

DESIGN ACTIVISMUS.

THE GERMAN CULTURE OF EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES
AND ENRICHING SPACE THROUGH DESIGN, ART,
PARTICIPATION AND DISCUSSION.

Australian German Association/Goethe Institut Travel Fellowship Report 2016
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IF DESIGN IS TO TRANSCEND ITS COMPLACENT FUNCTION AS A TOOL OF URBANIZATION IN THE SERVICE OF PRIVATE INTERESTS, THE INTENTIONS OF DESIGNERS, AS WELL AS THE POTENTIAL OF CRITICAL ACTION BEYOND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS, MUST BE CONSIDERED. THE CURRENT EMERGENCE OF ETHICALLY MOTIVATED ATTEMPTS TO REDEFINE THE PARADIGMS OF DESIGN, EMPLOYING THE CATCHWORDS “SUSTAINABILITY,” “SOCIAL COMPATIBILITY,” AND “PRODUCER-CONSUMER EQUITY”, GENERALLY FALL SHORT. THEY ARGUE VIGOROUSLY IN TERMS OF MARKET-ALIGNMENT AND REFLECT A CONSUMER-ORIENTED OR INDIVIDUALIST APPROACH, WITH THE RESULT THAT URBAN OR SOCIAL OBJECTIVES - AND HENCE ALSO ANY DESIGN-POLITICAL DIMENSIONS - REMAIN OFF THE MAP. IN ORDER TO DEAL PRODUCTIVELY WITH THIS DILEMMA, ONE MUST NECESSARILY CHALLENGE THE SELF-IMAGE OF THE DESIGN PROFESSION. HOW DO PROTAGONISTS SEE THEMSELVES, AND WHO COMMISSIONS THEIR WORK? WHAT ALLIANCES ARE WORTH STRIVING FOR AND WHAT ROLE SHOULD THE PUBLIC AND THE USERS PLAY? WHEN IT COMES TO A DESIGN FOR THE CITY, WHICH STRATEGIES, PROCEDURES, AND PERSPECTIVES DO WE NEED?!

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ABOUT ME

As a Bachelor student of the RMIT's Interior Design programme I was fortunate enough to undertake a semester's study abroad in 2012. Without knowing very much about the city, I elected Berlin as my second preference, New York City being the first. Luckily, my close friend and academic rival won the only position available at our partner university in N.Y.C and she now lives and continues to study there, equally happy with the outcome of her own exchange. On my arrival at the *Technische Universität* in Berlin I spoke exactly no German and had only hazy impressions of the country's history, people, culture and design atmosphere. My intended 6 month stay evolved into an 18 month one as I became enchanted, like so many others, by the city's personality, pace and goings-on.

During my semester of architectural studies at the T.U Berlin I had 2 encounters which shaped and honed my own personal direction as a student and designer. The first was an informal in-class talk by 2 members of the Berlin based multidisciplinary design group *raumlaborberlin* in which they discussed a number of their projects and the motivations behind them. Powerful to me was the notion that as young designers with strongly moral intentions but who lacked briefs (at that time) for the kinds of projects they were truly interested in working on, their solution was to go out and do such design work anyway, without waiting for a client (and his or her budget). Essentially, this was the approach of artists, by designers.

Second was a one day conference held by the *Kunst-Werk Berlin* at the university entitled *Make-Shift: The Expanded Field Of Critical Spatial Practice*. The conference presented

various practitioners who each in their own way authored the production of space in ways other than the formalisation of rigid design processes. Rather, discussed here was the question of how to legitimise the informal, organic, ground-up and self-generated civic spatial actions which give a city so much of its identity yet which are most often in-compatible in the long term with capitalist forces. Among the speakers was Jeremy Till, co-author of *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* and one of the most important voices in maintaining the global discussion of the social consequences and responsibilities of design.

Each of these encounters in Berlin helped to solidify my understanding of what kind of designer I wanted to be and as such it was not difficult for me to compose my ideas for a research proposal to the Australian German Association. It made much sense to me to return to Germany and get a deeper understanding of the histories, mindsets and methodologies of these and other practitioners I felt could still have much to show me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been inspiring in the extreme to meet with people on the far side of the planet who spend their time aiming to improve the lived conditions of those around them using all manner of wits, canniness and professionalism and who would take the time to show me something of themselves. I would like to extend my thanks to those who agreed to be interviewed and who showed me their work in action. Furthermore, I am grateful to the Australian German Association and the Goethe Institut for providing me this exciting opportunity. I am all at once awed, inspired, energised and better educated!

I especially wish to thank Richard Middelman and Isolde Lueckenhausen (or should I write Lückenhausen) for their warm encouragement during the selection process, and since.

Thanks also to the RMIT Interior Design school, which is in fact more a family than a faculty.

Lastly, to my own family, with whom I share little blood but lots of love and upon whose support I depend more than you all realise, thank you!

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

THE POLITICS OF SPACE.

Design and art are inherently political pursuits. When we look at a building, the physical forces against which it must contend are often immediately visible: the effects of weather, the wearing down of steps, the build up of pollutants, the emergence of rust, vandalism, repairs...

However once a building is completed rarely are we any longer able to see the invisible socio-political forces, often tugging in many directions, that resulted in its erection. Architecture has the effect of, quite literally, casting in solid form the trends of its time. This is one of the invaluable ways we have of preserving the stories of our past, but it also confers a great responsibility on the producers of space, as once cast in hard materials produced spaces have the power to influence for a long time the social, political and economical destinies of their inhabitants and their overseers.

AIM OF THIS PAPER

This paper aims to investigate instances of activism in Germany in some way influenced, encouraged or initiated by designers and spatial practitioners, towards improving lived environments and social conditions and to learn not only the convening circumstances that made the action necessary but also what tactics were used that made the approaches of artists and designers more appropriate or effective than straightforward protest, social work or intervention from responsible government departments. In attempting to look at both the methodologies employed in concert with the said circumstances as well as the historical factors which make each episode unique, it is also hoped that lessons can be derived and adapted for use by these practitioners' counterparts in other locations.

For the most part the research methods I employ are qualitative, where generally data is only found in relation to the defining of social issues rather than to their solutions. Using predominantly site visits and in-depth interviews I will try to investigate the 'human factor' employed in this kind of activism, namely mentalities and tactics, which often fly under the radar of statistical enquiry.

Finally, it's important to acknowledge the circumstances which lead to the writing of this paper. Rather than an academic line of enquiry, it is the result of a privately funded travel fellowship offered by the Australian German Association, which not only aims to foster business relations between the two countries, but also, and most importantly to me, to invest in the professional development of young Australians. The criteria for the paper, or rather lack thereof (in terms of academic grading, word counts

and formatting requirements) has enabled me to develop a secondary, more internalised enquiry which relates to how I want to position myself in a field whose boundaries and self-image are constantly shifting. The award of this fellowship came at a particularly important crossroads for me, in a moment where, having recently graduated and standing on the threshold of professional life, I was asking questions about my own future practice: what kinds of projects do I want to work on, who do I want to work with or for and to what values do I want to align myself? The process of researching and writing this report has helped me to develop answers to these, although I suspect these are questions I will and should continue to address throughout practice. However the result, at times intentional and at others unavoidable, is that this is both a paper which answers the topics I originally posed, yet it can also be read like an extended letter to myself which reflects on those questions through the lens of personal professional development.

SECTIONS EXPLAINED

This paper has 6 sections. The first is a foregrounding. In providing the reader with information, historical, personal and theoretical, about the writer and the objects of investigation it is hoped that the 'spirit' of the investigation is conveyed. Accompanying this is an attempt at a definition of the burgeoning field of Critical Spatial Practice, whose presence is intended to impart relevance to that spirit.

The research findings which took place in Germany is then divided into 4 categories of spatial practitioner. The first group is the broadest, or perhaps most abstract, and deals with the production of stories, memories and critical thinking in relation to spatial activism. While this group does include architects, it focuses on projects of theirs which deal more with the discourse around the spatial playing field than with physical objects. For example, a text, exhibition or museum space.

The second group are designers. These are distinguished from the above section by focusing on projects with more physical outputs and the consequences of those. This group includes architects, designer-builders and a graphic designer.

The third group are artists. While we will see a blurring of this particular and powerful distinction, artists here are distinct from designers in that traditionally they operate 'without-mandate'³ and without a client. Another way of stating this is that where design tries to offer solutions to society, the long held domain of art is to force questions upon it. Also important to the distinction between artists and architects is how they define themselves, which often follows on from a course of study.

The last section concerns higher education in Germany as it relates to spatial activism. However, instead of interviewing educators on the topic (although many of those I met have also held significant teaching roles) I decided to find out from students what their experiences of studying in Germany were and how this has shaped their sense of their own role in the community. This decision was made in response to the idea that I had always intended this paper to be of interest to other young designers making the shift from study to practice, and it was felt that perspectives from their contemporaries might offer up more transferable information to those readers.

These 4 categories are mostly intended to provide structure and an understanding of the many ways in which space can be manipulated to offer up more positive social outcomes. However I should also state that none of these categories is very rigid. One of the characteristics of the new spatial agent is a seepage of their very classification, where to achieve results he or she must be able to play a number of roles and thus finds effectiveness and survival in flexibility.

Finally, while I attempt to take a critical standpoint on each of the case studies presented throughout the paper, the last section assembles these into a more cohesive picture, enabling me to draw out some key thinking points about the differences, potentials and geo-historical considerations of German spatial activism as they relate to Australian practices, current and emerging.

SPATIAL ACTIVIST: A DEFINITION

The term *activist* for the purposes of this paper, refers to those who act in a mobilising capacity, enabling or empowering ordinary citizens to exercise some level of influence for or against respectively good or poor development as it relates to their everyday existence. A *spatial activist* may achieve this using tactics or skills that lie outside the set regularly belonging to political or street activism, although it may also include those to some degree. They may also use tools typically belonging to the design and art fields, but which are then in some way reconfigured to allow interested parties (for example, community groups, residents, school children) to steer them. In this way a *spatial activist* will usually operate outside a traditional client-designer or artist-gallery relationship.

As previously mentioned, this paper is built very much upon the notion of the spatial agent as presented in the website and accompanying book *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*.⁴ The work undertaken by it's authors to define the *spatial agent* in a global and historical context, I would argue, has been instrumental to bringing the discussion of 'design activism' to the centre of architectural discourse. At least, it has for me.

The term is an observation of a phenomenon of (often) architects addressing social, environmental and ethical imbalances in a spatial format. In the book, the practice of

architecture is given special attention while it remains the practice in which economic, cultural, political and logistical issues are at their most intense convergence, heightening the opportunities for agitation and consequence. However, the use of the word *spatial* as opposed to *architectural* expands the scope of the research to acknowledge that the authorship of space is never solely the deed of the architect, but rather a confluence of different agents with varying skill-sets and agendas. For this reason, this paper, while called *Design Activism*, also aims to go beyond familiar labels of designer and architect and to acknowledge a broader range of German spatial practitioners treating '(social) space as a (social) product.'⁵

3. In reference to the chapter of the same title in Markus Miessen's *The Nightmare of Participation*, to be discussed in Section I.

4. *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till.

5. From Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, discussed further in the section 'Defining Critical Spatial Practice.'

AT THE TIME OF WRITING

At the time and place of writing (Hamburg and Berlin, Winter 2015) Germany is in the midst of social discontent on several fronts. My return flight from Germany back to Australia was initially intended to depart from the new Brandenburg Airport which, while mostly complete, remains closed for use due to ongoing financial and political controversy. Similarly in Hamburg, the *Elbphilharmonie* opera house designed by *Herzog & de Meuron* and intended to be the crowning feature of the massive *HafenCity* harbour redevelopment, stands incomplete and unoccupied while its estimated cost of completion has inflated from €241.3 million to €575 million, most of which will be drawn from public funds.

As in so many other western powers, political debate in Germany rages over the joint issues of border control and the intake of refugees fleeing wars, predominantly in Syria but also Afghanistan and Somalia. During my time in Hamburg I witnessed many marches and protests in which people were urging the German government to continue its commitment to support asylum seekers, while other areas of the country reported protests in contention, with strong anti-foreigner sentiment and neo-Nazi messages.

Each of these issues, some more complex than others, will at some point cross the desk or mind of a designer or artist, whether it be in a formal or informal context. Of interest to me is how these creative individuals respond, under pressure from the (often dissenting) voices of communities, developers, clients, employers, media and other interest groups, and how they use their specialised skill sets to advocate for the under-represented.

WHY GERMANY?

This shift of spatial practitioners engaging more directly in contemporary social issues is neither very new, nor is it exclusively German. In looking just at those working in Germany I do not wish to discount similar networks in other countries, and other admirable work can be found all over the World. However, the restrictions imposed by the overseeing funding body of this research actually has a felicitous effect. By necessarily being of Australian origin and investigating only German actors an opportunity arose to look, from an outsider's critical perspective, for both the valuable and replicable but also to understand, while being able to compare the cultures, what is hyper-specific to Germany.

While I intended to look only at contemporary practitioners, in light of our historical differences, I felt it was necessary to gain a good understanding of some of the historical aspects that I predicted might have played a role in the shaping of the German approach to space production.

BERLIN AS SPATIAL LABORATORY

Many of the episodes and examples presented hereafter occur or occurred in Germany's capital, Berlin and a look at the historical, economic and political contexts shaping the city is indispensable in understanding the topic of investigation. While there is much to be acknowledged about Germany's history of design and art as it relates to use as a political tool, I wish to focus this foregrounding on the years of and since the Cold War. Due to its unique position as a city divided, reunited and relatively impoverished during these years, its historical challenges not only allowed but necessitated its development into a place where individuals fought hard for their rights to govern their space and it is my contention that this mentality still finds itself echoed in spatial praxis in Berlin today, albeit embodied in different approaches.

West Berlin was not the only European city to grow a politically motivated squatting movement in the 1960s and 1970s but it was arguably larger and more influential than in other places. Limited space in the walled city and the government's preferred solution of *Sanierung* (redevelopment) and expansion rather than restoration were particular triggers of Berlin's movement. Developers were encouraged on this track by heavy subsidisation for new construction via the Berlin Help Laws which sought to stimulate economic growth in the isolated city but which in many ways functioned negatively.⁶

The protesters used squatting not just as a solution to the difficulty of securing appropriate housing, but also as a powerful tool for critique. It was felt by many that the city's official approach not only did little to solve housing hardships (overall, new developments eventually offered less accommodation than the collective number of *Altbauen* they replaced⁷) but also seemingly acted to erase Berlin's history from sight. Important to this discussion is an understanding of the tactics used by the squatters in order to recognise their continued influence.

Instandbesetzen (rehab-squatting) meant not only occupying a building but also renovating it and living demonstrably within its walls. This had the combined effects of expressing, through physical means, the desires to preserve the city's historical sites through self-funded restoration as well as the users right to govern how they lived in a social context. For instance, buildings were often adapted to the needs of a more communal way of living, with enlarged areas for communal cooking, meetings, exhibitions, shared childcare and workshop spaces. This was not only practical but made a critical statement against the building typologies being erected by developers, deemed by the squatters to be the "organised inhumanity of the concrete block"⁸.

