

An Artistic Challenge to the Culture of Forgetting in Serbia: Audiovisual Discontinuity in Ognjen Glavonić's *Depth 2*

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The testimony of Shyhrete Berisha begins twenty-eight minutes into Ognjen Glavonić's 2016 documentary *Dubina 2* (Depth 2). Over the course of half an hour, she recounts her harrowing experience of a grisly massacre of civilians in her village of Suharekë/Suva Reka in Kosovo.¹ In March 1999, the Kosovo Albanian residents of this ethnically mixed locale were attacked by Serbian state forces and local Kosovo Serb paramilitaries.² Berisha was among those Albanian villagers who were targeted, a group that also included her children, extended family, and many neighbors. They were ordered to gather in a local pizzeria by Serb soldiers, who then attacked the restaurant with rifle fire and grenades, killing most of those present.

Berisha's own testimony is a calm and matter-of-fact retelling, even as the violence she experiences escalates and intensifies. She conveys how, after the massacre in the pizzeria, she is put in a truck along with the bodies of those killed in the attack. She finds herself in a horrifying situation: badly wounded and presumed dead, she is en route to a mass grave of uncertain location, in total darkness, surrounded by the dead bodies of her children, family members, and neighbors. She nevertheless manages to make a deduction about her situation by listening to a conversation between the truck driver and his mother: the brief exchange is sufficient for her to identify that the driver is a Serbian neighbor, someone with whom Berisha's family had grown up. The way she learns these details is significant: Berisha comes to understand who is involved and culpable through sound. This moment is emblematic of the documentary as a whole because it is via the voice that the viewer learns, infers, and sorts through evidence.

1. The name of the town is first provided in Albanian and then in Serbian.

2. Officially the soldiers belonged to the army of Yugoslavia, as at this time Serbia was still part of a "rump" Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992–2003). Only Serbia and Montenegro remained within this much reduced Federation. Since most scholarly and popular discourse considers the Yugoslav state to have disintegrated in 1991–92, I refer to the country as Serbia and its army as consisting of Serbian state forces throughout this article.

Specifically, the voices of victims, perpetrators, and witnesses, as well as numerous accessories to this crime, are the means through which the viewer pieces together the details of the massacre. Their accounts are all from recorded testimonies provided to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (hereafter ICTY).³ In a departure from documentary convention, the content of these narratives is almost never depicted nor represented visually in the film, nor are any of the speakers shown on screen.⁴ Instead, Glavonić's camera sweeps over open landscapes: rivers, villages, and towns, as well as in-between spaces, including abandoned buildings and industrial sites. These places are presented entirely anonymously, without explicit identification or any contextual support. The relationship between audio and video is one of non-correspondence, ambiguity, and tension.

The central characteristic of *Depth 2*'s cinematic landscape, writes Pavle Levi, is “visual *absence*” manifesting in “sequences [characterized by] the prolonged absence of any human activity.”⁵ The function of the voice in relation to these emptied landscapes, notes Branislav Dimitrijević, is to convey “the visually missing event” and to “guide the observer.”⁶ But we might reasonably ask: guide toward what? Through an examination of Glavonić's use of audio-visual discontinuity and how the (audio recordings of) witness accounts are placed within that broader arrangement, we can begin to answer that question, and thereby gain a better understanding of both the film and its political commentary. An analysis of the documentary's use of voice and landscape—its aesthetic strategy—is essential to any understanding of its social and political meaning.

This article focuses on how *Depth 2* recontextualizes witness testimonies from the ICTY, employing audio-visual discontinuity to defamiliarize the content and to distance the film from conventional documentary tropes. These aesthetic strategies allow the audience to engage with this difficult subject matter in an unfamiliar manner. Glavonić thereby invites the audience to co-participate in constructing the film's meaning, in an approach to filmmaking he calls *sa-učešće*. This aesthetic strategy helps the film address a failure in cultural memory in contemporary Serbian society, specifically regarding the atrocities and war crimes of the 1990s. The role of the Serbian state and affiliated paramilitaries and their culpability in these crimes remain highly contentious topics in the country and wider region. Glavonić's film confronts the rupture between the orchestrated criminal actions of the Serbian state, and the absence of nearly any public knowledge and acknowledgment of those

3. The ICTY was established in 1993 by the United Nations to deal with war crimes that took place in the conflicts of the former Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s. All trials took place at the Hague in the Netherlands.

4. The only voice that is not a recorded testimony from the ICTY is an interview that Glavonić conducted with Marko Minić, a forensic anthropologist who worked at the Batajnica excavation site in 2002. In keeping with the rest of the documentary, he is also not shown on screen.

5. Pavle Levi, “Pejzaži u kadru, ljudi u odsustvu,” *Peščanik*, March 13, 2021, at www.pescanik.net/pejzazi-u-kadru-ljudi-u-odsustvu/ (accessed November 13, 2023). Italics in the original.

6. Branislav Dimitrijević, “Landscape of Crime,” *Peščanik*, November 24, 2018, at www.pescanik.net/landscape-of-crime/ (accessed November 13, 2023).

crimes in Serbia today.⁷ By reinterpreting the ICTY archive, and encouraging the audience to participate in that process of interpretation, *Depth 2* both critiques and provides a corrective to this failure.

In analyzing audio-visual discontinuity in the documentary, I pay particular attention to how *Depth 2* prompts viewers to engage in “acousmatic” listening. This neologism, developed by Michel Chion, describes the experience of listening to sound “that is heard without its cause or source being seen.”⁸ A voice which is not attached to a body on screen creates a number of unexpected cinematic effects: it can affect the film’s narrative, suspense, and plotting, but it can also modify the relations of power between a film’s voices and its on-screen characters, since an off-screen voice is associated with ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience, and omnipotence.⁹

Through an analysis of the disembodied voices of the perpetrators, and a consideration of how their accounts are presented in the audio-visual dynamic as a whole, I intend to show some of the political effects of Glavonić’s aesthetic choices. *Depth 2* as a whole creates a feeling of estrangement, presenting the testimonies and their histories of violence in a novel manner, so as to force viewers to engage with a topic long avoided and repressed in Serbian public discourse. The documentary creates a sonic blanket of perpetrators’ voices, which suggests there was a more extensive level of societal involvement in the war crimes. *Depth 2* thus makes a powerful intervention on the question of individual versus collective responsibility for war crimes, a sensitive and taboo topic in Serbia to this day. As a counterpoint to the voices of the perpetrators, Berisha’s testimony forms part of the documentary’s public and social acknowledgement of violence committed against Kosovo Albanian civilians. Glavonić’s inclusion of her testimony is an ethical act of giving voice to a survivor and, by extension, to her community. The documentary leverages the aesthetics of its cinematic language in order to address the complex social and political repercussions of the massacre in Suharekë/Suva Reka.

Histories of violence

Understanding how *Depth 2* addresses the near complete absence of public acknowledgment of Serbian war crimes in Kosovo requires some contextual knowledge of both the crimes themselves and the subsequent public conversation in Serbia. *Depth 2* is centered on the 1999 massacre in Suharekë/Suva Reka, during which close to fifty Albanian civilians were killed by Serbian state forces and paramilitaries.¹⁰ The armed men were accompanied

7. Any public acknowledgement—aside from a brief period after the crimes and their cover-up became known to the Serbian public—was ephemeral. The reckoning with the past is discussed below in more detail.

8. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, 1999), 18. Chion developed his theoretical reflections on “acousmatic listening” with reference to an obscure term—“acousmatic”—that he discovered in the works of French composer Pierre Schaeffer.

9. Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, 24.

10. The municipality of Suharekë/Suva Reka is located in south-eastern Kosovo. According to the 1981 census, the town had a population of 6,653, including 5,940

and assisted by Serbian residents of the town, often the neighbors and acquaintances of the victims. While the center of gravity in the film is Berisha's testimony describing this massacre, Glavonić is equally concerned with the broader story of the cover-up operation—code-named “Dubina 2”—that followed.¹¹ The operation involved the disposal of the murdered civilians and their transport to mass graves throughout Serbia. The largest of these graves was in Batajnica, a special police base on the outskirts of Belgrade where 704 bodies were later exhumed.

The historical events and circumstances of “Dubina 2” are well understood, and the facts of the case have been firmly established by the ICTY.¹² Between April and May 1999, the Serbian state was involved in hiding evidence of mass killings in Kosovo, removing the bodies from their initial interment sites in Kosovo, and relocating them to four mass graves across Serbia.¹³ The intent of the Serbian government was to ward off a possible ICTY war crimes investigation by moving the bodies hundreds of kilometers from the site of the massacres in Kosovo, to Serbian territory far from the conflict zone.¹⁴ According to a 2017 report from the Humanitarian Law Center (Belgrade), “the information about this action was kept secret until 2001, when the then Minister of the Interior, Dušan Mihailović, set up a working group to investigate the allegations of the existence of mass graves in Serbia containing the bodies of Albanians killed during the Kosovo conflict.”¹⁵ The initiative was the work of a new government, a democratic coalition that took power after the October 2000 revolution, when President Slobodan Milošević's government was overthrown.¹⁶ The first media accounts of the cover-up, which

Albanians and 570 Serbs. Albanians in Kosovo boycotted the 1991 census, so it is not a reliable indicator of the ethnic composition of the region. In 2018, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reported that the total population of the municipality of Suharekë/Suva Reka comprised 59,076 Kosovo Albanians and 2 Kosovo Serbs. See OSCE, “Municipal Profile: Suharekë/Suva Reka,” 2018, at www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/5/13131_1.pdf (accessed November 13, 2023).

11. Because the film bears the name of the government cover-up, I refer to the film as *Depth 2* (in italics) and the government cover-up as “Dubina 2” (the Serbian term).

12. See Case No. IT-02–54, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: *The Prosecutor against Slobodan Milošević*, at www.icty.org/en/case/slobodan_milosевич (accessed November 13, 2023). Also related to the “Dubina 2” cover-up is case IT-05–87, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: *The Prosecutor against Milan Milutinović, Nikola Šainović, Dragoljub Ojdanić, Nebojša Pavković, Vladimir Lazarević and Sreten Lukić*, at www.icty.org/en/case/milutinovic (accessed November 13, 2024); and case IT-05–87/1, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: *The Prosecutor against Vlastimir Đorđević*, at www.icty.org/en/case/djordjevic (accessed November 13, 2024).

13. In addition to Batajnica, graves were found in Petrovo Selo, Rudnica, and at Lake Perućac (on the river Drina, which marks the border between Bosnia and Serbia). Around one thousand bodies were excavated in total. See J. D., “Na četiri lokacije u Srbiji pronađeno 941 telo,” June 22, 2020, at www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/suocavanje/na-cetiri-lokacije-u-srbiji-pronadjeno-941-telo/ (accessed November 13, 2024).

14. Mladen Ostojić, *Between Justice and Stability: The Politics of War Crimes Prosecutions in Post-Milošević Serbia* (London, 2016), 123–24.

15. Nemanja Stjepanović, *Dossier: The Cover-Up of Evidence of Crimes During the War in Kosovo: The Concealment of Bodies Operation* (Belgrade, 2017), 32.

16. Ostojić provides the broader context to the lack of political will to indict Milošević locally: “The working group established by the Ministry of the Interior accused Milošević

emerged in spring 2001, helped force the hand of the coalition government. A newspaper in eastern Serbia reported that a freezer truck with fifty bodies in the trailer had been hauled out of the Danube in early April 1999 and that officials had immediately declared it a state secret, thereby foreclosing the possibility of public knowledge.¹⁷ Following these news stories, the government tasked the Ministry of Internal Affairs with forming a working group and carrying out the subsequent investigation.¹⁸

Evidence and conclusions from this working group contributed to ICTY trials against Milošević and six Serbian politicians who held prominent ministerial positions.¹⁹ The Humanitarian Law Center would later conclude its eighty-eight-page report by emphasizing that both the President and a large number of other actors were involved in the cover-up operation:

The above-mentioned evidence shows that the operation of removing the bodies of Albanian civilians from Kosovo and their burial in clandestine mass graves in Serbia was planned at the level of the national leadership, more precisely, in the Cabinet of Slobodan Milošević, the President of the FRY [Federal Republic of Yugoslavia], and that his instructions were then enforced by the police line management—starting with the Minister of the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Vlastimir Đorđević, down through to the ranks below.

Evidence points to the conclusion that the highest-ranking police officers were responsible for the operational implementation of the order to hide the bodies, and that the Armed Forces of Yugoslavia also played a role in the whole operation. In addition, it is noticeable that the process of hiding the bodies of those murdered in Kosovo, the excavation of the human remains and their transport to Serbia and then their burial in mass graves, involved hundreds of direct perpetrators.²⁰

The report is clear about the extensive participation of Serbian state officials and institutions in the planning, supervision, and execution of the crimes. Out of all the trials at the Hague, only Vlastimir Đorđević (former Assistant Minister of the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs in Milošević's cabinet) received a sentence for war crimes committed against Kosovo

and several former political and military officials of having organized the displacement of these corpses from Kosovo in order to conceal the atrocities for which they were responsible. But even in the face of such clear evidence of the atrocities committed, the domestic judiciary still failed to undertake any proceedings for crimes against humanity perpetrated by the former regime. It thus became obvious that without thorough reforms of the domestic judiciary and police, which remained staffed with Milošević-era executives and crippled by inertia, local courts were reluctant to carry out such proceedings, or even incapable of doing so." Ostojić, *Between Justice and Stability*, 62.

17. This became known as the freezer truck case. It was so called in the media because the truck was re-purposed from a slaughterhouse in Prizren, a city in Kosovo. For more details on this see Stjepanović, *Dossier: The Cover-Up*, 37–40.

18. For further context and political developments around the revelations, see Ostojić, *Between Justice and Stability*, 123–25; Eric Gordy, *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial: The Past at Stake in Post-Milošević Serbia* (Philadelphia, 2013), 12–14.

19. The "Kosovo Six," as they are informally referred to in the media, are Nikola Šainović, Dragoljub Ojdanić, Nebojša Pavković, Vladimir Lazarević, Sreten Lukić, and Milan Milutinović.

20. Stjepanović, *Dossier: The Cover-Up*, 56.

Albanians.²¹ There is a clear discrepancy between the significant amount of people involved in the crime, as described in the report, and the small number of those who stood trial, as seen in the ICTY trial record.

