

The cooperative features a high level of determination and is met by a great deal of idealism on the part of its supporters who understand the project as a form of civic commitment. The particularity and exemplary nature of the project currently fuels its successful realization. But does the utopia of a self-organized, open source process offer a third way in urban politics as well as planning? Despite the group's effort of creating an open setting in both physical and metaphoric terms, the project is clearly aligned with specific group preferences and shows profound signs of an ideological exclusiveness. The precondition of cultural capital results in the exclusion of those who do not possess it. Evaluating the idea of radical planning from a disciplinary point of view reveals that the concern must be how professional knowledge could better integrate with the tacit knowledge of users in order to generate benefits and acceptance on the local level and to prevent DIY urbanism from becoming yet another exclusive form of urban planning.

Uta Gelbke is a freelance writer, publicist and lecturer in architecture and urban planning. She previously worked as an architect in Berlin, Sydney and Melbourne and held a position as an assistant professor in architecture at Graz University of Technology where, in 2015, she also completed her PhD entitled *Urban Zero Points: Indeterminate Public Space and the Utopia of DIY Urbanism*. Her research focuses on the design, perception and appropriation of public space following formal political change. It also examines informal political movements and alternative models of urban design and life.

Notes:

1. I am referring here to Jacques Rancière's triad of police – politics – political. Rancière understands the political proper as a powerful attribute of enunciation and agency in opposition to a set and heavily defended order (the police). Political subjects challenge the distribution of roles, territories, or languages. Therefore, political subjectification can be defined as the practice of creating the enunciating entity and the capability to enunciate, which questions existing power relations. See Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London/New York: Continuum, 2006) or Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
2. Bar25 was a fantasy world of entertainment with shows, music, restaurant, and bar. It was established in 2004 but ceased to exist in 2010 due to renewal plans of the then site owner BSR (Berliner Stadtteilergruppe). The club moved to an abandoned building across the river where the initiators ran the new Kater Holzj between 2011 and 2013 before moving back to the original Holzmarkt site.
3. Mario Husten, head of Holzmarkt Plus eG, cited in Diez, Georg. "Wovis Legoland" in: *Der Spiegel* 12 (March 18, 2013) 133: "Stadt ästhetisch, politisch und sozial anders zu denken".
4. See Husten, Mario and others (eds.), "Holzmarkt: Concept & Architecture" (September 2013) Retrieved from: http://www.holzmarkt.com/downloads/HOLZMARKT_Concept&Architecture.pdf (accessed August 18, 2014).
5. The scheme takes advantage of neighboring facilities by mounting photovoltaic modules on the large roof surface of an adjacent housing estate and extracting heat from sewage water by the municipal water company next door at comparably low cost. In return, Holzmarkt will forward excess energy from its photovoltaics to the water company's pumping station.
6. Perpetuating the temporary-use-ideology of the former Bar25, the rental agreement envisages a fixed short-term rental period of 900 days maximum after which the tenant has to vacate the property.
7. The incubator might work well for the creative and software industries, where collaborations are common and intellectual property is difficult to substantiate. Yet, for professions where patent rights become crucial such as the engineering sector, the open source model seems less attractive.
8. Other issues that were mentioned include the lack of funding, time or adequate legal frameworks.
9. Pierre Bourdieu coined the term cultural capital in an effort to conceptualize different kinds of capital beyond the mere economic understanding of the word. In his essay "The Forms of Capital," he distinguishes between economic (money, property), social (relations, status), and cultural (knowledge, cultivation, education) forms, while also noting their interdependencies. In this theoretical context, knowledge has a wider meaning: it refers to socialization and immanent practices as much as education. According to Bourdieu, the way in which these forms of capital are distributed represents the social structure at a certain moment in time. See Bourdieu, Pierre, "The Forms of Capital" in: *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* edited by J. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986) 241-258.
10. Bourdieu understands society as being constructed on the basis of unevenly distributed forms of capital and thus containing inequality in terms of capabilities and opportunities. His model of social space differentiates positions in society according to varying degrees of economic and cultural capital that individuals might possess. Cultural capital informs specific tastes, opinions, and social relations. See Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (Harvard University Press, 1984).



