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Gentrification, social action and "role-playing": Experiences garnered on the outskirts of Hamburg

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This article reflects experiences of a working group against gentrification in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg, which is a district in the midst of the harbour inhabited by poor, migrant and working class people. Since the early 2000s, in the verge of the transnational tendencies of „revitalisation" of waterfronts, Wilhelmsburg was specifically targeted by local politicians to better its public image and attract investors and new middleclass inhabitants. Vehicle of these transformations were two big exhibitions, taking part in the district in 2013, but announced almost ten years earlier, followed by encompassing and partly successful measures to valorise real estate and privatise public space: e.g. the International Building Exhibition (IBA) and the International Gardening Exhibition (igs). The Working Group on the Restructuring of Wilhelmsburg (Arbeitskreis Umstrukturierung Wilhelmsburg) was founded when the results of the valorisation began to gain momentum: massive rent increases, reduction and „enclosure" of public space, and intensified social segregation. In order to oppose those tendencies and as part of the Hamburg-wide „Right to the City"-network, the group experimented with a wide range of actions: participation in protests against rising rents, street theatre and performances, initiatives against the instrumentalisation of artists and district culture by IBA and igs, as well the evaluation of the process by means of critical sociological research. Beyond the multiplicity of these variety of action forms the group was searching for alternatives against the intense process of gentrification in the community. The article shows that, although the protest movement gained a lot of public attention, this question is still unanswered.

Key words: gentrification, social action, urban social movements, poor peoples movements, right to the city

1. Introduction

For action research, "democratic dialogue between scholars and practitioners" is the "productive heartpiece": thus an emphatic formulation by Werner Fricke (2013, p. 214). In action research, "[n]ew knowledge [results] not from the activity and position of the neutral observer/analyst, who limits himself, as a scholar, to description, analysis and explanation, without interfering in social developments" (ibid., p. 217). Action research is rather about the participation of "practical actors in theoretical reflection, and of scientists in practical discourses" (ibid., p. 220).

The non-hierarchical production of knowledge and the open character of such production are also at the centre of this article, which reports on experiences the Wilhelmsburg Work Group on Urban Restructuring (*Arbeitskreis Umstrukturierung Wilhelmsburg*, AKU) garnered in the Hamburg neighbourhood of the same name. The article discusses experiences made in a neighbourhood where the deliberate valorisation of real estate and public space has engendered new social imbalances and conflicts. Yet while we, the authors, also engage with issues of urban policy and gentrification as academics, we will here discuss approaches that differ from "hard core action research" (Eikeland, 2007, p. 53) in that they were concerned not so much with collective reflection as with intervention in ongoing conflicts. What we do share with action research is our rejection of a certain ideological trope, that of the neutral scholar: we agree that establishing "spaces of reflection" (Fricke) presupposes that the positions of all participants are transparent and open to change. What this means for the case described below is that we set great store in providing an account of such changes. In order to highlight the fact that our prior experiences with urban social movements opposing gentrification made us deliberately break with certain established roles, we will also speak, in what follows, of role-playing. Our approach led to an open search process that gave rise to a considerable range of highly diverse forms of action.

Active between 2006 and 2014, the Work Group on Urban Restructuring (AKU) was a group that operated within the context of Hamburg's "Right to the City" networks and opposed the Hamburg senate's city marketing activities. The Work Group constituted itself because two extremely poor Hamburg

neighbourhoods, Wilhelmsburg and Veddel, lacked a voice by which to protest against the displacement of less well-off residents that was occurring within the context of gentrification processes (see section 2). Thus conflicts over rent and housing construction were a key field of action (section 3), as was the critique of local city marketing activities (section 4).