The revelations in 2001 about the killing of Kosovo Albanian civilians seemed to represent a turning point in the state's relationship to criminal proceedings at the ICTY and the view in Serbian society of war crimes committed by Serb forces. Eric Gordy argues that in 2001, the conversations around the freezer truck appeared to mark "the break with the period of reflexive denial."²² He adds that this moment, when crimes against Kosovo Albanian civilians became public knowledge, might have facilitated a more profound and painful examination of Serbia's role in war crimes and the extent of the state's responsibility for those crimes.²³ However, this promise was short-lived. Mladen Ostojić notes that media coverage of "Dubina 2" and the mass graves was sidelined soon after Milošević was transferred to the Hague in late June 2001: "the issue suddenly disappeared from the public spotlight," which "reinforced the hypothesis that the government had unveiled the mass graves in order to justify cooperation with the ICTY and prepare public opinion for the extradition of Milošević."²⁴ After the initial period of public shock, the prevailing attitude in Serbia toward war crimes in Kosovo "turned into relativization, and relativization to a space between silence and denial."²⁵

Glavonić has been clear that in his research for the film, he "did not discover anything new," and that he is "not an investigative journalist."²⁶ All the material he collected in the course of seven years of research was available in the public domain. Glavonić learned about "Dubina 2" from a magazine article he read in 2009, when he was a film student. Yet in conversations with peers and professors around that time, he discovered that very few had heard about this case. Beyond his immediate social circles, there seemed to be broad indifference to this dark chapter of recent Serbian history.²⁷ The reasons for this are multilayered and inter-connecting, extending beyond the short-lived nature of the early coverage of "Dubina 2." The lack of interest and awareness among the public is likely the result of decades-long attempts by the Serbian state to limit the public's knowledge of war crimes.²⁸ This is compounded by the unwillingness of most major media outlets to discuss Serbian involvement

21. ICTY, "Vlastimir Đorđević Convicted for Crimes in Kosovo," news release no. NJ/MOW/1390e, February 23, 2011, at www.icty.org/en/press/vlastimir-%C4%91or%C4%91evi%C4%87-convicted-crimes-kosovo (accessed November 13, 2024).

22. Gordy, *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial*, 13.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Ostojić, *Between Justice and Stability*, 125

25. Gordy, *Guilt, Responsibility, and Denial*, 14.

26. Ognjen Glavonić, "Interview with Galeb Nikačević Hasci-Jare," *Agelast* podcast, episode 23, May 22, 2020, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1v9Bj3l4_I (accessed November 13, 2023).

27. Glavonić, "Interview with Nikačević Hasci-Jare."

28. A March 2023 report by Kristina Ristić on media revisionism and the coverage of conflict and war crimes in Serbia is particularly useful in its broader historicization of the methods by which the Serbian state has, since the Milošević regime, controlled and suppressed media accounts of war crimes. See Ristić, *Mediji i revizionizam o ratovima devedestih u Srbiji* (Belgrade, 2023).

in such crimes.²⁹ A key motivating factor behind this silence is the prevailing nationalist sentiment in the country, which leads to any suggestion of Serbian culpability being treated with conspiratorial skepticism. NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia, which started in the spring of 1999, also plays an important role in this culture of silence, as it helped consolidate an already strong sense of victimhood in Serbian nationalism.³⁰ This victimhood narrative is often used to preclude any consideration of Serbia's involvement in war crimes, or to muddy the waters around questions of responsibility through suggestions of moral equivalence between NATO's actions and Serbia's own.

The bombings, which NATO framed as a humanitarian intervention aiming to peacefully resolve the conflict and establish self-governance in Kosovo, helped displace Serbian state violence against Kosovo Albanians from Serbian public knowledge and discussion.³¹ The NATO attacks encouraged Serbs to think of their country primarily as a victim of NATO military aggression, rather than a perpetrator of atrocities. Importantly, *Depth 2* sidelines references to the NATO campaign in order to foreground a history that Serbian society would rather forget. By focusing on war crimes in Kosovo, Glavonić's film thus goes against the grain of the dominant Serbian public memory of 1999, or of the 1990s in general (a decade of war and interethnic violence across the former Yugoslavia).³² The references to the NATO bombing in the documentary are brief: the most recognizable is a grainy, seconds-long insert from video footage of the bombing of the Pančevo petrochemical plant and oil refinery. A similar marginalization of the NATO bombing is reflected in the film's sonic arrangement. Glavonić's documentary intentionally excludes the sensorial tropes (such as the sound of air-raid sirens and bomb explosions)

29. The overall picture, and the current state of freedom and transparency in Serbian media is dispiriting, to say the least. Marko Kmezić argues that while the contemporary media landscape is not burdened by "the explicit political pressure and censorship of the past," coercion and control still exist and manifest in more sophisticated ways. Marko Kmezić, "Captured Media: Limitations and Structural Hindrances to Media Freedom in Serbia," *Review of Central and East European Law* 43, no. 4 (November 2018): 462. See also Věra Stojarová, "Media in the Western Balkans: Who Controls the Past Controls the Future," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 20, no. 1 (March 2020): 161–81.

30. See Orli Fridman, "Memories of the 1999 NATO Bombing in Belgrade, Serbia," *Südosteuropa* 64, no. 4 (December 2016); Marija Mandić, "Official Commemoration of the NATO Bombing of Serbia. A Case Study of the Fifteenth Anniversary," *Südosteuropa* 64, no. 4 (December 2016): 460–81; Eric Gordy, "Tracing Dialogue on the Legacy of War Crimes in Serbia," in Dubravka Žarkov and Marlies Glasius, eds., *Narratives of Justice In and Out of the Courtroom: Former Yugoslavia and Beyond* (Cham, 2014), 111–30.

31. The NATO bombing of Serbia lasted from March 24 to June 10, 1999. NATO claimed that the air campaign against Serbia was a humanitarian intervention driven by Milošević's refusal to sign the Rambouillet agreement.

32. It is worth pointing out that during the late 1990s, Aleksandar Vučić, the current president of Serbia, was appointed Minister of Information by Milošević. During his ministerial position, Vučić was responsible for implementing the "Information Law," which introduced media censorship and regulation. Independent radio television stations were shut down and reporters harassed, and there is good reason to believe that the state was behind the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, editor of *Dnevni Telegraph*, who was openly critical of the Milošević regime. See *Committee to Protect Journalists*, "Attacks on the Press 1999: Yugoslavia," March 22, 2000, at www.cpj.org/x/1df8 (accessed November 13, 2024).

that would elicit associations with the memory of NATO bombing.³³ By excluding the NATO bombing as a historical point of reference, Glavonić sets aside the simplistic narratives prevailing in Serbian society regarding the NATO attacks, where Serbia is portrayed as an entirely innocent victim of western aggression.³⁴

It is exactly this “failure in cultural memory” that *Depth 2*’s archival film-making critiques so effectively.³⁵ As Hal Foster writes, an interest in this kind of refusal to remember often informs archival art, which exhibits the “will to relate, to probe a misplaced past” with an eye to drawing out lessons for the present.³⁶ *Depth 2* belongs to a growing group of artworks (plays, conceptual art, film) from the former Yugoslav region that have turned to the ICTY archive for source material.³⁷ These artistic recontextualizations of the legal archive are diverse in their aesthetic modes and sensibilities, but it is undeniable that all of these artworks comment on contemporary society—whether they are incorporating reassessments of history, querying the processes of justice, or revealing the archive’s (or tribunal’s) blind spots. As Henry Redwood points out, the aesthetic politics of such archival artwork disrupt what has been made “sensible” for the present, a present that “renders certain knowledges ‘common sense’ whilst others are made illegitimate.”³⁸ *Depth 2* is in that regard an expression of Foster’s “will to relate”: the documentary confronts Serbian society and its refusal to listen to what happened in Kosovo, with the legal archive detailing exactly what happened. Moreover, Glavonić’s critique and correction of this failure of memory takes place not only through the film’s content but also—as discussed below—through its formal aesthetic choices.

