

Shall we play dead?

Shall we run?

Shall we find the exit?

Shall we continue to dream?

Shall we honor the fallen?

Shall we storm the gates?

Shall we capture the flag?

Shall we wait?

Pause

Hesitate

Occupy

## Jennifer Davy



# In the Global Urban Art Factory:

Notes on the  
ambivalent role  
of the artists  
in the Creative  
City

The “creative turn” and its focus on economic creativity very much dominated the last decade in cities all over the world. In the beginning, many critics proclaimed the “creative city” to be not more than a short-term bubble and policy fad and urban sociologists would shake their heads in disbelief. How can a city not be creative since creativity is an intrinsic part of the social DNA of the urban fabric? Almost a decade later, creativity has not just become a powerful rhetorical device in urban marketing strategies but cities set up creativity policies while cultural and creative industries continue to grow. Yet, what is the role of the artist in all of this?

The term “creative city” has become associated with two urban scholars who have quite different understandings. The American geographer Richard Florida proposes in his book “The Rise of the Creative Class” creativity as the ontological capacity of a new “creative class”. He claims that creativity as a form of human capital is embodied in a few professional individuals who he designates as the creative class and who, as he argues, will be the driving force of economic growth, innovation, and the decisive source of competitive advantage of cities nowadays. Strangely though, Richard Florida is not talking much about artists when he refers to the creative class. He rather denotes a larger group of creative professionals in finance, health care, law, or science as the creative class whose daily job is to engage in complex problem solving. Artists are important to attract and entertain the creative class by creating a vibrant cultural scene in cities.

Quite different is Charles Landry’s concept of a “creative city”. He thinks of a new urban planning cycle of creativity and innovation supported by a creative

bureaucracy, inclusive participatory planning processes, and strong local cultures that can tackle today’s complex urban problems. Landry rather thinks of a creative administration instead of creative practitioners. And here again, artists have only an enabling role in helping local cultures to flourish. Even though Landry actually coined the term “creative city”, his ideas have inspired only a few municipal governments.

From a policy-making perspective, a “creative city” can be one that supports cultural consumption and individualism (à la Florida and as traditional cultural policy would do) or cultural production as with the current creative industries policies here in Europe (usually headed by economic development), or both as many cities do—however, often without acknowledging the interdependencies between these two and lacking coordinated efforts between different departmental responsibilities. Undeniably, arts and culture have a privileged role in the conception of a creative city, they are valued for their economic contribution. Art galleries, museum and cultural organizations are celebrated for their role in upgrading inner city areas, for image enhancement, for attracting tourists, and for their economic productivity, but less for their role in stimulating societal change through inspiration, provocation and reflexivity. The massive investment in cultural infrastructures, as we have seen in the last decade, and its economic imperative favors consumption over production and leaves not much room for any long-term vision of artistic and cultural development or any considerations of the effects these policies might have on artistic and cultural activities in cities. Quite the contrary, last year, the UK minister of culture Marisa Miller

claimed that funding for the arts has to be justified by “returns” and “healthy dividends”—this financial argumentation is a far cry from the “arts for art’s sake” and “market failure” arguments that used to justify arts and cultural support in the past and clearly signals that culture has turned from a social good into an economic good.

The ongoing economization and instrumentalisation of culture, however, is not a new phenomenon and has been the subject of artistic critique for a long time. It is ascribed to The Situationists to have already claimed in the 1960’s: “culture is the commodity which helps sell all the other”. Today it sells cities to investors for the sake of economic growth. It seems that art and culture got caught up in the “(creative) economic narrative”, conformed to the expansion of the global art market and the creative economy but also to their instrumentalisation for social change and social engineering in urban redevelopment strategies. By now it’s a well-known fact that artistic critique and the often claimed “autonomous position” of the artist has been co-opted and incorporated into dominant capitalist discourse, as Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski discussed at length in the “New Spirit of Capitalism”. Artists have become the politically celebrated role model for the flexible, mobile worker who can creatively adapt to multiple situations and who is willing to constantly self-exploit, take on risks, and hold several jobs to sustain livelihood. In policy papers artists are valued for their entrepreneurial skills.

Despite the well-documented precarious labour conditions in the arts and cultural and creative industries, we have witnessed a tremendous rise in artists and cultural-creative professionals. Between 2005 and 2011 cultural sector

employment grew over 40 percent in Berlin with now more than 186,000 people employed in cultural and creative industries. However, to detect the real numbers of artists living and working in Berlin is complicated and given numbers are more an estimation. For instance, for the visual arts the Senate claims 5,000 artists in Berlin, the BBK reports 2,000 registered for its professional organization, the Künstlersozialkasse counts 9,400 visual artists (with designers and craftworkers), and the latest creative industries report claims 1,914 visual artists. In total the number of all artists registered at the Künstlersozialkasse in Berlin rose from 27,250 in 2009 to 35,130 in 2014. Berlin has twice as many artists as doctors (more than 16,000) and almost a third more than teachers (more than 28,000).

Furthermore, art has become deeply entangled with the urban situation. There's an aesthetic experience around every corner. Since the 1990s, we see a proliferation of artistic practices intervening in the social urban fabric. Labelled as relational aesthetics, social aesthetics or social practice, these participatory interventions are claimed to be socially engaged artworks—yet often, without really engaging with the people. Additionally, we have seen a proliferation of newly built cultural quarters as well as efforts to brand and nurture arts districts and creative clusters in cities and neighbourhood-based arts and cultural festivals that celebrate art in urban spaces. These developments were accompanied by the emergence of a global circuit of art festivals, such as biennales, and heavily supported by public investments with some artists and cultural practitioners profiting from it. Arts, capital, and public policy have become accomplices in post-industrial economic policies. As a consequence,

they gave rise to new forms of inequality and marginalization in cities. This can be most clearly seen with the process of gentrification that has evolved into a global urban strategy. The growing inflow of investments into premium housing and office buildings in cities increases rent levels, forces low-income residents out of inner city areas and makes it difficult for creative professionals, especially in the early stages of their career, to obtain and maintain a flat, let alone an additional office or production space in the inner city. The physical and social upgrading of inner city neighbourhoods has relied a lot on the symbolic capital of artists and their capacity to revalorize “underdeveloped” neighbourhoods. Subsequently, artists have been put into a contradictory position (Do you ever wonder if you are a pioneer or a gentrifier?), becoming unintentionally part of a vicious development cycle that plaster our cities with cheap investment architecture targeted at middle-class households.

It seems that artistic practices almost lost their appreciation and potential for resistance and critique. Hence, it's no surprise that the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe asks in “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces” if “artistic practices can still play a critical role in a society where the difference between art and advertising has become blurred and where artists and cultural workers have become a necessary part of capitalist production”? Her answer is yes, but only if artistic interventions actively engage with society again.

And indeed, we see rising protest against the current notion of a creative city as in Hamburg's Gängeviertel where thousands of artists have signed the Not In Our Name Manifesto, or in Rotterdam where the art collective Bavo has launched a Plea for an Uncreative City.

More and more artists are stirring discussions on the “urban commons” as, for example, in Italy after the dreadful budget cuts. And we see new forms of collaborative artist practices challenging the prevailing individualistic notion of creativity with the re-emergence of project spaces and shared workspaces. The subject of gentrification—a pressing issue in so many cities worldwide—has become a popular theme in artists' works too. Without exaggeration, the creative city has finally become politically contested and it is now time to reclaim and redefine the creative city as a shared space for all social groups. One line of argumentation is to bring the term sustainability into the discussion by scrutinizing if the creative city is sustaining the resources it is actually driving on and if it is addressing problems of cultural, economic and social sustainability as an urban development strategy.

