

Workshop (action10b)

NOTES BY KATHRIN BÖHM/PUBLIC WORKS

Local clay production/Feminine Rural Production

24 – 26 May 2010

in the village of Höfen, Southern Germany

Organised by public works in cooperation with the women of Höfen and Celine Condorelli/a42.org

Participants

RHYZOM

Kathrin Böhm (public works, myvillages.org, RHYZOM), London/Höfen

Andreas Lang (public works, RHYZOM), London

Celine Condorelli (support structure, a42.org, RHYZOM), London/Nürnberg

Bryonie Reid (PS2, RHYZOM), County Leitrim/Northern Ireland, Belfast

GUESTS

Arno Brandlhuber (a42.org), Berlin/Nürnberg

Silvan Linden (a42.org), Berlin/Nürnberg

Martin Eberle (a42.org), Berlin

Barbara Geralis (a42.org), Nürnberg

Tamara Härty (a42.org), Nürnberg

Matthias Spielvogel (a42.org), Nürnberg

Nils Wolfbauer (a42.org), Nürnberg

Andreas Oberhuber (a42.org), München

Andrea Bischof (University of Bamberg)

Michael Back (Open Air Museum/Historic Brick Factory, Bad Windsheim)

Thomas Gunzelmann (Amt für Denkmalpflege, Bamberg)

HÖFER FRAUEN

Waltraut and Gabriele Müller

Hildegard Lyssek

Rosa Leimbach

Resi Derra, Juliane, Waltraud, Lotta

Gertrud Stowasser

Ingrid Fischer

Kerstin Fischer

Annette und Christina Gütthlein

Paulina Köst

Rita Schuller

Bärbel Batzner

Marlene Baum

Birgit Lunz

Sylvia Helmut



Programme

All events took place at the Community House in Höfen.

Mon 24th 10.30 – 12.30

Introduction to *Rhyzom* and *Höfer Waren* as part of the *International Village Shop*

Those present briefly introduce themselves, and everybody chose to describe themselves in relation to their rural links and memories they.

A presentation by Kathrin Böhm, first explaining the particular local and trans-local context of the workshop, which links following three projects:

- 1) ***Rhyzom***: local cultural production and trans-local dissemination
- 2) myvillages.org/our villages: ***Höfer Waren***
- 3) public works together with others : ***International Village Shop***

The presentation explains specific approaches and methodologies by public works such as

- collective and cross-cultural production with the development of objects
- the tools and techniques involved in their local and trans- local distribution
- ideas related to the spatial production involved in and generated through such processes.

In relation to Celine Condorelli's research on "Commons" the workshop also wants to address questions of

- what are things in common?
- what are the common goods?
- where are the Commons, commoner's rights?

The specific issues for this workshop which also needs to be understood as a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural workshop held in a small village in Southern Germany - involving national and international guests are:

- the general and historically conflictual relationship between the rural and the urban
- questions of where culture is perceived to be produced and directions of distribution (often seen as a urban-rural direction)
- questions of power and hierarchies that determine/influence/shape social and cultural realities within a rural environment
- the specific recognition and representation of female production
- the relationship between the production and consumption of cultural goods in regards to rural communities who identify themselves through production but have recently shifted into societies who are predominantly involved in remote production/manufacturing and service industries.

Lunch

Vegetable soup, sausages and bread and homemade apple-wine from Walter Böhm

14.30 – 16.30 "Clay Reading"

An informal drop-in session for the women from Höfen to bring clay related objects and stories for a local oral history mapping. Individuals from the *Rhyzom* and a42.org group interview individuals to record their stories and memories. The recordings of the conversations were later presented back to the internal workshop group.

Martin interviewing Resi Derra who brought a brick made in the local brick factory. Her family was related to the family who owned the field where one of the two community brick factories was sited. She remembers local production up to the 40ies, and thinks that a lack of consistency in quality brought the factory down.

Nils and Tamara interviewing Walter Böhm who gave tours around his two storey home, which outer walls are made from sandstone and all interior walls are a mix between wooden constructions and clay fillings both for the ceilings and the floors.

Nils and Barbara interviewing Frau Reindl from Rattelsdorf: amongst many things she brought a clay pot she and her grandmother and daughter are using for making a local speciality, the "Ziebeleskäs" which is a

cottage cheese mixed with chopped onion and chives. She was talking about a certain size and shape pot, but it remained unclear if the clay was particular to this recipe.

