

Strand Releasing presents

A film by ULRICH SEIDL

IN THE BASEMENT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF *DOG DAYS* AND THE *PARADISE TRILOGY*

Starring Fritz Lang, Alfreda Klebinger and Manfred Ellinger

Official Selection: Venice Film Festival

PRELIMINARY PRESS NOTES

Country of Origin: Austria
Format: DCP/1.85/Color
Sound Format: Dolby SRD
Running Time: 81 minutes
Genre: Documentary
Not Rated
In German with English Subtitles

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Please download photos from our website:
<http://strandreleasing.com/films/in-the-basement/>

SYNOPSIS

Maverick director Ulrich Seidl (*Dog Days*, *The Paradise Trilogy*) delves into yet another exploration of the dark underside of the human psyche with a look at Austrian basements fitted out as private domains for secrets and fetishes. No desire or proclivity is off-limits to Seidl's camera, which takes in the opera-singing gunslinger, the Hitler-loving brass band, a hunter of exotic species and the passionate devotees of S&M with an equal measure of curiosity and compassion.

A FILM YOU COULD KEEP SHOOTING FOREVER: EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR ULRICH SEIDL

About basements it is safe to say: Almost everyone has one, almost no one reveals theirs. Can you tell us how you researched your film? Did you go out looking for specific basements?

In fact it was hard to gain access to people and their basements. It's easy enough to find the normal, banal, harmless. Many people are happy to show off their basements, but what you encounter is mostly hobby areas such as workshops, fitness or party rooms, or even entire basements devoted to a husband's model railway or beer coaster collection. But I was looking for abysses, and how do you go about finding them? How do you find people who have something to hide? After several weeks of research — which mainly consisted of going door to door and knocking — the results were so frustrating that we began to concentrate on more publicized themes: guns or underground shooting ranges, for instance, and we explored the SM-scene. It was half a year before we could even begin filming, although the search for additional people and locations stretched on for a very long time. Now that it's finished, I know that "In the Basement" is a film that you could keep working on, keep filming, without ever exhausting the subject.

What truths do Austrians in particular and people in general stow away in their basement?

For Austrians the basement has a significance that may not exist in other countries. Austrians often spend their free time in their basement. Down there, they — men, fathers, housewives, couples or children — can be who they want. Down there, they can indulge their needs, hobbies, passions and obsessions. The basement is a locus of free time and the private. But for many people the basement is also a place of the unconscious, a place of darkness and a place of fear. For some people that grows out of personal experience, for others a childhood memory. In fact, the basement was and is a place of hiding, a place of secret crime, a place of abuse and rape, a place of captivity, torture and violence.

Why, after your “PARADISE” fiction trilogy, did you return to the documentary form within this film?

For me personally and for my artistic work it is, quite simply, essential that I constantly plunge back into reality. My fiction films are nourished and often inspired by this. Getting to know other people and worlds has always been and remains very enriching. Which does not mean that it is always pleasant. You repeatedly come into contact with life and destinies, repeatedly witness the traps that people are born or have slid into. Humanity never ceases to amaze me: what people put themselves through to fulfill their longings, meet their obligations, sublimate their inadequacies, act out their need for power, or repress their sexuality. Or how people fight for their dignity, a bit of affection, a modicum of happiness. Often, what I experience and witness seizes hold of me, often I close the door shaken, often I am dismayed by the images of what people do to each other, usually without bad intentions. It's normal. You sense and feel the abysses hidden there — and in the best case you sense your own abysses as well.

In all of your films you seek out and find truths that aren't necessarily realistic. I'm referring to the much-noted integration of documentary stylistic techniques with those of fiction cinema that is at the heart of your cinema. To put it differently: It would not be a Seidl film if fact and fiction weren't intricately intertwined. I'm thinking for example of the scenes with a woman and the baby dolls. Could you tell us a bit more about them?

As always with my films, you set out on a journey into the unknown, into unknown places and people. You have certain ideas, you have a concept in mind — and with all that you plunge into reality. For me it's never about illustrating that reality; I instead want to discover my own view of the reality I find. Your perspective of reality is the cinematographic gaze that shapes that reality. Through it I try to show what I see, what I'm touched by, what I want to reveal to my viewers. With my cinematographic gaze I try to approach my protagonists and to gather filmic fragments of reality, none of which is complete or definitive.

