




ARTICLE

‘Berlin Does You Good’: Experimental Art, Place Marketing and the Urban Public Sphere in 1980s West Berlin

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This article analyses the relationship of mutual benefit that formed between West Berlin’s local government and experimental artists in the 1980s. In 1978 the West Berlin parliament established a grant programme to support independent artists operating in what was referred to as the ‘free scene’. The grants were intended to support the goal of restoring the city’s status as a capital of artistic innovation. Soon after, the local tourism office also featured these independent artists within a new place marketing strategy focused on raising the ‘experiential value’ of the city’s cultural offerings. But as this article shows, experimental artists were also using city grants to pursue alternative agendas focused on engaging with local populations in urban space. Through these projects, experimental artists extended the spirit of participatory democracy flourishing within the city’s counter-cultural enclaves to broader areas of the city.

Major anniversaries of the 1989 peaceful revolution in East Germany, including the thirtieth anniversary in 2019, tend to prompt the re-circulation of iconic images from the year’s explosive political events. Central to the images are crowds assembled in urban space: participating in candlelight vigils, marching through the streets of Leipzig and celebrating on top of the wall that divided the city of Berlin for nearly thirty years. The blinding light of 1989, captured so vividly in image and film, has obscured a parallel transformation of democratic politics in urban space taking place across the wall in West Berlin just prior to the revolution. As in East Berlin, experimental artists were uniquely positioned to contribute to this process. With special access to generous arts grants, West Berlin’s experimental artists staged performances, art actions and object-based installations across the island city. Through these displays, they extended the local alternative milieu’s emphasis on participatory democracy to broader audiences and areas of the city. Moreover, they invited (or provoked) viewers to join in. And unlike the disastrous combination of aesthetics, politics and urban space during the Nazi period, these artists encouraged the decentralisation, rather than the dismantling, of democracy.

In order to fund their consciously non-commercial work and gain access to high-traffic urban spaces, many artists welcomed financial support from West Berlin’s local government. Whether to accept state support was a difficult decision facing artists on either side of the wall.¹ In West Berlin, the issue was loosely marked by a generational divide. Artist-gallerists Wolf Kahlen and Rolf Langebartels, both born in the early 1940s, bristled at the thought of accepting state funding for projects and the creative compromise that came with such arrangements.² Arguments questioning the autonomy of state-funded art continue to carry influence over the critical reception of art. As recently

¹ For East German artists and state funding see Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, eds., *Bildstreit und Gesellschaftsumbruch: die Debatte um die Kunst aus der DDR im Prozess der deutschen Wiedervereinigung* (Berlin: Siebenhaar Verlag, 2013).

² Wolf Kahlen in discussion with the author, 15 Sept. 2014; Rolf Langebartels in discussion with the author, 27 Nov. 2014.

as 2012 the historian of participatory art Claire Bishop questioned an artist's ability to accept state support and create critical or 'counter-cultural' work.³ While taking these historical and contemporary arguments seriously, this article identifies a relationship of mutual benefit that formed between the West Berlin government and experimental artists. Many West Berlin-based artists born after 1950 readily accepted grants from the Berlin senate, West Berlin's executive body, the local parliament and district-level art offices, allowing them to bypass commercial galleries or corporate sponsorship.

This article highlights the role of these experimental artists in redefining the meanings and uses of city space in West Berlin in the 1980s, allowing for alternative modes of expression and collective action to emerge in the urban public sphere. The first section examines entanglements between the local government, tourism campaigns and experimental art in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This section also reveals how city leaders sought to provide financial support to freelance artists associated with the city's alternative milieu.⁴ In exchange, artists indirectly supported local efforts to increase tourism and recover the city's former status as an international capital of art and culture. While accepting grants from the senate and parliament (largely supported by substantial subsidies from the federal government in Bonn), artists remained free to pursue their own social, political and aesthetic agendas. And they did. Through their work, they shaped a more performative relationship between citizens and urban space and a social function for art closely embedded within the spaces and practices of everyday life.

The second section turns to a pair of controversial public sculptures and an experimental art series appearing during the city's 750th anniversary celebration in 1987. Staged in areas typically devoted to consumption or the daily commute, these public displays prodded viewers to debate the proper place for art in society, as well as urban space. Conceptual sculptures from artists Wolf Vostell and Olaf Metzger, which appeared in March 1987, triggered a massive popular backlash in the press and the formation of citizens' initiatives against public art. Spontaneous works of amateur art also appeared alongside the sculptures. These works demonstrated the public's willingness to make their own autonomous interventions in the urban public sphere and extend the dialogue from the press onto the streets. Performances and art actions connected to the July 1987 series *THE DIRECTIVE (DIE ANWEISUNG)* staged in subway cars, residential streets and city busses further contributed to this process. These projects provoked alternative modes of perception among residents and tourists through the transformation of quotidian life into a site of playful reinvention.

The sources informing this research, including records of the Berlin parliament, the Department for Cultural Affairs, popular press and exhibition catalogues, illuminate experimental artists' entanglements with city tourism and marketing campaigns. But they also tell a different story. Incubated within the city's counter-cultural enclaves, these artists found the city's isolation from the Western art world and low cost of living conducive to the exploration of alternative functions for art in society. Documentary photographs, private collections and oral history interviews help reconstruct this vibrant but largely forgotten world of experimental art staged across West Berlin during the late Cold War period. Through their work, these artists involved viewers – including the innocent passer-by – in the process of art making. Thus, the production of art, as well as modes of engagement in democratic society, were presented as collective rather than solitary acts. This model proved particularly useful in post-wall Berlin, when access to urban space became increasingly contested and state arts funding scarcer.

I

Throughout the 1980s West Berlin politicians frequently invoked the city's enduring symbolism as a bulwark of democracy behind the Iron Curtain. This narrative equating the half-city with liberal

³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2012), 189.

