

Katharina:

*„The longer we wait, the more we dream.*

*We're playing a game, motionless, in our thoughts.*

*Our whole life.“*

Steffen:

*„Than come with me. Now.“*



Theresa Scholze

Max Riemelt

a film by Christian Moris Müller

# Icons of Light

The movie about making a radical new start in life.

Drama | 81 Minutes

# Icons of Light

Lichtgestalten

High-Resolution Images and Video Files are available on [www.film-lichtgestalten.de](http://www.film-lichtgestalten.de)

Contact: [presse@film-lichtgestalten.de](mailto:presse@film-lichtgestalten.de)

## CONTENTS

Crew/Cast	1
Synopsis	2
About the Film	3
Actors & Director	5
Statement by the Director	6

Katharina	Theresa Scholze
Steffen	Max Riemelt
Robert	Sebastian Schwarz
Paul	Max Woelky

## CAST

1

## CREW

Script & Directing	Christian Moris Müller
Director of photography	Mario Krause
Setdesign	Paola Cordero Yannarella
Costume	Gioia Raspé
Make-up arist	Marlen Elstner
Cutter	David J. Rauschning
Music	Phillip Feneberg, Felix Raffel, Chandra Fleig
Sound recording	Benjamin Kalisch, Lukas Lücke
Sound mixing	Fabian Weigmann
Dramaturge	Alexander Kunja
Production manager	Martin Danisch
Producer	Christian Moris Müller
Film fund	Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg

