

Spatial Practices

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SERIES IN CULTURAL HISTORY,
GEOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE

General Editors

Christoph Ehland (*Universität Paderborn*)
Chris Thurgar-Dawson (*Teesside University*)

Editorial Board

Christine Berberich
Jonathan Bordo
Catrin Gersdorf
Peter Merriman
Ralph Pordzik
Christoph Singer
Merle Tönnies
Cornelia Wächter

Founding Editors

Robert Burden
Stephan Kohl

VOLUME 27

The titles published in this series are listed at brill.com/spat

Resistance and the City

Challenging Urban Space

Edited by

Christoph Ehland
Pascal Fischer



BRILL
RODOPI

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: William Hogarth: *Chairing the Member*, from *The Humours of an Election* series.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at <http://catalog.loc.gov>
LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2018023869>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1871-689X

ISBN 978-90-04-36918-4 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-36920-7 (e-book)

Copyright 2018 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Hes & De Graaf, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Rodopi, Brill Sense and Hotei Publishing.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Printed by Printforce, the Netherlands

Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
Notes on Contributors	VIII

General Introduction	1
<i>Christoph Ehland and Pascal Fischer</i>	

Introduction: Challenging Urban Space	11
<i>Christoph Ehland and Pascal Fischer</i>	

PART 1

Contested Civic Spaces in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

- 1 Civic Subversion in London's Public Rituals in the Seventeenth Century 19
Christoph Ehland
- 2 The Earl of Rochester: Sexual Politics, Riots and the Chaos of the Carnavalesque 35
Norbert Lennartz
- 3 Rus in Urbe: Parks in Eighteenth-Century Cities 47
Mihaela Irimia
- 4 The Slippery Slope to the Gallows: Crime and Punishment in Early Eighteenth-Century London 60
Kerstin Frank

PART 2

Urban Rioting in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

- 5 Giving Meaning to Anarchy: Contemporary Interpretations of Rioting in 18th-Century Britain 81
Gerd Stratmann

- 6 **Blending Spaces: The Gordon Riots in Literature** 98
 Pascal Fischer
- 7 **The "Capital of Discontent"? Urban Resistance in Manchester** 113
 Bernd Hirsch

PART 3

Reimagining Urban Space

- 8 **Creating Situationist Ambiences: Peter Ackroyd's *London: The Biography*** 129
 Stephan Kohl
- 9 **Reshaping the City: The Eruv as Stealth Architecture** 143
 Margaret Olin
- 10 **Challenging Urban Realities in Recent London Writing: Iain Sinclair's *Ghost Milk* and John Lanchester's *Capital*** 164
 Ingo Berensmeyer and Catharina Löffler

PART 4

Creative Transformations of the City

- 11 **Critical Urban Studies and/in "Right to the City" Movements: The Politics of Form in Activist Cultural Production** 181
 Jens Martin Gurr
- 12 **Street Art as Reclaiming the Streets** 199
 Marie Hologa
- 13 **Graffiti as a Place of Resistance in British Poetry** 213
 István D. Rácz
- 14 **The Berlin Wall as Mobile Ruin** 223
 Blake Fitzpatrick

Index 237

Critical Urban Studies and/in 'Right to the City' Movements: The Politics of Form in Activist Cultural Production

Jens Martin Gurr

Abstract

In contrast to the majority of recent scholarly engagements with “right to the city” movements, which have tended to theorize for or about these movements, this essay looks at self-conceptualizations of such movements; more specifically, in two case studies, it engages with forms of activist scholarship and activist cultural production. A first case study discusses the work of Norman M. Klein as an example of activist scholarship and engaged cultural production: Klein's 2003 *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920–1986* is a highly self-reflexive and radically critical multimedia documentary on twentieth-century urban development in Los Angeles, which is largely based on Klein's own research as presented in his equally critical study *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*. The second case study engages with Christoph Schäfer's 2010 *The City is our Factory*, a theoretically informed, equally self-conscious visual essay on the “right to the city” movement in Hamburg, Germany. Schäfer is particularly lucid on what has been termed “the anti-gentrifier's dilemma.” In conclusion, the essay suggests that what Purcell calls “networks of equivalence [...] counterhegemonic combinations of different but equivalent popular struggles” might be the key *organisational* success factor for such movements, whereas specific forms of artistic self-reflexivity and an awareness of its own potential commodification might be central to the *aesthetics* of activist cultural production.

Keywords

Norman M. Klein – Christoph Schäfer – critical urban studies – “right to the city” movements – urban activism – activist scholarship – activist cultural production – gentrification – self-reflexive forms

...

A self-programmed factory of passions? *The City is our Factory* – under this banner we might actually be able to finally escape the narcissist trap of the Left, which brands itself or the subculture as the real motor of gentrification and consequently sinks into a protestant discourse of guilt-ethics and self-accusation. [...] Today, the city itself has become a new production site: not only of objects, but rather primarily of concepts, attitudes, passions, communicative networks. [...] For me, *production* and *machine* are positive concepts, which stand up against the idea of the city and the imaginary as *theatre*, as a *stage of representation*. It's about the struggle for access – to let the city function as desiring machine. If we want to develop a post-crisis urbanisation model, if we want to replace the neoliberal model, we not only need to make the city greener or more social, but more accessible and designable by its inhabitants. Insofar it is no coincidence that artists play a major role in these struggles.

