SHOP AROUND THE CORNER. STORYTELLING INTERVENTION

Storytelling intervention is a practice that aims to create a framework for placing a narrative within specific public spaces through different methods of storytelling and process-led means of artistic expression. The objective of such practice is to approach a public space as a platform for dialogue and participation. In this case, the dialogue, however, does not happen directly, but is enabled through the previously untold and unheard stories within the given space. The stories are interpreted and reintroduced to the environment in the shape of physical artefacts or artworks, thus adding new meanings to the public space.

The objective of the artistic process in Cork (Ireland) was to empower the traders of North Main Street through making their stories heard and known to the neighbourhood and to create a dialogue about the current state of the street in the scale of larger Cork. The main stages of the process – collecting stories, processing and transforming them into artistic outcomes and bringing them back to the street – were planned and implemented over five days, with a presentation following on day six. The materials and means were not defined from the start, but were to be determined through engagement with the collected stories and the physical space they refer to.

Upon the collection of images, videos, stories and material artefacts, the brainstorming phase of ‘Shop Around the Corner’ started. It was brief, as the collected stories appeared to be quite straightforward, prompting rather literal interpretation. The narratives revealed sentimental and nostalgic aspects, a common theme connecting most of the stories. Certain artefacts and materials were donated by the primary storytellers and other supporters to contribute to the intervention.

Nine stories were chosen to be recreated in the final intervention. Five of the stories were childhood memories from an email I had received prior to my arrival in Cork by a pharmacist who grew up above the pharmacy she later inherited from her mother. Others had been discovered during the first three days of the project. Most of the
memories were interpreted through spatial installations integrated into meaningful locations in the Street. One of the stories was told through a performance. The individual installations represented the memories of the participants, thus resembling a tour of memories that could be attended in the Street during the final day of the festival. The tenth element of the intervention was a triple video projection in one of the shop windows. The first screen showed photos in a loop taken in the Street during the research phase. The second showed the making process, while the third screened rough cut of the documentary based on the conversation between the two traders. Some of the stories remained in the Street long after the actual tour, without being rejected by the space, community or authorities.

*The film ‘Shop around the corner’ is a documentary essay on a neighbourhood and site-specific art. It is one of the outcomes of the site-specific storytelling intervention. If you want to watch the film, contact me on my e-mail.*