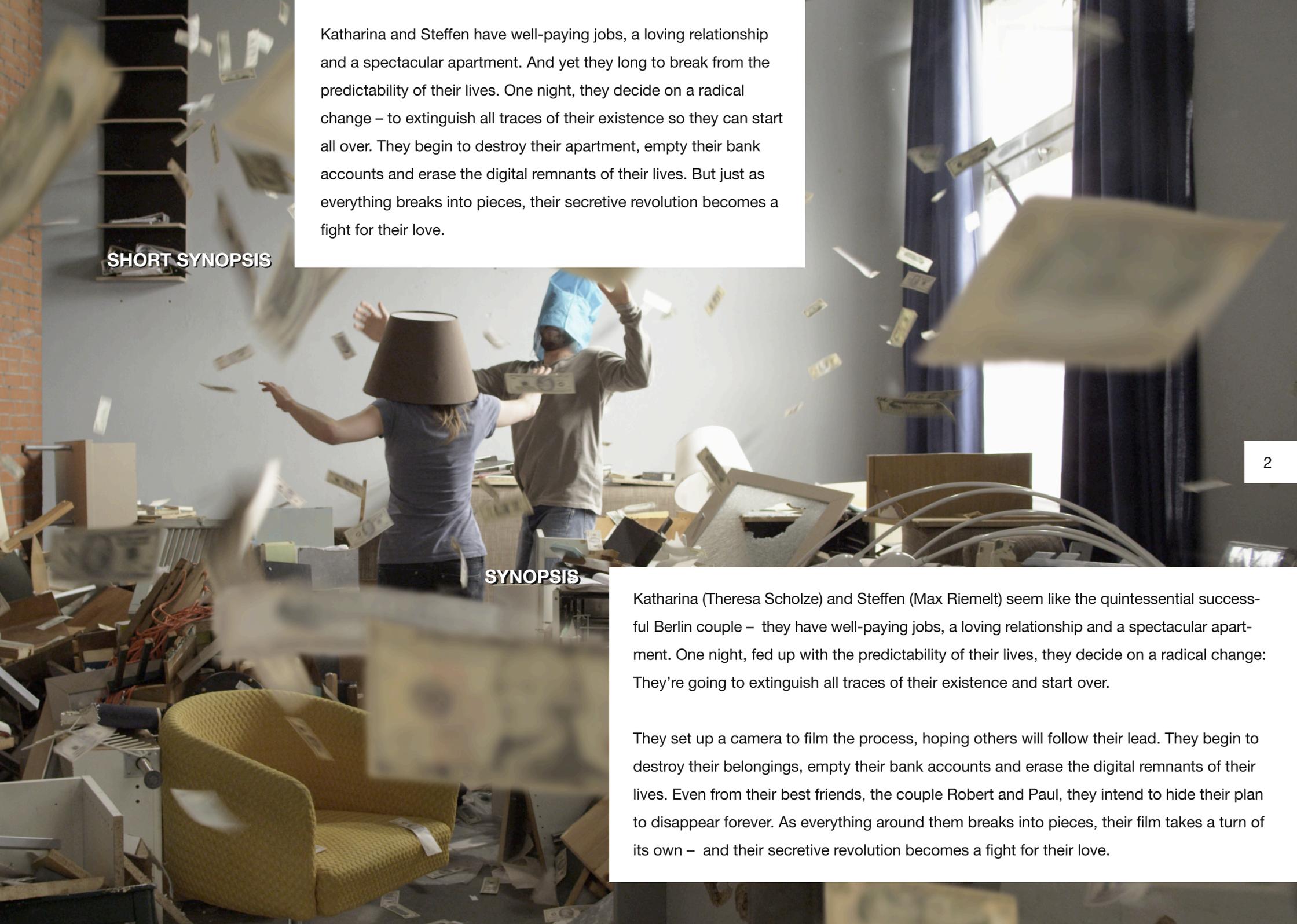
Christian Moris Müller Filmproduktion

ARRI  
RENTAL

BASIS  
berlin

cinechromatix  
Berlin

medienboard  
Berlin-Brandenburg

A cinematic still from a film showing a man and a woman in a cluttered apartment. The woman is wearing a blue t-shirt and has a lampshade on her head. The man is wearing a grey hoodie and a blue paper bag on his head. They are surrounded by falling banknotes and debris. A yellow armchair is in the foreground, and a window with blue curtains is in the background.

Katharina and Steffen have well-paying jobs, a loving relationship and a spectacular apartment. And yet they long to break from the predictability of their lives. One night, they decide on a radical change – to extinguish all traces of their existence so they can start all over. They begin to destroy their apartment, empty their bank accounts and erase the digital remnants of their lives. But just as everything breaks into pieces, their secretive revolution becomes a fight for their love.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

## SYNOPSIS

Katharina (Theresa Scholze) and Steffen (Max Riemelt) seem like the quintessential successful Berlin couple – they have well-paying jobs, a loving relationship and a spectacular apartment. One night, fed up with the predictability of their lives, they decide on a radical change: They're going to extinguish all traces of their existence and start over.

They set up a camera to film the process, hoping others will follow their lead. They begin to destroy their belongings, empty their bank accounts and erase the digital remnants of their lives. Even from their best friends, the couple Robert and Paul, they intend to hide their plan to disappear forever. As everything around them breaks into pieces, their film takes a turn of its own – and their secretive revolution becomes a fight for their love.