33. From a Humanitarian Law Center (Belgrade) press release: “[t]he data clearly show [sic] that the leadership of the Republic of Serbia responded to NATO attacks by severe and massive retaliation against the Albanian civilian population—expelling and killing civilians, and burning whole villages and houses.” See *Humanitarian Law Center*, “Demystifying ‘NATO Aggression and the Fight Against Shiptar Terrorists,’” March 25, 2015, www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=28616&lang=de (accessed November 13, 2023).

34. Jelena Subotić and Filip Ejodus write that the NATO bombing “was widely accepted in society as an illegal, illegitimate, and unprovoked act of aggression.” Subotić and Ejodus, “Constructing a Truth Regime: The 1999 NATO Intervention in Serbian Political Memory,” in Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić, eds., *Nationalism and the Politicization of History in the Former Yugoslavia* (Cham, 2021), 170.

35. Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (2004): 21.

36. Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” 21.

37. Alongside Glavonić’s documentary, prominent examples include Oliver Frljić’s drama *Kukavičluk*, in which the theatre is transformed into a tribunal with material explicitly taken from various trials; and Vladimir Miladinović’s inkwash drawings of Ratko Mladić’s war diary, which was entered into evidence in the later stages of Mladić’s trial at the ICTY. There are also “alternative literal archives,” in the words of Olivera Simić, creative outputs that coalesce testimonies for which no space was created at the ICTY, specifically the testimony of women. One such project is the anthology Lina Vušković and Zorica Trifunović, eds., *Ženska strana rata* (Belgrade, 2007). See Olivera Simić, “But I Want to Speak Out: Making Art from Women’s Testimonies,” *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 40, no. 1 (2014): 53.

38. Henry Redwood, “Aesthetic Contestation and the Archive: Vladimir Miladinović’s ‘The Notebook,’” *Eugster Belgrade*, 2020, at www.eugster-belgrade.com/vladimir-miladinovic-notebook/ (accessed November 13, 2023).

Defamiliarization of the Archive

The reframing of the ICTY archive in *Depth 2* functions as a cinematic defamiliarization of testimonial evidence. In the documentary, the ICTY archival material is transformed such that it is not easily identifiable as stemming from the trial at all. Glavonić consulted four hundred hours of testimony, itself only a small fraction of the trial's archive, and condensed them into ninety-eight minutes of film, a selection guided by his criteria that he would only include the voices of those “with first-hand experience, who touched and smelled the bodies.”³⁹ The entire documentary proceeds without identifying information, visual or otherwise, that might reveal the source of the voices the audience hears, with the ICTY trials only cited in the closing credits. Delaying disclosure of the source of the testimonies is one way for Glavonić to neutralize the evidentiary material, which would immediately become politically contentious were its origin made clear to the audience. For a Serbian public in particular, the ICTY is a highly charged topic: the tribunal does not enjoy widespread credibility in Serbia, where it is often dismissed as being institutionally biased against the Serbs, further contributing to the narrative of Serbian victimhood in public discourse.⁴⁰

The opening scene of *Depth 2* is illustrative of Glavonić's rejection of the “expository mode” of documentary filmmaking.⁴¹ We see a shot of a briskly flowing river accompanied by the voice of an unidentified narrator, who speaks without the viewer being aware of when or why the man is speaking. The voice, notably, is not the kind of omniscient narrator that an audience might typically expect from a documentary about war crimes. Conventional didactic voiceover—perhaps the most recognizable and common use of a disembodied voice that speaks from off-screen—aspires to objectivity and functions to provide exposition. Pooja Rangan writes that “such a voice forcefully [draws] attention away from its own source, materiality, and corporeal particularity toward its message, earning the informal moniker ‘voice of God narration.’”⁴²

39. Glavonić, “Interview with Nikačević Hasci-Jare.” In the credits, the voices are identified according to the degree of identification the witness chose at the trials; for some, like Berisha, this includes their full name. For others, they are identified by a number, such as K83.

40. On the topic of the widespread lack of credibility and illegitimacy of the ICTY in Serbia, see Sonja Biserko, Radovan Kupres, Nemanja Stjepanović, Izabela Kisić, and Obrad Savić, *Štampa: Nepromenjena Matrica* (Belgrade, 2004); Igor Bandović, ed., *The Activity of ICTY and National War Crimes Judiciary* (Belgrade, 2005); Patrice McMahon and David Forsyth, “The ICTY Impact on Serbia: Judicial Romanticism Meets Network Politics,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 30, no. 2 (May 2008); Vojin Dimitrijević, “Stavovi prema ratnim zločinima, Haškom tribunalu i domaćem pravosuđu za ratne zločine” (Belgrade: 2003–2009); Anna Geis, Katarina Ristić, and Vladimir Petrović, “‘Screening’ Transitional Justice in Serbia: ICTY Representations and the Memory of War Crimes in Serb Television Media,” *Forschung/Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung* no. 45 (Osnabrück, 2019), online at <https://d-nb.info/1193740746/34> (accessed Januar 26, 2024).

41. Bill Nichols writes, “The expository text addresses the viewer directly, with titles or voices that advance an argument about the historical world.” This mode “emphasises the impression of objectivity, and of well-established judgement.” Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington, 1991), 34–35.

42. Pooja Rangan, “Audibilities: Voice and Listening in the Penumbra of Documentary: An Introduction,” *Discourse* 39, no. 3 (2017): 283.

The point of the voiceover in documentaries, elaborates Stella Bruzzi, is “to generalize, to offer an omniscient and detached judgment, to guide the spectator through events whilst remaining aloof from them.”⁴³ *Depth 2*, by contrast, employs disembodied voices who neither pretend to be objective nor provide the viewer with any kind of explanation that would facilitate their understanding.

The documentary from the very first situates the viewer in the middle of the timeline of events. “The police officer on duty informed me,” the voiceover begins, “that in the Danube river, near Tekija village, a fisherman noticed an object floating on the water, something that looked like a truck’s trailer box.” The documentary then unfolds like a procedural investigation, building tension through a sequence of disturbing revelations. Even before the truck is pulled out of the river, the police diver notices human legs sticking out of the trailer. In total, fifty bodies are discovered in the truck. The viewer is unsettled, but so is the person who speaks, a factor that further differentiates him from a typical omniscient narrator. The narrator describes how, after advising the local municipality of the recovered bodies, a shipment of coffins arrives but there was no sense on how to proceed: “What could we do with only a dozen coffins? And what’s with the coffins anyway? What to do with them? Where to carry them?”⁴⁴ Here, *Depth 2* gives the viewer a proxy experience of how those involved came to understand and discover the many layers of the crime and its cover-up, from the killings themselves, through the transport of bodies across Kosovo and Serbia, to their disposal in mass graves. The viewer shares the initial lack of knowledge with those who experienced the events first-hand. It is specifically the formal arrangement of the film that enables this dislocation of the viewer: the lack of spoken exposition and audio-visual correspondence make it challenging for the viewer to find a foothold from which to make sense of what they see and hear.

Visually, matters are just as unclear. As the first witness speaks, sequences of a river, a muddy stretch of land, and construction work on the side of a cliff accompany the testimony. The interpretation of these images is open-ended: the images occasionally demonstrate a degree of proximity to the words (such as the shots of the river), but are most often non-referential.⁴⁵ The shot of the muddy river bank, for example, shows some tire marks in the soil, evoking a possible (but not explicit) connection with the testimonial detail about the truck careening off the road or being hauled out of the Danube. For the majority of the documentary, the landscape shots are associative and symbolic vis-à-vis the voice, creating multiple opportunities for the viewer to interpret for themselves the relationship between the two.⁴⁶

43. Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary* (London, 2006), 63.

