

THE WAY IT WAS

Brigitte Peucker

Time and place and the cultural texts anchored in them are determining factors for all biographies. Since 1970, when I graduated from college, I've been associated with Yale University, first as a graduate student and then as a member of the faculty, so my trajectory—intellectual and otherwise—may be more entwined with the history of the institution than most. While writing this talk, I was in fact surprised at how much my story is shaped by it. But the story doesn't begin at Yale. For me, the inaugural scene would surely be my family's erstwhile house on Lake Dämeritz, in the easternmost part of greater Berlin, a house whose location is near early film production sites. It was in this house on the lake that Hermann Kant, recipient of the Heinrich Heine Prize, the Heinrich Mann Prize, and the Goethe Prize—all awarded by the East Germans, of course—would write the *Bildungsroman* on which Frank Beyer's film *Held for Questioning* (1983) is based. Kant, head of the East German Writers' Association from 1978 to 1990, was a well-known Stasi informant, disliked equally by Right, Left, and Center. But that's a later conjunction of place and text.

Perhaps I should begin much earlier. The initial scene might be the Friedrichstrasse in the center of Berlin in the 1890s, for the story starts there. Not my particular story, of course, but that of my family's involvement with the moving image. In Berlin, moving image technologies begin with the Skladanowsky brothers, Max and Emil, whose primary innovation—the dual projection Bioscop of 1885—was almost immediately supplanted by the Lumière Brothers' Cinematograph. The chronicle moves on quickly, therefore, to Oskar Messter, whose 1897 studio was on the Friedrichstrasse near the city center. Just a few years earlier, Messter had established himself as a manufacturer of film equipment, specifically of film projectors using the so-called Maltese Cross that enabled projection. It was on the Friedrichstrasse that inventor Heinrich Graebe, my great-grandfather, owned a machine shop which manufactured such crosses for Messter, although my great-grandfather was not the only one to build them. Some say that Graebe himself designed and developed the Maltese Cross—he was a techie—but

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if this was really the case, references to Graebe have been lost in the historical shuffle. Whatever the origin of the Maltese Cross, Messter built sixty-five projectors by the end of 1897, many with parts manufactured by my great-grandfather. Known as the “Father of the German Film Industry,” Messter expanded his family business: his father manufactured optical equipment for magicians and showmen, and magic lantern shows designed with specially created equipment were staged in the Messter home. The young Oskar was fascinated by the feigned, uncanny movement of these images. Small wonder, then, that he not only produced projectors but also moving pictures, the first titled *Near the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin* (1896). By the end of 1897, the Messter catalogue featured eighty-four short films whose subject matter ranged from street scenes such as the Brandenburg vignette to comical skits, military parades, and cabaret acts. It was still 1897 when Messter bought a theatre on the famous street called Unter den Linden, and in that same year he projected a film at Berlin’s Apollo Variety Theater. My great-grandfather’s business, no longer confined to the manufacture of Maltese Crosses, likewise flourished.

Greater Berlin is a chain of many lakes joined by rivers and canals. Several years later, beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century and continuing into the teens and early twenties, popular adventure films were shot in the vicinity of the house on the Dämeritz lake, and more importantly, in nearby Brandenburg, in the villages of Woltersdorf and Rüdersdorf and at other lakes, the Weissensee and the Kalksee with its exotic chalk cliffs. These production sites served as sets for Harry Piel’s popular adventure films such as *The Prison at the Bottom of the Lake* (1920) and *Rivals* (1923), both of which drew on the area’s waterscapes for their settings. Hundreds of thrillers were made at Max Mack’s Lixie Studio on the Weissensee, while the landscapes around Joe May’s studio in Woltersdorf were the sites of his lavish serial blockbusters—in particular *Mistress of the World* (1919) and *The Indian Tomb* (1921). Vestiges of May’s sets are a tourist attraction to this day. How does the house on the Dämeritz lake feature in this early period? In its late nineteenth-century manifestation it was a *Jugendstil*—art nouveau—villa, inhabited by a film actor who played minor roles in movies shot in the Woltersdorf area, up to and including the tent colony sequence of Brecht’s and Dudow’s film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), shot on the Müggelsee, another neighboring lake. The best known of early German silent films, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, was shot in Woltersdorf as well. In fact, Woltersdorf continues to be a production site for more contemporary films: the director Wim Wenders, who, like Francis Ford Coppola, is devoted to preserving film history, shot *Faraway, So Close* (1993) in Woltersdorf as an *homage* to early German cinema. More recently, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck shot *The Lives of Others* (2006) there, a film about Stasi surveillance in East Berlin. Woltersdorf was, of course, part of the German Democratic Republic until 1989.

