

# We are family

CURATED BY NATAŠA ILIĆ AND JELENA VESIĆ





*I got all my sisters  
with me.  
We are family .  
Get up everybody and  
sing.*

Sister Sledge sang this cheerful disco pop song in 1979. It was the tipping point at which social optimism, which characterized the time when family and community had still played a central role in society, had already begun to wane.

*Living life is fun and we've just  
begun.  
To get our share of this world's  
delights.  
High, high hopes we have for  
the future.*

*We – no – we  
don't get de-  
pressed.*

Oh, no – what a completely false promise, Sister Sledge!

Oh yes, we will,  
Sister Sledge.



Lyrics released by another group in 1977  
put forward a more realistic scenario.

*There's no future.  
There's no future.  
There's no future for you.*

the Sex Pistols sang in a forlorn cry, an-  
nouncing the outcome we're facing today  
on a mass scale...

*When there's no future  
How can there be sin.  
We're the flowers  
In the dustbin.  
We're the poison  
In your human machine...*

Yes, we are, dear Sex Pistols ... post-hu-  
man, family-less, society-free.  
This is the second decade of the new mil-  
lennium.



**Entwining autobiographical, historical, and fictional narratives, *We Are Family* speaks about generational, personal, and political frictions, about rifts and entanglements unfolding in the dystopian context post-1989. The notion of family appears as an extended signifier. It overlaps with differentiated fields: social, communal, intimate, personal, and political.**



**The relationship between four figures maintain this tension – that of the Guest, the Mother, Love, and the Other.**

***We Are Family* is about our experience of non/motherhood in the broken domains of the art world and communal life. It is about thinking through historical and generational care and non-care, which have led to the present moment of the deregulation of everything.**

***We Are Family* is about the contemporary life of our generation: about the children of former generations of socialist builders and welfare state beneficiaries. It reflects on the specific social and intimate care that once looked to the future, which could see us as the future at a time when the future began to dissipate.**



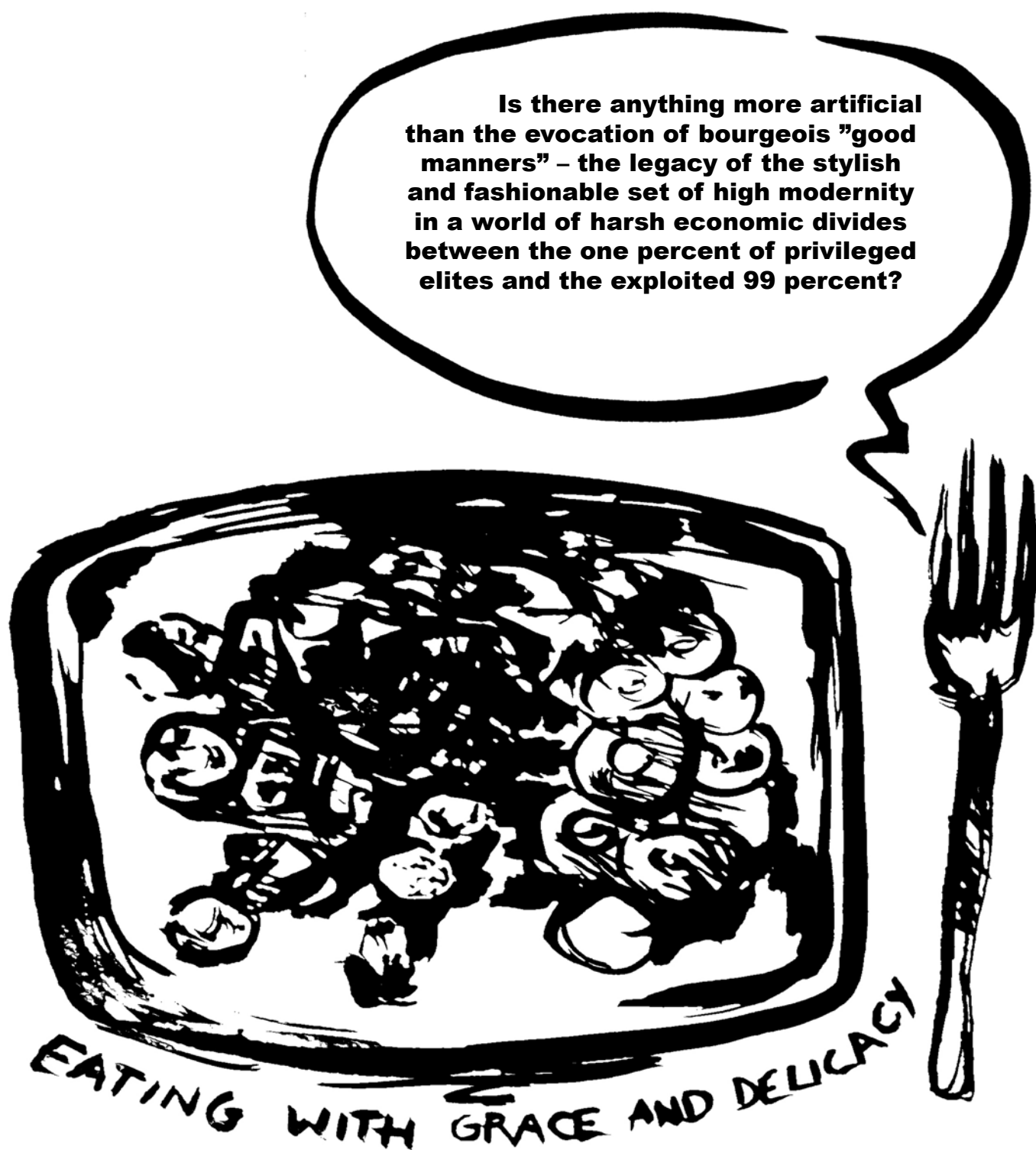
# Ana Hušman Ručak (Lunch)



