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Rudolf Thome – Überall Blumen

Rudolf Thome – Flowers Everywhere

Serpil Turhan

Producer Barbara Groben. **Production company** Luzid Film (Cologne, Germany). **Director** Serpil Turhan. **Screenplay** Serpil Turhan, Eva Hartmann. **Director of photography** Serpil Turhan. **Editor** Eva Hartmann. **Sound design** André Zimmermann. **Sound** Serpil Turhan.

DCP, colour. 84 min. German.

Premiere 16 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

Rudolf Thome's idiosyncratic oeuvre was created with a continuity rare in German cinema – he has directed 28 feature-length films over more than four decades since 1968. The writing of the script for film no. 29 and the parallel efforts to secure financing form the thread that runs through this cinematic portrait, which consists wholly of conversations and observations around Thome's home, a converted farm in Brandenburg. The filmmaker is nothing if not forthcoming, and the viewer has the opportunity to experience him in various other roles: as a gardener, a father, a cyclist, and a performer of his own persona.

A fountain pen is as much a part of Thome's daily life as keeping an online diary and filming sunsets. He's happy when he spots a redstart, gets a positive review, or when someone visits his website. His films are discussed in a pleasingly non-systematic way: a lighting mistake in *Supergirl*, his links to Marquard Bohm, the actors and actresses who brush their teeth in his films. The sight of prints of his oeuvre lying in piles of rusted canisters around his barn instead of in an archive forms one of the sadder moments in a film brimming with warmth, humour, and wit.

Birgit Kohler

The special intuition

In 2001, Thomas Arslan's *A Fine Day*, in which I play the leading role, was shown in the Forum section of the Berlinale. The mood during the public discussion after the second screening of the film was tense, with criticism directed at us. Then suddenly a man in the audience spoke up, saying how wonderful he thought the movie was. It felt like being rescued. That was my first encounter with Rudolf Thome, and I regarded his support as a great honour. Later that year, we met at the International Film Weekend in Würzburg, where Rudolf Thome's film *Venus Talking* was shown. At a schnitzel dinner at city hall, we happened to sit across from each other, and we spoke about filmmaking. This was the beginning of our friendship and collaboration.

From 2003 to 2006, I played the leading roles in Rudolf's films *Rot und Blau* (2003), *Frau fährt, Mann schläft* (2004) and *Rauchzeichen* (2006). Then I assisted him behind the camera in four other films. When collaborating with Rudolf, I was always fascinated by how he produces his films very intuitively, self-confidently and with special power. In crises, he makes immediate decisions and doesn't question them again later. He always keeps his eye on the whole and has a very honest and open way of speaking. When I later studied film, I realised how much I have learned from him. I have had the idea of making a film about Rudolf for several years. When I talked on the phone with him at the end of 2013, he told me he wanted to write another script in the following year and that it would be his last if he couldn't raise funds for the project. After that conversation, it was clear to me that the time had come to start my film.

Rudolf allowed me to visit him repeatedly at his farm over a long period. We spent a lot of time together and spoke about his films, his experiences over the past fifty years and his memories of childhood. These were intense discussions that made me even more powerfully aware of how deeply his life is tied together with his films. The farm, the new centre of his life, is a place full of traces of the past.

I wanted to make a film about Rudolf that not only reflected on his film work, but also showed a special person.

Serpil Turhan

"What connects us on the cinematic level is our love of the poetry of everyday life"

Your film paints a portrait of the filmmaker Rudolf Thome that is interesting not just for fans and film historians. Thome's work in films is an important aspect of Rudolf Thome – Überall Blumen, but the film is also about everyday life, growing older, the traces of life and art. What guided you at the beginning of the project?

