

# IMAGES IN PROGRESS BERLIN



Contemporary Berlin Filmmaking

Edited by Jürgen Brüning and Andreas Wildfang

I M A G E S I N P R O G R E S S  
**BERLIN**

"The  
Pale  
Pals"

Contemporary Berlin Filmmaking

Edited by Jürgen Brüning and Andreas Wildfang

**HALLWALLS**  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER  
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Treptower Park, Berlin

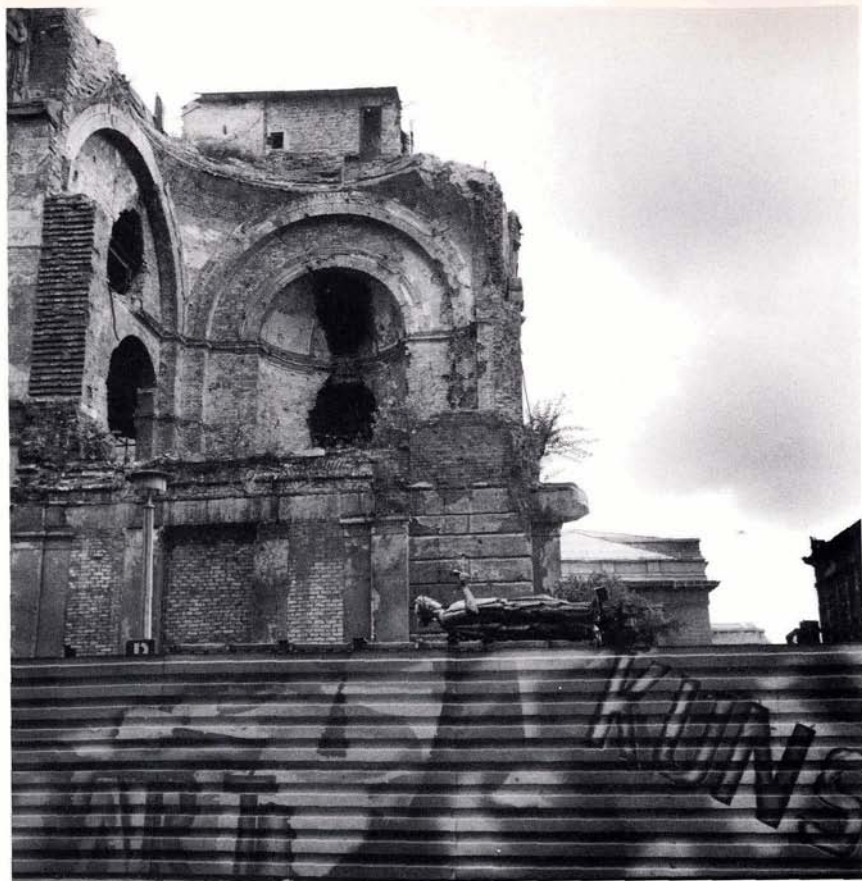
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Jürgen Brüning  
Andreas Wildfang  
Film Curators



Berlin, Pergamon Museum

# Introduction

by Jürgen Brüning

Berlin, city of myths and Nazis, surrounded by a wall to keep out imperialist influence, will display its diversity in this five-day festival of recent films.

Known for its vivid *filmkultur* since silent days, and in spite of its brief episode with Nazi propaganda melodramas, Berlin has remained a center for avant-garde, experimental, and underground films, wide open for multi-media events and other *Schweinereien*. Always suffering under a paternalistic political administration, the filmkultur has gotten its strength and kicks from all the outsiders who came to the city (and the Berliners who didn't leave), putting all their efforts into creating images which haven't been seen before.

Independent filmmaking in Berlin is always connected to the political situation of the city itself, commenting upon and reflecting it, and even going a step further by trying to install alternative structures of funding, production, and exhibition to foster the creative process. The diversity represented by the four filmmakers who will be screening their work at Hallwalls has prevented domination by any one aesthetic tendency and will give viewers an historical overview of the development of the Berlin film subculture over the past decade. One response to the political climate of Berlin was individuals joining forces in organized groups for either shooting or exhibiting their films. The use of the Super-8 format by these young filmmakers also brought a vivid renewal to the scene.

Looking to the individual development of the filmmakers whose work is included in this series, one can see certain characteristic tendencies: **Michael Brynntrup** was a founding member of the group *Oyko*, whose activities have been presented internationally since 1983. **Penelope Buitenhuis** moved from Canada to Berlin in 1984 and connected her North American background with the cultural environment she found there. **Katarina Peters** studied under Ramsbott at the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin. **Michael Krause** was involved from 1979 on in the U.V.A. (*und viele andere*, "and many others") project, which organized the first International Super-8 Festival in Berlin and later became known for such multi-media projects as *Notorische Reflexe*. These four filmmakers moved to Berlin at different times between 1977 and 1984, which reflects the continuous revitalization of the Berlin film subculture and its appeal to young German and international artists. Equally important has been the mutual influence between film and other art forms such as performance, music, and visual art and their fusion in new forms of expression. All the filmmakers represented in **BERLIN: IMAGES IN PROGRESS** have been actively involved in this movement in Berlin, and will be extending it to the U.S. scene by working on collaborative projects with American artists during their stay in the States. At Hallwalls, each filmmaker will present an evening of his or her films, along with these recent collaborations.





Berlin, Olympiastadion



# Berlin: Images in Progress

## The Grant Proposal Cut Up

by Andreas Wildfang

Super realism—Super-8—is the unofficial story of privacy. Home movies require permission, a PG reality. A capturing apparatus for home-hunting purposes. Staged neighborhood burlesque could enclose the following anecdote: Old lady tries to buy sausage for dog. Approaching the market stand at adequate speed she fumbles. Cane goes high, lady down. Rolling into the ditch she mumbles: I'm a poor sausage.

The machine inherits the values of time and space. The commercial value of Super-8: \$5 can buy you 15 feet and three minutes of film.

The upper class zoom lens. Stay distant and compressed. Come closer and get muddy hands. Get too close and reality becomes a blurry something.

One of many aspects of Berlin filmmaking: To get close but keep things in focus.

The project *Berlin: Images in Progress* focuses on specific aspects of Berlin culture in the field of independent filmmaking. "Berliner" means pancake and art is the art of eating. You can't eat the cake and keep it. Stay hungry and simulate. Berlin is as close as you can get.

The filmmaker and the city, a melodramatic relationship between creative individual and environment. Environmental claustrophobia: the friendly neighbor and his dog, past defeats, contemporary art and the futuristic design of the motor vehicle department, euphoric encounters in the next bar.

The project does not describe the city in terms of exoticism or surfacial image/frame. People do not wear grass skirts—it is cold and wet. The Brandenburg Tor exists and so does the Reichstag.

A Super-8 camera is a magic wand you can buy in the toy department. Filmmakers have lost the user's instructions. So they read the city. The city's axioms are reflected in their work less in the choice of images as in rhythm, montage, or scenic construction.

The city undergoes archeology through cinematic techniques, its historical presence gets reedited, its soundtrack manipulated, its stories subverted. The following story is a sociological digression on cinema:

I worked as a counselor in Berlin. I cared for a schizophrenic twin. His mother a drug-addict, his abusive father dead. We rode the neighborhood bus. The seats were covered with swastikas. I showed him our movie theatre located in a Kreuzberg-loft. He said: "This is Ghostbusters" and urged me to leave. He had nightmares the entire

week after.

Transgressive movements across the art forms have melted into innovative filmic expression. The artists participating in the project have encountered the film medium from very different angles. Their imagery has been charged up with elements from the visual arts, their tools transformed by sculpting, their narration processed by poetry. The human body is the perfect tool, the arm fulfills movements every crane dreams of, the muscles embarrass the dolly. Filmmakers and policemen are disproportionately represented in Berlin gyms.

There is subtle artifice and political aggressiveness, outrageous statements of cynicism and the nostalgic smell of rotting fur.

Super realism, the private story of the unofficials. Permission requires a home, homelessness doesn't know ratings. A haunted apparatus for capturing purposes. The nearby stage Berlin closes with the following anecdote:.....





Susic, 1972

# The Gay/Super 8 Connection: Berlin

by Jürgen Brüning

Gigolo is my favorite bar.

Gigolo is a bar where you watch old queers, young turkish hustlers and Susie, a drag queen. She plays the slot machine, drinks one Becks after another and talks about her work as a cleaning person in a brothel, her alcoholic lover and her customers. Look at her and you know what kind of customers she has. Her dream to leave the gay sub-culture became more real when she appeared in some movies by Werner Schroeter, Rosa Von Praunheim, and Robert Van Ackeren. This didn't last. She doesn't talk about it. When you don't listen to Susie, you stare into the monitors, showing big American dicks. American Dreams. Years ago they didn't have monitors. Standing on the bar was an old fashioned Super 8 projector, also showing big dicks. Every man's dream. At the same time Geniale Dilettanten were putting their Super 8 projectors in front of an audience. Celebrating their youth culture excessively. No dicks but, instead, dreams. Dicks came later. Geniale Dilettanten didn't come to the Gigolo, so I had to go to their places, diving into the jungle of whatever you call it to find some kind of film work. I found a diversity of styles connecting everyday culture with the latest pop myth to the mystification of post modern post punk Zeitgeist. Meanwhile, I met tons of people, with or without education, ideas which can be hilarious or depressing, surrounded by concrete, which nobody will accept as real. After spending night after night in the womb-like caves of our ancestors, getting a tan which enables one to be recognizable all over the world, some people do actually appear in the Museum of Modern Art or at Hallwalls.

After having nice adventures with foreign speaking people, everybody returns to the Kindergarten and does what they desire. My desire is to have a beer at the Gigolo bar.





Berlin, Prinzessinnenstrasse

# A Cinematically Divided City

by Karen Rosenberg

I met Germans in their twenties in movie theaters all over West Berlin last summer. They tended to dress alike, black being the color of preference, regardless of the heat. I was often the only person in the theater, male or female, wearing two matching earrings. But I gradually began to distinguish between two kinds of young Berliners in the film world (who don't like each other).

There are the kids who want to get into film school and be George Lucas. "What kind of films do you want to make?" I asked one of them. "Successful films," he told me. Since that's not a generally-accepted genre category, I inquired further and got the following clarification: "You know the way they line up on the Ku'damm for *Dirty Dancing*? I want people to line up like that for my films. I want to give people their dreams."

