



*The
Teachers'
Lounge &
Playground*

Allegory &
Anthropology









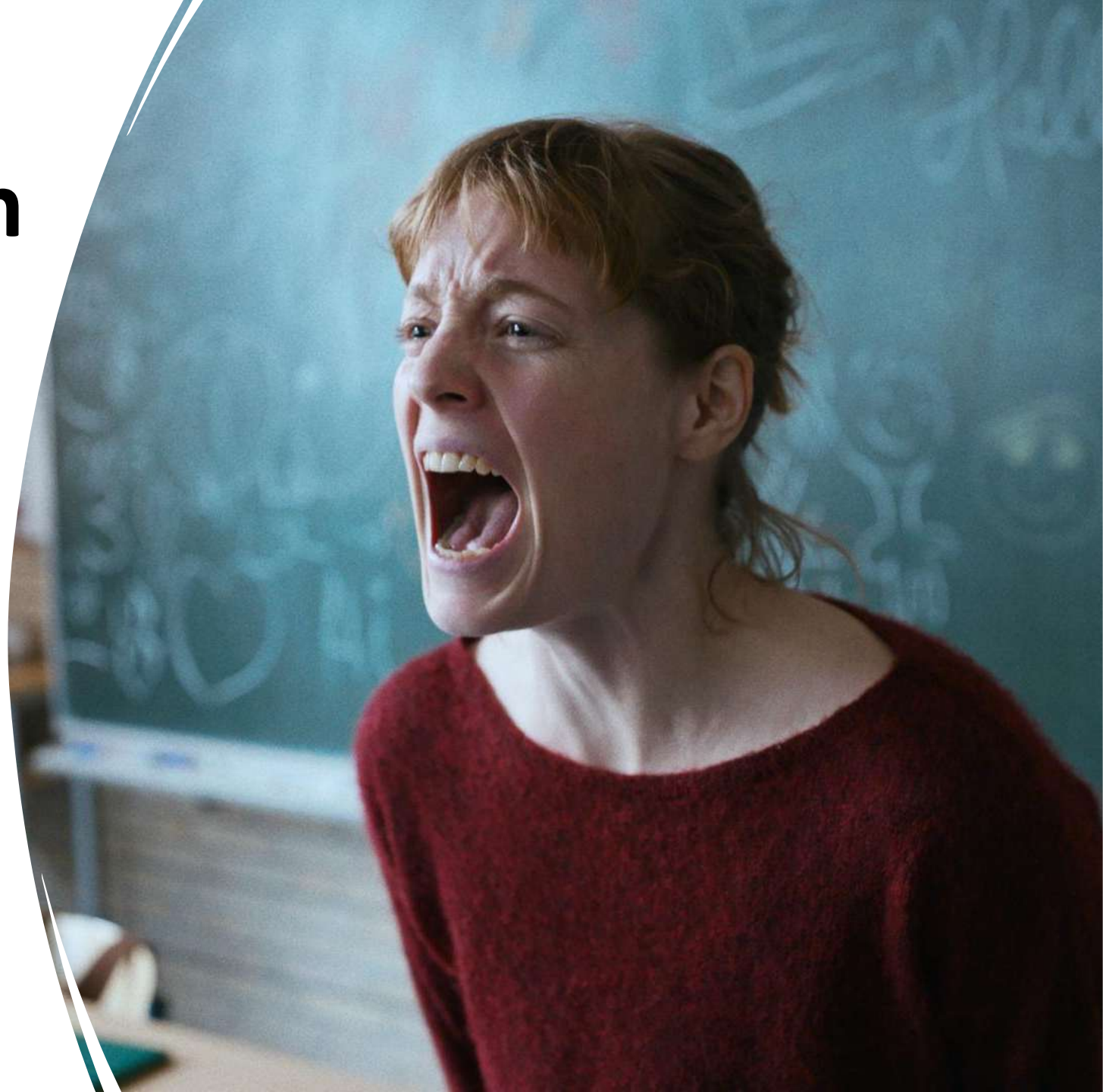
Pupils v. Teachers

- 'Most films [about schools] are on the side of children, who regard their teachers with contempt. This is partly a calculated move on the part of filmmakers to win sympathy for their child characters [...] There is a further perception, apparently prevalent in many countries, that teachers are a socially inferior class, badly paid, and in many cases emotionally isolated, as though being confined to years of contact with children marked them out as not quite adequate adults'. David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image* (2006)



Malevolent children

- **The film is very good at evoking the glittering malevolence of children:** it calls to mind Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009) and Laura Wandel's *Playground* (2022), films that, like Çatak's, cast the classroom as a place in which adults are outnumbered and ultimately ineffective. (Catherine Wheatley, *Sight & Sound*)



The School as Microcosm

A photograph of a classroom. A teacher is standing on the right side, facing the students. The students are seated at blue desks, some are looking at books or papers. The room has large windows on the right and a brick wall in the background. The overall atmosphere is quiet and focused.

