

Diagonale 2016: Where words fail, and thinking stumbles

Two feature-length documentary film debuts at the Festival of Austrian Film traverse the outermost limits of personal and abstract approaches.

(...)

The refusal of bloody images

Selma Doborac refuses viewers an emotional bond laid bare by film, such as Steiner's (note: *Holz Erde Fleisch* by Siegmund Steiner). The fate of a single person does not even come into question here as reference point. For a critical view of war as an overall construct (the Bosnian War is meant in this case) Doborac mistrusts the personal, direct, visual approach to the horrors of war. *Those Shocking Shaking Days*, working in a 4:3 format, does not show any fires or corpses, but instead, static takes of abandoned houses already overgrown by nature. These are the silent witnesses to war, memorials without pathos, proof of the repression and death of the people who once lived in them. The ruins of houses do not stand alone as images. A wall of text is stuck to them. Not in the form of written or commenting subtitles, but instead, questions and provocations.

The text asks me: what guerilla liberation movement would I join? One that uses hand grenades to "cleanse" houses or one that prefers setting houses on fire? Before I am able to think about the question, the next text panel—the next question—arrives.

Then the screen goes dark. The text continues to roll while archive recordings of militia at war supplant the blackness. They form no narrative context; the sound is choppy and incomplete. The voice of the narrator, entering when a black screen replaces this image, resounds loud and prosaic. Text and language have something compelling about them. Not in the sense of looking, but rather, that of reflecting. Where reality seems to exist only in the form of representative media, as Susan Sontag once said, Selma Doborac strives for a cinematic model that counters this, which forces a type of participation, excludes an immediate emotional reaction to the war, including its images. Even if one does not consider this the only valid cinematic approach, one still leaves *Those Shocking Shaking Days* with a sense of powerlessness in the face of war's barely comprehensible reality. Even without trauma, it is a reality that the film lets linger.

(Karsten Munt, Critic.de, March 12, 2016)