But what exactly would we wish to sustain then? What is in danger of extinction with current urban development? It's the cultural complexity of urban social life that emerges from the presence of heterogeneous social groups and the serendipitous encounters between them. What makes the urban situation so special and productive is the juxtaposition and density of difference. The last decade has seen urban policies fostering socially homogenous redevelopment, excluding more people than including. Cities such as London, New York and Paris have become unaffordable and inaccessible for normal income groups. Berlin too, has experienced tremendous upgrading in inner city areas with more and more people, artists and cultural organizations struggling to keep up with rent prices. So, on the bottom line, what is at stake here is no less than the question of

social inequality and social justice. However, questions of social or cultural sustainability are not part of current “creative city” thinking and especially not cultural or economic policy-making.

Berlin is a good example on how debates around urban creativity and creative city policy-making have lost sight of the cultural and social dimension of the creative city. Berlin is perceived to be the epitome of a creative city with its vibrant cultural scenes and Berlin’s politicians always highlighting that artists come to the city because it is relatively cheap here. However, what’s the point if it is only cheap? Why artists come is because of its opportunity structures, the openness the city provides, the promises it holds for individual self-realization, personal fulfillment and the possibilities for creative expression and work. Berlin is considered a place where they can make a meaningful contribution and where they can encounter like-minded people, but also the “other” or the “stranger”. Berlin is a city that permits a diversity of lifestyles. What makes it appealing is its strong “do it yourself” ethos and people exploring different visions of life. But the current development is driving out this socio-cultural diversity in the inner city areas.

For the past 25 years, the city survived in a constant mode of socio-economic crisis massively indebted with a weak economic base but with a structural spatial openness that provided artists and cultural producers with unmatched opportunities to actively appropriate the city. Currently, we are at a turning point because Berlin is growing, economically and demographically. Last year alone, more than 45,000 new citizens came to the city, the majority from abroad, and the population is expected to grow by another 300,000 in the next ten years. The city has become

a popular place to invest in real estate with artists becoming victims of their own acquired collective symbolic capital of the city. In light of the growing social polarization, the “crowding out” of artists and cultural activities from the inner city areas through rising rents and revalorization strategies, the now well-documented precarious labour conditions in cultural and creative industries sectors, and the contestations around the current notion of a “creative city”, its time for new critical perspectives. After more than a decade of creative city rhetoric (and some policy-making) it is necessary to stimulate an alternative vision of Berlin’s future. Urban development policies have left too many people and social groups off the “urban creative radar”. These policies were incapable of addressing problems of structural unemployment and social deprivation that are so characteristic for Berlin. Still half of Berlin’s households are entitled to social housing. With the current growth, however, social problems are not solved but only displaced. Certainly, enabling social equity and inclusion is not a task for artists but first and foremost for policy-makers.

Nevertheless, in an age where the economical dominates increasingly the social, cultural, and the arts and where “No Alternatives” to neoliberal policy-making and a reigning post-political consensus among political parties are claimed, artists again could play a critical role. More than ever, we need utopian inspiration, debate, and critical perspectives on where we are heading as an urban society. What we need is to restore a collective social interest in the whole city as a public good and a shared space of all social groups, whether perceived and experienced as creative or not. The obvious social contradictions of the creative city need to be challenged. Artists with their experimental

activity and critical negation can provide “spaces of hope for the construction of an alternative kind of globalization”, as David Harvey has proposed in “The Art of Rent”. However, given the ambivalent role of artists in contemporary urban development, first artists need to find a new position to argue from and then crucial questions have to be addressed: How can “spaces of transformational politics” be opened up when artistic autonomy and critique have been co-opted and incorporated into dominant capitalist discourse? Where are potentials nowadays for artistic resistance and critical practice? And regarding the current instrumentalisation of artistic practices, how might artistic experimentation and research become again a value in and of themselves?

# Das große Schwarze

Über düstere  
Ausrufezeichen und  
das Sichern von  
Standorten





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“Blind Spot” Fassadeninstallation von Mykola Ridniy und Serhij Zhadan an KuLe, Auguststrasse 10, im November 2014

Auf diese Weise entwickelten sich Experimentierfelder für andere Lebensformen und Arbeitszusammenhänge.

Freiräume werden einem aber nicht auf Dauer geschenkt. Es ist viel Energie notwendig, um solche Standorte langfristig gegen den kapitalistischen Verwertungsdruck zu erhalten. Wenn es an Geld mangelt, muss man zwangsläufig Energie, Zeit und Kreativität einsetzen um irgendetwas zu erreichen. Am effektivsten ist das natürlich in einer Gemeinschaft. Das ist anstrengend, aber es macht auch viel Spass.

Leute mit Geld schauen diesem Treiben gerne zu. Ob sie die Fähigkeit verloren oder nie gefunden haben, sich selbst ein solches Lebensgefühl zu schaffen sei dahingestellt. Jedenfalls kaufen oder mieten sie gerne Wohnungen in der direkten Nachbarschaft. Die alten Omis mit der kleinen Rente müssen dann als Erste weg aus dem Viertel. Das war jedenfalls Ende der 90er-Jahre in der Auguststrasse so. Den Rest kennt man. Die ungebremste Dynamik der Marktwirtschaft führt zu immer wilderen Spekulationen und zerstört die über viele Jahre gewachsenen Kiez-Strukturen.

Inzwischen ist der Kampf um Kreuzberg in vollen Gange und das ist für viele bitter. Ein breites Bündnis konnte sich (noch) nicht formieren. Offensichtlich sind die meisten Betroffenen mit der Suche nach Alternativen oder Ausweichmöglichkeiten beschäftigt. Mit der schwarzen Übermalung der berühmten

In Berlin, der Stadt der Künstler und Kreativen, ist die Stimmung tief gesunken. Das fröhlich-anarchische Treiben, das den Ruf Berlins seit Jahrzehnten prägte, hat einen bitteren Beigeschmack erhalten. Auf Ausstellungseröffnungen erzählt man sich gegenseitig die neuesten Horrorstories über Kündigungen und drastische Mieterhöhungen.

Die Attraktivität der Stadt hat in den letzten zehn Jahren zwar ständig zugenommen. Doch wer kann es sich demnächst noch leisten hier zu sein? Um das Verhältnis zwischen Akteuren und Konsumenten steht es schlecht. Dennoch scheint es für viele immer noch wichtiger zu sein, sich in einem kreativen Umfeld zu bewegen, als eine adäquate Bezahlung für kulturelle Leistungen zu erhalten.

Die Mythosbildung Berlins hat viele Wurzeln. Sie sind beispielsweise im ehemaligen Westberlin zu finden, der Insel mit politischem Sonderstatus, wo die Wehrpflicht aufgehoben war. Außerdem war die Stadt als Wirtschaftsstandort

unbedeutend. Sie wirkte also eher auf Menschen attraktiv, die sich für alternative Lebensmodelle oder Kultur interessierten.

Ich selber wollte die Schweiz verlassen, weil dort alles so geregelt war. Als ich 1988 an der Hochschule der Künste in Westberlin zu studieren begann, erlebte ich tatsächlich das Gegenteil. An ein geregeltes Studium war nicht zu denken. Es wurde gestreikt und es ging um Grundsatzfragen. Die Studierenden kämpften für mehr Mitbestimmung. An allen Hochschulen wurden autonome Seminare gegründet. Als dann die Mauer fiel und sich in Ostberlin ein Vakuum auf tat, haben sich Leute aus dieser Streikbewegung wieder getroffen und gemeinsame Projekte gestartet.

Als wir im Sommer 1990 in Berlin-Mitte die Auguststrasse 10 besetzten und die KuLe (Kunst und Leben) gründeten, gab es bereits 100 besetzte Häuser. Der Impuls für die Aneignung der Räume kam nicht aus einer “Anti-Haltung” sondern vielmehr aus dem Bedürfnis nach Selbstbestimmung.

