

Interview

## **Soldate Jeanette**

Daniel Hoesl, Gerald Kerkletz, Katharina Posch

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***Soldate Jeanette* evokes three female characters from cinematic history: Jeanne d’Arc in the movie by Carl Theodor Dreyer, Nana Kleinfrankenheim in Jean-Luc Godards *Vivre sa vie* and *Jeanne Dielmann* by Chantal Ackermann. Have all three contributed to the idea for this movie, to the composition of both female characters?**

Daniel Hoesl: They are three women who lead the same fight, and one learns that hardly anything has changed, and most of all, that one must not stop fighting this fight. Our movie is another contribution to this topic.

Katharina Posch: Adding to this is that “soldate” is a coinage, an artificial word. There isn’t a female form of the word soldier, “soldat”, in French, like it would be in German. The word in the title therefore is a mistake, the mistake is the female gender, and this really cannot be true. That’s why it’s written in bold letters on the movie poster. I just arrived from Paris and there I was frequently asked for the reason of this spelling. I answered “Because it is a mistake”. A mistake that the female gender doesn’t exist. When you watch the movie, you’ll find the answer to that.

Daniel Hoesl: The stimulus for the movie actually came from a totally different direction, it came through two pieces of music. One is by Beck and called *Soldier Jane*, the other is Schuberts *Die Täuschung*. We chose those two pieces to stake out what the plot will be like. We did not have a script, our starting point was based on a casting. We agreed that the movie, in deflection of the song lyrics, should be about women. Also, the version of the Schubert song, which originally was written for a male voice, is based on an interpretation by Christine Schäfer.

**Which lyrics underlie both musical pieces?**

Daniel Hoesl: „*Soldier Jane, don’t be afraid to take your heart out of your shell*“. And in Schuberts *Die Täuschung*: “*Only deception is my gain*“. Those are the thoughts that we use in the movie. Apart from that, the music plays an important role in the finished movie. It was rather difficult to find suitable pieces. I listened to a lot of music and I was very happy when I finally found Bettina Köster, who was spontaneously willing to travel, act and provide her music.

**Was the focus of pre-production on the music?**

Daniel Hoesl: Music was the starting point. The essential in pre-production was the casting, even before we had a story line. We knew that under the aspect of a minimal budget we only had a certain time frame in which we could work and finish shooting. I got to know two profoundly different women, the storyline developed from their biographies: The one actually did work on a farm for board and lodge at some point. The other woman comes from a former aristocratic family, grew up in a castle and has all the makings to build a contrast.

**Therefore the actresses provided the essential input in the cinematic tale?**

Gerald Kerkletz: It was our plan to include our cast in something like a co-authorship, to give them the opportunity to influence the story through their own biographies. Simultaneously the cast and all the other team members had the assignment to contribute things like contacts, locations, vehicles or costumes.

Katharina Posch: Production-wise the project was manageable, since all involved were willing to share the responsibility.

Daniel Hoesl: We worked only with what we found, we did not go and scout for something we wished. And this leads back to where Gerald Kerkletz and I found each other, in a hospital geriatrics, shooting Ulrich Seidl's *Import Export*. One could claim that Ulrich Seidl's method of finding people and assembling stories, is quite similar to ours, but he usually has a basic idea about the morals of his story, we on the other hand deliberately didn't. We could not afford going on a search for certain things we wanted to find. Our search was the finding, in a Picasso kind of way. Furthermore, Gerald Kerkletz and I, apart from both enjoying having a sauna, share a common interest, we both cook. Working on *Soldate Jeanette* was like cooking. We have a common favorite chef, Pierre Gagnaire, a forerunner of Nouvelle Cuisine. He, who of course has many years of experience as a chef, doesn't use recipes to create meals, he simply opens the fridge, constrains on a few things and creates a meal, a unique piece of art.

Gerald Kerkletz: Pierre Gagnaire deliberately constrains himself, even before he decides what should come out of it. His creativity originates from what he has, not from what he would like to have. For us, this principle is transferable onto the artistic as well as the production process. Daniel isn't someone who generally opposes to writing a script. But with this movie he didn't want to think up things that he couldn't have in the end, because it is his first feature length film, and many things would simply be too expensive, complicated or couldn't be found. For example when the storyline is determined by the motives and vice versa. Then I can find locations that look expensive but in reality aren't. When I fixate on something, or have to make something work because of a mandatory script, I have to count on costs, for example a production design, accordingly to it. I have to be in a position to conduct any necessary effort, which you might not even see in the movie, even though it costs a fortune.

