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#### Toronto Dispatch. 4.

**Michael Sicinski** on **Che**, **Il Divo**, **Wendy and Lucy**, **7915 KM** and **Dernier Maquis**. Notes on all these films follow. **Updated through 9/14.**

Another very impressive Toronto film, and a quite different model for "small" politics, is **Nikolaus Geyrhalter's** documentary **7915 KM**. Although it might seem unfair to group a documentary alongside fiction films in terms of possible models for political cinema, Geyrhalter's film is a special case. Unlike many of today's documentaries (and, by the looks of things, unlike much of this year's **Real to Reel** slate), Geyrhalter is as deeply concerned with cinematic aesthetics as he is with his factual subject matter. In fact, **7915 KM** demonstrates the degree to which form and content must be considered inextricably linked for any advanced notion of documentary to succeed. The film follows the path of the **Dakar Rally**, a yearly off-road race down the northwest coast of Africa. Geyrhalter's crew visited towns and villages along the path of the race after the racers had already been through, usually finding that the crazy Europeans and their fast cars had torn up local roads, acted disrespectfully to the local citizens (in one case, even to a young, somewhat Euro-identified Senegalese woman who participated in the race security crew), and that the whole event cuts an oblivious swath through some of the most inhospitable, and most politically contested and war-torn sections of the region. But beyond this, Geyrhalter takes this

somewhat random linear organization as an opportunity for an open, patient form of cinematic listening. Much of the film consists of strikingly composed interviews in which local citizens hold forth on matters of concern, from their own personal work histories, to their religious practices, to their views on Europe. "How rich must the Whites be that they can just drive around all day," one man in Mali observes.



But what makes **7915 KM** remarkable - easily one of the three or four best features I've seen in the festival - is its fragmentary, cumulative approach

to contemporary geopolitics. It is a ground-level project that also attempts to engage with its African subjects with a renewed, self-critical humanism. The film doesn't gaze at "the Other," nor does it try to make its subjects appear "just like us," nor does it throw up its hands and abjure the work of cross-cultural understanding altogether. Instead, Geyrhalter uses his determinedly Western framework - the cinematic apparatus, a highly stylized aesthetic approach, the deep space of the Renaissance perspective - to demonstrate distance from his subjects, but a meeting in difference, a mutual listening and engagement. Had Geyrhalter simply turned on a camcorder and walked around, all the same old unconscious habits, for filmmaker and spectator alike, would most likely come rushing to the fore. Instead, **7915 KM** insists on its status as a Western construction, but one that provides a small subset of Africans with a megaphone, to say nothing of a place inside a project of handsome polyethnic portraiture. Geyrhalter's globalist approach owes much to the late **Johan van der Keuken**, and perhaps as well to certain works by **Harun Farocki**. This is especially evident in the film's concluding moments, when Geyrhalter lowers the boom. After detailing the wild exploits of wealthy Europeans and Americans traipsing all over the Sahara at will, we see a group of Senegalese refugees trying to make it to Europe by boat. They are intercepted by a European Coast Guard vessel, because not just anyone can move freely about the world.