

NOTEBOOK

Eyes wide shut

By Lewis H. Lapham

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Staged annually in Amsterdam in late November, the International Documentary Festival is the preeminent trade show in its class and category, not as glamorous as the summer movie festival in Cannes but equivalent in the weight of its judgment and the worth of its good opinion.....Nearly all of the films had come to Amsterdam in company with their directors, producers, cameramen, sound technicians; a crowd of maybe 2,200 people from all points of the geopolitical compass (Holland, Italy, Japan, Hungary, the United States)..... Believing that impartial objectivity was attainable only by a roulette wheel or God, they brought their documentaries in the form of essays, some of them conceived as a search for personal meaning, others as political tracts or works of revisionist history. Nino Kirradze, the French director of *The Pipeline Next Door*, a film about the building of an oil pipeline across the Caucasus Mountains-told both from the point of view of the British petroleum engineers laying the pipe and from that of the Georgian farmers through whose village the pipe was being laid-likened herself to the novelist who seeks to turn a press release into a story, as opposed to the journalist who seeks to turn a story into a press release. Samira Goetschel, an Iranian woman living in Toronto, said that she had made her film, *Our Own Private Bin Laden* (a brief history of America's foreign policy in Central Asia), "for an audience of one." Keep faith with your own thought, your own experience, she said, and you have a chance of telling the truth.