

A Drive On Memory Lane.

Selma Doborac's film *It was a day just like any other in spring or summer*.

„He who strives to come near his own buried past has to act like a man who is digging“, Walter Benjamin writes in “Excavation and Memory”. According to Benjamin, one ought not to shy away from returning time and again to the same issue, since the layers one has to pierce through in order to get to the site of find are just as important as the site itself.

In Selma Doborac's short film *It was a day just like any other in spring or summer*. we are driving along a route that is fraught with memories of a crucial event that occurred during the war in Bosnia in 1992. The experimental road movie revolves around a single day evoked by three narratives told entirely through captions: the story of the child, who, in the bustle following a bomb attack, is picked up, quite haphazardly, by the father; that of the mother, who was in a different place at the time; and, finally, that of the grandfather.

Memory as a revisionary process cognizant of the layers that have accreted around the past event: while it is in the present that Doborac travels along the route, the text titles leading us back into the past evince a profoundly sceptical attitude towards remembrance – there is just too much that has accrued and hardened within memory without being susceptible of verification.

If there is always something ineluctably deceptive about memory, which is shaped by so many interior and exterior factors, then here, even though the visual data we receive do not verify or confirm the remembered events, memory is at least placed in a concrete geographical setting. Now through the windshield, now through the side window we see a landscape that, in the tradition of the works of Gerhard Benedikt Friedl, enters into relation with a text full of surmises.

As early as the first episode we are told that the first-person narrator would “surely [be] incapable of ever finding the aforementioned route and the surrounding sites again”, a statement that the film to a certain extent sets out to overwrite again.

Today, the small country lanes are lined with family homes, and the remarkable number of houses that, maybe owing to financial straits, have got stuck at the skeleton stage gives evidence of a region undergoing change. To the distracted gaze out of the car window the traces of war manifest themselves only indirectly, except perhaps for an image briefly glimpsed in passing. At one point the text makes mention of firearms being transported in passing cars, and it is precisely at this point that we can clearly make out the bullet holes pock-marking the facade of a building.

This dispersive relation between image and text, with each of the two remaining purposely imprecise, informs the whole film. The middle part is devoted to the shorter narrative of the mother. Apparently she was pulled into a car by physical force and carried off but then we are told that while to her the ride had seemed to go on “forever” the distance covered was actually rather short.

On the visual level, this episode finds striking expression in the traffic roundabout, which may be read as a pun on memory's tendency to go in circles or, alternatively, as standing for the patterns of repetition resulting from an unresolved shock.

By the same token, the grandfather's turbulent story of how a bomb explosion had prevented him from following his usual routine of bringing home the lunch does not find a resolution either, as the camera wends its way through the bustle of small town life, past shopping streets, parks, parking lots, pedestrians on sidewalks, and, again, houses sprayed with bullet holes. In the end, we are left with contradictory views about what happened to the food.

Selma Doborac's work traverses the layers of memory without ever arriving at the site of find, the starting point: what she rather aims for is an act of making-present predicated on memory as a subjective medium that tracks the past as if it were following a trace – on the road of uncertainties.

(Dominik Kamalzadeh, translation from German by Thomas Brooks)