Wandbilder des Graffiti-Künstlers Blu neben der Cuvrybrache wurde im Dezember 2014 jedoch ein starkes Signal gesetzt. Aber es ist ein düsteres Ausrufezeichen, wenn als letzter Akt der Selbstbestimmung die Spuren der eigenen Kreativität gelöscht werden, damit sie nicht als Deko für die Besserverdienenden übrig bleiben.

Auch an der Fassade der KuLe in der Auguststrasse sind die bunten Tage längst vorbei. Im Oktober 2014 war das ganze Haus von einem schwarzen Banner verdeckt. Nur in einer kleinen Kreisfläche ließ sich schemenhaft ein Kriegsschauplatz erahnen. Am Fuß der Fassade war der Text "Das zerschossene Museum" auf ukrainisch, russisch, deutsch und englisch abgedruckt. Diese Arbeit ist unter dem Titel "Blind Spot" von den ukrainischen Künstlern Mykola Ridnyi und Serhij Zhadan in Zusammenarbeit mit dem DAAD und Joel Mu für die Fassadengalerie der KuLe realisiert worden.

Trotz inhaltlicher Verschiedenheit sprechen beide Hauswände ähnliche Sprachen und sind Ausdruck von Verweigerung und Widerstand, Wut und Trauer.

Berlin sollte eigentlich mit einer ganzen Reihe von künstlerisch-politischen Protestformen in großer Schwärze konfrontiert werden! Künstler\_innen aus bedrohten Atelierhäusern haben diese Idee im März 2015 aufgegriffen. Als Bündnis AbBA (Allianz bedrohter Berliner Atelierhäuser) traten sie mit einer Aktion an die Öffentlichkeit, bei der 100 schwarze Umzugskartons erst aufgetürmt und dann einzeln an Unterstützer\_innen weitergegeben wurden.

Nur über Netzwerke und Solidarität wird etwas zu erreichen sein. Als Künstlerin weiss ich, was Freiheit bedeutet und welche Glücksgefühle damit verbunden sind. Allerdings ist Glück immer

größer, wenn man es teilen kann. Daher frage ich mich manchmal, ob ich meine Erfahrung von Freiheit weitergeben und durch meine künstlerische Arbeit vermitteln kann. Oder ob ich bereit bin, anderen Menschen Kreativität zu ermöglichen, die sonst vom kulturellen Leben so gut wie ausgeschlossen sind.

Die Gesellschaft ist natürlich froh, wenn Künstler Defizite in sozialen und pädagogischen Bereichen auffangen. Das ganze Bildungswesen ist auf engagierte und verantwortungsbewusste Menschen angewiesen. Das schlägt sich jedoch hierzulande nicht in der finanziellen Wertschätzung nieder. Bezeichnenderweise sind es heute eher die Lehrenden, die streiken, und nicht die Studierenden!

Und wo steht die KuLe heute? Das Haus ist "tourismustauglich" und lässt sich nach wie vor als einer der letzten lebenden Dinosaurier der Nach-Wendezeit bestaunen. Aber hinter den Kulissen ist Einiges im Gange. Die Gruppe der Bewohner\_innen muss sich in den kommenden Jahren einer Herausforderung stellen: Der Pachtvertrag wird 2018 enden. Zwar besteht eine Option für die Verlängerung, aber es müssen neue Konzepte und Finanzierungsmöglichkeiten entwickelt werden. Was dem Schokoladen in der Ackerstrasse gelungen ist, ist hier noch nicht geschafft.

Das Haus braucht neue Verbündete, was Institutionen, Stiftungen, Mäzene oder Bildungsträger sein könnten. Allerdings muss viel Entscheidungsspielraum bei den im Haus wohnenden Künstler\_innen bleiben. Ein Diskussionsprozess zu den inneren Strukturen und den Vernetzungen nach außen hat begonnen. Im Herbst wird zum 25-jährigen Jubiläum ein Buch erscheinen, das hoffentlich Kräfte freisetzt, die nach vorne weisen.



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Protestaktion gegen das Ateliersterben von AbBA (Allianz bedrohter Berliner Atelierhäuser) im März 2015

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Die übermalten Wandbilder an der Cuvrybrache im Dezember 2014



# Five Observations for Haben und Brauchen

Open Letter,  
September, 2011

*For someone who was not there, it is hard to paint the scene of how the 2011 project that came to be called “Based in Berlin” seemed to set off a firestorm through the artscene in the city, a wave of protest and organizing that still continues through the work of Haben und Brauchen and the communities around it. As of this writing, almost four years later, the project of Haben und Brauchen seems even more crucial, and in need of re-engagement. Uniquely in Berlin has the visual arts community pulled together—holding debates, developing critical reflection and engaging directly with politicians and the public realm to propose different models.*

*I eventually withdrew from Based in Berlin out of solidarity with this effort and the individuals who worked on it. The process of making that decision was the basis for the letter below.*

*The letter was then distributed at a September 2011 English language open meeting hosted by Haben und Brauchen at Salon Populaire.*

*It was an important event for me: that evening Alexander Koch, hearing the word solidarity go back and forth, jumped in with the question “What about solidarity with the public?!”*

*And I followed with: “I propose forming a Solidarity with the Public Working Group! Anyone who wants to join can come discuss it after the meeting.”*

*Koch, Jakob Schillinger (one of the curators of Based in Berlin), Stella Veciana, Eva Seufert, Libia Castro, Martine Van Kampen, Mathew Burbidge and I formed this Working Group, meeting throughout the fall of 2011. While the “Solidarity with the Public Working Group” never found a concrete way to connect back with Haben und Brauchen, and dissipated after a couple of months, it was not before we defined a key issue: the struggle for affirmative language to defend culture, especially in the face of budget cuts and the shift towards “creative industries.”*

*The letter itself, however, never got any response from Haben und Brauchen. Looking back now, it seems like the underlying assumptions of my thinking were quite far afield from the organizers, but equally likely is that the time and energy burdens they faced made things simply too difficult to take it on. But with both the local and European conditions I was reflecting upon still valid and relevant, hopefully this artifact from recent history can get a new life here. Thanks to the editors for preserving it in this way.*

Jeremiah Day January 13, 2015, Berlin

### 1 – 1.6 Million Euro; Principles

When I first came to Berlin the characteristics of the cultural scene here were striking and remarkable: the expansive accumulation of new strategies and situations, the spontaneous and independent establishment of new spaces, projects, institutions. It was not like any other city, anywhere.

But what was also striking to an outsider was the lack of interest in thinking through what this distinction might mean, or what potential there was to develop or preserve it.

So, as Fred Dewey remarked, the 1.6 million Euros (or whatever amount) that was spent on the Achievement Show (Based in Berlin) was worth every penny in that it produced your organization, which as I understand it has the thinking through of these questions at the heart of the mission.

Michael Schulze from General Public remarked to me that part of the goal of the founding of General Public was to make it possible to do things on short notice, and that the space should be independent from public money, not so much to avoid dependence but to not integrate the grant-writing structure and attendant bureaucracy into the center of the institution.

*Self-organization, independence, anti-bureaucracy, and the preservation of the capacity for spontaneity—these are clear principles which are bigger and more important than any one institution. They are the basis for something more significant than the narrow concerns of culture, and could be the basis for new understanding of how culture can contribute to the public realm.*

But equally importantly, thinking these principles through, elaborating upon them

theoretically and practically, is not an abstract project: it is an act of *self-defense*.

## 2 – 2500 Signatures

The response to Haben und Brauchen's open letter was phenomenal and probably without precedent. In a better world it would attract the attention of more than a few serious journalists to look into the question: why would the artists of a city protest the city's government wanting to spend money on culture?

So, the story of the shared sense of alarm and urgency sparked by the Achievement Show has not yet been properly told, and thus one can only speculate, but to my judgment the protest can only be explained by the idea that the Achievement Show was not perceived as *supportive* of culture, but rather *an attack upon it*.