“Make City” in Times of an “Absolute Present”?

Exploring Alternative Urban Practices at Ostkreuz, Berlin

By Nina Gribat, Hannes Langguth and Mario Schulze

1. Ostkreuz: mirroring paradoxical interpretations of urban development?

Since German unification in 1990, the area around Ostkreuz in Berlin has slowly transformed from an inner-city-periphery to

as part of the post-unification plans. In recent years, some urban development projects started picking up speed and the precarious situation of Berlin's alternative spaces has become increasingly apparent.



Site of former paper mill, some parts of which were converted by anarchist car and bike mechanics Edelrost e.V.

one of the busiest transportation hubs and one of the liveliest hot spots for the city's alternative nightlife. At Ostkreuz, official plans and projects of the municipality and large, formerly state-owned companies, such as Deutsche Bahn, as well as several large, investor-driven housing projects meet a variety of more or less thriving alternative urban practices that were developed by different groups of people. The situation at Ostkreuz – though it may seem extreme – is not untypical for many areas in Berlin: several optimistic urban development plans that were drawn up in the years after German unification have failed or have been delayed, myriads of alternative urban practices have blossomed on land that was to be developed

On the occasion of a series of events on the “Absolute Present”¹, hosted by the Berlin techno club //about blank and the Leipzig club *Institut für Zukunft* in June 2015, we have prepared a guided tour to explore the situation of alternative practices at Ostkreuz. The term “Absolute Present” is based on a popular thesis among cultural theorists², developed in the last 30 years, describing a “rapid stagnation” (Virilio) of our everyday life. Social progress and the development of economic or political alternatives to the status quo seem no longer possible due to a lack of grander visions for the future. In contrast, thoughts about the future tend to be related to fear, insecurity and precariousness. At first glance, the particular

situation of urban development at Ostkreuz seems to illustrate this diagnosis in an urban context. However, taking an urban perspective, the absence of a greater vision does not seem as problematic as the thinkers of the Absolute Present may claim considering a broader social context. Rather, the lack of such an urban vision appears to have provided a fruitful starting point for an urban development that is shaped by a variety of trajectories.

In contrast to the bleak analysis of an “Absolute Present”, a rather optimistic understanding of urban development has formed in recent years based on the examination of different

In our tour we aimed to address the seeming paradox between these two interpretations -- one coming from the rather abstract field of the international jet set of cultural studies and philosophy; and the other coming from a group of Berlin-based architects and urbanists. What can these interpretations offer to explore the developments at Ostkreuz? And what can a closer look at the greater surroundings of Ostkreuz offer to these wider debates?

In the following sections we will firstly describe the situation that we experienced in preparing and carrying out the tour at Ostkreuz, which included talking to several key actors.



Townhouses in urban development area *Rummelsburger Bucht*

do-it-yourself urban practices in Berlin. In this context, Berlin's alternative urban practices are interpreted as signs for a paradigmatic shift towards a more participatory urban development. This paradigm shift was proclaimed by a group of architects, urban designers and cultural entrepreneurs and is increasingly supported by public authorities. It has been alternately termed as “Make_Shift” (Ferguson et al. 2014) or “Selfmade City” (Ring et al. 2013). Most recently, this interpretation was celebrated publicly in the event “Make City: a festival for Architecture and Urban Alternatives”²³, which took place at different locations in Berlin at the same time of our guided tour.

Secondly, we will bring our findings in dialog with the two seemingly paradoxical interpretative frames, demonstrating how these interpretations can be read as two sides of the same coin. The conclusion takes us back to the situation at Ostkreuz and speculations about desirable and undesirable future scenarios of urban development - at Ostkreuz and elsewhere.

