

Please Hold the Line

a film by Pavel Cuzuic

Press text / Long

Connections

The situation is as ordinary as it is annoying: instead of talking to the telecom provider one is stuck with an endless repetition of „Please hold the line“. But who would have thought that this unnerving phrase can lead to unexpected perspectives?

In his documentary „Please Hold the Line“, director Pavel Cuzuic follows six cable technicians of phone, TV and internet providers through Bulgaria, Moldavia, Romania and the Ukraine. He accompanies them from rigid server rooms to the tangled piles of cables in the backyard, and into the homes of the clients – where the age of information collides with post-soviet realities.

The clients stem from different spheres of life: an orthodox priest, a collector, unemployed people, a woman from Quebec in the Ukraine, an Ethiopian in Bulgaria, and also pensioners, - including lovely elderly ladies in purple coloured rooms, who entertain their visitors with bloodcurdling tales. Cuzuic's gently observing but never intrusive camera work gives the protagonists room to express themselves; they thank him with intimate insights into their lives and ideas.

No matter what or who they are, rich or poor, educated or humble, divorced from this age or just eccentric: when it comes to their presence and vulnerability, they are all the same. This is equally true for their need of connection – both in a human as well as a technical sense.

While the latter is the core task of the portrayed network technicians, in reality they do much more: they are advisers, listeners, companions, interlocutors asking the right questions, psychologists and rapporteurs. Philosophers even, with elaborate visions about progress, humanity and life itself.

Pavel Cuzuic was responsible for conception, production as well as direction, sound and camera. While his filming is strictly documentary, his cutting, however, provides a fictional frame. For „Please Hold the Line“ this means that the camera remains very discrete, relying on few, fixed settings, to ensure that the protagonists are as undisturbed and consequently as authentic as possible. At the same time, a lot of attention is paid to the second and third level of the framing and their influence on the atmosphere of the documentary.

The editing added another layer to the narrative: periodically interrupted by the recorded message of a Romanian telecom provider - „Așteptați răspunsul operatorului“ („Wait for the response of the operator“), followed by a few bars of Mozart's Magic Flute - , the movie loosely portrays the typical working day of a network technician in the field. The new media are not just the subject of work, again and again they also become protagonists themselves, e.g. as TV propaganda, film in film, as end credits in the end credits, and also as radio reports about real crimes that the protagonists refer to.

With his latest film, Pavel Cuzuic has created a contemporary and simultaneously timeless document. His lucid, aesthetic images reveal the interfaces between modernity and tradition, always putting the individual at the centre, with its confusion and technical inability, as well as its hopes, desires, ideas and personal realities. And above all with its search for answers in the big wait loop called life.

Georg Thiel

Press text / Short

„Please hold the line!... Please hold the line!...“ With a Romanian holding pattern as Leitmotif director Pavel Cuzuic follows six cable technicians of phone, TV and internet providers through Bulgaria, Moldavia, Romania and the Ukraine. He accompanies them from rigid server rooms to the tangled piles of cables in the backyard, and into the homes of the clients – where the age of information collides with post-soviet realities.

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