This rationale of course must go deeper into the situation and circumstance of the city. A process which some might call "normalization" is taking shape as the exceptional conditions which for decades defined the city now recede further into the past, and so the proposal to erect a Kunsthalle, a typical architectural trophy of West German cities, could for some be understood as a symbolic and practical attack.

And it must be put into the context of a certain sense of diminishment—the closing of a window of possibility. The question "*What come of all these experiments in Berlin?*" is asked less and less. More and more one hears only that Berlin is "over" and destined to become international Williamsburg, fused into the capital of a resurgent Nationalist Germany. The 2500 signatures as an exceptional event can only be explained by looking into this broader *political* background.

## 3 – "Gentrification"

In the absence of a proper description of the Berlin project room art scene, and in the absence of a good narrative describing the motivation for the 2500 signatures, we must further struggle to gain access to a good understanding of the situation because of the habitual cliché of referring to the shifting urban development of Berlin in terms that do not apply—gentrification, in particular.

*The arrival of a wealthy class—the "gentry"—into a formerly working class area—this is a process with clear steps and stages. The collapse of a world power is not one of them.*

In other words, the use of the term "gentrification" to describe what has occurred in Berlin in the last twenty years does not clarify the situation, but rather obscure it. In such discussions what is being actively covered up are the geopolitical and broad historical contexts, without which the situation is impossible to understand.

*The urban development of former East Berlin was once clearly understood to have both symbolic and actual geo-political significance: a practical working out of concrete realities of great historical currents—socialism, capitalism, republicanism.*

But in a discourse led largely by non-natives to the city, "changes" can refer to something that has occurred only in the last five, ten, twenty years, ignoring the more significant change that came just before.

To be clear: the window of possibility that is closing now, can only be understood as a continuity and as part of a broader question of what possibilities existed in 1989 and 1990.

The sense of freedom and space of experimentation was not produced simply

because "it was cheap," but rather as part of a post-revolutionary trajectory, whose revolutionary roots must be remembered, not only out of respect and seriousness, but again, as a form of *self-defense*.

## 4 – A Meeting Between the Citizens of and Those Merely "Based in" Berlin

The best, most serious and good-faith defense of the Achievement Show was made continuously by Phillipp Klienmichel who argued that the show would be the best place for the citizens of the city to learn about the art world of the city, and could concretely contribute to civil society by offering a space of mediation. Klienmichel argued that one should not dismiss this space because it was the result of imperfect politics and was constructed to be a spectacle. First of all because spectacles are the language of our time, and second of all because to imagine the show might be done differently was a kind of utopian fantasy. And, to visit Based in Berlin on a warm night and to see whole families of clearly different social milieus touring the exhibition, one could see the confirmation of Klienmichel's insight—the citizenry indeed did come to see and explore, with generosity and seriousness, what the whole "Berlin art scene" had to offer. (Which means of course that the exhibition itself was a missed opportunity of giant proportions, as the organizers seriously underestimated the public. But, this is a relatively minor problem in the whole landscape of problems around the project.)

What went only implied but was even more consequential in Klienmichel's argument, was that the *citizens of Berlin, at this point, do not really meet or engage with the city's artists or their work.*

And in this respect, the “international” art scene and the Berlin “project-room” scene (for lack of a better term) are more or less equivalent. Is Salon Populaire more of a public space than Perez Projects? Who is more connected to their neighbors—Haubrok Presents or After the Butcher? Is General Public really, in practice, open to the general public? The answer, I would say, is no.

In one of the initial invitations to a meeting about the show, emanating from Basso, I believe, there was the idea of forming a counter-public. How could this be possible when Basso (and others) are not really part of the public at all, but rather a type of social club? And even an alliance of specialized social clubs is not a public realm, I think. What has been striking in the discourse around Haben und Brauchen has been the absence of this broader *civic consciousness*.

The focus on the private working conditions of the artists seems to me to be almost entirely off the point in this respect. What is perhaps uncomfortable to acknowledge is the degree to which the project room scene has integrated social hierarchy (snobbery and tribalism, to put it bluntly) as a structural organizing principle in just the same way as the international commercial art world.

In this sense the Mayor, even if he was indeed attempting to instrumentalize the art scene, displayed more concern for the greater good than anyone else—the curators of the show, the artists in the show, and even those who protested. He was asking simply *how can culture relate to the city* and for him the answer was pro-growth, city branding, and real-estate development.

One may not like his answers but to avoid the question means to turn “cultural politics” into an organized form of

self-advancement—a private affair, and thus of little or no political meaning.

#### 5 – PS1, For Example

One response to a proposal for a new Kunsthalle could be to refuse simply to have a “normal” standard West German Kunsthalle built in Berlin, but to demand that Berlin have its own kind or form of institution, one that would extend from the principles and priorities that make this place unique. In this way the new institution would serve to formalize, preserve and defend the territory that has been established. Perhaps such a new institution would require a new building, or perhaps not.

The first effort of such an institution is already underway—organizing a group of stake-holders to debate what are the concerns that could lead to a mission statement.

By even gathering in this way Haben und Brauchen makes a clear statement that visual art in Berlin is about more than throwing good parties and making one’s professional way. This statement must be developed into something more concrete and lead to something even more concrete still.

The European Project and the Rhineland model in particular produced a public realm in which contemporary art was central, not just a marginal affair of fashion or luxury collectibles. Contemporary art as an organ of civil society is best crystallized in institutions like Documenta, Sonsbeek or Skulpturen Muenster—all of which are understood by visitors and producers alike as charged with the mission to reflect, intervene and foster public life and dialogue.

Can this model be extended in Berlin, now? Can the self-organized, independent

and spontaneous ethos meet the ultimately conservative and institutionalized models?

In any case, in another time and for different reasons, visual artists came together and organized their own institutions to respond to their needs and reflect their concerns. 112 Greene Street and PS1 were the most enduring experiments of artists who organized spaces around the new strategies of site-specificity.

Berlin has produced new strategies, and it has produced new institutions, but what is required is solidification and concretization, a tending, grounding and fostering.

To take the form of institutions that exist in Munich or Hannover and build one here would be absurd and indeed destructive. But perhaps the Mayor is right and something new does need to be built that could preserve the capacities and principles that exist here, to show the very real accomplishments of the Berlin cultural world.

Haben und Brauchen need to be the architects, or at least the jury.

Shall we scratch the surface, or dig deep?

Shall we create another territory?

Shall we hold hands?

To carry the weight...

Together

Shall we turn the other way?

Shall we strike?

Shall we refuse to pay the rent?

Shall we build an underground culture, secret?





Fred Dewey

# Letter from an American Friend

I

Hannah Arendt, thinker and refugee from Germany, writing of a Berlin poet she loved, Robert Gilbert, spoke of the Berliner spirit he carried to his time from medieval common law—*Stadtluft macht frei*, the city air grants freedom. This law held a serf who escaped his lord and made it to the city became free, a citizen, after a year and a day. I very much felt this on my visits to Berlin, landing in Helmholtzplatz in September 2002. Walking down a still-undeveloped Kastanienallee, I fell in love with the city and its air. Suddenly it was as if freedom was how things could at last be organized. Across the city, the people themselves were making and defining things, engaged and talking, frankly, openly, across languages, building a new space for spontaneity, creativity, and thinking. Free, self-organized buildings, spaces, discussions, and events, countless languages and perspectives, reflections and initiatives, institutions and possibilities were rising from scratch. I experienced a private kindness, generosity, decency, and openness from Berliners that was striking. Though in public, a harsher side always loomed, again and again, I saw people erecting a perimeter around the *dog eat dog, wolf eats both* ethos used endlessly to crush the public realm. I felt I'd been robbed of a physical sense of "a future" in my own country. Arriving in Berlin, I found it everywhere.