2. Touring Ostkreuz – meeting “the makers”

Currently, three different urban development practices can be observed at Ostkreuz, which create an extremely heterogeneous environment: Firstly, there are large construction sites around the new Ostkreuz station – a multi-million Euro project by



Typical Berlin blocks at the lower end of Markgrafendamm



Temporary use of brownfield sites next to *Rummelsburger Bucht* development

Deutsche Bahn, which transformed the rather dilapidated former Ostkreuz station into one of the main transportation hubs of the city. The construction site includes preparations for the extension of the inner-city motorway A100.⁴ Secondly, there are several large- and small-scale housing projects, most of which have been and will be constructed at the Rummelsburg area adjacent to the railway station. Thirdly, there are a wide variety of alternative urban developments, which were initiated by different civil society groups and small businesses. These alternative developments include several nightclubs, bars and entertainment-oriented premises, various small enterprises or not-for-profit organizations, a youth club, several garden projects and artist studios. They have developed over time, turning former wasteland sites or vacant buildings into an array of diverse habitats for different user groups. These projects are largely based on temporary lease contracts for land or buildings owned by the municipality or the railway company. In our tour we visited different initiatives, met some of the protagonists and talked with them about the wider urban plans and projects that have set the development of this area into motion:

a) The urban gardening project “Laskerwiese e.V.”

Until 2006 the site of *Laskerwiese e.V.*, situated between a discount supermarket, a youth club and some leisure industries, was derelict. A non-profit-association of local residents formed

and succeeded in securing an agreement with the municipality for turning the site into an urban garden project. The garden is partly open for the public and partly used by a diverse group of people to grow their own herbs, vegetables and fruits. “*Laskerwiese e.V.*” is one of many urban garden projects in Berlin, representing urban commons not in danger of purely profit-driven urban development.

b) The anarchist car and bike mechanics “Edelrost e.V.”

Hidden behind the big wall along the congested Markgrafendamm, a not-for-profit initiative is occupying an old courtyard with multiple sheds once belonging to a paper company, which closed down after German unification. The initiative offers support for self-help (*Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe*) in the repair, maintenance and transformation of camper vans, cars and bikes. Having at first squatted the site, the initiative secured a temporary rental agreement with the municipality since the early 1990s, which has been renewed up to now – currently running until 2020. However, the site of *Edelrost* is marked for demolition as part of the controversial A100 motorway. The prospects of *Edelrost* are dependent on further delays in road construction. If the situation changes – that is, if construction on the ring road is commenced or cancelled – they will have to move, since the site will either be used for road construction or be turned into real estate.

c) *The "Network of Initiatives around Ostkreuz" ("Netzwerk der Initiativen rund um's Ostkreuz")*

Providing a platform for several civil society initiatives, the network aims at contributing to a collective and sustainable transformation of the area around Ostkreuz. The network was established in 2010. Several members of the organisation are involved in negotiations between local citizens, public and private authorities and city planning. The network has been particularly active in pressuring for public participation in the larger development projects as well as in re-using some of the wasteland sites temporarily, e.g. in the Rummelsburg area or in parts of the new railway station.

the space is needed by the A100 ring road, the future of the club is trapped in the same double bind.

Ostkreuz today is made up of a mosaic of various failed urban plans and visions and a range of larger and smaller urban practices, including investment and development projects of large municipal or formerly state-owned companies, the projects of different small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs, groups of individuals and civil society groups and what we have termed "alternative urban practices". How can we read this situation starting from the premise of an "Absolute Present" or a "Make City" Urbanism and vice versa, what



Fence of the nightclub and leftist collective *://about blank*

d) *The nightclub and leftist collective "://about blank"*

Right next to the new railway station, in the former kindergarten of the railway workers some activists from Leipzig and Berlin are running a well-known nightclub mainly focusing on techno events. Besides the club with its vast garden, artists, designers and political groups have their offices, ateliers and workshops on the site. Next to the club entrance, there is a café and an open space (*Raumweiterungshalle*), which can be used by different groups. Since 2006 *://about blank* rents the initially illegally occupied building from the municipality. The rental agreement expires 2022. Nonetheless they share a long-term perspective with the mechanics from *Edelrost e.V.*: Because

can we contribute to these debates from the perspectives of a particular urban situation?

