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THE FILMS OF HEDDY HONIGMANN

One of the most respected documentary filmmakers working today, Heddy Honigmann has acquired a devoted international following throughout her quarter-century-long career. Simply crafted and emotionally direct, Honigmann's work is distinguished by its unswerving determination to capture universal truth in its infinite subjective, personal manifestations. Honigmann seeks out ordinary people, who often have extraordinary experiences to share, and questions them with insatiable curiosity, frequently soliciting astonishing observations that carry with them a rare feeling of authenticity.

Born in Lima, Peru, in 1951, Honigmann is the daughter of Jewish Holocaust survivors from Austria and Poland who fled Europe during the Second World War. After pursuing literature at university in Peru she moved to Italy in 1976 to study film at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. Honigmann made the Netherlands her home in 1978, though she continued to pursue subjects for her documentaries elsewhere, often in her native South America. Firmly entrenching the plight of individuals as the locus of her vision, Honigmann has dealt with an eclectic array of topics, from the predicament of post-economic collapse Lima's cabbies in the masterful *METAL AND MELANCHOLY* (1993), to the world of Paris metro buskers in the lively and engaging *UNDERGROUND ORCHESTRA* (1997), and the musical reminiscences of Dutch U.N peacekeepers in the gripping *CRAZY* (1999).

Criss-crossing the globe in search of compelling stories, from Europe to South America to the Middle East, the multilingual Honigmann is adept at forging easy bonds with her subjects, whom she refers to as "characters." In Honigmann's work, the experiences and memories of specific individuals are always given far greater priority than political or historical context. Voice-over narration by the director and other elements of the didactic documentary approach are anathema to Honigmann's filmmaking philosophy. Honigmann does not shy away from engaging wholeheartedly with her subject matter; shunning the entirely observational "fly-on-the-wall" method, she overtly

acknowledges the importance of her rapport with her interviewees by making it a key component of her work * thus the level of "truth" contained within the films is, in one sense, a function of the level of honesty between the filmmaker and her subjects. (This "fly-in-the-soup" approach was pioneered by one of Honigmann's most admired filmmakers, French ethnographer Jean Rouch; she cites his 1965 study of a West African tribe, *LA CHASSE AU LION À L'ARC*, as one of her favourite films.) A shrewd listener, Honigmann guides speakers with penetrating questions whose purpose is the exhumation of another layer of truth, rather than the pursuit of a predetermined theme.

Honigmann's eye for colourful subjects, strikingly direct style, and a facility with her "characters" that is more akin to a patient therapist than interrogator result in documentaries of a singular nature. In *GOOD HUSBAND, DEAR SON* (2000), Honigmann spent several weeks with the widows of a small village near Sarajevo, listening to their devastating stories of loss, before finally recording their thoughts about their relationships with their murdered sons and husbands. As uplifting as it is sobering, *GOOD HUSBAND* seeks not to understand the politics that led to the massacre of the men; Honigmann's humanist agenda consists of a pressing desire to make sense of the women's responses to the tragedy, thus shedding light on the darkest of subject matter. Enraptured by the erotic verse of Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Honigmann travelled to Rio de Janeiro and asked several elderly people to read his posthumously-published work, which often sparked their own spicy recollections of love and lust. Glowing with vitality and charm, *O AMOR NATURAL* (1996) won three awards at international documentary festivals and the admiration of many critics, including The New York Times' Stephen Holden, who wrote that "the film is likely to leave you itching to go out and make hay while the sun shines." In *2 MINUTES SILENCE, PLEASE* (1998) and *PRIVATE* (2000), Honigmann turns her camera on Dutch society in an examination of commemoration and theft, respectively. Chronicling the ways in which a cross-section of Dutch citizens celebrate their Memorial Day, *2 MINUTES* achieves an elegiac simplicity in its climax of silence, while *PRIVATE* adds layers of complexity to its subject matter, featuring colourful testimonials from a series of admitted thieves.

Honigmann's peripatetic humanism has sought out inspiring instances of grace in the face of adversity wherever they have appeared. Her forays into fiction filmmaking have also, without

pulling punches, centred on the triumph of the human spirit over the potential ravages of the physical world: MIND SHADOWS (1988) deals with a man struggling with the affects of Alzheimer's disease, while GOOD-BYE (1995) is a sophisticated portrait of a volatile love affair. Honigmann's boundless curiosity and artistry have yielded a rich body of work containing a record of perseverance, wit, tragedy, and idiosyncrasy that is as unique as it is heartening; her extraordinary oeuvre asserts that the path to enlightenment runs through the lives of ordinary individuals. * George Kaltsounakis

GOOD HUSBAND, DEAR SON (GOEDE MAN, LIEVE ZOON)