In no way did the Work Group develop a representation-based understanding of politics: and it placed itself in opposition to the political approaches by which other local citizens' initiatives had established themselves, by the mid-2000s, as the "voice of the neighbourhood." This was also due to the fact that the practice of "procuring acceptance" through the simulated participation of local residents: an ultimately anti-democratic practice geared primarily to the interests of real estate valorisation, has become a key component of contemporary city marketing. The critique and rejection of such forms of representation was at the centre of the AKU's politics. Of course, such a critique did not automatically entail that "speaking for others" could be avoided in all of the AKU's activities.[1]

The following three sections attempt to retrospectively situate the AKU within the urban policy conflicts that have played out in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg since about 2007. The group consisted mainly of persons with an academic background, and some of its activists, including the authors of

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[1]   On the contrary, we are here concerned, among other things, with the question of how the impetus of "non-representation" operated within everyday conflicts over the gentrification of the neighbourhood (or failed to operate). The AKU's interventions into local city politics met with a situation that was determined by a strong and intensifying asymmetry in the distribution of incomes and other resources. Reflection on the social composition of the "Right to the City" networks, which the AKU was always part of, is currently an important issue within transnational urban research (cf. Mayer 2013a, 2013b). Co-operation between, on the one hand, actors who dispose of comparatively large amounts of social capital, and for whom it is relatively easy to make their agenda heard in the local public sphere, and, on the other hand, those who tend not to be heard there, is an issue whose relevance to the experiences described below can hardly be overestimated. One reason, and not the least important, for the relevance of this issue is that "non-representativity" and/or "anti-politics" is a key aspect of the crisis protests that have occurred in various European and non-European countries (cf. Birke & Henninger, 2012).

this article, have researched or are researching issues related to urban policy.[2] It should be noted that throughout the Work Group's history, there was a "primacy of practice." Scholarly activity was also understood as a form of practice, one that is tied into activist methods in a specific manner; and this is precisely the relationship that the present article addresses.[3] Differently from the scenario outlined in the above-cited text by Werner Fricke, the case described here lacked clearly identifiable speaking positions: the AKU spoke polyphonically; its activists were also tenants, workers, students, scholars; they acted both as "parties concerned" and as "commentators." But then, a fixed or even "professional" understanding of one's role was hardly appropriate to the field within which this circle of people operated. For what is at stake in the social space of large cities (following Lefebvre) is precisely "compressed difference," or (following situationism) the *dérive* qua act of breaking out of roles and behavioural patterns that may, in other social contexts ("workplace," "school," "military barracks"), appear ossified.

We here describe these rather diverse and sometimes contrary positions as a "role-playing game," on the premise that reflection on the production and circulation of different forms of knowledge is needed, and in fact especially needed, in the context described.

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[2]   This text is not a systematic summary of the AKU's activities, i.e. it is not a "group biography." The collective publication AKU 2013 comes closer to meeting that description. What is presented here is a selection, undertaken by the authors, one that has moreover been construed and developed into a narrative post facto. The narrative recounts events that were determined by numerous coincidences, and the text may make those events seem more coherent than they were. On all interventions described, see also the group's archive at [akuwilhelmsburg.blogsport.eu].

[3]   This also means that the AKU disposed of the material resources associated with the academic field only to a very limited extent; insofar as the three authors of this text earned their livelihood there, but also brought the resources of urban research into the AKU. What emerges from this is the fundamentally precarious basis of activism, which concerned or concerns not only virtually everyone within the AKU, but also most people within Hamburg's landscape of political initiatives.

2. Wilhelmsburg and the International Building Exhibition

Wilhelmsburg and Veddel are neighbourhoods within the city district of Hamburg-Mitte.[4] In total, about 55,000 people live there; the figure has been rising in recent years. In historical and geographical terms, the neighbourhoods are a diked assortment of numerous islands, traversed by canals and situated at the River Elbe's bifurcation point. The neighbourhoods lie between Hamburg's inner city (to the north) and Hamburg-Harburg (to the south), bordering directly on waterfronts and industrial districts. Highways and train tracks cut across the area, a third of which is put to agricultural use in spite of its overall urbanity. The different parts of the two neighbourhoods are dispersed over a large territory, and they are socially very diverse. Residential areas such as Alt-Kirchdorf, with (mostly small) owner-occupied houses, are directly adjacent to satellite towns from the 1960s and 1970s (Kirchdorf-Süd); the socio-structural data on many areas is indicative of poverty and migration (Reiherstiegviertel, Korallusviertel, Kirchdorf-Süd). The arrival of persons with medium incomes and German passports is mainly evident in Reiherstiegviertel, a neighbourhood that corresponds to the associated clichés in terms of its buildings, which mainly date from the turn of the century before last.