Berlin, from its early days as a fort bestriding the Spree, has always been a contest, the future compromised again and again, in bitterness and defeat, by the martial spirit. But to sense, only dimly, the deals that turned rubble and endless empty lots into a bonanza of real estate and so-called "creative industries" is to see, up close, how an atmosphere of

freedom is not the same as understanding freedom or lasting structures to protect it. Economic thinking prevails now. Günter Grass's words, from a December 1966 warning to Willy Brandt on the first "grand coalition" era in Bonn, West Germany, remain prophetic: "Universal adjustment will be the rule of political and social conduct." Now, in Berlin, free spaces are struggling or closing, artists' studios are being converted into condos, neighborhood after neighborhood is or has been "normalized," resentments over pressing questions are growing, and the memory of the non-economic and even anti-economic, and the rubble, is nearly gone. The public battles in Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain, as so much of the freedom Berliners fought for, have given way to what seems an irreversible process. The Free Templehof referendum in the summer of 2014, a defiant answer to this, was followed, not long after, by occupation of a large part of Kreuzberg, publicly, by suited police and vehicles from all over Germany—all in response to a school taken over by desperate refugees.

In a working group held in Moabit, I canvassed participants on whether they felt the city was still, or had ever been, "free." There was ambivalence, for most felt freedom was turning, now, into having a job and being a professional. Some spoke of the smashing of the squats, another of how, having been remade so brutally, so often, Berlin had turned transiency into a condition. Some spoke of the treatment of refugees. One person felt he'd become a unit of gross domestic product, another of Hartz IV, another spoke of the destruction of East Germany's freedom movements. Ex-mayor Social Democrat Klaus Wowereit came up often, how he'd turned Berlin into a sales product, how, with his gang, so much had been ruined. What

happened to the bracing self-examination in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the last years of the Communist East? With only a bit more than a decade's frame of reference, I have heard a hundred arguments why, as a Berliner might say, things now are "quite okay." But I remember several years ago how a brilliant South German, who'd moved here in a more raucous time, struggling for art while holding a job, when asked "What about your great word for freedom, *freiheit*?" nearly spat on the floor. City and national politicians may quietly worry about revolt in Berlin, but quiet is carefully enforced and freedom is fading. A weak rent control law recently passed the lower house of the German parliament, partly, one would guess, to silence Berliners. But the difference between a full body politic and a society is accelerating, papered over by money and the blocking, in media, of how and why the country is perceived as it is, by its own citizens and those in other countries. One thing is clear, however. It was not the people who altered and now seek to abolish Berlin's hard-won reputation for thoughtfulness, openness, and respect for non-conformity.

The German philosopher Karl Jaspers, writing of West Germany in 1966, warned of contentment with "mere prosperity," arguing what had emerged was an "oligarchy of the parties" assuring a "dictatorship of the politicians." He warned there was "no basis in the political ethos for a common public spirit." In certain respects, the West, rather than conquering the East as is argued, fused with Prussian, then Communist austerity to form an unstoppable expansionism against just such a spirit. The SPD's Hartz IV, worked out with a Volkswagen executive, was crucial, as were, in Berlin, the endless privatizations of public property and housing, secret deals made,

and still being made at the highest levels, with little fully public exposure or redress. Protests, in some case huge, vanished. Sites of defiance remain. A few legal and semi-legal squats hold on, and Kotti and Co. at Kottbusser Tor, along with other less visible efforts, uphold the people's rights to their city and to govern their own affairs. But Potsdamer Platz, like its sister Alexanderplatz, remains the sharper tale, told poetically by Wolfgang Kil in "The Terrain," a text in the elegant 2014 Keywords pamphlet series for Arsenal's Living Archive, edited by Madhusree Dutta and Ines Schaber: "No other place was more fundamentally lost, and yet no other place would have taught us more about the Germans and their capital city in the twentieth century." Does this loss not tell us still more about the 21st century? The people's political rights, made clearer by protests in the 1980s, have been replaced by control. A few years ago, an anti-gentrification campaign in my neighborhood of Neukölln took shape, then mysteriously vanished. Only a couple posters remain on walls, in English, pleading with "tourists" to think, to ask, and to protect their long-established neighbors. My memory, as a sporadic and minor participant in the effort, was of my laptop going haywire every time I tried to participate. This, I thought, was rather odd.

In Berlin, as in Germany, criticism is confused with negation and turning to a higher synthesis to wipe it, and the old, away. This brings to mind an example posed by Arendt, in an essay on "Humanity in Dark Times," of a crucial figure of German enlightenment, Gottfried Lessing, ignored, she argued, by a Germany "where the true nature of criticism is less well understood than elsewhere." In spite of people's initiatives, the new seems immune to the best, critical elements of

the past, perhaps even, again, to the past itself. Devouring process is reframing not just foreigners but nearly everyone as transient producers of value serving national, economic dominance. Jaspers' stern 1966 warning — that the people were never part of the post-war German constitution — remains woefully unanswered. Instead, an ethos I know well from Los Angeles, of loose ties, constantly moving about, never committing to a place or getting to know it, treating experience, life, and work as consumables, moving on to new places or partners when bored or thwarted, and most of all indifference and doctrinal rigidity hobbling every fight to preserve: this has turned into the answer to Berlin's great experiment in free space for a plural body of newcomers, residents, and languages. The German way of dealing with immigration as a matter of "host" and "guest," defining non-German newcomers as temporary, hides how guest, tourist, inhabitant, and employee have been fused together against the citizen. Those not in professions of marketing, computers, media, business, and government find themselves, here, as better-off versions of the *gastarbeiter*, artists and thinkers turned into "creatives" for "the creative industries." Years ago, I saw such language on an arts commission I served on, in my home of Santa Monica. It felt like an insult then. It remains an insult now.

An index of the forces blocking thinking about the meaning of freedom and the city's future was the strange, now unremarked importation of Chicago School economics into the city by enthusiastic local and international players, leaving unaddressed this economics' anti-federal, deregulatory, even dictatorial processes. The German Chancellor's invitation to the most notorious Washington-dominated

institution built on such thinking, the I.M.F., to join in subjugation of Greece—for an entity named "the Eurogroup," and nowhere in the E.U. charter—marked a final turn, elevating to all Europe the "universal adjustment" Grass warned so carefully of half a century ago. Another sign is more local. Berliners, aroused a few years ago by Mayor Wowereit's raw opportunism, formed groups to protect free artists struggling for so long, building on established coalitions and service groups. But rather than building power from the bottom up, among the people in neighborhoods, efforts migrated to negotiating with the powers that be, a new corporatist mayor, and his culture minister. While there is lively contest over this, such developments, symbolic in so many ways, have sidelined the potential of a free, self-constructing, self-organizing ethos, tested so uniquely here, in so many languages, as a principle capable of infinite extension. Silently, inexorably, a free ethos has been submerged in procedure, codes, and confusions exerted by a hidden assault on decentralized power, undoing one of the hardest won European achievements of the post-war era.

How politicians and the corporate realm treat the people is bound to how a country treats others. In Berlin, city and national authorities are turning, unchecked, and in spite of rhetoric to the contrary, against a Europe that rebuilt the city, that granted forgiveness, and that enabled the city to fill to the brim with talent from all over the globe. In no uncertain terms, Europe—conceived after WWII as an internally borderless and federally organized community by tough resistance fighters eager to secure lasting peace—built free Berlin. Has this now really become economic and national rule? The flags atop the Reichstag, where

the future of whole countries is now considered part of the local remit, show three German flags to one lonely E.U. flag facing Brandenburg Tor. In Rome, Paris, and most European Union capitals, official buildings hang their national flag proudly next to the E.U. flag, one to one, or did. This is not the way of the new Berlin, and the message is spreading. Atop the Reichstag, facts are reversed, conveying the false impression that Europe actually did not build up Germany after all, but the reverse. As one outraged German local put it to me, the favor granted Berlin by Europe is no longer being returned.

