

After the trauma I am a
different person: reflections
on the representation of
identity change after the war.
The Case of *Phoenix* (2014)
by Christian Petzold

*Después del trauma soy otro, reflexiones
sobre la representación del cambio de
identidad después de la guerra. El caso
de Phoenix (2014) de Christian Petzold*

FABIOLA ALCALÁ¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1200-280X>

This text studies from an aesthetic, narrative and intertextual perspective, a film that questions how one can be oneself after the war and what it means not to be anymore. The case is *Phoenix* (2014) by C. Petzold. This film will sophisticate the motif of the “feminine double” in contemporary cinema.

KEYWORDS: The Berlin School; identity; Petzold; intertextuality; modern.

Este texto estudia, desde una perspectiva estética, narrativa e intertextual, un filme que se cuestiona: ¿Cómo puede ser uno mismo después de la guerra y qué significa ya no serlo? El caso es Phoenix (2014) de C. Petzold. Esta película sofisticará el motivo del “doble femenino” en el cine contemporáneo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Escuela de Berlín; identidad; Petzold; intertextualidad; modernidad.

¹ University of Guadalajara, México.

E-mail: f.alcala79@gmail.com

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After the war, people stop being themselves; experiencing directly a war conflict marks a person for life, therefore the trauma becomes irreversible. Cinema has told countless stories, mainly melodramas, which portray this phenomenon: how people are different after the war, that is, how the trauma modifies the characters' physical and psychic identity; and in addition and above all, it becomes the synecdoche of a nation that has been also hurt by combat (Páez, 1993).

Examples of this are the children who behave as adults after the Spanish Civil War in films starring children, such as *PaNegre* (2010), *El Embrujo de Shanghai* (2002) or *El Espinazo del Diablo* (2001). All of these children carry the burden of war on their shoulders, although none of them participated directly in the fray, they do suffer the consequences of the conflict and the need of taking a mature stand despite their tender age. These characters are forced to be different by the circumstances (Sánchez-Biosca, 2006; Yela Fernández, 2013).

The trauma conditions the characters, pushing them away from what they used to be. The mark left by the war and its consequences take hold of their gestures and spirit, their identity has been transformed, no matter how hard they try, they cannot go back to being who they used to be. Because traumatic events are defined by their negative, extreme, unusual character and because they are associated with threats to people's lives, but also because "it is traumatic events that profoundly alter the set of essential beliefs that people have about themselves, the world and others" (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, p. 12).

This text intends to analyze the representation of this event, studying *Phoenix* (2014) by Christian Petzold, which in addition to portraying a character that cannot go back to being the same after the war –literally because her face has been reconstructed, and metaphorically because there are no traces of who she used to be–, it presents a series of intertexts with other films, in which reflection about identity, the motif of the feminine double and trauma are central issues, from the perspectives of the narrative, aesthetics and plot.

The theoretical-methodological guiding line proposed for this analysis recovers Deleuze's concept of time-image (1987), as well as Balló's reflections on myths and visual motifs (2000), in addition to some of the notions on narratology developed by Gaudreault and Jost

(1995), who apply Genette's postulates to the cinema. A model created by the authors allows us to analyze the film taking into account different contexts and relations with other films that deal with the subject of identity blurred after the trauma to delve in its reflection.

SOME PREVIOUS NOTES ABOUT *PHOENIX*

Petzold is one of the film makers member of the contemporary German cinema movement known as *Berliner Schule* (the Berlin School); along with Angela Schanelec and Thomas Arslan.² Their cinema is very different from one another, but they do share some common traits, according to Martínez Montañes: "the three of them share the need to make works about the contemporary world, about reality as a living matter and about characters without certainties, in a temporary situation" (2012, n.p.).

The Berlin School, and Petzold's particular form of making cinema, proposes films in which a new realism can be perceived, a sophistication of the national cinemas from the 1960's and 1970's, and of the concept of modernity built by them. This is a cinema that is humanistic in character, one that seeks to explore, by the hand of their characters, a series of unresolved doubts, fears and tensions.

To Petzold, there are three kinds of film makers: the painters, the musicians and the writers; he claims that David Lynch would be among the former, Brian de Palma among the second group and he, no doubt, among the latter (Petzold in an interview with Reviriego, 2013). Petzold studied literature and an intense connection with this field can be recognized in all of his films. The burden of his works rests mainly on the script.