"Enterprise Hamburg"

The "upward revaluation" of, and this is important, *parts* of the neighbourhoods located on the Elbe islands goes back to changes in urban policy, within which "the city" is no longer primarily understood as a community, but as an enterprise in the broad sense: an enterprise that needs to prove itself within the global competition between other cities of comparable size and with a comparable economic structure. In Hamburg, the economisation of

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4   In what follows, we speak of "Wilhelmsburg" (and not of the "Elbe islands" in their entirety), because, as will be seen below, both the activities of the Work Group on Urban Restructuring and the measures adopted within the context of the "Leap across the Elbe" were primarily aimed at areas within this neighbourhood.

urban functions, that is, both of their administration and of the firms associated with them, already became the hegemonic model within urban policy during the 1980s, i.e. after the second major recession following the postwar boom (von Dohnanyi, 1983; compare Dangschat, 1993; Bauriedl, 2007). This model has since been pursued by the city state's changing governing coalitions. In the first decade of the 21st century, a conservative, right-wing senate increasingly banked on a growth-oriented metropolitan policy, with an eye to improving Hamburg's position within inter-urban competition (Leitbild „Wachsende Stadt", Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg [henceforth: FHH] 2002, 2003). The yardstick of success was provided by city rankings, whose popularity is undiminished to this day. The key goal was to optimise local conditions so as to attract firms and their (potential) employees. In the broader German context, responsibility for the reproduction of one's labour-power was individualised through the introduction of an "activating" labour-market and social policy; within urban social policy, emphasis was increasingly placed on the valorisation of knowledge on the labour markets: accordingly, urban policy focused on Hamburg's attractiveness for the "new middle classes." In the course of a latent budget crisis, the welfare system was subjected to a series of spending cuts. The amendments to the developmental model made under the relatively short-lived Green-conservative coalition: amendments inspired by the theories of Richard Florida and introduced under the heading of the "creative city", supplemented these measures, while housing construction, and in particular subsidised housing construction, virtually came to a halt (for a critique, see Schubert, 2008; Volkmann, 2006). Accordingly, the critique of the instrumentalisation of creative work and "location marketing," as well as of the city's housing construction policy, was at the focus of the "Right to the City" movement that emerged from 2009 onward (cf. Twickel, 2010; Birke, 2010; Füllner & Templin, 2011; for the international debate on the "Right to the City" see, inter alia, Marcuse, 2009; Mayer, 2013).

The "leap across the Elbe"

One aspect of the developmental model "Growing City" was the "Leap across the Elbe," by which the "spatial potentials" of Wilhelmsburg, Veddel and Harburg were to be opened up for new strata of the population. To this end, the Hamburg senate established two urban development associations, charged with implementing the process of upward revaluation by means of exhibitions and festivals. One was the *Internationale Bauausstellung Hamburg GmbH* (IBA), which was responsible for organising Hamburg's International Building Exhibition between 2006 and 2013. "International building exhibitions" are a label that is by no means "international." They are, rather, an instrument developed in Germany that has recently enjoyed inflationary popularity, and that is intended to identify exemplary solutions to contemporary problems of urban development and architecture. The second urban development association is *internationale gartenschau Hamburg 2013 GmbH* (igs), charged, during the same period, with creating a new "people's park" on the territory of an existing park and its associated green spaces at the centre of the Elbe islands. Both associations were either fully or preponderantly owned by the municipality, but they behaved like private firms; equipped with their own budgets, they were able to act relatively independently of parliamentary-political decision-making processes.