The battles for freedom, self-government, and a federal principle in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s here, east and west, have been neutralized, and not only by reunification. A book I found in 2011, *Temporary City Berlin*, chronicled a show at Atelierhof Kreuzberg, the title revealing a dangerous misunderstanding. On an earlier visit in 2009, drawing on experiences on New York's Lower East Side and in Los Angeles, I spoke to artists at a small Kreuzberg free space, Miss Micks, warning the multi-lingual artists they needed to think out what they had and to join with other locals to protect it. They did not know how, they had no rights, they were fatalistic. What could they do? The space closed shortly after, though everyone said it would be back. How often I have heard this now. The list of closed spaces has turned into an endless dirge. Some in groups of artists fighting for the city, emerging out of the highly diverse international scene, now say it is the internationals that are the problem, that there is no time to translate local matters into the one *lingua franca*, English, the internationals have. This rushed and exhausted feeling is completely understandable. But it brings forward a dour thought. Might

Berlin, instead of a symbol of the new, be a more enduring symbol of the *too late*? Does Berlin not have repeated experience of this curse? What happened to struggles for freedom in *both* East Germany and West Germany before unification? What happened to a European vision of a meeting of cultures and languages? Who will be left to turn this history of the temporary and too late into a lasting freedom?

## II

There have been, fortunately, real surprises. The success of the 2014 Templehof "*freiheit*" referendum—protecting the fields of the old airport in south Berlin for all Berliners and from development—blindsided differently minded politicians, developers, academics, and planners. Written partly by a divorce lawyer I met in Schillerkiez, the referendum was the work of neighbors. None of the political parties would help craft the campaign, coming on board only when it was nearly over to control its results. How many then, once it succeeded beyond all hopes, dedicated themselves to creating lasting neighborhood structures for power, working from this convened sense and the diversity it encompassed? Desperate battles are underway, for Mauer Park and the few remaining free sites in the city. A precedent was established of the right to the city by its citizens. But who is now willing to deepen it and build it into a full-fledged form?

In response to former Mayor Wowereit's call for a city-wide art show that left self-organized artists' organizations out, protests and public formations led to new experiments in wider self-organized structures. The city Senate responded with a prize award to some self-organized

spaces. More money may well flow into the culture scene. But some of these spaces awarded prizes joined the city's majority of residents facing the skyrocketing rents. One prize recipient where I began my working group, General Public, was forced out. Did city officials step forward to publicly call this an outrage? Why would they be outraged? Destruction is part of the creation of value, of the "creative destruction" needed by "creative industries." People are scrambling, and while much can be rescued and new options sought, the larger question of political structure, forefronted by political parties' clever, eternal defusion of representation, remains off the table.

In my stays here, our working groups have focused on the thinking of Arendt. Moving across the city, from General Public in Prenzlauerberg, to Vierte Welt in Kreuzberg, and recently to ZK/U in Moabit, we have looked into Arendt's insights into public space, plural reality, questions of responsibility and power, the importance of public happiness, and the most important thing of all, the right to rights. We read out loud in English, the language Arendt herself used. How, given such limits, to describe and preserve a space of appearance? What would such activity even be? What about this thing she so brilliantly diagnosed as the "communistic fiction" of the hidden hand? One of the first subjects I put forward, at General Public, was the long friendship between Arendt and Jaspers, her former professor, and how each, in their ways, had taken on Jaspers' "venture into the public realm." In his 1966 challenge to his country of birth, which he too was forced out of, after the war, *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?*, Jaspers formulated a crucial demand: "a free citizen wants to make his political weight felt by his own activity."

What neuters this weight occurs at the level of daily life. A German-speaking non-German artist and friend, working here for many years, described what she called a subtle “search” for correctness, not only concerning language, but in how people are treated. Many artists must work outside Berlin, and outside Germany, to gain appreciation. They return to “suppression,” an unwitting, sometimes deliberate lack of regard for who people are and what they bring. This is a broader problem of the era, but it is also specific. In conversations with non-German parents, I have heard of children acting freely, as they will and must, told, by teachers and German children, this is not correct, with punishments and judgments meted out, classes and school years held back. An Italian mother spoke of her young child’s teachers receiving additional pay for finding and punishing such “incorrectness.” I heard of a struggling immigrant on Hartz IV benefits, needing more income, who’d begun cleaning apartments and was caught. Benefits were stopped and, though her German was decent, she was forced to take sixty hours a week of language lessons for nine months—and so could not work. She needed such “instruction,” the authorities said, because she had acted “incorrectly.” I heard from a struggling young German cabinet-maker and father, who, bicycling on Kottbusser Damm one night, was pushed toward parked cars by an expensive vehicle which then halted to precipitate a crash. The bicyclist, coming round to the front, was forced onto the car’s roof as the car began moving again and accelerated. Holding on for his life, he jumped off. At the local police station, the officer told him there was nothing to be done because the driver was “completely correct.”

Behind such so-called “authority,” answered by the kindness of ordinary Germans, lies a deep-seated confusion between rules, which demand obedience and correctness, freedom, which demands justice, fairness, openness, and power between all people, and necessity, matched properly only by freedom and never concession. Now, from this confusion, premises and biases are building into real consequences, none of which register, are rethought, or reversed. Lasting damage, interpersonally, politically, and globally, results. This is the experience of Greeks and other European countries under the regime forced outward, into international bodies, from the economic authorities of Berlin. How is this possible in an E.U., and a city, rebuilt and remade by Europe, for peace and comity? How did politics and equality turn into economic rule, justice into obedience, and tolerance again into supremacy? What of the federal principle, so crucial to Europe, where all were to be politically equal, no matter how economically strong or weak, where each retained a constituting role born of their different activity and vantage, weak countermending strong, with no country, by law, permitted to dictate?

Forgiveness is not a word or concept I hear often here now. It was described by Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, as “constantly releasing men from what they did unknowingly.” Arendt, probing action, wrote not of judgment but of remedy and repair, of how “only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents,” how “only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.” I know from my own country how the new can thoughtlessly destroy all that is essential. Italian writer Primo Levi,

in his first book, *If This Is a Man*, wrote of what lies behind this. An official escorting him through a concentration camp, losing his balance, grasped at an oily wire nearby to regain his balance. “Naturally, thoughtlessly,” “without hatred and without sneering,” the official wiped his filthy hand on Levi, “both the back and the palm, to clean it.” French structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss described such observations as those of a “great ethnographer.” There are tragic, shared facts more subtle than easily observable crimes. In 2008, during the growing international crisis and panic, a watershed was crossed and received no correction at all. The German Chancellor, in a fit of pique, described Greeks as “lazy.” Such words and gestures, however, continued emanating from the Chancellery to saturate Germany. I heard, from a highly educated, liberal German and friend how certain countries were not doing their “homework.” This comes from corporations and businesses, but also, in my experience, from universities here. The master decides, and all revere them. One must pursue mastery, because one *will be paid* only when one has the position of master. The master knows, can claim knowledge, and he or she will be paid. So everyone must repeat what the master says, behave politely, and do their homework. Who dreams up such assignments, and who decides if they are even right? How is balance maintained when every “who” is crushed, and with it, curiosity, thinking, dignity, difference, and freedom? No, this really does not matter. What matters is failing at the test issued by the master.

