certainly, these inanimate objects contain some narrative significance in terms of establishing the everyday physical environment (the table and the bench are both locations of the characters' gatherings, for example), and carry discreet suggestions of older symbols and allegorical meanings (mirrors carry the theme of *vanitas*). Rather than fetishize the object's sensuous materiality depicted by the film medium through close-ups, they present seemingly familiar objects to intense scrutiny. It is through the stillness of the image that the films address the viewer most directly, constituting a series of paradoxes that create desire rather than reflection.

The last part of this chapter looks at the still life in Angela Schanelec's feature *Nachmittag*. Specifically, it focuses on key moments when the narrative flow is arrested for an effect. In such moments, the moving image itself almost seems to freeze, presenting the contents of the frame to closer examination. Why does the camera hold onto objects in place? How do such moments of apparent stasis relate to the flow of film narrative and affect it? In traditional still life, the focus on the everyday is as much a commanding subject as it is a formal issue. Consequently, the use of seemingly ordinary objects persists, whether meaning derives from the decision to merely depict them as background or as symbol. When the arrangement of ordinary objects in a constructed setting of a narrative film is bracketed within the traditional genre of still life, what is added to its continued connection to historic terms and aesthetic conventions?

On the surface, *Séance* and *Nachmittag* could not be further apart in terms of genre, production, and form. Whereas *Séance* is a short film composed of shots no more than a few seconds in length, *Nachmittag* is a feature composed of long takes. And yet they do have similarities: the subject matter of both films is that of still life, and both films use the soundtrack to create emotional resonance. The most striking correspondence between *Séance* and *Nachmittag* is the focus on the subject's obsession with objects from the past. The still life calls attention to domestic objects and behaviors that seem so obvious that we take them for granted. This notion also runs through both *Séance* and *Nachmittag*.

Trained in theater and later at the DFFB under the supervision of Farocki, Schanelec is known for her minimalistic aesthetic. Other scholars have noted her preference for natural lighting and location shooting (oftentimes her friends' houses) over the dramaturgy of lighting and manipulation of settings. Her films are marked by limited cuts, with characters walking in and out of the static frame of long takes as if on a theatrical stage. The use of subtle non-diegetic music and on-location sound draws attention to the images and concentrates our viewing of the

film. On another level, she is also known for her collaboration with cinematographer Reinhold Vorschneider, who is also the director of photography in many other films associated with the Berlin School.⁴⁶ In her speech “To Light Itself,” for the Marburg Camera Award ceremony in 2013, Schanelec describes what made her interested in his camera work. She notes that his work is “composed of images that are solely indebted to the imagination.” And further, the way he shoots “gives the image a meaning that transcends what can be achieved via dialogue and plot.” Elsewhere, Vorschneider explains that giving the viewer freedom in viewing is most important to his work.⁴⁷ The resulting films of that collaboration present the viewer with only enough narrative so as to evoke the desire for more—that is, for more narrative action and for moving beyond everyday’s banality.

Memento Mori

In *Nachmittag*, Angela Schanelec uses the *memento mori* still life and its nuanced representation of—and allusions to—human preoccupations with absence, mistakes, failures, and death. Shot by Vorschneider, the film is based on Anton Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (1895), a portrayal of romantic and artistic conflicts between four characters. Filmed near the protagonist’s home located in the bourgeois district of Dahlem in Berlin, the film relies on minimalist means and defies grand narrative. It depicts three days in the life of the immediate family members of

⁴⁶ Most recently, Reinhold Vorschneider worked with Thomas Arslan on *Helle Nächte* (*Bright Nights*, 2017). He was also the cinematographer for Christoph Hochhäusler’s *Die Lügen der Sieger* (*Lies of the Victors*, 2014), Maria Speth’s *9 Leben* (*9 Lives*, 2011), Thomas Arslan’s *Im Schatten* (*In the Shadows*, 2010), and Benjamin Heisenberg’s *Der Räuber* (*The Robber*, 2010), among others.

⁴⁷ In 2013, Reinhold Vorschneider talked about his experience with working with Schanelec at a conference organized by *Deutsches Haus* at NYU and *The Museum of Modern Art*, entitled “The State We’re In: The Films of the Berliner Schule.”

Irene, a self-absorbed actress, who returns after a lengthy absence to her family home with her new lover, a successful writer. During her absence, her brother Alex, a former publisher, and her son Konstantin, who struggles with writing and with his love life, have been taking care of the house. Konstantin's love interest Agnes, who grew up next door, also returns home after a semester abroad. The film uses the backdrop of the house to explore the relations between the characters, and the relations between mother and son in particular, and to emphasize the repetition of their common past as a struggle for recognition and the inability to stop the passage of time.

The first scene establishes a space of play derived from theater. The film opens with a static view from the backstage, looking onto the theater stage and the viewers in the auditorium. An actress, presumably Irene, walks into the middle of the frame, stands, turns, and walks up to the dog on the right to pet it. Rather than perform, she appears to be waiting for something. So do the members of the audience. For the film viewer, the stillness of the scene and the display of static objects and bodies for an audience connect the theatrical space of the stage to the visual space of the still life. For the first three minutes of the film, we watch time pass in front of our eyes, while the diegetic audience direct their attention to the stage and, by extension, the film viewer. The view of the camera puts the film viewer in a privileged position, with access to the stage, but also the audience. As we watch in real time, we see the image change in front of our eyes. The shifting positions of objects and figures create a dynamic relation between presence and absence and foreground and background. Looking at the arrangements in time probes our patience. For the film viewer who might expect action and dialogue, the stasis is a problem. What is interesting then is that Schanelec recalls a much older, half-forgotten pictorial tradition, the still life, as a way of conditioning the viewer and dealing with that problem in cinema.



Fig. 35. A still rehearsal in Angela Schanelec's *Nachmittag* (2007).

The film takes its cue from Chekov's play, which opens with a play-within-a-play, written by the son with the intention of challenging the conventions of theatre with exaggerated emotions and expensive costumes to which his mother subscribes. As the actress is about to go on stage, she tells Konstantin that his play is difficult to act, that it has lifeless characters. Her lover later echoes her criticism when telling Konstantin that his characters are all dead. The audience, however, perceives the lifeless characters in Konstantin's plays not as a flaw, but as a kind of truth, representing the ghost-like state in which they function. Likewise, the film introduces its characters as lifeless. This moment of acting is referred to again later when Konstantin describes his mother as only being able to show affection when on stage. While pointing to the failure in her role as mother, we are reminded of the opening image, which lingers as an afterimage, and asked to identify something genuine, even in the realm of artifice. The film's engagement with still life poses questions of representational form. This is encapsulated in the first dialogue in the next scene. Following the image of the closed stage is a long shot of a lake with a view of a wooden platform. The lake represents in both Chekhov's

play and *Nachmittag* a more naturalistic and open place—a place of reflection, respite, and escape from the enclosing space of the family home. Here, Konstantin explains that he is always afraid to wake up his uncle during his afternoon nap. Konstantin brings to the viewer's attention the existential thoughts of the brevity and purpose of life that mark the dialogues throughout the film. The dialogue also encapsulates the film's aesthetic. Konstantin asks Alex what he believes in. Alex responds that he believes in "single moments." When in the next dialogue his mother asks about Alex, Konstantin tells her that he does not look back, but is rather "reduced to essentials." Each comment also describes the visual style of the film. Obviously, the dialogue between Konstantin and Alex tells us how to see the film. The reduction of essentials and depiction of moments in the life of the family ask the viewer to fill in the gaps.

Other commentators point out that Schanelec's films strengthen the viewer's faith in sonic rather than visual information. Characters frequently slip into and out of the tight and closed-in compositions of the static takes. Silhouettes and precise blocking often obscure their full view and prevent the viewer from gaining a sense of full access. Marco Abel argues that Schanelec places the viewer in a liminal state throughout her films, by obfuscating the characters' attempts to communicate with one another. In response to someone's effort to articulate their thoughts, characters often utter the lines "I don't understand" or "You don't understand me," as if to foreground the banality of communicative acts. In the end, writes Abel, "nothing seems to be given and no understanding results" (122). This apparent relationship between acoustic and visual information, sound and sight, in addition to the broken relations between characters, leads other scholars to interpret Schanelec's films as either a response to or, as Blake Williams observes, "a subtle polemic against Germany's reunification." Going further, he describes the film as an "allegorical expression of the country's re-conjoined psychology – still fractured from

the trauma of that initial severing, and now reeling to reassert some semblance of liberation amidst the looming spectre of neoliberalism.” But precisely because Schanelec’s narratives are so sparse, such a reading and understanding of her work as symbolic of else is misleading. Instead, it is the still life—the aspect that scholars have overlooked—that provides the historical form of seeing and representation and the film image that invokes that form and reworks it in a new context.

The link between the verbal language of dialogues and the pictorial language of still lifes is not arbitrary. Responses during conversations often sound from off-screen, pointing to an absence of the human figure. The subjects speak in ways that talk around issues rather than voice them directly and openly. In its way of withholding and delaying, as well as persisting and insisting on the image, the film goes against viewing expectations and thereby mirrors Chekhov’s play, which aimed at contrasting the melodrama of nineteenth-century theatre. The closeness to the play, however, is not a return to the nineteenth century but rather a precursor that generates the particular style of *Nachmittag*. And so is the still life.

The conversations between characters carry the language of *memento mori*. For example, upon her arrival, Irene notices the absence of the family’s rugs. Her startled reaction and exclamation that they are antiques, when Konstantin tells her that he sold them, suggests a commentary upon her material-mindedness. Yet, it also suggests a nostalgic attachment to remnants of the past, reminding her of the family home and her role as mother. Later, she will sit down at the dinner table and share her memory about her time in Paris when Konstantin was still a child. This memory of the past shared by mother and son, she explains, is her own. For Konstantin, however, this past is different. In his dialogues with Alex and Agnes, he repeatedly expresses that he wants to escape the passage of time. Other commentators align the repetitive,

stylized, and languid delivery of the dialogues to the mundaneness of bourgeois family life. The tension between the content of the conversation (absence, failure, and death) and its delivery, however, creates a space for the viewer to reflect.

In addition to the dialogue, music also links the film to the *memento mori* tradition. At key moments, we hear a subtle piano rendition of Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Bach, like his contemporary Johann Jacob Froberger, produced *memento mori* pieces dedicated to the reflections of passing relations and life. The piece is marked by spaces of silence left between transitions of notes to offer spaces of meditation on the subject of death by signaling duration and transition. The first time we hear the music, Irene walks down the stairs and turns her attention to someone off-screen. She jokingly asks if the person is practicing hara-kiri, a form of Japanese ritual suicide by disembowelment. She then quickly exits the frame, leaving the frame with an image of the room. The next cut shows her taking a bloody knife from Konstantin in a medium close-up. Like the spaces of silence in the music that give the listener a mental pause for contemplating tragedy and death, the camera delays its reaction to then show the aftermath of Konstantin's suicide attempt. The film withholds the drama of the situation. The release of tension between mother and son is only temporary and the situation quickly returns to normal (she asks him to change shirts and join them for dinner).



Fig. 36. *Memento mori* as mental space in *Nachmittag* (2007).

After Konstantin's attempt to end his life, the camera offers a moment of respite from shock and tragedy. The camera, positioned at the end of the table, at approximately the height of a seated individual, places the viewer as physically present and observant. The casualness of its placement is a sign of the camera's control and omniscience rather than its superficiality. On the lower left side of the image, glass water cups, plates, and other kitchen items are put in an arrangement that exceeds the frame. A bowl of cherries sits at the back of the table. This is the focal point of the shot. Next to the bowl is a vase with orange flowers. The bright color and size of the flowers against the white color of the wall dominate the image. For the next two minutes, we observe the objects being cleared by Agnes and Irene. Daily tasks like cleaning are often extracted from film narratives, or at least greatly reduced temporally by means of montage. In *Nachmittag*, this activity seems to take place in real time. The film offers an inversion of scale, by enlarging and foregrounding the presence of objects and thereby miniaturizing the drama of the family.

By placing the objects in the center of the frame, the film calls attention to what Angela Della Vacche calls the "unnoticed aspects of daily life" that "rearrange the scale of value and challenge hierarchies built into the act of looking" (239). In those moments, the film operates in the pictorial rather than solely narrative discourse. In addition to the metonymic value of objects as materials associated with the familiarity of the home, the objects also contain some narrative significance (they picked the cherries from the tree in the garden; the coffee and cups on the table on the terrace were placed there in preparation for an afternoon gathering; the uncle stays inside on a warm day to play cards with the neighbor's kid). As Peter Brooks has noted, the description of things like fruits, furniture, and decorative objects, in other words the subjects of still life, serves as a reality effect meant "to give a sense of the thereness of the physical world, as in a

still-life painting” (2005, 16). And as reality effects, these descriptions are often understood by narrative theory to constitute irrelevant digressions from “the real stuff of narrative literature” (Bal, 102).⁴⁸ This implies that readers read for, and film viewers engage in plot. Indeed, most foundational works of narratology have held that description constitutes narrative pause. Gérard Genette, for example, formulates descriptive pause as one extreme on the spectrum of narrative movement (93-94). Similarly, Seymour Chatman writes, “what happens in description is that the time line of the story is interrupted and frozen. Events are stopped, though our reading – or discourse-time – continues, and we look at the characters and the setting as at a *tableau vivant*” (119). In short, from a classical narratological perspective, nothing happens at all in the course of description.

Nachmittag challenges this understanding, inasmuch as its still-life moments do not interrupt the narrative. The images convey a sense of didacticism in that they endure and seem to encourage the viewer to look and imagine. More importantly, however, the filmic still life generates expectations and a surplus of attention to what is not in the image or at least not in the foreground, including off-screen sound and bodies in the background, oftentimes in diminished scenes viewed through internal frames such as windows that create images-within-images. Indeed, much of the film’s narrative weight is sustained by images resembling still lifes. These still lifes not only act as visual analogues to the narrative, but also move it. The still life with cherries in the aftermath of the suicide attempt can be seen as a small yet powerful moment of salvation from the tragic event. That moment of contemplation encourages us to look at the composition as a dynamic of removing and reinserting objects. While the table still life, like the still-life painting, “breaks with narrative scale of human importance” and “itches as a level of

⁴⁸ Perhaps, Bal has made an effort to complicate the position of description within narrative theory. In her recent edition of *Narratology*, she acknowledges that “the premise that descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula is somewhat problematic” (41).

material existence,” it does not do so (as Bryson claims) in order to stage a “wholesale eviction of the Event” (61). Rather, the visible image and material existence of the now empty table provides the setting by which to register the passage of time. The stillness of the objects, enhanced by the stasis and silence of Irene, turns the previously peopled kitchen into a desolate space.



Fig. 37. Reinserting the human figure in still life. *Nachmittag* (2007).