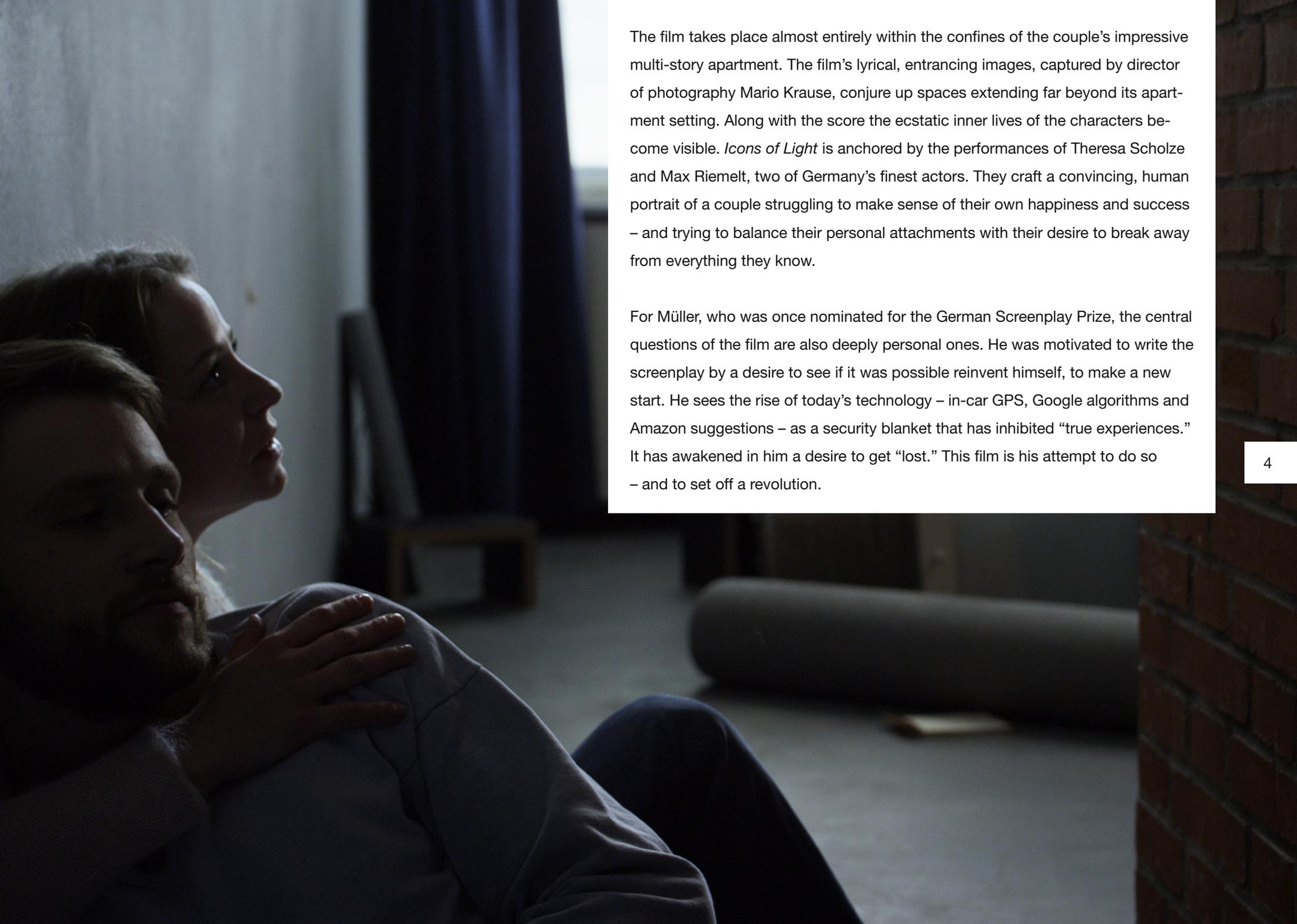


## ABOUT THE FILM

On its surface, *Icons of Light* (Lichtgestalten) the new film by Christian Moris Müller, is the story of a couple trying to find their place in the world. In many ways, Katharina and Steffen, the film's two thirty-something main characters, are living the bourgeois bohemian dream. They have a spectacular apartment, a loving relationship, thriving creative careers. They are both happily plugged into the digital world, obsessively documenting and sharing their lives on social media and on video.

But deeper down, like many other people in their position, the two share a sense of unease about not only their relationship with technology but about the deeper meaning of their own success. So the two embark on an experiment: methodically destroying or giving away all of their belongings while filming the process. In doing so, they hope to spur the launch of a movement to reclaim the spontaneity and immediacy of a truly lived life.

As this project progresses, *Icons of Light*, which is made up of the couple's own fictional recordings, picks apart not only the motivations of its protagonists, but some of the great anxieties of our contemporary times: about the role of money, the value of professional success, the ambiguous effects of technology on our daily lives and, above all, the importance of love. It does so with openness and ambiguity, and a sense of generosity towards its two flawed, complex protagonists.



The film takes place almost entirely within the confines of the couple's impressive multi-story apartment. The film's lyrical, entrancing images, captured by director of photography Mario Krause, conjure up spaces extending far beyond its apartment setting. Along with the score the ecstatic inner lives of the characters become visible. *Icons of Light* is anchored by the performances of Theresa Scholze and Max Riemelt, two of Germany's finest actors. They craft a convincing, human portrait of a couple struggling to make sense of their own happiness and success – and trying to balance their personal attachments with their desire to break away from everything they know.

