

5.1.13.

SOFIE THORSEN

ON THE EVERYDAY OF MAINTAINING AN IMAGE

When visiting the villages of S-chanf, Zouz, Madulain and La Punt Chamues-ch, it immediately becomes clear that a certain image of the place is efficiently presented to the visitor. Probably this is not a big surprise for anybody, not even for the average tourist. After all, that is the case for most of the locations he might visit as a tourist. Whether he reads the more or less critical texts about tourism in Piz Magazine, or he simply consumes the place without any reflection, on some level, he is probably aware that he is visiting something prepared especially for him. Every tourist knows the frustrating search for the authentic, or at least for that which he believes to be authentic, somewhere between all of the copies. In the end, he mostly settles for the imitation.

What this average tourist may fail to realize is that what he experiences as imitation, as lacking a certain authenticity, is, in fact, the contemporary reality of the place, not realizing that the other tourists are not disturbing his view, but belong to it, and probably unknowingly take part in constructing the image they are consuming – and that a lot of work is being done by the people living there to maintain this image and make the place work.

For the production of a site-specific art piece for the project 'public plaiv' I would center my interests on the everyday household of the place, on that which makes it possible for the area to present itself as a place worth visiting. I am interested specifically in the things that have been constructed, projected and built in order to make the place attractive ('public plaiv' being one of them), and how this work is handled practically. I am interested in how the area works structurally and what makes it possible to be at the same time a place to live and stay for some people and a place to visit on holiday for others. I am interested in the spaces where the image prepared for the tourists and the everyday reality of the place meet. The final result would be the production of an outdoor sound piece consisting of stories and information about some of the structures that make the area work and how these are part of producing the image of the place.

Visiting the Plaiv

Before coming to the area and visiting the villages S-chanf, Zuoz, Madulain and La Punt Chamues-ch, I was curious about the houses, about the tourist architecture and its relation to the traditional. I was looking forward to discovering what the overall plan of the village looks like, how the different parts are placed in relation to each other and how they interact with each other. I had read about the 'sgrafitti' and found it interesting to think about how different elements of traditional facade design uncritically enter into the contemporary holiday architecture, and how old buildings are made comfortable and livable by building in contemporary interior designs and other modern installations.

It is impressive how the new houses copy the traditional style without being integrated into the village at all. The silence when walking through such a neighborhood of empty holiday flats, if you can use the term neighborhood at all, is frightening. And it is strange how the huge glass windows behind the old stable walls make the space of restaurant Dorta comfortable and picturesque at the same time. It all more or less confirmed my expectations of the contrast and conflict, but also the mutual dependency of tradition and tourism.

But when walking through the villages I find myself just as interested in ordinary things, like the ones you find in almost every town. The waiting rooms of the train stations, some notes on the local community pasteboard, some chairs waiting for someone to sit on them, the kindergarten building built in the 90s, some groups of farm buildings on the edge of the villages. The empty sports grounds next to the ski lift and the school are almost more exciting to me than the renaissance 'chesas' on the central square. And I miss information in the tourist prospects about how the place actually works, about the number of schools and other public institutions in the villages, as well as information about agricultural and industrial production in the area. I find myself photographing the fire department building instead of the panoramic landscape and the historic buildings. And probably these photos have already been taken and there is no need to take them again anyway. Perhaps these more or less unordered signs of different life practices seem more appealing and more interesting because of their constant framing in the magnificent landscape, not to mention the above-mentioned architectural conflict. Such details serve as indicators for how the everyday relates to the ongoing story of tourism.

Things You See and Things You Don't

The whole tourist structure is based on what you see, and the image comes through very clearly. You immediately understand the images as belonging to the information. When sitting on a bench you are told what village or panorama you are looking at by a text on the bench itself. The tourist brochures tell you in short texts what to look for in each village. And even if you can't tell the difference between a new and an old building, the proportions and some characteristics of the local tradition come through in a simplified version. But what is less visible is the more abstract information about how the community is structured and actually functions, how decisions about the image of the place are made, how it is decided what to develop for the tourists, and how decisions concerning the everyday infrastructure of the villages are made.