The lunch – before it became a business lunch or a lunch break – was a central, ritualized event bringing together the so-called traditional nuclear family, comprising the breadwinner father and homemaker mother raising their biological children. *Lunch* was the daily event that promoted family values and good breeding. If preserved in contemporary practice, this form of gathering, with its plurality of family-forms, remains somewhat culturally divided – late lunch in the East, early dinner in the West.

At the beginning of the most recent financial crisis and with the rise of right-wing sentiments in Europe (if the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and tricky transition period of the 1990s were not an avant-garde of all that), Ana Hušman reconstructs the socially traumatic scene of lunch by deploying the artificial, automatized language of books of etiquette – *le bon ton*. In the customs of communal eating and drinking, the guest and their host families demonstrate their finesse and table manners to each other. *Eating with grace and delicacy – means being sensitive to the eyes and ears of our fellow guests [...]*\* – the video underscores this auditory landscape.

Hušman's video shows the labor of the housewife in its full 'immateriality' and familism of 'naturalized' care. Like a magic wand, the animation has things popping up from nowhere. Unspoken instructions for social cues come into full visibility and audibility.



\*Ana Hušman, *Lunch*, 2008 [excerpt from the script].

MILICA TOMIĆ

# Portrait of MM



IS THERE ANYTHING IN THIS WORLD  
THAT YOU WOULD BE PREPARED TO  
GIVE YOUR LIFE FOR?

In 1964, a year after her mother's death, Simone de Beauvoir published an account of the final six weeks of her mother's life in *A Very Easy Death*. What the title's "easy" refers to is not a lack of suffering – most certainly not – but the entrenchment of class privileges operating in death (a great leveler, they say). This also extends to what was already in the 1960s a dwindling luxury of social relations mediated through the notion of bourgeois family with all its neurotic oppressiveness. Here was a classic mother-daughter drama, a generational split, ambivalent feelings, and surgical analytical coolness worthy of a proper everyday tragedy.

*Thanks to my early childhood I had a confidence in myself that my mother did not possess in the least: the road of argument, disputation – my road – was closed to her. On the contrary, she had made up her mind to share the general opinion: the last person who spoke to her was right.*

*[...]*

*So she remained woolly-minded and she went on saying yes to everything and being surprised by nothing. In her last years she did attain some kind of coherence in her ideas, but at the time when her emotional life was at its most tormented she possessed no doctrine, no concepts, no words with which to rationalize her situation. That was the source of her bewildered uneasiness.\**



\* Simone de Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death*, (Pantheon Books, New York, 1965), pp. 31-32 (eBook)

The “*MM*” in Milica Tomić’s video *Portrait of MM* (1999) stands for the expression “my mother” as well as the name of the once popular Belgrade and Yugoslav actress and public persona Marija Milutinović. In her life, *MM* went through different transformations, which mirrored, in radicalized form, the wider ideological transformations of late Yugoslav society. Marija Milutinović became an actress in the late fifties, when she graduated from the *University of Arts in Belgrade* with her performance in *The Bald Soprano* by Eugene Ionesco. Later she discovered spirituality and became intensely religious during the 1990s.