For Müller, who was once nominated for the German Screenplay Prize, the central questions of the film are also deeply personal ones. He was motivated to write the screenplay by a desire to see if it was possible reinvent himself, to make a new start. He sees the rise of today's technology – in-car GPS, Google algorithms and Amazon suggestions – as a security blanket that has inhibited "true experiences." It has awakened in him a desire to get "lost." This film is his attempt to do so – and to set off a revolution.

## THE ACTORS

THERESA SCHOLZE has already worked together with director Christian Moris Müller as the protagonist of his feature film *Four Windows (Vier Fenster)*. Following the film's world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival, her bold and realistic portrayal was highly praised by viewers and critics alike. She first gained public attention next to Ulrich Mühe in the widely acclaimed television series *The last Witness (Der letzte Zeuge)*. Theresa Scholze was also a hit with audiences as the female lead in the telenovela *Alisa – follow your heart (Alisa – Folge deinem Herzen)*. She has been nominated for the Grimme Award.

MAX RIEMELT is one of Germany's most celebrated actors. He has received countless awards in Germany and abroad for outstanding performances in films such as *Before the Fall (Napola)*, *The Wave (Die Welle)*, *We Are the Night (Wir sind die Nacht)* and *Free Fall (Freier Fall)*, and in the television series *In Face of the Crime (Im Angesicht des Verbrechens)*. He is currently filming as lead actor in the American series *Sense8*, directed by Andy and Lana Wachowski (*Matrix*) and Tom Tykwer (*Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*).

## THE WRITER AND DIRECTOR

CHRISTIAN MORIS MÜLLER first gained success with his outstanding feature film *Four Windows (Vier Fenster)*, which had its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival and won the Franz Hofer Prize. He then directed the visually stunning film *Icons of Light (Lichtgestalten)*, with Theresa Scholze and Max Riemelt in the leading roles. Together with Alexander Kunja, he was nominated for the German Screenplay Award for their script in the historical film *On the Horizon (Am Horizont)*.

Before receiving a degree in film direction from the Munich College of Film and Television, he studied acting and theater direction at the Herbert Berghoff Studio in New York City. He also has a degree in communication and fashion design from the German Master School for Fashion. At an early age, he studied at the Heinz Bosl Foundation's Ballet Academy in Munich and created photographic works that have been presented at the Neue Pinakothek in Munich.



## STATEMENT ABOUT THE FILM by Christian Moris Müller

6

### **A Leap into the Unknown**

Twenty years ago, my father decided to start his life over. He wanted to start from scratch again to get a second chance at happiness. His decision continues to haunt me today. At a time when day-to-day navigation systems are meant to make our lives all the more secure, it makes me want to lose myself, to embark again on a quest for unforeseen discoveries.

I wanted to make a film about what it would be like to think about freedom in the middle of one's life. Even just the thought of an irreversible new start at life is risky. Perhaps one might give it a try if not alone. *Icons of light* (Lichtgestalten) is a story about two people who gather so much strength from their love that they're able to overcome their own limitations. Hand in hand, they face a leap into the unknown.

### **Freedom**

Katharina and Steffen fear that they may have lost their way over the last few years. They know that they have since outgrown their childhood dreams, but what has replaced them? One night they ask themselves: "Would we have the courage to just let everything go and begin somewhere all over again?" So many people have thought about it, but the thought is usually gone in a day. Katharina and Steffen couldn't let that thought go.

Their best friends, the couple Robert and Paul, are not sympathetic to their plan to disconnect from everything and everyone. The two men are looking for a way to integrate into society. Sebastian Schwarz plays the role of Robert, full of internal conflicts. He says confidently to Katharina: "It's a mind game. A truly self-determined life doesn't exist." But after a while he wonders: "If you're happy with your transition then you put my whole life into question as well. If you fail, you take my hope with you."

**Screenplay**

I didn't just want to portray the suffering of Katharina and Steffen; I also wanted to make their unfulfilled yearning palpable. I looked for forms and movements that, together with the music and sound design, created a cosmos apt for viewers to bring in their own fantasies. The surface of the film needed to be open and non-descript, though a carefully constructed matrix lies underneath. The dramaturge, Alexander Kunja, was a valued partner in the development and steering of this matrix. He has a truly remarkable imagination.