The model for this construct was provided by the association HafenCity Gmbh, responsible for the development of a large-scale construction project in the immediate vicinity of the inner city, a project that has been taking shape, since the 1990s, on the opposite bank of the Norderelbe (cf. Bauriedl, 2007). As a construction project, HafenCity is very much a paradigmatic example of the historic turn Hamburg's urban policy has taken, and which has been outlined above. HafenCity is illustrative of the post-industrial discovery of new uses to which "waterfronts" can be put, a trend also evident in many other metropolises (from Toronto to Lisbon): a mixed-use housing settlement consisting almost entirely of upscale residential construction, equally expensive office spaces and a share of "beacons" of knowledge and consumer society (such as the Elbe Philharmonic Concert Hall or the HafenCity Uni-

versity) that have been publicly financed almost to the point of financial collapse. Located on the inner-city bank of the Norderelbe, HafenCity, construction of which is now about half complete, represents the first step towards the valorisation of that part of the waterfront area that is largely inaccessible to modern deepwater vessels, thus offering an enormous area potential to the "growing city" and its social projection surfaces.

City marketing in the "Trouble Spot"

HafenCity GmbH and IBA GmbH also resemble one another in terms of their function within urban development policy. Both associations are primarily responsible for infrastructural, planning and publicity measures. In both cases, the goal is to sell municipal real estate to private investors.[5]. One focal point of IBA in particular consisted in the development of "new," "experimental" and "high-standard" residential buildings with a corresponding residential environment, presentable recreational facilities and model educational institutions. Unlike HafenCity, which is taking shape in a waterfront area shaped by industry, energy production and logistics, the special challenge faced by IBA and igs concerned their relationship to existing residential neighbourhoods. Comparison of the two projects has shown that within the IBA process, neighbourhood marketing played an especially important role, one providing the local initiatives active between 2006 and 2013 with a central (positive or negative) reference point (cf. Gatermann & Habermann, 2013). Aside from the interests of local actors (outlined in the next section), the circumstances under which neighbouring marketing was engaged in also differed from those associated with the former eastern waterfront area. For during the late 1990s and the early years of the 21st century, Wilhelmsburg was presented by the media as a "dangerous neighbourhood." Dubbed the "Bronx of the north," it even became a household name across Germany. The neighbourhoods on the Elbe islands were presented as a space deserted by the

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[5]   In spite of all similarities, there was also one difference: HafenCity GmbH had to make a profit from its sale of real estate, whereas the areas privatised by IBA were in some cases sold far below their value, so as not to endanger the overall success of the restructuring programme (cf. Bürgerschaft der FHH 2014).

majority of society and by politicians, and characterised by a high concentration of "problem groups," particularly "unemployed persons" and "foreigners." The neighbourhood was described as an area shaped by hopelessness, crime and violence, caught in a "downward spiral." It was claimed that whoever could afford it fled the Elbe islands, leaving only "socially unstable families" and "overburdened neighbourhoods": a self-perpetuating process associated with "negative neighbourhood effects" and social disintegration.[6] Normalising a neighbourhood thus described by altering its image initially seemed an ambitious undertaking. But this was also the point at which IBA and igs were able to latch onto demands articulated by parts of local civil society. Around the year 2000, the social situation was also being criticised as untenable by the residents themselves. In the very areas that have now become focal points of gentrification, such as Reiherstiegviertel, housing stock had for decades, in fact ever since the 1962 storm tide, been neglected by housing associations and private landlords. Since the late 1970s, many areas of the neighbourhood have been characterised by a multinational working class that was and continues to be employed in the industrial and logistical enterprises associated with the port. The extensive job loss that occurred in these sectors during the 1973 and 1981 recessions aggravated the social situation. (Fiercely contested) shipyard closures and the lack of investment in public and social infrastructure that was associated with the state's austerity policies continue to adversely affect living conditions in the neighbourhood to this day. During the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century, the fragmentation of workplace structures and the precarisation of large numbers of employees further aggravated the polarisation of incomes. Wilhelmsburg was and continues to be one of Hamburg's poorest neighbourhoods.

