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KippCity

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ABSTRACT: On 28 April 2011, on the Rathausplatz of Neukölln, my own puzzlement vis-à-vis Neukölln's liberation met the neighbourhood's flickering urbanity, which I seek to capture in a project called KippCity. KippCity is an experiment in tracing urban change while it happens. If space is the 'event of place', as Doreen Massey holds, the space of KippCity is the transformation of Neukölln.

NEUKÖLLN'S LIBERATION, NEUKÖLLN'S DEATH

I'm shopping. The place in front of Rathaus Neukölln is filled up with a few hundred, mainly young, people dressed in black. I lock my bike and try to find out what the gathering is about. From the loudspeaker a female voice calls for the support of Israel. On the stairs of the Rathaus, a group of youngsters wave the Russian, French, and British flags. From the ground I pick up what seems to be the only written message distributed in the gathering: an anti-gentrification brochure titled 'Wir bleiben alle' ('All of us will stay'). The subtitle specifies: 'for non-commercial culture and a dignified life, against rent increase and displacement of leftist projects.' I keep walking. With the anti-gentrification leaflet in my hand and the pro-Israel speech in my ear, I eventually spot a poster on the loudspeaker van: 'Tag der Befreiung Neuköllns' ('Neukölln Liberation Day' – Fig. 1). Behind the letters in the pink circle the background shows through: a black-and-white photo of war ruins, and a soldier waving the Russian flag.



Fig. 1. 'Neukölln Liberation Day' (Poster and leaflet, 28 April 2011).

Neukölln Liberation Day. But liberation from what? I take a second glimpse at my anti-gentrification leaflet: on the front page there is a pic-

ture of a woman, screaming. Her face is filled with anger and pain, her head encircled by barbed wire upholding the words: ‘Don’t worry, it’s just gentrification’ (Fig. 2). In my head, the messages mingle: liberation from corporate interests that threaten to eat the neighbourhood alive; and liberation from the imprisonment of commercial culture, undignified life, and rising rents. But how is Israel’s right to exist related to this neighbourhood liberation?



Fig. 2. ‘Don’t worry, it’s just gentrification’
(Anti-gentrification brochure, 28 April 2011).

My gaze roams over the elderly Turkish and Arab people on the benches around the Rathausplatz, silently watching the young white crowd. I ask a person near the loudspeaker van: What liberation of Neukölln does the poster refer to? Annoyed by my ignorance, he reluctantly explains that sixty-six years ago, on 28 April 1945, the district of Neukölln was freed from the Nazi regime by the Russian army.² Hence, the gathering was an event to celebrate the liberation of Neukölln, ten days before the commemoration of Berlin’s (and Germany’s) liberation from National Socialism by the anti-Hitler allies on May 8. I was embarrassed. Of course, I saw the war ruins and the Russian soldier on the poster. Of course, I know that the ‘Tag der Befreiung’ commemorates the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, and of course, supporting Israel is part of this anti-fascist historical consciousness. Yet I did not even consider that the event at Rathausplatz could actually be about German *history*. Instead, I assumed that the ruins of Berlin on the poster were metaphors of death, destruction, and unfreedom in the *present* or in a dark *urban future* awaiting us. As I saw it, the landscape of war ruins on the Neukölln liberation poster perfectly visualized the

message on page three of my anti-gentrification brochure: ‘There is already enough dead city’ (‘Tote Stadt gibt’s schon genug’ – Fig. 3). A strange entanglement of the possible meanings of urban death on the one hand, and Neukölln’s liberation on the other, unfolded in this half-hour of wondering. Here, urban death as a result of war, and urban death as the hyper-polished, unsocial other of urban life (as gentrification is often described) blend with Neukölln’s liberation from Nazi rule and Neukölln’s liberation from big business. And with this blend merge the pro-Israel speeches from the loudspeaker, the barbed wire, and the silence of the Neukölln Arabs sitting on the benches near the gathering.



Fig. 3. ‘There is already enough dead city!’
(Anti-gentrification brochure, 28 April 2011).

On 28 April 2011, on the Rathausplatz of Neukölln, my own puzzlement vis-à-vis Neukölln’s liberation met the neighbourhood’s flickering urbanity, which I seek to capture in a project called KippCity. KippCity is an experiment in tracing urban change while it happens. If space is the ‘event of place’, as Doreen Massey holds, the space of KippCity is the transformation of Neukölln.³ This transformation has become visible and palpable over the last few years. Neukölln, a neighbourhood long infamous for its social problems, violence, and ‘failed integration’, is changing rapidly.

