



Newsreel 65

**“WE HAVE
TOO MUCH THINGS
IN HEART...”***

Andrej Šprah

THE LOST “GAME” FOR OFF-SCREEN SPACE

For the development of film theory, the “golden” 1970s, when reflection still drew its charge from the energy of the revolutionary struggles of the 1960s, are one of the most fruitful periods. Especially the circles around the radical magazines such as *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Screen*, *Ciné-Tracts*, *Film Culture* and the like developed a school of thought able to astutely define the key determinations of the **game** in relation to the field of the visibility of cinematic images. Of course, primarily in the forms that drew on the need for social engagement, the continuation of class struggle and the desire to contribute to liberation or at least to change. It was also very much clear to them that a film is never only what it shows, but above all what it means. They thus came to and articulated the realisation that what is crucial for a filmic (self-)awareness is the relation between what is *inside* and what is *outside* the field, between *on-screen* and *off-screen* space. It was especially the *Cahiers* circle headed by Pascal Bonitzer that reached a series of astute insights. We could say that it was a time when a firm belief was established that what is *decisive* for engaged cinema is *how it treats its off-screen space* or as Bonitzer says: “*The **game** of a film includes both what it shows and what it does not show in order for the film space to be divided into screen space and off-screen space, the seen and the unseen, and for the ‘tension’ that originates in this division to implicate the viewer into its **game**.*”¹

They also knew very well that, in the **games** of meaning, it is not only about the direct sensible meaning, but also the subtle, intertwined non-literal meanings that co-create it. That is why they defined the lines of force of the background, outer, underground tropological currents of metaphors and metonymies, symbols and allegories, synecdoches and... They thus reached a new realisation that, in the games of defining the relation between the real and the imaginary, between the directly shown and the merely suggested, certain energies are released that can strengthen or weaken the

* *Mohammad's statement after his latest pushback to BiH.*

¹ All quotes are from Pascal Bonitzer's “O zunanjostih polja [Off-screen Space]”, in *Lekcija teme*, ed. Zdenko Vrdlovec. DZS, Ljubljana, 1987.

meaning's lines of force. It became clear that, due to its characteristics, the off-screen space includes elements that contribute to the strengthening of the metonymy of reality, for "off-screen space is, first, the metonymic region of screen space, of which it is the extension and the imaginary support". And the aware filmmakers that nurtured a respectful relationship with their film subjects understood the rules of this "**game**"; they were aware how important the conception of the inside and the outside space and their relation is; they knew how important it is whether "the off-screen space is used only to provide the complement of reality to what the screen offers the sight" or is, on the contrary, used to "underline *the imperfection, the gap, the division of filmic space*", which opens a completely "*different **game** from the one of classical cinema*".

From the very beginning, the projects of the Newsreel Front, which had agreed to this "**game**", sought and found the outside reference field in the extensive spectrum of their dialogue with – either past or contemporaneous – culture, art and reflection, since almost all the heretofore projects of the Newsreel Front include this communicational charge. The same can be said of its kindred movements and individual creators of contemporary newsreels: *NOW! A Journal of Urgent Praxis, Third World Newsreel, Reel News, Conscious Cinema ...*, Jem Cohen, Alex Reuben, Donal Foreman, Sylvain George etc. Regardless of their different approaches, creative decisions and methods, they share a tendency towards contributing their part to democratic aesthetics, for, by giving legitimacy to individual images of the moment of exclusion or struggle, they re-trigger resistance impulses precisely through communicating with what is outside them.