3. **Alternative urban practices at Ostkreuz - symptoms of an "Absolute Present" or of a "Make City" Urbanism?**

On our tour at Ostkreuz, we have focused on the small-scale alternative urban developments, which thrive next to the huge construction sites of the train station and the proposed motorway. On the one hand, the multiple alternative urban practices around Ostkreuz make it a prime example of the diverse, creative and self-determined city-landscape that is currently hyped by architects, urban designers and

increasingly so by public authorities. These practices can be seen to represent resourceful acts of "city-making" - unfolding the vast potential of civic engagement that the spaces of the inner-city periphery can offer: Hedonistic club culture infuses new life into an abandoned kindergarten; urban gardening turns wasteland into a place of intercultural contact; and DIY-inspired car and bike mechanics re-use a formerly industrial site. Through this lens the area around Ostkreuz would have also been a showcase example for the "Make City" debates, helping to promote Berlin as a city offering new solutions for the urban future (even if the examples that are mobilized in this debate tend to be more design- and image-driven and thus

driven urban development trajectory seems inconceivable. The future appears to have lost its promise and is mainly associated with concerns. This mirrors the theses of the Absolute Present in which slogan "There is no alternative"⁵⁵ has become the mantra of our time (Fisher 2009, 2014; Berardi 2011; Virilio 2006, 2012) - even if the alternative urban practices at Ostkreuz appear to tell a different story. Our conversations with representatives of the different alternative urban practices revealed scattered impressions of powerlessness, despite some signs of joining forces between different initiatives. This sense of cultural and political stagnation does not contradict the rush and the permanent condition of transformation that



Laubkresse e.V. next to GDR prefabricated housing blocks

rarely include the more everyday- or counter-practices).

On the other hand, the stories of the actors who created these spaces paint a rather different picture. According to the actual "city-makers" at the Ostkreuz, their future is, in the long run, doomed: Most likely, they will have to move. As a result of large-scale transportation infrastructure investments, the whole area has been transformed from an inner-city periphery to a central hub. In the midst of these changes, the "city-makers" of Ostkreuz will either be displaced by the planned motorway or, in the event of its cancellation, by real estate developments. Under current conditions, a departure from this investment-

a visitor of the Ostkreuz might experience. On the contrary, the constant hustle and bustle may lead to an increasing indifference that establishes the basis for the unimaginability of substantial changes within this present - the present appears to have become absolute at Ostkreuz. Taking this perspective into account, can the proclaimed paradigm shift towards a "Make_Shift City" really be an alternative and - if so - for whom?

The interpretation of Ostkreuz through the seemingly contradictory lenses of "Make_Shift City" and "Absolute Present" opens up new ways of approaching disparate current

urban developments. The confrontation of a case on the ground with these two lenses makes it possible to point out the limitations of both interpretations:

While debates around "Make City" describe and value alternative practices that have been flourishing (and which today appear throughout Berlin more diverse and self-determined than ever before), they fail to acknowledge the conditions necessary for these practices to evolve and to continue. Furthermore, the current debates are polarized in terms of the selection of actors as well as in giving prominence to built-projects. How would the current debate be shaped

developments are influenced by accelerated processes of late capitalism and more often specifically based on alternative practices leading the "Make City" debate towards a phantom debate (*Scheindiskurs*). With terms like "flexibility", "self-responsibility" or "entrepreneurialism" numerous projects are deliberately forced to develop urban sites with minimal costs and high efficiency. As a result, the Make City debate advocates a form of alternative urban development that is not at odds with – or threatened by – mainstream practices of public - or private large-scale developments. It is thus no contradiction that a real estate developer acted as one of the main sponsors for the Make City Festival.