For many critical observers, the transformation is simply called gentrification.⁴ In their perspective of present-day Neukölln, the contours of the neighbourhood’s future are already clearly apparent. ‘Even diplomats are already here’ titles an article on a prominent anti-gentrification blog.⁵ Here, a poor and neglected neighbourhood tips toward an upmarket place, attractive for the cultural bourgeoisie and no longer

liveable for the urban poor. In the lives and deaths of great Berlin districts, Neukölln is the most recent victim of a gentrification wave moving through Berlin – a wave that began in Kreuzberg in the 1980s, then moved through Mitte in the early 1990s, affecting Prenzlauer Berg in the late 1990s and Friedrichshain in the early 2000s, before it finally reached Neukölln.⁶

Gentrification has long left the ivory tower of academic discourse and become a common topic of small talk amongst a wide range of Berliners. From critical blogger to party hipster, reading the early signs of gentrification has become a common skill. Just as observers of a duck-rabbit figure or a Necker cube seek to learn ‘how to produce the flip’ by focusing the eye on a particular spot from a particular angle and moving it a certain way,⁷ critics of gentrification have trained themselves to assume a perspective, in which the future of gentrification is always already there, while the past, with its however vague and idealized neighbourhood ‘authenticity’, is vanishing for good.⁸ Yet the multistable figure of urban change produced by these critics is too stable and not multiple enough. They connect the dots too quickly.

With KippCity, however, I want to think of urban change as multi-directional, nervous, never complete, and paradoxical. KippCity is a flickering figure. But unlike an artefact *Kippbild*, which flickers between duck and rabbit, or vase and faces, KippCity Neukölln does not simply tip into a new pre-fabricated form. It flickers around multiple axes between different social worlds, conceptions of urban futures, physical appearances, and affective shapes. In that sense, my focus is not on a post facto outcome of the city changing its fabric, but on the space-time of change and on how this change is debated, deplored, celebrated, triggered, and combatted. This is what I call flickering urbanity, a nervous process where urban potentialities are simultaneously embraced and rejected, and where the neighbourhood’s emotions run high. Potentiality, as Veena Das puts it, is not understood in the ‘sense of something that is waiting at the door of reality to make an appearance, as it were, but rather as that which is already present’.⁹ KippCity Neukölln deciphers such potentialities in processes of urban change.

KIPPCITY – A WAY OF LOOKING

KippCity is inspired by *Kippbilder* – those figures consisting of two aspects that the viewer can never see simultaneously (Fig. 4). To view both figures requires a change of perception, a moment of flipping. The object is completely grasped (if at all) only through a temporal succession of different perceptions. I see the rabbit, and then I see the duck, if I am lucky. City researchers have a lot to learn from the model of multi-stable figures.

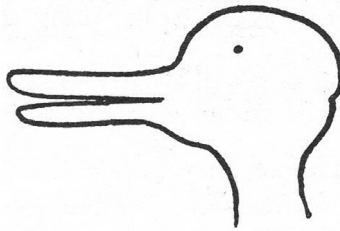


Fig. 4. Duck-Rabbit
(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 194).

The first lesson is about manoeuvring proximity and distance: the observer can experiment with what she can see or not see when being close (e.g. when directly in front of the rabbit's neck or inside the rabbit's ear) and being far away (e.g. when glancing at the entire rabbit and perhaps even getting a glimpse of the duck from time to time).¹⁰ The picture temporarily blurs, which can be more than an unsatisfying state to overcome in an endeavour to grasp the complexities of urban life and urban self-reflection. It is a moment in which ordering and imagining happens.

A second lesson involves the unstable relationship between the fragment and the whole. In the duck-rabbit figure, the duck and the rabbit are parts of one figure that comprises both the duck and the rabbit, and yet it is impossible to get a glimpse of both at the same time. The figure only becomes complete in time. The flip is not just a means of transport to the other aspect; it is itself an important element of the *Kippbild*. On the other hand, the space of the duck and the space of the rabbit are not fragmented at all. In their singularity, both rabbit and duck take up the entire space of the drawing. They even share the same eye. In a way, the duck is perfect without the rabbit, and vice versa.

Unlike a sketch that contains the imagination of the whole picture, the fragment, writes Veena Das, ‘marks the impossibility of such an imagination. Instead, fragments allude to a particular way of inhabiting the world.’¹¹ I, the researcher, am myself entrapped in one of those fragmented (perhaps duck or rabbit) worlds. Instead of being an outside observer, I am inside the object I am watching and therefore find myself stuck as the duck: when trying to wriggle its head out of the picture and await the rabbit to appear in front of its eyes, the duck must distort his own, and by that, the other’s, head to the point of complete distortion of the rabbit’s form. On good days, though, the glimpse of the other can succeed, and the memory of it be woven in.

