

Colophon

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Başakşehir: An Urban Model by Sandra Schäfer
(in collaboration with Ayşe Çavdar),
16 May – 28 June 2014, at GLASMOOG – Space for
Contemporary Art, Academy of Media Arts Cologne.

EDITED BY Heike Ander
GRAPHIC DESIGN Lisa Klinkenberg
ENGLISH COPY-EDITING Keonaona Peterson
TRANSLATION INTO TURKISH AND TURKISH COPY-EDITING
Bahar Bilgen and Bayram Sen
TRANSCRIPT ARTIST TALK Marie Altgen
INSTALLATION VIEWS Heidi Pfohl
TYPEFACES Graphik, Akkurat Mono
PAPER Fly spezialgeglättet extraweiß 115 g/m²
PRINTING Spree Druck, Berlin
EDITION 400

©2015 the artists, the authors,
and Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln;
for the works of Sandra Schäfer, ©VG Bild-Kunst,
Bonn 2014. All rights reserved.

PUBLISHER AND DISTRIBUTION
Verlag der Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln
Peter-Welter-Platz 2 • 50676 Köln • Germany
verlag@khm.de • <http://verlag.khm.de>
ISBN 978-3-942154-41-5

Başakşehir: An Urban Model is a project by
maze|film in collaboration with the Academy of the
Arts of the World and GLASMOOG/Kunsthochschule
für Medien Köln.

THANKS TO
Jochen Becker, Ekaterina Degot, Amin Farzanefar,
Asena Günal, Lale Konuk, Elke Moltrecht,
Aurora Rodono, Martin Schmitz



maze|film



GLASMOOG

GLASMOOG

Raum für Kunst & Diskurs • Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln
Filzengraben 2a • 50676 Köln • <http://glasmoog.khm.de>
Do/Fr 16–19 Uhr, Sa 14–18 Uhr und nach Vereinbarung • +49(0)221/20189-213

BAŞAKŞEHİR: AN URBAN MODEL

SANDRA SCHÄFER

with Ayşe Çavdar

PRODUCING SPACE

CORINNE DISERENS IN CONVERSATION WITH SANDRA SCHÄFER

CORINNE DISERENS (CD): For the first time today, I experienced the installation *Başakşehir: An Urban Model*, the way the videos are articulated between them and in the space. I had watched each video as an individual file when preparing our talk, but this afternoon I could understand better how each video resonates with the others, and the narrative interweaving and tensions between them. How the editing is complexified by the copresence of the videos in a given space. Having seen some of your precedent works, I am intrigued to know what made you decide to move away from a more linear narrative construction, to privilege a spatial collage offering perspectives with various filming and interviews on these urban, social, and political configurations and realities of contradictory natures. On the one hand, you keep the subject strongly as a structural form, sharing with the spectator your investigation methodology, your different way of approaching and distancing the subject to let certain doubts and questions emerge; on the other hand, you invest the exhibition space in such a way that the spectator is constantly reminded of the fragmentary nature of what he/she is watching. Experiencing this fragmentation gives room to a sense of contradiction of inherent paradox. Could you maybe develop why you have taken this position?

SANDRA SCHÄFER (SASCH): It's quite specific for this project; which is different from others where I didn't work on a particular urban space so concretely. Of course I worked a lot on urban spaces, but also on transgeographical relations—for example, in *on the set of 1978ff*, the video installation on the Iranian Revolution in 1978–79. At the beginning, *Başakşehir: An Urban Model* was to have been a two-channel video installation; it turned out to have seven channels with emphasis on different housing projects and areas: Living Lab, Migrant Houses, Sular Vadisi, Şahintepe, Oyakkent, and İkitelli Industrial Zone. At one point I decided to translate the segregation of space that you find in Başakşehir into the exhibition space. Başakşehir was planned as a public housing project to prevent families of lower classes from building further informal settlements around the new industrial zone İkitelli. In the first stage one can still recognize the leftovers of this former public housing project. Walking through Başakşehir you can see the different layers of the coming into being of this entire neighborhood, or plan, and how it shifted. Actually, you can see it in the different spaces that the video installation presents, and that's why I didn't want to put it into one single linear film, but rather to have that unfolding in the space itself.

CD: You've told me that all this filmic material is the product of long research. Therefore I'm interested especially in the question: What are your research procedures, and how do they diverge from your artistic practice? Today we are constantly hearing about research in art: How do we define artistic research versus other typologies of research? How would you define the moment where you decide or define the status of images and sounds, of rushes? What is the point that makes you decide that the investigation material is enough to be given a specific form?

