

MASSENGEKÜNDIGT!

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Jürgen Buchinger

Zur Wohnungsfrage: Eine Odyssee

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Zur Wohnungsfrage: Eine Odyssee

2020, installation with large-format projection and 3-channel HD video, 14 min., 18 min., 463 min. and 12 min, dimensions variable

The Housing Question: An Odyssey is a video installation about contemporary urban living, the right to housing and the urban housing market. The work deals with the privatization of our cities and the resulting gentrification processes, that more and more divide cities along monetary fault lines and class differences.

Starting from a house in Basel whose tenants had to move out to make room for redevelopment, viewers go on a journey with the artist to discover the financial entanglements of the owners of the house which lead to a refugee camp in Burkina Faso where Doctors without Borders is helping internally displaced persons.

The work encourages viewers to think about their own living situation and introduces tools for research and resistance to affected persons. It does not only point to the concrete hardships of our current housing market, gentrification and the microphysics of power that prevail between landlords, tenants and real estate investors. It also reflects on the philosophical question of what dwelling is for us today and how we can think anew our relationship to the spaces we inhabit.

Synopsis

The inhabitants of the house at Webergasse 28, at a central location in Basel's vibrating Kleinbasel district, have to move out. All tenants have seen their contracts cancelled so that the house can be redeveloped, the flats reduced in size but multiplied and the rent tripled. On a first screen, two tenants tell that story in interviews: Melanie, who lived there for nine years in a shared flat, and Gaby, who spent 35 years in the house, first with her partner and then with a growing family. After Basel's electorate voted for stronger tenant protection in June 2019, the house is one of many that are subject to mass terminations of rental contracts before the referendums are put into law.

Parallel to that, on a second screen, I investigate who is behind this transformation, locating the different legal entities that own the house, manage it, or own the owning legal entity. It is a complex system of subentities and deputies that makes it difficult to pin down any one party responsible. During my investigation

I finally arrive at a pension fund called „Profond“ in Zurich. In their annual report I come across something unusual, an unexpected image amidst the bright and smiling corporate dreariness. Two photos of a refugee camp in Barsalogo in Burkina Faso where Doctors without Borders organises medical treatment and potable water. It appears that all the employees of Doctors without Borders are insured at the very pension funds that in Basel contributes to gentrification and the destruction of a healthy and diverse urban demography.

A third screen shows the deliberations of Basel's city parliament for introducing legislation for stronger tenant protection. Approximately one year after Basel's citizens introduced a right to housing into Basel's constitution by referendum, this is the long awaited legislation following the popular vote. By watching the members of the parliament go through the law paragraph by paragraph to vote on wordings, small changes and adaptations, this screen becomes a stark contrast to the individual stories in the first screen. In the legislation, that in the end shall offer protection to each and every single tenant, there is no room for individual histories as everything has to be generalized. Slowly, one manages to discern divisions in the parliament between those who try to make a stronger regulation and those who try, in ever so tiny steps, to dilute it.

The screens are complemented by a large-format projection that shows a slow travelling through the Felix Platter-Spital in Basel. The empty hospital is being transformed into new living space at the same time that the tenants in Webergasse have to move out. But rather than maximising profit the cooperative responsible for the conversion aims to create sustainable and affordable living space for people of all sections of the population and all age groups while not driving out other people in the process. The projection thus serves as an encompassing visual that creates a space for thought and further reflection but also offers a positive and already existing alternative to the current prevailing strategies of urban development.

Artist's statement

Thinking about housing and everything around it means not only to unravel the intricate weaving of company structures or the acknowledgement of statistical evidence. To actively imagine a different way of living in the cities we must also think about what dwelling means to us, what a house is and what living in one entails. It means to look at the interconnections between different people that form the social tissue that keeps a city alive.

That the large-format projection in the installation shows an alternative to for-profit housing developments becomes slowly clear in the course of watching the other videos. But first and foremost it shows space. And creates space. A space that spectators can dwell in when they view the work. This space should be one for thought; thought, that goes in all directions rather than always in the same one. I aim for an immersive experience but not immersive in a story, a narration. Immersion into a topic that affects all people—albeit differently—but is seldom subject to speculative debate, to questions of how we want it to be instead of taking it for granted or lay out the specific tangible problems that emerge.

I see my work as a form of critique of ideology, that is, it aims to contest notions of naturality or inevitability of social or economic conditions that are in fact made to be the way they are. The world we live in is thus presented as one that is subject to change that can be initiated by people and everyone is encouraged to rethink the conditions of our reality that heretofore seemed irrefutable.



Installation at *Walls & Hedges*, Basel, Switzerland



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Credits

A work by
Jürgen Buchinger

Starring
Gaby Messmer
Melanie Müller
Jürgen Buchinger

Cinematography
Simon de Diesbach
Jürgen Buchinger

additional footage
Melanie Müller

Sound
Simon de Diesbach
Jürgen Buchinger

Music
Excerpts from "Odysseus" op. 41 by Max Bruch
NDR Radio Choir
Budapest Radio Choir
Radio-Philharmonie Hannover, Leon Botstein
Jeffrey Kneebone
Nancy Maulsby
Stephanie Lange

Soundmix
Thomas Gassmann

Editing
Jürgen Buchinger

Mentoring
Robert Müller
Marine Hugonnier

English Language Supervision
Carly Gertler
Nicholas Kazmierski

With quotes taken from
Theodor Adorno, Asyl für Obdachlose, 1944
Wilhelm Graff, Odysseus: Scenes from the Odyssey, 1872
Martin Heidegger, Bauen Wohnen Denken, 1952
Ernst Hubeli, Die neue Krise der Städte, 2020
Tammy Kim, Moms 4 Housing: Redefining the Right to a Home in Oakland, 2020

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Chantal Molleur

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Lucerne University of
Applied Sciences and Arts

**HOCHSCHULE
LUZERN**

**Master
Film**

Design & Kunst
FH Zentralschweiz

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1		c/o Tresag Treuhand- und Unternehmensberatungs AG Gessnerallee 28 8001 Zürich		
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Ei	Lö	Bemerkungen		
			Ref	Statutendatum

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SHAB 138 von 19.07.2005

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CV

Jürgen Buchinger's artistic practice often deals with social and political topics and encompasses a wide range of media from video and sound installations to social interaction and collaborative works. He believes in talking to each other as a political practice that can be fostered by art. Instead of solutions he aims to find poetic forms for overcomplex but important topics to raise questions in his audience.

He is interested in using language as a material for evoking emotions rather than communicating concepts and in the poetry of formalised language.

Jürgen Buchinger studied art history, philosophy and French language and literature at the University of Vienna. In 2010 he founded *all-over*, a journal for art and aesthetics together with Hannah Bruckmüller and Dominique Laleg and has been editor/publisher there until 2019.

In 2012 he started working as a research assistant at Raussmüller Collection, where, apart from research on artworks and artists in the collection, he is responsible for photo- and video-documenting works and exhibitions. Since his graduation at the University of Vienna, Buchinger has published several scientific texts including essays on aesthetics of documentary film and the documentary impulse in art.

In 2018, he started a Master's in Film at the Lucerne School of Art and Design where he graduated in June 2020 with the documentary video installation *The Housing Question: An Odyssey*.

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