Throughout his career he has worked with Harun Farocki writing some of his screenplays, in fact, *Phoenix* is the latest of their collaborations, since the legendary film maker of the image dies in the same year it was released. Together they adapted the novel *Le Retour des Cendres* by Hubert Monteilhet for this film. It was a project that

² They are the three founders of the movement, later on others would join: Ulrich Köhler, Christoph Hochhäusler, Valeria Grisebach and Maren Ade.

they had meant to carry out since they first met in the year 2000, because they agreed that after the war no one wanted to know anything about the survivors of the camps and they wanted to record this subject matter: how the survivors coexisted trying to recover their lost normalcy, an identity that had become blurred, while others simply wanted to forget and pretend that nothing had happened.

Phoenix is the second movie in which Petzold travels to the past to narrate a fragment of German history, he had already done that in his previous production and he promises to make a third film that would close this historical trilogy. The story of *Bárbara* (2012) the first of them, is set in 1980 in the times of the German Democratic Republic. Bárbara (Nina Hoss) is a physician who has been transferred to a hospital near the Baltic Sea, as punishment for having requested permission to abandon the German Democratic Republic. Under surveillance by the Stasi she plans her escape to Denmark but she ends up staying there to yield her place to a young abused woman who she protects together with her colleague André (Ronald Zehrfeld). Farocki also co-wrote this script.

In *Phoenix*, the journey back in time places us in postwar Berlin after WWII. Nelly (again Nina Hoss), is a singer who has survived Auschwitz and who has returned from the concentration camps with a disfigured face and she needs to undergo reconstructive surgery. She wants her new face to look as much as possible like her former self, she wants to look as she used to and recover her previous life. Her friend Lena has plans for her but Nelly only wishes to look for Johnny, her husband, and thus confirm if he really loved or whether he was the one who betrayed her and sent her to the camps. Johnny (Ronald Zehrfeld) does not recognize her for who she is, he just feels that she reminds her of his wife and he proposes to her to pretend to be his wife and thus collect her inheritance.

In aesthetic terms *Phoenix* recovers the model of the film noir, which is characterized by the “dual metaphysics”, as Sánchez Noriega claims:

The signals of identity of the film noir do not lie so much in the formal or thematic aspects but rather in a consideration of reality that establishes a strong dualism between the conformist vision of the individual and society,

and a more profound inquiry ... that exposes police corruption, blind passion, the maddening of the masses, thirst for power, etc. (2002, p. 164).

This story explains the blind love Nelly felt for Johnny, and throughout the movie an odd tension is perceived because, like with a detective film, in *Phoenix* the spectator wonders all the time what the main character will do and she is accompanied all along to collect a series of clues so that she can make a decision. Clearing up the mystery is equivalent to finding her place in the present, with her new identity and with the trauma of war heavy on her shoulders.

THEORETICAL METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To Deleuze (1987), time-image condenses the characteristics of modern cinema that is different from the classical cinema in that it stops focusing its attention in cause and effect. In modern cinema, actions become automatisms and heroes give way to more complex and realistic characters. Spaces gain a leading role not only as a geographic context but also as metaphorical images of the moods of the people who inhabit them and in general of the atmosphere that envelops the story.³

Movement-image would be the image organized according to the logic of the sensory motor scheme, an image conceived as an element of a natural connection with other images in a logic that is altogether analogous to the intentional connection of perceptions and actions. Time-image would then be characterized by a rupture of that logic, by the emergence –which is exemplary in Rossellini– of pure optical and sound situations that are not transformed into actions anymore. From this point, the crystal-image logic would be constructed –exemplarily so in Welles–, where the current image is not linked with another current image, but rather with its own virtual image. Each image is separated then from the rest to open up to its own infinity. And what is proposed now as a link is the absence of a link; the interstice

³ Deleuze explains that the point of departure for time-image is Italian Neo-realism, which is later on sophisticated by Antonioni or later on by Ozu.

between the images is what governs, instead of the sensory-motor linking, a reconnection from the void (Rancière, 2005, p. 130).