### III

These divides I did not see in short visits, and did not experience until I was here longer, attempting to participate in local

groups and institutions, form a chasm. I did not want to see it, blinded by my freedom to communicate in English. Yet something seen in my own country is boiling: the suppression of reality and the consequences of actions, of who people so ineluctably are in all their languages and differences, and most of all what a world beyond is saying about one. Here, before reunification, and unlike in my country, dealing with the past was pursued and structures changed to deal with it. But now, as in my country, a new mistake is being forced upon the world. Freedom is not the same as jobs and offices and hierarchical position, following the rules and fitting in, forcing on everyone an economic vision, and, most of all, forcing those ruined by it to keep their mouth shut. Do we not have the right to discuss rules and decide together upon them? This is difficult with multiple languages, but also better and deeper. Do we not need to listen to those unhappy with us, asking us, point blank, kind enough to speak across languages, "What in heaven's name are you doing?" Does not forcing accountability on this question alone mean the world? We are not tourists or guests or functions in an economy, we are humans in a shared world, born with different tongues. We are people. When I found myself at one dinner after an event receiving a *blitzkrieg* of reprimands, publicly, for not having learned German, at 58, and wanting to participate in the mean time, I thought, on my way home, in despair, perhaps it is time to go, perhaps I misunderstood what I'd first felt in this city. I had taken my time to listen to and hear an unfamiliar language, and now I too had to face this question. What in heaven's name was I doing?

It is the presence of a *lingua franca* that made Berlin unique, for foreigners

and for Germans. However problematic, it made the effort of communicating across languages possible. So I make my plea partly for forgiveness, but also for a principle. My plea is to all those who struggle here for the future, whatever their tongue, wherever they are, whoever they are. Do not let barriers, neglect, and carelessness undo this great opening, this polyglot freedom and its humanity. All have a right to the city, to the right to rights. This is as true in London or Athens or Rome or Lisbon or Paris as it is in Berlin, for all these capitals are only equals. All of Europe and the world is here, and it is this that taught freedom. This is what the union, but not the unity, of Europe made possible. It was never a vision of unity like those of Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler, and even NATO, but something utterly new. All have a right to carry weight. Europe was to be a testing of this right and its enormous gift to us. No one is superior or inferior to others. All must be free to exchange, to be different, to have their own tongues and ways of acting, to fail, to be incorrect, to feel safe, to find out, by their own ways and means all who are in this world, and most of all, to participate in the world's course, politically. Please, do not tell me or anyone we are transient creators of value, or incorrect, or that I or anyone has failed, or that what I and others contribute is weightless. Stand up. Fight. Speak, even if no one hears you or understands you. Embrace the freedom Arendt located most of all in the old Berlin she knew, "this way of thinking that always speaks up and says what it has to say." Build out, with all your tongues, from your self-organized structures, firmly, confidently, with this as a principle.

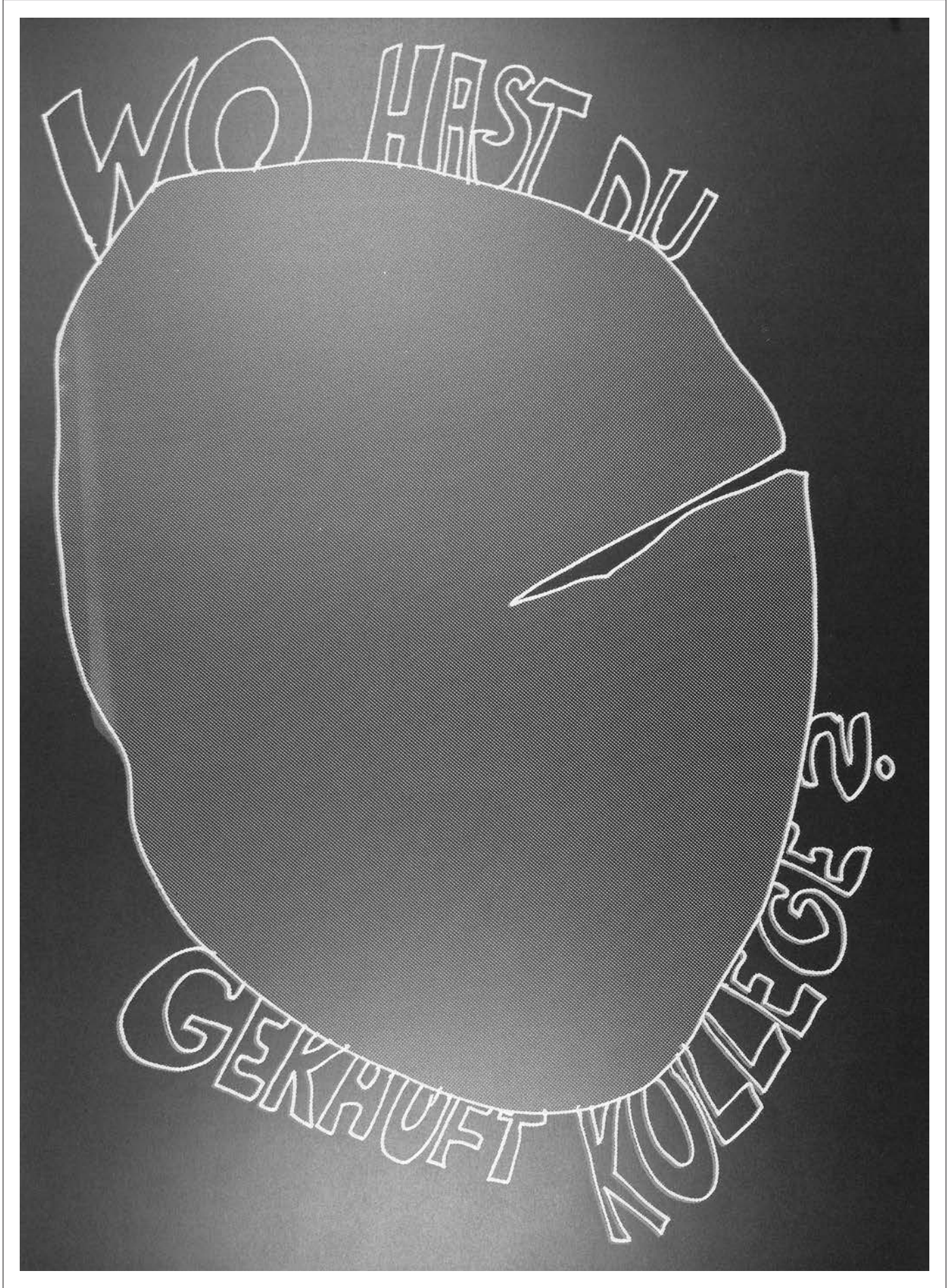
This dedication, this openness, this freedom, this thoughtful attentiveness, this extraordinary plural potential was

