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Café-Finovo

Geschichten fürs Leben|Stories for Life

Master Thesis
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“To live fully is to live with an awareness of the
rumble of terror that underlies everything.”
– Ernest Becker

“To be immortal is commonplace; except for man,
all creatures are immortal for they are ignorant of death;
what is divine, terrible, incomprehensible,
is to know that one is mortal.”
– J. L. Borges, *‘The Immortal’*

“You know, it's really very peculiar.
To be mortal is the most basic human experience
and yet man has never been able to
accept it, grasp it, and behave accordingly.
Man doesn't know how to be mortal.”
– Milan Kundera, *‘Immortality’*

INTRODUCTION: Being at the right place at the right time is usually all it takes for an idea to be born. I was at the right place at the right time. I landed at my fieldwork site accidentally. At that same time I was reading on issues that ended up becoming the focus of my project. The field became the laboratory where I tested the ideas' validity and my cameras and microphones the lab tools with which I conducted my research. I have often doubted the scientific value of my research however. A camera and a microphone have never been considered trustworthy tools. At the same time I wonder: "Why are words, put together on a piece of paper by a pen or a typewriter, more scientific than images and sounds captured by a camera and a microphone?" This question pushed me to visit the etymology of the word "science" in my mother language, something that I often do when I suffer from such doubts. Science in Greek is "Episteme" (1) (Επιστήμη) and it comes from the words "epi" (επί) and "istame" (ίσταμαι). "Επί" is a prefix that in this case conveys placement (on, to or against) and "ίσταμαι" is a verb whose meaning is "to stand". In particular, "epistame" (επίσταμαι) means to stand outside or by an object (entity) but maintaining contact (touch) with it. Some derivatives of the verb, which are used even today in modern Greek, indicate that the meaning of the word entails the notion of "care". The word "epistates" (επιστάτης) for example, means "janitor" or "superintendent", and the word "epistasia" (επιστασία) means "stewardship" or "custody". In essence, the word "Episteme" in ancient Greek is almost a synonym to "supervisory care"; which resembles the relationship between parents or legal guardians and children. In other words, science in Greek is not only a synonym to knowledge, but also one to observing (and/or supervising) with care ("observing" and "looking after" are - interestingly enough - often confused in Greek). In the light of this realization - or assumption - I take the liberty to say that a film can therefore be science as well. If a scientific endeavor is not only defined by the level of knowledge it produces, but also by the "caring" intentions of its author(s), then film can possibly even offer

(1) The word in modern Greek is used as a synonym to "Knowledge", the same way as "Science" is used in English.

something that writing cannot. “Without necessarily reducing the level of interpretation to frame-by-frame analysis (although this has its adherents), the composite vision of photographs and films offers a way of exploring connections in the social world often lost in writing, much as writing offers a way of recording conclusions about society unavailable to film.” (MacDougall 2006:38)

In this Master Thesis, the focus will be on the experience of making a film about the **Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof (2)** between September 2011 and October 2012 and it is intended to function as a supplement to the film. At first, it will lay the philosophical imperatives that lead the project, as well as situate the cemetery as an evolving cultural landscape in the modern Metropolis. The connections between the notions of space and place, and their visual anthropological implications will also be put forward. Furthermore, this thesis will focus on the methodology and how that became the cinematic and narrative approach towards the place, its people and their activities, and on how the use of the camera as a research tool is justified in the context of a visual anthropological undertaking. A few words will be employed to describe the use of sound in the film and the way that the interviews were conducted. Editing the material in accordance to the methodology and cinematic choices is also part of the process that I wish to share. Finally, at the end of this essay, instead of offering conclusions, I intend to share my realizations about the place, its people and myself. Being there is mostly a lived experience, and although that is not very obvious in the film, above all it had a significant effect on me.

SITUATING THE IDEA: Dealing with death is arguably a fundamental issue that humans have always faced. Yet people's behavior towards death is profoundly culture-bound. My project touches upon the relationship that is growing between the modern Metropolis and its burial sites. As the European megalopolis has expanded, cemeteries that used to lie on the edges of the city have been **engulfed (3)** through the various city-planning

(2) **Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof** is a cemetery located in Berlin-Schöneberg, only a few hundred meters away from the Yorckstraße (S1) S-Bahn Station.

(3) “Traditional layouts of Christian cemeteries in the structure of historical European cities were related to sacral objects, mainly parish churches, hospitals, shelters etc., since the Middle Ages. Situated inside the urban tissue, they were usually surrounded by a high wall, which acted as a borderline between urban life and the death, silence and quietness of a cemetery. It also emphasized a division between the space of the sacred of a cemetery and the profane of the outside. In the 18th and 19th centuries, as a result of tidying cities up and increasing hygiene, burials within a city were prohibited and new locations were chosen for cemeteries. They were usually peripheral areas at a distance from an intensively urbanized space. The green areas of cemeteries made a significant part of the green areas of a city since the interwar period when plans of the spatial development of cities included a balance of municipal greenery. As a result of the violent development of numerous big cities in the previous half-century, today's areas of suburban, especially 19th century cemeteries are situated inside the intensively urbanized urban space. The surroundings of resting places have changed significantly, too. Intensively used complexes of edifices are often located just outside a cemetery wall. Taller and taller service and residential buildings can be seen from behind it... The existence of historical cemeteries in a strongly urbanized space makes them charming parks in the city centre frequented by walkers and young mothers pushing prams, especially where new burials are impossible or the existing tombs are still used.” (Weclawowicz-Bilska 2009,161-162)

policies. In the case of Berlin, this surrounding of cemeteries seems to have happened quite gently in a number of places, where the borders between the space of the living and that of the dead is sometimes just a thin wall or a wire fence. Tombstones crawl up the walls of apartment buildings and families with baby strollers enjoy a Sunday walk through the cemetery around the corner. I conducted my research in a cemetery located in the heart of the city of Berlin, Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof. My first encounter with the cemetery was at the end of 2010. During the last day of class of my first month learning German, our teacher took us on an unusual tour of the city. We visited places that a tourist or someone transit in Berlin, like us, would not come across easily. My first impression of the cemetery was suffocated by the impressions of the other places we visited before. I just kept in mind its beauty, the fact that the Grimm Brothers are buried there and the images of the house-sized mausoleums of the prominent figures that were buried in [Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof \(4\)](#).