**It sounds like, not only were you short of money on this project, but also short of time?**

Daniel Hoesl: Time is a question of budget. You can buy time with a greater budget. We had 25 days of shooting in a timespan of six to seven weeks, in which to accomplish the shoot. I think we were highly efficient, measured by how few people overall and how many amateurs were involved.

Gerald Kerkletz: Also in respect of the camera work it was important to us, that despite the little technology, the smallest possible team and working without a script, it is in no contradiction to shooting a photographically framed, precise and formal considered, maybe even a visually sophisticated movie. It was never about a documentary aesthetic.

**Also, the dialogs do not sound as if they were improvised last-minute?**

Daniel Hoesl: The dialogs are more improvised than you might think, because Johanna Orsini-Rosenbergs lingo naturally equals "Schönbrunner" German, which hardly exists in this form anymore. The language-bastards are more and more eradicated in favour of standard language, which mirrors the uniformity of society very well. Within the milieu, Johannas origins, people commonly speak artificial, which I like. I do not regret though, that it isn't even more artificial, but it might as well have been a more stylized.

**Despite the strong focus on the biographies, was there a concept with which the actresses could start their work?**

Daniel Hoesl: We rehearsed and we practised on the language. Johanna Orsini-Rosenberg is a different person than Fanni in the movie, but she could resort to a repertoire in her biography and knew how people who have a lot of money feel, after they lost it all. It is essential that she has a reference point to people with such a story, when at some point all the money has gone. This strikes many. It leads us, looking back at the song lyrics, to the theme: To leave from places you feel locked in and, this applies mostly to the woman from the city, that society maps out the criteria for success and values. For the woman at the farm, it is more about to release herself from dominance, to break out of the structure. Our approach, in a clear and enlightening Rousseauian sense is: Do not do what you do not want to do.

Gerald Kerkletz: Especially because there isn't a well elaborated, every detail reviewed story, it is even more important that the roles are clearly defined. We all did not know, until a week before end of shooting, how the movie is going to end. This way we also had the possibility to react upon everything that has been shot already. The actors need to know very precisely who they are in the movie, in order to spontaneously react upon changes that developed during breakfast before shooting or lunch at the set.

**Which campaign does *Soldate Jeannette* lead, which war is she going to?**

Katharina Posch: Ehhh, who is Jeannette actually?

Laughter...

Gerald Kerkletz: Through the three women of cinematic history mentioned at the beginning, the trail is laid that any women could be Soldate Jeannette.

Daniel Hoesl: Also we feature music by GUSTAV. On the Album *Verlass die Stadt (Leave the city)* is a song called *Soldat\_in oder Veteran (Soldier or Veteran)*, and the song used in the movie is called *Alles renkt sich wieder ein (Everything's gonna be fine)*. GUSTAV isn't just a musician, but a rebel for freedom. Mundane as it may sound, it is very challenging to attack this battle.

Katharina Posch: What happens through Eva Jantschitsch's music, the musician behind GUSTAV, is a good example of what has constantly occurred in our project. As a result of us not wanting anything, we regularly were presented with gifts, with findings. Especially when it comes to the music of Eva Jantschitsch, which was not considered for the movie from the beginning. Only when the movie was close to finished did we find this amazing song and with it the musical circle was closed.

Daniel Hoesl: The fight of these three women, as well as of the artists like GUSTAV or Bettina Köster, results in a coherency. This fight is about finding alternatives to give life circumstances. One isn't per se happy when born rich or when born on a farm. It is probably just about getting off your ass. It was important to me that, when we talk about the desire for freedom, we do not show it like it is usually done in the classical middle-European author movies, watching the protagonists struggle and fail, but rather showing two protagonists who stand up and walk a path of new possibilities. One should step out of this movie, thinking: "I can do that too."

### **Courage for rebellion in a way.**

Katharina Posch: Rebellion, in an acoustical sense, sounds incredibly loud. What I like about this movie, and the path Fanni and Anna choose is, that it is so quiet but not any less rebellious because of it.

