

Introduction

Film stills are photographs used by the film industry and advertising media. While some attain iconic status or become fetish objects, most remain mass commodities, leading a shadowy existence alongside the main attraction: the film. Strictly speaking, film stills are not actually artworks. Although still photography certainly constitutes a profession, still photographers are not usually regarded as the “authors” of their photos. Film stills are items that have a supplementary function to the artwork in question (the film), their status thus being not unlike that of a book cover blurb. Their true area of application and the place where they are publicly displayed is the cinema. A very special place is reserved for them there: the threshold that marks the transition from the urban environment to the cinema auditorium. And it is at precisely this transitional point that they are meant to attract a passing audience—film-goers—and lure them into the cinema. Film stills thus take on the function of a passage, mediating between two different spaces. And since every form of mediation addresses certain desires, film stills equally work based on a promise. Yet this does not involve their simply mediating between the street and the cinema like a market-crier or hostess. It is more that they serve as an accompaniment to the movie, both preparing the viewer for it and allowing him or her to lament its passing. They are the last static images to be critically examined by the viewer before the film starts. One can look at the pictures and briefly compose oneself before temporarily giving up some of this self-composure in the cinema. They are equally on hand once the film is over, albeit in a different light, now becoming memories imbued with an air of melancholia, similar to the photo of a recent holiday. Their presentation is simultaneously marked as temporary from the very start. They are pinned up in display cases, forming a provisional extra that remains on view for only as long the film is still showing at the cinema. Afterwards, they disappear into the archives or the trash.

Much the same applies to film magazines or websites, which make use of film stills in advertising and discussing films. Even today, film distributors select various film stills and bring them into circulation to be hung up in cinemas or reproduced in the press. Film scholars also often add film stills to a film, usually after the event, such as when they have a close-up of a particular framing made for a publication. And with the help of a computer, any film viewer can stop a digitized film, isolate a still image from the flow of moving ones and print it out as necessary. The specific relationship between film and film stills can be termed “supplementarity.” The supplementary nature of film stills calls the closed nature of film as an artwork into question in fundamental fashion. This is equally accompanied by the fact that distributors repeatedly bring individual film stills into circulation that do not even appear in the film itself. The different

practices used to create film stills indicate that any film can have images added to it, even as the status of said images cannot be definitively explained beyond their basic supplementarity.

Despite this however, film stills represent a specific challenge with regard to their status as a supplement to a film, given that the film itself is equally present within the film still in the manner of a synecdoche. This figure of speech, which involves a part of something (the film still) referring to the whole (the film), positively invites the spectator or viewer to participate “directly” in the completion, supplementation or deconstruction of a film, whether in imaginary terms or in the form of a specific intervention. Film stills thus function as a shorthand for spectatorial empowerment. They allow the spectator to play an active role in a film’s sphere of activity and field of discourse in much the same way as others involved more “directly” in the process do, such as actors or cinematographers during the production phase or the critics, film scholars and theorists that get to grips with the film once it’s been released. This sort of spectatorial intervention is an aesthetic game carried by film stills which draws on the principles of reproduction, supplementarity and synecdoche. Historically speaking, this productive potential began to be unfurled around 1960 and is reflected both within the films of modern cinema and in the fine arts. Yet the aesthetic game surrounding the film still is already visible in both classic and silent cinema. Today, in the digital age, every spectator or every user can access digital film stills and use them as the basis for shaping his or her interventions, whether imaginary or tangible in nature.

The world of theory has also emphasized the significance of film stills on many occasions. Attempts have repeatedly been made to make the filmstrip and the still images contained within it the starting point for film analysis. Raymond Bellour criticized all these various attempts in fundamental terms, talking in this context of film stills as being “shadow images” that are necessary, yet by no means sufficient. He also underlines the impossibility of operationalizing film as a text for research purposes via film stills and making it manageable or workable for academic study.¹ My own suggestions for film analysis in this volume are more in alignment with the approach of Roland Barthes. They neither assume that film itself is a given quantity, nor attempt to operationalize film as a text by means of the film still. They carry out instead a form of film analysis that goes beyond the classical understanding of a research object. This theoretical maneuver shifts the perspective from an initial focus on the work (the film) to that of its paratexts and framework structure (the film stills). This intentional “view from the margins” does not assume that film is a text or a given artifact, but conceives of it instead as a sphere of activity and field of discourse that is open in nature.² What this procedure yields is the idea of film as a never-ending “projection,” as it were, on the part of the spectator. The theoretical maneuver behind this shift is thus not

merely about rendering film an operationalizable object but rather about making film analysis itself into film—into film in the sense of an open field of discourse.