Later in the beginning of 2011, I started reading Ernest Becker's "Denial of Death" (1973). I was quite moved by the reading. In fact, the way I confront and decode life has been profoundly shaped by Becker's writings. In my own words, he claims that the human condition is nothing but a side effect of our knowledge of mortality. Consciousness, at the same time being a blessing and a curse, puts us in a position of knowing that we are going to die. And that tears us apart, because our innate drive for expansion crashes on the bounding walls of mortality. As Becker writes:

“...The essence of man is really his paradoxical nature, the fact that he is half animal and half symbolic... We might call this existential paradox the condition of individuality within finitude. Man has a symbolic identity that brings him sharply out of nature. He is a symbolic self, a creature with a name, a life history. He is a creator with a mind that soars out to speculate about atoms and infinity, who can place

(4) According to an information board upon entering the cemetery, in 1846, the protestant parish of St.-Matthäus was founded in southern Tiergarten district, a residential area favored by senior civil servants, influential businessmen, artists, and well-known scientists. In 1854 the parish purchased a piece of land on a hillside near the village of Schöneberg for their own cemetery. The first burial took place in 1856. The cemetery expanded eastwards in 1883 and westwards in 1866 and 1884. The majority of the people buried in Alter St.-Matthäus cemetery came from affluent, upper middle class families, and many imposing graves of considerable artistic merit can be seen even today.

himself imaginatively at a point in space and contemplate bemusedly his own planet. This immense expansion, this dexterity, this ethereality, this self-consciousness gives to man literally the status of a small god in nature, as the Renaissance thinkers knew. Yet, at the same time, as the Eastern sages also knew, man is a worm and food for worms. This is the paradox: he is out of nature and hopelessly in it; he is dual, up in the stars and yet housed in a heart-pumping, breath-gasping body that once belonged to a fish and still carries the gill-marks to prove it... The knowledge of death is reflective and conceptual and animals are spared it... But to live a whole lifetime with the fate of death haunting one's dreams and even the most sun-filled days – that's something else." (Becker 1973:26-27)

In our need to overcome this predicament, Becker claims that we construct ways to cope with our knowledge of mortality by capitalizing on this symbolic capacity that we have, which is the counter effect of consciousness. Driven by this oxymoron, we construct heavens and hells, gods and devils, ways of life, religions, art, and essentially all the known political, social and cultural systems.

"The fact is that this is what society is and always has been: a symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules for behavior, designed to serve as a vehicle for earthly heroism. Each script is somewhat unique, each culture has a different hero system. What the anthropologists call "cultural relativity" is thus really the relativity of hero-systems the world over. But each cultural system is a dramatization of earthly heroics; each system cuts out roles for performances of various degrees of heroism: from the "high" heroism of a Churchill, a Mao, or a Buddha, to the "low" heroism of the coal miner, the peasant, the simple priest; the plain everyday, earthly heroism wrought by gnarled working hands guiding a family through hunger and disease. It doesn't matter whether the cultural hero-system is

frankly magical, religious, and primitive or secular, scientific or civilized. It is still a mythical hero-system in which people serve in order to earn a feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness, of ultimate usefulness to creation, of unshakeable meaning.” (Becker 1973:4-5)

Driven by these thoughts, I chose to use the space and the symbols of the particular cemetery, in order to complete the Ethnographic Film Workshop requirement, for our second semester In-House classes. The theme of the workshop was “Wealth and Power” and I decided to produce a cynical audiovisual comment on the above ideas. In a short film, I juxtaposed the sizeable and eloquent graves of the prominent dead against the simple stone graves and square boxes of the common mortals, thus stressing the vanity of maintaining status inequalities of life in the razing equality of death. That was the first time I noticed the potential for a long-term study of the place. It was when I started "seeing" the place through the camera that I started noticing all the things that it potentially had to offer. Its first aspect that attracted my attention was the fact that the living surrounded the cemetery. The city while expanding engulfed it, and it did so sensitively (5). The topography of the cemetery is defined from the walls of the surrounding buildings. It is situated on a hill and its west border is practically apartment houses whose balconies and backyards are overlooking at the graves. On the same side there is a primary school, parted from the cemetery by a high wall. The east border is mainly sidewalls of flat complexes. In some cases there are windows of bathrooms, storage rooms and living rooms directly above the gray and black stones of the graves standing below. The proximity of the two images creates interesting symbolisms. Carelessly looked at, the graves seem like entrances to the apartment houses. On the south side of the place, Monumentenstrasse is a busy street with traffic lights and apartment houses facing the north wall of the cemetery. The main entrance of the graveyard is at the north side, which is literally carved by the tracks of the S-Bahn line

