PHOENIX
A FILM BY CHRISTIAN PETZOLD
June, 1945. Badly injured, her face destroyed, Auschwitz survivor Nelly returns to her hometown, Berlin. She’s accompanied by Lene, a Jewish Agency employee and Nelly’s friend from pre-war days.

Having barely recovered from facial surgery, Nelly ignores Lene’s warnings and sets out to find her husband, Johnny – the love of her life who, by refusing to abandon their marriage, protected her from Nazi persecution for so long.

Nelly’s family has been murdered in the Holocaust. Johnny is convinced that his wife, too, is dead. When Nelly finally tracks him down, he recognizes nothing but an unnerving resemblance and doesn’t believe it could really be her. Hoping to secure her family’s inheritance, Johnny suggests to Nelly that she take on the identity of his late wife.

Nelly agrees. She becomes her own imposter. She wants to know whether Johnny loved her – and whether he betrayed her. Nelly wants her old life back.

SYNOPSIS
The first day of shooting for Phoenix: a birch forest, a man in Wehrmacht uniform, women in concentration camp garb. Our reference was a photograph supplied by the Shoah Foundation: a coarse-grain color picture of a woodland crossroads in impressionistic morning light. And, only at second glance, death: the corpse in the grass. Even during the shoot, we noticed that something wasn’t right. The light was good, we’d settled on the framing, it seemed like an accurate recreation of the image, but it didn’t work. The reconstruction of the horror, the cinematography in and around Auschwitz – as if we were saying, “Now it’s time. Now we’re going to condense the whole thing into a story and impose order on it.” We threw away all the material from that first day of shooting.

Raul Hilsberg wrote that the terror meted out by the Nazis and the obedient public essentially made use of well-known techniques. What was novel were the extermination camps – the industrial extermination of people. For the old techniques, there was literature, stories, songs… None of that exists for the Holocaust.

One text had a major influence on our preparations: Ein Liebesversuch (‘An Experiment in Love’) by Alexander Kluge. The story is set in Auschwitz. The Nazis are looking through peepholes into a sealed room. They’re observing a couple who, according to their records, used to be passionately in love. The Nazi doctors are trying to revive this love: They want the couple to sleep with each other. The aim is to establish whether the woman has been successfully sterilized. They try everything: champagne, red light, spraying them with ice-cold water – thinking that the need for warmth might drive them together again. But nothing happens – the two of them don’t look at each other. In a strange way, the Nazi doctors’ failure is a victory for love: a love lost that can’t be re-kindled by these criminals. I think that was the most significant text for us. Is it possible to leap back over the deep, nihilistic chasm torn by the National Socialists and the Germans, and to reconstruct things: emotions, love, compassion, empathy – life?

Nelly doesn’t accept that stories, songs, poems – that love is no longer meant to be possible. She wants to turn back time. I’m interested in people who don’t accept something and, in doing so, are defiant and stubborn.

Christian Petzold

Born in Hilden in 1960. Studied German and Theater at the Freie Universität Berlin (“Free University of Berlin”), then, from 1986 to 1994, Film Directing at the DFFB (“German Film and Television Academy Berlin”). Worked as assistant director to Harun Farocki and Harmsk Blüthnig. Christian Petzold’s award-winning films include PILOTINNEN (‘Pilots’, 1995), CUBA LIBRE (1996; winner of the Jury’s Advancement Award at the Max Ophüls Festival), DIE BISCHOFSLIEBE (‘The Sex Thief’, 1998, winner of the Producers’ Prize at the Max Ophüls Festival), THE STATE I AM IN (2001; winner of the German Film Award for Best Fiction Film and the Hessen Film-Award); SOMETHING TO REMIND ME (2002; winner of the Grimmie Prize, the German Television Award and the PIPPA D’Oro, Bavaria), WOLFSBURG (2003; winner of the International Federation of Film Critics’ Award at the Berlinale-Panorama and the Grimmie Prize), GHOSTS (2005; selected for competition at the Berlinale, winner of the German Film Critics’ Award, YELLA (2007; winner of the Silver Bear at the Berlinale and the German Film Award for Nina Hoss), JERCHOW (2008; selected for competition at the Venice Film Festival, winner of the German Film Critics’ Award and BEATS BEING DEAD (2011); winner of the Grimmie Prize and German Television Award. Christian Petzold’s film BARBARA won prizes including the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlinale in 2012 Berlinale and was selected as one of the “top five foreign language films” by the USA National Board of Review. The film’s further accolades include a nomination for the European Film Award and a silver German Film Award.

