

THE WALL (Die Wand)

a film by

Julian Roman Pölsler

Starring Martina Gedeck



WINNER OF THE ECUMENICAL PRIZE – Berlin Panorama 2012

Austria / Germany 2011 / 108 min. / German with English subtitles / Certificate 12A

RELEASE DATE : JULY 5TH 2013

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SYNOPSIS

Martina Gedeck, best known for her performance in The Lives of Others, stars in The Wall, a contemporary female Robinson Crusoe story. Based on Marlen Haushofer's best-selling novel from the 1960's, (to be re-published here by Quartet Books in June) the film is a highly original exploration of the experience of solitude and survival and ultimately what it is to be human.

The cawing of the crows breaks through the biting cold whilst, inside a bare hunting cabin, a woman (Martina Gedeck) forces her words into tight narrow lines on her last sheet of paper. The expression on her face mirrors her fate. This woman is not writing her story out of pleasure, this woman is writing to save herself from losing her mind. The rays of sunlight on a beautiful day in May evoke her memories.

With her friends Hugo and Luise and their dog Luchs, she drove through the Austrian mountains to their lodge for a weekend getaway. The couple set off that evening on a short hike to the village. They promise to return before dawn. The woman and the dog remain behind, sitting on the porch. She appears out of place in her urban clothes. This is not her world.

The next morning, the couple has not yet returned. The woman wonders what might have happened. Her friends would never have just left her in the hut alone overnight. She decides to go and look for them, setting off in her city shoes with Luchs down to the valley. Suddenly the dog begins to howl and stops walking. The woman hits an invisible wall. Bewildered, her hands move through the air touching the inexplicable barrier that separates her from the rest of the world. Everything else seems normal, but her heart is gripped with fear long before she even realizes it.

And even more puzzling than the wall is that there is not a single person in sight. She is convinced that she will not be able to survive. And yet she knows that she must survive; there's no other way out. The second time the woman sets off to explore the area bounded by this wall, she is better equipped: through her binoculars she can see the people in the neighbouring hut, frozen in mid-motion as if turned to stone. A swift death must have caught them by surprise. Perhaps it would have been wiser had she gone with her friends into the village.

With time the woman manages to come to terms with her new surroundings. She finds a cow, which she names Bella. She plants potatoes, goes hunting, survives the winter. In the summer she moves to a nearby alpine hut and, inspired by the natural world, she starts to connect with herself. The thought of someone ever finding her no longer haunts her, she realizes.

But one day, the time comes and she is found. But not as she had expected. This meeting changes her life a second time and, in her own way, she resolves the questions that will never let her go.

More information and downloads at www.newwavefilms.co.uk

CREW

Directed and Written by	Julian Roman Pölsler
Based on the novel by	Marlen Haushofer
Photography	J. R. P. Altmann, Christian Berger, Markus Fraunholz, Martin Gschlacht, Bernhard Keller, Helmut Pirnat, Hans Selikovsky, Thomas Tröger, Richi Wagner
Editing	Bettina Mazakarini, Natalie Schwager, Thomas Kohler
Sound	Uve Haussig, Gregor Kienel, Markus Kathriner
Sound Design	Johannes Konecny, Marcel Spisak, Achim Hofmann, Philipp Mosser, Nils Kirchhoff
Line Producer	Jimmy C. Gerum
Production Manager	Bruno Wagner
Producers	Rainer Koelmel, Antonin Svoboda, Martin Gschlacht, Wasiliki Bleser

A Coop99 Filmproduktion, Starhaus Filmproduktion production, in association with BR, Arte, with the participation of ORF.