Then came the moment when the spirit of exploration led Nika and Jošt to the players of a new "**Game**" in Velika Kladuša. They found themselves in insufferable, inhuman conditions of the refugee tragedy, soothed only a tiny bit by the unselfish help of a handful of self-sacrificing locals. The two found themselves among the beaten "colonisers in flip flops", bruised singers of elegiac melodies and dehumanised thinkers, who, with simple commonsense logic, convincingly dispel the highflying "humanitarian" platitudes of the "promised land". But above all, they found themselves in an area where, if we paraphrase the *Cahiers* circle, a completely different **game** from the one of classical refugee stories is taking place. For the only purpose, the only drive and motivation of their film protagonists is to play the rules of the unfair, rigged "**Game**", which knows only one winner – the System. The ice-cold, ruthless, merciless system of EU's "humanitarian" migration and asylum politics, whose implementation is left to the stray visions of its brutal local executors.

Newsreel 65 conveys stories and images that are practically identical with many from the improvised refugee shelters on European "no man's territories" – the ones

from the refugee "Jungle" in Calais, the ones from the sidetracks and abandoned warehouses of the railway station in Belgrade, the ones from Vučjak near Bihać in Bosnia etc. But what makes it substantially different from them is the creative awareness or decision that, in the images from Kladuša, the "off-screen space" can no longer contextualise the happening in the field of vision, in front of the camera. From the outside, from the other side, the "forest of darkness", there do come words and images of brutally beaten, humiliated people robbed of their belongings and dignity, but the records of their testimonies can no longer incorporate them in the "Story". The "**Game**" of a closed circle that always ends in the same result has undermined and depersonalised the "Story", leaving it to vulturous hopelessness!

That is why all that can remain is fragments, folded in themselves, so there is no more edges over which the gaze could reach and the consciousness extend. We are thus struck by the realisation that all that an actual engagement of respectful documenting can still be is a form of radical, almost insufferable reduction to the on-screen space. The possibility that, until recently, had been related to the processes of (self-)questioning, thinking or commenting enabled by the acts of "crossing", "overcoming" or "transcending" the frames of the factual on-screen space into its imaginary off-screen space in order to thus reach a meaning and a sense and get to the core and the point has finally been exhausted. "*What is decisive is how film treats its off-screen space*," emphasised the *Cahiers* circle. *Newsreel 65*, on the other hand, claims: if imaginary means only that we can *imagine* the off-screen space, if there is no shot to pinpoint it, then we are left only with the wager on the unimaginable in the form of direct pictoriality.

So when we assemble the fragments of the "**Game**", which the protagonists of the video fragments of *Newsreel 65* are subject to in a vicious circle of exclusion, despair and inexhaustible hope, we can resignedly ascertain that the time of non-literal meaning has definitely passed – both in the on-screen and the off-screen space, there are no more metaphors or metonymies, no symbols or allegories, there is only the bare, ruthless, chilling reality!

Ciril Oberstar

PLACES OF PARTING

*“The Future was better protected than the Past.
After more, painful tries, he eventually caught some waves
of the world to come.”*

(La Jetée, 1962, Chris Marker)

Of the eighteen shots of *Newsreel 65* that I received, a few were filmed with an old 8mm camera, such as were used in the 1960s and 1970s. The rest were captured with a digital camera. They feature people, mostly men. The men are not from here. They are currently staying in Bosnia. It seems that, despite their repeated failures, they will continue trying to cross the border with the EU. The shots come across as surreal, even unreal. It is hard to believe that the circumstances they show can exist in our time. But temporality has a complicated structure. And the places captured by the camera are not without their own memory. They are filled with a future generated by the filmic past of the socialist Yugoslavia.

(Shot no. 4:) Stray dogs running around a desolate and littered field. First, one dog wanders into the frame, then two, three, four... They form a line. They run past a puddle when the fifth one joins them... Two Siberian tigers are on a rug that represents the entrance into a tent made out of discarded bags and found pieces of plastic.

(Shot no. 11:). We see a man having his hair cut by his friend on the edge of a forest, but there is nobody around that could appreciate his haircut.

(Shot no. 7:) In the middle of a forest – a piece of a broken mirror in which a man’s face is reflected.

(Shot. 10:) A house without its front wall. Just like in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* or Tati’s *Playtime*, we see everything that is going on

in the rooms on the first and second floors.