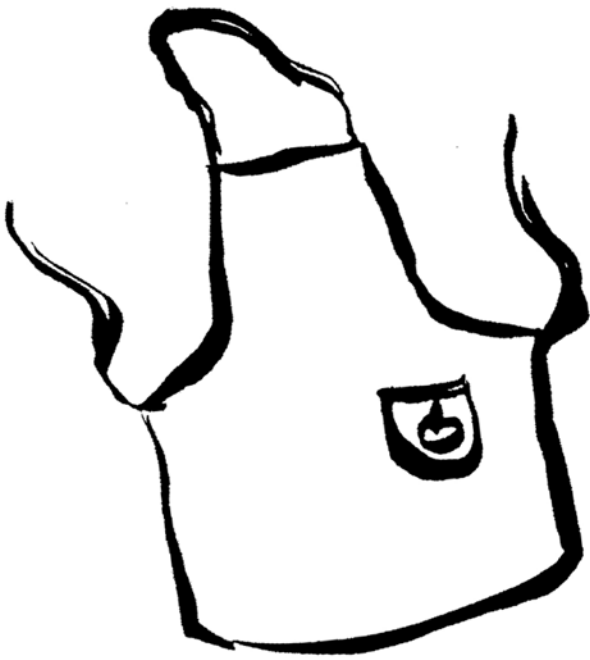
The story begins with an overarching question that, in a way, resonates throughout the entire film: Is there anything you are ready to give your life for? This is the question the mother tenderly addresses to her daughter, as if life were to mean nothing without the principle of full dedication or some kind of “higher reason”.

The film unfolds as Milica Tomić walks between her house and the home of her mother during the period of the NATO bombings of Belgrade in 1999. The artist uses the first person POV camera, symbolically simulating the impossible point of view of the “smart bomb” – a precision-guided satellite missile system used at the time. Throughout the film, we hear the conversations between mother and daughter. Meanwhile, on the way to its “target”, the “camera-bomb” records the pathological normality of everyday life in the streets of Belgrade, detached from the real situation.

Only at the end of the film, in the silence in which the flicker of an eyelash rumbles like a thunderclap, do we see the mother and the daughter meeting face to face and embracing each other.



# factory of found clothes



## Three Mothers and a Chorus



***Given voice,  
space and time,  
motherhood can,  
and should,  
be one of the central means  
through which  
a historical moment  
reckons with itself.\****

\* Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers. An Essay on Love and Cruelty*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018), p. 25 (eBook)

In the current climate of what feminist sociologist Angela McRobbie has described as a “neo-liberal intensification of mothering,”\*\* perfect middle-class mothers with perfect husbands and perfect marriages and perfect careers burst with self-satisfaction, intimidating and excluding everybody who cannot or does not wish to conform to this image. *Three Mothers and a Chorus* tells another story. It cuts through all that is wrong with a post-Soviet Russia that is struggling with the results of a massive redistribution of property and the privatization that followed the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Under the guidance of the IMF and US advisors, this process effected a massive transfer of state assets into private hands: “the largest privatization of state-owned enterprises ever known.”\*\*\* Strange to think of this “democratization” process as having such fatal effects, isn’t it? And what are mothers to do?

The chorus retorts:

*We’ve come here to present you  
with three mothers,  
three martyrs.  
With what can we compare  
the suffering of a mother’s heart,  
torn between her child and her job?  
Perhaps only with the suffering of  
an icebound brook,  
a lamb that’s lost its way,  
a caged songbird.  
How is she to restrain herself  
when she so wants  
to smother her child in love?  
And how can the suffering mother  
not sing her lamentation  
when her heart is rent with fear for her child?  
Or, what’s worse still, with fear of her child?  
Should we pity them, though?  
No, we say, no, no, no!  
They got what they wanted: a child.  
And they answer to society  
and their own conscience  
for the child and its upbringing.\*\*\*\**