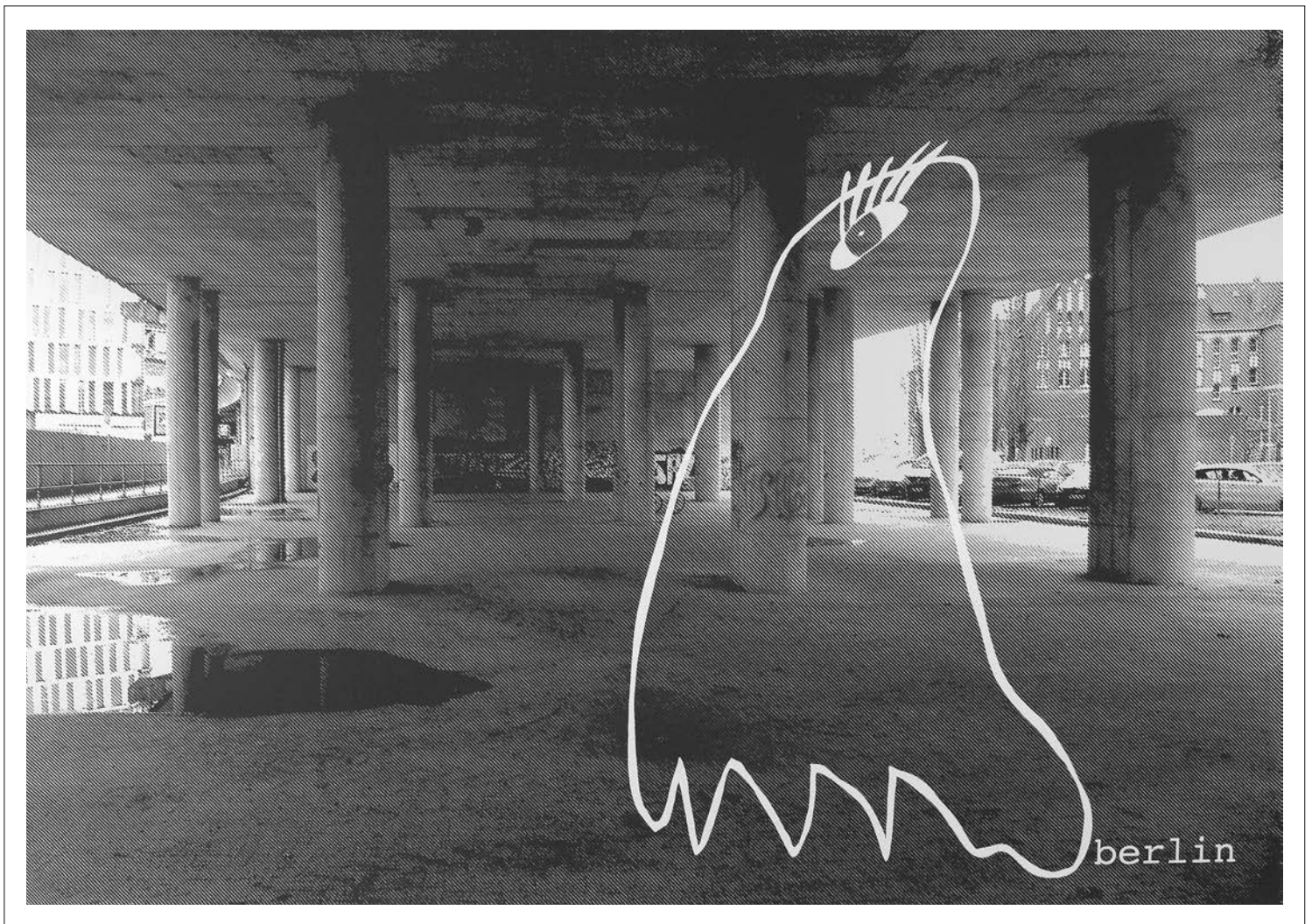
truly, miraculously so in Berlin. It has nothing to do with being correct, being economic, fitting in, and especially, only, being German. Nothing quite like what unfolded here has ever happened. Please, do not let go of this treasure, and most of all, do not let it be taken from you. The words of Jaspers, flawed and stumbling, bear down from 1947 and the devastation after WWII: "An enforced superficial community hid that which is now able to unfold." This is more true than ever. It revolves around the capacity to be responsible for all our depths, in full humanness, facing who all of us are and what has been done, in a spirit of freedom that is structural and political. It is to learn from all that separates and relates us at the same time. I came to Berlin to see how this public thing could work, to be part of a great effort and its promise of public and plural, not social or national, happiness. I came to reach across languages, to work, and to learn. Please, protect this city's example of that principle, a federal principle, that drew so many of us here. It is what made a different Berlin possible. However it happened, Berlin was and could, if it is caring, remain an example of this, what it means, could do, and be. Everything, our lives and futures, indeed those of the whole world, depend on it now.











## Marguerite van Sandick



You are not my lover anymore, but I have a memory of you that perseveres. Sitting there in this Greek restaurant, looking at the snow outside, it was clear that the food you were eating reminded you of home and better climates.

When you were eating I could see the native landscape in your eyes. And as if telling a joke, you were chewing the exotic for me.

It was only a few months later, in summer time, that I passed the same Greek restaurant. I was coming from Schillerkiez: the neighbourhood that faces high rent increase, due to the popularity of Tempelhofer Feld. I walked down the hill to document the poster campaign of the Berlin Biennale that I noticed had just in a few days occupied all walls and lampposts of Hermannplatz. Hermannplatz lies at the beginning of Hermannstrasse, a street that moves with a curve uphill. Traffic comes from 6 directions. In the centre of the square are some market stalls, which people pass while entering or exiting the metro.

A Peruvian told me that this place reminded him of South America.

It felt to me that here, at this place, I instinctively understood how the artificial 'contemporary' of the Berlin Biennale was intruding the real contemporary of people moving in 4 dimensions. I walk around the square looking for the posters and notice that they are not there anymore.

Becoming part of a puzzle, I decide that this walk and my artistic mission have failed. With my back to Karstadt shopping mall I spend the lost time overseeing the centre of the square where a small demonstration is taking place. I hear the lyrics of a song:

'This is no democracy'

Some people randomly cross the street in front of me. From where I am standing, all activity seems to come from the centre: bodies, light and sound.

On my right hand side a woman catches my attention. First I notice her hands tear a poster from the lamppost. Then I watch her move from lamppost to lamppost. Apparently I absorb her routine of tearing off and throwing away all advertisements. For a moment I picture her moving inside, through her kitchen, cleaning up the mess of her family. I follow her along the street and photograph her hands, the basket on her bike, the shreds of paper, her grey hair, her yellow-beige t-shirt, her blue trousers..

I go home satisfied about what I unexpectedly have found. During the preparations to go abroad, I delete the photographs of the woman. All that is left is a vague mental reproduction of her activity: some strokes of blue, grey, yellow, beige, an idea of 'centre' and a memory of vibrations.



You can listen to a recording of the song on the square here:  
<https://soundcloud.com/artmenu/thisisnodemocracy>



This city captures me . . . – *Hey Mister, can you give me directions / I've lost my way / Can you tell me where the object lives as a sensuous body / And where the intimate story finds amplification / To become a space, a public good / Maybe in NK, or is it in PB / Underground / In the cracks / Or in the open field / And where we may gather / Pause / Stare / Then close your eyes / Now open them*

Not only to foster the creative, but  
to creatively foster could be the  
future imperative

Free Berlin

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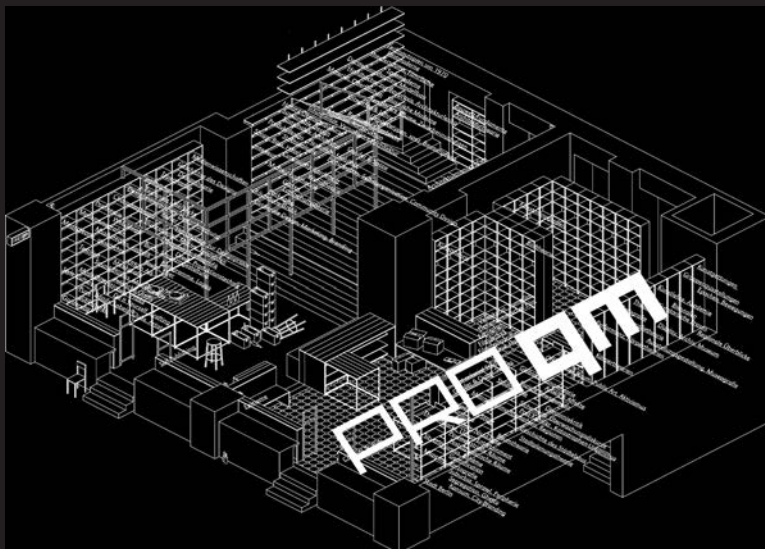
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An aerial, black and white halftone photograph of a city, likely Los Angeles, showing a dense residential area with many houses and buildings. The word "FREE" is superimposed in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image. The letters are slightly transparent, allowing the underlying city details to be visible through them. The overall image has a grainy, dotted texture characteristic of halftone printing.

# FREE