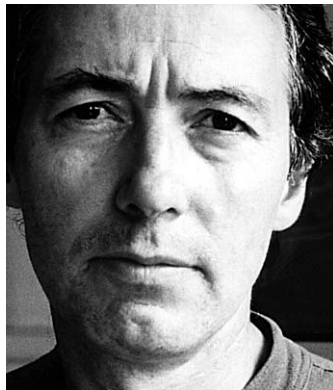


BIOGRAPHY

Born in Zurich in 1944 as the grandson of Italian immigrants to Switzerland. After leaving school at age 15, Dindo began travelling and doing odd jobs. He moved to Paris in 1966. Watching several films a day at the Cinémathèque Française and reading hundreds of books formed the basis of his education as a self-taught filmmaker. In 1970 he returned to Switzerland to make his first film, **Repetition** (Die Wiederholung). Since then, he has been based in Zurich and Paris, and has made over twenty documentaries and one fiction film, **El Suizo**. Dindo's films have been shown all over the world, including retrospectives in Germany, France, the United States, Canada and Argentina.

RICHARD DINDO



The Memory Composer

In a career spanning more than thirty years, Swiss filmmaker Richard Dindo has made over twenty films, all but one of them documentaries. Nearly all are biographies: of artists, or revolutionaries, or both. Alongside world-famous rebels with cult status – like Che Guevara (**Ernesto “Che” Guevara, le journal de Bolivie**, 1994), Jean Genet (**Genet à Chatila**, 1999) or Arthur Rimbaud (**Arthur Rimbaud, une biographie**, 1991) – Dindo has also devoted a number of films to lesser-known but no less intriguing characters from Switzerland, each a rebel and a victim of injustice in one way or another.

Dindo's commitment to shedding light on controversial episodes from his country's recent history has made him a lasting thorn in the side of the establishment. As early as 1975, he had already begun to question the Swiss role in World War II with his film **The Execution of the Traitor Ernst S.**, a collaboration with journalist Niklaus Meienberg. The villain/victim of the film's title, a petty thief, was shot for collaborating with the Nazis while leaders of Swiss industry did the same with impunity. Dindo would return to the topic of Switzerland and the Second World War in 1998 with **Grüninger's Case**, his homage to a Swiss border policeman who was dishonourably discharged for illegally allowing Jewish refugees to enter the country during the war.

Another topic repeatedly explored by Dindo is the crushing of idealistic youth movements by political interests. With his 2002 **Verhör und Tod in Winterthur**, which looks back on the tragic lives of members of the 1980s alternative culture in the Zurich region, Dindo returned to a time period he had already treated fifteen years earlier in **Dani, Michi, Renato &**

Max, an investigation of police brutality in the deaths of four young men. While the newer film takes a more elegiac tone than the openly angry 1987 documentary, it still portrays the events of the time as vividly as if they had just occurred. Dindo's most monumental treatment of the topic, however, is found in his latest film **Ni olvido ni perdón** (2003), which uncovers the long-hidden truth about the government-ordered destruction of the student protest movement in Mexico City in 1968. Besides setting the historical record straight about what happened then, the film also explores the variety of ways in which the events of the time are remembered in Mexico today.

Unlike the semi-fictional genres of the bio-pic or docu-drama, Dindo's films focus on authentic material and “the facts”: returning to the scene of historical events, collecting testimony

Richard Dindo is Switzerland's – and one of Europe's – best known documentary filmmakers. Using testimony, written or spoken, as his point of departure, his camera insistently investigates and fixes the actual spaces of events, seeking invisible scars to reveal and redeem a past now buried in the wake of time's passage.

San Francisco Cinematheque, 2000

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcy Goldberg is Canadian and has been living in Zurich since 1996. She has worked as a production assistant, documentary researcher, journalist, consultant, film programmer, university lecturer and translator. She is currently writing a dissertation on contemporary Swiss film and video.

RICHARD DINDO

> The Memory Composer

from eyewitnesses, examining documents from the period in question. Dindo has occasionally worked with actors, most notably in his portrait of Rimbaud, which is based on scripted and staged scenes, or in **Genet à Chatila**, where a young actress performs the search for Genet's biographical and literary traces. But in most of his films he avoids dramatization, instead showing a distinct flair for setting up real situations in which the present may encounter the past. In **Grüninger's Case**, for example, the St. Gallen courtroom where policeman Paul Grüninger was tried in 1940 becomes the scene where those same refugees return, nearly sixty years later, to share their memories of how he saved their lives. Grüninger died in poverty in 1972 and was rehabilitated posthumously in 1993; he is absent in the film, but his presence hangs over it.

Dindo's work in "reading" the past also involves the re-reading of works of literature. The poetry of Rimbaud, the lyrical prose of Genet, and the moving testimony of Che's last diaries form the basis for the films about them. At the same time, the films also function as commentaries on the texts. This interplay between the image and the word occurs most masterfully in **Aragon: le roman de Matisse** (2003). While the poet Louis Aragon struggled to use written language to portray Matisse's visual art in his book on the great painter, Dindo's film camera simultaneously – and seemingly effortlessly – captures the paintings, the prose, and the places where both were created.

"To ensure that historical events are not forgotten, they must be recounted" says the narrator in **Ni olvido ni perdón**. This simple sentence sums up Dindo's filmmaking project in all its richness and complexity. Dindo's rebels and poets, victims and visionaries come alive again through his films, and live on in our memories.

