

AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE



a film by **SEBASTIAN BRAMESHUBER**

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AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE

a film by Sebastian Brameshuber

Documentary | 2014 | A | 91 min.

German OV with English subtitles

Ebensee is a small Austrian town surrounded by mountains. In 2009 a radical right-wing incident took place during the annual memorial service in the former concentration camp of Ebensee. It was caused by local teenagers. Director Sebastian Brameshuber took the incident as an opportunity to accompany three young people from Ebensee by following their lives over the course of a year: from softguns to guitars, from Lederhosen to DocMartens, from school to work life. His film *AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE* shows with clear and unembellished images a portrait of a generation that is trying to find it's own way between yesterday and tomorrow, between traditions and McDonald's. An intimate piece of history.

SYNOPSIS

In Ebensee, a small town in Austria surrounded by mountains, three teenagers – Ramona, Andreas and Michael – appear to be waiting for something. A new shopping center is being built, but the planned offer of shops is rather disappointing for them. While the arrival of visitor buses for the annual memorial service in the former concentration camp raises not only curiosity but also suspicion in the young residents, the older generation remain predominantly skeptical. They feel the need to distance themselves from the dark history of the place; the eerie adits which, as relics of National Socialism, threaten its peace. In 2009 a radical right-wing interference caused by local teenagers took place during the memorial service in one of the tunnels. Director Sebastian Brameshuber took this incident as an opportunity to accompany three youths from the village as they got older over the course of a year: from soft gun to guitar, from lederhosen to DocMartens, from school bench to professional life. With sobriety and clear imagery *AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE* paints an unromantic portrait of a generation which, between tradition and McDonald's, between the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow, is trying to find its way. An intimate piece of contemporary history.«

PROTAGONISTS



Andreas, 16, cannot decide whether he should become a musician, policeman or soldier. Or a gunsmith after all? But if a BMW 7 Series is the declared goal in a material respect, then possibly neither a guitar nor a gun are the proper work tools.«



Ramona, 15, lives with her family on the foundations of the former Ebensee concentration camp. Even if the annual memorial service is a cause of big trouble, it is one of her least worries at the moment: she urgently has to find an apprenticeship position.«



Michael, 15, is only interested in the here and now. His eclectic music taste ranges from Pöbel & Gesocks to various Austrian folks songs, to his namesake Michael Jackson. When he meets David at his new workplace in the fall, Michael becomes a punk.«





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Finding words for a film that I assembled over the last years, months and weeks from loosely connected moments into a fragile whole (or better: into a suggestion for a whole) presents me with a challenge. It still feels to me as if I were viewing *AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE* on a huge movie screen from a distance of just ten centimetres. Taking my starting point from the title, which suddenly occurred to me during the lengthy editing process, I would like to think about this film and share my thoughts and associations in the following.

Geographic centre

One aspect is the geographic centre extolled at the beginning of the film. Ebensee is one of the many centres of the universe, a place I've known since childhood and in direct proximity to where I grew up. There is a traditional, intense competition between my hometown Gmunden, a small city on the northern shore of Lake Traun, the centre of the universe, and Ebensee on the southern shore. In Gmunden it is assumed that *uncivilised* people are at home in Ebensee; in Ebensee the Gmunder are vilified as *swelled-headed* snobs. As a schoolboy, I found it unpleasant when the Ebensee children with their conspicuous dialect stormed onto the school bus halfway between Gmunden and Bad Ischl, where I attended high school. During a stay in Istanbul in May 2009, when I learned in the Turkish media of an incident at the former Ebensee concentration camp, the first thing I thought was: "Typical of Ebensee". A moment later I was amazed at my reflex and began questioning this prejudice from my childhood and youth. And that's how this project began.

The Salzkammergut region has a centuries-old salt industry. The salt was mined in Bad Ischl, processed in Ebensee and traded in Gmunden. Gmunden, on the sunnier side of the lake, grew rich; Bad Ischl, as the summer resort for Empress Sissi and the Austro-Hungarian court, grew rich and famous. Ebensee remained the rather impoverished workers' town on the dark southern shore. In 1943, the Nazi leadership decided to install a satellite camp of Mauthausen concentration camp in Ebensee. The people of Ebensee are still working through this legacy - with little success. A small segment of the

population, together with the local museum of current history, acts decisively against forgetfulness and tries to shift the focus from shame and guilt to a more timely exploration of the issues, but encounters wilful ignorance and rejection from most of the residents. In this, Ebensee is no exception, but is typical of all of Austria. Why should people in Gmunden or Bad Ischl, fifteen kilometres away, have less reason to concern themselves with the Nazi past and be able to delegate this duty to Ebensee, so to speak? What remains swept under the rug elsewhere for lack of occasions merely comes to a head and appears in Ebensee.