44. These coffins were ultimately not put to use, as the bodies were loaded into a different truck and transported to Belgrade (specifically to the Batajnica mass grave). This took place on the orders of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

45. Sometimes the images are outright abstract. When Berisha speaks, her words are superimposed on a stream of zoomed-in frames that focus on textures and color. These are most likely close-ups of walls and doorframes. The images provide a blank space for viewers’ reflection as they listen to Berisha’s account of violence.

46. Though Glavonić did travel to southern Serbia and Kosovo, shooting at times in the exact locations where these crimes occurred, there is nothing in the film identifying

These techniques create a specific and active role for the viewer and how they relate to the film, which Glavonić calls *sa-učešće* (literally, co-participating). *Sa-učešće* is a neologistic concept of Glavonić's own making, drawing on the connotations of *saučešće*, meaning "sympathy" or "condolence" in Serbian. Rather than the definition of sympathy as commiseration or an expression of sorrow, the emphasis is on its definition as common feeling or a correspondence of feelings.⁴⁷ Speaking about his filmmaking in 2018, Glavonić explained his understanding of *sa-učešće*: "It is important for me to create the largest possible space for the active participation of the audience and to attempt to engage what is human in you, [to engage] your imagination, your feelings, your memories, your world."⁴⁸ By co-participating in the construction of meaning in the film, the audience is invited into a possible identification with the protagonists of the cinematic world. The viewer expands and infuses what they hear with their own experiences—what Glavonić refers to as the imagination, feelings, memories, and world of the viewer.⁴⁹ One means by which this is achieved in *Depth 2* is through "[the] emptiness or lack of the image."⁵⁰ Levi notes that the emptiness of the landscapes is "a request to the viewer for active participation in the film: for supplementing, for further imagining that strategically emptied and, as such, *incomplete* image."⁵¹ The absence of human figures on screen who speak is a key component of this incomplete image. It is precisely their absence that elicits the participation of the viewer, because the voices of ICTY witnesses are not tethered to a particular face, setting, or context.

This provides broad opportunity for reflection and co-participation in meaning, especially relevant for those in the Serbian public, where the issue of possible responsibility and complicity is much more controversial and polarizing. Glavonić attempts to provoke these reflections by removing an all-knowing narrator who puts forward a single, authoritative account presented in seemingly objective terms. Instead, the disembodied voices require a sorting out on the part of each individual viewer, who must consider for themselves

the locations shown as being the real site of these events. Glavonić, "Interview with Nikačević Hasci-Jare."

47. Sympathy as the "the quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling. Also, a feeling or frame of mind evoked by and responsive to some external influence." *Oxford English Dictionary online*, "sympathy, n." (Oxford, July 2023) at <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5261923118> (accessed November 13, 2023).

48. Glavonić, "Interview with Nikačević Hasci-Jare." *Teret* (The Load), a fictional film, shares *Depth 2's* thematic scope. The story follows a driver who transports a truck with—to him—unknown cargo from Kosovo to Belgrade. Over the course of the journey, he develops a growing sense of the crime he is now part of. The research on "Dubina 2" upon which the documentary is based also feeds into *The Load*.

49. Where that identification or relation between viewer and film might go is one of the open-ended aspects of this type of filmmaking. My hope with this article is not to extinguish the open-endedness or the ambivalence of this type of formal practice. Rather, by interrogating in more detail the formal techniques with which the film treats voice and sound, I examine how this technique guides meaning.

50. Levi, "Pejzaži u kadru."

51. *Ibid.* Italics in the original.

not only the complicity of individuals who participated in the cover-up but also the social and collective reverberations of the crimes. Though there is no guarantee that the documentary will have the desired effect on the viewer, *Depth 2* provides possibilities for the co-production of meaning.⁵²

Disembodied Voices and Collective Responsibility

The presence in *Depth 2* of an unspecified number of voices that are heard without the speakers being seen allows Glavonić to comment on the tension between individual and collective responsibility for war crimes—a tension that permeates discussions in many post-war societies, including in the Balkans. As the film unfolds, the sense of witnessing and learning of a criminal cover-up grows, as does the number of participants who give their version of the events. Yet, by design, it is difficult to discern within the documentary the actual number of voices who provide an account of taking part. By suspending the correspondence between sound and screen, between voice and body, *Depth 2* disrupts the audience's ability to attach words and actions to specific individuals.

There is, then, a complexity and ambiguity to the disembodied voice in filmmaking: it can function as all-knowing, steeped in power structures, or, alternatively, it can be used to challenge the very same. Glavonić's treatment of voice in *Depth 2* leans on this tension in order to communicate ideas about state power and the perpetrators' responsibility. This is achieved specifically through the film's formal organization around disembodied voices, which steer the viewer away from perceiving the men who took part in the cover-up as individuals, coalescing their identities into a group.

This aesthetic trope—erasing individuality through anonymity—is a means by which the film comments on collective participation and responsibility. Since *Depth 2* does not identify to whom the male voices belong, and since the narration switches back and forth between individuals, it is often difficult to tell the men apart. As such, the lack of clarity as to who is speaking underscores the interchangeability of the perpetrators in the complex logistical operation of the crime. Because they are interchangeable, the voices merge into a collective. The unspecified number of men and the viewer's confusion regarding how many speak in the documentary has the effect of suggesting that a large number of people were involved, much more so than if the speakers were each individually shown on screen. The collective nature of the cover-up is confirmed in a more explicit, literal sense toward the end of the film when a forensic anthropologist who observed the excavation of the bodies at Batajnica says,

52. *Depth 2* did not have broad distribution beyond the film festival circuit (both locally and internationally) in the year of its release. As of 2024, the Serbian public broadcaster Radio-Television Serbia (RTS) has not shown *Depth 2* nor Glavonić's 2018 film *The Load* (nor have any of the private television broadcasters in the country). Neither film has gained a mainstream audience. In an interview, Glavonić notes that any dissemination of his films is most reliably undertaken through illegal torrents. Glavonić, "Interview with Nikačević Hasci-Jare."

The number of people that took part in this entire operation, if you think about it, that the victims were killed somewhere, that they were loaded into trucks, that those trucks crossed a lot of miles and came to the opposite side of the country, that those trucks went to one very important site where the victims were unloaded and buried, think about it, there must've been an enormous number of people who took part in that entire operation.

This comment states outright what the aesthetic tropes of *Depth 2* have subtly intimated.

By creating a sonic blanket of perpetrators' voices, *Depth 2* hints at the huge scale and collective nature of the operation, with the participation of many people in different professions (policemen, local councillors, drivers, waste workers). The film reframes the evidence of the courts, which collected said evidence to determine the guilt or innocence of individual generals and political leaders, to instead reveal the extensive network of institutions and actors who were collectively responsible for carrying out the crime and its cover-up. This contrasts with the official line of the ICTY, which sought top-level arrests to avoid passing judgment on societies at large. In the words of Theodor Meron, who presided as a judge at the Hague, "the great hope of tribunal advocates was that the individualization and decollectivization of guilt—placing responsibility on the leaders and the perpetrators of atrocities, rather than on whole communities—would help to bring about peace and reconciliation."⁵³ To some, this is precisely where the tribunal failed in its pursuit of post-war justice: in singling out individuals, it glosses over the fact that many war crimes involved the explicit and implicit participation as well as approval of a broad swathe of institutions, political parties, criminal organizations, diaspora networks, communities, and individuals.⁵⁴ *Depth 2* echoes this critique aesthetically in its treatment of voice and sound. The unattributed testimony, with no faces seen in the documentary, has the effect of making state power seem omnipotent, anywhere and everywhere.