SCHÄFER, 2010a 300f.



1 Introduction: "Critical Urban Studies," Activist Scholarship, Cultural Production

All those who know the term "gentrification" are part of the problem. (user comment on Kettcar's "Schrilles buntes Hamburg" video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdL4sRBZ-Hk)¹

There have recently been numerous publications conceptually engaging with what appears to be a surge of anti-gentrification activities and "right to the city" (*sensu* Lefebvre) movements in the "neoliberal city" and especially in the wake of the fiscal crisis. However, while much of the scholarly work has looked at these movements from outside, as it were, there have been far fewer studies focusing on how these movements themselves conceptually frame their activities. Studying what might broadly speaking be subsumed under "right to the city" activism, we may heuristically distinguish between three forms of commitment: 1. community activism (whether explicitly theory-conscious or not), 2. activist, or politically committed scholarship, 3. activist cultural production; I will here be concerned with the two latter types. As for the degree of

¹ Original: "Alle, die das Wort 'Gentrifizierung' kennen, sind Teil des Problems."

explicit engagement with urban theory, we might differentiate between activism and cultural production that 1. appear to make no use of notions borrowed from "critical urban studies," 2. that implicitly use such notions or appear to be indebted to them, 3. that affirmatively deploy theoretical concepts, 4. that reflexively and critically make use of such concepts, occasionally with the more or less explicit aim to contribute new facets to theoretical discussions. Again, this essay largely addresses the two latter forms as arguably the more common types: Given the demographics of many activist groups and the frequently academic background of many leading members (cf. Liss 257), it is hardly surprising that anti-gentrification and "right to the city" movements in the U.S., Britain, Germany and elsewhere frequently appear to be highly theory-conscious and deploy notions borrowed from Lefebvre, Castells, Harvey, Soja and other key thinkers in "critical urban studies."²

In a 2008 essay in the *New Left Review*, David Harvey captures the essence of what I take "critical urban studies" to mean here:

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. [...] The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. [...] At this point in history, this has to be a global struggle, predominantly with finance capital, for that is the scale at which urbanization processes now work. [...] Lefebvre was right to insist that the revolution has to be urban, in the broadest sense of that term, or nothing at all.

HARVEY 23–40

We can thus conceive of critical urban studies as a broadly coherent tradition of leftist inquiry into the relations between the city and capitalism, questions of marginalization, power structures and sociospatial developments, which seeks to point out strategies for alternative urban communities, taking its cues from leading exponents such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Manuel Castells, or Peter Marcuse. In a recent essay, Neil Brenner has conveniently identified four key principles of the tradition of "critical urban studies": 1. it

² For the city as a location central to the formation of social movements and for a discussion of literature on 'urban social movements' (Lefebvre, Castells, Harvey, etc.), cf. Miller and Nicholls 2013.

is interested in theory as such (not just as a tool for practice), 2. it is reflexive and situationally specific in the sense that it is aware of its local and historical positionality, 3. it is critical of merely descriptive (or even boosterist) urban studies that “promote the maintenance and reproduction of extant urban formations” (Brenner 19), 4. it is interested in the distance “between the actual and the possible,” between what is and what might be – the “ultimate goal being a different city as an expression of a different, just, democratic and sustainable society” (19 *et passim*; cf. also Brenner, Marcuse, Mayer 5 *et passim* and further contributions in this volume). One can observe that many such movements generally seeking to foster a more equitable, sustainable or democratic society, crystallize around fairly concrete issues such as activities against gentrification, specific building projects, the privatization of public space, “neoliberal” urban growth policies, or protests drawing attention to the issues of foreclosure, housing crises or homelessness in the city.

It is also to be observed, however, that most scholarly work in “critical urban studies” and on urban activism tends to theorize *for* and *about* these movements, an observation one may find somewhat surprising in the context of a movement so centrally concerned with questions of agency, voice, participation and self-directedness. Take as a representative example the recent rather ambitious collection of essays entitled *Cities for People, not for Profit*, which brings together a number of the major figures in critical urban studies. The editors state as one of their main goals “to contribute intellectual resources that may be useful for those institutions, movements, and actors that aim to roll back the contemporary hypercommodification of urban life, and on this basis to promote alternative, radically democratic, socially just, and sustainable forms of urbanism” (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2). In fact, in the entire volume, Jon Liss’s essay on the nation-wide Right to the City (RTTC) Alliance in the U.S., largely a report of the organizational efforts and strategies of this group to move beyond traditional Alinsky-style community organizing, is the only one by an activist rather than by a scholar. This essay is also clearly the odd one out in the volume for being large devoid of theorizing. Addressing the issue of voice and agency, Liss states that the “leadership of NWCOS [New Working Class Organizations] is primarily university-educated, ‘middle class,’ and oppressed nationality” and also comments on conflicts between university-educated middle-class activists and members of the class they are supposedly struggling for (Liss 257).

