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newweirdberlin, Kai Stiehler, 2009
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AFTER BEING IMMersed IN RADIALSYSTEM V'S FASCINATING SYMPOSIUM ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEW PUBLIC ARTSPACES AND CITIES, NEW SPACES AND SYSTEMS FOR THE ARTS (P2-4), IT WAS THRILLING TO GET ONTO THE STREETS OF BERLIN TO EXPLORE SOME OF THE ISSUES RAISED FROM OTHER PERSPECTIVES. COURTESY OF A GOETHE-INSTITUT ITINERARY AND AN EXCELLENT GUIDE, OVER TWO DAYS WE MET PEOPLE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN SHAPING AND CHALLENGING THE CITY'S NOTIONS OF ITSELF. APTLY, BE BERLIN, A GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN TO ENCOURAGE BERLINERS TO PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPING A SENSE OF THEIR CITY'S IDENTITY, WAS IN FULL SWING.

Much has been written about the attractions of Berlin, not least its plethora of opera, theatre and dance companies, numerous festivals, including Transmediale and the Berlinale Film Festival, superb museums, countless commercial and independent galleries and clusters of shops with innovative wares (promoted in printed English/German guides in each of the fashionable districts). Large student and artist populations, enjoying cheap rents, have fuelled the evolution of squats into idiosyncratic art, shopping and eating districts with varying degrees of gentrification, development and heritage preservation.

The squats either side of the Wall in the 80s, especially in the former East Berlin, became hubs for intensive creativity into the 90s and beyond, incubating a wave of successive cultural hot spots across the city. We looked out from RadialSystem V across the River Spree at the graffitied old warehouse and factory squats that our hosts said would soon be home to new development. This wave moves slowly, if with determination. Land ownership was, and remains, a hugely problematic issue in the reunification of Berlin—who actually owned what in the former East? An older problem, resolving ownership and compensation for land stolen from German Jews by the Nazi state, persists as well. Several people we spoke to said that ownership challenges had a positive aspect in inhibiting rapid commercial development and keeping rents down. Protests against development are also common—one was taking place as we looked across the river.

The artists we met, not a few of them Australian, live in Berlin because of its cultural density which offers them connections, networks, study, mentoring, collaborations, inspiration and cheap rent, but not necessarily work or grants. Some arrive with grants from their home countries, many work elsewhere in Europe and use Berlin as home.

Already we had a strong sense of Berlin as a creative totality—it's a place where artists want to be, as do audiences from the city itself and beyond. However, we were

constantly reminded that Berlin is seriously broke, that a huge percentage of arts funding goes to a handful of major institutions and performing arts companies and little to a huge population of individual artists and groups. Much of the population cannot afford to enjoy the arts.

Nevertheless the city appears to be in a state of continual renewal. We visited the Neues Museum the day after it opened, a superb work of renovation and preservation housing the creations of ancient and mediaeval cultures. The external walls are pockmarked with bullet holes: inside and out the city's history remains visible.

Two of our acquaintances are proud Berliners, but believe that the Nazi and Communist destruction of the city's middle class and Jewish life in the last century meant that Berlin lost the opportunity to establish a consistent, coherent cultural drive, one that could acknowledge the artistic realities and potentials of the city. They look elsewhere—to the emerging cultural life of Istanbul for example—for inspiration.



Xenia Rautenberger, 2009
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urban dialogues

Others worry at the fragmentation of Berlin life. Instead of a coherent city, they see islands—ghettos of isolated citizens divided socially and spatially although living almost side by side. Urban dialogues (www.urbandialogues.de) devises projects that take participants deeper into their own neighborhood and then outside of it—to other parts of the city or some other city elsewhere in the world.

Urban Dialogues began in 1998 with an emphasis on site-specific work involving young people, research based projects and conceptual art work. A team of 11 evolved—eight artists, two urban geographers, one pedagogue. Artistic director Stefan Horn and collaborators constantly reinvent their approach according to the character of the location and the participating group as well as the skills and passions of the artist who will run the project. Photography has become the principal tool for many of the projects, used in myriad ways.