In further contest to West Berlin's 'Amerification' and the city's desire for recognition as a free and capitalist capital, the squatters projected their message to the rest of Berlin by taking a visual stance sharply juxtaposed to the modernist aesthetic that dominated new architecture and culture. Not so much a result of happenstance renovation as first it might seem, the anti-modernist visual patchwork of graffitied

6. [Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin](#) by Emily Pugh, 20

7. *Ibid.*, 21

8. *Ibid.*



INSTANDBESETZT

Ausstellung im JFH PallasT
 Pallasstr. 35, Schöneberg vom 18.10.82 bis 18.11.82
 Ausstellungseröffnung, Montag 18.10.82 um 18.00 Uhr

montags bis samstags
 von 13.00 Uhr - 20.00 Uhr

Bülowstraße 55, Schöneberg
 besetzt seit dem 27.1.81
 Fotos von Volker Schuttsch

Liegnitzer Straße 5, Kreuzberg
 von Frauen besetzt seit dem 5.1.81
 Fotos (Sept. 82) von Birgit Rolles

Witten, Instandbesetzer im Ruhrgebiet
 geräumt im Dezember 81
 Fotos von Michael Wolf
 Texte von Jan Christ

Bezirksamt Schöneberg von Berlin, Abteilung Jugend und Sport — Jugendförderung



facades, D.I.Y banners bearing political slogans and low budget publications along with the disheveled look of their authors was rather calculated to fly in the face of the fever of rapid modernisation of the city and to draw attention to their critique of the direction in which they felt it was headed.

Initiated in 1979 and concluded in 1987, the *Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin* (International Building Exhibition) in West Berlin was an urban renewal project undertaken by the Senate and concerned itself with 2 streams of thought and action: *IBA Neubau* for large scale new constructions and *IBA Altbau* which concerned itself with the principle of 'Careful Urban Renewal' of existing structures in the Kreuzberg area, and was, it has been acknowledged, strongly influenced by the public's sympathetic reactions to the squatter's plight. Some of the 12 principles defining the approach included:

1. Careful urban renewal is a factor of the needs and interests of the present residents and businesspeople of the district. Existing structures will be used wherever possible, not destroyed. For economic, political and social reasons there is no alternative to this concept. It admits of developments over a longer term.

2. Careful urban renewal requires a very large degree of agreement on objectives and methods between residents and businesspeople and the developers or sponsors of projects. Technical and social planning and execution must go hand in hand.

9. The procedure of discussing and taking decisions on objectives and measures to be taken, programme planning and control should not go on behind closed doors.

Delegations of interested parties will have more rights; decision-making commissions will meet locally.

10. A programme of careful urban renewal should enjoy the confidence of all concerned. This necessitates that funding for the district in question be guaranteed for a period of several years. The funds must be made available promptly according to the requirements of each case.⁹

The planning policies developed through the exhibition sought to secure not only the physical infrastructure of the Kreuzberg area, but also its ingrained social infrastructures via protection: of buildings and their low-income inhabitants, and participation: in decision making and actual construction. While the policies governing this approach have mostly been superseded, what was inherited by the city's planners, policy makers and people is the feeling that Berlin's milieu should remain culturally, socially and financially diverse and that her inhabitants ought to be involved in urban politics beyond a kind of token participation.¹⁰

The reunification of Germany and the re-stitching together of Berlin along its famous 28 year tear¹¹ continues to play a role, politically and spatially, in the way space is authored. What was 2 cities was suddenly one city with 2 or more of most everything. The scaling back of industry was rapid and affected mostly those belonging to the former East, where the technology was deemed outmoded by comparison to that of the West and many lost their jobs. As in the industrial sector, so too in the fields of planning and architecture were Eastern qualifications devalued, leaving a dominant intellectual class stacked in the favour of

Western ideology and aesthetic, leading to the abandonment and later demolition of G.D.R icons like the *Palast der Republik*. Officially, the city adopted *Planwerk Innenstadt*,¹² an agenda of physical reunification via a return to the pre-war and pre-Nazi landscape as a way of ‘rewinding’ to a time before division. We see this today in the reconstructions of classical buildings such as the Berlin Palace/Humboldt Forum project. However, the reunification of Germany saw its symbolic completion in 1991 when Berlin was reinstated as the country’s capital. What followed was a time of rapid urban development, which speculated upon the idea that Berlin would explode as a western financial power. Berlin’s population was expected to double to 5 million by the end of the 1990s as companies settled their headquarters there, leading to excitable speculation and foreign investment for huge building projects. There was certainly no lack of space given the considerable scars the Berlin Wall had left in the landscape, in particular on its eastern side, and what resulted were mass constructions like *Potsdamer Platz*. The rate of development left little time for considerations of ‘careful urban renewal’ and this abandonment caused irritation and distrust among many and was responded to in unique ways by the city’s spatial practitioners.

Along with the vacating of jobs came the

vacating of buildings all over the city. Former G.D.R factories, power stations and swimming pools sat empty. Combined with the huge volume of space left behind by the wall and vacant land never rebuilt upon in East Berlin after WWII, there remained an abundance of free space when the initially heavy rate of development had contracted significantly by the mid 1990s. What ensued was an exciting period of testing the use of disused, interstitial, abandoned or unnoticed spaces. Berlin’s scene of ‘artistically creative workers’¹³ flourished in patches of overlooked city. At the same time that *raumlaborberlin* began its creative criticism of the *Planwerk Innenstadt* other spatial practitioners also took interest in this less formal production of space. For instance, the Urban Catalyst research project team, who sought to document, classify and ultimately develop a discourse about the impact and value of temporary use: nightclubs that appeared in a location for one night only, community farming initiatives such as the *Prinzessinen Garten*, ‘beach’ bars by the River Spree, *Bar 25* and *raumlaborberlin’s Der Berg*. In a cash-strapped city that, by comparison with Munich and Frankfurt, held significantly fewer employment opportunities for recently graduated architects, Berlin developed into a spatial utopia for the *prosumers*,¹⁴ where people went about implementing for themselves the kind of physical amenities they wanted to enjoy.

What began as an agglomeration of

9. *Internationale Baustellung Berlin 1987 Project Report*. English Edition, 202.

10. *The Berlin Reader*. Bernt, M, Grell, B & Holm, A (eds.). 17.

11. Construction on the Berliner Mauer (Berlin Wall) began on August 13 1961 and its dismantling was triggered on November 9 1989.

12. *Acting in Public*. raumlaborberlin. Maier, J & Heidelberger Kunstverein. 29.

individuals and groups exploiting the relative financial freedom of low rents and an abundance of free space in the form of interim use, quickly began to be recognised by artists, planners, designers and researchers (like *Urban Catalyst*) as a kind of ‘motor for urban transformation’¹⁵. Initially viewed as a hindrance to official city planning, it wasn’t long before the city too began to recognise the different ways in which interim uses and users could be of value: financially, touristically and democratically. In 2004 the Berlin State Senate commissioned the *Raumpioniere Berlin* study, which documented over 100 types of temporary use taking place in Berlin at the time. The culmination of the investigation was a symposium bringing together state officials, planners, real estate agents and temporary users themselves, and during which recommendations were made to encourage such initiatives.

Berlin’s reshaping into a post-Fordist city fueled the *Zwischennutzung* (temporary use) movement, which in turn reinforced the cultural knowledge society class characteristic of such cities, in a kind of corkscrew social development. Berlin’s very identity as a place of artistic, sexual and financial freedom for the creative middle class is one of the factors driving its current intense rate of ‘techno-tourism’ of the ‘EasyJet set’ and gentrification and thus laid its own ground work for the kind of complex spatial activism taking place today.

Much of the ideology and tactics of the

interim users of the 1990s can be seen as an echo of the squatter’s movement, however, what has shifted is the relationships and interactions between the players. Instead of playing the antagonist, rather the contemporary spatial agent, more subject to the power of (but also now, the interest of) developers and the State, must navigate in amongst the stakeholders as opposed to riling against them, in order to achieve his or her ends. The modern spatial agent is now often used to ‘mediate conflicting interests within an integrated decision making process’¹⁶ in what I’ve come to refer to as being the meat in a bottom-up top-down sandwich. This shifting of the role of the German spatial agent from antagonist to prosumer to mediator has given birth to one kind of practitioner this paper seeks to investigate.

But why is spatial activism needed? What are the issues being tackled? All too generally, it’s three things: migration, gentrification and the neo-liberal commodification of space. These are the core issues being explored in this paper via the moment of collision between they and the counter forces presented in this writing.

13. Creative cities’ and the Rise of the Dealer Class.

Stefan Krätke. 2010. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

14. A term from the dot.com era which refers to those who jointly produce and consume media, but also pleasantly applicable to the spatial happenings in Berlin at that time.

15. Urban Catalyst: The Power of Temporary Use.

Philipp Oswalt, Klaus Overmeyer, Philipp Misselwitz.

16. Ibid

17. The Production of Space Henri Lefebvre.

DEFINING CRITICAL SPATIAL PRACTICE

In 2010 I participated in a student workshop with the architectural theorist Jane Rendell in which she asked us to remake a work of our own at 1:1 scale, only without most of its physical elements, and to publicly erect it in a busy shopping mall. This idea challenged us students to think all at once along bodily, social and commercial lines. This was also the first day I heard the words *Critical Spatial Practice*, the meaning of which Rendell was one of the first to (attempt) to define and a discussion of which should, to my mind, offer some added context to this paper beyond the geographical.

The Lefebvrian catch-cry (*Social*) space is a (*social*) product¹⁷ deftly lifts space production out of the abstract exclusively physical domain, instead re-fusing the physical and non-physical and thereby acknowledging the complexities and consequences involved in making space. This thinking treats space and its production as situational and dependent upon infinite social factors: political, economical, conceptual, perceptual, accidental, incidental, philosophical, all of which overlap and tug in different directions. The idea that a stand alone profession such as architecture (or interior design) can hope to be aware of all of these and control them to create a fully controlled designed outcome is thus cast in a foolish light. Rather, practice is itself yet another of these factors. In light of this, when attempting to interact with spatial production on some of these levels as opposed to the mere physical, the focus is

shifted away from finished product and onto process.

As Jeremy Till describes, the shift into the realm of political processes necessarily involves including others, where the practitioner acknowledges that we all produce (social) space and our productions overlap. This is how the questions of ethics and responsibility enter the practice. His spatial practitioner is less 'lone genius' and more an agent of 'collaborative ethical imagination'.¹⁸ He offers architects the simple yet powerful challenge to take up a shift in scale. Where the revered scale for architectural drawing is 1:100 he proposes moving this into a social scale, of 1 architect to 100, 1000 or 10,000 users. This is just one way to shift how we think when we design.

However, Critical Spatial Practice should, by definition, go further and have a way to feed its own findings and review back into the field. Markus Miessen's definition is thus further concerned with the 'conscious staging of discourse and debate'. Critical Spatial Practice can, when relevant, also exist in non-spatial formats, namely writing, but also conference, public debate, and teaching. Through these media, the practice may also critique itself.

Critical Spatial Practice thinks about space without necessarily wanting or needing to intervene in it physically.¹⁹

18. *Architecture Depends*. Jeremy Till 151.

19. *Crossbenching*, Markus Miessen, forthcoming from Sternberg Press.

20. Michael de Certeau developed the idea of the oppositional stance between the use of 'strategies' and 'tactics,' the former as a means of preserving rigid socio-political frameworks, the later being a means to prod, provoke and ultimately redirect them. See *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

In this way, Miessen proves the relevance of the published spatial work. It should also be mentioned that his advice to me for writing this report was to

burn your bridges if you have to.

His own definition, discussed later, is to me the most thorough and that which captures my own impressions, aspirations and intuition toward the field. There are of course others and they can differ. But to generalise, the critical spatial practitioner, whether trained in art, architecture, curation, film or even interior design is a tactitian²⁰ whose 'everyday activities and creative practices seek to resist the dominant social order of global corporate capitalism.'²¹

Perhaps any attempt at more rigid classification would set up certain expectations and risk sacrificing those critical powers that give it importance.

At the time of writing there is no Wikipedia page dedicated to it and there are no Universities offering programmes in it. These 2 trivial facts say something. You will notice that all of the people explored hereafter have designed their own approach to spatial practice, making the field broader with each project.

A bit like pornography, I can't always define it, 'but I know it when I see it.'

21. See the essay [Critical Spatial Practice](#) by Jane Rendell
janerendell.co.uk

SECTION 2: STORIES, MEMORIES AND QUESTIONS

THIS SECTION PROFILES THOSE WHO INVEST CONSIDERABLE TIME CONTRIBUTING TO THE DISCUSSION OF SPATIAL POLITICS, IN WRITTEN AND CURATORIAL FORM AND IN THE PRESERVATION OF MEMORIES OF REVOLUTIONS PAST. I CONSIDER IT CRUCIAL, ESPECIALLY IN THE COMMODIFIED DESIGN LANDSCAPE, THAT THESE PRACTITIONERS KEEP PRODDING AND PROVOKING DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF OUR SPATIAL AUTHORS (WHICH INCLUDES YOU, THE READER) .

MARKUS MIESSEN

All of Markus Miessen's physical projects, theoretical writing, teaching studios and research are nested within his personal practice, Studio Miessen. While a trained architect, his architectural projects have consistently small envelopes. According to Miessen, this both enables him to avoid the longterm financially binding and thus risky line walked by so many other architects and leads him into more theoretical, temporal and critical territories. For instance, he works on a habitual basis with 3 separate artists as exhibition designer, something he likened in passing to a relationship with a 'dentist'.

His writings are chiefly interested in the emerging role of the spatial practitioner-whether it be the architect, artist or politician- and he is both prolific and provocative on the topic. His most widely disseminated work, the 'Participation' trilogy, emerged from his masters thesis in 2009 and developed into a critical dissection of one of the most common buzz words in the design, political and commercial spheres today, vying for highest use with 'sustainability' and 'ecological.'

ALBTRAUM PARTIZIPATION 2010

The term *Participation* is so imbued with positive association and so oft employed such that the title of this book alone initially stirs feelings of suspicion, dictatorship and injustice among the motives of its author. However, upon reading I was caught off guard by my own failure to recognise the points made therein and I was also made painfully aware that I had already been in at least one situation where my role as a designer had been, to some degree, to oil the wheels of the 'consensus machine.' For this reason the ideas presented by Miessen have been invaluable to me.

The major issues identified with participatory processes by Miessen are: the glossing over of serious socially discordant scenarios and the romanticised notion that true consensus is possible without their further solidification; its superficiality and possible use as a smoke screen to divert attention away from processes happening behind closed doors; the farming out of conscience by governing bodies to non-answerable ones, turning that conscience into a prosthetic limb to be employed for aesthetic purposes rather than being fundamentally integrated, leading to a

“politically motivated model of pseudo-participation” (a proposition to let others contribute to the decision making process), which is habitually stirred by the craving for political legitimisation.²²

Miessen encourages the spatial practitioner to act 'without mandate' and this is a dictum I have by now seen repeatedly in the kinds of practices I've explored and for which I had developed my own loose term, 'the artist approach.'