At a closer look the public infrastructure in the Plaiv is surprisingly well-developed with respect to the number of inhabitants in each village. There is a town hall, a fire department, a school in almost every village, even though the communities are small and so close to each other that it would only be a matter of a few minutes if the fire truck would have to come from the next village. Of course, one can argue that the enormous increase of the population in high season requires an infrastructure much larger than what would be needed for the locals alone. But this argument doesn't work for kindergartens and schools. The size of the administration must also be part of a tradition and a local political history, an important part of the local identity. In these structures the daily pragmatics of the communities are handled, as well as

the future development of the area. In this way these structures play an important role for the internal maintenance and continuing construction of the local identity.

The point of departure for the research for an art piece in this area would be how much one as a visitor can learn about the problematic described above within a limited time frame. This should be the space of a week, a typical tourist time format. It should be based on the observations one can make from the street and the different kinds of official and public information that is available for an outsider, in principle for any visitor speaking German and thereby capable of talking to people and reading brochures and information sheets. In this research as well as in the final piece, the public institutions and the information they can provide should be a central point.

I assume that in some way or another the identity and image of the place is dealt with here. After all, in Madulain and in La Punt Chamues-ch the tourist office is in the same building and just next to the community office. Who else but the politicians should be deciding where it is allowed to build more apartments, and how they are allowed to look? And isn't a golf course just as much a part of constructing an identity of the place as the renovation of a historical facade? I also assume that the place and how it works is not just discussed in the context of local politics, but penetrates almost everything, and is also considered and thought about in the schools and other parts of the public system. I suppose that no local 16-year-old is so naive as to believe that the inline skating path was made for him or her. The question remains to be posed whether the young participants in the 'Chalandamarz' know that they are partly doing it for themselves and partly for the visitors. I am convinced, at least, that the organizers, the community itself knows very well.

Audio for Tourists and Other Listeners

The research along the lines described above should result in an outdoor sound installation. Audio information is a classic tourist information format and seems an appropriate way of telling people about a place where there is already enough to see. It would consist of a voice relating information and stories about some of the things you can see from the sites and some of the things and structures that you cannot see in light of the various problems described above. It should talk about some of the ways things are decided and give background information to things you can see in the area. The information could be merely informative, but also contain narratives about people and events collected during the research. The collected information would be edited, rewritten and read in German.

The site should be somewhere in the landscape with a view and the possibility for the viewer/listener to sit and perhaps be a little protected from the wind. The exact position would be decided during the research. The sound might not run constantly but start from time to time, to leave some space for the real sound of the place. By being in the open, the images that are joining the sound are happening in real time in front of the visitor's eyes, and the sound/text becomes a story about the place, played as an addition to the already present image.

Cleaning Madulain

A holiday resort as well as a hometown has to be kept up. According to a note on the community pasteboard in Madulain, the inhabitants met on April 27th for the yearly cleaning day of the village. I am not sure who they did it for, if they cleaned up after the guests of the winter season. Or if it was for themselves, to enjoy a clean and quiet village in between seasons. Or if they are already doing the first preparations for the summer tourists. Or if it is simply a community tradition to meet up once a year to go through the village together while cleaning it. Probably it is a little bit of everything. In between these different interests, the identity of the place is produced, partly for the visitor, partly for the inhabitant. That is probably the authentic Madulain, with a number of interests at play at once. My focus lies on the spaces and structures where the different interests are handled and meet. The cleaning day in Madulain is, like the ski lift next to the school and the tourist information in the community house, one such point among many in the Plaiv.









