

THE CURVED CLAW

THE CURVED CLAW, Berlin 1997

DVD, colour, sound, 30'26"

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Summary

The aim of the film is to present a reflection, considered to be urgent and necessary, on the (critical) state of mind within the "Republic of Berlin." Both the reactionary town planning policies associated with it and the reinforced nationalist consciousness and its architectural conceptions (e.g. Potsdamer Platz) are only too well known, and moreover there is a resumption of the police-state measures that were applied in the wave of privatisations that swept over Berlin during the 1990s. Since all of this is such plain everyday knowledge, the sector whose purpose is to deal critically with these issues now has to face up to its own impotence and political insignificance.

The film takes as the basis of its story Derrick and Harry, two police officers whose mission will be to clear up three cases in which politicians have been swallowed up by the earth after shaking hands with private capital at foundation-stone ceremonies for new buildings in Berlin. This detective story takes place in Berlin settings, both real and recreated, and most of the characters represented are civil servants involved in the politics, economics and architecture of the capital city, who, along with the forces of order, both state-run and privatised, seek to control the local political climate. It goes almost unnoticed that, in a very coherent manner, not one woman appears throughout the whole film.

Interspersed with the unfolding of the story there are passages from Peter Weiss's novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. The attempt to adopt art as the comprehension of society from a left-wing standpoint is exemplified in the Pergamon Altar in Berlin, through which the city of Pergamon in turn constitutes a metaphor: a despotic, oligarchic city-state. *The Aesthetics of Resistance* begins at a time (1933) when Fascism was entirely wiping out the German left. In the film, the "search for clues" to the crimes also links up in this way with historical archaeology, an archaeology of the resistance, and it refers both to the programmatic difference between operative and idealist aesthetics and to the "non-existence," the extinction, of left-wing politics which is still seen reflected today in autocratic state repressions.

In their investigation, Derrick and Harry come into contact with various social circles: architects, passers-by (who will be "cleaned" from the streets), civil servants and "political opponents." The participants' information (capital) stagnates or is channelled according to their degree of impotence. The civil servants suffer from amnesia, the opposition's head blows to pieces.

Naturally, the cases are not "solved." Instead, Derrick, the "solver," turns schizophrenic.

Characters

Chief of police (DERRICK), his assistant (HARRY), tourist GUIDE, TÖPFER (Environment Minister), DÜRR (Director of the Federal Railways), SCHREMP (Daimler-Benz), DIEPGEN (Mayor of Berlin), ERNST (estate agent), STIMMANN (City Councillor for Public Works), JAHN (architect), THE REINCARNATION OF HANNO KLEIN (former City Councillor for Public Works who died in mysterious cir-

cumstances), FIRST FORENSIC SCIENTIST, WISSMANN (Minister of Development), CHRYSANTHEMUM-HEADED INTELLECTUALS, NAGEL (architect), UNGERS (architect), KOLLHOFF (architect), ROGERS (architect), KLEIHUES (architect), SECOND FORENSIC SCIENTIST, THIRD FORENSIC SCIENTIST, POLICEMEN, SECURITY GUARDS and SERVICE CONTRACTORS.

Places

Pergamon Museum, Derrick's office, Ministry of Development building sites (the former Geological Institute), in front of the Reichstag, Potsdamer Platz, Galeries Lafayette, Friedrichstraße, architects' club, Infobox (in Potsdamer Platz).

Preliminary scene: in the Pergamon Museum

Tourists visiting the Pergamon Altar, carrying audioguides.

GUIDE: Here you see stone bodies that intertwine, disperse and cling together in a collective movement. These are the torsos of the sons of Gaea, who have rebelled against the gods. It is obvious that they make reference to other battles. The leaders of the Attalid dynasty achieved immortality thanks to their sculptors. The massacres of the Galatians who invaded from the north have been turned into the triumph of noble purity. These events seem historically acceptable to them as superpersonal power. The subordinate wants infinity, and there are few who can dictate destiny with a click of the fingers. The specialists talk about art. But these figures look askance at the cracked vengeance and feel the claw tearing into their own flesh.

Title: The Curved Claw

1. Scene in the office

Derrick and Harry, watching a film of a foundation stone ceremony. In the background is the Reichstag, enveloped in white cloth by the artist Christo. Two civil servants – clearly the two contracting parties – shake hands. One of them suddenly begins to be swallowed up by the earth, and finally disappears. The scene is repeated with other characters at the laying of another foundation stone.

