URBAN TRANSCRIPTS
OCTOBER 2014
BERLIN
WORKSHOP
BERLIN UNLIMITED
3 - 9 OCTOBER 2014
ARTS AND CREATIVE MEDIA
THEORY AND RESEARCH
ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN
Architects, researchers, artists, a DJ, a social scientist and a journalist, are the international team of tutors leading the Berlin unlimited workshop. Focusing on Berlin’s actual problematics, the workshop is an interdisciplinary exercise in understanding the urban condition. Each of the 5 units of the workshop focuses on a different methodological approach of urban investigation and is framed by a set of themes, particular to Berlin, to be explored.

Open to all, the workshop will be of particular interest to students past their 2nd year of study, postgraduate students, and recent graduates, in disciplines related to the study of the city and urban intervention; notably architecture, urbanism, planning, geography, the social sciences, and the arts. Urban explorations, on-site visits, and group work, form the key pedagogical elements in each unit, conducted by a team of guest and host tutors: each guest tutor brings in a unique way of looking at the city, while the unit’s host tutors brings in a thematic framework specific to the local content of Berlin. Additionally, the workshop includes a series of transversal activities, such as lectures, film screenings, and social events.

The workshop’s main objective is to equip participants with a sharpened vision through which to comprehend the city as a complex interactive system. It aims towards the development of collaborative strategies that challenge conventional methods of urban analysis and cut through disciplinary boundaries, encouraging creativity and originality.
### PROGRAMME

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SCAR
MEMORY AND AMNESIA IN THE ERASURE OF CONTESTED SITES
TUTORS: CATALINA POLLAK W. + XENIA KOKOULA

“Whereas Germans have been laboring under the reproach of forgetting or repressing their historical past for decades since 1945, critics for some time now have articulated the reverse reproach: inflation of memory. Indeed, already since the 1980s Germany has engaged in a memory mania of truly monumental proportions.”

Andreas Huyssen in ‘Monumental Seduction’

Perhaps Berlin, more than any other European city, has had to negotiate carefully between the premise of remembrance and that of erasure in becoming the city it is today. Hugely damaged during the Second World War, and later fragmented in the Cold War period, Berlin has furiously reinvented itself after 1989 without forgetting its highly contested socio-political narrative. A process of renewal that has brought into question the symbolic aspects of space as an important cultural commodity.

Monuments, Museums, Memorials, have been built extensively to keep memory alive, while meaningful political sites have been kept from erasure to make the scars of the city indelible. The Wall, which divided West Berlin from the East for nearly thirty years, is perhaps one of its most emblematic structures. Witness to a spatio-political division that saw the city fragmented and torn apart for decades now stands as a blurry border that is being constantly repossessed and negotiated.
URBAN CONTEXT

The effects of this ongoing process on the more permanent urban structures have been highly diverse. Some structures seem so deeply ingrained that have remained more or less intact, while others have been completely redefined, removed or replaced. In almost every part of the city, traces of growth and destruction, of control and resistance, of policy and improvisation, of violence and consent narrate different stories which compete to remain visible. While the Wall seems in some cases to be the dominant narrative, and its remains are carefully staged as a monument, in other cases the importance of less well-known, albeit no less identifiable and emotionally invested moments seems to be acknowledged. As a result Berlin’s urban fabric is much more than an entity that has once be violently divided, only to be later re-united: It is still highly fragmented and bears traces of memories, scars and erasures that usually overlap or merge in a complex, sometimes even illegible narration.

The processes of decision-making are ultimately a selection and clarification of this narration, which in general reflects a certain collective mindset on the diverse traces of Berlin’s recent history. However these processes are multiple and diverse, while each case is unique; places of difference and complexity abound.

The workshop focuses on these ambiguous places, whose identity is only partly defined by the Wall or its absence. The Wall is rather a visible or invisible line that intersects or overlaps with other inscriptions on the urban fabric. Different typologies of urban space including public spaces, infrastructure or fragments of urban nature fulfill these criteria and reflect this history of constant reinventing that resulted in multiple intersections and overlays. Engelbecken, where the Wall has been erased to restore the 19th century design of the Luisenstadt Canal, is now neither a memorial nor a canal, but rather a contested green space in a rapidly changing neighborhood. In the still developing area surrounding the Alte Jacobstrasse multiple erasures have taken place, leaving but the smallest, almost imperceptible material traces. Between the Panke and the Volkspark Humboldthain scars that can be deciphered in the distinctive topography become re-coded as a part of the park’s recreational landscape. Making the complexity of these spaces visible, rather than reinforcing a dominant narrative is the focus of this workshop.

