

PICTURE TREE INTERNATIONAL
PRESENTS



The *DEIX* movie

Snotty Boy

My life in
Siegheilkirchen



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Length: 86 min.
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Directors: Santiago López Jover, Marcus H. Rosenmüller
Production company: Aichholzer Filmproduktion, Filmbüro Münchner Freiheit
Animation director: Santiago López Jover
Art director: Manfred Deix (†)
Screenplay: Martin Ambrosch
Script editor: Roland Zag
Music: Gerd Baumann
Film Editing: Philipp Bittner
Producers: Josef Aichholzer, Ernst Geyer
Co-producers: Josef Reidinger, Antonio Exacoustos
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Short Synopsis

In 1960s Sieghelkirchen, a small town in the Austrian hinterland that is steeped in reactionary, ultra-Catholic attitudes, the son of a hard-working innkeeper – known as Snotty Boy to all and sundry – is at odds with the narrow-minded confines of his home town. But his unstoppable talent for drawing gives him an outlet for his discontent as well as entertaining his school mates and exposing the town's bigwigs in all their ridiculousness to a collective orgy of unashamed laughter, thus saving his beloved, the ravishingly pretty Mariolina, from malicious persecution by a handful of political die-hards.
A politically incorrect and funny animation, based on the life and work of illustrator and cartoonist Manfred Deix.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER (director)

Interviewer: KARIN SCHIEFER

Manfred Deix (1949 – 2016) is listed in the credits of Snotty Boy as Art Director. To what extent should we perceive this Austrian artist, who became famous particularly because of his sharp, provocative caricatures, as a source of inspiration and artistic mentor for the film?

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: Before his death Manfred Deix took on the screenplay and provided a number of dramaturgical influences based on his own life story. But he enriched our work with his casting even more than in a dramaturgical sense: all the characters in Snotty Boy are taken from his creative work. We only constructed a very few new figures. There was a period when I had about 20 of his books lying around at home, and together with the producers and the creatives at the animation company Digital Light Factory, in particular Marcus Salzmann, we tried to work out who could be which character. I wasn't involved from the very beginning: the producers – Josef Aichholzer from Vienna and Ernst Geier from Munich – came to me in 2012 or 2013 with a screenplay. I was so impressed by it that I came on board. Definitely my sort of thing: the story of a snot-nosed kid who uses his artistic talent to liberate himself from the establishment in his village. Poetic, cheeky, bawdy and surprising. A third element of Snotty Boy that we owe to Manfred Deix is his aquarelle drawing style; applying that to the aesthetics of the project was a challenge for the creative team.

Which new challenges arise for someone who can draw on experience in feature films but takes charge of an animation film project for the first time?

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: This animation project was a completely new experience for me. Many years ago I approached the job, absolutely clueless, and I've learned an incredible amount. I'd never have been able to do it by myself. That's why a few years ago Santiago López Jover came on board as co-director, bringing with him considerable know-how and a huge amount of feeling for the characterization. Incidentally, I treated the characters from the very beginning the way I would in a normal feature film. Many of the processes are the same as in a live action film: working on the screenplay with the writers, questions of interpretation, creating a storyboard with a storyboard artist, and lots more. But one completely new experience was that we really had to “produce” everything. With an animation there is no location scouting, which might mean you have to rewrite a scene to adapt to the external conditions, the location. We created the village

of Siegheilkirchen entirely according to our own imagination. There were some fantastic thinkers, artists and writers involved in the production, and the whole thing developed as teamwork with them. It was an incredible learning process for me. For example, when it comes to set design, I realize it's often the illogical things that convey authenticity. On the other hand, it was crucial to analyze which authentic images would make a film no longer Deixian. What did we have to make non-authentic in order to keep it Deixian? That required a completely new way of thinking.

Deix's artistic depiction of Austria is very unforgiving, showing a land dominated by three driving forces: untamed sexuality, Catholic hypocrisy and inveterate sympathy for National Socialism. And his perspective on human beings always has something distasteful about it. Which balancing act did you feel you had to perform to make the Deixian desire to provoke and cross boundaries appropriate for film audiences?

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: I think that a good story which addresses audiences has to be based on good dramaturgy, and it had to fit in with our financial constraints. That was the biggest challenge. The fundamental aim was to find gripping dramaturgy. If you make a Deixian film, the three aspects you have mentioned have to be in there. And it has to be said that in 2012, when I was approached, some subjects didn't have the same contemporary resonance they do today. I never imagined how important the film would be today, and I'm not happy about the fact that certain political attitudes have once again come to the surface. These three aspects certainly make the film what it is, and they also make it worth seeing. The distasteful element is also a fact, and we allow that to show through as well. When you make a film it's always a product of the producers and the director, so it's also my attitude. Perhaps we toned down some aspects a little. Maybe Manfred Deix would have added something more. But after all, Santiago and I were doing the directing.