(5) The process of incorporating the cemetery in the city planning was not always so friendly. According to the information board upon entering the cemetery one can learn that in 1938-1939 part of the northern section of the cemetery was demolished. Thousands of graves were moved to other places or totally destroyed. Many imposing family monuments had to make way for the development of Germania, the large-scale development plan of Germany's capital. It was planned that in 1941 the rest of the graveyard would follow the same fate, but World War II intervened and the moving did not happen. Many graves were also destroyed during the war. It was only until the mid 1970s that the historical wealth of the graves and memorials was recognized. When the parish of St.-Matthäus was dissolved in 2001, the Protestant parish of the Twelve Apostles that took-over, adopted the measure of sponsorship in order to contribute to the preservation of the important graves of the cemetery. One of the restoration projects that characterize the preservation effort supported by the parish, was the drawing of the outlines of the destroyed monuments on the walls of the neighboring apartment buildings. The graveyard continues to be a favorable final resting place to date.

S1. The passing train pulsates the space every three-four minutes, providing a heartbeat to the place. Its presence is eminent with the sound of the train stopping to drop off passengers, pick up new ones and get back on its route. Right across the entrance of the cemetery there is a playground that is usually busy on the weekends. As far as the graves are concerned, the architecturally and historically interesting ones are mostly on the south half of the cemetery up the hill, and the majority of them have a north orientation. Some of them are the size of houses and some of the mausoleums have basements where the caskets with the bodies are safely locked. Others are simpler and modest, while many are uniquely decorated with various design elements from various eras and artistic influences. Down the hill, one can find ordinary graves, mostly from decades that are closer to date or from deceased who were cremated. It is important to note that many victims of HIV, mostly members of Berlin's homosexual community, are buried in this particular cemetery since the late 80's and 90's.

However, the most interesting aspect of the cemetery is a café situated directly beyond the main entrance on Großgörschenstraße. **Café-Finovo (6)** was founded in 2006 by Bernd Boßmann and it also serves as a flower shop, but the sale of flowers to mourners or the hosting of memorial services is not the café's primary function. It is quite busy, especially on the weekends with ordinary visitors who come to enjoy the sunny day, tourists that are attracted by the fame of some of the dead who are buried at the graveyard, or locals that use it as an ordinary hang out place. It has two floors, a front and a back yard and it sits right next to the chapel of the graveyard. Furthermore, the café accommodates EFEU e.V., a non-profit organization run by Bernd Boßmann and Ludger Wekenborg, which supports a number of cultural and social activities. In particular, **EFEU (7)** is responsible for the organization of thematic tours, poetic and literary readings, concerts and artistic projects that take place both in the spaces of the graveyard and the café. The events take place regularly, at least twice a month, and

(6) The name, Café-Finovo is derived from "End" (Fin) and "New Beginning" (Novo) - a new word invented by Boßmann. In 2006 the parish of the Twelve Apostles looked for possible uses of the building right after the entrance of the cemetery, which up to that point was used for administrative purposes. Bernd Boßmann's idea was chosen among others to be the one to implement. It is important to note here the parish's tolerance with regards to the religious affiliation of the people who choose St.-Matthäus Friedhof as their final resting place. Not only is the cemetery trans-religious, but it also accepts atheists who wish to be buried there.

(7) "EFEU" stands for Erhalten, Fördern, Entwickeln and Unterstützen (to conserve, further, develop and support) and the word "Efeu" in German means "ivy", a plant that can be widely found in the cemetery.

attract a variety of audiences. Besides the organization of various cultural events, EFEU is also responsible for the implementation of the idea of Grave-Sponsorship (Grabpatenschaft). Various old graves are not looked after, since the families buried there no longer exist or have lost connection to their present descendants. Due to their historical and aesthetic value, graves are preserved through sponsorship and can eventually be bought and “reused” by new owners for a 20 to 25 year period. Finally, EFEU is responsible for allocating and preserving a specific space in the cemetery for the burial of unborn children and the overall care of the flora and aesthetics of the graves. Other notable activities that take place in Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof are regular botanical tours organized by Olaf Tetzinski in the spring, summer and autumn, and periodic art installations by various artists. Finally, Café-Finovo, after acquiring quite a reputation for its tasty cakes, has also become the last stop of a culinary tour of the city of Berlin organized by “www.eat-the-world.com”.

This particular cemetery in Berlin is apparently known for being one of the more interesting and beautiful cemeteries. It's uniqueness is in its liveliness, as most don't expect the final resting place to be so bustling, in particular that many of the activities have little or nothing to do with death and mourning. The people working around the café, in addition to those who choose to pursue their entrepreneurial and artistic activities there, and the ordinary visitors (that do not come in order to mourn their departed loved ones), form a community with an unusual relationship to death. Be it **oblivion, disregard or simple comfort (8a)**, these people seem to be at ease with the morbid aspects of the environment they choose to be active at. For me coming from Greece, where we still tend to hide our dead, and where anything unrelated to mourning in a cemetery is considered blasphemous, the combination of the place, the people and their activities at the graveyard became profoundly symbolic. On one hand, I was curious to learn more about the cemetery and the people who inhabited the space. As a newcomer and

outsider in Berlin, I wanted to understand whether this unique acceptance of death is specific to this cemetery. Sociologist and anthropologist Michael Kearsal writes:

“Cemeteries are cultural institutions that symbolically dramatize many of the community's basic beliefs and values about what kind of society it is, who its members are, and what they aspire to be. Any change in the social ethos is accordingly reflected in these cultural barometers. As rights of the living came to be defined and contractualized, so have the rights of the dead come to be elaborated — the sanctity of the dead is normally directly related to the sanctity of the living.” (Kearsal 1989:49)

On the other hand, the place provided a testing ground for Becker's ideas around mortality. In his last book "Escape from Evil" (1975) Becker claims that in our effort to flee from death, we produce evil. We banish in hell, those who do not agree with our concept of heaven and we kill those who believe otherwise in order to strengthen our beliefs. And when he speaks of "we" he means everybody.