AIMS

Understanding that the process of regeneration will see the traces of the Berlin Wall disappear in time (if not yet), eventually restoring the city to one seamless fabric, the workshop will question aspects of memory and erasure by exploring tactical strategies on how to trace and perpetuate the symbolic aspect of such an extended and contested urban narrative.

Drawing from spatial practices within public art, urbanism, architecture, performance, and activism; the workshop will take an open approach to explore a system of actions or interventions by which to transpose the fading existence of such a controversial structure. How do we understand the principles of memory, monument and monumentality without falling into Huyssen’s parody?
UNIT 1

The workshop will bring into discussion topics such as: the problem of translation and space representation; the political dimension of remembrance and erasure within contested narratives; the materialization of trauma; the symbolic; temporality, scale and predictability.

APPROACH

The workshop will start by visiting some important memorial sites in the city to revise the effectiveness of their spatial and material narratives in relation to their subject, site and theme.

We will then move to site by selecting 3 paths – fragments of West Berlin’s former perimeter – where we will analyze and evaluate their state of repossession. Each path will be done as a morning walk, one per day, and each day a different proposal will be sketched following a set of rules or obstructions specific to that particular path. The agency will be set on proposing a signaling system that could be altered and repeated according to a clear definition of parameters given by the context – whether spatial, historical or political.

We will support our empirical research by using as a navigation tool the mapping survey Memorial Landscape - a documentation project done by the Department of Architectural Conservation of Brandenburg University of Technology.

The workshop will heavily rely on documenting the walks and proposals for their presentation at the conference’s exhibition once the workshop ends.

REFERENCES


Catalina Pollak W. is an architect and artist working and living in London. She is currently Visiting Collaboration Associate at the University of London and Artist in Residence at the Centre for Creative Collaboration – C4CC, where she leads Public Interventions, an interdisciplinary practice that combines art and technology to address questions about public art, spatial narratives and public engagement.

Catalina undertook her Diploma of Architecture at Universidad Católica de Chile (2001), studied an MA in Visual Arts at Universidad de Chile (2006-2007) and later moved to London to study an M.Arch at the Architectural Association. Involved constantly in Academia, she has taught architecture graduates and undergraduates at PUC - Universidad Católica de Chile; UEL - University of East London; and the AA - Architectural Association in London.

Lately she has produced and curated the Symposium ‘Agoraphobia?: Railings and Public Space’ (2013) an event commissioned by Camden Council as an extension to the acoustic interactive installation Phantom Railings (2011), project which was also part of Urban Transcripts 2012 in London.

www.publicinterventions.org
info@publicinterventions.org

Xenia Kokoula studied Architecture at NTU Athens, Greece and Urban Design at the ETH Zurich, Switzerland. Her work, informed from contemporary spatial theory, has been published in architectural magazines in Germany and Switzerland and presented in international conferences. She is currently holding a teaching and research position at the TU Berlin, chair of Landscape Architecture and Open Space Planning, where she is lecturing an introductory course on urban design methods and tools. Her research focuses on the representations of space, urbanity and the gendered body in (mostly) fictional case studies coming from contemporary art and literature, which are however highly relevant in current planning and design debates. She attempts to apply these insights in design studios and theory seminars taught in the Master Programmes Landscape Architecture and Urban Design of the TU Berlin.

http://www.freiraum.tu-berlin.de/index.php?id=1659
Berlin’s ruins and wastelands are loaded with memory and trauma. Today, as remnants of a past gradually absorbed by urban development, these unstable and vanishing leftovers have become, to a great extent, part of the identity of the city.

Among Berlin’s ruins, the remaining fragments and voids corresponding to ‘die Berliner Mauer’, the barrier that divided the city between 1961 and 1989, stand as the most significant. The promise of liberation after the fall of the wall and further meanings and memories were reflected in its very leftovers, but disparate regeneration projects and infrastructure operations started to replace them, leaving just scattered portions of it. Some of them turned into touristic spots, fewer were incorporated in everyday urban life. Memory, consumption and forgetfulness are hence involved in ongoing processes of conservation and renovation.