⁴ See Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Das Alternative Milieu: Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968–1983* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010).

democracy emerged during the early post-war years of Allied occupation.⁵ In 1948 the Soviet blockade of transport routes to West Berlin and the UK- and US- organised airlift further supported this narrative, helping rebrand the city as the ‘outpost of freedom’.⁶ Following the end of the blockade, the city’s symbolic significance to the anti-communist West was periodically renewed: after the 1953 uprising in East Berlin, during visits from US politicians, following the wall’s construction in 1961 and through the enduring presence of Allied troops. Yet in the 1970s and early 1980s the actually existing democracy of West Berlin was struggling to live up to this ideal. Real estate scandals, bribery, back-room deals and even ties to the East German Ministry for State Security ensnared members of the Berlin senate and parliament from both the centre-left Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) and centre-right Christian Democratic Union of Germany (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*; CDU).⁷ Relations between the senate and the city’s sizeable squatter community also grew hostile around 1980. Shortly after coming to power in 1981 Governing Mayor Richard von Weizsäcker and his CDU-led senate targeted existing squats with a series of violent evictions.⁸

The entrenched and opaque nature of the West Berlin government and its perennial scandals, known colloquially as the ‘Berlin sleaze’ (*Berliner Filz*), coexisted with a dynamic spirit of participatory democracy emanating from the Kreuzberg and Wedding districts. Abutting the wall’s path, these districts harboured an array of squats, co-operatives, self-help networks, art collectives and other grassroots-based community projects.⁹ Various attempts were made to bring these parallel political cultures into a shared orbit. In the early 1980s the senate-sponsored International Building Exhibition (*Internationale Bauausstellung*; IBA) sought the participation of former squatters and others affiliated with the city’s fecund alternative culture.¹⁰ Part of IBA’s wide-reaching series of building projects centred on restoring dilapidated tenement housing in Kreuzberg.¹¹ IBA organisers promised financial support and resources for tenant-led restoration projects in the buildings that involved many former squatters.¹² IBA also sponsored the Picobello experimental art series within the gutted buildings that invited artists to develop installations and performances within the raw construction sites.¹³ In spite of these and other attempts at building bridges between the alternative milieu and senate-sponsored initiatives, mutual distrust endured.¹⁴

A more symbiotic relationship developed between the Berlin senate’s Department for Cultural Affairs and local experimental artists. This relationship was built upon the personal and professional networks between local politicians, cultural bureaucrats and artists cultivated in the 1970s under the SPD-led senate. Experimental artists used these connections to secure both space and funding for their

⁵ Scott H. Krause, *Bringing Cold War Democracy to West Berlin: A Shared German-American Project, 1940–1972* (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 57–64.

⁶ Stefanie Eisenhuth and Scott H. Krause, ‘Inventing the “Outpost of Freedom.” Transatlantic Narratives and the Historical Actors Crafting West Berlin’s Postwar Political Culture’, *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, 11 (2014), 188–211; Michael Lemke, *Vor der Mauer: Berlin in der Ost-West-Konkurrenz 1948 bis 1961* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), 37–40.

⁷ Wilfried Rott, *Die Insel: eine Geschichte West-Berlins 1948–1990* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009), 313–21; 338–9; 353–4.

⁸ Alexander Vasudevan, *Metropolitan Preoccupations: The Spatial Politics of Squatting in Berlin* (Chichester; West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 127–8; Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, & Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 211–7; Rott, *Die Insel*, 345–6.

⁹ Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014), 22–4.

¹⁰ Krijn Thijs, ‘West-Berliner Visionen für eine neue Mitte: Die Internationale Bauausstellung, der “Zentrale Bereich” und die “Geschichtlandschaft” an der Mauer (1981–1985)’, *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, 11 (2014), 237.

¹¹ Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, & Identity*, 250–72.

¹² Carla MacDougall, ‘In the Shadow of the Wall: Urban Space and Everyday Life in Kreuzberg’, in Timothy Brown and Lorena Anton, eds., *Between the Avant-Garde and the Everyday: Subversive Politics in Europe from 1957 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 164–5.

¹³ Thijs, ‘West-Berliner Visionen’, 238; Dieter Uh, ed., *Picobello: Kunst aus den Zwischenräumen Teil 1, 7.-15.9.1985* (Berlin: S.T.E.R.N GmbH, 1985); Christian Hasucha, ed., *Picobello: Kunst aus den Zwischenräumen; Teil 2; Oranienstraße 44, 7.-15.9.1988* (Berlin: S.T.E.R.N. GmbH, 1985).

¹⁴ Hasucha, ed., *Picobello*, 2–3.

projects. Like the local squatter community emerging in the 1970s, artists had also found the city's numerous decaying and abandoned buildings a great location for experimentation. Unlike the squatters' focus on private world-making, these artists were interested in making art that was directed outward and accessible to all. This echoed an emphasis on effecting change at the everyday level, which was also emerging within the West German anti-nuclear and environmental movements following the height of left-radical terrorism in the late 1970s.¹⁵ But experimental artists in West Berlin preferred spontaneous, playful and provocative actions over more traditional forms of political engagement in urban space.

This interest in increasing the presence of art in public space complemented an enduring goal among local government leaders to recover the city's status as an international arts capital. This perennial post-war desire morphed into a survival strategy in the 1970s following the onset of Cold War detente. In the early 1970s the signing of a series of treaties between the two German states and Allied representatives swiftly altered West Berlin's position as a major flashpoint of Cold War confrontation. The treaties eased travel from the West to East, creating new channels for cultural and scientific exchange and opening the door for increased trade. But detente also significantly dampened the city's status as a central node of Cold War tension, which weakened West Berlin's already lethargic economy and confronted the city with a crisis of identity.¹⁶ With German unification appearing even more distant, a new wave of local industries moved to the West and took their workers with them.¹⁷

The arts offered a promising sector for economic stimulus, but this would first require a greater investment from the city in the local arts scene.¹⁸ In the mid- to late-1970s cultural leaders in the senate and parliament organised a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening existing arts institutions, attracting international artists to the city and creating new venues for exhibiting experimental work.¹⁹ A partnership with the German Academic Exchange Service (*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*; DAAD) and Academy of Arts converted a nineteenth century hospital in Kreuzberg into the Artist House Bethanien (*Künstlerhaus Bethanien*), which included an exhibition and experimental performance space, a print workshop and studios for visiting artists.²⁰ In 1978 the Berlin parliament also established a new grant programme for independent artists working outside major arts institutions, collectively referred to as the 'free scene'. Artists of all stripes were eligible to apply for a grant from this 'free scene' fund, which was initially capped at one million Deutschmarks, but continued to grow under CDU control throughout the 1980s.²¹

One of the first groups to receive a grant (10,380 Deutschmarks) was the art collective Büro Berlin, comprised of Raimund Kummer, Hermann Pitz and Fritz Rahmann. With the grant, the group occupied the fifth floor of an abandoned building south of the Tiergarten. There they hosted an exhibition series in which various artists created work using materials found inside the building. Projects took the form of installations, found object sculptures, photography and performance. The Büro Berlin relished

¹⁵ Dieter Rucht, 'Das alternative Milieu in der FRG', in Reichardt and Siegfried, eds., *Das Alternative Milieu*, 75–7; Andrew Tompkins, *Better Active than Radioactive: Anti-Nuclear Protest in 1970s France and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7–9.

