

AUGUST

A Film by Mieke Azuma

84min., HD, Colour. Germany 2011

Synopsis

There are places that don't reveal their past easily. Hiroshima is one of them. On a clear August morning 66 years ago hell literally broke loose here. Yet strolling through today's city this is hardly noticeable. Business men are hauling taxi cabs, teenagers are streaming through the malls after school, people are leading their everyday lives - just like on the 6. of August in 1945. The Japanese filmmaker Mieko Azuma shows Hiroshima in a very unobtrusive way in this semi-fictional documentary about memory, remembrance and imagining the past.

For the German writer Johanna (Sylvana Krappatsch) her research trip to Hiroshima means also going back to a place of her own childhood. Because her sick mother's memory about this time is fading away Johanna has to rediscover places and people she only knows from old pictures. As she is strolling through the modern streets and we alongside with her we get to know today's inhabitants of Hiroshima. The bus driver who drops his uniform and white gloves after work for an electric guitar or the old woman who drives up in a small car to her interview with Johanna. "I'm leading a normal and happy life now" she says smiling after having remembered that particular morning from long time ago.

Other people weren't so lucky. A young woman tells Johanna about her recently deceased grandmother who had been standing next to another girl her own age the morning the bomb went off. The girl shielded the grandmother from the heat flash and died days later. All her life had she been remembering her, tells the young woman about her grandmother. Now she would do that because without remembrance it would be as though the girl had never existed.

There's no historical footage, no mushroom cloud, no explosion in this film. Azuma doesn't want us to leave the present we can so easily relate to. And this is what makes this minimalist film so powerful. We are forced to find the history of Hiroshima in its people, faces, stories and rituals of today.

Credits

Sylvana Krappatsch - "Johanna"

Hirota Otsuka - "Translator"

Mieko Azuma (Writer, Director, Cutter)

Yoshihito Takahashi (Director of Photography)

Magnus Pflüger (Sound)

Ingo Fliess (Producer)

Kiyoshi Mizokami (Co-producer Japan)

Noriyasu Hirakata (Associated Producer Japan)

Hiroshi Hanamura (Chief Lightning Technician)

Keiko Murashima (Costumes)

Midori Arai (Make up)

Kodai Hanayama (Production manager)

Susanne Quester (Assistant to the director)

Berthold Kröker (Sound design)

Gerhard Auer (Sound mixing)

Fabian Spang (Post production Co-ordination)

Takashi Mimatsu (Production Assistant Tokyo)

Yukako Kishino (Production Assistant Hiroshima)

Milena Bonse, ZDF (Commissioning Editor))

if... Productions/ ZDF/ HFF München 2011

Mieko Azuma (Writer, Director)

Mieko Azuma was born in 1977 in Kyoto, Japan. After three years of art school, she studied traditional Japanese arts and crafts with priority on artistic casting at the Kanazawa Art Academy from 1996-2000. Since 2001, she studies documentary and television journalism at the Munich HFF. In 2008 she won the Munich Starter-Filmpreis and the DAAD award for her films „Yuri – about Love“ (director) and „Tuesday“ (Director of photography).

Films as director

- 2008 YURI-ABOUT LOVE / YURI - ÜBER DAS LIEBEN (documentary, 64min, DV and Super 8); Yamagata Festival 2009, Audience Award, Starter-Award of the City of Munich 2009, DAAD Award 2009
- 2007 GERMAN COURSE/ DEUTSCHSTUNDE (documentary, 6min, 16mm, b/w)
- 2004 YUKIO (documentary, 40min, DV)
- 2002 EYES/ AUGEN (documentary, 9min, 16mm, b/w)

Films as director of photography

- 2008 HOTEL ARNOLD, Director: Susanne Quester (feature film, 15min, 16mm, colour)
- 2007 SILENT VOICE, silent Colour, Director: Ayako Mogi (documentary, 90min, 16mm/HD)
- 2006 TUESDAY / DIENSTAG, Director: Susanne Quester (documentary, 90min, 16mm, colour)

