

## Michael Glawoggers Tells It All (to Olaf Möller)

*OM: What's so fascinating for you about the notion of foreignness, alienness which characterises your oeuvre so strongly?*

MG: When I was a little boy and away on holidays with my parents - usually somewhere in former Yugoslavia -, I always fantasised about those other lives lived there, in those cities, their streets, houses, etc.: How would my life be if I went to school there, who would be my friends, through which streets would I walk home and what mother would open the door for me, etc.; and then I closed my eyes and wished, with as much force as I could master - and dared - that I could live that other life for only a day - and never more than that day, for I was just a boy then.

Later on, before I got really serious about making films, I thought that one should make a film about an Austrian who becomes a foreign worker in Turkey (or Italy, or Yugoslavia...). I liked the idea but discarded it right away, because its obvious social aspects simply crushed everything of interest in it for me, the question: What happens if one suddenly and unprepared in every which way has to live some other life.

I still love to think about this, and I still want to know how it would be, this other life, if only for a day, or maybe even longer - there's a certain courage that comes with age.

*OM: How did "Slumming" originate? Was it only the Kallmann you met while working at "Frankreich, wir kommen!", or did he just fit in with something already growing in your mind?*

MG: A few things, pieces need to click before you start to think seriously about a project - they don't need to fit, they just have to feel as if they belonged together: A piece somewhere up there, another one somewhere in the centre of things, and then, here or there or where, somebody merrily munching away at a sandwich.

In this case, there was 'Kallmann the Ballman', who became the harbinger of Kallmann the Notepaper Poet. Kallmann had bought a container worth of footballs which he'd laboriously pumped up at home and put into some net, which he shouldered every night of the Football World Championship '98 for a walk through the pubs of Vienna trying to sell them, hoping to cash in on the atmosphere. Well, things didn't go exactly as he'd hoped they would so in the end he was left with about half of the balls in his 200-square-foot apartment without gas, phone or electricity. We shot a few scenes with him for "Frankreich, wir kommen!" which we had no use for in the end. But Kallmann stayed with me.

As another man did, some drunk I met in a joint some fifteen years ago who told me a story about how he'd once put a homeless man - too far gone to notice anything - into his car's trunk and went across the border, only to abandon him there. More interesting than the story was the guy itself, the way he told his story: I never knew whether the story was true or total bull which, again, the guy obviously enjoyed big time - he could see that I never knew whether I should believe him or not. He fucked with my head. At first, I found the guy more interesting than the story: I liked to think about him. But when I started to put the screenplay for "Slumming" together, this story just fit in - how would it be to find oneself in another city, another body, another mind although one would still be the same?

I don't know whether this story is true or not, but sometimes you think about a story for so long that you start to believe it really happened.

*OM: Do you see a connection between "Slumming" and "Nacktschnecken" - i.e. between your Thanatos- and your Eros-film?*

MG: Well, "Slumming" is certainly the more serious, the darker film... the way it 'feels' for me, its surface, what I call a film's 'tactile' qualities, what ones eyes can 'grab'. I think about that quite a lot before we start shooting, how the film should feel: Smooth, shoddy, grainy, bright, monochromatic, or like a shaggy dog... One could say, for a start, that "Slumming" is a dark green comedy with bright patches while "Nacktschnecken" is a gay yellow comedy progressively darkened by certain muted hues.

On other levels, the films certainly have something in common. Take the two buddy-couples: Max and Johann in "Nacktschnecken" and Sebastian and Alex in "Slumming" with Michael Ostrowski playing Max as well as Alex. Obviously there are a lot of differences in details between those two pairs but they're very similar in the way they relate to each other: They play around with each other, there's a certain playfulness as well as an ordinariness in the way they're played - they're playing at playing.

I'm not as certain as you are about the Thanatos-presence in "Slumming" - but what I know for sure is that there's barely Eros in it which is certainly not the case with "Nacktschnecken". There's actually so little Eros in "Slumming" that I'm always startled about Pia's and Sebastian's bed-scene - but when I see her tenderness, the way she caresses him, I slowly calm down again. That's simply right there and then, justified. This is something common in "Slumming", the way it cares for its characters: They're like seedlings I feel a need to water; e.g. whenever I see Kallmann waking up in front of the train station, I just want to take him by his hand and lead him back home all through the Czech Republic.