Although barely existing today as a discontinuous trace, the wall has still a strong presence in the collective memory of city’s inhabitants and the imaginary of its visitors. It is an absent element of identity, a negative monument that haunts contemporary Berlin.
There are places where literally nothing has remained of the wall. Sometimes you’ll only find a cobblestone stripe to mark the former wall ... actually it’s really difficult to find a place in Berlin where you can see a part of the former wall at its original place.

In many parts of the Berlin Wall new forms of borders have arisen, especially borders between rich and poor. Mostly, the rich part lies on the former eastern part of the wall, for example between Eberswalder Straße and Bernauer Straße or at Potsdamer Platz. The history of Bernauer Straße is directly linked to the chapel of reconciliation, which was part of the Berlin Wall and has been demolished in 1985. In 2000 the chapel has been inaugurated again and is part of a memorial center (http://www.berliner-mauer- gedenkstaette.de/en/).

Close to Potsdamer Platz in the center of Berlin you can find the exhibition space “topography of terror” (http://www.topographie.de/en/), which has been built next to the ruins of the former Gestapo headquarter.

Nowadays the Oberbaumbrücke between Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg connects two former separated sides of the barrier, the river Spree. It has become a symbol for reunification although many people lost their lives trying to cross the river. Close to the Oberbaumbrücke you can find a former strip of the wall which is one of the few parts which remained on its original location. The only reason is that graffiti artists turned it into a piece of art and the city of Berlin had to give it a new meaning and named it “East Side Gallery”.

All these famous and touristic places like Checkpoint Charlie of the former Wall created new forms of barriers within the city. The Wall itself became a souvenir and is now located all over the world in its smallest elements. So you could ask if the absence of the Wall is also a product of the new world order after WW II and got scattered mentally and physically anywhere else, but not in the center of Berlin anymore. On the other hand, there are some almost mythical spots at the margins of West Berlin where time stands still – “Albrechts Teerofen” is a good example. There you can find a bridge which was once crossed by the wall. It still seems like the end of the world.
Some parts of the Wall stayed almost the same but became a new green space through the city. Thereby the former death strip found a completely new meaning for a future of open spaces. (http://www.gruenzuege-fuer-berlin.de/?page_id=260)

Another aspect of the wall is that it gets more real and present, the further you go away from the sites it once occupied. You may find people in Steglitz or Lichtenberg, who have never thought of visiting a part of the other side of the city. Talking to people on the street and involving them to find out if there is still an “invisible wall” in their minds is also an opportunity in the workshop.

The website “berlin wall map” is a documentation of the memorial landscapes of the Berlin Wall. It offers different remnants and traces of the 150 km stretch. (http://berlin-wall-map.com/)

AIMS

The proposal of this workshop is to explore and represent the absence of the Berlin Wall, interrogating its material remains and the spaces of its former presence as a way to recreate its memory and grasp its aura.

The idea is to go beyond the revamped areas punctuated by purpose-built or preserved historical spots, and look at the whole extent of the wall that divided the eastern and western sides of the city, even considering the whole division that separated western Berlin from the former DDR.

Searching past the well-known historic sites -or looking at them differently- may allow to gain alternative and complementary interpretations of what the wall is in today’s city, when the division era seems to fade away in time.
APPRAOH

Photography will be used as a main tool for registering the explored territory, and its further editing and manipulation are considered as a way of triggering new interpretations acknowledging the presence/absence of the Berlin Wall. Within experimental photography, other complementary means like sound and video could be considered, as well as the recollection of site-specific objects or oral histories from local people.

After the fall of the wall and the forthcoming reunification of Germany, a series of terrain vagues (Solá-Morales 1995) emerged referring to their conflicted past in an open and evoking manner, at the same time they provided further possibilities of interpretation and occupancy. Different people and communities found there their new places of freedom and identity, aside from an increasingly overwhelming urban development.

Photographers like David Plowden and Manolo Laguillo, among others, played an important role in first portraying the empty spaces flourishing in the interstices of increasingly changing urban environments, back in the 1960s and 1970s. But beyond being a form of documentation, photography could be a means of further interpretation and proposal.

Works of artists-photographers like Michael Wesely, Idris Khan, Stephanie Jung or Diane Meyer explore the possibilities of photography as a means to reveal sites and situations in a different way. In their work, long exposures, overlay, collage, and other forms of experimentation enhance the limits of images and their ability to describe or evoke place, time, movement, perceptions and emotions. So, bearing in mind that photography etymologically means ‘writing of light’, and that a photograph itself is a projection of the light of a past moment, then what narratives can be built out of the photographic register of the absence of the Berlin Wall? Is it possible to re-write through images its disappearing traces and voids, or to look differently at the new portions of city being built upon them?