### **Theresa Scholze**

Theresa's precision as an actress was still fresh in my mind from working together on *Four Windows* (Vier Fenster). She quickly senses what I want to create in each scene. While working, we can often communicate in half-sentences. For example, she once performed uninterrupted for five minutes and I only said: "The gasp, a bit gloomier, but only at the last moment, already in movement." Theresa, amused, replied: "Gloomier." She implemented it perfectly in the very next take. We didn't need to discuss which gasp was meant, and we both didn't really know how to act out a gasp with more gloom. But it worked. With Theresa I can be exceptionally discriminating, and yet she always performs with the same lightness and ease.

### **Max Riemelt**

As an actor, Max Riemelt is extraordinarily authentic. Direct access to a scene provides him with clarity and strength. This was especially useful in *Icons of Light* to offset the film's contemplative underpinning with something tangible and corporeal. While working with Max, I discovered that things get especially exciting on the set when I open wide the possibilities for him as an actor and prepare things well for his arrival. He enters like a gust of wind. With skillful movement he transforms the setting and incites immense fascination.



## Cinematography

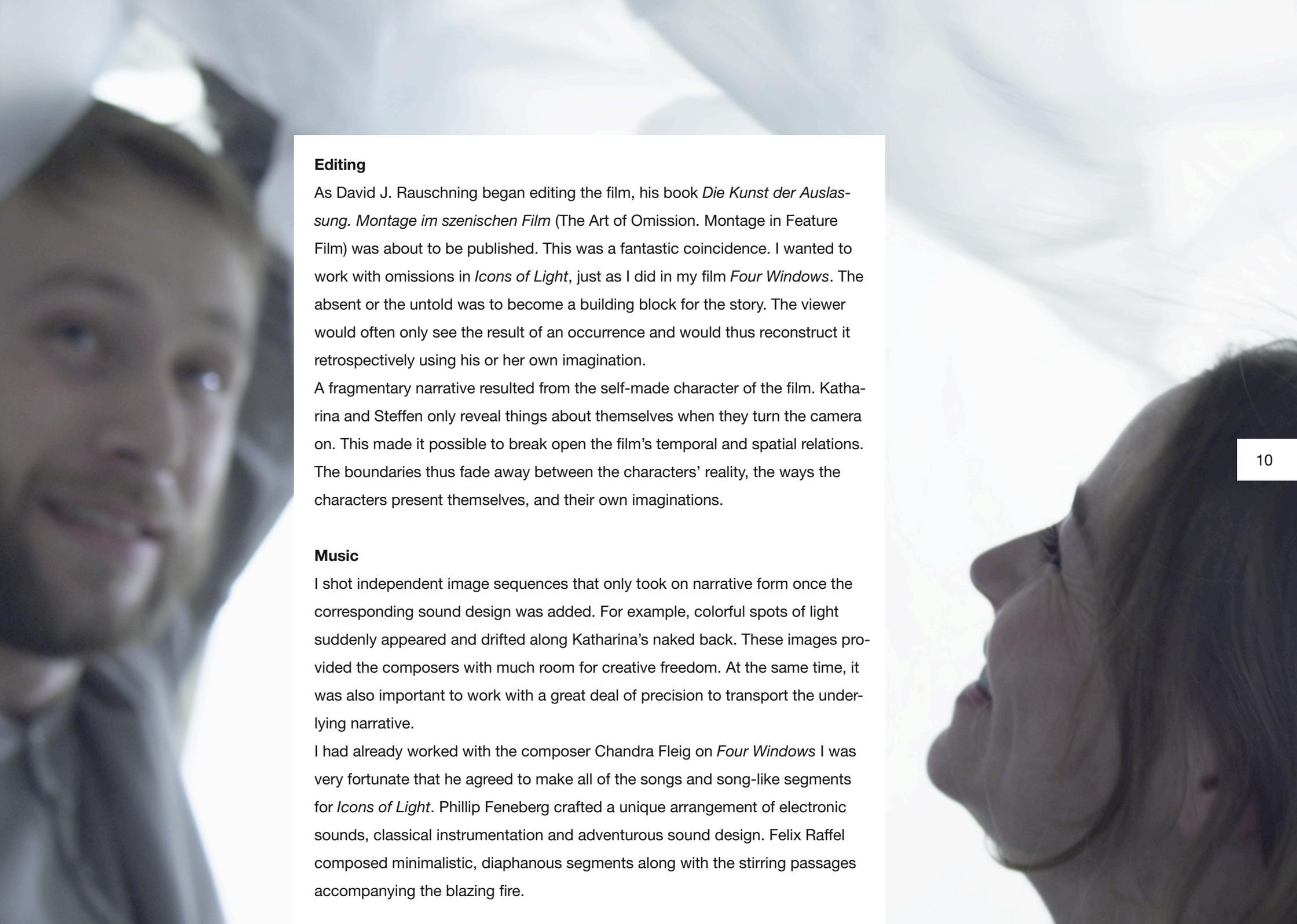
The main characters could have shot the entire film themselves. With the cameraman, Mario Krause, I opted to not make use of the pseudo-authentic style of home video. We wanted to start at a higher aesthetic level to make it possible to further develop the film visually.