FILMOPHGRAPHY

2014 PHOENIX
2012 BARBARA
2011 DREILEBEN (BEATS BEING DEAD) TV feature
2008 JERCHOW
2007 YELLA
2005 GHOSTS (Geispeistern)
2003 WOLFSBURG
2002 SOMETHING TO REMIND ME (Toter Mann)
2001 THE STATE I AM IN (Die innere Sicherheit)
Born in Berlin in 1977. Studied Acting at the Ernst Busch Hochschule für Schauspielkunst ("Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts"), Berlin. He has had theater roles at the Deutsches Theater (German Theater in Berlin), the St. Pauli Theater in Hamburg and the Berlin Ensemble with Peter Zadek and Hans Neuenfels. In 2005, Ronald Zehrfeld made his film debut in Dominik Graf’s THE RED COCKATOO, leading to his nomination for the New Faces Award. His other films include 12 PACES WITHOUT A HEAD (2009, dir. Sven Taddiken), SHORES OF HOPE (2012, dir. Toke Constantin Hebbeln), WEISSENSEE (2013, dir. Friedemann Fromm), FINSTERWORLD (2013, dir. Frauke Finsterwalder), LOSE MY SELF (2014, dir. Jan Schomburg), INBETWEEN WORLDS (2014, dir. Feo Aladag) and BELOVED SISTERS (2014, dir. Dominik Graf). Ronald Zehrfeld’s accolades include the German Television Award and the Grimme Prize for Dominik Graf’s IN FACE OF THE CRIME, as well as the 2014 Grimme Prize for MORD IN EBERSWALDE ("Murder in Eberswalde"). He was nominated for the German Film Award as Best Supporting Actor for his role in Christian Petzold’s BARTABA (2012).

NINA HOSS
Nelly

Born 1975 in Stuttgart. Studied Acting at the Ernst Busch Hochschule für Schauspielkunst ("Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts"), Berlin. While still a student, she played the lead role in Bernd Eichinger’s A GIRL CALLED ROSEMARIE (1996). Since then, she has become one of Germany’s best-known theater and film actresses. Nina Hoss’s accolades include the Gertrud Eysoldt Ring for her role in MEDEA at the Deutsches Theater (German Theater in Berlin), the 2006 Bavarian Film Award for THE WHITE MASSAI (dir. Hermine Huntgeburth) and the 2009 Bremer Film Prize. Her other films include ATOMISED (2006, dir. Gia Coppola), WOMAN IN BERLIN (2007, dir. Max Färberböck), GOLD (2013, dir. Thomas Arslan) and A MOST WANTED MAN (2014, dir. Anton Corbijn). Nina Hoss has worked with Christian Petzold since 2002. She won the Adolf Grimmie Prize for SOMETHING TO REMIND ME in 2003 and WOLFSBURG in 2005. For NILLA (2005), she was awarded the Berlinale Silver Bear and the German Film Award. Her next collaboration with Christian Petzold was JERICHOW (2008). For BARTABA (2012), she was awarded the Capi Hollywood European Actress Award and was nominated for the European Film Award.