The film depicts childhood in the provinces, in Lower Austria, during the postwar period, which clearly also suggests one explanation for Deix's view of Austria. Was it perhaps possible to transform the people in his caricatures into film characters without so much difficulty because they have a multi-faceted aspect, a personality?

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: That was definitely the case. The figures in Deix's caricatures have depth and character, which means they're not at all one-dimensional. However repulsive one of those figures might be, there is always the fascination of watching him, and as a result you also develop a certain sympathy towards him. It sounds crazy. But that's what his characters are like. Deix manages to bring the inner values to the surface. Marek, for example, who is always sitting in the bar with Poldi, is a good example. In the screenplay he didn't have a real function at first, and we chose him because we liked him. So the writer started to make him come to life, and scenes were written for him, because he is someone who becomes likeable. We allowed ourselves to be guided by the characters in the drawings in order to give them certain dialogue, attitudes and scenes.

On the one hand the film depicts something about the courage to pursue art and to break out of narrow confines. But on the other hand it also shows a political atmosphere where National Socialism still resonates powerfully, and those echoes can be heard right up to the present day. Which themes in Snotty Boy did you feel especially strongly about?

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: We are all born in a system which represents home for us. You hope you can feel safe and secure in this home, in this extended family. If you don't feel at ease, then first you tend to blame yourself; you feel at fault because your views are different. The snot-nosed boy realizes that the values of his home are hypocritical: the regulars in the bar, the teacher and the priest, even his parents: people who will go along with anything. I hate violence, so the idea of art helping to change the world for the better – drawing caricatures, in the case of the snot-nosed boy – is hugely appealing to me. And even though the snot-nosed boy doesn't succeed in changing others, there's a certain satisfaction that he has changed himself and his life. And that's my belief: that I should question the values I'm born in and therefore take some responsibility for the world.

The shabbiness typical of the post-war period is captured very impressively, and so are the faces of the characters. On the one hand you have the extremely distinctive Deixian physiognomy, but is also the face of Mariolina, who is a beautiful girl without copying the perfect facial expression of Disney characters.

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: A long time before the debate that is preoccupying everyone right now, there were always powerful female figures in my films. Natascha, Mariolina's mother, is based on Marietta Deix, and we were particularly keen to convey the fact that alongside our snot-nosed boy, who is pretty insecure,

the real “cheeky brat” is Mariolina. It took us a very long time to find the characters we invented – snot-nosed boy and Mariolina – because they didn't feature in Deix's cosmos of characters. As far as the Deixian characters are concerned, I'd compare it to a normal casting process – with the same problems that come up in real life. For the village it was important to us that it didn't look too neat and tidy, so you should always sense that the façade is crumbling, the society inherently fragile.

Were there some moments where you experienced animation as a more expressive form of film narrative? And where did the opposite happen?

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: To be honest, this work has made me venture much further into the world of animated film; I have watched a lot of films that I had neglected previously. I've only now realized what a wonderful world that is, and what opportunities it provides. On the other hand, the work itself is less personal. There's no interaction with the actors, which is something I value particularly in live action films. But I couldn't say right now whether I prefer one film world or the other. They're two different worlds, and on top of that I make documentaries now and then; I think each of them has its advantages. But with animation films you can only convey the ideas in your head if you have the appropriate budget. On the other hand, I have to admit that creative solutions can be found if there is a shortage of finance, just like in feature films. Without Santiago López Jover and all the creatives the film would never have become what it is, and I definitely underestimated how long the work would take.

Did animation prove to be the ideal medium in order to do justice to an artist like Manfred Deix?

MARCUS H. ROSENMÜLLER: That certainly was the crucial factor. I remember clearly that my first reaction was to think: yes, the screenplay is a super story, so why don't we try to make it as a live action film? But it quickly emerged that precisely because the film characters were developed from Manfred Deix's caricatures, an animation film would be perfect. And of course it's great that a film about Manfred Deix, inspired by him, has become one of the first full-length animation films in Austria. Precisely because his artistic work is so outstanding. He's a really great artist. I am also proud that the producers came to me with their suggestion that I should be involved. I myself have spent a huge amount of time with regulars in bars like that in Siegheilkirchen, and I also included these impressions in Grave Decisions. That world wasn't at all alien to me. I felt pretty much at home there. The essence of Deix's characters applies just the same way to us in Bavaria. Oh sure.

INTERVIEW WITH SANTIAGO LÓPEZ JOVER (director, animation director)

Interviewer: IOAN GAVRILOVIC

SANTIAGO: I'm Santiago López, I'm a director and animation professional. In this case I directed the film together with Marcus H. Rosenmüller. My career has been focused on character animation for many years, and lately I have been concentrating more on directing and supervising animation projects. So that's my professional background.