We meet Horn at the Clärchens Ballhaus in Berlin-Mitte, a century old timber dance hall where you can eat and drink, dance at night (as does our guide), enjoy chamber music or a jazz recital. The atmosphere is warmly communal. The amiable Horn briskly engages us with alarming accounts of the borders rising within cities and optimistic arts-led means for breaking them down. He describes himself as “a theatre designer who wanted to get out of black boxes and into urban dialogues outside. So I did a project with choreographers and designers on how to deal with community.”

Urban dialogue projects, explains Horn, are about “difference and communication, youth art and networks. A project might take three years to complete. Urban Dialogues builds teams of freelancers. Young people join workshops, each run by a professional artist. Each project has academics evaluating it from beginning to end with reports at different stages. We’re always looking for different ways to work with young people. Again there’s no recipe.” Horn appoints a local artistic director and “keeps in touch by teleconferencing and lots of visits. In Berlin we have done lots of art and education projects, focused on school or youth groups, choosing artists with the right experience.”

The main function of the projects is to reduce a sense of isolation, to encourage something as apparently simple, but often quite threatening in a big city, as visiting a neighbouring suburb. Young people going from from Brixton to Barcelona were “shocked by small things—the ritual of sitting down to drink coffee instead of taking it away.” The project report emphasises how quickly the young photographers sought out what was distinctive about Barcelona, instead of the familiar “we’ve got one of

those."

The 15-month Signs of the City program focused its young participants (variously students, vocational trainees, hearing-impaired, homeless) in Berlin, East London, Sofia (in Bulgaria) and Barcelona on documenting and creatively interpreting cultural signs—state, commercial and personal—points of recognition and recollection. Often it was their first encounter with cameras, from pinhole to digital.

In these projects the artist leaders are not cast as teachers, they provide the means, models and inspiration for participants "to become authors in their own right, directly involved in the production of knowledge." Significantly this is achieved through collaboration and through visual language, circumventing literacy challenges and allowing communication between different language speakers. These young people "are cut off from the art world as a result of language and segregation." Artists and assessors reported the invaluable addition of GPS-receivers to the project, allowing the participants to achieve a greater sense of active documentation and facticity beyond taking and selecting images—"conjoining place and time."

Exhibitions of the photographs were staged in each city, but online collections played a more significant role in allowing participants and others to see the greater range of the projects and to play with the images, assembling them into patterns and narratives to help shape perspectives on where they live (www.citipix.com). Excellent documentation of the project can be found in Stefan Horn, Rudolf Netzelmann, Peter Winkels eds, Signs of the City—Metropolis Speaking, Jovis, Berlin 2009.

Horn elaborated on the range of projects Urban Dialogues had initiated or been involved in, including Islands+Ghettos, case studies of Dubai and Caracas. These are "extreme cases of ghettoisation", he says, "but good exemplars of working in social crisis zones." He mentions the gated communities of London and Barcelona: "Sometimes the borders within a city are actual but even if metaphorical they're nonetheless real." A very real example can be found, he says, in East London where he's currently working and where the 2012 Olympics will be held. He's concerned that appropriate urban regeneration will be hindered by the installation of an 11 mile, 10 foot high, blue security wall replete with CCTV that cordons off the Olympics site over many years. The assumption is that the Olympics will regenerate the East End, but Horn is concerned it will set up new borders given its long-term presence and the possibility of permanently dividing communities.

Horn thinks that "urban regeneration can work but there's no recipe for it. It should develop at the same speed as the lives that inhabit it. People need a chance to cope, to develop a life in their city." As for Berlin, despite its steady cultural development of parts of the city, Horn sees it as an island with ghettos—"an island needing culture and tourism" to keep it alive. He writes in Signs of the City, "Berlin: a city that could, and had to, re-invent itself after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Sometimes resembling a peaceful urban island...[it faces] the challenge of integrating two different social and value systems."