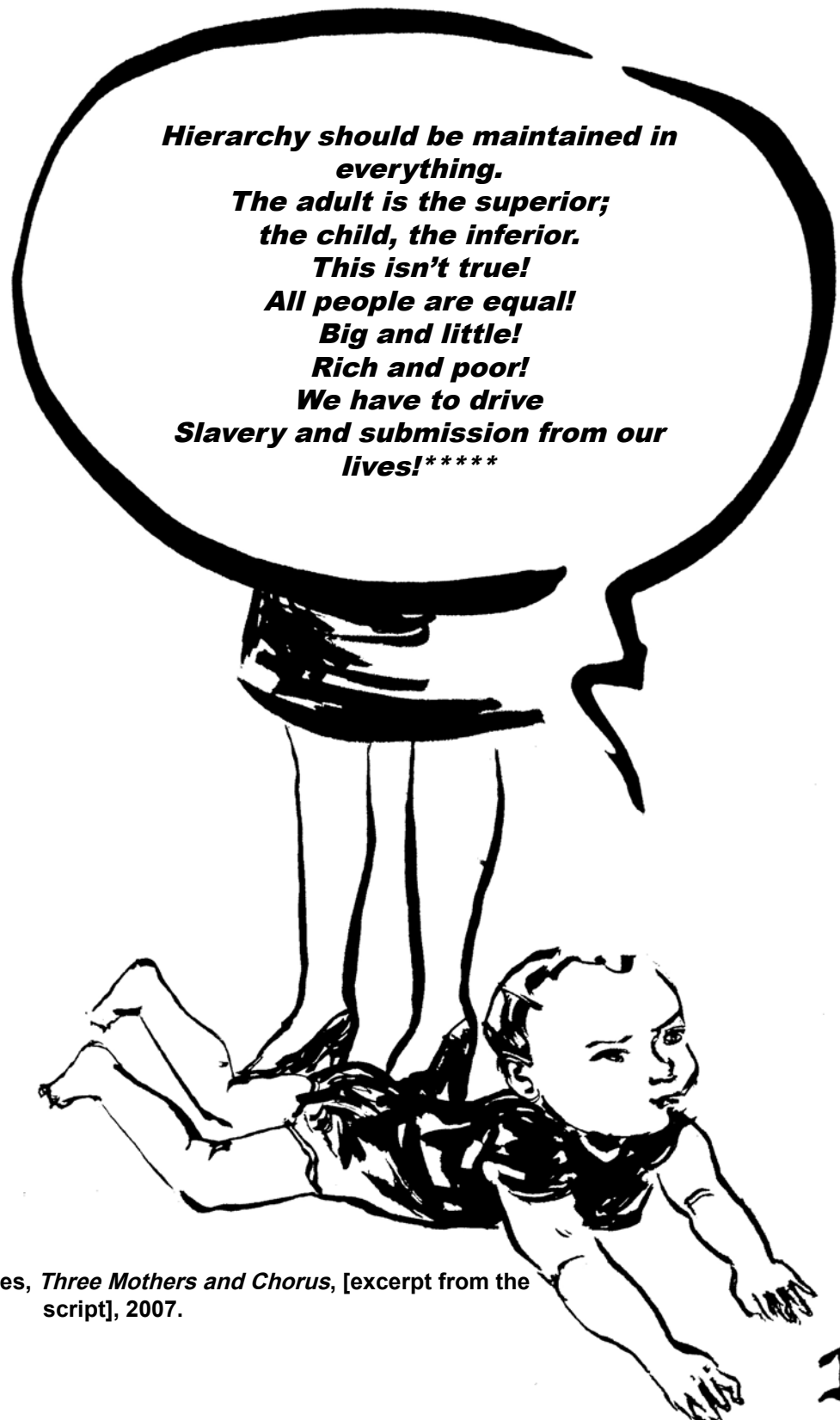


\*\*Angela McRobbie, Notes on the Perfect: Competitive Femininity in Neoliberal Times, Australian Feminist Studies, 2015.

\*\*\* Michael Haynes and Romy Husan, *A Century of State Murder? Death and Policy in Twentieth-Century Russia*, Pluto Press, London, 2003, p. 126

\*\*\*\* Factory of Found Clothes, *Three Mothers and Chorus*, [excerpt from the script], 2007.