RONALD
ZEHRFELD

Johnny

Born in Berlin in 1977. Studied Acting at the Ernst Busch Hochschule für Schauspielkunst ("Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts"), Berlin. He has had theater roles at the Deutsches Theater (German Theater in Berlin), the St. Pauli Theater in Hamburg and the Berlin Ensemble with Peter Zadek and Hans Neuenfels. In 2005, Ronald Zehrfeld made his film debut in Dominik Graf’s THE RED COCKATOO, leading to his nomination for the New Faces Award. His other films include 12 PACES WITHOUT A HEAD (2009, dir. Sven Taddiken), SHORES OF HOPE (2012, dir. Toke Constantin Hebbeln), WEISSENSEE (2013, dir. Friedemann Fromm), FINSTERWORLD (2013, dir. Frauke Finsterwalder), LOSE MY SELF (2014, dir. Jan Schomburg), INBETWEEN WORLDS (2014, dir. Feo Aladag) and BELOVED SISTERS (2014, dir. Dominik Graf). Ronald Zehrfeld’s accolades include the German Television Award and the Grimme Prize for Dominik Graf’s IN FACE OF THE CRIME, as well as the 2014 Grimme Prize for MORD IN EBERSWALDE ("Murder in Eberswalde"). He was nominated for the German Film Award as Best Supporting Actor for his role in Christian Petzold’s BARTABA (2012).
BEGINNINGS

CHRISTIAN PETZOLD: “Filmkritik magazine’s issue on Vertigo included an article by Harun Farocki called ‘Switched women’. One of the examples he cited in his essay was a book by Hubert Monteilhet called Return from the Ashes, on which the film draws. Later, when I met Harun Farocki, we spent a lot of time talking about this book. We asked ourselves whether, perhaps, a story like that – a kind of mixture between Vertigo and returning from the concentration camp – could only be told in France. And that’s when we started thinking about German post-war cinema – why it is that we have no comedies or genre films – and the idea that National Socialism created an abyss into which you’re thrown again and again.

Years later, when I started working on Barbara and was presented with the lovers played by Nina Hoss and Ronald Zehrfeld, I thought maybe I could tell the story through them. That’s why we decided to try again: to see whether this story could be told in Germany, after all – and if so, how.”

THE CHASM

CHRISTIAN PETZOLD, NINA HOSS, RONALD ZEHRFELD AND NINA KUNZENDORF ON PHOENIX

NINA KUNZENDORF

Born 1971 in Mannheim. Studied at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst (“Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts”) in Hamburg before taking on roles at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg and the Munich Kammertheater. She has acted for television since 2002, for example in Rainer Kaufmann’s MARIA’S LAST JOURNEY (2005, winner of the Bavarian Television Award) and UNSPOKEN (2010, winner of the Grimme Prize and the German Television Award for Best Actress). For YEARS OF LOVE (2011, dir. Matti Geschonnek), she won the Golden Camera for Best Actress and the Adolf Grimme Prize. For her role as Commissioner in the German series SCENE OF THE CRIME (in those episodes produced by the Hessen Broadcasting Corporation between 2010-2012), Nina Kunzendorf was awarded the Golden Camera for Best Actress and the Hessen Television Prize. Her cinema roles include ROSENTRÄGER (2003, dir. Margarethe von Trotta) and WOMAN IN GOLD (2015, dir. Simon Curtis).
BERLIN 1945

[RONALD ZEHRFELD] “In the postwar years, I think there was an emphasis on instincts – on this desire to survive, just to find something to eat in bombed-out Germany. At what point are you allowed to laugh again, to go dancing, to gain a sense of yourself, of life? For Johnny, it’s about forming a vision of the future, finding a justification for life, going away so that he doesn’t have to confront his feelings, his experiences and the decisions he made regarding Nelly.”

[NINA KUNZENDORF] “They’re all broken, they’re all damaged, they’re injured or absent. That’s how I perceived these three people and the others who appear in the story: They’re all looking for a life. Some of them want their old lives back. Others – like Lene – want new ones. They’re trying to build something new, to craft some sort of idea of the future. They’re united by the fact that they’re all damaged. Lost.”

HOMECOMING

[NINA HOSS] “The more I explored the character, the more I realized how few first-hand accounts there are of the period ‘afterwards’. Nelly comes out of a concentration camp – she’s survived, she’s been saved. What’s that like when you’re still in the middle of that trauma? What kind of condition are you in? Can you even talk about your experiences yet? For me, that was a defining point: When we meet my character, what condition is she in and how close might she be to insanity? In the camps, you were de-humanized. They tried to destroy everything that made you human. How can you then re-connect with the things that defined you as a human?”

