



Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia*, 1514 / Peter Weiss, *Filmcollage*, undated

Trauerspiel 1
Ian White

Walter Benjamin's 'The Origin of German Tragic Drama' (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*), 1928 is an expansive and complicated book that I have not read academically. Nevertheless, it variously describes and characterises the specifically German late Baroque dramatic form of the *Trauerspiel*, or 'mourning play' as peculiar and distinct from the model of tragedy as we have received it in its Aristotelian form, with its familiar, entertaining narrative arc of a Tragic Hero, subject to his Tragic Flaw, witnessed falling from his position of power by the audience for the sake of a catharsis that reinscribes civic obedience. Instead, the *Trauerspiel* functions much more according to an allegorical model, with, let's say, a structure that is more flat, lives at least figured more ordinary, time passing more regularly (albeit in an abstract space); where meaning is demonstration-like, a staged act of speaking and reading rather than the effect of emotional peaks and troughs, mimesis, persuasion or expression as such.

Trauerspiel 1 is not an illustration of Benjamin's text – just as its five 'dances' do not illustrate its five films, or vice versa - nor is it necessary for a viewer to be familiar with what Benjamin wrote. I employed some of his ideas as they intersect with my own performance practice and to structure my research into the collection of artists' films at Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art as part of the Living Archive project. Benjamin's text and the selected films are the means and material of a multiplying new work: a slow-motion flicker between a series of related actions and an unlikely film programme, between the auditorium, stage and screen. Allegories of Love and Time generate each other. Co-occupation. Production is the matter of *our* own act of reading (which is also speaking) and an encounter with the situation we are in.

The films are, in order of appearance:

Karola Shlegelmilch, Bauchlandung (Bellyflop), 1991, 3'

Klaus Telscher, Her Mona, 1992, 7'

Hellmuth Costard, Besonders Wertvoll (Of Special Value), 1968, 11'

The text in this film comprises extracts from a speech by the CDU politician Dr. Hans Toussaint, concerning then new state support for German films that are not 'against the constitution or that violate laws or morals or religious feeling' [cough] not 'political propaganda or tendentious films' but films that 'respect the values, laws and religious feeling which are written down in the constitution'. Dr. Toussaint is confronted after a visit to a family home: 'Are you not ashamed?'

Peter Weiss, Studie IV (Frigörelse (Liberation)), 1954, 9'

Robyn Brentano & Andrew Horn, Cloud Dance, 1980, 13'

Co-performer: Ingolf Sander-Lahr

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