After a few conceptual remarks on “critical urban studies” and the intersection of scholarship, activism and cultural production, the present essay uses two case studies to discuss selected examples of explicit engagements with “critical urban studies” in urban activism and particularly in what might be

termed “activist cultural production” commenting on this phenomenon. My two case studies are Norman M. Klein’s *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986*, a multimedia documentary radically questioning 20th-century urban planning in Los Angeles, and Christoph Schäfer’s *The City is our Factory/Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik*, an activist pictorial essay on the history of the urban, detailing especially the “right to the city” movement in Hamburg. How are theoretical concepts in urban studies appropriated and strategically deployed in these representations? To what extent are urban activism and activist cultural production self-reflexive and aware of their own ambivalence and potential for commodification? I will argue that some of the most theoretically informed exponents of these movements are keenly aware of this ambivalence and occasionally self-consciously ironize theory-inflected urban activism as to some extent the pursuit of an internationally connected urban elite failing to address the concerns of those groups most severely hit by gentrification and exclusion.

With the caveat that a discussion in print without illustrations is bound to fall short of fully doing justice to the primarily visual format both of the multimedia DVD and of a large-format pictorial essay, I turn to my two examples of activist cultural production of the highly theory-conscious and reflexive type.

2 Case Study 1: Activist Scholarship and Cultural Production in Los Angeles – Norman Klein’s *Bleeding through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920–1986*³

An area is not a slum because the people living there are poor and black. A community becomes a slum when the space is represented for everyone (including those who live there) by those who don’t live there.

MARBACK 82

Norman M. Klein’s 2003 multimedia docu-fiction *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986* explores the connection between genre-specific urban imaginaries of Los Angeles, racist urban policies, greed and the concomitant ruthless urban planning. Juxtaposing two formats, a constantly self-reflexive 37-page print novella and a multimedia documentary DVD⁴ chronicling over

3 This section is based on the much more detailed discussion of Klein’s work in Gurr “The Politics” 2011 and Gurr/Butler 2011.

4 References to the novella, where this source is not clear, will be abbreviated as BT, references to the DVD will be given by tier and chapter.

60 years of urban development around downtown L.A., *Bleeding Through* takes us on a revisionist tour of twentieth-century L.A. history and points out the extent to which innumerable films set in or associated with L.A. (from film noir to *Bladerunner* and beyond) have shaped perceptions of the city. It thus provides a subversive view of hegemonic strategies of urban planning and ethnic segregation and undercuts conventional representations of multi-ethnic L.A.⁵

Essentially building on Klein's research on twentieth-century Los Angeles in his 1997 study *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*, *Bleeding Through* is loosely based on the fictitious story of "Molly", who moved to L.A. in 1920 when she was 22 and whose life and times the narrator of the novella attempts to chronicle. The work centres on a few neighbourhoods close to downtown Los Angeles such as Bunker Hill, Boyle Heights, Chavez Ravine, and Chinatown, which were all demolished in questionable urban development projects in the second half of the twentieth century. The impetus of the project is archaeological in nature in that it attempts to re-present these erased parts of the city. Since this area is also the setting of countless screen murders in Hollywood films and has also been the site of rampant real estate speculation and racist eviction policies, *Bleeding Through* also addresses the role genre-specific urban imaginaries of Los Angeles have played in fostering urban policies driven by racism and greed.

The novella "Bleeding Through" has a highly self-conscious first-person narrator who tells the story of Molly and – just as centrally – his attempts to reconstruct it:

I couldn't trust any of her stories. Not that her facts were wrong. Or that she didn't make an effort. [But] she'd fog out dozens of key facts. Whenever I noticed, she would blow me off, smiling, and say, "So I lose a few years." [...] But there were seven memories in the years from 1920 to 1986 that were luminously detailed.

KLEIN, *Bleeding Through* 10

The first section or "Tier" of the DVD documentary, "The Phantom of a Novel: Seven Moments" is structured around these seven key stages of Molly's life in L.A.; these seven chapters are dominated by historical photographs of people

5 In Klein's 1997 book *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*, on which *Bleeding Through* is based to a significant extent, he names as one of his key themes "the uneven decay of an Anglo identity in Los Angeles, how the instability of white hegemonic culture leads to bizarre over-reactions in urban planning, in policing, and how these are mystified in mass culture." (Klein 2008: 17).

and places in the neighbourhoods surrounding Bunker Hill. Making full use of the medium's technical possibilities, the sequence of photographs is not fixed but rather randomly brought up from a database archive. Additionally, with each phase of Molly's life, there is a short narrative comment by Norman Klein in a window in the corner – a commentary that can be opened and closed by the user. The narrator of the novella describes this first tier as "a visual, interactive radio program [...] a kind of modern novel on a screen with hundreds of photos and Norman as narrator. You might say they are also a docu-fictional movie" (BT 43).

Tier 2, "The Writer's Back story," which the narrator of the novella describes as "more like a contextualization," is largely made up of newspaper clippings and establishes the context of other people and places more loosely connected to Molly's story. It collects clippings covering events and developments occurring during Molly's life, with references to the ban on interracial marriages in the state of California in a 1932 article, the controversial reception of a 1941 anti-Semitic speech by Charles Lindbergh, the deportation of Japanese Americans during World War II, or the McCarthy era – frequently interspersed with innumerable sensationalist clippings reporting murders in Los Angeles.