¹⁶ Mary Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente and Ostpolitik, 1969–1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 122.

¹⁷ Rott, *Die Insel*, 294–7; Claire Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin: Place Marketing and the Politics of Urban Reinvention Post-1989* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 58–9. Between 1970 and 1983 the city lost 100,000 industrial jobs.

¹⁸ Jürgen Engert, 'Füllhorn oder Flaschengeist', *Omnibus*, 1 Nov. 1980, 43.

¹⁹ Berlin Senat für Wissenschaft und Kunst, *Bildende Kunst in Berlin: Bericht des Senats von Berlin an den Ausschuss für Wissenschaft und Kunst des Abgeordnetenhauses von Berlin* (Berlin: Senat für Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1974).

²⁰ A proposed children's clinic lost out to the art space, though the larger Bethanien complex housed many other social programmes affiliated with Kreuzberg's Division for Adult Education, Youth and Sport including a senior centre.

²¹ 'Über Förderung von kulturellen Aktivitäten freier Gruppen', Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, 7th Wahlperiode, Drucksache 7/1291, 26 May 1978; 'Beratung des Antrags der FDP und SPD über Förderung von kulturellen Aktivitäten freier Gruppen', 7th Wahlperiode, Kulturausschuss 7/52, 11 Sept. 1978.

this departure from traditional art spaces and the opportunity to work in alternative spatial contexts.²² When the city razed the building in 1981 the group easily found another in Kreuzberg, where they continued staging site-specific exhibitions and events. They also organised a physical office space within their new building to assist other artists in realising their own site-specific projects across the city.

In 1980 Büro Berlin moved outside the building and into urban space to engage with West Berliners in what the artists referred to as a 'real space' – removed from the typical venues associated with the production or consumption of art. For one day only the Büro Berlin transformed the Gleisdreieck train station just south of Checkpoint Charlie into a site of action art. Through this action, the group experimented with new methods of constituting and interacting with an audience in public space.²³ Each member contributed their own element to the action.²⁴ Pitz rigged a tiny car to travel up and down a cable running above the train platform. A toy man riding inside the car and holding a camera appeared to be recording the people below. Kummer choreographed three men in red work uniforms who moved about the station throughout the day. Finally, Rahmann rigged a stream of water to flow continuously from the train platform down the stairways through multiple levels of the station. In this action, the group attempted what they called an 'infiltration of the everyday'. Surreptitious and surreal, the group focused their actions around a scene of daily life in order to explore the malleable quality of urban space and their ability to alter that space through art and action.²⁵ The group's integration of art into spaces of everyday life had a considerable impact on other artists interested in action-based work. Like Büro Berlin, these artists were also disinterested in the better known neo-expressionist painting style emerging from Kreuzberg at the same time. In the coming years, the city's experimental artists continued integrating art into 'real space', while staging projects that were increasingly more overt and provocative.

In the early 1980s artists' migration from the gallery into urban space coincided with a city-sponsored campaign to increase tourism to West Berlin that identified the marketability of the experimental art scene. Previous tourism campaigns from the mid- to late-1970s had less successfully sought to enhance West Berlin's appeal to business travellers, professional conferences and general tourists.²⁶ The campaigns failed to generate the desired economic stimulus or divert substantial tourist traffic to the half-city from the more popular tourist destinations of Paris and London. Yet the city's distance from tradition-bound hometowns in West Germany had attracted an eclectic group of West German youth, including artists, students, punks, activists and young men seeking to avoid mandatory military service in the Federal Republic.²⁷ Their migration helped make West Berlin the unofficial capital of alternative culture. But these new residents offered little to the local hospitality industry or to the city's overall economic recovery, until the city turned the counter-culture into a tourist attraction.

Tourism guidelines released by the Berlin senate in 1982 called for the adoption of corporate tools like market research, public relations and advertising to cultivate a new image for the city.²⁸ Above all, the guidelines moved away from the typical emphasis on shopping and gastronomy to prioritise the organisation of events offering the highest 'experiential value' (*Erlebniswert*) for visitors through a steady stream of 'culture and entertainment'.²⁹ This pairing of 'culture and entertainment' prompted the tourist office to explore the possibility of integrating 'free scene' artists into city-sponsored arts and cultural events seeking to maximise the 'experiential value'. This recognition of contemporary art's

²² Raimund Kummer et al., eds., *Büro Berlin: Ein Produktionsbegriff* (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 1986), 151–60.

²³ Claudia Büttner, *Art Goes Public: Von der Gruppenausstellungen im Freien zum Projekt im nicht-institutionellen Raum* (Munich: Silke Schreiber Verlag, 1997), 118.

²⁴ Michael Schwartz, 'Hints of Utopia: Art in Berlin since 1977', in Kynaston McShine, ed., *Berlinart 1961–1987* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1987), 85.

²⁵ Kummer et al., eds., *Büro Berlin*, 141.

²⁶ Verkehrsamt Berlin, Advertising Campaign, 1974, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 085 Nr. 5.

²⁷ Rott, *Die Insel*, 330.

