



MARIO PFEIFER EXHIBITION 2011

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Mario Pfeifer
A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue &
Epilogue, 2010
35mm film / HD-multiple-projection for
exhibition pace, color, stereo, 50min,
Hindi, Tamil with English subtitles





प्रकरण ४





प्रकरण १





प्रकरण ७



प्रकरण ८





When he came to Mumbai, India, in 2010, Mario Pfeifer faced a problem that had already vexed Pier Paolo Pasolini and Louis Malle, who traveled to India in 1968, and many cinematic auteurs after them: What to show of a country and a culture that still strike the Western filmmaker as mostly unfamiliar and exotic? How would they avoid a colonialist perspective replete with standards of value they have brought with them? How might they catch a glimpse of what lies beyond the stereotypes about social inequality, about the misery of lower-caste life and the upwardly mobile middle classes, that dominate the critical picture of India in the minds of Westerners? Louis Malle thought it was impossible. In his classic „L'Inde Fantôme“, he spends 378 minutes commenting on the limitations of his own view.

It is this problem that Mario Pfeifer's 35 mm production „A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue & Epilogue“ addresses. We show the work as a multipart installation on three floors. Pfeifer uses lay actors to stage various perspectives on everyday life in Mumbai. Held together by a loose narrative, the open sequence of episodes arranges local sceneries as though in a kaleidoscope: a cab ride, fishermen on a river, a visit to a temple, workers in an ice factory. Pfeifer seeks out places that offer themselves as symptomatic sites to a social critique, talks to the citizens, researches backgrounds. He reenacts situations based on real situations and then shoots them a single time. Yet his gaze through the camera finally gives a surprising phenomenological twist to such methods of documentarism and realism: its attachment is solely to what is visible. Instead of looking for a filmic representation that seeks to do justice to the social world he finds, he gleans atmospheric details. And instead of offering a penetrating critique of what he sees, he focuses entirely on formal aspects: on colors and the qualities of materials, on stretches of time and sequences of motion, on sounds.

Pfeifer knows that there is no escaping the Western conditioning that informs his eye—but that does not stop him from seeing. So he formalizes what is happening and captures the inherent dynamism of the cinematographic apparatus in filmic tableaux he distributes across an exhibition architecture built for this purpose. Its rigorous and mannerist formal calculation suggests a kinship between his images and the paintings Gustave Caillebotte created around 1875, works that Jeff Wall also drew on. And not unlike Wall, Pfeifer not only does not align what can be seen of social landscapes, what can be shown of them, and what can be known about them—he does not even offer his audiences a coherent perspective of interpretation. Looking at what are allegedly social hot spots of a “developing country,” „A Formal Film“ arrives at motifs of a disturbing beauty that defy easy consumption, either as exotica or as critical clichés. Mumbai remains, for the time being, the phenomenon that it already was for Louis Malle. Yet unlike Malle, Pfeifer distances himself from documentarism, casting even the posture of commentary and critical information in doubt: documentary social critique itself appears as a form of colonialist encroachment.

Mario Pfeifer was born in 1981 in Dresden, Germany. After his studies in Leipzig (HGB) and Berlin (UDK), he graduates from Willem de Rooij's class at Städelschule Frankfurt in 2008. Pfeifer is a Fulbright fellow in Los Angeles (California Institute of the Arts) in 2008/09. Further grants from Goethe Institut and DAAD lead him to Bangkok, Mumbai, Marrakesh and New York. Since 2005 his home base is Berlin.

Mario Pfeifer

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