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MARK COUSINS' SOLIDARITY MACHINE: THE STORY OF DOCUMENTARY FILM

An interview by Amanda Barbour

Beyond nonfiction film history, *The Story of Documentary Film* (Mark Cousins, 2026) looks at the worlds that gave rise to documentary cinema. It traces the reverberations between movies and social movements to ask: who holds the camera? And what are they pointing the camera at? In conversation with Klassiki, Cousins explained that, "Documentary allows us to see other lives, understand other lives and hopefully therefore care about other lives." 100 years after John Grierson first coined the term "documentary," audiences are now invited to see two chapters of the 16 hour epic at DokuFest:

- The Story of Documentary Film: 1960s, Thursday, August 13 at 20:30 at Kino Lumi.
- The Story of Documentary Film: 1980s, Monday, August 10 at 19:30 at DokuKino and August 14, 20:30 at Kino Lumi

Shkolla e Muzikes 'Lorenc Antoni' is hosting Visual Conversations: Remarkable Images in Documentary Cinema on Tuesday, August 11 at 15:00. Here, Cousins joins Albanian Cinematheque director Iris Elezi and programmer Thomas Logoreci on a visual journey through documentary cinema around the world, tracing its history and his own discovery of it while challenging the established canon along the way.

DokuDaily: When you say you're trying to challenge the canon, could you give our readers more context on what you meant by that?

Mark Cousins: Often, the documentaries that we've seen have been produced by the system. You're slightly reliant on what distributors will provide to you. This is changing, of course, but there's a whole world of documentary out there. Films from the Arab world, films directed by women, Japanese filmmakers of the '70s, Indian filmmakers of the '60s and '70s haven't arrived at our doorstep. Now, we can probably find them ourselves, but if I can be a pathfinder. If I can say to people: documentary is even greater than we think, then I'm gonna do that.

A central tenant of your film is looking at documentary as a heterogenous film practice. It's not one genre. It's many genres.

Exactly.

In having such a broad definition of what constitutes documentary film practice, how did you navigate what was in and out of scope?

Documentary isn't a genre, as you say. It's an approach to cinema. It's an approach to the world. Documentary filmmakers are often saying: what's out there in the world is more interesting than what's inside me. I've always said that film schools and art schools should not teach self expression. That's not what this medium is.

Obviously, I'm a white European man. But I wanted to make sure I didn't make the mistakes of white European men, by talking about white European cinema. I wanted to make sure that I



PHOTO: AGON DANA

knew stuff from all periods and all parts of the world. Then, I need to choose. What I choose is guided by the question: who were the innovators? Who were the women, in particular? Making sure that we don't leave new voices out of the story.

In this 16 hour film, I don't really define what documentary is. That's for the academics, to decide what documentary is. I'm the opposite of an academic. I'm a filmmaker, so I'm looking at it from the creative perspective. I'm looking for films that are centrifugal in their imagination, outwardly directed.

Documentary has certain tendencies. It's a new type of consciousness. It's a solidarity machine, which is different from Roger Ebert's "empathy machine." Filmmakers who are filming other human beings and saying, look at them. Aren't they interesting? Shouldn't we care about them? Shouldn't we understand their worldview? Broadly, it's that. But there is no definition there. It's more open. I was going to say open-minded, but I would use another phrase. Open hearted. You can see there's passion in what I do.

Yes. I think that's evident in the use of your voiceover. It doesn't feel like an academic giving a lecture. It feels like a friend sitting in the cinema with you, whispering in your ear to give you more context.

It has to be one on one. I record it really, really, close to my mouth in my own bedroom with the duvet over my head. It needs to be gentle and the opposite, as you say, of a lecture. My films are dubbed in many countries. They always use men and I think, why? Why is it always men? It's usually a more stentorian man than I am. I hope that there's a kind of nighttime quality to the way I talk about these things.

The conventional wisdom is you start with the script, and then you get the imagery. That's arse over tit. For me, the script is the very last part of the process. I write live to the image. That's why the writing always says: this, here, now. It's never past tense. It's always present tense. I think that helps with the accessibility of my work, hopefully, because people think that we're watching it now in the present tense.

I'm very influenced by Pier Paolo Pasolini's *In Search of Locations for The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964). In the editing suite, he spoke live to the footage. That's what I'm searching for. That kind of liveness, immediacy and availability. I also never use phrases that are common practice in film studies, like *mise en scène* and *auteur*. You know, you're looking for a kind of poetry. So those words don't scan well for me, you know? I come from a super working class background. Where I come from, nobody knows what those words mean, so why am I gonna use it in a text if I want those people to watch?

When you use that language, only a specific audience understands what you're saying.

Yes. It puts a barbed wire fence around your work. Cinema is the art form of the people. It should be available to everyone, if at all possible. I know that sounds a bit naive, but in principle, that's the right thing.

No, I agree with you. That's how it started, and that's how it should end.

By refusing jargon, it doesn't mean you can't deal with complex things. I think in my work, I do deal with complex things. But, I don't use complex language. People hide behind complex language.

They do. They hide intellectual shallowness behind complex words. Most of the footage in these films is pulled from other films, but there are some interludes where you film streets in Sarajevo, Berlin, Buenos Aires. When do those interludes become necessary?

I think of them as kind of breathing spaces. I knew I would need that, because you can't just dive into an image and then another image. You need to step out.

To have a full stop in between sentences.

Yes. You need to stop for a bit.

You often wear a shirt on the festival circuit that says, "Documentary kills fascism." Fascist cinema is also a part of documentary cinema, through the work of Leni Riefenstahl and people like that. How do you think about documentaries' potential to kill fascism, while also coexisting with fascism in some parts of film history?

