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Technology and Perception in Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*: A Reflection on Time, Space and Memory in the Postmodern Metropolis

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Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* is a work that cinematically explores discourses of history and memory in postwar Germany and, since its 1987 inception, most examinations of the film have centered on these aspects. However, little attention has been given to the significant role of technology in Wenders' film. Emphasized not only in the opening scenes but also throughout the rest of the film, transportation technologies such as airplanes, cars, and trains link the spaces of the city and therefore lie at the heart of Wenders' Berlin portrait. Furthermore, the self-reflexive nature of Wenders' work posits film as the quintessential technological medium of storytelling and history, and my paper will thus link theories of technology and perception with those of memory and history. I will begin my paper by elucidating Paul Virilio's and Jean Baudrillard's theories of speed and spatiality in postmodern society and will link these theories with the portrayal of transportation technologies in *Wings of Desire*. The next part turns to Walter Benjamin's model of space and memory as a more optimistic approach to spatiality in Wenders' Berlin portrait, and this latter model will prove to be highly significant in my final analysis of Wenders' film. In particular, I will explore the film's emphasis on spaces of absence and the way in which this emphasis reveals a model for a new kind of perception and a model for narrating the past. The last section of my paper will stress the way in which Wenders mediates between the communication technologies¹ of transportation and film, and further, between modernity and postmodernity.² Ultimately, the technological perception created by transportation technologies (and theorized extensively by postmodernist theorists Baudrillard and Virilio) is redeemed by the medium of film because of its ability to overcome what film theorist Siegfried Kracauer calls the "blind spots of the mind" (53).

The storyline of *Wings of Desire* follows two angels, Daniel and Cassiel, who wander past various landmarks of Berlin and are frequently drawn to its spaces of emptiness and historical destruction. As a postmodern (and postwar German) metropolis, Berlin is a divided city and a city without a clear, historical center. Thus, it is difficult to

compare the angels with Baudelaire's *flâneur* who strolls into the city center in order to observe and participate in modern life. In fact, the angels' movement into the city's spaces of absence reverses the direction of Baudelaire's *flâneur* and indicates the postmodern setting of Wenders' film. This setting is further strengthened by the film's emphasis on fragmentation and discontinuity, which is cinematically revealed through the series of snapshots that introduce the viewer to Berlin, and by the film's resistance to a traditional, chronological narrative. In this sense, Wenders' work corresponds to David Harvey's definition of the postmodern as a "total acceptance of the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic" (44). In his work, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey devotes an entire chapter to an analysis of *Wings of Desire*: ultimately, he concludes that the film is a postmodern one, albeit with strong modernist elements appearing in the second half. Harvey interprets the second half of the film as "an attempt to resurrect something of the modernist spirit of human communication, togetherness, and becoming, out of the ashes of a monochromatic and dead-pan postmodernist landscape of feeling" (320). However, I read the ending as postmodern in that the utopian love story of Marion and Daniel is characterized by exaggerated poses and overstated mythical connotations, resulting in a parody of the paradigmatic modern narrative. Thus, I argue that *Wings of Desire* deliberately portrays these modernist elements in an attempt to represent the interconnectedness between modernism and postmodernism, the latter being definable only in opposition to, or at the very least in tension with, the former.

Cultural theorist Marita Sturken further examines the definitions of modernity and postmodernity, but does so specifically in relation to technology: according to her article, "Mobilities of Time and Space: Technologies of the Modern and the Postmodern," characterizations of these two concepts should not be understood as binary oppositions, but instead as a set of continuums with "shifting terrain and tensions between the two" (74-75). I agree with Sturken in this regard, and understand Wenders' film as a candid portrayal of the particular tensions between the modern and postmodern, especially with respect to communication technologies and the way in which they structure our experiences of the city. Thus my paper expands on the argument put forth by David Caldwell and Paul Rea in their article "Handke's and Wenders's *Wings of Desire*:"

Transcending Postmodernism” in which they argue that “*Wings of Desire* both illustrates and transcends tensions between modernism and postmodernism” (46). By exploring the discourses of technology and perception in Wenders’ film, my paper further examines these tensions in the film and reveals the way in which *Wings of Desire* ultimately favors the medium of film as the postmodern medium of storytelling because of its ability to illuminate the overlooked spaces of the postmodern metropolis.