But in 1919–1928, Heinrich Graebe’s older daughter, my great-aunt, would star as Tony Ebärg in thirteen films written, directed, and produced by her husband, William Kahn, who emigrated to Hollywood in the early 1930s, fleeing the Nazis and—the

family always contended – Tony herself. These are short, primarily serial films, some with vaguely erotic content: *Whirlwind of Decadence* (1920) is the title of one such series. Small wonder that my great-aunt's chosen profession was frowned upon by the bourgeois Graebe family, who asked that she assume a stage name, not use their own. Naturally I've tried to see Tony's films, but they are almost entirely lost. Archivists tell me that the only extant fragments are in the Moscow Film Archive – so, right now at least, as good as lost to me.

Of course I knew nothing of this history when, in 1952, my mother told me to gather a few of my dolls, put me and the dolls on her bike, and rode from our lake house to the nearby railroad station, where we took a train to West Berlin, never to return. Never to return until, that is, the lake house was restored to me after the Wall fell in 1989. Why did my parents leave? Because they had no wish to live under Communism, for one thing. Also because my father had falsified a passport in order to attend a technical convention in Hanover, and leaving the Eastern sector of the city illegally was punishable by years of imprisonment. I was four years old when a threatening phone call came: when my mother answered it, an unknown voice told her that the family should leave at once and never return. Imagine a situation in which instructions such as these are actually acted upon. I clearly remember the occupation of the house by leaders of the East German Communist party. It was not a particularly large house, but heavy bombing during the war produced an acute housing shortage, and those houses still standing had more occupants than they were designed for. Houses on the lake in particular were favored by Party functionaries. I remember, at the age of three or so being told to be especially quiet while the wife of one of these, Frau Henschel, practiced her opera arias; even at that age I sensed that not to do so would be somehow dangerous. (Perhaps it was this incident that provoked my ambivalence towards opera, which continues to this day.) We abandoned the lake house, then, to Party functionaries, but some bureaucrat neglected to do in the case of our house what was then common practice: to strike owners' names from the property register, the *Grundbuch*, and replace them with the Party as owner of title. The fact that no expropriation took place in the case of our lake house – was it an oversight or just the feeling that we'd never be back anyway, that the German Democratic Republic was there to stay? Anyway, it was one of the reasons why I had no trouble, as my grandmother's heir, having the house restored to me in 1990, the beginning of reunification. But while the lake house was henceforth mine, it was not without inhabitants, and I became the landlady – at a distance – of Hermann Kant, Stasi informant, novelist, and writer of screenplays, one of which was the basis of the aforementioned film by Beyer. Do I think that there's some sort of mystical connection between these bits of film history and my choice to devote most of my career to film? Certainly not. But something is there, something that I can't quite put my finger on.

The family business during the 1920s through the postwar period was no longer the manufacture of projector parts alone but also of machines and machine tools. It

was located in what became West Berlin, so while we were refugees from the German Democratic Republic, we were not without means. But in West Berlin my father, an engineer, felt that he was not yet far enough away from “the Russians,” as he always called them, and took a position with a German company in the US. Thus I came to Summit, New Jersey, as a five-year-old and was enrolled in the Kent Place School for Girls, where I learned English very quickly, as children do. Having learned English, however, I was loath to speak German – no doubt because I hoped to be like the other children. From that time on, I spoke only English to my parents while they spoke German to me. These bilingual conversations continued until their death. Oddly, perhaps, we were not really aware of speaking different languages when we conversed.

