**Other Worlds are Breathing**
The WSF Film Festival 2004

The over riding memory is of dust. The dust kicked up by thousands of feet. Thousands feet traversing miles of the venue over and over each day. Frankly, till now I had only read and imagined anything like this. This was an experience, unforgettable, unavoidable, and in my face. Then the sounds. Languages, drums, slogans and speech vied together for attention. And yet the result was not cacophony but something else altogether. And then the people. Over 100,000 of us from all corners of the world. And then the colours. Every hue and shade was represented in the clothes, in the posters that lined each possible space, in the banners and the flags, in the installations, in the different stages (7 in all). And then the activities. Over 1200 seminars, 800 workshops, plenaries, continuous demonstrations, opening and closing events, installations, stalls for selling books, posters ,food, exhibitions and plays. Nearly 3000 participating artists came. Art was visible, art was political and high art and street art mingled freely with unashamed enthusiasm to create a different kind of WSF experience. Many commented that the WSF in India had put culture on the agenda itself.

In a quiet corner, very near Gate 2, in a converted industrial shed - conjured into 2 auditoriums and a foyer by the architect: Pankaj Joshi - the WSF Film Festival 2004 took place. This was the first full-fledged international film festival dedicated to the World Social Forum. Called "***Other Words Are Breathing***" the festival presented 84 contemporary documentaries from 40 countries and 8 classic fictions on related themes. The 2 theatres had a combined seating capacity of 900 (550 + 350). But many times, over 1000 people were present simultaneously, and each day saw between 8000 - 10000 people who came to engage with the very important and critical films that were on the agenda.

The two halls lay perpendicular to each other in a L shape, the walls were created by ingenuously using metal pipes covered by jute matting, the floor was carpeted in deep blue with white plastic chairs and 16 feet x 9 feet screens mounted 20 feet above ground at each end of the two halls. The foyer completed the square of the original industrial shed. A long table with posters, brochures and details of a few individual films was manned by volunteers who patiently answered questions through out day. Very colourful banners identified the two halls: **Ghatak** and **Eisenstien**. And posters of films lined the foyer walls. Striped mats lined the walls of the foyer and colourful banners hung from the roof - creating a vibrant ceiling. The colours of the mats and the ceiling reflected the colours used in the brochure and the poster of ***Other Worlds Are Breathing***. And a line of posters lined the foyer wall, poster of individual films and the film festival.

From February 15th onwards the volunteers worked to put up posters announcing ***Other Worlds Are Breathing*** all across the WSF venue. In a corner, just outside the festival venue a informal cafeteria functioned. It provided a space for unwinding and informal discussions and of course unending cups of cheap coffee.

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And looming over all of this, in the entrance to the foyer (that led to the two halls) were huge Bollywood posters, painted by Bombay poster artists, that reflected the theme of Bombay (or Mumbai) in Bollywood. The largest was 21 feet wide and 17 feet high. 3 others were only marginally smaller.

5000 printed schedules were distributed and read and many people came to see specific films - this was apart from the main WSF brochure that also carried details of the Film Festival screenings.

**Preparing for the WSF Film Festival**

Prior to the film festival we had carried out two related activities. First, we had curated a travelling film festival package that aimed to tour the country and mobilise support for the WSF and its agenda. The films were curated thematically, based on the five main themes of the WSF: *Imperialist globalisation, Militarism and peace, Communalism, Casteism and Racism and patriarchy.* The details of these films, with synopsis, is attached.

As we did this work in less than a month we culled from the most easily accessible and available material. So we relied on films we knew and had seen. Most films were Indian or from South Asia. Only one film was from Australia, but its subject too was India. Called Diverted to Delhi the film portrayed the scenario of mushrooming call centres in India and searched for the international financial angle into that.

Due to paucity of time we decided to make a set number of version of the Travelling Film Festival Package so that they could travel simultaneously. All film makers participated quite enthusiastically and gave 5 copies of their film at very, very nominal price for this endeavour.

