

Through the Looking Glass

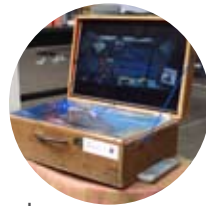
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June 18 – 26, 2011
Shanghai, Cologne, Istanbul

The project “Through the Looking Glass” was a multidisciplinary project devised by Petra Johnson in collaboration with Nicole Teng (Shanghai), Philip Courtenay (Liverpool), DQE (Cologne) and Asli Kiyak Ingin (Istanbul). It opened windows into the daily lives of the inhabitants of three selected neighbourhoods: Ehrenfeld Cologne, Jing’An Villas, Shanghai and Şişhane, Istanbul.



The title “Through the Looking Glass” refers to the story of the same name by Lewis Carroll in which a seven year old girl explores the world behind the mirror in her living room. Like the story, the project is about different ways of movement and participation, about unusual encounters and miraculous journeys. By linking the neighbourhoods of Şişhane, Ehrenfeld and Jing’An Villas the project takes the visitor to ordinary and simultaneously magical places and situations around the globe.

Performing Chorography

In the European tradition there is a forgotten art, called chorography: the writing of place. The role of chorography was to understand and re-present the unique character of a place. As geography became an accepted discipline within the humanities, chorography faded into oblivion. Similar to the landscape painter, who composes visual information on a flat plane, a chorographer composes information and narrative in different media to present her interpretation of a specific place. In this way, the artistic objective of the Looking Glass project was to show unique and simple aspects of an urban neighbourhood situated in a different culture.



The driving question was: How can place, community and locality be conveyed beyond the limits of language and geography? How can taste, touch, smell, habit: the texture of daily life be communicated across culture?

The project consisted of three components:

- an exhibition and symposium at DQE Hall in Ehrenfeld, Cologne;
- daily LiveLinks in shops, studios, offices and workspaces in each city;
- and videos installations displayed in shop windows in Körnerstraße in Ehrenfeld.

The Exhibition & Symposium

By appropriating the idea of *tableau vivant*, several settings of living rooms invited the visitor to enter environments that reflected the colonial past of Jing’An Villas and to become captivated by videos from contemporary Shanghai based artists about location and sense of place. Altogether fourteen works were presented in the DQE Hall and at Kiosk Babylon in the Landmannstraße 8. The exhibition reflected places, situations, processes, and movements that most Western



audiences, even those living in Shanghai or Istanbul, would have little contact with. Amongst them was a film portrait of an old woman in Shanghai who cooks for her cats; a view from the inside of a kiosk onto the street at dusk in Shanghai and another

over several months from a kiosk in Şişhane, Istanbul. Also included in the exhibition was a photographic and multimedia exhibit of the lighting industry in Şişhane, Istanbul, documenting the intrinsic connections within a local production network.

The symposium “Performance in Daily Life” compared factors and influences on changes and developments in all three neighbourhoods. Thor Zimmermann (Körnerstraße), Asli Ingin Kiyak (Şişhane), Anja Götte (cultural scientist & sinologist), Philip Courtenay (e-spacelab) and Sabine Voggenreiter (DQE) made short presentations and spoke candidly about the transformations currently affecting each neighbourhood.

The LiveLinks

For one week (June 18 – 24, 2011) daily LiveLinks were set up between the three neighbourhoods. These were installed in semi-public spaces such as cafes, shops,



and artist studios. The Links were intentionally set up in locations in which the ordinary and everyday life of these neighbourhoods could be performed and observed. For example a coffee shop and a felt hat designer in Körnerstraße were linked with a tea-shop and a tailor in

Jing'An Villas; and a lighting designer in Shanghai was linked with a supplier of lighting equipment in Istanbul. These LiveLinks acted as the Looking Glass through which the other world could be observed and (ex)changed with.

LoopShop Videos

The videos shown in shop windows on Körnerstraße focussed on the tactile skills required for hairdressing, massage and cooking in both Germany and China.



