

Unfolding the Aryan Papers

Unfolding the Aryan Papers was made in 2009 on the basis of research at the Stanley Kubrick Archive held by the University of the Arts London and was commissioned by Animate Projects and the British Film Institute. The film centres on the Dutch actress Johanna ter Steege. She had been chosen as the lead actress in Stanley Kubrick's project *The Aryan Papers*. The film, which was never made, was to be based on the novel *Wartime Lies* by Louis Begley, which tells the story of a Polish Jew and her nephew, who escape persecution by adopting a Catholic identity. After years of preparation, Kubrick discontinued the project in the early 1990s in connection with the release of *Schindler's List* among other considerations, as well as doubts about whether the Holocaust can be properly presented in film.

What remained were scripts, set design research photographs, costume tests, correspondence and historic visual material from the Nazi period. Following the traces of the unrealised film through the archive, the Wilsons spoke with Johanna ter Steege fifteen years later about her preparation for the role. Using the camera, they explored her facial expressions and gestures, asked her to read passages from the script, and interlaced this newly filmed material and voice-over with the archival research collated by Kubrick himself.

Ter Steege's recollections, together with the archival material, point to a working method defined by control, precision, and distance. In Kubrick's treatment of asymmetrical power relations, fiction and reality are tightly interwoven, extending through the production process. In the context of a film concerned with the Holocaust, this generates a particular tension – one that the Wilsons' work takes up in a multilayered way. The role that was never played remains a possibility in their rendering and writes itself into ter Steege's life. Mirrors placed on either side of the screen multiply both the actress and the filmed locations. Identity becomes layered and unstable, formed through projection, refracted through performance, and endlessly re-staged.

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