For many of us, school is our first exposure to politics, the first act of institutionalisation, entering into a system of testing, lockers and classrooms that – for good or ill – teaches us about life. (Bruno Savill De Jong, BFI)



Ilker Çatak, The *Teachers' Lounge* (2023)

- 'So, every school has its own politics, even in **Germany**. We did a lot of research, and there are schools that are very liberal, and then there are schools that are law-and-order, with zero tolerance. **Every school we went to felt like a different country**: you have a dean, you have people in charge, and they are aligned with the dean (or not). **And you have a school paper, which is like our media**'. Ilker Çatak

A complex social system

- Carla Nowak finds that her ideals as a teacher are challenged by the messy reality of the school as a social space.
- Teachers who view their roles in different ways.
- Pupils with different perspectives on school and education.
- Pupils who know how to use the rules to their advantage.
- Pupils who replicate behaviours from the adult world.
- Parents.
- Migration/democracy/respect/truth.
- **Not just different truths, but different criteria/mechanisms for arriving at truths.**

'Debate culture'

- 'You mentioned 2016, which is when the Trump era began with this whole notion of alternative facts. When we were writing this, we thought, "Wouldn't it be cool to dig into that? What is truth?" **We wanted to pose that question and examine how everyone is trying to make up their own truth**'. Ilker Çatak
- 'Right, well it was complex. But the crucial thing to understand is that a proof needs a derivation that builds up step by step. We'll get there, don't worry'. Carla Nowak



'Mean modern society'

- A situation that is undefined and not complete is taken up as a cause without adequate facts. And a coalition of people who aren't nearly as informed as they believe they are, feel empowered by their own conclusions and defiant when challenged. They become resolutely committed to what they think, without question. [...] There [are] power structures in the school system that have been there for a long time, and everyone it seems, pushes to express themselves within the structure, not noticing the effect on individuals.
- *The Teachers' Lounge*: Mean Modern Society Plays Out In Microcosm in German Oscar Contender





Laura Wandel: *Un monde* (2021)

- 'First of all, I like that it's a very open title. It can refer to many things: the world of school, the world of childhood... Secondly, you will see that many things happen in the playground that I think [are] also happening in society. **So, it's also a reflection of the conflicts in the world in general.**'



'Semi-feral' children

- *Playground's* French title, *Un monde*, translates as “a world”, and the school is just that: the squat, blocky buildings and treacherous strip of asphalt are a hostile and inescapable environment. There is no respite – either for the audience or for the kids who find themselves outcasts in **the semi-feral pack dynamic of childhood**. (Wendy Ide, *The Guardian*)





Childhood on film

- Attempting to engage with the 'otherness' of childhood.
- Exploring the emotional and intellectual life of children.
- Exploring the complex ways in which that otherness is connected to the adult world.



Children as heroic figures

School - learning

- Social groups – hierarchies, bullying, recognition.
- Knowledge – scale, danger, wider social world.
- Power structures – silence, alliances, secrets, adult world.
- Friendship – trust, co-operation.
- Sense of self – being a body in the world, integrity of self.



Off-screen

- Your film presents a very closed world – just the school, specifically the playground. Why did you decide not to show the children’s home lives?
- 'I wanted off-screen space to be really important – I wanted viewers to imagine what they needed, in regards to the children’s families. I wanted to stay within that microcosm: **it actually opens things up more than closes them in**'. Laura Wandel



'Un monde'

- First of all, I like that it's a very open title. It can refer to many things: the world of school, the world of childhood... Secondly, you will see that many things happen in the playground that I think is also happening in society. So it's also a reflection of the conflicts in the world in general.
- <https://blog.moondayapp.com/laura-wandel-interview>

UN MONDE

Absent adults

- There isn't always an adult in the room when you need one.
- Adults don't know everything.
- Adults are sometimes not up to the job of being adults.



Bullying

- 'It's still frighteningly relevant to our adult lives as well, and although we can handle such situations better (or at least we like to think so), it's everywhere we look [...]. **It's a relentless cycle that dates back to our days in the schoolyard, effectively creating large parts of who we were, are and who we are still becoming'**.

<https://www.poorlywrittenmusings.com/post/review-playground-2022>



Alliance-omerta

- Alliance is central feature of the social world.
- Can you build relationships on the basis of alliance?
- Can you build a society on the basis of alliance?





An immersive experience

- 'Very early on, I had this intuition to film in this way, to adopt this immersive aspect in order. To be as close as possible to what Nora lives and feels, so that viewers project themselves into this story and project elements of their own experience on it. Everything is at the service of Nora, of her perception'. Laura Wandel

Making a film *with(?)* children

- Workshops with the children over a long period.
- Building the brother-sister bond.
- The children created storyboards.
- Supported by a speech therapist and coaches.

