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Romantic Dream Poetology in Wim Wenders and Peter Handke's *Wings of Desire* (1987)

In the lecture *Unmögliche Geschichten* (*Impossible Stories*) from 1982, Wim Wenders divides his films into two groups as follows: "In the first group (A) are all black and white films [...]. The other group (B) contains color films that are also based on existing novels. On the other hand, the films of group (A) are based on an idea of mine – idea is a very imprecise term: it includes waking dreams and experiences".¹ The opening scene of one of *Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*)—premiered in 1987, one year before the fall of the Berlin's wall and after Wender's 7-year long stay in the USA— shows according to Wender's description of group (A) a black-and-white film montage of images (such as of the sky, clouds, airplanes, angels, and children) and Peter Handke's poem *Lied Vom Kindsein*. How does *Himmel über Berlin* suggest Wender's "waking dream"? And, how is Wender's dream language in *Himmel über Berlin* related to Handke's romantic understanding of literature? Handke's poem demonstrates literature as fundamental "otherness" of the rational discourse similar to the dream.² *Himmel über Berlin* invokes visually and poetically topoi of the romantic poetology such as the bourgeois novel (Bildungsroman), Doppelgänger, melancholy, dreams, angels, and children.³ For instance, the protagonists Damiel and Cassiel are angels from a magical world between waking and dreaming, between heaven and earth. They can only observe the real world, but cannot intervene in people's lives. The female protagonist Marion moreover dreams of becoming a trapeze artist. While angels and dreams function as aesthetic vision of a unity in romanticism—for example in Novalis' *Hymen an die Nacht* (*Hymns to the night*, 1800) – for Rainer Maria Rilke, angels are mediators between life and death, heaven and earth, and broken figures of "transcendental homelessness".⁴ Do the angel and dream mediate between East and West Germany and embody the lost community in German post-war history? Does the film montage itself imitate a dream, referring to Walter Benjamin's *Kunstwerk*-essay? Does the dream function as "otherness" following Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of dreams? The dreamy montage articulates a desire for a German identity and unity, and yet it deconstructs the very "idea" of national identity itself.

1. Wim Wenders, *Unmögliche Geschichten*, in: *Die Logik der Bilder. Essays und Gespräche* ed. Michael Töteberg. Frankfurt/M., 1993, 72f.

2. Peter Handke *Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms*. Aufsätze, Frankfurt a. M. 1972. Jacques Derrida, "Fichus: Frankfurt Address" in *Paper Machine*, Stanford University Press, 2002, 165-202.

3. *Der Himmel über Berlin. Ein Filmbuch von Wim Wender und Peter Handke*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1989. Translated by TK.

4. Georg Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik*, Berlin: Paul Cassirer, 1920, S. 9. „Als Schlüsselwörter fungieren: Traum, leise, müde, blaß, weiß, traurig, Frühherbst, sanft, still, schmachten, weinen, Sehnsucht. Es entsteht eine Welt der abgetönten Farben und gedämpften Laute, der abgeschirmten Orte [...], bevölkert von weißgekleideten Mädchen mit schmalen Händen, weichen Gewändern und wehendem Haar, blonden Knaben und Engeln, ausgestattet mit einem ebenso standardisierten Inventar von Schwänen, Birken, Lilien und Pretiosen [...]“. Manfred Engel, *Rilke und die moderne Lyrik*, Stuttgart, 1986, 103f.