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Even if all others..., I will not: The Red Orchestra and the "Art of Resistance"

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Stefan Roloff and Anne Nelson (© GKNY) While

efforts such as the Stauffenberg Plot or the White Rose movement are widely known expressions of the resistance movement in Nazi Germany, the activities of the Red Orchestra remain relatively obscure. Even the name "Red Orchestra" wasn't chosen by the members, but was foisted upon the group during the Second World War, bearing long-term consequences for its image in history. Only since 1990 and in light of recent scholarship has the movement been recognized as a legitimate part of the Nazi opposition.

The lecture "The Art of Resistance," held on January 12, and the art installation *Et si omnes ego non* (Even if all others..., I will not) at the German house raise the question of in which ways, for how long, and at what cost individuals are able to go against the masses- a question that not only applies to the particular time of the Red Orchestra, but to the present as well.

In their lecture at the German House on January 12, Ann Nelson, author of "Red Orchestra: The Story of the Berlin Underground and the Circle of Friends Who Resisted Hitler," and artist Stefan Roloff, son of the late Red Orchestra member Helmut Roloff, discussed the gross misconception of the Red Orchestra that led to the false portrayal of their role in history, for decades after the Second World War.

The name "Rote Kapelle" originated from a term the Gestapo used to identify members of the resistance with suspected radio contact with the Soviet Union. Through the attempts of some members of this at best loosely organized network of anti-Nazi activists to establish radio contact with the outside world, the Red Orchestra was identified as a treasonous, Moscow-based spy ring. Labelled as traitors to the Nazi regime and inaccurately associated with "red"- implying the communist Soviet Union- the Red Orchestra was then falsely preserved in history as a group of secret agents in a Soviet spy network.

Nelson's book traces the lives of Red Orchestra embers, fifty of whom were executed by the Nazi regime for their activities. Her research reveals that in reality, these Red Orchestra members were not spies at all, but rather people of various political beliefs, ethnic groups and religious and professional backgrounds. By helping persecuted people, documenting crimes and mobilising others through public statements and artwork, they all played a part in undermining the Nazi regime.

Stefan Roloff, whose research on the Red Orchestra has yielded a book published in German as well as a documentary film, "Rote Kapelle," and an art installation, spoke on the experiences of two survivors from the resistance that he came to know while conducting research for his documentary. He also presented his own piece on the Red Orchestra, containing members' mug shots in motion, each picture morphing into the next. For a moment, each person "becomes someone else," indicating how easily visual media- and reality- can be and was manipulated, particularly in a totalitarian system, as in the case of the Red Orchestra name in Nazi Germany. The same photos were used to falsely document these members' "spy activities."

The lecture was complemented by a compelling audio art installation by Birthe Blauth. With the Latin phrase *Et si omnes ego non* (Even if all others...I will not) for its title, the work features the sentence repeated over and over by different voices- disordered at first, then slowly uniting into one rhythm. The process is at the same time visually portrayed through a frequency diagram.

Et si omnes ego non is on display at the German House through January 24.

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The Art of Resistance