Privately used gardens at urban gardening project *Laskerwiese e.V.*

if it turned its attention to the urban practices of refugees, homeless or unemployed people? How would it be shaped if urban practices were included that cannot be summarized in a built-project or a fancy photograph? Focusing mainly on the aesthetics and the design of the projects, the "make_shift city" debate does not address possible regulations or approaches to planning that could contribute to securing the continuation of such projects or to offering the same chances of "making their city" to future generations. The economic situations of such alternative practices, which to a large extent are based on self-exploitation and precariousness of those involved remain also unaddressed in the make city debate. Today's urban

In contrast, the lens of an "Absolute Present" focuses primarily on the socio-cultural effects produced by the current conditions of late capitalist development. In this light, there is little room for hope and the proponents of this debate thus lament the absence of grander future visions. The situation of different practices around Ostkreuz seems to adequately represent the Absolute Present. While the "Make City" debate turns a blind eye to the instability and insecurities of alternative practices - which largely rely on a state of being in-between - the Absolute Present highlights these conditions of insecurity. However, seen from the situation of Ostkreuz (and other urban contexts), the hopes connected to the re-emergence of future



An old water-tower located in the midst of the transport infrastructure development of Deutsche Bahn AG which has been sold to a private investor recently

visions (which are inherent in the Absolute Present discourse) also appear as counter-productive: Rather than advocating the emergence of a grander vision, the situation at Ostkreuz (and elsewhere) highlights the qualities of a contingent and open-ended urban development that allows and secures possibilities for the contributions of diverse actors. In recent years, the socio-political circumstances have accidentally produced such conditions in Berlin (and several initiatives and actors have taken up the chance). Instead of advocating the emergence of a grand hopeful future vision, the more fruitful alternative concerns the question of how such openness and contingency can be secured in an urban context that is increasingly shaped by determinacy and acceleration.

4. Securing possibilities for alternative urban practices in the future

To protect and enable the development of a rich variety of alternative practices in Berlin in the long run, the limitations of the current debates need to be overcome. This applies to both: the naïve celebration of Make City and the rather bleak outlook of the Absolute Present. Both debates have certain potentials: the optimism of the Make City could be complemented by more critical analyses of the political conditions; the astute analyses of the Absolute Presence could be balanced with an acknowledgement of current alternatives, even if they remain



Public space at urban gardening project *Laskerwiese e.V.*

small-scale.

In addition to overcoming the limitations of these debates, new approaches of governing, regulating and planning should be tested. Taking the ideas of an "open city" as a starting point, Berlin's current urban development could be pushed more decisively towards a "city for all". This substantial shift would put the individual actors and their practices of city-making at the core of urban development and would highlight the conditions of a constantly dynamic, open-ended city as a potential asset rather than a limit.

More incisive analyses of the historical and political conditions that have enabled alternative practices across Berlin (and elsewhere) in recent decades could provide a starting point for new policy experiments. The experiences from the 1970s and '80s, a very inspiring era of participatory urbanism in Berlin provoked by the squatters' movement and the rise of more inclusive planning approaches such as "cautious urban renewal" (*behutsame Stadterneuerung*), could provide examples for both – alternative urban practices that are not characterized by a focus on design and image as well as the struggle to implement wider scale policy change based on a range of individual projects. The struggles of current urban social movements to secure certain spaces from Berlin's many mainstream urban developments - 100%



Construction site of infrastructural development of Deutsche Bahn AG at Ostkreuz

Tempelhof or *Mediaspree versenken* are two such examples (these movements aimed at readjusting and preventing investor-driven urban development in Berlin and succeeded in referendums) - underline the political significance of such a project: if alternatives are not implemented voluntarily by policy makers, the public can be mobilized to radically change urban policy in Berlin.

Nina Gribat is a senior researcher at the *Habitat Unit, Department of International Urbanism and Design (TU Berlin)* and at *SAGE, University of Strasbourg*. The current focus of her research is on perspectives of planners on urban conflicts. *Nina* studied *Architecture and Urban Planning* at several Universities in Germany and the UK. She is part of the editorial collective of *sub/urban.zeitschrift für kritische stadtforschung*.

Hannes Langguth is a researcher and doctoral candidate at the *Habitat Unit, Department of International Urbanism and Design (TU Berlin)*, where he also teaches. *Hannes* studied *Architecture* at the *Technical University of Braunschweig* and the *Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna*.