The third lesson is about the productiveness of puzzlement and surprise. The sudden change of aspects between duck and rabbit sometimes surprises us, because it is neither always nor completely voluntary. It might also just happen and then not happen anymore. And at some point, the observer might anticipate the shift. By contrast, staring at a city and waiting for the shift to occur is both more boring, since urban change is not sudden, and more exciting, because we cannot know exactly the next form the picture will reveal. There are different potential aspects and various axes along which the figure might flip. It is in this moment of uncertainty that KippCity appears strongest, because here the city is not one with itself, but frustrated and in danger. As film theorist Ackbar Abbas phrased it, we should ‘see the city not through privileged moments of insight or revelation [...] but rather through working with uncertainty, puzzlement, and confusion.’ Abbas calls such experiences ‘negative epiphanies’.¹² Puzzlement can be a strategy to estrange the frame through which a particular social phenomenon is seen. The ‘ghetto’ and ‘gentrification’ are such frames from which Neukölln might want to liberate itself in order to allow for other stories to be heard.

The fourth lesson is a parallax gesture that searches for a critical perspective, not in a certain determinate position as opposed to another position, but in the ‘irreducible gap between the positions itself’.¹³ A parallax way of looking, Slavoj Žižek holds, resists the attempt at reducing one aspect to the other and instead asserts antinomies as irreducible. Irreducible gaps and distortions, ‘slips of the tongue or other inadvertent mistakes’¹⁴ are then the modes by which changing cityness can be addressed.¹⁵ The parallax gesture involves another important move: namely, that of shifting an object’s position against its back-

ground through a change in observational position. In city research, such positional shifts allow us to critically attend to the dominant framings of phenomena of urban change in public or academic discourse, and to ask what they would look like if we framed them differently.

Overall, the manoeuvring of proximity and distance, the wandering between fragment(s) and whole, the embracing of puzzlement, and the assertion of the irreducible gaps between positions are the tools with which I investigate Neukölln's transformation. With these KippCity methodologies, I want to grasp the city as an object of intellectual excitement in its flickering. Tools for this endeavour should not suppress this flickering, but help to bring it about.

TRANSFORMATIONS

In KippCity Neukölln, the event of change – and the self-reflective talk about this change – form a hot bundle of flickering urbanity. In this section, I will disentangle some of the threads of which this bundle is composed.

Not long ago, Neukölln was on the verge of turning into a ghetto – this, at least, is what many urban officials repeatedly remember when looking back.¹⁶ The working-class and immigrant neighbourhood in the former West Berlin was always poor, but in the 1990s, after the wall fell, Neukölln was hit especially hard.¹⁷ The remaining factories and department stores were moved to the cheaper Berlin outskirts in the former East, and municipal support for Neukölln was stopped and transferred to urban renewal initiatives in the East Berlin districts. Neukölln seemed stuck in a state of depression and anger – a sentiment expressed by a legendary article in *Der Spiegel*, entitled 'Endstation Neukölln' ('Neukölln, the final destination'). There was nowhere else to go from here, as it were; it was a dead-end street from which exiting was difficult. The article states: 'Berlin's centre is booming and sparkling. Yet on the fringes, the metropolis is turning into a slum. In the working-class neighbourhood of Neukölln, neglect, violence, and hunger are the signs of social decline.'¹⁸ Neukölln, it seemed, meant standstill and depression. The only movement was downward, or, for those who could, out.

The title photo shows a boy jumping over urban ruins, a picture that might recall the iconic photo taken of the young East German sol-

dier jumping over the barbed wire fence on 15 August 1961, when the Berlin Wall was in its third day of construction (Figs 5 and 6). The soldier made it out of the German Democratic Republic; the little boy will certainly not make it out of Neukölln, or so the tone of the article suggests.



Hinterhof-Tristesse: „Die Strukturen der Familien, des früheren Großstadtkiezes sind zerstört“

HAUPTSTADT

Endstation Neukölln

Im Zentrum boomt und glitzert Berlin. Doch an den Rändern versummt die Metropole. Im Arbeiterbezirk Neukölln zeigen Verwahrlosung, Gewalt und Hunger den sozialen Niedergang an. Von Peter Wensierski

Fig. 5. ‘Neukölln, the Final Destination’ (*Der Spiegel*, 1997).