Documentary's been on the side of the devils, as well as the angels. Lots of people who make films (not only documentaries, films in general) have a preconceived idea of the world. They're not curious. They're not looking for something out there, beyond themselves. Or their party.

In *The Story of Documentary Film* I say: Germany, 1930s, female director, who do we think of? Leni Riefenstahl. Well, there's another person: Ella Bergmann-Michel. I think her work is just as great. Why is she not in our conversation? Ella Bergmann-Michel was a gentler artist, a brilliant artist. Part of what I'm trying to do is get Ella Bergmann-Michel into the conversation.

Documentarists have to be humanists. Of course, there are many documentary films about penguins, mountains, cars, or sports. But overall, a documentary filmmaker has to dial themselves down a bit. To look outwards and think, what is that? What is that other creature that I'm looking at? What might matter to them? Luckily, there are more of those people.

Overall, people are decent and willing to help each other. I'm optimistic about human nature. I think documentary, the history of documentary, overall reflects that optimism. It keeps going because the world outside of ourselves is fascinating.

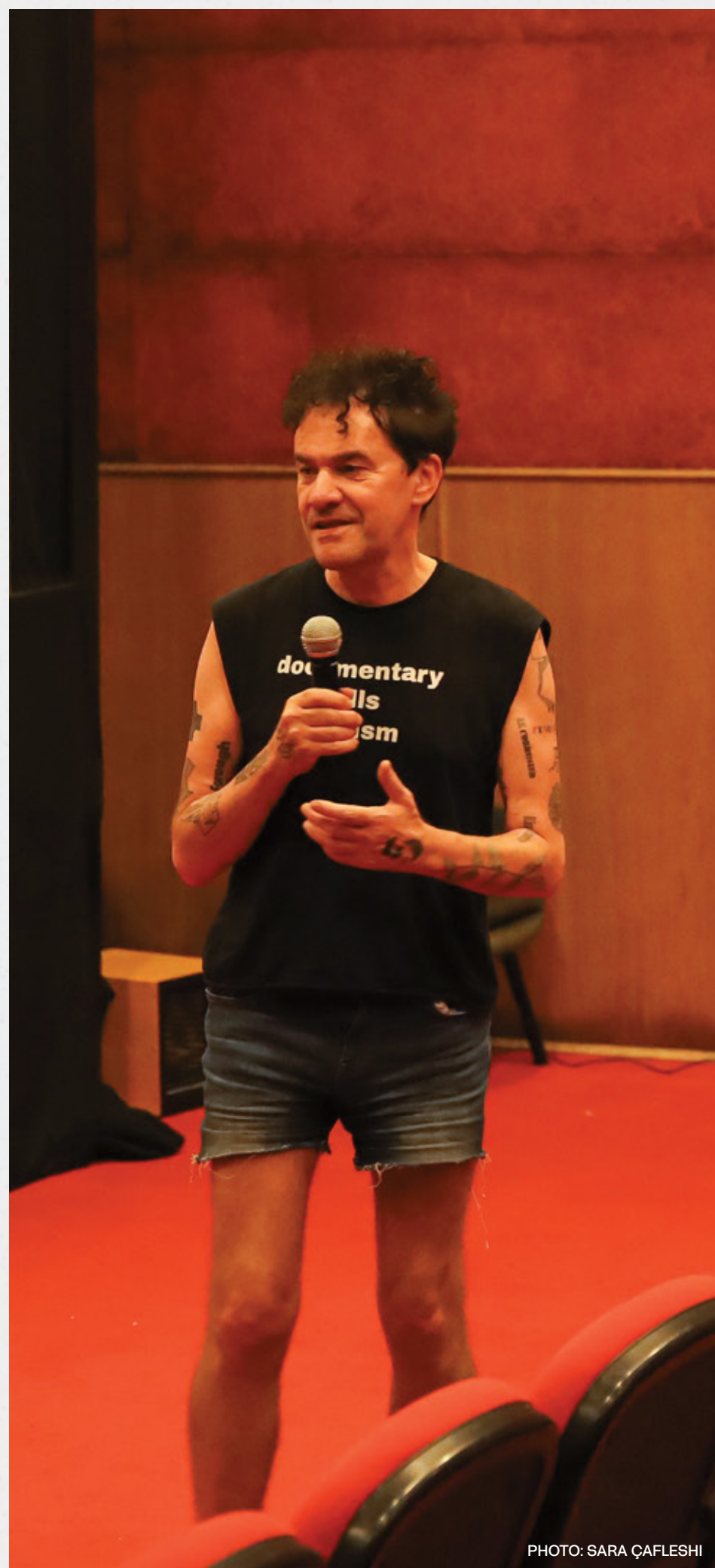


PHOTO: SARA ÇAFLESHI

“CONSENT NEEDS TO BE AN ONGOING POINT OF NEGOTIATION”

Filmmakers & researchers on dealing with the topic of war time sexual violence in cinema



PHOTO: FERDI LIMANI

Writing about the portretization of sexual violence in cinema inevitably means writing about power. Regardless of the perspective you decide to take, one cannot help but dive into multiples “Who(s)”. Who is creating, who is looking, who is being looked at, is someone uncomfortable with the looking that is happening to them, who has been allowed to speak, and who ultimately got to decide what became visible for the audience?

Feminist film criticism has long questioned the assumption that visibility is liberating by nature, having learned from the fate of many women, that the violated female body can easily become an object for the audience’s gaze, and that their suffering can easily be transformed into spectacle. Yet, documentation of violence remains important, because, as women, we have learned the hard way that without documentation our pain remains largely unacknowledged.

So how can filmmakers decide to engage with such an important topic, extremely sensitive subjects and contexts, all the while remaining empathetic and ethical in their approach. I carried with me these dilemmas, and walked in with them into the DokuTalk: After Silence: Film, Testimony and Justice After Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.