The crystal-image appears in the time-image regime as a representative of this type of unique image. The past and the present coexist in the crystal image, the image as such and its virtual image, in addition to the fact that it gains value by itself, without having to depend on an editing that organizes it and confers meaning to it. In the words of Deleuze:

It was often observed in modern cinema that editing was already in the image, or rather that the components of an image already implied the editing. There is no alternative anymore between editing and the shot (in Welles, Resnais or Godard). At times, editing goes to the depth of the image, on other occasions it becomes flattened: the question it asks is not anymore how the images are connected but “what does the image show?” This identity of editing with the image can only emerge under the conditions of direct time-image. In a wide-scope text, Tarkovski says that it is essential how time flows in the shot. Its tension or its rarefaction, “the pressure of time in the shot”. Tarkovski thus seems to enroll in the classical alternative, shot or editing, and opts vigorously for the shot or rather the force of time in the image, and the other the relations of times or forces in the succession of images (relations that are not merely a succession, just like image is not just movement) (1987, pp. 65-66).

Time and how it is revealed in each shot turn the time-image into a way of making and thinking the cinema that drifts away from the classical cinema, and in addition it proposes a breaking away from it or rather its sophistication. As it will be seen below, *Phoenix* belongs in the time-image logic, mainly due to this exercise in which time imposes itself on movement and in which the strength of the shot predominates over that of editing. The scenes look like individual mosaics with such strength, that they do not seem to need the others. The characters are trapped not in causality but in the wonderment of a reality that left them perplexed, confused or frightened. The spaces of the present are impregnated of traces of the past making them at once unrecognizable and familiar.

In turn, Balló, in his text *Imatges del Silenci* (2000) considers that cinema uses certain visual motifs, which are images that appear once and again in different films and that, thanks to their visual composition, provide emotive information that the spectator knows how to decipher and complement.

This means that by just watching the visual composition of a segment of a film we understand perfectly well what is going on, what the characters are thinking, their mood. The cinema consumer acts more like a connoisseur than a spectator. It is as if an intelligence contract were in place between the director and the spectator, a contract that allows the director to omit part of what they are going to tell and he lets the spectator provide what is missing (Cavero, 2000).

Among the most recurrent motifs are: piety, woman in front of the mirror, the house as a grave, the thinker, the dance, the spectator in front of the spectacle, etc. If each of them is studied, it will be possible to acknowledge that they have a symbolic power that works as the emotive synthesis in the film, a gesture to optimize but above all to condition the film's reading.

In cinema, motifs (which come from an object, a stage, a staging device) have ambiguous characteristics, and they are open to suggestions, but they never represent something that is totally inert, that depletes in its own symbol, but rather they have the capacity to jump from one film to another, thereby making it appropriate to analyze the expressive and narrative functionality of its repetitive character, to create a recurrent form that becomes a communicative mechanism (Balló & Carnicé, 2017).

In *Phoenix*, the double appears as a motif, as it will be explained later on, we have seen this gesture in Hitchcock's, Bergman's, Kieslowski's or Buñuel's movies, hence it can be thought of as one more for the typology proposed by Balló, which works just like the ones described by the author, with a narrative, expressive and intertextual force.

In addition to the motifs, it is possible to recognize other types of relations or affiliations between *Phoenix* and other films, above all with

those made by the film makers of the New German Cinema who marked a major milestone when it comes to reorganizing and rewriting, in images, the History of Germany after WWII. Petzold's cinema recovers narrative, plot and/or formal concerns of this cinematographic tradition.

Lastly, the concept of ellipsis is recovered as presented in the narratological work undertaken by Genette and rethought for its application to the cinema by Gaudreault and Jost, ellipsis is defined as follows:

The fourth case defined by Genette is ellipsis. It corresponds to a textual (and therefore narrative) silence about certain events that, according to the diegesis, have taken place. That translates as a formula that is a little more complex than the two latter and it is reminiscent, given that it is its exact opposite, of the first of all, that of the pause: $TN=0$ and $TS =n$, in which $TN < \infty TS$ and it reads as follows: the time of the narration is equal to zero, while the time of the story is equal to "n", undetermined duration, hence the time of the narration is infinitely less important than the time of the story (1995, p. 128).

The proposal is then to think of ellipsis not only as an element of the story or as a narrative and editing device, but also as an aesthetic decision that confers relevance to the shot over the editing –just like the time-image– and in addition, it demands a more active involvement from the spectator who must fill in the gaps in the narration, which in the case of the film under analysis, to think about the story is to reflect about History with a capital H.

With these theoretical tools in mind, the analysis of the film is divided in three parts: the first allows seeing how the film is structured from the narrative point of view and the role played by ellipsis in this organization, the second reviews the possible affiliations with New German Cinema film makers, and the third, in which the motif of the double is developed to thereby reflect on the central theme of the film –and that of this paper– which is the change of identity after the trauma. The concept of time-image will course through the three sections precisely because its scope is greater than this division, and it works as an epistemic framework of a particular type of cinematography.