Tier 3, "Excavation: Digging behind the story and its locale," is described in the novella as "the aporia of media itself." (BT 43). In five sections, it offers a wealth of further material, here arranged thematically rather than chronologically. There is a section entitled "People Molly Never Met But Would Make Good Characters in Her Story," featuring randomly arranged interviews with twelve residents (including Norman Klein) of these neighbourhoods who comment on their experiences within the social and ethnic developments in twentieth-century L.A., the Zoot Suit Riots, fear of violent police officers, ethnic festivities, or the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Largely consisting of film and video sequences, it is a "vast 'ironic index' of what Molly left out, forgot, couldn't see. It samples from the back-story that gets lost when the movie or novel is made legible." (BT 43).

Molly is herself a new-comer and an outsider when she arrives in the city in 1920, as Klein the narrator tells us: "In 1920, Molly is a twenty-something girl from a Jewish home in the Midwest, who arrives in Los Angeles to find her husband to be." (DVD 11; cf. also BT 13). As Bénézet points out, "Through Molly, Klein articulates a gendered and minority-oriented revision of the city's history." (Bénézet 2009: 69). With Molly as its protagonist, *Bleeding Through* shifts attention from hegemonic white males and draws attention to the role of minorities in L.A.'s complex history.

A central theme throughout are the drastic changes imposed by radical urban development projects in areas such as Bunker Hill. The section "Collective

Dissolve: Bunker Hill," in film sequences from Kent McKenzie's 1956 documentary *Bunker Hill* and *The Exiles* from 1961, maps, photographs from the 1890s to the 1960s attempts to recreate Bunker Hill before the massive demolition program that cleared the area for what is now regarded as "downtown L.A.". A long sequence from McKenzie's *Bunker Hill* refers to the Community Redevelopment Agency's major redevelopment plan to relocate 8000 residents of the neighbourhood, to demolish all buildings and to sell the land and have modern office and apartment complexes built (DVD 1:6). This chapter of the DVD also displays images from 1959 and 1960 showing the large-scale demolition of Bunker Hill. A sequence from Gene Petersen's 1949 film "... And Ten Thousand More" [housing units] also refers to the problem of "slums" in L.A. and the need for urban development. This sequence is captioned "The myths of urban blight." Similarly, the photograph of a model "Redevelopment Study for Bunker Hill, March 22, 1960" is captioned "Cooking statistics to justify tearing down Bunker Hill." (DVD 1:6). Indeed, statistics on the housing situation and living conditions in Bunker Hill appear systematically to have been distorted in order to win public support for the demolition of this predominantly Mexican neighbourhood.

All in all, in keeping with *The History of Forgetting* and its "radical historiographical agenda" (Anderson 93), *Bleeding Through* shows how twentieth-century Los Angeles, in the process of becoming increasingly multi-ethnic demographically, continued to erase the visible traces of this diversity in favour of a de-ethnicized all-American look and feel. This massive redevelopment programme was modelled on the needs of a largely white elite and culturally reinforced by representing ethnic L.A. along the lines of the paranoid and implicitly racist aesthetic of innumerable *noir* murder films. I have shown in detail elsewhere (cf. Gurr "The Politics," 264–267) and can only sketch here that the attempt at an open, non-hierarchical and anti-hegemonic representation of these complexities is closely tied to the non-linear and de-centred form of the multimedia hypertext documentary: In contrast to even the most experimental filmic documentaries, which still inescapably rely on the linearity of film, *Bleeding Through*, makes full use of the digital medium to break linearity. Thus, while documentaries, which – despite the importance of DVD and other home-viewing formats – are originally meant for collective viewing, induce forms of shared medial experience, the effect of *Bleeding Through* specifically relies on a highly individual experience. The constant need to "do" something in the process of navigating the multiple layers – all clips are very short, hardly anything happens without being triggered by the user, who is essentially assigned the role of a detective in search of the truth – not only foregrounds the mediality, narrativity and construction of the material, it also activates the

viewer. In keeping with the promise of the medium, the non-linear presentation of the material thus precludes closure, stimulates the discovery of knowledge rather than imposing it and thus fosters learning without being explicitly didactic.

If, as Burnett has argued, "[h]ypertext is rhizomorphic in all its characteristics" (Burnett 28) – and Klein's work makes full use of the hypertext medium – *Bleeding Through* may be characterized as fully rhizomatic, with all the non-totalizing and anti-hegemonic implications Deleuze and Guattari famously ascribe to rhizomatic discourses (cf. Deleuze/Guattari 7–13). Thus, the multimedial, multivocal, multi-perspectival, interactive, non-sequential and highly self-reflexive experience of navigating *Bleeding Through* brings out "traits that are usually obscured by the enforced linearity of paper printing" (Burnett 3) and, like hypertext generally, serves to undercut, liquefy and question established and hegemonic representations with their frequently unquestioned dichotomies and "*hiérarchies violentes*" (*sensu* Derrida). Database fictions, in flaunting the arbitrariness of such choices and enabling users to choose differently next time (but never exactly to retrace their steps), are potentially subversive purely in their form in that they expose as a construction and fabulation what narrative traditionally represents as a given. By making each journey through the material necessarily a different one – and by thus presenting what is merely material for a story as subject to change and human intervention – these narratives also contribute to the activation and mobilization of the user in ways that even the most advanced self-reflexive fiction – which is still subject to the unchangeable linearity of print – cannot achieve (cf. also Kinder 54; for literary strategies of representing urban complexity, cf. Gurr "Literary" 2011).