Moderated by film scholar Sanjin Pejčević, the conversation united activists and filmmakers Feride Rushiti, Alisa Kovalenko, Karla Condado, and researcher Erida L. Lameborshi to discuss conflict, memory, gendered violence, and the politics of representing survivors. In addition to doing a favor for all of us who share their gender identity by occupying this space and articulating themselves so empathetically, these four women are also ensuring that whenever survivors of sexual violence are featured in documentary films, their dignity is carefully preserved.

Who owns a testimony once it has been confessed?

In the context of documenting war time sexual violence and gender based violence, testimony is never “just a story.” Women survivors’ testimonies come along with fragile memories built upon a trauma they often try to repress, because it is too painful. Yet, through sharing, they are obliged to relive it, under extreme vulnerability and complex socio-political contexts, which oftentimes tend to view them as guilty for what happened to them.

That is why, approaching a testimony as such becomes one of the most difficult responsibilities a filmmaker undertakes, because once that testimony enters a film, it also navigates the terrains of authorship, spectatorship, media attention and public memory. The survivor may have spoken, but speaking does not mean surrendering their ownership to what has been testified.

For Feride Rushiti, whose decades of work with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Kosovo have been shaped by the absence of documentation as much as by the abundance of testimony, there should be no question of authorship at all. It must be clear, she says, that “the testimony is the property of the survivor alone.”

“We need to be reminded that whenever we engage with women victims of sexual violence, we have to have their consistent consent. Not simply consent at the beginning of a film, research project or book, but throughout its making, over and over, and after. Survivors need to know their rights, to be able to question what has been taken from their testimony, and to withdraw it whenever something no longer feels right. Their story does not belong to us, neither to the media, neither to the filmmakers. It is their property”

In a cinematic culture that often treats testimony as material to be gathered, edited and transformed into narratives that “suit an audience” this may sound like a radical proposition. It is not, really. Continuously taking the consent of survivors should never be an aspect to ignore, but to closely cherish and prioritize, as it allows filmmakers to continue developing a closer relationship with survivors, building the space for trust, instead of making them feel like they have been used, which often times, as Feride says, happens:

“Sometimes what happens when survivors are asked to provide their testimonies for documentaries, media interviews, films, the interaction of the filmmaker with them finishes with that interview,” Feride says, “survivors are not informed about what is the aim of that film, interview or media outlet. They have to know what will happen with that interview, what will happen to the sensitive information provided, otherwise they remain in fear that any detail included in the materials might reveal their identity.”

Surely, the camera does not automatically create an ethical space simply because someone has agreed to sit in front of it. Consent, then, cannot be treated as a signature, it has to remain an open conversation. This insistence on continuity is particularly significant when we consider the feminist history of testimony. Women who have experienced sexual violence have repeatedly been asked to prove, explain and retell what happened to them, to make their pain legible to institutions, courts, journalists, researchers and audiences. The demand for testimony can itself become another form of extraction when the person giving it loses control over what happens afterwards.

The panel discussion therefore offered an important reflection, proposing that maybe ethical filmmaking begins when we stop asking what can be “taken” from a testimony and start asking what are the conditions that filmmakers need to create to allow the person giving it to maintain trust, safety and agency over her own story.

For Alisa Kovalenko, the question of breaking silence was more personal. A documentary filmmaker and activist from Ukraine, Kovalenko was raped by a Russian officer while documenting the war in Donbas. She remained silent for almost two years, unable to find the language to speak about what had happened, before eventually encountering another woman who had experienced torture and sexual violence.

In her foundational essay, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” Audre Lorde argues that women must speak their truths, even when afraid, because transforming unspoken pain into shared language builds connections and bridges differences among women. While self-revelation is terrifying, speaking real words bridges divides among women, while allowing them to examine the language they can use to fit into a world they believe in, giving each other strength to confront systemic violence.

Something similar seems to have happened to Kovalenko, as when she started talking to other survivors, another layer of solidarity was unfolded in front of her. As more women began speaking, Kovalenko described a shift from the isolation of individual trauma towards collective action, which also inspired her film: *Traces*.

For her, documentary became both a record of war crimes and an instrument of advocacy, a means not simply to break stigma, but to change narratives and position women as agents of change, because “for perpetrators, silent victims are appropriate,” she said.

There is a sharp political proposition inside that sentence. Silence is not always simply the absence of speech. It can be produced by shame, fear, stigma, social expectations, violence and the structures that make women feel responsible for what has been done to them. Breaking silence can therefore be an act of resistance.

But the panelists were all careful not to turn speaking up into another obligation for survivors. Filmmaker Karla Condado

approached the conversation from an entirely different position, because in her case, there was no survivor left to speak. Her aunt Miriam was killed by her partner when Condado was thirteen. She grew up without understanding what had happened because her family never spoke about it. Her film emerged precisely from that absence.

By focusing on an intimate, time-transcending letter to her deceased aunt rather than the violence of her murder, she subverts the spectacle of femicide to explore the life that endured and the personal process of her slow grieving.

On architectures of absence

The dominant visual language of violence often demands the body, in cinema, the wounded body, the violated body, the dead body. Women’s suffering becomes legible through its visibility. But what happens when cinema refuses to provide that image? Erilda L.Lamebroshi, whose intervention brought a critical perspective from Kosovo’s cinematic landscape, turned precisely towards this question through what she called the “architecture of absence.”

Reflecting on films such as *Women Talking*, she noted how sexual violence can remain almost entirely outside the frame and yet become palpable through the negotiations, silences and embodied responses of women. The violence does not disappear because it is not shown, she noted, it simply stops being offered to us, and this distinction becomes crucial.