Most remarkably, perhaps, this scene ultimately reinserts the human figure into the still life composition. And yet, the insertion is only partial. As Irene steps back into the frame, the frame of the camera cuts off her face. She herself remains still for a minute. Her stasis and the seemingly dispassionate gaze of the camera turn her into one among many inanimate objects in the frame. This stillness connects back to the stage scene of the film’s opening. In such visual repetitions, the still lifes in *Nachmittag* do not just aspire to stillness or to be primarily understood spatially, but also temporally and capable of driving events.



Fig. 38. Obsolete objects. *Nachmittag* (2007).

Nachmittag draws upon the viewer's knowledge of more general and universal systems of visual significance, and more precisely, the cultural iconography of the *memento mori* still life. Fruits, flowers, and reflective surfaces serve as material reminders of mortality and death. Abandoned objects present another variation on the *memento mori*. After conversations between the characters, the camera turns its attention to inanimate objects. The shots of unused coffee mugs and clothes borrow from the tradition of still life. Their size within the frame complicates the positioning of characters. Indeed, the camera captures the noticeable lack of relations to human life that obviously seem to be missing. The human figure that was in the frame previously has now left the frame or is visually cut off. Each of these moments can be identified as *memento mori* within the film. And its variants further extend into conversations. At critical moments, the characters display a sense of nostalgia with abandoned, obsolete objects. The apparent abandonment of objects, in turn, parallels the impermanence of relations between characters and becomes a mirror of their own impermanence and desolate mental state. The antique rugs for Irene are one example. Towards the end of the film, Alex speaks of his former job as publisher. At the time, the house was filled with stacks of paper. The stacks, he says, offered comfort, and yet they eventually had to be thrown away. Konstantin is another example. In his conversation

with Agnes, we sense that she is ready to leave their relationship behind and move on to something new. After his failed attempt to keep her with him, Konstantin becomes obsessed with a necklace that she had left at his place but seems now misplaced. This remnant of the past, however, is now lost to him.

If we understand the table scene and the following seemingly descriptive shots of everyday objects within the historical framework of the *memento mori* still life, we find a visual and specifically pictorial exploration of absence and death. We can also sense through the repeated camera treatment of object arrangements a foreshadowing of the actual loss of the body at the film's conclusion. Bryson reminds us that the removal of the body is the "founding move" of the still life genre (60). The still lifes in *Nachmittag* demand the completion of a particular kind of narrative. Bound up with the inevitability of human mortality, these examples of *memento mori* drive the story to its only possible conclusion. Death as the end of life is the ultimate closure in classical narrative, as it seems to be in *Nachmittag*. Stillness and death have been constituent parts of the narrative since the beginning, which may be unusual for a feature film, but should come as no surprise.

The film breaks the ending into four distinct shots that mirror the beginning of the film. None of the characters speak for the last six minutes. Their silence turns the viewer's attention to the visible image. The last words we hear before the silence are Irene's, who shares her memories of being in Paris with her son. Regretfully, she exclaims: "Es gab keine Zeugen" ("There were no witnesses"). Her recollection is followed by a static shot of Konstantin in the bedroom. Sitting on the bed, his back is turned towards the viewer. Against the dark background, his figure is merely a silhouette. As we hear the sound of crinkling plastic, we imagine him placing one pill after another into his hand. Again, the image invites the viewer to step into the

space and to fill the stillness. Shot in real time, we witness, but also imagine, his attempt to end his life. The next shot is of Konstantin outside in the lake swimming towards the wooden platform. This second-to-last shot recalls the second shot at the film's beginning. Konstantin's stillness is followed by an image of the tree in motion. A shot of Irene outside the house against a green garden hedge ends the film. Devoid of discernable awareness, she stares into empty space (presumably at the lake and Konstantin), then turns around and walks out of the frame, leaving the viewer with a shot of the former background before the screen turns to black. The sound of the birds remains with the viewer as the credits begin to show.



Fig. 39. Seeing the ending. *Nachmittag* (2007).

At the end of the film, the viewer finds herself back at the theatrical stage. In Chekhov's play, Konstantin explains that he wants to portray "life not the way it is, or the way it should be, but the way it is in dreams." The actress responds: "But nothing happens in your play! It's all

one long speech. And I think a play ought to have a love story.” Like the play, *Nachmittag* features a love story and a story that ends in suicide. What distinguishes these works are the use of symbolism and self-conscious reflection on the nature of art. While we understand the first and last acts in Chekhov’s play as meta-reflections on theater, we are now able to see how *Nachmittag* works as a reflection on film, and specifically on film as an unexpected form of still life.

Before the film concludes, it once more offers an open image after a striking moment as a form of salvation from tragedy. It perversely does so while simultaneously leveling it, like the shots resembling still lifes throughout the film, against repeatedly emphasized remnants from a tangible, increasingly painful past. In this last image, Irene’s words remain with the viewer as a type of afterimage. The image asks the viewer to control her disbelief, not to suspend it. Death is the fulfillment of the promise made by the still life. Yet again, the stillness and absence of the human figure provokes her to occupy a mental space where she is inclined to think towards the story, even as the viewer’s eyes could simply surrender to the soothing movement of the leaves in the wind and the sound of the birds in the distance.

I started the chapter with Christoph Hochhäusler’s collage of still images to hint at the connections between film and the still life. Both share deceptive qualities and the paradox of movement in stillness. Rather than simply make the point about the movement from an outdated understanding of the still-life genre as purely descriptive, incapable of containing or propelling narrative, to a new understanding, I emphasized the movement of still life from painting and photography to film, and how the still life then changes along the way. The still life finds its way into the filmic examples by Harun Farocki, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Angela Schanelec,

where it guides the viewer through a range of emotions. In these films, the inanimate objects prove moving and adaptable. When they seem to proclaim a sense of nostalgia, for example, they also give way to mortality. And when they appear most static and desolate, they invite the viewer to enter and fill the apparent emptiness. The films of the Berlin School ultimately show still life's ability to move the narrative and in effect the viewer.

Chapter Four

Framing History

In 2015, Benjamin Heisenberg and his brother Emanuel, in collaboration with Elisophie Eulenberg, unveiled the permanent video installation *Brienner 45* for the Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism. National and international artists participated in the competition, “Reasons for the Rise of National Socialism in Munich—Consequences for the Present and Future.” The title of the installation refers to the address of the “Braunes Haus,” once the national headquarters of the National Socialist German Worker’s Party in Germany. Grey blocks containing up to four video monitors are scattered around the public, architectural space outside of the museum. Reminiscent of ruins or the remains of buildings, they call attention to the past and to the historical significance of the site. Despite their stasis, the arrangements of blocks give a sense of movement, appearing as if they are rising from the ground or sinking into it. In addition, several blocks are tilted and partially obscured. While the installation positions the viewer in relation to the past, it recalls the instability of that position at every turn.



Fig. 40. Heisenberg’s video installation *Brienner 45* highlights fragmentation.

The installation engages the problem of history and historical representation in terms of

vision and narration. The monitors show endless loops of soundless films, each three to six minutes in length. Heisenberg built the concept of the films on the principles of collage. A plurality of stories—texts from Nazi victims and perpetrators, both known and unknown—confront historic and contemporary images. These texts include, for example, a letter written by a fourteen-year-old boy that was found outside a concentration camp in Pustow; a speech by Adolf Hitler; a statement by George Elser, a man who attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler; and a 1942 speech by Thomas Mann, addressed to the German people. For every image, there is a word. In this regards, the installation recalls M. M. Bakhtin's idea of "heteroglossia." The term describes the conflicting plurality of voices in the discourse of the novel, which, according to Bakhtin, "must represent all the social and ideological voices of the era, that is, all the era's languages that have any claim of significance" (411). Heisenberg achieves this diversity through a complex frame-by-frame (picture-by-picture) composition of images and words that corresponds to the multilayered subject matter. The viewer registers image and word simultaneously. Entering an associative realm, the images—photographs, pictograms, and film stills—seem to simultaneously acknowledge and contradict the words. According to the press release, the jury praised the installation for its deconstruction of Nazi semantics, achieved by making contradictions visible and by creating irritating connections with the present. It found that the implementation of the narrative form is extremely demanding and at the same time has a strong emotional effect on the viewer, because the intensity of simultaneous signs makes it impossible for the viewer to follow a single story and a single static meaning. The productive irritation of customary ways of thinking and seeing keeps the viewer at a critical distance and forces her to approach the past and the stories from different angles.

The constant deferral of meaning in Heisenberg's short films is characteristic of allegory.

Allegory's operation depends upon the establishment of multiple levels of narrative.⁴⁹ Some critics, like Craig Owens, go so far as to suggest that photography is inescapably allegorical. In reference to Walter Benjamin, he writes that an allegory "is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete—an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expressions in the ruin" (70). The allegorical play within the image itself folds back into the scene of reference, since, as Owens further suggests, what is most significant about allegory is "its capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear" (68). Indeed, Heisenberg's work is about the restoration of the past and the production of stories, not a simple reconstruction of the past. What drives the imagination of the viewer is the recognition of images and words. The arrangement of images and words that make up a picture and narrative is implicitly linked to continuity and historical representation (as reconstruction), which the installation calls into question. Both the past and stories are recombined according to principles that derive not from chronology but rather from the power of association.

History Painting

The art genre most closely associated with allegory and storytelling is history. For centuries, history painting was considered the most important pictorial genre. Derived from the wider sense of the word *istoria* in Latin and Italian, the term "history painting" refers to narrative. History paintings are depictions of religious, mythological, allegorical, and historical subject matters. Traditionally, a multi-figured history painting depicts a dramatic and idealized moment in a story or an event taken from a text, like the Bible or classical mythology, rather than a

⁴⁹ For a study of allegory's meaning and changes of its meaning over time, see, for example, Jane K. Brown, *The Persistence of Allegory: Drama and Neoclassicism from Shakespeare to Wagner* (2007).

specific and static subject, as in a portrait or still life. In his treatise *De Pictura (On Painting)* of 1436, Leon Battista Alberti argues that multi-figured “narrative painting” was the noblest, and at the same time the most difficult form of art. As a visual form of *istoria*, it had the greatest potential to affect the viewer through detailed depictions of gestures and expressions of the exemplary deeds and struggles of moral figures. Michael Baxandall reads Alberti’s treatise as “a handbook in the active appreciation of painting for an unusual kind of informed humanist spectator” (129). History painting possesses a didactic, moralizing intent in that it conveys a sense of universalized societal values.



Fig. 41 and Fig. 42. Neo-classicist history paintings by Angelica Kaufmann (*Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi*, c. 1785) and Jacques-Louis David (*The Death of Marat*, 1793).

History painting reached its pinnacle in the mid-eighteenth century, around the time of the French Revolution, primarily through the theoretical deliberations of the French Academy, which deemed history painting the highest genre. With the rise of the salon culture of the progressive bourgeois class, new rationales for painting emerged, including patriotism and civic virtue, and self-sacrifice. Neo-classicist art is best known for its “masculine” paintings of bravery

and patriotism, expressions used to shape a sense of collective identity of a nation. Alex Potts explains that the style's development relied on the writings of German art scholar Johann Joachim Winckelmann and his publication of *Geschichte des Alterthums*: "From the moment of its publication in 1764, [it] had a far-reaching impact on the artistic and literary culture of the late Enlightenment. Its apologia for a purified and simplified Greek ideal in art played a formative role in that it intensified engagement with the sculpture of Greek and Roman antiquity we now designate as neoclassicism" (1). Winckelmann's focus on the noble ideals spoke most clearly to contemporary men, and especially painters of the time. For example, Jacques-Louis David's paintings depict scenes from classical sources, with figures sacrificing individual happiness for the betterment of the state. In David's *The Death of Marat* (1793), the subject is Jean-Paul Marat, a journalist and member of the National Assembly, an administrative body during the French Revolution. Killed in July 1793 by a member of an opposing party, David illuminates Marat in light from an invisible source, which renders the historical figure into a martyr. Through his incorporation of Christian iconography, historical actuality, and fiction, David's neo-classicist painting became the *pietà* of the French Revolution.⁵⁰ In contrast to these "masculine" paintings, the paintings by Swiss painter Angelica Kaufmann, a student of Winckelmann, show strong heroines from classical antiquity, elevating feminine virtues and ideals such as compassion and kindness. Paintings such as *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasure* (*Cornelia Mater Gracchorum*, c. 1785), based on the story of Cornelia, the wife of a prominent Roman citizen who has long been considered the ideal mother, depicts two very different women. The contrast between their ideals is shown through their treasures. While one

⁵⁰ Examples of royalist history scenes include Adolph Menzel's depictions of scenes from the former court of Frederick the Great—paintings that are largely determined by patriarchal interests of absolutist monarchy and regime. These dramatic and idealized compositions stand at the service of current national conscience and glorification of the past and its heroes.

points to her jewelry, the other points to her children. Through Kauffmann's use of such story and theme, the painting solidifies the character of Cornelia in the social consciousness of the viewer as a figure of Enlightenment—the “good mother” devoted to her children and their education.⁵¹

Absorption

At the time, French critic Denis Diderot, in his commentary on art salons, articulated the connection between history painting and the concept of the *tableau*—a large-scale, self-contained depiction of a scene that transfixes the viewer in front of the painting at a heightened and centered concentration. Drawing from Diderot, art historian Michael Fried describes an affective relation present in early-to-mid 1750s painting in France known as absorption. Fried introduced the notion of absorption to designate the transition from the immersive world of realist painting to the notion of theatricality in modern art, minimalism, and the exhibition of mere “objecthood.” The figures in the earlier paintings, according to Fried, intentionally ignore the viewer by focusing intensely on an object in the painting. For example, *The Card Castle* (Jean-Baptiste-Simon Chardin, 1737) depicts a figure engaged in a game of cards. Further, the viewer participating in this concentration is presented as a beholder – or, following the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of “behold,” one that is “held by,” “kept hold of,” or “retained.” He writes that “the painter's task was above all to reach the beholder's soul by way of his eyes” and that “a painting must attract, arrest, and enthrall the beholder” (92). Diderot's ideal for painting “rested ultimately upon the supreme fiction that the beholder did not exist, that he was

⁵¹ The story of Cornelia is recorded in a number of classical texts, including Plutarch's *Life of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus*. For more information on the connection between the patron and the subject matter of the paintings, see Heidi Strobel, “Royal ‘Matronage’ of Women Artists in the late 18th Century,” *Woman's Art Journal* vol. 26, no. 2, Fall 2005-Winter 2006.

not really there, standing before the canvas; and that the dramatic representation of action and passion, and the causal and instantaneous mode of unity that came with it, provided the best available medium for establishing that fiction in the painting itself.” (Fried, 103). The fully realized *tableau* thus creates an illusion of totality based on its disregard of the viewer, drawing her in and mentally engaging her as a beholder into an intense focus on the work.



Fig. 43. Figure absorbed in everyday activity. Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Card Castle*, 1737.