Fig. 6. East German soldier leaping over barbed wire into West Berlin on 15 August 1961.¹⁹

Then, maybe in 2006, Neukölln's agony became overlaid with enthusiasm. The neighbourhood's roughness was suddenly charming, its empty buildings were remodelled as places of creative potential, and its cultural frictions emerged as the stuff that makes an exciting neighbourhood. The city magazine *Tip* compared present-day Neukölln to New York's Lower East Side thirty years ago and labelled it the 'playground for the avant-garde'.²⁰ Neukölln has become the site of play, of magic, of creation. Its combination of imperfection and charm makes it the epitome of 'poor but sexy' – Mayor Klaus Wowereit's declaration of his love for Berlin. Neukölln is now on the map; it takes itself seriously: its future is debated, and its past reclaimed. The 'Neukölln Liberation Day', as proclaimed by antifascist youth on 28 April 2011, is but one example of this emerging Neukölln consciousness.

Part of Neukölln's growing self-awareness is the fear that the neighbourhood might turn into a gentrification hotspot where rents are high and the poor no longer welcome. Indeed, the public debate about Neukölln's transformation alternates between these two flip scenarios: ghetto and gentrification. Both are embedded in different temporalities: the ghetto was the future scenario in the recent past and still haunts contemporary debates, while gentrification is the present-day scenario for the future. Neither scenario inspires any hope: both are urban futures of ethnic or class homogeneity whose excluding effects are feared. Both dystopian depictions (whether they talk about past or present futures) reverberate in the present.

IN LOVE WITH THE MOMENT, AND JUST THE MOMENT

Haunted by those dystopias, Neukölln, it seems, digs its claws into its *now*. The advertisement for the 'Nowkoelln Flowmarkt' – a flea market created in May 2010 – illustrates this fascination with Neukölln's present very well. With 'Now' in the place of 'Neu', this nonchalant renaming of the neighbourhood as part of the advertisement is a celebration of the *now*. *Now* is the moment in which Neukölln is energetic, exciting, and charming, and in which the creative makeshift rules. *Now* is the moment that must be celebrated before gentrification devours it, before gourmet cappuccino and handmade chocolate spoil the district. And before rents are as high as in other parts of Berlin: property owners

already report how, after decades of difficulties renting out their flats in Neukölln, they can finally ask for the rents they had always hoped for.²¹



Fig. 7. Advertisement for 'Nowkoelln Flowmarkt' (Poster and web campaign, 2010).

The Nowkoelln advertisement itself hints at the anticipated end of the *now*. The flea market is called *flowmarkt* (playing with the sound of the German expression for flea market: *Flohmarkt*). On the back of the leaflet, we find the slogan: 'The flow must go on!' – a Nowkoelln interpretation of Queen's 'The show must go on'. Just as the show must continue even after the lead singer's foreseeable death, Neukölln's flow must keep on flowing even against the threats of gentrification. The replacement of 'show' with 'flow' is telling: the flow can only flow on when 'edge' and 'authenticity' stay where they are. Indeed, what the newcomers to Neukölln love so much is the 'authenticity' of Neukölln, the absence of glamour and its 'honesty'. As a networking activist for immigrating creatives to Neukölln states: 'Neukölln's charm is that it is raw and rough.'

Like a raw diamond. One can still jump around, can realize one's dreams. [...] There is the space, and you can still occupy it.²²

While many newcomers to northern Neukölln have stories about cheap apartments and vacant places that lured them, for many long-term residents this transformation remains completely obscure. A young man who grew up in Neukölln and who now runs a fast-food restaurant explains to me how his Turkish and Arab friends perceive the transformation. He describes how for many it was simply 'incredible [...] what actually happened' (meaning how empty shops became a paradise for young creatives). According to him,

people [now] move into those corners and do something with them, where [not even] a foreigner wanted to do anything with them anymore. This, after all, is why they were empty, because there is always this hierarchy. Alright, so there comes a German and does something with it, then comes a Turk and tries to do something with it, then maybe comes an Indian who tries to do something with it, and if nothing at all works anymore, then it remains vacant. So then it is really over. And then suddenly the people from Swabia [in Southern Germany] come and open a bar or a pub, where for ten years nobody wanted to do anything anymore, and it had just remained vacant. And now they are putting shops in and, of course, it works fantastically. And now, many [of the locals] have the feeling that they have missed something.²³