Lamebroshi argued that what we understand as silence or absence is not necessarily an absence of speech, emphasizing that “these can be forms of embodied speaking, ways in which women communicate experiences that dominant social codes do not know how to recognise.”

“There’s this notion that if you don’t show it, you haven’t dealt with it,” Lamebroshi notes. “But that binary is false.”

Films such as *Grbavica*, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* and Kosovo’s own cinematic responses to war and violence demonstrate otherwise. The massacre does not need to be visually reproduced for us to understand that it is happening. The question is not simply whether violence is represented, but whose experience the representation is serving. Is the film serving the testimony of the woman who lived through it? Or is it serving the audience’s need for catharsis?

According to Lamebroshi, when resilience is represented without dignity in filmmaking, it ceases to be resilience and becomes a way for the audience to extract emotional release from someone else’s suffering. The survivor is no longer the centre of the story – the audience is. This is exactly the dynamic that ethical filmmaking must resist. For Kovalenko, the ethical centre of *Traces* became increasingly clear as she followed women through their recovery. She realised that the film was not ultimately about trauma, pain or war crimes, but about “human dignity conquering this evil.” That shift completely changed the meaning behind her film.

Looking back at the Berlinale screening of her movie, Kovalenko explained how survivors travelled from their villages to attend the screening. She remembers watching the audience stand and applaud, and seeing the women cry. “That screening was healing for them,” she says. But she did not understand those tears as pity, rather, as recognition.

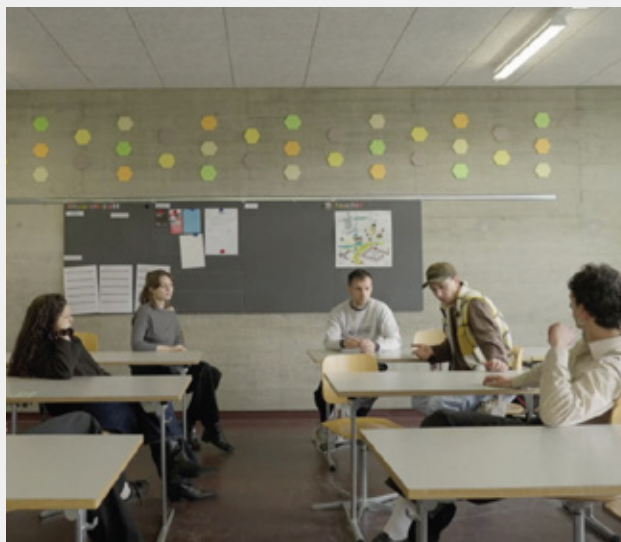
Perhaps this is what an ethical cinema on sexual violence can offer, certainly not the satisfaction of having seen everything, but the possibility of seeing differently.

When speaking about ethics in filmmaking that navigate through difficult topics such as sexual violence, we need not to be bold and require cinematic standards that are able to develop a language around silences, a form from absences, consent as an ongoing relationship based on trust, and dignity as something that must never become collateral damage in the pursuit of “a powerful story.”

Valmira Rashiti

HI(STORIA) NË “KOHËN E TASHME” 1/2

Upon the authors request, this text has been posted in Albanian



Ditë më parë, teksa po përpiqesha të shkruaja, gjeta një përmbledhje shënimesh online nga regjisori Marcel Hanoun, i cili, ngjashëm me Robert Bresson, i jep një drejtim letrar dhe poetik filmit. Përmbledhja e titulluar Cinéma Cinéaste : notes sur l'image écrite është shkruar me një gjuhë të thjeshtë, të hapur dhe të lirë. Këto shënime të shkurta të Hanoun-it nuk i udhëzojnë filmbërësit se si ta bëjnë një film, por ofrojnë një përsiatje që na mundëson ta mendojmë dhe analizojmë krijimin e filmit përmes marrëdhënieve të shumta mes gjuhës, imazhit, tingullit, lëvizjes, historisë dhe kohës si elemente që duhet rishikuar dhe rishpikur vazhdimisht. Formulimi që po u bëja filmave të kategorisë kombëtare kishte afri me këtë mënyrë të menduarit për kinemanë:

“Words and images write themselves, shatter, break off into notes, become forms, colours and chiaroscuro, textual images, visible, transparent, which found sense and form our gaze.”

13 filmat e sivjetmë të kategorisë kombëtare në DokuFest e kanë ndërlidhur dhe fiksuar ngushtë fotografinë e tyre me gjuhën. Teksa përcjellim ngjarjen në këta filma, gjuha e folur është thelbësore në formulimin e asaj që e përjetojmë ne si shikues, në mënyrën si krijohet një raport me një rrëfim personal dhe cilat nga këto tregime e histori mund të hyjnë në lidhje me procese më të gjera historike dhe shoqërore.

Filmi i shkurtër artistik Stolen Life i regjisorit Viron Roboci e ndërton këtë marrëdhënie përmes një reduktimi të qëllimshëm të fjalës. Në një botë ku dhuna është kthyer në një formë marrëdhëniejeje e poashtu shkëmbimi, heshtja e personazheve shërben si gjuhë e përpiktë mbijetese. Dy fëmijët e vegjël nuk mund të na e shpjegojnë realitetin ku ndodhen; ata e përjetojnë atë përmes shikimeve plot frikë dhe reagimeve fëmijërore. Përmes kësaj zgjedhjeje formale, filmi zhvendos vëmendjen nga ajo që thuhet te ajo që fotografia dhe frika e personazheve mund të na zbulojnë. Makina automatike, si objekt qendror i

filmit, shndërrohet në një figurë të një bote ku marrëdhëniet njerëzore maten përmes transaksionit, shpërblimit dhe indiferencës. Në këtë hapësirë, dhuna është simptomë e një realiteti më të gjerë shoqëror ndërkaq humbja e pafajësisë fëmijërore, pjesë e një rendi të zakonshëm.