The woman with the baby dolls is a good example of how, given my approach to reality, the filmic narration is sometimes invented. The woman who plays these scenes with the doll did have one of those strikingly realistic Reborn babies in her apartment, but not in the basement. The story that the film tells — namely, that this woman has several “babies” hidden in her basement that she talks to every day — is an invented story. Only the location is real. The scenes were shot in her actual basement.

The film's main threads deal with people whose passions and interests are far from socially acceptable, whereas the traditional hobby basement or party basement or laundry room is represented only in Seidl tableaux. Why do you favor the extreme?

I don't. Admittedly, very few of us have a picture of Hitler hanging on our walls, but rejection and hatred of or indifference toward the Other can be found everywhere.

The socially acceptable, as you put it, is only a veneer. Beneath that is the private, the real truth, real life. If extremes form the core of the film, it is because I believe that this “extreme” in one form or another, in a modified or diluted form, applies to us all. None of us are immune to xenophobia, we all have our fears and abysses — be they fascistic sympathies, repressed tendencies to violence, unexpressed desires for power, or repression or sexual fantasies that deviate from so-called normalcy.

Why violence and abuse, whether physical or psychological, occur in all social institutions, public and private, religious or progressive-secular in orientation. Wherever people are allowed the possibility of exercising power over others, you find oppression, humiliation, exploitation and abuse.

The crimes of Wolfgang Priklopil and Josef Fritzl, notorious pedophiles who each kept a young girl prisoner for years or decades, have led to a distorted view elsewhere of Austria and its basements. Did that motivate you to make this film, or deter you from it?

Neither. The idea for this film originated long before those crimes came to light. It occurred to me around the time of “Dog Days” (2001), when I was location-scouting with my crew in suburbs, exploring and nosing around housing developments, urban deserts, row houses and single-family-housing ghettos. The more homes I visited and the more basements I went down into, the more I realized that basement rooms were often more lavishly conceived than actual living areas, and that the inhabitants of these dwellings preferred their basements more than their living rooms and spent more time there. The living room was often only for show. That was new to me, a new realization.

Then, in the past few years, as we all know, Austria gained regretful worldwide notoriety for its basements. Things that you could never imagine were a reality. So you have to accept the fact that, regardless of how or what my film deals with or shows — no matter what film you make on this theme: In the minds of the audience, the crimes of Fritzl and Kampusch will always be present.

In spite of your directorial rigor and the emotional power of the stories, “In the Basement” is also full of humor. Several of your protagonists tell jokes on camera. In your cinematic universe, the enjoyable and the unpleasant go hand-in-hand.

Humor is important in all my films, but what is new here are the obscene male jokes. They too, in a certain way, describe realities. They cloak male sexual fantasies, racism and sexism in a supposedly “humorous” guise that is socially acceptable. Often while shooting a scene I would ask myself: Should I laugh or cry? Maybe I should pursue that. Maybe someday I should make a film that consists only of obscene male jokes.

Interview by Markus Keuschnigg

RITUALS OF LIFE AND DEATH: AN ESSAY BY OLAF MÖLLER, INSPIRED BY "IN THE BASEMENT"

From the ground floor up, we put on an act, represent. Society is imitated, staged as daily life: charade, masquerade, performance. But living, letting it all out, indulging our eccentricities — that happens in the basement, where visitors are not allowed, sometimes not even other family members. Below the surface, bathed in artificial light that makes skin look waxen, sickly, moribund... you can be yourself, have a good time, toy with all the ideas that one floor higher are unwelcome, if not prosecuted and punished by law. Down below you find a kind of fulfillment that neither wants nor needs to pay lip service to the demands of culture as defined by media and society.

In the basement you can practice killing and watch killing and show off your self-assurance while killing; you can pay homage to Mad King Ludwig and the Führer and our Lord Savior all at the same time; you can happily have yourself beaten to orgasm, be hung by the balls, or strapped into a gynecological examination chair and generously tongued. There's music there. It's cozy there. Time can stand still there or race on toward a tomorrow that seems entirely possible. Again and again there, death and love look the same and demand similar poses: The man watching his regal snake devour its prey behind glass adopts the same posture of devout humility as the love slave on all fours waiting opposite the toilet to be allowed to lick his mistress clean after she finishes peeing.