Suddenly, something works in the district that was dysfunctional before, a shift that eludes most locals' ability to understand. They seem to have missed the moment in which hipster life in Neukölln began. The hipsters have a narrative on how they 'found' Neukölln, how they populated its 'voids', while for most old-timers such glamorous narratives of change (and choice) do not exist. Rather, conversations with long-term Neukölln residents strongly express a negative attachment to the place or a resigned attitude à la 'everybody has to live *somewhere*'.²⁴ The old-timers' speechlessness vis-à-vis the changes mark a lack of ownership of the transformation: the hipsters' Nowkölln is not their Neukölln, even if some long-term residents use the momentum and sell beer and soy milk to the new neighbours who 'don't care about the prices'.²⁵

SELF-HATRED

Meanwhile, the ‘Nowkoelln’ hipsters can neither entirely enjoy ‘their now’ nor plunge completely into the flow of joyful experiment. Graffiti insults the hipsters as yuppies who should ‘piss off’. Anti-gentrification blogs express their disgust about the ‘caravan of the young and beautiful’ moving through Neukölln.²⁶ Those immigrating youngsters are certainly not rich themselves, but they are perceived as the ‘storm troops of gentrification’, gradually displacing the poor ‘by constructing the habitus, latte by latte, of the new urban middle class’.²⁷ At the end of this nervous emotional flickering, an anonymous poster campaign warns, the neighbourhood will be dead – murdered by the kind of hipster depicted in the photo (Fig. 8).

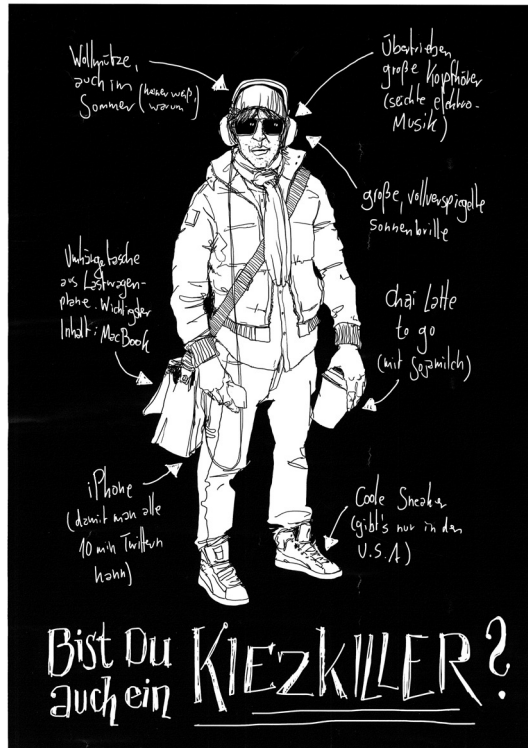


Fig. 8. ‘Are you also a killer of the hood?’
(Anonymous poster campaign in Neukölln).

I spotted the poster in a window of an antique shop with the name ‘arm und sexy’ (‘poor and sexy’). Targeting the hipster’s conscience, it asks: ‘Are you also a killer of the neighbourhood?’ (‘Bist du auch ein Kiezkiller?’). The poster portrays the stereotypical Neukölln hipster with iPod, trendy jeans, MacBook, cool sneakers from the US, and a Chai Latte to go. With his enormous headphones, sunglasses, and woollen hat, the *Kiezkiller* looks like an alien. It seems as though he belongs to another planet – or city, or neighbourhood. While walking through the streets of Neukölln, he remains encapsulated in his own world; his surroundings will not get through to him. At the same time, he seems familiar. The poster relies for its punch on the passer-by’s familiarity with the hipster codes while reinforcing such familiarity by involving her in the picture (‘you’, ‘also’). The poster bears no signature or label; the shop owner tells me that the designer wants to stay anonymous.²⁸ The accusation is pungent: a person with a particular lifestyle and outfit is stereotyped and held responsible for the death of a neighbourhood. The poster does not specify the kind of death (death of authenticity? aesthetic death? displacement of the poor? death by boredom?) or the kind of neighbourhood; other more structural drivers of gentrification are not mentioned.

