

Michael Zinganel & Michael Hieslmair

School trip. Installation

Open every day until October 14th from 2 pm
Public but terminal, Andreas-Hofer-Platz, Graz/Austria
Commissioned and produced by steirischer herbst'18

School trips are among the educational formats that everyone is familiar with, even if the memories of them are sometimes very vague and fragmented.

Depending on the political Zeitgeist and the teachers' commitment, school outings oscillate between popular cultural experiences, playful pedagogy and methods of gentle indoctrination. Infused with travel fever, a thirst for adventure, and a breath of freedom (free of classroom control) these nature excursions and visits to industrial monuments and historical sites, are helpful tools for educating and constructing local, regional, and national identities. But they rarely get involved with the dark sides of history.

Michael Zinganel and Michael Hieslmair park an adapted trailer between the coaches at the bus station of Andreas-Hofer-Platz — as a research station. Since the post-war period this has been an important mobility hub connecting the provincial capital Graz with the Styrian peripheries, an arrival and departure point for commuters and schoolchildren and therefore an ideal place to involve the public. The trailer becomes a container for a collection of contradictory levels of experience and a metaphor for the ideological "baggage" carried on a typical school trip, both what is repressed and what the participants actually remember.

An imaginary "(bus) trip" links the exploitation chain from energy production to mining, steel production, mechanical engineering and back again, from the terraced open-cast ore mine to the steel works in Donawitz and the former Steyr-Puch car factory in the south of Graz. In an extendable hanging system, these striking icons of modernization are presented on panels with archive footage from the post-war period. The expressive black-and-white propaganda images of the reconstruction of the Republic of Austria are counterpointed by a "landscape" of silhouettes – a popular depiction technique in the 1930s – growing from the ground so that school excursion destinations and their dark past intermingle. The narrative background is formed by a "radio play" that juxtaposes personal memories of school trips with facts about the repressed aspects of the past: Styrian industry experienced its fastest rate of expansion during Austrofascism and National Socialism during which many forced labourers were employed for almost exclusively military production purposes.

Based on the annual chronicles of Styrian schools and interviews with teachers, this research installation examines cheerful experiences and gloomy history while at the same time questioning the conventional, ruminative depiction of urban-rural difference.

Research, production audio and publication: Robin Klengel and Adina Camhy