Austria/Germany 2011 108 minutes

With:

Martina Gedeck	The Woman
Karl Heinz Hackl	Hugo
Ulrike Beimpold	Luise
Hans-Michael Rehberg	Smallholder
Julia Gschnitzer	Smallholder
Wolfgang Maria Bauer	Man
Luchs	Luchs (Lynx)

JULIAN PÖLSLER

Julian Pölsler was born in 1954 on the Kreuzberg, a mountain overlooking the village of St. Lorenzen in the Paltental, a valley in Styria, Austria. He studied Directing and Production at the Vienna Film Academy as well as Directing and Dramaturgy at the Max Reinhardt Seminar, working among others as the assistant director to Axel Corti. Since 1990 he has been making TV movies and directing for the opera. He also holds a teaching position at the Konservatorium of The City of Vienna in the Drama department and at the Institute for Computer Science & Media of the Vienna University of Technology. He lives and works in Vienna and Munich.

Filmography

Cinema

2011 *The Wall*

Television

2009 *Anna und der Prinz*

2007 *Bella Block*

2006 *Daniel Käfer und die Schattenuhr*

2005 *Daniel Käfer und die Villen der Frau Hürsch*

2004 *Hubert von Goisern TRAD 2*

2003 *Polterabend*

2002 *Himmel Polt und Hölle*

2001 *Blumen für Polt, Sommer und Bolten*

Interview with Julian Pölsler

Why did you want so much to make a film of the novel *The Wall*? Does it play a special role in your life?

The novel does indeed play a special role in my life. I read the book for the first time 25 years ago, because a good friend, the actress Julia Stemberger, had recommended it to me. Since then it has never let me go. Perhaps the film was my attempt to finally let it go. But instead the effect has become even stronger.

Before you could acquire the film rights, the material was in the hands of other producers for a long time. How did you finally get the project and what was your intention?

The rights were initially taken and so I was forced to wait patiently for almost 20 years. In 2003 I finally managed to acquire the rights. I was perhaps predestined to make this film. I had to be the one to make it. My chief intention with this film was to create a platform for a wonderful novel that I consider one of German literature's most impressive works. Many people today no longer read books, but prefer to go to the cinema. With his film I hope that Marlen Haushofer gains the even bigger place in the hearts and minds of people that she so greatly deserves.

You wrote the screenplay yourself. What was important for you in the process?

From the first time I read the novel twenty-five years ago, I have been tracking the path of this novel's film adaptation. I finally ended up working for seven years on the script. It was a slow and lengthy process. The most challenging aspect was dealing with the reactions of the script readers in Germany and Austria. Everyone who had read the novel wanted to see his or her vision implemented in the script. French, British, and American readers who didn't know the novel, however, encouraged me to go my own way. Americans especially would often say to me: "What others say is bullshit, what your heart says is right." It was important for me to adapt as much of the novel as possible into the film – hence the off-screen voice. I set a clear maxim for myself: make changes only by cutting things out, and don't add anything.

And your collaboration with Martina Gedeck?

We had an extremely intensive and, in the course of filming, almost silent collaboration. Once I had invited my students to visit the set and they were so astounded at the way I worked with Martina Gedeck. They thought we weren't getting along very well because we hardly spoke to one another. We of course discussed the work before and after the filming. But during the filming we communicated using very minimal signs. Often a single look was enough to say everything that needed to be said. This was highly concentrated work, based on mutual trust. We didn't have to discuss anything but chose to focus on the larger themes: Fear, doubt and how you deal with them. All that's needed in this case is a look, a nod, a shake of the head or a smile.

Does nature play a central role?

I grew up on a mountain farm above the Paltental valley in the Steiermark in Austria, completely isolated from the rest of the world, nurtured by a wonderful family and surrounded by magnificent nature. Perhaps this is why nature is so important for me. I'm not an urban neurotic. I'm a nature neurotic. Humility in the face of creation is unfortunately something that we've lost today. I find that nature could almost have played a greater lead role in this film. Along with the off-screen commentary and the Bach partitas, a third form of language in the film deserves more space: the silence of nature.

The film was shot in several stages and in different seasons. What was the reason for that?