Serpil Turhan: When I heard from Rudolf that he wanted to make a last attempt to write a new script and would quit making films if he couldn't find funding, it was important to me to accompany his transition to a new phase of life. I knew that the idea of possibly being unable to make more films was not easy for Rudolf. That made it all the more important to me to show not only what he has achieved in the past as a filmmaker, but also what concerns him in the present. Rudolf is a person who writes candidly about the problems of ageing, who rides a bicycle every day to keep fit, who cares lovingly for his huge garden and who still dreams of shooting films. His films are so closely interwoven with his life that it seemed natural

to me to accompany him in his daily life and not focus primarily on his film oeuvre.

We experience the filmmaker as a gardener, father, cyclist, blogger – and always where he lives, a former farm in the state of Brandenburg. Why did you concentrate on this location?

Until 2012, Rudolf commuted between Berlin and Niendorf, where he usually spent the summer and weekends. After his last film, *Ins Blaue*, the focus of his life increasingly shifted, and he spent most of the time on his farm. Before the shooting sessions, I visited him there a few times and sensed how important this place had become for him in the meantime. But the farm is not the central place in Rudolf's everyday life. In several barns, he stores traces from his past: props, costumes and film rolls from movies, some of which were even shot there. Beyond that, I knew from conversations with Rudolf that his parents also had a large garden and that he spent lots of time in nature during his childhood. So, in a certain way, Rudolf is returning to his origins. The way he schedules his daily life there shows what a structured life he leads and which rituals he follows. It is precisely these everyday moments that let me sense what kind of a person he is.

Your interest is quite clearly not in systematically working through the stations of Thome's life and his filmography; you leave much up to conversation and thereby to unpredictability and spontaneous moments. Did you consider in advance what biographical and filmographic information should be mentioned?

In 2010, I filmed a six-hour interview that Lukas Foerster and Ekkehard Knörer conducted with Rudolf. I was already playing with the idea of making a film about him at that time. In this interview, almost all of his films were discussed chronologically and in great detail. It was clear to me from the beginning that this meticulous form of approaching Rudolf Thome's film oeuvre would not take the centre in my film. I am interested in the person behind this extensive oeuvre. How did Rudolf manage to shoot one film after the other so continuously? Where did he find the strength, and what drives him? We have had many talks about his beginnings as a filmmaker, about the importance of the nouvelle vague, his time in Munich, his escape to Berlin, his experiences with producers and later as his own producer and about the time when, deep in debt, he worked for the Arsenal film institute in Berlin. We also spoke about his work as a film critic. The aspects of the conversations that go beyond individual films and tell how he deals with crisis and about his motivation then crystallised in the editing process. In connection with the spontaneous moments during the shooting that were actually very important to me, I initially had some intense disagreements with Rudolf, because he wanted a kind of shooting schedule from me. I resisted that and had to convince him that we could also shoot without a plan. After some time, we then found a way. As a matter of fact, I did not work through any previously determined stations in our talks. Whenever I tried that, Rudolf corrected me or I noticed that the atmosphere got a bit stiff. The most wonderful moments came in a certain freedom and relaxation in the conversations, although it was also important, of course, to dig deeper and to open myself up to Rudolf's thoughts and memories.

The special quality of the encounter and interaction between you and Rudolf Thome contributes decisively to the pitch and form of

the film. To what degree did the fact that you worked together with Thome as an actor and camera assistant influence the shooting?

I think our relationship plays an important role in the film. We met in 2001 and have gotten to know each other better over the years by working together several times. Due to our friendship and great mutual trust, I was allowed to live on Rudolf's farm during several phases of shooting; I could move around completely freely. This togetherness resulted in a valuable intimacy that wouldn't have been possible in this way with a larger team. That's why it was clear to me from the start that I would be shooting alone. I adapted to Rudolf's daily rhythm, and we developed common rituals that can be seen in the film. For example, we often watched the sunset together. There is also a scene in the film in which Rudolf speaks with me about his mother's love. Earlier, we had browsed through all his photo albums and in some pictures discovered details that Rudolf himself had never seen. He related in great detail his memories of the post-war period, his relationship to his parents and his stay at a boarding school. Our conversations and discussions over the shooting period not only led to a documentary film, but also further deepened our friendship.