DERRICK: Stop, play it back from the beginning.

The film rewinds.

DERRICK: Yes, there. The Reichstag, the laying of the foundation stone. When was that?

HARRY: In 1995.

The film advances.

DERRICK: Who's the one that vanished?

HARRY: Töpfer, from the federal government.

DERRICK: And who's the other?

HARRY: Dürr, of Deutsche Bahn AG.

DERRICK: More slowly... What building site is that?

HARRY: Brown, dark brown like caramel, cigars and brandy chocolates...

The film continues until a group photo appears.

DERRICK: Who's that?

HARRY: Kleihues, Ungers, Kollhoff and other architects from Sony, debis and AT&T at the laying of the foundation stone in Potsdamer Platz.

The film continues until the next "sinking" scene.

HARRY: Diepgen is swallowed up, Schremp is left unscathed.

DERRICK: Why haven't they called us before?

HARRY: Up to now, the two previous cases could be interpreted appropriately...

The film continues: a scene in the street in front of the newly-opened Galeries Lafayette. Lots of contractors and policemen.

HARRY: Galeries Lafayette, Friedrichstraße. It's very difficult to rent out the premises, but they were opened with a very swanky VIP party.

The pictures now show the interior of the building, with people holding glasses of champagne in the middle of the foyer.

DERRICK: Who's who?

HARRY: These are the architects Jahn and Ungers, the Public Works Councillor Nagel...

A character appears shrouded in flames.

DERRICK: Who's that?

HARRY: It's the reincarnation of Hanno Klein.

A character with a chrysanthemum head, carrying a placard proclaiming: NEVER AGAIN.

DERRICK: And this guy?

HARRY: A madman.

Two civil servants shake hands next to the glass cone in the Galeries.

HARRY: Ernst and Stimmann, from the property and town planning sectors.

The characters fall into the glass cone, spin round and are suddenly turned to stone. They reappear placed on the figures of the Pergamon Altar.

2. Scene at the Pergamon Altar

Audioguide: Derrick and Harry.

GUIDE: On the 2nd of July 1816, the French frigate *Medusa* was wrecked off the coast of Senegal due to the incompetence of the captain and the maritime authorities. The lifeboats could barely save half of the almost 300 passengers on board. The captain, the officers and the most influential passengers took the boats by force. The rest of the passengers piled up on an improvised raft they had made from remains of the ship's timbers. The lifeboats were supposed to tow the raft, but at the first signs of a storm they cut the ropes, and of the 150 people on the raft, after 12 days only 15 were found still alive. Three years later, Géricault's painting was not allowed to be exhibited with the title *Raft of the Medusa*: it was entitled

Shipwreck Scene and hung higher up than the rest and very poorly lit, showing how intolerable the theme was to the representatives of the Bourbon restoration, an event that revealed the corruption of the civil service and the cynicism and egoism of the government.

In the office. In the background, a model of the Pergamon Altar.

DERRICK: Sometimes people have to be eliminated to preserve the class. This is then followed by investigation commissions and special commandos. Like the special Lietze commission that was set up over the Antes scandal in 1986.

HARRY: The legendary flash of lightning Fischer took charge of the case along with 300 more police agents acting for the courts. Over 1,000 investigations were opened against the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and the building industry. Dieppen resigned, Landowsky and Radunski were very scared, Wohlrabe and Pfennig disappeared.

DERRICK: The cases were dismissed due to partiality. The money is no longer handed over in envelopes, but by giving jobs and awarding contracts. The people and their relations continue. Where are the case files?

HARRY: Töpfer still isn't completely in his right mind.

DERRICK: And Dürr?

HARRY (*hands him a photo of Dürr*): In the 80s, Dürr had to refloat AEG, which ended up in a takeover by Daimler. Now he works in the privatisation of the national rail network and is a pioneer in public social hygiene, as well as being the Vice-Chairman of the IHK (Chamber of Commerce and Industry), a member of Berlin 2000 Marketing GmbH and one of the heavyweights in the Transrapid train business.

DERRICK: What about Dieppen?