In the book documenting Islands+Ghettos (Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, Heideberger Kunstverein, 2008), Horn writes "that the spatial fragmentation of urban space...will increase in the future." Concerned about "territorial delimitations and their effects on young people", he argues that "perception must be schooled and the gaze sharpened for the things that surround us everyday that, all too often, we no longer really recognise, because we are accustomed to them." As several observers of Signs of the City point out, this is a quest to develop 'urban literacy' and a slowed down, considered response to city life. For a freelance writer, Andrew McIlroy, reflecting on the project, Signs of the City is possibly about "emergent citizenship" and "the city as a place with soul."



ina Wolny, Lea Draeger, Trust, Schaubühne Am Lehniner Platz
photo Heiko Schäfer

schaubühne am lehniner platz

Tobias Veit (Director Artistic Production) and Friederike Heller (Dramaturg) spoke frankly with us about the Schaubühne's place in the city as the only major theatre company in the former West Berlin. It has been a challenge, they said, to get audiences to cross town. As well, this once wealthy district of the city, Charlottenberg, has become progressively poorer. Against these odds the Schaubühne has sustained progressive direction and programming, establishing itself as European and an international player.

The Schaubühne makes itself "internationally visible" with productions with English surtitles, by translating plays, by including in the program dance theatre which, Veit and Heller say, can draw a very different audience and build the contemporary profile the company is looking for—"to give way to diversity, rather than be overwhelmed by it." Some productions draw particularly large audiences, like artistic director Thomas Ostermeier's production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* performed as a party in a garden, but there's a need to reach out beyond Berlin's constraints.

The Schaubühne is part of Prospero, a partnership networked across six European cities. Veit says that "the works from each of these companies are very local in origin. Each year four mutually agreed on productions are shared. There are 10-12 other productions from which each chooses two. The challenge is to take into account your own audience and decide what they'll like." The organisations also meet, this year in Tampere and in 2012 in Leige, for a colloquium—"talking, dealing with four languages, developing co-existence, growing together."

Veit pointed out that the partners are six completely different organisations: "The Modena company in Italy (Fondation Emilia Romano Teatro) is an autumn festival with no theatre of its own but produces tourable works. The one in Lisboa, Portugal (Fundaco Centro Cultural de Belem) is a cultural centre that presents a variety of forms. The Finnish Department for Theatre Research and Practice co-operates with the Tampere Festival. None is doing the kind of work that Ostermeier does. But there is a shared interest between organisations in certain directors."

Another international dimension to the Schaubühne is to be found in its International Playwrighting Festival on Identity and History and FIND, its International Festival of New Drama focusing on and promoting lesser-known writers from around the world. The festivals involve "very fast programming—one year ahead—invited productions, staged readings, fundraising, support gained from political leadership, the Goethe-Institut and educational organisations, and programs are printed in German and English."

The Schaubühne ethos is built on Thomas Ostermeier's notion that culture comes from the contemporary author. The company has been producing Falk Richter's work for 10 years as well as the plays of Marius Von Mayenberg [whose plays have been directed by Australian Benedict Andrews, a regular at The Schaubühne] alongside works by British playwrights Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill. Choreographer Anouk van Dijk has been working with the company since 2000.

When Berlin's other theatres followed the Schaubühne's focus on authors, "it became overfished territory," said Veit. "Too many young writers in Berlin were expected to come up with a string of world premieres." It was decided at the Schaubühne, among other things, to include dance in the program and to make an innovative shift by

working with Van Dijk and Richter on the production TRUST, broadening the company's ambit.

Despite the language barrier (we had brief access to a rough draft translation), TRUST proved to be an engrossing experience shared with a large responsive audience. We're familiar with dance theatre, but TRUST is like an inversion—theatre dance—in which the text is centre-stage but is danced and inventively moved to varying degrees. As an elliptical drama about an ageing relationship, infidelities, cross-cultural encounters, the global financial collapse and the draining pressures of digital social networking the tone of TRUST ranges from hyperreal to fantastical. While being lifted high and swung, characters continue to communicate normally. Or they are rendered puppet-like. A man performs a neurotic little dance in an armchair, not knowing what to do with himself as a woman speaks on and on. Monologuish interrogations of self or other multiply: "Have you actually ever thought about your body, what it tells you, the story of your body...the story your body tells me every morning?" A funny therapy class that offers release through barking turns nasty. Bodies clump together or are tossed behind a couch or are disappeared by a box. Speakers lose limb mobility as they rattle on. And all the while there's the growing sense that personal or couple collapse is just part of some greater, surreal if mundane disaster. The performers, a mix of actors and dancers, commit to Richter's lateral text and van Dijk's movement (the show is co-directed by writer and choreographer) with passion and precision on the multi-level set to a live sound score. We're hoping TRUST will hit the festival circuit with surtitles so that we can share our excitement in this theatre-dance innovation.