Barbara interviewed Heidi Böhm, who thinks that clay vessels are used less because they re not dish washer suitable and they are simply too heavy. References the “Römertopf” , a clay pot with a top, which is soaked in water before being used to bake food, and which became very fashionable in the 70ies as part of promoting healthier and fat reduced cooking.

Most people have clay objects/vessels as decoration and as remembering things - rather than using them.



Other local uses of clay vessels:

- Sauerkrauttopf/ pots for pickled white cabbage
- Schinkentöpfe/ Pots for pickled ham
- Gurkenfässer/ Pots for pickled gurkins

Arno and Bryonie interviewing Hildegard Lysek: who remembers that they climbed through the brick factory ruins as children in the mid 40ies, and that they made clay murmurs and small puppets from clay during the 2nd World War. Each child would have its symbol to identify their murmurs. They also made their own special bags to collect them. Hildegard made some marbles during the conversation and she just remembered instinctively how to shape the clay.

She thinks that clay doesn't hold a high reputation and is associated with poor people's solutions, such as home made clay vessels, etc.

That it was considered bad luck if one had a clay field.

Her husband was polish and worked on a farm, and they had to wait until he found work in a local clay factory, so he would earn enough money to get married and start a family.

Martin interviewing Juliane and Waltraud Derra: who live in small villages nearby but only have a very vague articulate sense of their identity and the identity of the villages they live in, which they would describe as being very similar, or villages near Bamberg. Juliane wore a clay necklace from a recent holiday in Croatia.

Andreas interviewed Anna Fischer at her farm: clay used to treat cows with “gas”, clay to be applied to their tummies. Her daughter in law, Ingrid, thinks that clay isn't very important in everyday thinking and doing. Anna was proud of the local stubbornness.

Interview with Annette and Christine GÜthlein: they brought some medial clay for healing skin conditions or minor cuts. Clay as a natural remedy used for it disinfecting qualities.

The general observation was that local knowledge about clay and its production history is very limited. There were a few very intriguing personal stories where clay was at the core of the story, such as the house built from broken bricks by a man who worked in a brick factory and took the damaged material home over years.

Celine refers to the Situationists' reference to the "Postman's House" that was made from collected and self assembled bits of material as the only possible architecture.

There was little memory/knowledge of using clay within everyday situations, or even remembering in detail how clay was processed. It seems that some "rural myths" regarding certain qualities of clay reappeared, such as cherry trees and roses growing better on clay rich soil.

There was also a generational gaps between those born before 1940 who remembered at least the brick factory buildings and those who have never been exposed to local use/production of clay.



General discussion about the fact that clay is used everywhere but its not obviously visible in the village. The story of "Rechtler" came up, villagers who would have the right to harvest wood from the forest for free.

Later

Meeting up and dinner at a beergarden in the next village, situated on a pretty tree-covered site next to a river and a mill. There was an option to go to a less idyllic looking place which has better beer, but from a visitor's perspective the leafy beergarden seemed the more desirable place to spend the evening.

Tues 25th 09.00 – 12.00
Clay digging and processing

Michael Back who is a clay engineer and runs the historic brick factory at the open-air Museum in Bad Windsheim joined us for the morning to describe the history of clay production in the area, and to sample some clay bricks using historic tools. We first walked to the site of the traditional clay digging hole, and started conversations and questions there.



Some clay facts:

- clay in the area is distinguished into "Löss" along the sloping hills and "Retolias" further up on the hills.
- First settling farmers would be looking out for clay-rich fields which were meant to be more fertile and contain humidity in the soil for longer

- the easy-to-dig "Löss" (from around 1 m below surface) is intersected by chalky bits which need to be separated out
- this was often done by using cheap child labour. Children would stamp the clay and feel the small chalk bits and then remove them by hand
- the quality of clay is defined by its "plastic" qualities which are its ability to be shaped
- clay products are directly recyclable and can be directly transferred back into the landscape

Some facts about local clay production:

- Höfen had two community brick factories ("Gemeindeziegelhütten") which since around 1600 were part of a number of communal facilities, such as the shepherd's house, poor people's house, the brewery etc.
- houses in the region were thatched until the late middle ages. Following an attempt to control and manage fires, the clay roof brick was introduced.
- At the same time houseforms changed from one floor thatched dwellings to multi storey buildings, where the external walls would be structural, and the interior wall and ceiling structures were made from wood frame structures and clay fillings. The houses would carry a wooden roof construction to be tiled.
- the roof/attic now not only protects the dwelling but also important storage space for food
- the clay factories were established and financed through the land owner and their feudal system, and then managed on a to-lease basis
- the brick maker was probably a crafts person who would lease the facilities
- it was probably a travelling business which would pass on knowledge and skill but also control the lease system internally within the network/family relations
- the reason for a very local brick production were also determined by external (feudal) economic interests which would exploit the fact that labour and material were very cheap, which meant that some of the brick factories remained economically viable until the end of WW2
- the introduction of the railway facilitated the local production to be distributed elsewhere and allowed poorly paid factory workers to find better work elsewhere