True to the "democratic form" of hypertext digital media, *Bleeding Through* by means of its form thus already serves to deconstruct hegemonic accounts of history by constantly drawing attention to the medial, discursive, selective nature of such conceptions. As a user, one is never allowed to forget that this is a revisionist, anti-hegemonic, at times polemical re-construction of a repressed, alternative Los Angeles. What makes *Bleeding Through* even more directly political, however, is that it self-reflexively draws attention to the political implications of its narrative procedures and even explicitly links its own constructedness to a history of political fabrications from the Cold War to the Bush administration.

By juxtaposing the visions and grand designs of city planners with the voices of former inhabitants of these razed neighbourhoods, *Bleeding Through* implicitly takes up the perspective "from below," considering the city not so much as consisting of roads and buildings but of people, who – in the sense of de

Certeau – tactically make use of the hegemonically imposed infrastructure of the city in the daily pursuit of their lives.

Engaging with various forms of appropriating the city – from the most direct version proceeding by means of bulldozers to fictionalized and medialized forms in filmic urban imaginaries –, *Bleeding Through* is itself a form of appropriating the city, if a mediatized rather than an immediate one (for the category of “mediacy” in appropriations and representations of urban space, cf. Gurr/Butler 150f.). As a documentary meta-appropriation of the city, it is a unique form of cultural expression in an urban context, seeking to raise awareness and potentially to influence policy-making and urban planning by celebrating the ethnic and cultural diversity of Los Angeles in the face of ruthless urban redevelopment based on racism and greed. However, in order once more to highlight the centrality of agency and voice, one might ask who speaks, and on whose behalf. Moreover, it seems plausible to argue that, while *Bleeding Through* powerfully counters the memoricide induced by urban planning in L.A., it is precisely the solitary experience of navigating the documentary which inherently forgoes any chance of fostering a sense of community and which thus deprives the work of some of its assumed subversive potential. Additionally, although some of the developments have continued into the present, *Bleeding Through* – despite these topical references – is largely retrospective in orientation and, though radically critical of recent and contemporary urban development in Los Angeles, is not “activist” in the sense of being aligned with a specific urban social movement or of campaigning for a specific cause such as the preservation of a neighbourhood *currently* facing demolition or gentrification.

3 Case Study II: The “embedded artist” – Christoph Schäfer’s *The City is our Factory* and Hamburg’s “Right to the City” Movement

Some succeeded in connecting their sub-cultural and art practices with the struggles against gentrification.

SCHÄFER, 2010a 130

Christoph Schäfer is a central figure in Hamburg’s “Recht auf Stadt” [“right to the city”] movement, a network of some 25 initiatives working towards affordable housing, the preservation of public space and of urban green spaces, more participation and a more democratic city. He has been called an “embedded artist” of the movement (moderator in Schäfer, *Politics of Desire*), and his 2010 book *The City is our Factory/Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik*, a pictorial essay in some

160 drawings, is “a rhizomatic history of the urban” (publisher’s blurb) from the first cities thousands of years ago to Hamburg in 2009. In the form of exploratory and annotated drawings and in some 15 pages of more discursive text densely printed in five columns per page,⁶ it discusses issues such as the origin and development of urban settlements, the production of space, urban anthropology, the connections between social and spatial developments, urban imaginaries and identities, changing forms of work, participation and bottom-up community organizing, gentrification, squatting and the struggle against the privatization and commercialization of public space, city branding and marketing, the creative class discourse, or the role of art and artists in urban development.⁷ Throughout, the book displays an acute theory-consciousness and familiarity with central concepts of ‘critical urban studies’ in the sense outlined above. Here, as well as in interviews (cf. “2010b”), Schäfer very adeptly employs, cites and alludes to Benjamin, Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin, Lefebvre, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, David Harvey, or Siqueiros and the aesthetics and politics of Mexican *muralismo* as well as innumerable further directly apposite as well as arcanelly related notions and concepts. I can here only discuss a small selection of issues and their negotiation and will do so focusing on those which are, firstly, most prominent in “right to the city” movements generally and, secondly, which best illustrate the poetics and politics of Schäfer’s approach.

The more explicitly political sections dealing with the recent Hamburg initiatives revolve around the intersecting concerns of city branding and imaginizing, the attempt at tailoring the city to the needs of the ‘creative class,’ and the privatization and commercialization of public space: “Unnoticed at first, something essential began to change in the cities when we started walking around with cardboard cups full of hot milk and coffee. Entire neighbourhoods soon gave you the feeling that you were purchasing a stay permit with your latte.” (142).