HARRY (*shows him a photo of Dieppen*): The higher education system is structurally homologous with the ruling class. The effect it produces is the effect of structure. During his law studies, he belonged to a student society with a liking for fencing, which also included Landowsky, Kittelmann, Lummer, Wohlrabe, Kleman, Radunski, Raue and Finkelnburg. In 1971 we was elected to Parliament. In 1985 he became mayor in spite of the many cases of undeclared donations.

DERRICK: And Schremp?

HARRY (*shows him a photo of Schremp*): He's a director of Daimler and debis. He was the contact with the City Council on the Potsdamer Platz deal that was brought before the European Court of Justice on charges of unfair competition. Now debis wants to sell to the City Council an integrated transport concept for several million Deutschmarks.

DERRICK: Stimmann we know about: what about Ernst?

HARRY (*photo of Ernst*): He began his career in 1969 in the commercial and industrial property sector, and in the early 80s he was one of the major players in the first wave of liberalisation in the property market in Frankfurt. After the collapse of the Wall, he concentrated on Central Berlin and the new federal states. By 1991 he was already handling an order book of 2,500 million, which by 1994 had become 6,000 million. He had excellent connections with trust funds, he specialised in buying up lands expropriated from the Nazis – including the Hackeschen Höfe – and he avoided having to return them thanks to Lex Knauth, a close friend of the Chancellor's Office, which in turn is a friend of the CDU, which is who lays down the law.

DERRICK: Right, now let's go to the Reichstag.

3. Scene in front of the Reichstag

First forensic scientist, Derrick, Harry.

FIRST SCIENTIST, *taking soil samples and talking quietly to himself*: One bright morning in September 1871, Humann was brushing sand out of the curly hair of the son of Gaea. In the first 25 days, Humann had at his disposal 20 workers, most of them Bulgarians, whose wages amounted to 800 marks. The watchman was paid 100 marks. 500 for the equipment. Humann's fees amounted to 1,000 marks.

DERRICK: Can we see the first results yet?

FIRST SCIENTIST: Look here in the N, the hands of Dürr and Töpfer, even the upward and downward movements. For K and U, I've even reconstructed the silhouettes. But there's not the slightest trace of the body that was swallowed up by the earth.

HARRY: What about the consistency of the soil?

DERRICK: Let's take some samples for the Geological Institute.

4. Scene in front of the former Geological Institute, which is being transformed into the Ministry of Development

Wissmann, Derrick, Harry. Derrick, Harry and Wissmann standing close together looking at the building. In the background we see workers throwing objects from the building into the containers. The scene starts in the middle of the conversation. Derrick shows the soil samples.

WISSMANN: Of course, with the alterations we've assumed the responsibility for the geological archive. No doubt we'll be able to establish some reference data from your samples.

DERRICK: That's very kind of you, sir...

HARRY (*pointing at him*): ...Wissmann, a member of the CDU youth party for 20 years...

DERRICK: ...Mr. Wissmann, since when has geology been a part of the Ministry of Development's functions?

WISSMANN: Look, Mr. Derrick. Between 1602 and 1734, the Indians buried 150 millions sterling pounds' worth of silver, so that the people would not be afflicted by insanity as had happened to high society. Ministries are no more than the administration of added value, of information, so to speak, of knowledge, of know-how. To which we also add knowledge of the nature of the land and the soil.

DERRICK: Such as the plan for the Schönefeld airport?

WISSMANN: That's not my field, Mr. Derrick. We'll be in touch with you.

During the next sentence we begin to hear very soft music.

Wissmann starts to throw away the samples and sings:

Everything that doesn't blind you is false.

Everything that I don't know belongs to the past, is deep, is vertical.

Everything that I understand is horizontal, horizontal.

My field has a future, my company remains.

My field has a future, my company remains, yes, it remains.

5. Street scene

A camera scans both the façade and the street. The street bustles with workers of the services sector (informers, security van staff, couriers, cleaners, hot dog sellers). In the background we see public and private security personnel in concealed positions aiming guns at the passers-by: now and then one of these drops dead on the ground, while the rest walk on. The police attack a building, tearing down posters showing Berlin's Interior Minister, Schönbohm, characterised as Mr. Clean. A watchman poisons his dog. The camera pans slowly to the end of the street. A text appears superimposed with fragments in each scene.