“The man who dropped the atomic bomb is the warm gentle boy who grew up next door. The kings of Dahomey who signaled annually for the heads of hundreds of murdered prisoners to be piled in heaps very likely had a child-rearing experience that Margaret Mead could have written about favorably. The reason is positive and simple: man aggresses not only out of frustration and fear but out of joy, plenitude, love of life. Men kill lavishly out of the sublime joy of heroic triumph over evil.” (Becker 1975:141)

In his last writings before his own death, Becker wondered how would life be if we could embrace our limitations. In which form could personal being and social life evolve, if humanity faced its predicaments with **more logic (8b)** and less fear? And these are the questions I ask myself every time I visit the cemetery. How would it be if we made

(8a,b) The Epicurean take on death is characterized by oblivion and disregard, as a result of a logical elaboration. Although, “...it is possible to claim that the fear of death is a crucial evolutionary product, ‘hard-wired’, as it were, into our minds in order to allow us to survive...” (Warren, 2004:8), Epicurus claims that we should nevertheless rid ourselves from it: “Make yourself accustomed to the thought that death is nothing to us, since every good or bad resides in perception and death is the absence of perception. Therefore death, the most terrifying of evils, is nothing to us, since for the time when we are, death is not present; and for the time when death is present, we are not. Therefore it is nothing either to the living or the dead since it is not present for the former, and the latter are no longer.” (Ep. Men. 124-125, Warren 2004:18-19)

peace with the fear of death? How would it be if we lived aware of death without turning our heads away? Can we live a fuller life when we embrace the certainty of our expiration? Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof is a good example of a place where the living get along with the dead and therefore became the filmic case study and testing field of Becker's and Epicurean ideas and my contemplation on the above.

SHAPING THE GOAL: The pivotal decision with regards to the project's goal, which essentially shaped its cinematic approach, was taken at an early stage. I started visiting the place at the end of September 2011. At first I was fascinated with the endless beautiful details that attracted my (and my camera's) attention. The immediate response was to film. Gradually, I reminded myself that the graves were not going anywhere. I enjoyed walking around the cemetery without a film camera, observing and taking it all in with a recording device between the subject and me. Slowly images, framing and compositions came together that reflected my personal experience in the space. Only then did I pick up my Canon and begin filming. This initial process of 'participant-observation' without a recording device between me and the place was a departure from my traditional understanding of filmmaking. As a television producer and documentary filmmaker, I was used to searching out classic activities and stories that would be easy to tell. At the beginning I was tempted to film grief, as the sweet melancholy of such moments was very attractive, and perhaps easy. Soon, I understood they had little to do with both what had attracted me there, but also what I had observed without the camera in hand. Collecting such moments on film would shift focus away from what I had perceived as regular cemetery activities — tours, talks, music, art, performance and just the daily social relaxation the space offered. The first opportunity presented itself early in October, as I attended the surreal performance and tour of Gerhard Moses Hess and Olaf Tetzinski (9). They were so visually interesting that I was compelled to film them in detail, from multiple angles, heavily influenced by my

(9) Hess is a professional storyteller, and twice a month he organizes tours of the graveyard. During the tours, which take place mostly on Saturdays at 14.00, he tells stories related to the season or the people who are buried there. Often the tours are inspired by the birthday or the death anniversary of the deceased. On cold days and depending on the extremity of the weather, the tours end up on the second floor of the café where the visitors may enjoy a piece of cake or a hot drink. Tetzinski is an alternative healer, specialized on herbal remedies. His botanical tours involve describing the flora of the yard, which plants are useful and how, and which plants on the other hand are to be avoided. Both activities take place practically by the graves.

experience in producing audiovisual content for Television. Soon I came to the realization that the interest did not lie in the activities themselves, but to where they were taking place. Hess and Tetzinski engage in the same activities elsewhere as well. It is the combination of the activity and the place that made these events interesting. Overcoming this last temptation led me to the conscious decision that I was making a portrait of the place. That in its turn, influenced significantly my approach and my cinematic choices. I let my television background fall to the wayside and focused on developing a method to evoke the place, rather than an illustrative approach of 'show-and-tell'. But how could one evoke a place without telling its stories and showing what is happening within its limits? Isn't a place the sum of the above? And how legitimate it is to call this project "The portrait of a cemetery" when its basic function – grief – is not dealt with at all?

SPACE VS PLACE: There is interesting literature that examines the relationship between space and place. In Steven Feld's introduction "Senses of Place" (a collection of essays from diverse scholars examining the complexities of a place-based anthropology) he suggests that space precedes place.