The crisis and fragmentation of the bourgeois class in the nineteenth century and the semantic confusion between *istoria* (story) and history (past) brings about the fragmentation of history painting. In the 1860s, the concept of the *tableau* reached a point of crisis. Édouard Manet, in his desire to make paintings that were realistic rather than idealistic, famously rejected the concept of the distancing *tableau* as it had been understood by Diderot. His paintings show figures facing, perhaps even challenging the viewer. At the same time, the movement known as historicism—the adaptation of artistic styles and conventions used in the era depicted in the painting—added to the confusion. With the increasing demand that paintings depicting historical subject matter should be “heiter und mythenleer” (cheerful and emptied of myth, Robert Vischer) in order to convey a realistic description devoted to imitation, two other formats replace the neo-

classicist *exemplum virtutis*, a painting of courage and virtue: the *tableau d'histoire*—, a large-scale painting that pursues description, however, at the expense of idealistic portrayal and aesthetic emotion—and the historical panorama—a painting in the round that creates effects of sensory immersion. With its subjectivism and formalist aesthetic, modernism eventually abandons the “literary” and the notion of subject matter in the name of art’s autonomy and theatricality. With the invention of the photographic camera and its ability to quickly produce and distribute forms of documentation perceived as more reliable and less subjective, history painting temporarily disappeared.⁵² Contemporary artists, however, reclaim the genre and format, creating by various means large-scale *tableaux* that critically allude to recent political and historical events, but also the absorptive relation between the picture and the viewer as beholder.



Fig. 44. Kiefer uses oil, emulsion, shellac, charcoal, and powdered paint on burlap to convey a grand vision of history in *Böhmen liegt am Meer* (*Bohemia Lies By the Sea*, 1996).

Several examples are particularly important for the filmmakers of the Berlin School.

Anselm Kiefer’s works engage issues of Nazi history, Nordic mythology, and memory. In art criticism, it is commonplace to describe his work as theatrical, alienating the viewer in front of

⁵² History painting reemerged as Social Realism during the Great Depression in the 1930s, a form of large-scale and heroic figurative painting once an exemplar of European bourgeois value. Women might not regret the genre’s disappearance since both history and painting have been dominated by patriarchal interest.

the canvas. The sheer size and monumentality of the paintings, which incorporate materials such as straw, ash, clay, and lead, effectively dwarf the viewer and demand to be seen. Rather than memorialize heroism and illustrate myths or historical events, Kiefer reinterprets them by adding layers of contradictory and even controversial meaning, while underlying ruin and fragmentation as an inevitable characteristic of history. At the heart of Kiefer's paintings referring to German history is the question of how this heritage is to be represented by a post-war generation "whose memory is without recollection because the personal remembrance of the Nazi years are absent" (Arasse, 74). Arasse suggests that Kiefer's work is not a work "of" memory, but a work "on" memory. Kiefer claims the memory of the past through others' objects, texts, and images. Furthermore, according to Andreas Huyssen, Kiefer's thematization of German history is expressed not by stereotyping "the German," but rather through the work's ambiguity, particularly in the context of German society after Auschwitz. His work does not explore and exploit the power of mythical images without reflecting on the ambivalent nature of such mystifications at a time when German culture was positively "haunted by images which in turn produce haunted images" (28). By recognizing an ambivalence between fascination and horror, Huyssen shifts the attention from the work itself to the ambiguous experience of the viewer in the face of a historical space now emptied of its actors.



Fig. 45. Richter's *September* (2005) depicts the perception of the attacks on the World Trade Center.

More recently, Gerhard Richter's painting *September* (2005) reacts to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. Robert Storr points out that Richter resists enlarging his canvas to the scope of the event—the clichéd move in history painting—but instead finds meaning on a more modest, perhaps even domestic scale. *September* is close to the size and shape of a flat-screen TV, matching the size of the apparatus through which we saw the event rather than the size of the event itself. The subject of *September* is the impossibility of condensing the scale and scope of the attack into art, or into any form of summation. Rather than try to illustrate the past event, the painting comments on its time of perception. And rather than have photography emulate painting, as has been the case with Pictorialism, Richter's painting imitates the effect of instantaneity, contingency, and lack of composition that characterizes press photography and video journalism. It thereby draws attention to the fragility of photography's claim to authority over the representation of the "real" based on a narrow set of conventions.

"Everyday" Tableau

In the 1989 catalogues for two major art exhibitions, *Une autre objectivité* at the Centre

National des Arts Plastiques in Paris and *Foto-Kunst* at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, art historian and critic Jean-François Chevrier launched the idea of a *tableau form* in photography—a key notion in photographic theory of the late twentieth century. Chevrier draws attention to the photographs of artists such as Jeff Wall, Thomas Ruff, and Andreas Gursky, who, in the 1970s, started making larger photographs designed to hang on the wall and visually dominate it. They began exploring a rather different idea of the photograph as picture. For them, pictures were not simply objects to be overthrown, ironized, or parodied. Rather, in their connection with the pictorial tradition, photography provided a way of overcoming spectacle and of making pictures that reconnected with largely forgotten modes of picturing inherited from painting but repressed by the iconoclasm of the avant-gardes.

Jeff Wall is a key example for scholarship on the *tableau* as well as for the Berlin School. “A picture is something that is difficult to define,” according to Wall, “but we know that what we call a picture, in the Western tradition of art at least, is something extremely compelling and that the standards for it, established both by painters, photographers and so on, are very high. Therefore, a good picture is difficult to make” (Campany). In an interview with Benjamin Heisenberg, one of the key figures of the Berlin School, Wall explains that what fascinates about a good picture is that which is absent, invisible—the inner world (“*Innenwelt*”) without clear meaning, without a beginning, a middle, and an end, and without an obvious function other than that of eliciting an experience from the viewer.⁵³ Both statements relate to Chevrier’s idea of the photograph as *tableau*. While the term *tableau* may connote staging or something overtly

⁵³ Asked about what makes a good picture, Wall tells Heisenberg: “Das, was man an Bildern liebt, sind die Dinge, die fehlen, die einem entweichen. Diese Faszination ist wirklich wichtig—die Faszination für den unsichtbaren Teil. Weniger gute Bilder haben keine solche *Innenwelt*. Man weiss, was vor und nach dem dargestellten Moment passiert ist. Diese Art von Bildern hat eine Bedeutung, eine Funktion, wohingegen künstlerische Bilder keine Funktion haben, ausser der, eine spezielle Erfahrung auszulösen” (303; emphasis added).

theatrical, it may not need to involve any of that.

David Campany suggests that a photograph is apprehended as a *tableau* if it is seen, by whatever means, as an internally organized image that compels on the basis of that organization: “It may be documentary in origin or highly staged, but what is important is that the mode of attention and aesthetic judgment solicited by the *tableau* is itself a way of ‘artificing’ it.” The *tableau* always has, at least in part, an ideal or promise (Chevier, 2003, 113). But when it appears in photography, the tableau produces a tension between the image’s status as evidence and trace, which locates it in the past, and its pictorial organization, which conjures an imaginary, contemplative dimension.



Fig. 46. Jean-Louis Théodore Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa* (*Le Radeau de la Méduse*, 1818-19).



Fig. 47. Jeff Wall's *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After An Ambush of a Red Army Patrol, Near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)*.

Wall's large-scale photographs conjure moments of strange resonance, mixing art historical references with subtle conceptual strategies and juxtapositions. For example, *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After An Ambush of a Red Army Patrol, Near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)* shows an intricate fictional scene that resembles at once a painting of war and a still from a horror film. Staged in several parts, the photograph depicts a battlefield with soldiers coming back to life. The absence of the horizon closes them into a crater, giving them no escape. The brighter colors of the faces and blood against the dark monochromatic dirt and rocks attract the viewer's eye to the bloodied faces. Their expressions show a range of emotional responses to their transcendence, ranging from amusement to confusion. Thierry de Duve notes that *Dead Troops Talk* contains allusions to the *Raft of the Medusa*, from 1819 (36). In his neo-classicist painting, which depicts the aftermath of the wreck of the French naval frigate *Méduse*, Jean-Louis Théodore Géricault focuses on the contrast of life and death, hope and pessimism. On the low end of the raft, figures are desperate in the face of death, while the figures at the high end are hopeful at the sight of a ship on the horizon. Wall's photograph, too, contains a contrast. He

shows soldiers who are all dead, and yet they appear to be laughing and talking with each other, as if freed from their violent responsibilities as soldiers.

Dead Troops Talk depicts a war scene, but it also stands in contrast to documentary war photography. As Susan Sontag writes: “Pictures of hellish events seem more authentic when they don’t have the look that comes from being ‘properly’ lighted and composed, because the photographer is either an amateur or—just as serviceable—has adopted one of the several familiar anti-art styles” (26-7). Looking at the *tableau*, it becomes clear that Wall does not trick the viewer into thinking this is a genuine war photograph. The sheer scale and detail and the fact that it is meant for museum walls attests to this, which in turn makes it unacceptable to be seen in the news media. It would, however, be acceptable to see in mainstream cinema. In fact, many films reenact past events, including war. Wall thus makes use of cinematic strategies. Elsewhere, he even claims that his work is “cinematographic” (“Cinematography: A Prologue, 2005,” 259). The outstretched format of the photograph printed on transparency and displayed in a light box mimics the look of film reflected on the screen. In addition, the men depicted are not only actors in an artificial space (Wall’s studio), but also a world of fantasy (even though they are dead, they continue to talk). Wall employs the visual methods of fictional representation (historical painting and cinema) in order to comment on the failure of documentary war photography.



Fig. 48. Jeff Wall’s sixteen-foot-long *tableau Restoration* (1993).

In many ways, Wall invests contemporary economic and social issues with the importance of history painting. To give another example, *Restoration* (1993) shows conservators in the process of working on the restoration of a panoramic painting, known as the *Bourbaki Panorama* (1881) of the Franco-Prussian War. Panoramas flourished in the nineteenth century as a popular form of public attraction, satisfying a desire for an overall fictional and illusory experience. Visitors to a panorama were not deceived, but rather suspended their disbelief in order to contemplate the image surrounding them. In this case, the painting depicts a defeated army receiving asylum and assistance from the army, and the citizens, of another country. Wall points out that it is not, in contrast to other historical war representations, a spectacle of victory (92). The title of the *tableau* refers not only to the historical battle scene depicted in the panoramic painting, but also to the literal restoration of the painting depicted by the photograph. Looking at the composition of the photograph, we see several restorers engaged in different activities within the panorama, which serves as an architectural space surrounding them. On the left, two people in the back appear to be talking, while on the right, one is working, and another is surrounded by her tools and stares into the distance towards the other half of the panorama, which remains off-frame and out of sight for the viewer. This division, between framing and de-framing, and between the visible and invisible, places the viewer at once inside and outside of the depicted scene. Wall's *tableau* thereby connects to the particular formal conventions of seventeenth-century Dutch interior art, also known as genre painting, which depicts scenes from everyday life. The viewer is given access to domestic spaces, the social and gendered structures of daily living as seen through windows and doors that work to frame the figures. The paintings also introduce a play between perceptual qualities: foreground and background, interior and exterior, and closure and openness. For example, Nicolaes Maes's famous eavesdropper series, he thematizes the tension between private and public, and secrecy and disclosure, through

depictions of figures in liminal spaces of doorways in the moment of listening in on conversations that remains out of their sight. Besides reflecting the figure as a liminal figure within the domestic space, the painting also self-reflexively examines the space as a picture, a concept reinforced by framing a fragment of life alongside a multiplication of inner frames (windows, doors, and pictures on the walls). Georgina Cole writes that these figures appear in theatrical poses between the two worlds, always “equally protagonist and beholder, spectacle and spectator, both within and without the pictorial narrative” (20). In *Restoration*, we see a similar depiction. The division of space into various platforms enables a play on staging and framing and on the visible and invisible. Further, it is telling that both the restorers of the painting in Wall’s tableau and those assisting the soldiers in the historical panorama are women. Positioned between the space of the panoramic painting and Wall’s photographic camera, she mediates between different historical periods, perspectival systems, and means of production. The restaging of compositional elements in a contemporary setting queries the relationship of women, history, and production.

Though distinct in their approaches, Heisenberg’s installation, Kiefer’s and Richter’s paintings, and Wall’s photography all take certain formal and thematic elements from the tradition of history painting. They also question the relation between the construction of pictorial space and the positioning of the viewer. That is, they explore how history – as both the past and a story – is perceived, rather than what it “is.” Their works refer to a history that has been rendered by media: staged, distorted, and fragmented. Ideally, as is the case with traditional history painting, the viewer’s assumptions and associations structure the work and her collective memory completes it. This practice conveys an awareness of history painting as a tradition, but also the recent history *of* painting, and of image making more generally. Indeed, all these works return to the aim of history painting. They share an allegorical vision that does not convey

authenticity but instead pleases the eye and stimulates the mind of the viewer. To consider their works as a kind of “history painting” requires an understanding of how they present the viewer with an allegorization of history, in which time is an effect of the technical media (film collage and photography). Some might see their work, and Wall’s in particular, as a simple repetition of old themes, or perhaps even a form of regression. Yet, even if their works are manifestations of regression, they might say more about the present inability of art to progress beyond its current restrictions. Their work, however, also restores and thereby challenges an art historical discourse virtually forgotten in prior art practices; through the foregrounding of the inherent duality of absorption and theatricality they effectively underline the *tableau* aesthetic.

The examples are particularly important to filmmakers of the Berlin School who work with history. Christian Petzold’s 2012 film *Barbara* was the first feature film associated with the Berlin School to be set in the past. For many, this turn to the past came as a surprise since previously all films associated with the Berlin School had unfolded in the contemporary moment. Continuing with his examination of the past, Petzold set his next project, *Phoenix* (2014), in the aftermath of World War II. The film follows a concentration camp survivor returning to Berlin. Fellow Berlin School filmmakers were quick to follow suit. Thomas Arslan’s *Gold* (2012) centers on a determined, independent woman who journeys with a group of German immigrants to the Canadian gold fields of the Klondike gold rush. Jessica Hausner’s *Amour Fou* (2014) takes place at the height of the Romantic era in Berlin and focuses on the friendship and double suicide of Henriette Vogel and the fatalistic writer Heinrich von Kleist. And Christoph Hochhäusler’s current project, *Je T’Ai Vu Sourire*, set in occupied France at the end of WWII, tells the story of a woman who develops photographs for German soldiers.⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that the protagonists

⁵⁴ Christoph Hochhäusler reflects on the importance of giving access to the world of everydayness and domesticity when working with historical subject matter. He speaks of the

of these films are all women in liminal situations.⁵⁵ As critics push for greater representation of women both in front of and behind the camera, the filmmakers of the Berlin School restore women to film history.