REFERENCES

+ Andrew Higgot, Timothy Wray (eds.) (2012). Camera Constructs. Surrey, Ashgate.

Felipe Lanuza is an architect trained at the University of Chile (2004) and Master in Architecture by the Catholic University of Chile (2008). From 2004 to 2011 he taught architectural design and architectural history and theory, and also worked in urban history research. In parallel, he developed a professional practice in association with other professionals, which ranged from territorial planning and management projects to the architectural scale. His interests are situated in the areas of architectural and urban design, history and theory, having presented his research in conferences and exhibitions in South America and more recently in the UK. Through his work on the notion of absence he explores processes of design and representation as a way of prompting new understandings and alternative interventions in the built environment. Since 2011 Felipe studies these matters at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, where he pursues a PhD by Architectural Design. Felipe joined Urban Transcripts in 2012 and held the position of Design Director in 2013, being now involved in different projects developed by the company.

Benedikt Stoll is trained in architecture and urban planning at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) and University of Arts Berlin. He also gained experiences in design and photography during his studies at University of Arts Karlsruhe. In 2012 he co-founded an international collective working on the forgotten and unused resources in cities, called Guerilla Architects, in London. His interests are basically approaching architecture and design in unusual and interdisciplinary manners to explore new ways of thinking and living. That’s why he initiated and co-founded the creative association “die Anstoß e.V.” in Karlsruhe in 2013. It’s an interdisciplinary network of dedicated folks who strive to improve the discourse in-between creative folks and the city through comprehensive cultural projects and interventions. Benedikt has been awarded at the Urban Transcript exhibition in London in 2012 with the Guerilla Architects project Hidden Borough. Now he is part of the organization team for UT in Berlin.
According to literary critic, Adreas Huyssen (1997), Berlin is a city text that has been “written, erased, and rewritten” so intensely throughout the twentieth century that there are visible markers of this violent history both in its architecture and urban space. For many, Berlin is a large architectural exhibition where each and every year things change.

This is a palimpsest city that has reinvented its present numerous times in a frenzy of future projections; obsessed with architectural and planning issues as coverage to the city’s ‘terrain vagues’, ruinous past and historical absences. Even as the contemporary city has been given a radiant material form through buildings and districts designed by world-famous architects, Berlin remains distinctive for its haunted geographies.
AIMS

This workshop will look at Berlin as a text where haunted geographies and voids are narrated constructing spatial stories on the city’s urban fabric. Absence and silence in architectural continuity will question and contest contemporary representations of Berlin as a model-city of economic and urban development. To do this, the 5-day workshop will take the form of an experimental urban lab where participants will work as a team to co-create an alternative guidebook to Berlin. This guidebook will textually, visually and/or digitally narrate the “erased” and “invisible” urban (hi)stories of the city.

APPROACH

Drawing on readings from Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Andreas Huyssen, Manuel Castells, and Ignasi De Sola-Morales, the workshop participants will contextualize their ‘guidebook’ around the following core themes:

- Void: ‘being without’
- Ruin: falling to pieces
- Flow: the direction of movement

A methodological toolkit will be at hand during the workshop to facilitate the construction of the guidebook drawing on the following bodies of research:

1. Materiality of Place: a materialist/phenomenological approach which is concerned with the experience of place and with its appropriation.

2. Imagined Futures: speculative materialism, capital flows and future projections in architecture and urban planning.

3. Site Specificity: an ‘urban site/lab’ based on research methods from the arts and humanities:
   - Everyday ecologies: everyday object biographies allowing other than human agencies to participate in the telling of stories about those places (e.g. materials, sounds, atmosphere)
   - Place ballets – rhythmanalysis (Henri Lefebvre): A useful source of inspiration for thinking about city rhythms and performativity of place
   - Urban tours: urban walking as an ethnographic research method. This method follows Michel de Certeau’s divide between strategies and tactics.
   - Spectral Ethnography = ethnography of absence of people, places and things that have been removed, deleted and abandoned to the flows of time and space.
UNIT 3

The workshop participants will work in teams using a set of these methods to explore and document spatial stories that will be included in this novel guidebook. Narratives of people, things and spaces will be analysed in juxtaposition to map symphonies and tensions, tactics and strategies upon/ across the city.

