



Superwelt

Superworld

Karl Markovics

Producer Dieter Pochlatko. **Production company** epo-film (Wien, Austria). **Director** Karl Markovics. **Screenplay** Karl Markovics. **Director of photography** Michael Bindlechner. **Production design** Isidor Wimmer. **Costume** Caterina Czepek. **Make-up** Danijela Ibricic. **Sound** William Edouard Franck. **Music** Herbert Tucmandl. **Sound design** Philipp Mosser. **Editor** Alarich Lenz.

Cast Ulrike Beimpold (Gabi Kovanda), Rainer Wöss (Hannes Kovanda), Nikolai Gemel (Ronnie Kovanda), Angelika Strahser (Sabine Kovanda), Thomas Mraz (Georg), Sibylle Kos (Helli), Michael Scherff (Neighbour), Harri Stojka (Geronimo).

DCP, colour. 120 min. German.

Premiere 9 February 2015, Berlinale Forum

Married supermarket worker Gabi Kovanda's lower middle class life revolves around her family and her job. Until, after work one day, everything changes. Suddenly, there's someone new in her life, someone with whom she had already been casually acquainted: God!

Superwelt is a story about God and the world: a world whose heroine works the till and a God we never see nor hear, but whose presence we feel throughout the film. Lead actress Ulrike Beimpold delivers a remarkable, moving performance as a woman under divine influence, a woman in crisis who sends shock waves through her whole family. While director Karl Markovics consistently works in a realistic mode, his narrative approach is often operatic, with elaborate bird's eye shots and strikingly composed images of biblical proportions that make God's presence manifest. Until, that is, the twilight of the gods descends and the heavens come crashing down on the plot. All good things come from above, after all. *Superwelt* is like a small miracle. A super good one.

Ansgar Vogt

In the beginning, a picture

Like all of my stories, *Superwelt* began with a simple image. I encountered it while shopping. The cashier at a chain supermarket used a short break in the afternoon stream of customers to clean the rubber conveyer belt that moves items to the cash register. She reached into the hidden depths of the space at her feet below the register console for a bottle of all-purpose cleaner and sprayed it on the endless black belt, pressed a rag onto the belt, and set it in motion again with a hidden button on the floor.

This little everyday scene was the trigger for my story. I no longer know how one thing led to another, but finally it was clear that this would become a story about a relationship; a relationship to what is hidden and to what there is nothing else behind: to God. 'Woman meets God. Woman loses God. Woman gets God back again.' In a certain way, *Superwelt* is the continuation of my first film, *Atmen*. Both are about recognising one's 'being thrown into the world' and the consequences of this awareness. Both are about people who find limits, because there are 'things' for which there are no words and concepts. And in both, these people sense that knowledge is possible only on the other side of this boundary.

Karl Markowics

Assumptions about God

1st Blog Entry

It's a strange feeling to work on a script for nearly two years, and when you begin to shoot to suddenly find that you are reminded of yourself every day. A team of forty or fifty people works twelve to eighteen hours to turn an invented recollection into a real memory. The film is called *Superwelt* and tells the story of a fifty-year-old supermarket cashier whose simple life is turned upside down by an encounter with God. This film has nothing to do with religion. I say that not in my own defence (or in the defence of any religion); I say it for the sake of thoroughness. *Superwelt* is an essay about God – a God the way I would like to imagine Him. I was baptised a Lutheran, but in my childhood I sometimes helped out as an altar boy for the Catholics. My best friend smuggled me into this. At the time, I enjoyed the change of pace – rising from being a simple listener to a sober-sided Protestant sermon (where my grandmother took me every other Sunday) to being a participant in a relatively opulent event with light, smoke, and sound effects, and incidentally also receiving tips (key words: baptisms, weddings, funerals). But back to my film and what are probably the most frequently posed questions; I hope answering them in this blog will spare me many future interviews (*credo quia absurdum?*). Question 1 among these frequently asked questions about my new film: 'Mr Markovics, how did you come up with this material?' Markovics: 'One day I observed a supermarket cashier who, apparently lost in thought, reached down and brought up a bottle of all-purpose cleaner from the depths of her register console. She sprayed the conveyor belt with cleaner, tore off a few paper towels, set the belt in motion, and pressed the paper towels on it to clean the belt. The whole time, she stared off into space. ('Into a distance where no one could follow,' Alfred Polgar would say.) She looked as if she were listening intently to someone. To herself perhaps? Or maybe to God? I wanted to tell a story about this person – a story about what is most banal and what is most special.