***Three Mothers and a Chorus* also re-invents the format of the *Songspiel* developed in the late 1920s by Berthold Brecht alongside Kurt Weill as a form of social critique. It juxtaposes the musical dramaturgy of the opera with the aggressive style of the popular ballad. The aim is to form a concrete articulation of the everyday, fomenting intellectual and cultural action and transformation. The format of the *Songspiel* would later enter the repertoire of *Chto Delat*, a collective of artists to which two members of the *Factory of Found Clothes*, Gluklya & Tsaplya, also belong.**



***Hierarchy should be maintained in  
everything.  
The adult is the superior;  
the child, the inferior.  
This isn't true!  
All people are equal!  
Big and little!  
Rich and poor!  
We have to drive  
Slavery and submission from our  
lives!\*\*\*\*\****

\*\*\*\*\* *Factory of Found Clothes, Three Mothers and Chorus, [excerpt from the script], 2007.*

# ANA DAUČIKOVÁ

## 33 SITUATIONS

In 1935 Andrei Platonov wrote the screenplay *Father-Mother*. At the time he was also working on his (unfinished) novel *Happy Moscow*, in which the protagonists act out a plot against the backdrop of a city constantly being demolished and constructed anew. Envisioning a film that would capture the realities of social transformation, Platonov came up with the story of an orphan boy with many mothers and fathers. The film was to convey the upheavals of human relations of the period as well as the many contradictions that would endure.



**ZHENIA (removing her blue raincoat): Look what we've got—a ready-made son; we can move straight to the era of exploitation.**

**Bezgodov makes a hiccupping sound. Puts Stepan down. Shakes himself.**

**BEZGADOV: Better to begin with construction—heavy, then light, and only then exploitation.**

**STEPAN: Mama! That's enough silly talk! Stop now, or I'll leave you.\***

In the 1980s, soon after graduating from the *Academy of Fine Arts* in Bratislava, Anna Daučíková moved to Moscow. She emigrated for a woman she fell in love with. She stayed in Moscow until the early 1990s, all through the *Perestroika*, but left before what came out of it fully mutated into post-Soviet Russia. She lived as an undercover lesbian, worked as a glassblower, and joined the *Soviet Artists' Union*.

In *33 Situations* Daučíková conveys the experience of having a “secret life” by providing an index of different people's repressed or covert sex stories. She organizes and narrates these individual cases in the form of a neat template, evoking the aesthetics of a repressive state apparatus, of police dossiers or medical files.

The work catalogs hateful neighbors in a communal apartment practicing voodoo against the lesbian couple next door. It inventorizes the nasty neighbors, the neighbor-informers, indifferent officials, zealous bureaucrats, the couples, the police, workers, trips to the countryside, picturesque scenes in the gulag, sickness, families, ubiquitous aggression, moments of tenderness, cockroaches, the sex trade, and sexual deprivation amongst other peculiarities.

If, for Adorno, family was not only the cell and seed of fascist oppression, but also what stood against it, *33 Situations* frames family as that which breeds a love for authority. It suggests that ties to fascism can be shattered only by a radical anti-Oedipal reconfiguration of the family, but also community at large.

\*Andrei Platonov, *Father-Mother*, NLR 53, Sep-Oct 2008, pp. 43-76.

# Slaha Maanoun Dear Animal



**Dear Animal is the story of a group of petty drug dealers who cannot find their stash because the pusher in charge of guarding their inventory has turned into a strange animal – a kind of goat with zebra stripes.**

# Which families are broken, which are made which just coming into being?

***In the couple of years following the 2011 Egyptian revolution, I noticed a rise of interest in animals in the writings of people around me. I started looking and finding more animals, animal news, and analogies appearing in the news, talk shows, opinion pieces, literary texts, and art projects. Possibly an attempt to revise or conversely to re-assert the status-quo and its catastrophic power relations. In this film, I focused on two significant pieces of writing\* from that period in which animals curiously appeared – not as metaphors, symbols, or prosthetic tongues for an endangered political subject, but as indeterminate shifting forms with uncertain beginnings and ends.\*\****



**In Letters to His Parents, in a note from 1939 when Theodor W. Adorno's parents had emigrated from Germany and were waiting for their US visas in Havana, the philosopher wrote at his most personal: "I am a hippo with a tough life. First, there is the thick skin, then the huge masses of flesh, which makes him float under water – and only then comes the substance."\*\*\* Personal anecdotes such as these also crop up in the publication in 1951 when Adorno returned from sunny California to a ravaged Frankfurt. He would die in Switzerland in 1969, shortly after being humiliated by a female protester flashing her breasts to counter his conservative position on students protests. But that is another story (or maybe not)...**

**Throughout his life, Adorno tried to understand authority. He maintained that family is not just its malicious outpost but also a stronghold able to withstand fascism, which in turn attacks it violently. Adorno was also known to love zoos, and, in his family, all members were assigned different animals.**

***My dears: this is but a brief note to welcome you to the new world, where you are now no longer all too far away from us.***

***I would only like to give you two pieces of advice today:***

- 1.) do not eat any uncooked pork, as the risk of trichinosis is very high throughout America,***
- 2.) take great care from the start to protect yourselves against the sun, which must be considerable now in Cuba,***
- 3.) be very careful in your dealings with other emigrants.***

***12 May 1939\*\*\*\****

\* The film by Maha Maamoun uses a story by Haitham El-Wardany about a drug dealer who turned into an animal as well as excerpts from letters written by Azza Shaaban, a woman filmmaker involved in the Egyptian revolution now active in India.