***The Travelling Film Festival*** began travelling from mid-October and has been viewed in many parts of the country. The travel was co-ordinated by the WSF secretariat.

In September we sent out a **call letter** inviting film makers to participate in the festival. The films, we said, should reflect the main themes of the WSF and there will be a process of selection to decide which film will be screened at the WSF.

By mid-October we realised that the decision to set up a selection process was sound, as we already had far too many films than that could be screened. Eventually, we had to extend the original deadline of 31 October (to receive preview copies) to 30 November 2003.

In the process to send the **call letter** as widely as possible, and into the regions we normally don't see films from, we began to ask friends and film makers to send out the call letter to their network. And in this process we met Todd Lester - in the cyber space - a communication student at New York who had extensive experience of working in Africa

and of film festivals. Todd volunteered to help with the festival and we gratefully accepted. And he contributed to the festival in more ways than one.

From the 1st of December 2003 the selection committee sat in New Delhi to select the final entries for the WSF Film Festival. Even as the committee worked we continued to receive entries for the festival. On the 7th December when the committee wound up, it had viewed a total of 184 hours of material in 222 films. After this, we did not - and could not -accept any further entries although the requests still kept poring in. At the final count we had received an additional 100 odd films and forms which we couldn't keep in the selection process.

In order to make the selection process transparent and accountable we constituted a selection committee for finalising the films that will be screened at the WSF. The committee comprised of the following people
**Prof. Habeeb Kidwai** (chair person) is the former Director of the AJK Mass Communications Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia University. **Manjira Datta** is an award-winning filmmaker and photographer. **Jai Sen** is a human rights activist who has been involved with human rights and rights of the marginalised people for the past three decades. **Reena Mohan** is anawrd winning film maker and editor of repute. **Aurelie de Lalande** is a young professional who has been working on enhancing various NGOs' communication skills in Europe, West Africa and India. **Gargi Sen** works with communication and issues of human rights.

The selection process was extremely rewarding. It was a pleasure to see the films and a wretch to leave many excellent ones out. And the main issue was of time. We had begun on the assumption that we will get 3 auditoriums and by the time the selection process was over, we knew that we had one, and maybe there could be a second one. So the selection committee made 3 separate lists of films that would be used as the final selection depending on the number of auditoriums were assigned to the film festival. We were told with certainty only by end-December that we had two auditoriums and the final list was prepared. However, as we needed to get the screening copies from film makers, by December 10 we had begun to use the first list to call for these. So in end-December we sent out another letter asking for screening copies from film makers. And we are extremely grateful that all such film makers obliged without a fuss.

The two weeks prior to leaving for Bombay (called Mumbai these days) were spent in finalising the festival brochure, poster and the schedules - of the festival and the panel discussions. And the help of Todd Lester and Bethany Cole was invaluable for these tasks. The final schedule had 84 films from 40 countries and 27 panelists arrived from 10 countries.

We also had our round of **controversies**. Some film makers and activists from India were unhappy with some of the exclusion. However, as no selection process, however transparent and accountable it may be, is not without controversies, it was probably inevitable and unavoidable. One such rejected film maker however felt enraged enough to hold a protest screening outside the film festival venue on the 20th of his film "Godhra

Tak." I suppose this incident, more than any other, demonstrated the openness of the WSF space - even protest against it was imminently possible and doable.

**Other Worlds Are breathing: A festival of moving images**

The festival began on February 17th morning and ended on the evening of the 20th. The films were further categorised in the following sections

i. The Global Market
ii. A World at War
iii. A World of Work and Survival
iv. Life, Politics, Struggle
v. The World Abused, I
vi. The World Abused, II
vii. The Woman's World
viii. Identities
ix. Culture / Resistance
x. Other Worlds are Breathing

Jai Sen, a member of the selection committee, named the sections as also the festival. The title is inspired by Arundhati Roy's closing words in her speech to the last Forum, in Porto Alegre, in January 2003 - **Other Worlds Are Breathing**.