1. Narrative economy, the weight in the image

The film is narrated in two acts. In the first we witness Nelly's recovery: through a series of minimalistic scenes, the spectator finds out that she was shot in her face while she was imprisoned at Auschwitz, that her friend Lena is taking care of her, she is the one that takes Nelly to the doctor so that she can get reconstructive surgery; it is Lena who stays with her and puts her up at her house after her recovery and intends to help get out of Berlin and take her to Israel to live there. In this first act we also learn of Nelly's motivation: to find her husband Johnny thanks to whom, she claims, she managed to survive the camps, and who, according to Lena's investigations, betrayed her and had her locked up by the Nazis.

The second act begins when Nelly finds Johnny and even though he does not recognize her, he proposes that she pretend to be his dead wife because she reminds her of Nelly so much and because he needs her to be alive to collect her inheritance. Together they start to plan Nelly's return. Johnny helps her with her transformation bringing her clothes, hair dye and teaching her how to walk and write like his wife. Nelly, in turn, intends to re-conquer Johnny and she is excited by this wicked game of doubles, imagining that she will get him back like this. When she explains to Lena what she is up to and tells her how excited she is, Lena does not approve and days later, she kills herself, leaving Nelly a letter along with the divorce request that Johnny signed on the same day that she was arrested. That is proof of his betrayal. In this second act, Nelly reconstructs herself and leaves, while Johnny ends up realizing—in the film's last and very emotive scene—that she really was his wife.

These two acts that make up the basic narrative structure of the film are intertwined mainly by brief scenes, which take advantage, to a large extent, of the off screen and concentrate on giving the equivalent to brushstrokes of information and above all of feelings in which the shot gains greater relevance than the editing. And it is in this exercise of fragmented narration that ellipsis gains relevance.

The role played by ellipsis in the story is special since the entire movie is told on the basis of fragments using minimal images and sounds. For example, the film begins with a scene in which Lena and Nelly, with her face disfigured, cross an American check point, the soldier asks her to

reveal her face unmindful of Lena's explanations. When Nelly uncovers her face, she does so off screen and the only thing the camera shows is the guard's face who is shocked by the disfigured face and he apologizes for having demanded that she uncover herself.

The scenes are made up of few shots, but each of them describes, shows and conveys feelings. The economy of images and sounds elevates the storytelling to another power. Hence the relevance of considering ellipsis as both a narrative and an aesthetic device in this film. We are before the presence of time-images, in which in addition to the necessary actions, other actions occur with an expressive, poetic character that do not act with the cause and effect logic, but rather, they become interconnected in the logic of time, even of that time that does not elapse on screen, but in other times. Nelly's disfigured face is a metaphor for wounded Germany, which has to find its place after the war.

2. Influences, affiliations and marks

One of the influences that we can see in the film is that of Alexander Kluge's work, the New German Cinema film maker who likes to write cinema as if it were literature and to write literary texts as if they were cinematographic images. Kluge's cinema is an active one that takes into account the spectators' prior knowledge and uses it so that they can interpret the movie.

In *Phoenix*, the same spirit is perceived since the spectators have to imagine and resort to their own wealth of memories and visual experiences to complete the filmic text. For example, we only know what Nelly's stay at the concentration camp was like through a brief dialog in which she describes how camp women were supposed to sit naked on a beam and how when new inmates arrived, they were in charge of ransacking their clothes looking for money or jewelry, and she explains that on one occasion a girl looked at her as she searched through her mother's dress and she said to Johnny, shaking, moved, that she has never been able to forget that girl's face.

Evoking the girl's face becomes the metaphor of everything Nelly lived through in the camp. There are so many texts about the Holocaust that details are not necessary, just a powerful image like that of a girl who watches as her mother's dress is rummaged through is enough to evoke

all kinds of possible acts of violence, humiliation, and/or deprivation endured in that period of reclusion, repression and madness. There is no need to lengthen the story, just imagine that face and understand its meaning. The weight of a single image as a symbol of the trauma, the horror and the genocide.