It became clear to me why Nelly has to keep hold of this fixed idea of Johnny: if he recognizes her, that means she’s alive again. For me, it wasn’t about asking, ‘Why doesn’t she recognize him’? After all, she doesn’t recognize herself. If you’ve been broken to the core, then you no longer recognize yourself. I had to get my head around that. That was my biggest challenge: understanding that this is about a person who’s trying to piece herself together. She’s come from far away and is grappling at anything within reach in her attempt to understand who she was and who she could now be. She tells Lene, ‘Johnny made me back into Nelly’. Sometimes I get really jealous of myself – of how happy I was.’ She talks about herself in the third person, as if referring to someone else. Even so, it relates to her – she was that person. Where’s that gone?”

[CHRISTIAN PETZOLD] “There aren’t many stories, narratives or films that you could call After the Camp. It reminds me of a quote by Alexander Kluge. He said that it took Odysseus ten years to reintegrate into society. Because, after Troy, he couldn’t come straight home. In 1945, though, nobody experienced this odyssey, because ‘home’ no longer really existed. In Germany, the reception centers for displaced persons – the survivors from the camps – stayed open until 1950. That means that, for 15 years, those people couldn’t find anywhere to live.”

[NINA KUNZENDORF] “They’re all broken, they’re all damaged, they’re injured or absent. That’s how I perceived these three people and the others who appear in the story: They’re all looking for a life. Some of them want their old lives back. Others – like Lene – want new ones. They’re trying to build something new, to craft some sort of idea of the future. They’re united by the fact that they’re all damaged. Lost.”

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**PRODUCTION DESIGN**

**[NINA KUNZENDORF]** “I thought the locations were very special. The production design really impressed me. They laid Lene’s apartment with old parquet flooring from that era, and it had a particular smell… When you enter a set like that, you really feel like it’s not a film or a backdrop or a set of props. Instead, it’s real: It’s living and breathing.”

**SHOTS**

**[CHRISTIAN PETZOLD]** “The first 20 minutes of the film aren’t shot from Nelly’s point of view. Doing that would’ve meant placing an identity, a subject, at the center of the narrative and saying, ‘I’m going to tell you the story from her perspective.’ But what’s her perspective? She’s destroyed, her body is destroyed, her face is destroyed, she’s been through things we can’t fathom. We can only show Nelly – bandaged, faceless, inside a room, encountering people. That meant that, in the opening scenes, we created long distances between Nelly and other people: We selected shots where the implicit distance between them also exists as physical space. The CinemaScope format was perfect for that. It’s not until Nelly is at Lene’s apartment, listening to the Kurt Weill song with her, that we notice that something’s happening to her. She’s touched by a song and by a feeling – a feeling of love and a sense of the meaning of Speak Low, of a moment that’s lost but that was beautiful and that, as a memory, keeps you alive. And then, suddenly, she gains a face. It’s the starkest reverse shot in the film up to that point, because there’s something emerging between these two people as they sit opposite each other, listening to music.

In the course of the film, Nelly – against her friend’s advice – takes things into her own hands and sets out, like a young girl, to search for her lover in the city. In doing so, she becomes an observer: She sees something of the world. And when you show things that are seen, you’re also showing the observer and her point of view. It’s only through Nelly’s actions, only when she has a plan, that the distance that has existed up to that point is removed. You could call it a time-reversal plan: ‘When I was at the camp, I held onto memories and images and built myself a cocoon, so I want to go back to the source of that cocoon: I want to return to the paradise of my memories. And, because this paradise is no longer accessible to her, her challenge is to find an entranceway. At that moment, she’s the subject and we can go out into the world with her.”