IOAN: So in a hands-on example, what exactly would those tasks be?

S: I directed this project together with the talented director Marcus H. Rosenmüller. I was supervising designs, building the narrative, and directing the animation, among other tasks. First I worked on how to translate the script into images, into storytelling, that was my first task in the movie. Once the design was defined (visual style, characters, locations, etc) we started to draw a storyboard from the script, and then we created an animatic, as it's called: this is a video where the storyboard drawings are edited with some temporary music and sounds, so that you can previsualize the whole movie; all the breakdown of shots, all the acting of the characters, the mood and the narrative pace is already there. You can see what works and what doesn't in the film. A reduced team of super-talented storyboard artists and Philipp Bittner, our editor, helped to create a very solid animatic that formed the storytelling backbone of the film. The next production steps are layout, animation, compositing... things that are related to the final visuals of the film. We are now finishing the animation, and the next step will be the the color grading lightning colour and rendering – all that sort of stuff. I have to supervise all that and give guidelines, direction, etc...

I: So I'm guessing you've been involved in this project for quite a while now -

S: Yeah, more than two years.

I: So if you could maybe give the audience or the viewers an idea of the hard work this process actually involves.

S: Well with me it's a really different case, because I'm not Austrian, so when I came on board I had no idea who Manfred Deix was. I came from working on other projects for the wonderful studio Cartoon Saloon, mostly fantasy stories for kids, which was very different. The first thing for me was to learn about the artist behind this more adult story. My first impression was that he was an artist who enjoyed

provocation... Actually, as a Catholic, I felt provoked by his cartoons, which initially made me doubt if I was the right person to work on this film. At the beginning it was like "Oh, this is completely different to all the animation projects I have been working on until now – I need to learn about him first." It was a process where Deix and I got to know each other in a kind of way: the producer Josef helped me a lot with that. And it reached the point where I understood who the person behind the provocative art was, and his particular vision of Austrian society, and human psychology in general. In that way, I find very interesting how this film approaches the artist from different points of view, from real events that happened in his life... the story is based on these real events. But also from an artistic, visual point of view, his art, his humour, most of the big Deix topics are in the film; we tried to be very respectful to his essence. It was very interesting to explore and adapt all that material in such a way that I could feel comfortable working with it.

I: So, how do you translate the emotions or the performance of the actors into an animated character? How does the process work?

S: Normally you have the script first and with the script you record the voices. Marcus (the other director) is a talented director of live action films, so he is really skilled at directing actors: he did an amazing job leading the voice recording sessions and getting the exact emotions needed for each scene from the actors. These voices give a lot of hints about how the characters are going to be. And it's also good to shoot the voice recording sessions, because when the actors are performing the voices, they are already acting. So it's giving you ideas for the character animation. But also, besides that, it's very, very important that the mood and the acting are worked into the storyboard. The storyboard in animation is not like with a live action film; it is of course a guide for the compositing and the camera angle, but it's much more precise about how the characters should act. It needs far more drawings than a normal storyboard for live action films, drawings that express how the character performs, what the character is doing. So basically the animator receives the scene prepared for animation, with the voices and the storyboard drawings (which have been edited in the animatic). These, together with the director's briefing, are the main guidelines for the mood of the film and the action. And then after that, it depends on the animation supervisor and the animator to agree how to approach those hints and that mood. We also filmed ourselves performing the action as additional references for the acting, so we have like a live-action reference to approach the character. And in this case also it's

particular, because the characters are designed with these Deix features. These features, with the cheeky faces, the big lips, the exaggerated cross-eyes... all these needed to be animated, so we made a selection of shots that were intended to emphasize the "Deix" look. And we were always trying to focus on these things when approaching the animation. To sum up, that's the process: storyboard, voices, references, and then the animation.

I: Taking the concept of a reference point, how did you reference original Deix drawings or watercolours? Because that's the only thing you had. It was 2D. How did you put those characters into the stories? How were they pictured?

S: Normally there is an art director on every animation film project. Here I would say that the art director was Deix. Even if he was not in the film at that point, we always considered his artistic production as the base design material. Not only the characters but also the texture of the film itself is strongly inspired by the watercolour technique he uses. So, there had already been some previous work done on how to explore that Deix look in 3D. When I came on board, my first thought was that this movie would be better in 2D, because Deix was basically painting with watercolours, very analogue stuff! But then I saw how Markus Huber, our CG supervisor, and his team were doing an amazing job translating the look of Deix into the 3D characters, the objects, the sets, everything. We aimed to have Deix present in every single shot of the movie. So yeah, Deix is the art director.

I: Maybe if you could elaborate on that a little bit. How dear is this project to you, and how do you feel now that it has finally been completed?