This volume explores the use of film stills in various different contexts, whether in the art world or the world of theory, in relation to auteur cinema, the spectator and the museum or with respect to media culture. It sheds light on how the still was already prominent in film production during the silent era, such as in *DIE FILMPRIMADONNA* (*THE FILM PRIMADONNA*, Urban Gad) starring Asta Nielsen from 1913 (chapter 2), and explores how the film still has been employed both for advertising purposes as well as being frequently integrated into the plot, as can be seen in paradigmatic fashion in François Truffaut's *LES 400 COUPS* (*THE 400 BLOWS*, 1959) (chapter 9). From 1960 onwards, various artists also became increasingly interested in the film still, such as Richard Hamilton, John Baldessari, or Cindy Sherman (chapter 3, 4 and 5) for example. The strategies employed in these art contexts include both the appropriation of film stills and the deconstruction of film. Yet it was also film and photography theory that paved the way for these strategies while continuing to accompany them. Siegfried Kracauer thus already examined the film still back in the 1920s (chapter 6), before it returned to the focus of attention in the 1970s, both in the writings of Roland Barthes (chapter 7) and the work of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen (chapter 8).

The film still is equally connected to processes relating to the musealisation of cinema and its control. It enables us to study how the cinematic event differs from the photographic artifact as well as how the perceptual modes of static images differ from those of moving ones. The relationship between the institutions of the cinema and the museum are also revealed within the film still based on the various institutions which have declared themselves responsible for each of the respective image forms over history (chapter 12). These differences were already being depicted at the start of film history, such as in the early chronophotographs by Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, which can be seen as the forerunners of an encyclopedia of movement (*Encyclopaedia Cinematografica*) (chapter 11), or in Edwin S. Porter's *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY* (1903), in which the photo on a wanted poster suddenly comes to life and the gangster it shows fires his pistol at the cinema audience (chapter 10). Auteur filmmakers also developed complex strategies for appropriating film stills as a form of film quotation, shifting the concept of film as a work towards intertextuality and intermediality and increasingly extending it into an open collection of fragments, such as can be shown in the films of François Truffaut and Nanni Moretti. This process equally implies empowering the spectator, resulting in what can be described as a "politics of the spectator" analogous to the politics of the auteur (chapter 9).

Last, but not least, the film still also appears in altered form in media culture, a process already described by Siegfried Kracauer in the 1920s with respect to the photo of a film diva. As such, it is no surprise that film stills from a successful contemporary film, Tom Tykwer's *LOLA RENNT* (*RUN LOLA RUN*, 1998), were adapted for use in political campaigning in Berlin (chapter 13). Press photos too (including those of Fidel Castro and the Pope) can also appear much like stills from a film that has just not yet been shot (chapter 14). Much the same also applies to video surveillance images.

Since the 1990s, stills taken by surveillance cameras have taken on an iconic quality, whether the images of the kidnapping of James Bulger (1993), Princess Diana at the Hotel Ritz (1997), or terrorist Mohammed Atta at the airport (2001). The final chapter (15) of this volume deals with stills of this kind and describes them as symptomatic of permanent surveillance, whereby video cameras are set up to form an integrated system of control whose images are intended to record and be superimposed over reality "just in case" anything happens.