*OM: At which point do you know how and what exactly you think your film should be? Do you leave some room for 'documentary' accidents, if indeed you're interested in that... I mean, the scene with Kallmann on the Mariahilferstrasse was shot there and then and right on the spot, right?*

MG: We collectively went bonkers on the Mariahilferstrasse. Paulus Manker so needed to play with all these people floating by: For several weeks he was all alone in the Czech Republic with only train stations, garden gnomes, deers and pictures of the Virgin Mary to play with - dark it was, grating and difficult. And suddenly there's a whole street full of people, and, my friend, he certainly had a ball with them, we could barely stop him once he got going.

But these things need to fit in, and here it did while at other places it simply wouldn't, for this method of shooting just doesn't work for each and every situation. When putting together my stories, creating my characters, I get ever stricter and more precise these days, I want to be ever more in control of it all - everything should be there for a purpose, to make my point, therefore every all so tiny distraction becomes a problem, no matter how brilliant and beautiful something might be in and of itself. For that reason we didn't use all the goodies we had from the Mariahilferstrasse: Each moment more would have thrown the balance. And it's actually okay to go bonkers during shooting, as long as it's part of the plan... I mean, I could've had a set designer build the Mariahilferstrasse for me, and I could've chosen each and every passer-by, but I didn't, because I wanted things to be and work the way they did. That's a decision I already made while writing the script. I'm working towards attaining an ever bigger control over the material already during the writing process, so that nothing can throw the balance later.

*OM: How did you put your cast together?*

MG: I have major problems with writing a character when I don't know who'll play it: I like to just close my eyes and imagine somebody doing or saying things.

In the case of "Slumming", I knew right from the start that Paulus Manker would play Kallmann, Pia Hierzegger Pia, and Michael Ostrowski Alex: While writing, I heard them talk, saw them entering a room, closing some car door etc. But I had no idea who would play Sebastian which was a problem because he always felt simply wooden in the first drafts of the script; the only thing I knew for certain was that he's German: therefore, in my mind, he had always something precise, determined, even stealthy. To solve that problem I looked at a lot of films and pretty soon found out that Sebastian just had to be played by August Diehl, and so I started to write the character with him in mind - and, my friend, you have no idea how fucked I'd have been if August hadn't been interested. And that, in the end, he - like the others - played a lot of scenes in a way I could've never imagined, is just part of the game, the process, it has to be like this in order to be good.

And besides that, there're things I never can imagine, never, like the kind of shoes the characters wear...

*OM: How did you end up in Indonesia, of all places?*

MG: Well, there're things one can't think up, at least I can't, and Sebastian's way to Indonesia is one of these things - it needed to present itself to me.

I was writing "Slumming" while working at "Workingman's Death" which has a chapter set in Indonesia. While shooting there, Mohamad Iqbal - a photographer I was collaborating with for an art's projected connected to the film - one night showed me these singers, and I suddenly knew that Sebastian had to see them, too.

Originally I only knew that Sebastian had to go afar. At that point (while shooting in Indonesia), I was tinkering around with the idea of having him go to Bangladesh, but only because I had just been to Chittagong researching ship breaking - it was just nice to write about something I had just experienced, but it didn't really help the scene, it still lacked a heart. But when I saw these singers and dancers and danced there myself, and put bills into their hands, not really understanding what was actually going on, but feeling happy in my alienness, I suddenly knew how the scene would work, and how Sebastian would feel, and I also had a notion about how August Diehl would feel himself there...

*OM: What, actually, is going on there with these women?*

MG: Well, they're beautiful, they sing and they dance, you can watch them, and if you give them some money, you can hold their hands, but only for a moment. Und because beauty is the shining reflection of truth, that's all there is to be said about this, at least here and now.

*OM: And back to August Diehl.*

MG: Right. Because August started to dance in a way I could never have imagined - dancing, by the way, is like shoes: I just can't imagine it. Well, when I saw August dancing there while we were shooting, I was just happy and I knew that I'd like the film.