Director: Heddy Honigmann

The Netherlands 2001 50 minutes video

Honigmann takes an original approach to grim subject matter in the inspiring GOOD HUSBAND, DEAR SON, an affecting tribute to the murdered men of a small village near Sarajevo. Delivered by one of the few survivors of a massacre, the film's opening voice-over describes the execution of eighty percent of Ahatovici's population, a story made more haunting by its pairing with idyllic imagery of the sleepy town. Honigmann interviews the women of Ahatovici, who speak not of the massacre itself but of the men they lost, describing their personalities as they treasure their possessions and memories. Often communicating with her subjects on camera, yet never distracting from the power of their reminiscences, Honigmann achieves an open rapport with the widows that is remarkably unintrusive. The film's ending, in which the possessions of the murdered men slowly fade on screen, is a touching grace note that finely underscores the intent to restore and preserve their memories.

PRIVATE (P®IVÉ)

Director: Heddy Honigmann

The Netherlands 2000 50 minutes video

As the fascinating PRIVATE unfolds it subtly brings complexity and emotional nuance to the topic of theft, exploring the various manifestations of the crime and expanding the concept to include not only possessions but anything of value, including people and love. Probing her interview subjects with absolute candor and ease, and

with a hunger to unearth truth, Honigmann questions an intriguing line-up of individuals who describe their experiences with thievery; among them are two expert pickpockets who rob an unsuspecting shopper blind in front of a hidden camera; a career thief and scam artist named "Rocky" who recounts the origins of his criminal lifestyle; an elderly lady who sneaks onto trams to avoid paying her fare; and, in the film's most unsettling sequence, a farmer who reveals a shocking childhood incident involving the repressed memory of his sister.

2 MINUTES SILENCE, PLEASE (2 MINUTEN STILTE A.U.B.)

Director: Heddy Honigmann

The Netherlands 1998 88 minutes

Honigmann, who has often found subject matter for her films in her native South America, shifts focus to her chosen country of residence, Holland, to examine the divergent ways in which Dutch citizens practice remembrance. Shot entirely on Dutch Memorial Day (May 4), 2 MINUTES SILENCE, PLEASE contains testimonials from a variety of ordinary people who survived the war, including an expatriate Hungarian who fled Budapest during the Second World War, unable to outrun the toxic memory of executions he witnessed; a woman trying to come to terms with the revelation that her parents were Nazis; an elderly woman who had to disguise herself to work for a Jewish family so that locals wouldn't recognize and report her; and a man who propagates the memory of a Jewish classmate who disappeared from school along with 103 other Jewish school children. A valuable document of anecdotal history, offering several priceless personal accounts, the film is also a study of recollection and ritual that culminates in a powerful two minute-long commemorative silence at the end of the day.

CRAZY

Director: Heddy Honigmann

The Netherlands 1999 97 minutes

"With . . . customarily succinct but penetrating style, [Honigmann] examines not only the psychic aftershock of war, but, more uniquely, the role of music in helping soldiers stay sane" (Variety). In part a continuation of subject matter found in 2 MINUTES SILENCE,

CRAZY takes a new twist on the topic of war and remembrance in its focus on soldiers' experiences through the filter of music. Interviewing a succession of Dutch "blue helmets," UN peacekeepers who have been stationed in areas of conflict ranging from Korea in the fifties through to Kosovo in the nineties, Honigmann asks them to share a specific song or piece of music that was in some way meaningful to them during their mission. Their answers, running the gamut between Guns n' Roses' Knockin' On Heaven's Door, Pucini's Nessun Dorma, and Seal's Crazy, unleash a flood tide of emotion, painful memories of life-threatening situations, and witnessed atrocities.

THE UNDERGROUND ORCHESTRA (HET ONDERGRONDS ORKEST) Director: Heddy Honigmann
The Netherlands 1997 115 minutes

"Wonderfully compassionate [a] potent, thoughtful piece of film-making" (Time Out). This rich portrait of a musical community sheds light on the heterogeneous and intriguing subculture of Paris Metro buskers. Hailing from Iran, Algeria, Armenia, Venezuela, Colombia, Africa, and Vietnam, these artists have compelling, often horrifying, stories to tell about their former lives and escapes from political and religious persecution. Honigmann enters their homes and submerges herself in the world of her subjects, capturing a gritty, black-and-white picture of their day-to-day existence and viewpoints. All the members of this "underground orchestra" share the common ground of passion for their music, which is but one of the highlights of this accomplished documentary. "A splendid example of how illuminating and entertaining a documentary can be" (Kevin Thomas, Los Angeles Times). "As song follows story and story follows song in an inspired melding of music, image and personal anecdote, we are coaxed ever so quietly away from the safe vantage of the bemused spectator" (LA Weekly).