Some historic facts how the social and economical life of the historic village:

- farms were organised alongside the "three field principle" which meant that farmers had to coordinate to grow the same crop at the same time on their long stretches of field in order to make the growing and harvest economical
- the idea was to establish a social hierarchy amongst farmers and make the stronger ones lead the weaker ones.

Some facts about clay roof tiles and their local history:

- the thatched roofs were replaced by brick tiles, which in length referred to the wooden structures used for fixing the straw
- a pagan tradition to paint symbols and patterns on the straw roof to protect the building from demons etc, was continued with the clay tiles and the same patterns were drawn into the soft clay during production
- this started to change with the Christianisation of the rural areas throughout the 16th century, but the tradition to inscribe the tiles remained. They slowly changed into picture and language based messages which especially toward the late 19th century often became very sarcastic (" Was kümmert mich die Welt, ich mach aus Scheiss mein Geld"/ "the world doesn't bother me, I make my money from shit") and sexually explicit imagery
- hand made tiles often have a very clear individual "handwriting" / personal marks. Messages on the tiles were often written by someone else who knew how to write
- some of the decorating was also related to the fact that the tile manufacturer was not allowed to ask for a tip or extra payment. To produce more decorative or bespoke tiles allowed him to earn some extra money. ("Haischiegel")

How to make a historic brick:

- to cover the metal shape in sand (plenty of similarities towards cooking and baking such as covering in crumbs, rolling etc.)
- rolling the clay and fill up the shape
- remove extra material with a wire
- compress the clay in the shape with a wet piece of timber
- shape a "nose" which acts as the hook to later hang the tile and keep it in position
- sanding a wooden board and put the tile on it

- smoothing the surface with water and draw some lines for the rainwater to later run downwards



Product ideas from Mr. Back:

- to as a village collectively produce historic bricks for one building in the village
- to invent a new wedding gift which is consists of two brick with a shared pattern

14.30 – 17.00

Group session to assess product ideas and themes so far.
Break out groups, developing articulate briefs for new products.
Sketching, 3D model making, filming or photo diary, etc.

A brief conversation, trying to point to the issues that seemed most relevant:

- systems of valuing and value exchange
- the process of clay manufacturing and possibilities to subvert an industrial process
- the multiple and less obvious material qualities of clay, such as its thermo capacities
- the desire to move away from crafty clay product to slick and cool looking
- the idea to create clay amulet as multi-part map to explain where you are from
- the issue of roofing – straw tattoos, clay pattern related to protection
- the idea to integrate something in modern tiles that protects from current “dangers” such as radiation etc.
- the idea to have cooking/baking vessels that also determine the shape of the food (“Brick Bread”)
- to run more “clay-fusion” experiments , e.g. throwaway and furniture
- reading clay as a way of reading geology
- the “nose” of the handmade tiles as a literal object that means “hooked on”
- to start thinking from within the limitations of the material

We tried to record the observations that seems most important and particular in hand-drawings.

Following issues got caught on paper:

One Use Clay (disposable)
Self-representation
Material qualities
Value/Trade
Food/Clay

19.00

Public event with

Thomas Gunzelmann, local historian, on the history of the village within the region, and Andrea Bischof, archaeologist, who will talk about the history of ceramics.



The evening was advertised in the larger municipality and the local newspaper.

The community meeting room was packed, and the audience included a good range of ages, backgrounds, gender. Individuals you always see at those events, and others who rarely participate in anything public. The reasons? The common denominator “ the history of the village where you live” and the open invitation to everyone.

Mr. Gunzelmann gave a clear statement on the historical accuracy and dilemma of his presentation, which would include numerous facts about Höfen, but at the same time would be a description of the actual lack of knowledge, which is – amongst many things- caused by the fact that Höfen is a rather generic name (“Hamlets”) and shares its name with 35 other similar settlements in Bavaria only.

