

# I FORCED RITUALS – APPROACHING BUREAUCRACY

***„Humans being the social creatures that they are, birth and death are never mere biological events. {...} Death is even more complicated because those same social relationships that one has acquired in life have to be gradually severed, rearranged. {...} but it is precisely paperwork, rather than any other form of ritual, that is socially efficacious in this way, that actually effects the change. {...} Without those forms, neither my mother, nor any of the other people cremated at this establishment, would be legally – hence socially – dead“ (Graeber 2015: 50)***

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Jelena, a lady in her 50s who lives in a grey and dusty, still standing depiction of brutalist Belgrade, finds herself stuck in despair. The movie „Requiem for Mrs J“ starts its narration on a Monday, where it becomes clear that Jelena, widowed precisely one year ago, has lost her will to live and starts her tangled journey of trying to commit suicide. A mother of two more or less grown girls, she seeks to prepare everything as smooth as possible. She lets her name engraved next to her husband's on the tombstone and deciding to spare her children the ugly sight of her head disfigured by a bullet, she tries to get the medication necessary to bring her life to an end. By Friday, she decides, everything has to be done and thereon she takes off to an endless row of waiting rooms. In order to get the medication, she is being sent to her insurance institution to re-validate her health card. There, her record of years of service is improper, which she is to validate in the next administration, so the story goes on with her in the end facing such a vast bureaucratic labyrinth that in the end makes it impossible for her to do one of the most basic things in life – to end it. Certainly, director Bojan Vuletić narrates his side-critique to a rusty post-communist Serbia with a twinkle in the eye. But the joke is