



Freie Zeiten

After Work

Janina Herhoffer

Producer Janina Herhoffer (Berlin, Germany). **Director** Janina Herhoffer. **Screenplay** Janina Herhoffer. **Director of photography** Tobias Zielony, Janina Herhoffer. **Script consultant** Judith Berges. **Sound mix** Jochen Jezussek. **Sound** Thomas Knapp, Michael Tumm. **Sound design** Jochen Jezussek. **Editor** Janina Herhoffer.

QuickTime ProRes, colour. 71 min. German.

Premiere 6 February 2015, Berlinale Forum

A girl band makes music. Women at a slimming course talk about successfully losing weight by controlling what they eat. Teenagers dance or go shopping. A role-play on conflicts at work is performed at a meeting of a men's group. Other people do yoga, meditate to the sound of Tibetan singing bowls, limber up by babbling gibberish or run laps in a gymnasium.

A documentary that trains its gaze on group leisure activities. There's something slightly insane about seeing an entire yoga class hanging upside down from ropes, an image that fascinates and alienates in equal measure. At moments like this, the protagonists come across like unknown creatures performing strange rituals. The film keeps watching and listening to them with true precision. The static camera and carefully considered framings generate clarity and concentration. The montage succeeds in bringing a feeling of abstraction into these concrete observations of recurring situations. A portrait of free time as a project designed to hone one's body, consciousness or performance skills emerges, whether through discipline, play or conversation. One would never have thought that research into leisure could be so visually rich.

Birgit Kohler

“People look for instruction in every area of their lives”

Let's begin with the obvious question: why make a film about leisure?

Janina Herhoffer: I wanted to work with a theme we are all constantly surrounded by, one that most viewers relate to and about which they can form an opinion. Since people's own experiences and observations accompany and are compared with a film, the reception of that film is expanded to include the personal. I liked that idea. Ultimately, I arrived at the topic of leisure time; astonishingly, there have been hardly any films on this before. There is a great British black-and-white film from 1939 titled *Spare Time*, at least. But aside from that, leisure seems to be an overlooked theme. I can't really explain why. After all, what we do in the hours we're not working says a lot about the dominant zeitgeist.

Leisure is a very broad topic. How did you approach the whole thing?

I spent a lot of time considering how to deal with this topic – for example, whether I have to show work if I want to talk about leisure. But that would have constantly imposed conclusions: someone who does this kind of work spends his free time in this way, etc. That's why I did not show the context in which the people I portray move when they're not engaged in their leisure activities. This enables the viewer to develop conjectures about the figures involved, without confirming these ideas. In the end, the concept was very simple and clear: each activity is depicted within a situation, in the form of unprocessed excerpts. A band practices, a group of men converse, a yoga lesson is held. The point is to watch how people spend their free time.

What distinguishes leisure activities from hobbies?

The term 'hobby' is hardly used anymore, at least not without a value judgement; I think this mere fact is revealing. It used to be a matter of course to mention your hobbies on your CV. Today, the term has a petit bourgeois ring to it. That distinguishes it from the term 'leisure activity'. A hobby is, in principle, free of any intention; that may be why it no longer fits in with our times. A fairly well known German fashion designer has collected cacti for thirty years. That seems like a classic hobby to me. But my impression is that there has been a move toward professionalisation, even in leisure activities like growing cacti. Even when the leisure activity is not about one's own body but, as in this case, about an object, nowadays the aim is to achieve high standards, as professional as possible. The point is always to optimise something and to constantly acquire new specialised knowledge.

Object-related leisure activities don't appear in Freie Zeiten. Why not?

I thought about showing something like that in the film. Riding racing bicycles – powerfully object-related, almost fetishist. In it, too, the apparatus, the bicycle, is constantly expanded and changed. I also found it fascinating that people who ride racing bicycles in their free time try to become one with, to fuse with, their machine. But in the end, I concentrated more on group activities and especially on instructed groups, because I have the impression that they are especially representative of our time.

In what way?

Today, people look for instruction in every area of their lives. We encounter coaches and advisors everywhere, and that extends

to our free time. In some passages, however, I thought it was important to stretch the concept of free time and to let situations fall outside the given framework. That's why I show a girl band in its practice room and young people shopping. They all act without instruction.

These two groups consist of teenagers, by coincidence – or maybe not coincidentally. They are what put me in the best mood. That could simply be because they are likable, charming people, or perhaps because the idea of self-optimisation does not seem to be salient. Whereby we could debate whether the idea of a better life that you buy with a new piece of clothing plays a role when they shop.

The shopping was important to me for the film, because, like many other activities carried out in free time on one's body or one's attitude, it is a move to shape and it ultimately aims at one's self-perception. The young people are constantly expressing attributions like, 'You look low-class in that top', etc. Nonetheless, these activities seem freer and more carefree than others in the film, because they don't move within a clearly defined system. I'm amazed when I see fifteen grown people doing yoga and submitting themselves to the voice and instruction of a single person. There's something unsettling about it. And yet it's clear that precisely this instruction is what provides what many people seek there: an hour of time out.

I was impressed by the apparatus with which the yogis work. The slings, stools and ropes.

I always wonder how well disposed these objects are towards the human body. But older people really can't practice this kind of yoga without such aids.

Let's talk about the formal aspects of Freie Zeiten. You worked with a static camera that rests on the protagonists for quite some time.

I wanted to give the viewers a chance to observe people and their bodies. How do they behave in a situation in space, what do each of them look like when carrying out a certain motion or activity? What do their gestures and facial expressions tell about the demands they place on themselves or about the background they bring into the situation? I greatly enjoyed this aspect, during my research as well. At first I always had to participate in the respective activity, but at some point came the moment when I could merely watch. What a joy! Sometimes when the bodies follow such a defined performance, you see beauty. In other activities, there is scope for breaking out and interpreting. In the laughing group, for example, the idea is to act in freedom from all systems. But often there is only success or failure. What does failure mean then? Must you simply keep practicing, or did you choose the wrong system?

Is the point of the laughing group to learn how to laugh again?

The idea is, of course, that laughing is fun and good for you. In such groups, a fundamental human ability is institutionalised and instructed; it can be and is supposed to be trained. In my research, I found it fascinating that part of the point in the laughing group is to consciously make yourself ridiculous and step outside of your roles. I easily understood the attraction something like that can have.

What do you see as the reason for the development that Freie Zeiten illustrates in general? For example, would you say that neoliberalism plays a role in it?

I don't want to propound a particular hypothesis with the film. That's too narrow and stifles the discussion too much. I think it makes sense to look closely at things. After all, it's also a pleasant desire to practice something regularly, to devote oneself intensely to an activity. I was interested above all in the limits people run into in the framework of their leisure activities: at what moment do I get the impression that the ambition or the practice of such an activity turns against the person carrying it out.

Interview: Anne Waak, January 2015



Janina Herhoffer was born in Heidelberg in 1978. Since 2000, she has been an assistant editor of documentary and feature films; since 2001, she has been a freelance editor and script consultant. From 2003 to 2009, she studied Film Editing at the Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf (formerly University for Film and Television Konrad Wolf) in Potsdam-Babelsberg, Germany. Her

graduation film project *Es sind noch Berge draussen* (58 min.) was her first work as director. *Freie Zeiten* is her first full-length film.