\*\* Maha Maamoun in an interview: <https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/171> (retrieved 20/10/2018).

\*\*\* Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to His Parents: 1939-1951*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

\*\*\*\* Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to His Parents: 1939-1951*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 20 (eBook).

**Some of Adorno's greetings addressed to his mother:**

***Heartiest kisses from your now audibly whinnying horses  
Hottilein and Rossilein  
My faithful, dear old Wondrous Hippo Cow,  
My dear faithful old Wondrous Hippo Cow animal,  
I kiss you upon your rosy hippo snout, Your old Archibald  
My Giant Hippo Cow,  
My dears faithful old Wondrous Hippo Cow Marinumba,  
Marinumba, my Hippo Cow-Sow,  
Marinumba my animal,  
Marinumba  
my dearest Hippo Cow animal,  
Mumma my animal,  
Heartiest kisses  
from your old child  
Teddie \*\*\*\*\****

\*\*\*\*\* Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to His Parents: 1939-1951*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 20 (eBook).



# Rachel O'Reilly

## Film NOTE (For the Gas Imaginary)

*When we last spoke,  
I told you I was torq-ing  
this difference between  
mine and manpower.*

*The efforts  
Because of how  
when father dies  
A certain kind of labour relation  
goes with him.  
It's conceptual,  
as much as anything,  
because the labour had changed already  
(and) never mine in the first.  
But we long for the material, don't we?  
Some fine difference*

*between **DAD** reckoning  
and **DEAD** reckoning*

*if only at the level of method.\**

\*Rachel O'Reilly, *Film Note*, 2013, [excerpt from the script].

**Film Note** is Rachel O'Reilly's first output from her ongoing artistic research project *The Gas Imaginary* (2014), which explores forms and norms of unconventional extraction in the area of Gladstone harbor. She started this research while travelling to Australia to visit her father during the final stages of his terminal illness. In the metaphorical but also actual sense, while her father was still alive, the eco- and human sphere were still living. Now everything has been subject to merciless capitalist extraction, till the last breath and – if possible – beyond.

O'Reilly's *Film Note* plots the story around changes in labor, living conditions, and social reproduction from the times of settler colonialism to contemporary semicapitalism. In the historical narrative according to which industrialization in Europe initially served as a default model, the link between modernity, rationalism, and the West appeared as more than contingent. The idea of human progress followed the phases of Darwinist biological theory: from savagery through barbarism to civilization. The colonizers therefore inherited no responsibility, but were surrounded by a noisy and excessive nature – no man's land, as they would call it.

The task of the family during the industrial epoch (famously discussed in Engels' *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, 1877) was to protect against the outside world and serve as a shelter from the competition of dehumanizing forces of modern society. The family as a repository for warmth and tenderness (embodied by the Mother) stood in opposition to the competitive and aggressive world of commerce (embodied by the Father). However, with the death of the Father – as O'Reilly's *Film Note* explains – the compensatory and protective role of the family disappears. For this new change, O'Reilly uses the metaphor of fracking to mark the fall of modern social verticality and its replacement with a matrix of horizontal pipes – the invisible networks of power.

**Gas**

*images are made to ride on Networks,  
rather than to settle here.*

*Each precariatizes a clearer social relation -  
showing some aspect of its prior exchange.*

*Its the genre that communicates  
even while the social license*

*of Corporate Citizenship  
breaks - the civil contract.*

**Is it at all possible to search for the new social forms  
that will lead toward what Angela Davis calls “planetary  
belonging”?**