Meanwhile, on the financial side, "75-80% of the Schaubühne's budget comes from the city while the other four major theatres receive up to 85%." The five theatres are competitive but, says Veit, "there's no serious debate or will to cut funding." Similarly, despite the financial odds, Berlin still has three opera companies as well as the most theatre companies of any German city. With 230-250 personnel involved in the Schaubühne at any one time, "we might do 500 performances a year, 60-100 will be outside Germany, few within. Touring is very important to us."

The Schaubühne reflects the changing social dynamics and fortunes of Berlin, adapting by finding new forms and audiences within the city and outside the country. Theatre companies around the world are diversifying their programs, embracing contemporary dance and performance, in some ways keeping pace with new multi-functional arts spaces like RadialSystem V.

adrienne goehler

Author, curator and sometime politician, the dynamic Adrienne Goehler describes Berlin as being full of "people searching for euros because we're an experimental city reinventing ourselves after the fall of the Wall." For 12 years Goehler headed the academy of fine arts (Hochschule für bildendeKünste) in Hamburg. In 2002-2006 she was curator for the Hauptstadt Kulturfonds (cultural capital funds) of Berlin and wrote a book, *Liquefaction, Ways and byways of the welfare society, culture* (Campus, Frankfurt, New York 2006). For seven months she was Cultural Minister for the City of Berlin

A passionate arts advocate with a radical social justice agenda, Goehler has ambitions for Berlin. She'd like there to be more free creative spaces; for her city to more conscious of the importance of the arts for its own future; and a basic income for all citizens, working or not, "given that there will be no longer a return to full employment in Germany."

Goehler describes the recent Jugend Forum with Parliament: 1,000 young people discussing the city's creative crisis. "It included a range of artists—film, dance, cyber—addressing everything: alcohol, political correctness, poor kids, dating protocols, modern Nazis who are dangerously subtle and wear suits...The city is still bankrupt but recognises that it needs to open itself to new practices. But it's too busy commercialising art and not understanding the conditions of creativity and without a clue about the pioneering work that has been done. The result is more and more a shopping window culture with a mayor who adopts the cultural ministry to create a culture to mirror himself and ignores the grassroots."

Goehler spoke about how hard life was in the city for most artists, while at the top end the arts were well funded. She's convinced there's "a need for capital to provide a

laboratory to discover new kinds of labour and art. But the city's departments of economy and arts are totally separate." This, she says, was what hindered her in her seven months as cultural minister: "In blinkered divisions people limit their responsibilities, whereas one of the big potential energies in Berlin is in-between-ism, between the arts, between sectors—especially in education. You need arts and artists in schools. I want dance in school during the daytime, not after 5pm. One of the best things that Simon Rattle did when he took up the job as Chief Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic was to demand music education in schools as part of his appointment. It's taken three and a half years before the Departments of Education and Culture began to share euros and responsibility."

Goehler said that when she headed the cultural capital fund "the government didn't like my approach because it looked 'social' whereas I said, 'it's urban, ideological, educational.'" She drolly described her experience as arts minister as "my little workshop." She was fired. "I'd won too many battles. I'm opposed to functionalising art for politics."

As for her work now, she describes it as "a wild, intense precarious, independent life curating and writing. I'm fighting for a basic guaranteed income for all, an idea feared by all political parties. In the 21st century we need different ideas and creativity to overcome ecological and other problems. Therefore we need artists and scientists and we mustn't let them starve. This includes non-university scientists and artists. Art has been built on the self-exploitation of people in their early 20s and the current means of securing money is humiliating."

