

“Outside the frame”

X slide 1 stillness and silence installation shot

Historical/personal position

For the last three years, I have extensively photographed and filmed in the border woodland between Germany and Holland, in and around sites in Berlin and the Grunewald, and the Serpentara woodland by Olevano. Through that I am exploring the relationship between place and memory and geographically between Germany and Italy during WW2, addressing the two nations’ different ways of dealing with their accountability for the event unfolding during that time in relation to the act of remembering and to forgetting. I aim to create a space for the viewer to engage with their own experiences and memories thereof, for questions to be asked that remain possibly unanswerable and for those to be formulated, which were considered unspeakable. As pointed out by Kraenzle

“The invisible, Sebald reminds us, is often more compelling than the visible [...]. Every site is haunted by countless ghosts that lurk there in silence, to be evoked or not. These absences stimulate the

imagination, encouraging the viewer to fill in the blank spaces in the landscape.”¹

To find concrete answers is not the essence; it is the recognition of the necessity for such a space to exist, which is important.

Using my own practice as an example, I propose to reflect on how the medium of photography, as well as film, which both have historically – to a certain extent – been associated with the representation of the real, can be employed to address personal and cultural memories. I want to explore how the artist’s personal and cultural memory becomes interwoven with the live encounter with a particular place, and how this experience can operate within the process of making the work and also as part of the final artwork itself.

Being of German nationality and growing up on the Dutch/German border in a village adjacent to a British NATO base, I am part of the generation whose grandparents remained silent about their experiences and memories of WW2. W.G. Sebald describes this as a *“conspiracy of silence [that] still lasts. It is something which people*

- ¹ Kraenzle, C., 2007, “Picturing Place: Travel, Photography, and the Imaginative”, in *Searching for Sebald*, ed. Patt. L., The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, Los Angeles, pp.126-145, p.138.

*in other countries can scarcely imagine. [...] It was just a taboo zone which you didn't enter."*²

The places, the woodlands

X slide 2 film section from stille fragmente

Over the last years my work has focused on two seemingly opposing types of environments, the city and woodlands. However, both types of spaces address the notion of memory and remembering in different yet very connected ways.

A large woodland adjacent to the village was partly used by the NATO base for training purposes, most of it however formed the space between two national borders, referred to as 'no-man's land'; an undefined interspace belonging to neither nations.

Woodlands have historically been places of danger as well as safety. They can be understood as a place where one can follow ones thoughts, as well as tarry, hover for a while, get lost, literally as well as metaphorically. However, this romantic and almost fairy-tale like idea of woodlands has by now been impregnated with the knowledge of the atrocities that have happened in woodlands all over the world, creating a more ambivalent space. Ones imagination

² Wachtel, E., 2007, "Ghost Hunter" in *the emergence of memory, conversations with W.G. Sebald*, ed. Schwartz, L.S., Seven Stories Press, New York, pp.37-62, p.44.

is infiltrated by facts, facts are mixed with fiction. Being in the woodland allows for an initial escape, only to be caught up by ones own thoughts and imagination. The images, still as well as moving, taken of those woodlands present a lot of detailed information about the trees and undergrowth represented but at the same time they provide very little with regard to their meaning. As suggested by Christina Kraenzel when writing about Sebald's use of photographs in his book *Rings of Saturn*,
*"these images – which offer little factual information about the time, location, or condition of their creation – are perhaps more compelling as depictions of a particular view of landscape, one which values landscape for its evocation of the intangibles, the mysteries of human existence that cannot easily be figured in language. Here the photographic medium is enhanced by its subject. Both function as 'incitements to reverie,' invitations to fantasy and projection by the observing mind."*³

The Places, the cities

X slide 3 bullet marks on wall

The two cities of the Rome-Berlin Axis formed in 1936 are testimonies to their own history. Berlin one could argue is a

³ Kraenzle, C., 2007, "Picturing Place: Travel, Photography, and the Imaginative", in *Searching for Sebald*, ed. Patt. L., The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, Los Angeles, pp.126-145, p.142.