The central role of technology in Wenders’ film becomes apparent early on: in fact, the film’s opening shot of an airplane quickly reveals the significance of transportation technologies in the postmodern city and, furthermore, indicates the influence of these technologies on our perception. The ability of transportation technologies to restructure our perception of the world has been previously documented. According to the cultural historian, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, the industrialization (and especially the emergence of mechanical forms of transportation) in the 19th century left the world with an entirely new perception of time and space:

Transport technology is the material base of potentiality, and equally the material base of the traveler’s space-time perception. If an essential element of a given socio-cultural space-time continuum undergoes change, this will affect the entire structure; our perception of space-time will also lose its accustomed orientation. (36)

In other words, new technologies transform the entire structure of our time-space perception. While Schivelbusch writes specifically about the emergence of the railway in the 19th century, his theory about shifts in space-time perception also applies to the postmodern era in which communication technologies are constantly increasing and changing. Many theorists have identified this shift in time-space perception, including Frederic Jameson, David Harvey, and Marshall McLuhan (who coined the term “global village” in an attempt to convey a recent transformation in time-space perception). The notion of a change in the “socio-cultural space-time continuum” is still relevant today in relation to contemporary technologies and is especially prominent in Wenders’ depiction of Berlin.

The airplane portrayed at the beginning of the film not only sets up Berlin’s status as cosmopolitan metropolis, but also highlights the breakdown of physical boundaries in

the postmodern era. After the establishing shot that depicts the airplane from an external point of view, the camera moves inside the plane and pauses on Peter Falk as he makes a mental check list of all the cities he has recently visited: “Tokyo, Kyoto... Paris, London, Trieste... Berlin” (11). This scene reflects the same erasure of geographic boundaries that Virilio discusses in his theories regarding the postmodern metropolis. According to Virilio, “if the metropolis is still a place, a geographic site, it no longer has anything to do with the classical oppositions of city/country nor centre/periphery” (86). The character of Peter Falk, an international actor who flies around the globe to make movies, is an example of this collapse in geographic boundaries. Furthermore, Wenders’ decision to open his film by zooming in on an airplane demonstrates the way in which “the intramural-extramural opposition collapsed with the transport revolutions and the development of communication and telecommunication technologies” (86). The airplane is seen cutting across the sky and passing over the Berlin Wall as easily as if the wall did not exist; transport technologies thus transcend any physical boundaries and create a uniform, metropolitan area. In this way, Wenders’ film creates a setting, which powerfully resonates with Virilio’s theories about the role of technology in the postmodern era.

This technological setting immediately indicates two significant discourses in *Wings of Desire* – the problem of speed and a spatialization of time. The central characteristic of speed in postmodern society has been explicated at length in Virilio’s writings. Speed structures the entire postmodern experience precisely because of the transportation technologies, which are the basis of all metropolises. According to Virilio, these communication and transmission systems are often invisible but nonetheless compose and order the city:

In all likelihood, the essence of what we insist on calling urbanism is composed/decomposed by these transfer, transit and transmission systems, these transport and transmigration networks whose immaterial configuration reiterates the cadastral organization and the building of monuments. (94)

While Virilio is not referring solely to transportation technologies here, these are the technological systems most prominent in Wenders’ film. The opening scenes of *Wings of*

Desire immediately depict several technologies of transportation including a bus, an airplane, a bicycle, several cars, and an ambulance. The rest of the film likewise centers on subways and train tracks, which crisscross the entire city and are, in this sense, the basis for all communication throughout the city.

However, despite all of these communication technologies, there is very little communication occurring among the inhabitants of Berlin. In fact, the city's inhabitants are largely alone and isolated from each other. This becomes evident as the camera moves down a street or through a subway train and pauses briefly on each person it passes by: these people are always surrounded by others and, yet, are strangely alone. The scene on the subway train is especially telling in the way that each person's thoughts are entirely isolated from the next. One person asks, "so why am I living?" (32) while his neighbor muses on financial problems and how to pay the next doctor's bill. The subway trains and other transportation technologies thus appear to hinder, rather than foster, communication.