The immigrating students and artists have long internalized the accusation. They are deeply self-reflective about their own and their peers’ role in the neighbourhood. They routinely endeavour to explain why they are not killing the neighbourhood. A curious fight has arisen about who was here before the pull to Neukölln began, who is more of a neighbourhood native than others, and hence, who is here legitimately. It is striking how much the debate is broken down to the individuals whose tastes and choices are represented as key drivers of the dynamics that have fashioned Neukölln as Nowkoelln and that might turn Nowkoelln into a version of Prenzlauer Berg. It is not the flows of capital or ‘the literal and figurative effacing of the proletariat in the city’,²⁹ not urban politics that employ gentrification as a systematic and comprehensive tool of neo-liberal governance, nor international developments that force cities into competition with one another who are held responsible here, but rather those who are ‘ready’ to pay higher rents.³⁰ This approach certainly overestimates individual agency.³¹

An effect of the hipsters’ self-hatred is that the debate itself takes place mainly between young white educated people. The voices of immigrants and lower-class old-timers are rarely heard in gentrification

slanders, and the lack of their presence in activists' alliances does not seem to cause much of an outcry amongst anti-gentrification activists. In Berlin, it seems, the interest in Neukölln's transition is not so much a concern about neighbourhood diversity, as a worry for some to lose the excitement of a unique place. In this sense, the kind of gentrification critique we encounter on Neukölln's walls and blogs remains vague: conscious of the battle over the district and the dangers of displacement (see the widespread slogan 'all of us will stay!'), yet strikingly indifferent to and ignorant about the working-class population around them.³²

STUCK IN KIPPCITY

In a rap song, titled 'Mein Bezirk' ('My Hood') by Turkish singer Playa Emre, the story of Neukölln's toughness reads differently:

[...]
In my hood Neukölln
[...]
Nobody can diss us
Our hood, our homies
Our home, our block, our city
It's everything we have, you see?
Here we are all bound together
No one gets out
We are the law
We are NATO
We are the Führer
We are the Dictator
We decide what's going on here
And we decide who's dead.
[...]³³

While the new young Neukölln-lovers worry that there might soon be no place left to open their studio, for some of their Turkish neighbours the choice looks different: for the hipsters, Neukölln is opportunity and excitement, while in the song, Neukölln is 'everything we have'. While the hipsters can withdraw right before Neukölln's momentum is over, the people depicted in the rapper's song are stuck. 'No one gets out' seems to be the flipside of the 'finding-Nowkoelln' narrative.³⁴ Here KippCity Neukölln flickers between the privilege of mobility (for some) and the destiny of being stuck (for most).

But the pleasures and calamities of being stuck somewhere are intertwined, as the parallelism of ‘no one gets out’ (the ghetto destiny) and ‘all of us will stay’ (the anti-gentrification mantra) suggests. Kipp-City Neukölln seems to flicker between the two worst cases: you either can’t get out, like the boy jumping over the ruins in the picture of *Der Spiegel*, or you are *forced out* of the neighbourhood, because it becomes unaffordable. Here, KippCity Neukölln is stuck in its own oscillation between ghetto and gentrification, and fails to address the complex factors shaping (im)mobility in the city.

And yet, being stuck, as the song suggests, also means getting to decide ‘what’s going on here’, what ‘laws’ and whose dictatorship rule. Here, long-grown social infrastructures and established forms of rule still shape the hood, even when lots of new faces have come to populate the streets, the bars, and the apartments. Seen in this light, the alleged *Kiezkiller* doesn’t instill much fear. The real decisions over ‘who’s dead’ are made elsewhere.

The ‘no one gets out’ combined with ‘we are the law’ and ‘we decide who’s dead’ also gives a glimpse into the realities to which the gentrification debates cannot do justice, such as violence and everyday rule in a neighbourhood, inequality of chances in the school system and labour market, the cocooning of different social groups in their ‘flowing enclave’,³⁵ and the challenges of cities competing against each other on a global scale.³⁶ Urban liberators should not stop at ‘no gentrification’, but should reach out beyond their comfort zones and touch on the troubling paradoxes that accompany current processes of change. Perhaps the message of the leaflet on Rathausplatz would better read: ‘Do worry it is *not* just gentrification’. Neukölln’s liberation is still to come.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank the members of the ICI colloquium for helpful discussions on an earlier draft of KippCity. In addition, I am grateful to K. Heintzman, Katrin Pahl, Christoph Holzhey, and Ulrike Bialas for their close readings and comments on the paper. The article is based on ethnographic research conducted in Berlin Neukölln between October 2010 and September 2011, with a fellowship of the ICI Berlin.
- 2 A chronic of Neukölln’s liberation in a booklet on antifascist resistance in Neukölln from 1987 states that the day of Neukölln’s liberation was 26 April. On 28 April the anti-fascist civil administration was put in place. See VVN-Westberlin/