²⁸ 'Über Leitlinien der Fremdenverkehrspolitik', Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, 9th Wahlperiode, Drucksache 9/469, 18 Mar. 1982, 2–4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

potential to generate tourism to provincial regions drew upon successful West German models set by Kassel's documenta exhibition and other public sculpture series featuring prominent artists in Monschau, Münster and Bremen.³⁰ Since the first documenta in 1955, the 'world exhibition of contemporary art' gained a reputation as a pilgrimage site for art lovers to view cutting-edge work every four or five years.³¹ Reflecting the emergence of what sociologist Gerhard Schulze dubbed the 'experience society', the popularity of the exhibition in the early 1980s demonstrated the promising form of economic stimulus in art tourism.³²

West Berlin's tourist office recorded a major success with the 1984 summer series Berlin Midsummer Night's Dream (*Berliner Sommernachtstraum*), which attracted thousands to the city. The series offered audiences the chance to encounter the city's 'free scene' alongside 'top-class' artists and musicians. Featured evening programmes integrated elements of art, spectacle and entertainment. *Berlin Does You Good* (*Berlin Tut Gut*), the West Berlin tourist magazine (also a contemporary place marketing slogan), hyped the festival as a portal to a fantasy world where one could leave reality behind.³³ Emphasising the edgy and exotic qualities of the local art scene, it listed appearances from 'free scene' artists under the heading, 'atop the pavement lies the art'. The phrase was a play on the French Situationist slogan 'under the pavement lies the beach', later adopted by the West German anti-authoritarian *Sponti* scene in the 1970s. At Ernst Reuter Platz, visitors could take part in a twenty-four-hour marathon 'sound outburst' (*Klangschrei*) combining drummers, electronic musicians, a selection of Berlin choirs, free jazz for breakfast and a grand 'sound finale' the following afternoon. As the magazine described in language better suited for a trip to the zoo, one could wander the streets of the central commercial district and encounter young jazz musicians, thespians from a free theatre group, 'environments' or installations from visual artists, poetry readings from international writers and performances from a punk circus troupe.

While the city promoted 'free scene' artists as a tourist attraction, many of these artists were staging projects that bypassed the tourist office's interest in entertainment and consumption. Instead, the artists focused on creating work that intersected with the daily routines of residents. Like the tourist office, artists also embraced marketing tools and occupied spaces typically reserved for advertising. But they did so to critically engage with the overwhelming presence of advertising in urban space and introduce alternative uses for such spaces. Along a stretch of billboard panels on the Yorck Strasse underpass connecting the Kreuzberg and Schöneberg districts, a series called THE DIRECTIVE presented 'action art in city space' from fifty 'free scene' artists. A promotional banner for the series installed at West Berlin's central Zoological Garden train station warned all to 'avoid York Strasse' with the actual intent of attracting curious visitors.³⁴ Those that did not avoid Yorck Strasse encountered installations of pre-made artwork on the billboard panels, as well as artists in the process of producing new work. Promotional materials invited the 65,000 cars passing daily to inspire the artists' 'concrete canvases'.³⁵ THE DIRECTIVE transformed the usual habitat of the Marlboro Man and other advertising icons into a space for art and action. As Walli Dreher noted in a review for *Zitty* magazine, the series was also democratising art by bypassing the 'ritual of art presentation in closed spaces with white wine and orange juice and cultivated small-talk'.³⁶ Most surprisingly, with financial support from the sizeable Midsummer Night's Dream budget, this seemingly rogue occupation of city space was a state-funded operation.

Unlike THE DIRECTIVE, the festival's big-ticket event offered viewers an escape from the mundane via the spectacular. On 7 July 1984 Viennese multimedia artist André Heller presented *Fire*

³⁰ Volker Plagemann, ed., *Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Anstöße der 80er Jahre* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1989).

³¹ Klaus Siebenhaar, *Documenta: A Brief History of an Exhibition and its Contexts* (Berlin: Siebenhaar Verlag, 2017), 27–32, 36.

³² Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnissesellschaft: Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt/Main; New York: Campus Verlag, 1992); Siebenhaar, *Documenta*, 45–6.

³³ *Berlin Tut Gut*, May/June 1984, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 150, Nr. 97.

³⁴ DIE ANWEISUNG-Yorckbrückenprojekt 1984, press materials, Gero Gries Archive.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Walli Dreher, 'Aktionskunst unter den Yorckbrücken', *Zitty*, 8, 16 (1984), 6–7.

Theatre with Sound Clouds, a forty-minute visual spectacle above the Reichstag building with musical accompaniment from Stravinsky, the Alan Parsons Project and Pink Floyd. Heller's *Fire Theatre* drew an unexpectedly large crowd of 500,000 viewers, though only 200,000 entrance tickets were sold. 'With flaming fantasy' the show presented Heller's 'story of the world and underworld of war and peace, power and emotion, good and bad dreams'.³⁷ Though the show took place directly in front of the wall, viewers were invited to escape that reality and instead consume images of a mythic past. The visual display featured 120-metre-high by 100-metre-wide flaming sculptures resembling cave paintings and hieroglyphics. The event sold out hotels, crowded the subway, packed the viewing grounds on the Platz der Republik in front of the Reichstag and spilled into the nearby Tiergarten. It also contributed to a spectacular traffic jam among crowds attempting to reach the site and leaving at the show's conclusion.³⁸ For local leaders, this was a welcomed inconvenience. It was a sign that West Berlin was once again becoming an international destination rather than a provincial outlier. As one member of the Berlin parliament enthusiastically proclaimed:

The results of the Midsummer Night's Dream are so positive that we expect to expand on such shows in 1985. They will once again provide Berliners with joy and fun. Berlin will once again be associated with words like 'breakthrough', 'impulses of the 1980s' and 'trends'. Berlin once again has an identity ... Berlin definitely does you good!³⁹

Through the Midsummer Night's Dream, the senate sought to bolster the hospitality and service industry and, along with it, the city's international standing as a capital of culture. This formula was well known outside West Berlin. The use of big-budget cultural events, festivals and exhibitions as an economic stimulus and centrepiece of place marketing had spread across Western Europe and the United States in the 1980s.⁴⁰ Urban sociologists Hartmut Häussermann and Walter Siebel attribute this 'festivalisation of politics' in city governance to the structural changes to capitalism in the 1970s.⁴¹ Within municipalities, the post-industrial economy meant increased inner-urban competition, a greater emphasis on the service sector and the prioritisation of economic growth. As geographer David Harvey describes, cities now sought to 'maximize the attractiveness of the local site as a lure for capitalist development'.⁴² West Berlin was shielded from some of these trends until after the city's unification due to the heavy reliance on federal subsidies from Bonn.⁴³ But the embrace of marketing and advertising tools calls into question how exceptional West Berlin truly was in this regard.⁴⁴ And the struggling hospitality industry offered additional motivation for city leaders to take the necessary steps to compete for outside attention and investment.⁴⁵ The Midsummer

³⁷ *Berlin Tut Gut*, May–June (1984), Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 150 97.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Plenar Protokoll 9/75, Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, 9th Wahlperiode, 11 Oct. 1984.