Marcy Goldberg, 2003

Richard Dindo is undeniably the most active and independent documentary filmmaker in this country. His filmmaking skills, his œuvre ranging over a quarter of a century, his intellectual-emotional style, his consistency, speak for themselves.

Michael Lang, ZOOM (1/97)

FILMOGRAPHY

1970	Repetition , Die Wiederholung
1971	Dialogue , Dialog
1972	Naive Painters in EasternSwitzerland , Naive Maler in der Ostschweiz
1973	The Swiss in the Spanish Civil War , Schweizer im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg
1975	The Execution of the Traitor Ernst S. Die Erschiessung des Landesverrätters Ernst S.
1977	Hans Staub, Photojournalist Hans Staub, Fotoreporter
1977	Clément Moreau, commercial artist , Clément Moreau, Gebrauchsgrafiker
1978	Raimon – Songs Against Fear , Raimon – Chansons contre la peur
1981	Max Frisch, Journal I-III
1983	Max Haufler, "The Mute" Max Haufler, "Der Stumme"
1985	El Suizo – a love in Spain Un amour en Espagne
1987	Dani, Michi, Renato & Max
1990	Arthur Rimbaud, a biography Arthur Rimbaud, une biographie
1992	Charlotte Salomon, "Life or Theatre?" , Charlotte – "Leben oder Theater?"
1994	Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Bolivian Diary , Ernesto "Che" Guevara, le journal de Bolivie
1996	A Season in Paradise , Une saison au paradis
1998	Grüninger's Case , Grüningers Fall
1999	HUG, les hôpitaux universitaires de Genève
2000	Genet in Chatila Genet à Chatila
2001	Verhör und Tod in Winterthur
2002	The Illness of Memory La maladie de la mémoire
2003	Aragon, le roman de Matisse
2003	Ni olvido ni perdón

Richard Dindo**SELF-INTERVIEW****The Principle of Memory and the Art of Biography**

A look at your filmography reveals that the protagonists of nearly all your films are dead.

Do you only make films about dead people?

Jean Cocteau once famously remarked that the cinema shows death at work, meaning: the passage of time, our mortality. To that I would add that film is also capable of bringing the dead back to life, at least for the space of a moment, as if in a dream. I often dream of my dead brothers. In my dreams they live again for a moment, because the dream is a photographic memory. That's how Marcel Proust, my teacher, wrote his greatest book: he imagined the past like a photograph, and then he described the photo and brought it back to life. Film, like culture in general, always has to do with memory, and memory is also always the memory of dead people, because the dead are only really dead when we have forgotten them.

How would you define the subject of your work?

Essentially I work on two things. The first is the principle of memory. I try to produce films which reproduce the mechanisms of remembering. My films ask: how can memory be produced with a documentary film? The viewer becomes an eyewitness to the film's reproduction of memory. And remembering always has to do with emotion, because it is something fundamentally moving. The second thing, I'd say, is that I work on the art of biography. With my biographical films, I try to discover the truth of a human being.

You often work with pre-existing texts, or adaptations of books.

I'm an atypical, "impure" documentarist, because I work with the past and not the present. I don't record that which occurs in front of the camera, but that which is absent, invisible. There's not much to show there: one must be able to imagine the past. Memory is only possible together with story-telling. I need the written or spoken word in order to tell the story of my images. I fall in love with a text, and then I look for the images which might be able to tell the story of the text. The text explains the images, and the images illuminate the text. The question is always raised, as Marguerite Duras once put it: what can be said with sentences, and what can be shown with images? Documentary can do both at the same time. Working simultaneously with sentences and pictures. The more I know about an image, the more closely I look at it and the more I discover within it, including that which it cannot show. With an image one can reveal only a small portion of reality. I am a reader. For me, the world is like a book I want to read. My films also need to be read. A constant thought process must take place. The viewer must think along with the film. Documentary is about the very simple things in life: like talking, listening and looking.

Richard Dindo

SELF-INTERVIEW



You always make films about politically committed people.

I am interested in poets, rebels, resistance fighters. I'm from the 1968 generation and I have remained faithful to its ideals. **Ni olvido ni perdón** may be my last political film, a final homage to my generation. In South America – in Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay – my generation was not able to complete its historical mission, because it was prevented from doing so by force. With my last film about 1968 I would like to erect a monument, because my films are also monuments, mausoleums for the dead and for the living. A memorial to those who fought for a more just and fraternal society and were murdered in the process.

Your protagonists are often intellectuals.

The generation of 1968 raised the question of what an intellectual is, and what the intellectual's function in society and history could be. In those days we believed the intellectual was a rebel who must help the people to change society. For many of us, Che Guevara embodied the intellectual as rebel, and as we know, that was also the cause of his failure. He was the best, the most dignified and the most tragic representative of the greatness and the weakness – “the glory and the misery” – of the intellectual. The true intellectual is a dreamer, dreaming of a better society. The dreamer tries to make the impossible possible. As a result he can only fail, but his failure may also be transformed into a triumph thanks to our memories. Just as victories may turn into defeats, as we have seen elsewhere. What is a victory, anyway? What is a defeat? For me, as a filmmaker, there is only the past as memory, so that we do not forget our history, and utopia as the future, so that we never stop dreaming of a better world.

Questions and answers by Richard Dindo, July 2003. (Translated from the German by Marcy Goldberg)