Goehler is involved in organising an exhibition on aesthetics and sustainability, bringing together inventors, artists and scientists. Behind the show there's an aim, to set up a fund to connect the arts and sciences, "not a foundation—foundations are also sector-bound, and artists too need to see beyond their sector."

At a time when art is expected to be educational, therapeutic, an industry, a service, Goehler's position is a significant one. She places art firmly in a socio-political context, as having a role in improving the city, but on its own terms and for which artists should be duly rewarded. "[Creativity] is flexible, liquid, not a reserve, not a commodity, but a current." As she said in a speech delivered in Sydney several years ago, of a city with the highest density of independent artists in Germany. "Berlin...has all the pre-requisites to perceive itself as a laboratory for trying out arts and knowledge related jobs."

be berlin

Berlin's government is also having thoughts about the city's identity, clearly hoping to consolidate among its citizenry a positive view of the metropolis. The Mayor has backed and visibly fronted a public relations campaign. Christophe Lang Head of Corporate Communications/PR Be Berlin, says "it is designed to make Berliners aware of their own city, to overcome a certain critical and sceptical frame of mind. The best Berliners would ever say about Berlin was 'you can't complain.'" After the Wall came down, Lang says there was "a lot of change and a sense of loss but an improved attitude after 2006 when Germany was the World Cup host."

Be Berlin commenced in 2008 "with a five million euros budget, and an aim to enhance trade for Berlin-based companies and marketing of the city, but not for tourism. It involves 168 companies—advertisers, publishers and management agencies. The central idea is a new branding of Berlin as the place to be: 'Become a part of a city of change, and be changed by Berlin.'"

The campaign's emphasis has been "on finding the uniqueness of Berlin. It's already seen as unique, especially by the young but it was not clear what this uniqueness stood for. A logo was developed and posted all over the place. We sent letters to 1.4 million households, invitations 'to tell your story—about your successes.' We got thousands of responses from which 500-600 stories were chosen covering 2,500 people. We didn't use celebrities or professionals, just average Berliners. If your story was accepted it was projected onto the Brandenburg Gate and you'd become a Berlin Ambassador with a special award and your story included on the website for Be Berlin."

Each story was headed by a slogan variation: "Be volleyball/Be winner/ Be Berlin"; "Be

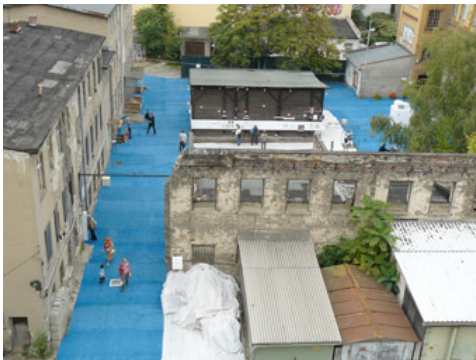
upright/ Be garden saver/ Be Berlin." The stories, in the areas of art, business, science, city life, are about personal successes large and small (www.be.berlin.de/en/stories).

Lang says that there's a strong focus on youth, on green energy and cultural events and that polling has revealed a high approval rate for the campaign which is now extending to international events and trade fairs overseas. The key 'descriptors' of Berlin that appear to have emerged from the campaign suggest that the city is energetic and cutting-edge, has unparalleled diversity, attracts people from all over the world and has friendly citizens "with big hearts and big mouths." There's also a Berlin Friendliness Initiative designed to show visitors Berliners are helpful and good humoured. The Be Berlin logo is attached to arts, fashion, design, science and business products and events wherever there's a will to be involved. Not surprisingly, artists we spoke to are less than impressed, thinking that the money spent on Be Berlin might be better invested in creating a future for the city rather than an attitude.

monopol

We enjoy a brief meeting with Elke Buhr, the assistant editor of the millionaire-owned Monopol. With its staff of 10—five writers, two art directors, two picture editors, two production people—the magazine initially focused on lifestyle, art and fashion, but "discovered that lifestyle readers are not so interested in art." So the focus became visual arts in a city with reputedly the largest number of galleries in Europe per head of population and heavily involved in the continuing boom in the commercial art market: "We need the visual arts public."