⁴⁰ Colomb, *New Berlin*, 13–4. See also Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis was Sold to the World* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008); John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

⁴¹ Hartmut Häussermann and Walter Siebel, 'Die Politik der Festivalisierung und die Festivalisierung der Politik: Stadtentwicklung durch große Projekte', *Leviathan*, 13, Special Issue (1993), 11–5.

⁴² David Harvey, 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism', *Geografiska Annaler*, 71, 1 (1989), 2; See also Hartmut Häussermann and Walter Siebel, *Neue Urbanität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987).

⁴³ Janet Ward, *Post-Wall Berlin: Borders, Space, Identity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 31; Elizabeth Strom, *Building the New Berlin: the Politics of Urban Development in Germany's Capital City* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2001), 3.

⁴⁴ Colomb, *New Berlin*, 58–9.

⁴⁵ Berlin's hospitality industry had long sought to overcome stagnation through tourism campaigns. For the interwar period see Adam Bisno, 'Berlin's Grand Hotels and the Crisis of German Democracy', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 52 (Spring 2019), 27–52.

Night's Dream, particularly Heller's *Fire Theatre*, represented West Berlin's first successful implementation of the 'festivalisation' model. More was to come.

The distance between projects like THE DIRECTIVE and Heller's *Fire Theatre* also reveals the schizophrenic nature of the senate's approach to arts and culture – between locally-sourced avant-garde projects and outsourced art spectacle. Indeed, the festival's success raised tensions among local arts and government leaders regarding priorities for arts funding. Criticism of big-budget spectacles like *Fire Theatre* and the resulting chaos came from multiple parties across the city parliament.⁴⁶ Members of the far-left Alternative List party preferred to see arts funding go toward 'decentralised' grants and community-based projects at the district level.⁴⁷ Other local cultural leaders also chimed in, denouncing the city's brazen co-optation of the 'free scene' as an economic stimulus. Michael Haerdter, director of the Artist House Bethanien, bemoaned how the Midsummer Night's Dream exploited the Kreuzberg arts scene as a 'promised delicacy in Berlin advertising'.⁴⁸ Though this was certainly true, Haerdter failed to acknowledge this was a two-way street. Through publicly funded projects like THE DIRECTIVE, the 'Kreuzberg arts scene' (which extended beyond Kreuzberg) directed that arts budget toward autonomous agendas and more ambitious projects than 'free scene' artists could typically afford. Due to the success of the 1984 summer series, the senate continued inviting experimental artists to stage work within the urban landscape and offered them even larger sums to do so.

II

In 1987 thousands of tourists and dignitaries converged on Berlin to take part in the abundant festivities on both sides of the wall celebrating the 750th anniversary of the city's founding (B-750 from now on). Event planners in both East and West sought a unified aesthetic for their respective celebrations. A range of new building projects, public art, museum exhibitions, concerts and parades sought to attract visitors to the parallel celebrations in competition with one another.⁴⁹ Turning down offers to collaborate with the West Berlin senate on programming and publicising events, the ruling Socialist Unity Party in East Germany focused on the restoration of East Berlin's historical core in the Nikolai Quarter. East Germany's celebration of their capital city's history became an opportunity to present a narrative of class struggle and its culmination in the creation of the workers' and peasants' state. Visitors to East Berlin's B-750 encountered daily concerts and arts presentations, murals and a parade depicting major moments in Berlin history, including construction of the 'anti-fascist protection wall' in 1961.⁵⁰ For West Berlin, B-750 offered the opportunity to highlight the city's cultural pre-eminence over the East German capital. Without access to the historic city centre, West Berlin's planning commission instead focused on conveying the city's reputation as a modern, cosmopolitan and tolerant city.⁵¹ The endless series of cultural events, spectacles, exhibitions and parties throughout 1987 also reflected the city's financial edge over East Berlin. In reference to the dizzying offerings and rare public celebration of German history, social theorist Jürgen Habermas characterised West Berlin's B-750 as 'a year-long cultural bubble bath . . . concocted of pop, punk and Prussia'.⁵²

⁴⁶ 'Kosten des Sommernachtstraums I', Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, 9th Wahlperiode, Drucksache 9/2196, 13; 'Kosten des Sommernachtstraums II', Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, 9th Wahlperiode, Drucksache 9/2453, 17.

⁴⁷ 'Feuertheater André Heller Nr. 1 & II', Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, 9th Wahlperiode, Drucksache 9/2051, 35–6; 'Organisatorische Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Feuertheaters André Heller, Abrechnung des Feuertheaters mit Heller vor dem Reichstag Sommer 1984, Rechtliche Folgeprobleme mit dem Feuertheater André Hellers', Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, 9th Wahlperiode, Drucksache 9/2447, 11.

⁴⁸ Michael Haerdter, 'Umfeld Bethanien: Ein Paradigma, Gedanken über Weite und Vielfalt eines künstlerischen Arbeitsfeldes,' in Walter Aue, ed., *Umfeld Bethanien* (Berlin: Publica, 1985), 9.

⁴⁹ Krijn Thijs, *Drei Geschichten, eine Stadt: die Berliner Stadtjubiläen von 1937 und 1987* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008).

⁵⁰ Thijs, *Drei Geschichten, eine Stadt*, 256–7.

⁵¹ Protokoll, Bundesangelegenheiten und Gesamtberliner Fragen, 21 Sitzung, 25 Nov. 1982, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 017, Nr. 75.

⁵² Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 196.

West Berlin's extensive B-750 arts and cultural programme included three official series featuring performance and action art or conceptual sculptures in public space. One of these series, the Sculpture Boulevard, featured seven abstract and conceptual sculptures installed along the high-density Kurfürstendamm shopping district. Two of the sculptures, from artists Olaf Metzel and Wolf Vostell, sparked an immediate public uproar and became a source of great embarrassment for Governing Mayor Eberhard Diepgen. Negative press for the two sculptures was concentrated in the conservative *Berliner Morgenpost*, which claimed the sculptures were ugly, dilettantish, a waste of taxpayer dollars and an undemocratic occupation of urban space by the cultural elite. But the sculptures also initiated a widespread public discussion on the tensions between the defence of artistic freedom inscribed in the West German Basic Law, democracy and state-funded art. The surprisingly polemical responses to Metzel and Vostell's sculptures offer a rich trove of sources for accessing the typically thorny issue of reception and exploring forms of local participation in the urban public sphere amid the controversy.

