

Sandra Vitaljić

Infertile Grounds

Neplodna tla

The *Infertile Grounds* of Sandra Vitaljić or how to re-read *Et in Arcadia ego*

Svetlana Slapšak

There are some interpretative writings that we consider to be classic, for they draw to a close certain chapters of meaning, at least for a few generations. This is certainly the case with the text of Erwin Panofsky about the motif of death in Arcadia.¹ In the chapter about the motif *Et in Arcadia ego* (*I too lived in Arcady*), on the basis of analyses of pictures of Guercino and Nicolas Poussin and of textual reminiscences on Virgil's Eclogues, he concluded that the "I" is death itself, whose scythe is at work even in an ideal, Utopian Arcadia, and that Poussin's lonely grave of someone from Arcadia who had died represents a mistaken inscription of the meaning. The anonymous grave, the mortal remains found accidentally, a sign: the European melancholic imaginary of mortality and ephemerality was to be wrapped and to develop around the uncertainty of the identity of the victim of death. Erwin Panofsky went to America and developed his theory and his research there, fleeing, as a likely casualty, from the most egregious and most massive European slaughter of civilians in hostilities to date. His conclusion does not need to be connected in any way with his personal experience, but it certainly generates a traumatic question of his time and, in a great measure, of the era of generations that came after, the question of the right to memory. Poussin's error, the mistaken inscription, passes more easily over the identity of the dead than Guercino's warning of the sempiternity of death, of a death, what is more, that is deprived of funeral rites, is perhaps the consequence of crime (the abandoned and found human skull).

I proposed for myself a second reading of Panofsky after viewing the Sandra Vitaljić series of photographs *Infertile Grounds*. Some of them, I had seen before, in Sarajevo, some of them in publications, and finally on the Internet. Panofsky, as Sandra Vitaljić's photographs revealed to me, had brought into his interpretation of the pictures the element of responsibility (of memory), which gave sense to the plaintive European tussling with mortality. Guercino emphasised the responsibility of memory both verbally and visually (the skull and the said inscription in Latin): this accumulation to a great extent corresponds with the total absence of signs in the photographs of Sandra Vitaljić and in the documentary text that accompanies the photographs. The writings accompanying the photographs openly invoke a positively-connoted concept of knowledge, which started with the Renaissance, went on with the Enlightenment, and is vanishing before our eyes. Without abhorrence Sandra Vitaljić rejects the arbitrariness of "one's own poetics", the aesthetic cave or aesthetic desert, as you will, and invokes only documented, historical memory as the only human response to a perfect alliance of censorial and politically committed indifference of nature. The indifference of nature is a semantic field in which discursive frauds are invented, such as that claiming war is natural; the indifference of

¹ Panofsky, Erwin (1983). *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Chicago.



SISAK

Tijekom 1991. i 1992. godine u Sisku je ubijen velik broj civila srpske nacionalnosti. Broj građana koji su bili mučeni i/ili likvidirani kreće se, prema različitim izvorima, od stotinu do čak 600. Sišćani srpske nacionalnosti odvođeni su, zlostavljani i mučeni na lokacijama na kojima su bile smještene jedinice tadašnjih antiterorističkih grupa: "Barutana" u Capragu, lječilištu Jodno i omladinskom brigadirskom naselju ORA u Galdovu. Tamo su ispitivani, mučeni i likvidirani, nakon čega su tijela bacana u Savu. U nekim slučajevima nestajale su cijele obitelji.

U srpnju 2007. godine Državno odvjetništvo odbacilo je kaznenu prijavu Zajednice Srba u Republici Hrvatskoj protiv Vlade demokratskog jedinstva Republike Hrvatske zbog zločina u Sisku.

U lipnju 2011. uhapšeni su bivši sisačko-moslavački župan Đuro Brodarac te ratni zapovjednik specijalne jedinice MUP-a u Sisku Vlado Milanković zbog zapovjedne odgovornosti za ratne zločine nad srpskim civilima 1991. i 1992. godine u Sisku. Drago Bošnjak uhapšen je pod optužbom za neposredno izvršenje zločina.

During 1991 and 1992, a number of Sisak's citizens of Serbian origin, although not involved in the rebellion, fell under suspicion and were taken away by groups of Croatian defenders. They were assaulted and tortured at various locations where Croatian anti-terror units were placed. Detainees were executed and their bodies were thrown into the Sava River. In some cases, whole families disappeared. The number of citizens who were tortured and/or liquidated ranges, according to various sources, from one hundred up to six hundred. Until recently no one was prosecuted for those crimes. In July, 2007 The State Attorney's Office rejected the charges for the crimes in Sisak brought by the Community of Serbs in Croatia against the Government of National Unity. In June 2011 three persons were arrested in Sisak under accuse of organizing and ordering questioning, torture and liquidations of Serbian civilians in Sisak.

SANDRA VITALJIĆ

Sandra Vitaljić rođena je u Puli 1972. godine. Magistrirala je fotografiju na Akademiji za film i TV (FAMU) u Pragu, a na istom fakultetu doktorirala je iz područja povijesti i teorije fotografije 2010. godine. Zaposlena je kao izvanredna profesorica na Odsjeku snimanja Akademije dramske umjetnosti u Zagrebu. Dobitnica je stipendije ArtsLink (1997.) u Ansel Adams Center for Photography, San Francisco, CA i Fulbright (2006-7.) u Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY.

Sandra Vitaljic was born in Pula, Croatia in 1972. She took her master's degree in Photography and PhD in history and theory of photography at the Academy of Performing Arts, Film and TV (FAMU) in Prague, Czech Republic. She is employed as associate professor at the Cinematography Department of the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb, Croatia. She was awarded the following scholarships:

in 1997, ArtsLink at The Ansel Adams Center for Photography, San Francisco, CA

in 2006-2007, a Fulbright at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY.

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