S: Well actually, one of the main difficulties was that it was the first Austrian animation movie. Here in Austria there was no real experience in animation films, no tradition, so everything was new for the team, how to approach the different steps of the production. I think as artists who have worked in other countries and on other films, other stuff, we brought some experience to the project and that was good. But we discovered that it was very limited in terms of finances, it had a smaller budget than other independent animation films, and of course, way less than the major American animation studios' films with their budgets of forty million and more. In the end it was all worthwhile, because now we have a smaller and humbler film, but one that is vibrant and exciting all the same.

I: Maybe you could say some more about that. It must be a great feeling for you as an animator, or as an animation director, to finally complete the project.

S: Every time I see the outcome from the guys who are rendering the scenes, it's amazing what we have achieved. It's looking really nice. And now you have seen the process until the rendering of the final images, and now with the amazing music of Gerd Baumann. This is amazing! It's the kind of movie it is. It's so unique, so different. It's completely different to what we are used to watching. In animation the movies all come from Disney, from the USA. We have a movie that is for adults, a coming-of-age story that deals with important universal topics, but which at the same time has a very unique visual style that comes from Deix and that I had never seen before in my years of experience in the business. We have a story that is also really unique and funny and emotional.

I: And it includes a lot of aspects of Austrian society. It's a great combination of all the main subjects that kind of triggered the art of Deix I think. The xenophobia, the Catholic Church, it's all perfectly wrapped up together.

S: Absolutely, yes. That's one of the strong points of the film, that it treats a lot of subjects that are indigenous, very recognizable for an Austrian person. But they are also subjects that a person that is not from here can understand and empathize with. When I started to explore the script material, I realized how cleverly he Austrian society was visualized, how authentic the context felt. And I was able to enjoy it and to understand it, because it's displayed in such nice way where you find the satire and the humor behind it, but also the love for the characters that Deix always showed in his work. And what's really interesting is that the story is set in 1967 or so, many years after the Second World War. The young people in Austria realized the terrible past of their country in the war, and wanted to disengage from it. In one of the romantic moments of the film, one of the characters says "There is going to be a revolution", prophesying the love revolution of May '68. The film reflects the historic transition of social values that took place during those years, in Austria and across the world.

I: So, it definitely also has an international appeal to some people.

S: Totally. When I read the script the first time it reminded me of the films of Fellini, in particular *Amarcord*. The 400 Blows also came to mind, and I thought that would be great to make an animation film with that mixture of costumbrist comedy and coming-of-age drama with such unique and great characters. This is a combination that feels universal no matter where are you from.

I: So, after all this time you spent with these characters, I'm sure you kind of fell in love with some of them. And also the whole project. What is your

really personal relationship with the set, the characters and with this world that you were thrown into?

S: Yeah, I feel a special affection, a love for Wimmerl and Grasberger. Then Natascha. These three characters ...

I: Who are these characters?

S: Wimmerl and Grasberger. When I was working on the storyboard, I put a lot of emphasis on these two guys, because in most of the situations they don't live an idealization of their reality. The script is very smart in that way, it treats these boys as normal guys, not idealized in the Disney way; together with Rotzbub they feel like flesh-and-blood guys. They are real, with all their defects and their good sides. And it's really funny to hear the conversations they have, because it's really a conversation I could have had with my friends when I was fourteen or fifteen years old. And as I said, on the storyboard, all the acting, etc, was worked on to make them look believable... characters that we could empathize with. And then I have a favourite character that for me is particularly interesting in our current times – Natascha: a Roma woman who goes with her daughter into a 1960s tavern frequented only by men; she lights a cigarette and orders a glass of wine. A woman who doesn't fear a macho society and who defies the impositions of her time, but loves and protects her daughter all the same. The animation and the look of her were designed to work as a magnet for the audience, a figure that personalizes diversity and freedom, and whom you want to know better.

I: Could you go into why this project is so unique. What are all the reasons why this is such a special project and something entirely new?

S: The film has very good aspects that I will summarize in three or four points. The first thing is the storytelling. It's a coming-of-age story about a main character who is not a superhero, is not a super guy who's brave, who's determined ... No, it's more or less the opposite: he's like an anti-hero. And we see the evolution of the character. How he transforms from this anti-hero to a guy who finds the strength and uses his drawing skills to confront the problems of his town. So that is something that for me makes the whole story different. The second thing is that it's an animation but is for adult audiences. So there are no taboos in the film. It touches lots of things at the right point and with very good intentions. And it criticizes things that are, unfortunately, nowadays very present again. Like racism, these kinds of things. And I think the movie treats this with a very good moral standpoint. And then the other thing is the visuals. The visuals for this animation film are so unique and so different. I think there's really almost nothing else like this animation. And I'm talking from my own experience, because I have worked on many different movies with different styles in different countries and different places. And this is probably the most different project I have ever worked on. So I would say these topics are for me what make the film really good.

INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN AMBROSCH (screenwriter)

Interviewer: HOSEA RATSCHILLER

Hosea Ratschiller: The ROTZBUB (SNOTTY BOY) project is over ten years old. At what point did you become part of it?

Martin Ambrosch: I came on board during the last third of the project. Quite a lot of work had been done on it before that. When I joined I realized relatively quickly that there was one mistake that had to be avoided at all costs. And that was to try to make an imitation Deix film out of Manfred Deix and his humour. The story has to be told in a completely different way, in a warm, agreeable, wittily entertaining way that should not make the mistake of trying to emulate a master in his mastery – because that is guaranteed to go belly-up.

HR: Was ROTZBUB the first time you had got involved with comedy?

MA: Yes, more or less! Of course I'd frequently had to do with comedy, but in the case it was the first time I'd actually written one.

HS: Because your usual kind of thing is blood, dark valleys, hell and crime series, etc...

MA: People get stuck in pigeon-holes, but that doesn't mean that sometimes one wakes up and suddenly thinks – wow there's a new pigeon-hole. My desk has lots of different pigeon-holes, not just one large one.

HS: Will you develop your comedy screenwriting portfolio?

MA: Let's just say I've already had a number of enquiries. Enquiries in the sense that producers have said, come on, it's time you wrote another comedy. Because I always try, even in Spuren des Bösen (Anatomy of Evil), for example, to slip comedic elements into these figures, which always work well. And I was doing that right from the beginning, when I wrote SOKO Kitzbühel (an Austrian TV crime series) many, many years ago – that was a signature feature in the 'odd-couple' relationship between the leads.

HS: Do you believe there's a difference in approach in your role as storyteller as to whether you want to give a subject a tragic or comic treatment?

MA: No. If I take a story seriously then there are always two sides. I can see it

deadly seriously and I can view it from its absurd side. And when I view it from the absurd angle, then it's only a small step to comedy.

HS: ROTZBUB is a national premiere, a premiere for the Austrian film industry as a whole in that it's an animated feature film. Does the circumstance whether a film is animated play a role in the writing of a screenplay?

MA: Well, it was a very novel and also a very illuminating experience. It's the first time I've written a screenplay and known that it will be realized just as it's written. Down to the last detail. Because it can't be done any other way – because it then has to be animated. And I needed time to realize that there was nothing that could be changed later on in the editing process or added when a scene didn't work that well. So in that sense absolutely everything in the screenplay is important. And it was a great experience to realize that it's not just a working basis. Fortunately I work with people who take my screenplays very seriously. It's not always been like that. But in this case I suddenly understood that I have to take the screenwriting more seriously. Because every move – a figure walking from here to there – will be transposed exactly. You can't just say, 'I'll leave it to you to come up with an idea of how you get from here to there'.

HS: Does that mean thousands of extra discussions and meetings?

MA: In the case of a screenplay for a non-animated feature film it's like this: once the screenplay is ready there are lots of meetings, reads-through and so on. With an animated film there are lots of discussions while it's still beginning to take shape, then again with the storyboards and animatics. All that is reviewed again and again and discussed with the animators. What can be done before it gets to the stage where any changes become unaffordable? So this means that the storyboards are discussed down to the last detail.

HS: Where does the director fit into this process?

MA: In this case there are two directors. One is the animation director, who spent hours sitting next to me working on the scenes, saying things like, 'How are we going to do that?', 'I'd do it like this'... And I'd say 'Ok, perhaps it would work like this...'. And with Rosi (Marcus H. Rosenmüller) the process was more like 'What does the figure look like?' 'What's his/her character?' 'What's the setting?' I sat

with Rosi in this room for three days; we laid drawing paper on the floor and more or less sketched out the whole film. But that was all ahead of the actual work – subsequently I had more to do with the animation director.

HS: Did you have optical sketches of the figures?

MA: No, I had no optical sketches at all.

HS: So they were based on what you wrote?

MA: It was there in concrete form. How the Snotty Boy and Mariolina look is mostly down to Rosi. We had long discussions about this. I can remember that early on we talked a lot about the issue of them not looking too conventional. They had to have something slightly weird about them and not look too ‘pretty’. That was a really important process, bringing them to life and not making the mistake of making the figure completely ‘Deixish’ or giving Mariolina elfin looks.

HS: Had this story with the 1960s and Austria’s Nazi past been a subject you’d tackled before as an author or was this the first time you’d done a screenplay with this setting?

MA: No, it’s a subject that’s occupied me all my life. I’m Jewish, so it’s something I was confronted with very early on. Sometimes out in the country even today the people there come out with something unwittingly anti-Semitic – it takes your breath away. And they’re completely unaware of what they’ve just said.

