

Wochentage (Weekdays)

We find her first in the shower, in a room lit by ghastly neon. (Immediately, some questions suggest themselves: To whom does this apartment belong? Why are her clothes neatly folded in plastic bags?) It is Tuesday. She pads across the floor, naked from the waist down, and recovers a plastic sachet of cocaine from a tub of what looks like plaster, and sitting cross-legged on the floor, begins to apportion quantities on a set of scales. Later a man will come to call, a silent man with a sullen face, and she will cling to him with a sudden, desperate tenderness as he lays waste to the flat. On Saturday, she says, she will visit her grandmother.

Writer-director Garsten Gebhardt is concerned exclusively here with the quotidian details of modern life. Strange, inconclusive encounters; moments of thoughtless, idling repose. The ennui of nightclubs and the loneliness of cities at night. Remarkably, there is no attempt to represent his characters' psychology: his approach is strictly phenomenological, his female protagonist simply one among many, moving seemingly at random through the world. Her rare lines of dialogue are unilluminating, even banal. ("Last weekend was ... so great," she murmurs dully.) She takes a trip to the sea, but it seems flat and grey, incapable of consolation. Even her dreams are unremarkable: when she confesses a desire to live by the ocean, "and watch it change colour every day," her companion cuts her short: "Everyone would like to live like that," he snaps - and he's right.

Why, then, is this film so compelling? Perhaps because Gebhardt has a remarkable eye, and a talent for the arresting, the unexpected image. Or because its production values belie its micro-budget (the minimal score is especially beautiful.) Gebhardt reportedly adapted this feature from two short films - Dienstag (1999) and Mittwoch (2000). Each featured the same actress, screen debutante Zoe Naumann, and she stars once again here; a fearless performer, she inhabits this character completely. We never learn her name and never quite get more than a vague sense of what makes her tick. But as we witness seven days in her life, we come to realise that the purpose of her existence might be as obscure and incomprehensible to herself as to the viewer. On Wednesday afternoon, in yet another apartment, she gives a man a handjob - but her gaze is fixed all the while on some far, fixed point. Despite the sordid, sundry details of her life, she seems as serene as Queen Christina - and every bit as unknowable.

Shane Danielsen – Festival Artistic Director