

TFF

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**LA PASSIONE DI
ERTO**

by Penelope Bortoluzzi

Erto, a village in the Friulian Alps.

In its impracticable valley, at the end of the 50s, the Vajont dam is built, the highest at that time. In 1963 one of the slopes of Mount Toc collapses into the reservoir, causing a wave that kills almost two thousand people.

On the other side of the valley, in front of that mountain, the people of Erto have never stopped enacting the Passion of Christ, before and after the catastrophe.

Every year, for as long as can be remembered, a Christ from Erto has been betrayed, sentenced and crucified on the evening of Good Friday, while History goes on with its construction and destruction, its victims and survivors, its real and imaginary Calvary.

The movie moves around two outstanding events that fix the course of time, even though poles apart: on the one hand, an annual and cyclic ritual, which down the centuries beats the time of a closed community; on the other hand, a unprecedented catastrophe, that accelerates the changing processes of an era and crystallizes the contradictions. The spring rite is unchangeable, it builds a specific identity and fixes it perpetually in time, whilst the catastrophe changes what was before and deletes the singularities in the faint space of devastation.

The uniqueness of what happened in Erto allows a universal story to be told, as if it were a fairy tale or a legend: the disappearance, as of the 60s, of the last communities that remained at the margins of History, the end of an entire civilization and the traumatic passage of its survivors to modernity. Like a lens, the catastrophe amplifies an historical process which elsewhere took fifty years, but in the Vajont valley happened overnight. At the same time, the Passion the inhabitants put on is a real theatrical representation of that ancestral world which conceived its own existence only in past generations' spaces and roles. In Erto people literally took the role of their predecessors, in life as in the Representation.

The short circuit of Erto's history, the catastrophe's irruption into the ritual's cyclic time, was for me the thing that made a film narration impossible. With the images taken after the catastrophe, and the vicissitudes of a centuries-old Representation, we can talk "presently" also of the past, because this is not a narration, but something that happens in front of the camera. Catalogued images often appear for wounds, abysses, dramatic historical events that open windows onto the past, documentaries like more extensive and complex mosaics.

From the day after the tragedy to the following decade, the clips of Vajont become memory, not only of the event and its consequences, but also of the faces and words of those who would never have been filmed otherwise. I tried to "re-activate" these catalogues in this movie, and never to use them in descriptive way; I put them together as current material, just as if they had been shot today, trying to re-build spaces where there were only fragments. After all, the Passion of Christ, an ancestral game for the inhabitants, is a living fossil, a theatrical auto-representation of the same community, a mise-en-scene between devotion and blasphemy, tradition and mutation, almost a self-portrait which is a great gift for a director.

With these two starting items I tried to recount Erto today, through the eyes and voices of the Christs, Judases or Pilates of today, and through the living material of archives' images. It is not a movie about the remembering the tragedy, but about the present of a community that carries the stigmas of its history, on the faces of today and yesterday, about a valley and its scars, about the eclipse of a world and its vain attempts to resist, about the mock-tragic vicissitudes of what remains of that world.

LA PASSIONE DI ERTO
a movie by Penelope Bortoluzzi
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