

script excerpts from

STILL (STILLE)

a film by Wendy Oberlander

There may be a bend in the road, which looks just like the one you know, and you wait for another to come and suddenly you realize, the other one will never come because you live in another country. *Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, 1940*

The feeling is unmistakable and quite old.

Pressed to find words, I look into my hands.

One knot.

One knot ties two stories.

One knot binds a bundle, two bundles, three more.

I travel somewhere between comfort and ruin
looking for my place in the story.

At this late hour
feeling only the weather
hearing only the hum.

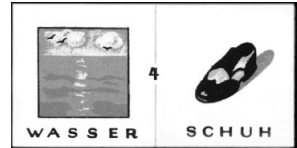
I start to cut.

The past is past
but the grain of forgetting pulls me back.
I catch myself in the stories
I fade.

The moment I see her she will be gone.

It is the noise between the sweetness
the air in the void that makes the sound around which I turn.

Listen.



I wanted to go to Berlin with my mother.

In 1998 we were invited by the City Senate - a sort of “welcome home” tour, extended to thousands of former residents: Jewish citizens who were forced to leave. Lucky enough to leave. Lucky enough to survive.

My mother posed one question: “Why should I go to Berlin as a Jew if I did not live as a Jew before the War?”

This is the knot that twists in my hand.

This is the picture that turns before your eyes.

To the west of Berlin, toward the end of the city train line, is a lake known as Wannsee. We spent a fine day touring - a catered kosher lunch, and a speech by a school teacher describing how she wrestles with her country’s history.

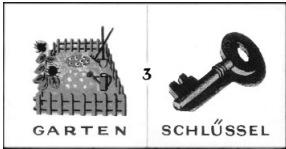
All we want is to sit in the sun, and visit.

I stand with my back against the railing, and drink in the tender scene. Here I am, sailing in my mother’s childhood neighborhood with all these wonderful people who are oddly familiar - the accents, the determination, the broken parts. Beyond the sweetness and the pleasure of the moment, one image is fixed. A boatload of Jews in Germany going nowhere. I startle: it is 1998.

Walking through the woods at the back of her house, my mother tells me a story. The household was crated, sent off two months before. Suitcases sit in the front hall. My grandmother hands her a small purse of knitted silver wire. Bury this at the back of the house, and do it quickly. My mother runs to the woods, digs a shallow hole. Throws the purse in. Covers it, stomps on the dirt. Runs back. My grandmother anxiously waits: where is the purse? I buried it. My grandmother replies: I meant just the coins.

Sixty years later, we stand on top of the hole. I pick up a stick to dig. She says, don’t bother.

A story, the trees, and a few lifetimes between us.



Sometimes when I wake up in the morning, I look for my window at the left, or when I am just about to fall asleep, I wonder why my bed stands the other way round as it used to. One tries not to cling to any of these illusions, but there might be a small incident, such as a smell of burning wood in the country, which suddenly before you can help it reminds you of something you have experienced before. *Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, 1940*

We are standing by her garden gate.
Some people wait years for this moment. Others spend a lifetime forgetting.
The trees my grandmother planted, the garden walls, the gravel driveway.
The gate, just as she left it.

The deep purple lilac blooms.

My mother is very matter-of-fact about most everything. That was then,
this is now. I live here, I lived there.

What was left is only that.

Yet her accent her gestures the conversation over the dinner table.
Nothing quite fits.

Pocket sack rucksack satchel portfolio chest box case casket desk bureau
trunk valise carpet-bag briefcase vessel canister jar jug basket pannier crate
plate platter dish bowl cupboard bin drawer bookcase cabinet wardrobe.

The endless packing and unpacking of something familiar.



script excerpts from **Still (Stille)**
a film by Wendy Oberlander

Still (Stille) looks back to the world of assimilated European Jews during the 1930s. Sixty years after the exile, I travelled with my mother to her birthplace of Berlin - only to find the dissonance of my diaspora playing in real time. Toys from my childhood displayed in store windows; my grandmother's lilacs in full bloom; a sack of coins, buried deep in the back yard, waiting.

Still (Stille) transforms a collection of archival footage, gathered from strangers around the globe, into an indelible montage of people and places - discoveries of Benjamin's *mémoire involontaire*. Projecting my inheritance and my story onto these tender and familiar faces unties the knot of loss and irreconcilability - if only for a moment, as the film passes by.

An original score by bass clarinetist Lori Freedman, plus sections of improvisations played by Freedman and cellist Peggy Lee, amplifies the gaps between memory and history. Picture, word and music surround each other in a retelling of the endless Jewish story.

A film by Wendy Oberlander
Music created by Lori Freedman,
bass clarinet with Peggy Lee, cello
Edited by Jennifer Abbott
25 minutes, b&w
Hahn & Daughters Productions © 2001

