

Esther Shalev-Gerz
Inseparable Angels, 2000 (Angel 12)
Video, 15'

SOUND

Taxidriver : It's going to be a little bit wobbly... The road is still as it was built at that time for the World War. Everything here was built in the World War.

Esther Shalev-Gerz : This road?

T. : Yes. It's going to become even worse. It's a concrete road, I guess slowly it's going to break down. I think they want to keep it like this as long as possible... as a memory.

E. S-G : If the road was built by the prisoners, it must be very old....

T. : Yes, it was built by the prisoners. It was right at the beginning, when the camp was created...

E. S-G : When was this?

T. : There were not even shacks in Buchenwald. They had to sleep in tents.

E. S-G : In what year was this?

T. : '36.

No sooner was I done than the ceiling was cracking up indeed. Still from high above – I had misjudged the height –, in the semidarkness, an angel, wrapped with golden strings in bluish-violet sheets, was slowly descending on large white wings with a silky shine, stretching out the sword with his raised arm. “An angel, that's what it is!” I thought. “All day he has been flying toward me and I did not know it in my unbelief. Now he will speak to me.” I lowered my eyes. But when I raised them again, the angel was still there, to be sure, hanging rather deep from below the ceiling which had closed up again, but he was no living angel any more, only a painted wooden figure from the prow of a ship, as they would hang from the ceiling in sailors' taverns. That was all. The knob of the sword was fitted to hold candles and to collect the following tallow. I had torn the light bulb down, in the dark I did not want to stay, a candle could still be found, so I stepped onto an armchair, stuck the candle into the sword knob, lit it, and then sat long into the night, under the angel's feeble light.

Franz Kafka, Diary, 25th June 1914.

T. : Soon you will see the station of Buchenwald on the right side.

951. One deserts the realm of the here and now to transfer one's activity into a realm of the yonder where total affirmation is possible.

Abstraction.

The cool Romanticism of this style without pathos is unheard of.

The more horrible this world (as today, for instance), the more abstract our art,

Whereas a happy world brings forth an art of the here and now.
Today is a transition from yesterday. In the great pit of forms lie broken fragments to some of which we still cling. They provide abstraction with its material. A junkyard of unauthentic elements for the creation of impure crystals.
That is how it is today.
But then: the whole crystal cluster once bled. I thought I was dying, war and death.
But how can I die, I who am crystal?

952. I have long had this war inside me. This is why, interiorly, it means nothing to me.
And to work my way out of the ruins, I had to fly. And I flew. I remain in this ruined world only in memory, as one occasionally does in retrospect.
Thus, I am “abstract with memories”.

Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee* (translation by B. Schneider, R. Y. Zachary and Max Knight, 1964), 1915.

E. S-G : And the camp is here?

T. : The camp is here. You can go and visit it later. That’s what I would really advise you. You just have to take this impression with you. It’s one thing to talk about it – but looking at it is another thing...

Down there, where there is the quarry, there was another big factory. There was this whole production for the war. There were huge rock machines.

“Die wahre Bestimmung einer Zeitschrift ist, den Geist ihrer Epoche zu bekunden. Dessen Aktualität gilt ihr mehr als selber seine Einheit oder Klarheit, und damit wäre sie – gleich der Zeitung – zur Wesenlosigkeit verurteilt, wenn nicht in ihr ein Leben sich gestaltete, mächtig genug, auch das Fragwürdige, weil es von ihr bejaht wird, noch zu retten. In der Tat : eine Zeitschrift, deren Aktualität ohne historischen Anspruch ist, besteht zu Unrecht. Dab es diesen mit so unvergleichlichem Nachdruck erheben durfte, macht die Vorbildlichkeit des romantischen “Athenäums”. Und zugleich wäre dieses – wenn es not täte – ein Beispiel, wie für die wahre Aktualität der Mabstab ganz und gar nicht beim Publikum ruht. Jede Zeitschrift hätte wie diese, unerbittlich im Denken, unbeirrbar im Sagen und unter gänzlicher Nichtachtung des Publikums, wenn es sein mub, sich an dasjenige zu halten, was als wahrhaft Aktuelles unter der unfruchtbaren Oberfläche jenes Neuen oder Neuesten sich gestaltet, dessen Ausbeutung sie den Zeitungen überlassen soll.”

...