# VUKICA DILAS Home Movies

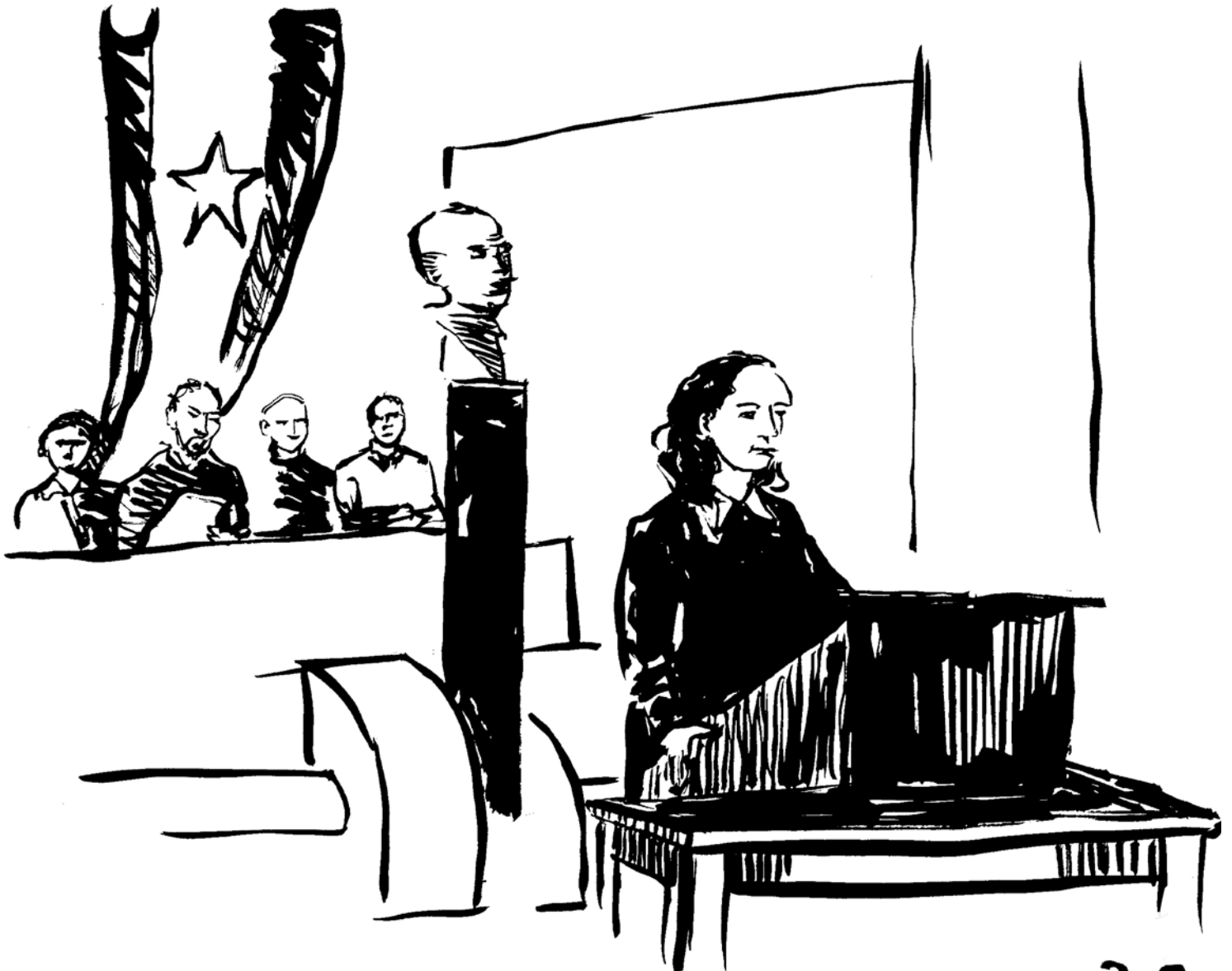
Rovinj 1989 Mitra



The mother of Vukica Đilas, Mitra Mitrović, was a *drugarica* (a female comrade) – the figure within the partisan resistance whom in the 1940s, the fascist press portrayed as a woman who became a monster. Mitra Mitrović was a famous communist-feminist, educator-propagandist, and one of the leading figures of the *Women's Anti-Fascist Front of Yugoslavia (AFŽ)*, an organization established during WWII. In the postwar Yugoslav context, the issue of women's liberation was considered to be 'solved.' Due to universal emancipation, the *AFŽ* dissolved in an act of self-abolition in 1953, claiming that its "historical task" had been realized and that specific "women's issues" would be delegated to the state, party, and society as a whole.

Mitra Mitrović and her other female comrades were not "monstrous enough" since they put their partisanship over their feminism.\* They gave up their autonomy for a wider revolutionary movement, with the consequence that said autonomy (of the feminist struggle) was revoked by that same movement.