I didn't shoot in Bangladesh for "Workingman's Death" because we filmed the ship breaking-scenes in Pakistan; in "Slumming", Bangladesh pops up but only in some subclause; but maybe one day I will shoot something there, maybe even some day soon, maybe parts of an upcoming project called "Whores Glory". For my work has developed a certain dynamic of its own, kind of like a spiral, where everything leads smoothly into the other, on and on, everything's in motion. And that's exactly the way it should be.

*OM: After "Die Ameisenstrasse", which was something of a painful experience one hears, you basically stopped working in fiction. What got you back there, and what was different, method-wise, for you when you made "Nacktschnecken" and "Slumming"?*

MG: When a project called "Love Sick" - an adaptation of a novel by William Vollmann - collapsed, I thought that, well, was it; I stopped thinking about fiction-based feature films. And without Graz's "Theater am Bahnhof", especially Michael Ostrowski, and doing "Nacktschnecken" with them, it would have stayed like this for a very long time.

Through working with the "Theater am Bahnhof", I suddenly discovered a certain playfulness and simplicity in dealing with stories and acting - I thought, "Yup, that's the way things should be, this works". Because, actually, theatre isn't exactly my cup of tea, it's all too distant, too artificial to do the trick for me; let's put it like this: For me, theatre is the opposite of those singers in Jakarta or the Teatro Garibaldi in Mexico City and its shows around Cassandra (a key scene in "Megacities" is set there) - those are more my kind of places.

Then came "Nacktschnecken" and it somehow felt like all that, on a different level, maybe, but still. When I read the first draft of the script I thought, "That's exactly what I want to see in cinema, that's something close to me, that's something I can laugh about"; it's a bit like certain moments while working on a documentary, when you meet somebody and realise at once, "Yes, that's cinema". It's in moments like these, moments of discovery and realisations, that fiction and documentary cinema are closest...

In a certain way, my fiction films are fed by my documentaries: If I weren't able to meet all these people and see all these places, I just couldn't think up all the places and people because

I just can't imagine all that stuff. In the end, it all becomes cinema which is what it's all about.

*OM: A pretty Baroque cinema by now...*

MG: Let's put it like this: I love pictures and stories with a certain over-abundance, they have to rip the frame apart, they have to contain traces of all sorts of other stories inside them - there has to be just a tad more of everything all around, a controlled sense of things falling apart, a spillage. I'm not interested in showing how somebody painstakingly hammers one nail into the wall and then with excruciating exactitude hangs one picture at it - I prefer to show how somebody hammers a whole fistful of nails away, just so, into a wall and hangs a picture at every single one of them, which then start to tell a story of their own, or several stories at once crisscrossing each other. Picture for picture you have to feel a sense of wonder, you have to be surprised and happy, things have to be all over the place on every level and all at once. I love it when things are several things at once. And for that, the screen tends to be too small, therefore, there's some 'spillage'.

*OM: What was your closest shave with death yet?*

MG: There weren't that many actually, even if my films don't look it - sometimes, suddenly, a notion like "Now I could drop dead and it would be okay", but then, another turbulence starts to shake a plane a bit too violently and you know that thoughts like these are just bullshit.

But there is something I more and more intensely long for, and that is limits -- and maybe this longing for limits is a first step towards a kind of longing for death?... I had to think about that recently, while reading a novel by Russel Banks, "The Darling": It's about a woman chased by the FBI, and suddenly, only for a moment, she just wants them to find her, and put her into prison, and that there's an end to all that chaos - she so much longs for the kind of

simplicity and clarity, that particular boredom of prison. She wants to let go. That's something I could relate to, that I even understood. When I think about films I sometimes feel the same, I want to be relieved from having to make all the decisions, I so long for limits. Just now, I did a Mozart-film that had to be exactly one minute long; wonderful. Also, I'm just now writing a screenplay that's based upon a novel - I don't have to invent everything, I just need to tell the story; marvelous. That way, I start to learn how it is to let go, in the end.

*OM: Last question - Who'll win the Soccer World Championship?*

MG: England, I hope, for nobody wants it the way they do, and nobody quite needs it the way they do: for the way they see themselves as well as for the future of their nation. Maybe, that way, they'll stop thinking that they have to participate in such atrocities as the Iraq War.