Sylvana Krappatsch ("Johanna")

Sylvana Krappatsch was born in Germany in 1965. After studying acting at the University of Film and Television in Potsdam/ Babelsberg she worked at various theatres in Berlin, Bremen, Munich and Vienna. In 1996 she was selected best newcomer actress by the most important theatre magazine in Germany, "Theater Heute". From 2002-2005 she was part of the ensemble of the Schauspielhaus Zürich in Switzerland. Since 2005 she belongs to the ensemble of the Münchner Kammerspiele in Germany. Sylvana Krappatsch worked with many renowned directors like Frank Castorf, Werner Güggelin, Stefan Pucher, Johan Simon or Andreas Kriegenburger. She lives in Munich.

Ingo Fliess (Producer)

After studying history of art Ingo Fliess joined the theatre and screenwriters agency "Verlag der Autoren" in 1994 serving as screenplay agent, story reader and manager. In late 2006 he founded if... Productions specialising in auteur documentaries and artistically ambitious fiction films. In 2008 he founded the documentary label "DocCollection" (together with Jörg Adolph and Gereon Wetzel). Aside from working as a producer, he teaches at various film schools. He lives in Munich.

Filmography (if... Productions):

- 2011 THE GREAT PASSION. Documentary by Jörg Adolph. 144 min., HD/s16mm, colour Germany 2008-2010. Produced by if... Productions in co-production with BR. World Premiere at Film Fest Munich, June 2011.
- 2010 EL BULLI - COOKING IN PROGRESS. Documentary by Gereon Wetzel. 108 Min., HD/35m, colour Produced by if... Productions in co-production with BR, WDR. With funding from BKM, FFF Bayern, Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film. World Premiere at IDFA Amsterdam 2010. Awarded "FFF-Nachwuchspreis" at Dokfest Munich 2011 and Best Editing at The German Camera prize 2011. German distributor: Alamodefilms, World sales: Outlook Film Sales, Austria.
- 2010 HOW TO MAKE A BOOK WITH STEIDL. Documentary by Gereon Wetzel and Jörg Adolph 88 min., HD, colour Produced by if... Productions in co-production with ZDF/3sat, with funding from FFF Bayern. Awarded "Best German Documentary" Dokfest Leipzig, "Award of the Goethe-Institute" Duisburg 2010, Awarded Best German Documentary 2011 ("Prize of the House of Documentaries").
- 2009/ 10 MEIN LEBEN IM OFF. Feature film by Oliver Haffner. 103 min., 16mm/ HD Cam, colour Co-produced with HFF München with funding from FFF Bayern and the HFF Funding Foundation. Premiere: "Max Ophüls Preis" Film Festival 2010. "Audience Award" Biberach 2010. Distributor: if... Cinema! In German Cinemas July 2011.
- 2009/ 10 AUGUST. Documentary with dramatised sequences by Mieko Azuma. Co-produced ZDF ("Das Kleine Fernsehspiel"), with funding from FFF Bayern. Premiere at FID Marseille 2011.
- 2008/ 11 PASSION. Documentary by Jörg Adolph. 89 min., HD/s16mm. Produced by if... Productions, commissioned by BR TV. First aired 22.4.2011 on BR TV.
- 2008/ 10 DIE OBERAMMERGAUER LEIDENSCHAFT. Documentary by Jörg Adolph (co-directed by Ralf Bücheler). Co-produced with BR, first aired on BFS on 13 May 2010. DVD: Telepool
- 2008 BESPRECHUNG. Documentary by Stefan Landorf. Co-produced with 3sat/ZDF, with funding from FFF Bayern. Premiere: Duisburger Filmwoche 2009. Distributor: Arsenal
- 2007 DIE REPRODUKTIONSKRISE. Documentary by Jörg Adolph and Gereon Wetzel. Co-produced with BR and the Goethe-Institute. Distribution & DVD: DocCollection. Premiere: Filmfest München 2008.