Nevertheless, after a time, IBA was relatively successful in replacing the discourse of Wilhelmsburg as an urban trouble spot with other, more favour-

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[6]   A characteristic impression of the media reports is provided by the article "*Er machte alle kalt*" ("He Wasted Everyone") that appeared in the weekly *Spiegel* in 2000 (Brinkbäumer 2000). The report on the young boy Volkan, who was lethally injured by an attack dog, impressively strings together the stereotypes on Wilhelmsburg's "downward spiral." On the nationwide discourse on "trouble spots" during the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, see Lanz 2000, pp. 40 et sequitur.

able representations of the neighbourhood. To be sure, this was achieved at the cost of a de-thematisation of social conflicts, and/or of their culturalist rearticulation. On the one hand, there was the grumpy, likeable, motley island, the composition of whose population may not have been particularly hip, but refashioned as a "cosmopolis," the reality of migration society could nevertheless be profitably put to use.[7] On the other hand, one encountered, throughout IBA's numerous publications, a quasi-colonial gaze that treated the "Elbe island" as a "blank spot" on the map of Hamburg, one it was now a matter of "discovering." While the neighbourhoods of the western inner city, which had found themselves in a comparable situation during the early 1970s,[8] now faced the transition to hyper-gentrification, turn-of-the-century Wilhelmsburg seemed like an island divorced from its age. This suddenly made it extremely attractive to art and cultural professionals, urbanists, a more subculturally-oriented student milieu and an ecologically-oriented middle class; the post-2008 Green-conservative city government's reception of hypotheses associated with the concept of the "creative class" reinforced and structured their interest in Wilhelmsburg.[9] At the same time, rent was still considerably lower, up until the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, than in residential areas closer to the inner city. Thus the neighbourhood continued to provide (community) infrastructure for persons struggling with discrimination on the inner-city labour market, as well as niches characterised by reduced regulatory control. It was mainly the northwestern areas of the neighbourhood, characterised by *Gründerzeit* buildings and the housing construction of the 1920s and 1930s, that gradually attracted a new clientele – a process massively and deliberately promoted by the city senate, which had

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[7] On IBA's strategy of reinterpreting the "trouble spot" as a space full of potential, and on the effects of this strategy on urban development policy and housing conditions, see also Hohenstatt/Rinn 2013a. On the results, see also Birke 2013b.

[8] On the plans for large-scale renovation and area rehabilitation formulated during 1960s and 1970s (see Grüttner, 1976).

[9] The effects of Richard Florida's hypotheses on Hamburg's urban policy can be seen clearly from an expert opinion in which the planners examine the distribution of "creative milieus" in the city; urban development policy was increasingly displacing such milieus to areas labeled peripheral (cf. FHH, 2010).

already launched a programme of subsidised student accommodation in one of these areas, the Reiherstiegviertel, in 2004.

Actors within local urban policy

Thus one could observe, here as elsewhere, what has been discussed, in the international scholarly debate, as the "fourth wave of gentrification" (Lees, Slater, & Wyly), become a state strategy: phases otherwise neatly distinguished within urban research now coincide, and the social figures determining these phases, such as "pioneers" and gentrifiers," now enter the stage simultaneously. Thus, from the beginning of the "Leap across the Elbe," the neighbourhood saw creative entrepreneurs meeting cooperative housing projects and radical-left outlets. The aspirations to social research many IBA projects laid claim to virtually turned this acceleration effect into an urban-policy concept (IBA called it a "temporary state of exception"). "Participation" was one of the marketing buzzwords reiterated mantra-like by IBA's planners, but one that could hardly conceal the fact that since the beginning of the policy of festivals and the associated image production, rent had begun to rise across the neighbourhood; the number of residents increased, reducing the amount of available accommodation and initiating a process of displacement from the more popular parts of the housing stock to those considered less attractive (cf. Hohenstatt & Rinn, 2013b).

