

dječak (boy)

Sonja Zelić

VHS tapes and a box of tailoring fabric offcuts and ephemera are the starting points for a video portrait of a father born in a country that no longer exists. Borders disassembled and reassembled — fragments of video torn from their context reflect a journey of displacement and survival through war.

the threshold of a world no one knew existed

'By the spring of 1943 there were 12 million foreign workers in Germany' — my father was one of them — a conscripted worker in Germany's armaments factories. 'They amounted to 40 percent of the nation's workforce, and in some arms factories 90 percent of the workers were non-German.'

Charles Whiting, *The Home Front: Germany World War II*, 1982

My father was born in Yugoslavia, experiencing one war at its axis and the next at a safe distance. At the age of 16, at the start of the Second World War, he was conscripted to work in Germany with thousands of others.

a feather and a hammer fall and hit the moon's surface at the same time

A few years after the war ended, during the period of repatriation by the allies, he was sent to the the UK to work, eventually finding work as a tailor for a men's outfitters in Wales, having started his apprenticeship as a boy in Yugoslavia.

it speaks five official languages, and prays to an eastern orthodox, catholic and muslim god — this is no imaginary land this is Yugoslavia

His experiences continue to affect my life as an ever-present echo reflected now in images of so called 'economic' migrants and those fleeing war in the news and media today. The 'echo' was there way before I interviewed him one Christmas and got to know him as more than just 'my dad'. Here was a person who had survived times of great danger, through ingenuity, resourcefulness and luck, and through the kindness of others, but who was also traumatised by what he had witnessed and experienced. He never talked about any of this until that Christmas.

I have never seen a man so scared

By the time he came to the UK he knew about borders — about crossing them, or not crossing them.

when you're outside in one of those spacesuits you're really in space, there are no boundaries to what you're seeing

A pile of VHS tapes of programmes my dad recorded from the TV, (wildlife, westerns, the Apollo and Discovery space missions, documentaries about the Second World War, coverage of the 1990s war in Yugoslavia...), holiday/home videos, an audio interview with him, other ephemera/objects, and film/video created in the course of my art practice — is the material I am working with.

5 miles per second — that's the speed of these films and tapes as they free fall weightless around the earth

In dis-assembling, juxtaposing and reassembling this disparate source material, releasing it from it's context to act in a free-floating state I hope to find a space where borders intersect — where words, images and sound can collide and make new meanings.

you gradually realise that you're weightless and everything is floating, the fluid starts shifting into your head and your head feels like it's filling up with blood and you just have to get used to it

TV was a window to the outside world in our house. As a child, I watched coverage the Apollo space missions with my Dad in mutual wonder and excitement, it was where we connected.

There is so much I didn't ask, but I've been finding his young thoughts in the spaces between the images and words and sounds I've been working with.

This piece is an opportunity to connect with him again.

The Natural World

It is also about being more conscious of, and valuing my own natural thinking processes — where thoughts spark off at tangents and multiply, which I hope will be reflected in the creative structure of the work.

In the comments section at the end of an online piece on foreign workers in wartime Berlin, there's a question, or rather accusation in relation to migration that familiarly disregards the effects of war and poverty:

- At war's end, what happened to all of the foreign labourers who were in Germany? How were they separated from Germans? How were they returned to their respective countries and how were they treated upon their return. But most importantly, how many of these labourers were truly forced to go to Germany to work and how many voluntarily went to make money? Can you suggest any books or studies that would answer these questions?

I hope this film in some way will help to address this question.

Here frozen in time is a glimpse of what the Earth was like long before the steam engine or the automobile, before humans began to burn fossil fuels. The cores from Antarctica are a vital link between the past and the present.