

PRESS REVIEW #3 BONANZA

ZONE 09

Holoceen 3: Bonanza is a film from the Antwerpian artist collective Berlin (Bart Baele, Caroline Rochlitz and Yves Degryse) which begins as an innocent documentary and stealthily unfolds into a social thriller. Following *Jerusalem* and *Iqaluit*, *Bonanza* is the third part of the *Holoceen* cycle; a series of part-film, part-theatre portraits focussing on unconventional present-day (holocene is *our* geological era) communities. The abandoned mining town Bonanza, situated in the Rocky Mountains, is officially the smallest town in the state of Colorado. It's seven inhabitants are nestled in five houses. In the glory days of the gold rush, the town numbered 12 000 inhabitants, along with thirteen brothels and 'not one church'.

We see images of the harsh, untouched landscape accompanied by innocent birdsong. Five adjacent screens slowly zoom in on the five houses of Bonanza. Although they number only seven, the inhabitants seem to live fairly isolated from each other. They are full of praise for the peacefulness, the freedom and the majesty of the surrounding nature. For one resident, Bonanza is 'the total freedom do what he wants'. For another it is the absence of deadlines and timetables. 'From time to time we call someone to check that the world hasn't been destroyed', jokes a third.

And yet there is a snake hiding in the grass. 'Don't believe anything you hear and only half of what you see', warns an inhabitant with a bitter grin. The crumbling of the paradise-like illusion starts with a conflict in the municipality council. Dispute around the election of the mayor gets tongues wagging. The subtle editing and intelligent cinematography reveal bit by bit the true nature of the beasts in Bonanza. 'The smaller the city, the greater the discord' it seems to suggest. The seven expose themselves more and more as egoists and opportunists, driven by jealousy and petty feuds. The tensions escalate to conflicts which have their fair share of extortion, threats and accusations.

The strength of *Bonanza* lies in the crawling pace with which the paradise of freedom is unmasked as a suffocating hell, which even the Catholic Flemish villages of old cannot touch. The separate screens portray the impossibility of the seven inhabitants to live together. So near each other and nevertheless in their own box, in their own mental pattern. Berlin understands perfectly well why this film plays in the theatre. The theatrical context not only creates the rest and the time which is necessary for the development of the dramatic plot, the theatrical framework is also important. *Bonanza* is an intelligently made, sometimes hilarious and yet oh so poignant *Paradise Lost*. (Evelyne Coussens)