Due to time limitation, the guidebook will focus on a specific area and/or neighbourhood in Berlin to allow a more in-depth analysis (e.g. Potsdamer Platz). Participants will collate their fieldnotes (either visual, textual and/or digital) together to synthesise a guidebook draft proposal. The guidebook will be a collection of fieldnotes (text, sketches, drawings, photographs and/or audio-visual recordings) presented on a weblog (i.e. wordpress).

REFERENCES


Penny Travlou is a Lecturer in Cultural Geography and Critical Urban Theory at the Edinburgh School of Architecture & Landscape Architecture (ESALA), Edinburgh College of Art/University of Edinburgh. Her research is inter-disciplinary with a particular focus on theories of space and place and their implementation on studies of the politics of public space, visual & digital culture and ethnography. She has worked in various projects as Co-Investigator and Principal Investigator looking at how people use and experience public space using a multi-method approach. As a Research Fellow at OPENspace research centre (2002 – 2012), she worked on projects concerning young people’s use and perception of public spaces. She is also interested in how new technologies e.g. GPS, mobile phones, can be used as methodological tools in researching youth spaces. Since 2006, she has been involved in projects that look at the use of ubiquitous technology and locative media in the experience of public and virtual space using ethnographic methods. She has published her work in international peer-reviewed journals, edited books and conference proceedings. She is Course Organizer of the M.Arch Studies in Contemporary Architectural Theory and Programme Leader of the new MSc in Cultural Landscapes (both located at ESALA).

Emil Angelov is a Berlin based DJ with the name Emil Doesn’t Drive. Playing around Europe and resident in some of the most known clubs in Berlin, Emil spent the last 10 years collecting records. The last 3 years, he managed a club in Berlin called The Zone which left a significant trace in the Berlin underground club scene. Emil has recently moved to Sofia in Bulgaria, where he is one of the club-tenders of the place called Jules Verne. Surprisingly next to it, Emil has started an internship in an architectural office and will begin his studies in architecture in September this year at the NBU University in Sofia.
Through our personal experience we determine our own impression of the urban landscape. One becomes an actor as well as narrator. Both – the long term (residents) and short term (visitors) re-create the city’s narrative every day and thus re-shape its image. Berlin had an image of an alternative rebel, becoming one of the most prominent destinations for cutting edge fashion, art, design and music. The consequence of that popularity is transforming the image of the city as market forces respond to the ‘added value’ this free spirit of Berlin and Berliners generated.

What makes up the spirit of Berlin and is it already fading away? Or has it found new quarters, parks and alleyways? How fundamental is this narrative of urban exploration, experience and storytelling in context of the quality of life and vitality of the city as such? The stories based on experience are retold and transformed, becoming part of the collective memory, such as the famous tales of brothers Grimm, perhaps the best-known storytellers of folk tales, who lived in Berlin for 20 years. During the workshop will encourage the participants to explore the contemporary tales and legends of Berlin through its urban environment as an experimental ground where limits are constantly re-defined.
URBAN CONTEXT

The districts of Berlin are very diverse, each having its own character; one can almost distinguish the citizens by the borough they live in. The residents of Kreuzberg many of whom have squatted the area after the fall of the Berlin wall have created their own world within their community, and are known for being politically engaged. This area has also become very popular and touristic over the years, presenting potential to engage voices from different angles and viewpoints.

Neukölln, the Turkish-Arabic borough is another interesting area where different cultures co-exist with their own rules. It became notorious for its underground venues and party scene attracting young people and tourists and perhaps best captures the rebel spirit of Berlin.

During our initial briefing discussion with the participants we will determine whether one or both of these locations will become the focus of our research.

AIMS

The objective of the workshop is to explore the role of storytelling in creativity and city making, bridging the limits between reality and imagination. How can we contribute to the process of changing urban landscapes through storytelling? As designers, we have the power to invent and develop narratives beyond the physical design, in order to engage people and activate urban areas. By storytelling we initiate and enable social exchange, enhancing the quality of urban life. The aim of the workshop will be to create an IMAGINARIUM, where the limits and possibilities converge through storytelling and urban narratives.

APPROACH

“Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city ... Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode ... but the born again flâneur is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing everything.”