CROSSBENCHING

forthcoming

For this paper I also looked at the practice of Susanne Hofmann, another architect working in Berlin and the author of a new book entitled *Architecture is Participation*.

This presents an interesting dichotomy within a small geographic location and is a reminder that critical theories are just that: theories. Instead of serving as strict guidelines for thought, rather each should be interpreted by the reader according to their relevance to broader practice as it takes place in the world. The role of the critical voice is to learn from the failures of some to the broader benefit of others, especially where the individual can be incapable of self reflection to the same extent as an ‘uninvited outsider’ can. To this effect Miessen’s work is especially useful, as it offers a critical counterpoint to the sometimes saccharine imagery present in many of the projects discussed hereafter. He argues for a spatial practice which acknowledges not just the unavoidability of dissonance but also its enormous importance for a properly functioning democracy. Instead of raising up consensus as our key objective for spatial practice, rather we should aim to produce spaces and stages for productive agonistic encounter to play out.

If the Nightmare of Participation took a critical knife to the use of those methods in spatial practice, Miessen’s evolutionary next step, Crossbenching, is an attempt to answer the question ‘how can we do it right?’

Derived from key chapters from his PhD, Crossbenching offers Miessen’s own definition of *Critical Spatial Practice* (his capitalisation), which for me elucidated and connected many loose strands of thought I’d had, particularly in light of this report, that I had struggled to plait together and label.

“*critical*,” which refers to a particular moment in time in which one interrogates or critiques an existing practice or protocol and consequently maps out how to proactively alter, bastardize, augment, or develop this existing reality further.

Spatiality, in this regard, should be understood as a set of relations between humans, “things”, and (built) structures – the built environment. It is this relationality embedded in the term “spatial” that makes it political.

In contrast to the conventional understanding of architecture-as- *practice*, more recent iterations of practice strategically include and value immaterial products, such as research-as-practice.²³

22. Albtraum Partizipation or The Nightmare of Participation (English Edition) by Markus Miessen, 14

23. Crossbenching, Markus Miessen, forthcoming from Sternberg Press, 6-7

24. See Till’s chapter on the design studio format, entitled Deluded Detachment in Architecture Depends, 8

25. Crossbenching, 30

26. Ibid, 34

Only in one tantalising footnote does he provide us with a point 9 size list of those he deems exemplary in some aspect of Critical Spatial Practice. But perhaps this limitation is placed upon us so that we are not tempted to measure ourselves against them, instead continuing the responsible design of our own practice, thus avoiding reinforcing the cyclical professionalisation of architects which begins during their training.²⁴

Out of this definition he proposes a model of practice termed Crossbenching:

Instead of being interested in a simulation of participation, Crossbench Practice performs a non-illusory form of pragmatism, with an awareness of the dirty realism that someone needs to be in charge.²⁵

Rather than clinging too doggedly to a leftist ideology and an overly naive faith in the fairness of democratic processes, the Crossbencher enters the spatial arena with their individuality intact, rather than seeing him or herself as belonging to a given field, such as architecture. With a kind of realism toward the current state of supposedly democratic processes, they first acknowledge their own motives as part of a larger ecosystem of process and only from that standpoint do they begin practice. What should result is

a productive attack on the looming participatory dogma: it forecasts and declares a new value of nondemocratic-rather than antidemocratic decision-making, toward empowerment, relative autonomy, and the development of operative potential.²⁶

JESKO FEZER

In 2002 Jesko Fezer was one of the founding editors of *AnArchitektur*, a Berlin based bi-annual magazine which sought to highlight and explore, through analysis, critical reflection and discourse, the impact of architecture on political and social infrastructure and vice versa. While Fezer can be seen as practicing in many different fields, it is my understanding that his is a singular practice which never deviates far from those questions posed in *AnArchitektur*. As an architect working with *ifau* (see page 37), an owner of the art/design/theory bookshop *Pro qm*, a curator, writer or teacher at *Die Hochschule für bildende Künste* in Hamburg, his work is firmly underpinned by questions relating to market forces, the political and the role of design in, or rather for, society. While this practice is manifested in myriad forms, beyond the formal and ritualistic aspects of actual output, Fezer himself sees little distinction between them.

Despite the preoccupation with the socio-political impacts of architecture, Fezer does not consider himself an activist, wherein one has a sharpened, unwavering outlook or else very specific affiliations with a certain group (such as the cases of Sandy Kaltenborn or *Park Fiction*). Instead he tends towards a kind of critical flexibility which perhaps comes from his discursive roots (such as *AnArchitektur*). While not an activist by personal definition, there is the sense of a deep questioning of dominant structures and procedures running through his work, and which I wondered whether might be attributed to location and cultural factors. He shared with me his perspective on what could account for the strong agglomeration of spatial practitioners working with (varying forms) of activism in Germany:

A point which is crucial for the German context that in general is more good than bad, is that this country experienced that there is nothing to be taken for granted and that people can be kind of radical and can make a change. It's not only about Nazi Germany which is some time ago. It's also about '68, the fall of the wall, about squatting. It's about the transformation to capitalism of half the country in the last years which has had some very negative effects. But at least you realise that things happen and that people are doing it, and some people are against it and in general there is the chance to do things differently and this is an experience I, for myself at least, had and this makes it possible to think about alternatives. Maybe that's something that is special in Germany.

When this attitude is further employed in an inward facing manner, it's possible to see from where another of his frequently explored topics comes, which is the role of the designer, who has powerful tools to wield, once we've understood, as Fezer does, the broad reaching impacts of the profession.

WOHNUNGSFRAGE

October-December, 2015

Fezer was one of three curators of the exhibition *Wohnungsfrage* (The Living Question) which I was able to see at *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin. The exhibition offered multiple explorations of the issue of the commodification of housing and its increasing inaccessibility to various groups:

How is one to get housed as a newcomer or as a longtime resident? How is one to live while training or studying, in old age, as a single occupant, with children?²⁷

and the resultant peripheralisation of broad-er social questions:

Who do we want to live with? What kind of housing do we want?²⁸

The gentrification of Berlin is a topic of discussion which can be frequently overheard all over the city and Berlin does present an interesting case study to explore it from all sides.²⁹ *Wohnungsfrage* used Berlin as its laboratory by presenting different stories of groups from the city struggling to defend themselves against powerful market forces. However, the exhibition was taken beyond a presentation of facts and anecdotes and into a discursive arena through complementing historical examples, new art commissions and lecture series. For example, in addition to informative material and imagery, the story of *Kotti & Co* (see page



41) was also told through a new video art work by Angelika Levi, in triptych, which showed interviews and a satirical song, with and by respectively, the embattled residents of Kottbusser Tor. In addition to this, the curatorial decision was made to pair the *Kotti & Co* working group with an American practice and research based design studio in order for them to share their knowledge of 2 very different scenarios yet both of which are at heart *Wohnungsfragen*. *Estudio Cruz*' work is concerned with the Tijuana/San Diego border situation, in particular the informal vernacular building practices in the border zone and the political and bureaucratic forces governing these interstitial communities. By opening up a platform for learning from one another's experience, these two seemingly distant initiatives were able to develop new ideas. Taking *Kotti & Co's Gecekondus* as its starting point, *Estudio Cruz* developed a design for

27. *Wohnungsfrage* Exhibition Guide. Jesko Fezer, Christian Hiller, Nicholas Hirsch, Wilfried Kuehn & Hila Peleg (eds). I.

28. Ibid

29. *Berlin's Gentrification* Mainstream by Andrej Holm., in *The Berlin Reader*. 171.



a series of buildings, similar in scale and potential use to the Gecekondü, but which can be self-built from components available to those living in the Tijuana territory.

In our interview I asked Fezer about the significance of what I had perceived to be an emphasis on the ‘stories’ of the housing question as opposed to its theories. He reacted by saying that what they wanted to explore was ‘reality relation;’ or in other words, the real situations that people were facing. What is interesting to me is his taking this a step further and using the exhibition as a tool to try to propose new possibilities, rather than leaving the living

question hanging. By artificially arranging these different responses to that question in an exhibition environment, as was the case with *Wohnungsfrage*, we are given an important opportunity to view the issues at hand in a broader global context and to have a discussion which is less urgent and thus more forward looking than the kinds of conversations taking place on the front lines of gentrification.

Above: The *Wohnungsfrage* Exhibition, this image shows Levi's video work and the 1:1 model by KOLABS

PUBLIC DESIGN SUPPORT

Hamburg 2011-2016

For students at *Die Hochschule für bildende Künste* (Hamburg Fine Art Academy), *Public Design Support* was a class on offer under the Experimental Design programme of which Jesko Fezer is a professor; for residents of *St. Pauli* it was an office where they could bring design related issues to be addressed, free of charge, by the students and staff. This approach has its roots in Paul and Linda Davidoff's concept of 'advocacy planning'³⁰ which aimed to develop the role of the design profession in such a direction that disparate groups could have access to design knowledge in order to create their own ideas for space in the context of Robert Moses' aggressive urban renewal programmes in 1960s New York City. An advocacy planner (or designer) is a conduit between a community's needs and real solutions, but who also defends their clients interest in a playing field where they speak the language, similar to how groups or individuals might employ a lawyer to argue for or against something.

In working with their clients in a participatory manner the emphasis was placed on coming up with solutions that could be carried out by the client and rather than finished solutions they tried to offer 'practical help for autonomous action' and the promotion of self-empowerment. Where possible they tried to find solutions in which no materials were required, favouring a re-thinking of existing realities.

One example highlights the potential for starting broader social conversations by using a design one as a softer entry point. One *St. Pauli* resident approached *Public Design Support* for help with re-organising his apartment but when they made a visit to his home it became clear that rather what

he would benefit from was help around the more psychological issue of hoarding. Rather than installing more storage, they instead suggested ways he might look at his possessions in a more critical light. They also showed him how he might find ways to give away or sell things Online. In the end they spent 10 Euro on helping him with some simple repairs, but they major changes to a now radically reformed space were a result of helping someone reorder their life through their own thinking about space.

Successful in some ways and less so in others, according to Fezer a key issue lies in people's differing definition of what a design problem is. Frustrating to both students/designers and clients/residents is the presentation of a problem beyond their capabilities. An example might be the struggles of residents to keep their housing at *Esso* (discussed on page 49). Another difficult aspect could also be when the design problems simply weren't complex enough for the students to extend their own thinking. However, while Fezer is the first to acknowledge the shortcomings of the *Public Design Support* programme, that doesn't mean it hasn't significant value to him:

It's a way we want to try out how we can engage locally with design practice. It's also a kind of pedagogical teaching method, how to find out something about people's lives and the potentials and disadvantages of design practice where failure shows the limits of the profession and in this way it works quite well.

Many of the projects explored in this paper are born from an urgent reaction against an unfavourable situation to those involved, whether on behalf of themselves or others. In this way we can understand their authors as activists in the popular sense, even if they don't fit the popular imagery of activists. *Public Design Support*, on the other hand, presents us with a different method again for advocating the improvement of social space. In operating in a way closer to a professional studio with clients than to activists railing for or against change, this project offers an interesting insight into how the design profession can be re-imagined. Another important aspect to be acknowledged here is the academic framework it sits within.

While this particular format may not be financially viable to those beyond their educational years, that should not mean aspects of it are not translatable and what's more, its belonging to the realm of students should not disqualify it from carrying relevance to the wider design community. Rather, the academic space

is unpractical, ineffective, irrational, noncommercial and this space where people do different things than practice. It's very important. This has to be strictly defended.

In other words, schools of design are a place to breed and test new ideas that can inform the future of our practice and profession.

It's very dangerous to rely on the view of how the profession is right now. You have to set up your own network, your own knowledge, your own perspective. And this is more interesting than looking at the professional practices.

Public Design Support also brings to light one of the frustrating realities of operating in the design field. With projects like these which operate on the very frontiers of gentrification there is always the awareness that we are part of the problem. As part of a highly educated creative class, does setting up a shop front which offers a design service not contribute to the growth of cultural capital which makes these areas so enticing to developers? I feel the initiative manages to assuage the danger of this by being solution oriented rather than object oriented, by looking for 'empowerment in small things'³¹ and by trying to engage with those normally lacking access to design services. Less about an idealised future, the project deals in 'pragmatic utopias.'³²

30. *Advocacy And Pluralism In Planning*, Paul Davidoff, Journal of the American Institute of Planners.

31. *All Issues and Problems can become objects of design processes*, Jesko Fezer & Studio Experimentelles Design, 81

32. *Ibid.*

FHXB MUSEUM

Berlin

In 2001 Berlin reduced its number of municipalities, mostly by amalgamating the 26 smaller areas into 12 bigger ones. Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain, formerly West and East respectively, were combined under one management and the *Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum (FHXB Museum)* was funded as an initiative to ease the reunification process.

It's easy to understand what an important role museums can play in offering access to educational historical material outside of schools, universities and popular media. But we often think of museums as neutral ground, as spaces of impartiality and objectivity, but this view is idealistic. It also undermines the potential for museums to play a bigger role in social conversations. In assembling any exhibition, political and social decisions are made and the 'human factor' can't be avoided, nor should it necessarily.

Museums and galleries can help to engender a sense of belonging and the affirmation of identity for groups which may be marginalised. They can envision inclusive societies and encourage mutual respect between different communities, tackle discrimination and challenge the stereotypes that feed intolerance. These kinds of outcome are delivered through thoughtful approaches to collection, display, programming and interpretation which reflect the full diversity of society.

Acts of racism, racial violence, racial prejudice and abuse do not exist in a vacuum. They are not isolated incidents or individual acts, removed from the cultural fabric of our lives. Notions of cultural value, belonging and worth are defined and fixed by the decisions we make about what is or is not our culture, and how we are represented (or not) by cultural institutions.³³

Today the *FHXB Museum* focuses heavily on inter-cultural and integration issues. It is important to them to 'display life in a multicultural quarter,' while at the time of writing approximately 50% of those living in the Kottbusser Tor area are of non-German origin.

The *FHXB Museum* is an involved (though radically inclusive) space of activism in 2 ways. Firstly, while Kreuzberg is continually being redefined through changing demographics, politics, migration, tourism and gentrification, the museum promotes both resistance and flexibility to the upheaval by

explaining to people what's happening and raising consciousness through historical example.

Secondly, through their permanent exhibition and extensive archive, they are a living document and thus reminder of the quarter's legacy of activism. Moving through *Geschichte wird gemacht! Protestbewegung und Stadtsanierung in Kreuzberg SO 36* (History is Made! Protest Movement and Urban Renewal in SO36) the visitor is presented with images, posters and artifacts from the 1980s squatters' movement and moves through to present day to discuss, in a critical light, the effects of gentrification, extremely visible today. For tourists like

33. Including Museums: *Perspectives on Museums, Galleries and Social Inclusion*. Jocelyn Dodd & Richard Sandell, 31.



myself it offers a sobering insight into the growing effects of our presence on a neighbourhood struggling to hold its ground as a place of broad social inclusion and affordability. We are even presented with data on the rising numbers of 'vacation rentals' and their inflated prices versus the rising rents of ordinary citizens. For residents it is a reminder of their own inheritance, of Kreuzberg's historical attitude of resistance to market forces and perhaps it is a call to arms.

