

## Documenta Platform 2, Delhi May 01, pt. 2

New Delhi, May 7–21, 2001

Report by: Sonia Khurana

Part 2: Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Process of Truth and Reconciliation. Reviewed for ArtHist by Sonia Khurana, New Delhi - Amsterdam <sonia\_khurana@yahoo.com>

India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

May 7 - 21, 2001

Platform 2 was twofold. There was a conference from May 8 - 12, and a video and film exhibition from May 7 - 21.

The films

A season outside

Director : Amar Kanwar

A SEASON OUTSIDE is a personal and philosophical travelogue of the mind's voyage through geographic and historic India: a nomad wanders through the shadows of past generations, conflicting positions, borders and time zones, lines of separation, and studies the marks of violence.

Amar Kanwar, the director of A SEASON OUTSIDE has directed over 40 documentaries which deal with issues of health, ecology, philosophy, labour, law, politics, art and education.

In this film he explores the idea of non-violence: How can it prevail, in the face of history's aggression? Through memories of India and Pakistan's partition in 1947, a trauma and heartache for many families in the subcontinent, through inquiries into Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, through legends of 16th century Mughal attacks, and through records of the aggression against Tibetan monks and families. This visual essay searches for a wisdom to transform conflict through a process of humanization.

The film begins its exploration at the Wagah border, an outpost where everyday, divided people are drawn to a thin white line that divides India and Pakistan. Probably anyone in the eye of a conflict may find themselves here.

The documentary is in the form of an analytical essay about the ambivalent dimensions of conflict, with many characters but without

interviews it embarks, with the viewer, upon a search that could await peace of a different kind.

The specialist  
directed by Eyal Sivan  
1991

THE SPECIALIST is a document of the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi bureaucrat who organized the mass deportation of Europe's Jews, Slovenes and Gypsies to concentration and death camps, Deliberately presented as a public event, Eichmann's trial by the Israeli Government was immediately recognized as an event of great historical significance and was extensively covered by news media around the world, the trial was the subject of intense interest and debate. The prosecution described the accused as a bloodthirsty monster, yet his demeanor was that of a family man, quietly comic and terrifying in his 'banality'. While he never denied his role in the Nazi deportation of the Jews of Europe, he maintained that he was merely following the orders of his superiors, and could not be held responsible for following orders.

The Israelis decided to document the trial on videotape, then a very new medium, and installed four video cameras behind partitions in the courtroom. Approximately 500 hours of footage was shot of the trial, which was the only trial of a Nazi criminal to be documented in its entirety. THE SPECIALIST is assembled from this footage.

The documentary filmmaker and Israeli dissident Eyal Sivan is particularly interested in political manipulations of memory and the historical significance of Eichmann's trial, which both shaped the national identity of the young state of Israel and provided a proving ground for critical tenets of international law, led Sivan to begin work on THE SPECIALIST.

The movie whittles down hundreds of hours of archival footage into a hauntingly immediate précis of Eichmann's trial. A surly and bespectacled Eichmann's obsessive distance from his crimes gives THE SPECIALIST a lingering chill.

We finally stare right into the face of Adolf Eichmann, the infamous Nazi head of transport whose 1961 war-crimes trial in Jerusalem inspired Hannah Arendt, in her coverage of the event, to coin that legendary invocation of the Holocaust bureaucracy: "the Banality of Evil".

Videograms of a Revolution  
1992

The compilation video VIDEOGRAMS OF A REVOLUTION, concerns the Romanian revolution of 1989 - including the fall, attempted flight, and Christmas-day execution of President Nicolae Ceausescu and his

wife Elena - and was assembled under the direction of Andrei Ujica and the prolific Harun Farocki, seen by many as the German "guerrilla filmmaker". VIDEOGRAMS.. was drawn from 125 hours of footage including TV broadcasts and work by amateur videographers taken during the 1989 Romanian revolution that toppled Nicolae Ceausescu's regime. Opening with a hospitalized woman proudly declaring her commitment to the resistance and asserting "We don't want a dictator," the film closes with images of Ceausescu's corpse taken after his execution less than two weeks later.

In a way VIDEOGRAMS reminds one of images and techniques used by the early Soviet montagists, especially Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (1927) : crowds are seen from above scattering under gunfire; revolutionary leaders seize the platform at popular manifestations, and major moments in the story are presented from multiple perspectives. But with the difference that Farocki and Ujica's work consists of found-footage, assembled and intercut with rather awkward titles to gradually reveal the course of history.

