

HANS LÖW



ELENA RADONICICH

IN MY ROOM



A FILM BY
ULRICH KÖHLER

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Armin is getting too old for his night life habits and the woman he likes. He's not really happy, but can't picture living a different life. One morning he wakes up: the world looks the same as always, but mankind has disappeared. – A film about the frightening gift of maximum freedom.





COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR

"Armin lives alone and avoids commitment. Whether he loves his freedom too much or is running from responsibility – he has left his options open for so long, most are now missed opportunities. He lives from day to day, takes what he can and avoids looking into the future. Only after losing someone he loves does he begin asking questions. When he wakes up in an empty world, he needs to make a decision. He chooses life. And when he meets the last woman on earth he believes in love for the first time. But even in paradise the question arises: Can the possibility of happiness withstand reality?"

Like the main character Armin and many others of my generation, I grew up in a liberal household without any existential hardships. After high school graduation many doors were open. We didn't think about choosing a career or starting a family right away because the possibilities seemed endless. The sense of being able to start over at any time is part of my identity, just as much as refusing to conform to materialistic logic and security mindedness.

But as you advance in age, the range of possibilities quickly becomes narrower, regardless of which path you take. Not committing to anything, as

Armin does, doesn't mean that all doors will remain open. The constraints of our generation look different, but do we really have more freedom than our parents did? How does this freedom manifest itself? Our dignity relies on the belief that we create our own biographies.

The protagonists in this film experience a catastrophe and are given the chance to reshape their lives. But they can't start from scratch, they're dragging their past with them. Kirsí's faith in love has been shaken and Armin has never lived with a woman before.

On the peak of its crisis the film leaves realism behind and throws the protagonist into a deserted world. The narrative follows the inner logic of the character and deliberately refuses a realistic explanation for this deviation. Thus Armin's crisis is deepened and fundamental questions about human nature arise. The disappearance of man serves as the framework for an experiment which explores the conflict between the desire for both freedom and intimacy. This film raises the question if we humans are capable of reinventing ourselves.

IN MY ROOM is not a dystopian movie – disaster and the destruction of mankind are not the focus of this film – it's a "realistic" story with an unrealistic premise, the love story of the last humans on earth."



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1969 in Marburg, Germany, Ulrich Köhler studied Fine Arts in Quimper, France, philosophy in Hamburg and later Visual Communication at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg, where he also made his first short films. His feature films "Bungalow" and "Windows on Monday" premiered at Berlinale and screened at many festivals worldwide, winning national and international awards (Buenos Aires, Thessaloniki...). His latest movie "Sleeping Sickness" premiered in Competition at Berlinale and won the Silver Bear for Best Directing.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2018 IN MY ROOM

2011 SLEEPING SICKNESS (SCHLAFKRANKHEIT)

2006 WINDOWS ON MONDAY (MONTAG KOMMEN DIE FENSTER)

2002 BUNGALOW



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Ulrich Köhler in conversation with Martin Hossbach.
Berlin, 15.3.2018.

"In My Room" is your first genre film – even if the genre isn't all that easy to define.

My first thoughts on this project came about while reading, not watching films. Marlen Haushofer's "The Wall," Arno Schmidt's "Black Mirror" or David Markson's "Wittgenstein's Mistress" are not easy to classify, either. The absence of others allows them to view humans in isolation and free of social constraints. These are not dystopian texts. Schmidt's protagonist is even quite happy about being alone.

At its core, "In My Room" is probably a castaway narrative. It entails childlike fantasies of a simple, self-sufficient life in nature.

The film's title is the same as that of a bitter-sweet Beach Boys song

"Now it's dark and I'm alone, but I won't be afraid, in my room..." To me, Armin is already a Crusoe: Even before humanity disappears, he has withdrawn, shut the door and is letting no one in. In the second part of the film, when he wants to open the door, it's too late. Kirsi is similar to Armin at the start of the film; Disappointed by bourgeois life, she has become a nomad. The two protagonists have taken paths leading in opposite directions.



An inversion of traditional gender roles?

Yes, she is restless, a hunter, and he is sedentary, a farmer who wants to start a family and create a new world. She doesn't believe in the future and wants to experience something in the time that remains. Armin doesn't take this seriously. She's his Eve, his dream must also be her dream. The two of them don't succeed in reconciling their different views. Romantic love is a symbiotic concept and doesn't prepare us particularly well for the compromises of everyday life.

The two of them don't manage to free themselves from their biographies.