Why does the Berlin School turn to the past? The idea that “representations of the past are motivated and shaped by present concerns” guides Anton Kaes’s discussion of German filmmakers’ attempts to come to terms with Germany’s stigmatized history. In his seminal study of the socially interpretative function of film as a reflection of German society, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (1989), Kaes turns to the New German Cinema of the mid-1960s through the 1980s. He claims that the motivations for turning to the past are bound up in personal memory and a yearning for national identity. Responding to the absence of the Nazi past in Heimatfilms of the 1950s, which favored nostalgic glorification of rural life, the New German Cinema confronted this collective amnesia as a response to the cultural and political crisis surrounding the RAF terrorist attacks. To support his claim, Kaes discusses five exemplary films by Hans Jürgen Syberberg, Rainer Maria Fassbinder, Helma Sanders-Brahms, Alexander Kluge, and Edgar Reitz. Kaes points out that Sanders-Brahms and Margarethe von Trotta were closely aligned with the genre of the melodrama, as were their male counterparts, Edgar Reitz

“Küchenperspektive” (“kitchen perspective”): “In der Bibel gibt es die Geschichte von Martha und Maria. Martha hantiert in der Küche, Maria beteiligt sich nicht an der Hausarbeit, hört Jesus direkt zu. Martha beklagt sich, aber Jesus verteidigt Maria, kritisiert Marthas falsche Prioritäten. Als Geschichtenerzähler würde ich dagegen Martha recht geben. Die Küchenperspektive auf die Geschichte ist die einzig richtige, weil das Echo großer Ereignisse den vertrauten Maßstab, die alltäglichen Verrichtungen braucht. Mein (hoffentlich) nächster Film erzählt von der deutschen Besatzung in Frankreich 1941 aus so einer ‘Küchenperspektive’” (“Re: Fragen zu Filmen und Arbeit bei Revolver.” 1 April 2015).

⁵⁵ In fact, the protagonists of films associated with the Berlin School are almost invariably women. Several films have mothers as pivotal characters. See, for example, Maria Speth’s *Töchter* (*Daughters*, 2014) and *Madonnen* (*Madonnas*, 2007), Ulrich Köhler’s *Am Montag kommen die Fenster* (*Windows on Monday*, 2006), and Henner Winckler’s *Lucy* (2006).

and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.⁵⁶ In the 1980s, scholars considered melodrama a women's genre because of its historical popularity with female audiences and the spectatorial engagement it was believed to offer. Although these assumptions have since been nuanced or even challenged, it is important to stress their importance for German film culture at the time. In light of the various links between women and the domestic sphere, melodrama seemed an appropriate form for exploring historical issues from female-centered perspectives and for providing space for women's voices and experiences.

How interesting, then, that the Berlin School exhibits both thematic and aesthetic similarities with the New German Cinema despite the fact that they have no personal recollection of the history they depict in their films. They did, however, grow up surrounded by images of German history (and not just films). Kaes demonstrates how postwar German films reconstitute the viewer's sense of the past:

A memory preserved in filmed images does not vanish, but the sheer mass of historical images transmitted by today's media weakens the link between public memory and personal experience. The past is in danger of becoming a rapidly expanding collection of images, easily retrievable but isolated from time and space, available in an eternal present by pushing the button on the remote control. History thus returns forever—as film. Innumerable Westerns have made the Wild West a movie myth. As the Hitler era slowly passes from the realm of experiences and personal memory into the realm of images, will it also become a mere movie myth? (198)

Inasmuch as the past is dissolved and reconstituted by the cinematic images that replace it, the

⁵⁶ Melodrama was also tied to an autobiographical impulse of female filmmakers that their male counterparts left largely unexplored.

Berlin School expresses a renewed reflection on history as not only memory and narrative, but also – more importantly perhaps – as a picture or *tableau* that must be seen. This is a new development in its own right.

Cinematic Tableau

When discussing the *tableau* form in film, scholars often refer to theater. The *tableau vivant* is the staging of well-known paintings with posed performers. Borrowed from stage melodrama, *tableaux vivants* enabled early filmmakers to punctuate the action, emphasize dramatic situations, and convey intense emotions in non-verbal form (Jacobs, 92). When they are filmed as frontal takes with a more or less static camera meeting point of several modes of representation is created – drama, sculpture, and painting – that is most suggestive for an analysis of intermediality (Peucker 295). For this reason, *tableaux vivants* most frequently appear in films with strong ties to the theater or the visual arts. In his analysis of the early films by Carl Theodor Dryer, film scholar David Bordwell explains:

As image and structural principle the tableau is firmly tied to a tradition of what we might call *chamber art*. Historically, the stylistic premises of this tradition are the perspective discoveries of quattrocento painting and theater, whereby space is conceived as a cube to be filled by human figures. With the increasing secularization of subject matter, in northern baroque painting, chambers housing the Virgin or various saints were replaced by everyday interiors, the bedrooms, parlors, and kitchens of bourgeois homes. (41-2)

With the emphasis on continuity editing in narrative film, the use of *tableaux* as a synthesis of still pictures with moving images diminished. Yet, the fascination with *tableaux* and depictions

of interior spaces, or what Bordwell calls “chamber art,” remains. A moveable form (unlike the fresco that depends on architecture), the *tableau* finds its way into film, and European and American avant-garde cinemas in particular. Later filmmakers employ stillness to create a sense of disparity between stasis and movement, past and present. As Kaes writes about the *tableau* in Syberberg’s *Hitler, a Film from Germany*:

Past events and characters, removed from their original contexts, become quotable set pieces in an aesthetic structure that follows its own laws. History is “produced” (in both meanings of the word) and exhibited in the form of a “show,” appearing as a revue that consists of a number of self-contained sketches. Syberberg is less interested in constructs of history that deal with cause and effect than in evoking moods in which interconnections are recognized. (45)

In his discussion of Syberberg’s provocative restaging of German history in postmodern *tableaux*, Kaes refers to theater. Film calls into question the very possibility of historic representation. Association and anachronism undermine the illusion of reference and continuity in narrated history: “Historical time is stopped and recombined according to principles that derive not from chronology but the power of association. Visual and aural leitmotifs recur throughout the film, often as only one layer of several on the soundtrack or in the image construction” (45). He concludes that “Syberberg places himself in the long tradition of German writers and artists – Lessing, Goethe, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Wagner, Tucholsky – who designed an imaginary, idealized Germany in order to contrast it with the unbearable real Germany” (72). In his discussion of the *tableau* form, however, the connection to the pictorial arts is notably missing. The cinematic *tableau* offers not only a relevant perspective on the cultural anthropology of space, but also a reflexive structure of the in-between, which defines its aesthetic.



Fig. 49. Opening *tableau* in Brüggemann's *Kreuzweg* (*Stations of the Cross*, 2014).

Dietrich Brüggemann's modern-day drama *Kreuzweg* (*Stations of the Cross*, 2014) provides a recent example of *tableaux* in a feature film. The story concerns a girl, Maria, who lives within a strict Catholic community. Maria oscillates between teenage impulses and extreme piety. Though drawn romantically to a boy at school, she is also drawn towards self-denial and self-abnegation as a means of winning God's favor on behalf of her autistic brother. The film follows the fourteen stations of the cross—Jesus's journey to Golgotha from being condemned to death to being laid in his tomb, as told in the Bible—and is organized into fourteen static, single-shot *tableaux*, each introduced by an intertitle.⁵⁷ The film opens with a title card that reads "1. Jesus is condemned to death." This is followed by a fifteen-minute static long shot of a group of teenagers engaged in a conversation with a priest, while seated together at a table in what appears to be a box-like interior. When asked about the form, Brüggemann refers to "The

⁵⁷ The structure is reminiscent of silent film. It also follows the structure of Jean-Luc Godard's *My Life to Live: A Film in Twelve Scenes* (*Vivre Sa Vie: Film en Douze Tableaux*, 1962). Influenced by Bertolt Brecht's theory of epic theatre, Godard uses several alienating effects: intertitles introduce each *tableau*, jump cuts disrupt the editing flow, and characters speak directly to the camera.

uncompromised gaze of an immobile camera, a space that one always sees as a whole, an ensemble of actors who are choreographed as in the theater and who can command this space through a camera that covers everything from long shot to close-up. We don't need to take the viewers by the hand through resolution and editing; instead, we allow them to let their eyes wander and perceive simultaneously" (press kit, 4). Although Brüggemann points to theater, it is the history and tradition of Christian art and Dutch interior art that guides the viewer's "wandering eyes." The intertitle introduces the theme of the opening *tableaux* and instructs us on how to view it (as the first station of the station of the cross). But the composition also clearly relies on established viewing habits by drawing on the history and certain traditions of painting. Distinct lighting from an off-frame source places the focal point on the priest and the girl to his right. The composition recalls Leonardo Da Vinci's mural painting *The Last Supper* (*Il Cenacolo*, around 1495), and represents the scene of Jesus's last supper with his disciples, as told in the Gospel of John. In *Kreuzweg*, the group's conversation appears to be isolated and closely interconnected within the frame of the picture. The fact that some students have their backs towards us underlines that impression. The formal rigor and restriction of the *tableau* (framed composition, frontality and absorption, extended duration) puts the viewer in a fixed position in front of the picture, rather than into the illusionary world thereof. We behold the characters absorbed in their conversation as if they are arranged on a canvas. Further, the arrangement challenges Fried's concept by foregrounding the inherent duality of theatricality and absorption that underlines the *tableau* aesthetic, in that the *tableau* produces the effect of everyday experience on exhibit. It introduces the "real" into the picture, merging "reality" with representation. Indeed, this introduction distinguishes it from the *tableau vivant*. Whereas the *tableau vivant* creates the illusion of paintings coming to life, the cinematic *tableau* reframes life as a construct of the picture.

Nowhere else in the Berlin School films do we find the same project of strict formal experimentation. And yet, many films reframe moments of their stories within the aesthetic construction of a picture. The Berlin School has designated the *tableau* as a defining element of its style, resulting in films that are distinct yet somehow still share a set of key features. The *tableau* in film is not only a moment of arrested action, but also a pictorial situation. On the basis of composition, it compels the viewer narratively, and perceptually, to consider gestures and object as meaningful and as self-reflexive of its form. Less a reconstruction of specific paintings, the cinematic *tableau* plays with the tension between stasis and progression and the many possible associations elicited by a picture against the pre-determined narrative line of film. Constructed as a stand-alone image (based on the close interconnections between objects, characters, and spaces within the frame of the picture), it can also be described by the themes of absorption and theatricality. Although originally employed as conflicting terms, their antagonism was called into question by large-scale photography. In the following discussion of three films, I look at the renewed interest and aesthetic of the *tableau* form and its close connection to the theatrical, architectural spaces that the characters inhabit. Mostly depicted in static, absorptive, and painterly poses, the characters in the films are often in conversations delivered in single takes as if on a theater stage. Consequently, the films call attention to principles of centering and decentering of the characters and also allow the viewer to encounter alternative images. I suggest that the filmmakers of the Berlin School look to art and history in making their films *about* art and history. In so doing, they reconnect with formerly predominant modes of pictures and produce further challenges to dualistic concepts, such as absorption and theatricality, immersion and abstraction.

Decentering

Jessica Hausner's *Amour Fou* presents its viewer with a series of *tableaux* depicting domestic interiors in a style similar to Dutch interiors and what Bordwell describes as chamber art. The static gaze of the camera turns nineteenth-century life into an endless repetition of characters absorbed in social engagements, proper performances, and repetitive conversations about universal taxation. Each meticulously arranged shot carries painterly qualities and relies on the same key elements: large blocks of pastel colors with their shades repeated in the high-collared costumes of the characters; carefully placed sections of patterning on floors, wallpapers, and fabrics; solitary photographs, paintings, or mirrors on a wall; and, as necessary, door frames and windows for further delineation. Every composition functions like a new, equally static and restrictive iteration of the previous one. Only occasionally do the characters break free from the restrictions and venture outside. Indeed, the static *tableaux* reinforce that there is nothing to move towards or aspire to. *Tableaux* and convention ensure that no one moves freely through the empty spaces, as the geometric rigor of the frame serves to root the characters within the space and transfix the viewer outside. On the few occasions when the characters are permitted to move freely, for example during a dance scene, they do so "like puppets, moving to a fixed choreography," as Kleist himself comments.

In an interview with Ralf Krämer, Hausner reveals that the film was first conceived as a tale about a contemporary double suicide pact carried out by two Norwegian teens. Instead of examining the present, the film turns to the past and engages one of the most famous suicide pacts in history, that of Heinrich von Kleist and Henriette Vogel. Details about the pact are left to speculation. Some say that the pact was Henriette's idea. Others, like the film, suggest that Henriette was not even Kleist's first choice. While Hausner has thoroughly researched the true

story of Kleist's suicide, she chooses to ignore, suppress, and revise various historical facts. Others, she treats as ambiguous. James Quandt points out, for example, that the film does not portray Kleist's peripatetic existence, noting only that he has lost his state allowance (99). Similarly, the portrayal of Henriette Vogel contradicts the few historical facts that are known about her, ignoring especially her intellectual and musical talents that first attracted Kleist. In addition, there is the suggestion that Henriette may have been terminally ill. This is one of the few details about Henriette that tends to make it into “great-man accounts” (Dargis). Kleist seems to have held his own narrow views of her, as suggested in a letter to his cousin Marie, later in the film. As he writes of Henriette: “She has grasped on a higher plane that my sadness was incurable and deeply rooted, and therefore, although she has enough means at hand to make me happy here on earth, she will die with me.” Disinterested in historical accuracy, Hausner makes the most of the self-absorption embedded in that letter, notably by turning the camera’s gaze away from the man who wrote of “my sadness” to the woman willing to “die with me.”



Fig. 50. Opening shot in Hausner’s *Amour Fou* (2014).

Amour Fou is built on framing and reframing. Set in Berlin, primarily at the home of the married couple Henriette and Friedrich Louis Vogel, the film links the representation of women

to the value-generated nexus of the family.⁵⁸ It opens with a static shot of Henriette carefully arranging flowers. Even though Henriette is placed in the center of the image, the dominant, closed, and stylized arrangement partly decenters her. It obscures the view of her face and body and pushes her to the background, while making the flowers the center of our attention.

Bordwell's remark on Dreyer's *tableau* technique holds true for Hausner's film as well: "our attention swerves to objects and furnishings, details become as clearly articulated as figures" (48). As we follow from one interior to another, such compositions constructed around the characters paradoxically manage to decenter them.

Flowers, as exemplified by Novalis's blue flower, served as widely recognized symbols among German Romantics. The film positions flowers as the visual focal point of many shot compositions; arrangements are carefully placed between the characters to divide the space between them, but also as a central motif that escapes vision. In the next scene, a gathering at the Vogels' home, a woman sings Mozart's *The Violet*—a song set to a poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe about a flower being trampled to death. A guest declares that the song is so beautiful you could shoot yourself. Ever since the publication of Goethe's epistolary novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774), descriptions of inner turmoil and abject misery resonate deeply with Germans. Some say it was this feeling that drove Kleist to form the suicide pact. At the moment when the singer gives voice to Mozart's flower—"and so I die, then let me die for her"—Henriette's gaze meets Kleist's. This exchange of glances intertwines their fates and introduces romance as a driving force behind the narrative. The static compositions and arrangements of figures within the frame, however, reconfigure the Romantic desire expressed in

⁵⁸ Several of the films associated with the Berlin School address motherhood: Henner Winckler's *Lucy* (2006), Maria Speth's *Madonnen* (2007) and *Töchter* (2014). More recently, films address fatherhood: Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* (2016) and Thomas Arslan's *Helle Nächte* (2017).

the song. The film explores a vision of Romanticism in which the arrangement and choreography of bodies point to the restriction of emotions and not to their liberation.