Rather than making a straightforward documentary, Farocki and co-director Andrej Ujica opt for a reflexive approach that pays as much attention to formal concerns as to the political changes themselves. The process of compilation is foregrounded by the presentational press-conference style of many shots, the constant switching between stock type, the representation of cameras and monitors within the frame and voiceover commentary on the historical import of the images and the relationship of film to history.

Early in the revolution, the gaps and lapses in state TV coverage were largely a product of the government's confusion-when protest breaks out at a rally, the cameraman "censors" it by panning to the sky -but soon afterward, television crews become both active participants and witnesses to the revolution, as evidenced by the prime minister's decision to deliver his public resignation twice because the TV cameras weren't rolling the first time.

Farocki superimposes the rapid consumption of images with a tranquillity for their examination. And it is that which motivates the ascetic exactness and the tranquil ordering of the cutting rhythm.

### Long Night's Journey Into Day

1999

LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY takes one inside post-apartheid South Africa to give one an intimate look at a country's attempts to heal itself with truth as the balm.

LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY reveals a South Africa trying to forge a lasting peace after 40 years of government by the most notorious system of racial segregation since Nazi Germany. The documentary studies South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), set

up by the post-apartheid, democratic government to consider amnesty for perpetrators of crimes committed under apartheid's reign. Shot over 2 1/2 years during 8 trips to South Africa, the film tracks the human drama of just a handful of the 10,000 requests for amnesty that came before the TRC. The film also reveals the lesser known fact that most of these applications for amnesty were made by black South Africans. In exchange for absolute truth about their activities and human rights abuses, perpetrators could earn amnesty for the crimes they committed before Apartheid collapsed in 1994.

LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY takes viewers to the hearings where murderers meet the surviving family members of their victims in four different cases, one of which is that of a young black activist who comes to recognize the anguish he caused by killing a white California student during a mob riot, while her parents see past their pain to embrace a new, multi-racial South Africa.

The film quickly dismantles the simplistic perception of the TRC's mission and goals, and the impression that everybody was willingly coming forward, and confessing to everything they did, and all the victims were willingly forgiving, and everybody was living happily ever after. In the words of the co-director, Francis: The one time I went myself it was in the midst of a very intense hearing. The stories were of such intense betrayal on the part of the police of these young kids. By the middle of the week I was starting to have my nervous breakdown too. It really was hard to hear that day-after-day." Co-director Deborah Hoffman said that it just blew her mind that "the idea that first of all a whole country would agree to uncover its past, as opposed to cover up its past, and then would agree to discuss, on a national level; How would we heal and move on?"

The film attempts to bring to the fore the most profound moral and ethical questions about justice, truth, forgiveness, redemption, Blanket amnesty, the problem of no individual accountability and the ability of brutalized and brutalizing individuals to subsequently coexist in harmony.

As the Rev. Desmond Tutu says in the film : "We make the mistake of conflating all justice into retributive justice. Whereas there is something called restorative justice and this is the option we have chosen."

What for me is particularly remarkable about the film is the strong participation of women in the process of conflict, forgiveness, and renewal : for instance, after enduring more than ten years of police denials, the mothers assess to what extent their need for justice is satisfied by finally hearing the truth. One mother says, "As long as they are telling the whole truth, I've got no problem with the amnesty." Others feel that simply admitting their guilt does not absolve their sons' killers, and they express the desire for punitive

measures.

As they speak out, telling their own truths and evaluating the killers' testimonies, the mothers move through a process of transformation and empowerment. Having considered themselves to be victims, the mothers find a voice and an identity through their participation in the TRC, emerging with a newfound sense of themselves as full-fledged citizens in a progressive democracy.

A daughter of a White South African teacher who was killed in an attack, in an interview in the film quotes Maya Angelou:

"History , despite its wrenching pain , cannot be unlived but if faced with courage, it need not be lived again"

sonia khurana

Sonia Khurana is a visual media artist. She works in the area in-between video, photography, performance, installation and public art. Sonia received the INLAKS Grant to study art at the Royal College of Art in London, between 1997 and 2000.

She has been selected for a year - long period at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam for the year 2002. She currently lives and works in Delhi.

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