

Mistrusting the Past. Andrei Nekrasov's documentary composition, *Nedoverie* [*Disbelief*], Russia and US, 2004

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Nekrasov's film is about 9-9-99, a day in the history of Moscow. As a documentary its cinematic language is reminiscent of a full-length feature film. The final credits, for example, list the real-life characters as *dramatis personae*. In a highly suggestive manner, Nekrasov creates a montage of private investigation, numerous interviews, official archive material, family home videos; furthermore his use of nostalgic freeze frames and subliminal associations lasting one or two seconds are not the usual stuff of documentaries.

Although translated as 'Disbelief', the Russian title 'Nedoverie' means rather 'mistrust' or 'distrust'. It is the official version of the events on September 9, 1999 which are the subject of mistrust. Step by step the film leads the viewers down into an expanding inferno of personal tragedies, unresolved crimes, sinister political implications, and scenes of war and destruction. Most of the *dramatis personae* have suffered personal tragedies and the point of the film is to assist them in their quest to uncover what really happened. Putin is the unproved villain of the story, and the accusation is that the apartment explosions in 1999 were instigated by the FSB, if not by Putin himself, as a provocation to discredit the Chechens and mobilise Russian public opinion in support of a second war on Chechnya.

The memories of the private, individual characters are presented as authentic, while the official characters are to be mistrusted. The problem is that the murder of the innocent inmates of the Moscow apartment building is not resolved – justice is not redressed. When the film ends, the narrative is left hanging and the suffering of the victims is still ongoing and open. Whereas a documentary may not be able to complete its investigation, a feature or fictional film narrating a tragic human drama creates the expectancy of resolution and – for the viewer – relief or catharsis. It is in the hybrid genre of documentary and feature film that Nekrasov's film achieves its disturbing pathos whereby the past does not loosen its grip on the present.