(Shot no. 17:) We hear a young man talk about the Mirabeau Bridge in Paris. “*A very famous bridge,*” he says, “*maybe I’ll stand on it one day*”.

But we who watch this today already know what the man in the shot may not. Despite this, we listen to him and let him dream his future. His future in Paris, which, as we know from Chris Marker’s film, is completely destroyed: “*And sometime after came the destruction of Paris. Many died. Some believed themselves to be victors. Others were taken prisoner. The survivors settled beneath Chaillot, in an underground network of galleries. Above ground, Paris, as most of the world, was uninhabitable, riddled with radioactivity.*”

The photos showing us the images of a demolished Paris were made in 1962, when the French filmmaker included them in his photographic essay *La Jetée*, which tells the story of a time traveller living underground. The survival of people caught in an impossible present depends on his success.

Two years prior, the Yugoslav sci-fi film *Atomic War Bride* (Rat, 1960) predicted a similar future for Europe. It was directed by Veljko Bulajić and written by the famous Italian neorealist screenwriter Cesare Zavattini. The story began with the wedding of John and Maria, which was interrupted by the outbreak of an atomic war. When, with their machineguns, the enemy planes mowed down a cow in the field near them, they might have stood on the edge of the same forest near the border with Croatia where the man with a fresh haircut and his friend are standing in the mentioned shot.

Maria was desperate, “*the world has changed*”, it suddenly became horrible. “*We might die,*” she added. “*No, my sweet, we’re in love. It’s impossible to die.*” But their conversation took place only a few hours before the President’s address, which the citizens could watch on big screens in the shelters: “*There can be no point in sacrificing our lives. There’s only one hope. In just a few minutes, our great atomic projectiles will penetrate the enemy’s defence and strike.*” The citizens in the shelters followed the attack live, via cameras attached to the atomic projectiles. They first saw the image of white clouds; it was as if they followed a bird’s flight high in sky. Then the projectile descended under the clouds and headed towards a square full of people...

and exploded. The screaming in the shelter drowned the bomb strike. The enemy was defeated. But it was too late for the winners too; the enemy's automatically guided atomic projectiles were already on their way to Yugoslav cities. They will destroy Ljubljana, Zagreb and perhaps even Belgrade.

The capital of the socialist Yugoslavia has been in a permanent crisis. It was so also in 1976, in the sci-fi horror film *The Rat Saviour* (Izbavitelj, Krsto Papić), in which the city is taken over by rat people. They meet clandestinely in the abandoned building of the central bank. The mayor of the city and the actual leader of the rat people, who can shift between rat and human form, consoles the impoverished inhabitants of the capital: "*We're in a crisis that has engulfed not only our country, but the whole of Europe.*" We must join forces, he tells them, "*to save what is of essence to you – where you live and what you do*".

The young man that talked about the Mirabeau Bridge in Paris, hoping to "stand on it one day", had to go through Belgrade to get to Bosnia, where the camera captured him. But even if Belgrade had survived the atomic attack during the Cold War and the economic crisis of the 1970s, it would be depicted as a devastated city a few years later by the Serbian filmmaker Želimir Žilnik in his sci-fi vision of Yugoslavia's future.

In *Pretty Women Walking Through the City*, the constant "floods, earthquakes and radioactive fallout" caused a "mass emigration" from Belgrade. The survivors "settled in the countryside, in the so-called ecological settlements. They worked according to the slogan: *Let's change our weaknesses into our advantages. They said: Luckily, the big industry did not pollute nature. Our chance is craft production and natural farming. These retrograde trends were supported by the inspectors of Southeast Europe, who imposed themselves as the untouchable ruling class. They visited us rarely, but always with threats and prohibitions.*" The only people not to have left the desolate Belgrade were "students of political sciences". Many years later, only a small group consisting mostly of old men and young girls entrusted into their care believed in the "revival of the city of Belgrade".