An impressive sequence of drawings explores the connection between neoliberal urban policies and the loss of urban memory emblemized in the collapse of the Cologne City Archive as a result of privatized construction work on a new underground line: “Cologne, March 2009: Suddenly the earth opened up and the entire history of the city disappeared down a hole” (152). In an interview, Schäfer commented on the collapse as “an almost

⁶ Like the entire book, these texts are in both English and German.

⁷ The five chapters are titled as follows: “Lefebvre 4 Kids” (3), “Appropriated Space” (69), “1979: The City is Our Factory” (115), “Black Holes” (151), “Hamburg: Surrounding the ‘Expanding City’ with Projects” (165), “The Evening I Would Like to Have on Film” (272).

biblical omen for the end of the neoliberal city model" ("2010c" 106, my translation).

In a related vein, Schäfer attacks the way in which the City of Hamburg uncritically deployed Richard Florida's widely debated, reductionist "creative class" policies (cf. Florida) in its urban development strategies in order to target this 'economically desirable' segment of the population. In addition to overstating the contribution of specific forms of culture to an attractive economic milieu, which has led to a socially exclusionist latte-macchiatoization of parts of the city, the concomitant instrumentalization of art and artists as well as the gentrification associated with these processes have also met with significant resistance from artists refusing to be commodified as mere location factors conducive to the 'bohemian index' of a city.⁸ The connection is captured as follows: "In 2004, Senator of Science Dräger hands out books by Richard Florida in the Hamburg city senate. Florida holds lectures. Roland Berger develops "Hamburg, City of Talent." Artists leave the city" (174).

Arguably the central issue in this most topical and specific chapter "Hamburg: Surrounding the 'Expanding City' with Projects" (165–271) is that of gentrification, in response to which numerous projects and initiatives have been launched. In addition to the more conventional flyers, protests, public lectures, performances or squatting, one of the more humorous ideas is the "degentrification kit," a set of items and ideas to "ruin the image of the neighbourhood" so as to scare away investors: "add foreign names to your door bell [...] dry ugly clothing outdoors [the illustration suggests the type of ribbed undershirt popularly known as a 'wifebeater'] [...] broken windows effect foil⁹ [...] hang Lidl bag out of your window [...] add satellite dish (or 2, or 3!)" (183).¹⁰ The caveat "But watch it – don't get too creative [where the creatives are working, rents go up]" (183) is characteristic of the constant awareness of the "anti-gentrifier's dilemma," the insight that even (and especially) resistant cultural production can be commodified.

It is not least the ongoing light-hearted reflections on this ambivalence of activist art and the self-mockery in the awareness of a privileged form of theory sudoku – insights which in no way trivialize the sincerity of the commitment – that makes Schäfer's work so compelling. This is especially prominent in the final chapter entitled "The Evening I Would Like to Have on Film":

8 Cf. also the much-publicized protest of artists in Hamburg against such endeavours: "Kunst als Protest" from 2009.

9 There is a certain irony here in the reference to Wilson/Kelling's notorious "Broken Windows" essay in that the 'broken windows theory' is usually vehemently attacked by "critical urban theory"-inflected urban activism and scholarship.

10 The phrases appear in a drawing, hence in no particular order; the order is mine.

The evening I'd like to have as a movie began like this: We had arranged to meet with the Utopia Salon & Spa Group at the McDonald's in the central station. We drank lattes and gazed at the tracks. Only 3 people showed up. The conversation revolved around arcades, urbanity, rambling, the promises of a by-gone age as encapsulated in architecture. After a while we left and went on talking as we walked. The evening was dry and warm. It was August 21, 2009. (274)¹¹

The corresponding drawing is highly allusive: three figures at a table perched above the platforms and underneath the steel arches of the station architecture reminiscent of the arches of the 19th-century Paris arcades memorialized in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*.¹²

The ambivalence of subversion and the awareness of the anti-gentrifier's dilemma directly tie in with the questions raised in my initial discussion of voice, agency, privilege and the question of who, given the potential for commodification, ultimately benefits from such activism:

It was our most radical gestures that could best be made use of. – To increase the value of real estate, to construct new neighbourhood identities. As soon as there was an illegal club somewhere, a cappuccino bar would open next door, followed by a new media agency ... we were management consultants. ... [W]e had acquired precisely the skills that image capitalism needs – visually literate, consumption-competent truffle pigs. (132, 134)

This is remarkably close to Mayer's thoughts in her recent essay on some of the key issues in "right to the city" activism:

Even though these coalitions do frequently succeed in preventing, or at least modifying, crass neoliberal urban development projects, their struggles often end up saving some oases and protected spaces only for the *comparatively privileged protagonists*, spaces which increasingly become *instrumentalized in creative city branding efforts* in the competitive

11 Cf. also 284: "We stopped at a cellar restaurant. A place I had never been before. We got hold of a corner sofa and on went the conversation: Lefebvre and the urban revolution, David Harvey and the urban roots of the fiscal crisis, how a post-crisis urbanisation model might look, the invention of the Bohemian and its totalisation today, the 3D printer and Fab Lab ... Hours later we left the pub, poisoned with alcohol and nicotine" (284).