The long filming period was important for me. I wanted to see real snow in the film. I wanted the light in the mountains to be authentic, exactly as I had imagined it. For urban people, who regard the forest and the mountains as something alien, this may seem quite kitsch. But it isn't for me. I would have loved to spend 14 months living with the film team in a hunting cabin. I wanted to come as close as possible to the truth that is the strength of this novel. Authenticity is the truth in this film. For me, this also meant living in a secluded hut during the scriptwriting phase – which almost led to my falling into a depression...

You trained your own dog Luchs (Lynx)...

This was a double pressure for me but Luchs made it easy. My dog had to step in because his brother, who was initially intended for the role, would not be trained. Bavarian mountain hounds are quite stubborn. In the past I had filmed extensively with animals and I had always disliked this trained behaviour, especially how dogs are fixated on the rewards and so step out of

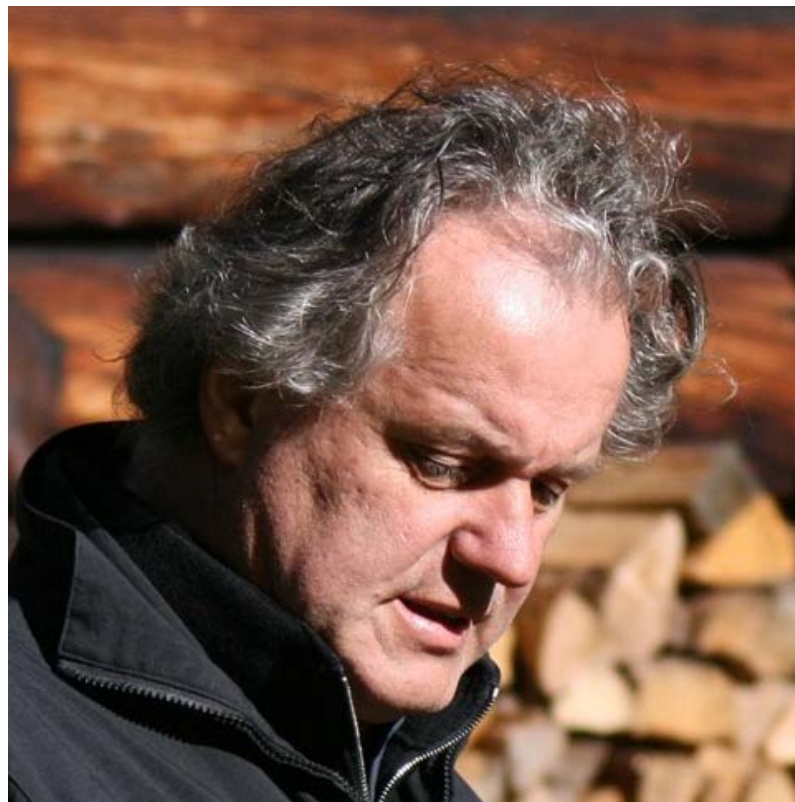
their relationship with the actor in the film. I wanted Luchs to develop an invisible connection to Martina Gedeck. So my role was less of a dog trainer and more of a dog whisperer. I tried to “convince Luchs with good arguments”. When I was at the end of my tether as far as my canine actor's skills were concerned, then my last argument was a liver sausage spread. Perhaps in future I should also keep liver paté up my sleeve for my actors...

What was important for you in the way the wall is portrayed in the film?

I didn't want the wall to be shown. I wanted it to appear as non-physical as possible. It had to be clear that the wall is neither tangible nor graspable. Aside from the woman's first encounter with the wall, it only appears visible in her nightmares and in the scenes where the Bach partitas continue the narrative, which are used every time the woman approaches the wall physically or in her thoughts.

What was your idea for the special sound design of the wall?

I looked for a long time for the right sound for the wall. I talked to Hubert von Goisern about it, who was to write the score, and then finally to Michael Haneke. He suggested using absolute silence, but I found that too radical as one had the impression that the sound had failed. By chance I discovered that there are people who can supposedly hear the earth's rotation. A scientist friend of mine then told me that it sounded like an electromagnetic field. I then tried to use this tone as the basic sound of the wall. In one scene you hear the voice of the Burmese Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Actually I had wanted to dedicate this film to her. But now that she has reappeared behind her wall due to the positive political developments in Burma, the message of the film remains broader: It pays homage to all the women who are forced today to live behind an invisible wall of ignorance and intolerance.