I suppose one could say that the German language won out after all, since I became a German major at Mount Holyoke College. When I entered college in 1966 I had only read the occasional German magazine, never serious literature, and the only German I wrote was in letters to my grandmother in Berlin. But at Mount Holyoke I was placed into senior seminars as a freshman, seminars whose subject matter – the works of Thomas Mann, of Kafka and Brecht, of Günter Grass – I found wholly compelling. My principal teacher and mentor, Sidonie Cassirer, who held a PhD from Yale, was the niece of Ernst Cassirer, and discussions on aesthetic matters were philosophically inflected and eye opening for someone who had just graduated from Branford High School. Her focus on twentieth-century German literature and culture obviously included the Nazi period and the second World War, as well as postwar Germany, topics about which I knew too little. But by the end of my sophomore year I’d completed the German major, such as it was, and I spent my junior year in Munich, in 1968–69, a year dominated by student protests in Europe as well as in the US. One of my professors, Walter Müller-Seidel, then lecturing on nineteenth-century literature, collapsed at the podium when students crowded around him on the stage. Paradoxically – or perhaps not – my favorite course at the university was a seminar in art history, on the Italian *quattrocento*.

During the course of that year, I spent a great deal of time in museums, at the theater, and even at the opera. On one of my visits to Berlin, I took a bus through Checkpoint Charlie to the East. By then I was an American citizen, otherwise I might not have risked making the trip back into the German Democratic Republic. Passports were checked by the East German military police while we passengers sat on the bus. Since mine lists my birthplace as Berlin, Germany, I wasn’t exactly surprised, though somewhat nervous, when called out of the bus and made to sit in an empty room for what seemed an interminable period of time, probably about half an hour. What was being checked and how? If my family name was on a list of some sort – we had, of course, fled the country, even if the Wall wouldn’t be completed until 1961 – it was probably felt that my American citizenship made it unwise to prevent me from crossing the border. This was not a conventional bus trip: these tourist buses only took prescribed routes through East Berlin and there were few stops. One, I recall, was at a

tourist shop where one could buy Western goods such as toothpaste and detergent—with Western currency. When the passengers were not on the bus, soldiers with rifles kept close watch. So there was no chance of going to the house on the lake or even to the village in its vicinity.

I'd been hoping somehow to get the flavor of the place, to revivify its landscape in my memories, perhaps in some sense to integrate the experience into my study of literature. Yet when I returned to Mount Holyoke as a senior to write my thesis on Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959), it was not historical issues on which I focused, but rather questions of narrative and figurative texture. Much later, in 2006, just before the publication of his memoir, *Peeling the Onion*, Grass revealed that he'd lied about his war record and claimed he hoped to make amends. Despite his ongoing commitment to liberal politics, Grass would be pilloried for not acknowledging being drafted into the Waffen SS at the age of 17, in 1944, just before the end of the war. His revelation would undermine years of sustained political activism and literary work on his part on behalf of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). In the meantime, Grass's reputation was as yet untarnished and international, and he would win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1999. Back in the fall of '69, when we students had other issues on our minds, I heard Grass read from work-in-progress at Columbia University. This only intensified my fascination with his work. Grass's writing was imagistic from the start, a tapestry inflected by his visual sense—he was a graphic artist and sculptor before he began to write fiction—and that was a large part of what drew me to *The Tin Drum*. In the meantime, I'd completed two semesters of independent work on Goethe, who was also a visual person, an *Augenmensch* (a person of the eye), as he liked to call himself. It was actually while in college, then, that I developed an abiding interest in the interrelation of the arts—the Sister Arts—an engagement with painting, literature, and film that runs through my work to this day.

We were all still using typewriters for our essays in the spring of 1970. During the Cambodian invasion, writing seemed next to impossible, but when my senior essay was finally complete, I took the ninety-page thesis home to Branford, Connecticut, where my parents knew someone who could type German. Imagine my shock when—driving along I-95 towards Branford very early in the morning—I saw what must have been a dozen, possibly more, large tanks driving *on the highway* in the opposite direction, towards New Haven. It was a hallucinatory experience—and not produced by any illegal substances, I assure you. This was in early May, the time of the Black Panther trials in New Haven, just after the May Day demonstrations, and presumably the tanks had been called out to “protect” the city. I never learned what became of them, where they might have been parked, just for instance—did they go to the Green? But I know they weren't deployed.

