

FILM REVIEW

The Other Side of Everything, dir. Mila Turajlić (HBO Europe, 2017)

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The Other Side of Everything is a documentary about an apartment in Birčaninova 20, a leafy street in Belgrade, Serbia. It is the family home of Mila Turajlić, the film's director (known for her much-lauded film *Cinema Komunista* from 2010), who uses this well-appointed interior to explore the intimacy of history. After World War II, following Partisan victory and the establishment of the People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Turajlić's family found itself identified as a "class enemy": they were bourgeois bankers and lawyers, with significant capital and assets. Their family home was partitioned by the Yugoslav secret police in 1947. Two rooms were selected for a proletariat family and the adjoining doors locked, separating the two apartments. These doors remain locked until the final act in Turajlić's documentary.

This divided space, symbolically charged, hosts the "political ghost story" (which is the film's subtitle). The objects of the interior recount a hundred years of public transformations and upheavals: from the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes all the way to the October 2000 revolution that brought down authoritarian President Slobodan Milošević. Between these two parentheses are the socialist victory of World War II, decline of Yugoslavia in the 1980s, the beginning of the war in Croatia, international sanctions, hyperinflation, and protests against Milošević. Other than selected documentary footage, the camera's lens barely breaks

its gaze from the interior, barely disrupts the rhythm of everyday life. This aesthetic-thematic disjuncture is interesting: large history, on the one hand, visualised through routine actions and bourgeois still life, on the other.

Life in the partitioned apartment becomes a wait for political time to run out, the space-time of state socialism. As the anti-communist bourgeoisie in Tito's Yugoslavia, the unchanged grandeur of the interior offers the family a refuge from what they experience as loss in social status outside their private domain. Turajlić's camera-work makes explicit this spatial separation of the domestic adobe that continues into the present moment (2015, when the majority of the documentary was shot); from the window, she captures hooligans attacking an embassy on the street, construction workers employing unsafe working standards due to lack of regulation. This is a world that, though it unfolds in front of their building, the Turajlić family is insulated from by layers and layers of social capital.

Tellingly, certain moments of the documentary are shot in a style that mimics mechanisms of observation, of watching and being watched. At times, Turajlić aims the camera lens through the viewfinder of a peephole, reinforcing the idea of invisible but palpable neighbourly observation. Employing the aperture of observation in this manner is striking because it displaces the contemporaneity of the film and reproduces instead the temporality of socialist communal control. It is an anachronistic gesture, perpetuating through formal means the notion that the family is still in the role of the "defeated bourgeoisie"—even after the end of state socialism.

Why did the end of state socialism not represent the end of their historical wait? Turajlić's own mother and a central figure of the documentary, Srbijanka Turajlić, does, after all, take the stage of history to enact a political goal. A professor of engineering who was fired during the 1990s for opposing the state's ethnonationalist pol-

itics, she participates in the protests against Milošević’s regime and is publicly perceived, to this day, as a voice of moral consciousness and rectitude. She also contributed to the “Otpor” (“Resistance”) movement during the 1990s and early 2000s, when Milošević was toppled in what is known as the October revolution. It was a period of energy, great hopes, and, unfortunately, rapid disappointment for the “Druga Srbija” (“the Other Serbia”), the name for a number of loosely united groups and individuals who identified as anti-war, liberal, anti-nationalist, and pro-democratic. Anthropologist Jessica Greenberg writes that disappointment “became a necessary feature of, rather than an exception to, democratic practice” in Serbia in the early 2000s.¹

By 2015, when Turajlić shoots her documentary, that legacy of disappointment has curdled—but it explains why the family are depicted not only as losers of communism but also of the political present. A latent class suspicion of and antagonism towards the new working class colours this post-socialist present. The proletariat of yore is replaced by the new working class who figure not as workers (that is to say, beneficiaries of redistributive policies under Yugoslav socialism) but are personified as the lumpen (the hooligans attacking the embassy) and the poor (the janitor of the building).

Importantly, this new working class in the film has a collective role to play; they are the link in the chain that leads to regressive nationalist political outcomes. As Marko Miletić has written in his critique of the film, the documentary suggests that it is the working class who voted for Milošević (and kept him in power); that it is the working people who looted the government after the October revolution (which Srbijanka felt was shameful). In bringing together the working class with contemporary politics, adds Miletić, the film rehearses the story “of the eternally erroneous nature of the

people who are constantly shackling the [bourgeoisie's] personal progress and, by extension, the progress of Serbia.”²

The bourgeoisie as a class perceives its own temporality (its origins and rise) as self-evidently and naturally coupled with the trajectory of social progress, which they create and condition in economic and political terms. But these are assumptions. Because they are unexamined—living a life alongside the system, as Srbijanka puts it in the documentary, means you don't see how the world has changed outside your interior—the family, despite all of its accumulated status, is the political anachronism. The never-changing interior reflects a world back to them that has been ideologically exhausted. Yet the weight of moral and material inheritance looms large, even when the family's ideologically muddled beliefs in Yugoslav unity and capitalist liberalism are no longer politically actionable. Srbijanka recognises this and is candid that her own generation has run out of time. The daughter, however, is marked by a certain political directionless and so turns, through filmmaking, into an archivist of the past. The mother protested for a better future; the daughter records this promised future in the aftermath of its failure.

ENDNOTES

¹ Jessica Greenberg, *After the Revolution: Youth, Democracy, and the Politics of Disappointment in Serbia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p.39.

² Marko Miletić, “Predstava radnika”, *Mašina*, 16 January 2018, <https://www.masina.rs/?p=5782>. Accessed 30 May 2020.