- Verband der Antifaschisten und Neuköllner Kulturverein (eds), *Widerstand in Neukölln* (Berlin: Movimento Druck, 1987).
- 3 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).
 - 4 Andrej Holm, *Wir Bleiben Alle! Gentrifizierung – Städtische Konflikte um Aufwertung und Verdrängung* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2010); Neil Smith, 'Der Zusammenschluss zwischen Anti-Gentrifizierungskämpfen und den Aktivitäten der weltweiten Bewegung für soziale Gerechtigkeit kann extrem bedrohlich werden', in *Mieterecho*, 324 (Oktober 2007), pp. 9–12, <<http://www.bmgev.de/uploads/media/me324heft.pdf>> [accessed 7 July 2013]; Gentrification Blog <<http://gentrificationblog.wordpress.com>> [accessed 18 September 2011].
 - 5 Gentrification Blog, 'Berlin Nordneukölln: "Es gibt sogar schon Diplomaten hier"' (5 January 2010) <<http://gentrificationblog.wordpress.com/2010/01/05/berlin-nordneukolln-es-gibt-sogar-schon-diplomaten-hier/>> [accessed 10 April 2011].
 - 6 See urban sociologist Andrej Holm's influential writings on the Berlin gentrification waves, in 'Gentrification in Berlin: Neue Investitionsstrategien und lokale Konflikte', in *Die Besonderheit des Städtischen: Entwicklungen der Stadt(soziologie)*, ed. by Heike Herrmann, Carsten Keller, Rainer Neef, and Renate Ruhne (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011), pp. 213–32 (p. 215–16).
 - 7 William Connolly, 'Materiality, Experience, and Surveillance', in *Political Matter: Technoscience, Democracy, and Public Life*, ed. by Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 63–86 (p. 70).
 - 8 Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
 - 9 Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent Into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 9.
 - 10 See Paul Rabinow's ideas on the anthropologist's task to 'cultivate untimeliness' and to take on a 'critical distance from the present that seeks to establish a relationship to the present different from reigning opinion': Paul Rabinow and George E. Marcus with James D. Faubion and Tobias Rees, *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 58.
 - 11 Das, *Life and Words*, p. 5.
 - 12 Ackbar Abbas, 'Poor Theory and New Chinese Cinema: Jia Zhangke's "Still Life"' (Lecture held at the Critical Theory Institute, University of California, Irvine, 3 December 2008), p. 14.
 - 13 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
 - 14 Abbas, 'Poor Theory', p. 2.
 - 15 With 'cityness', scholars such as AbdouMaliq Simone and Edgar Pieterse refer to the lived reality of cities; cityness is the 'city as a thing in the making'. See AbdouMaliq Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 2.
 - 16 This view was repeatedly expressed during interviews I conducted with representatives of Aktion Karl Marx Straße on 28 October 2010; Area Management

- Körnerpark on 22 October 2010; Economic Support Agency for Neukölln on 7 September 2011; and Kulturamt Neukölln on 23 October 2011.
- 17 Around 41.1% of Neukölln's population has an immigration history; most came from Turkey as so-called 'guest workers' to Germany in the 1960s, while others arrived as political refugees from ex-Yugoslavia or Lebanon. 22.3% of the district's population has no German citizenship. See Bezirksamt von Neukölln, 'Melderechtlich registrierte Einwohnerinnen und Einwohner am Ort der Hauptwohnung in Berlin am 31.12.2012 nach Migrationshintergrund' <<http://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/migrationsbeauftragten/bevoelkerungsstruktur.html>> [accessed 29 June 2013]. Over half of Neukölln's kids grow up in poverty. See res urbana, 'Die Entwicklung der Quartiere in Neukölln im Vergleich zu anderen (Teil-)Bereichen der Stadt Berlin in den Jahren 2007 bis 2009' <<http://www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/baneukoelln/2009pdf/qm/nklgutachten190711.pdf>> [accessed 29 June 2013]. Neukölln's unemployment rate was 17.2% in February 2013 (compared to Berlin's unemployment rate of 12.3 %). See <<http://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/derbezirk/arbeitslose.html>> [accessed 29 June 2013].
 - 18 Peter Wensierski, 'Endstation Neukölln', *Der Spiegel*, 43 (1997), pp. 58–63.
 - 19 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conrad_Schumann> [accessed 29 June 2013].
 - 20 Jacek Slaski, 'Spielplatz der Avantgarde', *TIP Berlin*, 39 (4 March 2010), pp. 29–35.
 - 21 Interview with Property Owner (16 December 2010); for a critical perspective see Andrej Holm, 'Wohnungspolitik der rot-roten Koalition in Berlin', in *Linke Metropolenpolitik: Erfahrungen und Perspektiven am Beispiel Berlin*, ed. by Andrej Holm, Klaus Lederer, and Matthias Naumann (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2011), pp. 92–112; Gentrification Blog 2010; Berliner Mieterverein, 'Mietenentwicklung im Reuterkiez', Presentation by Willie Lauman (2010).
 - 22 Interview with Neukölln Networking Activist (8 October 2010).
 - 23 Interview with Neukölln Imbiss Owner (13 May 2011).
 - 24 Talja Blokland, *Urban Bonds: Social Relationships in an Inner City Neighbourhood* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 158.
 - 25 Interview with Vendor in a Turkish-run corner shop (19 May 2011).
 - 26 Gentrification Blog, 'Berlin Nordneukölln: "Es gibt sogar schon Diplomaten hier"'.
 - 27 Smith, 'Der Zusammenschluss', p. 10: 'Sturmtruppen der Gentrifizierung', and Zukin, *Naked City*, p. 18.
 - 28 A few months later, the owner of a popular hipster bar told me that he, together with a friend, had had the idea for the poster. In his bar, too, I found a copy of the poster.
 - 29 Loic Wacquant, 'Relocating Gentrification: The Working Class, Science and the State in Recent Urban Research', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32.1 (2008), pp. 198–205 (p. 199), see also Neil Smith, 'On "The Eviction of Critical Perspectives"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32.1 (2008), pp. 195–97; Neil Smith, 'Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 45.4 (1979), pp. 538–47.