As a born and bred American, I figured I could understand this desire all too well. So I spent more time hanging around the young filmmakers who told me they definitely didn't want to go to film school. In West Berlin, they all seem to know each other. The Super 8 scene is much less competitive than the 16mm or 35mm crowd. If you ask one of the "big boys" in his mid-forties what other films by West Berliners he can recommend, you are apt to be greeted by a very long silence. The Super 8ers, on the other hand, are happy to give you the phone numbers of all their friends, and you'll waste a lot of time before you find the good films.

Why the difference? I asked a lot of people that question and the answer I often got was that, for 35mm and 16mm film, there is intense competition for large grants and intense envy of those who get them. The Super 8ers are still fighting as a group for the legitimacy of their medium—its right to get reviews in the press, more money from the grant-giving agencies, etc.

But I think that there is also a generational divide. Each German filmmaker who came of age in the 1960s seems to have worked out a very particular political stance. Recommending a colleague with another position is probably anathema. The kids in

their twenties are noticeably anti-theoretical. In fact, a number of them don't respect the critical faculty at all. "Every time you think you have a clear and correct idea, it is suspect. You can't know anything exactly," Jochen Mueller of the Bonn-based group *Schmelz Dahin* (Melt Away) told me in West Berlin. I had seen their dream-like film *Der General* (The General) twice, once at the Hamburg No-Budget Short Film Festival and once at the Arsenal theater in Berlin. A diligent critic, I'd taken copious notes and was still confused about its themes. It turns out I shouldn't have worked so hard. "It's not a thought we want to present. We want to *evoke* thoughts," Mueller told me.

A love of dreams and evocative images links the film-school applicants and the committed Super 8ers, regardless of the differences in their aesthetics. As a rule, they are united in their opposition to the older generation. (Perhaps they have even defined themselves as anti-"film essay.") As a foreigner in my mid-thirties, I stood between these groups and outside of their conflicts, so I could talk with most everyone. There were days I felt less like a film critic than a war correspondent, visiting the factions of a cinematically divided city.

# Self Portrait with Skull

Remarks on the films of Michael Brynntrup  
by Birgit Hein

Since the beginning of the Twenties many of the most important works in experimental cinema have been the personal films, which were "psycho dramas" representing individual feelings and thoughts against the censored official culture. These films have always developed new forms of expression to convey their subjects.

Michael Brynntrup's films belong in the context of this tradition because they are radical, personal, and because he cultivated his own new narrative style with them.

For him, filmmaking is a process of searching for his own identity; therefore he is mostly his own actor and subject of his films, in which he examines reproductions in relationship to reality.

In his film *Handfest-Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle*, 1984, these are old and new passport photos, old films and photographs, xeroxes and his mirror image, whom he asks about himself. This analysis is at the same time a reflection about the producing of images and filming as a process of reproduction.

He lays his head on the xerox machine's glass where the light is flashing. What kind of copy of the head will it create? The xeroxes of his hands, the plaster hand on the hand photography, the moved hands, the hand with the ants from *Chien Andalou*—they are all the same reality in the film. He enlarges the xerox of his passport photo in several steps, and finds that the pupil of his eye looks like a skull. The producing of images means to create a new reality and not to reproduce an existing one. The film shows what you actually can't see: feelings of guilt, which lead to the intention to commit suicide, and the terrible fears resulting from the forbidden action of the hands. The trauma of the adolescent.

In *Tabu I-IV*, 1988, he portrays his own life in the last years. It starts with a drastic personal experience, a dangerous and painful operation. The text from his diary is supplemented with a small, not very focused, polaroid photo, which depicts him with a bandaged head in bed. This is the proof of it—that everything has happened. As the pages of the diaries turn, the images lose their documentary style. His life is now



portrayed in clips from his films in chronological order. On one hand, it means he portrays himself indirectly, in a digested, new-constructed reality. Privacy is taboo. On the other hand it means that his life goes into his films and that you can find the essential there.

The peculiarities of his narrative style are fully developed here. Portrayal and function. He is addressing himself directly to the audience. He looks into the camera, he talks to the spectator, he reads texts off camera—or he displays written statements like “please publish after my death” (in *Testamento Memori*). He allows us to see how he writes his texts or draws his drawings. We get the impression that the film is being produced now, as it is projected to us. Images and texts put themselves together like arguments of a direct speech. At the same time one is conscious of the process of making, although the shooting isn’t visible. The distance of the filmed action also results from the dichotomy between image and text, which, for example, in *Höllensimulation*, 1987, don’t seem to relate to each other. The spectator has to make an effort to decode the information.

Michael Brynntrup works in many different styles. He also carries out the search for his own identity by playing the part of somebody else, as in *Jesus Der Film* or *Orpheus*. Through using “the other,” his own persona becomes visible. In the mirror he doesn’t see himself, he sees the other face.



Die Botschaft Totentanz 8



In some of his films the skull is his partner and his second ego (*Musterhaft*, 1989/86 or *Testamento Memori*, 1989), with whom he talks, plays, kisses, and even has sexual intercourse.

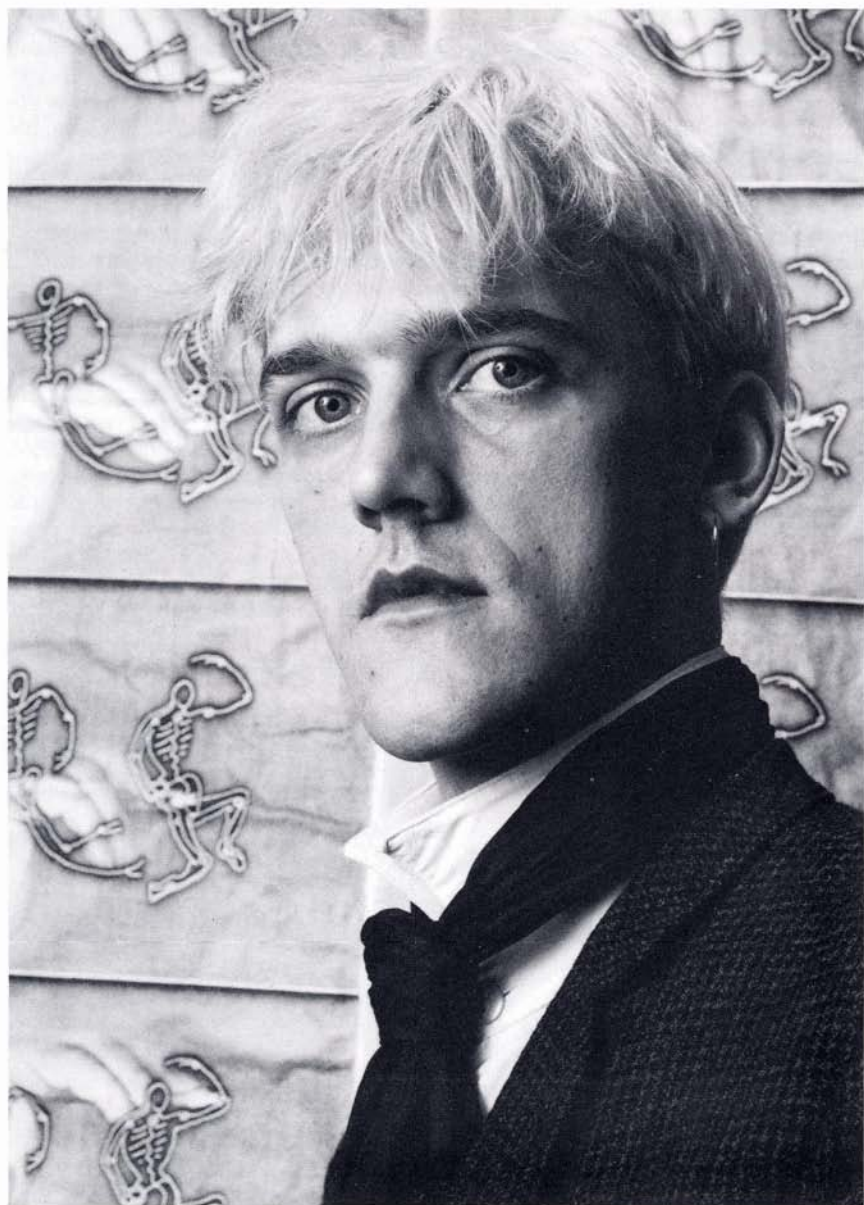
The death theme runs through his work from his early films on. Death is the end in the beginning, before life has really started.

*Der Rhein-Ein Deutsches Märchen*, 1983, is about his uncle, his father's younger brother, who died when he was 18 in the last days of WWII at Kaub, the area where his family spent their summer vacations. Brynntrup dissolves the color home movies of his childhood with the B/W documentary footage of fighting soldiers. The study of death even in his childhood has a deeper meaning. His identical twin brother died in childbirth. Speaking in terms of depth-psychology, the guilt of the survivor unconsciously determines his fascination with questions of death.

*Testamento Memori* ironically describes the birth-death theme. Texts with music about breathing techniques accompany his playing with the skull, in which the exhortation at the end is satirized. In this film his talent to create his own new images comes to full expression. His face, his hands, the skull, and a "Chinese" bird cage dangle in the room like silver shadows on a golden background.

In these works, the unified pictorial style is used repeatedly. There are episodes of *Totentänze 1-8*, 1988/89, for example, in which the skull has different "relationships" with men and women. I have seen only one of these eight films, which evoke the poetic independent American cinema of the early sixties.

You can see Michael Brynntrup's films again and again and you can always discover something new in them. The visual and textual complexity of his work ranks him with the most important new German and European filmmakers.



Michael Brynntrup

# Interview with Michael Brynntrup

by Steff Ulbrich  
March 4th and 12th, 1989

Scene 12, Take 354: *So Michael, over the years I have noticed an increasing use of the skull in your films. This started out as a series of xeroxed passport photos of yours where repeated enlargements revealed a skull in your eye. Then there is Testamento Memori, with you fucking a skull, leading to the Dances of Death (Totentänze), where you spread the skull among the people. My interpretation is: you are preaching the skull.*

How provoking! But you're really starting at the end.

*I intended to.*

Well, to me death is a theme, though never the only theme. It emerged quite early and runs through nearly all my films. But there are other things as well, and it is important to me that they appear in every film. Take the hand motif, for example. This appears on purpose in all my films; it symbolizes something to me.