“Indeed, that places are the determinations of an already existing monolith of Space has become an article of scientific faith, so much so that two recent books in anthropology that bear expressly on place... espouse the view that place is something posterior to space, even made from space. By “space” is meant a neutral, pre-given medium, a tabula rasa onto which the particularities of culture and history come to be inscribed, with place as the presumed result.” (Feld, Basso 1996:14)

In the case of Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof, the “posterior” space is a picturesque hill of what in the recent past had been nature spaces in suburban Berlin. The last 156 years, the use of the space has transformed it into something quite specific: a cemetery. The conventional notions tied

to cemeteries as cultural institutions are gravely affected by the established religious beliefs. Graveyards are for most the resting place of the dead and a place where the activities of the living provide suitable symbols to express man's hope of immortality and reduce his anxiety and fear of death. Obviously, a cemetery can offer a lot of information about the living as well. Francaviglia, historian and geographer writes: "In the cemetery, architecture, 'town' planning, display of social status, and racial segregation, all mirror the living, not the dead. Cemeteries, as the visual and spatial expression of death, may tell us a great deal about the living people who created them." (Francaviglia 1971:509). In the past 6 years, since the opening of Café-Finovo, the cemetery has evolved from accommodating traditional mourning activities into something more recreational. As café owner Boßmann told me, the large majority of cemetery visitors are tourists or locals coming to the place for reasons that have nothing to do with grief. This shift can mean two things: for the place, that it is no longer only an arena where the alive deal with their existential angst, and for the people, that they experience an 'other', 'new' place unrelated to what it was until 2006. "As Feld (this volume) puts it, 'as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place.'...we are not only in places but of them." (Feld, Basso 1996:19) In fact, a Facebook site has been set up that reflects this new 'place', "[The Cemetery Lives](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Der-Friedhoflebt/202448689783028?ref=ts&fref=ts)" (10) and even though all on the site refers to the place as "cemetery", there are diverse voices. It is a space to announce events, share links about other cemetery cultures such as in the USA, and have discussions around death, and mortality. But also much more, fashion, music, art also have a place in this forum, much like the real place. Place, whether virtual or real, is primarily defined by it's inhabitants, by the relationship between space and people, memory, emotion etc. Again Feld writes,

(10) <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Der-Friedhoflebt/202448689783028?ref=ts&fref=ts>

"Rather than being one definite sort of thing - for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social - a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and

description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only are, they happen. (And it is because they happen that they lend themselves so well to narration, whether as history or as story.)” (Feld, Basso 1996:27)

Recognizing the above legitimized my project’s field: a place is defined by its use and Alter St.-Matthäus is a lively place for those who experienced it as such. Creating a portrait of the cemetery by showing only its lively side is, arguably, a legitimate portrait. And it only makes sense, that in order to draw this portrait properly one has to deal with its constituents: the space, the people and their activities. Expanding on the doubt expressed at the beginning of this essay, I now believe that it is only by audiovisual means that a place can be portrayed. I would agree with Macdougall, that film is capable to evoking that what writing cannot:

“In portraying social environments, films often automatically communicate an entire complex of relations that in writing would emerge only as the result of a firm intention... To understand them better, the social scientist must explore them as entities in themselves, composed of all the interrelated material objects and activities of community life. This aesthetic dimension of social experience remains a relatively undeveloped area in the human sciences. It is an area particularly open to investigation in the visual media.” (MacDougall 2006:59)

A place, besides being a “thing”, is also a lived experience, and the sensorial qualities of film may have the capacity of transcending this experience. This was definitely valid in my case and allowed me to define the methodology of my fieldwork and filmmaking practice.

METHODOLOGY AS CINEMATIC CHOICES: Simply put, filmmaking entails the collecting and ordering of selected, captured audio/visual material from a specific

place and time. If making a portrait of a place is indeed handling its constituents, then capturing the images and sounds of the space, the people and their activities equals making a filmic portrait of the place. Although the above equation is naïve and simplistic, it nevertheless helped me define the field and the fieldwork. The field in this case is the geographical area drawn by the borders of the cemetery, and the work is capturing everything taking place within these borders that is connected to its lively side. The obvious exclusions are actually as helpful as the obvious choices: I consciously decided not to film anything outside of the cemetery (which in this case could be the busy street life around it or the people living at the flats overlooking the graveyard) and nothing in connection to mourning. As for the obvious choices, (which for the sake of this essay I call “layers”), those were conducting interviews with the people involved only with the lively side of the cemetery, filming their activities and capturing the images and sounds of the space.

LAYER 1 | INTERVIEWS | AUDIO: Keeping in mind that the protagonist of this project is the place, and in order to avoid attaching to it specific human faces, I chose to conduct interviews without the use of a camera. The absence of the camera helped the people relax and soon enough the interviews became cordial conversations. They were conducted with a TASCAM in German, months after the beginning of my research. It was important for me to understand the dynamics of the relationships between the people who live and work there, as well as to establish relationships with them. I ended up conducting **seven (11)** interviews from which I finally used six. Most of them were conducted in the café, and they were quite casual. The questions were simple and dealt with the characters’ **experiences (12)** of the cemetery. Besides providing contextual information, the interviews were additionally very helpful in dealing with the philosophical impetus of my project. Although I never asked the interviewees if they were aware of Becker or Epicurus, their responses were amazingly similar to some of their **axioms (13)**.

(11) It was within my intentions to interview Ludger Wekenborg as well. He, together with Boßmann, runs EFEU. Wekenborg also organizes thematic tours of the graveyard, but since I never managed to establish a relationship with him, I chose not to continue filming his activities. The interview that hasn’t been used is that of Andreas Wallbaum. Wallbaum offers consultancy to people who seek unemployment money from the state (<http://www.hartzeroller.de>). One of the places he offers his voluntary services is Café-Finovo. I chose not to include him because his activity was not visually interesting enough and there were already 6 indispensable characters for my film.

