

Kurz davor ist es passiert

It happened just before

Peu avant

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Intelligently structured, Anja Salomonowitz' documentary film about the trafficking of women and illegal women migrants combines an ambiguously staged reality into a commanding and enlightening analysis of one of society's grievances. The film blurs the barriers between the social classes of the protagonists and thus forces the audience to find their own position. The original and playful perspective of the director provokes the audience's interest, who will leave the cinema deeply touched by the staged confrontation with authentic people's fates.

Caligari Award Jury Statement, Berlinale Press Release 2007

The film places the narrative logics of filmic fiction – "what could happen" – and documentarism – "what did happen" – into a continuously changing relationship with each other. In its paradoxical confrontation and questioning of the apparent naturalness of rule and exception, the film employs the stylistic devices of the horror film. Everyday life is stylized into idyllic normality that is interrupted by something uncanny. The characters are as if "possessed" by other stories. But the horror and the sinisterness that affect everyday life are nothing more than reality; a reality torn from its secret social (as well as everyday) invisibility.

Nora Sternfeld, Berlinale Festival Catalogue, 2007

Parlera-t-on d'un nouveau réalisme? Peut-être, à condition d'y voir une théâtralisation du documentaire tout autant qu'une "dérromancisation" de la fiction. Les documentaristes autrichiens figurent en bonne place dans ce défi. Des films comme *Le Cauchemar de Darwin* d'Hubert Sauper, *Notre pain quotidien* de Nikolaus Geyrhalter ou *Dog Days* d'Ulrich Seidl, our encore *Peu avant* d'Anja Salomonowitz, ont défrayé la chronique, et effrayé la critique, avec cette aura de provocation sulfureuse qui semble inévitablement (depuis Thomas Bernhard jusqu'à Haneke en passant par Jelinek) accompagner les artistes autrichiens en rupture de ban. (...) Le dispositif de Salomonowitz produit une subversion de la vision ordinaire, comme ces dessins dans lequel le regard découvre progressivement une inversion de la forme et du fond: n'est-ce pas le monde "normal" qui serait une fiction

propre à cacher l'autre? Ne vivons-nous pas comme des irresponsables dans un demi-monde ignorant son autre moitié plus ou moins consciemment rejetée et livrée aux abus?

François Niney, "Pendre le spectateur de front. Sur le nouveau documentaire autrichien: Sauper, Geyrhalter, Seidl, Salomonowitz", *Austriaca* n° 64, 2008

It happened just before is a fine example of the inherent possibilities and gains to be made when plying the border between fiction and documentary. The multilayered film is an alternative way of telling gruesome stories that would otherwise not have been told on film. This also gives the film an aesthetic quality, by exploiting the possibilities in the various storytellers' working surroundings using well-composed shots: the empty loneliness at a remote customs station or the kitsch pink-and-purple interior of a brothel. This is a completely different aesthetic than usually seen in such films, which often use re-enactments of interviews with victims whose face have to be blurred. Salomonowitz also achieves her goal of removing pity from the trafficked women. She keeps the audience focused on the stories and profound problems they experience instead of on broken-down victims. As Salomonowitz emphasised at the seminar, these women need more rights, not more pity.

Cecilie Bolvinkel, *DOX Documentary Film Magazine* Issue #75, March 2008

VIFF should be doubly praised for its inclusion of Anja Salomonowitz's film *It Happened Just Before* in its program - not only for taking a chance on a documentary that distances itself from traditional definitions of the genre, but for not being afraid to still classify it as a non-fiction film.

As each of the characters goes about their daily lives, we are slowly and deliberately revealed stories of prostitution, slavery and abuse mostly at the hands of Austrians in positions not unlike those shown on the screen. The juxtaposition of these mundane, complacent and possibly complicit people makes the stories of suffering all the more haunting. Salmonowitz uses gorgeous, long artistic takes so, even when the story isn't interesting, there is something to look at. She allows the images and stories to flow into and inform one another in a way that really captures the imagination.

Hopefully this film marks the beginning of VIFF looking to more experimental forms of artistic documentary to fill its non-fiction program.

Cameron Maitland, *Schema Magazine*, October 2007

Is it possible to relate the gruesome experiences of female sex and labour trafficking without tears and melodrama? Anja Salomonowitz's documentary responds to this dilemma with a provocative experiment. Instead of shrouding the real women in shadows or using actresses to retell the stories, Salomonowitz employs

"everyday people" engaged in their everyday activities to recite real reports from trafficked foreign women in Austria. These narrators, who have relationships to the places or professions thematised in the stories, create a parallel narrative: they are the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of the female trafficking problem.

The connection between narrator and narrated is not arbitrary, but rather an elective affinity: the customs officer, for example, recites the story in which a border crossing becomes a painful experience for a woman forced into prostitution. As these five Austrians play themselves they simultaneously give voice to the silenced women who go unnoticed everyday.

Mattias Frey, "A Cinema In-Flux - German Films at the 57th Berlin International Film Festival", Senses of Cinema, February 2007

La sélection 2007 confronte deux formes de documentaire, explique Marie-Pierre Duhamel-Muller: "Les dispositifs théâtraux complexes avec effets de distanciation; et les films fiévreux, à l'arraché, dont les images ressemblent à un combat permanent avec ce qui est filmé." Dans la première catégorie, se distinguent deux films autrichiens. (...) L'audace narrative est d'une tout autre ampleur dans *Kurz davor ist es passiert*. Anja Salomonowitz donne un visage et une voix aux victimes du trafic de femmes en Europe en faisant raconter leur calvaire par des privilégiés (une conseillère, un chauffeur de taxi...) qui auraient pu les rencontrer ou subir leur sort. Dispositif aussi perturbant qu'efficace, surtout quand un douanier reprend les mots d'une immigrée que son petit ami a vendue.

Samuel Douhaire, "Cinéma du réel, des bouts du monde", Libération, 7 mars 2007

Anja Salomonowitz's film takes a fresh look at real women's stories of exploitation and abuse through a chilling documentary-like narrative. The women's stories are told through the unexpressive voices of those who were not directly involved in their abuse, but may have played a role in the continuation of these exploitations - the customs official, the neighbor, the brothel owner, the diplomat, the taxi driver. Although these people are going about their everyday lives, the film is a haunting look at seemingly innocent actions they perform everyday that may help to continue the sex slave trade, spousal abuse and forced prostitution.

Stephanie Dickrell, "Femini-sionario", Minnesota Daily, March 6, 2008

Though Austrian filmmaker Anja Salomonowitz's documentary *It happened just before* explores the grave and sober issue of global white-slave trafficking, Salomonowitz approached her material in an unusual manner. She collected harrowing real-life stories about the topic — tales of manipulation, exploitation, violation, sadism, and blackmail. She then interwove the tales into a documentary screenplay, and had each of five everyday individuals

with different occupations read one of the narratives — a customs officer, a female consul, a brothel barkeep, etc. As each participant reads of the events that transpired in the type of locale that he or she frequents, Salomonowitz runs a stylized sequence that depicts banal events unfolding in that location — enabling us to imagine the described terrors unfolding in the milieu before us.

Nathan Southern, All Movie Guide