



© Ruth Beckermann Filmproduktion

Die Geträumten

The Dreamed Ones

Ruth Beckermann

Producer Ruth Beckermann. **Production company** Ruth Beckermann Filmproduktion (Wien, Austria). **Director** Ruth Beckermann. **Screenplay** Ina Hartwig, Ruth Beckermann. **Director of photography** Johannes Hammel. **Editor** Dieter Pichler. **Sound design** Gerhard Daurer. **Sound** Georg Misch. **With** Anja Plaschg (Ingeborg Bachmann), Laurence Rupp (Paul Celan).

DCP, colour. 89 min. German.

Premiere 13 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

It's not uncommon for a film to have a moving love story at its core. Yet this particular set-up is unusual. The lovers here are Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, both important representatives of post-war German-language poetry. The story of the relationship between the Austrian and the Jew from Czernowitz is told through their nearly 20-year correspondence (1948–1967). Or, more precisely, by a young woman and a young man reading from their letters in a studio in Vienna's venerable Funkhaus. You hear longing, accusations, doubts, expressions of intimacy and alienation, news of separations and lengthy silences. You sense their struggle for words. What these words trigger can be seen in the faces of those reading them out. It's not only the text but also its effects that are being performed and occasionally discussed. The intensity of the relationship drama is generated via the fascinating language, the actors' presence, and the camerawork and editing, which break up the dialogue via changing perspectives and shot sizes. Chats during cigarette breaks, in the stairwell and the canteen, lead into the present. History, which was stronger than love, never slips out of focus.

Birgit Kohler

Are life and art compatible?

Everything is always also the opposite of itself. The media like to tell us we live in a time of emotional glaciation, of isolation in the supermarket of Internet lonely heart adverts. At the same time, the desire to have authentic experiences and feelings is growing. The great classic love stories have lost none of their timeliness. Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan are among the ranks of the great modern lovers. Their love is unique, on the one hand, but it also stands paradigmatically for the possibility and impossibility of an encounter after the catastrophe of war and annihilation. The two probably most important German-language poets of the second half of the 20th century wrestle with the questions I always ask myself: What does love mean in our modern or postmodern time? For how many generations will the Nazi ideology's destruction of empathy and trust last in its core countries, Germany and Austria? Are life and art compatible?

Ruth Beckermann

"This love has the character of a dream"

Our conversation about your last film, Those Who Go Those Who Stay, ended with the following sentences: 'What is off-screen must be made much more powerfully visible. Maybe a film should be made about everything that can't be filmed.' You also spoke of the limits of documentary film and the act of watching as such. Have literary text, the voice and hearing – other sensory perceptions, other means of artistic expression – opened a kind of window onto a new cinematic terrain that you now enter with Die Geträumten?

Ruth Beckermann: I surely am entering new terrain with this film. *Die Geträumten* is not only the first time I've ever worked with actors; I worked differently from before in every way. At first it wasn't even clear to me how I would move away from the essay film. The idea of taking a literary text as a starting point came through my encounter with the literary critic Ina Hartwig; I spent more than a year developing the script for the film with her. There were about twenty-five different versions of the text. We met while on the jury for the Wartholz Literature Prize. Travelling together in the car from Vienna Airport to Reichenau an der Rax, we talked about Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan's correspondence, which was published a few years ago as *Herzzeit* ['heart time'; published in English as *Correspondence*, -ed.]. Ina Hartwig is writing a book on Ingeborg Bachmann. That's how our collaboration came about, and we worked up a synopsis very quickly.

Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan are both very language-intensive voices in post-war German-language poetry. How do you find a cinematic language, considering this linguistic density? How did you approach scenic writing?

From the beginning, we had the idea that two people, not necessarily actors, should play speakers reading Bachmann's and Celan's letters in a recording studio for an audio book or a broadcast. Initially, however, that was going to be only part of the film. We planned to let the voices move offstage, and I would shoot footage of places where the two had lived – not documentarily in the house where they lived, but associatively, freely, and contemporarily. In Paris, in Munich, in Zurich, in Rome. At first I took a rather essayistic approach, and I'd already recorded pictures and sound in some places. Before the

actual shooting with the actors, I shot some trial footage with friends to see whether the texts would be powerful enough for this radical reduction. I already secretly wished the film would become a chamber play. The two actors, Anja Plaschg and Laurence Rupp, were both so strong that the concentrated form fit the broadcasting station. After the initial edit, the film's editor, Dieter Pichler, and I looked at each other and said: That's it! We're staying in this room.

So it was highly controlled work, like with a feature film?

