Sander carries brilliant, complex Faraway, So Close

**FARAWAY, SO CLOSE**
Directed by Wim Wenders
Starring Otto Sander, Nastassja Kinski, and Willem Dafoe.
Coolidge Corner Theatre.

**BAD BEHAVIOR**
Directed by Les Blair.
Starring Stephen Rea and Sinead Cusack.
Harvard Film Archive.

Jan. 29, 30.

By Jeremy Hytton

The beginning of Wim Wenders' new film Faraway, So Close is dizzying. Wonders' camera flies across the top of East Berlin and begins to circle the Angel of Victory statue. The camera moves in closer and closer as it spins faster and faster around the Valkyrie-like head. Suddenly a man is standing between the head and wing of the giant warrior.

It is a moving and beautiful sequence. As the background of the city blurs into a confusion of motion, Cassiel (Otto Sander) stands serenely in the foreground surveying the chaos. And then he jumps, and flies through the city.

Faraway, So Close, you see, is about angels. The sequence captures the timeless-ness of angels that Wonders tries to convey; as the world spins by at dizzying speeds, angels stand serenely by and watch. Two of these angels are Cassiel and Raphaela (Nastassja Kinski),surveyors of post-Cold War Berlin. They move through the city and watch their human charges, but can make contact with them only in dreams.

The opening scenes of the movie shot in a luminous black and white show Cassiel struggling against the boundary between men and angels. Cassiel moves, seemingly at random, from place to place, watching Konrad (Heinz Ruhmann) an aged chauffeur-tinker with his 50-year-old cars, or Hanna (Monika Hansen), a working single mother, care for her sick, young daughter Raissa (Aline Krajewski), or stands behind Mikhail Gorbachev (as himself) pondering the world's future.

There is an odd, but intriguing dynamic at work in these scenes: Cassiel longs to make contact with these people, and Sander captures perfectly the terrible sadness Cassiel's distance generates; his face, mouth betray no emotion, but his eyes ache. At the same time, Cassiel watches so intently that it is hard not to be uneasy. Is this guy an angel or a voyeur?

There doesn't seem to be much plot in these early scenes, until Cassiel the watcher is joined by another spy, a man (Rudiger Volger), who watches Cassiel's charges. Just as this complication starts to develop, though, Raissa falls off the balcony of her 10th-floor apartment. Cassiel is forced to act, and in an instant, he is standing on the ground below with the child in his arms — and the movie is now in color. He has given up his serene, angelic existence for the colorful, fast-paced life of a human.

Sander is again wonderfully expressive as a man-child learning what it is like to be human. Sander navigates an enormous emotional range, capturing Cassiel's absolute joy at seeing the world as it is (we imagine that angels see in black and white, too), and the poignancy of his separation from Raphaela. In one painful scene, Cassiel sits in a booth with his picture taken, and he longs to be with her; the film moves abruptly to black and white and we see that Raphaela is actually there, holding him and rigging the camera playfully, but he can't see her.

The biggest change for Cassiel in the new world is his sudden concern for time. It is also one of the weak points of the script, by Wenders, Ulrich Zeiger, and Richard Reitinger. Apparently, angels have trouble getting used to time and the script tries to set up some great

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