Hall **Ghatak** named after the legendary Bengali film maker Ritwik Ghatak showed films under the sections: *The Global Market; A World of Work and Survival; Life, Politics and Survival; The World Abused I* and *Other Worlds are Breathing*. Hall **Eisenstein** showed films under the sections: *A World at War; The Women's World; Identities; Culture/Resistance* and *The World Abused II.*

Every evening, after 8 p.m. when the section on documentary and short closed, fiction films were screened. This section was curated by Meenakshi Shedde and she showed world classics.

On the 17th morning we ran into a technical snag and the screenings of the morning was disturbed. The problem was corrected soon. However 5 films, scheduled for the 17th morning, were shifted to the 21st morning.

It was not a film festival in the traditional sense of the word. It was much more. The combined seating capacity of the halls were not sufficient to always seat people, people lined walls and the aisles. Each day, on an average, 8-10,000 people formed the audience of the film festival. Many serious film enthusiasts stayed in through out - stepping out only for coffee or food. Many came for specific films, rushed, in between meetings and important presentations - and waited impatiently for their chosen film. And a section of the crowd was floating, stopping to see what was happening, as they did the rounds of the WSF, and moved on.

Nevertheless, that a serious audience remained was evident in the discussion times, in the impatience in the rare breaks when nothing happened and were meant to be a break merely (2 in the 4 days!) and by the queues that formed each morning, before the venue opened. While we cleaned and did tech-checks, people settled in around us. And very soon we gave up trying to have everything perfectly working before starting at 10 a.m. Sound and visual got checked, aisles were cleared and a quick check of the days film's screenings copies happened with the audience watching and waiting. The only time we faced the ire of the audience was when the schedule was changed.

The 17th morning was unavoidable. And it made people angry. However, not angry enough to give up films. Only they made sure that they stayed with the new schedule by returning many times and checking it and asking the volunteers the same thing over and over again. In fact the audience returned for these films on the 21st morning, although the WSF march took place in the city at the same time. And on the 18th we ran half an hour behind schedule, much to the chagrin of that section of the audience that came for specific films. And by the 19th we were on line, and on time, and with the relaxation came the pangs of separation: only one more day to go!

On the 21st morning we screened the films that could not be shown on the 17th. Additionally, an important Indian documentary: *The Final Solution* was screened in the hall across. This film did not make it to the selection process and yet, as it was a very important documentary and was presented to us a few days before the festival was to open, we took this decision. It helped of course that the film maker was from Mumbai and could hand us the screening copy.

We had also done sufficient publicity of the special screenings on the 21st morning and we had a very good audience turn out.

Many participants to the WSF came with films that they wanted to show. It was impossible to include them in the main festival. However, on the 20th the culture committee made a special space available to us. This was in the **video tunnel** space and 18 films were screened, again to a packed house.

Panel Discussions at ***Other Worlds Are Breathing***

With ten complex themes and many filmmakers in attendance, there were sixteen panel discussions including 26 primary speakers – both filmmakers and activists alike – during the WSF film festival. Additionally, there were 20 qualified specialists drawn directly from the audience to enrich these panel and roundtable discussions. Panelists arrived from Canada (2), US (4), India (11), South Africa (1), France (1), Thailand (1), UK (2), Pakistan (2), Germany (1) and Morocco (1). The format of the panel presentations and Q&A sessions was to show 3-5 films that had been curated along the aforementioned themes and then to have their representatives/filmmakers discuss cumulative issues brought out by the overall body of films in the thematic sub-section. This also allowed for filmmakers to field questions pertaining to individual films.