In September I returned to New Haven, under different circumstances, to attend Yale Graduate School in German literature, with a minor in English. Women had just been accepted to Yale College the year before—as juniors—so only a handful of female

undergraduates was in evidence. But the Graduate School had been admitting women for years, and our entering class of four in German included another woman. We did not feel isolated or especially put upon. Those were the days, however, when more than one senior professor in the German department made male students cry, incidents I witnessed. They were also the days when the oral examination of two and a half hours had no reading list for its general section. It covered *all* of German literature, from the *Hildebrandslied* – written in Old High German circa 830 – to novels published yesterday. They were also the days when, of the five seminars generally on offer per semester in the department, two were held on Friday afternoons: one from 2:00 to 4:00 and the other from 4:00 to 6:00, in the Germanic Seminar of the Hall of Graduate Studies, across from the reception room where the Happy Hour for grad students began at 5:30. The sound of tinkling ice cubes filled the seminar room, nearly drowning out the discussion on realism in the novel.

I was permitted to substitute four courses in English poetry for the required courses in Middle High German and medieval literature, courses which would doubtless have done me good, but wouldn't have contributed to my early academic work in the way seminars in poetry did, because in grad school I abandoned postwar German literature for lyric poetry: pre-romantic, romantic, and post-romantic. German lyric poetry was not really much taught at Mount Holyoke, although one of my professors would occasionally cite lines from Goethe's love poetry – she favored *Gingo Biloba* (sic) – and we suspected that there was a lost love somewhere in her life. One of my mentors at Yale was Heinrich Henel, who introduced me to the close reading of poetry by way of several under-read poets of the nineteenth century whose work I find fascinating to this day: Eduard Mörike (masterfully translated by our colleague Howard Stern); Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, a proto-symbolist; and Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, to whom I later devoted a chapter in one of my books. But it was Geoffrey Hartman whose seminars held me spellbound. This was the early Geoffrey of *Beyond Formalism* and *The Fate of Reading*, which contained essays I read and re-read, hoping to emulate his strategies for reading. Like my fellow students in his classes, I struggled to follow what we called his “imaginative leaps,” which we found as difficult as we found them brilliant and inspiring. These were also the days when lyric poetry was a major center of literary attention at Yale, which in turn was the center of literary study in the United States. Soon I would listen to Paul de Man's lectures in French with their occasional forays into German. More leaps were required there, but a great deal of excitement was generated among us students by being part of an institution which fostered hard thinking about literature. Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* was a seminal work, and its overarching argument would shape a lot of my thinking about texts. Then, in February of 1973, I met Paul Fry, whose brilliant conversations about poetry kept me reading it. I married him the following year.

That term, spring of 1973, I was serving as a teaching assistant for Peter Demetz for his then brand-new lecture course called Literature 300, which combined the history of

criticism with a modicum of literary theory. It was challenging to find that my section comprised only graduate students – this would never be permitted today, thankfully – and I spent nearly the entirety of each week reading not just the assigned texts, but as deeply as I could around those texts. On the reading list were several essays from Susan Sontag’s *Against Interpretation* – we felt that it was very chic of Professor Demetz to include them on the syllabus. In the 60s these had been inflammatory essays – in the year of their publication (much earlier, in 1961) the *New York Times* called Sontag “easily the most controversial critic writing in America today.” So I was introduced to her work by teaching it, and it took me in a new direction. Her stimulating takes on Roland Barthes, on films by Godard and Leni Riefenstahl, and on Camp and other cultural texts have been an influence. (Many years later Sontag spoke at a tea at Ezra Stiles College and attended a dinner with us there when Paul and I were heads of the college. Furious at the beginning of the tea because she’d just given a reading to an unsympathetic audience, she “mellowed” over the course of the evening to become her satirical and incisive self.) Years later Paul would take over Demetz’s Lit 300, which had by then become Lit Y. (Paul’s course is still available on Open Yale.) In its heyday Lit Y enrolled nearly 200 students, another sign that literature was a trendy focal point for many undergraduates. A witty colleague of Paul’s joked about wishing he had the black leather concession at the auditorium door. And in the early 80s Jodie Foster, in an interview with Dick Cavett, proudly announced that she was a “lit major” at Yale.