Ndërkaq, gjuha ka një rol kyq tek një grup të rinjesh shqiptarë të lindur dhe rritur në Zvicër. Gjuha e Diasporës e regjisorit Diell Curri pushton hapësirat ku këta të rinj jetojnë dhe takohen duke u munduar të ndërtojnë një terren ku ajo ekziston përtej funksionit të saj komunikues, si pjesë e përkatësisë dhe vazhdimësisë kulturore. Përmes bisedave në gjuhën zvicerane dhe shqipe, këta të rinj diskutojnë se çka ndodh kur gjuha largohet nga origjina e saj dhe përballet me proceset e migrimin, përshtatjes dhe shtypjes. Gjuha e ndërtuar në film nuk e ka vetëm objekt mjetin e të folurit por e ka edhe strehë përmes të cilës personazhet krijojnë marrëdhënie me historinë, vendin dhe identitetin e tyre. Kjo përkatësi (ose mungesë e saj) shfaqet në meloditë e qiftelisë, në vërtetësinë e formulimit të saj dhe identitetit të tyre. Nganjëherë edhe si barrierë, nganjëherë si tregim i frikshëm i ndëgjuar nga prindërit apo thjesht si muhabet ku negociohen kujtesa dhe përkatësia.

Gjuha është edhe arkiv që regjistron momente pasigurie historike. Në Farewell until a free Kosova kthehem në vitin 1998, periudhën kur Kosova po përballej me përshtatje të dhunës dhe represionit serb. Një kasetë e këtij viti, na dërgon në Gjermani në një moment intim familjar: Agroni dhe Fitnetja, të rrethuar nga familjarët e tyre po inçizojnë urimet e martesës për t'ua dërguar të dashurve të tyre në Kosovë. "Trupin e kemi këtu, po mendjen atje" shprehën ata. Kjo fjali më së miri përmbledh përvojën e shumë familjeve shqiptare në diasporë gjatë asaj kohe, një gjendje pezullimi mes sigurisë së përkohshme në Gjermani dhe shqetësimit për familjarët që kishin lënë pas në Kosovë. Kumtimi me të cilin familjarët dërgojnë urimet është shqetësues. Atmosfera është pe i hollë i tensionit mes asaj që shihet e thuhet dhe asaj që pritet të ndodhë. Dy fëmijët e vegjël që shohim në kasetë e mishërojnë këtë atmosferë. Diçka s'na duket mirë as me ritmin e qytetit evropian. Në këtë kalim nga një kujtim familjar drejt një dëshmie kolektive, filmi prek një nga shënimet themelore të Hanoun-it: marrëdhënien mes kamerës dhe historisë.

"One doesn't plant a camera before history as it passes by; the camera is history."

Kamera jo vetëm se ka regjistruar një takim familjar por bëhet pjesë e mënyrës se si ajo ngjarje kuptohet sot. Një regjistrim familjar, i krijuar fillimisht për një qëllim privat, merr një dimension tjetër kur vendoset brenda kujtesës kolektive. Imazhi nuk ruan vetëm atë që ka ndodhur; ai ruan edhe gjuhën që në atë moment nuk mund të kuptohej ende.

Tek Antimuseum i regjisorit Renis Hyka, gjuha bëhet një mënyrë për të ruajtur kujtimet, por edhe për t'u larguar përkohësisht prej tyre. I ndërtuar mbi rrëfime të ish-burgosurve politikë, filmi ndjek një rrëfimtari që përpiket të tregojë historinë e një jete të bukur. Ai kujton dëshirën për t'u martuar me Mirandën dhe fantazinë e një jete që mund të kishte jetuar përtej mureve të burgut. Por rrëfimi i tij ndërpritet vazhdimisht nga një melodi e më vonë edhe një këngë, e cila i ishte lëshuar gjatë kohës së burgimit. Me çdo ndërprerje, ai detyrohet ta nisë tregimin përsëri, duke e mohuar ose riformuluar atë që sapo ka thënë. Gradualisht, pas tregimit për dashurinë, dëshirën dhe jetën e imagjinuar, fillon të shfaqet një e vërtetë më e hidhur për kohën e kaluar në burg. Përmes animacionit, filmi krijon një hapësirë ku kujtesa nuk rrëfëhet në mënyrë të drejtë dhe të pandërprerë. Ajo kthehet, përsëritet, devijon dhe përplasat me dëshirën për të kujtuar diçka tjetër. Kënga e shoqëron rrëfimin, duke e penguar disi kujtesën e tij: një tingull që lidh përvojën e burgut me ëndrrat, dhimbjen dhe jetën që vazhdonte të imagjinohej. Në këtë mënyrë, gjuha mund të duket si një përpjekje për ta mbajtur dhimbjen larg por edhe për ta rikthyer atë në të tashmen. Film i pyet se çfarë ndodh kur kujtesa e një përvoje të dhunshme ndërtohet përmes dëshirës që njeriu formulon për të vazhduar përpara.