12 In the Bergermann interview, he explicitly speaks of this as "a Benjaminese situation" (122, my translation).

entrepreneurial urban policy game. The chapter thus raises the question whether the “right to the city” movements in the global North need not relate more directly to the struggles of groups that have been excluded from the model of the neoliberal city.

MAYER 2012, 64, my italics

What Mayer here notes about the need to “relate” different types of urban struggles to each other is precisely what Mark Purcell has termed a “well-known problem for left politics ... [the need] to combine local struggles into something larger without reducing each struggle to a homogenous unity” (562). Here, according to Purcell, “[t]he right to the city [*sensu* Lefebvre] can be useful in establishing relations of equivalence among groups in a broad counterhegemonic urban alliance” (Purcell 571f.).

This need for a broad range of highly diverse urban social movements to march under *one* banner and the “right to the city” as a claim with such an integrative potential are also a central and recurring subject in Schäfer’s account of urban activism in Hamburg:

Right to the City: appropriation, social questions, counter-projects, international, tenant battles, poverty, solidarity, segregation, self-organized spaces¹³ [...] *Unlikely alliance* [...] And there we are [...] a group of left activists, from different ethnical and religious backgrounds [...]. To come together and fight we use the term *Right to the City*.

SCHÄFER, 2010a 236, 190, emphasis in the original

In search of “success factors” for urban activism and activist cultural production, in addition to such organizational issues of community organizing, Schäfer in an interview also comments on the political implications of artistic form and the choice of media and genres:

U.B.: Your book is not poly-perspectivist, but functions in a rather linear way from beginning to end, beginning with the history of the city of “Ur” and ending in the urban present.

C.S.: Strictly pseudo-linear. [...] I like techniques that compress things. It looks linear, fixed, pigeon-holed, but the brevity also opens up associative possibilities of jumping back and forth. Thus, even if universalism

¹³ The terms and concepts appear in a drawing, hence in no particular order; the order is mine.

has rightly been criticized, such a schematic representation allows me to relate developments on different continents to each other – and thus also to relativize genealogies such as Eurocentrism. My book claims, first of all, to define fundamentally what a city is, what the urban revolution might be and what it aims at. At the same time, the book works against such linearity; there are constant prolepses and analepses.

SCHÄFER, 2010b 119f., my translation

Emphasizing the processuality and openness of drawing, he here speaks about drawing as an activity in which exploratory doodling, the deliberate putting-to-paper of an idea and the making of a product until the last moment do not have to be mutually exclusive: “A drawing can potentially escape goal-directedness and instrumentalization until the last second” (Schäfer, 2010b 116). This understanding is developed further in response to a critical question about de-collectivization and his potential appropriation of drawings originally from and for a political context for his own artistic and economic self-promotion: “I was able to give talks in ‘right to the city’ contexts with these drawings, using them to illustrate Lefebvre’s terms in a different way, thus using them for our exchange. There is no pure form that is entirely free of a potential commodification” (122).

Given this constant exploration of artistic strategies of subversion, the considerable publicity and success achieved by the Hamburg movement, and finally Schäfer’s own prominent role in it as an activist, participant observer and embedded artist, a comment on the intersection of activism and cultural production in an earlier section of the book might well be read as an oblique remark on his own successful negotiation of these issues: “Some succeeded in connecting their sub-cultural and art practices with the struggles against gentrification.” (2010a 130).

4 Conclusion

A few tentative conclusions may be drawn based on the two case studies: Strategically speaking, it seems that a success factor in urban activism is to achieve what Purcell calls “networks of equivalence [...] counterhegemonic combinations of differentiated but equivalent popular struggles” (Purcell 562) and what Christoph Schäfer refers to as “unlikely alliances: *Letting disparities co-exist and emphasizing difference even while acting together*” (2010a 236, emphasis in the original).

As far as aesthetic strategies in activist cultural production are concerned, they frequently appear to be the result of a keen awareness of "the anti-gentrifier's dilemma." But the more theory-conscious and self-reflexive artists and activists become, they also appear to be aware that their own brand of urban activism is occasionally an activity of the privileged rather than of those most directly affected by gentrification and social exclusion. It seems that one of the recurring strategies in response to these dilemmas is a highly self-conscious, extremely reflexive, media-conscious form of experimentalism in cultural production, frequently with fairly explicit claims as to the emancipatory potential of this formally experimental form of presentation. However, in the case of Klein's activist scholarship and cultural production, one might argue that the way in which the dynamic and non-linear multimedia format (emphatically *not* a straightforward documentary) seeks to activate the individual user is precisely what undercuts any sort of communal activism precisely *because* of the solitary nature of the reception experience. In Schäfer's case, by contrast, we can argue that such formal strategies *do* work: The drawings have been used in lectures at MIT and elsewhere and thus furnish material for academic discussions, but they also work as posters, flyers, food for thought in community workshops etc. Thus, without claiming that Schäfer's work was pivotal in this, the Hamburg "right to the city" initiative has had a number of very remarkably successes; and as long as activist cultural production can thus be tapped into at various levels – and the kind of deliberately open-ended, exploratory process of drawing seems to lend itself to that – it does have the potential to be instrumental in the kind of urban resistance movement we are concerned with here.