*Is the skull also a symbol for you?*

It's a symbol as a non-symbol. A symbol is always something very concrete, like the Red Cross. A skull, for example, can mean poison, but wait! I don't regard it only as a symbol representing a mystical philosophy of life. To me the skull is especially interesting because its symbolic character is charged up by different parties. For instance, drawing classes love to use it as a prop. But it's also a sign of fashion; people put them on necklaces. The skull is present in nearly every youth culture—like the rockers, the skins or the punks. To me that means that it is a symbol for something which is hard to define otherwise. It is provoking, but on the other hand it worships or quotes a condition which can't be explained any further: the subject of death. Everyone's involved, everyone tries to get hold of it, even if it is only as an earclip. But the preoccupation with death is extensive and comprehensive. I don't use the skull to make a precise statement, I use it to evoke an atmosphere, I play with it. It has this nice ambiguity ranging from dead-serious to not being serious at all. In any case it touches an emotion, but rationalism is also part of the motifs.



*How do you develop the ideas for your Dance of Death films? Are these ideas which are exclusively yours and where you tell people: here, do this so and so, or are they based on collaboration? Or do you develop them together with actors? This would be similar to the structure of Jesus Der Film. You discover the Jesus-symbol and develop some ideas for that. You put yourself into the project as the main character, but on the other hand you have given other people the opportunity to work on this idea.*

In a broad sense my work may be considered as small pieces of handicraft which develop from actual situations. I pick them up spontaneously. *Handfest*, for example, belongs to those. That's a film where material had been accumulated, or archived. Of course, if you pick up a camera spontaneously and you film everything which you consider important or interesting, connections may arise between the single subjects after three years. Subjects you've been especially interested in. So that actually fits very well, it creates a film which makes sense by itself. *Tabu* is a similar example.

But there are other things which I approach in a more conceptual way, especially episodic things, fragmentary. To me Super 8 favors a fragmentary procedure. It is not script-writing, it is not about preparing a film for three years and then shooting it in 14 days. You collect your material with your handy camera. Or you just walk into the world for a day to shoot things you've just thought of, something you've just conceived. Then you outline a small story, an episode, that fits into Super-8.

If it's an episodic film like *Jesus*, or recently, the *Dances of Death*, I watch the people closely of course. And I get inspired by them as well. Take Ichgola (main character in *Dances of Death 6*) for example. I've seen her stage act and we know each other privately quite well, too. I've figured out that she has similar things in mind, grotesque and weird things but funny at the same time.

So we had thought about making a dirty little movie, a Dance of Death with a lot of meat and blood and a strange guy collecting it. Of course I had been to the slaughterhouse before, getting eyes of pigs and some guts. But the actual film happened quite unexpectedly, like the good weather. We met at Ichgola's. Her room is a real treasure-chest, a collection of curiosities. We got this and that out and ready, and did not know at all where to shoot. We opened the map of the city, but of course everything is pretty limited if you're surrounded by a wall: it's hard to find interesting places to shoot, especially if the theme is nature.

So we picked out the tiny blue dots on the map, little ponds and suchlike. Then we headed directly for one of these dots but we didn't find it. It seemed to be a printing mistake on the map. So we asked around a little and came up with a pond between some buildings. Though this one wasn't marked on the map. And then we shot the thing and if you watch the footage it seems to be total solitude, marshland, endless nature till the horizon. Actually we had to cut out poles and wires by finding clever angles. That's how Ichgola's *Dance of Death* was produced. The story developed at the location, more or less. The other *Dances of Death* are similar to that: Location, story and time. That is a situation, a view permitting fantasy. What is this anyway? What does he do there, where does he live—this is not storytelling in a conventional sense, to present persons. Then he meets someone, then they have to fulfill a task together or whatever, so narration does not exist in my films.

*You are not only a filmmaker, you do copy-art as well and you have studied art history. How could you explain the relation between the Dances of Death and the medieval Dances of Death?*

With an iconographic topos such as the medieval Dances of Death, everyone

somehow knew what it was about. King, farmer, beggerman, their personal death was provided to everyone. This is interesting to me because it could only happen after the awakening of consciousness of individualism. Before that there hadn't been an individual death, only the guild's ranks appeared worth portraying. It was at this point that individual fates were coming into consciousness, this self-reflecting moment. That you are thinking about yourself, not only as a person but also what you are dealing with. In this way I regard experimental film as some kind of meta-film. Every experimental film, and thus the *Dances of Death*, gives evidence about the medium of film. In this way the skull represents individual consciousness and self reflection.

*Are the Dances of Death pieces of handicraft or are they conceptual films?*

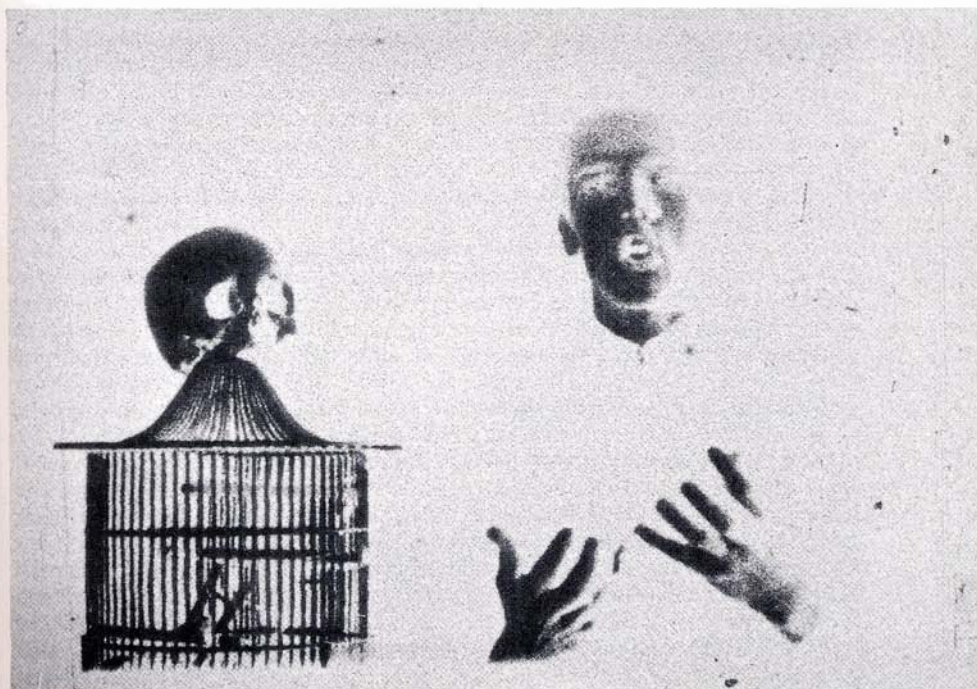
Conceptual insofar as they are part of a cycle. And in the sense that you limit yourself to a concrete situation from the start. When it comes to film I try to do something different from an ingenious, witty, conceptual thing. I try to work in a more emotional way.

*The Stummfilm Für Gehörlose (Silent Movie for the Deaf) is a more conceptual film for you.*

Yes, the film and image aspects do not offer total illusion. It is an educational film, it is a forefinger film, where I raise my forefinger.

*...but beware, if I watch the ending..*

That's a line from *Testamento Memori*. They dissolve into each other, the regions.



*Testamento Memori*



The title *Stummfilm Für Gehörlose* already points towards the film medium, for example that film means sound as well...Definitely I want to keep Super-8 as a spontaneous medium of expression, you can collect material for a longer time pretty wonderfully and you're not tied to the normal conditions of production. It is a very personal medium, as an individual you can get involved much more. That's not possible in big-budget productions where work is split up.

I just figured something out while shooting the *Dances of Death*—these are on Super-8 as well—I want to blow them up. There are criteria of quality, the quality of the images, sound...but that won't get better through a blow up. 16mm has obvious advantages—maybe not the quality of the images, but the sound quality in any case. Splices and so on...these are reasons to work in 16mm. Aside from that, distribution gets more commercial; you can't live on Super 8 and I want to live from my films.

*Your work is explicitly based on das Deutsche (German-ness), or maybe we should say on Central Europe. Does the cultural identity of different peoples still exist for you?*

Yes, sure, we are strongly influenced by history, there are direct effects on our time. If you don't deal with it, if you deny this occidental culture, you are placing yourself in a vacuum.

*But can you still afford, for example, to insist on your German past?*

Yes, I made a statement on the Berlin Wall in *Todesstreifen - ein Deutscher Film* (Deathstrip—a German Film), but I didn't make a statement on national socialism in *Der Rhein - ein Deutsches Märchen* (The Rhine—a German Fairytale) but on the Germany of the "economic miracle." It is that time which has shaped us and in which we grew up. That belongs to my person and to the present time. I can't imagine reappraising an aspect of German history, not even the persecution of homosexuals during the Third Reich...even in the form of documentary fiction. I regard it as completely unnecessary to present my opinion on that, nor do I consider myself competent to do so. There are other things which are closer to myself and more concrete. Persecution of homosexuals still exists today and I think it's important to report this as I have experienced it myself. You take yourself as an example.

*I don't mean it pejoratively, but you don't seem to deal with homosexuality much, aside from a certain attitude.*

Yes, I regard this as self evident, but I do believe that it is clear that my films have been done by a gay filmmaker. I just haven't done an exclusively gay film. And what is a homosexual film anyway? A traditionally narrated one with nothing more than a gay story. I do think that gay identity exists and so does gay culture, gay aesthetics.

*What does gay aesthetics mean to you?*

Or let's say straightout what happens in my films in that direction. Homosexuality is not particularly placed in the foreground. But there is always a variety of themes in my films. A lot of things have an impact on them. And maybe it's just that which makes my films fit together in one program so well. So, when I'm doing a movie I always think about including certain gay moments. Take the *Stummfilm*, for example. You see these cards which introduce sign language for the deaf. And more or less suddenly and inexplicably the sign representing homosexuality appears. This can be one level. The *Tabu*film is much more personal. I am talking a lot about my own coming-out. Or take the *Dances of Death* for example. I consider them as being pretty gay, especially in the age of AIDS. It hadn't occurred to me that way, at first. For

example *Dance of Death 3* with Antoine Strip-Pickles. But then some people thought about it as a gay love story—though it deals with a skull as well.