In 1975 the German department changed its approach to teaching the language by replacing the so-called “German grandmothers,” who were retiring, with lecturers and assistant professors, depending on whether the successful candidate had finished the dissertation or not. They were hired to teach five courses per year, and those without the PhD would be given two years to complete it, after which they might be promoted to assistant professor. Who, given that opportunity, would not have done so? So I finished my dissertation over one summer and a holiday break. At that time assistant professors in German were required to teach some language courses, which, for a period of time, I quite enjoyed doing, since Yale students’ humor and imagination emerge spontaneously in the less intellectually taxing setting of the language course. But it was really the seminars that I most enjoyed, although at the beginning there were some cliff hangers, such as when, two weeks before the term began, I was asked to take over a course on the late Rilke, on the sonnets and the elegies, when a senior professor unexpectedly took a medical leave. I worried whether there would be enough students. In a small department such as German filling one’s courses with an appropriate number could be a challenge and even in the late 1970s, lyric poetry in the original language was a difficult sell – though not so difficult as today, of course.

In 1979, a couple of years into my assistant professorship, I developed a new and compelling interest. Again it was Peter Demetz, always committed to innovation and eager to support women in the profession (he is alive and well at age 100 as I speak), who pushed me in a new direction. We’d seen one another often, if distantly, at the

movies over a number of years when the York Square Cinema was flourishing. Then, in 1979, the Goethe Institute in Boston compiled a program of perhaps a dozen new films by the so-called New German directors Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, and Wim Wenders, not well known at the time in the US except in film festival circles, and virtually ignored in Germany until they made their mark in New York and Paris. Peter Demetz brought this program to Yale, where all dozen films were shown over the course of two and a half days, and he imported a panel of New York film critics to discuss them. Over my protests, he appointed me to participate on that panel. It was another cliff hanger, but a productive one, since afterwards it was suggested I put together a lecture course on German cinema—which I did. Reading texts was one thing. However, I knew nothing about the camera, about editing techniques, lighting, and the other strategies which produce films, so I enrolled in the summer program in filmmaking at NYU’s School of Art, then called the Sight and Sound Program. In groups of three we made a number of short films including an abstract film, a simulated animation, and a melodrama. We worked in 16 not 8 mm. and learned to edit using Steenbeck flatbed editing machines, all completely out of date in these days of digital everything, of course. I loved it. But it was clear that at thirty-one I was already too old to go to Hollywood, so I gave the lecture course on German cinema instead. It drew a lot of students, excellent students, with some of whom I’m still in touch.

From that time on I devoted myself not just to lyric poetry, about which I was still writing, but also to teaching myself about film, once again by means of teaching it to others, a method tried and true. At first Werner Herzog was a focus. Around that time Harold Bloom voiced the opinion that Herzog’s film *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* (1972) was a true inheritor of the Sublime. Herzog had become fashionable. We succeeded in bringing him to Yale, where he showed *Burden of Dreams*, a documentary by Les Blank, inspired by the problematic production of Herzog’s *Fitzcarraldo*. Afterwards, Herzog played soccer on Old Campus with some of the students from the audience: he was not one for talking. But it was the relation of language to images in Herzog that drew me to his work, especially in the stunning film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974). *Kaspar Hauser* was fascinating for the way in which writing was materialized, embodied by natural images. This conjunction of writing and figured materialization, including various strategies of illusionism, were topics of interest for me in lyric poetry as well. My first published essay was titled *The Poem as Place: Three Modes of Scenic Rendering in the Lyric* (1981), and in its various aspects, this problematic would become the governing idea of my second book on film, *The Material Image*, published much later. After the lecture course on German cinema, there followed seminars on Weimar cinema and Nazi cinema, the point about teaching the latter being to uncover a Fascist aesthetic and the rhetorical strategies that supported Nazi ideology, for which Sontag’s “Fascinating Fascism” was a seminal text.

