

NaTragu

The title is difficult to translate, meaning ‘to return’, ‘to chase’ and ‘to search’. There was a very real reason for Banovic to revisit Serbia: she had come across a newspaper article about lakes that had turned red for no clear reason. Banovic was eager to film them, but by the time she arrived, the waters were no longer red. The film opens with the text of the article; by showing a painting of Christ on the cross, focusing on his stigmata, a connection with suffering is made. Although not mentioned in the film, the newspaper report heralds from 1992, which once more irrevocably evokes an association with the war that had commenced not long before. Is the country’s suffering represented by its blood-red lakes? In her search Banovic does not, however, concentrate solely on concrete facts and incidents. She recounts how she regularly returns to Serbia in the hope of finding something without actually knowing what it is. Na Tragu seems to be more concerned with the search for an ideal site, a specific place, rather than a lost identity.

The film, divided into episodes, begins in a park and leads, via a visit to a women’s cloister, to the orchard of a monastery. As a place, a cloister could be considered a ‘heterotopia’, a term used by the French theoretician Michel Foucault. He describes heterotopias as “(...) real places (...) which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”ⁱ One of the principles of heterotopias mentioned by Foucault is that they – as is also the case with cloisters – are seldom open to the public or only if the individual has undergone specific rites and purifications.ⁱⁱ With this, Banovic refers to the moment when she talks to a nun about wearing a headscarf, and when she asks a young monk about his calling. The cloister could, moreover, be seen as a ‘heterotopia of compensation’, as Foucault calls it. The function of such a place is to create a perfect, well-running, actual space that compensates the chaos of our world. Gardens are also included under Foucault’s notion of heterotopias. He writes: “The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginning of antiquity (...)”

The last part of *Na Tragu* takes place in the garden of the monastery. By referring to the Paradise of Adam and Eve, Banovic does not depict the garden only as a heterotopia, but as a utopia, a typology of Heavenly Paradise. The reference to Paradise is unmistakable: an old white-bearded gentleman offers her apples. The scene with the apples can also be read as a gesture of purification, a gesture of God’s forgiveness of human sin. The utopia Banovic seems to be in quest of is unquestionably a place without guilt. However, just as she overturns the sublimity of the ‘trance’ of the rituals in *Droomjagers*, Banovic also reveals that the utopia in *Na Tragu* is flawed. Both the nuns and monks talk of sin, laws and commandments. In the Garden of Eden – to recall the here and now and, most probably, sin too – coil endless lengths of sinuous black. Utopia is beyond reach. And Banovic knows it.

Hilde de Bruijn
Curator Smart Project Space Amsterdam

Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, in: Documenta X – the book: politics poetics, Ostfildern 1997, p. 265. Original text in: Diacritics 16-1, Spring 1986.

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