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RUTH BECKERMANN AND THE WALDHEIM WALTZ

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Photo: Lukas Beck

By José Sarmiento Hinojosa

Ruth Beckermann's last film, **The Waldheim Waltz**, it's a rotund denunciation of Austrian former president Kurt Waldheim and his troublesome past with the former German National Socialist Party (the Nazi party) but, beyond that, is a profound gaze on how right wing politics are making a comeback in some European nations, and how people have or are basically forgotten crucial parts of the past.

Beckerman started in the Videogroup Arena, in 1977, which documented this major turning point in Austrian history by means of a huge protest demanding public spaces for youth culture activities. After founding the film distribution company *Filmladen*, she shot various documentaries which tackled issues like post war, workers' strike, memory and identity. However, She claims no nostalgia was involved in her return to her old archive footage in this different social climate in Europe:

Why should one long for a quite horrible outburst of anti-Antisemitism and populism? But what I regret is the lack of strong and international protest against racism and the extreme right today.

Beckermann is no optimist about the change of times. **The Waldheim Waltz** documents a sad state of affairs, the incorporation of Nazi characters to the political life of Austria. This documentary speaks hard about the need of revisionism or denial on some tragic events of WWII in different parts of Europe today, looking to strengthen some radical right movements, and it seems that partly, this was a motivation for her on doing her last documentary:

We tend to believe that once political fights have been won, the achievements will stay forever. We can see now that this is an illusion. Every generation has to fight again for their rights. When I started to work on the film in 2013 the extreme right was less strong and a president like Trump, unbelievable. What I intended to show are the mechanisms of populists. They always create a situation of WE and THE OTHERS. In the case of Waldheim, it was WE Austrians and the bad Americans and Jews on the other side. Another motivation was to show that one can protest and fight against those ideas as we did at the time. We've lost and he was elected but in the long run this affair provoked a profound change in Austria; a change for the better. Austria doesn't lie today about its Nazi-past.

Found footage, or the use of archival material is now being used by different documentary filmmakers to address the conflictive past history of the world, sometimes in particularly creative ways, like in Johan Grimontprez' **Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y**. This phenomenon of the use of archives is being part of a new activism, something that is directly confronting this new paradigm of "post-truth" in different countries. For Beckermann is an interesting fact but it's not enough:

There are some films which just put material together without much thoughts behind. Reflection and analysis and artistic ideas are needed! The cinema is the place for that. Films should be radically different from TV and social media.

The reaction of critics worldwide has been overwhelmingly good. *It won the documentary award (at Berlinale) and in other countries (also got a prize in Tui/Spain)*. But it might be too soon to talk about the general reception of the public, in a time where post-truth and far left ideas seem to come back with a revenge.

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