Local political initiatives responded in different and sometimes contrary ways to the conflicts that developed from this. During the 1990s, a number of citizens' initiatives had emerged in Wilhelmsburg, as elsewhere; they focused mainly on ecological issues (protesting against the construction of a waste incineration plant or the growing strains associated with traffic and logistical activities around the port). To this were added protests against the planned construction of a new highway; initially intended to pass by the northern edge of Reiherstiegviertel, it was eventually decided to build the highway in the south of Wilhelmsburg. Because these developments starkly contrasted with any sort of "upward revaluation," there was the hope, within parts of the citizens' initiatives, that IBA might have positive effects.

The same was true for the field of social and educational policy, where IBA's planners picked up on certain demands raised by the citizens' initiatives: e.g. for better educational infrastructure – and addressed the critique of Wilhelmsburg's "poor image" by reference to a "whitebook" on the "future of the Elbe islands" that had been issued by the initiatives and the city administration at the height of the trouble-spot discourse in 2002 (Zukunftskonferenz 2002). This was the context within which the Work Group on Urban Restructuring was founded; its aim was to confront IBA's mediatic dominance, then scarcely contested at the local level, with critical positions. In the course of its existence, the Work Group saw ten to twenty people aged between 20 and 60 cooperating; most had only moved to Wilhelmsburg during the first five years of the 21st century (for a more in-depth account, see AKU, 2013, pp. 7ff.).

The Work Group's activities against rising rent and environmental destruction involved co-operation with highly diverse groups from the neighbourhood. In the case of the rent issue, for example, these groups included a local church congregation, the association "Tenants Help Tenants" and a social counselling centre, all of which had jointly formed the "Housing Work Group," which still exists today. With regard to IBA, the AKU co-operated with local artists and groups associated with the autonomous left. After 2009, the oppositional city-political networks of the "Right to the City" groups became a decisive and city-wide point of reference; these groups focused on a fundamental critique of entrepreneurial urban policy, the lack of accommodation and the instrumentalisation of artistic and creative work for the purposes of city marketing. All three of these aspects could easily be related to the situation in Wilhelmsburg. At the same time, it became possible to articulate, within the "Right to the City" network, the social situation in a changing neighbourhood that had hitherto largely been ignored, including by Hamburg's left.

3. Conflicts over rent and housing

As mentioned, the AKU was not a research group. This means there was a relatively high degree of flexibility with regard to the social locations and

themes addressed; at the same time, the group was chronically disadvantaged with regard to resource availability. This also concerned the conflicts on local accommodation policy that we were involved in. These conflicts imposed themselves on us, so to speak: and we assumed altogether diverse roles within them: we were persons immediately affected, advisors, tenants, political activists and sometimes, particularly in the public's perception of us "experts." In retrospect, a typical feature of these conflicts can be seen to have consisted in the fact that they were not situated at the nodal points of the gentrification processes: the southern Reiherstiegviertel, where, with the exception of sporadic conflicts over rent hikes and a certain (weak and highly individualised) advisory function, we never moved beyond a more or less symbolic "campaign politics": more on this in section 4.

The conflict at Weimarer Straße

A conflict involving a local tenants' initiative occurred in southern Reiherstiegviertel, an area characterised by the large-scale housing construction of the 1930s and 1940s. There, the renovation of about 800 small apartments, characterised by poor housing conditions and very low rent, had been on the agenda since 2005. What the municipally owned housing association SAGA GWG, the owner of the apartments and a project partner of IBA, eventually called the "World District" was an area characterised by poverty and an extraordinarily high share of persons receiving unemployment benefits. At the same time, the neighbourhood displayed a relatively high degree of informal self-organisation, evident in, for example, the "wild" gardens in front of the houses: gardens not cultivated on rented property but nevertheless tolerated by the owner. The reordering and restructuring of the area around Weimarer Straße began when SAGA GWG renovated a first housing block. In doing so, it disregarded a number of regulations stipulated in German tenancy law. Contrary to common notions about their fundamentally deficient capacity to act, and in spite of a brief phase of paralysis and indignation, the persons affected were quite capable of informing themselves on their legal options. They began to defend themselves against the measures adopted by SAGA. Talk of first successes, in the form of concessions on the part of the

landlord, quickly made the rounds. The tenants' initiative focused mainly on informing people on the rights accorded them by tenancy law; this information was circulated by means of a series of collective counselling appointments with lawyers of the association "Tenants Help Tenants."