(12) I started every interview by asking basic questions about the people’s profile. Who they are, what they do, and what brought them to Berlin in case they were not born there. Later I asked them how they were introduced to the cemetery, what do they do there, and finally I asked them how they feel being active in such a place. In the cases where the interviewee was a grave sponsor I was also interested in finding out how it feels to know one’s final destination.

(13) One of Boßmann’s quotes for example resembles quite adequately an Epicurean axiom by Philodemus: “It is a good feeling to know that death is coming at some point. Then the stress will be over. But the hope to live a couple more good moments in the “now” is also nice, no? But we must always be conscious of that.” (Boßmann, Interview transcript) - *“The one who understands, having grasped that he is capable of achieving everything sufficient for the good life, immediately and for the rest of his life walks about already ready for burial, and enjoys the single day as if it were eternity.* Philodemus, De Morte XXXVIII.14–19 Kuiper
The wise man is always ready for death. He walks about ‘already prepared for burial’ because, presumably, once he has achieved eudemonia to die at any point would be no better or worse than dying at another. But Philodemus is quick to remind us that this does not mean that

LAYER 2 | ACTIVITIES | VIDEO: A great deal of my footage, if not the majority, involved filming the extracurricular activities at the graveyard. Most of this footage focuses on the activities of Hess, and some on Tetzinski and Marion Fabian (14). In order to achieve evoking, instead of simply showing and telling, I chose to take mostly long and wide shots. Such observational framings and shots are well known in the work of David and Judith MacDougall, whose patient filming methods reflects an attentive unfolding of events.

“Any shot I begin making will contain multiple events, objects, and qualities that will either emerge over time or that already coexist in the shot simultaneously. The viewer's attention can take possession of anyone of them, or any combination of them, all at once or progressively as it wanders among them. Yet far from being a weakness of film (although it does limit film as a lexical system) this capacity of film for compound expression is also its greatest asset. As a filmmaker, I cherish the complex structure of the shot and the possibilities it creates for seeing the interconnections within it, as well as the interconnections made possible by its resonance with other shots.” (MacDougall 2006:41)

This observational filming method is contingent upon a certain intimacy and accesses the film's subjects. Hess and Tetzinski always introduced me to others on the grounds, providing a brief description of who I am and what I do. This level of access became one of the most important factors in determining both the intimacy and invisibility with which I was able to return to the cemetery, camera in hand. Along the dictates of observational cinema, I often **blended** (15) with the surroundings or the on-goings, taking five-minute or even longer shots at a time. This way I wanted to avoid emphasizing what was happening, and put stress on the location instead. Sometimes I notice, even when I see these long shots later in the editing studio, that I start looking around the frame attracted by detail – as if I am standing there – instead of

this person finds nothing valuable in life. Each additional day is enjoyed. Nevertheless, such a person's attitude towards time and duration differs significantly from that of those who do not view their mortality correctly. The single day becomes for him eternity, not in the sense that he lives life 'slowly', but, perhaps, because he has recognized that a single day offers him the chance of absolute fulfillment.” (Warren 2004:152)

(14) Fabian is an artist who chose the space of the cemetery to create art installations. Her works contemplate on the notions of life and death.

(15) Sometimes I blended in so much, that people would completely disregard my presence and stop right in front of the camera in oblivion.

being guided by editing. In addition, the fixed perspective accentuated my presence and worked as a channel for the spectator. With this defined approach to my role as filmmaker, I expanded to start filming internal, administrative cemetery activities as well, such as grounds maintenance, grave sponsorship, and the daily running of the cafe in order to access the backstage goings-on of the cemetery.

LAYER 3 | COMPOSITION | VIDEO: Aside from the activities and voices of the graveyard inhabitants, a large part of my portrait of this cemetery focuses not on people, but on what I might refer to as filmic compositions, or still-lives. Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof is a genuinely picturesque cemetery with a variety of uniquely decorated graves. Walking around and simply filming the graves became one of my past-times over the past months. Some of the monuments are unique works of art, others abandoned hundred-year-old graves, many are made of simple rocks lying on the ground, and some are even lacking identification. There are graves with wooden crosses, with marvelous statues hovering over the dirt and painfully beautiful children graves with clinging ornaments, toys and colorful wind spinners. However, the visual relationship between the monuments inside the graveyard walls with the external environment is perhaps, the most interesting topographic observation I made. I have spent hours filming graves in juxtaposition – or dialogue – with the “outside” world. The obvious symbolism often says more than contextualization can offer. These compositional framings developed throughout the year of fieldwork, as I was able to experience with pleasure how the space, light, sounds, energy changed with each of the four seasons. Some shots became fixations and I have them in a variety of seasonal “attire”, returning each season to capture and experience them anew.

Finally, the most challenging set of images was that of the café. Although along the lines of observational cinema, I have many wide shots of the café’s front-yard, busy with people drinking coffee and socializing, my urge to film the intriguing details was challenged by my reluctance to

disturb the visitor. Therefore, I decided to film the spaces of the café mostly when they were empty, and as a result, the cafe becomes a series of meditative still-lives. By allowing a direct dialogue between myself (behind a camera) and the space - without the activity of people - I was able to bring attention to an important goal of this project - to evoke the place.

