

From Oberhausen to Paris/Texas Places as story-tellers in the work of Wim Wenders

Concept for a university-seminar (realizable as a one- or a two-day seminar) with a focus on students of film and TV studies as well as students of literature and cultural studies by Marcel Wehn.



Wim Wenders: Onomichi Sunset (2005)

Introduction

The German director Wim Wenders shoots, in principle, on location only. Studio productions he basically dislikes. Analysing Wenders' film work as well as his photographs it becomes apparent how important authentic places are as a basic element of and as an inspiration for his films. While other directors normally start to scout for the ideal location for their stories after finishing the script, Wim Wenders literally lets himself be inspired by a certain place, to tell the story that the place "already contains", as Wenders says. "Every place carries a secret" he determines. To adapt elements of that certain secret into a part of his narration is a major aspect of the principle working method of the director Wim Wenders.

Conceptual formulation

The workshop "From Oberhausen to Paris/Texas" asks the students to examine the films and the photographic work of Wim Wenders with a focus on the locations used to consciously capture the characteristics and similarities of these places. Indeed Wenders doesn't "find" his preferred locations by chance. By scouting for his settings he follows a "search system" that is consistently connected to certain issues or topics. These issues should actively be discovered and associated to each other by the students within the workshop. Understanding the meaning of places in the work of Wenders is going to be discovered as one major key to the full understanding of his film and photography work.

Wenders' issues and topics

Comparing the locations and the main motifs in the pictures of Wim Wenders and connecting them with the stories told in the films, we can discover the following topics to be carved out within the seminar:

- Travelling as an emotional state and places of travelling as film settings (e.g. airports, motels, highways)
- Geographical systems as a dramaturgical guideline in a road movie (e.g. the German-German border in "Kings of the road")
- The love-hate relationship between the USA and Europe (e.g. expressed in "The state of things")
- Wide spaces, horizons and the passion for western movies (in contrast to the conservative social constrictions in Germany in the sixties)
- The decay of the American Dream (the search for motifs of the decay of an era)
- Cinema as a permanent topic (cinema itself and screens as constant motifs)
- Inspiration from paintings and photographs (Edward Hopper, Ansel Adams, Caspar David Friedrich)
- The reverse angle showing a truth (the "Einstellung" (framing/attitude) of the person taking pictures)
- Places of his very own biography (autobiographical places as symbolic places)
- Every picture is the beginning of a story (which story can be told at a certain place?)



Left: Caspar D. Friedrich „The wanderer above a sea of fog; above: False movement (1975)

Procedural method:

On the basis of excerpts of films and on the basis of selected photographs, the students will undertake a "journey" to certain places within the complete work of Wim Wenders. The main task will be to let the students find out Wenders main issues and topics connected to his film settings by themselves. By comparing motifs in the pictures and selected film clips side-by-side in a carefully and analytically observant way, the students are asked to discover repetitions, systems and principles in the choice of Wim Wenders film places self-dependently. These aspects are then extended in a more deeply examined way through the comparison with paintings and photographs of other artists that have had an influence on Wenders directly.



Paris/Texas (1984): The reverse angle

These issues and topics carved out by the students will be completed by quotes taken from Wenders essays as well as from texts of other writers dealing with the work of Wim Wenders to also prove our thesis. In addition to that, the students will watch excerpts from the documentary "One who set forth- Wim Wenders' early years". Within the film Wenders says much about autobiographical places and personal occurrences. The observer can undertake a side by side location tour with the German director to find out in what way Wenders is interested or even fascinated by the places he visits.

The seminar will be completed with a last summary of the major topics and thesis that were developed in the group during the workshop. It is underlined in what way the biographical and symbolical places between Oberhausen (the home town of Wim Wenders in the German Ruhrgebiet) and Paris/Texas (certainly the most famous film setting in a Wenders movie) are the co-authors of Wim Wenders' stories told in his movies.