About Hiroshima by Mieko Azuma

People say that the ground from Hiroshima was elevated one meter after the bomb had been dropped. Streets, rubble and other remains were buried in the reconstruction effort and new structures were built on top. What remains of the former Hiroshima only exists in peoples memories. I was literally standing on top of burnt houses, trees and corpses in Hiroshima and I was constantly asking myself: How will the memory of this be told in the future by people who have not witnessed it?

The fear of forgetting the past is present in Hiroshima. The last eye witnesses are dying out and with them the stories loose a fair amount of their credibility. Because the city is constantly modernised the little of what is left of the "old" Hiroshima is vanishing. The motto "we must not forget" has been ritualised and institutionalised, a common problem that exists throughout the world.

Many countries and people have tried to pass on the memory of the Second World War to future generations- not only in Japan. Film played an important part in this: Documentaries in which eye witnesses or perpetrators are interviewed or feature films that try to reconstruct the past and refresh the issues. Those efforts mainly emphasise on how to reconstruct memory or preserve it for the next generations. But what I am more interested in is the state of remembering today. Which memories still exist in Hiroshima that had already been passed on to second or third generations and how do the younger people integrate those passed on memories in their lives? The film doesn't try to look back into the past but looks for the answers in the present.

In the film two countries and cultures interact that were heavily shaped by their respective pasts. Hiroshima and the Holocaust were two of the most defining and traumatic events in recent history. Both countries cannot easily be compared with each other but they show parallels in their history. Because of Hiroshima the Japanese see themselves as victims in the Second World War but at the same time they were perpetrators in many asian countries. In contrast to Germany Japan still refuses to come to terms with the dark moments of its own past. Many Japanese admire and idolise Germany as a model in this regard. In my film both sides are looking at each other and their ways to deal with the past and try to grasp the nature of their respective memories.

Interview with the director

The title of your film, AUGUST, refers to the anniversary of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945. Why did you decide to make a film about it?

Mieko Azuma: Five years ago I was in Hiroshima for the first time and stood on its ground. The ground in Hiroshima is one meter higher than it had been before the atomic bomb exploded because the survivors asphalted the ground and buried the rubble, trees and dead people underneath it. I was confused that I couldn't imagine what happened there at that time. This feeling captured me.

In the film, you have actors interacting with real life situations. Why did you choose to shoot this way?

Within the documentary way of filming I created a subjective perspective of a person in order to tell about the unimaginable past and the personal memory.

You're exploring the memory - or to be more accurate the fading of memory - through the investigation of the writer Johanna. What is the connection between the organised, institutionalised commemoration of Hiroshima and a much more intimate and private search for lost childhood memories?

In contrast to the institutionalised preserving of the past it was important for me to show the human nature of forgetting and repressing memories. The confrontation of these two ways of memories shall open up questions about the subject of memory in the minds of the audience.

What part do the different languages play in the film?

The subtitles were used consciously to show what Johanna is understanding, so that the audience can empathise with Johanna's situation in a foreign country. The entangled communication with various languages in the film should imply how difficult it is to transfer the past through language.

The way you use reverse shots in the interview scenes gives a strong sense of separation, as if the testimony were something completely sealed, impossible to be truly understood and passed on to those who weren't there when it happened.

It is possible to interpret the film in different ways because it is narrated fragmentarily and not in a logical way. In contrast to the past described in the testimonies daily life in Hiroshima seems to be very normal. I was impressed by the fact that people had or have to forget and repress their memories in order to live their lives. Parallel to the story of Johanna, it was important for me to show the present Hiroshima.

How did you come into contact with the people that are interviewed in the film?

The young girl whose grandmother had just died in the film I met when I went to Hiroshima in 2007 for doing the first research. In an exhibition against nuclear bombs she was the only young one among only old people. She had bleached hair back then and was wearing a leather necklace with a metal sting. She was very interesting so I talked to her. The old woman I got to know through the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. The people there chose an eye witness from their pool of experienced storytellers. I wanted to use this arrangement for the concept of the film to show how well this institutionalised culture of remembrance is working today.

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