Gëzimi i pritshëm i një martese të dy të rinjve përplasat me realitetin e luftës edhe në filmin Valle të regjisoresh Hana Bucaliu. Në prag të luftës në Kosovë, një udhëtim drejt bashkimit të një

çifti që pritet të martohet, shndërrohet në përballje me dhunën e forcave serbe dhe pasigurinë e atëhershme. Një vajzë e vogël, e ulur në sediljen e pasme të makinës, e ndjek babain dhe vëllain e saj në këtë rrugëtim pa mundur ta kuptojë saktë atë që po ndodh përreth saj. Muzika bëhet një gjuhë tjetër e filmit. Vallja poashtu. Ashtu si tek Antimuseum, ajo nuk shërben vetëm si melodi por edhe si mënyrë për të përballuar atë që nuk mund të bëhet. Vallëzimi nuk e ndal dhunën, por për një çast krijon një hapësirë ku njerëzit përpigjen të ruajnë dinjitetin, dashurinë dhe një pjesë të jetës së tyre përballë frikës dhe shkatërrimit. Për shikuesin nuk është e qartë se a do të ketë fund tragjik filmi. Pikërisht kjo pasiguri e mban gjuhën e imazhit pezull: ne nuk shohim atë që ndodh, por e ndiejmë përmes tensionit të krijuar përmes muzikës dhe burrit që vallëzon e poashtu edhe përmes dy të rinjve që mbesin jashtë kuadrit.

Çfarë ndodh kur personi që është përgjegjës dhe fajtor për humbjen tënde është edhe një njeri që mbart plagët e gabimeve të veta? Wet Soil e vendos luftën në këtë hapësirë të ndërlikuar morale, përmes takimit mes një nëne dhe një ushtari të ri i cili, pa dashje, ka shkaktuar vdekjen e djalit të saj. Përballë një historie që zakonisht ndahet në viktima dhe fajtorë, regjisor Jon Brovina kërkon një gjuhë tjetër për të folur rreth dhimbjes, përgjegjësisë dhe faljes. Zërat e Yllka Gashit dhe Kushtrim Hoxhës e udhëheqin këtë rrëfim, duke i dhënë jetë një bote ku kujtesa dhe trauma nuk ruhen vetëm në fakte historike por transformohen edhe në mënyrën se si ato tregohen. Përmes animacionit, animacioni krijon një hapësirë ku lufta shfaqet jo përmes betejës, por përmes pasojave njerëzore që mbeten pas saj. Film i pyet nëse falja është e mundur kur dhimbja ende jeton dhe çfarë gjuhe mund të gjejmë për t'u përballur me historitë që trashëgojmë.

Tash e një kohë, filmi i Kosovës është përballur me kujtesën e luftës dhe gjurmët e saj. Two Lives in Tight Socks e sheh në sy një tjetër pasojë të kësaj historie, në të tashmen: jetën e përditshme në një shoqëri ku tranzicioni vazhdon të ndikojë në zgjedhjet më intime të njerëzve. Regjisor Besim Ugzmajli e lejon shikuesin ta shohë nga pranë një përvoje personale dhe të bashkëndjejë në një hapësirë të ndjeshme: shtatzaninë e Rilindjes dhe pasiguritë që e shoqërojnë ardhjen e një fëmije në një shtet në tranzicion. Film i përpiket të flasë edhe për shumë realitete të tjera në Kosovë. Pasiguria e Rilindjes është në fakt gjendja e një vendi që vazhdon të përballet me pasiguritë e veta. Para kamerës, ajo flet drejtpërdrejt për humbjen e vendit të punës, vështirësive shëndetësore, pasigurinë për të ardhmen. Gjuha e bën këtë rrëfim të fuqishëm në gatitshmërinë për të ekspozuar një realitet që shpesh mbetet privat. E folura e Rilindjes përkthehet në një dimension shoqëror dhe politik pikërisht në faktin se ajo flet për jetën me gjithë brishtësinë e saj.

Tregimi nuk përcillet kaq lehtë - të paktën kur nis - në dokumentarin Në Kërkim të Poezisë. Një grumbull burrash të vjetër në moshë, i takojmë poshtë një pallati, e më pas në një kafe e pastaj rrugëve. Ata kuvendojnë për një histori të vjetër. Por dalëngadalë, kuptojmë se nuk jemi pas këtyre burrave. Jemi pas Filit. Një poet, ish i burgosur politik gjatë periudhës komuniste, i cili kishte fshehur dy fletore me poezi brenda murit të një apartamenti. Papritur jemi në kërkim të fletoreve bashkë me ta. Kamera lëviz çrregullt. Ne jemi pas gjuhës, një gjuhe që i ka mbijetuar përpjekjes për ta zhdukur atë.

Blerta Haziraj

WE WERE HERE, PRANAV BHASIN

Bagchi, Ganguly and Pimple, three retired men living in a crumbling Indian town, protest against machines and new AI technologies taking human jobs. Bagchi, a dish antenna, Ganguly, a reverse camera, and Pimple, a microwave, stage their own peculiar revolt in defence of the human side.

Living in a time when life has become almost impossible without technology, with our day-to-day machinery constantly upgrading at a rapid pace and AI increasingly integrated into it, “We Were Here” offers a refreshing comedy about a trio of men who decide to resist it. We follow their protest and at the start we discover what brought each of them to it. Coming from different workplaces and different homes, they each have their own reasons for joining the same cause. And now that they are retired, the time on their hands calls for something bigger.

The opening shot shows monkeys jumping across the tops of buildings, evoking the familiar image of human evolution: from monkeys, to humans, and eventually to the “robots” the three men have labelled their enemy.

Bagchi was once told, “One day robots will take our jobs.” His response is: “No, we will take theirs.” And so, he becomes a dish antenna.

