figures on the curtain being replaced by holes. This links to the idea of the eyes being a pathway to the soul and, therefore, is a metaphor for the way in which modernity is sucking the soul out of ancient traditions.

The opening of the film is perhaps slightly misleading; not only in the way in which the title is *Face Reading*, when throughout the film the art is referred to as curtain reading. Similarly, the filming appears, at times, fairly jolting, perhaps suggesting amateur filming, which can be distracting from the content. The subtitles are generally good but there appear to be a couple of minor mistranslations. Also, there is a certain repetitiveness to the documentary which renders it slightly monotonous and therefore less conducive to watching to the end. However, it shows the way in which this particular art is endangered and the difficulties faced by current-day curtain readers, and therefore is successful in drawing attention to a cultural tradition that could easily die out unless enough people take more of an interest in its heritage.

In general, the film offers an interesting insight into the tradition of curtain reading and the various difficulties that it has faces as a cultural practice due to modernization, which the scene portraying the inauguration of the television in Iran, presents in a particularly emotive way. There is, however, a lack of diversity within the film which renders it slightly monotonous and also the quality of the filming, in places, makes focus on the content difficult.

*Dido Tetley*
*University of Oxford*


Directed by husband and wife Valérie Berteau and Philippe Witjes, this 65-minute wordless documentary comes with a beautifully illustrated book in which background information can be read in three languages (French, English and Dutch). The book is a helpful companion to the documentary, and includes a recipe for daal and stunning photographs which are stills taken from the film. Valérie Berteau is a photographer and filmmaker who works with associations and NGOs as an artistic coordinator. Philippe Witjes is an independent cook and video director, and has cooked in several volunteer kitchens in Belgium and abroad.

The documentary is set in the Harmandir Sahib – the Golden Temple of Amritsar in the state of Punjab in north-west India. It is not only a place of religious importance for Sikhs, but also a symbol of human brotherhood and equality. Without dialogue, the film presents the _langar_ (kitchen), the Sikh tradition of a common canteen funded by the first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak, in the sixteenth century. There, people from all backgrounds are served free vegetarian meals cooked by volunteers, night and day.
This is a film for the senses. Although it is wordless, it is not silent. Human voices, chants, music, fire crackling, water running, metal clinking. In contrast to this chaotic cacophony, the visual journey is one of serenity. In the close-ups shot throughout the ceremony, one can see eyes, hands, movements, positions, attire but no visible signs of social class. However, devotion seems to be a common ground. Each person is performing their tasks religiously, as if guided from above by an invisible conductor. Beings and elements are one. All are equal: old, young, men, women. The crowd walks in procession, orderly, choreographed by unspoken rules. The volunteer’s work is repeated over and over again, with generosity.

Every stage of the preparation for the meal is filmed, from harvest to plate. No fancy utensils, no packaging, just essentials: nature and humans at work with the elements. In a world where competition reigns, where access to food is reserved for the fittest, the strongest or the richest, the film promotes equality without preaching. We are left guessing. We sometimes feel frustrated at not knowing the lives of these people. What is that man’s story? That woman’s job? Does she have children? Is she rich? What is she waiting for? What lies behind those eyes? We are so used to getting information, to being told what to think, that one can be puzzled by simply being presented with images. But the film does not give answers, it simply shows raw material. As a meditation, it lets us reflect on our lives. Hunger does not need explanation; it needs to be satisfied. We therefore need to get on, and feed our bodies, together, in rhythm, in harmony, because little else matters.

*Himself He cooks* is not only carrying a message, it is also a feast for the eyes. The colours of the clothing are vibrant, each person is filmed with great skill, only capturing the essential. It is a respectful portrayal of a people. The film must be watched over and over again, for pleasure and also as a reminder that food is precious, that we need to share it and that serving others matters. Beyond words, this unpretentious visual manifesto guides the viewer towards a path worth following in order to repair and save our modern so-called advanced societies.

**Véronique Davis**

*Oxford University Language Centre*


A class room in Brussels. The director, who was born in Iran and came to Belgium with her family during her childhood, does not write or read in her mother tongue. The camera does not show us her face, but rather between her hands and the teacher, as if the spectator is placed next to the director, like another pupil. The point of view of the lesson is thus somewhere in between the director’s own perspective and that of an external observer. The director’s position embraces that of the ethnographer,