When film makers were present they briefly introduced the film (or we read out text send by them) and took part in the panel discussion. Normally a screening of 3-4 films was followed by a panel discussion, and each day there were 3 panel discussions. There were notable exceptions of course. The entire section on *'Identities'* was too short to be truncated by a discussion which was held at the end, after screening 5 films in a row. **'The Corporation'**, the theme film of the festival was too long to be clubbed with any other and had a discussion on its own. Arundhati Roy joined this panel and extended her views on shutting down corporations. Apart from film makers who were present in the panels (alas, so few!) we also invited panelists who were subject experts.

**Saturday, January 17**
**Auditorium Ghatak**

*The Global Market*
**Patti Lynn** (+ qualified specialists) w/ 'Making a Killing: Philip Morris, Kraft and Global Tobacco Addiction'
**Tony Avirgan** w/ 'Trinkets and Beads'
**Dennis Brutus** w/ 'I am a Rebel'

The discussion was colourful and vibrating. Denis Brutus, the subject of **I am a rebel** was present and the audience did not want stop asking him his views and aims. The panelists, almost in one voice, condemned globalisation and asked people to be vigilant.

*The Global Market*
**Arlene Ami** read a letter from Mark Achbar, the filmmaker of 'The Corporation' and **Arundhati Roy** spoke on his behalf after the film.

**Auditorium Eisenstein**

*A World at War*
**Madeline** and **David Kaplowitz** represented 'In Whose Interest?'

Due to technical problems the auditorium lost some of the audience by the time the discussion began. The two panelists talked about why they made the film and challenges they faced. A couple of questions were asked from the audience and a sing-up sheet was passed around for emails.

*A World at War*
**Anand Patwardhan** (+ 5 qualified specialists) w/ 'War and Peace'

This was one of the most attended panels. The panelists discussed problems specific to India and the proceeding film's topic of nuclear proliferation.

**Sunday, January 18**
**Auditorium Ghatak**

*The Global Market*
**Patrice Barrat** w/ 'Globalisation: Violence or Dialogue'

The discussion focused on the subject of the film.

*A World of Work and Survival*
**Arlene Ami** w/ 'Say I Do'

Many questions were asked about the status of the women the film had portrayed. Additionally, Arlene Ami had promised to collect visiting cards for Mark Achbar, the director of **The Corporation** and many people inundated her with this.

Auditorium Eisenstein

*A World at War*
**Zoe Young** w/ 'On the Buses'
**Gopal Menon** w/ 'Papa 2'

Panelist Zoe Young discussed why and how her film "On the Buses" was made. Gopal Menon discussed his film "Papa 2" and people asked several questions about the political issues involved in both films.

**Monday, January 19**
Auditorium Ghatak

*A World of Work and Survival*
**N.S. Eye** (+ gender specialists from across Asia) represented 'Silk and Iron'

*Life, Politics, Struggle*
**Gautam Sonti** w/ 'Anjawa is Me, I am Anjawa'
**Rakesh Sharma** w/ 'Aftershocks: The Rough Guide to Democracy'
**Suma Josson** w/ 'Gujarat: A Laboratory of Hindu Rashtra'

This was the most controversial panel till date. A section of the audience took umbrage to Suma's film and the questions almost moved towards heckling. Todd Lester, in charge of the panel discussions, made many interventions to keep the questions focussed to the subject.

Auditorium Eisenstein

*The Woman's World*
**Munizae Jehangir** w/ 'Search for Freedom: A Story about Four Afghan Women' (She also conducted a Q & A session just after her film the night before.
**Genevie Vaughan** represented 'Austin Women in Black: The War is Over, Why are You Still There?'

**Karin Jurschick** w/ ‘The Peacekeepers and the Women’
**Beena Sarwar** w/ ‘Forced Marriage-Abroad’

The four panelists talked about the making of their films. Genevie Vaughan discussed her organization *Austin Women in Black* and the problems they encountered filming in Texas. Several questions were asked about Karin Jurschick’s film ‘The Peacekeepers and the Women’ and how she was able to interview the women she did. There was a lot of interest in Munizae Jehangir’s film ‘Search for Freedom: A Story about four Afghan Women’.