Metzel's sculpture, titled *13.4.1981*, was a towering eleven-metre pile of red and white police barricades with an overturned shopping cart projecting off one side. Installed at Joachimsthaler Platz along the Kurfürstendamm, the sculpture recalled a day of violent demonstrations in West Berlin referenced in the sculpture's title. On that day, rioters responded violently to reports that an imprisoned Red Army Faction member had died from a hunger strike, which were later proved false. Many accused the conservative Springer Press of intentionally spreading the phony report in order to incite left-radical violence on the eve of city elections. Those elections resulted in a victory for the centre-right CDU after decades of SPD control. On the evening of 13 April 1981 Metzel had encountered a wild pile of police barricades at Joachimsthaler Platz resulting from the day's tumult. His personal photograph of the barricades provided a blueprint for the sculpture he installed in the same location nearly six years later. Through the sculpture, Metzel rendered the pile of barricades as an aesthetic object, while using the display to examine the role of the press in framing (and distorting) reality during the episode.⁵³

Roughly three kilometres west of Metzel's sculpture, in the more residential Rathenauplatz, Wolf Vostell's sculpture, *Two Concrete Cadillacs in the Form of the Nude Maya (Concrete Cadillacs from now on)*, featured a massive Cadillac installed vertically and covered in an arched segment of concrete. A second Cadillac was installed beside the first car, positioned on a diagonal ramp with the front end pointed downward and framed in the middle by a concrete band. Though protesters argued the sculpture was out of place, like Metzel's *13.4.1981* the sculpture was in fact directly engaged with its site – a high-traffic boulevard near an exit ramp off a busy freeway. According to Vostell, *Concrete Cadillacs* brought to life a 'twenty-four-hour dance of the auto drivers around the golden calf'.⁵⁴ Amid the roar of cars and smell of exhaust, the location offered a full sensory experience of the automobile fetish.

Many West Berliners were unconvinced by the conceptual or site-specific motives of Metzel and Vostell and disturbed at the lack of public input in the planning for the Sculpture Boulevard series. Immediately after their installation, the sculptures were met with expressions of confusion, scepticism and public protest. The most vocal critics often concluded their tirades with demands that the sculptures be blown up, burnt down or hauled to the dump.⁵⁵ The artists and the series organisers from the New Berlin Art Association (*Neuer Berliner Kunstverein*; NBK) received death threats, while Culture Senator Dr Volker Hassemer was flooded with letters questioning his judgment and

⁵³ Walter Grasskamp, 'Der Bürgerkrieg als Dienstleistung', in Rudij Bergmann et al., eds., *Olaf Metzel: 13.4.1981* (Munich: Schreiber, 2005), 8.

⁵⁴ Barbara Straka/NBK, eds., *Skulpturenboulevard Kurfürstendamm Tauentzien: Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Berlin 1987. v. 1. Projekt und Künstlerdarstellung* (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1987), 220.

⁵⁵ Sabine Vogel, 'Kunst muss provozieren', *Die Tageszeitung*, 27 Mar. 1987, reprinted in Marius Babias, Sophie Golz and Kathrin Becker, eds., *n.b.k. Kunst und Öffentlichkeit: 40 Jahre Neue Berliner Kunstverein* (Cologne: Verlag der Walther König Buchhandlung, 2010), 229.

denouncing the undemocratic selection process.⁵⁶ Dozens of heated editorials appeared in the local press from late March through May. They likened Metzel's police barricades to a 'riot monument' and Vostell's Cadillacs to a 'junk heap', while presenting a laundry list of other issues: the sculptures were a waste of taxpayer dollars, lacked artistic value, were out of place in a residential and commercial district and encouraged political radicalism.

The hostile public response extended from the editorial pages of the local press into urban space. Two hundred protesters, many near or beyond retirement age, like sixty-four-year-old Gertrude Höhlich, gathered at Rathenauplatz on 28 March 1987, before the second Cadillac was even installed. The protesters held hand-made signs denouncing Vostell's sculpture and circulated a petition demanding its removal.⁵⁷ Informational display boards about the Sculpture Boulevard artists appearing near the sculptures also served as an impromptu message board for people to weigh in on the art.⁵⁸ Passers-by covered the boards with ballpoint pen and permanent marker, offering sarcastic critiques, denunciations, crude drawings and responses to other commenters. Others offered a defence of the works by writing phrases such as 'artistic freedom' and even 'Metzel for president'. But the vast majority of the comments were negative, taking aim at the high cost of the series and the quality of the work with quips such as 'please tear this down, and fast', 'maybe a bomb created this art work', and 'can someone tell us what that is?' Some respondents even adopted a hostile, neo-fascist tone, including one use of the word 'decadent' (*entartet*) – an obvious reference to modern art banned during the Nazi-era.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the dialogue playing out on the information board and in the press further demonstrates the additional modes of engagement within the urban public sphere sparked by the sculptures.

Other citizens expressed their distaste for the sculptures by installing or staging their own works of public art. Sculptures made from trash or found objects appeared alongside *Concrete Cadillacs*, suggesting an equivalent level of artistic talent or technical skill was involved. Another group covered the Cadillacs with flowers and a sign declaring 'flowers instead of concrete', playfully referencing the title of an earlier Vostell print.⁶⁰ In July 1987 the *Trabi-Pyramid* appeared near Vostell's *Concrete Cadillacs*, featuring an East German Trabant enclosed in a pyramid of concrete. Rather than another protest, the *Trabi-Pyramid* appeared to be an act of playful solidarity. A nearby sign called for 'unity and the right to artistic freedom!', signalling the creators' support for Vostell's sculpture, while referencing a line from the West German national anthem (unity and justice and freedom).⁶¹ The *Trabi-Pyramid's* support for *Concrete Cadillacs* followed a chorus of letters in the press that also defended the sculptures.⁶² Supporters responded to the complaints from the citizens' initiatives and populist protesters with counter-arguments in defence of public art, even when it was not popular, and the state's duty to support it within a democratic society. Yet the illiberal extremes taken by the opponents had left many West Berlin politicians and cultural leaders embarrassed and stunned at the brazen display of narrow-mindedness.⁶³

Division over the sculptures also ran through the Berlin senate. Governing Mayor Diepgen openly conveyed his dislike for the project on the popular West German television variety show *Wetten*,

⁵⁶ For a large collection of letters and press clippings on the Sculpture Boulevard debate see Babias, Golz and Becker, eds., *n.b.k. Kunst und Öffentlichkeit*.