Yes, you could say Armin is free because he dares to make a fresh start. Conversely, you could say Kirsi is free because she refuses to accept the logic of the situation. If the last woman meets the last man, that doesn't necessarily mean they have to become a couple. We tend to blame social constraints for our lack of freedom and overlook the fact that our biographies make us who we are. We've internalized countless things and freedom may possibly be wasted on us.

Do we need to know what happened on the night that mankind vanished?

No. The disappearance is a postulate that heightens the inner condition of the protagonist. I'm no prophet, the film doesn't offer

a vision of the future. Unlike dystopian cinema, it's not about warning against undesirable aberrations or investigating causes. The deserted world is an experimental design that asks if – when freed of social constraints – we could make a fresh start.

Kirsi asks: "Why do you live in Germany? You could live anywhere."

Yes, it's the audacious thesis that after a short trip to the south, the last person on earth settles in the district of Lippe, Germany. Armin remains in a place he knows. If all possibilities are open to you, you can also choose what's close at hand.

You call the second part the "Paradise Part." Why?

If Aldi, Lidl, Kik and Rewe were to be taken back by nature, then to me this is not a horrific scenario – in this regard, the disappearance has a romantic aspect. Armin feels at home and does things he completely refused to in his previous life. He takes responsibility, takes care of his animals and garden.

"Back to the roots?"

The way Armin endeavors to live self-sufficiently isn't without irony. His rejection of the internal combustion engine has no particular ecological significance in a world devoid of humans. I can understand Kirsi making fun of his hydroelectric power station and horse-drawn cart.

It must've been difficult to work with so many animals, right?

Animals aren't more complicated than people. Armin's mare, Eibe, for example, was a peaceful work horse; she came from a nearby farm that's worked exclusively by horse. Incidentally, her owner plays the hunter in the first part of the film. One problem, however, was Eibe's aversion to goats. She hated her stable because goats had been provisionally housed there. She couldn't stand the smell and perpetually wanted to break out.

I, on the other hand, really came to appreciate goats. They're clever, inquisitive and idiosyncratic, and you can always negotiate with them if you have a few tasty beech branches to hand.

The physical transformation of Armin in the "Paradise Part" is impressive. How did Hans Löw, the leading actor, prepare for it?

Hans was great fun to work with, he's very physical. He used to play handball and was on the national youth team. His metamorphosis is crucial for the inner transformation of the character. Both leading actors spent a lot of time in nature in the weeks prior to the shoot. They were with hunters in the forest, cared for the animals, fed chickens, milked goats, and even slept in the hut. They were meant to get to know the world their characters inhabit.



How did you find Elena Radonicich, the actress who plays Kirsi?

We looked for Kirsi for a very long time. Elena was the first candidate I could believe to have lived alone for five years. Her autonomy was astonishing.

Let's talk about the first part of the film. How did you develop the sequence in the house of the dying grandmother?

To a degree, this goes back to personal experience. The writing wasn't the hard part, it was the shoot I was afraid of. I found myself in a moral quandary about filming a death and expecting a very old woman to play the role. Ruth Bickelhaupt, the actress who plays the grandmother, relieved me of this fear. Ruth is 96 years old and cooler than most of her younger colleagues. She's director Axel Ranisch's grandmother and also acts in his films. I'd warned her that she would have to lie in bed doing the death rattle whilst letting completely unfamiliar men insert her dentures, but Ruth was just curious. She assumed the task with both humor and great earnestness, which was very touching. The woman who jumped out of bed after the take, had a joke on her lips and nothing in common with the dying old lady in the film.

The grandmother's house looks like it can't have been invented.

And it wasn't. When we visited the location, we very swiftly

decided in its favor. The house was so detailed and multifaceted, several generations of musicians had lived there. There were heaps of sheet music everywhere. It was a gift, although with all its nooks and crannies, it was a real challenge to light and shoot.

How does one have nature reconquer a small town?

We owe our success to the enthusiasm of the Vlotho community, the persuasive power of our production manager, Fee Buck, and the set designer team. We asked the residents not to mow or prune their front yards for six months. I'm very grateful to the people who participated. For some of them it was a real challenge.

And the video store where Kirsi and Armin "rent out" films?

It was a lucky find. We happened to pass this overgrown building. We thought nobody would believe us, it would look digitally recreated. But the video store really existed, it was still in operation ... As I was later to learn, Jörg Buttgereit had already shot there some years before us.