Fig. 51. A moment of liberation turns into a moment of restriction in *Amour Fou* (2014).

The film not only visually restricts and decenters the character, but also does so aurally. In one of Henriette's performance scenes, the camera frames her in a meticulously composed *tableau* as she sings in front of a group of friends at her home. For the duration of the song, we witness in real time a moment in which she is able to express herself through art. Our eyes wander around the pictorial space. Constructed around Henriette's performance, the *tableau* again decenters its subject by placing at its center a representation, in this case a painting of a woman that becomes the focal point of the viewer's attention. This decentering of Henriette as subject is further reinforced through the use of sound. The act of saying what cannot be said – of “opening up” or “speaking out” – is, for Peter Brooks, the basis of all stage melodrama. In New German Cinema, the ability to speak became a trope that empowered female characters, reversing the tradition of the passive, silent woman as object. In *Amour Fou*, the woman's voice carries over into reaction shots of the audience, even though her body remains visually restricted within the frame. Cut to Kleist. With the camera now on him, the sound of her singing is overlaid with Kleist's own voice-over, in which he narrates a letter describing the narrow-minded and

humiliating life from which he is determined to rescue Henriette. When the camera cuts back to Henriette, our understanding of the *tableau* and the image of Henriette changes. Through Kleist's narrow perception of her we now "see" the *tableau* of Henriette not as a representation of her liberation. Rather, her performance now appears to be a daily chore. The visual resemblance between the women, Henriette and the maid, who share the pictorial space, supports that understanding. The viewer adapts her vision to Kleist's. Further, the scene reveals a process of decentering and overwriting presentation (the absorptive realism of the image) with representation in the form of the painting and the letter.



Fig. 52. Domestic interior in *Amour Fou* (2014).

Further, doors and windows act as interior frames. In contrast to Dutch interiors, these frames do not extend the rooms. Rather, they serve to restrict the characters' movements and block the viewer's field of vision. For example, when Kleist engages his cousin in conversation, our view is drawn to a marble bust in a back room that is separated from the main room by a red curtain. Next to the bust is a man who watches a performance placed beyond our vision. The characters, however, eavesdrop. By adopting the motif of the eavesdropper from Dutch painting,

with the figure standing in liminal spaces and on the threshold of opened doorways, the scene draws us in as witness to a scene while simultaneously closing us off from it.

It is a recurrent motif in *Amour Fou* to place the eavesdropper in emotionally charged scenes. When the doctor tells Henriette's husband about her condition, for example, we see the maid standing in the room with them and listening in on the conversation. But the film also sets up scenes in which conversations between characters are in sight of the viewer, while the next cut reveals that another character, placed beyond the viewer's vision, has overheard the conversation. For example, when Kleist talks to Henriette in the park and proposes the double suicide, the camera frames them together. The next cut, however, reveals that Henriette's daughter Pauline was standing close-by. This cut turns the pictorial depiction of the life of servants or housewives as eavesdropper into a powerful portrayal of the young daughter as a liminal, unseen figure. Her position in the family is not only as an outsider; she is an extension of the marginal figure of the eavesdropper, listening in on conversations and observing the characters in their activities.

Even in its dismantling of Romanticism, the film explores a vision in which arrangements are central to the restriction of emotions and a woman's story has been controlled by that of a man. Like the *tableau*, the film draws attention to the internal structure of the image and the film. The film uses the structures of chamber art to visually emphasize the absurdities of domestic alienation. Likewise, the delivery of perfectly pitched, restrained lines of dialogue marked by passive constructions and abstract nouns inflect a similar notion. When introducing himself to Henriette at the gathering, Kleist treats her as a kindred spirit: "You, too, see the emptiness of all wordly effort." While he speaks of inner turmoil, he delivers the words flatly, without hints of enflamed sensibilities. When suggesting that she join him in suicide, he explains that "The

daylight pains me with its constant shimmering.” Henriette later echoes this sentiment while under hypnosis by a mesmerist who attempts to cure her mysterious illness: “It’s the flowers, they frighten me. I can’t bear to see their sweet beauty.” Only when the doctor proclaims that Henriette’s condition is physical does she reconsider Kleist’s offer, which she initially found absurd. Facing a lonely death, she explains, she is now ready to join her suitor. Once she embraces Kleist’s ‘understanding’ of her sorrow, he retreats to an argument pertaining to her acceptance of his gloom, not her own: “Rather than fear of death, I had hoped you would recognize my suffering as yours. I suffer from life, not death.” Kleist’s reasoning raises questions about whether the finality of suicide is also a form of exhibitionism. Is Henriette’s condition a bodily complaint, a mental condition, a developing love interest, or the lack of forward movement within the confines of her home? Is Kleist’s condition incurable like a physical illness? And is love in its conventional definition simply a mental illness? Two centuries after their deaths, these are still relevant questions, which carry the film and move it beyond the strictures of the frame and the historical past. Rather than fully answer the questions, the film proposes a social commentary on domestic alienation and romantic ideals, as well as a cinematic parody of the *tableau* form.

Exhibiting

We perceive a similar direction of inflecting the *tableau* format towards fragmentation in Christian Petzold’s *Phoenix*, a melodrama about a Holocaust victim returning to Berlin in the aftermath of WWII. Nelly, a German-Jewish woman, is the sole survivor of her family. Due to a disfiguring wound, she undergoes reconstructive surgery to repair her damaged face. Embodying the false optimism of those who believe the past can simply be erased, the surgeon explains that she could have any face she wants. Nelly replies, “I want to look exactly like I used to.” The

reconstruction, however, falls short of her expectations and leaves her feeling unrecognizable to herself as well as to others. Without family, Nelly is essentially an unknown woman. When she seeks out her husband Johnny, he fails to recognize her as his former wife. Despite the inability to see and recognize, he is struck by Nelly's resemblance to the wife he now presumes dead. He proposes that she impersonate his wife as a "look-alike" so they can claim her inheritance, as there is no document certifying that his wife is dead. Johnny's proposal suggests a chance for her to become 'Nelly' again. He begins to turn this woman he believes to be a stranger into an image of the wife they once knew. Her performance charts the profound inability to go back in time and become her past self. The title of the film first indicates this transformation, alluding to the myth of the long-lived bird that is cyclically reborn. The phoenix-like resurrection speaks to Nelly's desire to return to the past, as well as to her husband's guilt over his actions, and to Germany's blindness to its own Nazi war crimes.⁵⁹ Bearing witness to a world that has moved on in her absence, Nelly represents the identity crisis of Holocaust survivors in the aftermath of the war. Ultimately, the film is about the relationship between characters and their relation to the past, and it explores this relation in terms of vision and framing. Throughout the film, we observe Nelly in a series of attempts, both literally and symbolically, to maintain her relations and to be seen.

⁵⁹ *Phoenix* is a also variant of the Orpheus and Eurydice tale—a myth of a poet's descent into the underworld to retrieve his lost love whom he loses once again because he cannot help but look back as she follows him from the land of the dead. The myth has also been recast by Alfred Hitchcock in *Vertigo* (1958), Chris Marker in *La Jetée* (1962), and Steven Soderbergh in *Solaris* (1972), amongst others. The various myths add layers of association, both by way of juxtapositions between them and by way of their position within the particular historical context of the film.



Fig. 53. Inventive framing. *Phoenix* (2014).

Here, inventive framing also supports the rich conceptualization of centering and decentering the character, ranging from visual abstraction to isolation. For the first fifteen minutes of the film, we see Nelly's face wrapped in bandages. We finally see her face for the first time in a brief close-up, followed by a shot of what she sees in the reflection of a broken mirror while surrounded by the ashes and rubble of postwar Berlin. For a brief moment, the image communicates the denial and also her reckoning with what she now sees in the mirror: a woman who is doubled, fragmented, and obscured. Reminiscent of Anselm Kiefer's abstract compositions, the image also explores a vision of history. The sheer physical presence of the picture—the burned rubble, the wet ashes, and the broken mirror—brings the catastrophe of the past into the viewer's present, confronting us with our own relation to that past. Similarly, the films explore a vision of Nelly silhouetted against a glass door, transforming her into what looks like a monochromatic painting. For brief moments, the pictures break out of the narrative and myth in which the film confines them, only then to open a more provocative space that appeals to the viewer's association.



Fig. 45. Variations of dialogues and *tableaux*. *Phoenix* (2014).

In *Phoenix*, the most striking images of characters in conversation display pictorial quality. In a later scene, for example, Lene and Nelly sit at opposite sides of a table while they listen to a recording of “Speak Low.” We already heard the song by Kurt Weill and Odgen Nash as a gentle bass and piano piece, a minimalist jazz score over the opening credits intended to introduce the film’s central theme and allegorical dimension.⁶⁰ The song honors the triumph of a couple’s love even as they acknowledge its inevitable decay: “Time is so old and love so brief /

⁶⁰ It is worth noting that Weill wrote the song in the United States after fleeing Nazi Germany in 1933, for *Phoenix* is a film preoccupied with war changing lives, identities, and relationships. The sonic return of Weill becomes an allegory for cultural loss (an art world destroyed and banned by the Nazi regime) and the hopes and uncertainties of return.

Love is pure gold and time a thief.” It becomes part of the narrative as the story unfolds, with various degrees of presentness. Here the song moved from the seemingly non-diegetic sound at the beginning of the film to diegetic sound, from sound only heard by the viewer to sound heard by onscreen characters as well as the viewer. The absence of dialogue or movement within the frame focuses the viewer’s attention on vision—surface and depth, presence and absence, image and sound. Now on the diegetic level, the song awakens memories of the past. Lene tells Nelly that she listened to the song every night after her escape to London during the war. At the same time, she expresses her aversion to German songs and her eagerness to leave Germany and the past behind. She exclaims, “I can’t stand German songs anymore.” Rather than reconstruct the past, Lene looks to the future, envisioning their lives together in Palestine. When Nelly asks her why, she points to their moral and ethical responsibility. In the manner of mid-eighteenth century history painting, the image of the two women sets up a division, to present the viewer with a picture of two different relations to the past. The color-coding of their dresses (Nelly in blue and Lene in red) and the alternation between static long shot and individual close-ups of their faces further underlines their contrasting views. The visual and aural concentration of their arrangement and their contrasting relations to the past transfixes the viewer and exposes the moral, perceptual, and temporal tension that lies at the core of the film. The fragmentation into autonomous shots further emphasizes the inherent quality of the *tableau*, as each character in the composition becomes magnified. Indeed, many scenes focusing on Nelly and Jonny in the basement apartment display a similar pictorial quality. Alternating two-shots and single close-ups of the characters convert their daily interactions into stylized images. An intriguing example is the night scene of Nelly and Johnny sitting at the desk as she practices imitating her own handwriting. The scene is lightly illuminated by a glowing candle to create an image that is remarkable in its intimacy and, at the same time, in its bleakness. The film thus presents its

viewer with a space that moves between haptical—an actual room to move in—and optical—a mere frame with the characters placed against a depthless background.



Fig. 55. Variations of the liminal figure. *Phoenix* (2014).

Placed within frames provided by architectural features such as doorframes and windows, Nelly also resembles the figures in Dutch interiors that are similar to domestic and architectural spaces. Towards the end, Johnny gives her a red dress to wear for their reunion with old friends. Opening the curtain that separated her sleeping space from the rest of the apartment, she presents herself to Johnny. In that moment, the enclosing apartment opens up as if it is a stage or a spatial arrangement that she walks into. Yet, despite being in the center of the image framed by the curtains, she remains a lingering figure in the liminal space between the rooms, much like the figures appearing in Dutch interiors that are in close relation to domestic and architectural spaces. Only in *Phoenix*, the lightness of the traditional scene is reframed so as to take on a sinister resonance.



Fig. 56. Performing for an audience. *Phoenix* (2014).

The film ends with the friends reuniting in a carefully choreographed series of static *tableaux*. Nelly performs “Speak Low” in front of an audience comprised of Johnny, who accompanies her on the piano, and a group of their friends. The audience, in addition to a room filled with photographs on the white walls, encodes the notion of theatricality and exhibition within the picture. Again, we witness in real time the duration of the song, a moment that heightens our sense of realism. Less than half-way through the song, Johnny stops playing the piano. Nelly continues singing before she too stops and a silence stretches out. For Johnny, this is the moment he recognizes his former wife. The sight of the number tattooed on her forearms, which the camera reveals in a close-up, is further confirmation. As the realization of her deceit sinks in, Nelly turns around and walks towards an open door. The lensing turns Nelly into a depthless image of colored specks, blurring the viewer’s final vision of her just before the screen fades to black. The film turns away from the frontality of the *tableau* that offers the viewer a vantage point from where to behold the scene as a stage or an exhibited space, and leaves the viewer with a series of close-ups of the main character that frame her as fragmented, abstracted, and open to association. At the same time, the end raises awareness of the mediation and offsets the viewer’s perceptual relation to the past by reframing. It serves as a perfect metaphor for the past and memory in that it restores something incomprehensible and unknowable.

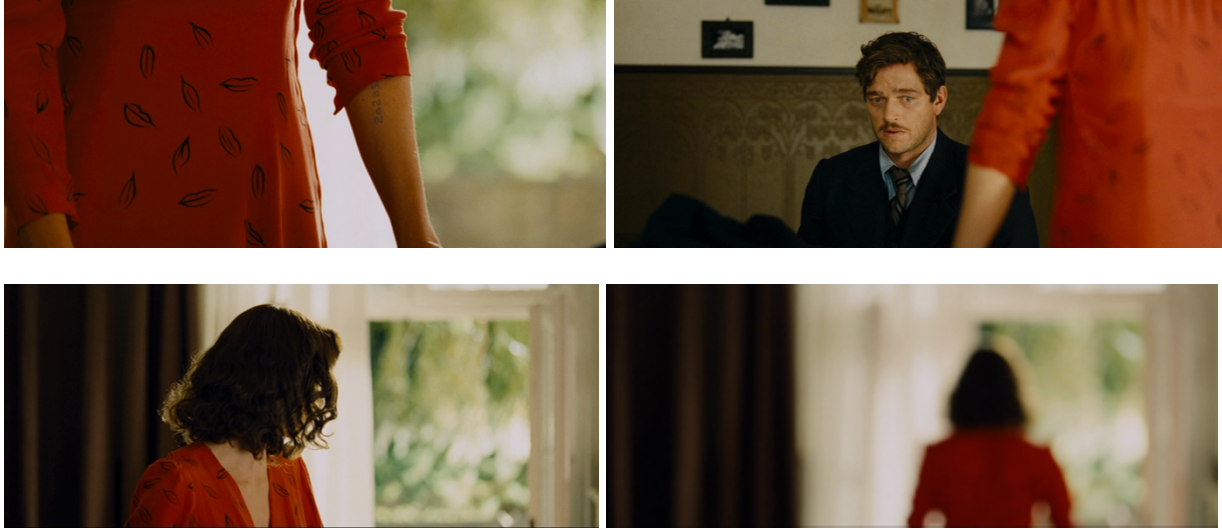


Fig. 57. Signification of framing. *Phoenix* (2014).