*I didn't mean gay content so much as gay aesthetics.*

Form and content have to presuppose each other. Both have to relate to each other in a sense-ful way and that means: They have to appeal to your senses and make intellectual sense as well. Gay aesthetics is more likely to be seen in the *Dances*. That is hard to express, trying to describe an image from the *Dances*. There is an effect on another level than a spoken or written word like "homosexuality." The Orpheus film appears to me as being quite a gay film as well. The gay view: Orpheus advances towards the underworld, the kingdom of the dead, and tries to get back his loved one. But he doesn't succeed, the woman stays out of his reach. He devotes himself to the arts...anyway, to the baroque, the pleasure of dressing up.

*But that's not specifically homosexual either, it's fun for everyone to dress up.*

Not necessarily. Men are not allowed to wear wigs. Likewise, the glance into the mirror, or the body-consciousness.

*This as well is only something human in general and not specifically homosexual.*

No way. Take, for example, an average, mortal, straight guy. His socially determined role has not forced him to face his body, his self, his sexual identity as gay persons always have had to.

*Let's forget about gay aesthetics, they don't exist.*

I wouldn't put it that way.

*What has been your goal with your Tabufilme?*

The *Tabufilme* do not state: what did Michael Brynntrup do on the 12th of May, 1989. But they are about what a diary is: does it include taboos? What is already predetermined by the diary medium? What are the conditions for diary writing? Do autonomous functions exist in the medium? And then there is another level. If you're doing a movie on the subject, where does that get you? Regarding content, it is clear, for example, that time, as it gets closer to now, gets more and more chaotic. Only in retrospect—let's say through history—things clear up somehow. In retrospect history gets categorized into "isms." This has been the case in the *Tabu I-IV* films. These four diaries have been the given frame, a four-part form. The transitions and themes have been floating through all the diaries. And all the same threads run through all the films as well, though the main focus is changing. The *Tabu*film is the confession—the attempt to get a hold on this chronological chaos by the means of form. And that is the reason why I structured the first diary under the main focus of the medical surgery. I have summed the second one up under another theme, general confusion and coming out. The third diary makes it clear that the *Tabu*film is a film, just that, the single pages of the diary become animated, something is moving inside the diary itself, and in the fourth diary, a concrete situation is recorded as in screenplays. It's about the here and now with its long ending. So all this is pretty complex and interconnected. But I think that the statement as a statement is important, which is to try to model your life, and you'll find out that it always is a reduction, an illusion. You don't organize your life by means of a diary, you create a diary and your life as well, again and again. You do so by looking things up again and figuring out different focuses. And then you say to yourself, well, that time I was so and so and thank God it's over. But at the same



time you figure out that there still is a piece left from that phase. And so the past stays alive in that you don't put it aside but keep on forming it. Your thoughts get relative and so does your inner urge and the fatefulness of all your actions. So now this is not an appeal for conscious breathing, but it is about what has been my circle of themes in the *Tabu* film.

*But where is the provocative element if you want to present a taboo as a taboo? I don't expect you to solve your own taboos, but at least to touch them.*

But come on, Steff! Now it's definitely your turn to name your taboos, the actual ones, here and now! Take my homosexuality for example. This has been a taboo for me in the past; today it's not, that's something I made clear in the *Tabu* film.

*You presented your diary as a guestbook at the premiere party, but no one wanted to write anything in it.*

Privacy is one of the last taboos. I wanted to confront people with it when I asked them to write something in my own diary. Finally it's always you who sets the taboos. They should have decided how far they wanted to go: to respect privacy or leaf through the diary or even write something in it. This play happened in front of a mirror. My work is never easy-going or purely sympathetic. Those who watch my movies always have to reflect on themselves as well. Take the example of this long ending. They realize that the movie isn't over yet, that there I am, sitting on a hard chair getting a sore butt. I drag them out of illusion, which every film creates, and out of fascination. I try to work on a structure which throws the people back to themselves. I don't offer figures of identification. The viewer can only identify with himself. Finally it's always about the audience being a single individual which has to deal with itself.

*So you would recommend to your audience that it's better for them to deal with themselves than to deal with your movies?*

No. But I do think that if there is any positive effect arising from my movies, then it is the idea that people become aware about dealing with themselves.

*So you don't do entertaining movies.*

Well, I don't want to do movies without edges, which will be forgotten in a minute, but films which require work while watching them.

*So that's why you use these coded, sometimes even mysterious symbols.*

It's just nice to work with symbols. They have been there for a long time and they have a precise meaning, though they are open to different interpretations. Symbols fit my case pretty nicely. You can work with them in a closed unit. But on the other hand they are very open and unoccupied. Whoever watches the movie can make up his own mind. So many different symbols exist and many different people use their own special symbols. So why, for example, the hand: there might be personal reasons. Possibly it has something to do with the fact that my hand has come into my consciousness as the first body part. And there is puberty; other people have told me, a friend whom I desired sexually made a remark about my beautiful hand. That's a personal experience and it stuck to me. And then it's simply the existence of the hand. The hand is a medium, something intellectual. You express yourself very personally with your hand through script and writing. There are hand-signs and there is palmistry. Maybe the hand is only a microcosm representing the entire body, the entire life, the entire world.

*And now you're going to tell me that some friend made a remark on your really beautiful skull.*

Before I started doing movies I already liked to draw skulls. There is a link to the awakening consciousness of individualism which by the way has interested me as a socio-historical phenomenon for a long time. This also explains my preference for mannerism, as this is exactly the time of the awakening of the individual—to make a long story short. And then there is puberty when a lot of things happened to me. And as time has confronted me with my hand I learned to regard it as my self, as a mirror of my self. It was natural that I started questioning myself: Where does everything lead to? And that's the phase when you start wondering about your death. Personally I have never been confronted with the death of a person I was close to. And this has been the trigger of something, maybe even a philosophical and theoretical idea. A lot of people—especially artists—relate everything they do entirely to their childhood, even when they are sixty. Because the decisive signs have been set there and I guess that applies to me as well.

*You just talked about your puberty and it seems that it has obviously been a decisive phase in your life. Am I wrong? There has been this criticism about Jesus Der Film. A university journal described it as adolescent. All these brain jerkers from the philosophy department sure loved writing that. But is this actually an insult for you, still being in puberty, or do you regard it as something valuable?*

Words like puberty, silly or embarrassing do not sound negative to me. Even more, they inspire me to deal with these issues, just because they are on the verge, not only in film but in life as well. You have to think these forms positive. You shouldn't disrupt the process of communication and discussion about these forms as they are changing steadily.

*You just mentioned mannerism briefly.*

I consider mannerism to be the most interesting epoch of art ever. Especially interesting is the rejection of formalism, the rejection of theories which tried to cover nature and vision by law. For example, the imagery: The central perspective, the centrality is suddenly led into absurdity. It is an interesting fact that mannerism has defined itself by what it rejected, which means it was first of all negative. But there is a positive expression in mannerism: its view of the diversity of man and of the world's complexity. This is something the central perspective had excluded, everything had its place in a pre-set structure. Mannerism weighs proportions freely and a free spirit can express itself in fantasy.

*Where does fantasy come into play in your movies?*

Well, first of all, I hope, in the viewer's head. In my films, well, there is a playfulness, there are puns, free associations. Maybe it gets clearer in the editing, where I like to crash things against each other which are pretty much unrelated.

*But to me your films get interesting just when they form a very closed unit.*

I always care about breaking things up, to tilt a curve I just built up to. I think about the *Dances of Death* in the same way though they are more like a unit. Only that the editing isn't tilting it. Things are not turned into their opposite by a concrete precise cut. I try to tilt and twist the film in a more emotional way through an elegant convolution of the brain. There is a good example in the *Dance of Death 3*. Two images are dissolved onto each other. One transports the story which can be conceived





*Der Elefant, aus Elfenbein, Totentanz 3*

emotionally. The other one displays a rotating circle of skulls, they turn and turn and turn— actually I think that's pretty funny.

And there is the Ichgola *Dance of Death*. Something outrageous and comic happens. So you might follow the storyline with interest, but after the film's done you just shake your head and wonder: What the hell was that? Whatever that might have been, it has touched me. But I have my head filled up with structures and pre-set patterns. I'm not getting anywhere here. In retrospect the story might appear as trivial trash, and recognizing this triviality the film is merely a joke, and that's queer and that's somehow enough.

*You think it's important to be funny and queer, but is that really enough?*

No, to guide the people to it on a really complicated path, a path they'll understand much later, on a fascinating path to this state of mind. So I don't want to make a statement here now, which you might answer somehow with arguments, and then this still would have to be discussed, and then we'll have to come up with a joint resolution. Not all that crap which somehow represents the stability of the whole system, but simply to point towards a region in every human being, in every subjectivity, where other things count besides words.

*Thank you.*

You're welcome.

# Moderns in Ruins

by Madeleine Leskin

Do you remember when you looked like this?

The "you": young men and women, urban dwellers, at once reluctant participants and enthralled voyeurs. Speakers and observers experiencing love, violence, and paranoia amidst the ruins of a ghettoized landscape.

And this place looked like that?

The place: the postmodern city, apprehended as compressed sprawl, the endless stream of abandoned buildings, vacant lots, garbage strewn streets, deserted ferry decks, and subway tracks, which comprise any number of geographic points from New York to Berlin, Toronto to Barcelona. The city as backdrop to any number of images, sounds, and stories.

The work of Canadian filmmaker Penelope Buitenhuis maintains a constant pathological preoccupation with the way people live in big cities, the "how" of their neuroses. The responses and accompanying metaphors are varied: cultural misappropriation, image representation, memory erosion. If the past is an excuse, and museums are refrigerators and the revolution will be coopted prior to broadcast, the question is how to unframe an uncertain future?

Born in Toronto, Canada, in 1959, Buitenhuis studied art history and film in Vancouver and at the Sorbonne in Paris and graduated in film from Simon Fraser University, British Columbia. She has been making films and videos independently in Berlin since 1984, and has presented at festivals in Brazil, England, Spain, Holland, West Germany, and the U.S. She works primarily in Super 8, shooting quickly and on a low budget, preferring the spontaneous, instinctual quality it offers. Her recent work is available on video for distribution at V-Tape in Toronto, Women in Focus in Vancouver, and Videograph in Montreal.



*Framed*



*Disposable* (1984-86, 16mm, 14 min., color tinted) follows Lester, "an ahistorical pop figure" through the rubble of North American disposable culture. Endless rows of statues, endless displays of paintings, and an endless supply of television screens and static radio channels line Lester's environment. Graffiti, instant polaroids, boom boxes, video surveillance all lead to a corruption of memory. The challenge is to reconsider the value of the image in a world where classical expressions of representation are relinquished to the garbage heap of pop life.