The above-mentioned subway scene conveys a Virilian sense of speed. In order to set the scene, a shot is taken from the outside of the subway and this still shot depicts a train rushing by at almost dizzying speeds. According to Virilio, "speed distance obliterates the notion of physical dimension [S]peed suddenly becomes a primal dimension that defies all temporal and physical measurements" (91). In the film's subway scene, speed is certainly portrayed as a "primal dimension" in a place where physical and temporal measurements appear arbitrary. In fact, the subway's location underground denies any possible orientation in terms of familiar physical locations or even a reference point for time. According to Jean Baudrillard, it is speed that "cancels out the ground and territorial reference-points, since it runs ahead of time to annul time itself" (6). It is especially interesting, in light of this quote, that once the camera moves inside of the subway car, the rushing speed of the train is suddenly translated into a timeless calm. Here, the subway passengers sit quietly next to each other, absorbed in their own thoughts and seemingly unaware of each other.

The emphasis on speed in postmodern society is also highly significant for the film's discourse on memory and history: the ever-increasing speed in postmodernity stands in opposition to memory and the past. Baudrillard's understanding of speed in

postmodernity is thus especially relevant to my analysis of *Wings of Desire* because he explicitly indicates this connection between speed and memory:

Speed is the triumph of effect over cause, the triumph of instantaneity over time as depth, the triumph of the surface and pure objectality over the profundity of desire. Speed creates a space of initiation; which may be lethal; its only rule is to leave no trace behind. Triumph of forgetting over memory, an uncultivated amnesic intoxication. (6)

Baudrillard links speed with instantaneity and forgetting – two characteristics which are highlighted in the above-mentioned subway scene. The people on the subway train are portrayed as if they exist in a time capsule; they seem to be moving neither forward nor backward, but simply sit immobile in the present. In this sense, speed places emphasis on the moment and erases any relationship with the past or the future; thus, speed stands in opposition to memory in Wim Wenders' film.

The second significant characteristic of Wenders' postmodern setting is the spatialization of time. The entire film is preoccupied with space and, in particular, the perception of space within a postmodern metropolis. However, unlike the concept of speed, this spatialization of time fosters memory in a new and constructive way. I will, therefore, devote the next section of my paper to exploring the way in which space is conceived throughout the film and the way in which these spaces relate to the film's discourse on memory. The opening scenes, which depict the aerial perception of the angels, stand in stark contrast to the ground-level perception that develops in the second half of the film. These two planes of perception also result in the perception of different kinds of spaces. In order to analyze the film's exploration of space in the postmodern metropolis, I will turn to Benjamin's writings on memory and the city, and in this way will elucidate the connection between the film's discourses on perception and space with its overarching themes of memory and history.

What quickly becomes evident in their wanderings through the city is that the angels traverse and exist in space rather than time. This emphasis on space is particularly salient in Cassiel's recounting of the day's events. With each recorded moment, he reveals not the time during which it occurred, but, rather, the location in which it took place. Shortly thereafter, Daniel reveals his inability to experience time through his

desire “at each step, each gust of wind, to be able to say ‘now’ ... ‘now and now’ and no longer ‘forever’ and ‘for eternity’” (20). Accordingly, the angels’ perception, as represented by the camera, is generally comprised of long, sweeping shots, which continually traverse the cityscape of Berlin. This mode of perception stands in stark contrast to Hollywood realist narratives of film, which tend to remain focused on one location, following a temporal rather than spatial series of events.³

The film’s focus on spatialization is especially interesting in relation to Benjamin’s theories of space and memory. In his *Berlin Chronicle*, Benjamin chooses to record his childhood memories on a map of Berlin, rather than in the traditional autobiographical narrative. In his desire for ‘setting out the sphere of life – bios – graphically on a map,’ he expresses his understanding of memory as spatial rather than temporal (596). As a result, he is very specific about the fact that his book is not an autobiography, despite the intention of recounting his childhood memories, because it focuses on space rather than time:

Memories, even when they go into great breadth, do not always represent an autobiography. And this is certainly not one, not even for the Berlin years which, after all, are my only concern here. For autobiography is concerned with time, with sequence and what constitutes the flow of life. Here, however, I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities. (612)

In order to locate his memories spatially, Benjamin takes his reader through the labyrinth of Berlin, exploring the places of his childhood experiences. Rather than providing his reader with a linear narrative, Benjamin depicts isolated moments of his childhood in relation to the location of their occurrences.