O AMOR NATURAL
Director: Heddy Honigmann
The Netherlands 1996 76 minutes

"An intriguing window onto the fervid landscape of Brazilian sexuality . . . a lovely film" (Elliot Stein, The Village Voice). This winning, bold examination of sex and love revels in sensuality and

passion, employing an endearing technique to pay tribute to the erotic poetry of acclaimed Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade, whose work was published after his death in 1987. In O AMOR NATURAL, elderly residents of Rio de Janeiro read de Andrade's work out loud and comment on it, while Honigmann's characteristically intimate questions to her subjects uncover a goldmine of private experiences, recounted with disarming frankness and an invigorating, ageless lust for life. Much loved by both critics and audiences, O AMOR NATURAL won the Prix du Jury at the Montréal international film festival in 1996. "An ode to the erotic . . . this warm, simple film uncovers a rich vein of ageless, grassroots sensuality and joie de vivre" (Variety).

followed by

FOUR TIMES MY HEART (VIER MAAL MIJN HART) Director:
Heddy Honigmann
The Netherlands 1990 15 minutes
Cast: Saskia Temmink, Harriet Stroet

This endearing short offers a glimpse into the romantic life of four different women whose worlds briefly intersect when they cross paths one cold day in the park. The film's depiction of these characters' frailties, hopes, and neuroses * each woman is introduced as a "type": dreamer, temptress, belligerent one, and shy one * is both amusing and eloquent.

METAL AND MELANCHOLY (METAL Y MELANCOLIA) Director:
Heddy Honigmann
The Netherlands 1993 80 minutes

"METAL AND MELANCHOLY is quite like the Peruvians themselves * relaxed, persevering, nakedly emotional, and tougher than seat leather" (Michael Atkinson, The Village Voice). A gem that has garnered a number of awards at international festivals, METAL AND MELANCHOLY chronicles the lives of Lima's cab drivers, a remarkable group of people whose capacity for poignant observation and humour despite their woes is highly memorable and moving. After Peru's devastating economic collapse in the early nineties, scores of the country's middle classes took up cab driving as a means of making ends meet, forming a unique social strata comprised of

educated men (and a few brave women) brimming with lyrical and philosophical assessments of their predicament. (According to one, taxi drivers are "seafarers of the 20th century;" another, an employee of the Ministry of Justice, comments that he painted his cab green, "the colour of hope.") Refreshingly direct, stylistically ascetic, METAL AND MELANCHOLY is both uplifting and penetrating, documenting "the struggle to survive at its starkest, simplest level" (Dave Kehr).

MIND SHADOWS (HERSENSCHIMMEN)

Director: Heddy Honigmann

The Netherlands 1988 112 minutes

Cast: Joop Admiraal, Marja Kok

Set during an interminable, brooding Nova Scotia winter, MIND SHADOWS immerses us in the terrifying world of mental disintegration brought about by Alzheimer's disease. Maarten, an expatriate Dutchman living in retirement with his wife by the sea in Cape Breton, begins to experience a steady decline of his cognitive faculties, until the situation becomes so acute he can't deny it anymore. Honigmann's approach to the subject matter is appropriately disorienting: an extremely subjective depiction of the illness is achieved through the use of voice-over narration, which provides a window into Maarten's fragmenting mind, and abrupt, discordant flashbacks from his childhood * bright, summery memories that effectively contrast the callous Canadian cold. Honigmann cuts to the devastating heart of the matter in this skillfully constructed drama that ultimately questions the nature of one's connection to reality.

GOOD-BYE (TOT ZIENS)

Director: Heddy Honigmann

The Netherlands 1995 110 minutes

Cast: Johanna Ter Steege, Guy Van Sande

"An aching true account of consuming passion with an almost unbearably intense sexual and emotional charge running through it . . . a drama of rare observational acuity" (Variety). Honigmann's second feature fiction film is a powerful and understated story of modern-day amour fou. Two voracious lovers, married Jan and single Laura, are unable to resist their attraction to each other despite the near-certain

knowledge that their relationship is doomed from the beginning. GOOD-BYE's genuine portrait of a tempestuous affair is studied and restrained, slowly revealing aspects of its characters' personalities as they swing back and forth between passionate romance and forced separation. Johanna Ter Steege won the Special Prize at the 1995 Locarno film festival for her smouldering performance, which Variety praised for its ability to evoke "complete sympathy, conveying all the subtleties of love at its best and worst."

HOLD MY HAND (DAME LA MANO)

Director: Heddy Honigmann

The Netherlands 2003 running time?

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