“Nichts scheint dem Herausgeber wichtiger zu sein, als dab hierin, in der Abwesenheit jeden Scheins, die Zeitschrift ausspricht was ist, nämlich dab der reinste Wille, das geduldigste Bestreben unter den so Gesinnten keine Einheit, geschweige denn Gemeinschaft zu stiften vermögen, dab also die Zeitschrift in der wechselseitigen Fremdheit ihrer Beiträge es bekunde, wie unaussprechlich in diesen Tagen jede Gemeinsamkeit – auf welche denn ihr Ort zuletzt doch deutet - und wie sehr auf Probe diese Verbindung gestellt bleibt, deren Ausweis am Ende beim Herausgeber liegt.

Hiermit ist das Ephemere dieser Zeitschrift berührt, das sie sich von Beginn an bewubt hält. Denn es ist der gerechte Preis, den ihr Werben um die wahre Aktualität so fordert. Werden doch sogar nach einer talmudischen Legende die Engel – neue jeden Augenblick in unzähligen Scharen – geschaffen, um, nachdem sie vor Gott ihren Hymnus gesungen, aufzuhören und in Nichts zu vergehen. Dab der Zeitschrift solche Aktualität zufalle, die allein wahr ist, möge ihr Name bedeuten.”

Walter Benjamin, *Ankündigung der Zeitschrift : Angelus Novus*, 1921

T. : This is where the SS army slept. Until a short time ago this was still used as a hotel. It was called the « Buchenwaldhotel », it was really a hotel...

My wing is ready for flight,
I would like to turn back.
If I stayed timeless time,
I would have little luck.

Gershom Scholem, *Grub vom Angelus*, 15. Juli 1921

T. : (*The radio is playing*)

Here you can walk across the hill and into the Buchenwald-forest. This place is called the « timebreak ».

E. S-G : The « timebreak » ?

T. : Yes.

E. S-G : What is this ?

T. : It's because Goethe used to walk up to the Buchenwald-forest from here. Then he sat down there and looked at Weimar. And that's why this path, that is called “timebreak”, was recreated – you can go up there. But you can only walk, you can't go there by car.

And it's good so, they should look at all this... you forget so quickly. It's not good to forget.

E. S-G : Why ?

T. : I think children should know what happened here, what human beings are able to, what human beings can do with human beings.

“Der Engel aber ähnelt allem, wovon ich mich habe trennen müssen : den Menschen und zumal den Dingen. In den Dingen, die ich nicht mehr habe, haust er. Er macht sie durchsichtig und hinter jedem erscheint mir der, welchem sie zugedacht sind. Darum bin ich von niemanden im Schenken zu übertreffen. Ja, vielleicht war der Engel ange- lockt von einem Schenkenden, der leer ausgeht. Denn auch er selbst, der Klauen hat und spitze, ja messerscharfe Schwingen (,) macht keine Miene, auf den, der gesich- tet hat, zu stürzen. Er fabt ihn fest ins Auge – lange Zeit, dann weicht er stobweis, aber unerbittlich zurück. Warum? Um ihn sich nachzuziehen, auf jenem Wege in die Zukunft, auf dem er kam und den er so gut kennt, dab er ihn durchmibt ohne sich zu wenden und den, den er gewählt hat, aus dem Blick zu lassen. Er will das Glück : den

Widerstreit, in dem die Verzückung des Einmaligen, Neuen, noch Ungelebten mit jener Seligkeit des Nocheinmal, des Wiederhabens, des Gelebten liegt. Darum hat er auf keinem Wege Neues zu hoffen als auf dem der Heimkehr, wenn er einen neuen Menschen mit sich nimmt. So wie ich, kaum dab ich zum ersten Male dich gesehen hatte, mit dir dahin zurückfuhr, woher ich kam.”

Walter Benjamin, *Agesilaus Santander* (2. Version), Ibiza 13. August 1933

T. : Originally this is one of Weimar’s oldest houses; but it’s in a miserable state.

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 9th theses, 1940

T. : On the right side there is the city museum...

... and this is where there was this art exhibition, but it’s closed at the moment.

“Zwischen Stadt und Stadt
Nach der Mauer der Abgrund
Wind an den Schultern die fremde
Hand am einsamen Fleisch
Der Engel ich höre ihn noch
Aber er hat kein Gesicht mehr als
Deines das ich nicht kenne”

Heiner Müller, *Glückloser Engel 2*, 1991

T. : After the war there were only these “manure-columns”. Everything what you see here now, was new built after the war. But there is nobody who wants to make something out of this, because the owners of these buildings want to have a whole lot of money for it.