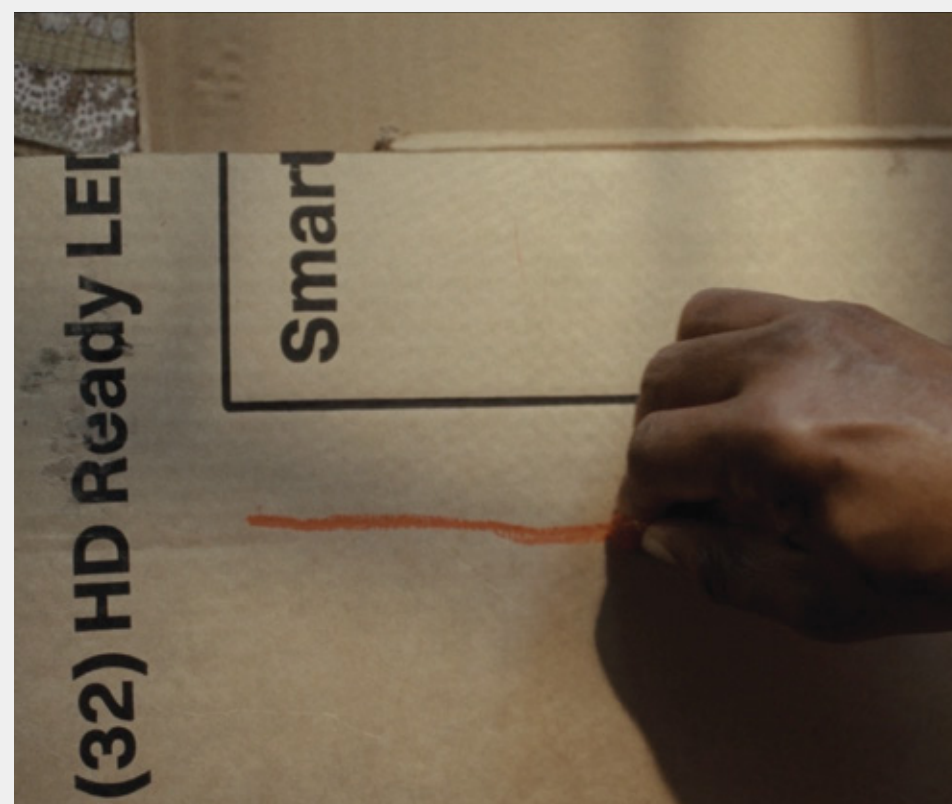
Ganguly used to be a driver, so becoming a reverse camera comes naturally to him.

Pimple’s inspiration, meanwhile, comes from his son, who tells him that nowadays he can identify as anything. After learning that his son is non-binary, Pimple takes the advice quite literally. And so, he becomes a microwave.

Here their story begins, in an unlikely alliance built around a shared cause.

“Come join the human side”

Following their journey, we see the campaign become increasingly heated and chaotic, as the line between AI and technology in general begins to blur for our trio. Through all of this, the film remains deeply hopeful, romanticizing the small imperfections of being human in some of its funniest moments. The music plays into this balance, adding to the humor while giving the smaller fragments of drama their emotional weight.



Protests against the machine



A turning point comes when Pimple’s son gets an internship at a company that works with data. In Pimple’s eyes, his son has joined the “AI side” and deserted him. Still, he continues to protest, despite the turn of his son to the “enemy.”

As we get a closer look into their lives, we begin to understand that there is something more personal behind their revolt. Bagchi, for example, speaks about never being able to have children with his college sweetheart, who is now his wife, and about seeing the trees around his home as his own. It is within these moments that the film gives us something more intimate to reflect on.

Visually, “We Were Here” carries the same tenderness. Its warm color palette is accompanied by its playful costume design, especially the machine costumes worn by the trio, while the image occasionally shifts from the regular frame into recorded footage from their campaign. These recordings give their protest its own visual space within the film.

It is through Pimple’s son that the revolt eventually begins to make a difference. Something he encounters at work makes him reconsider what he had dismissed before, suggesting that perhaps his father’s revolt was not entirely pointless. Its impact may be small, but it is there.

Eventually, Pimple’s son sends over a remote-controlled robot with a message coded across its chest: “Sorry from robot side”. Unaware that his son is behind it, Pimple and the trio believe the “enemy” has finally reached out for peace.

The absurdity of their fight remains, alongside the feeling that they’ve finally been heard.

In one of its final moments, the film returns to the orange chalk line Bagchi draws at the beginning. He states that robots make “a flawlessly perfect line,” while his own shakes because he is breathing. He then asks, “Doesn’t a flat line mean death?”

It brings us back full circle, to the human imperfections the film has been carrying throughout. A perfect line may be clean, yes, but the one that shakes carries the element of life within it.

And I think that is to say:

“We Were Here.”

Rea Kurtaj

BEHIND THE SCENES, BEYOND THE DESK

Tale of the Hospitality Team: lost flights and festival faces, redefining DokuFest's inner orbit



After a well-deserved break from mediatic attention, the hospitality team make their second appearance. This time around, Zana and Ardora direct the spotlight towards Elona, the coordinator, and first-time volunteers, Hanë, Isra, and Rron.

Bringing us a full-circle moment, Elona starts talking about her presence at DokuFest by remembering the year 2022 when she was a volunteer. She is nostalgic of a time in which the festival's structure was slightly different. For the sake of things running smoothly, the past few years they've had to locate most practical matters in proximity to the screenings. Though this has made coordination much easier, she misses being a "part-time tour guide" and giving guests a little taste of the city from a local's perspective.

The next year she graduated into a hospitality assistant, dealing with the guests' transportation schedule. "I still remember the full name, the face, and the reaction of the guest that lost their flight that year! It served me well though... I now know better than to send them one hour in advance. Ever since that mishap, I have had to convince guests that it's better to be at the airport five hours ahead rather than having to bear, say Tirana's, atrocious traffic jam!" You can feel Elona's regret when she recounts that story, and it just goes to show how deeply she cares about her job. Reflecting on it three years later, she says: "One thing I am so grateful for is the support system that I had from my team. Though I was completely floored, the management team did not pressure me in any way. Their understanding gave me space to grow professionally, and the upcoming year I felt so successful not having made anyone lose anything (Laughs)!"