In the 1980s my teaching reverted to the eighteenth century—preromanticism had been the topic of my dissertation—not to eighteenth-century poetry, but rather

to issues of gender, just then coming to the fore, and to interarts questions, too. For five years I taught the senior seminar in the Humanities Program as a text and image course, beginning with the eighteenth and moving into the early twentieth century. I was encouraged to include a number of films on the syllabus, and with perceptive students as my interlocutors, I honed the ideas on the interarts issues that informed my first book on film: *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts*. Clearly there was a distinctly Bloomian dimension to this book, which I mostly regret now, but it was translated into German a few years after its publication. The book is predicated on the understanding that film is an art, a point that is not taken by everyone, even to this day. While I no longer taught courses in German poetry, I developed a course on techniques of vision and proto-cinematic practices starting in the eighteenth century, and that included German texts.

While writing this talk I became aware of the extent to which my trajectory evolved in tandem not only with my teaching but also with university practices and the administrative aspect of my career. I recount some of my experiences now because they shed light on the history of film studies and the status of junior faculty at Yale in the 70s and 80s, particularly of women within that body. Looking back at my CV, it seems there's nary a committee on which I did not serve: Admissions, Humanities Advisory/Tenure Appointments; Economic Status of the Faculty, and many, many more. It was rightly felt that every committee needed a woman, and there were not yet so very many to go around. In the meantime, my two books on poetry appeared in the 80s, when I was already heavily engaged in teaching film. From 1986 on, I also served as the head of the Film Studies Program, which I helped bring into existence. Until 1986, any student wanting to major in film – and this was possible, since there were courses generated by several departments, taught by Don Crafton in History of Art for instance, and by Annette Insdorf out of French – would have to submit to the cumbersome process of applying for a Special Divisional Major. But after a great deal of lobbying, and with the staunch support of Howard Lamar, then dean of Yale College, the proposal for a Film Studies Program came before the faculty. The faculty meeting at which it was discussed was something of a circus, bringing into focus a variety of emotional protests from the opposition. The one that sticks in my mind particularly was voiced by a scientist whose confessed reason for speaking against film studies was that, when he was a child, his father worked for Alfred Hitchcock and never came home until very late at night. I am not distorting what he said – it could probably be checked in the minutes. Perhaps this outburst, in which an inner child came to the surface, caused some embarrassment in other members of the faculty whom it swayed to vote yes. But it was primarily Howard Lamar who pushed film studies through. Howard himself used films successfully in his courses on the American West and knew that the medium should be the focus of serious academic engagement. The film studies proposal was the last agenda item at his last faculty meeting as dean, and Howard's quietly insistent manner brought the program into being. From 1986, when I was tenured, until 2000, I chaired the Film

Studies Program—while I also chaired the German department (1997–2004) and served as assistant head of Ezra Stiles College (1995–2002). One of my tasks as chair of the Film Studies Program was to fill a newly created slot for a junior position in film, also a result of Howard Lamar’s intervention. That led to the hiring of Charles Musser.

By 2000, Dudley Andrew, at that time probably the best-known American scholar in film studies, joined the faculty, leading to the establishment of a joint PhD program whose students were and are much in demand on the job market. Some years later Francesco Casetti, an eminent European scholar, now a Sterling Professor in the Humanities, came to Yale to participate in what would soon become Film and Media Studies. But there were other scholars of note along the way who didn’t stay at Yale. Earlier, tenure had been refused to a prominent theorist whose two departments voted unanimously in favor. His career path was a smooth one, however, since he was courted by both Harvard and the University of Chicago. To this day, there has been a reluctance on the part of Yale to commit fully to Film and Media Studies, and I am convinced that it’s now too late. I’ve always wondered why Yale didn’t jump at the chance to foster the excellence of the program in its earlier years. I argued repeatedly for departmental status. The response was couched in financial terms, but I suspect negative voices from within.