While upstairs is crammed with furniture and knickknacks, good taste and even better intentions, downstairs is minimalistic: Only what is needed to carry out fantasies has been acquired. Here even the suite of rooms filled to the last corner with paintings (reproductions) and medals and weapons and shop-window mannequins dressed in Nazi uniforms appears Spartan because it is devoted to a single obsession, an *idée fixe*, one locus of myth and person. But such mass-market opulence (of the most politically disturbing kind) is the exception; most of the rooms are reminiscent of understated and unadorned Romanesque churches, pure places of worship. The underground shooting range, for example, is a vaulted area equipped with a simple, automatic cable system to shuttle the prints of human targets, and with plain wood dividers between individual stalls. The SM rooms are similarly free of frills: a whipping bench, a display case for sex toys, a rack for whips, paddles and ropes, a bondage chair surrounded by candlesticks, here perhaps a chain, there a table, possibly a shower stall and a toilet, but otherwise nothing, nothing at all that doesn't play a role in the realization of complementary desires.

Or is that maybe a shovel lying on the floor of one of the basements? The spheres can't be separated that precisely, things overlap. Only a short driveway, after all, separates the street and the underground garage; from outside you can glimpse what's inside below, and if you look in the right light and from the proper angle, you can get a good idea of the kind of ghosts that the basement harbors. For his part the love slave has to clean the bathroom with his tongue, wash the dishes in the kitchen and in the bedroom caress and pleasure his mistress.

The culture of our times pretends that feelings, needs, fears and distress can be precisely partitioned — as if for everything there was one drawer, and one drawer alone, if you please, to be filled according to its label. But apparently that's not how things work in the world. Nor is it desirable.

For the basement gives rise to all the energies that whirl our street-level existence. At work are subterranean, subversive forces, antisocial and undirected in a world that absurdly purports to be goal oriented. In the basement are articulated all of the contradictions and perversions that the ground floor tries to drum into us as abnormal. A buxom, seemingly affable whore explains, for instance, that she gave up her retail sales job because she was treated like a number and always had to be nice, regardless of how horrible her customers were. And a shyly smiling masochist turns out to be an employee of the Catholic charity Caritas who works with abused women: In her soul, private eros and the experience of male violence in relationships have become inextricably interwoven.

ULRICH SEDIL – BIOGRAPHY

Ulrich Seidl, born 1952 in Vienna (Austria), is a director, author and producer. Ulrich Seidl started his career with award-winning documentaries such as “Good News” (1990), “Animal Love” (1995) and “Models” (1998). Seidl's first feature film “Dog Days” won the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 2001. “Import Export” (2007), the first film to be produced by his own production company, was followed by his successful and multiple-award-winning “PARADISE Trilogy” (2012). The three films had their premiere in the competitions of the world's most important film festivals in Cannes, Venice and Berlin. “In the Basement” (2014), a film essay, is his newest work.

Filmography

2012 PARADISE: Hope | 2012 PARADISE: Faith | 2012 PARADISE: Love | 2007 Import Export | 2006 Brothers, Let Us Be Merry (short) | 2004 Our Father (filmed stage play, Volksbuhne Berlin) | 2003 Jesus, You Know | 2001 State of the Nation | 2001 Dog Days | 1998 Models | 1998 Fun Without Limits (TV) | 1997 The Bosom Friend (TV) | 1996 Pictures at an Exhibition (TV) | 1995 Animal Love | 1994 The Last Men (TV) | 1992 Losses To Be Expected | 1990 Good News | 1984 Look 84 (fragment) | 1982 The Prom (short) | 1980 One Forty (short)

Prizes

2014 PARADISE: Faith — Best Female Actress, Austrian Film Award for Maria Hofstätter | 2013 PARADISE: Faith — Best Austrian Film 2013, Papierener Gustl, Austria / Order of Merit for Services Rendered to the Republic of Austria, Honour by the City Vienna / PARADISE: Love — Best feature film, Vienna Film Award, Viennale — Vienna, Austria / PARADISE: Faith — Best Sound Design, European Film Awards 2013, for Matz Muller und Erik Mischijew — Berlin, Germany / Golden Angel for Artistic Insolence, Toffifest International Film Festival — Torun, Poland / Honour Prize for World Cinema Contribution, Molodist International Film Festival — Kiev, Ukraine / Outstanding Achievement in the Arts, International Film Festival Message To Man — St. Petersburg, Russia / PARADISE: Love — Best Cinematography in a Feature Film,