Glavonić relies on the connotations of the voiceover as authoritative narration to stress the dominance of the political system within which the men are ideologically embedded. The hegemony of the state is especially evident in the speech patterns of the anonymous men. The men speak in an overwhelmingly obfuscating manner, their testimonies teeming with detached and bureaucratic language as they describe the cover-up. The transport of bodies is a *zadatak* (task), an *običan posao* (regular job), and a *posao koji se mora završiti* (job that must be done). The language neutralizes the crime by

53. Theodor Meron, "Answering for War Crimes: Lessons from the Balkans," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no.1 (January–February 1997): 6.

54. See, for example, James Gow, *The Serbian Project and its Adversaries: A Strategy of War Crimes* (London, 2003); Kosta Nikolić and Vladimir Petrović, "Organized Crime in Serbian Politics during the Yugoslav Wars," *Journal of Political Power* 15, no. 1 (2022): 101–22; Jens Stilhoff Sorensen, "War as Social Transformation: Wealth, Class, Power and an Illiberal Economy in Serbia," *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (2003): 55–82. There is an additional irony, given that during his court appearances at the ICTY, Milošević frequently declared that the tribunal was not about punishing him, or other leaders, accusing the ICTY of instead attempting to punish and subjugate the Serbian people as a whole. See Milošević's opening statements at the ICTY trial against him on February 14, 2002, at www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/trans/en/020214IT.htm (accessed February 10, 2024).

making it seem like an official and ordinary undertaking: this is especially clear in the phrase *zadatak koji je važan i u interesu za državu* (a task that is important and in the interest of the state), a formulation that explicitly upholds state legitimacy and authority.⁵⁵ The disembodied voices speak with the authority of the state and they make that authority apparent: the state is an abstract concept, with no embodiment, but the power the state wields is here represented through the speech patterns of the men. Glavonić's directorial decision to render these voices anonymous(ly) makes their homogeneity all the clearer: not only is it hard to tell them apart because the viewer cannot see them, but they also speak in the same bureaucratic manner, throwing into relief the workings of state power.

That this language of neutralization and obfuscation was instigated by the central state organs is confirmed toward the end of *Depth 2*, in a sequence in which Glavonić inserts images of documents showing that the government sanctioned and authorized this criminal undertaking. The illegal transport of bodies is signified by the terms *raščišćavanje* (clearing) and *čišćenje teritorija* (cleaning of territory). In these papers, the state creates a "clean" fiction around the crime, creating a linguistic disguise that enables police, military, and political institutions to avoid naming their brutal actions. The notion of "clearing" bears no imprint of the bodies of the killed civilians. They are doubly erased: first, killed at the hands of the Serbian state, then entirely removed from the discourse around the transport of their bodies.

Yet this impersonal violence, articulated through detached and indifferent speech, is undermined through the voice of Shyhrete Berisha, the survivor of the Suharekë/Suva Reka massacre discussed at the beginning of this article. It is Berisha who interrupts what had previously been a relatively cohesive account, eroding any sense of a "viably unified and authoritative point of command."⁵⁶ Her words disrupt what has been heard up until that point in the documentary in a number of significant ways. She identifies herself and provides a family biography, alongside their place of residence. Glavonić's decision to include these details in the film is a strong statement about attaching identity to the victim and survivor. Berisha agreed to have her identity made public during the actual testimony at the ICTY and Glavonić emphasizes her choice. He does not provide that same emphasis for the other testimonies we hear—even though some of the perpetrators (like Božidar Protić) declined the option to remain anonymous during testimony.⁵⁷ Indeed, the majority of

55. There are historical and political precedents for this type of discursive neutralization, which have been theoretically explored by Hannah Arendt (among others). The function of this neutralizing language is for the state to ensure regulation and cooperation. This reflects Arendt's analysis of language rules in the Third Reich, which "proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity in the various widely diversified services whose cooperation was essential in this matter." Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 2006), 85.

56. Rey Chow, "Listening after Acousmaticity: Notes on a Transdisciplinary Problematic" in James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow, eds., *Sound Objects* (Durham, 2018), 123.

57. Božidar Protić was one of the drivers who transported bodies in the hold of the truck. His name is provided in the credits. He testified at the ICTY under zero anonymity.

witnesses at the ICTY (72 percent) testified with no protective measures.⁵⁸ By emphasizing Berisha's identity, the film draws a contrast with the anonymized and interchangeable collective it has created of the other speakers. Moreover, Berisha has a doubly minoritized presence in the documentary, as a woman and an ethnic Albanian. Statistically, women accounted for just over 10 percent of all witnesses at the ICTY, which corresponds with a broader marginalization and underrepresentation of women's voices and experiences in the international legal system.⁵⁹ Her voice is a departure from the assumed power of the voices that surround her testimony in the documentary, functioning as a counterpoint in two crucial ways: Berisha gives expression to violent experiences that are gendered, and she challenges the obfuscation and neutrality of the men's speech that disguises state and intercommunal violence.

Her testimony draws attention to gendered violence: how women, alongside children and the elderly, were made entirely vulnerable, first separated from the men and subsequently hounded by Serbian state forces.⁶⁰ Glavonić gives space to Berisha's detailed testimony, which is an account of escalating violence, both verbal and physical—from insults, threats, and harassment to the gruesome end, a massacre of around forty women and children in the pizzeria. Early in her testimony, Berisha specifically expresses a fear of violation, which is directly connected to her gender:

I had 3,000 deutsche marks. I was afraid that they would undress me, the Serbian men that were there. So I pulled out the money that I had and gave it to the policeman with the gloves. Fatima [Berisha's sister-in-law] also had some money and started pulling it from her chest. But the policeman with the black gloves didn't wait. He reached for her chest and took the money himself.

The violation does not end with the massacre; it continues all the way to the moment of Berisha's utmost vulnerability and helplessness. After the pizzeria attack, as the bodies are being hauled into the truck with Berisha presumed dead, the soldiers steal two gold necklaces from her; "they thought they were more valuable than a human life," she later recalls. Her entire testimony turns on the contrast between her lack of recourse to help or protection (Berisha and her neighbors even run barefoot out of their own homes) and the armed power—rifles, grenades, and tanks—wielded by the men carrying out

58. This information is provided by the ICTY and encompasses all witnesses from over one hundred trials. *ICTY*, "Witness Statistics," updated June 30, 2015, at www.icty.org/en/about/registry/witnesses/statistics (accessed November 13, 2023).

59. Keina Yoshida, "The Cinematic Jurisprudence of Gender Crimes: The ICTY and Film" (PhD diss., London School of Economics, 2015). Of all of the witnesses at the ICTY, 87 percent were male and 13 percent were female (as of June 30, 2015). The ICTY does not offer statistics on ethnic identities of witnesses, just a breakdown of where they are from. *ICTY*, "Witness Statistics."