- 30 As Andrej Holm assumes for Berlin, in many cases the so-called ‘pioneers’ of gentrification in one neighbourhood are themselves displaced from another neighbourhood: Andrej Holm, ‘Gentrification Mainstream in Berlin’, *Lecture at the Urban Sociology Colloquium*, Humboldt University (Berlin, 9 May 2011).
- 31 Of course, there are other, more structural critiques of gentrification (see the writings by Holm and the anti-gentrification blog he runs). Yet, the gentrification critique of the poster, which targets the individual, and the light-hearted gentrification jokes in various Neukölln tours stand for a new genre of public debate in which celebration and critique of gentrification blur. The media debates in 2011 show another effect of such individualized gentrification critique: journalists have ‘discovered’ that the loudest complainants about gentrification are the gentrifiers themselves. This alleged paradox is now increasingly used to brush off any legitimate critique and diagnosis of gentrification in the first place. See, for example, Andreas Thiesen, ‘Neue Spießer: Warum die übliche Kritik an der Gentrifizierung provinziell ist und zu nichts führt’, *Die Zeit* (26 January 2012), p. 54 as well as Nana Heymann, ‘Mehr Gentrifizierung wagen!’, *Der Tagesspiegel* (27 August 2011) <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/berlin-mehr-gentrifizierung-wagen/4545108.html>> [accessed 2 February 2012].
- 32 It is important to note that the gentrification debate in Berlin has not taken the uncritical turn that Tom Slater has labelled as the ‘eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification research’. In activist and academic gentrification debates in Berlin, gentrification is not being ‘sugar-coated’, and displacement is not displaced from critical discourse on urban development. See Tom Slater, ‘The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 30.4 (2006), pp. 737–57, (pp. 741 and 747). Yet the Berlin gentrification debates meet another weakness pointed out by Smith, Wacqant, Allen, Slater, and others: that the poor and the immigrants have no voice in the debate.
- 33 Playa Emre, ‘Mein Bezirk’ <<http://www.magistrix.de/lyrics/Playa%20Emre/Mein-Bezirk-50787.html>> [accessed 25 June, 2011].
- 34 Needless to say, quoting Playa Emre does not necessarily reflect the voices of Turkish youth, nor that of Neukölln’s older population. I am treating this text more like Sarah Nuttall, in her work on Johannesburg, as a scrap of an urban ‘surface’, through which the entanglement with the various urban ‘underneaths’ can be unfolded. See Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009).
- 35 Rowland G. Atkinson, ‘The Flowing Enclave and the Misanthropy of Networked Affluence’, in *Networked Urbanism: Social Capital in the City*, ed. by Talja Blokland and Mike Savage (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 41–58.
- 36 See Christine Hentschel, ‘City Ghosts: The Haunted Struggles for Downtown Durban and Berlin Neukölln’, in *Locating Right to the City in the Global South: Transnational Urban Governance and Socio-spatial Transformations*, ed. by Tony R. Samara, Shenjing He, and Guo Chen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 195–217.

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