What was new for me about this approach was the intense preparation. What I like about documentary film is that I can throw myself into it and experience so much that's surprising while shooting; I invent the film anew in the editing. The whole thing's an adventure. But *Die Geträumten* was prepared down to the smallest detail. With the cameraman, Johannes Hammel, I worked for a year on ideas for the lighting and resolution, and for more than half a year with Lisa Olah, a very smart casting director. I was surprised at how fascinating it is to prepare something like this. In a feature film, simple components suddenly take on great significance; for example, we spent a long time deciding on the colour and size of the sheets with the text so that they didn't cover up the speakers' faces or reflect light too much.

Did the extreme reduction you decided on have to do with the density of Bachmann's and Celan's language? Did you have to stand up to it this way?

Certainly. But the theme stood in the foreground. Such a romantic, tragic love story is already very powerful by itself. The language of Bachmann and Celan is unbelievable. Such preconditions allow you a high degree of reduction. I like reduction anyway. But initially, something entirely different interested me, namely how these letters and this language affect young people today. Bachmann and Celan were very young when they met: she was twenty-two, he was twenty-seven. I wanted to have very young actors with whom I could imagine that the texts would trigger something in them – in each of them and also in their relationship.

You put Laurence Rupp, a member of the ensemble of Vienna's Burgtheater, alongside Anja Plaschg, one of the great figures of the young Austrian music scene. Why this choice?

I decided on Anja Plaschg very quickly, although I also considered using actresses, because I knew that the demands on a non-actor would be very high. Anja Plaschg is not only a strong personality; she's the right one for Bachmann's texts. It was harder to find an interesting man, who, after all, had to embody a contrast to Anja. Laurence Rupp is very versatile. You feel how he matures and grows older over the course of the film.

How did you confront the two performers with the texts?

Of course, during auditions, everyone read from the letters, but that doesn't really reveal much. Important for me were their voices and a very old-fashioned aspect, namely whether they have 'depth'. We didn't rehearse at all. Our agreement was: 'We shoot immediately and everything.' The interludes leading back to everyday life – whether the canteen, the concert hall, or smoking breaks – were all planned, but in a way that left a lot open. For example, I didn't know what would be rehearsed in

the concert hall when we shot a significant event there. It was a Wolfgang Rihm composition that fit perfectly with the film's mood – that's what I call the luck of documentary filming.

There is a lot of discussion right now about the ORF Funkhaus (broadcasting station) in Vienna's Argentinierstrasse, because a very controversial sale is in the offing. The film is also a very subtle homage to this particular building.

The building is architecturally interesting, and above all it's a very historical site that's being sold off dirt-cheap. The post-war era was the heyday of radio. Ingeborg Bachmann worked for radio for a very long time; Celan was repeatedly invited to read on German stations. During my research, I looked at many, many studios on the Internet. At first, I hesitated to decide on the studio in the Funkhaus, because it's so large and so it didn't seem suitable for recording the intimacy of two people's written correspondence. But precisely this size, which also permits wide shots and physical closeness and distance between the actors, was interesting. Besides, the pictures on the wall seem like windows onto the world. While working on *Die Geträumten*, I increasingly liberated myself from a realism that isn't the point at all, anyway.

The relationship or correspondence between the two is shaped by an intense play with closeness and distance, on several levels. Was this search for balance between closeness and distance a leitmotif in your filmic adaptation?

Johannes Hammel, the cameraman, did a great job of expressing this in the camera's positions. He always finds the right distance. We filmed everything, including the wide shots, with a hand-held camera, because I absolutely didn't want to create an academic, theatrical, chamber play situation. I wanted the picture to live and vibrate. And I wanted Johannes to move and be able to respond spontaneously while the two talk with one another, although they sat far apart, rather than having the camera pan back and forth on a stand.

Did your wish to work with actors have to do with being able to shape emotion more than in documentary films?

I think there is a lot of emotion in documentary film, too: through the protagonists, through an off-screen text. As the author of a feature film, you have a completely different position. *Die Geträumten* is an auteur film, but I don't bring myself into it as a person. Here there isn't this 'I', as in a text or a montage, for example in my last film, which tells everything from my perspective. What was interesting about this project was that, while I was the one controlling everything, there were also these two people giving their own faces and voices to what Bachmann and Celan express. This was a whole new game with feelings for me. The setting of *Die Geträumten* creates distance from the emotions of the letter writers, while a documentary film often aims to give an emotional charge to a picture, for example of a landscape.

Correspondence is a literary genre that, whether in a biographical or socio-historical sense, has something documentary about it, but at the same time something very subjective. The temporal intervals that the mail dictates and everything left unsaid between two people who know one another well bring a fictional component into play. Is correspondence, as a literary genre, the transition between the documentary and fiction per se?