They gave the passer-by a view into another world; the possibility to witness ways of doing without letting go of established roots and provided local residents with peep holes into other (dis)similar worlds.

The Neighbourhoods

What makes the three selected neighbourhoods noteworthy of comparison is that they are all organically grown. In each neighbourhood spatial identity and human identity are interwoven with one another and each neighbourhood is undergoing a transformative process. As each neighbourhood searches for that something that will carry it into a shared future, the Looking Glass project offers a glimpse into current struggles between tradition, nostalgia, transformation and desire.



Körnerstraße is a place in which a slow, but constant transition is taking place. By means of shops, cafes, galleries and studios, a young generation of inhabitants is shaping the future of the neighbourhood by composing its street life under the umbrella of a creative community. Many shops use the exterior public space as an extension of the interior by making it homely and simultaneously attract people from outside the neighbourhood.



Jing'An Villas is a neighbourhood whose transformation process is in a stage of acceleration. Here young designers and artists who draw from the traditional ways of life around them, have opened shops and established new studio spaces. Offering workshops and activities they have brought fresh life into an established neighbourhood fabric. Currently, Jing'An Villas still has many shops that serve the needs of the local population, like vegetable stalls, eateries and street restaurants, hairdressers and tailors. In October 2010 the area was sold to a developer leaving Jing'An Villa's future in a state of uncertainty.

Şişhane in Istanbul is famous for its lighting industry. For more than a hundred years, technical and decorative lighting shops have been located in this small vibrant district as are the multiple processes that are needed for making lighting - from turning aluminium heads to welding lampshade frames, from supplying metal, wooden, glass and acrylic fixings to dressing frames with fabric and finally to electrical work. This, too, is a neighbourhood under transformation. Five years ago the local authority published plans to remove the workshops and redevelop the area for tourism.



LiveLinks

- Alexandra Richter Huang Jin & Pu Na
- Wohnzimmer (Furniture, books, design) + LA (Furniture & restaurant)
- Mahira Yigit Hahn Mr. Li Gang Wu
- Kiosk Babylon + Mr. Li Gang Wu's Kiosk
- Esther Klein Huang Jun Ping
- Van Dyck (Cafe & Roastery) + Teashop Shanghai
- Ulrike Geitel & Ulrich Dürrenfeld Yang Man
- Atelier Geitel (Artists) + Atelier Loli (Illustrator)
- Nicole Suess
- Nicole Suess (Design of hats and accessories) + Yue Huan & Jin Yue (Tailor)
- Anna Lederer Erkan Isik & Rafet Oymak
- Utensil (Household items) + Aypar (Lighting accessories)
- Thor Zimmermann Nicole Teng
- Gemischwaren (Everything) + Plum Studio (Pottery, Sewing & Painting)
- Paul Kampfmann Gaye Kosan
- Duck & Cover (T-Shirts) + Lookka Design Shop (Designer, jewellery & clothing)
- Hüseyin Sami Kiran Huang Jun Ping
- Teashop Istanbul + Teashop Shanghai

LoopShop Videos

- Jan-Marc Kutscher
- Jan-Marc Kutscher (Design) shows Xiao Hun Tun Restaurant
- Yvonne Behnke
- Kurma L (Massage) shows Foot massage in Jing'An Villas no. 12
- Lawrence Bello
- Multikulti Afro (Hairdresser) shows Hair cutting in Jing'An Villas no. 109
- Paul Kampfmann
- Duck & Cover (T-Shirts) shows Feiyue Shoes (Hand painted sneakers)

Participating Artists

- Chen Tao NingZuoHong
- Li Xiao Fei Ding Beili
- Liang Yue Petra Johnson
- Jeremy Cheval Philip Courtenay
- Tao Hongjing Asli Kiyak Ingin
- Nicole Teng Esther Blodau-Konick
- Xu Zhifeng Aysim Turkmen
- Lu Chunsheng GFFA Multimedia Workshop

Collaborators

e-space lab, Made in Sishane, Plum Gallery, DQE Cologne

Text

Esther Blodau Konick & Petra Johnson
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