Diagonale Prize for Wolfgang Thaler and Ed Lachman — Graz, Austria / PARADISE: Love — Best Production Design of a Feature Film, Diagonale Prize for Renate Martin und Andreas Donhauser — Graz, Austria / PARADISE: Love — Best Female Actress, Austrian Film Award for Margarethe Tiesel / PARADISE: Love — Best Feature Film, Austrian Film Award / PARADISE: Love — Best Director, Austrian Film Award / Golden Camera Award (for extraordinary contribution to cinema) artfilmfest Trenčín — Trenčín, Slovakia / PARADISE: Love — Best Austrian Film, Papierener Gustl, Austria | 2012 PARADISE: Faith — Special Jury Prize — Venice, Italy / PARADISE: Faith — Premio Cinem Avvenire, Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica, Venice, Italy / Zloty Glan Award, 18th Forum of European Cinema Cinergia, Łódź / Poland (for Contributions toward European Cinema) / PARADISE: Faith — Best Screenplay & Eurimages Award (best co-production) — Sevilla, Spain / PARADISE: Love — Palic Tower — Best Director — Serbia / Gold Medal of the State of Lower Austria | 2011 Maverick Award — Motovun, Croatia | 2010 Bremen Film Prize — Germany | 2008 Amnesty International Award — Festival Internacional de Cinema Independente — Lisbon, Portugal | 2007 Import Export — Golden Apricot — Armenia / Import Export — Palic Tower — Serbia / Import Export — Main Prize — Bangkok, Thailand | 2005 Film Prize of Lower Austria — Austria | 2004 Jesus, you know — Best Director — Riga, Latvia | 2003 Festival Internacional de Cine de Gijon, Spain (for the intensive search for boundaries between reality and fiction in today's cinema) / Jesus, You Know — Best Documentary — Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic / Jesus, You Know — Film Prize — Viennale — Vienna, Austria / Jesus, You Know — Prize of the Association quebecoise des critiques — Montreal, Canada / Jesus, You Know — Erich-Neuberg Prize (ORF — Austrian TV) — Vienna, Austria | 2002 Dog Days — Special Jury Award, Oporto International Film Festival, Portugal / Honorary Prize of the Office of the Chancellor — Austria / Dog Days — Austrian Film Prize, Association of Film Distributors and Distribution Agencies | 2001 Dog Days — Silver Lion — Venice, Italy / Dog Days — Best Film, Best Director — Bratislava, Slovakia / Dog Days — Best Film — Gijon, Spain / Dog Days — FIPRESCI-Prize for Discovery of the Year / Dog Days — Most Successful Austrian Feature Film for the Year 2001/2002 — Austria / Models — Best Feature Film — Television Prize — Austria | 2000 Models — Audience Award — Sarajevo | 1999 Silver Venus from the Creative Club Austria and Third Prize in Werbe-Edward (for the ORF-Schwarzseherkampagne) | 1996 Animal Love — Best Documentary — Potsdam, Germany / Pictures at an Exhibition — Best Documentary — Austrian Prize for Adult Education, Austria | 1992 Losses to Be Expected — Runner-up Prize — Yamagata, Japan / Losses to Be Expected — Jury Prize — Amsterdam, Netherlands / Losses to Be Expected — Austrian Film Days Prize, Austria / Losses to Be Expected — Best Documentary Film — Golden Frame, Austria | 1991 Good News — Prix des bibliothèques — Paris, France / Good News — Vienna Film Prize, Viennale — Vienna, Austria

CAST

Fritz Lang	Himself
Alfreda Klebinger	Herself
Manfred Ellinger	Himself
Inge Ellinger	Herself
Josef Ochs	Himself
Alessa Duchek	Herself
Gerald Duchek	Himself
Cora Kitty	Herself
Peter Vokurek	Himself
Walter Holzer	Himself

CREW

Director	Ulrich Seidl
Idea and Concept	Ulrich Seidl, Veronika Franz
Cinematography	Martin Gschlacht
Additional Camera	Hans Selikovsky
Second Additional Camera	Wolfgang Thaler
Sound	Ekkehart Baumung
Editor	Christoph Brunner
Production Manager	Louis Oellerer, Max Linder
Line Producer	Konstantin Seitz
Producer	Ulrich Seidl
Production Company	Ulrich Seidl Film Produktion
With support from	Österreichisches Filminstitut, Filmfonds Wien, Land Niederösterreich
Co-produced by	ORF (Film/Fernseh-Abkommen), coop99 filmproduktion, WDR
In collaboration with	Arte