In the meantime, in 1982, I’d been promoted to associate professor and awarded a chair, the Charles B.G. Murphy Associate Professorship, along with Bryan Wolf from American Studies. Naturally we called it the “folding chair,” since one could not hold it if one were either fired or promoted to tenure—it was for untenured faculty only. In those days Yale didn’t have tenure-track positions and we junior people never expected tenure. The process as it existed then only became fully transparent for me when I became chair of German myself. First, a position had to be allotted to the department in question; then a letter had to be sent out to ten experts in the field, asking who the preeminent persons in that field were and ranking them. These referees could not be contacted by anyone in the department and could not be told that a junior person in that department was being considered for a senior position. If the internal candidate’s name miraculously came up in the requisite number of letters, a slot was allotted and the person could then formally “come up for tenure.” Only then were their writings sent to another eight to ten referees who reviewed the work. And it was only after that that the department voted. Then the Tenure Appointments Committee weighed in, and finally the entire senior faculty voted. Fortunately, this baroque procedure changed over time, as we know, and it’s quite different today.

As it turned out, when I was promoted to tenure, I was only the tenth or eleventh tenured woman in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and this was 1986. And I had been the first pregnant Fellow at the Whitney Humanities Center a couple of years before. My son was born in the spring of 1984 and I submitted my materials for promotion to a tenured position in September of ’85, when he was not yet eighteen months old. There was no such thing as parental leave. At that point my first book

had been published (my second was almost finished), but I was also asked to submit substantial work on film – part of a new manuscript. It was argued that it would be a selling point for my tenure, that German lyric poetry alone would not do the trick. Needless to say, complying with these requirements was not easy, but Paul spent most of the summer taking care of our son while I worked on my manuscript. Since I didn't expect to be promoted to tenure, I didn't give the process much thought until the holidays. It was then that I had two encounters, just hours apart, that shocked me deeply. One afternoon we attended two holiday parties, the first at Ezra Stiles College, where a senior member of my department reported that there'd been a discussion about whether I would wish to go on in my profession now that I had a child. That person assured everyone that, yes, I certainly would, but the story was unsettling. Clearly, a transgressive conversation had been conducted, but that didn't begin to compare to what happened at the private party we attended a couple of hours later. As we entered the house a person then serving on the Tenure Appointments Committee stopped me at the door and asked: "Well, Brigitte, how does it feel to be a professor at Yale and have a baby?" More than unsettling this time, impossible to forget, this conversation provides a glimpse into the situation of faculty women at the time. When I responded, "Let's ask Paul that question," my interlocutor may have been too tipsy fully to take my point, but perhaps it dawned on him later on. These experiences politicized me, but only privately, since it was all too clear that there could be no recourse if things didn't work out. It helped to be on the short list for a tenured position at Cornell.

What of the visual arts? While a graduate student I took sculpture courses at the Creative Arts Workshop where one of my sculptures, of Daphne metamorphosing into a tree, was stolen from an exhibition. I am still rather proud of this. And while we served as heads of Ezra Stiles, Paul and I put together several exhibitions of painting and sculpture by Yale-connected and New Haven artists, of works by Ruth Miller, Constance La Palombara, Natalie Charkow, Will Lustenader, and others. The exhibitions were open to the public but our goal was to create a Soho-like atmosphere in order to interest undergraduates – future patrons of the arts, we hoped – in attending exhibitions. In addition to the writers, poets, musicians, directors, and actors – not to mention the Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia – who participated in our college teas, Christo and Jeanne Claude spent an afternoon and evening at Stiles, projecting images of their work to a crowded room. This was around the time they were completing their Gates project in Central Park and the excitement around their presentation was high. Indeed, the years at Stiles were notable for the cultural events we were fortunate enough to host.

