

**"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH
PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"**

Panel 1: Research, Media Art and Documentary Filmmaking

Ulrike Mothes (doctoral candidate, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany)

"Self-reflexive documentary films in India"

Abstract

Ulrike Mothes' presentation deals with the influences of film-aesthetic form and narrative strategies of recent documentary films in India. Film was brought to India as a colonial medium of entertainment and ethnographic record, and was soon taken over by Indian filmmakers. The state-funded documentary sought to distance itself from western documentary perspectives, and played a crucial role in the nation building process of Independent India in the 1950ies and 60ies. Starting from the 1970ies, the institutional documentary representations were questioned by independent filmmakers. On low budgets, they produced activist films about social and political injustices, to initiate change. During this time, the filmmakers focused strongly on the represented issues and responded skeptically to formal and structural explorations of the documentary genre. Art films were considered empty play of forms. To what extent do international funding and co-production systems, a new interest in Indian documentaries within the western festival circuit and a growing documentary audience within India today provide a turning point for young as well as established filmmakers to discover new forms of documentary expression?

By way of example, Ulrike Mothes' reflections are pivoting on Ranjan Palit's video diary "In Camera", a personal retrospection of his 25-year practice as a cinematographer in Indian documentaries. Palit's approach of shot taking, voice over and montage are located within the aesthetics and narrative style of nonfiction film in India, to which he contributed tremendously by participating in numerous important productions. The talk discusses Palit's documentary treatment of his own archival material and his artistic form of self-reflection.