Across the upper 2 levels the museum displays both a historical and yet also a living, ever growing account of migration to the area, from the religious refugees in the 1800s, to the working migrants of the West, later the East and also refugees, both post-war and current. The stories are told through historical display and through recorded experiences one can listen to, in the words

Above: Inside the FHXB Museum, this image shows the interactive room-sized model of Kreuzberg which belongs to the permanent exhibition.

and voices of the recounter. The stories can be uplifting, saddening or mundane and centre around migrants impressions of and encounters in Kreuzberg. These 2 points of emphasis tell the story of Kreuzberg as a place of constant struggle and also attempt to stitch the significant cultural factors of activism and migration (past and ongoing) into a unified story of the area as opposed to 2 different ones. They also work with other initiatives in the area that have aligned agendas, hosting events with the *Kotti & Co* tenants initiative, an organisation whose existence would seem to reinforce the contention that it is possible to preserve the at once disparate yet united spirit of the area.

The museum receives district funding enough to cover rent of the space, exhibition materials and 2.5 salaries. The rest they must secure themselves through donations from visitors and fundraising and the exhibitions are mostly staffed by volunteers. People on low-income welfare are also able to work at the museum in exchange for extra benefits. Despite the financial relationship to city government the curatorial decisions are autonomous.

SECTION 3: DESIGNERS

THIS SECTION LOOKS AT GERMAN DESIGNERS (BY SELF-DEFINITION) WHO PRACTICE, EITHER PARTIALLY OR WHOLLY OUTSIDE A REGULAR CLIENT BASED DYNAMIC AND WHO PRODUCE WORKS OR ACTIONS WHICH ADVOCATE FOR USES OF SPACE TILTED MORE IN THE FAVOUR OF THE CITIZEN OR COLLECTIVE USERS AS OPPOSED TO THE ENTRENCHED COMMON COMMERCIAL OR STATE OPERATED ALTERNATIVE.

RAUMLABORBERLIN

While its core group consists of 8 trained architects, *raumlaborberlin* is not an architecture firm so much as a working group whose number swells and contracts on a project by project basis, dependent upon the scope and the expertise required. Looking beyond the limitations of their own experience, typically each project will engage others in different knowledge fields, such as artists and gardeners, as well as those with intimate knowledge of their own living conditions, 'expert citizens.'³⁴

Their projects can range in flavour between public art, exhibition content, urban planning, intervention, community building and occasionally physical architecture. Rather than their training as architects, it's the issues at hand that seem to drive the format: a lack of affordable studio space for artists leads to a city wide survey and book of spatial opportunities, a degrading harbour in Sweden calls for a new sauna to invigorate bathing culture, and an invitation from a curator logically leads to an exhibition entry. Aside from commissions, many of their projects are self-initiated, as Christof Mayer explained, many projects start with an interest, energy and the attitude

we want to do something, let's find some money.

This means their clients can range from the Berlin Senate to themselves and some interested residents.

The aims of any project appear to be to engage and question. A playful approach is often employed to bring people together in such a way as to shine a critical light on existing conditions and thus serve as a starting point for a conversation. For

example, their well known *Kuchenmonument* is a kind of Trojan Horse which houses an inflatable bubble that can create an intimate space in the most overlooked urban spaces. When a deserted area under a train line suddenly transforms into a space for a feast which passers-by may join, couldn't that make the participants question the urban fabric that becomes invisible over time due to habit and exposure? Another interesting feature of their work is the shift in working scales. As Mayer explained, taking a lofty vantage point may be necessary for planning projects, such as their work at Tempelhof Feld, both in terms of literal physical space but also in terms of looking at long term implementations. But their 'bigger picture' projects are always accompanied by 1:1 scale testing involving the aforementioned 'expert citizens.' In this way aspects of broader, long term plans are tested, say through a festival such as *Junipark*. Discoveries and failures may be made during these 1:1 parallel projects which can then be incorporated back into the broader plan. Consider the potential of this approach as compared to conventional architecture and planning which customarily carries out little at full scale until the time comes to build, solidify, make permanent its intentions.

I asked if there were any important lessons they had learned from failed projects and Mayer drew my attention to the need to find systems for 'caretaking' with every project, whether these be financial or social. When talking about Till's scale shift of 1 architect to 100 or more people this implies a need for shared responsibility and shared energy. Therefore, they consider a project a failure if it cannot continue to operate without their ongoing attention. With the exclusion of temporal events and festivals the goal is to

MARKTHALLE IX

Berlin, 2009-ongoing

find affected people in the community to be custodians of their projects to everyone's benefit.

It should also be mentioned that some of its members have more formal practices outside of their work with *raumlaborberlin*. This leads me to assume that both arms of practice are necessary financially, yet also that they inform one another. Mayer confirmed this, and stressed that for himself the practical experience of architecture is important to *raumlaborberlin*, as are the networks that came along with it, and the professional relationships developed in his practice, such as with clients, builders or planning bodies can also be shared across both practices.

raumlaborberlin's work seems deeply rooted in their city and the timing of their formative years as they coincided with pivotal points in its history:

We are attracted to difficult urban locations. Places torn between different systems, time periods or planning ideologies, that can not adapt. Places that are abandoned, left over or in transition that contains some relevance for the processes of urban transformations. These places are our experimentation sites. They offer untapped potential which we try to activate. This opens new perspectives for alternative usage patterns, collective ideals, urban diversity and difference.³⁵

My first exposure to the idea of an 'incremental design process' was in relation to the *Markthalle IX* in Kreuzberg, Berlin. Initially necessitated by a lack of money to realise a complete design solution, for *raumlaborberlin* this concept has grown into an important approach which allows for greater testing, observation and flexibility.

I am also interested in this project because it demonstrates a difference in approach by governing local authorities between Berlin and Melbourne. Initially the historical building, which had not served as a traditional German market hall for over 15 years and in the interim housed only larger commercial chain stores, was to be sold by the city to the highest bidder. However when residents protested this, the city opted instead to call for alternative proposals with fixed price rental given to for proposals considered most worthy. Although I could not find out what the selection criteria were, contracts for use were awarded to a local group of residents who had experience in the food industry and who worked with *raumlaborberlin* to develop their submission which proposed a community operated market hall and hub. I struggle to find examples of similar bureaucratic scenarios in Melbourne.

After 6 years the design process is still ongoing. The aims remain the same: "to make a public space for food and to make a space for everyone" and according to these aims the design is refined and solidified further with each year. When I last visited in 2013, aside from the canteen and the commercial retailers, the traders operated from behind wooden trestle tables hung with festive awnings. Today a baker has a fixed position with a constructed store and

34. Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, 32.

35. <http://raumlabor.net/statement/>

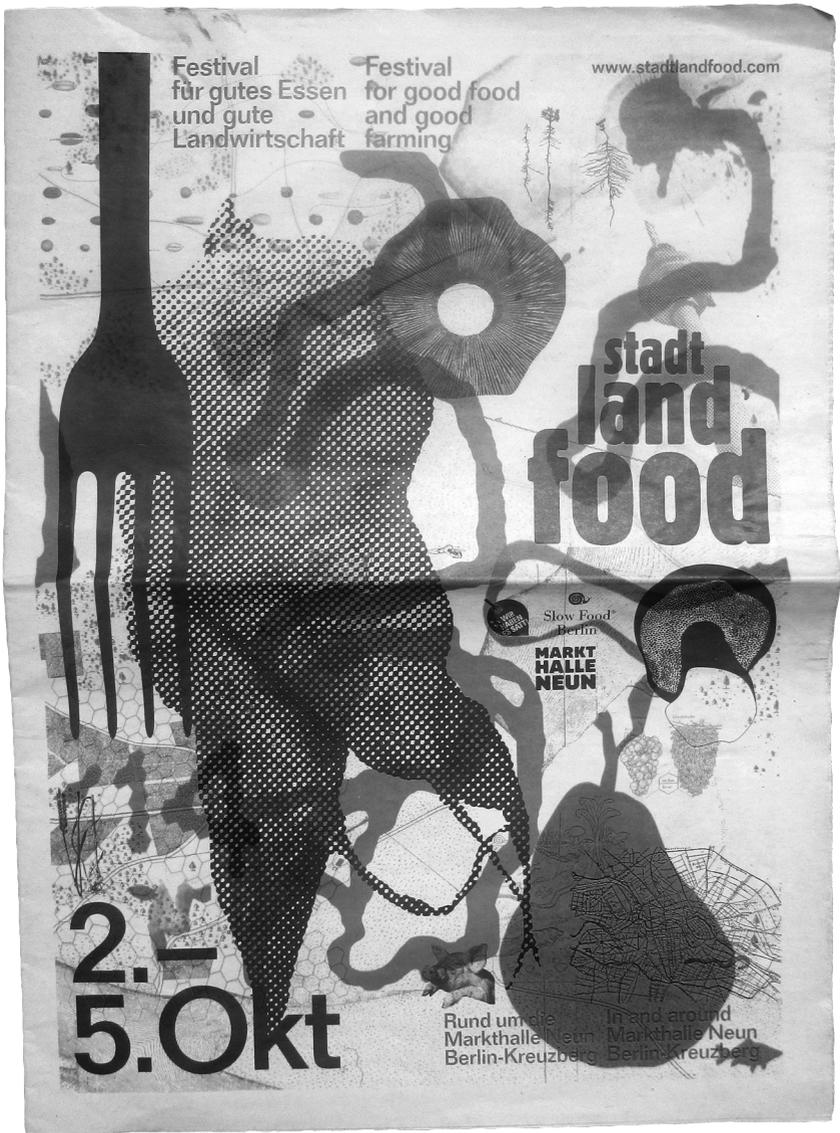


an oven with which they do all their baking and a butcher is similarly settled in a store in which observers can see how their sausages are made—a deliberate design choice to break down some of the distance which has grown between modern food production and consumption. Both of these along with the canteen, ALDI (a budget supermarket chain), KIK (a discount variety store) and the café and restaurant on the outer perimeter of the market are now open 6 or 7 days per week as the market solidifies economically as well as physically.

Criticism from some locals over food prices at the market lead me to acknowledge the fact that while a community initiative, projects like these can also be markers and even drivers of gentrification processes. Behaving less like traditional markets such as the nearby *Türkischer Markt*, whose offerings are mostly limited to cheap groceries and household products, *Markthalle IX* has a performative feeling supplied by its many food stalls, eating areas and as a space to host food related events. It has become a place of pleasant atmospheric quality which draws people to it as a meeting place within the neighbourhood. However, a good example of the benefits of the incremental design can be seen in the re-interpretation of the

goal to make a ‘place for everyone.’ Initially *raumlaborberlin* and the working group wanted the chain retailers to have their leases discontinued as they weren’t seen to fit with the image of local-ness and quality they had envisaged...

But soon we realised that the ALDI opens up the place... I think the ALDI market and the strange coffee place in the middle, they still provide for different people, to visit the place and this makes it interesting. It’s still democratic. People complain that the food is expensive and this evens the field. We wouldn’t have realised this if we’d been able to take over everything at once. By working slowly you can make corrections, change direction according to what works and doesn’t... I’m critical about the gentrification aspect as well but it’s about finding the best out of a lot of options when change is inevitable. If you do things you make mistakes, if you don’t do things you don’t make mistakes but you can’t be blamed for anything.



Facing: Inside the **Markthalle IX**, the permanent Café and ALDI behind.

Above: Programme for Food and Farming festival held at the **Markthalle IX** in 2014

DIE GÄRTNEREI

Berlin 2015-ongoing

Die Gärtnerei consists of a communally organised garden in which mostly flowers are grown and an adjacent building that hosts German classes 4 times per week. Building workshops, either in the school-house or in the garden depending on the season, are held 3 times per week.

Evolving in a different way to the *Markthalle IX*, the concept for *die Gärtnerei* (The Nursery) arose from a series of coinciding circumstances which created an opportunity to 'do something': the offer of a piece of land for free use from a church group and then a building on that site also becoming available. Only from this point was the idea developed to make a cultural space that could serve as a 'place of arrival' for refugees along with the wider community. At the time (and now) the public debate over the fate of refugees in Germany is far more urgent and heated than in Australia.

'Arrival' can be interpreted broadly: to the country, city, neighbourhood, community, culture, language. It also implies that a departure will follow: out into that community when dependence on the project is replaced by the skills, confidence and support the project aims to foster. The decision to create a garden in which mostly flowers could be grown and then sold was dictated by the site conditions; a cemetery, unused for 30 years but which can't be used to grow edible plants due to health concerns.

Presently they have funding from a cultural body which supports some staffing and the renovation of the former mason's workshop but which ends in late 2016. The hope is that they can move towards financial self-sufficiency from flower sales and other ventures.

However, the aim is not only to 'do something (altruistic) for refugees,' but rather to create a space of reciprocity, for learning and cultural exchange at a time when tensions over forced migration are high and emotionally fraught:

We try to give the guys an opportunity to meet people from Berlin and give Berliners the chance to put faces behind the mass of refugees which is coming. You hear through the media all the dramatic numbers but I think as long as you don't do anything one to one with the guys you don't see the potential which is here. This mediation aspect is totally important... But the idea is not only to give them a safe place but also how can we give them an idea about how we live and learn something about their needs. This is expertise that is very much needed in the next years.

I was interested in the challenges, legal and otherwise, and also the failures of a project such as this, where perhaps cultural differences and the romanticism of spatial, social advocacy that is proliferated through popular media are concerned. It turns out that legal permissions regarding the use of the land and building were able to be avoided, given that they are privately owned by the *Evangelischen Friedhofsverband Berlin* (Protestant Cemetery Association) and securing funding from the semi-autonomous cultural body, *die Kulturstiftung des Bundes*, meant they were able to begin fairly quietly. This is important as of *die Gärtnerei's* 10-15 regular participants who are seeking asylum several are residing in Germany illegally. Therefore, something they must be vigilant of is the use of images and names on the Internet and other media. One expects



there to be challenges arising from cultural differences, but what they learned here is that these arise in just the kind of situations one might not anticipate and this is the very nature of such differences, necessitating flexibility in coping with issues as they arise. What follows is an anecdote of one such situation.

There was a small issue that took on huge proportions. Some of the participants received metro tickets from the project, some others didn't. Those who get a little bit of money from the state we thought could buy it themselves. But this split the group into smaller groups and there was a small rebellion. You think it's just a detail and to us the reasoning was clear but then we realised that if we didn't change something it could be disruptive to the progress of the project. So communication is very important and we should not forget that we have different cultures and different ways of seeing the world, which is very nice and there's a big potential but

to make the place function we have to find some space where we really understand each other above our cultural differences.

I attended one of the monthly events in which either the garden or workshop are opened to the public. Given it was winter, *Café Nana*, as this aspect of the project is called, was held indoors, and around 35 people were present, mostly project participants and some locals. Some of the refugees (they are all men at this stage) gave a presentation about the different activities from the past months. Most importantly, the presentations were in German, a result of their classes as part of the project. The atmosphere was cheerful and this made me wonder about the reception of the project from the surrounding neighbourhood.