The filmic memory of the area where the people featured in *Newsreel 65* are staying is thus full of catastrophic visions of the future as imagined in the Yugoslav cinema of the 1960s and 1970s.

The newsreel shots show people trapped in such a present like in a coop. A present that has aborted its future. That is why we, as the engineers of film, have no other choice but to send them travelling through time as they tried in *La Jetée*. Even though only the rare survived and the end was often death, they saw no other possibility: "*The only hope for survival lay in Time. A loophole in Time, and then maybe it would be possible to reach food, medicine, sources of energy. This was the aim of the experiments: to send emissaries into Time, to summon the Past and Future to the aid of the Present.*"¹

¹ Chris Marker, *La Jetée*, 1962.

Tara Najd Ahmadi

“WHILE EVERYONE RUSHES INTO THE FUTURE”

In the fall of 2020, when I was in the middle of editing an essay film about sleeplessness and its social context, I saw a video fragment that Nika had shot at a refugee camp at the border between Bosnia and Croatia. In this fragment, a man talks about his desire to cross borders while he is getting his beard shaved by another refugee with a knife. He talks about his dreams to become accepted in Europe, and about how the Croatian police beat him and his group "like animals" when they tried to cross the border. He explains his desire by saying, "*I just want to go to Europe and have a normal life.*" He then pauses and calmly continues, "*because I want to sleep, do you understand? I have not slept since I was 20 years old. My only dream is to sleep.*" The rest of his words turn into a poem with one recurring verse, "*because I want to sleep.*"

There is so much that can be said about the systematic brutality that causes his suffering, about the daily trauma that he faces, about a violent life deprived of decency and care, about police, borders, wars, and poverty, and yet the migrant decides to frame his experience in terms of his desire to dream. Peaceful sleep is at the core of what he perceives as his lost right. He refrains from using additional words about the grand scale of the catastrophe that he is experiencing. He simply wants to sleep.

His story reminded me of another sleepless migrant who lost his power of sleep in his twenties. Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran often talked about his sleeplessness and how it made him stop thinking about philosophy as an answer, since "*in moments of despair, philosophy is no help at all.*" Cioran understands sleeplessness as a continuous state of anxiety that deprives us not only of sleep, but from life itself. Life, when one is suffering from sleeplessness, does not exist, and neither does future: "*...for someone who doesn't sleep, from the time of going to bed at night to waking up in the morning it's all continuous, there's no interruption.*"

Which means, there is no suppression of consciousness. It all turns around that. [...] The nightmare continues uninterrupted in a way, and in the morning, start what? Since there's no difference from the night before. That new life doesn't exist. The whole day is a trial, it's the continuity of the trial. While everyone rushes toward the future, you are outside.”^[1]

Jošt Franko

»WE'RE ALL JOKERS HERE ANYWAY... «

On 15 July 2020, around midday, the police in full riot gear surrounded the informal refugee camp in the vicinity of Velika Kladuša and bulldozed over the belongings of the people on the move. Their shelter, blankets, sleeping bags and the rest of their belongings were crammed into a large pile and set on fire. The people on the move seemed undisturbed by the commotion and the brutality of state action, proud of the items they had managed to hide and keep – or scavenge and patch-up. Among them was a deck of playing cards that a group of Pakistanis pulled from underneath a burning pile of tents and improvised shelter.

“Clubs and Diamonds and Spades and Hearts... Queens and Kings and Aces. But we're all Jokers here”, Mohammad claimed, laughing at the scavenged possession.

It rained heavily in the afternoon. A group of Moroccans that resided on the southern edge of the camp left for Sarajevo. Almost everyone else stayed.

“We walked here from Kashmir. Jungle, jungle, mountain, river. I haven't seen my family in 5 years... This guy, three years and a half. This guy, 10 months. That guy just arrived.

He's 17.”

The police left the following day.

