

Maeve Connolly (Exhibition Review), Ulla von Brandenburg, Irish Museum of Modern Art, *Artforum*, December 2008: 313.

Ulla von Brandenburg
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

Taking its title from the “Angel-talks” of Magus John Dee, astronomer, occultist, and consultant to Elizabeth I, Ulla von Brandenburg’s exhibition “Whose beginning is not, nor end cannot be,” was replete with references to doubles, ghosts, and the realm of the supernatural. At one point, the baroque chapel of the Royal Hospital Kilmmainham, the seventeenth-century building that is now home to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, provided the setting for a performance entitled *Holes in the Light*, 2008. This shadow-play, created by von Brandenburg and Julia Hortsman, introduced a live element into the exploration of theatrical props, conventions, and staging devices evident throughout the exhibition. Rows of small chairs were laid out in the chapel, facing the place where an altar once stood and thus invoking the history of the building prior to the establishment of the museum. The configuration also recalled a scene found in von Brandenburg’s *8*, 2007, a looped 16mm film that appears to trace a continuous journey through the baroque Chateau de Chamarande not far from Paris. Each room in the artist’s cinematic castle is occupied by a different *tableau vivant*—one of the scenes is composed of a small group seated in rows, observing from a distance as the death of a young man stretched out on a low bed seems to draw near.

Such self-reference is typical of von Brandenburg’s practice. The tableaux in *8* derive from the artist’s earlier Super-8 films, restaged in Dublin with a new array of performers. *8* is in fact marked by many forms of doubling, from a painting of the castle itself upon which the camera lingers, to the floor plans held aloft in one *tableau* and, finally, the endless mirrors disrupting the boundaries between physical and virtual space. It also incorporates references to many other works in the exhibition, including the 16mm film *Geist* (Ghost), 2007, and various components of the installation *Karo Sieben* (Seven of Diamonds), 2007. Installed in the last of a succession of gallery rooms envisaged by the artist as chapters in a narrative, *8* employs a continuously moving camera that appears to move forward even when it is actually doubling back, hinting at the possibility of a reverse view of both exhibition and museum.

While much of “Whose beginning is not, nor end cannot be” is concerned with movement through architectural and narrative space, the shadow play in the chapel introduced alternative trajectories. Incorporating a live reading of excerpts from Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, the staging of *Holes in the Light* directed attention to the activity of reading through the visible presence of two narrators positioned to one side of a backlit projection screen. A play of shadows upon the screen was created by cut-out silhouettes, interspersed with sequences of fluid improvised movement performed by a single dancer. Although interesting moments occurred at the edge of motion and stasis, particularly in the jerky transitions between cut-outs, the dance sequences were strikingly out of sync with the measured investigation of gesture and theatrical convention found elsewhere in the exhibition. So while *8* offered a compelling reflection on both the architecture of the museum and von Brandenburg’s earlier films, the performance of *Holes in the Light* appeared to probe entirely new territory, an unexpected move for an artist who is wholly attuned to the uncanny power of the familiar.

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