Mario Schulze is a senior researcher within the interdisciplinary research cluster "Image, Knowledge, Gestaltung" at *Humboldt University of Berlin*. Recently he finished his doctoral thesis at the *Department of Cultural Analysis at the University of Zurich*. *Mario* taught at the *Humboldt University of Berlin*, the *University of Zurich* and the *Goethe University of Frankfurt/Main*. He studied cultural studies at the *University of Leipzig*.

References:

Franco Bifo Berardi (2011): *After the Future*. Edited by Gary Genosko, Nicholas Thoburn. Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore: AK-Press.

Francesca Ferguson, Urban Drift Projects (Hg.) (2014) *Make_Shift City: Renegotiating the Urban Commons*, Berlin, Jovis.

Mark Fisher (2009) *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?*, Hants: Zero Books / John Hunt Publishing.

Mark Fisher (2014) *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Hants: Zero Books / John Hunt Publishing.

Kristien Ring, AA PROJECTS und Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt, Berlin (Hg.) (2013) *Selfmade City Berlin: Stadtgestaltung und Wohnprojekte In Eigeninitiative*, Berlin, Jovis.

SenStadt (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt Berlin) (Hg.) (2007) *Urban Pioneers: Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin*, Berlin, Jovis.

Paul Virilio (2006 [1977]) *Speed and Politics*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Paul Virilio (2012) *The Administration of Fear*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Notes:

1. <http://www.absolute-gegenwart.de>
2. Namely Mark Fisher, Bernardo 'Bifo' Berardi or Paul Virilio.
3. <http://www.makecity.berlin>
4. Section 16, running from Neukölln to Treptower Park, will be completed between 2016 and 2022 (http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/bauen/strassenbau/a100_16_ba/de/zahlen.shtml). The planning process for Section 17, running from Treptower Park to Frankfurter Allee passing by Ostkreuz, has not been completed and the envisaged timeframe for construction has not been announced.
5. Phrase used by Margaret Thatcher claiming that the liberal economy is the best and only way for western societies to develop.
6. in Zusammenarbeit mit der Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt Berlin

Image credits:

All photos are ©Anna Blattner (www.aannablattner.com)

Participation as a Battlefield

Interview with Damon Rich



Subsidized Landscape

Bernd Upmeyer interviewed the American designer, urban planner, and visual artist *Damon Rich*, based in Newark, New Jersey, who is known for investigating the politics of the built environment. His work studies the shaping of the world through laws, finance, and politics. In 1997, Rich founded the *Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)*, a New York City-based nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to improve civic engagement, where he served as *Executive Director and lead designer* from 1997 to 2007, when he retired from *CUP* staff while continuing to serve on the *Board of Directors* through this year. From 2008 to 2015, Rich served as the *Planning Director & Chief Urban Designer* for the *City of Newark, New Jersey*. He now is principal with *Jae Shin* of planning and design firm *Hector Design Service*, while continuing his practice as an educator and exhibition-maker. The interview took place in September 2015.

Center for Urban Pedagogy

Bernd Upmeyer: In 2004 you were one of the first contributors to *MONU Magazine* with an article, written together with your "Center for Urban Pedagogy", for *MONU's* issue #1 entitled "Imagining the Subsidized Landscape". Just a couple of years previously you founded the *Center for Urban Pedagogy*, a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to improve the quality of public participation in urban planning and community design in New York City. What were your motivations for creating this organization and why did you want it to focus on public participation at that time? What were your ideals and who were your role models from the past?

Damon Rich: Hello. Yes, I am remembering the legitimating thrill of being asked by a European journal (I pictured *MONU* as dour as the *Frankfurt School*) to report on some of *CUP's* work. The feeling reflected the European orientation of my architectural education, which heroized early 20th-century modernism through the distorting lens of the 1970s US East Coast architectural vanguard.

"CUP projects demystify the urban policy and planning issues that impact our communities, so that more individuals can better participate in shaping them."