Iain Sinclair, Lights out for the Territory

The participants will be encouraged to explore urban space beyond the visible city fabric, undertaking interviews and performing site specific interventions in order to create a space of the IMAGINARIUM. Over the course of the
workshop, exploration of individual as well as collective stories will be developed into a mental map. Alternatives to traditional architecture/urban processes will be encouraged, such as use of video/audio and performance-based methods that will enable the participants to engage with the urban space in a more accessible and direct ways. The outcomes should be focusing on communicating the methods and processes rather than just specific results.

Petra Havelska (MA Arch ARB, RIBA / Co-founder, Marko&Placemakers, London) is an architect, communicator and enabler of creative projects. She gained diploma in architecture from Vienna University of Technology and worked within several established practices in London before completing a masters’ in creative entrepreneurship at Goldsmiths, University of London, to develop her role as facilitator of good quality built environment. Petra co-founded the urban design and research consultancy Marko&Placemakers with Igor Marko in 2013, following their long-term collaboration on public realm projects such as the award-winning Irwell River Park strategy. Alongside practice, Petra has been a curator and coordinator of numerous initiatives and authored a book on the future role of architects Together Alone – Architecture and Collaboration (Artistbooks UK, 2011). Her writings have been most recently published in a collection of critical essays Contesting Space: Architecture as a Social Practice (Archa, 2014).

Denica Indzhova graduated the University of Arts in Berlin in 2013, after studying architecture in Munich, Paris and Berlin. She did an internship at Aas Gonzalez Haase in Berlin and at SANAA, in the building of the Museum of Louvre-Lens in Lens, France. Since 2012 she is part of the young architects group Guerrilla Architects, working with the unused resources of our environment: http://guerrillaarchitects.wordpress.com/ Denica is also interested in installation and film art and its means of manipulating one’s perception of space.

REFERENCES


Nollendorfplatz, Berlin
Project M by RONE

Denica Indzhova graduated the University of Arts in Berlin in 2013, after studying architecture in Munich, Paris and Berlin. She did an internship at Aas Gonzalez Haase in Berlin and at SANAA, in the building of the Museum of Louvre-Lens in Lens, France. Since 2012 she is part of the young architects group Guerrilla Architects, working with the unused resources of our environment: http://guerrillaarchitects.wordpress.com/ Denica is also interested in installation and film art and its means of manipulating one’s perception of space.
Berlin has become a place of aspiration and desire for people all over the world. In the 90s, Berlin seemed to be full of empty space, offering its use for anything anyone could imagine. But what is it that people imagine about Berlin? What do they hope to find here and where? And how does the city react on that? How have we changed the city on our journey through our dreams and desires, and how has the city changed us and our expectations?
URBAN CONTEXT

Berlin is a city of discontinuous developments. In the central areas, many empty slots and wastelands have been filled with buildings, uses, activities. 100,000 of people have moved here in the last years. Many centres of creativity, music and revolution have been created, moved several times and vanished during the last ten or twenty years. Others have become well-known spots of touristic interest. New business and residence buildings have created a new form of empty spaces – the absence of creativity and liveliness. Some “creative” quarters and spots have turned into their own cliché. On the other hand, many subcentral quarters, especially in the west, have lost inhabitants. People living here don’t seem to have noticed even the fall of the wall. Other quarters have changed from vibrant subcultural playfields into chilled and affluent areas where the wild kids have grown old and laid-back. Every aspect of these changes or continuities may shape the ideas and expectations people have and have had of Berlin. They are all true, but they may not be true everywhere, anytime and for everyone. So which is the Berlin we think to know and which one will we find?

AIMS

JEUDI 14 AVRIL A 3h /
Rendez-Vous dans le jardin de l’église /
Rue Saint Julien le Pauvre

Les dadaistes de passage à Paris voulant remédier l’incompétence de guides et de cicerones suspect, ont décidé d’entreprendre une série de visites à des endroit choisis, en particulier à ceux qui n’ont vraiment pas de raison d’exister.

[Tzara: 1921]

URBAN FIELDS is an open network of international artists and creatives from different discipline based in Rome, Italy. The main activity of the group is to explore the physical and social controversial condition of the contemporary metropolitan realm through spontaneous, instant and temporary appropriations of neglected public space: mapping, urban Installations, performances, workshops, playgrounds, social events and various experiments of communication and relational design involving local communities in participatory processes. The aim is to make emerging the unexpressed potentialities of abandoned public spaces, most of the time marginal (not necessarily peripheral), neglected, removed by the collective awareness. Re-activating those spaces, make them re-vitalizing trough simple and minimal acts, witnesses the believing into the public realm (physical and social) as an opportunity for everybody to express a personal point of view, to express ourselves as human being. We want to remind you of this anecdote by Bruno Munari: “If you ask a Japanese kid, to whom belongs the public garden where he is playing, he will answer that it belongs to everybody. If you ask an Italian kid, he will answer it belongs to nobody...”