I had never worked with refugees before and didn't know too much about the topic and so I didn't know how people would welcome the project. I was quite stressed at the first 2 events here where we just

said ‘everybody is welcome.’ But in the end we had only positive feedback. The neighbours that pass by are happy to come in and happy to meet (us). And last week we had some school children offer us some money they earned from making some small objects over 6 weeks which they sold at the Christmas Market and they gave us the money together with some juice and some cakes and it was really nice... The teacher told me they were scared to come. And when they went back to school they were singing on the way and telling all the other children ‘oh the guys are very dark but they are so nice.’ And if those children tell other children and their parents then you have a snowball effect.

When I interviewed the project coordinator, Anne-Laure Gesting, a young architect who works with *raumlaborberlin*, I inquired

about the nature of working with such a socially and organisationally complex project and how her training is employed here, and how would the outcomes differ were her role filled by a social worker, language teacher or gardener:

It’s not easy. As an architect you are trained to think in a structured way and to develop concepts so this is for sure useful in this context because I’m a coordinator of the project and so I also have to think in a cultural or artistic way about how to develop the programmes. But in the day to day life I have no time to draw plans. Someone else does that. And sometimes I don’t see those things anymore. Much of the time I spend the day lost in the details, talking to the guys one after the other because someone doesn’t have a place to stay or has to go away to get papers. And some days I am purely social worker, some days I am just building... It changes every day. I’m questioning that sometimes. My task is also to bring the project forward not just week by week but also looking forward. We have money for the next 18 months only. So we have to think of ways to earn money through the project.



Page 35: From my *Café Nana* visit, looking back at the past year.

Left: Free postcards from *die Gärtnererei*

IFAU

ifau (*Institut für angewandte Urbanistik*/ Institute for Applied Urbanism) is an architectural firm based in Berlin which emphasises its own form of negotiation within design. Rather than the more overt activism pursued by some of the other projects here, *ifau* rather employs design and critical thinking as a tool to investigate 'urban difference and diversity' and uses these as its springboard for making projects which question the professional architectural status quo and peoples' ideas about space, particularly in relation to housing³⁶. In our interview, Christoph Schmidt described *ifau* to me as being interested in how architecture as a decision making process can be more liberal, effective and interesting - for themselves as well as for their clients.

Of particular relevance to this paper is their initiation of the co-operative housing project, *R50*.

R50

Berlin, completed 2011

R50, at Ritterstraße 50 in Kreuzberg, is an example of a building trend that is gaining momentum in Germany. However, *Baugruppen* (building groups) are a socio-economic phenomenon as opposed to an aesthetic one and involve groups of private individuals pooling their financial resources to fund the design and construction of their own apartment buildings or housing complexes, bypassing the involvement of developers.

The groups can be formed along many different lines; they may be families with children with a disability and who therefore have similar accessibility and social inclusion needs, or they may simply be friends with similar ideological values. As opposed to purchasing a single apartment from a plan, these self-initiated projects allow their owners to be involved in the design process, driving more demand-led designs. As *R50* was initiated by a group of architects who were also stakeholders, their process went further than meeting physical spatial requirements and brought in critique from the architectural standpoint, asking questions around quality, privacy and necessary housing size.

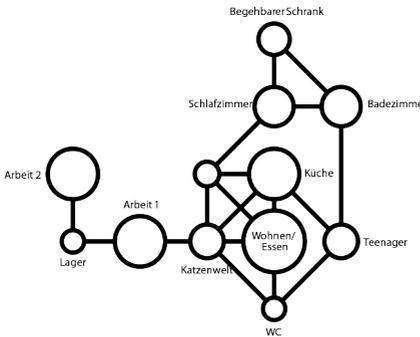
After establishing a construction method and building envelope that would deliver the required space for their budget, *ifau+Jesko Fezer's* (who collaborate on some projects) role was to assist the other stakeholders in establishing a clearer view of their own spatial needs so that their floor plans could be largely self-programmed. They used questionnaires to inquire about people's daily habits, how they used space in their old homes and what expectations they had for their new one. Then they asked people to measure all their furniture which should

accompany them to the new apartment. It was found that the owners had very different ideas and requirements.

There's a family that is happy to share one big space to live together because during the day they are at school or work and at home they meet just 2 or 3 hours a day and they're happy to meet in a big room and to just have small cabinets for their individual space...Others said we want to separate this because our children are teenagers and they should have their own area where they can meet with their friends.

From the responses gathered, they made abstracted diagrams, showing in a simple visual way how each apartment could use roughly the same amount of space differently. The owners could reflect on these differences, compare with how others had responded and make further decisions

Judith & Florian



before settling the designs. Some aspects were not designed at all, leaving decisions related to finishes and appliances up to the individual to make at later stages. This kept costs to the whole group lower but also plays on a theme encountered a lot in the process of this research, which is the incremental approach to design, whereby, in this case, people figure out what they need through living there with

the idea that maybe the most effective situations in life are the temporary situations. But they're really lasting long.

This kind of demand led design process means the architects offered up the knowledge of their profession without driving their own aesthetic agenda. An ideological agenda related to more compact living is present, but this is an intention which binds the *Baugruppe*.

They also found ways to reduce the individual need for space by coming up with interesting communal solutions beyond the typical shared laundry. For instance, there is a guest bedroom coming off the common ground floor area, which saves a large amount of space were each apartment to have their own, at the risk of it becoming an extra storage space for 11 months in a year.

36. See their 2014 entry with Jesko Fezer into the [Urban Living competition at Am Mühlenberg / Meranerstraße, Berlin](#) (through the Berlin city website).

37. See Victoria's [Market Led Proposal guidelines](#).

38. [The Phenomenon of Building Groups in Berlin: What changes when a community starts building?](#) by Winne Chan. 34

39. [Andreas Ruby And Nathalie Janson On The Baugruppe Initiative](#) www.designcurial.com

Cooperative housing projects offer up some fertile areas for understanding and coping with social issues through ‘bottom up’ architecture and it’s easy to draw some lines of reference back to earlier ideologies of housing in Germany such as the squatting and *Gründerzeit* movements. Furthermore, while certainly not the case for all projects like this, the land for this building was purchased directly from the city of Berlin, which had allocated it specifically for use in this way. In Victoria, similar arrangements exist for private organisations, but these are market driven with an emphasis on providing services and approvals subject to the sitting government’s policy agenda.³⁷

This is one of the few projects presented here where data, as opposed to qualitative observation, is available. By circumventing developers’ profit margins and other costs associated with buying off the plan, such as marketing, *Baugruppen* save between 25% and 35% as compared to market prices for other new buildings.³⁸ In 2011, co-operative housing projects accounted for 10% of new construction in Berlin and cities like Berlin and Hamburg support this in their urban planning policies by reserving land for such groups; in Hamburg’s case it’s as high as 20%.³⁹ There are some convincing reasons why they should do so. For one, many such projects incorporate sustainability measures in their designs. Secondly, by allowing people to build and stay in the city, sprawl is contained and they maintain their tax and

voting bases. Such recognition is lagging in Australia and this is a powerful idea that attempts to address the *Wohnungsfrage* which could certainly be iterated in other places.

There exist a number of similar communities in Australia, such as *Moora Moora* in Healesville, but they tend to be outside of metropolitan areas, coming together more from ideological standpoints such as radically sustainable living. Adelaide urban planner and researcher Jasmine S. Palmer has made comparative studies of *Baugruppe* in Germany and the UK and has observed issues in translating the idea to Australia could begin to be addressed by removing

legal barriers to innovative self-formed bottom-up groups building for themselves and promoting and facilitating the ‘expansion of demand-led housing provision as a trustworthy alternative to supply-led provision.

40. Owner Input In Medium-Density Housing Design: Supply Versus Demand Lessons From Uk And Germany. Jasmine S. Palmer

Page 38: Spatial Diagram for an R50 apartment.

Right: Exterior of R50 in Kreuzberg, Berlin.



SANDY KALTENBORN

Sandy Kaltenborn is a graphic designer and activist who credits a number of influences for his sense of social responsibility and political engagement. Part of his family comes from Afghanistan and migration and anti-racism issues are strong themes in his work. Having always taken part in political conversations, first at home, then as a student under one of the founders of the *Grapus Collective* (active in France following the 1968 student movements) and as part of the punk and radical leftist autonomous movement in the late 80s which grew up in opposition to the neo-liberalisation of the country. He also enjoyed the ‘spatial utopia’ of the late 80s and early 90s as a squatter in Kreuzberg and, needless to say, he has witnessed many changes since. He sees the two notions of activism and design as one and the same and both are an expression of this sense of responsibility.

Designing always meant not only designing media products, but designing the world. Shaping social interactions, space, etcetera.

His activism is intensely local, responding to the issues faced by his neighbourhood. But rather than using his design skills as a tool to further political interventions,

design is (the) social intervention.

Kaltenborn runs a design studio, *image-shift*, which works exclusively in the cultural, educational, social and political areas. Most of their projects arise from his network of similarly politically socialised contemporaries, but he emphasises that these connections are a result of shared ideologies as opposed to opportunistic networking, going so far as to

reject the working conditions created by the culture of service industries - where money structures the dependencies / the relations between us and our clients rather than the ideas we share with them. We are not friends with the cultural industries, as we believe that culture has other causes, than serving an industry. ⁴¹

41. 13 points from image-shift
(statement of intention)

KOTTI & CO

Berlin, 2012-ongoing

Kaltenborn is one of the founders of *Kotti & Co*, a tenants initiative protesting continuously since 2012 for a series of demands relating to rising rents at Kottbusser Tor in Kreuzberg, an area which has for a long time served as public housing and which is now one of the most rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods in Berlin. Rents in Kreuzberg have increased between 20% and as much as 40% in the last 5 years, in an area where unemployment sits at around 15%. *Kotti & Co* is a diverse group of people galvanised by these issues:

We have teenagers, elderly, Turkish, Arabic, Jewish, Christian, Muslim people; atheists, radical leftists, conservative religious... From the very beginning we said this is not about ideology, about religion or sexual orientation.

So far the group has helped to achieve partial changes to rental laws through a citizens' plebiscite, with another to follow in September 2016 if enough signatures are collected. Their most vocal demands are rent caps and the monitoring of utility prices for those in social housing, the de-privatisation of the social housing sector and the provision of new social housing stock.

The initiative uses a many pronged approach in their activism, ensuring their protest reaches many different levels of accessibility. Along with organising noisy protests and marches on the streets they have published research, held intellectual debates, organised a housing conference, made a film, published a book and several brochures with information about housing statistics and rights. As such, they are well supported by the community and various academic and political circles and have become an

important player in the political battleground that Berlin housing has become.

Apart from much of the organisation and written output for *Kotti & Co*, Kaltenborn is naturally responsible for the visual output of the initiative. He developed an image not just for the group but for the neighbourhood in general to identify with and stand behind. Here he discusses with me their sticker printed logo, now visible all over the neighbourhood:

The area has always been presented by the media as problematic: low income, social welfare, the biggest open drug scene in the city, car accidents, pollution, failed architecture, also migration as a negative point... But if you talk to the people who live here, 99% love this neighbourhood despite the problems. The design work is very small. It's basically just finding the right font and putting the sticker together, but what's behind it is much bigger. And so is what it's brought to light. Thousands have been produced and they're all over the place and suddenly there was visibility for the tenants where beforehand they had no public outcry. We're not pounding anybody with our protest. There's a heart, there's not a fist.

Besides the involvement from a prominent graphic designer, the *Kotti & Co* initiative is also interesting and relevant to this investigation from a more physical spatial perspective. After their first year of collective action, having felt that not enough attention was being garnered, they made the decision to 'squat Kottbusser Tor.' On a small public area of land they erected 2 walls made of Euro Pallets and a bench and pledged to stay there day and night until their demands

(R STEHT FÜR ALLE!)



MACHT LÄRM

GEGEN HOHE MIETEN UND VERDRÄNGUNG

SAMSTAG • 18. MAI 2013 • LÄRMDemo

NICHT VERGESSEN: NEIßBRÄN, KUCHENFEST, FRÜHFRÜHGELEN UND WAS SONST NOCH LÄRM MACHT MIT EINIGEN GUTEN ERNÜHRUNG UND KOMPASSMILCHGÄHRE SO WIE FREIEN L.W.

14UHR • KOTTBUSSE TOR SÜD • BEI KOTTI & CO

ORGANISIERT VON: KOTTI & CO. JUGEND • WWW.KOTTICO.NET

I ♥
Kotti



were met. In the 3 years since making that commitment, their grasp on the small space they've occupied has been strengthened in stages by physical changes and ensuing social ones.

When the weather became colder and wetter a local architect designed and built a more enclosed pavilion-like structure. A kind of

urban social furniture which is really stable and heavy and they can't take away in 2 minutes,

the *Gecekondu* now serves as the group's headquarters despite illegally occupying the space. Rather than allowed, they are 'tolerated.' The Turkish name *Gecekondu* means 'built overnight' and references a legal loophole in Turkey oft exploited by the migrant population there which stipulates that any structure built between dusk and dawn may not be forcibly removed by authorities. Clearly, having a sheltered space (but which maintains an openness with large windows and flimsy doors) has served the group well in providing a meeting point and image of stark determination.

The space has also served as scaffolding for improved social relationships and provided strength in other ways. Firstly, having a structure that needed to be maintained as well as preserved solely for the group's aims, that is, not allowing it to be co-opted by other initiatives and ideologies, necessitated a negotiation process between the group's diverse members.

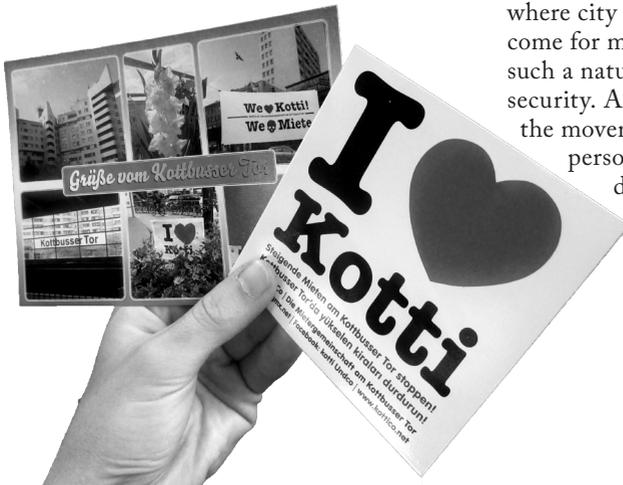
It's constructed by the group. And I mean construction in terms of social infrastructure. It's about who makes the tea, who brings the food, the water, who takes care of the electricity, who talks to the police, the city officials.

Being enclosed tested and proved their tolerance of and respect for each other's differences. For instance, tea is an important aspect of their meetings, as a way of coming together. The Samovar however, is the domain of the Turkish women who are part of the group, a boundary within this tiny space which is respected by the others.



Secondly, its illegality has been a binding force for the group and its permanence helps maintain energy levels in the struggle.