However, the presentation gave a clear sense of a history that starts much further in the past than normally talked about. It also put the village in clear relation to historic power systems that shaped it, and explained the “constructed” reality of the place, which was often manipulated and guided in order to suit commercial interests. He also told a few anecdotes which seems to confirm the sense of stubbornness and willingness to fight, which is still very present in current discussions such as the local “Flurbereinigung” (Land Rationalisation Programme), which judging the laughter confirms a certain feeling of identification, and being the “David” fighting “Goliath”.

Some interesting facts in relation to local production:

- the village had a fisherman
- and “Flachs” was being grown and processed
- in 1880 the village had 33 households, 1 shepherd’s house, 1 community black smith and 2 community brick factories

Aspects that Mr Gunzelmann would consider typical for the village:

- “Höfener Hohlwege” e.g. Lochshutweg, which are lower lying paths that are covered by overgrown tree-tops which tunnel the path
- terraced fields
- with fruit trees , so called “Baumfelder” oder “Obstäcker”.
- beer production and consumption was important, and shaped the landscape (“side effects for the health and the landscape”) through its multiple stone caved beer cellars along routes, and the seasonal summer beergardens (Bierkeller)

Following this, Andrea Bischof, an archaeologist from the nearby University of Bamberg, talked us through a brief history of ceramics with distinct references to local histories and production.

She started by pointing out the particular material qualities of clay: its plasticity (contains up to %40 water), and the basic distinction into fat (fetten) and lean (mageren) clay, which is important in relation to what could be produced where. All fired products made from clay are called ceramics (Töpfer – Topf – tief, also called Haffnerware).

The history starts way back 25.000 BC with a clay venus figure, which she uses to explain how much or little is actually known of the use and purpose of such findings, and that most of our knowledge is simply an interpretation of the facts we have, and might be right or wrong. The Venus could have been a spiritual figure to do with fertility, as much as an early pin up or simply a doll.

Around 9000 BC first pots started to be produced in the area/region, and some communities started to become known by the style of ceramics they produced. Most historic ceramics are from burying sites, where ceramics were added until around 700. A general distinction can be made: ceramics found in settlements would be very simple, those from burying decorative and more advanced.

A significant turning point in ceramic production is the introduction of the turning wheel (from the Romans to whom the Germanics would have had contact), which as a tool was lost for many centuries and reintroduced around 1300 which led to a first wave of mass production in ceramics from about 1400.

The point Andrea Bischof was trying to make was the rather extraordinary fact that historic manufacturing processes such as ceramics and porcelain survive into a time that could easily replace clay by plastic and synthetic materials.

We put chunks of clay on the tables, and invited everyone to shape it during the evening.



We finished the evening with some Brotzeit, and Herr Gunzelmann explained in more detail some of the German laws and rights regarding access to common land and common goods.

It was made part of the constitution during the Drei Räte Republik, that land/the landscape should be accessible by everyone, unless they would damage the crop. This excludes for instance walking across meadows after 1. April until after the last harvest. The law was implemented during a very short time window in otherwise conservative politics, and is something that might not have been possible any later. There is a specific addition in the Bavarian Constitution that points out the right to access to all edges of all public lakes (which of course isn't the case and could lead to some fundamental court case regarding private land ownership).

Some of the common goods that still exist are the right to pick and collect fallen fruit – even from private land. And shepherds have the right to grass meadow land during certain months. He also explained more the right of some residents in the village (Rechtler) to harvest wood in the governmentally owned woods.

The discussion around “Commons” often stimulated by Celine’s particular interest, leads to the question why those rights were introduced/established in the first place? How to protect and exercise those rights? But it also raises the question if it would be possible to create/initiate new common rights through either commonly accepted informal rules or even legislative means.

Wed 27th

9.00 – 12.00

Conclusion day one and two, some observations collected from individual feedback during a group session:

- the way landscapes embodies social and cultural detail from very small to large scale
- the importance of recognizing layers of histories
- the often remarked on relationship between ownership and the shaping of communities
- things in common (between the *Rhyzom* participants and women and other residents from the village)
- such as the remarkably good attendance of the different parts of the three days shows a shared “wanting to know”.

There was a sense of equality of knowledge even though we were all here for different reasons. Question: whether we can develop **products that tackle the different scales and layers** involved in the workshop and discussions so far.