*Framed* (1986, S-8, 15 min., b/w) tells tales of modern "misdirected passions framed in a circle." A narrator holds up title cards to prompt the enactment of clichéd vignettes, fragmented stories of modern romance, desire, and suicide. The actual exposition of the stories, like the stories themselves, is predetermined, predictable: the action is "guided" through the anaesthetized, glass-eyed gazes of two women transfixed by their television. Situations are altered with a flick of the hand, the changing of the channel.

*Movimento* (1985-87, S-8, 12 min., b/w) articulates expression in the form of movement, through street rituals concerning birth and death. Flesh and marble, the human and the statue, engage in a brand of dislocation dance, while Japanese butoh performers hang suspended in midair, re-staging the circumstances of creation. A woman moves like a snake through a field of dead leaves, a graffittist performs his action on the walls of ancient history, flag-wavers at a Catalonian street demonstration are juxtaposed with a matador fighting a bull. The ubiquitous detached observer acknowledges such spectacles with a healthy round of applause.

In *Indifference* (1987, S-8, 25 min., b/w), the politics of surveillance directly affect the reading of reality, further heightening the accompanying sense of powerlessness. Ordinary, daily street events, experienced by a woman riding her bicycle through New York's Lower East Side, are as clichéd and theatrical as the pieces in *Framed*:—a fight, a car accident, a murder, a drug deal, a lover's quarrel. Business as usual, only this time the action is orchestrated and planned from outside. It's a kind of urban cat and mouse game designed to spawn paranoia, as the girl is given the "script" and "stills" of the day's event. The response? To stay indifferent... and survive.

The young would-be revolutionary/dreamer in *They Shoot Pigs, Don't They?* (1989, S-8, 15 min., color) also grapples with paranoia as she tries to come to terms with a nostalgia for a distant past, a vision of radical change. The hackneyed iconography of revolution (the memory of violence, the clenched fists, the heroic visages) leads to frustration. A group of media terrorists, the "Women against Pigs," take over ABC to deliver a manifesto. Their televised message and fashioned pose is ripped from historical and cinematic models, one part SLA, one part the Women's Army from Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames*. The "pigs," two potato-chip chomping cops, view the statement from the vantage point of their living room television, the blue glare revealing the breast of the spokeswomen for revolution—the desired media closeup. Predictably, their mission fails, as the "maintenance plan rules."

What kind of image is that?

Control over a steadily cheapened and deceptive bank of images translates into a manipulation of the maker. Documenting a mode of existence necessarily leads to a questioning of the filmic moment at the point of documentation. Watching television becomes a self-reflexive act in Buitenhuis' films; any reproduction of the visible is less *identification* than *projection*. Characters are surrounded by predetermined imagery, either of their own making ("framed" by clichés) or imposed from





*Indifference*

outside (boxed by TV screen). This sense of bewilderment vis-à-vis daily perception makes the camera eye necessarily curious, restless (a mugging is seen from the street, then from above). Angles and points of view are constantly changed to reveal the mechanisms of perspective.

The thematic which runs through much of Penelope Buitenhuis' work—the you, the place, the filmmaker herself—has its corollary in an inventive use of sound. Urban noise rarely concurs with urban vision—the sound is no slave to image here—and the result is sound within a framework of associative imagination. The city inhabitant experiences sound on the level of idiot savant, as comprehension is rendered through an oppressive, constant din. Buitenhuis works closely with musicians like the Dutch group Mekankik Kommando, who create specific texture and atmosphere from the roar of the machine, the crowd, or the lone rapper.

Different levels of sound reveal different degrees of aural overload, followed by sonic retardation. Radio stations, new broadcasts, planes overhead, interior monologues are layered to convey a dyspeptic rhythm of street life.

Bombarded with sights and sounds, in a world both of and not themselves, Buitenhuis' characters manifest their neuroses on a personal and public level. Subway riders wear Walkmans like protective armor; TV voyeurs brandish remote control devices like weapons; relief from the paranoia of the street is sought after but rarely successful. A ride on a boat away from the towering skyline brings little consolation. There is no comfortable escape. The refuge sought behind locked doors and closed blinds is elusive as the street worms its way through the walls. At the end of *They Shoot Pigs*, a voice from the chaos offers a suggestion: The power of ideas is not to bring back ghosts.

After all, what's so important to remember?



Penelope Buitenhuis



# Sucking the City Pulse

Interview with Canadian/Berlin Filmmaker  
Penelope Buitenhuis  
by Torsten Alisch

*Your latest film, They Shoot Pigs Don't They?, deals with the role of politics and media in our society.*

One of the obvious problems of media is that it represents the prevailing ideology, whose mechanisms are carefully masked in forms of entertainment or information (news, etc.). There are no outlets for unmediated mass expression. The opinion of the left, for instance, is not heard on a "mass level," it is marginalized and therefore rendered powerless. In *They Shoot Pigs*, I present the absurdist situation of a violent takeover of ABC television by a radical women's group who make a national broadcast criticising the present system and in particular the unjust murder of a black man by police in the Bronx. The obvious target to attack in an authoritarian society is the police or "pigs" which is what happens in my film in a slapstick way. But the film is also questioning the "nostalgia for revolution." In the beginning of the film a girl is in her room, the walls of which are plastered with political posters of symbols and figures that I think are common to us: Che Guevara, Baader-Meinhoff, clenched fists, black stars, etc. We are surrounded by these ideas of revolution, or images of people who took dangerous steps in trying to bring about radical change through revolutionary upsurges, at least in the western world. Today it is particularly problematic because a common, shared, youth ideology does not exist. We can reveal the worst things about politicians and governments, yet they continue to maintain power. It's crazy. So the nostalgia about revolutions serves really only to frustrate and torment, not to provoke.

*That's a question of content in which you transcend information, but what about form? In your films you don't tell stories through a plot; instead, you use sounds and images which are very different from conventional feature films.*

The form in my films developed quite instinctively and improvisationally. Because Super-8 is technically simple, inexpensive, and portable, I can afford to experiment. It is easier to extract spontaneous natural performances from inexperienced actors, it is possible to concentrate on developing a form and establishing a distinctive aesthetic. I tend to use a lot of metaphors and contrapuntal images and sounds with fragmented



narration to express an idea. The films also quite evidently acknowledge the presence of the maker. Though my films have become more narrative, I am quite aware of rejecting normal codes of representation (shot-reverse-shot, sync-sound etc.). These codes can be insidious and manipulative. I do not utilize "suture" for example, which is a film theory term to describe an image, sound, and editing process which is used in many "Hollywood films" to seduce the viewer into being a passive participator who becomes emotionally engaged. Like Godard, I prefer a detached, critical observer. A lot of elements are left open in my films for the audience to actively interpret.

*Your latest films seem to me to be documentaries about the life-styles and feelings of big city youth, but documentaries in a new form. Your new film, They Shoot Pigs, uses the feature film form. Why?*

Yeah, partly due to frustration. Habits of watching have become, I think, more conservative, conditioned, and impatient than perhaps thirty years ago. Because of television mostly, the viewer's ability to concentrate has been seriously damaged. My experience with a lot of audiences is that they often can't follow symbolic, suggestive films, that they don't trust their own visual comprehension to interpret images without words or narrative. Unfortunately a story is almost necessary if I want my films to be understood. In alternative cinemas like Eiszeit here in Berlin, the people are prepared to look at other kinds of things—They are already converted. The funny part is that people who are not filmmakers like my new film a lot and insiders from the independent film world don't. They find it formally problematic, the representations naive and the theme outdated, which is a sign of the times. We can no longer discuss revolution because it is a passé idea... That's scary! Since I've come to Europe my films have changed, they are less experimental perhaps because European audiences have a different tradition. The history of experimental films in America, like those of Stan Brakhage or flicker films, are movements that we studied in film school, particularly in mine, and "experimental" was part of artistic film education. In Berlin or Germany these forms seem totally unacceptable to a lot of audiences. Even the word "experimental" is a pejorative expression to use in Berlin. People immediately shy away (especially funding institutions)... it's an instant media turn-off. Although European films are generally more innovative than American films, I still find the avant-garde sector less tolerant of extreme forms. *They Shoot Pigs* is an attempt at storytelling on numerous levels. The internal monologue dreamer, the dream confused with actuality and the neo-documentary didactic. I also want to show that a lot of stories aren't told because of their radicalness or strangeness—that they don't correspond to the "common experience" and are therefore inaccessible. I mean, most of the population don't think about revolution except perhaps within themselves.

*I think your films have a very American style which I like more than the German intellectual problem films.*

That's also the different history. I come from a lighter, less obsessed culture where fun and entertainment is considered important. I have this feeling that European filmmakers, especially in the avant-garde, feel the necessity to be highly intelligent and extremely complicated. To create something fun is frivolous. I don't want to bore people or be pedagogic or didactic. I don't feel obligated to make some big intellectual statement, after all, I don't KNOW anymore than the next person. I think films can be intelligent and enjoyable...one does not exclude the other. German intellectual filmmakers tend to think they know a lot more than the masses; they are not humble. I don't associate with very many of them because of that and they're also so serious and their work is so serious. If I was asked why I make films I'd have to say "because it's fun," a lot of work but fun.



*They Shoot Pigs Don't They?*

*In your films you use a lot of sound, or music as sound. Do you think that sound is a universal language?*

Yes, more than English is. An incredible scope of experience, memory and associations can be brought out with one sound. An image is often too concrete and can be easily slotted and is often culturally specific whereas a sound can be interpreted very individually. Just as music can instantly bring back memories, different sounds can affect you unconsciously and therefore have a broader realm of acceptance. I also believe that people are aurally not so refined. Everyday our ears are bombarded with sounds that many are not aware of. In my films I tend to use a lot of prominent, exaggerated sounds which the audience is forced to be aware of. I deliberately use non-synchronized sound so that the voice is not trapped in the body, but takes on a more omnipotent, poetic force. In many films, sound is secondary to image and corresponds to the picture. I like to detach the sound from its owner and bring it in, for instance, much earlier, so an image has already been formed in one's head before it actually appears. Up until this last film I worked a lot with the Dutch band Mechanik Kommando who combine natural sounds with industrial, synthetic music. Because I



can't afford to pay people who work on my films, I tend to give them a lot of creative freedom to interpret their role, and you can hear this in the soundtracks. It is more inspiring if a director isn't hanging over your shoulder telling you what to do. The Berlin band The Rude Angels did the soundtrack on *Pigs*, and it is much more musical. They used certain kinds of rhythms and genres associated with different political and emotional states.