And finally, the physical and political infrastructures have fed each other whereby in having a defined (yet illegal) meeting space where city officials and political players come for meetings and events, affiliations of such a nature in turn reinforce the building's security. As a place infused with the spirit of the movement the *Gecekondu* has a public persona of its own and as such is very difficult for authorities to remove without serious backlash from the public.



Page 42: Poster for a protest against high rents, on 18 May, 2013 by Kotti & Co.

Page 43: The Gecekondu.

Top: Kaltborn and a fellow Kotti & Co member inside the Gecekondu.

Left: 'Greetings from Kottbuser Tor' postcard and 'Ich liebe Kotti' sticker.

SECTION 4: ARTISTS

RATHER THAN TRADITIONAL GALLERY AND MUSEUM WORKS, THESE ARTISTS (ONCE AGAIN SELF-DEFINED) AUTHOR WORKS WHICH RESPOND TO 'REAL-WORLD' SOCIO-POLITICAL PROVOCATIONS OR TOP-DOWN PROCESSES. THEY EMPLOY PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES WHICH FURTHER PROMOTE THE AUTHORSHIP OF SPACE BY THOSE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

CHRISTOPH SCHÄFER

Christoph Schäfer is a well known face in St. Pauli, Hamburg's liveliest neighbourhood, characterised by its red-light district, mixed milieu and the fanaticism and left-wing activism of its football team's supporters. During our meeting which took us on a walk through the district to various project sites, we were stopped multiple times by local characters wanting to talk about politics or football.

From a classification perspective, Schäfer is an artist. He studied at the Fine Art Academy in Hamburg and has exhibited extensively in Europe. However, it would be reductive to classify him further in terms of outputs such as painter, installation artist, critical theorist, etc. Even harder to determine is where his production ends and external forces take over, and I would argue against such a designation being possible. Mostly his works are concerned with the authorship of space in everyday life and the 'production of desires',⁴² not just his own but those of others. His critical approach is heavily rooted in Lefebvre's theory of (social) space and *The Right to The City* movement. Perhaps the spirit of his approach is best summarised by the title of his book *Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik/The City is Our Factory*, which discusses, in visual narratives, the consequences and possibilities for the fight to 'produce' space in the neo-liberal landscape.

PARK FICTION

Hamburg 1994-ongoing

Schäfer was one of the people who sparked the well documented protest, *Park Fiction*, in which he and other artists simultaneously opposed the residential development of the last parcel of land in St. Pauli overlooking the harbour and in its stead made their own demonstrative proposal for an open public space. The working group brought to light the inaccessibility of official planning process to residents by leading their own 'parallel planning process,' which invited those living in the area to express their support in numerous ways.

Referring to their approach as *Infotainment*, they organised artistic workshops, games, a telephone hot-line as well as the making and screening of a documentary on the issue. They employed the squatter ideal of *Instandbestzen* by using the space as if it were already their park, however their approach differed to that of the squatters whereby rather than simply being in stark opposition to the development, they went further by offering up alternative ways to imagine the space. This less confrontational approach, argues Schäfer, is more effective.

To Schäfer, the idea of having the residents as a 'social resource' to be drawn upon, as having a history to be displayed and preserved, was an important concept. That they shouldn't be brought together in a forceful way under threat of losing something, but rather as participating in creating something and celebrating their status as

42. Based on Deleuze and Guattari's argument for a new understanding of desire: that desire and its objects aren't merely separate entities which in turn casts the lack of the objects in a negative frame, thereby meaning that desire may only ever cause pain. Rather, desire is understood as a machine integral to the process of social production, in short, a positive force that creates reality.

[Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia](#) by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane.



part of the history of an important area worth saving. This approach was more palatable for a broader range of people and more sustainable in terms of energy. After a long 9 years of protest and discussion with the city the park began to be realised, however, not in its entirety.

Due to the long process and the close co-operation with authorities in the realisation phase, key ideas of the project have been damaged, forgotten and corrupted.⁴³

In terms of activism, *Park Fiction* was both collectively fought for and designed, with the design process of the park being an extension of that activism. By inviting people to think about how the space would best suit them and collating these into their alternative proposal, the community became

activated by their ability to engage directly with the imaginative process.

What is amazing to me about *Park Fiction* is that people remained engaged in their fight for so long. This raises the question of the two opposing notions of either acting locally or acting as Miessen's *uninvited outsider*. Where one is motivated by the ties they have to their surrounding community as a source of energy from which to draw, the other has the benefit of being a somewhat flexible 'nonaligned embedded practitioner.' Of course, one may not be planning an activist action so much as it is cast upon them by a sudden provocation, in which case it's natural that one is driven by their connection to a locale. But for those wanting looking at *Park Fiction* as a source of inspiration, while some of the tactics they employed may be replicable, the specific history of St. Pauli's activism may be harder to foster in other places. Schäfer himself stressed to me the importance of *in Fühlung bleiben*. This means remaining in touch with those who are effected by the process and acknowledging that work in the community

43. <http://park-fiction.net/the-city-is-unwritten-urban-experiences-and-thoughts-seen-through-park-fiction/>

Above: The 'Flying Carpet' lawn at Park Fiction.



carries with it ongoing responsibilities. And while *Park Fiction* took an artistic approach towards activism, the goal always remained the attainment of the park as opposed to achieving artistic ends. Instead of an art work in itself, rather the act of making art, in various forms, was employed as a strategy for allowing many people to become involved in different ways and as a platform for a different kind of discussion about space authorship. Even when exhibiting at *documenta 11* the aim was to bring the awareness of their fight to a wider audience rather than to further personal artistic ends.

Round tables are a dangerous thing, as their name suggest an equal power balance, that conceals the unequal status of the participants. Also, speaking with bureaucrats means to half-accept their, the dominant way, of thinking and negotiating.⁴⁴

44. *Belltown Paradise/Making Their Own Plans.* Brett Bloom & Ava Bromberg (eds.) Above: *Park Fiction* in use.

PLANBUDE

Hamburg September 2014-February 2015

After long protests by residents and locals against its demolition, *Esso-Häuser*, located prominently on the Reeperbahn, was dismantled in early 2014. The complex had served as affordable public housing as well as housing small scale retail and landmark nightlife venues since the 1960s. The residents' sadness and fear for their future quickly turned into resolve to influence any reconstruction that would take its place. It was announced that a competition would take place for the tender of the project.

At an autonomous community conference of 400 local residents in the St. Pauli Stadium ballroom, they rejected the Mayor's proposal to allow 2 community members to sit on the selection jury. Instead they wanted to be consulted before the competition was formed and have every entering architect respond to the same community developed brief.

Schäfer, among others and on behalf of the residents, proposed to the city that a planning hub, *PlanBude*, be located on the vacant site and staffed during regular office hours by a team of locals including artists, an architect, a social worker and an architecture student. One key to securing such an unusual scenario was the argument that when shared, the work load and subsequent wages would amount to the equivalent of hiring one full time urban planner for the same amount of time, yet they would derive added benefit from the manifold inputs more staff could collect, especially ones with local knowledge.

PlanBude employed a large selection of self styled tools for engagement to ensure they received as wide a range of inputs as was possible. They constructed mobile planning

studios which could attach to street furniture, they sent out surveys which ranged in complexity depending on the age and language skills of the respondent, held discussions in bars as

**that's the home of (some) people...
you don't need much courage to say
something,**

took walking tours with locals in order to document the tiny moments which formed the essence of the neighbourhood, or as they named it *The St. Pauli Code*. Further to this, they recorded the conversations they had while collecting the information.

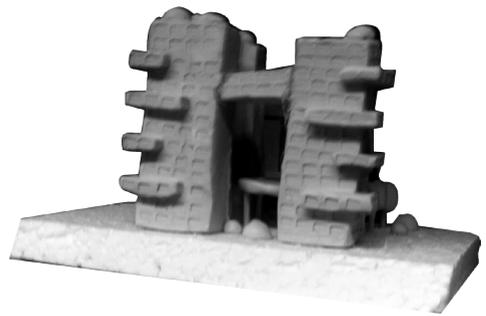
When the consultation phase ended, crucially, the *PlanBude* team analysed every single input they received, even those from the smallest child, effectively translating what people were asking for into a dense but clear and usable brief for all competing architectural firms to respond to. They were able to do this by searching for patterns in the responses and from these create clear categories that the designed space should touch upon.

The winning design from *NL-Architects* and *BeL-Architects* shows astounding sensitivity to a broad range of specific and repeated sentiments of the brief. On the other hand, the level to which key aspects of the residents' brief was ignored by many of the entries shows that many designers either mistrust or have no validation for the value of the input of *expert citizens*.

This citizen driven approach to participatory brief making would be hard to replicate elsewhere, where the sheer 'local-ness' of those involved, as well as the trust vested in



them by the community as a result of their involvement with the *Park Fiction* protest is quite unique. However, one clever tactic which may be transferable is the way they developed a language around the brand of their neighbourhood. In describing to city officials the value of the *St. Pauli Code* as something to be ‘cracked’: understood, categorised and preserved in the future design of the *Esso-Häuser* for the sake of retaining its value as somewhere attractive to tourists as well as locals, by communicating in financial terms that could more easily be understood and uncontroversially backed, they effectively sold their own image back to the city. They won the opportunity to conduct their own briefing process and the city got to feel as if it had a wider economic benefit.



Top: Exterior of the PlanBude which sits on a corner of the former *Esso Building* site, now behind heavy hoarding.

Right: A model by one of the *St. Pauli* residents of their desired new home, made at PlanBude.

GRAND HOTEL COSMOPOLIS

Augsburg 2014-ongoing

As previously mentioned, Germany is accepting thousands of refugees every week. While stemming from crises at the international level well beyond the scope of this paper, at the local (German) level it's easy to see how the question of space becomes central to the political, resulting in a kind of spatial havoc.

The *Grand Hotel Cosmopolis* is an artist run initiative in Augsburg, Bavaria and its location is interesting while Bavaria remains a conservative stronghold, with the *Christlich-Soziale Union* (Christian Social Union) having held power in the state since 1946.

Named to invoke the luxurious hotels of stater times, the 'Grand Hotel' takes on a new meaning when combined with *Cosmopolis* which comes from a previous art project by some of the initiators, in which they made World passports. Instead of specific nations, they showed that everyone shared one territorial identity as *citizens of Cosmopolis* (i.e. The World).

As the name suggests, it is a hotel, but the building also houses a hostel, bar, café, artist studios and large spaces for public use.

On the middle 2 levels of the building the rooms are reserved for refugees awaiting the status of their asylum claims, of which there are around 50 at any given time. While the refugees are free to move anywhere, for privacy reasons paying guests may not enter that area. Whether a refugee or visitor, everyone who stays there is referred to as a 'guest' with a view to reducing the perceived differences between the groups, and instead emphasising participation and interaction by all parties. Volunteers running the café and bar are people from Augsburg and refugees alike.

The ideological framework for the Hotel references Josef Beuys' *erweiterte Kunstbegriff* (expanded concept of art) wherein every human is an artist and part of the social sculpture, (*soziale plastik*). In broadening the role that art can play into social, political and economic areas, Beuys saw its potential to bring about radical reform in those areas, and in declaring the creativity in all people, made everyone capable of contributing to that revolution.

If you take this you see that everybody has inside creativity and everybody can do



this if you make a space for this in society. And we try this in this house: to give everybody a space for human art. One of the important things is conversation, as an art form. Conversation is plastic, it's not finished.

The refugees are a part of our social system. With this example we can show other people the importance of humanity. That's one part of being human. It's not special to the refugee question but it's one example in which it's very important. It's important for the complete social system that we are human beings and it's also important that you have no fear of other people, to see that it's very interesting. All this that we don't know is not fearful, it's fun. And that's also an important thing to show other people in society.

The building, formally a home for the elderly which had stood disused for some time, is owned by the *Diakonie Augsburg*, the social welfare sector of the evangelical church of Augsburg. The Swabian government had approached the *Diakonie* about housing refugees and a core group of artist was able to hijack that request by becoming involved at the right time, and proposing to take over the refurbishment and catering of the building in exchange for being able to test their concept. Today the *Diakonie* is responsible only for administration of the refugee living quarters, deciding who lives there and for how long. Everything else, including the organisation of legal advice, childrens' homework programmes, help with child-minding and cultural integration projects, are carried out by the artist-volunteers.

The operation is legally run as a *Gemeinnütziger Verein* (public charity), and all the profits from the paying guests, café and events are spent on continuing the refurbishment which is roughly half finished at the time of writing.

In the past year the project received a 150,000 Euro grant from the *Robert Bosch Stiftung*, which will be used to pay some full time wages for management and to continue the process of becoming financially independent. A restaurant and catering service are planned, along with more effective advertising to draw people there.

The broader issues the Hotel faces, such as the intake and status of refugees in Germany, are tied to rises and falls in political fortune and offer constant worry but in the day to day running they haven't hit any serious hurdles from say cultural differences or animosity within the local community. Rather, the reception has been positive, with people from the neighbourhood becoming involved in various ways.

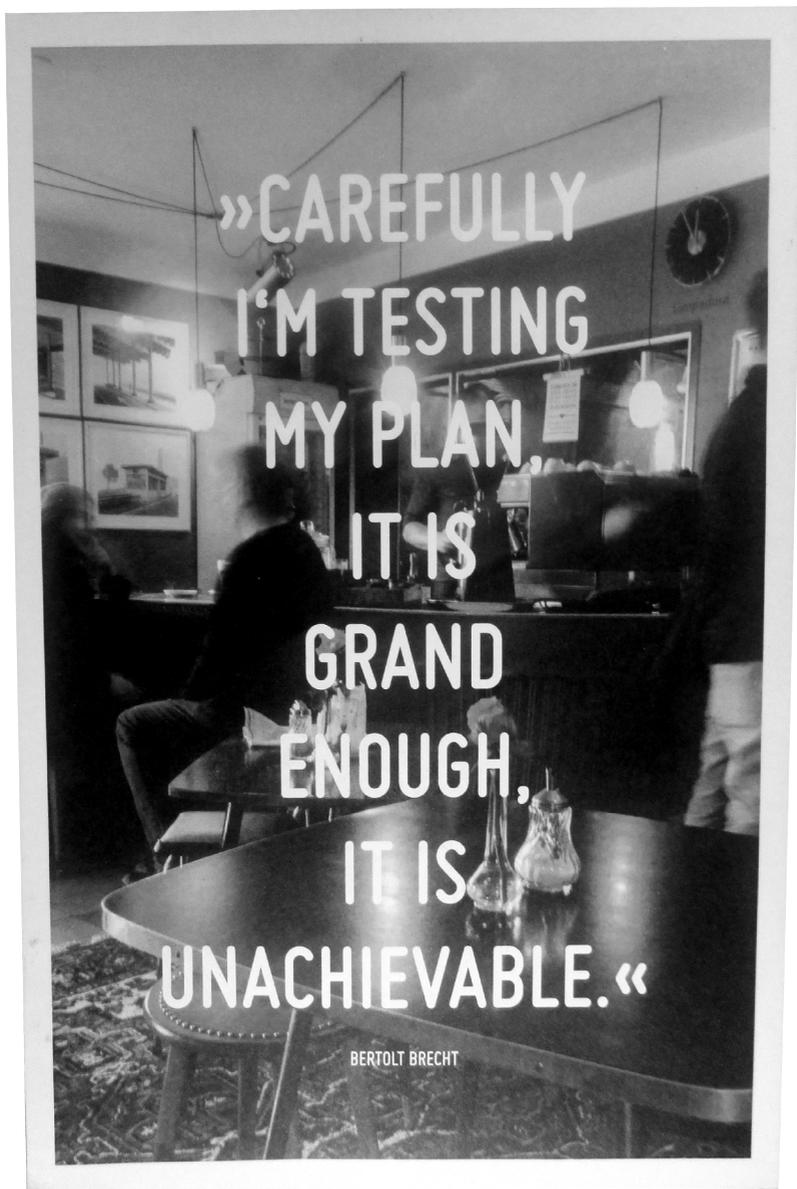
The Hotel's activism on the refugee question in Germany says 'yes' in a different way. By living out their opinions demonstrably they hope to affect change at lower levels.