22 June 2014

2nd Blog Entry

On *Superwelt's* Facebook page, it says: 'Markovics walks spiritual paths.' I have no idea who wrote this – it doesn't matter. Interesting is that people always shift to a different language when the subject is God, the way one moves to the other side of the street when a stranger approaches in an unfamiliar neighbourhood. With 'different language' I don't mean Aramaic or Latin, but the kind of formulation. What other times does one use terms like 'walks' (rather than 'walks on') and 'paths'? The same phenomenon can be observed in relation to diction. Please tell me which speaking coach teaches the Austrian priesthood (and many of the Austrian People's Party's politicians)? As if they had first anointed their tongues, devotions bubble from their mouths, often sounding more self-righteous than devotional. Why must one bend and twist oneself in speech when bowing would suffice? If one seriously believes in God, then in my opinion, one believes in the most natural thing in the world. I wish for this kind of faith. I've experienced this kind of belief for moments. But I can't remember ever 'walking a path'. This could be Question 2 of the most frequently posed questions about my film *Superwelt*: 'Mr Markovics, do you believe in God?' – 'Yes.' 'No.' 'Yes.' 'No.'

2 July 2014

3rd Blog Entry

I admit my last blog entry was rather short. And I've already received a gentle reproach for it. To excuse myself, I could add that the time between sleeping, shooting and sleeping again is short, but that doesn't count as a valid excuse. My conscience is rather sensitive – it feels bad easily. So I want to quickly add a few thoughts on the topic of 'signs'. As I understand it, signs are not things that are 'written', but things that are 'to be read'. What I mean is that God would never set a thorn bush afire. Thorn bushes, especially in deserts, burn very easily and without much external help. But if you open your eyes and ears (and one's heart – yes!) in the right place at the right time, then the most banal events can reveal themselves as existential truths. A little example: a few years ago, I was driving out of Vienna on Triester Strasse, and at a red traffic light I observed a young bloke almost tenderly poking with the tip of his shoe an apparently dead pigeon that lay in the gutter. You might now say, 'Aha,' but for me this scene had something very human, not to say divine, about it – a kind of reverent and simultaneously helpless curiosity about Creation, which for me expressed itself as a sign in this image. With which we come back to my somewhat cumbersome idea that signs are not something 'written', but 'to be read'. In the scene I've just described, you could say something to the effect that the connection between the two through the gesture of poking and the observation by a third person (in this case, me) can lead to something sign-like. Something greater presses outward and powerfully demands its interpretation. How we ultimately interpret the signs lies less in the literal eye of the beholder than in our souls. When things/beings enter into relationship with one another, there is inevitably a reaction. If another observes this reaction and tries to interpret it, it becomes a sign. Why am I so interested in signs that the result is the longest blog entry in this series so far? Because signs are representatives of something ineffable. At bottom, art is the same. Might God be a mathematician, after all? (...)

5th Blog Entry

(...) Hardly any collective phenomenon is so simultaneously unifying and separating as faith. Across all continents and all social

strata, no matter what age, skin colour or sexual orientation – the question of God is a question of humanity and the individual at the same time: it is a question of the 'I' and the 'we'. And the way this 'believing we' is defined is essentially shaped by religious affiliation. We Christians! We Muslims! We Buddhists! We Jews! The respective others have only a secondary place in a denominational world of imagination – at best as potential converts. In my idea of an 'ideal God', the 'more ideal believers' are those English atheists who drew attention to themselves in 2008 with a poster campaign in which they covered London buses with the slogan: 'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.'

The attempt to imagine God is one of the oldest human cultural phenomena and has persisted through all epochs and all civilisations to the present, although or precisely because it eludes rational access. And because the idea of God is so irrational (in the subjunctive mood, so to speak), because faith means believing rather than knowing, the issue of right, true and the only thing leading to blessedness is so complicated and ultimately an unbelievably presumptuous matter. Every religion, every church, every persuasion propagates a possible idea of divinity. That's how it should be. But to claim that one's own idea is the only right, true or blessed one is a stupid, naïve or criminal fallacy. God neither throws dice (Albert Einstein), nor does he enter a church, mosque, temple, synagogue or cinema. At least that's what I believe. I don't know, of course.