In all of his precisely arranged images, Mario always looked for the tender moment. He captured each scene from such an interior place, it's as though his camera is another character of the film that moves unseen through the rooms and provides comfort right where it is needed.

## Set Design

The set designer, Paola Cordero Yannarella, looked for an interesting dichotomy in every detail of her work. Katharina and Steffen's apartment is a space of comfort and emotional intimacy. At the same time, an obscure hunger for adventure shimmers throughout. We built several intermediate worlds, such as the constricted architecture under the mezzanine staircase. Using a particular lighting arrangement we were able to take the characters out of their everyday context. Instead, their sinister interior world flickered for just a moment. During the film, the characters thus transform their surroundings themselves. The bleaker the rooms become, the louder the call to flee resonates.



The background of the page is a blurred, artistic photograph of a man and a woman. The man is on the left, looking towards the right. The woman is on the right, looking towards the left. The image is out of focus, creating a soft, ethereal atmosphere.

## Editing

As David J. Rauschnig began editing the film, his book *Die Kunst der Auslassung. Montage im szenischen Film* (The Art of Omission. Montage in Feature Film) was about to be published. This was a fantastic coincidence. I wanted to work with omissions in *Icons of Light*, just as I did in my film *Four Windows*. The absent or the untold was to become a building block for the story. The viewer would often only see the result of an occurrence and would thus reconstruct it retrospectively using his or her own imagination.

A fragmentary narrative resulted from the self-made character of the film. Katharina and Steffen only reveal things about themselves when they turn the camera on. This made it possible to break open the film's temporal and spatial relations. The boundaries thus fade away between the characters' reality, the ways the characters present themselves, and their own imaginations.

## Music

I shot independent image sequences that only took on narrative form once the corresponding sound design was added. For example, colorful spots of light suddenly appeared and drifted along Katharina's naked back. These images provided the composers with much room for creative freedom. At the same time, it was also important to work with a great deal of precision to transport the underlying narrative.

I had already worked with the composer Chandra Fleig on *Four Windows* I was very fortunate that he agreed to make all of the songs and song-like segments for *Icons of Light*. Phillip Feneberg crafted a unique arrangement of electronic sounds, classical instrumentation and adventurous sound design. Felix Raffel composed minimalistic, diaphanous segments along with the stirring passages accompanying the blazing fire.



### Production

All through the preparation phase and while filming, I needed to be as free as possible for directing. My entire production team accomplished so much during this time. The production manager, Martin Danisch, arrived with more determination than I ever expected. I can hardly imagine how *Icons of Light* would have been possible without him.

### Icons of Light

Working on an artistic film, one meets people who take risks. They go under the radar for some length of time, driven by the hope that there might be something meaningful to discover.

*Icons of Light* describes precisely this hope. The film is meant to spark the courage to embark on a new epoch.