

## Document Citation

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## / From the East

D'Est, France/Belgium/Portugal, 1993

Director/Writer: Chantal Akerman

Production Co.: Paradise Films/Lieurac Productions

Executive producer: Marilyn Watelet

Producer: François Le Bayon

Photography: Raimond Froment, Bernard Delville (colour)

Editor: Claire Atherton

Sound: Pierre Mertens

107 minutes/16mm

Festivals: Toronto, 1993. Berlin (Forum), Melbourne, 1994.

The fearless Chantal Akerman takes us into post-Cold War Eastern Europe and tells us absolutely nothing about what she shows us. What she shows us is long, long tracking shots of people waiting in lines, people walking down streets, people resting on the benches of a huge metropolitan station. The imperturbable steadiness of her moving camera; the sombre colour of her environment; her depth of focus; all contribute to a formal grandeur that seems to mythologise mundane activity and render it deeply mysterious. Her camera gazes directly at people as she passes. Many look past or through its stare. Others meet it in the eye. The film becomes a series of glancing, intimate encounters to leave us tantalised, unsettled, in an anguish of curiosity and isolation from people whose lives might well resemble our own and equally well might not. Few documentaries invite us to speculate in this way, virtually forcing our minds to wander. Cinema, especially documentary cinema is, after all, expected to interpret the world for us. The polar opposite of *Baraka*, *From the East* leaves a receptive viewer so steeped in the ordinariness of the foreign that seeing it is like being there, a stranger, lost in a familiar land. – B.G.

The East in *From the East* is less a place – post-Cold War Eastern Europe and Russia – than it is a space. Her camera shows flat landscapes and ribbons of city streets, modulated by the change of seasons, by the succession of day and night. The East is a space of muffled sounds, traversed by the footsteps of passers by, punctuated by clusters of motionless figures, sporadically pierced by music, laughter and strange interjections. It is an epidermal space: the camera slides over appearances ('like a caress', says Akerman)... The East, no longer monolithically impersonal, is shown as both familiar and completely strange. This is a haunting and, quite literally, *extra-ordinary* film. – Francette Pacteau, *San Francisco Film Festival 1994*

Feature only

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