⁵⁷ Bettina von Saß, 'Spießiger Geschmack darf kein Kunstmaß sein', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 29 Mar. 1987, 3.

⁵⁸ Babias, Golz and Becker, eds., *n.b.k. Kunst und Öffentlichkeit*, 224; Bergmann et al., eds., *Olaf Metzel: 13.4.1981*, 58–61.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Use of the term *entartet* in reference to Vostell and Metzel's sculptures also appeared in letters to the editor in the local press. See Ernst Alberts, 'Skulpturen provozieren die Berliner', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 12 Apr. 1987, 72. During protests against Metzel's sculpture, series organiser Barbara Straka from the NBK also reported an anonymous heckler calling for the artists to be hauled off to Auschwitz and receiving a letter from a West Berlin doctor exclaiming that Hitler's phrase 'degenerate art' was 'too mild of a judgment for the sculptures'.

⁶⁰ 'Blumenreiche Kritik an den "Beton Cadillacs"', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 17 May 1987, 6.

⁶¹ 'Trabi-Pyramide in der Nachbarschaft!?', *Bild-Zeitung*, 22 Jul. 1987, reprinted in Babias, Golz and Becker, eds., *n.b.k. Kunst und Öffentlichkeit*, 245.

⁶² Martina and Peter Lüttjohann, 'Demokratisches Forum', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 12 Apr. 1987, II.

⁶³ Berliner Abgeordnetenhaus, Kulturausschuss, Wahlperiode 10/29, 5 Nov. 1987, 5.

das...⁶⁴ In a subsequent public statement, he clarified that the Sculpture Boulevard's biggest problem was its location, declaring 'the Kurfürstendamm is not an appropriate space for an artistic experiment that is actually an artistic provocation'.⁶⁵ Abandoned by his mayor, Culture Senator Hassemer defended the project he had once optimistically referred to as a birthday present for Berlin. He also expressed disappointment at the city's failure to showcase its reputation for tolerance and cosmopolitanism during B-750.⁶⁶ But Hassemer was also not completely surprised by the provocation as such was the role of art in public.⁶⁷ The dramatic response confirmed what local 'free scene' artists already knew very well: the ability of art to provoke a variety of forms of public exchange and collective action in urban space.

In July 1987 THE DIRECTIVE returned to West Berlin, this time presenting a month of events across the city from over one hundred 'free scene' artists. Like 1984's *Midsummer Night's Dream on steroids*, THE DIRECTIVE received 250,000 Deutschmarks from the B-750 budget to host a month-long series of events showcasing the city's 'free scene'. An unbelievable sum for independent artists, THE DIRECTIVE's organisers were ready to think big. Like the 1984 iteration, they deployed marketing techniques to hype the event in advance. Mysterious notices appeared in the arts and cultural magazine *Zitty* in spring 1987 that paired bizarre images with the cryptic warning: 'THE DIRECTIVE is coming'. A satirical brochure for the series referencing a Jehovah's Witnesses pamphlet declared, 'If your God is dead, the Directive lives!'. The brochure's text adopted a sensationalist tone typical to the genre, asking readers 'did you change your 1986 travel plans because of a fear of art?' and 'were you ever secretly in love with an artist?'⁶⁸ Masked by the brochure's absurdity was the motivation behind the series, which could be found in the fine print. The authors rejected the role of art as a 'room ornament' or 'source for personal aggrandizement' and instead elevated the role of art as something more transitory and amorphous. A 'review question' appearing toward the end of the brochure asked: 'Is real art ephemeral?' Through their performances, actions and temporary installations, artists involved with THE DIRECTIVE answered this question in the affirmative.

The July 1987 series featured a new round of painting actions, poster art and performances on the billboards along the Yorck Strasse underpass and a fleet of artist-designed double-decker busses. Other artists affiliated with THE DIRECTIVE staged actions and performances that spontaneously inserted uncanny moments within highly quotidian scenes. For his action on the U1 subway line, local sound and performance artist Benoît Maubrey persuaded the West Berlin transit authority (*Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe Gesellschaft*; BVG) to loan out official uniforms for a 'theatre performance'. Instead, Maubrey sewed speakers into the uniforms and staged the inaugural appearance of the *Audio-BVG*. During the action, Maubrey and other members of his *Audio-Gruppe* roamed the subway stations and train cars in their wired BVG uniforms. The hidden speakers played back pre-recorded phrases familiar to any rider of the Berlin subway: 'please board', and 'stay back, please'. At the Wittenbergplatz station, real BVG employees caught on to the performance and asked Maubrey to leave. The group moved above ground but continued the performance on Wittenbergplatz.⁶⁹ Through the subtle action, the *Audio-Gruppe* integrated art into the non-art space of the subway, while exploring forms of interacting with people in city space that focused on creating shared encounters with the extraordinary. Feminist philosopher Tina Chanter has examined the importance of such moments, noting how 'perceptions acquire a rigidity that comes to light only when they break into

⁶⁴ Press clippings on Sculpture Boulevard, Dieter Stäcker, 'Krach um Berlins Kulturmeile geht weiter', *Neue Presse*, 4 Apr. 1987, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 150 Nr. 452.

⁶⁵ 'Regierende Bürgermeister Diepgen erklärte zur Eröffnung der ersten Lokomotivhalle und Borsig-Jubiläumsausstellung des Museum für Verkehr und Technik', Berliner Abgeordnetenhaus, Landespressedienst 16 Apr. 1987, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 150, Nr. 132.

⁶⁶ Volker Hassemer to Bund der Steuerzahler Berlin e.V., 26 Mar. 1987, in Bergmann, et.al., eds., *Olaf Metzger: 13.4.1981*, 67.

⁶⁷ Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus, Kulturausschuss, Wahlperiode 10/29, 5 Nov. 1987, 4.

⁶⁸ DIE ANWEISUNG, promotional brochure, Gero Gries Archive.

⁶⁹ Benoît Maubrey in discussion with the author, 26 June 2014.

pieces, only when they shatter'.⁷⁰ Maubrey's intervention provided such an impetus to provoke this shattering or breaking of traditional perception, particularly among those B-750 visitors unacquainted with this form of public art.