**PRESSURE CHAMBER**

**[CHRISTIAN PETZOLD]** “The basis of the film is, essentially, film noir. In film noir, the contrasts are always stark. People try to access the in-between spaces, but the world is black and white. The in-between spaces and nuances have disappeared. That’s why Hans Fromm and I decided that, on the one hand, there have to be stark contrasts between light and dark, over-exposed windows and dark, impenetrable corners in the basement. But on the other hand, we didn’t want the film’s narrative space to become some kind of psycho space, devoid of color and dripping with depression. The noises outside, the very lush natural world – they’re beautiful in the film. The world holds the promise that things will go on, somehow, but the contrasts are so stark that they erase any nuances. You could say that we wanted to link film noir with Technicolor. That’s why we shot on film – because it’s warmer, it works hard, it’s alive.”

**PRESSURE CHAMBER**

**[NINA HOSS]** “The film is essentially treated like a piece of chamber theater. I had a lot of respect for that approach: It means that your work has to be very precise, including the relationship between the two characters. That made sense to me because, in their basement apartment, it’s as if they’re in a pressure chamber. A pressure chamber magnifies and accelerates things. Nelly is so focused on this one person: She believes he can give her old life back to her. She feels like he’s the reason she survived. She’s clinging on to this love and doesn’t want to give up. When she gets out again, the world re-enters her story. She has to wake up. That’s when the film starts to unfold, as well.”

**BODY**

**[NINA HOSS]** “I think – if, like Nelly, you emerge from an experience like that, from the concentration camp, and are then confronted by something which is by no means an ‘ideal world’, which is still a threatening place, where the people you meet might be the same ones who did these things to you – I think that’s reflected in your body. Initially, you walk through the streets like a non-person. You have no idea how to do it. And then, slowly, when Nelly gets her Parisian shoes back, when she remembers and even enjoys remembering, when she once again senses how things used to be – that she really did live and laugh, taste and love as a memory returns, then the body changes. Initially, I tried to make Nelly somewhat...
childlike, nervous, unstable… Like her hair: Everything’s so grey and not really there. Then, over time, her body takes shape: She starts to know who she is again. She has to regain her self-confidence; she has to find faith in herself so that she can hold her body upright.”

REPLICATION

[CHRISTIAN PETZOLD] “Nina Hoss had to work her way into something; she had to replicate Nelly’s sense of forlornness and obliteration. But she didn’t have to show these replicated feelings. That’s what’s wonderful about her: she didn’t do that. She didn’t put the things she had read, seen and felt on display. During the preparations, I listened to testimonies given by survivors at the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt. In fact, they couldn’t find a language with which to describe their experiences. I think Nina saw it in a similar way: She can’t find a language for the things her character has experienced. As an actor, she can only imagine the torture; she hasn’t been through it. But what she can do is act out this impossibility: the impossibility of conveying something, behind which her character’s experiences lie.

There’s a scene in which Nelly recounts fragments of her experience at the camp. It’s based on the testimony of a survivor taken from the Shoah Foundation’s oral history archives – I think it was recorded in 1998. The moment this woman started talking about it, she could actually barely talk about it any more. Prior to shooting, I almost knew that Nina Hoss wouldn’t find it easy to tell this story, either. But the way in which she does it, the way she acts in this scene – we didn’t talk about that. It would’ve been wrong to spend too much time reflecting on it.”

LENE

[NINA KUNZENDORF] “With Lene, there’s always a good dose of pragmatism. She’s a lawyer: she negotiates, she works, she stands up for other people. The things she does are very concrete – even the way in which she deals with death, including her own. There’s a scene in which she’s sitting in her office, looking at the numbers through a magnifying glass, trying to establish someone’s identity. She’s confronted with death on a daily basis: death, suffering and loss. That leaves its marks. Apparently, many of the people who undertook this task ended up taking their own lives. At some point, you can’t bear it any more. Just like she writes in her suicide note: ‘I feel more drawn to our dead than to the living.’ And, even so, it wouldn’t have taken much for Lene to make the opposite decision – to choose life and the living!”
When Nelly tells Lene about being together with Johnny, she says, ‘We’re almost like new lovers getting to know each other for the first time.’ And there are moments when Johnny’s defense mechanisms break down: ‘My wife’s dead. She’s not this woman. This is just a model I’m constructing.’ But, using movements and memories, Nelly manages to reach the parts of him that he has suppressed. She tries to bring the love that he has suppressed back into the present moment. And that’s where all the tension comes from. He’s trying to prevent this love from being brought out, and she’s trying to restore it. In the basement apartment, this dynamic sometimes reverses. It’s not just Nelly who’s led by and attracted to Johnny – she begins to pull the strings, too. In a strange way, it’s like a courtship.