memorial itself: it is impossible to escape its marks or scars of twentieth-century history. As described by Andreas Huyssen, “Berlin now finds itself in a frenzy of future projections and, in line with the general memorial obsession of the 1990s, in the midst of equally intense debates about how to negotiate its Nazi and communist pasts.”⁴ Describing Berlin, Huyssen argues that the city “remains first and foremost historical text, marked [...] by the visible presence of its past, from prominent ruins [...] to World War II bullet and shrapnel marks on many of its buildings.”⁵ Being confronted by these traces as well as the memorials it is almost impossible to escape its meaning and purpose. The Stolpersteine put in place all over the city, and now recently being introduced also to Rome, makes one almost stumble of monuments. However, as “Freud [has] already taught us [...] memory and forgetting are indissolubly linked to each other, [...] memory is but another form of forgetting, and forgetting a form of hidden memory.”⁶ Referring to Freud, Paul Ricoeur elaborates recalling “Freud’s remark at the start of the first text: the patient repeats instead of remembering. ‘Instead of’: repetition amounts to forgetting. And forgetting is itself termed a work to the extent that it is the work of the compulsion to

⁴ Huyssen, A., *Present Pasts*, Stanford University Press, California, 2003, p.52.

⁵ Ibid, p.52.

⁶ Huyssen, A., *Present Pasts*, Stanford University Press, California, 2003, p. 17.

repeat, which prevents the traumatic event from becoming conscious.”⁷

X slide 4 under a bridge by the Wannsee

Returning to Huyssen and focussing on Berlin which one could argue is a monument in itself,
“it seems striking that a country whose culture has been guided for decades now by a deliberate anti-fascist anti-monumentalism should resort to monumental dimensions when it comes to public commemoration of the Holocaust for the reunified nation. [...] recalling Robert Musil’s observation that there is nothing as invisible as a monument, Berlin – and with it all of this memorial-crazed Germany – is opting for invisibility. The more monuments there are, the more the past becomes invisible, and the easier it is to forget: redemption, thus, through forgetting.”⁸ Having been brought up within this culture and having inherited a collective memory, I suggest a less black and white reading of the country’s way of addressing its history, which is implicit within how I develop my

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004, p.445.

⁸ Huyssen, A., *Present Pasts*, Stanford University Press, California, 2003, p. 32.

work and what I aim to achieve with it. Similar to how Adorno's claim that there can be no poetry/art after Auschwitz has been misunderstood I like to suggest that addressing the folds of memory and recollection is not an exception to how a particular generation is dealing with its cultural/political history.

While Germany's place within the history of WW2 is clear and undeniable, and Berlin functions almost as its main and most monumental memorial site (successfully or not), Italy's way of addressing its place with regard to its position towards Germany and the Nazis is somewhat less clear. As suggested by Philip Morgan, "one could say that the initial post-war forgetting of the war in Italy prevented, or postponed, Italians assuming some kind of collective awareness of and responsibility for Fascism."⁹

In Rome I am exploring how this particular part of its history has found, or not found, its way into the surface as well as the substance of its architectural presence. Starting similarly to how I started in Berlin, by photographing the most pressing memorials, such as the Fosse Ardeatine (Ardeatine Graves) and Via Rasella and Via Boccaccio.

⁹ Morgan, P., *The Fall of Mussolini*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p.5.

The material

I suggest that the notion of remembering is to a certain extent shared between these objects: photographs, the very 'still' moving images that I have been working with, and memorials. All function as a form of vehicle where memories can be experienced, referring to what has been.

X slide 5 + 6 juxtaposition examples of images from berlin, city and woodland

By bringing these different elements together I would like to draw the viewer's attention to the relationship between nations, memories and experiences. Films and photographs taken in Italy, in Rome will be shown next to those taken in Berlin, woodland images will be mixed with ones showing the cities.

X slide 7 +8 berlin and woodland proper prints

The photographs will be presented without frames, the frame being that which marks the closure of the image, its restrictions.