SASCH: The filming was also an attempt to see what I actually can do in this space with a camera, having permission to film in the Başakşehir neighborhood, where everything is privatized. It was part of my research, part of the whole process, to find out how I can move, how I can film, and who I can approach, who is going to talk to me or not. Recording specific sounds, views, details of the urban texture, this all became part of my filmic research. I started the production process by going through the rushes and reading the interviews many times before I started to select specific scenes, images, and sounds. Slowly from this selection and through shifting and moving around these pieces I started to build a narrative. This is for me the moment when the images and sounds leave their status of being rushes. In the beginning I wanted this only to be research as a basis for a second filming in Başakşehir, but then certain things happened—for example the Gezi protest—and suddenly it became clear that we would not be able to conduct a second filming. Going through the material I had the feeling that there were already so many aspects about the different layers of Başakşehir and its political implications that I decided to work with what I had. I had to tell the different narratives that came out of my reading. I kept the searching-and-circulating approach of my audiovisual investigation. Thus my research doesn't follow a linear causal logic derivation. I am rather interested in the friction in the margins and opposition and how to unfold them in audiovisual narratives and in a spatial arrangement. Maybe here it differs from other research methods or classical academic research. But at the same time there is the new label of artistic research applied to something that has existed for a long time as an artistic practice.

CD: How did you get involved with this situation—which is very particular and not so particular at the same time—which we find in many cities today?

SASCH: I lived in Istanbul in 2011 to work on the video installation *on the set of 1978ff* about the Iranian Revolution. And I visited my friend Ayşe Çavdar, who lived at that time in Başakşehir, because she was working on her PhD research there. We walked around Başakşehir and discussed a lot about political Islam in Iran and in Turkey, and how it has changed. Through Ayşe I got to know Başakşehir. Actually I found the situation in Başakşehir quite particular, because it's closely related to a political shift in Turkey; an aspect one would not find in this way in Germany, for example.

CD: How would you characterize this particularity?

SASCH: It is the rise of a very new middle class; it is a state politics that is at the same time an acting together with private enterprises in a housing market and completely shifting an urban space, defining it and intervening really on the level of the economy, but at the same time also on people's lives. We can see it for example in the chapter “Living Lab.” It shows very strongly the biopolitical aspect that is involved in this new idea of living a kind of modern life that is controlled via technical devices and surveillance cameras. But at the same time it's also the shifting and changing or coming into political power of a group that has been marginalized for a long time and now is somehow defining its space again in the city.

CD: Most of the persons you've interviewed live there. That's why we are confronted with all sorts of very positive voices and perspectives, which are quite different from the working and commuting people in the film.

SASCH: What's happening in this urban space is problematic on many levels. I find it not easy to understand that there is no public life anymore in the streets, that there actually is no public space apart from the connecting streets. I understand that one wants a modern life—that is, easier access to certain supplies etc.—but I don't understand this kind of segregation that is also supported by the people moving there. Because it is a place where mainly specific groups of people live. Apart from the migrant housing, which will probably disappear, it's a very homogenous community.

CD: Which kind of community?

SASCH: The inhabitants of this neighborhood are predominantly religious, middle-/upper-class . . .

CD: How was it implemented? We know it's a mu-

space embracing experimentation. You don't work in the same way if your aim is to transmit activist positions, or a pamphlet, or a manifesto. Historically we have been confronted with a lot of ambiguous relationships, which can be stimulating. Where the manifesto starts, what is the status of the document, where a work of art ends.

SASCH: And I must say, while I was editing this video installation the Gezi protest took place, and I was in quite a crisis at that point because I was not sure if I could really continue. I had a lot of anger and I thought whether I should go to Istanbul, what I should do, but then I thought, No, I don't live in Istanbul anymore, it would be a kind of activist-tourism. Instead I joined the protests in Berlin and I was in constant exchange with friends in Istanbul. And I decided that I wanted to edit the work, because what is happening right now is related to exactly this urban and political transformation.

CD: It is about thinking about the condition of your production, transmission, reception, which are totally part of the artistic decision.

SASCH: And it is also about a responsibility. I was really questioning the whole work for a while, asking myself what it means in this concrete political context.

AUDIENCE: What we see from the aesthetic but also from the impression people give us is an atmosphere of loss and of longing, which I experience from many of the statements of the people who were in a limbo between something that they lost and something they're expecting from the future, and you tried to show us that they maybe won't get what their hope is about and maybe they say it for themselves. What is your idea about Başakşehir? Will nature come back there, or let's say maybe not nature, but this life they left behind as you also gave us this image of the animals running around and there is some diffusion of this old life in this very modernistic context. Do you think there will be a symbiotic synthesis of where they come from and this more modernist life, or do you think they really lost something? What will be the future?