*Identities*
**Sridhar Rangarayan** of Solaris Films spoke with the filmmakers of ‘The Crooked Line’, **Arunima Shankar** and **Aparna Sanyal**.

Following four films about sexual identity, the panelists talked about gender identities and the challenges faced by homosexuals in India. The audience was quite crowded but didn’t ask too many questions due perhaps to the subject matter.

**Tuesday, January 20**
Auditorium Eisenstein

*Culture/Resistance*
While there was a lot of interest in this section, especially in the film **Seeing is Believing** by Peter Wintonic, unfortunately there could be no discussion as the film makers couldn’t come. This was one of the two breaks that people insisted on staying on for, and wanted to talk. So, instead, we showed a short film from Cuba, **Deficiando** that was a visual representation of the spirit of resistance of the Cuban people.

*The World, Abused II*
**Karyn Keenan** represented the film ‘The Price of Gold’ and her anti-mining advocacy
**Zoe Young** w/ ‘Suits and Savages: Why the World Bank Won’t Save the World’
**Rita Banerji** w/ ‘Under the Sun: The Transient Fisherfolk of Jambudwip
**Sanjay Kak** w/ ‘Words on Water’

Following four films on environmental injustice  the panelists talked about their experience and shared experience from the movements that they represented in the films. This was a hugely attended panel. The audience was quite crowded and many wanted to know the situation of the different areas today.

Auditorium Ghatak

*The World, Abused I*
**Ajay Noronha** w/ ‘Bhaile”

A brief discussion took place on the current situation in Goa with tourism , especially sex-tourism and the increase of pedophiles.  An activist from the audience, Roland martin,

also cautioned other participants about using visuals of children unthinkingly. He had noted that some stalls had displayed photographs of naked children and he cautioned people against such use.

*Other Worlds are Breathing*
**Anjali Monteiro & K.P. Jayasankern** w/ 'Naata'
**Scott O'Brian & Saw Eh Do Wah** w/ '"Karen education surviving'

This was a very special panel with a full house of 550 people in the audience. The panelists from Burma requested that there should be no photograph as they were under military dictatorship. A very spirited discussion took place on the need for hope in the present days of calamities. Anjali shared some of her experience during shooting. Scott and Saw Eh Do Wah too did the same. The panel was joined by Bhau, one of the protagonists of 'Naata'.

*Other Words are breathing*
In the final panel of the film festival we were very honoured to have **Faouzi Skali and Waddick Doyle** who led the audience into a discussion on culture, identity and challenges. This was the closing panel and the very eminent panel led a spirited discussion on culture. They observed that the WSF in India had put culture on the agenda and commented on the diversity in India which provides hope to many people. They nuanced, in their presentation, aspects of culture and identity. This was a fitting end to the film festival indeed.

**Late Night Classics of World Cinema**
We thought of the feature film section for not only as a variation in genre, but also as an attempt to contextualise the contemporary struggles, issues and expressions in the backdrop of world history. While the documentary section concentrated mainly on films made in last five years, the feature film section showcased some of the classics of world cinema. We looked at issues that had enraged or engaged mankind over the last century of cinema, including war, dictatorship, poverty, unemployment, communal violence, refugees, patriarchy and the exploitation of the marginalised.

Since we could project only DVDs, it promptly ruled out a lot of great cinema. Our final choice was D.W. Griffith's Intolerance (US, 1916, b/w, silent) on intolerance & war and M.S. Sathyu's Garam Hawa (India, 1973) on communalism & partition, shown, Roberto Rossellini's Germany Year Zero (Italy, 1947) on war and Majid Majidi's Baran (Iran, 2001) on patriarchy & refugees shown, Leo McCarey's Duck Soup (US, 1933) on satire on dictatorship by the Marx Brothers and Raj Kapoor's Shree 420 (India, 1955) on poverty, unemployment and real estate crime shown, Jiri Menzel's Closely Watched Trains (Czech Republic, 1996) on satire on Czech occupation by Nazi Germany) and Walter Salles' Central Station (Brazil, 1998) on exploitation of street children shown.