Although I've no wish to move from the sublime to the somewhat less sublime, we also entertained Ina Garten and Martha Stewart, whose presentations on the domestic arts everyone intensely enjoyed, myself included – not that they were able to give advice on my situation, of course. At that time there was inadequate domestic help in the colleges for the wives of the college head – all wives at that point, no husbands

yet – so, among other things, I found myself driving to Price Club to buy Snapple by the caseload, planning all of our entertainments and even setting up for the teas. (Recall that I was involved in administrative duties, chairing, teaching, and writing and had a child still living at home.) It was not until Ed Kamens, also a tenured professor, became the assistant head of Saybrook College when his wife Mary Miller was head that substantive changes were made to the system.

In an effort to engage students with the architecture of Stiles, we asked Cesar Pelli, who had been a young associate of Eero Saarinen at the time of its construction, to speak about its design and its place in relation to the buildings that surround it. I wish I could say the students were convinced that it was appropriate for its site or that it paid homage to San Gimignano. Imitation Gothic remained their object of desire and that is still the case today. But my visual interests were also professional. Later, after many years of looking at art and reading art theory, I taught a course called Film and Painting in History of Art with a graduate student from that department. A graduate seminar I had developed for Film and Media Studies, *Intermediality in Film*, was primarily a course on film and painting, and it became my signature course for a number of years. Among other things, it was the elusive presence in his films of painting that drew me to Alfred Hitchcock. The Hitchcock course I taught over many years – of which I never tired – was the course of mine that drew the largest audience. *Intermediality* would be the nexus of the last of my three books on film, *Aesthetic Spaces: The Place of Art in Film*, which appeared in 2019.

Perhaps it was knowing I could do several things at once that whetted my interest – in the late 90s, while still at Stiles – in moving into administrative work completely. Or perhaps it was the desire to escape the kind of multi-tasking that had become my lot. In any case, I was on the short list for two deanships at Seven Sisters colleges, then received an offer from a third institution, an offer that was very tempting and that I nearly accepted. This institution wanted to hire someone whose mandate would be to reconcile the humanities with the arts. Tempting as this offer was for me, family considerations ultimately got in the way. There was also the commitment to film studies, not to mention an entire career spent at a single institution. Should I have left? Perhaps, but I still wanted to explore other topics in my writing. And it was questionable whether there would be as much freedom to move in various directions at that institution as there had been at Yale. Whatever the hardships there might have been for women at Yale, they were of their particular moment in time and have by and large been addressed. But what other institution allows its faculty to move out of one field and into another? I feel a great deal of gratitude for having had that chance.

In the last couple of years I've published an essay on the ways in which reproduction – technological or otherwise – may be understood in relation to Vermeer's work as presented by moving image technologies, asking what happens to the aura in the process. I look at documentary and narrative films that focus on Vermeer's work, films that vary in their response to the notion of ineffability as it applies to painting,

a notion that underpins connoisseurship, art history, and the art market alike. There's also an article about Van Gogh and immersive visual practices in film. We spectators repeatedly seek out such experiences, each in its historically specific context, with its historically-specific technologies, yes, but each with its distinctly physiological and psychological component. What is immersion's pull, the piece asks, are immersive experiences simply fairground attractions, given different guises by different epochs and diverse technologies? My most recent essay is another one on Hitchcock. "Hitchcock's Undertexts: Objects in Language," which appeared in February [2021], explores the way in which the generative capacity of language inflects objects and props in several films by Hitchcock, where language can be punning; it can extend the image, evoking another unimagined object, or act as a verbal solution to a puzzle. Most recently, the pandemic has made film comedy an attractive distraction, so I am editing a collection of essays on Ernst Lubitsch with a former student now teaching in Israel.

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But what I intend to return to after that is finished is a piece on early cinema in Berlin. This project takes a different approach from that of my previous work, which has been largely concerned with aesthetic questions. I hope to visit the production sites near the lake house on the Dämeritz and to view some of the early popular blockbusters in the archives of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek—Joe May's *Mistress of the World*, for example. In prospect, a final section of the project would take up several films of the contemporary "Berlin School," the latest German school of filmmaking to gain prominence. These will likely include Angela Schanelec's *Passing Summer* (2001) and *Afternoon* (2007) which, despite the intended nonspecificity of her locations, were probably shot at the Dämeritz lake. Thus I'd be coming full-circle, in a manner of speaking, returning to the site where, for me, it all began.