We present ourselves with this text:

Simple, minimal, almost intimate gestures. Over anonymous moments of everyday life. Space changes. Intention reveals what has been hidden: the shape of the sun, the thickness of the air, the relations among things, the tale of the soul. Paradoxical, surreal, spontaneous. Fast transformations like mirroring a sunlight over a building facade or swinging up and down suspended on a tree. Nomadic
landscapes made of wind blows captured into transparent capsules. Simple, minimal, almost intimate gestures. Liberating gestures soon disappearing... and all those moments will be lost in time like tears in the rain...

That's our manifesto, essentially a feeling of unsuitableness: like Monsieur Hulot lost into a no man’s land, we wander around the city trying to find relief from the functionalistic rationality of the city with minimal gestures that can radically change the way we look at the space around us.

All our open source experiments are documented here: http://urbanfields.wordpress.com and also you can have a look to our recent publication totally common licensed on issuu.com http://issuu.com/unpacked/docs/

APPROACH

 [...] le reste, tout le reste, où est il? Ce qui se passe chaque jour et qui revient chaque jour, le banal, le quotidien, l’évident, le commun, l’ordinaire, l’infra-ordinaire, le bruit de fond, l’habituel, comment en rendre compte, comment l’interroger, comment le décrire?

[Perec: 1989]

Being Urban Fields’ attitude less analytical and more empirical, we do prefer lateral thinking and imaginative conjectures over the (apparent) logical objectivity of the reality. Therefore, our proposal has an experimental nature, a bit subversive and provocative, sometimes paradoxical, almost situationist. We would like to organize the workshop in two parts. The first part takes place before going to Berlin, a kind of preparatory session. The second part is the proper UT workshop in Berlin.

#1. Reading: an emotional mapping.

The dadaist city is a city of the banal, it has abandoned all the hypertechnological utopias of the futurism. The visits to neglected places are a concrete form to totally subvert art, a way of combining art and life, the sublime and the quotidien. [...] The urban ready made in Saint-Julien-Le-Pauvre is the first symbolic act that ascribes an aesthetic value to a void and not to an object

[Careri:2006]

+ What do we do before coming?

Urban Fields, which at the moment is also involved in some experimental projects on teaching and designing through social media, is going to open a Facebook group called URBANFIELDS BERLIN UNLIMITED 2014. We will virtually meet the participants there and start an operative conversation a couple of weeks before the onsite workshop in October.

+ What will be the output?

We’re going to produce a kind of emotional map of Berlin, isolating from 10 to 20 peculiar places, uncommon, not ordinary, (not touristic at all!), according to the sensibility of the group of participants: in the outskirt of Berlin, in the inner neighborhoods, It doesn’t matter, there is no limits, even an imaginary or literal place is ok. Our emotional map of Berlin will be a “graphic” like MilanoMiFaMale artefact – the image and the link is provided below – enriched of excerpts from the Facebook conversations in URBANFIELDS BERLIN UNLIMITED 2014. Of course, we are going to talk about the main theme of the Urban Transcript year theme: LIMITS. This session, in other words, will be an ongoing Facebook-based narrative brainstorming: at the end, we will synthesize the whole into the emotional map mentioned before.
#2. Exploring: The journey rather than the destination. A gaze into the banal, a red thread among the commons: choosing is already an interpretation, is already a project.

*Before the menhir [...] humankind was able to change symbolically the landscape through walking.*

[Careri:2006]

The second part is the workshop itself in Berlin. Having the Emotional Map in hands, day by day we decide to go visiting the places in the map. After a preliminary brief, we start our daily journey to reach our destinations: we can go by bicycle, by foot, by subway, by bus, by all possible means of transportation. We can go in group or alone. We can go straight or we can go “a zonzo” (stroll around). What we choose here doesn’t really matter, because the journey is much more important than the destination. We will get amazed by the urban scapes we will be crossing in our voyage!