References

Primary References

- Klein, Norman. *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986*. Karlsruhe: ZKM digital arts edition, 2003. DVD and Print.
- Klein, Norman. *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*. 1997. New York: Verso 2008.
- "Kunst als Protest: Lasst den Scheiß! Hamburg nur noch als 'Marke', der wir Aura, Ambiente und Freizeitwert verpassen sollen? Das machen wir nicht mit. Ein Künstler-Manifest gegen die Hamburger Kulturpolitik." *Die Zeit*. Web. 1 July 2013.
- Schäfer, Christoph. "The City is our Factory: Politics of Desire and the Production of Urban Spaces between Grande Latte and Park Fiction." Lecture at MIT, September 28, 2009. Web. 1 July 2013.

- Schäfer, Christoph. *Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik/The City is our Factory*. Leipzig: Spector, 2010a.
- Schäfer, Christoph. "Maschinen aus Möglichkeiten: Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik." Interview with Ulrike Bergermann. *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* 3 (2010b): 115–123.
- Schäfer, Christoph. "Ein biblisches Warnzeichen." *Der Spiegel* 21 (2010c): 106.

Research Literature

- Anderson, Steve. Rev. of *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*. By Norman M. Klein. *Spectator* 18.1 (1997): 92–94.
- Bénézet, Delphine. "Recombinant Poetics, Urban Flânerie, and Experimentation in the Database Narrative: *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986*." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 15.1 (2009): 55–74.
- Brenner, Neil. "What is Critical Urban Theory?" *Cities for People, not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*. Ed. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer. London: Routledge, 2012. 11–23.
- Brenner, Neil, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Mayer, eds. *Cities for People, not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Burnett, Kathleen. "Toward a Theory of Hypertextual Design." *Postmodern Culture* 3.2 (1993). Web. 1 Oct. 2010.
- Butler, Martin, and Jens Martin Gurr. "Urbane Populärkultur als Bewertungspraxis und -ressource: Zum normativen Potential populärkultureller Inszenierung und diskursiver Aneignung urbaner Räume." *Place-Making in urbanen Diskursen*. Ed. Ingo H. Warnke and Beatrix Busse. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014. 369–384.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 1980. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome." *A Thousand Plateaus*. 1987. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Continuum, 2004. Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 2. 3–28.
- Florida, Richard. *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Gurr, Jens Martin, and Martin Butler. "Against the 'Erasure of Memory' in Los Angeles City Planning: Strategies of Re-Ethnicizing L.A. in Digital Fiction." *Selling EthniCity: Urban Cultural Politics in the Americas*. Ed. Olaf Kaltmeier. London: Ashgate 2011. 145–163.
- Gurr, Jens Martin. "The Literary Representation of Urban Complexity and the Problem of Simultaneity: A Sketchy Inventory of Strategies." *Cityscapes in the Americas and Beyond: Representations of Urban Complexity in Literature and Film*. Ed. Jens Martin Gurr and Wilfried Raussert. Trier: WVT; Tempe, AZ: Bilingual, 2011a. 11–36.
- Gurr, Jens Martin. "The Politics of Representation in Hypertext DocuFiction: Multi-Ethnic Los Angeles as an Emblem of 'America' in Norman M. Klein's *Bleeding*

- Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986.* Screening the Americas: Narration of Nation in Documentary Film / Proyectando las Américas: Narración de la nación en el cine documental. Ed. Josef Raab, Sebastian Thies and Daniela Noll-Opitz. Trier: WVT; Tempe, AZ: Bilingual, 2011b. 153–171.
- Harvey, David. "The Right to the City." *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23–40.
- Kettcar. "Schrilles Bunes Hamburg." *Youtube*. Youtube. Jan. 2012 Web. 5 July 2013.
- Kinder, Marsha. "Bleeding Through: Database Fiction." *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986*. Ed. Norman Klein. Karlsruhe: ZKM digital arts edition, 2003. 53–55.
- Klein, Norman. "Absences, Scripted Spaces and the Urban Imaginary: Unlikely Models for the City in the Twenty-First Century." *Die Stadt als Event: Zur Konstruktion Urbaner Erlebnisräume*. Ed. Regina Bittner. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2002. 450–454.
- Liss, John. "The Right to the City: From Theory to Grassroots Alliance." *Cities for People, not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*. Ed. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer. London: Routledge, 2012. 250–263.
- Marback, Richard. "Detroit and the Closed Fist: Toward a Theory of Material Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review* 17.1 (1998): 74–92.
- Mayer, Margit. "The 'Right to the City' in Urban Social Movements." *Cities for People, not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*. Ed. Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer. London: Routledge, 2012. 63–85.
- Miller, Byron, and Walter Nicholls. "Social Movements in Urban Society: The City as a Space of Politicization." *Urban Geography* 34.4 (2013): 452–473.
- Purcell, Mark. "To Inhabit Well: Counterhegemonic Movements and the Right to the City." *Urban Geography* 34.4 (2013): 560–574.
- Wilson, James Q., and George L. Kelling. "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety." *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1982): 29–38.