Factish Field Project 2
Bertille Bak

Faire le mur

18.01.14 – 02.03.14

Collective is pleased to present work by Bertille Bak for the second Factish Field exhibition. Bertille is an artist based in Paris who works predominantly in film; her work draws on her observations of the communities she has worked with, looking at their rituals, gestures and objects. Bertille portrays life within these communities with affection and humour, mixing truths and falsehoods and playing with the clichés and fantasies that we have.

Presented at Collective is Bertille's 2008 film Faire le mur (To the wall) alongside six new and old tapestries created by the participants of the film.

Faire le mur follows the inhabitants of Barlin, an old mining village in Northern France and the artist's familial hometown, through their last revolt against the development and subsequent raised rents in their town.

While plotting the rebellion, tapestries were passed from house to house and sewn by the community. These tapestries are based on famous paintings by old masters including Poussin and Duyster and all portray classic depictions of revolution and lost paradise.

Factish Field has been a yearlong collaboration between Collective and LUX. Looking at artist film work and anthropology, it has included talks, screenings, commissions and exhibitions.

This project is supported by Fluxus.

Anticipated Geographies
Angela McClanahan

Life under emergent capitalism was to be organised as a practice of denial of pleasure in the present for a set of specific (secular) rewards in the future. This is still the matter of bourgeois life today, but is embedded in a vastly different politics of temporality. Instead of a stable, moral present which produces a future of certainty (even if it is one of utopia), we have a turbulent present which is doubled and produced by readings of potentially immediate futures of uncertainty... As the mechanisms of capitalist accumulation have developed into ever greater levels of novelty, preciseness and intensity, the nature of ‘anticipation’ has changed towards dystopia, catastrophe and feeble hopes of survival.... “[E]conomies of anticipation” assemble new publics and spectacular violence in the present in the name of “necessary adjustments” for the sake of attracting capital investments in the future.

— Kaushik Gosh, defining ‘economies of anticipation’

The ubiquitous and formulaic processes of urban, town and rural ‘development’ in the neoliberal world are almost always characterised by stealth ‘zoning’ of land and buildings defined by the state as in ‘decline’, fractious ‘top down’ consultation encounters between local people and government and/or private development firms, usually accompanied by some form of protest and ‘resistance’, and subsequent community fragmentation and displacement. Where speculative property value bubbles develop, out-migration of those with fewer financial choices tends hurriedly to follow. Although many development projects are no doubt underpinned by good intentions, as argued in the edited volume Estate by Zimmerman and Johansson, geographers, urbanists and planning specialists from Jane Jacobs and Saskia Sassen to Colin Ward and Doreen Massey have long shown that ‘regeneration’ is ultimately the naturalisation of market values sublimated within bricks, mortar and land, and is largely a euphemism for ‘pushing the poor out of town’.

This kind of struggle is explored in the small post-industrial French community of Barlin in Bertille Bak’s Foire la Mure, and is materially embodied within the tapestries referencing paintings that depict significant historic revolutionary moments, crafted by the town residents that accompany it here. Together, the film and tapestries convey elements of and references to the politics and poetics of the community inhabitants’ relationships with each other, their modes of resistance to the impending ‘renewal’ of their formerly gainful coal mining town, as well as the seemingly inevitable and result of the process, which is of course portrayed in the film scene depicting the solemn, silent march of many of Barlin’s inhabitants out of town, and dispersal to unspecified ‘elsewheres’.

Employing an observational approach, the film is reminiscent of 19th and early 20th century ‘salvage’ anthropology and ethnography, which attempted to document the practices and collect the material culture of ‘dying’ communities being colonised by ‘outside’ forces (in this case, of course, the ‘culture’ being documented is being colonised by the spectre of mythical value and finance capital rather than an ethnic and geographically defined empire), for both academic study and potential exploitation.

‘Of particular tropes of community’ - the representation of the handmade as an authentic embodiment of inhabitants’ values, face to face engagements rather than technologically mediated modes of communication, and collective, ritualistic modes of resistance - all recall early anthropological processes of ‘expanding interests’ as opposed to the idealisation of lost utopias. Rather than being seen as outmoded and irrelevant, the concept of collective self-help and organisation and mutual aid, as advocated in relation to planning and housing initiatives by late activist Colin Ward, need to be harnessed and used in ways appropriate to 21st century life, in order to provide realistic alternatives. Urging updated employment of concepts of solidarity and mutual aid, he urged that ‘new experiments in “housing enterprise zones”, as advocated many years ago in the well-known paper by Peter Hall and others, “Non-plan: an experiment in freedom”’, which advocated complete DIY housing zones for residents to occupy and decide the planning design of their own territories.

After all, he remarked, ‘the practice of town and urban “planning” originally began as a popular movement, not as a library of legislation used to serve market interests. Its future and effectiveness would be much more trusted, assured and hopeful if it could recover its popular and populist image.’

Further reading on development, regeneration, planning, housing issues and anthropological engagement with these subjects:


Dr. Angela McClanahan gained a PhD in Archaeology from the University of Manchester, and lectures in Visual Culture in the School of Art at Edinburgh College of Art. Her primary research interests include examining how people engage with and construct meaning from the material world, and she is currently examining ‘contemporary’ ruins and processes of ruination, as well as in ethical and sensual dimensions of ethnographic research and art practice.