

ASCAN BREUER (DOKUMENTARISCHES LABOR)

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These videos by Ascan Breuer might be summed up under the heading 'socio-political topography'. All three works address themes of home, place, identity and globalisation. Breuer is also testing the potential of different documentary strategies: while *Paradise Later* combines a historical work of literature with up-to-date visual material, *For(e)st* adopts an experimental audio and visual idiom to reflect the lives of asylum seekers in Germany without seeking to be representational. These two unusual explorations of reality contrast in turn with *Teheran – Lost & Found*. Here Breuer accompanies his main protagonist with a simple portable camera, deliberately dispensing with sophisticated post-production of his video footage.

Paradise Later, 2010

"The conquest of the earth is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much," writes Joseph Conrad in his novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The story he set in the Belgian Congo at the turn of the last century is transported by Ascan Breuer to modern-day Indonesia: the narrative voice-off we hear is that of the main character, a sales rep reading from his annual report. The camera glides gently across a river that reveals itself upon closer scrutiny to be a slum: what seem to be colourfully decorated trees along the bank are in fact hung with rubbish. These are not pictures of an exotic idyll. Rather, the people who gradually come into focus are fishing in cloudy waters for anything edible.

There is no direct link between the text and the image. They do not serve to illustrate or explain each other. And yet their interplay demonstrates how relevant the novel is today: the format for colonialism may have changed, but the arrogance of the West, which looks upon the alien world from what it takes to be a superior perspective, is still as strong as it was 100 years ago and more.

Forst, 2005

Forst tells of asylum-seekers in Germany and their day-to-day lives in a refugee camp. The forest, so often formulated since the German Romantics as a scene of yearnings, is contrasted with *Forst* as a place of banishment and exclusion. Breuer, however, departs from traditional methods of depicting marginalised social groups. He refrains

from simulating authenticity by displaying an aesthetic of misery. Breuer consciously seeks to prevent viewers from looking at these refugees merely from a perspective of pity or fear. In no way does he wish to reproduce the usual hierarchy between the spectator, actively integrated into society, and the suffering victim. Instead Breuer shows the people in *Forst* as agents of their own structure of solidarity.

Teheran – Lost & Found, 2011

In *Teheran – Lost & Found* Breuer follows his wife on a quest for traces of her Iranian family in the home they left before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. It is a confluence of Western expectations, memories recounted by relatives and contradictory impressions of this oriental city. The tourist's gaze is not denied but, if anything, highlighted by the use of a little handheld DV camera.

Ascan Breuer was born in Hamburg in 1975. He studied at the Institute of Cultural Studies of the Humboldt University in Berlin, at the University of Vienna and at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. His works have been shown at many exhibitions and film festivals, including Videonale 13 and 14 in Bonn, the Berlinale, the Festival de Cannes, DokFest Kasseler Film- und Videotage, the Centre George Pompidou in Paris and MoMA New York. *Forst* won the prize for Best Short or Documentary Film at the Austrian film festival Diagonale in 2005; *Paradise Later* received a special mention in the Best International Short Film awards at Planet in Focus in 2010.