Containing

Thomas Arslan's *Gold* adds an explicit reflexivity to the expansion of the *tableau* from interior spaces to the outdoors. Set in the summer of 1898 in the Canadian West, the film recounts the journey of a single woman, Emily, who, coming from Bremen to Chicago, joins a group of German immigrants, most of them men, as they set out to prospect for gold. All of the prospectors, hopeful for a better future, responded to a newspaper advertisement to venture overland to the Klondike. The man who posted the advertisement, William Laser, claims to have found a few nuggets of gold and insists that an easier and cheaper route to the Klondike runs through the uncharted interior of the Canadian territory. One after another, the characters succumb to their weaknesses and fall victim to the land. Emily, now the sole survivor of the group, continues the journey alone.⁶¹ Nineteenth-century German art often explored this state of

⁶¹ Arslan's character shares certain recognizable features with the literary figure of the pioneer woman. Writing about the differences between representations of the American Wild West and the Canadian West, Elizabeth Thompson notes that living in the Canadian West gave women special opportunities as producers of stories. They saw literary "material" in their daily lives in

isolation: Think of Caspar David Friedrich's contemplative figures silhouetted against night skies and Gothic ruins. For the majority of the time, the camera stays fairly close to the characters, and the female protagonist in particular. Only occasionally does the camera suggest a seemingly endless wilderness in which the characters are lost. More often, the vast open landscapes we traditionally associate with the Western genre are replaced by mountain landscapes—a recurring theme of German Romantic painting. In this case, the long-takes of characters riding through the landscape are further indebted to nineteenth-century panoramic painting and photography of a monumental type. They resemble spatial arrangements and offer a painterly representation of nature in which the Canadian landscape is markedly stylized, exploiting the pathos inherent in their contemplation. To do so, they rely on unusual, distanced viewpoints and camera angles that contribute to the impression that the characters are moving on a stage, even while in the great outdoors.



Fig. 58. Moving as if on a stage. *Gold* (2013).

The film begins with a prelude—a shot that pans over water, rocks, trees, and the sky.

frontier, rural, and urban western spaces, which they shaped into letters, journals, sketches, essays, and stories for eastern magazines and presses. As Arslan explains, *Gold* is based on such a journal, written by the Canadian politician Martha Black. Nina Hoss explains in the press release: “Martha Black, who traveled to the Klondike in 1898 and became one of the first female members of parliament, wrote that she didn’t travel to find security, but to liberate herself, to experience an adventure. This yearning existed in the women of the time.”

This shot conveys the sensory context for the characters, who will soon begin their journey and immerse themselves in the land. The credits roll and the sense of fluidity and the picturesque of nature give way to the rigid frame of the static camera: a tracking shot of a train that cuts through the dry land, followed by a static shot of the main character stepping off the train and onto the platform to begin the journey. The contrast between the depicted water and dryness on the one hand, and the fluidity of the tracking shot and the stasis of the camera on the other, is suggestive of a short essay by Jeff Wall, entitled “Photography and Liquid Intelligence” (1989). In this essay, Wall explains the way water may be captured by the camera, allowing the viewer to see it in new ways. Wall uses the metaphor of the uncontrollable nature of “liquid intelligence” or natural forms in opposition to the mechanical, precise nature of the photographic lens and shutter (which he refers to as “dry”) to talk about the ability to control every aspect of the picture. He then acknowledges the presence of water in photography as an essential contribution to the processing of a photograph and relates this distancing from the natural process of photographic chemicals to a newly found sense of self-consciousness in photographic practice. With reference to Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Solaris* (1972), his argument is summed up as follows: “The symbolic meaning of natural forms, made visible in things like turbulence patterns or compound curvatures, is, to me, one of the primary means by which the dry intelligence of optics and mechanics achieves a historical self-reflection, a memory of the path it has traversed to its present and future separation from the fragile phenomena it reproduces so generously. In Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Solaris*, some scientists are studying an oceanic planet. Their techniques are typically scientific. But the ocean is itself an intelligence which is studying them in turn [...] In photography, the liquids study us, even from a great distance” (218). If one considers everything that is optical, geometric, technical, and architectural in the way that the *tableau* is constructed, then one may find in *Gold* a similar relation of liquid and dry, mechanical and fluidity, and

structured and open.



Fig. 59. *Tableaux* in the outdoors. *Gold* (2012).

The film achieves this relation by alternating shots composed in accordance with the paradigm established by Dutch interiors and open landscape views. For example, the characters repeatedly sit in a circle, to eat dinner together, engage in conversation, and even listen to the performance of a song. Stuck in the rigidity of the tableau and long-take, the scenes convey a sense of both absorption and theatricality. These *tableaux* are followed by a series of shots depicting the journey through the mountain range from various angles, in which the absorptive and theatrical gives way to the open and sensuous space of the Canadian outdoors. At some point, we see a landscape view through a wide-angle, *tableau*-like perspective with trees forming horizontal lines. As the camera holds our gaze, we see the group making their way across the picture plane. The area is light-filled and expansive, but at the same time dense and almost impenetrable. The camera emphasizes the pull and the power of the country's vast, untamed wilderness and, simultaneously, its sense of restriction and claustrophobia. The pictures also reveal a remarkable control of formal aspects, such as the framing of the composition, the density of light, and the unusual color range that is close to painting.



Fig. 60. Containment. *Gold* (2012)

The film also achieves this relation by what is excluded from sight and remains off-frame, namely sound. In addition to the aural landscape of the Canadian environment, the film makes use of a subtle musical score. The cross-historical, original compositions of Dylan Carlson's electric-guitar score contain traces of classical Americana. It is a distinctive roots-oriented sound that creates a space outside the restricting forms of the various traditions upon which it draws. In *Gold*, it announces presence outside the frame and diegesis. In fact, when played over the final landscape view of Emily her journeying alone, it refuses to complete her journey. For several minutes, that is, the camera holds onto the landscape as the last character continues on her way, allowing the viewer to contemplate the prospect of a never-ending journey. The screen turns to black and the music continues over the credits. The film makes use of music to bring us full circle, back to the beginning, when it played over the panoramic-like shots of the journey. It thereby challenges the linearity, process, and goal-oriented forms of filmic expression, but also history. It reminds the viewer that the film is about a moment in history, in the middle of a journey, not a generic overview (with a beginning, middle, and end). Deprived of classical dramatic structure, the characters remains in the rigidity of the *tableau*, merely exhibited for the

viewer to see and contemplate as a single picture. In Jeff Wall's terms, its temporality is both "liquid," immersed in the "incalculable," and "dry," as a result of the optical apparatus associated with modern vision. Connected to the pictorial tradition, it continues developing, restoring images, and thereby affecting the present circumstances of viewing.

The tableau in *Gold* encompasses a picture that responds to a sense of composition and internal organization in which past and present, absorption and theatricality, realism and stylization are not clearly differentiated. This places the viewer in an ambiguous relation between immediate recognition of the historical past that the camera constructs and the resemblance, association, and attraction with which it is imbued. The film does not employ the pictures in its relation to real, experienced, historical time, but rather in its relation to the cinematic, which replaces history as the temporal narrative and displaces the viewer from the scene of history. As a result, the film's relationship to history is paradoxical. It points to repetition and continuation in other places and times as the picture formally suggests the inability to contain closure vis-à-vis the past.

Hausner, Petzold, and Arslan employ decentering and exhibition as main metaphors for their films, in a complex attempt to frame the everyday life of women at the margins of history. Their picturing of the past is tightly connected to pictorial history. Although concerned with different time periods and topics, all three films share a perception of history as fictional and stylized. They restore the aesthetic, intermedial, and performative space of the *tableau*, with its origins in history painting and Dutch interiors. Turning to the representation of women who have been historically overlooked, they combine low-key realism (characters absorbed in conversations and daily tasks) with a high degree of stylization in the image. In Fried's view, the

realist tradition in painting presents figures that are absorbed in their daily activities, oblivious of the viewer. These paintings, according to Fried, stand in contrast to modern art's theatricality, which relies on the presence of the viewer. We have seen that Dutch interiors already introduce theatricality into absorption by including onlookers and eavesdroppers in their compositions. The Berlin School filmmakers return to the pictorial tradition, once abandoned by avant-garde art practices, and effectively revitalize the role of architectural spaces in the intermedial texture of cinema (painting, photography, theater, sculpture), in order to forge an original cinematic style based on the aesthetic of the *tableau*, while also working to visually and conceptually reframe it. They use historical intertextuality to create their own historical spaces. In doing so, they also shape the viewer's perception of that period, creating the illusion that the films are biographical. Ultimately, the framing leaves the viewer at the margin of history.

In certain respects, the films use the *tableau* as a flexible means to move towards formats of expanded cinema. The relative autonomy of the carefully elaborated *tableaux*, and the repetition and reframing of visual components that decenter and exhibit, are elements that connect the works with gallery films. The spatial arrangements resemble paintings rather than rooms and become protagonists themselves, effectively enclosing and restricting the characters.

Like their contemporaries in art, the Berlin School filmmakers are part of a long tradition of image-making concerned with pictorial history. Drawing further implications from Chevrier's observation on the *tableau*, Michael Fried in his seminal book *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008) suggests that contemporary *tableau* photography engages, whether consciously or unconsciously, with the issue of its relation to the viewer. By reconsidering his interest with pictorial figures in painting that turn their gaze away from the viewer, in what he calls their "absorption," Fried situates recent art photography as operating within the same

conventions of the pre-photographic age. He further claims that the artistic regime beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, initially theorized by Diderot, remains in force. The continued relevance of the *tableau* in contemporary art and filmmaking is one indication of that. Indeed, it is highly instructive to see how the contemporary art photography cited in Fried's study fits into the tradition of pictorial representation, and specifically within the logic of traditional art genres. In prior chapters, I have situated recent works of art photography—of the type Fried also includes in his book—as they would appear within the traditional hierarchy of pictorial genres of portraiture, landscape, and still life. History painting, once regarded as the highest genre, now takes the form of an “everyday” *tableau*. Whereas photojournalism and documentary inherited the task of telling stories about the social significance of war, conflict, and catastrophe through large-scale depictions, art photography returns to the aim of realist art for the purpose of creating everyday *tableaux*. In their films, the Berlin School attempts to address just that: life as a realm of images.

Conclusion

Maren Ade's most recent film, *Toni Erdmann* (2016) is a series of encounters in the life of Ines, a corporate strategist posted in Bucharest, whose father, Winfried, decides to surprise her with a visit. There, he becomes a witness to his daughter's daily life. He sees the misogyny of her daily work and the raunchy entertainment that are part of her corporate socializing. Questions of recognition, seeing, and posturing are at the core of this film, which slowly unfolds the complex relationship between father and daughter across 162 minutes before leaving the viewer with an open end. After attending the funeral of Winfried's mother, the film ends with father and daughter standing in the backyard, reminiscing. Wanting to capture the moment in a photograph, Winfried walks off to get his camera. We watch Ines waiting in silence for a few minutes before the screen turns to black. While most critics celebrate Ade's film as a festival and award breakout, others express disappointment. Surprisingly, fellow Berlin School filmmaker Christoph Hochhäusler writes about the lack of artifice in favor of naturalism.⁶² In the film, the handheld camera, neither agile and probing as video, nor completely static and composed as film, follows its characters in clear distance, and thus mimics the act of observation and "real-time." But the film also thrives in artifice, which is a point that Hochhäusler dismisses and which deserves further attention.

The title of the film, a reference to Winfried's alter ego, brings the viewer immediately into the realm of performance. In the film, the performance refers to artifice, role-playing and repetition. The film opens not with Winfried, but with Winfried pretending to be his "dangerous" brother. Indeed, throughout the film, we see him repeatedly in various costumes and disguises,

⁶² See, for example, Amy Taubin, "Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann*" (2017) and Christoph Hochhäusler, "Nathloser Konsens" (2016).

blurring the line between the “real” Winfried and the characters he creates. By contrast, in the business world, performance describes the process of carrying out tasks, which the film also explores and connects to the understanding of performance as staging to show their similarities. The dialogues between Ines and her colleagues, for example, are full of observations about “concepts” and “performance reports.” Meetings with clients are scripted and rehearsed. In addition, Ines’s business suit works as much as a mask or costume as her father’s props. But performance has also a less obvious role in the film: to encapsulate the film’s relationship with cinema and art.

Indeed, the film has its roots in happenings and performance art.⁶³ In art, performance refers to the live-ness, physical movement, and impermanence that offer artists an alternative to the stasis and supposed permanence of painting and sculpture. Performance art is directly presented to an audience and can take place in any type of venue or setting and for any length of time. Traditionally defined as an antithesis to theater, performance takes as its ideal an ephemeral and authentic experience for performer and audience in an event that is not repeated or recorded (Lucie-Smith 88). Prototypes of performance art are, for example, Maria Abramović’s and Carolee Schneemann’s works in the 1960s and later that show the female body as artistic medium.⁶⁴ In Ade’s film, Ines’s empty, white-walled apartment resembles a white cube of

⁶³ As inspirations for writing the film, Maren Ade lists the Berlin-based collective Gob Squad, a group of artist working in the fields of performance and video installation. See Maren Ade, “On Writing: ‘Toni Erdmann’ is in a Sense Autobiographical, Except for that Naked Party.” *LA Times*, 17 November 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/la-en-m-on-1117-writing-toni-erdmann-20161024-snap-20161109-story.html>.

⁶⁴ In the 1990s, performance art gained admittance into galleries and museums. In 2010, for example, the Museum of Modern Art held a major retrospective and performance recreation of Abramović’s work. During the run of the exhibition, she performed *The Artist is Present*, a 736-hour and 30-minute static, silent piece, in which she sat immobile in the museum’s atrium, while the audience was invited to take turns sitting opposite her.

galleries and museums. Objects are put on display to be looked at rather than used. At some point, Winfried even takes a picture of an arrangement of vases, creating his own still life. Further, the apartment turns into a performance space. To celebrate her birthday, Ines invites colleagues over to her apartment. Thanks to a dress malfunction, the get-together turns into a “team-building exercise” that includes nudity (Ines and her guests) and a massive Bulgarian kukeri costume for scaring away evil spirits (Winfried). How are we to see this prolonged scene? In many ways, the immediacy of the “naked party” restores space, bodies, time, and audience as principle elements of art performance. Paradoxically, it is set before the viewer as a component of cinema. Do we approach the scene with the same expectations as narrative film or art? In that moment, it renders visible how our grasp of reality proceeds from conceptual categories, which derive from representations that we constantly consume.