Between societal margins

At the centre of this film are not marginal milieus and outsiders, but the middle of society. By birth and descent, I will remain particularly tied to this middle all my life. In the last three years, friends and colleagues have often asked me, usually with a smug grin, how far along I am with my *Nazi film*. For make no mistake, not only Austria's rural youth but also a large part of its so-called cultural elite seem to have had enough of remembering. But they know how to maintain appearances by giving lip service at the right moment.

Yes, National Socialism and the burdensome legacy it left in this country are a theme that, in the meantime, is treated in a rather inflationary and often extremely shallow manner. As a filmmaker, one is often suspected of addressing it calculatingly. But to abandon the field would seem to me a negligent capitulation, not only to the passage of time and to forgetfulness, but also to the here and now and to current societal and political developments. I admit: I too am anxious about someday having no more hair on my head, sometimes more than about the advent of a 'Fourth Reich'. But that's not the point; the point is to look and listen, to try to find a new facet in a discourse that has become sometimes redundant and to make suggestions for a differentiated and timely exploration of a complex theme. I see this film as such a suggestion. This brings me to the third association I have with the film's title. But perhaps I'll first speak about a fourth, so that what the film primarily treats does not end up in the background.

Between childhood and adulthood

I mean that hormone-pervaded middle that we call youth, halfway between childhood and adulthood. A beautiful, crappy time - beautifully crappy - that I guess everyone eventually remembers with mixed feelings: what nonsense we thought, spoke and maybe also did. Is anything left of the self I was back then, and if yes, then which part? Who or what made me what I am - my family? Friends? School? Coincidence? It seems just a moment ago that I was the world's greatest Michael Jackson fan. Then my older sister's cool friend appeared on the scene as a hip-hopper. Where is the next shop where I can buy baggy pants? - and immediately, because I want to be a hip-hopper tomorrow already, if that's okay. Or, even better, if it's not okay. When I was a teenager, my hip-hop outfit was just enough to modestly provoke my grandparents. To my frustration, my parents didn't care at all. An existence constantly in-between: between a still meagrely defined self, friends, parents and school (or workplace), the here and now and a future still to be shaped but constantly getting closer and for which I was supposed to decide and that threatened to put an abrupt end to that incomparable, never to return, seemingly everlasting today. Between desire and the (hormonal) imperative to either conform or to rebel, to be adequate to the field of tension between aspiration and reality, a field whose priorities constantly change - or not to.

Between aspiration and reality

Aspiration, reality - and the in-between. Those are the keywords that bring me back to my third association, the one that has to do with remembering. Aspiration: that is the discourse, which never really fully arrived in Austria anyway, of the *devoir de mémoire*, the duty to remember. A task, an ideal, an utopia. It will have been. The grammatical form of the future perfect, writes Harald Welzer in his essay "Erinnerungskultur und Zukunftsgedächtnis" (the culture of memory and memory of the future), is an expression of the human ability of "anticipated retrospection", of being able to look back on a future that hasn't even become reality yet. It's almost crazy that I, human that I am, am able to do this. What all would be made possible, what could be prevented, if humanity, taking recourse to what is past, could subject what it has already learned, its thinking and its actions to the logic of the future perfect. Reality looks different, and for Ramona, Michael and Andreas, the youthful

protagonists of this film, between aspiration and reality lies what we call everyday life, on the one hand. The search for a place in this world places considerable demands on them, and it's not hard to imagine that, between homework, appointments at the labour bureau and onerous if well-meant parental suggestions, the next parish fair is more important than celebrating the liberation of the former concentration camp. That's the one side.