Question 5 of the probably most frequently asked questions in connection with my new film *Superwelt*:

'Mr Markovics, the leading characters in your film are working class. The protagonist lives with her husband and her son in a one-family house in eastern Lower Austria. You, too, come from a similar milieu and grew up in a similar area. This isn't a coincidence, is it?'
'No, it's no coincidence. I grew up in Kapellerfeld near Gerasdorf near Stammersdorf near Vienna. Somehow it was still the countryside, but it was very close to Vienna. There we had not only 'real' farmers with fields and tractors and such, but also workers and small business owners who, in order to create 'something of their own', built little houses on the plots of land that were still affordable back then. My parents were in the latter group. That's usually how it is: you write about something you know. I know the so-called 'ordinary folks', and I wanted to bring these people into connection with the greatest thing I can imagine. The greatest thing in my imagination is the unimaginable. And the most unimaginable thing in my imagination is God.'

20 July 2014

6th Blog Entry

Today is the last weekend before the last three days of shooting *Superwelt*. We began shooting this film seven weeks ago. So somehow it is almost already finished, in terms of the raw (in our case digital) material. But actually, a film becomes ever more unfinished and unclear the more of it is shot. When you finish shooting, you have a certain amount of film material (celluloid, magnetic tape or digital hard disk content). In that, somewhere and somehow, is the story – but only somehow and somewhere. Only in the montage, in the editing do you encounter supposed traces and signs that help you get to the supposed bottom of the story. And it's not rare that the story unfolds in a completely different way from how the screenwriter and director planned. That is metaphysical. You could also call it superworldly.

With this film, from the beginning I had this strange feeling – namely, of having no inkling of what would come out in the end. I literally had no inkling. Normally this is not a pleasant state, at

least not for someone like me. But in this case, cluelessness set me free and, in a certain way, carefree. An old saying occurs to me, one whose last line Johannes Mario Simmel took as the title of one of his countless novels: 'I live and don't know how long,/ I'll die and don't know when,/ I am going and don't know where, /I'm surprised that I am so happy.' (...)

27 July 2014

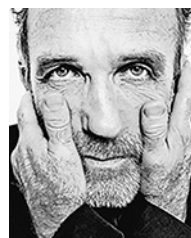
7th Blog Entry

Wednesday, 30 July was the last day of shooting, and it ended with a literal clap of thunder. After we had shot the last takes, a massive thunderstorm broke out, with lightning bolts this way and that; there were even horizontal flashes and double bolts in parallel over the rooftops. Rain poured in buckets, and the water pattered through all the cracks and gaps of the disused factory hall where we had just shot the last scenes of *Superwelt*. I have no particular reason for describing this.

I love people. I can't express it any other way. Even though I know what horrors we are capable of and what horrors we actually perpetrate. It's hard for me to imagine a life without us. And yet there would be life without us – but there would be no concept of it. Creating an idea of as much of everything as possible is what I call living – that's what I always wanted to spend my life doing, for as long as I can remember. My earliest thoughts were imaginings – imaginings of 'I', imaginings of 'you', and imaginings of 'it'. Consciousness brings forth the present, but only through imagination can an event become conscious as a sequence of something in the past, present and future. At least that's how I imagine it.

It's one of the beauties of the German language that the term 'Vorstellung' (idea, imagination) has the meaning, on the one hand, of 'to create a mental picture of something' but also, on the other hand, of external presentation in the sense of a theatre or circus performance. For me, internal and external 'Vorstellung' were always connected. The one was unthinkable without the other. Everything I could imagine, I also wanted to present = construct in the world. As a child, I didn't have to decide whether I wanted to be a writer, director or 'merely' a performer. I was everything together – simply a child, playing. Only later, when terms like 'profession' and 'adult' moved into the world of my imagination, did this become a serious identity problem. All of this has quite a bit to do with my new film, but I hope it's not all essential for understanding the film.

3 August 2014, Karl Markovics



Karl Markovics was born in Vienna in 1963. He began his acting career in 1982 at Vienna's Serapionstheater and later worked at theatres such as the Vienna Ensemble and the Vienna Volkstheater, among others. Beginning in 1994, he became known to a broader public in the role of Detective Inspector Stockinger in the television police series *Kommissar Rex*. Numerous TV and film

roles followed, along with work in theatre, opera, and musicals. Markovics' biggest international acting success so far was in the lead role of Salomon Sorowitsch in Stefan Ruzowitzky's film *Die Fälscher / The Counterfeiters*. In 2009, he and other Austrian film professionals founded the Academy of Austrian Film. Markovics debuted as a director and screenwriter in 2011 with the feature film *Atmen / Breathing* (90 min.). *Superwelt* is his second film.