The policies of the state are really not flexible and it takes a lot of time. I think it's more important that we reach people, the normal Augsburg person and try to transform their minds.

I thoroughly enjoyed my stay at the hotel and found that from all appearances they are achieving what they set out to do. The atmosphere was fun, calm, open-minded and friendly and I left with a sense of positivity and pride in being a human being.

Page 51: Each of the hotel and hostel rooms for paying customers are decorated differently by artists, both founding and visiting ones.

Right: Flier detailing Grand Hotel Cosmopolis' concept and intention.



»CAREFULLY
I'M TESTING
MY PLAN,
IT IS
GRAND
ENOUGH,
IT IS
UNACHIEVABLE.«

BERTOLT BRECHT

SECTION 5: EDUCATION

THIS SECTION EXPLORES GERMAN DESIGN EDUCATION FROM THE INSIDE-OUT. BY TALKING TO STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION THERE AND WHO HAVE SINCE SHAPED THEMSELVES AS SPATIAL AGENTS, IT IS HOPED THAT THE INTERVIEWS WILL OFFER INSIGHTS INTO HOW OUR KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTIONS CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE SOCIAL SENSIBILITIES OF THEIR CHARGES.

KOLABS



Kooperatives Labor Studierender (KOLABS) is a group of 6 young students and recent graduates of German Universities who were selected to be representative of their demographic for the *Wohnungsfrage* exhibition in Berlin. The individuals were chosen on the basis of their engagement with the spatial as it relates to housing, pedagogy and participatory practice.

Once assembled, the group was tasked with creating a brief for Japanese architects *Atelier Bow-Wow* that would address the idea of communal student living and its related issues: affordability, privacy, shared

space and gentrification. The outcome was a 1:1 prototype which also served as a theoretic model, proposing a rethinking of the most common aspects of commercially operated student housing. For instance, the wasted space of a long corridor was rearranged to become a space of encounter and ‘interface.’

Above: Taken at a workshop run by KOLABS in their 1:1 model for new types of collaborative living. Participants cooked a shared meal and built stools.

INTERVIEW WITH NORIKA REHFELD OF KOLABS

JW: What factors led to you becoming involved in spatial practice? Was it a long held interest, perhaps a result of which school you went to (we have quite a different system for schooling in Australia) or did you arrive at it through an artistic route?

NR: I decided during my preparation to register for a course with no *Numerus Clausus*, because my grades were just okay. This allowed me to immediately move out from home and start the exciting life of a student! To be honest, that's why I chose educational science as my main subject, and sociology and cultural anthropology as minor subjects in a *Magisterstudiengang*.

After some months at the university I realised that social sciences really are interesting and worth studying. I guess this way of choosing your area of study, trial and error, isn't very common in Australia when you have to pay for university. In my case, this way of choosing was perfect, because it taught me that something I feared, because I felt myself not to be good enough for it, turned out to be quite suitable for me. After some semesters I chose social pedagogy as my specialisation.

During my time as a student I started to wonder about visual phenomena in architecture and the built-environment. I discussed it a lot with a friend of mine who studied geography. Interdisciplinary discussions always felt natural for me. When I had to find a subject for my final thesis I started to tell this joke that I would like to change my topic into something more simple like: *Maybe just observing some youth, hanging around on playgrounds, watching them smoking cigarettes and so on.*

Maybe I was also making fun of "random" qualitative research works. I always intended to develop my works in a very theoretical manner. Anyway, I thought about my 'joke' for some time and realised that this could in fact be quite interesting and also a way to integrate my personal interest in architectural topics into an educational scientist's thesis.

At first, my professor said: *Jah, it sounds quite interesting, but where is the social pedagogy?* So I said, okay, it's about youth in urban space. My topic was about using appropriation-theories as a way to integrate social pedagogy into the design of public free space for youth. I found out that a theoretical approach to this topic was quite rare. So I wrote a text about how to define spatial appropriation from a social pedagogy point-of-view and defined some traits to establish if and how appropriation was included (either implicitly or explicitly) in the design of public spaces. To do so I looked at public free spaces (recreational areas and so on) which were created within the official programme *Soziale Stadt* – a programme of integrated city development.

JW: What University did you attend and how did it shape you thus far: were political questions central to your study and was this a result of the mentality of the institution or of your own personality or experience? (In Australia we pay for our University education, which can shift the education sector into a service industry rather than a place to challenge existing structures, so this question is really interesting to me).

NR: See my answer above. And yes! Political questions were very central to my studies. I was also fascinated by the question of how architecture itself can be inclusive or exclusive. For example benches in railway stations which were replaced with a row of chairs with armrests between each of them making it impossible for homeless people to sleep on and so on. This is also close to the approach of critical theory, which I like very much. During my studies I read a text about the limits of community work, which was quite important to me, because this method is not able to fix the main inequalities which exist within a society. I am very into the topic of social work but at the same time I'm also very critical about its limits and about overestimating things.

The transformation of universities into service industries is a development which I could research too. Many students opposed this in Germany by protesting. The movement was called *Bildungsstreik*, but of course, eventually the protesters got weak and the new system kept coming. I always tried to be aware of these mechanisms and to oppose to them, with a sort of inner *Widerstand*. I always thought that finding 'your topic', something that you find really interesting will push forward the quality of your work as well. So it's more important to find out about what you are interested in than to find out what society wants you to be. I don't care about a well paid job, if it's something that feels completely wrong to me.

JW: Given that post-Fordism has arrived, work landscapes are changing quite a bit, the high number of graduates, gentrification and a desire to maybe do something about it, I'm wondering how you feel about life after school. What ingredients does your ideal future spatial practice contain?

NR: My ideal future spatial practice contains a pedagogical point-of-view, given my expertise. In my craziest dreams, I would get the opportunity to plan sort of a system which can be used by urban planners, architects and so on, to create a spatial programme that has profound implications for the idea of appropriation. And of course that these so-planned spaces would be well-received by people. But this is quite unrealistic, and in reality, I see myself struggling even to get access to this profession because, officially, I've studied the wrong thing. The question of improving a little corner in the world into something better, is very tricky. Firstly: is this even possible? Secondly: how can this be possible? I think doing something better means making connections to the ordinary, bad practices. Doing something different when it's about how the construction of different groups (for example gender) is also manifested/intensified by the dominant spatial structure. Where and how is female or male behaviour represented and created? How can we dissolve the traditional boundaries and so on...

DIE BAUPILOTEN

The architectural practice of Susanne Hofmann is built on the idea of participation in the design process. For Hofmann, the question of participation is an existential one whereby precedence is given to allowing people to design their own environment over the implementation of personal aesthetic values. It is in this sense that she and her office *die Baupiloten* fit the spatial activist designation, albeit from an economised standpoint. In her book, *Partizipation Macht Architektur* (Architecture is Participation) Hofmann promotes her approach, developed through practice, and protests the lack of such engagement and prejudices against participation in the wider commercial architectural profession. She is included in this section of my paper while her studio was formerly based at the *Technische Universität Berlin* and at that time all of her projects involved students of architecture. I'm interested in how this shaped both students and projects and this will be explored in an interview with one of these students rather than the architect herself.

Taking cues from a long list of architects who have sought to develop such approaches within the field, she posits that participatory processes have a number of advantages compared to more closed off ones.

Based on the idea that they know better than the architect what they need and want from a space, clients and end users of a proposed building are given the opportunity for high level input during the design process, leading to a more successful design. Success is measured by Hofmann according to how well a building supports its intended use and how its users respond to it on a more personal level with the idea that

including people allows them a greater sense of identity with the place, leading to its sustainable use and caretaking.

Hofmann contends that because it is not a required step in the design of new spaces, neither legally nor socially, the potential of participation often goes unfulfilled. Usually, it is either not used (most common) or when it is used (growing trend) it is done in a tokenistic manner, allowing only for superficial accommodations into a final design. On this point she and Miessen agree on some of the dangers of such processes. She acknowledges and parries the most common pitfalls of participatory practice in her book, and outlines *die Baupiloten's* own methodology that they have developed in response to these.

As well as the more political issues identified by Miessen, Hofmann has recognised that challenges can arise in communication (between designers and users), in the users' lack of belief in their own creative powers and the size of the task, as well as the danger of an ultimate inability to use users' suggestions made due to budgetary restriction or a clash of ideologies.

To tackle these problems they have fundamentally reversed their approach to space production. Typically, researchers have observed, architects will develop designs by beginning with the material and structural considerations, leaving the more programmatic ones for later. The same research found that laypersons, having little knowledge of the former will instantly tackle the same spatial problems by starting with the social aspects. To accommodate the layperson better in their design process, *die Baupiloten* have developed a language

around the idea of spaces as ‘atmospheres,’ as opposed to rooms that must fulfill a series of strict functions. These ‘atmospheres,’ employed at all stages, by being described, designed and ultimately experienced, form the common currency or language between themselves and those they invite to participate. By interpreting spaces in terms of what they evoke they hope to bridge the language barrier between architects and everyone else.

Atmosphere as a participatory design strategy is not a nightmare, it has incredible potential for the productive and meaningful participation of everyone involved.⁴⁵

In order to encourage people to consider atmospheres, both current and future, Hofmann has developed a toolbox for participation, the contents of which are adapted on a project by project basis dependent upon the intended outcome and users’ ages and cultural and social backgrounds. For example, they may ask people to document their favourite places with a camera. The images are then jointly categorised and ordered in terms of preference and ultimately sifted for their atmospheric qualities that might give the designers insight into what would constitute a success, in terms of their criteria mentioned above. The outcomes of the various methods are all compiled into a ‘fiction,’ a narrative for the shared vision of the outcome which can then be used as a kind of brief. In order to achieve success at each stage, Hofmann stresses that high levels of trust and respect are required between the actors which is in turn achieved by a level of transparency to the architects processes. She writes:

45. Architecture is Participation.
Susanne Hofmann, 41.

HUGH CROTHERS ON RIISING EDUCATION

Berlin and Cameroon 2014

In January 2014, 15 architecture students from the *Technische Universität Berlin* traveled to Bertoua, Cameroon for 3 months in order to design and construct a primary school.

While largely student initiated, the *Rising Education* project was operated as a full-credit subject within *die Baupiloten* department for students enrolled at the Berlin university. As such, the processes employed in the design stage were embedded in the participatory methodology of Susanne Hofmann.

In preparation for departure the students raised funds for the building materials and also went about testing their tools for participation. During visits to local German primary schools, games, colouring books and creative exercises were undertaken with children of comparable age to the users of the school in Cameroon.

Hugh Crothers, one of the participating *Rising Education* students, shared with me some insights on the project and its impact on him in terms of his attitude towards spatial activism of a humanitarian nature.

Something which stood out to me was that those children in Bertoua who participated in the activities would not be the end users of the school as they would have moved beyond primary school age in the time taken to complete the building. This undermines the contention that such processes allow for greater identification with spaces where users can see their inputs embodied in the design. A further layer of integrity is shaved away when one considers the volume of inputs created in a participatory activity and how they are then handled by the designer:

Often when you present that in an architectural body of work it presents really well. But through a selective process, if you critically analyse it a bit more, when you have 40 students all doing something, you're going to like the one which aligns with your preconceived design intent anyway, so it doesn't necessarily result in the outcome that it perhaps reads as, in a theoretical context...

Having said that, these processes nonetheless engage people in a process which normally takes place behind closed doors, which should be seen in a positive light, yet only so far as that is the original intention.

..but whether or not it genuinely informed the design or empowered anyone around the designer, I would argue that it didn't.

Having only limited time for building required that a near finished design be completed before departure for Cameroon which once again calls into question the use of the inputs by the local children. While the materials for the building were locally sourced and people from the community were employed in the construction, Crothers reflected that the disconnect between making drawings in Berlin to be executed in Cameroon left him with an uneasy awareness of the at times neo-colonial nature of the project:

We built a monolithic structure that will last for a long time, longer than anything else in the area, and that was very gratifying for us. As architecture students you want to build something... But at the same time that was our egos. It was very Mies. We built a third of the project in that 3 months. Arguably I would say that



was a failure of the project. If we knew we only had 3 months then why were we using materials which take 28 days to dry? We should have been responsive to our circumstance and built something out of timber that could be raised straight away. The same spatial planning could have been implemented through different materials and more realistic for what we needed to do.

Whats more, the students found themselves becoming engaged in questions around education and wider social issues of the region that lay outside their training, nor did they have support from other disciplines who did have such expertise:

We thought we were just going to be the architects and the builders...But because of the nature of the project we became the administrators. We were being asked about education programmes and things like this but as designers I don't think that was our scope.

Also alluded to by Crothers, 'ego' is another aspect of this project which ought to be discussed. He acknowledged that the not-for-profit organisation was led by a former inhabitant of the area where the school is being built and who had motivations to do with wealth, status and wanting to be seen as someone "who had access to the 'white foreigners,'" which for Crothers even called into question the necessity of the new school.

While there is much scope for designers to become engaged in activism and humanitarian work, I find Hugh Crothers' critical reflection from his personal experience very useful. It highlights the complexity of such situations and the danger of purporting to bring down a consensual design solution which will have deeply felt social impacts. I think his point about being aware of one's limitations as a designer and as someone who does not have experience in many areas that will inevitably overlap with a project like this (such as education, poverty



or health) is crucial to developing a way of practicing and also of collaborating.

Furthermore, the buzz word and image-driven nature inherent to today's Online culture drives the feeling that 'making a difference' is as easy as traveling to an under-developed country and trusting that your collaborators have the same good intentions as you do. Beautiful renders of idealised outcomes hide the complexity discussed here. This is not to assert that such projects have no or negative value. But this example shows that one needs to be careful to inform oneself thoroughly of a situation before entering the humanitarian area. I think responsible design starts at this point, rather than with the design process, regardless of how participatory it may be.

Page 61: Rising Education
architecture students and
Cameroonian primary school
students doing a participatory
design exercise.

Above: The new primary
school in Bertoua under
construction.