*You often shoot your films in many different cities like New York, Berlin, and Vancouver, integrating them into one cityscape. Do you think there is a common connection between cities all over the world and their inhabitants?*

Yes. For example I think every city person suffers from problems of concentration. There is a sort of overload of sound, pitch, and picture...like watching too many films with too many characters. A consequence is often depression and isolation. Not only do you have your problems to deal with, but you hear or see everybody else's. One becomes like a vampire, sucking the pulse of the city. It's quite difficult to be optimistic under such circumstances and a certain amount of optimism is needed to create. In all cities, it's a fight which can be very inspiring but it can also render one totally useless.

*You've lived for five years in Berlin and three years in Paris. Do you think that Europe has influenced your films and your thinking?*

Yes, but it is difficult to pinpoint. I never really thought politically until I came to Europe. It never occurred to me that how you live your life is a political choice. The concept of "working" solely for money is not given here. In Europe, history and tradition is everywhere and it affects what is produced culturally. I think I have become more aware of subtleties of language and of representation, but in many ways the concerns in most of my films haven't changed. I continue to shoot in ghetto areas of big cities, as background metaphors for the world in ruins. If I'd stayed in Canada I probably would have stopped making Super-8 films years ago and would be writing scripts and trying to get funding for 16mm projects. Although the Canada Council has a fairly liberal mandate for subsidizing films, there is not so much money available there to produce films. I am interested in making as many films as possible with the least amount of bureaucracy. In North America, Super-8 is also not considered a serious medium and it is very difficult to find a venue that will screen your films. In Berlin, Super-8 is respected and it's one of the only places where I have gotten critical attention. A big article about a Super-8 filmmaker in a daily paper in North America is practically unheard of. Nobody wants to read about something which is unknown. In Berlin the public is interested in a wider range of things, in the unusual and the new. I heard an American guy say that it is easy to be famous in Berlin, which has some truth. A funny anecdote about my mother: she never took my filmmaking seriously until she read the article translated from the German papers. Then she said: "Oh yeah, now I understand what you're trying to do." In North America most of the cinemas are monopolized and low-budget productions mostly only get shown in festival situations or are purchased by museums for archives. Here there are many private, repertory theatres who have the freedom to show what they want, and they do show a wide variety of films. After all, I don't make films to collect dust on the shelves. The whole motivation and optimism to continue to make films would be harder to maintain in Canada.

*Many of your films have a certain video-clip aesthetic, where a mood is created simply, without a continuous narrative.*

Yes, mood and sensation serve a function equally as important as story. Ultimately one doesn't leave the cinema with a story but with a feeling.

# 4/89 Berlin “The Inter-View!”

Niels Krüger is listening to Michael Krause  
and is looking into the face.



## TRUTHFULNESS

I had a lot of professions, to name only a few:

Painter, car sales person, electrician, script writer,  
photographer, driver, cook, cashier, market researcher,  
historian, author, actor, social worker, theater director,  
site-foreman, porter, mechanic, courier, publisher, projectionist, caretaker, etc.,  
etc., all kinds of rubbish, mainly  
what turned out to be important in life (which doesn't  
appear as such)

Jobs I haven't had (but dream of):

Shoplifter, swindler, soccer star and singer as well as  
everything which has to do with money (but which is definitely totally  
uninteresting as such)

Boaster, pervert, lecher, weakling, and coward



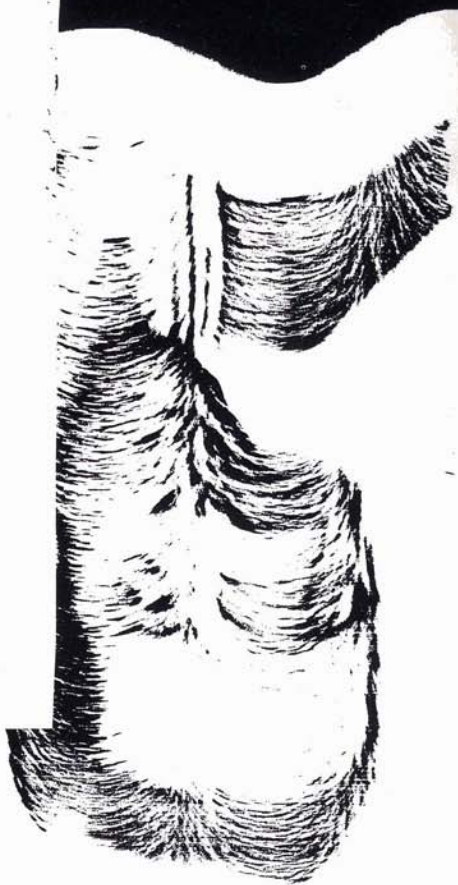
In this sea of quietness nobody can cry...to lay oneself on the street, shouting and kicking ones legs what is this supposed to be Europe we must not have the war we should live love forget the deep hate, which we have brought with us from our womb-like caves of our primal ancestors, whose carriage is the pentagon, whose signs were the FASCES LICTORII (there have been already some people there, AH and the common comedian Benito) when those humans have shouted, everybody shouted too, and went to war got themselves their legs and heads shot off and today: we have the scissors and the shouting in our heads, so nobody is necessary anymore, who is standing in the front and is yelling at us, then screaming inside of us? This is Hitler inside of us. There is the task, the job, the installments and finally everything has to work and you can't think about it saying afterwards we didn't know, this is not working anymore (we have an ozone-layer, for example) but then it will be said again: We heard about it, but we could only save our naked life, so we saved what was possible to save and it hasn't been you, you lovely children.





## MAGISTER LUDUS

The filmmaker as lover, an interesting case. If the filmmaker is also a detective, specializing in caviar and easy going stuff, smart and educated, polite and used to the matter (girls), middle-sized, slim and provided with a small hand, well dressed and subtly perfumed, successful, rested and somehow well-to-do, not conceited, but self-confident, generous, but not wasteful (in the right moments), happy, sometimes thoughtful (a class by itself, so to speak), getting intoxicated by the spring air, then by a bottle of Schnapps, being secure in a bicycle seat as well as driving a jaguar, then...





## OUTSIDE

I am only with people who understand me...when I see the lunatics who run the world today, responsible for my health my future my money ruling everything for everybody, then I can only become radical! Films have to be radical! What price Hollywood? What price the World? What price do I have to pay for this a) when I keep my mouth shut and b) when I would express myself radically in my films and relinquish, to carry something too far, lean myself hard against its uprising, kicking, scratching, spitting on them (although they have very small ones). To tear out the eyes, fighting with everything you have for a green world which seems to be blue from the outside. For nothing more than the smell of the Spring for a glance, for one moment, fighting for the moment, when everything stops.



## NONSENSE

I hate myself, when I can't sleep I hate myself, when I can sleep all the time, I hate this winter and I hate only myself, when I want to know why?

The following "but": because I know, that I am too weak, that I can't knuckle down in the big box of my abilities, that when I see myself get drunk, I simply gotta puke, my loneliness kills me, and then somebody could come and take care of me in the madhouse of the self-chosen loneliness. And if it isn't self-chosen, but simply just is, from the events of the last months, when I almost became a father twice with two different women, once real and once a false alarm. With one of them it probably would have been a painful act she never would have got over, and with the other woman, because it was a false alarm and the love anyway was directed to somebody else, it wasn't of any interest to me. Therefore I flunked with two people and one angel. There is nothing to get, then I can only shit through my hole and drink and hope (secretly and unconsciously and crying) that it will become better someday—what's this to do with me, I am weak and I drink.





And I can't sleep and I have collected all sorts of disorders and I simply hope I don't get cancer or AIDS or something with the liver. Being quiet sometimes, embracing a girl and waking up safely or not, because the skin will hang down in scraps from both of us. What else are we doing not to bear the pain, to forget the pain, to forget, not to remember, getting sick and pretending not to know it, being sick and not noticing, not noticing how somebody dies slowly.





# A story from a Berliner Courtyard

by Katarina Peters

I slaughtered a goat. The old women conserved the fresh skin with salt and air. For many months it lay around smelling musty. Then I came upon the last tanner in Berlin. A tanner is someone who transforms the rattiest skins into expensive furs. With this bundle, I wander through the old Berliners' courtyards. I can't find the tanning yard and am about to give up when I discover a small inconspicuous sign. H. Kloditz, Tanner. The sign leads me down a dark, damp stairway to a heavy iron door. There is no evidence that activity could be going on behind this door. I knock. After waiting for a long time, a cautious shuffling approaches. The door opens with a creak. An atrocious smell pours out. A little man, about 80, with thick glasses in a greasy, grey smock, stands before me. I must speak loudly and clearly so that he can understand me. I convince him to let me in, because after all, I have an order for him, and hold up the musty package containing the dried-out hide. The iron door shuts behind me. I stand in a somber, humid, vaulted cellar. I follow him through a narrow passage. Left and right are old chipped workbenches covered with odds and ends. Yellowing papers, worn-down pencils, and above all mountains of hair, bristles, dust, and sawdust.

A few bare lightbulbs hang from the ceiling, the dim light reflecting nothing, its glow swallowed by all the surfaces. Every single object is covered with a sheen, a yellowish-brown film accumulated over the years.

The smell stings my nose. I don't know if his peculiar nod incites me to approach, or should I rather hold my breath. The space opens up. I am in the middle of the witch's kitchen. The space is narrow and difficult to survey. Chaos rules.

He says it takes twenty-five steps to create a fur. Accordingly, many workplaces are lodged in this intimate space. Next to me, three old bathtubs are filled up to the edge with some odorous dark liquid, crowned with yellow foam.

But what strikes me as most unusual are these tiny islands sticking out of the swamp. Some of them are slimy, sullen and veined. They are the epidermis of the hide.

The others are hairy with wet bristles protruding in all directions. An unbelievable mixture of substances, which in my opinion should reject each other. Next to this is a steaming barrel with a small fire burning underneath. The introduction to rebirth, the process of cooking in the witch's hollow. Boiling chaos. Simmering germs. Poison of conspiracy bubbling frantically in the foul brew. All imprinted forms fuse together.

A big moldy cudgel leans at the edge of the tub, with which the contents are stirred and turned. There are signs of overflow. The floor all around is humid and muddy, with holes to absorb the excess curing mixture. Above the bathtubs, lines are stretched to help drain the soaked skins. Even high above, underneath the ceiling, iron axles form another mysterious apparatus.