HS: I found the film highly competent – in depicting how it really is. What the mechanisms are in a table full of die-hard locals at the tavern, the way the film avoids taking the high moral ground and dismissing them from above as ‘idiots’. The dynamics that operate there, the relationships of dependency and so on, they’re all there in the film. And I really liked the figure of the butcher’s assistant and the way she isn’t just one-dimensional but has her own story to tell. Is this a world of stories – growing up in the country, in a provincial town, that you can relate to?

MA: And how! My mother is Jewish and from Vienna, and my father was from rural Styria. And I absorbed both of these worlds. Naturally I feel revulsion and disgust at Nazism, but I also see that people just went along with it and say things they

picked up in childhood. I’ve often heard people saying things like: ‘Weißt eh, da haben wir uns angestrengt bis zur Vergasung.’¹ But I wouldn’t automatically think the person saying this is a Nazi – it’s just the atmosphere in the country. That’s the negative side. The other is a feeling of belonging. These tables of regulars at the pub put on a friendly front, but in the background the burgomaster slopes off to the busy butcher’s assistant like in the film. There are always two sides and one gives the other the wink. So I feel very, very close to this world and its tables of regulars. From an early age on.

HS: While I was watching it the thought occurred to me that it’s in fact a story of how democracy began in Austria. About its beginnings. And actually there’s no true hero in it except the figure of Marek, voiced by Erwin Steinhauer. And at the same time in my view he’s the most ‘Deixesque’ figure in the film – at least visually. Was that intentional?

MA: That he looks the way he does is not a coincidence. It was done deliberately. But for me it was important that we had a figure who can link the two worlds And that’s what Marek is capable of doing. He has both these sides in him. He’s one of those good-hearted men that I’ve often encountered in taverns. The kind that say, ‘We’re all human, let’s get along’ – that’s Marek for me. Marek, if you like, is the shape-shifter, who on the one hand can sit at a table with the Nazi die-hards and say ‘Come on, that’s enough, now’ instead of pounding on the table. And then he can sit in Poldi’s espresso bar with Mariolina’s mother and you see that is where he belongs. He’s got many different sides to him.

HS: Is that perhaps a typically Austrian thing?

MA: It would be good if it were. Because he’s not an unlikable figure.

HS: I once asked my granny, who’s almost a hundred, what the most important event in her life had been. Or what she had thought least likely to happen. She has been through a lot in her life, but to my great surprise she said that no one would have expected that Austria would be able to exist as a nation state. That it had turned out to be capable of surviving – that was the great event in her life. And I thought to myself that this Marek perhaps has something to do with it...

MA: I’d agree.

HS: And I also had the feeling that it’s almost like Part One. We hope that the Snotty Boy moves to the city and has a great time as he grows up. What are the chances of a Part Two?

MA: I could imagine it. I know it always depends on how it’s received. So if it’s a huge success, then yes, it would be easy to imagine. I’d find it very amusing, also how the Snotty Boy ends up at the Academy of Fine Arts, for example. And the Vienna of that time. Yes, it would be great!

HS: You’ve written many screenplays for films that have been of outstanding importance for Austrian cinema and tell unusual Austrian stories, in narrative modes that have not often been seen before. Can you give me an example of an Austrian story that you believe hasn’t yet been told and one that you would like to write?

MA: I think that would be what’s in the pipeline in any case. And that’s a comedy, without animation, that moves away from the ‘cabaret film’, fronted by a famous stand-up comic. The big successes of the last few decades have been these kinds of cabaret films. It must be said that Josef Hader broke the soil in this respect. And most importantly, it’s developed over the years in the meantime. I believe that one must start from an indigenous tradition. And it was really important to have these cabaret films because they started a tradition, with people saying: ‘We

look forward to going to the cinema to enjoy ourselves as normal audiences and not as cineastes. And we get the message when it’s not shoved in our faces but conveyed between the lines’. That’s what characterized all the cabaret films – this open-mindedness and seeing the world at a slightly different angle. And that continues. It’s not for nothing that I write a lot of crime feature and thrillers. Because that has tradition. If you watched all the crime series on Austrian and German TV you’d end up with square eyes. But this signifies that it’s the western of German and Austrian TV. And that’s why it goes down well even in China. Because it’s a familiar world that we don’t have to acquire knowledge of beforehand. And that’s why I believe that comedy as a genre, because it’s very character-driven, a good opportunity to tell stories. Far too few comedies have come out in recent times. And even fewer good ones.

HS: I’ll look forward to it. Do you think a lot of other animation films will come out in Austria now? Will this be a start or was it an experiment and the infrastructure that has been built up will crumble away again?

MA: For me it would be great if it continued to exist. It’s been a huge pioneering achievement. Especially thanks to Ernst Geyer and Josef Aichholzer, who brought it all into being. But let’s be honest: the question is always of how it’s received. If audiences like it, then I believe it will establish a tradition.