FEUERWEHR PUMPIERS

FORSTAMT FORESTEL

1872
IN LIBERTED
E PROPRIETAM
PAGHRESIPA
C BEACON



5.3.13. SOFIE THORSEN

Sofie Thorsen interessiert sich für die Schnittstellen zwischen öffentlichen und privaten Räumen, wie sie sich etwa an Hausfassaden manifestieren. 1999 übertrug sie das mit Pflanzen angefüllte Schaufenster eines Büros, das soziale Projekte im Arbeiterviertel Kopenhagens unterstützt, als weisse Umrisszeichnung auf die Scheiben des benachbarten Kunstraums. Für die Arbeit *Reader* (2000) skizzierte die Künstlerin die bevorzugten Leseorte von 16 Personen. Zusammen mit Interviews, die die spezifischen Interessen der 16 Personen an Büchern erkennen lassen, wurden die Zeichnungen auf Plakate gedruckt und an die Gestelle der Kopenhagener Hauptbibliothek montiert. Für *Village fig. 2 / counting the parts* (2001) fotografierte die Künstlerin sämtliche Häuser eines durchschnittlichen dänischen Dorfes von der Strassenseite her in streng frontaler Ansicht. Der Umstand, dass in den Abbildungen nur Einfamilienhäuser und kaum grössere öffentliche Institutionen, Wohnblocks oder Einkaufsläden vorkommen, deutet auf einen suburbanen, ländlichen Lebensraum hin. In Ausstellungen wurden die Fotografien als Diaprojektionen gezeigt. Über Kopfhörer hörte man eine weibliche Stimme, die das Inventar der Mauer- und Fenstertypen, der Grössen und Bepflanzungen der Vorgärten, der Vorhänge und Fensterpflanzen aufzählte. Allmählich ergab sich beim Betrachten der Bilder und beim Hören der nüchtern rapportierten Statistik ein Zusammenhang zwischen Repräsentation und Verbergen, Sehen und Gesehenwerden, Vorder- und Rückseite einer Gemeinschaft. In der Projektskizze *On the Everyday of Maintaining an Image* (Über das Alltägliche, ein Bild / ein Image aufrechtzuerhalten) für die Plaiv schlägt die Künstlerin einen Vergleich vor zwischen der konkreten Landschaft mit ihren eingeschriebenen, sichtbaren Strukturen und den vorhandenen statistischen Daten, wie sie in den Gemeindehäusern aufliegen. Eine weibliche Stimme spricht (in Deutsch) von geschichtlichen Eckdaten, den Zahlen der Einwohner, den Arbeitern in den Betrieben und Gästen in den Hotels, von schulpflichtigen Kindern, von der Sprache, den gebauten und geplanten Hotels, von Daten der Landwirtschaft... Die Audioarbeit wird an einer Sitzbank mit Aussicht auf das Tal installiert. Ein Bewegungsmelder setzt das Tonband in Gang, sobald sich jemand auf die Bank setzt. Pausen, in denen die üblichen Geräusche des Umraums – Autolärm, Flugzeuge, aber auch Vögel – hörbar werden, unterbrechen das Vorgetragene regelmässig.

Sofie Thorsen liefert eine Analyse der Erholungs- und Ferienorte und verdeutlicht damit die ambivalente Erfahrung zwischen Ferien und Alltag. Die Wandertouristen und die hier Sesshaften stellen grundsätzlich andere Ansprüche an die Plaiv. Die Kontexte ihrer Wahrnehmung sind völlig verschieden. Ohne inhaltlich zu kommentieren, versucht die Künstlerin, den Horizont der Touristen über das Sichtbare hinaus um das faktische Wissen des gelebten Alltags zu bereichern. sw

Sofie Thorsen, 1971 in Århus, Dänemark, geboren, hat sich an der Königlichen Dänischen Kunstakademie in Kopenhagen und an der Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Wien ausgebildet. Sie lebt und arbeitet in Wien.

Gruppenausstellungen / Projekte im öffentlichen Raum

- 2002 ‹Indgreb›, in Zusammenarbeit mit Elsebeth Jørgensen, Uppsala Konstmuseum, Uppsala, Schweden
 ‹Non-places›, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt a. M.
 ‹Das Experiment 2A & 2B› in Zusammenarbeit mit ‹A Room of One's Own›, Secession, Wien
- 2001 ‹KOSMOS›, Rooseum, Malmö, Schweden
 ‹Sous le pont, le long de la riviere› in Zusammenarbeit mit Elsebeth Jørgensen, Casino Luxembourg, Forum d'art contemporain, Luxemburg

Auszeichnungen

- 2002 Blinky Palermo Stipendium der Ostdeutschen Sparkassenstiftung im Freistaat Sachsen