Over small belts, power is transmitted to different primeval machines. Amazing that they still move with the amount of cobwebs, dust and bristles covering every inch of their surface. There are further work benches in the room. One of them has a very sharp cutting device screwed on, which removes turgid rinds from the skin. The thick, greasy apron lies over the stole. The old man is just about to cut the soaked skin of a wild boar, with over four centimeters of fat, down to a one millimeter skin. The wobbly rinds burst from underneath the work bench into the room. Elsewhere there are two big rotating wooden drums of one meter radius, also driven by the belts. Inside them the damp skins are permeated with sawdust, grease, oils and scent. A pulpy wool accumulates on the floor, with a stringy texture. In between, small machines comb the bristles and soften the underside of the fur.

All over the place are troughs with oils, greases, and suets, bags full of salts, different powders, and sawdust, crocks with the rinds, and mounds of hides in different states of preparation. Mucus, with bristles and sawdust clinging to it, already sticks to the soles of my shoes. I pull myself together, trying not to touch anything, to avoid contact with this decay. It could overcome me.

“The consciousness behaves like a man who has heard a suspicious noise in the basement and who hurries to the attic to discover that there are no thieves, and therefore the noise must have been pure imagination. In reality this cautious man did not venture to go down into the basement. In the basement the darkneses remain day and night. Even with a candlestick in hand, the man sees shadows dancing across the black basement walls.”

Gaston Bachelard  
*Poetics of Space*

THERE ARE WAYS.

BUT THEY ARE SLIPPERY.

SLUGGISH BEINGS WALK THERE.

FIND A WAY THROUGH THE RUBBLE.

THE SLIME IS SUPPOSED TO BE CURSED.

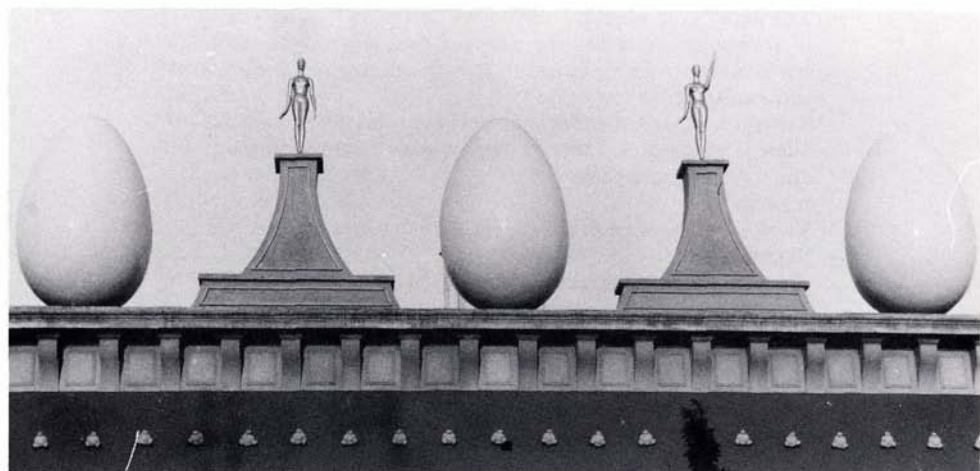
use brain over slime

allegedly

ledge

Tia Maria eats CANDY and reads LOVE STORIES ALL DAY and gives CARD READINGS. The cards are STICK-ING AND SMUDGED WITH CHOCOLATE. And now, Tia Maria, RETIRED fat lady from a traveling carnival comes out onto the LOWER balcony, SUPPORTING HER VAST WEIGHT ON TWO CANES! IMPLACABLE IT FLOWS OUT OF HER like a foam runway. The vecinos FEAR her sweetness which they regard FATALISTICALLY as a NATURAL HAZARD like earthquakes and volcanos. THE SUGAR OF MARY they call it, IT COULD GET LOOSE one day and turn the city into a CAKE.

W. Burroughs  
*The Wild Boys*



Dali's Palace in Figueras, Spain



Woman must learn to criticize and hold her opinions at a distance, not in order to repress them, but by investigating their ORIGINS to penetrate MORE DEEPLY into the BACKGROUND, where she will then discover the PRIMORDIAL images.

C.G. Jung

## BULLSHIT

HOW CAN WOMEN DISCOVER THE "BACKGROUND" IF THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO INCORPORATE THE BACKGROUND?

HOW CAN THEY DISCOVER ANYTHING IF THEY ARE THE SOUL OF THE OBJECT? TO BE DISCOVERED THEMSELVES?

IF THEY ARE SENT TO THE ORIGINS THEY ARE BEING RESTRICTED TO IMMANENCE.

The background is a dark cavity with no words.

The background is an object. The hollowness is an object.

The depth is an object.

If women are related to the deep sea then it is only because she is meant to be an object of the conquering, exploring consciousness on top of it.

She is not born in the deepness. There is no deepness.

Slime is yielding, is docile, is passive and yet compromising, due to its obscure cling.

It sucks.

Slime is the revenge of the object.

Women suck.

They are sly and sluggish.

Their preoccupation is secretion.

They make men sweat their balls off.

# From an interview by Masud Rajai with Katarina Peters

M.R.: How do you work with space?

K.P.: I would like to have a giant playground.

And in the state of construction and transfiguration one should not disregard odor and sound, because the eye cannot see what's around the corner and appearances are deceptive. The eye can be tricked, the nose not. Above all, those senses leave more to the individual imagination. Images are too concrete.

M.R.: What are the tools you play with?

K.P.: All that is possible.

All kinds of material, all kinds of techniques, light, sound, rhythm, smell ... For instance, one game is to discover what you can do with the element of light in a space filled with dust or smoke.

M.R.: Why dust or smoke?

K.P.: Because the two dimensional screen bores me and light traversing particles becomes sculptural.

Light objects are tangible and weightless.

They appear and vanish.

They are accessible.

They possess magic.

In the thesaurus "Der grosse Duden" is written:

Light - snot, mucous discharge from the nose.

- blinded by the light

- to be enlightened.

- to come into the light.

- held in the dark.

Snot in this instance means the snot hanging from a child's nose or snot dripping off the upper

lip. Moby Dick: The boy wipes the light away with

his glove before his mother sees. I don't mean light as an effect like it is used in TV shows. It concerns the confrontation with space, with the internal and memorized space and actual places.

Actually light is soundless. No. It has so many beautiful, colorful gray tones. Like the world of sound with its infinite variation

of tones. A bright light glares, a strong odor stings.

And B is yellow and round.



Potsdamer Platz



# Die Alten Filme

by Andreas Döhler

Berlin, 4/12/1999 : The phone rings, I'm startled awake from a terrible nightmare—a military patrol has confiscated our last projector, “for use of propaganda” they said. I try to massage my brain, the phone's still ringing —outside it's dark again, maybe early evening, s maybe late night, my sense of time disappears with the usual evening lack of electricity. Stummy is on the line: “Have you already heard?”—his voice trembles with the artificial excitement of an informer who has made a big deal—“There's a new underground cinema opening tonight.” That's not an amazing event, that happens every night. “You must be joking,” I answer sarcastically, “What's the program?” “A film allegedly made by a kind family man from Zehlendorf who has filmed how he is killing his family and afterwards killing himself, pretty good picture I've heard - a real documentation.”

Not again, I'm getting sick of that stuff. There was a glut of such films during the last months and their origin is getting more and more dubious. In the beginning, it was an extreme subversive thing: harmless citizens are cracking up for no reason, no motive, and they are wiping out their home sweet home, additionally recording their madness with these handy home-video cameras. It was bizarre fun at the start, but now it's getting too institutionalized and I really don't understand why the undergrounds are still jumping on this train. Sure, they were the first showing these 100% documentary features in their late shows, which is strictly forbidden, but they were taping some obscure sources in the highest police department quite successfully . These screenings are dangerous for everybody who is connected with it and that's why the idea of cinemas changing their location daily was born. Real action-cinema in movement. Meanwhile, there's no difference, you have to go underground to run a cinema and for showing films there's hardly any choice. The authorities are working hard to prevent that development, but their steps are going into the wrong direction. They don't understand. “Listen.” Stummy's voice seems to lose its stability. “The best I haven't told you yet, there are rumours that it's a brand new Super-8 film.” That sounds good indeed, because filming with Super-8 is nearly on the way to celluloid heaven. Only a dozen of these cameras exist in the city and new Super-8 stock is only available on the black market for a lot of money. Many people are still working with

Super-8, but normally with used stock. I remember the last new Super-8 film I saw half a year ago. Everybody was crazy about it, though its content was pretty stupid. A young guy ejaculates on his breakfast egg and eats his sap with real pleasure. Suddenly I feel alive. "When do we start?" "Meeting place at midnight, subway station 9 ...don't be late." These meetings at subway stations are really a kind of transfigured past, since the lines are now completely out of order except a few centrals which are under cop-control. For a while the shafts and stations of the subway were a kind of center for the new underground cinema movement until authorities found out and set the subway system under water. Sometimes it was possible to find new junctions, but now it's a paradise for piranhas. "I'll be there." A glance at the watch, a few minutes past ten, enough time for making preparations to go outside—necessary measures for enjoying the movies in a state of emergency. You have to cooperate with guys like Stummy to get information about what's going on. To be a human bulletin of the underground is his profession. I mean you can go on the street and ask around. Success will be rare. The cinemas—better call them projection rooms—exist only for a few screenings one evening, then they vanish so fast you hardly realize it. A few months ago there were still printed flyers announcing day, time, location of the screenings. Nowadays a few people hang around in the morning. "Let's put up a screening tonight" and so they finish their drinks and start up a cinema. It's somehow more difficult now with the electricity problem. Your need aggregates but there is a way to handle every situation and you'll see: it works amazingly well. Trust in structures by chance, they are effective and good for surviving in times of decay. There are plenty of decent projection rooms out of state control, maybe the whole city is one—empty or squatted houses, factories and store sheds, basement labyrinths, or just staircases in anonymous concrete ghettos. Once I was actually watching a film in the shop window of the biggest store in the city, but there was only time for a short one. Then the cops arrived. Empty skyscrapers with functioning elevators are the all-time favorites. Watching films in a lift for hours and hours while going up and down is really like being on a trip, no possibility of getting closer to the projection of life. Some of these eccentric adventurers are always on the road with their cinemas on wheels and they only have to avoid get trapped in a traffic control. A strange performance—to see this ghost city illuminated by the light of a thousand projectors every night. My feelings are sometimes weird and absurd, still working at EISZEIT together with three other mates, which is one of the last independent cinemas in town located at a steady place. Maybe it is a real anachronism, but perhaps the old dinosaur is smart enough to arrange himself with the mutation which invents new ways of seeing films all the time. Let the old cinemas die. Why not if it's time? The heads are no longer buried and the nervous system is swinging. Cinema has become a way of surviving; it is living against total control. Anyway, there is no other choice but to show forbidden films as the sex and violence law puts nearly every film on the censor's index. We are not showing films treated by censorship. So when the cops come we just close the doors before they get in, that's all. They are bent on destroying the "real" underground, it's a social ulcer they want to get rid of, but it's blooming and growing. Everybody can fulfill the dream of his own cinema and that's why they can't take it: Open Screening. And the fact that everybody has a camera and is making his own films all the time confuses them. They can only arrest you if the camera is registered and there was a little bit of fighting after the film academy was plundered—but who really cares. It's a funny thing that a lot of the filmmakers from the "old underground" are having a hard time with the new deal that everybody is his own filmmaker now—you can't lease the underground for the rest of your life. I have to start up now, it's a long way nowadays to find the cinema you want to go to. Berlin 4/12/1988: better a strange vision of the future than a tired lament of the present situation. Maybe fifty people are coming for the screenings of Penny's new films at the beginning of next month—if the press announcement is good.