Performance art is also connected with the wider use of video and the practice of real-time recording. For *Toni Erdmann*, Ade takes the characteristics of real-time recording but also makes use of cinema’s most important tool: editing. Throughout, the film relies on shot-reverse shots, mimicking the flow of conversation, to show the speechless reactions shots of the characters to Winfried’s performance of his alter ego. As a viewer, we know that we do not spend “real time” with the characters, but it feels as if we do. In fact, inasmuch as we are unable to differentiate between the “real” Winfried and Ines and the roles they play, we are also unable to differentiate between our time of viewing and the character’s time of being. As the most recent film associated with the Berlin School, Ade’s film exemplifies how important artifice and intensity of the Berlin School’s editing continues to be in creating the fiction of time, especially in an era when real-time recording is so commonplace.

This study began with the idea that the Berlin School secretly explores cinema's relation to art. The engagement with this idea has brought me to European and North American histories of art and film practices, Berlin School feature films, and their student work and art installations. It brought the films in conversation with film theory, especially theory that embraces avant-garde film practices (Paul Arthur, A.L. Rees, and P. Adams Sitney). At the same time, it related these theories with debates about the visual qualities of representations in art history (Svetlana Alpers, John Berger, Norman Bryson, and Michael Fried) as well as literary theory and criticism (Mieke Bal, Peter Brooks, and Gérard Genette). In doing so, the study pushes disciplinary boundaries to offer a new and comprehensive study of the Berlin School as a cinema that engages portraits, landscapes, still life, and historical *tableaux* as both forms of representation and ways of seeing within the practice of narrative filmmaking. My approach has been to closely analyze both the films and the context of cinema as contingently produced and constantly moving.

The preceding chapters have uncovered themes, metaphors, and structures of art that allow for an understanding of the apparent lack of motion in Berlin School cinema. The conceptual aim of my project was to demonstrate how these films and the growing concern with stasis over motion has become increasingly self-reflexive and more art-oriented. Taking the films as case studies, this dissertation has argued that moments of artifice, like those of performance in Ade's film, can be understood as telling us little about the depicted characters (portraits), places (landscape), objects or mise-en-scène (still life), and the past (history). Instead, the proposed framework makes available a more flexible and responsive method for approaching the Berlin School as a relationship between a work and its viewer. Berlin School filmmaking explores that fundamental condition of contemporary art. Taken together, the films return to representation and depiction, imitation of representational conventions, and display of poses and clichés, and

thereby move the emphasis from a dialogue about art and cinema back to the image and issues of making and seeing pictures that are part of a larger narrative. Berlin School cinema not only engages art in a dialogue, but also reconsiders the varieties of aesthetic experiences within the paradigm of art to embrace its meaning as both representation and a way of seeing.

A second and broader conclusion to this study is that issues of art, actually, need more attention than they have already received in the studies of art cinema. The films remind us that art is indeed central to art cinema, even if the latter is narrowly defined by its slowness and excessive stylization and complicated relationship with the commercial film industry (Galt and Schoonover 6). The term “art cinema” poses a problem for film scholarship. Is art cinema a genre? An institution (Steve Neale 1981)? Or a mode of exhibition (Barbara Wilinsky 2001)? To develop more positive and productive models and ways of engaging issues of art in narrative cinema, it is necessary to reflect on the use of the term, on its prejudices, and its implication for a theoretical understanding of art cinema, particularly in light of the growing crossover between art and cinema. To do so, we might reconsider David Bordwell’s understanding of art films, which “possess a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures” (94). He relates art cinema to notions of ambiguity, lack of narration, depictions of a world drawn from a variety of viewpoints, and unresolved endings. Indeed, it is through these features that he argues that art cinema can be understood as a “distinct mode of film practice” (94). He contends that art cinema descends from silent cinema schools of French Impressionism, German Expressionism, and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, but also literary modernism. To this, we have to include the history of art and the art context from which the films of the Berlin School emerge. Any conclusion about contemporary art cinema must include the Berlin School’s cinema as a reflection on the history of art.

Works Cited

- 9 Leben (9 Lives)*. Directed by Maria Speth, Germany, 2010.
- 19 Porträts (19 Portraits)*. Directed by Thomas Arslan, Germany, 1990.
- Abel, Marco. *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*. Camden House, 2013.
- . "The Cinema of Identification Gets on my Nerves: An Interview with Christian Petzold." *Cineaste*, vol. 33, no. 3, Summer 2008, <http://www.cineaste.com/articles/an-interview-with-christian-petzold.htm>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Absolut Warhola*. Directed by Stanislaw Mucha, Poland/Germany 2001.
- Ade, Maren. "On Writing: 'Toni Erdmann' is in a Sense Autobiographical, Except for that Naked Party." *LA Times*, 17 November 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/la-en-m-on-1117-writing-toni-erdmann-20161024-snap-20161109-story.html>. Accessed 11 May 2017.
- Alpers, Svetlana. *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*. Chicago UP, 1983.
- Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting and On Sculpture*. Edited and translated by Cecil Grayson, Phaidon, 1972.
- Alter, Nora M. *Chris Marker*. Illinois UP, 2006.
- Altman, Rick. *A Theory of Narrative*. Columbia UP, 2008.
- Amour Fou*. Directed by Jessica Hausner, Austria, 2014.
- Am Rand (On the Edge)*. Directed by Thomas Arslan, Germany, 1990.
- Angell, Callie. *Andy Warhol Screen Tests: The Films of Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*. Harry N. Abrams, 2006.
- Arasse, Daniel. *Anselm Kiefer*. Thames and Hudson, 2001.
- Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. California UP,

2004.

---. *Film als Kunst*. 1932. Suhrkamp, 2002.

Arslan, Thomas. "Interview with Gabriela Seidel." *Peripherfilm*, 14 Jul. 2001, ,

<http://www.peripherfilm.de/derschoenetag/dst2.htm#Interview>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

---. "'Berliner Schule' an der DFFB 1985-95: Einige Filme." Interview with Michael Baute.

2015, <https://dffb-archiv.de/editorial/berliner-schule-dffb-1984-95-teil-2-einige-filme>.

Accessed 10 May 2017.

---, and Nina Hoss. "Interview." *Gold im Kino*, <http://www.gold-im-kino.de/zum-film.php>.

Accessed 11 May 2017.

Arthur, Paul. "No Longer Absolute: Portraiture in American Documentary and Avant-Garde

Films of the Sixties." *Rites Of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*. Edited by Ivone

Margulies, Duke UP, 2003, pp. 93-118.

---. *A Line of Sight: American Avant-garde Film Since 1965*. Minnesota UP, 2005.

Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by

John Howe, Verso, 1995.

Baer, Ulrich. *Spectral Evidence*, MIT Press, 2002.

Barbara. Directed by Christian Petzold, Germany, 2012.

Baute, Michael, et al. "Berliner Schule: Eine Collage." *Kolik.Film*, Oct. 2006,

<http://www.kolikfilm.at/sonderheft.php?edition=20066&content=texte&text=1>. Accessed

10 May 2017.

Bakhtin, M.M. "Discourse of the Novel." *Dialogic Imagination*. Edited by Michael Holquist,

Texas UP, 1982, pp. 259-422.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto UP, 2009.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 1980. Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 2010.

---. "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein." *Images-Music-Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1977, pp. 69-78.

Baxandall, Michael. *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450*. Oxford UP, 1971.

Beckman, Karen R., and Jean Ma, editors. *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*. Duke UP, 2008.

Bellour, Raymond. "The Pensive Spectator." *The Cinematic*. Edited by David Company, Whitechapel, 2007, pp. 119-23.

Belting, Hans. *Faces: Eine Geschichte des Gesichts*. Beck, 2013.

Berger, John. "The Changing View of Man." *The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays*. Pantheon Books, 1967, pp. 41-7.

---. *About Looking*. 1980. Vintage Books, 1991.

---. *Ways of Seeing*. 1972. Penguin, 1977.

Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt (Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis). Directed by Walter Ruttmann, Germany, 1927.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 2001.

Brett, Donna West. *Photography and Place: Seeing and Not Seeing Germany After 1945*. Routledge, 2016.

Bright, Deborah. "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men" An Inquiry Into the Cultural Meaning of Landscape Photography." Deborah Bright, 1985,
<http://www.deborahbright.net/PDF/Bright-Marlboro.pdf>. Accessed 11 May 2017.

Brilliant, Richard. *Portraiture*. Reaktion, 1991.

- Brody, Richard. "About 'Neo-Neo-Realism.'" *The New Yorker*, 19 March 2009, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/about-neo-neo-realism>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Bordwell, David. *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer*. California UP, 1981.
- . "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice." *The European Cinema Reader*. Edited by Catherine Fowler, Routledge, 2002, pp. 94-102.
- , Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. Columbia UP, 1987.
- Breakfast (Table Top Dolly)*. Directed by Michael Snow, USA, 1976.
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. Columbia UP, 1976.
- . *Realist Vision*. Yale UP, 2005.
- Brown, Jane K.. *The Persistence of Allegory: Drama and Neoclassicism from Shakespeare to Wagner*. Pennsylvania UP, 2007.
- Brückle, Wolfgang. "Face-Off in Weimar Culture: The Physiognomic Paradigm, Competing Portrait Anthologies, and August Sander's Face of Our Time." *Tate Papers* 19, Spring 2013, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/19/face-off-in-weimar-culture-the-physiognomic-paradigm-competing-portrait-anthologies-and-august-sanders-face-of-our-time>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Brüggemann, Dietrich. "Fahr zur Hölle, Berliner Schule." *d-trick.de*, 11 Feb. 2013, <http://d-trick.de/blog-de/fahr-zur-holle-berliner-schule>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- . *Kreuzweg Presse*, 2014, <http://www.kreuzweg-derfilm.de/#presse>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Bryson, Norman. *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*. Harvard UP, 1990.

- Burgin, Victor. *The Remembered Film*. Reaktion, 2004.
- Butler, Judith. "Surface Tensions." *ArtForum International*, vol. 42, 2004, pp. 118-124.
- Campany, David. "Traces and Pictures." *David Campany*, 2011,
<http://davidcampany.com/traces-and-pictures>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Chatman, Seymour. "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)." *On Narrative*.
 Edited by W.J.T. Mitchell, Chicago UP, 1981, pp.117-36.
- Chevrier, Jean-François, editor. "Les Aventures de la Forme Tableau dans l'Histoire de la Photographie," *Photo-Kunst: Arbeiten aus 150 Jahren, Exhibition Catalogue*. Cantz, 1989.
- . "The Adventures of the Picture Form in the History of Photography." 1989. *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960–1982 (Exhibition Catalogue)*. Translated by Michael Gilson and edited by Douglas Fogle, Walker Art Center, 2003.113–28.
- , and James Lingwood, editors. *Une Autre Objectivité/Another Objectivity (Exhibition Catalogue)*, Idea Books, 1989.
- Clarke, Graham. *The Portrait in Photography*. Reaktion, 1992.
- Roger F. Cook, "Embodied Simulation, Empathy and Social Cognition: Berlin School Lessons for Film Theory," *Screen* vol. 56, June 2015, pp. 153-171.
- Cook, Roger F., Lutz Koepnick, Kristin Kopp, and Brad Prager, editors. *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave of German Cinema*. Intellect, 2013.
- Dalle Vacche, Angela, *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*. Texas UP, 1996.
- , ed.. *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History*. Rutgers UP, 2003.
- Dargis, Manohla. "'Amour Fou,' About the Woman in a Poet's Suicide Pact." *New York Times*, 17 Mar. 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/movies/review-amour-fou-about-the-woman-in-a-poets-suicide-pact.html?_r=0. Accessed 10 May 2017.

De Duve, Thierry. "The Mainstream and the Crooked Path." *Jeff Wall*. editor? Phaidon, 1996, pp. 24-55.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema I: The Movement Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Athlone, 1986.

Der Schöne Tag (A Fine Day). Directed by Thomas Arslan, Germany, 2001.

Diers, Michael. "Bilder nach (Film-)Bildern oder Andreas Gursky und die Interferenzen von Fotografie und Film." *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2003, pp. 393-408.

Döblin, Alfred. "About Faces, Portraits, and their Reality." *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-33. Documents and Essays*. Translated by Marion Schneider and edited by David Mellor, Arts Council of Great Britain, pp. 55-59.

Dreileben. Directed by Dominik Graf, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Christian Petzold, Germany, 2011.

Durand, Régis. "The Secular Imagery of Thomas Ruff." *Thomas Ruff, Exhibition Catalogue Centre National de la Photographie*, Actes Sud, 1997, pp. 23-4.

Eisner, Lotte. *Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Translated by Roger Greaves. 2nd ed, California UP, 2008.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, vol. 11, 2005, pp. 54-63.

---. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." 1972. *Home is Where the Heart is*. Edited by Christine Gledhill, British Film Institute, 1987, pp. 43-69.

Erster Tag (First Day). Directed by Angela Schanelec, Germany, 2009.

Feldstraße. Directed by Ulrich Köhler, Germany, 1994.

Fisher, Jaimey. "Out of the Present: Films of the Berlin School." *The Brooklyn Rail*, 5 Nov. 2013,

- <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2013/11/film/out-of-the-present-films-of-the-berlin-school-at-moma>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- . *Christina Petzold*. Illinois UP, 2013.
- , and Brad Prager, editors. *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Wayne State UP, 2010.
- Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. California UP, 1980.
- . *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. Yale UP, 2008.
- Fry, Roger. *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*. Hogarth, 1927.
- Gallager, Jessica. "The Limitation of Urban Space in Thomas Arslan's Berlin Trilogy." *Seminar*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2006, pp. 337-352.
- Galt, Rosalind, and Karl Schoonover. "Introduction: The Impurity of a Cinema." *Global Art Cinema*, edited by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, Oxford UP, 2010, pp. 3-27.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell UP, 1980.
- Gierstberg, Frits. "European Portraits: An Introduction." *European Portrait Photography Since 1990*. Edited by Frits Gierstberg, Prestel, 2015.
- Gläse, Helga, Berhard Groß, and Hermann Kappelhoff, eds.. *Blick, Macht, Gesicht*. Vorwerk, 2001.
- Gold*. Directed by Thomas Arslan, Germany, 2013.
- Gombrich, Ernst H.. *Norm and Form: Studies and the Art of Renaissance*. Phaidon, 1966.
- . *The Image and the Eye*. Oxford, 1982.
- . *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*. Phaidon, 1963.
- Göktürk, Deniz. "Turkish Delight, German Fright: Migrant Identities in Transnational Cinema."

