

Memory Wound

Magdalena Malm: Your project *Memory Wound* was the winning proposal on the competition for the memorial site for the event of July 22nd at Utøya and in central Oslo. The event was an expression of extreme nationalism with a bombing of the government buildings in Oslo, killing eight people, followed by a mass shooting at a Workers Youths' League camp on the island of Utøya killing 69 more people, mostly teenagers. To formulate such a project seems very challenging. How did you go about it?

Jonas Dahlberg: My overall concept comes from an emotional observation during an initial site visit to Utøya. At the island I noticed how different the feeling was of walking outside in nature, compared to the feeling of walking through the rooms of the main building. The experience of seeing the vacant rooms and the traces of extreme violence brought me—and others around me—to a state of profound sadness. In its current state, the building kept close within it the memory of the terror acts of July 22, 2011. Like an open wound.

But while the building produced these feelings, nature was somehow different. Although we stood directly on the very place where many people had lost their lives, nature had already begun to obscure all traces. Considering the location for the memorial, I thought about the possibility of doing something that wounded nature to the point that it couldn't heal, to do something which couldn't be undone.

MM: The memorial site is located on a peninsula with a sharp point extended from the mainland with a view over Utøya across the water. You propose a large cut straight through the rock. In *Memory Wound* you combine the brutality of the event capturing the political dimension, but you also constructed a very intimate space of reflection. Could you explain how you worked on combining those different perspectives?

JD: It is almost like working in two different scales or narratives, which work in parallel and function like a panoramic shot and a first person perspective in film. . There is the large scale, like an overview, with the cut through nature. The wound that can not be overcome, and which is a concept communicated in the images of the cut. Then there is the other scale, which needs to be experienced through a journey or a sequence in that specific place. The journey starts when you begin your trip towards the memorial with bus or car, continued by foot when you walk on the pathway through the forest to finally end up in the middle of the cut where your view towards Utøya, which you thought would be the end of your journey, is destructed by the cut. In the balcony, inside the rock in the middle of the wound, you will hear the water and the wind and see the light glitter on the shiny cut rock surface displaying the names of those who died. It will be a beautiful and very intimate and private space.

MM: Often at a memorial site, especially in a beautiful nature setting, it is difficult to grasp the reality of that event. It seems that by refusing the view of the island, you offer a space where this might be possible.

JD: Yes, instead of placing the viewer in a voyeuristic standpoint in relation to the island, the journey becomes a journey inside of yourself. Like I've done in many of my films I wanted to work with sightlines and questions of seeing or being seen, and to become

aware of ones own seeing, effectively making up a more contemplative space where each persons gaze is re-directed back inside as reflection.

MM: The work you proposed is not a monument but rather a space expressing loss. Could you describe how you were thinking?

JD: I didn't want to make a monument representing loss. I wanted to create a space or a situation where the visitor is in the centre, experiencing loss rather than being informed about it or reflecting on it.

Instead of building something abstract that would represent loss I made loss by removing 1000 m³ rock. Instead of building something abstract that would represent distance I made distance by creating a 3,5 meter gap to the names of those killed. And instead of building something abstract that would represent the venerability of an island I made an actual island by letting the water float through the cut.

MM: The event of Juny 22nd is very charged both for the close relatives of the victims, but also to the citizens of Norway and even beyond the national borders. In what way did you relate to that when you constructed the work?

JD: This is connected to what I talk about earlier regarding the different layers or perspective of the memorial. Nationalism is again growing in Europe and the language used among us and in politics is getting harder and harder. It might sound tough but on a larger scale I wanted the memorial to also be able to communicate that we all were part of making something like this happen. It is the language we use and the society we create that also have created these terrible things.

MM: At this moment in time the work is still a proposal. The second venue for the memorial is in the government quarters in the centre of Olso, where the development plan is in the making. This means that you will need to re-formulate that part of the memorial in the process. How do you go about that?

JD: My basic concept for the governmental quarters is to use the 1000 m³ stone from the cut to construct a public square. A memorial site, which serves as a relational space designed to be a place for the sustained dialogue upon which tolerance forms—which is what so many of those directly affected by the attacks were passionate about. The space itself will be a reflection of life amidst loss, healing, remembering, and a future to behold. From this concept the exact features will be shaped in dialogue with the renovation of the governmental quarters.