

The Secret of the Island

Testimonies that create myths as well as rumors which become the collective memory of a place are at the core of this project. Neli Ruzic and Marie-Christine Camus have had the courage to revive a buried history of a past which not many people want to evoke. The small island of Solta, Croatia is only one of the few sites which witnessed the atrocities of power during World War II and where the aftermath led to confusion and uncertainty. *Journey to the Island* focuses in 1943, during the recent formation of the socialist Yugoslavia and the proletarian revolution, when antifascist movements generated several acts of violence against the invaders, mainly Germany and Italy.

In the island of Solta, the pit Rudine was a hole that was used to disappear people --those who were suspicious of being allied to the axis powers. The hole is now surrounded by multiple stories which go from the alleged innocence of the victims to the ruthless clandestine methods used by the *partisans* to hide the bodies. The hole is now a memorial, and even when it was investigated the bodies were never taken out of it. The whole chronicle remains an oral secretive rumor and the memorial remains as the only visible trace of the executions.

Ruzic and Camus are interested in how this memory is built. Through interviews with relatives of the people who disappeared, photographs and documentation of the site, the artists are constructing the history of this particular moment and place. The sequence of events has become a manifold of versions which produce a portrayal of the situation. As the artists state "Between a theatrical play of memory and a possible erasure of the traces of the past, we explore the signs left by the ideological discourses of the past and how they operate in contemporaneous life. We want to reflect upon the co-existence of multiple time lines..."

In this particular fragment of the project, a midwife becomes the departure point for the narration. The speculation of whether she was Italian or not still remains, and the cruelty and pain she suffered before she was thrown into the pit Rudine is a theory as well. However, the repetition of accounts is what activates an approximation to the truth. The reminiscences of images, sounds and oral histories are the main evidence of the facts. The research and documentation that Ruzic and Camus realize today not only reinstate a historical precedent but also establish different

relationships among the people with this similar past in the island and examines collective memory in its quintessence.

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