Vukica's father was Milovan Đilas – the famous revolutionary political prisoner, a commander of the partisan resistance, and a close ally to Tito. He became a high ranking politician in the postwar years, active on the international political scene. After 1948, when Yugoslavia was expelled from Cominform, Đilas became a hard-core anti Stalinist and harsh critic of the new bureaucratic class. As a writer of the political bestseller *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*, published in Great Britain in 1957, he also would become the greatest political dissident of socialist Yugoslavia – "a traitor to the party". His surname resonated as a warning throughout almost the entire life of his daughter.



\**AFŽ* declared itself to be a communist and not an exclusively feminist organization.

Although the entire political history of the 20th century left can be narrated through the life stories this exemplary parental couple, Vukica Đilas strips her *Home Movies* of all personal and political baggage pertaining to her revolutionary family. Yet if one searches for such details, one can observe, for instance, a single framed photograph of Milovan Đilas in the interior of the artist's home, the apartment of her mother in the dense city center of Belgrade.

Mitra Mitrović "naturally" appears more often in the film by simply inhabiting the cinematic frame, but she is just the nameless figure of a mother shown as an older woman, neatly and decently dressed, mostly sitting and knitting or looking at the distant horizon.

Vukica Đilas lived in the same apartment with her partner Branko Vučićević, a critic and filmmaker who closely collaborated with the authors of the *Black Wave* of Yugoslav film, such as Dušan Makavejev, Želimir Žilnik, Bata Čengić, Karpo Godina, Slobodan Šijan, Lazar Stojanović, and Tom Gotovac. *Home Movies* presents the "scenes from the life of culture shock laborers" – as Vučićević would playfully name the labor of filmmakers whose works are designated as *Black*. These scenes are compiled from their joint screenings of film projections at Belgrade Cinématèque; their visits to the Belgrade film festival FEST; footage from films such as *The Role of My Family in World Revolution* (1971) by Bata Čengić; as well as the 1971 film by Karpo Godina *I Miss Sonja Henie*, which authorities in Yugoslavia banned for many years.

*Home Movies* compiles more than twenty years of passionately recorded "pictures from life" captured on super 8. Vukica Đilas worked on the project almost invisibly and anonymously, since nobody knew about the film before it came out a decade after her premature death from lung cancer in 2001. This cinematic production was a "monumental surprise", especially within the community of her friends of active filmmakers. The film was brought to the public thanks to efforts on the part of Đilas' former husband Branko Vučićević and her friend, notable director Slobodan Šijan, who mediated the digital release of the film accompanied by a musical score by the group LP duo. *Home Movies* is the only film Vukica Đilas ever made: a life-long film, or rather, a film as long as life, edited in camera frame by frame.



A self-portrait of Vukica Đilas – a female nude surrounded by the décor of Warhol's painting *Flowers*. In another frame she sits in place of the anonymous model playing chess with Duchamp (*Duchamp Playing Chess with a Nude*). Her library. A lot of reading. Writing. A lot of nudes and semi-nudes. Reoccurring scenes with Branko Vučićević reading or writing. Friends from their community of filmmakers. Conversations, drinks, cigarettes, more films. TV programs – *Tarzan*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Snow White*, *Donald Duck*. Scenes at the zoo. Books, shelves, tables, films, walls. A lot of white walls. Several exhibitions. Pictures from openings for experimental art shows, performances, and new media. Vukica Đilas inflates a red balloon. Fragments of the body – the skin, a nipple, moles, and the curve of a breast. *Test gambit No 6*. Her mother knitting. DADA. The end. The heroine of a late night TV musical restlessly dancing.

Me – the end.

The image of the *Ugly Duckling* crying.

Melodramatic film scenes of lovers separating. A white, heterosexual couple.

That's all, folks!



***We Are Family*, curated by Nataša Ilić and Jelena Vesić**

**Artists: Ana Hušman: *Ručak (Lunch)*, 2008; Milica Tomić: *Portrait of MM*, 1999; Factory of Found Clothes: *Three Mothers and a Chorus*, 2007; Anna Daučíková: *33 Situations (Excerpt)*, 2015, Maha Maamoun: *Dear Animal*, 2016; Rachel O'Reilly: *Film Note (for The Gas Imaginary)*, 2014; Vukica Đilas: *Home Movies*, 1970–199?.**



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