Absolutely. Bachmann and Celan's correspondence already has a strong fictional level that sometimes reminds me of troubadour songs. They also had a literary relationship. Their real affair was very short: two months in the spring of 1948 and then ten years later maybe once more for a month. But they carried out a literary dialogue all their lives. It appears in their work, as well, whereby Bachmann goes into Celan's verses and passages more than he deals with hers. I wouldn't call the letters purely documentary. They also float, they contain so much: of course their real love story, but also all their ideas about love and life, the theme of the Shoah, the post-war period. The idea that a young Jew from Czernowitz and a young woman from Carinthia meet in Vienna in 1948 and practically fall into each other's arms is interesting and very romantic. Our basic questions were: What themes did these two have? What does this text mean today? Today we can imagine a love story in Israel or another country shaped by severe conflict between members of hostile camps, even if it wouldn't have the same tragic dimension as after the Shoah, when one collective wanted to annihilate another. That two people from such contrary collectives encounter one another was very important to us. This circumstance makes everything more intense and reinforces their love all the more.

How would you describe the complex relationship between Bachmann and Celan?

When I started reading the letters, I was more on Celan's side. The more I delved into their relationship, the better I understood Ingeborg Bachmann. She tried all her life to help him, hold him, bolster him. He pushed her back again and again. In his poem 'In Egypt', which depicts the beginning of their correspondence, he immediately puts her in her place, as the foreigner adorned with the pain of Ruth, Naomi and Miriam, the pain of Jewish women. On the other hand, I understand that it was difficult for Celan to endure her attempts to write herself onto the side of the victims, as it were. All her life, Bachmann never spoke about her father, a member of the Nazi party. I can imagine that was too much for Celan. From the beginning, he was hurt and unjust, also envious of her successes, and simply a macho; over time he turned ever more paranoid. At the end, Bachmann writes to him: 'You want to be the victim.' From his role as victim, Celan victimised her, but she didn't permit it. She kept growing stronger and more self-determined. She was beautiful and incredibly erotically attractive, open to relationships and socially very gifted. In short, she had a gift for marketing herself and, completely unlike Celan, she was a networker, as people say today. In these texts and, I hope, in my film, there are many levels on which the theme is the possibility of love, closeness, understanding and not understanding. These questions aren't limited to Bachmann and Celan's time. Can a man and a woman understand one another at all? And if they can: to what degree? Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan went relatively far, I think.

They are always speaking of missing and passing by one another.

Yes, but they both fight for this love. I can't say how much Celan loved Bachmann, but Celan was her great love. When he committed suicide in Paris, her manuscript for Malina was already finished; but under the title *Die Geheimnisse der Prinzessin von Kagran* (the secrets of the princess of Kagran) she added a few pages to the novel in which she treats her story

with him again in fairy tale form, as a kind of obituary. In this text we read: 'He was my life. I loved him more than my life.' We placed these lines at the end of the film as a whispered epilogue.

*The correspondence tells of a lived love and, at the same time and much more, of one not lived. Is that the reason for choosing the film title **Die Geträumten** [The Dreamed Ones, -ed.], a word taken from one of Ingeborg Bachmann's letters?*

This love has the character of a dream.

Interview: Karin Schiefer, Vienna, January 2016



© Ruth Beckermann Filmproduktion

Ruth Beckermann was born in Vienna. After studying art history and journalism in Tel Aviv and New York, she earned a doctorate from the University of Vienna. Ruth Beckermann worked as a journalist for several magazines in Austria and Switzerland. Along with Josef Aichholzer and Franz Grafl, she co-founded the Filmladen distribution company in 1978. She was involved

with the company for seven years, and her first films and books date from that period. Ruth Beckermann has been working as a writer and filmmaker since 1985.

Films

1977: *Arena besetzt* (78 min.). 1978: *Auf amol a Streik* (24 min.). 1981: *Der Hammer steht auf der Wiese da draußen* (40 min.). 1984: *Wien retour* (95 min.). 1986: *Der Igel* (34 min.). 1987: *Die papierene Brücke* (95 min.). 1991: *Nach Jerusalem* (87 min., Berlinale Forum 1991). 1996: *Jenseits des Krieges* (117 min., Berlinale Forum 1997). 1999: *Ein flüchtiger Zug nach dem Orient* (82 min., Berlinale Forum 2000). 2001: *Homemad(e)* (85 min., Berlinale Forum 2001). 2006: *Zorros Bar Mizwa* (90 min.), *Mozart Enigma* (1 min.). 2011: *American Passages* (120 min.). 2012: *Jackson/Marker 4am* (4 min.). 2013: *Those Who Go Those Who Stay* (75 min.). 2015: *The Missing Image* (Multichannel video installation). 2016: *Die Geträumten / The Dreamed Ones*.