Everything that doesn't blind you is true.
How can we show investment in action,
and how capital causes movements:
the privileges, the dependences, the drive to eliminate
and the predisposition to betray on each one's part?
How can we describe in detail the flow of funds,
their sources, their course and how they end up in our pockets?
Who will work for that, for how much money, and when will they be fired?
But if we design a picture of the machine
that simulates the market economy,
you'll close your eyes.
First you'll close your eyes to the picture,
then to the memories,
then to the facts
and to the contexts.
We can only give you a rough idea
of how the market economy operates.

6. Scene in the front garden, at the information point

Chrysanthemums. From above we see the last buildings in the street. The camera approaches slowly. At the foot of the building there is an idyllic garden, full of demonstrators and motionless policemen who slowly turn to stone.

View from a shop window. In the window there are people watching the idyll. The following text appears superimposed:

Does each resistance prove its existence only to itself?
Then it does not really exist.

Shortly before this there begins a murmur that repeats at different intervals:

First dissolution, then prohibition of the party, defence of the Constitution, solitary confinement and sentencing of the radicals.

Those for whom we speak, do they really know anything about it,
or do we still hide something up our sleeve, behind our hand,
in a small frame, that seems to float in the air in order to be round?

The murmur continues until the next scene. The characters move back and forth. In the background stand large video cassettes. The heads turn into chrysanthemums.

7. Street scene. Derrick, Harry

Derrick and Harry pass in front of the window.

DERRICK: I wonder why there are no bodies. Why is the handprint the only trace left?

HARRY: "Politicians swallowed up on shaking hands with private capital," that could be the headline.

DERRICK: But Roland Ernst has also disappeared. It must have to do with the contracts themselves, not the individuals or the role they play.

They continue walking along the same street. A limousine almost runs them down.

DERRICK: That was close! It's obvious that someone doesn't want us here. Now let's go to the architects' club.

The street is deserted, except for the bodies of shot passers-by lying everywhere.

8. Scene in the architects' club in Potsdamer Platz

The architects Rogers, Ungers, Kleihues, Kollhoff, Nagel, the Public Works Councillor, Derrick and Harry. The floor of the club is a map of Berlin with huge stains. The architects, suspended, float from one stain to another and sing.

Today we talk about image. In German, the word for "image" means "global face."

When you have a business partner, you have to show him your face.

If you don't show him your face, you're not in a position to decide on your part, to explain your orders, to win your status.

Derrick and Harry walk up to the club.

DERRICK: Here we'll find everyone who was in the foyer of Galeries Lafayette just before Stimmann and Ernst disappeared.

ARCHITECTS: Recently we had 1,500 job vacancies in Alabama.

60,000 people applied, and they didn't ask about the working hours, the wages or sick pay. They only wanted a job.

Wages or sick pay.

They only wanted a job.

Derrick and Harry focussed by the surveillance camera of the architects' club.

HARRY: We'll find the same people at other foundation stone ceremonies: friends of the National Gallery, the Banking Association, the Hauptstadt-Klub, the LTTC Rot Weiß tennis club. I don't know how far this is a matter of individual delinquency.

Derrick rings the bell. The architects look towards the entrance.

HARRY: Good evening, gentlemen, please forgive the interruption. We are the police officers investigating the Töpfer, Diepgen, Ernst and Stimmann cases.

Derrick looks at one of the stains on the floor and reads: density of investment.

DERRICK: I suppose you all knew those gentlemen.

NAGEL: We worked together once in a while.

DERRICK: Some of you are responsible for the building standards.

NAGEL: We're architects, not politicians.

DERRICK: Even so, haven't you been struck by anything – and I use the word advisedly – *strange* in the foundations?

In the background, Kollhoff and Rogers throw architectural models out of the window.

NAGEL (*attempting to avoid the subject*): We were all shocked. I couldn't name you a single person in this room who hasn't suffered total amnesia since then.

Derrick: How unfortunate. If anyone remembers anything, you know where to find us.

They leave the club.

Derrick: But on this surface...

HARRY: We've ordered the strictest examinations of the soil. The archaeologists are working at the incident scene in Potsdamer Platz.

9. Scene at the Infobox in Potsdamer Platz

Audioguide. Room with the busts of the Potsdamer Platz architects.

GUIDE: In October 1995 the Infobox was inaugurated in Potsdamer Platz. This is a pavilion that the major investors use for public relations purposes. Before you are the busts of the architects: Jahn for Sony; Piano, Isozaki, Kollhoff and Rogers for debis; and Grassi for AT&T. Debis is building 19 complexes, Sony seven, AT&T five. A city of gods with strictly clearly separated zones. The administration departments and the office spaces of the executive clans are far away and isolated from the people. We can only give you a minimal notion of the complexity and size of the buildings without completely dazzling you.

