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Camera Threat

Bernd Lützeler

2017, 35 mm/DCP, color, 30 min., Hindi, English. **Producer** Bernd Lützeler. **Production company** Bernd Lützeler (Berlin, Germany). **Written and directed by** Bernd Lützeler. **Director of photography** Bernd Lützeler. **Sound** Johannes Hampel. **Music** Guido Möbius. **Sound design** Bernd Lützeler. **Editor** Bernd Lützeler. **Production manager** Philip Widmann. **With** Mansi Multani (actress), Pushpendra Singh (director), Girish Pardeshi (filmmaker), Harish Bhimani (voice), Shai Heredia (voice).

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Set in the dreary nooks of Mumbai's film industry, stuck between star-cult, superstition, and the daily gridlock, *Camera Threat* explores the ambivalent and sometimes paranoid relationship that this film city has with the moving image itself.

Seated on a casting couch, a director and an actress get trapped in their impromptu conversations on the unwanted side effects of a world that no longer bothers to tell facts from fiction. An expanded multi-genre film within the constraints of the so-called Masala Formula popularly known from Indian cinema.

Camera Threat

man: "Shooting in Mumbai is not allowed because of Camera Threat!"

me: "Excuse me, sir, what do you mean? What is 'Camera Threat'?"

man: "Camera Threat is ... Camera Threat! It's Camera Threat!"

This conversation took place as I was negotiating through the daily Mumbai gridlock a couple of years ago, determined to capture time-lapse shots for my previous film *The Voice of God*. But placing my 16mm camera with a cluster of release control, wires, and batteries into a Mumbai traffic jam for several hours was sheer impossible, since every inch of asphalt in this city is being exploited commercially. When the rush hour starts, it's seen as an opportunity by thousands of hawkers to set up their shops right into the traffic. This attracts huge hordes of customers, who seem to enjoy this sort of high-density shopping experience. Whatever looks like a good spot to place a camera in the morning will be overrun by an avalanche of humans and vehicles a few hours later. And if I wasn't already being pushed away by the traffic itself, I would be bothered by the locals, asking for my shooting permission and trying to extract baksheesh from me.

So after innumerable failed attempts to capture this mad traffic onto celluloid, I decided to change my strategy and started hiding my camera in a sports bag. On this particular day I was looking for an ideal spot to put my bag: a busy railway junction with enormous traffic crossing through all day. Just a few minutes after setting up the camera I noticed I had already attracted the attention of two gentlemen who were standing a few meters away, indignantly talking about the lens peeping out of my bag. To avoid any potential trouble, I went over to them and asked if there was perhaps any problem. And there was a problem. And the problem had a name: The problem was *Camera Threat*.

Masala Formula / Digital and analog

Ever since I had borrowed my very first Hindi movie, coming on a worn-out VHS tape with no subtitles and full of drop-outs and sound glitches, I became fascinated by the inconsistency in space, time, and genre in popular Indian cinema. This narrative form, also known as Masala Formula, prioritizes the spectacular over logic, by stringing multiple film genres together into one storyline. Love or family dramas get interrupted by action sequences, romantic songs, comic sub-plots, melodrama, and dance routines. I always wanted to experiment with this crude but exciting film structure. In the end it took fifteen years until I realized that during my travels to Mumbai so many materials, found footage, and ideas had piled up, enough to become the source for a Masala experiment, where all those heterogeneous fragments of film and video would come together on screen.

During my previous film projects, I had worked on 16mm and 35mm celluloid with local technicians and film labs in Mumbai. Now, for this new project, I decided to work with them again. But soon after we had started, I saw most of them running out of business, closing their doors forever, or even worse – still sitting in their studios day by day waiting for the phone to ring. With some of them, I was literally their last customer. So the worldwide digitization of the film industry had finally reached Mumbai and

therefore, I made it part of my concept. Since I was already combining all sorts of analogue and digital formats, I expanded the concept of my Masala experiment: in the screening, analogue and digital images would be projected side by side, from a 35mm and a digital projector, and finally the two light cones would merge on screen.

Bernd Lützel

Bernd Lützel, born in 1967 in Dusseldorf, Germany, lives and works as an artist and filmmaker between Berlin and Mumbai. In his works he explores techniques of moving image production and presentation in relation with their form and perception. Loops, found footage, and jugaad (DIY) technologies are an integral part of his films and expanded cinema works. His travels to Mumbai have had a strong impact on his work, which often looks into the aesthetics of popular Indian cinema and television within the urban context. His films have been shown at venues and festivals worldwide. He is an active member of the artist-run analogue film lab LaborBerlin.

Films

1993: *Rauschlitanei* (video installation, loop). 1998: *Eternal Show-down* (film installation, loop), *The Suspect Usual* (18 min.). 2000: *Loop-o-Rama* (film installation). 2003: *True Love is Just Filmi* (15 min.). 2005: *Rapid Eye Love* (3 min.). 2011: *the Voice of God* (10 min.). 2014: *Traveling with Maxim Gorkiy* (10 min.), *Nola's salon* (film installation). 2016: *Batagur Baska* (7 min.). 2017: *Fultu Faltu Filim* (2 min.), *Ein Tonfilm* (5 min.), *Camera Threat*.