¹ ‘We worked until we dropped’, but using the expression ‘Vergasung’ (‘gasification’), which though originally deriving from the field of chemistry is now associated for obvious reasons with Nazi crimes.

INTERVIEW WITH PRODUCER JOSEF AICHHOLZER

How did the project come about?

Ernst Geyer, a fellow-producer from Munich, and I paid a visit to Manfred Deix and said: ‘Manfred, your cartoons, your figures, your people enchant not just us but many, many people, and we think it would be great if they came to life and started moving.’ At first Manfred hesitated, then said: ‘So how would you do that?’, and then we showed him what it would look like if his two-dimensional figures suddenly turned into people, solid bodies that move and walk independently without him having to draw and write anything in addition. From that moment on he was full of enthusiasm for the project. Then there was a lengthy process before the story was ready. Funding went relatively smoothly and quickly. Compared to an analogue film we were plunging in at the deep end, because in Austria we hadn’t had any real experience with making an animated film of over 90 minutes. That ended up taking years.

The film tackles many large subjects of Deix’s, and his criticism of society – everyday racism, the way Austria’s Nazi past continued to affect post-war society, the overbearing influence of the Church. How were all these themes compressed into the film?

Again I can only start with Manfred himself, whom I got to know very well. After all, we lived with this project together for ten years before he died. He was a great entertainer and remained a child all his life. This child in him saw something with a child’s eyes, voiced it and then put it down on paper as a drawing. The child’s eyes tell what everybody sees but what grown-ups then don’t dare to name and later forget to name. And that’s what these themes are: the themes from life at the time when Manfred Deix was growing up. The time when the Second World War was over, after the post-war reconstruction began and a kind of suffocating dome of secrecy and silence hung over Austria: the past was not talked about. Nobody talked about how it could have come to us walking into this dark hole, persecuting the Jews, looking away, always ‘not there when it happened’. Those are the themes that he commented on – not in the manner of an investigative journalist nailing the topics of the day to his masthead – by observing people looking away in everyday life. It was this habit of looking away, averting one’s gaze, especially in the provincial towns and villages, where patriarchal structures predominated and women were not welcome in public life. There’s a brief scene in the film where Mariolina’s mother comes into the tavern as a matter of course because she simply wants to treat herself to a glass of wine after work, and then

men stare at her and say, ‘what’s a woman doing in here?’. Those are the themes that he experienced day in, day out, and captured in his drawings. He knew there was something wrong with the notions that women should get back into the kitchen, that people from elsewhere – strangers, foreigners – should be sent away. He knew that a Church that swept everything under the carpet (or rather cassock), shouldn’t exist in that form, because it did harm, and also that political issues should not be solved in a way that wasn’t always in the best interests of society. That there’s a teacher who bullies children, and a burgomaster who in an outwardly god-fearing town likes to run after young girls while talking about piety.

Let’s talk briefly about the contents of SNOTTY BOY.

The story’s inspired by what made Manfred Deix into Manfred Deix, without being a biopic of Manfred Deix. In this respect it’s the story of a shy fourteen-year-old who grows up in a small staid provincial town and realizes that while he has family and friends there, his true home is where his drawing pencils are. There his life is secure, that’s where he can discover the world. He falls in love for the first time in his life with a young girl who’s a stranger in the town and is given to know that he’s done something wrong, ‘because one is not allowed to fall in love with a foreigner’. He realizes that the bigwigs in the town want to get rid of these people. Everything rebels in him, because he wants to save his beloved from harm. He takes out his pencil and shows the people as they really are. That’s when he becomes Manfred Deix and in doing so saves Mariolina, also saving, so to speak, the soul of the town.

In a way, the Snotty Boy is a prime example of a rebel; the film is a declaration of love to rebellion. It’s the coming-of-age story of an artist and a declaration of love to the attitude that one should never let oneself be oppressed, that one should always be true to oneself.

I was young in the 50s, 60s and 70s. Back then as children we always heard the prototypical comment from the grown-ups: ‘What will the neighbours say?’ That’s exactly what happens to the Snotty Boy – his mother tells him, ‘don’t do anything wrong, anything dirty, don’t be cheeky, be good, just as the authorities want you to be’. That’s the story that’s being told here: dare to feel what you feel, dare to see what you see, dare to do what you want to do – in that respect it is a story of doing what one wants to do, against the resistance from powers that want you to submit. And – as he falls in love – it’s a declaration of love to love itself.

Which is all quite close to the truth ...

It is quite close to the true story. At the end of the day the story of Manfred and Marietta Deix resulted in a wonderful partnership that lasted a lifetime. They went through thick and thin together, until Manfred Deix’s death; they were like two polar opposites who held fast to one another.

What’s your personal connection to Deix’s work?

There is one person I cherish above all others in my remembrance – and that’s Manfred. I often sat with him in the pub and always so enjoyed the way he could imagine his way into stories and fall about laughing like a small child over some little thing – sometimes on highly official occasions.