LAYER 4 | ACOUSTICS | AUDIO: Capturing the soundscape of the cemetery was the most intriguing aspect of my project. In the past I have considered sound as an automatic sidekick to filming a pretty picture. In this occasion the possibilities created by the acoustic topography of the place were unique, both in aesthetics and symbolism. The borders of the cemetery, besides being drawn by the surrounding structures, are also defined by the sounds coming from the respective directions. From the southern border, sounds are strictly urban. Car engines, the occasional horn and, for a short period of time, construction sounds carry from the scaffolding across the street. During the weekdays one can hear children playing at the yard of the primary school on the east side. From the west side, sounds emanate from house interiors and working spaces. However, the most interesting acoustically side of the cemetery is from the north. Every Wednesday and Saturday there is an open market right behind the train tracks. Their activities cannot be seen, but the sellers screaming out their goods can definitely be heard. The quiet of the inner cemetery sound space, with the piping birds and the wind gliding between the leaves, blends with the penetrating sounds from the exterior, while the passing train provides the rhythm. My choice to visually exclude the surroundings does not apply to the acoustic sound layer. Despite the fact that the sounds do not come from the cemetery, they belong to its sonic personality. They just cannot be avoided. Evidently, I have also captured the sounds of the “internal” space, be it the birds, the wind or the bells signifying the closing time for the visitors. MacDougall expands in his writings on sound as well:

“Sound and image together can generate powerful synesthetic responses, creating a heightened sense of space, volume, and texture. What we see and hear taps into our prior experience of the world and stimulates the imaginative capacity that most of us possess to fill in the gaps left by the cursory acts of perception. Paradoxically, this is true to such an extent that a sound heard off-screen – a distant voice, or the cry of a bird - is often more evocative of a place and its spaces than if we were to see what caused the sound.” (MacDougall 2006:42)

Recording sounds also provided me with an **alternative** (16) when dealing with the café, without disturbing the visitors: for obvious reasons nobody is annoyed by a guy with a TASCAM and headphones, in comparison to the same person but with a camera in hand. During my acoustic research, I spent a considerable amount of time recording voices and clinging ceramics, inside and outside the café. The acoustic layering of all these different kinds of sounds became an essential to a deeper understanding of this place.

RECONSTRUCTING THE EXPERIENCE: With all these collected audiovisual layers, and my fieldwork complete, my next step was begin piecing together the layers into an evocative portrait that reflected my own observations and thoughts about the cemetery. Staying committed to the methodological resolutions did not make the task of editing any easier. Nevertheless, having clear goals helped a great deal in the decisions of whether to include or exclude a certain framing or sequence, knowing that sacrificing a pretty shot for the sake of the whole is an inevitable process in editing film. I often repeated out loud to myself that my project is about the place and has nothing to do with grief. Under this guiding light, I stood behind my choices with regards to the use of the diverse audiovisual material (layers). For starters, the interviews are indeed used for contextual purposes. They provide information about the place and its people (including those being interviewed), and only later in the film are the voices connected with the physical appearances of the

(16) At the beginning of the project, and for quite a while throughout, I would start the audio recording and take notes of what I see while listening through the headphones to the sounds of the environment. This practice helped me become transparent and possibly allowed the people who work there to get used to my presence as well. It also made me more attentive to non-visual details that I may not have noticed under traditional participant-observation.

speakers. The activities are hardly edited. Some are included in the film with a single shot. The images are allowed to speak for themselves by lasting long enough to be actually seen. The occasional use of music is intended mostly to keep the spectator from getting tired of the slow pace of editing. Finally, the sounds are used on black without images, aiming to evoke the place in a fuller, more sensorial way. In “The Perception of the Environment” Ingold sites Ong (1982:72) on the evocative capacity of sound:

“Sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer... Vision comes to a human being from one direction at a time... When I hear, however, I gather sound from every direction at once: I am at the center of my auditory world, which envelops me, establishing me at a kind of core of sensation and existence . . . You can immerse yourself in hearing, in sound. There is no way to immerse yourself similarly in sight.” (Ingold 2000:249)

The narrative backbone that carries all of the above is the passage of the seasons. Guided by my philosophical influences, I chose to begin with winter and end with the fall. My goal is to show that life is a bright passage through the darkness of non-existence. We come from, and return to non-existence. The rhythm is much slower at the beginning and closing of the film, following the mood that the season sets. Correspondingly, during “Spring” and “Summer” editing is faster and livelier.

THE CONCLUSION IN FILM: I end this thesis with the simple argument that my thesis film is the conclusion to my research. The 'scientific' tools are my camera and audio equipment, as well as my methodology and the selection and editing of my 'findings, the video footage and audio files. This approach forces me to invite the reader to watch the film instead of reading a written report. My intentions are to produce a self-standing audiovisual account of my

experience, which is proportional in contextualization, audiovisual poetics and philosophical stimuli. The original language of the film is German, subtitled in English. Fifty-two minutes long, the film consists of ca. 16 minutes of interviews (mostly with footage not corresponding to what is being said), 8 minutes of footage accompanied by music, 6 minutes of black with natural sound, and 23 minutes of activities and image sequences.

