

*Those Shocking Shaking Days* by Selma Doborac

“Which guerilla liberation force would you join if you had the choice between two possible styles of liberation work?” reads the question posed at the very get-go of Selma Doborac’s film essay which proceeds over the course of the next 80 minutes to ask with unremitting intensity whether cinematic means can be used to represent the phenomenon *war*. Is this even possible given the Medusa head of war, perpetually sprouting yet another coiling aspect of the human abyss?

Who feels addressed by this question? Who knows what a person engaged by this question imagines?

The first few words of the film are superimposed onto the image of a carefully barricaded shell of a building. They clearly establish a couple of things from start, including that questions always raise new questions and that the viewer is expected to participate in a search for answers. This self-perpetuating process becomes the veritable driving force of the film, feeding on texts formulated without exception as questions, primarily appearing as sentences that visually accompany the image, though at times are spoken by a voice in the manner of a media report.

What intonation is appropriate to tell of events entirely beyond our comprehension, without a given sentence contradicting the one that preceded it? How do you distance yourself from what all the supposed experts have maintained, without withdrawing into complacency? After all, missing empirical data does not dismiss us from the responsibility to formulate our own opinion. And is it possible to speak of such a thing as an opinion if you keep it to yourself?

Rarely does a film so drastically demonstrate the struggle between emotional overload and mechanisms of intellectual processing that is symptomatic of us humans. Linguistic formulations relentlessly appear as text superimposed onto the image, presenting virtual obstacles to an undivided viewing of the film – as if to indicate there is something else to be understood before we can give way to the poignancy of the images. The wordlessness of the images could otherwise be misunderstood by the viewer as an invitation to temporarily tune out intellectually. And conversely: How can language ever measure up to certain images?

As an example of *war* and its context, Selma Doborac considers the Bosnian War of the 1990s, in which the media played an unprecedented role. She logically addresses the viewer as a medial audience powerlessly party to an endless number of uncritically consumed images: the audience in a sense thereby had become a participant in war.

Selma Doborac quotes “war” by means of authentic VHS material shot in midst of the Bosnian war. Two forms of war documentation thereby converge: one form conveys the impression it was produced for the sake of medial digestion, while the other stems from local chroniclers. In addition to an abundance of various textual materials Doborac focuses on consequences of the war using 16 mm documentary images she filmed of landscapes fortified by architecture. These pictures allow us to observe how nature is reconquering the territory.

Nature is apparently unstoppable as it re-appropriates houses that increasingly display clear signs of dissolution and decay over the course of the film – houses that had to be abandoned and to which nobody will return due to the atrocities inscribed in their architecture. Vegetation has overtaken the ruins, rampant undergrowth blocks former doorways, and so the buildings are gradually given to disappear. Shrubs nodding in the wind gently demand we move on.

*Those Shocking Shaking Days* by Selma Doborac is aside from all this also a film about filmmaking, about the aspiration to step out of a private microcosm and fearlessly take on a colossal theme armed with the weapon of art.

Hanno Millesi

(Translation from German: Eve Heller)