INTERVIEW WITH MARIETTA DEIX

Interviewer: Ioan Gavrilovic

Ioan Gavrilovic: How did you react when you first heard about the film project?

Marietta Deix: I first heard about it ten years ago. I was thrilled, of course. I somehow thought it was perfectly natural that a Deix film was finally being made.

IG: Perhaps you could say something about Manfred's involvement in the project.

MD: Manfred was overjoyed that there was to be a Deix film. We'd known Josef Aichholzer forever and were thrilled that it was him who'd be making it.

IG: How did Manfred react? What did he say about the project?

MD: He wanted to do everything himself. He wanted to write the screenplay. He was nervous. He'd bitten off more than he could chew, and writing the screenplay proved not to be as simple as he'd thought, so he handed it over to someone else. I am so sorry that he's not here to see it. Whenever I go to visit his grave in the Central Cemetery, I tell him all about it, of course; and I end up quarrelling with him, because he died and can't be here to see it. The Deix film – the Deix characters start to come alive, it's wonderful.

IG: So it's a memorial to him in film.

MD: Yes, of course. Manfred is Austria's premier caricaturist. He needs a film. I'm sure it will be sensational. The first scene was fascinating – I was delighted with it.

IG: Let's talk a bit about this aspect of two-dimensionality becoming three-dimensionality. Quite late on he started making statues, didn't he?

MD: Yes. That was the greatest thing for him. He repeatedly tried to persuade the people at the Cartoon Museum to display more figures, more Deix figures. That was the greatest thing for him: Deix characters, Deix figures and films.

IG: When you met you were still very young, weren't you?

MD: Yes, we were fourteen when we met, and from then on we never lost sight of

each other. And that would become fifty years, with this naughty boy.

IG: With the Snotty Boy.

MD: He was fantastic. He was the funniest, most interesting, creative, good-natured man. He loved animals. He had a good heart. He never tried to curry favour with anyone. On the contrary. He blew it with all the important people in Austria. He always gave his honest opinion about things. He really didn't give a damn. Whether it was a politician or any other important person. Deix said what he thought. And I loved him for that. He loved painting and drawing. But the Beach Boys were a thousand times more important; music was a thousand times more important to him. I believe he'd much rather have had a career as a musician. Although drawing was important to him as well. He found that so easy, so effortless. He had an idea and immediately put it down on paper. He never did any sketches or anything – no, wham, down on paper, finished and off to the magazine. That was it. He didn't waste a second on it, whether it was good or bad.

IG: He was a great rebel ...

MD: Yes, he was.

IG: The film is a true rebel's declaration of love.

MD: He was a rebel – he never gave a toss about what anyone else was saying, or worried about what was called for or considered important. He simply didn't recognize authority. It meant nothing to him. He was a fighter and wouldn't put up with anything. But he could get on with anybody. Bishop Kurt Krenn, public vilified as conservative, ultra-conservative – Manfred got on really well with him. They were both the sons of inn-keepers. The magazine News sent us to meet him, in some monastery on the Czech border. Manfred was to meet Bishop Kurt Krenn. They were expecting a stand-off, with opposing opinions. Left-wing rebel versus ultra-conservative cleric. And nothing happened! The two inn-keepers' sons got on like a house on fire, and Krenn told him: 'Deix, you're also a child of God, and you mustn't abuse your talent'. So Manfred said: 'But that's what I like doing most – abusing my talent'. They parted as friends. Manfred could talk to anybody. He never shut himself off. He sat with anyone in the pub. That's why he drew like

he did – he knew these people, he wasn't an aloof artist, he was the son of an inn-keeper.

IG: He had deep empathy ...

MD: Absolutely. He knew all these people from childhood on. He waited on them at table – the chimney-sweep, the parish priest, the labourer and the farmer. He was like that to the end.

IG: He loved people, even though he made fun of them.

MD: I agree. Of course he drew them as they were. No question. But he didn't despise them for it. He understood them. They were friends. He didn't mean it maliciously.

IG: And politically? What about political correctness?

MD: Dreadful. It deadens satire. Satire is malicious. And satire is always against someone or other. Someone or other is always going to feel hurt. Satire that doesn't hurt anyone doesn't exist. You may as well not bother. It's not funny. It's always at someone's expense. Then one can laugh about it. If it's always just harmless and cautious and elegant – what's the point? It doesn't work. No, it's not funny at all.

I see that now. I see it in conversations, invitations. For god's sake – Manfred would have exploded. Encountering a priggishly punctilious sort of person, Manfred would go for his throat, whether left-wing or right-wing. He couldn't stand it. Freedom. You have to be able to say and draw what you want. That's imperative. It's the end of satire. Who laughs at boring things? Sorry, but political correctness is always boring. That's it. I've had my say.

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