Just as it is possible to recognize an affiliation with Kluge's cinema in narrative terms, we can speak of another, but in this case one of an aesthetic character, with Fassbinder's cinema. This relationship can be identified above all in the choice of colors and in the creation of a minimalistic, theatrical and symbolic atmosphere that reveals the city after the war as if it were constructing realistic frescos but with overtones of fantasy. A Berlin that is no longer what it used to be, a city whose inhabitants coexist with fear and they do so in different languages, among strangers dodging ruins. A setting of rubble unknown to everyone, as it can be observed in Figure 1.

The ruins seem to be the same, both the ones that appear in *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979) and the ones outside what had been Nelly's house. The bar "Phoenix" –where Johnny works– is also reminiscent of the Bar in which Eva used to act to survive the postwar period. The spaces are represented with similar hues and similar talks.

These spaces are also wounded characters, for example in Petzold's movie, Nelly walks along the streets shaking and fearful looking for Johnny, she stops and asks a street musician where she could find a

FIGURE 1

FRAMES FROM *PHOENIX* (2014) AND *THE MARRIAGE MARIA BRAUN* (1979)

Source: Gaczkowski & Petzold (2014); Fengler & Fassbinder (1979).

pianist after the war and he answers what luckily he may be working at some bar for American soldiers. Indeed, she finds him in a bar, but cleaning tables, not playing the piano. The grotesque show of the bar works as a parody in both films; reality has been blown out of proportions, the places have also bled and their inhabitants have become different people.

Reflection on Farocki's images can also be perceived in *Phoenix*. An example are the still images that allow reorganizing the story: when Nelly is at the hospital she wanders about the wards and she finds a photograph, it is she and her friends (Lena also appears in the image, Figure 2); one of them has the symbol of a cross, which means that she is dead. Later on in the movie when Johnny and Nelly prepare her arrival, he shows her another photograph: his friends appear in the photo and in addition to the fact that some are marked with the cross meaning that they are dead, others are marked with a circle meaning that they are Nazis.

This gesture of reviewing the images seeking new meanings and other forms of organizing memory, both personal and historical memory evoke other films by Farocki in which he insists that we look at images again because meanings change over time and because images are not

FIGURE 2
THE MARK IN THE PHOTOGRAPH, *PHOENIX* (2014)



Source: Gaczkowski & Petzold (2014).

always reliable witnesses of reality, if they cannot be read properly and several times.

In *Images of the World and War Epitaphs (Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges, 1988)*, Farocki analyzes, among other images, the aerial photographs taken and, in theory, studied by the US Air Force, in which the Auschwitz concentration camps appears clearly, and yet, as the film narrates, they were reviewed at the time without taking into account this important detail, it is not until the 1970's that they realize this. Additional information that rather than just provide more data about WWII and the Nazi extermination camps, it allows us to question what we overlook when we review History. Farocki reflects on an issue that does not only speak about the war but also about the documents that refer to it, casting doubt on both the object and the observation. The film's profundity is even greater due to the juxtaposition of an analytical discourse and a file that we thought we had already seen (Alcalá, 2014, p. 116).

These affiliations contextualize the movie and place it on the line of the reflexive proposals by these film makers who were born in the middle of the war and had to rewrite its consequences. Dealing with the period of time again does not mean just making a historical film because the present also shows in the recreated images, it is rather joining in a reflexive discourse about who we are and how the war changes us. Looking back to understand the now. In this sense, it can be believed that Berlin School cinema recognizes in New German Cinema a point of departure to continue telling stories, an influence that is sometimes narrative while others it is aesthetic or even ideological.

3. About the double as a visual motif

The double is a visual motif that is repeated in several films with similar aesthetic intentions and narrative meanings, it is a motif that demands complicity on the part of the spectator who becomes convinced that this character can be the same or multiply itself. It is a completely cinematographic game.

Phoenix repeats the double motif as we have seen in other films. For example, the motif appears in *Más allá del olvido (1956)*, an Argentine film in which a man is devastated by his wife's death and then he meets

a girl who looks like her, he woos her and tries to turn her into his dead wife, he transforms her so that she looks like her. Both Hugo del Carril's movie and Petzold's resort to the motif of the double to transcend death, whether for love-obsession as in the case of the Argentine film or for money as it turns out to be in *Phoenix* (Figure 3).

Both Mónica and Nelly make an effort to look like Fernando's and Johnny's dead wife, respectively; they do not realize how useless the transformation is and they do not see the genuine love that they are being offered, their obsessions are stronger, and by the time they have a moment of revelation, when they actually see the person before them, it is too late. Mónica is dead and Nelly has left.