SECTION 6: OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AN OUTSIDER

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATORS

I have made observation and comment throughout this text about specific aspects of projects which could be worthwhile considering in the Australia context. Here I repeat some of the more viable and also add some which result from reflecting on my time in Germany as a complete experience.

In making recommendations for activism, I feel it is important to separate a movement's causes from the tactics employed in its execution. This is especially true when comparing happenings in 2 different countries and cultures. Here I will attempt to hold to a discussion of methods, while broad recommendations for institutional change can offer little. The following points are the result of observation of the practices but also the personalities of those I interviewed, and some may seem intuitive, perhaps even un-academic. Yet, as I wrote at the outset of this paper, as well as reportage and analysis of foreign spatial activists, this has also been a process of personal development in helping me to answer some more existential questions relating to my own future path in design. This marriage of tangible recommendations with the more character based acknowledges the fact that every practitioner has his or her own personality and conscience which drives their work. Therefore, these recommendations may also be read like a disjointed personal manifesto which has been developing within me since the outset of this study.

Where various professions have been experiencing and appreciating higher levels of cross-pollination for some time, I feel there is more scope for such activity at the level of design education and educators could foster more collaborative work between different types of students in universities. For instance, the recent reciprocal interest between the professions of design, for its positioning as a tool for social production and problem solving, and anthropology, for its deep understanding of culture and society, feels like a logical match. It could be fruitful to see how these studies could interact at an academic level, between students that is, and to see if their modes of investigation could have a positive, expanding effect on each other.

My experience of design education was a fairly apolitical one. Whether education on the political should be placed in the hands of design education bodies or the individual student is difficult to answer but I feel both can play a role. However, educators should at least emphasise the inseparability of the socio-political influence on design. As well as this, during my studies, much of the exposure I had to design theory was more classical than contemporary. I feel a lot can also be gained from exposure to those currently engaged in developing further critical spatial theory and practice, wherever they are in the world, given the ease of communication in the modern, modern age.

The sheer number of hours design students spend in study is at once considered obscene yet also worn like a badge of honour and is an almost tribal rite through which they seem to have to pass. This is a universally upheld condition in design academies and while not likely to change, perhaps

those hours could be put to use in more 'concrete scenarios.' *Public Design Support* puts forward an interesting model in which real world problems can be addressed and students build their education around those. Whether the outcomes are deemed successful or not or whether they even reach some sort of conclusion is less important than the process of developing expectations about how design can and ought to play out on a stage of reality. What's more, those hours spent on projects such as *Public Design Support* may just as easily have been spent in closeted computer laboratories in university halls.

While it's already the case that many design studio classes at architecture and design academies are led by professionals established in their field, this is often done in a piecemeal manner, with little continuity over more than a semester. Following the example of *die Baupiloten's* long residency within the *Technische Universität Berlin*, I feel there is scope to establish 'concrete' practices more strongly within the university framework. This can be a mutually beneficial scenario in which students gain realistic experience of practice and those professionals have access to the resource of a student work force. This would be especially fruitful for those practices who wish to operate in areas somewhat outside traditional market led methods and as such aren't as able to survive financially.

In this way universities can operate as a testing ground for new models of professional practice to which students have immediate exposure. And in maintaining these studios over a number of years the knowledge acquired by students has a more fluid

flow across those years. What is learned by students participating in such studios is carried forward into professional life with them, but it also remains behind in a 'commons' pool, at once embodied and built upon in the form of the studio.

FOR GOVERNING BODIES

In Australia, political engagement is at an all time low and voter cynicism at all time high, indicating a lack of faith in the democratic system as it is now.⁴⁷ In Germany I encountered a distinctly more politically engaged citizenry not limited to special demographics and most design discussions ended in political sentiments. Rather than pose the broad question of how to re-engage the public in political interplay which, again, is beyond the scope of this paper, I wondered about specific governmental frameworks in place there which allow for more direct access to democratic processes. I discovered a number of instances in the use of citizens' initiatives and peoples referendums, as was the case in determining the future of Tempelhof Feld and the *Berliner Mieten Volkentschied*.

In 2006 *citizens' initiatives* were introduced in Berlin as an instrument to allow for more participation at the district level. For a *citizens' initiative* to be successful, the initiative needs to be approved by the district after which three percent of all eligible voters have to support the initiative by signature with a set period of six months. If successful, the district administration is ask to discuss the implementation of the *citizens' initiative*. Should an agreement on the issue not be reached, a referendum must be held within three months: The districts inhabitants will be asked to vote on the content of the *citizens' initiative*. For a *referendum* to be

successful 15 per cent of all eligible voters must participate in the vote - and the absolute majority has to vote in favour of the *citizens' initiative*.⁴⁸

By no means limited to spatial problems, citizens' initiatives are a well known avenue for political participation in Berlin. While not an impenetrably sound democratic process⁴⁹ citizens' initiatives carry the weight of hard to ignore popular opinion and the ability to raise awareness of topics in hard to reach demographics where the collection of signatures takes place at street level, in less formal settings than other inaccessible parliamentary ones.

While in Australia there is a growing recognition of the value of 'citizens' juries'⁵⁰ this value should be expanded upon, and points of access to democratic processes widened. Referendums are considered the most expensive democratic tool (Australia's 1999 republic referendum cost almost \$67 million Australian dollars⁵¹). Yet if one compares the Gross State Products of Berlin-Brandenburg and Victoria, \$US145 billion⁵² and \$US260 billion⁵³ respectively and with a population difference of only 500,000, the argument against its introduction here on financial grounds is undermined. Instead, as in architecture, the question shifts to how comfortable (or uncomfortable) leaders and professionals are in ceding some of their decision making power to more participatory inputs.

47. See *The Australian Voter: 50 years of Change* by Ian McAllister.

48. *Wahlen in Berlin*. Landeswahlleiter (ed.) (2006) Statistisches Landesamt Berlin.

49. See the essay *Spree Banks for Everyone! What remains of Sink Mediaspree?* by Jan Dohnke for an instance of the undermined ratification of a legitimate people's referendum.

50. For example, Melbourne's use of a 43 person randomly selected citizens' panel to develop a 10 year financial plan which was wholly ratified by the city council.

Australian states could also learn from the example of special forms of land allocation, as with the cases of the *Markthalle IX* and *R50* in Berlin. Granting privileged access to real estate that non-commercial initiatives would not ordinarily be able to secure and doing so on the grounds of cultural and social appeal allows for innovation. Both in terms of design and soft programming, new models for living in the city can be given fair space for testing and governments can use this as a tool for confidence building in their voting base.

While not generally the intention of their authors, such initiatives can also be drivers of cultural and thus economic interest, namely gentrification. I clearly do not support the acceleration of gentrification processes, however I do support the promotion of small, independent operators being given the space which would otherwise normally be sold to larger corporations who have little interest in strengthening the communities in which their outlets sit. Therefor I find it pertinent to mention the benefits to both governing bodies and the initiatives in these scenarios, where sometimes securing a desired outcome requires, as in the case of *PlanBude*, an awareness of one's value in a broader financial context is key, particularly as our cities develop undeniably more neo-liberal landscapes.

In the same vein, city governing bodies would do well to recognise the value of preserving mixed inner city areas which are the most under threat of gentrification. Where the most colourful, exciting neighbourhoods are found, namely those with the highest marketability to tourists, so too does one find society's fringe-dwellers and underprivileged. If we want to preserve the rich cultural fabric of our neighbourhoods, cities must intervene to make it possible for lower income earners to remain within city boundaries. Berlin has recently taken steps to decelerate rent increases with market rent caps and to de-privatise public housing in Kreuzberg, but even they (and the activists) have far to go before the special identity of the locale is protected.

51. Cost of Elections and Referendums, Australian Electoral Committee.

52. National accounts – Gross domestic product, Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, (2014).

53. 5220.0 Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, 2014-2014, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

FOR LAYPERSONS

As previously noted, the tapping of the resource of design students can offer fruitful experiences for them and those who engage them. Laypersons, community groups, social workers and activists should be bold in engaging university students, educators and emerging designers who are relatively free of financial burden, to help by bringing design thinking to their causes. Students can gain much awareness of 'real world' design problems and the scope of their own abilities when they are tested in areas outside the hermetic academic studio environment.

While there remains no industry standard to which local councils, architects and urban planners are held when it comes to participatory processes, those invited to take part from the community in such actions need to be scrutinising as to what kind of participation is on offer. One should ask questions about who is conducting the consultation and on whose behalf. At what stage in a given process is the participation taking place: is it a call for proposals, is it at the time of briefing for a defined project or well after and pertaining more to aesthetic considerations? Who else has been asked to take part and is there a fair representation of those likely to be affected? Is the goal one of consensus or a proliferation of varying ideas? All these pitfalls are not to say that one should not become involved in such processes. To the contrary, when responsible bodies profess to prioritise community participation and feedback they open themselves to the critique of their processes and are held unto standards of their own making, so the layperson may have ways to influence change on unexpected levels by turning their attention to these protocols.

FOR EMERGING DESIGNERS

The most basic step towards responsible spatial practice is to acknowledge that every spatial condition has accompanying social ones. Limiting one's attention to the physical domain is hermetic, encourages antisocial space to develop and wastes the enormous potential that critically minded design has to improve at least itself as a profession, and at best the quality of social space.

Today's expanded notion of design demands both an awareness of material and technology as well as of cultural and social contexts. By becoming more aware of the social and political roots that actually give birth to the problems we try to solve with design solutions we can automatically enter a mode of practice of higher social value. And rather than focusing on the popular imagery of altruistic works and their associated front end messages, work should focus on 'the relationship between power structures and how to enter them as praxis.'

One of the most compelling precursors of successfully executed and properly intentioned design activism is the by now mantric call to act *without mandate*. To demonstrate the real power of this approach, not just for the sake of those wishing to work outside market-made bindings but also for the sake of how we can re-imagine the role design can play in reframing critical issues in society, I have included a powerful excerpt from Jesko Fezer's essay *Die Nicht-Lösung problematischer Probleme in der Wirklichkeit* which brings to light the kinds of self-inflicted restraints design must rethink in order to progress through the analogy of our most common call to act, the client given design brief:

Looking for problems and discussing them make up a considerable part of the design process and significantly influence how solutions develop. What usually happens is that complex, multifaceted problems are reduced to stereotypical design assignments, whose terms already contain the desired solution. This reduction drags design away from reality. It suppresses design's potential to tackle problems openly and thoroughly. Take the example of a commission to design a bus stop. The exact problem is not fully clear. It is something vaguely along the lines of: fear of irate customers who could get wet waiting for a bus in the rain. So the task is this: a reconceived bus stop (ideally with back-lit advertising space). And so the solution is this: a reconceived bus stop with back-lit advertising space. To identify problems, to research them, to examine them critically, and to design them - all of this first demands that we leave behind our usual approaches to design. Classic solution paths, fixated on objects, can only be applied to very specific and limited problems.

If we acknowledge that design solutions are incompatible with the problems of a complicated social reality, we can come to a deeper understanding of the challenge facing design. It also sheds new light on the possibility of actually designing: only when you ignore the standard ideas and

procedures of design does space open up for the act of designing itself. Of course you can always orient yourself to professional practice and try to learn the techniques needed to get on in that world. But it is risky to pursue artificial demands and fleeting trends, as well as established approaches and job descriptions. And this is not just on an individual level: for better or worse, to move smoothly into the established orders of professional practice means arranging yourself for the market forces that define professionalism, and this always means turning your eyes away from large parts of the world. Breaking with constraining professional frameworks does not represent a further turning away from social conditions. Only a true social connection to reality can open up a free space to think differently about design and to go beyond professional norms and their distorted perception of reality's problems.⁵⁴

This paper has looked at multiple approaches to the notion of democratic participation in artistic and design processes. Susan Hofmann assures us that *Architecture is Participation* while Miessen warns of its potential to create new and reinforce existing socio-political nightmares. It seems to me that when dealing in participation a good starting point is to distinguish the design experience from the desired outcome. A fun, empowering, inclusive design process is only relevant if the outcome is a successful reflection of that process. The same does not apply in reverse-especially if that outcome is to be permanent. That is, one can also achieve fair outcomes where the designer takes the approach of the *uninvited outsider* who is not subject to the pulls of the specific political microcosm into which

54. *Alle Themen und Probleme können zum Gegenstand von Design-Prozessen werden*, by Jesko Fezer, 90.

they must insert a disruption. To be sure there are different flavours of participation, many are too easily compromised in the name of reaching a consensus but many have immense value. As we've seen with *PlanBude* and the *Hotel Grand Cosmopolis*, participation can be used to real empowering effect when it is driven by those without mandate to do so and for the genuine purpose of enabling people to express their creative intuitions about the use of space. In reflection of this, each designer should create their own modes of participation which are mindful of broader forces at play and can navigate with them with a mood of realism.

At every step, those wanting to pursue Critical Spatial Practice must also design their own practice and critically reflect on each stage of practice. Unlike the well delineated notions of architecture and interior design as they are practiced professionally, there is no clearly marked path. But one should take comfort from the role models of artist, musicians and even some politicians, who arrive at and continue to develop their individual modes of practice through their identity and curiosity as opposed to the often overly prescribed footsteps of more established 'professions.' An expanded notion of design accommodates a wide variety of impetuses to 'do'.

Furthering this idea, when prescribed practice and its reliable incomes are ruled out it becomes at once necessary and interesting to seek other formats for design work and thinking beyond the built. Emerging practitioners should be aware and exploitative of many platforms: writing across many media, teaching, exhibiting, curating, arts funding, community initiative funding and volunteer work could all be ways of threshing out practice via alternative means of production.

Melbourne, 2016

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Unless otherwise noted in sectional foot-
notes, all quotes in the body of this text
are taken from the interviews I undertook

(listed below) as part of my own research.
To access copies of these interviews please
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Date	Interviewee	Practice, Projects	Location
27/11/2015	Herr Christoph Schäfer	Park Fiction PlanBude	Hamburg
09/12/2015 (workshop)	Kooperatives Labor Studierender (KOLABS)	Wohnungsfrage-contributors	Berlin
15/12/2015	Herr Sandy Kaltenborn	image-shift Kotti & Co	Berlin
18/12/2015	Herr Christoph Schmidt	ifau: R50	Berlin
20/12/2015	Herr Bernd Hilble	Grand Hotel Cosmopolis	Augsburg
22/12/2015	Herr Christof Mayer	raumlaborberlin: Markthalle IX	Berlin
12/01/2016	Herr Jesko Fezer	Wohnungsfrage-curator Public Design Support R50	Berlin, Hamburg
20/01/2016	Frau Anne-Laure Gesting	raumlaborberlin: Die Gärtnerei	Berlin
21/01/2016	Frau Ellen Röhner	FHXB Museum: Curator	Berlin
27/01/2016	Herr Markus Miessen	The Nightmare of Participation Crossbenching	Berlin
07/03/2016	Frau Norika Rehfeld	Kolabs	Berlin, email (follow up)
08/03/2016	Mr. Hugh Crothers	Technische Universität Berlin/ Baupiloten student	Melbourne

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