A chrysanthemum-head walks across the Infobox area and collapses on the ground. Fade to black.

10. Scene in the chrysanthemums' headquarters

The chrysanthemum-heads move back and forth.

An isolated voice: We always wanted to gather everything we could of the events that shaped the days, and once again, all that remained were the articles that appeared in the newspapers. We live in the midst of these simplifications, in a constant overflow and flood of ideas. And if it's escape that seduces us, it's a compulsory escape. We collapse from exhaustion after spending a whole day surrounded by news bulletins and press reports.

11. Scene in Potsdamer Platz

A black limousine runs across a pile of sand, leaving tyre tracks behind it.

12. Scene in Potsdamer Platz

Second and third forensic scientists, Derrick, Harry.

SECOND SCIENTIST: After the foundation of the German Empire and the fall of the Paris Commune, the Europe of the time stank of police and the capital city demanded treasures – so the excavations continued.

THIRD SCIENTIST: At first, one-third of the excavations corresponded to Prussia and two-thirds to the Grand Vizier. In this state of interdependence, the court relinquished its rights to Constantinople in exchange for 20,000 marks.

They continue working. A pause.

SECOND SCIENTIST: Nothing here, the microanalysis is negative, too. All we have left are the tyre tracks: the profile is easy to recognise.

THIRD SCIENTIST: So can we take the car of one of the perpetrators as a starting point?

SECOND SCIENTIST: The tracks are still fresh. The criminal's car returns to the scene of the crime.

Derrick and Harry greet the scientists.

DERRICK: Have you reached any conclusion?

THIRD SCIENTIST: There's no sign of the bodies of the men who disappeared, but look at this profile.

DERRICK: Very odd. What does it remind you of, Harry?

HARRY: Vectors? It looks like a statistic...

THIRD SCIENTIST: ...charted over a very long time, although the function lines are very far apart.

DERRICK: Thank you very much, gentlemen, you've done a fine job.

13. Scene in Potsdamer Platz

DERRICK: A statistic in the form of a tyre track.

HARRY: In black, income tax: in green, wealth tax.

DERRICK: The statistic produces a logic of progression that may not exist at all.

HARRY: We've examined the film material in detail, we've sent off the moulds, we've interrogated the possible witnesses.

DERRICK: The logic of the disappearance may be fake.

HARRY: But capital continues to flow.

DERRICK: Töpfer, Dieppen, Stimmann and Ernst bowed out in a very peculiar manner.

DERRICK (*becoming two-headed*): The invisible hand, the invisible hand. Have they fooled us? Are we helpless, confused, deceived, duped? Watch out!

The black limousine chases Derrick and Harry across the site. At the end we see two enormous headlights approaching the camera.

End: A carousel.

In the centre, the stone figures of Kollhoff, Stimmann and Ernst, a policeman, a park bench. In the first circle, some "twins" from the services sector. In the second circle, benches, waste bins, protective helmets, brooms, uniforms. In the last circle, members of the film crew. The circles turn against each other. Chrysanthemum heads float above the carousel, singing:

The new type of elite has no place.

The new type of elite is raving mad.

The opposition has no subject.
It floats.
The new type of elite is corporate and composed,
it says: I'm normal.
Everything else is behind us:
corporate pop
a sense dispenser

But you, allow yourselves once more to demolish
the facts that surround you.
Just for once.
To have an idea of nothing, nobody, nowhere.
And then...
nobody, nowhere. And then...

The object of my desire is still foreign to me.
At first it doesn't stare maliciously,
but declares that it's true.
I make it small, to fit into my pocket.
And then the thought beings to possess me: can it be levelled or not?

But you, allow yourselves once more to demolish
the facts that surround you.
Just for once.
To have an idea of nothing, nobody, nowhere.
And then...
nobody, nowhere. And then...
nobody, nowhere. And then...
nobody, nowhere. And then...

The Curved Claw is an animated film that was made in 1997 along with Andreas Siekmann, Josef Strau and Amelie Wulffen.

Textual sources: Peter Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*; Harun Farocki, *The Inextinguishable Fire*; Matthew D. Rose, *Berlin, Capital of Sleaze and Corruption*.