West Berlin native Christian Hasucha explored a similar disruption of perception in his performance piece *Mister Individual, Walking*. Four hours a day for three weeks, Mister Individual, played by actor Rainer Homann, carried a shopping bag and walked along a conveyor belt installed at the top of a nearly two-and-a-half-metre tall pedestal. The pedestal was installed within the median of the busy Yorck Strasse, not far from the artist-designed billboard panels along the Yorck Strasse underpass. For viewers who were unfamiliar with street art of this nature, the action was a source of irritation and confusion. As Hasucha recalls, 'in no way was it a part of the familiar everyday occurrences of the people that passed by there'.⁷¹ Throughout the day, Mister Individual received a series of taunts: 'are you a robot or what? Are you thirsty? Aren't you tired? Do you know the film *The Living Dead*? Are you also a zombie? You bum! You idiot! How much are you getting paid for that?'⁷² Hasucha's *Mister Individual, Walking* placed the everyday act of walking through the city on a pedestal, with Mister Individual – the everyman – taking the place of the bronze sculpture or monument. Like Maubrey's *Audio-BVG*, Hasucha's surreal mimicry of reality inserted a surprising disruption of reality. And while this was aggravating for many, this was also precisely the point.

But the performances, actions and visual displays affiliated with THE DIRECTIVE also supported the city's efforts to market West Berlin's urbanity to visitors during B-750. As geographer Doreen Jakob describes, within this process 'urban space itself is represented as a spectacle and transformed into an aestheticised site for consumption'.⁷³ B-750 visitors consumed West Berlin as they moved from museum exhibition to department store to subway. On the streets, they encountered experimental artists and even became a part of the performance. But the range of visual displays and actions appearing during B-750, from Metzel's *13.4.1981* to Hasucha's *Mr. Individual, Walking*, also presented viewers with alternative possibilities for engaging with urban space beyond consumption. Moreover, the amateur art appearing near Vostell's *Concrete Cadillacs* demonstrates how the exposure to public art also inspired viewers to respond with artistic productions of their own.

III

As the B-750 events wound down, West Berlin geared up for another year of festival-level cultural programming as the city became the 1988 European Capital of Culture. Local art critics, however, began 1988 in a pessimistic mood, weary from the previous year's packed calendar and highly publicised battles over public art and arts funding. As Hartmut Häussermann and Walter Siebel have observed, 'after the big festival comes the unavoidable hangover'.⁷⁴ The parochial attitudes toward art voiced during the B-750 convinced many local critics and commercial gallerists that West Berlin was doomed to retain its provincial reputation. They pointed to the city's lousy art market, the absence of collectors, the small arts press and the city's isolation from the international art world.⁷⁵ Rather than seeking to recover its glorious past as a cultural capital, art critic Thomas Wulffen concluded West Berlin's cultural politicians were beholden to the 'almightiness of the spectacle'.⁷⁶ As Wulffen declared, 'What counts is really the masses. . . the financing strategies no longer play a decisive role. What is

⁷⁰ Tina Chanter, *Art, Politics and Rancière: Broken Perceptions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), vi.

⁷¹ Christian Hasucha in discussion with the author, 24 Nov. 2014.

⁷² Christian Hasucha, 'Herr Individual geht, Gedächtnisprotokoll', in Giro Gries and Christian Kuhn, eds., *Katalog von DIE ANWEISUNG* (Berlin: Movimento, 1987), 110.

⁷³ Doreen Jakob, 'The Eventification of Place: Urban Development and Experience Consumption in Berlin and New York City', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 20 (2013), 449.

⁷⁴ Häussermann and Siebel, 'Die Politik der Festivalisierung', 22.

⁷⁵ Thomas Wulffen, 'Jubiläum der Fragen: Die Kunst Berlins im Meinungsbild', *Zitty*, 1 (1988), 43–7.

⁷⁶ Thomas Wulffen, 'Die Allmacht der Spektakel: Kulturpolitik', *Zitty*, 17 (1988), 13.

meaningful is the growing number of overnight stays. So it hardly matters what is being presented in the end – what matters is spectacle!⁷⁷ And what lurked behind the spectacle? Consumption.

But there was more to it than Wulffen cared to admit. The senate had also invited the city's experimental artists to integrate visual displays, actions and performances into prominent public spaces. Funding channelled to the 'free scene' supported projects that transcended concerns of entertainment and consumption and sought instead to transform the meanings and uses of urban space. As a result, the work of experimental artists contributed to forms of political and social change at the local level that overrode the senate's potentially de-politicising focus on consumptive pleasures. These visual displays and actions playfully disrupted the coherence of everyday life, creating moments of visual chaos, fantasy and absurdity and modelling alternative forms of collective interaction in urban space. Other works incited public dialogue and amateur artistic responses, inviting citizens to stake their own autonomous claims to the city. More broadly, these artists helped to extend the alternative milieu's decentralised approach to politics and citizen participation to residents and visitors across West Berlin. Through these practices, artists insisted that art and urban space be truly accessible to all.

An open letter signed by leaders of local arts organisations appearing in *Der Tagesspiegel* during the Sculpture Boulevard protests in spring 1987 echoes this understanding. The signers expressed support for artists Metzel and Vostell and for Culture Senator Hassemer, who had helped organise the Sculpture Boulevard. Their letter credited the sculptures with transforming city space into a 'site of democratic discussion', though this process was already long underway.⁷⁸ Moreover, the statement stressed the fact that such art was not simply a *result* of democracy. Instead, art's task was to *produce more* democracy. This was precisely the aim of many of West Berlin's experimental artists throughout the decade. Across the island city, these artists helped to relocate politics from city hall and art from museums and galleries and moved both back to the streets.

In the final years of division West Berlin's Cold War identity as metonym for liberal democracy took on new meaning as a spirit of participatory democracy spilled out of the more dominantly counter-cultural districts and across the city. In the 1980s residents began to recognise the untapped potential for political engagement within the city's scarred urban landscape in forms more expansive and imaginative than merely gathering to hear a political speech. And when former East and West Berliners gathered on city streets in the unified city in the 1990s, both sides drew upon home-grown models for democratic action that elevated the performative power of bodies in the urban public sphere. As more confrontational modes of citizen engagement appeared in response to the heightened contestation over urban space in the unified city, the tactics for intervention tested by experimental artists in the 1980s proved particularly effective.

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⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Neue Berliner Kunstverein, 'Senator Dr. Volker Hassemer hat die Unterstützung der Berliner Künstler und Kulturinstitution', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 16 May 1987, 22.