Maybe you can say something about working with your cameraman, Patrick Orth.

We've known each other since our studies at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg – the same goes for set designers Jochen Dehn and Silke Fischer. Patrick has been the DOP of



all my films. We're so attuned that I can concentrate fully on acting-direction. We make a shot list beforehand and, after rehearsals, usually know where we want the camera. Patrick is also a good dramaturge and offers advice on casting. In a word, he's involved to a varying extent at all levels.

The disco scene is very successful – many films fail to convincingly depict dancing people.

We actually did shoot the scene documentary-style, that is, at a club on a normal evening. The ravers knew that the film was being shot, so the cover charge was reduced. Our actors mingled with the dancers, and the result was these unfeigned club scenes. It was fun, just like shooting the demo-scene – it was also a 'real' demo. In the future, I want to work more often in this "embedded" fashion. Inserting a fictional character into a real situation is good for a control freak, it means I have to let things be.



After "Windows on Monday," this is the Pet Shop Boys' second appearance in one of your films, which can hardly be entirely due to your music consultant, can it?

No, I adore them, too, they're the quintessence of pop. But I wasn't so aware of "Later Tonight," that was your suggestion for the scene in Armin's Berlin apartment. The genius of the song is that it works simultaneously as source music and score. Armin could be listening to this kind of music – his generation

grew up with "West End Girls". At the same time, the song is an external commentary that intensifies the emotion of the scene, a beautiful ballad about loneliness and forsakenness. Indeed, it might also have occurred to us to use it as the concluding song. Why didn't we think of that sooner?

Ulrich Köhler and Martin Hossbach met during the post-production of "Windows on Monday." Hossbach helped him to clarify the rights for "To Speak is a Sin" by the Pet Shop Boys and has since been involved on all Köhler films as a music consultant.

MAIN CAST BIOGRAPHY

HANS LÖW

Hans Löw graduated at the Otto Falckenberg School for Acting in Munich and soon became well known as a stage actor at major German theaters in Hamburg, Berlin and Stuttgart. Since 2001 he earned further reputation in TV and cinema, working with renowned directors such as Lars Kaume, Sherry Hormann, Detlev Buck, Sonja Heiss, Maren Ade and Sam Gabarski. The role of Armin in IN MY ROOM is his first cooperation with director Ulrich Köhler.

ELENA RADONICICH

Elena Radonicich is an Italian actress, graduated at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. Since 2005 she has become a well known actress in Italy for her work at theaters, in TV and cinema. On the big screen she has been working with major Italian directors, for example Alina Marazzi, Claudio Cupellini, Nicola Bellucci and Elisabetta Sgarbi.





CAST & CREW

Armin – Hans Löw
Kirsi – Elena Radonicich
Father – Michael Wittenborn
Grandmother – Ruth Bickelhaupt
Rosa – Emma Bading
Lilo – Katharina Linder
Editor – Felix Knopp
Tanja – Kathrin Resetarits

Director & Writer – Ulrich Köhler
Producers – Christoph Friedel & Claudia Steffen
Director of Photography – Patrick Orth
Production Design – Jochen Dehn, Silke Fischer
Costumes – Birgitt Kilian
Make-up & Hair – Diana Badalova
Original Sound – Johannes Grehl
Film Editing – Laura Lauzemis
Visuals effects – Thomas Loeder
Sound Design – Andreas Hildebrandt
Re-recording Mixing – Matthias Lempert
Production Manager – Fee Buck
Commissioning Editors – Andrea Hanke (WDR),
Birgit Kämper (ARTE)
Co-Producers – Maja Wieser Benedetti
& Andreas Pichler, Katrin Schlösser, Janine Jackowski
& Maren Ade & Jonas Dornbach
In Co-Production with – Echo Film (Italy),
Komplizen Film and Westdeutscher Rundfunk, ARTE
Production Company – Pandora Film Produktion

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Filmförderung and IDM Südtirol-Alto Adige, MiBACT

A man with a beard, wearing a dark sweater, stands in profile on the right side of the frame, looking towards the left. On the left, the front of a dark-colored bus is visible at night. The bus has a bright light on its roof and two large headlights at the bottom. The word "Pistoia" is visible on the upper part of the bus, and "YOKOHAMA" is on a lower section. A license plate with "HD-WW 200H" is also visible. Some green leaves are in the upper left corner.

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TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original title: In My Room
International title: In My Room
Duration: 120 min
Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1
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Year: 2018
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