Buhr describes the magazine as "Berlin-centred while being international." Mrs Taschen, partner in the idiosyncratic Taschen publishing company, "does a double-page column each edition focusing on a different city." Atypically two recent issues cover performance art, with a lead story on Rose Lee Goldberg's Performa live art festival in New York. Initially the coverage was to be in one edition but was spread over two "to avoid an impression of 'harshness.'" Media arts only occasionally make it on to the pages of Monopol whose strength lies in responding to a Berlin and European niche readership committed to progressive visual arts.



Rigaer Street 71-73A
photo Marian Mügel

fabrik (im) quadrat

Our last meeting was in Friedrichshain with The Association for Urban Spaces and the Creative Industries involving young artists directly engaged in preserving and regenerating a part of the city. Behind a tired, old wall topped with ragged barbed wire there's a courtyard in which stands a large timber shed (apparently long ago it housed cows) and to its right a low bunker-like stone building. Towering above is an elderly, neat apartment building, once a 19th-century factory, with a shared cafe space on the ground floor in which plans are on display to convert the site in part into a cultural centre.

The shed is adorned with photographs, charts, maps and information cards, suspended light globes and an occasional 'peep' box. As we walk around the shed a 140 year history of the building unfolds, its industrial uses, including as a furniture factory in the 30s, changing ownership, the 'missing' years (blank wall space) of Nazi domination, the stealing of the property and the murder of the Jewish owners, the merchants Mechel and Simon Beiser...and on to more recent times. The display has an archaeological aura—photographs of layers of brick, a peephole glimpse of wall surfaces—and an air of mystery—swinging globes and a query about what precisely Osram were up to here with their wartime armaments research. It's an engrossing

site-specific installation, even on a chilly day. We've arrived just after the exhibition closed and see only traces of the bright blue 'carpet' that filled the spaces between buildings, unifying Rigaer Street 71-73A into a single concept—a workplace of the past, a living space in the present and an active cultural hub for the future.

This project at Fabrik [im] Quadrat (literally, the factory in the square) is described as "an intervention with light boxes, future-plans and historical speculations; yard-exhibition," and was shown throughout October. An initiative of the local community (residents, artists, associations) who came together in 2008 to contest the sale and demolition of the historical property, the project gained the support of other organisations including the Cottbus Technical University.

In the 'bunker' are a range of other peephole works including a small self-contained 50s lounge room in which, swathed in retro-glow, you can sit as others spy on you. The venue is also used for progressive music performances at night and has a cozy bar and a variety of small rooms, one of which features a huge mound of trolley wheels (another layer of the site's history) on which are mounted flickering video monitors. Outside, in the ruins, there are remnants of a sound art installation—small speakers on walls and in cracked wash basins. At the edge of the property a mechanic happily restores old GDR Trabant cars.

The three young artists, Hajo Toppius, Thomas Redekop and Sasha Schneider, who guide us around the site are committed to preserving and simultaneously transforming it, collaborating with the 70 residents of the building. Although they admit it will be a challenge given unresolved ownership and city politics, their determination is evident.

berlin: i.d.

Strangers to Berlin, and on a short visit, we quickly absorbed a range of opinions as to the character of this city. We certainly sensed and experienced its diversity and vitality and were left in no doubt that here was a city busily re-inventing itself, despite its financial debt. But while the city saw itself as friendly, creative and internationally attractive, and was shoring up that opinion with its Be Berlin campaign, it was also described as an island with more connections to the greater world than with Germany, but also with islands and ghettos within of citizens separated by geography and wealth and inequitable degrees of access to the arts. Activists, theorists and artists seek a balance between preservation, regeneration and the new, seeing the city as a laboratory for producing new forms of art and knowledge. In the opinion of Adrienne Goehler, Berlin already is that laboratory, but it has to acknowledge it and, to make the most of it, invest.

Our thanks to Klaus Krischok Director of the Goethe-Institut Australia for proposing the visit, to Timm Klöpfer of the Goethe-Institut Berlin for organising our itinerary and special thanks to our excellent guide Monika Böttcher for her companionship and for generously sharing her considerable knowledge of the city.

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