She goes to explain her logistics' coordination process and I get a headache by merely listening to it... imagine having to deal with all the calls, all the timetables, all those people. Shockingly, she radiates calm and joy. She finds motivation in the variety of the personalities of her collaborators saying that certain drivers will be as thoughtful as to give her a call, making sure she knew that the guests had arrived well in their destination - multiple bonds have been formed.

It's not only the guests that take space in her considerate character - recalling the previous year's edition, she gives us a different perspective. That year, 2025, she was working at the British Embassy in Prishtina, and somehow she ended up being a guest at DokuFest. "I went to the reception and screening that the festival was hosting in collaboration with the British Council. Seeing Veton, Eroll, Samir, Alba, as a "mysafir" of theirs felt so bizarre - we'd joke so much about this dynamic. In the back of my mind, however, were Ardora and the rest of the hospitality team - thinking of the intricate process, I would go and check-in on them every chance I had."

This edition is special and slightly challenging to her as she has a little bit more responsibility than the previous years. There are ten things happening in one minute - they talk and fuss about it in the moment and then it becomes a funny story to tell. "The first peace of mind happens when I see the guests all checked-in for their flights. The true serenity kicks in when I see them around the festival with a smile on their face." She explains that another part of their job is the representation of their culture: for first-comers in Prizren, our faces are the first thing they come in touch with. It is of great importance to us for them to have a good first impression."

The first faces that welcomed DokuDaily in the hospitality office today were this year's volunteers. Elona says their energy is commendable: "Whenever someone enters, they immediately stand up and ask what they can help with. We're so lucky to have them!" Hane, Isra, and Rroni say their first year at DokuFest is going perfectly well. They make this very easy to believe as they have the calm to reflect, understand, and not take anything personally: "Some guests have had their flights delayed and gotten slightly angry, but it's understandable, we'd be the same! It all passes though!" It all passes indeed as they have made a little space for films in their busy routines - Isra and Hanë take their time to tell us how absorbing their first time watching a VR film was, while Rron says that "Closure" deeply touched him. Let's see if next year they'll return to watch more movies or host more guests - it seems like a difficult choice to make...

jona b

DAILY PICKS

For the 11th of August



JÉRÔME LE MAIRE
THE PRICE OF THE SUN 91'

DOKUKINO @10:30
GREEN DOX

A 21st century Western: Nomads face the significance of a large renewable energy plant being built in central Morocco as part of a “green” gold rush. Set deep within the vast desert interior, an epic tale slowly unfolds as the need for many is set against ancient livelihoods of a few.

INTERNATIONAL SHORT DOX
CHUURAA 17'
DRAGICA, DANICA, DUŠKA / OR /
WHEN ZORA, THE GODDESS OF
DAWN, OPENS THE GATES OF
HEAVEN FOR SUN TO EMERGE 10'
KISS KISS BANG BANG 28'
NORMAL PLANET 29' 59"

TEATRI "BEKIM FEHMIU"
(SALLA E MADHE) @12:30

In Siberia, a Sakha scientist searches for an ancient creature beneath the permafrost.

Zora, the goddess of dawn, is said to dwell in the Palace of the Sun, reigning over the cosmos.

A filmmaker explores how his gender transition reshapes a relationship.

A fish guides us through a virtual museum and its visitors' imaginations.



INTERNATIONAL SHORTS
TARIK 27'
DETACH 16' 4"
IT LIVES UNDER THE SNOW 16' 13"
HABIBI 15' 55"

TEATRI "BEKIM FEHMIU"
(SALLA E MADH) @15:00

After being expelled from the school, Tarik moves to Novi Pazar to live with his father.

A surgical robot gains self-awareness and questions the boundary between healing and killing.

Searching for a missing man, villagers uncover a secret beneath the snow.

In a remote mountain village in Kazakhstan, Laura sets off for the city to give birth.



MARYAM EBRAHIMI
THE PHANTOM PAIN OF ROJAVE 81'

TEATRI "BEKIM FEHMIU"
(SALLA E MADHE) @17:30

With a deeply personal touch and an unique access, Emmy Award-winning director Maryam Ebrahimi captures the hopes and dreams of a group of Kurdish guerrillas. Once celebrated as global heroes in the war against ISIS, they now find themselves abandoned by their allies. The Phantom Pain of Rojava is a post-war story set in Rojava, an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Syria, where Ebrahimi follows four friends in a house for wounded soldiers over the course of five years.

SANAZ SOHRABI
AN INCOMPLETE CALENDAR 77'

DOKUKINO @19:30

Inspired by the 1980 vinyl record Rhymes and Songs for OPEC, this essay film uses songs and rare archival footage to reconsider oil not as a commodity, but as a political force that supported Palestinian liberation and strengthened Pan-Arab solidarity in the 1960s and 1970s. The film is the final chapter in filmmaker Sanaz Sohrabi's trilogy examining the relationship between image-making, archival technologies, and the visual cultures of resource extraction in Iran and West Asia.



NATIONAL
THE GELINA OF RIBNOVO 10' 55"
ANTIMUSEUM 14' 16"
KEEP GOING 11' 46"
ALL GOOD 14'
ANGEL777 26' 48"

DOKUKINO PLATO
@20:30

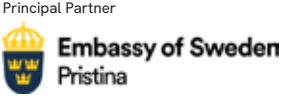
High in the Rhodope Mountains, Ribnovo preserves its traditions through a striking bridal ritual.

A narrator tells about his beautiful life, but a piece of music interrupts him from time to time.

Teen footballer pursues her dream despite her father's fears.

Heart disease would be easier than feelings.

After a breakup and a strange donation, Genc races toward a dark fate.



SWISS FILMS



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SHTYPSHKRONJA
PACKAGING PRODUCTS

