

The state of contemporary politics reflected at this year's edition of the Berlinale.

FILM TITLE: Angriff Auf Die Demokratie – Eine Intervention / Democracy Under Attack – An Intervention.

Director: Romuald Karmakar

SECTION: Berlinale Panorama Dokumente

Camera: ~Uli Kohler and Manuel Forster

Subject and Production: Romuald Karmakar – Pantera Film, Berlin.

Catalogue Page: 175.

Research:

General German documentary productions of the year:

<http://german-documentaries.de/>

General overview of the Panorama Documentary section

<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118048805?refcatid=1061>

Extended research on author monographic publication released by the Austrian Film Museum

[http://www.filmmuseum.at/en/press/press\\_photos/publications/books/romuald\\_karmakar\\_1](http://www.filmmuseum.at/en/press/press_photos/publications/books/romuald_karmakar_1)

The provocative cineaste Romuald Karmakar is probably best known internationally for his multi-award feature: *Der Totmacher* (The Deathmaker, 1995). The film's main lead actor, Gotz George received a well-deserved best performance prize in Venice of that same year (La Mostra del Cinema, 1995).

At a first glance, there isn't much of a connection between the two films. *Deathmaker* is, first and foremost, a highly subjective piece centered upon deeply unsettling moral, legal and philosophical circumstances and with a wonderfully designed aesthetic. On the other side, *Democracy under attack* – an intervention, appears more routinely structured, perhaps more clearly segmented and ultimately "more dry", in terms of both formal properties and content.

Notwithstanding their obvious differences, one might argue in favor of a certain kind of connectivity between the two films. Karmakar's willingness to directly address issues which have been shockingly important for our ill-born society such as the advent of killing, torture and bestiality, in the first place; and the corrupted state of neo-liberal capital, in the second; clearly reveal the presence of a very cerebral filmmaker and a terribly active and scrutinizing filmic approach.

The story of this film is as simple as Karmakar's decision of documentary portrayal: ten guests are invited to deliver a speech about the present state of the world, with a primary focus on Europe's economic, legislative and political 'downfall'. They all come from various artistic or cultural backgrounds, yet they all share a passion and hope for democracy in and for itself. The powerful texts that these people are saying are shown in a linear, chronological order of appearance on stage. Filmic manipulation is kept to a minimum, yet manipulation is used intelligently throughout. Ultimately, *Democracy (...)* aims to reveal the basis of democratic interventions, nothing more and nothing less.

The location for this symposium, also a Berlinale venue this year, Haus der Kulturen der Welt is both a physical locus of reunion and shared knowledge as well as a symbolic dacha in the old democratic sense of the Ancient Greek arenas. Here, the (forgotten) values, tenets and foundations of democracy are brought to the fore by trying to explore and revitalize the energy of addressing the public live. The impact of this symposium, held only a few months ago, back in Berlin, is deeply arresting and hugely relevant to all cultural attaches around the world. Quite a few of the 'actors' in the film are easily recognizable public figures pertaining to the Germanic cultural landscape.

*Democracy (...)* is a strong example of filmic intervention for various reasons. One basic reason is tightly related to freedom of speech and the value of filmic representation. In this case, the artist or the filmmaker is actively taking part in the democratic debate, which aims to save democracy and is meant to interact, explore and intervene in the very fiber of public discourses.

Karmakar's camera, seemingly objective and unobtrusive, chooses to respond to the charisma of the person filmed, and does so, in complex, subtle ways. The alternation between medium shots and long shots or between close-up portrait and medium close-up are both relevant and meaningful in order to decipher the filmmaker's degree of implication in relation to the arguments offered. The quality and the range of subject-matter which end up covered may be sometimes variable, yet the effort of delivery is almost always very convincing.

Most opinions appear to be nurtured by an idea: that communicating and sharing a thought with others is the foundational act for future mobilization, both culturally and politically. As a matter of fact, there is a need to defend and re-appropriate the very notion of democracy, tout court. At a time, when Europe is incredibly burdened by political and economic innuendo it is now, more important to address wider, bigger and tougher issues which have little to do with bailouts and the Monetary Fund and very much to do with the foundational structures of society.

Karmakar is known to have referred to this film as "experimentation with found footage". In this sense, public opinion is to be 'found' and then to be 'footaged'/ discussed in a forum-like environment. By virtue of this basic rationale, 'found footage' is relevant to both contemporary crowds as well as to posterity. These ten small interventions by ten gifted men and women deserve to be re-played, immortalized and scrutinized by an engaging and demanding eye. The foundations of democratic society must be disseminated so that a 'new form of active and involved democracy' may arise.

Whilst employing a rather rudimentary filmic approach, Karmakar succeeds in reaching an immensely wider audience and covering more difficult issues about the very nature of filmic representation and the manifestation of cultural activism. By simply "being there present", and being in Berlin for the Q and A, Romuald Karmakar is making a statement about what it means to become actively involved in politics via an exploration of your own medium.

Keeping in mind the most intricate use of animals at this year's edition of the Berlinale, Karmakar's short film inside the film becomes an active parable of the futility of the free market, under neo-liberal leadership and the general alienation and precariousness such discourses engender everywhere. His gentle short film 'Ralph N. Elliott discovers that market movements wholly reflect the mental behaviour of market participants' – is a small, witty, sarcastically dry piece – whereby the footage of goats in the fields and their interaction is meant to mimic the difficult situation that Europe is facing today in an unbalanced and money driven context. Both the short film, as well as the democratic effort to re-defend democracy by virtue of filmic intervention deserve a better chance for distribution, outside television chains or the film festival circuit. Only in this way, Karmakar is bound to receive the recognition he and his small team deserve. Definitely, one of the strongest German voices present inside the Panorama Dokumente section for this year.