X slide 9 side view

It is the edge of an image in another, intangible sense: it is its perceptible limit. Jacques Aumont calls it the limit-frame. The limit-frame is where the image ends, defining its field by separating it from what it is not; in this way, it constitutes an out-of-frame.

X slide 10 side view

In this way, the edges of an image are what limits the image, but more importantly in my work, it builds a connection between the interior of an image, its 'field' with its imaginary extensions 'off-screen'. Depending on how the content within the field is placed inside the image, the 'off-screen' becomes more pressing.

Showing the photographs, leaving gaps between the individual sheets of paper, draws attention to their own materiality as well as their limits thereby undermining the pictorial illusion of the photograph.

X slide 11 three images with gaps

Here vision, as suggested by Juhani Pallasma, "reveals what the touch already knows. We could think of the sense of touch as the unconscious vision. Our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience. The distant and

the near are experienced with the same intensity, and they merge into one coherent experience.”¹⁰

X slide 12 + 13 Berlin wall of memorial and woodland

In case of the films, they will be presented in a way that they are not all visible simultaneously, the viewer will have to move within the space where the work will be shown, thereby incorporating the space itself within the body of the work.

X slide 14 installation shot light

X slide 15 installation shot dark

While moving within the space, the viewer will become part of the projection as they will create a shadow within the image, drawing the viewer's attention not only onto the projected image but also on the place from where the image originates as well as the space between projector and the surface the light falls upon, be that the viewer's body or the wall.

X slide 16 + 17 + 18 + 19 + 20 slow changing stills from SF

¹⁰ Juhani Pallasma, *The Eyes of the Skin*, Wiley-Academy, Sussex, 2005, p.42.

Individual segments of film will very slowly morph into each other, creating moments where the image becomes unclear and almost ghostlike, which again draws attention to the process and material used. The use of these types of media is essential, it allows for fragments to be collected, which remain otherwise separated and through the encounter of those fragments a series of connotations are prompted that go beyond the meaning of **the individual ones**. When Barthes writes about a third meaning he explains “I am not sure if the reading of this third meaning is justified – if it can be generalized – but already it seems to me that its signifier (the traits to which I have tried to give words, if not to describe) possesses a theoretical individuality. On the one hand, it cannot be conflated with the simple *existence* of the scene, it exceeds the copy of the referential motif, it compels an interrogative reading (interrogation bears precisely on the signifier not on the signified, on reading not on intellection: it is a ‘poetical’ grasp); [...]”¹¹

X slide 21 second film section from SF

By placing the individual elements of the work in this specific way, I aim for a journey to take place which otherwise remains theoretical, inviting the viewer to move between geographical different and

¹¹ Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning” in *Image Music Text*, Fontana Press, London, 1977, pp.52-68, p.53.

separated places and to bring those closer together through their own imagination and possible personal memories. Describing “the other meaning, the third, the one ‘too many’”, Barthes states that “the third meaning also seems to me greater than the pure, upright, secant, legal perpendicular of the narrative, it seems to open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely. I even accept for the obtuse meaning the word’s pejorative connotation: the obtuse meaning appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, information; [...]”¹²

The viewer experiences physical as well as metaphorical space, and the photographs “insist on their status and identity as objects rather than simply as photographs of objects”. The paper will not hang flat. It absorbs the humidity from its surrounding conditions, making it stand away from the wall, exposing a space behind, and thereby drawing attention to the space in front, and to that which has not been shown in the photograph. Here I am interested also in particular in the way the photographic surface itself shares elements with the surfaces represented. By using a particular paper and showing the objects without a frame, the photographs emphasise the physical qualities and material production, drawing attention to porosity, the notion of decay and duration. Exposing the photographic object to its environment without protection, its

¹² Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning” in *Image Music Text*, Fontana Press, London, 1977, pp.52-68, p.55.

material will react and change, like the memorials, whether publicly sanctioned or involuntary. And like memories, the surfaces of both the memorials and the photograph are porous: they are like a living membrane, they are imperfect. Like the fading and recurring images of the film, they change over time, they become and they go.