Benjamin’s childhood memories are, therefore, recounted very similarly to the way in which Wenders’s angels record the lives of Berlin’s inhabitants. *Berlin Chronicle* as well as *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, which consists of a series of vignettes often titled by their locations such as “Tiergarten” and “Victory Column,” depicts Benjamin’s memories in relation to specific locations. Parallel to this is Cassiel’s account of the day’s events, which, as discussed above, are recorded in terms of location rather than time. It is easy to imagine Cassiel’s notes in the same format that Benjamin uses in his autobiographical works, whereas it would be difficult, if not impossible, to organize

Cassiel's notes into a linear narrative. Because Benjamin's two Berlin works are organized spatially, they are both fragmentary and his childhood memories are recorded as temporally isolated moments. These works convey the manner in which Benjamin views his life as existing all at once within the space of Berlin. His understanding of life is, therefore, temporally fragmented but spatially unified. This idea is faithfully mirrored in the way in which Wenders angels perceive the world; both the angels and Benjamin perceive the past in present spaces.

The spatialization of time, which pervades Wenders' film, is still very much in line with Virilio's theories of the postmodern city. Virilio similarly writes of a "singular temporality" within the city, and "a unity of place without any unity of time" (88). This postmodern temporality is constructed through communication technologies (through what Virilio calls the "transmission systems" that organize our cities), much as it is portrayed in Wenders' *Wings of Desire*. Virilio, however, understands this change in perception in a much more negative light:

The new technological time has no relation to any calendar of events nor to any collective memory. It is pure computer time, and as such helps construct a permanent present, an unbounded, timeless intensity that is destroying the tempo of a progressively degraded society. (89)

While Wenders also recognizes the construction of a kind of "permanent present" through transportation technologies, he makes room for memory in his model of spatialized time and, in this sense, produces a much more optimistic picture of the postmodern city. Furthermore, by exploring various modes of perception within his film, Wenders ultimately identifies and maintains a filmic perception that leaves room for subjectivity and, thus, hope for the future.

The next section of my paper will demarcate the particular modes of perception portrayed in the film and in this way reveal the preference which is ultimately given to a subjective, corporeal perception. *Wings of Desire* explores modes of perception primarily through the characters of the angels; it is interesting, therefore, that when the angels descend into the streets of Berlin and take a closer look into the reality of everyday life, they are often drawn into the empty spaces within the city. These spaces, generally hidden from the objective birds-eye point of view that dominates the film's earlier scenes,

become increasingly visible as the angels wander through the streets of Berlin. Even more importantly, the angels tend to pause longer in these spaces than on the crowded highways or subway trains: while the angels initially move through Berlin without stopping, Cassiel pauses to stay with the aging storyteller, Homer, in an empty field and Damiel pauses to watch a trapeze artist in an empty tent. Here it becomes especially clear that Wenders' angels prefer the deserted spaces of the city to the typically crowded downtown areas of the modern metropolis. It is here, in these empty spaces, that a story begins to develop in Wenders' film. Rather than simply roaming about Berlin and viewing the inhabitants solely from an objective perspective, Damiel begins following one specific person, Marion, and in this way turns to a radically different mode of perception – a subjective perception that is cinematically depicted in the transition from black-and-white to color film.⁴

Jonathan Crary's theory of vision is exceptionally significant in light of this transformation in perception delineated in Wenders' work. According to Crary, the 19th century underwent a shift towards a more subjective understanding of vision, one which emphasized the role of the observer in perception. Unlike the 17th and 18th century, which understood vision in a Cartesian, objective light, the 19th century experienced the emergence of new technologies that resulted in a fundamental shift towards a subjective understanding of vision. This vision was based first and foremost in a corporeal subject and relied heavily on the science of physiology:

The corporeal subjectivity of the observer, which was a priori excluded from the concept of the camera obscura, suddenly becomes the site on which an observer is possible. The human body, in all its contingency and specificity ... becomes the active producer of optical experience. (Crary 69)

Vision was therefore no longer understood as an objective phenomenon, but as one that is deeply rooted in, and embodied by, the subject. The classical observer, whose model had been the camera obscura, was transformed into a radically new and subjective observer, who understood vision as originating in his own body, rather than as something imposed from the outside. In *Wings of Desire*, this process is paralleled in the objective perception of the angels and the subsequent transformation into a subjective observer when Damiel

chooses to fall into mortality; even more significantly, the latter form of perception is privileged in Wenders' film, which culminates in the narrative of a utopian love story.