Daniel Hoesl: "Chutzpah" is a word I had spelled in big letters on a board at my home. I think one should take up the cause of it. Fanni lives it and it has something amusing about it. One gets far with chutzpah and it is essential to know that chutzpah is allowed, but it is never applied because we walk around the streets completely domesticated, that chutzpah will be extinct at some point. Chutzpah was also essential for the production process. Without my telephone calls with location owners, who generally confirmed and thanks to the long experience that I have in this area, we could shoot at locations which otherwise would have been out of our reach. It is a similar story with our actors. When I think about who is plausible as a shoe sales man, who is a real dandy, the factor community and friendship plays an important role in casting, as well as production. I had to quickly find someone who would fit. The people in the movie from the art scene were simply present in the moment we needed them. Or regarding location, a friend of an actress was on vacation, therefore we could shoot in her apartment. The collective group factor is very important. I've always been impressed by Alain Tanner and Michel Soutter and their way of making movies in the early seventies with Group5 in French-Switzerland. As there was no movie funding system established at the time, they could receive funds from Télévision Suisse Romande in order to shoot movies with a small budget. Little money, but little bureaucracy. This way directors could develop themselves artistically by simply working. Not all movies were good, but many were good. I do not want to question the funding system here. It is good, and I profit from it when I work on a different project as assistant director. But I still think that there is a different way of making movies. Earlier we talked about language and the disappearance of certain dialects. There is a uniformity when it comes to making movies and therefore of the cinematic art. This uniformity is supposed to fill certain formats, but it kills the artist, the individual spirit and the spirit of independent cinema, which is all about independent thinking. It is a fight we eagerly lead. However, we would have made the movie even without any money.

### **Who supported the movie?**

Katharina Posch: The movie was supported by bm:ukk, the province of Lower Austria, Cine Art Styria and the cultural office of the city of Vienna, altogether we had a budget of €65.000,-. Not every project demands the same execution, and this project was not presented on a blank sheet of paper to the funding offices. We had a dossier filled with the main cast, locations, mood, scene sequences and an argumentative work method which proposed the security of us knowing which goal we are working towards. At the same time,

because of the work method and the frame we drew of this movie, it was possible to work with a very small budget. Self-exploitation is not the goal, not even with a movie like this. In our case, something different wouldn't have been possible because we wanted to try something different.

Gerald Kerkletz: A binding script, a more or less common method of operating and production condition gives all involved a sense of security and are therefore, for most funding institutions mandatory. Often despite the fact that a project with a different approach, might be more harmonious or cheaper to produce. I personally believe that the movie industry would profit more, the more diverse it is, and this does not only apply to finished movies but also to the production stories. On that note, I think we should risk something together more often.

Daniel Hoesl: I have written movie scripts and I will continue to write movie scripts. There should be a possibility to realize movies differently, as an alternative, since we follow this philosophy of cooking. *Soldate Jeannette* didn't need a script.

### **Does the form apply to the content?**

Daniel Hoesl: This goes hand in hand. I hope that the one speaks for the other. That at least was our plan. It requires a philosophy to work this way and the necessity to understand that, next to the regime there is freedom, this freedom you have to take and pay the price. This way of producing leads to content and one is so richly rewarded with possibilities of content. When it's about décor, costumes, casting, one is presented with a Carte blanche which gives you total freedom. To have a script has other advantages of course...

**There are very interesting elements in pictorial design and rhythm. Idly waiting in the safe room takes probably longer than seduction and a night of love. Figures are only shown as pars pro toto (foot in the shoe, neck with pearl necklace), a scene in the train is entirely spoken from the off while the camera is fixed onto the tracks. How did the premises pictorial design look like?**

Gerald Kerkletz: Only in retrospective did it become clear to me that our formal use of pictures and stories in the movie, reflects our method of working and the conditions of the shoot. Resolution was all about breaking it down to a minimum. No establishing shots, reverse shots only when really necessary. When faced with the decision whether we wanted a distance shot or a close up, we would decide on the spot and did not leave it up to cutting. To get back to cooking language: as long as the story continued to develop it was important not to get lost in a sea of spices, exotic ingredients which can be imported from all over the world and are really hard to find, but to manage with the five, six, seven, with seven being an important number to us, we never wanted to go beyond seven-essential things. Our team practically never consisted of more than seven people.

**When Ernst meets Fanni for the first time, there isn't a reverse shot. Was this reverse shot never actually filmed or was it cut out later?**

Gerald Kerkletz: It never existed. Things have of course changed a bit during cutting, but within a scene hardly anything got cut.