THE NOVEL *The Wall* by Marlen Haushofer

“I doubt that I shall ever succeed in producing such an achievement again, because you probably only ever encounter such material once in your life,” Marlen Haushofer (1920–1970) suggested in a interview about her novel *The Wall* in 1968. Thanks to a reading on ORF radio that same year, Marlen Haushofer gained solid recognition for her work as a writer in her native Austria. When her fifth book *The Wall* was published in 1963, she was depressed, as she confided to her friend and mentor Hans Weigel in a letter, because the book received no mention in the press for over a year. In her lifetime, her work was not a big seller.

Today, Haushofer’s novel has been translated into 19 languages and considered a favourite book by Germans and Austrians alike. As a cult novel of the emancipation and freedom movements, it stood at number two on the paperback bestseller list in 1985. This work, awarded the Arthur Schnitzler Prize, touches on fundamental questions of human existence and explores the origin of the psyche of fear and loneliness, making it timelessly contemporary.

How does one deal with the feelings that emerge from a sudden and complete loss of security and prosperity? *The Wall* offers a possible answer, which may be one reason why this work still captures the minds of readers today.

The novel is being re-issued in English by Quartet Books in June.

Martina Gedeck

Martina Gedeck is one of the most influential and respected actresses in Germany. With her lead role as the East German actress Christa-Maria Sieland in the German Oscar winner *The Lives of Others* and as Ulrike Meinhof in *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, Martina Gedeck has made an international name for herself while interpreting difficult and controversial figures of recent German history.

Recently she has appeared in a number of outstanding film projects including István Szabó’s *The Door*, opposite Helen Mirren; Robert De Niro’s *The Good Shepherd*; Oskar Roehler’s adaptation of Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Atomised*; Stefan Krohmer’s relationship drama *Summer of ’04*; as Clara Schumann in Helma Sanders-Brahms’ *Clara*; and as a police psychologist in Carsten Unger’s thriller *Bastard*.

Since *The Wall*, Martina has been involved in the remake of the Dennis Diderot literary classic *The Nun*, in which she plays the nun’s mother.

Martina Gedeck is a member of the European Film Academy, the German Film Academy, and the German Academy of Performing Arts.



Filmography – Martina Gedeck

- 2013 **Night Train to Lisbon (Dir. Bille August)**
- 2012 **Halbe Hundert (Dir. Matthias Tiefenbacher)**
- 2011 **The Wall (Dir. Julian Roman Pölsler)**
The Door (Dir. István Szabó)
- 2010 **Bastard (Dir. Carsten Unger)**
- 2009 **Agnosia (Dir. Eugenio Mira)**
Tatort – Wie einst Lilly (Dir. Achim von Borries)
Jew Süß – Rise and Fall (Dir. Oskar Röhler)
Sisi (Dir. Xaver Schwarzenberger)
- 2008 **Tris di Donne (Dir. Vincenzo Terracciano)**
- 2007 **Clara (Dir. Helma Sanders-Brahms)**
The Baader Meinhof Complex (Dir. Ulrich Edel)
Merry Christmas (Dir. Vanessa Jopp)
- 2006 **Aus dem Nest gefallen (Dir. Christoph Stark)**
- 2005 **Un ami parfait (Dir. Francis Girod)**
The Good Shepherd (Dir. Robert de Niro)
Summer of '04 (Dir. Stephan Krohmer)
The Elementary Particles (Dir. Oskar Röhler)
- 2004 **The Lives of Others (Dir. Florian Henckel v. Donnersmarck)**
- 2003 **Der Stich des Skorpion (Dir. Stefan Wagner)**
Hunger auf Leben (Dir. Markus Imboden)
- 2002 **Mostly Martha (Dir. Sandra Nettelbeck)**