60. My use of the term "gendered violence" comes from Katherine M. Franke's work on the international criminal courts and gender: "It is worth noting that it is rare for criminal tribunals to treat gender-based atrocities as anything other than sexual violence against women. Of course, men too are victims of sexual violence, and women are victims of gendered violence that is not sexual." Katherine M. Franke, "Gendered Subjects of Transitional Justice," *Columbia Journal of Gender & Law* 15 (2006): 822.

the attack. It is a depiction of the generalized masculine violence of war, but at the same time it is a specific expression of gendered violence in Berisha's life and in the life of the Suharekë/Suva Reka community. While intercommunal violence operates predominantly according to a masculine logic, there are brief moments in Berisha's testimony that point to the ambiguous and unaddressed positions of Serb women in Suharekë/Suva Reka. These women did not participate directly in the acts of violence but knew to varying degrees about what was happening in their own communities and with their own families. Even though these women have a marginal presence in the film itself, they are nonetheless incorporated into the broader community whose unacknowledged collective guilt the film addresses.

Berisha's words shatter the linguistic camouflage of bureaucratic speak ("a task in the interest of the state") by naming and narrating the brutal acts that she and members of her family experienced. Her testimony is a revelation of truth, showing the terrible reality that those involved in the cover-up seek to avoid naming. Interspersed with her account is the testimony of an armed participant (most likely a local policeman) who narrates the attack from the perspective of someone sent to "secure" the Serbian position around the house where Berisha was staying.⁶¹ Speaking in a digitally altered voice (a protection of the courts), one of the first things he says is that "everything was happening very fast, like in a film." This cinematic acceleration of the action is reflected in subsequent passages of the participant's testimony. He acknowledges the violence only obliquely, with killings taking place in the space between the moments he describes: "While I was going towards that cafe, to get alcohol [to calm down], I passed by an old woman and an old man, they were still alive. When I got back, they were dead." This part of his account resembles a montage, a narrative excision and compression. Later in the same man's testimony, there is a similar partial elision of violence: he describes hearing a gunshot without seeing what took place, only putting together what had happened when he arrives at a café to see his commander holding a gun. Interestingly, during this moment of narration, the visuals are static with some freeze frames lasting close to a minute. We see images of a restaurant interior in total and utter ruin—more destroyed by something violent (we see shattered stone features and burnt boxes) than simply left to fall apart over time. Glavonić allows the viewer time to fully examine the frame, to take in details of the wide shot. This slow pacing and the stasis of the camera are in opposition to the verbal characterization of the man who speaks.

Providing a stark contrast to this vague and ill-defined violence is Berisha's articulation of what was done to her family, by whom, and with what consequences. Unlike the policeman's fragmented testimony, her narrative is characterized by temporal and spatial continuity. The painstaking detail of her testimony is punctuated by specific chronological markers, with references to what was happening at 5 a.m., at noon, and in the early afternoon. This emphasizes the duration of the ordeal, which to her was not like a scene from

61. This man testifies to not taking part in the killings "because I knew those people." He remains close to the scene and essentially corroborates Berisha's testimony but in very different terms.

a film. Glavonić further stresses this aspect by intersecting her testimony with that of the policeman instead of letting it run uninterrupted. The documentary paces her testimony, which is one narrative means by which to communicate the length of the attack on Berisha and her community.

Berisha's testimony also brings to light how Serbian members of her own community helped carry out the attack in her once multiethnic village, thus deepening the personal stakes of the narrative. She talks about a man from her town, a Serb named Zoran who took part in the attack, who had a good command of Albanian and whom she describes as "having grown up on Albanian bread."⁶² This is a brief detail, yet her folkloristic phrasing conveys the long-standing social bonds of a multi-ethnic community, and the depth of the betrayal of these affiliations. Nikola Matevski refers to this moment in Berisha's testimony as an example of "implied emotions" that are ultimately "allusive" yet significant because this kind of information (individual backgrounds, personal relationships) is typically "disregarded for the benefit of establishing facts" in legal testimony.⁶³

This implied emotion pertains to personal but also communal loss. A phantom voice in the documentary, Berisha's testimony is an instance of prosopopoeia, a rhetorical figure in which an absent or dead person speaks.⁶⁴ She speaks over images of a landscape from which her family and neighbors have been erased. Through the film's discontinuous audio-visual arrangement, Glavonić artistically enables a symbolic return of the disappeared voice. Her voice is heard against the backdrop of the landscape of her former life—a landscape no longer hers, since she describes leaving Kosovo for Albania. The very fact that we hear Berisha but do not see her is a constant reminder of violent and enforced disappearance—the disappearance of herself along with her community.

The Sound of Burning as an Auditory Haunting

In its final minutes, *Depth 2* shifts aural and visual registers, creating a coda bracketed off from the documentary's preceding formal and rhythmic qualities. After the testimonies, the film ends with an off-screen sound of burning, accompanied by inserts of two forms of evidence: first, documents from the Serbian government relating to the cover-up and, second, personal objects recovered from the mass grave in Batajnica. The shift in the film's visual mode—from landscapes to the recovered objects—brings into focus those individuals who were killed and who cannot be given a voice, an idea that

62. Berisha herself understands Serbian and she is able to surmise what the soldiers and those who took part in the attack are saying about the Albanian civilians they killed.

63. Nikola Matevski, "Notes on *Depth Two*," *Senses of Cinema*, October 2022, at www.sensesofcinema.com/2022/after-yugoslavia/notes-on-depth-two/ (accessed November 13, 2023).

64. Prosopopoeia is "a rhetorical device by which an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting; the introduction of a pretended speaker." *Oxford English Dictionary online*, *Oxford Oxford English Dictionary online*, "prosopopoeia, n." (Oxford, July 2023) at <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/109028992> (accessed November 13, 2023).

is further reflected in Glavonić's use of the phantom sound of burning, unaccompanied by any corresponding visual referent. The lack of voice gives the film's coda an allusive and symbolic quality, foregrounding sensorial experiences as a conduit of meaning that had been, up to that point, conveyed by verbal narrative.

The film's coda moves toward a portrayal of the victims who had been absent from the film up until this point. In the testimonies of the perpetrators, those who lost their lives are characterized as corpses (*leševi*) or routinely referred to through demonstrative pronouns ("there's no need to photograph that" where "that" indicates the bodies). Berisha's account verbally describes her children and relatives who lost their lives, but it is a heartbreaking expression of their last phrases and screams, rather than a fuller depiction of their lives and histories. At the end of *Depth 2*, these people are put on the screen visually in the form of their personal objects, including clothes, ID documents, drawings, and photographs recovered from the mass grave. Glavonić's camera pans across these objects slowly, initially in extreme close-up: what appear at first as artful abstractions eventually come into focus as torn, bloody, and damaged items of clothing. The objects also register the work of the human hand—particularly poignant are a school notebook and a portrait of a woman's face. At one moment, the camera lingers on one of the ID cards long enough for the name "Berisha" to become legible. These objects speak in a particular way: such belongings are "an integral part of reviving and reshaping the personality of the dead," writes Maja Petrović-Šteger.⁶⁵ It is an ethical choice on Glavonić's part to end the film with this focus on Albanian civilians who, though voiceless, can nonetheless have their personhood and citizenship acknowledged.