**We hear a whole dialog scene in a train, yet we see the train in a distance shot from above...**

Katharina Posch: That we shot the train scene the way we did, was on the other hand for production reasons.

Daniel Hoesl: Prehistory is that we couldn't afford to shoot with the Austrian Railways. Without money one gets into quite kafkaesque situations and therefore we ended up with this solution which I prefer, dealing with the situation by coping with it and applying our rigid standards to the situation. You cannot tell the story any faster than this. It is fun to challenge the audience.

Gerald Kerkletz: This scene developed through a rejection, which in retrospective one could call another gift. You only have the idea to do it in that way, when you are forced to.

Daniel Hoesl: The city in the first part of the movie depicts itself, as it presents itself. In rectangles, with walls and square angles, density: one feels driven into a corner. That is why there is a rigid adjustment. The first tilt happens in the forest. Camera-wise the movie splits into three parts: the city part, the forest part and the country part. The farm mixes the styles as industrial farming methods have moved in. First there is a break through the first hand camera scene, later the farm offers an assembly of opportunities through its architecture and the architecture of the management of the farm. And then the landscape implodes. This changes the camera perspective.

Gerald Kerkletz: The breakfast scene, which only consists of close-ups, is another example for efficiency. We never shoot coverage. Later in the movie, there is a welcome party for Fanni which was filmed entirely in one total view. There we did not film any close-ups. For me it was a lot about not to think of the small team, the little budget, the short time as a disadvantage, but as a challenge to concentrate on the essentials.

**For this interview you spontaneously decided that you, as the three backbones of this project, wanted to talk about this collaboration together. How did this synergy develop, what stands behind the European Film Conspiracy Kollektive?**

Katharina Posch: I met Gerald Kerkletz through Nikolaus Geyrhalter film production, where I'm employed junior producer. He told me briefly about Daniel in May 2011 and showed me two short movies by him. His short "The Madness of the Day" was very appealing to me. I just came back from Middle America where I had been in touch with the independent movie industry through my work there at film festivals. At this point we only knew that we wanted to shoot a movie by fall 2011, which on such short notice is impossible when going through the normal funding process. We had to stick to the timeframe though because of our actors. So we started to look for locations, build a team, create funding documents. This movie was a heart-matter for me, even if it was difficult at times to afford it financially as well as time-wise.

Gerald Kerkletz: I let myself get involved with this project out of joy for experimenting and because I knew what Daniel stands for. Within an idea of complicity, people found each other to try something new, even though they were advised against it. From the moment on where we saw the projection of the movie and therefore its existence, we had a feeling that we

made it, regardless of this recognition from outside. Everything that happened afterwards, Rotterdam, Sundance and what still may come, is good for us, but it stays the movie, the experiment which we were proud of from the beginning.

Daniel Hoesl: I stay with my artistic pigheadedness. If nobody saw the movie, it wouldn't have influenced me. Not because I have no interest in the public, but because I know that I will break once I bend. If the next movie isn't successful, so be it. I have already made movies that did not have a premiere at all. Nevertheless those are great movies, without which collaboration with Gerald and Katharina, who both saw these movies, would have never happened. Even if these movies aren't shown at any festivals, they remain pioneer movies for an independent way of thinking. European Film Conspiracy is not a company, but a philosophy. It is a collective like *Groupe 5*, and its philosophy consists of working with the minimum, working together and community based. This offers about artistic freedom necessary.

Gerald Kerkletz: The European Film Conspiracy for me is the idea of shooting a movie with a circle of friends and walking on paths that may not be found in a map. For some goals the security of established paths totally make sense. In a movie like *Michael* for instance, I was grateful for it but that was a totally different movie. If Daniel writes a script that demands classical financial and production conditions, it probably won't be a movie by the European Film Conspiracy, we would seek a production company then. But if we feel like walking off the common paths again, we will have the possibility to refine this kitchen. I do hope for a little more money then. But the philosophy of the European Film Conspiracy should not be afflicted by that.

#### **Who did the cooking during the shoot?**

Katharina Posch: Barbara Wilding cooked very well. She and all the other colleagues earned a big credit, without them this movie wouldn't have been possible.

Daniel Hoesl: It is very essential when in a community (in opposition to our society) to be there for each other, to cook, to sit down and take the time, not only to consume together, but to be together.

Interview: Karin Schiefer/Austrian Film Commission.

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