On-site development of an intuitive methodology became a deciding part of this research. Audiovisual layers were approached in a somewhat divided way — faces separated from voice, activities allowed to occur without interference, filmic still lifes capturing the juxtaposition between the living and the dead, and finally the attentive collection of an acoustic topography that was unattainable thought purely filmic means. Each of these four layers were led, first, by an intuitive aesthetic drive, but also backed up by a yearlong commitment to visiting, engaging and patiently watching this certain place. Despite the fact that the editing is complete with the film available for viewing, I still have difficulty answering the questions that drove me to the field. Most people I spoke with have a clear perception of death before their exposure to the cemetery. Two examples however, provide a partial answer to my query (17). In contrast to Boßmann, Hess and Fabian have undergone changes since they started being active at the graveyard. Hess told me in his interview that in the past he found cemeteries creepy, but now this feeling is surprisingly gone. He is no longer intimidated but the “rot and decay” he used to think of when he was in such places in the past. Fabian, on the other hand, provided an example of someone who actually improved her life after dealing intensively with death. In an interview included in the film, Fabian told me that suffering from depression was what actually led her to engage in artistic activity at the cemetery, “I fought the fear by dealing with death. It has helped me so much. To make my own grave. That was the best thing I have done here. It is better than any medication or pill against depression... to make my grave with my own hands and imagine that I lie there and that I

(17) “How would life be if we became friends with our mortality?”

am dead”. Both of the above examples are clear indications that dealing with our limitations can actually help us lead a fuller life. And to back my realization up, I can only offer my personal experience (18). I got to know the cemetery like a friend, in all its idiosyncrasies, through different moods and characteristic facets. And like in any good friendship, I myself changed as well. In particular, I no longer feel intimidated in the face of our cultural expressions of death. I feel quite comfortable at the cemetery, and in contrast to the past, I actually enjoy being there. Reminding myself of my limitations and finitude relaxes me and relieves me from unnecessary stress. Dealing with the “now” is an intense challenge, and the people working at the cemetery, especially the owners Boßmann and Hoffmann, are a great inspiration towards that goal.

(18) Writing about the experience offers me the possibility to express my personal feelings that evolved through the past year. These feelings are not particularly obvious in the film, since I chose to avoid self-reflexivity in order to be as dedicated as possible to the primary goal of the film, which was to evoke the place.

Additionally, the experience of filming at the cemetery changed me as a filmmaker. Coming from the television world, to take my time with a project was a great trial. My filming practices changed significantly and the friction with the discipline of visual anthropology and ethnographic-methodology shifted my direction to other modes of audiovisual expression. For me this film was in fact a test and a realization on what evoking entails in contrast to the artistic and ethical problematic of “show-and-tell”. But above all it was a reassuring justification of my decision to pursue this Master Program.

In the beginning of this thesis I contemplated on the meaning of the word “science”. If science involves the notion of “care”, then visual anthropology is indeed the scientific field where this duality becomes prevalent. During my project, I learned to be patient and above all attentive. I was open to what the place had to offer, instead of going there to look for clues that supported my presuppositions. At the same time, I was meticulous in gathering the information that could construct a legitimate record of my experience. Strong in “Visual Anthropologists at Work” provides interesting input on what it means to be an anthropologist and a filmmaker:

“Anthropology studies human belief and behavior. Through comparison, it attempts to establish what is universal about all human cultures on the one hand, and what may be unique to a culture or cultures on the other. Visual anthropologists are not distinguishable from other anthropologists in these ways. Visual anthropologists do place more emphasis on how human beings express and communicate their cultural traditions. These comprise outwardly observable forms such as language, music, art, dance, use of space, physical attitudes, and expressions. These perceivable manifestations give some measure of concrete reality to the inner mental abstraction we call culture. Visual anthropologists deduct and intuit the references to the natural world, symbolic and metaphoric meanings observable in such communicative conventions. Audiovisual recording devices both archive and facilitate analysis of such aspects of culture. By the same token, anthropology in general has been a visual discipline since its inception. Handmade illustrations, still photographs, and moving pictures have accompanied written texts, lectures, and other verbal materials from the very beginning. “ (Strong 2009:2, intended emphases)

For me, it becomes clear that between film and scientificity, the visual and the anthropological can meet, and my academic experience in the face of my film constitutes proof of the above. Nevertheless, a film is a work of art. So is visual anthropology an art or a science? (19) Picking up the thread I laid at the beginning of this essay, visiting the etymology of the word “art” in Greek may make sense at this point. Art in Greek is “Techne” (Τέχνη). “Techne” has the same root with the word “techno” (τέκνο) which means “child” and derives from the verb “tikto” (τίκτω), which means “to give birth”. In essence, art means “new life”. It becomes more and more unambiguous as art and science are intertwined, since the end product of every scientific endeavor is a new entity. It is accepted that the visual anthropologist changes the field the moment he/she decides to enter it. In addition, the

(19) This is not only my query: “Is visual anthropology a science or an art? Is it a combination of the two? If so, what kind of combination? Does the distinction matter? If so, in what way does it matter? These are also questions visual anthropologists constantly ask.” (Strong 2009:3)

field is not in a laboratory, rather it is always unstable and fluid, making the relationship between the anthropologist and the field interactive and interchanging. It is inevitable that the end product of the fieldwork is something new about something already constantly evolving. Clearly, the product of the scientist's experience is in a way "a new life" and therefore - at least as far as the Greeks are concerned - art. That of course does not mean that art and science are the same, nevertheless it is implied that they meet at some point. The common denominator of the two - I claim - is care; an anthropologist/scientist cares about the subject he is handling and the filmmaker delivers with care the new life that derives from the experience at the field. Visual anthropology is possibly one of the few fields where the two traditionally opposite worlds of art and science can meet in harmony, completing one another. "Visual anthropology is a multidisciplinary field that joins the arts and the humanities with the social and biological sciences. We learn how to communicate our findings through words, photography and film, art, music, and other expressive forms." (Strong 2009:1)

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Declaration

Declaration in Lieu of Oath
ELEFThERIOS FYLAKTOS
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This is to confirm that my master thesis was independently composed/ authored by myself, using solely the referred sources and support.
I additionally assert that this thesis has not been part of another examination process.

Berlin, 08.10.2012

Signature:.....