The sound of burning that accompanies the images doubles the scene's emotional resonance: though these objects convey the personhood of the dead, the sound of burning brings to mind damage and destruction. Because it is an off-screen sound, it is less important for the viewer to connect the burning to a particular event than it is to engage with its connotations in the context of the difficult subject matter, as well as the political and ethical questions of the documentary. Chion's notion of "rendering" sound is useful here: to render sound is "[t]o (convey, express) the feelings associated with the situation" in a film, which is more "truthful, effective, and fitting" than actual auditory verisimilitude.⁶⁶ In other words, *Depth 2* encourages the viewer to consider not so much the source of this burning but, rather, the effect and sensations "associated with the sound source."⁶⁷ In the coda, Glavonić translates the violence described in the testimonies into a non-verbal form, making out of it an auditory haunting of all that the viewer has heard.

65. While observing the work of excavating bodies, she adds that "finding a piece of clothing among the remains in a mass grave would always cause tumultuous emotions." Maja Petrović-Šteger, "Anatomizacija konflikta i telesnih ostataka kao strategija izmirenja?" *Reč* 76, no. 22 (2008): 134n.

66. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans Claudia Gorbman (New York, 1994), 109.

67. *Ibid.*, 110.

The unremitting sound of burning during the coda evokes all the different instances of burning brought up in the accounts of the perpetrators: the burning of the freezer truck in which the bodies were initially found, the burning of grass around a grave to disguise the work of heavy machinery (which could be picked up by satellite remote sensing), and the burning of the bodies when they were first brought to Batajnica.⁶⁸ The forensic anthropologist who observed the excavation at Batajnica testifies:

In the majority of graves, remains and traces of fire were found in the pits as well as partially burnt clothes and body parts, also suggesting that the bodies were thrown and set on fire in the pits. Remains of rubber tires were found, so it's evident that there was an attempt to burn and then bury them. I assume, when they realized that they lacked time, they started with the backfilling.⁶⁹

Played during the coda, the sound is localized as a memory of what the audience has already heard in the testimonies. The sonic motif of burning thus makes present the non-representable—yet experienced and felt—crimes and acts of violence. Along with the visual inserts of recovered evidence, the sound of burning conveys not only the initial acts of destruction—the killings—but also the subsequent attempts to destroy any evidence of them.

A Political Statement in a Culture of Disavowal

Depth 2 tackles a sequence of difficult subjects: responsibility for war crimes, the possibility of a social and public reckoning with Serbia's recent violent history, and acknowledgment of wrongdoing perpetuated by Serbian state forces against Albanian civilians in Kosovo. Recasting extensive legal evidence of the war crimes committed against these civilians, *Depth 2* comments on the question of participation and guilt and further suggests to the Serbian and wider public that responsibility for war crimes is more extensive than socially acknowledged. Crucially, this commentary is made through formal cinematic techniques in addition to the film's content. Through the anonymity of a sonic arrangement that renders individual testimonies into a collective, *Depth 2* subtly conveys a sense of widespread participation in extensive state-organized criminality. This approach stands in opposition to the "wholesale justice" of the ICTY, which chased only the "important kingpins."⁷⁰ Glavonić's documentary, by contrast, does not seek to use the testimonial archive to lay blame, but rather artistically arranges the evidence in an effort to encourage societal acknowledgement of Serbian involvement, which has yet to meaningfully occur. *Depth 2* is therefore oriented toward repairing the silences and breaks in collective memory. Berisha's testimony, and its central role in the

68. NATO was already looking for evidence of war crimes in Kosovo in the spring and summer of 1999 (which was during its attack on Serbia). Eric Schmitt, "Allies Check Satellite Pictures for Evidence of War Crimes," *New York Times*, May 19, 1999, at [archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/051999kosovo-military.html](https://www.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/051999kosovo-military.html) (accessed November 16, 2023).

69. This is a slight edit for clarity of the English-language subtitles of the film.

70. Franke, "Gendered Subjects," 820.

documentary, plays an important part in the film's attempt to bring about such an acknowledgement. Not only is her account that of a survivor of violence, but it also throws into relief the gendered violence to which she was subject. Further, she names what is not named by the perpetrators: the fact that violence was committed by Serb members of a community against their Albanian neighbors and acquaintances, and that even those who did not take part directly knew and kept secret the killing of civilians.

Depth 2 ends cryptically: as the camera scans the objects of forensic evidence, it zeroes in on a bullet hole on a green t-shirt and zooms in toward it. The hole starts to look like a void, abstracted from its referential aspect, no longer appearing to belong to a garment. Visually, it resembles a portal that the camera lens could potentially move through, suggesting the possibility of a continuation, both of the film itself and of the social and political questions it asks. Through this image, Glavonić suggests that the story continues beyond the film's own ending. This point is borne out by the contemporary political climate in the Balkans. The issue of the missing keeps returning in the talks between Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić and successive Kosovo prime ministers. While Batajnica has been fully excavated, around 1,600 Albanians and Serbs from Kosovo remain missing, and a political stalemate between Serbia and Kosovo is stalling the disclosure of grave locations.⁷¹

As of 2024, there are no public memorials to the victims—neither at Batajnica, the other three mass graves in Serbia, nor in Kosovo. Once the bodies of the victims were excavated, the Batajnica police base became a training site for an anti-terrorist unit. There is, however, a newly built Orthodox church near the training site, which generated some controversy and protest from Kosovo Albanian families.⁷² The church, partially funded through donations and labor from the anti-terrorist unit (as well as residents of the neighborhood), was heavily criticized by human rights groups and leftist journalists in Serbia.⁷³ Officials in Kosovo see the church as an expression of aggressive Serbian nationalism, and an attempt to whitewash the recent violent history of the area, condemning the building of the church as “an act of contempt and lack of respect for Albanian victims.”⁷⁴

What remains are unofficial monuments, like the pizzeria where Berisha and others were attacked. There is now protective glass in front of the ruined restaurant, which “still smells like the bodies.”⁷⁵ A family member placed the

71. See Xhorxhina Bami and Milica Stojanović, “Delay to Kosovo-Serbia Deal Upsets Wartime Missing Persons’ Families,” *Balkan Insight*, July 21, 2022, at balkaninsight.com/2022/07/21/wartime-missing-persons-families-upset-by-delay-to-kosovo-serbia-deal/ (accessed November 16, 2023); Milica Stojanović, “Serbia: Exhuming the Skeletons of the Kosovo War,” *Balkan Insight*, December 21, 2020, at balkaninsight.com/2020/12/21/serbia-exhuming-the-skeletons-of-the-kosovo-war/ (accessed November 16, 2023).

72. *Al Jazeera Balkans*, “Kosovo osuđuje izgradnju crkve u Batajnici,” May 16, 2020, at balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2020/5/16/kosovo-osuđuje-izgradnju-crkve-u-batajnici (accessed November 16, 2023).

73. Tomislav Marković, “Kad crkva nikne na masovnoj grobnici,” *Al Jazeera Balkans*, April 18, 2018, at balkans.aljazeera.net/opinions/2018/4/18/kad-crkva-nikne-na-masovnoj-grobnici (accessed November 16, 2023).

74. *Al Jazeera Balkans*, “Kosovo osuđuje izgradnju crkve u Batajnici.”

75. Glavonić, “Interview with Nikačević Hasci-Jare.”

glass there, because he could not wait for the municipality of Suharekë/Suva Reka to undertake an official act of commemoration.⁷⁶ While *Depth 2* is also a type of unofficial monument, the documentary is crucially a political statement. It is a circuit breaker in a culture of disavowal; it is “ammunition,” as Glavonić says, for social change and a rejection of the stultifying and damaging nationalism of the post-conflict status quo.⁷⁷

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76. Ibid.

77. Glavonić adds that his films are “small steps through the jungle of revisionism.” Glavonić, “Interview with Nikačević Hasci-Jare.”