"The Pale Pals"

IMAGES IN PROGRESS  
BERLIN

Exhibition Program





## Michael Brynntrup

Buffalo, May 1989

*Der Rhein, ein Deutsches Märchen*

Super 8 1983, 14 min. color, B/W  
(The Rhine, A German Fairytale)

*Aus Vier Jahreszeiten*

Super 8, 1984, 4 min., color

*Stummfilm für Gehörlose*

Super 8, 8 min., B/W  
(Silent movie for the deaf)

*Handfest-Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle*

Super 8, 1984, 17 min., B/W & color  
(Firm hand-voluntary self control)

*Testamento Memori*

Super 8, 1987, 8 min., B/W

*Veronika* (vera ikon)

Super 8, 1987, 11 min., B/w

*Der Elefant aus Elfenbein Totentanz 1-3*

Super 8, 1988, 9 min., color  
(The Ivory elephant Dance of Death 3)

*Der Hieronymus, Totentanz 6*

Super 8, 1989, 7 min., color

*Die Botschaft, Totentanz 8*

Super 8, 1989, 10 min., B/W  
(The message, Dance of Death 8)

*Pause*

Super 8, 1987, 3 min., color

# Penelope Buitenhuis

Buffalo, May 1989

*Disposable*

16mm, 1984/86, 14 min., color

*Framed*

Super 8, 1986, 15 min., B/W

*Combat Not Conform*

Super 8, 1987, 4 min., color

*Movimento*

Super 8, 1987, 12 min., B/W

*Indifference*

Super 8, 1987, 25 min., B/W

*They Shoot Pigs Don't They*

16mm, 1989, 17 min., color

# Michael Krause

Buffalo, May 1989

*Berlin-New York*

Super 8, 1986, 7 min., color, B/W

*EYE*

16mm, 1989, 3 min., color

*On McCarthy*

Super 8, 1986, 2 min., B/W

*Melody of a Landscape*

Super 8, 1987, 15 min., color

*Zeitlos*

Super 8, 1989, 15 min.  
(Timeless)

*Huncke*

16mm Blow up, 1989, 45 min., color

*Our Hitler*

3/4", 1989, 14 min., color



# Katarina Peters

Buffalo, May 1989

*The Allied Day Parade*

Super 8, 1983, 15 min., color

*Keep a Hot Man on Your Mind*

Super 8, 1981, 8 min., color

*Bauchfilm*

Super 8, 1982, 3 min., color  
(Belly film)

*Am Rand der Erde* (On the Edge of the Farm)

16mm, 1988, 10 min., color

*The Tanner*

Audio - Art, 6 min., 1989

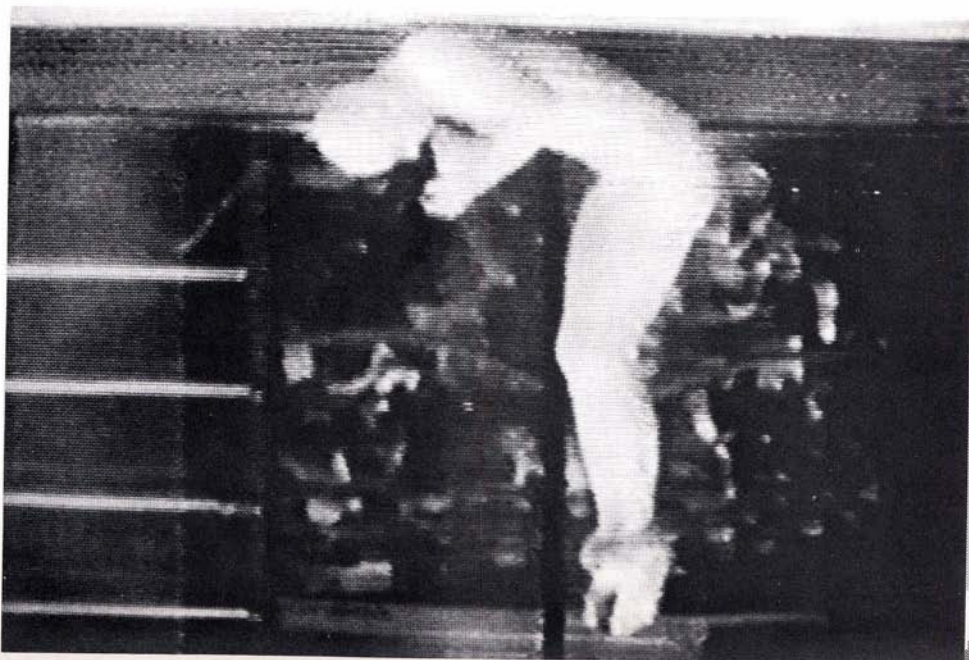
*Lichtebene*

A 3-dimensional light installation  
(Light Level)

*Zentri-fuge*

Super 8, 1986, 6 min., B/W  
(Centrifuge)

*Movimiento*



# TOURIST TRAPS

Places to go to find the excitement  
you are looking for

KINO EISZEIT shows experimental and independent films by young filmmakers, American and English films in original versions, music, performance, and multi-media events. Famous for its parties.

SPUTNIK KINO I & II is run by young committed film enthusiasts, shows independent films, and is well known for discovering overlooked filmmakers and films. Sputnik Kino often does retrospectives of young filmmakers and shows films in different contexts, so that you can appreciate them from a new point of view.

XENON KINO shows independent work, often horror and gore stuff. One of Berlin's famous splatter filmmakers, Jorg Buttgerit, works there.

ARSENAL KINO is the traditional place, existing for twenty-five years now. If you missed a Stan Brakhage in the U.S., you can see it there.

REGENBOGEN KINO is located in a former squatted house. If you haven't seen one, you should go there. The interior is perfect for those who like to sit in their grandmother's living room.

KOB, also located in a former squatted house, shows films on some nights. On the weekends they have bands from hard core to post punk.

Several other places show films occasionally. The above-mentioned cinemas and the other events are listed in two magazines that are published biweekly, *Tip* and *Zitty*, and also in the daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*. A very good source of information for English speaking people is the magazine *On The Edge*, which you can find in public places.

The club scene is more diverse and changes a lot. Some clubs and bars, which were interesting to go to before I left, were KUMPELNEST FISCHLABOR, FISCHBURO, ORANIENBAR, HAVANNA, CASINO, and MADONNA. Be careful: everybody hates tourists and to make it more interesting, I won't provide addresses.



## CONTRIBUTORS

TORSTEN ALISCH, journalist and film critic for *Die Tageszeitung*, Berlin; organizer and distributor of Super 8 packages together with SCATURREX, was recently fired by the newspaper because of his controversial writing. He lives in Berlin.

JÜRGEN BRÜNING, founder of KINO EISZEIT, Berlin; director of the International Super 8 Film Festival, Berlin, since 1984; member of the artist group OYKO; made several Super 8 films; produced *Kinder der Konfettimaschine*, 1987 for ZDF. He is working on another production called *Der König der Eideschen* for ZDF and is currently living in Buffalo as film curator at Hallwalls.

ANDREAS DÖHLER, curator at KINO EISZEIT, Berlin, founder of SPUTNIKKINO, Berlin, writes criticism for *Die Tageszeitung*, Berlin, and lives in Berlin.

CONSTANCE HANNA, photographer, Pittsburgh, PA

BIRGIT HEIN, German filmmaker, has produced films for twenty years, together with her husband Wilhelm Hein. Their filmwork includes *Marterialfilme*, 1967-70, *Love Stinks*, 1982, and *Verbotene Bilder*, 1986. Birgit teaches at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Braunschweig; one of the students is Michael Brynntrup, her most recent project is *Kali Films*. She lives in Cologne.

NIEL KRÜGER, performance artist, writer, and publisher of magazine projects, lives in Berlin.

MADELEINE LESKIN, writer for *Skoop*, Berlin, is currently living in Berlin.

KATARINA PETERS, filmmaker and multi-media artist, Meisterschüler Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Berlin, is recently working on a project for Das Kleine Fernsehspiel, ZDF. She lives in Berlin.

MASUD RAJAI lives in Berlin.

KAREN ROSENBERG is a Boston based writer who often writes on film, literature, and cultural history. She is a contributing editor of *The Independent*, a film and video monthly, and writes for periodicals in the U.S. and Western Europe.

STEFF ULBRICH is a filmmaker and writes diaries. His most recent film was *Verfilmt*. Currently he is working on another script and is looking for funding. He lives in Berlin.

ANDREAS WILDFANG is an independent filmmaker; co-director and curator of Kino Eiszeit, Berlin; director of the International Super-8 Film Festival, Berlin, 85-88; member of film group OYKO, Berlin; critic for daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*, Berlin; co-owner of NOW-performance tour agency, Berlin; technical director for Jo Andres-performance, 87/88 Germany; and is currently living in Buffalo as curator of film at Hallwalls.

## PHOTO CREDITS

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"The  
Pale  
Pals"

*Michael Brynntrup*  
*Penelope Buitenhuis*  
*Michael Krause*  
*Katarina Peters*

**HALLWALLS**  
CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER