

“Comparatively harmless images”

With *Those Shocking Shaking Days*, filmmaker Selma Doborac presents a grandiose essay on war and war reporting.

At the beginning was the silent film, or, at least a sense that the sound had gone off in the cinema. Yes, for her most recent film, *Those Shocking Shaking Days*, Selma Doborac was awarded “best sound design” at the Diagonale 2016. It almost seems like a joke when one reads on the cover of the Blu-ray, which she handed over to the Stadtkino for viewing: “ATTENTION: SOUND STARTS AT 18:33.”

First of all, eighteen and a half minutes of total silence. One sees destroyed single-family homes and building shells in a wild no-man’s-land. And one reads, displayed above, questions such as: “Can a critical reflection of a war be achieved for example by means of poeticity or visuality, or would it be advisable in such an undertaking to tendentiously forego unambiguous words and images in favour of a more critical reflection of a war?” or: “Would this enable redressing a misuse of language?”

*Those Shocking Shaking Days*—from the very first moment, a film that goes all out. A film that dismantles itself in the attempt at reorientation—it is about nothing less than a language for the horrors of war. And it is a film that simultaneously subjects viewers to a form of disorientation, in which they have to ask themselves about their own position toward what has been filmed, made into a film, staged; toward supposedly authentic war reports and pictures.

It is an experiment, that is, an essay film in the best literal sense, with, as is the case with experiments, an open outcome. For example, after eighteen and a half minutes: a pan over a difficult to understand exchange of shots in some hills, or: the picture fails, the sounds of the news anchor Paul Kraker, who resumes the tirade of the previously “legible” text inserts (can we concentrate better now—without the supporting images? Not really?). Then, once again, hectic video chase scenes of random men who rush through depopulated landscapes and the question of what it would do to recreate war in B-pictures—“because material” like this “does not represent memory, even if it comes close to it.”

It is about the Bosnian War, one finds this out with an increasingly oppressive impact. Thus, it is about a war that was broadcast throughout the world day after day in emotional media images, not that anyone would have truly intervened, simply because the images, authentic or staged or found or made, kept on running, demanding repositioning quasi continually, which in turn, prevented action. Something was happening right then.

Insofar, *Those Shocking Shaking Days* is, no least, a film about a paralysis through movement, about the question of whether it might not be wiser to work one’s way up first through the spoken, written word, rather than search with growing exhaustion between idiosyncratically unsorted batches of information layers for something resembling a narrative. With its extreme focus, it is a nervous film, which in light of “relatively harmless images,” does not aim to shake off the horror (no least, before one’s own readiness for atrocity). And with all of its universal validity (comparably, one could currently also argue about images of refugees), it is astonishingly concrete in dealing with a specific subject in contemporary history, with specific sites and landscapes.

The German filmmaker Harun Farocki, who passed away two years ago, once said in an interview: “War and war reporting are moving ever closer together.” He constantly circled this theme in works such as *Etwas wird sichtbar*, and referred back to it again in his lectures in the Stadtkino, which he offered on a regular basis with his film classes at the Academy of Fine Arts.

Selma Doborac was one of his students in Vienna. Also in the Stadtkino lectures, she was constantly vehemently motivated to engage in dialogue with film and video, matter-of-fact, impulsive. A circle nearly comes to a close now as she presents *Those Shocking Shaking Days* at Stadtkino—as part of our new monthly series of Austrian films worthy of seeing and discussing, which aim to find their audience beyond the common rental and festival structures.

“Again, another film about war?” *Again*. And with the highest recommendation!

On June 1, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. in Stadtkino in Künstlerhaus.

(Claus Philipp, *Stadtkino Zeitung* No. 540, May 2016)