I always really liked the scene at the table with Lene and Nelly sitting opposite each other. On the one hand, they’re saying things like, ‘I can’t listen to German songs any more,’ and on the other, she says, ‘We have to sort out your inheritance.’ Those are moments, I think, in which something like light-heartedness emerges, or could emerge. For a brief moment, something appears, a memory – maybe of laughing together endlessly, or partying, or talking all night… it’s also an attempt to survive. to say, ‘There used to be something there. Let’s see if it returns.’

Cinema, in contrast with theater, is essentially composed of reverse shots. People stand facing each other, and we occupy the space between them that they create with their expressions, gestures and words. That’s the cinematic space, the space between people. With Johnny and Nelly, we have a reverse shot in the Phoenix Club: a close shot, his face, her face, gazes that don’t meet. She looks at him but he looks past her, because, to him, she no longer exists. Nelly tries to draw his gaze towards her, but he doesn’t see her. And then, when the two of them are in the basement apartment, the aim is basically to erase the hurt caused by the absence of this gaze, by looking at each other. Nelly’s expression is saying, ‘It’s me’ – but he still doesn’t recognize her. His failure to do so pushes her back, again and again, into the world of ghosts.

For him, it’s clear that, if he ever wants to breathe again, feel himself again or make music again, then he has to get out of Germany. And that’s possible only with Nelly’s help – with the help of Nelly’s imposter, as he sees her. And, on the other hand, there are his feelings of guilt about his decision to sign the divorce papers – out of fear of reprisals or because he believes he can no longer protect her. When he meets this woman again – who as if by a miracle, has survived – his moral self-flagellation simply becomes more powerful. Would I have been stronger if I had martyred myself? Did I betray her? Should I be allowed to live on? Can we believe in humanity any longer?

I love moments like that. In one such moment, when Johnny sees Nelly in front of him, you think, ‘OK, now he has to recognize her!’ But either he doesn’t trust his feelings or doesn’t allow himself to feel these emotions. Because, ‘It’s impossible! She’s dead! And I won’t allow myself to feel this because my future depends on me passing her off as my wife.’ For him, it’s clear that, if he ever wants to breathe again, feel himself again or make music again, then he has to get out of Germany. And that’s possible only with Nelly’s help – with the help of Nelly’s imposter, as he sees her. And, on the other hand, there are his feelings of guilt about his decision to sign the divorce papers – out of fear of reprisals or because he believes he can no longer protect her. When he meets this woman again – who as if by a miracle, has survived – his moral self-flagellation simply becomes more powerful. Would I have been stronger if I had martyred myself? Did I betray her? Should I be allowed to live on? Can we believe in humanity any longer?"
Of course, Nelly sometimes experiences a glimmer of hope: ‘Now he’s recognized me!’ But then it doesn’t happen. It was important to me that she also has another quality – the ability to fight back. For example when, in one scene, she puts on makeup and he rejects her again – ‘Now I have to get out of here! I won’t stand for this.’ She has that, too. She has the strength to survive. And when it gets too much for her in that moment, he’s the one who has to work. It’s an interplay: When she withdraws, he follows her; when he withdraws, she tries to convince him.

**THE LAKE HOUSE**

“Sometimes, you have the good fortune to find a soul mate, a friendship that endures for a very long time – maybe even for a lifetime – and that accompanies you as you pass through life’s transformations. I see that as a deep, friendship-based love. For Lene, Nelly is a kind of spirit, a soulmate.