Between rascals and neo-Nazis

In May 2009, at least eleven boys from the town disturbed the annual liberation celebration at Ebensee concentration camp by lying in ambush in one of the former camp's underground factories and shooting a group of visiting survivors with air guns, abusing them with Nazi slogans and, some in ski masks, goose-stepping back and forth in front of them. The national and international press reported on a planned neo-Nazi action. Shortly thereafter, charges of "repeated offense" were filed against four of the participating youths, who were between fourteen and eighteen years old at the time of the crime.

In stark contrast to that, people in the town were sure that these were not neo-Nazis. The kids hadn't known what they were doing and had no clear idea of the significance and consequences of their actions. Actually, they are nice boys who merely say stupid things sometimes. It was a tremendous exaggeration to file charges and take them to court. Local residents thus turned *neo-Nazis* into *rascals* and then right away stylised them as *victims* of a politically over-correct society.

Both interpretations, the *neo-Nazi action* and the *prank* are vastly inadequate and ultimately serve only to calm the public by either pushing the participants to the margin of society (neo-Nazis) or rhetorically retarding them forcibly into the protective framework of childhood (*rascals*). A contradiction emerges between the official view of the incident, shaped by the judiciary and the press, and the little community's world. People can't imagine that these boys, close to them as children, friends, pupils or schoolmates, are responsible for an offense that is suddenly found in the context of the greatest crime in human history. This overlapping of current and older history





prompted one of the defence attorneys to remind the jury that the youths were not charged with the National Socialists' crimes. There was much criticism in Ebensee of the media reporting, which was felt to be one-sided, but the town itself, including its schools, made no effort to deal with the incident. This, too, reflects Austrian dealings with unpleasant history.

Between camera and cinema audience

The youthful protagonists found themselves in the middle while we shot the film, as well: between their desire to take part in the film and to share very personal aspects of their lives with me, the camera and a public, on the one hand, and my expectation, on the other hand, to make a film that did justice to their lives without bracketing away the recent and very recent past, the blind spots, *the holes in the mountain*, the known unknown. The decision to *lock them up* in images with largely strict framing while the camera observed, questioned and interpreted them, in order to formally counter their hardly predictable bursts of youthful energy, makes me as filmmaker recognisable as another inquiring instance and authority (along with parents, school, institutions, employers etc.). The voices of adults, including mine, intrude on the youthful universe like interfering frequencies and make the attempt to break through the protective sheath of the faceless, eternal present with annoying questions about the future and past. The camera usually remains at a respectful distance. I didn't want to be the young people's friend and confidant, but a counterpart who takes them seriously and with whom, despite everything, their story is in good hands. Now it is a movie audience that will watch them on the screen and subject their actions, their choice of words etc. to a new – and I hope sympathetic – evaluation.◀

Sebastian Brameshuber



BIOGRAPHY SEBASTIAN BRAMESHUBER

Born in 1981 in Gmunden, Austria. Graduated from University of Applied Arts Vienna in 2011. Since 2004, short, experimental video works have been produced under the pseudonym Fordbrothers (in cooperation with Thomas Draschan), and have been screened at numerous international film and video art festivals as well as art exhibitions.

With *PRESERVING CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN A PERIOD OF INSTABILITY* the Fordbrothers made a highly regarded contribution to so-called Austrian avant-garde cinema. It was screened at the Viennale, BFI London IFF, Hong Kong IFF, Max-Ophüls Festival, Impakt Utrecht, EMAF and New York Underground FF, amongst others, and received the NO BUDGET AWARD at the Shortfilmfestival Hamburg in 2005 as well as a HONORABLE MENTION at the Media City 11 Festival in Ontario, Canada.

First feature length documentary *MUEZZIN* premiered at Karlovy Vary IFF 2009 and was subsequently screened at over 30 international filmfestivals. In 2010 it was awarded BEST DOCUMENTARY at Medfilmfestival Rome. *MUEZZIN* was theatrically released in Austria in 2010 and later broadcasted by ARTE, NHK, ORF, Aljazeera and other channels. Work on the second feature length documentary *AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE* which will premiere at the Berlinale 2014 (Section FORUM). Lives in Vienna and Roubaix, France, where he is currently enrolled at Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains.◀



FILMOGRAPHY

And there we are, in the middle | 2014 | 91 min.

Muezzin | 2009 | 85 min.

With the spoon towards your mouth! | 2011 | 35 min. looped

in cooperation with Thomas Draschan:

Everything's gone green | 2007 | 4 min.