- Mapping the Margins: Identity Politics and the Media*. Edited by Deniz Derman and Karen Ross, Hampton, 2002, pp. 177-92.
- Gras, Pierre. *Good Bye Fassbinder! Der Deutsche Kinofilm seit 1990*. Translated by Marcus Seibert, Alexander Verlag, 2014.
- Grootenboer, Hanneke. "Laura Letinsky: Hardly More Than Ever. Photographs 1997-2004." *Laura Letinsky*, http://lauraletinsky.com/media/Letinsky_HardlyMoreThanEver_pgs_1-164_LowRes-copy.pdf. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Hake, Sabine and Barbara Mennel, editors. *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium: Sites, Sound, Scenes*. Berghahn, 2014.
- Halbschatten (Everyday Objects)*. Directed by Nicolas Wackerbarth, Germany, 2012.
- Halle, Randall and Sabine Czulwik, "History is not a Matter of Generations: Interview with Harun Farocki," *Camera Obscura*, vol. 46, 2000, pp. 47-75.
- Halle, Randall. *The Europeanization of Cinema: Interzones and Imaginative Communities*. Illinois UP, 2014.
- Harbord, Janet. *Chris Marker; La Jetée*. MIT Press, 2009.
- Hausner, Jessica. "What Fascinates Me a Lot is the Huge Difference ..." Interview with Karin Schiefer, May 2014, http://www.austrianfilms.com/news/en/what_fascinates_me_a_lot_is_the_huge_difference_. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- . "Das Fräulein Wunder." Interview with Sarah Al-Hashimi, *The Gap*, 23 Oct. 2014, <https://thegap.at/das-fraeulein-wunder/>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Helle Nächte (Bright Nights)*. Directed by Thomas Arslan, Germany, 2017.
- Herrmann, Mareike. "Geisterlandschaften. The Memory of Heimat in Recent Berlin School Films." *Heimat: At the Intersection of Memory and Space*. Edited by Friederike Eigler

- and Jens Kugele, de Gruyter, 2012, pp. 158-75.
- Hesselberth, Pepita. *Cinematic Chronotopes: Here, Now, Me*. Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Higgins, Scott, editor. *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies*. Routledge, 2010.
- Hochhäusler, Christoph. "Film als Portrait." *Revolver: Zeitschrift für Film*, vol. 26, 2012, pp. 57-9.
- . "Album." *Raumsprache*. 20 November 2010.
<http://raumsprache.blogspot.com/2010/11/album-1995-2010.html>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- . "Grüße vom Nordpol." *Parallel Film*. 17 February 2008.
<http://parallelfilm.blogspot.com/2008/02/gre-vom-nordpol.html>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- . "Re: Fragen zu Filmen und Arbeit bei Revolver." Received by Jasmin Krakenberg, 26 March 2015.
- . "Nathloser Konsens." *Parrallel Film*, 17 Juli 2016,
<http://parallelfilm.blogspot.com/2016/07/nahtloser-konsens.html> . Accessed 11 May 2017.
- . "Eine Sekunde aus dem Leben von." *Liebling*, November/Dezember 2008, pp. 36-7.
- . "Halbwelt, Halbbild: Zur Fotografie von Katja Stuke." *Katja Stuke*, 2008,
<http://ks68.de/texts/halbwelt-halbbild/>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*. Chicago UP, 1985.
- Huyssen, Andreas. "Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth." *October*, vol. 48, 1989, pp 25-45.
- Im Schatten (In the Shadows)*. Directed by Thomas Arslan, Germany, 2010.
- Jacobs, Carol. *Sebald's Vision*. Columbia UP, 2015.

Jacobs, Steven. "Blurring the Boundaries between City and Countryside in Photography."

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, vol. 14, no. 3, 2012,

<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/6/>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

---. *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts*. Edinburgh UP, 2011.

Jaffe, Ira. *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action*. Columbia UP, 2014.

Jane. Directed by D.A. Pennebaker, USA, 1962.

Jenkins, William. *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*, International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975.

Kaes, Anton. *From Hitler to Heimat*. Harvard UP, 1989.

Karl Jasper. *Die Geistige Situation der Zeit*. 1931. De Gruyter, 1998.

Koch, Stephen. *Stargazer: Warhol's World and his Films*. Calderbooks, 1974.

Köhler, Ulrich. "Why I Don't Make Political Films." Translated by Bettina Steinbruegge, *Cinema Scope* vol. 38, Spring 2009, pp. 10-3.

Koepnick, Lutz. "German Art Cinema Now." *German Studies Review* vol 36, no. 3, 2013, pp. 652-60.

---. *On Slowness: Towards an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*. Columbia UP, 2014.

Kopp, Kristin. "Christoph Hochhäusler's This Very Moment: The Berlin School and the Politics of Spatial Aesthetics in the German-Polish Borderlands." *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*.

Edited by Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager, Wayne State UP, pp. 285-308.

Krakauer, Siegfried. "Photography." 1927. *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*.

Edited by Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, Routledge, 2014, pp. 60-63.

Kreuzweg (Stations of the Cross). Directed by Diedrich Brüggemann, Germany, 2014.

Landry, Olivia. *The Performance of Berlin School: Movement, Affect, and Presence*. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2015.

La Jetée. Directed by Chris Marker, France, 1962.

Liebermann, Valeria, editor. *Ruff, Thomas: Works 1979-2011*. Schirmer/Mosel, 2012.

Lim, Song Hwee. *Tsai-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*. Hawaii UP, 2014.

Lippard, Lucy R.. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multi-Centered Society*. W. W. Norton, 1997.

Löffler, Petra and Leander Scholz, eds..*Das Gesicht ist eine starke Organization*. Dumont, 2004.

Die Lügen der Sieger (The Lies of the Victors). Directed by Christoph Hochhäusler, Germany, 2014.

Lupton, Catherine. *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*. Reaktion, 2004.

MacDonald, Scott. *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place*. California UP, 2001.

Marlon Brando. Directed by David Maysles, USA, 1965.

Mein langsames Leben (Passing Summer). Directed by Angela Schanelec, Germany, 2001.

Menschen am Sonntag (People on Sunday). Directed by Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer's, Germany, 1929.

Milchwald (This Very Moment). Directed by Christoph Hochhäusler, Germany, 2003.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Landscape and Power*. 2nd ed., Chicago UP, 2002.

Modern Times. Directed by Charlie Chaplin, USA, 1936.

Montag kommen die Fenster (Windows on Monday). Directed by Ulrich Köhler, Germany, 2006.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

---. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness in the Moving Image*. Reaktion, 2006.

Nachmittag (Afternoon). Directed by Angela Schanelec, Germany, 2007.

Neale, Steve. "Art Cinema as Institution." *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1981, pp. 11-40.

Ostwärts. Directed by Christian Petzold, Germany, 1990.

Owen, Craig. "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism." *October*, vol. 12, 1980, pp. 67-86.

Park Film. Directed by Chris Welsby, UK, 1972.

Petzold, Christian. „Uuuuuh, die Sache wird nicht nur angenehm.“ Interview with Norbert Thomma and Christiane Peitz. *Tagesspiegel*, 23 Sep. 2014, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/weltspiegel/sonntag/regisseur-christian-petzold-uuuuuh-die-sache-wird-nicht-nur-angenehm/10728622.html>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

---. "Eingetrübte Romantik," Interview with Jens Hinrichsen. *Monopol Magazin für Kunst und Leben*, 6 Mar. 2012, <http://www.monopol-magazin.de/eingetrübte-romantik>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

Peucker, Brigitte. "Filmic Tableau Vivant." *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*. Edited by Ivone Margulies, Duke UP, 2003, pp. 294-314.

---. *The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film*, Stanford UP, 2007.

Phoenix. Directed by Christian Petzold, Germany, 2014.

Poor Little Rich Girl. Directed by Andy Warhol, USA, 1965.

Potts, Alex. "Introduction to Johann Joachim Winckelmann." *History of the Art of Antiquity*. The Getty Research Institute, 2006, pp. 1-53.

Der Räuber (The Robber). Directed by Benjamin Heisenberg, Germany, 2010.

Rees, A.L., and Michael Pray. "Introduction." *Undercut*, no. 7/8, Spring 1983, pp. 9-19.

---. *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-garde to Contemporary British Practice*. British Film Institute, 1999.

Remes, Justin. *Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis*. Columbia UP, 2015.

- Rentschler, Eric. *The Use and Abuse of Cinema: German Legacies from the Weimar Era to the Present*. De Gruyter, 2014.
- Rhodie, Sam. "Film and Landscape." *Screening the Past*, 30 Apr. 2004, <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2014/12/film-and-landscape/>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Roggen, Sam. "You See it or You Don't: CinemaScope, Panoramic Perception, and the Cinephiliac Moment." *LOLA*, Aug. 2013, <http://www.lolajournal.com/4/cinemascope.html>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Rössak, Elvira, ed.. *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, and Algorithms*. Amsterdam UP, 2011.
- Rother, Rainer. "No Solutions, Only Questions: An Encounter with Nina Hoss." *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*. Edited by Anke Leweke and Rajendra Roy. Museum of Modern Art, 2013, pp. 60-65.
- Rowe, Peter. *Making a Middle Landscape*. MIT Press, 1991.
- Roy, Rajendra. "Introduction." *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*. Edited by Anke Leweke and Rajendra Roy, Museum of Modern Art, 2013, pp. 11-12.
- Ruff, Thomas. "Interview. Régis Durand." *Thomas Ruff, Exhibition Catalogue Centre National de la Photographie*, Actes Sud, 1997.
- Sander, August. *Antlitz der Zeit. Sechzig Aufnahmen Deutscher Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. 1929. Schirmer/Mosel, 1976.
- Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.
- Schanelec, Angela. "To Light Itself." Translated by Juliane Camfield. 8 March 2013, Marburg.Camera Award Ceremony, Marburg. Keynote Address.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd. ed, Routledge, 2013.

Schick, Thomas. "A "Nouvelle Vague Allemande"? Thomas Arslan's Films in the Context of the Berlin School." *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, vol. 3, 2010, pp. 143-55.

Schlafkrankheit (Sleeping Sickness). Directed by Ulrich Köhler, Germany, 2010.

Scott, A.O.. "Neo-Neo-Realism." *The New York Times*, 17 March 2009,

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/22/magazine/22neorealism-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. Accessed 10 May, 2017.

Screen Tests. Directed by Andy Warhol, USA, 1964-66.

Séance. Directed by Christoph Hochhäusler, Germany, 2009.

Sitney, P. Adams. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000*. 3rd. ed, Oxford UP, 2002.

---. "Landscape in the Cinema: The Rhythm of the World and the Camera," *Landscape, Natural Beauty and Arts*. Edited by Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell. Cambridge UP, 1993, pp. 103-126.

Sievert, Thomas. *Cities Without Cities: An Interpretation of the Zwischenstadt*. 1997. Spon, 2003.

Smith, Murray. *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*. Clarendon, 1995.

Snow, Michael. *The Michael Snow Project: The Collected Writings of Michael Snow*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1994.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Penguin, 1977.

---. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador-Farrar, 2003.

---. "Freak Show." *The New York Review of Books*, 15 November 1973. Reprinted

"America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly." *On Photography*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977, pp. 27-48.

---. "On Culture and the New Sensibility." *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964. pp. 293-304.

Stilleben (Still Life). Directed by Harun Farocki, Germany, 1997.

Storr, Robert. *September: A History Painting by Gerhard Richter*. Tate Publishing, 2010.

Strobel, Heidi, "Royal 'Matronage' of Women Artists in the late 18th Century." *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2, Fall 2005-Winter 2006, pp. 3-9.

Struth, Thomas. "The Tower and the View: Gil Blank and Thomas Struth in Conversation." First published in *Whitewall*, vol. 6, 2007,

<http://www.gilblank.com/texts/intvws/struthintvw.html>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

Schwenger, Peter. "Still Life: A User's Manual." *Narrative*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2002, pp. 140-55.

Taubin, Amy. "Maren Ade's Toni Erdmann." *Film Comment*, vol. 52, no. 5, 2017, pp. 28-32.

Tobey, George A. *A History of Landscape Architecture*. American Elsevier Publishing, 1973.

Truninger, Fred. *Filmic Mapping*. Jovis, 2013.

Tweedie, James. *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*. Oxford UP, 2013.

Van de Valde, Danica. "An Archaeology of the Filmic Essay: Untangling Harun Farocki's Still Life (1997)." *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 80, 2016, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2016/cteq/still-life/>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

Vorschneider, Reinhold. Interview with Angela Schanelec and Marco Abel. "Berliner Schule.

Part 3: Angela Schanelec, Reinhold Vorschneider, and Marco Abel." *Youtube*, uploaded by Deutsches Haus, 15 Feb. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ0ohn-D0aA>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

Wall, Jeff. "Cinematography: A Prologue, 2005." *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition*, Phaidon, 2009, p. 259.

---. "Restoration, 1994: Interview by Martin Schwader." *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition*, Phaidon, 2009, pp. 86-95.

- . "Interview with Benjamin Heisenberg and Roland Zang." *Revolver: Kino Muss Gefährlich Sein*. Edited by Marcus Seibert, Verlag der Autoren, pp. 298-307.
- . "Photography and Liquid Intelligence." 1989. *Jeff Wall: The Complete Edition*, Phaidon, 2009, pp. 218.
- Webber, Melvin. "The Urban Place and the Non-Place Urban Realm." *Explorations in Urban Structure*. Edited by Melvin Webber, Pennsylvania UP, 1964.
- Welsby, Chris. "Interview with Michael O-Pray and William Raban." *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists' Films and Video*. Edited by Nina Danino and Michael Mazière, pp. 121-126.
- Werneburg, Brigitte. "'Color in Outer Space is Nonsense, in Any Case.' Tracing Thomas Ruff's Work." *Deutsche Bank Art Works*, 2012. 31 Oct. 2016, <http://db-artmag.com/en/70/feature/color-in-outer-space-is-nonsense-in-any-case.-tracing-thomas-ruff/>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Wilinsky, Barbara. *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema*. Minnesota UP, 2001.
- Williams, Blake. "Saying Something: The Films of Angela Schanelec." *Cinema Scope*, vol. 68, 2016, <http://cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-online/dreamed-path-angela-schanelec-germany-wavelengths/>. Accessed 10 May 2017.
- Wolf, Sabine. "Die Urbane Landschaft in den Filmen der Berliner Schule," *Cinema*, vol. 54, 2009, pp. 39-50.
- Zander, Peter. "50 Jahre DFFB: 'Ein Labor, um das Sehen zu lernen.'" *Berliner Morgenpost*, 17 September 2016, <https://www.morgenpost.de/kultur/article208249419/50-Jahre-DFFB-Ein-Labor-um-das-Sehen-zu-lernen.html>. Accessed 11 May 2017.
- Zardini, Mirko. "Green is the Color." *Mutations*. Edited by Rem Koolhaas & Harvard Project on the City, Stefano Boeri & Multiplicity, Sanford Kwinter, Actar, 2001, pp. 434-39.

Zielony, Tobias. "Then it Gets Light: Christian Petzold in Conversation with Tobias Zielony."

Story/No Story. Translated by Rebecca van Dyck. Hatje Cantz, 2010, pp. 110-17.