

INTERVIEW with Jochen Hick

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Questions by Avner Shapira

1. It seems that most of your films focus on the ways of life of men who live in the margins of the gay scene. What are your basic motivations as a filmmaker?

My basic motivation is to create new images or document rather unknown realities or point of views of the world which hopefully helps other people to understand that world better. At least for me the margins are always more interesting than the mainstream and the middleclass – which also exists in gay life. Mainstream never creates anything new or interesting, mainstream only sells. Nevertheless you can understand a minority and the “normal” society very well by observing how they treat their own minorities. Therefore films like CYCLES OF PORN or TALK STRAIGHT do maybe tell as much more about the American or German society as a whole, as they deliver about gays.

2. In your opinion, as a filmmaker and as a documentarist, do you have any political or social duty? Do you feel you have to be involved in struggles, that your art should serve some messages?

I hope I don't proclaim messages and I have no duties. However, personally, the more I work on gay themes, the more I explore a worldwide universe with so many interesting and thrilling stories, which have never been told. Producing and directing films which include gay themes is already a struggle because of mostly insufficient budgets. I am also not proclaiming a gay self-complacency. This makes the struggle sometimes even worse.

3. Your 2 films about the sex industry in Los Angeles expose the daily life of those who work there, the life that behind the glory of being a porno star. After I watched the film (part 2), I had a debate with a friend if the film shows the wretchedness of its protagonists, or if they seem a little bit ridiculous. I mean, if the film has a sad message or a good and funny message. How do you see the main people who participated in this film? For example, what do you think about the young lads whose life is like reality TV, or about those who were porno stars, or those who do not want to leave this industry, in spite of all the dangers?

CYCLES OF PORN shows survival strategies of people who live, lived and want to live in and of the porn industry. Together with the first part (SEX/LIFE IN L.A., 1998) the film is just a little multi-bio-pic-epos, which catches up with two generations.

You can watch it as a very entertaining, erotic and insightful documentary. Some viewers experience it as shocking and very sad. At least it shows, that the level of “sexploitation” in the gay porn business can be as harsh as in the straight one. I do not find it ridiculous, what the young guys do in L.A. in order to have success. Within the settings and myths of the American west coast gay society it's rather understandable - from a European point of view, it might appear quite bizarre. But to be honest: who hasn't met at least one gay friend who had the phantasy of once being in a porn movie. At least porn can be talked about, whereas the heterosexual porn industry is a megabillion, very exploitive and aggressive market but very few heterosexuals admit to be at least consumers. It's just a big taboo.

4. Many people would say that Germany, and especially Berlin, is a heaven for homosexuals and lesbians, in culture, law, politics, etc. It seems that homosexuality is in the middle of the main stream. It means that in contrary to the history of homosexuals in Germany, today being gay, or dealing with queer issues and homosexual identity, is not necessary being radical, one who try to undermine the values and the institutions of the society. Do you agree? How do you see the gay scene in Germany today, and especially, the way this scene is showing in the culture? Can you say if there are big differences between gays who live in the big cities and those who live in small places, or between gays who live in the east Germany, in comparison with the west? What are the main purposes of the gay community in Germany after achieving a lot of rights and influence?

Berlin and Germany today seems a heaven for gays and lesbians. Compared to many other countries it probably is. But sometimes this “homophile” environment seems more created by the media. No German politician nowadays makes any points by bashing gays and lesbians rights. This does not mean that even in Berlin you will find people, who have decisive opinions against gays. It’s just not opportune for them to speak it out. Of course gay people in rural areas may have more problems to be accepted than their colleagues in bigger cities. TALK STRAIGHT is an entire film about that topic. Many gay and lesbian people do not move to the big cities primarily because they are discriminated, but because they want to be in a more “gayish” environment, where they do not always have to explain their diversity to straight people, because those are the only ones around them. Society will never accept a sexual minority as “normal”. The majority is the norm for them and that’s it. Gays and lesbians should realize that and be more concerned about civil liberties.

We have no idea how long this “homophile” environment will last. It’s spooky to see what happens at the Eastern borders of the EU with gays and lesbians, what right-wing and nationalist groups will provoke, we do not know if the next proposal for the EU constitution will include Christianity (as usually interpreted by the big churches) in the preamble and what all kind of religious fundamentalists within and around Europe and Germany will evoke.

5. The topic of Rainbows End is very actual now, after the attacks against homosexuals in Moscow and Poland. Many people say that despite the EU efforts, there is an East/West divide concerning gays and their rights. What was your impression in your visitations in East Europe? Do you think that there are conditions to change the homophobia in these states?

Some Gays and Lesbians in Western Europe think, that the worst thing which could happen to their rights was accepting these countries into the EU. I don’t believe so. There is no need to be arrogant. Countries with really decent conditions for gays and lesbians are a minority compared to countries with bad conditions. And even very liberal countries like the Netherlands have no ideal recipe how to deal with right-wing, christian-fundamentalist and aggressive-islamic tendencies in their own country.

Officials of countries like Poland, Russia and Latvia tend to label homosexuality as an import from the decadent west. But every country has a different situation: In Moscow the few foreign and even less Russian activists were disorientedly walking around the rainy Red Square, some with flowers in their hands (I would never call that a demonstration). They were facing hundreds of Russian-orthodox, nationalist and neo-fascist contra-demonstrators, which called them sodomites, pedophiles and public enemies, who want to start an orange revolution in Russia. In Poland it seems to be mainly a mixture of the very special local Catholicism and the nationalists.

We have been filming in Poland and Moscow and we will be documenting the parade in Warsaw this coming weekend as well. I believe that the presence of foreign activists and politicians have saved the 2005 Warsaw march from being squashed by the neo-nazis – the police had to secure the march. The presence of the international media possibly saved the life of the organizers of the protest in Moscow. There is a big support from German groups for Poland, which is called “Warschauer Pakt”. And there is a big support, mainly from French and German groups for the Russian activists. Time will show.

The question of sexual minorities seems to become a central question of political belief and a symbol for the clash of cultures. Gays and lesbians, who are probably one of the most peaceful minority on earth have to fear that they will be the losers of these fights, unless they get up and fight for their civil rights where and whenever they can. Because no one else will do it for them.

6. I have read that this year you create a short film about the visit of the Pope in Cologne, Hallelujah. Could you tell more about this film (what is the main subject of it?) ? How do you see the role of the Catholic church regarding its conservative positions about gays?

There is no doubt about the eminent role of the Catholic church in the fight against gay and lesbian rights. But we know that it's not only the Catholic church, as we see in the United States, in Israel or in muslim countries. HALLELUJAH! a film of six minutes just documents almost four painful hours of waiting for the new Pope to pass for 15 seconds through a narrow street in Cologne. Thousands of Christians repeatedly sing and shout “Hallelujah” and “Benedetto”, while a group of Gays and Lesbians sings “We are all homosexual!”. Viewers can decide by themselves if this is really that so-called “renaissance of belief” or just another youth cult.

7. As far as I understand, all of your films deal with gay issues. Can I ask what is the reason for it? Do you plan to create also films which discuss on other topics?

That's a very popular question for filmmakers dealing with gay issues, a filmmaker always just dealing with straight and mainstream issues would never be asked that. I did a lot of productions for tv which had no gay topic, maybe those ones are just less known. First of all, I believe my films discuss much more topics which are universally interesting than gay topics only. You can tell all relevant stories and questions of our lives through gay environments and this makes them even more edgy. I certainly have many ideas for other topics as well. If I get the money and the support to produce them, I will do them as soon as I can.

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