This e-book brings together my observations and research on the film still over the last 15 years. The individual essays were written and published for various different purposes and occasions. Chapters 3–5 are based on one section of my doctoral dissertation at the Berlin University of the Arts, which was published in 2004 by the Stroemfeld Verlag under the title "Filmstandbilder. Passagen zwischen Kunst und Kino." Chapter 4 was also published in English in the catalogue for the "John Baldessari. A Different Kind of Order" exhibition at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (ed. Rainer Fuchs, 2005). Chapters 6, 8, 13, and 14 form part of my second book to be published by the Stroemfeld Verlag, "Das ABC des Kinos. Foto, Film, Neue Medien" (2009), which I completed during the first years of my professorship at the University of Bremen. These chapters, as well as the entire ABC of cinema, can be listened to on the Internet in German (the audio book can be downloaded at www.abc-des-kinos.de/). Various other chapters were already published in English by the Bertz + Fisher Verlag for the various publications linked to the International Bremen Film Conference: Chapter 7 in "Word and Flesh. Cinema Between Text and the Body" (ed. Sabine Nessel et al., 2008), Chapter 10 in "Public Enemies. Film Between Identity Formation and Control" (ed. Winfried Pauleit et al., 2011) and Chapter 11 in "Animals and the Cinema. Classifications, Cinephiliias, Philosophies" (ed. Sabine Nessel et al., 2012). Chapter 9 appeared in the anthology "Vom Publicum. Das Öffentliche in der Kunst" published by Transcript Verlag (ed. Dietmar Kammerer 2012) as part of a conference organized by the "InterArt" DFG International Research Training Group at Freie Universität Berlin. Chapter 12 is based on a conference paper given at the University of Bremen in collaboration with the Focke Museum (Bremer Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte) and was published by the Transcript Verlag in the

anthology "Kunst – Museum – Kontexte" (ed. Viktor Kittlausz, Winfried Pauleit, 2006). Chapter 15 was initially published by the MIT Press as part of the ZKM Karlsruhe exhibition project "CTRL SPACE. Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother" (ed. Thomas Levin et al., 2002), while Chapter 2 was written for the Asta Nielsen Conference in Frankfurt am Main and published by the Verlag Filmarchiv Austria in "Unmögliche Liebe. Asta Nielsen, ihr Kino" (ed. Heide Schlüpmann et al., 2009). Preparatory studies on the individual chapters were also presented at the following universities: FU Berlin, the University of Bern, the University of Bremen, the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, the Kadir Has University Istanbul, Lisbon University, the University of Minnesota, Vanderbilt University Nashville, the University of Newcastle, the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, and the University of Vienna. Some of these preparatory studies were initially published in magazines: the preparatory study for Chapter 8 in *Frauen und Film* No. 62, 2000; for Chapter 9 in *Nach dem Film*, No. 8, 2005, for Chapter 13 in *Plurale* No. 0, 2001, and for Chapters 14 and 15 in *Ästhetik & Kommunikation* 1998, No. 101 and 103. The English translation of the introduction (Chapter 1) was done by James Lattimer, Robin Benson translated Chapter 4, and Timothy Jones translated Chapter 15. All the remaining translations were done by Brian Currid. All the texts were reviewed and partially reworked for their publication in this volume. All the existing translations were also reworked and updated by James Lattimer for this publication.

This volume would never have been brought to a successful conclusion without the discussions with numerous colleagues both at universities and publishers, as well as their support in a whole range of different ways. I would like to thank all of those colleagues and the translators, as well as my working group at the Institute for Art and the "Film, Media Art and Popular Culture" Lab at the Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research at the University of Bremen for their support and promotion of my work in this publication. Special thanks also go to my wife Sabine Nessel, who accompanied my writing over the entire period with true passion.

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Notes

- 1 See Raymond Bellour, "The Unattainable Text," in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington, IN, 2000), 21–27, and Raymond Bellour, "Analysis in Flames," *Diacritics* 15:1 (1985): 52–56. See also my own essay "Die Filmanalyse und ihr Gegenstand," in *Film als Baustelle: Das Kino und seine Paratexte*, ed. Andrzej Gwóźdź (Marburg, 2009), 37–57.
- 2 See here my essay "Film als Handlungsfeld: Oder: Wie 'falsches Spiel' zu Bildungsprozessen führt," in *Filme sehen, Kino verstehen: Methoden der Filmvermittlung*, ed. Bettina Henzler and Winfried Pauleit (Marburg, 2009), 118–136.