SASCH: I think that it depends very much on who we're talking about. I don't have the impression that the majority of the middle-class people feel such a big loss. I rather have the impression that they appreciate how they live. And if they lost something, they will fill the gap that it has left behind. In a way I am more concerned about the sameness that the gated communities produce. I hope that this sameness will remain an ideal. To quote Hannah Arendt, we should not be in the position of choosing our coinhabitants otherwise we will lose the preconditions of our political existence.

AUDIENCE: I'm for example thinking of the person on the bus on its way to Şahintepe, who says that he will have to move, and that he will probably have to go forever to the countryside to his family, or to Ankara.

SASCH: You talk about a landscape worker who lives near Şahintepe. These changes are actually already happening in Şahintepe. The people in Şahintepe definitely will lose something, they will lose their home, and they will be removed to faraway places. They need to organize themselves very well, but until now this was not successful, because their individual ownerships differ from each other; that's why it's difficult for people to organize themselves together. And they are in a very weak position in terms of political power, but also economic power. With the whole restructuring processes that already have taken place they probably will be removed. They are very poorly paid. Also they are not the landowners in most cases, which also makes it difficult. The new flats they get offered are further out, so the commuting is harder. They will be displaced from their social environment. I think the landscape gardener describes it really well. For him it's also the conflict that he doesn't want to go back to the countryside, because he is now used to life in the city, and he really enjoys it.

CD: I'm going to digress a little about migration and belonging, etc. I traveled in the areas of Turkey near the Syrian and Iraq borders for a project for the first time approximately ten years ago. Then I went back six years ago, last time I went it's probably four years ago. I was totally amazed, because the policy and

investment planning the government has about the infrastructure development in the country is extremely powerful and fast. Turkey is positioning itself as a political, military, and economic power for the region. In this southeast area of Turkey, which is mainly small villages (farmers, animal holders), and towns with very little industry, there is a network of small country roads through the hilly landscape which is extremely complex and which maps different communities, the Syriac, the Kurdish, the Muslim communities, and it unites them but also defines their land organizations. . . . The construction of elevated highways divides the territory and prevents access to these old roads in the hills. It's an authoritarian and aggressive way of appropriating and controlling this part of the country by breaking down the communities' resistance.

SASCH: The city really ends with Şahintepe. And the informal settlement of Şahintepe has been built throughout so many years, so it's really grown. It's very different from how now these huge building blocks are built. The blocks are raised in one year or even less. At the moment they try not to accept these certificates that they are offered, but some of course started to accept them, which began to break the resistance among the larger group of inhabitants.

AUDIENCE: Could you please clarify the connection between Başakşehir and Şahintepe?

SASCH: Şahintepe is an informally built neighborhood, which belongs to the district of Başakşehir, but it's not part of the new town. It's going to be removed, because it's near the new Bosphorus that Tayyip Erdoğan wants to build.

AUDIENCE: You mentioned earlier a striking moment when the sales manager of the Mavera Başakşehir Project, who is feeling somehow confronted, complains: “This feels like an interrogation,” and your laconic answer is: “No, we're just having a conversation.” Did your interview partners know that you are kind of critical? Did they guess it, or were they okay with that?

SASCH: They knew, but at the same time they were proud of what they were doing and the situation in which they live now.

AUDIENCE: Actually you are the foreigner, you're coming from outside and putting all the questions. Did you feel that had effect on the answers?

SASCH: It definitely had an effect. My collaborator Hande Yılmaz and I come from the outside, we don't live in Başakşehir. Hande is from Turkey, I am from Germany, and Hande wears the headscarf. When I was together with Ayşe it was a different filming because she is differently involved in the subject, but she also has her specific approach. And being two women also played a role. So this all matters, it's never neutral. Our bodies are political bodies.

The public conversation between Corinne Diserens and Sandra Schäfer took place in the exhibition Başakşehir: An Urban Model at GLASMOOG, Cologne, on June 10, 2014.

The art historian and curator Corinne Diserens is director of the art school Erg in Brussels and head of the jury at Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart. Before, Diserens was director of the Museion in Bozen/Bolzano, the Musée des beaux-arts de Nantes, the Musées de Marseille as well as curator at IVAM-Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno Centre Julio Gonzalez in Valencia.

Sandra Schäfer is a visual artist and filmmaker living in Berlin. In her work she is dealing with the representations of gender, urbanism, and postcolonialism. Her collaborator for the project *Başakşehir: An Urban Model*, Ayşe Çavdar, is a journalist living in Istanbul.