As said before, we are interested in the banal, the obvious, the common, the neglected and its unexpected potentiality to be triggered by operative yet critical approaches: performances, instant installations, playgrounds, walks. All the Urban Fields work is based on that kind of method for an open and spontaneous urban interpretation. So what is the meaning? The media is the message, our beloved Marshall McLuhan says.

Every participant will have to keep tracks of the journey through Google Map, posting pictures, text, comments, etc. along a trace/route made of the typical graphic of pins and segments. We can call all that ‘bodygraphy’, an interesting semantic overlap of different way of record the journey given simultaneously: the transcription of a physical experience into the space on a geographical map, a visual representation by pictures and a textual report.

Limits make the experiment more interesting and meaningful. Every journey is going to be documented in max. 30 stations/pictures/comments and most important, every journey is going to be about a critical issue/theme emerged from the previous discussion on limits.

The journey, which will be an urban transit, is going to be documented originally. It will be an intention, a critical choice. It will be not spontaneous, intimate, but programmed in the way you are going to watch. It needs to tell a story, to express a personal point of view. Every participants will choose the way of look at the urban scapes: pictures, text and the geographical transcription must constitute an interpretation, a project. It need to be visually coherent, and textually pregnant. Just to give an idea about how the kind of output will be, here there are some interesting examples of previous experiments: http://exhibitiondesignlab.unpacked.it/?p=50

The basic meaning of this part of the workshop is to find/built/propose/conceive, for every participant, a red thread (leading thread) visually and textually strong (= conceptually, critically strong) about a nomadic experience into the Berlin urban scapes. The red thread is the way of seeing, is the gaze, the personal and critical gaze that connect the banal and common elements around us, that usually people even don’t perceive.
At the end, we bring out into the real the digital journey documented on Google map through a simple but effective installation: a huge, long, large wall tessellated of the pictures and the texts of every journey. Below there some images of similar experiments already done.

#3. Interventions: changing the way of looking at urban scapes by simple and minimal changing

Everybody can do this experiment, you can buy the paper, the scissors, the instruction are here, also your hands are ok, try! Try to do also other shapes. Again (because the previous were not good enough). Yes, these are ok!

[Munari:1969]

As soon as we arrive to our ‘Berlin Gran Tour’ destinations, every day each participants will be asked to transform the space around and document the changings through a very short and simple stop motion videoloop (we’ll provide all the necessary knowledge to do that!). The intervention is going to be the kind of Urban Fields performance that can be watched on http://urbanfields.wordpress.com simple, minimal, instant, yet strong and meaningful gestures using mirrors, chalks, ropes, stones, the ground, waters, the sun, whatever we’ll find. At the end the group will have a collection of short microloops to be shown on the Facebook page. Of course, all this is going to be referred to Limits.

REFERENCES


Daniele Mancini (Roma, 1974), architect, holds a PhD in Theory of Architecture, is specialized in History of Architectural Design, received a Master in Interaction Design. He worked in the Netherlands at Wiel Arets and Paris at Jakob+MacFarlane. He collaborated with Cloosstraat in Turin and was project leader for at-exhibition design unit at IDI Ivrea. He conceived and built installations among others at Venice Biennale, at Beijing Biennal, at Victoria & Albert Museum in London. As member of the CICCIO Group Daniele designed an interactive and inflatable open source teaching platform displayed since 2002 all around the world. He is art director of URBAN FIELDS, a collective exploring the controversial condition of the neglected public space, and with his partner Irene Rinaldi founded UNPACKED a think tank based in Rome supporting initiatives crossing different forms of contemporary creativity between the digital and the analog. He writes books, articles, essays on architecture and he is at moment interested also in social media and their relationships with design and teaching. He's been visiting teacher at NABA Milan, IED Roma, Architectural Association London, Cornell University New York in Roma, École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Versailles. You can follow Daniele at: http://unpacked.wordpress.com or on http://www.facebook.com/danielemancini74

Neelke Wagner (*1978), a social scientist and journalist, has studied political science and philosophy in Berlin and Venice, with a special interest in social theories, discourse theory and epistemology. Afterwards, she has worked as a journalist in such different fields as photovoltaics, consumer rights and direct democracy, she has organized political debates and workshops on feminism and worker’s rights with the group reflect and she has co-founded the subculture foundation [f.u.c.], using an abandoned brewery for art exhibitions and techno parties. She is part of the Hedonist International’s World Congress and has co-organized some unconventional protest actions against christian fundamentalists. She likes to connect art with politics and protest, and to connect philosophy with action.
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