- can we think **objects as something activating, promising**, as something that creates and addresses relationships
- suggestion to make **sketches of relationships (past or proposed) as a way towards a product**
- what is the product for?
- the **product as simply a reason for getting involved**, and that applies to the research and development process as much as the trade later
- the **product as transmitter** or actor
- to think the **product collectively**, also in order to find out who knows what and wants to contribute with what, rather than a later division of labour
- generally the fact that the workshops were well attended by women from the village was often remarked on, and their openness to share information
- some of the org42 students felt that they owe something to the women, which isn't the case, because the workshop was set up as an genuine and mutual exchange between producers, who even though from different fields come together for a shared reason, to think and develop a brief for a new product.
- to replace the feeling of owing something by a feeling of responsibility towards the situation is more productive
- comments on the openness and friendliness of all the women from Hoefen involved
- to get to know someone/another group via a topic rather than descriptions of the own persona.
- descriptions of how awkward it felt to come into the village and those meetings, and how it reversed the situation where the city is awkward for those coming from the countryside
- questions about where the conflicts were within the village, and suggestions that the product should address a larger subject or conflict, such as the discussion around Flurbereinigung ("Land Rationalisation Process") which seems to involve complex and probably quite long lasting issues and arguments around land-ownership, power relationships within the village, traditions of negotiating agricultural land that is organised in small individual parcels, etc
- the historically founded necessity to negotiate the fragmented landscape in order to farm remains a strong image of the landscape. Even though it seems old fashioned it is also something that empowers the villagers.
- the strangeness of the fact that some of this land is neglected or not in use. Does anyone mind? If the landscape shapes identity, what does a changing landscape mean?
- the **use of clay in a new product would link a loss in production and agriculture**
- to tease out more gender-related issues related to the landscape
- there is a **general unease to use clay** just as a material for a new product
- remarks on the validation of a local discussion/search around identity given through the presence of the workshop

The group then divided into three smaller teams to discuss themes for production and briefs for products further. The one I was involved in evolved around issues of:

- relationship ground – food production
- gender issues/feminine production
- the negotiation of the landscape
- the similarities between processes in food and clay production (rolling, baking, mixing, shaping etc).

The term "Hausfrauentchnik" became central, in regards to stressing the knowledge production involved in domestic food production and household management. To claim homework as a area for technology (if though different from scientifically driven technology) where very precise knowledge is being accumulated. To rationalise and rework homework as an area of production. The immediacy of clay as a positive aspect, which can bring production very close to home. The pleasure of making things.

"Hausfrauentchnik" as an approach to get used to a material. As an empowering approach.



15.00

Public presentation of the different outcomes during a coffee and cake session for the women.



- **to create clay recipes**
referencing the connection clay vessels – food processing and preparation, the close connection between the soil being clay and the type of fruit and vegetable that grows there
- **packaged clay dust from Höfen**
referencing: the fact that clay is everywhere, and cold spread anywhere, as a product to make new things look older
- **creating a modular ornament from local clay and donating it to the “Wiederaufbau Berliner Stadtschloss” project in Berlin**
referencing the relationship village – capital, rural –urban, local production and representation outside, the women of Höfen as producers and donators rather than receivers of culture
- **clay murmur game**
referencing the memories of clay toys, easy and cheap production, games as a social connector
- **an experimental clay/fruit kitchen to explore Hausfrauentechnik**
referencing the close relationship food/soil or clay/fruit, experimenting together by using these materials, developing a new recipe or product but generating knowledge through action and subsequent confidence to handle clay as a material, to generate empirical knowledge based on Hausfrauentechnik which will include more instinctive forms of handling food and domestic tools
- **“ Surprise Bowl” clay cereals bowl with integrated toys that fall out when you trash the bowl**
referencing the tradition of the “Polterabend” (smashing party), to integrate the release of something new into the smashing, to produce it locally and low tech, referencing the surprise easter egg, reversing smashing as an act
- **Höfer “Flurbereinigungsspiel”**
referencing the now decades old conflict in the village to collectively negotiate the rationalisation of the agricultural land, this is clearly a conflict situation and a game could tackle some of the underlying issues (landownership, hierarchies within the village, gender relations)
- **Beer mug top**
referencing the tradition of summer beergardens, clay as a one off material, easy to inscribe messages referring to the tradition of inscribing on tiles
- **Höfer Pinada, “the last cow”**
referencing the loss of agricultural production as an identifier, as a public game, symbolically trashing it in order to release something new
- **Toolkit for creating permission free construction**
referencing laws and regulations within planning which allow the construction of buildings without planning permissions, e.g. farmers can build an agricultural building that has to be smaller than 100 sqm anywhere on their land