The possessions of the people on the move, soaked from the night under the rain, were laid out on the river bank. In an almost automated motion, new shelters started to emerge from branches and plastic sheets, stacked with backpacks and crammed with dozens of people. A new-old camp started to materialise. It soon looked as if nothing had happened the previous day.

Jolly.

¹ Emil Cioran in conversation with Jason Weiss.
<https://www.itinerariesofahummingbird.com/e-m-cioran.html>

The game of migrants might be different from that of Écarté or Euchre. Their Game involves walking through thick and thin, over mountains and rivers, through forests, cities hostile to their presence, areas surrounded by the brutality of the landscape and manmade barriers. Their path consists of marching past the rotten bodies of their colleagues, washed up on the river banks. A reminder of how the Game sometimes ends.

“J’ai déjà essayé à travers la mer.

La chance n’était pas ma part.”

“I go, I back. I go, I back.

Keine Chance.”

The group of Kashmiris made it to Italy.

I haven’t heard back from the Moroccans.

This is just part of the Game.

“We’re all Jokers here anyway...”



Andreja Hribernik

»I COLONISE YOU IN 'FLIP FLOPS'«

This is something Zied said in Bosnia in the summer of 2020 – poking fun at Europe for being afraid of the colonisation by refugees and migrants, who, due to police violence, often wear only flip flops. He thus simply summed up the tragedy of the people that, due to the politics of the EU, got stuck on their way, barefoot and condemned to languishing on the margins, where today the principles of necropower, as Mbembe defines it, or the mechanisms of thanatopolitics, as Agamben names the phenomenon, are being implemented in the harshest form. Here, the once colonial principle of exploitation, which still presumed control over the exploited, hoping to gain economic benefit from it, is replaced by the exclusion of certain parts of the population, especially the population that is displaced and useless to society, just like flip flops are useless in colonising Europe.

From the historical perspective, European racism is, as Balibar claims, founded on two mechanisms – colonialism and antisemitism.¹ The European colonial forces drew a large part of their economic progress from their colonies, where they exploited both the resources and the workforce. At the same time, they spread their cultural influence across all the continents. European history is also marred by the image of concentration camps, where they systematically killed former citizens whom they stripped first of their civil and then of their human rights, and in the end their life. This past is incredibly close if we think that the process of decolonisation in the sense of the withdrawal of the administrative and the military apparatus from the colonies began taking place more intensively only after World War Two, while, regarding the cultural and economic fields, the question of colonisation by economically stronger countries is still very much present and relevant today. So it seems to make more sense to talk not about the decolonisation processes after World War Two, but rather about the transformation of colonisation, which

¹ Balibar, E. (2007): *Mi, državljani Evrope? Meje, država, ljudstvo, Založba Sophia, Ljubljana*, pp. 175–176.

moved from a manifestation in the field of politics into the field of the economy. There still live people that have a direct experience of being deported to concentration camps and living in them. The aliveness of the history of this past and the fear of it that is spreading across Europe can today be seen in the rise and revival of islamophobic and xenophobic impulses and an increase in nationalistic movements.

At the centre of these processes is the image of a refugee, a migrant, which, since 2015, has filled media spaces more intensively than before. This image is distorted, stereotypical, it is an image of a dirty and unschooled bearded man, a terrorist. The relation between a refugee or a migrant and a terrorist actually discloses, as Nail explains, the two main problems of the contemporary nation state: its incapacity to ensure that all its inhabitants have rights and the incapacity and ineffectiveness of its fight against terrorism.²

Thus, the image of a refugee holds up a mirror to Western civilisation and its failed historical projects such as universal human rights, the effectiveness of international intervention etc. Even more, refugees today testify to Europe's colonial guilt, which haunts us.

² Nail, T. (2016): *A Tale of Two Crises: Migration and Terrorism After the Paris Attacks*, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 159 (accessed on 26 November 2020: <https://refugeersearch.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Nail-2016-The-figure-of-the-migrant.pdf>).

Newsreel Shreds

Newsreel Front

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