In this sense it is also possible to establish parallelism with Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), since Nelly, like Judy Barton, must transform into herself. Both characters participate in this mechanism of multiplied identities to please the person they love, even though the process can be painful and devastating.

Nelly accepts the change to get her husband back, to transform herself. Johnny asks her to try on his dead wife's shoes which they had bought in Paris, he asks her to put on a red dress like the ones she used to wear and to dye her hair to look more like Nelly, the sexy singer who had been his wife. This is all too much to her and she asks Johnny constantly if he does not think that all this transformation is artificial and phony because no one returns like this from the camps. He

FIGURE 3

MÁS ALLÁ DEL OLVIDO (1956), *PHOENIX* (2014)

Source: Del Carril (1956); Gaczkowski & Petzold (2014).

just answers that no one wants to look at the people who return from the camps with burns or shot wounds on their faces, these people are avoided by everyone.

In *Vertigo*, Judy agrees to dress like Madeleine to please Scottie, but the transformation as such reveals her lie and her guilt, going back to being Madeleine means accepting that it was her who pretended to be Mrs. Elster in the beginning, admitting that she made him fall in love with her and turned him into a witness of a murder because he was considered vulnerable.

On the other hand, in Nelly's case, wearing her own shoes again or dyeing her hair is too much for someone who has just endured the horrors of war; she cannot walk in those shoes anymore because her entire body shakes when she walks because trauma has taken a hold of her pushing her away from whom she used to be before Auschwitz. Transforming into herself reminds her of the fact that she has changed and that everything she cared about is gone.

In the three movies the creation of the double is a wicked game, it is creating life to satisfy someone in particular, but it is a game that is doomed to fail because truth eventually reveals itself and that transformed body cannot stay in the same place.

The spectator should be the accomplice of the motif in the three movies, imagining Madeleine Elster because she looks like Judy, but never appears on the screen, trusting that Mónica looks like Blanca Arellano, since there is only a story that is told to confirm it, and believing that Nelly looks like the woman she used to be before the surgery, but there is no evidence to that effect. The same actress must be and stop being herself.

The double in cinema allows understanding the complexity of identity, much more so if it is an identity that has been transformed by a trauma, since everything ends up not being what it used to be and a reconstruction from the ashes is necessary.

The fact that this exercise of the double is completely feminine is very interesting; women doubles are created by men to fulfill their imagination, but the same does not happen with male doubles. When a man unfolds as a double on the screen, it is usually associated with a mental disease, but there is not a creator who builds him.

CONCLUSIONS

Phoenix allows reflecting, through Nelly's story, on how difficult it is to go back to being who you used to be before the war. In the film, Nelly's reconstructed face serves as a metaphor of everything that has changed in her, not only physically but emotionally, after serving her sentence for having Jewish ancestry. She does not even feel Jewish, her reality before the war was that of a Berlin singer who was in love with her husband and she had nothing to do with the conflict she found herself involved in.

Not all the Jewish people who were sent to the extermination camps thought or acted the same way, many of them felt as German as their persecutors and they had a hard time understanding that that was not the case. Nelly's case is an example.

The film establishes an interesting dialog with some of the narrative, aesthetic and plot tendencies of New German Cinema film makers, as a homage but also underscoring the need to continue writing about identity issues and concerns in a country such as Germany that is very complex and undergoing constant change, and of course, the need to do so using the devices of realism and rethinking its aesthetic.

Recovering Kluge's minimalistic writing style, Fassbinder's aesthetic or Farocki's concern for images, allow *Phoenix* to be a more solid text, one that updates previous statutes and reflections and puts them back on the table. Because cinema should also think about its own ways of looking at and representing History and its story.

In *Phoenix* images are built in the framework of modern cinema, characters wander throughout the spaces allowing time to be in charge of transforming them. That is why it makes use of minimal scenes in which ellipsis plays a very important role, not only to help with the narrative leaps but also to confer greater relevance to the shot than to editing and allow these unique mosaics to have an impact on spectators, as if it were a painting and therefore, they are turned into accomplices of the game that involves stitching up the gaps in the fabric of the story.

The motif of the double appears with the strength of a well-known myth or story. The spectators have already witnessed similar transformations and they feel that something that is not very pleasant

will come of the wicked exercise of transformation. Creating monsters has always had consequences. In the case of *Phoenix*, Johnny will eventually recognize Nelly in her double and when he does, it will be too late because she will have left after singing together for the last time and doing so “speak low”. A feminine double that must disappear to punish her creator.

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