In the initial scenes of *Wings of Desire*, it quickly becomes evident that the camera is portraying the perspective of the angels; furthermore, the broadly sweeping birds-eye view of Berlin designates their perspective as objective and overarching. The space depicted by the camera in these scenes is, therefore, entirely unlike the space in which the inhabitants of Berlin reside. The angels view the city of Berlin from above and, therefore, perceive it on a macroscopic level. As the camera begins sweeping down towards the streets of Berlin, it transitions to a microscopic perspective in which individual people are observed. Thus, these initial shots are exceptionally significant in setting up the film's discourse on perspective and space. The rest of the film will depict constant shifts and transitions between these two modes of perception and, thereby, explore the tensions between these spaces within Berlin.

The variation between distance (aerial perspectives) and proximity (close-ups) in the film highlights an important aspect of the perception created through modern technologies of transportation and the camera. According to architectural historian Mitchell Schwarzer, technologies of transportation produce a fragmented mode of vision that rests largely on the juxtaposition of panoramic perspectives and close-ups.⁵ Film is a medium that allows for a similar effect by contrasting panoramic or aerial perspectives with close-ups, and Benjamin's theories of auratic art and film are especially useful here. In his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin defines aura as "the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be" (*Illuminations* 222).⁶ This interplay between distance and closeness that Benjamin identifies is clearly significant in the medium of film, which perhaps more than any other art form combines these two perspectives into a whole; Benjamin himself elucidates this point when he compares the cameraman with the painter:

The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality. The cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus, for contemporary man the

representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. (233-234)

According to Benjamin, then, film is groundbreaking precisely because it is able to penetrate reality rather than simply view it from a distance as occurs in the medium of painting. It can be argued that this analysis of film is somewhat simplistic in the way it subscribes to film as an inherently realistic and transparent medium; bound to a two-dimensional screen, film certainly cannot reflect human perception in an entirely natural way no matter how closely it mirrors the technological perception created by modern modes of transportation. However, despite the fact that film cannot depict human experience in an entirely unmediated manner, it *can* reveal spaces that are normally overlooked. Film is able to surpass the bounds of a merely technological perception (exemplified in the technological perception created through modern modes of transportation) in its depiction of spatiality and Wenders' film illustrates this.

Wenders makes a clear distinction between camera and transportation technologies and, in order to explore these differences, I will turn to Siegfried Kracauer's film theory. In his work, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Kracauer elucidates (in a way similar to Benjamin) the unique ability of film to penetrate reality. He argues that film does not only record reality, but, in fact, goes even further and "reveal[s] physical reality" to us (ix). There are things which we generally do not observe in everyday life, such as hidden alleyways and small details on architectural structures and, according to Kracauer, film serves specifically that function of rendering visible these normally invisible things. What Wenders adds to Kracauer's theory is the fact that these missed observations are often due to the transportation technologies, which hurl us through the city at such great speeds that we are unable to see many details of the city. One example of these "unseen things" (46) is what Kracauer calls "blind spots of the mind" (53). The empty spaces within Berlin, which Wenders continually focuses on throughout the film, might be understood as such blind spots. Because our perception generally focuses on forms rather than emptiness, the foregrounding of empty spaces

within the bustling metropolis of Berlin brings to light a different mode of vision. In this way, then, Wenders uses the medium of film to render visible the things that one is generally not aware of in everyday life. Thus, Wenders offers the medium of film as a means of reflection on space and highlights the space that is so often overlooked in the increased speed of postmodernity.

So, unlike the transportation technologies that Virilio and Baudrillard discuss in their theories, film does not erase certain spaces or memories; rather, film is understood here as a communication technology which is able to slow down time and, in this way, fosters contemplation. According to cultural theorist David Harvey:

If it is true that time is always memorialized not as flow, but as memories of experiences places and spaces, then history must indeed give way to poetry, time to space, as the fundamental material of social expression.

The spatial image ... then asserts an important power over history. (218)

Wenders' film clearly privileges the spatial image as one which is conducive to memory and contemplation. Furthermore, the empty spaces within Wenders' Berlin cinematically depict Benjamin's theories of memory and narration. In particular, Benjamin's preference for the fragment as a writing strategy is highly significant here. In between his fragments of memory and fragments of text lies a palpable space, which his readers must complete in order to finish the narrative. Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit* (now-time) clearly posits the past as occupying the same space as the present in such a way that both enter into a dialectical relationship in the present moment; by locating the past in the present, however, Benjamin also recognizes the role of individual subjectivity in narrating the past. For this reason, he leaves spaces in his *Berlin Childhood* into which the reader can interject herself and he arranges fragments of text into ever-changing constellations of memory. In all of these cases, it is the individual who must work to fill these spaces by bringing his own subjectivity into the equation, thus completing the narrative. Historical perception, in this sense, does not search for an absolute, objective historical truth but, instead, recognizes the fragmentation, atemporality, and subjectivity of the past.