M. S. Sathyu, Director of the legendary film Garam Hawa not only personally presented his film also came back on the consecutive days to hold discussions with the audience.

Starting at 8pm this programme was popularly termed as late night feature films, making it truly an adult affair. One dire night, there were a some 500 audience who stayed till the end of Griffith's masterpiece-running into 3 hours and 20 minutes-including foreigners, who realised they would be missing the last train home in an unknown city, but did not waver. Suddenly, all the doubts whether there was any justification of screening feature films in WSF were answered on its own.

We are really thankful to Somenath Zutsi of Seagull, Calcutta and many other friends for lending their precious copies of the films, as WSF could not afford to buy DVDs from the market.

**Finally**

One repeated request we received was that for repeat screening. The film that many people wanted to see was **The Corporation** and a group of youngsters were willing to view it late, after the feature films ended, after mid-night. We of course lacked the collective energy for this enterprise. Similar requests were made for **The Peacekeepers and the Women , Swara- Bridging Troubled Waters, Search for Freedom: a Story about 4 Afghan Women, Tales of the Night Fairies, Words on Water, Say I Do, The Men in the Tree** and **Live Containers.** Films that came from Eastern Europe had huge audiences and there were repeated requests to screen these again and again.

Unfortunately, we did not have the time for repeat screenings. We tried to set up a screening booth in the foyer but it became an impossible task given the rush of people each day. Also, that would have meant viewing them on VHS, with ear phones, and one person at a time. Probably, if we had planned It better, we could have made a number of such viewing stalls, which might have been of some use to the audience.

When we were asked to curate and co-ordinate the WSF Film Festival I had asked Madhusree Dutta, the co-ordinator of the Cultural Committee "Why a film festival? Nobody wants to see films at the WSF. " And she said "Just for the experience of it. Just to have huge audiences for these films. Lets experience by participating…." and more such words of wisdom that I can't completely remember. And the experience of doing this gigantic project was eventually worth it because of the astonishingly enthusiastic response from the people. The huge turn-outs would gladden the hearts of any film maker. The panel discussion were deeply moving and proved to me, and most panelists, the need to continue to show films and discuss them. In many ways it was a very humbling experience. And of course extremely encouraging. We are now enthused about repeating the experience, once again.

And of course we made many friends. Todd and Bethany helped us to make the festival what it became. Karin Jurschick, Arlene Ami, David Kalpowitz, Tony Avirgan, Scott O'Brien and Saw Eh Do Wah, Jawad Metwani and Prerena Reddy, Munaizae Jehangir, Patrice Barat came from distanced lands. The festival did not pay for their travel, nor put them up, nor helped them in a city that we, ourselves, were strangers to. They came on their own. And many wrote to us regretting that funds barred them from being present. Many Indian film makers too came for the festival, under similar conditions, Sanjay Kak,

Meghnath, Gautam Sonti, Rita Banerji, Aparna Sanyal came from cities far away from Bombay. And of course the Bombay film makers were present, even many whose films were not showing.

In all it has been a very rewarding experience to do this festival. We have seen some excellent films, made many friends (and probably a few enemies as well☺ ), participated in the WSF in a meaningful manner and had the pleasure of seeing different audiences for different films. We are now planning to send the films to travel in India (we'll write for permissions etc). There are also a few requests from outside India for the festival. And maybe, we will do the next WSF Film Festival in 2005 as well! So maybe we will all meet once again, either in person or virtually.

*Report by Gargi Sen*
*With inputs from Meenakshi Shedde (Section on Late Night Classics)*
*Todd Lester and Bethany Cole (Section on panel discussions)*

[For another report of the WSF Film Festival please visit
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