There are several scenes in which Thoma speaks about the presence of the camera, the element of staging and his role, acting the role of himself. How was it for you to have an accomplished filmmaker as interlocutor? What did trading roles – you as filmmaker, he as protagonist – bring with it?

In the first phase of shooting we had discussions, because it bothered me that Rudolf kept flirting with the camera. He saw himself as an actor, and I tried to get him to stop. We talked several times about how we wanted to proceed. Rudolf understood shooting film as work and as an intervention in the natural course of events. He cited examples from atomic physics and ethnology to try to make it clear to me that my presence alone already influenced his daily life and that a certain degree of staging was thus unavoidable. I in turn explained to him that I was looking for spontaneous moments and didn't want to stage anything. Ultimately, I learned a lot from our talks. In the second and third phases of shooting, our attitude toward this topic relaxed and Rudolf got used to my way of shooting.

Along with the conversations, you also use Thome's online diary, which provides a huge reservoir of original soundtrack. You yourself quote from it from off-screen; we hear Thome's reflections from your mouth so that the character of these texts oscillates between self-disclosure and commentary. What led to that decision?

Rudolf has had a blog since 2003. I've read it almost daily since I've known him. After the conclusion of his most recent film, *Ins Blaue*, this online diary became even more important for him. He publishes photos and short videos from his daily life in it, he writes about his films, memories, experiences at festivals, and about growing older and the problems that entails. Even before we began shooting, it was clear that these diary entries would flow into the film. During the editing process, we concentrated on the blog entries from the time when we were shooting. This was an additional treasure hoard of Rudolf's thoughts we could make use of. Some of these texts touched me deeply, and I was sure that they'd give the film an additional level describing Rudolf even more clearly.

Basically, your portrait displays qualities often attributed to Thome's films: the poetry of the quotidian, the richness of the minimal and a cheerful tranquility.

If that's how it seems, I'm very happy about it. I did not consciously decide to be guided aesthetically by Rudolf's films. Maybe the parallels have to do with Rudolf standing in the centre of the film himself – especially the cheerful tranquility. What connects Rudolf and me on the cinematic level is, indeed, our love of the poetry of everyday life, openness for coincidences and spontaneous moments, with him in his feature films and with me in my documentary films. Both of us felt that again and again while shooting, even if we didn't speak about it every time.

Several times over the course of the film, you focus on the piles of films in rusting cans lying in Thome's barn. This is to be understood as a statement or as an appeal to preserve his works, isn't it?

I think it's unbelievable that all these valuable copies are lying around in his barns and more and more dust is collecting on the cans. While filming, I felt like I was in a treasure chamber and the whole time I thought: someone has to rescue this treasure. In the form of film copies, cores, clapboards, props, booms, costumes and much more, part of German film history is stored on this former farm. These storage rooms depress Rudolf, because no one is interested in the objects. I hope my film can make a small contribution to keeping Rudolf and his work from vanishing from the film world's memory.

Interview: Birgit Kohler, Berlin, January 2016



Serpil Turhan was born in Berlin in 1979. From 1997 to 2005, she was the lead actress in several films by Thomas Arslan and Rudolf Thome. She then began directing documentaries and studied Media Arts/Film at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design. She completed her studies there in 2013 with her graduation film, *Dılım Dönmüyor – My Tongue Does Not Turn*, her first full-length documentary.

Films

2010: *Herr Berner und die Wolokolamsker Chaussee / Mr. Berner and the Wolokolamsker Avenue* (39 min.). 2013: *Dılım Dönmüyor – Meine Zunge dreht sich nicht / Dılım Dönmüyor – My Tongue Does Not Turn* (92 min.). 2016: *Rudolf Thome – Überall Blumen / Rudolf Thome – Flowers Everywhere*.