Lene managed to escape from Germany in time. She went to London and Switzerland and helped and worked from there. Nelly, on the other hand, chose her love for Johnny. That was the first break. Later, after their unexpected reunion, Lene tries to save Nelly a second time by saying, ‘Come with me – come into life. Let’s start something new.’ Once again, Nelly makes a different decision. As Lene sees it, she decides against her: She has been abandoned.”

And Lene leaves Nelly behind: ‘You know, I’m closer to the dead than the living.’ At that point, I always asked myself what Nelly would do – either throw herself in front of a train or find the strength to say, ‘What Lene did must not be in vain. She saved me, she saved so many of us, and she had plans. She was always such a strong person, and now she hasn’t made it.’ I thought Lene was always the stronger one, whereas Nelly was probably more someone who lived for the moment. Lene was the more ambitious of the two, the one who pursued something and succeeded, who gave Nelly structure and support.”
For me, that kind of shock is unimaginable. Of course you assume that, when you come back, people will ask questions. I think a key point in the film is when Johnny says, ‘No one will ask you!’ To be honest, I wasn’t sure how I’d act. She becomes ever more aware of this meaning but, at the same time, her goal is actually for Johnny to ‘reconstruct’ her: her goal, and it’s also her nightmare. Her ‘reconstruction’ in the eyes of other people will also mean that her experience is erased. Nelly is caught in this balancing act as she staggers from one point of rupture to the next.”

For me, one of the most exciting scenes is when Johnny returns and Nelly is standing in front of him for the first time with dyed hair and wearing the red dress. It hits him in the face with brute force; he realizes there’s suddenly a power in the room, and it’s doing something to him. And he attacks her: ‘What’s all that stuff on your face? There’s far too much, that isn’t right at all…’ He forbids himself to recognize her: ‘It can’t be Nelly! It must be a dream, she’s standing in front of me, everything fits, even the handwriting… But it can’t be!’ He forces himself to deny it, even when his instincts all say something else.”

The only person who doesn’t recognize Nelly is Johnny. And Nelly herself. She has lost something; he has betrayed something. At the end, they’re at a train station. Outside: the night. Nelly has a pistol. She steps onto the platform, towards the oncoming train. While editing, my thought was that this scene encompasses all the permutations of a classic romantic tragedy: suicide, a murder of passion, a reconciliation… But Nelly makes a different decision. It’s a plan that’s entirely hers, one we don’t expect: Nelly brings the story to a conclusion. We’re left with our questions, with everything that remains unresolved.

The only person who doesn’t recognize Nelly is Johnny. And Nelly herself. She has lost something; he has betrayed something. At the end, they’re at a train station hotel. Outside: the night. Nelly has a pistol. She steps onto the platform, towards the oncoming train. While editing, my thought was that this scene encompasses all the permutations of a classic romantic tragedy: suicide, a murder of passion, a reconciliation… But Nelly makes a different decision. It’s a plan that’s entirely hers, one we don’t expect: Nelly ends the film. That wasn’t explicitly stated in the script. Or maybe it was. But we really only understood it when we shot it.”
MAIN CAST

Nelly Lenz
Johnny Lenz
Lucia Winter
Soldier on Bridge
Doctor
Elisabeth
Wolfram
Club Owner
Dancers
Soldier in Club
Young Woman
Max
Central Office Staff Member
Hostess
Alfred
Sigrid
Monika
Walter
Frederike
Phoenix Club Band

MAIN CREW

Christian Petzold
Screenplay
With the collaboration of
Based on the novel
Cinematography
Film Editing
Production Design
Costume Design
Casting
Music
Sound Design
Sound Mixing
Original Sound and Song Recordings
Makeup Artists
Commissioning Editor for BR
Commissioning Editor for WDR
Commissioning Editor for ARTE
Commissioning Editors for BR/ARTE
Executive Producers
Producers

A SCHRAMM FILM Koerner & Weber production
In cooperation with Tempos Film in coproduction with Bayerischer Rundfunk, Westdeutscher Rundfunk and ARTE
Production supported by Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, BMI – Federal Commission of Culture and Media, German Federal Film Board, German Federal Film Fund

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