Keynote | 2006 | 4 min.

Bloodsample | 2005 | 4 min.

Preserving Cultural Traditions in a Period of Instability | 2004 | 3 min.

NOTES ON THE FILM

by Dominik Kamalzadeh

In May 2009, visitors of a memorial service in the tunnel of the former concentration camp Ebensee were shot at with an air soft gun. The teenage culprits, who also shouted Nazi slogans during this attack, made headlines; a year later they were convicted of re-engagement in National Socialist activities.

For the Austrian filmmaker Sebastian Brameshuber, this inglorious incident in Ebensee's recent history was the trigger to take a closer look at the living environments of the young people there. *AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE* provides a circumspect and above all impartial account of everyday life in which the incident in the tunnel functions as a reference point: parents see themselves confronted with the unspoken reproach of having dealt too little with the past; the school takes on this case with pedagogical zeal; and the girls and guys have to respond to this misdeed and the Nazi past, because they themselves, so to speak, have fallen into disrepute with the whole town. In clearly and thoughtfully framed shots, Brameshuber empathizes with the young people who, in their search for identify, between ending, respectively, dropping out of school, the first jobs and testing out different youth cultures, seem somewhat disoriented: which path should one take and which goal pursued? The possibilities in town are limited, even the offer of a new shopping center is a bust - there is not even a McDonald's. The film's points of contact often result associatively, like, for instance, in the scene in which Andi and a friend explain their enthusiasm for firearms: "I'm just a little bit of a war fanatic."

However, it does not remain at seemingly one-sided attributions; this already guarantees a temporal perspective - the space of a year in which a lot can change in the life of an adolescent. The developments that are a matter of course at this age are especially striking with Michael, who develops from an avid Michael Jackson fan and imitator into a nihilistic punk on his buddy's side - and finds himself having to explain his actions to his parents. The process appears moderated with Ramona, who does not really have a proper





idea about her future, but also does not unnecessarily worry about it: The only thing is that there is always too little time.

The feeling of alienation and social disconnection is strong. Yet Bramehuber makes clear that his protagonists are indeed involved in a social exchange. Whether it is a family council where the parents show themselves hardly receptive to the culture of remembrance surrounding the concentration camp, or whether it is a job application or counseling session: the connections to the adult world are existent; the identificational effect is slight. The title *And AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE* is loaned from a folk song that describes Ebensee's position - always the underprivileged odd man out between Gmunden and Bad Ischl. But it also applies to the focal point of this film, which does not want to scandalize any fringes, but rather explores a vacuum that is spreading out in the middle of society.«

Dominik Kamalzadeh





KGP KRANZELBINDER GABRIELE PRODUCTION

We are an independent film production company located in Vienna, going since 2001. We first made films under the name of Amour Fou, until 2007, when Gabriele Kranzelbinder established the KGP under her sole ownership, known for internationally successful and both in content and format transgressive productions with international filmmakers of all genres. Our films have been exhibited at all major festivals (Cannes, Berlin, Venedig, Locarno, Toronto etc.) and have won numerous awards. Our name is synonymous with the classic European auteur film as well as experimental cinema and the avant-garde. We tell stories and invite the spectator to come on a journey with us to experience exciting narratives, exotic locations, unknown realities and all aspects of the human world of emotions.

FILMOGRAPHY (EXCERPTS)

And there we are, in the middle | Sebastian Brameshuber | 2014 | Documentary
We come as friends | Hubert Sauper | 2014 | Documentary
Grand Central | Rebecca Zlotowski | 2013 | Feature
Shirley - Visions of Reality | Gustav Deutsch | 2013 | Feature
Museum Hours | Jem Cohen | 2012 | Feature
Griffen - On the tracks of Peter Handke | Bernd Liepold-Mosser | 2012 | Documentary
What is love | Ruth Mader | 2012 | Documentary
The Fatherless | Marie Kreuzer | 2011 | Feature
Carlos | Olivier Assayas | 2010 | Feature (Executive production Austria)
Tender son - the Frankenstein project | Kornél Mundruczó | 2010 | Feature
Muezzin | Sebastian Brameshuber | 2009 | Documentary
Universallove | Thomas Woschitz | 2008 | Feature
Taxidermia | György Pálfi | 2006 | Feature
Struggle | Ruth Mader | 2003 | Feature



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