By focusing on empty spaces within the city, Wenders thus represents a physical counterpart to Benjamin's emphasis on absence in narration. Essentially, Wenders is metaphorically depicting this need through the spaces of absence in Berlin and through

these very spaces, he leaves room for individual interpretation. Furthermore, not only do the empty spaces in Wenders' film serve to stimulate interpretation, but the presentation of a spatial narrative itself encourages interpretation. *Wings of Desire* is a film that strives to depict three-dimensional space. It does so, not only through the use of vertical as well as horizontal camera movement, but also through the length of individual shots. Unlike much Hollywood cinema, which quickly draws the viewer into an action-packed plot, Wenders takes the time to capture specific objects and spaces as fully as possible. This kind of a spatial narrative naturally demands interpretation from the viewer because it leaves ample time for contemplation without an excess of explanation.

By cinematically exploring the empty spaces of Berlin, Wenders reveals not only a world in which the time-space compression has vastly accelerated but also one in which it is still possible to slow down and contemplate the past in present spaces. In this sense, Wenders ultimately turns away from the pessimistic theories of speed and postmodernity as they are delineated in the works of Virilio and Baudrillard. Things do not have to "fade into the distance faster and faster in the rear-view mirror of memory" (Baudrillard 72). Rather, through the technological medium of film, it is possible to depict the 'blind spots' which have been created through other communication technologies and, thus, locate the past even in the chaotic metropolises of postmodernity. The subjective mode of perception that is created through Daniel's pauses in spaces of absence and, ultimately, his fall into the mortal world, leaves the viewer with hope and optimism in a world of increasingly accelerated and depersonalized technologies.

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¹ I understand the term 'communication technologies' here as referring very generally to the technologies that move or transmit people, goods, or information – a definition that can be found in James Carey's *Communication as Culture* in his discussion of communication as transmission. I therefore include technologies of the camera as well as transportation technologies under this heading.

² While the film certainly begins with a defiance of traditional cinematic narratives by refusing to develop one particular story, the second half of the film does progress into a coherent narrative by following the love story between Damiel and Marion. In this sense, it could be argued that the film ultimately regresses to a form of modernity in its search for the 'eternal and immutable' as David Harvey has argued (44). However, the film has also been read as an attempt to transcend the postmodern/modern dichotomy altogether, as is argued in David Caldwell and Paul Rea's article "Transcending Postmodernism". I agree with this latter analysis and view the film's discourse on technology and perception as a reflection of the film's emphasis on a continuum of modernism and postmodernism.

³ Hollywood realist cinema tends to follow a linear, teleological narrative and therefore emphasizes events (and more specifically, the unfolding of events in *time*) over space and place.

⁴ I understand the angels' view of Berlin (represented by black-and-white film) as objective in the sense that the angels are not involved in any of the events they record; their descriptions are noted in a factual manner, omitting any emotional response or active participation in the recorded event. The angels thus stand outside of time and it is only once Damiel falls to mortality and acquires his own subjectivity that he can experience the world with all of his senses. Assenka Oksiloff has made a similar point, arguing that the realm of the angels is constituted by a disembodied, visual perception and the realm of mortality is constituted by a much broader sensory spectrum that includes feeling and corporeality.

⁵ Mitchell Schwarzer's *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media* investigates the modern-day perception of architecture as it is mediated through technologies of transportation and the camera. This modern perception of architecture is what Schwarzer defines as the zoomscape – "a largely optical mode of perception characterized by speed and surface" (12). Unlike a pedestrian, who experiences a city's architecture through many senses and as a three dimensional space, the modern observer views architecture from a separate space and generally in passing. The technologies of transportation and camera thus shatter our time-space continuum through "abrupt shifts of viewpoint and via unexpected juxtapositions" that radically alter our perception of architectural landscapes (12).

⁶ Martin Jesinghausen has already noted the connection between Wenders' films and the concept of aura in his essay "The Sky over Berlin as Transcendental Space." In particular, he points out that the title of another Wenders (no apostrophe here) film, *Far Away, So Close!* (the sequel to *Wings of Desire*), can be understood as a "programmatically reference to Benjamin's concept of aura" (84).