The second step taken by SAGA GWG was that of fundamentally restructuring the area: in co-operation with IBA, the stock of smaller apartments was reduced and fewer apartments with more living space were created. Since this was associated, for a large number of tenants, with massive rent hikes following their return to the refurbished apartment (from about four to about 5,60 euros per square metre), major discontent resulted, SAGA GWG's elaborate promotion activities notwithstanding. By refusing to formally agree to the restructuring measures, whose implementation was legally premised on such agreement, they succeeded in slowing down the construction process and obtaining for themselves comparatively favourable conditions, such as compensation payments, financial coverage of their move to another apartment and substitute apartments in relatively proximate locations. Nevertheless, SAGA GWG succeeded in slowly but surely clearing the apartments. Today, a little more than five years later, construction is still ongoing, but SAGA GWG can already state that only about 40 percent of the former tenants have returned to their now refurbished apartments.

To begin with, our role within the conflict over Weimarer Straße was mainly characterised by the fact that about half the persons active in the AKU lived in a residential project that had established itself, in early 2005, in a house located in this area. Acting very much in an intuitive manner, we contacted "Tenants Help Tents," contributed to the organisation of tenants' assemblies, later provided a counselling service of our own and also took care of press contacts. An important experience we made on this occasion is related to the twofold outcome: the protests met with little public response. They were difficult to articulate, including by comparison to the conflict over the gentrification of Reiherstiegviertel, because the area's social composition and the condition of the apartments were considered an "extreme case," such that the ongoing process of "upward revaluation" tended to actually be welcomed by local initiatives. When the construction measures began and tenants started to move out, the assemblies and protests came to a halt. Never-

theless, the tenants affected succeeded, de facto, in "discretely" imposing their numerous demands, without much propaganda. At the same time, the conflict is in a sense not over: in coming years, SAGA GWG plans to implement similar restructuring processes for thousands of comparable apartments in the surrounding areas.

The conflict around the subway station and in Korallusviertel

The conflicts we were involved in around the subway station and in the Korallusviertel neighbourhood, from about the middle or end of 2010 onward, stemmed from an altogether different situation: the tenants of these two areas, located immediately next to the Wilhelmsburg subway and the premises of the International Building Exhibition, were not protesting against imminent renovation measures threatening them with displacement. Instead, their protests addressed intolerable housing conditions such as mould and vermin in the apartments, crumbling façades, broken, even free-falling elevators and balconies in danger of collapse. None of this prevented the relatively new owner, who had acquired the buildings from a railworkers' co-operative in 2005, from raising the rent and demanding service charges that tested the bounds of the legally permissible. The roughly 1,400 apartments were owned by the Luxembourgian corporation GAGFAH, whose main shareholder at the time was the internationally notorious real estate hedge fund Fortress. Much as in the case of the "World District," the situation near the station and in Korallusviertel initially received virtually no public attention (in spite of tenants already having taken up protest measures, such as a signature collection). The only residential construction project that might have been endorsed by IBA was never heard of again after having left nothing but extensive wrecking measures, the demolition of a car park and a muddy stretch of fallow land.

Attempts to draw attention to the situation of the tenants, who resisted their landlord in a variety of ways, were undertaken by the pastor of a local congregation, and by employees of the local social counselling centre, verikom. Collective tenant counselling meetings were organised jointly with "Tenants Help Tenants," and members of AKU attended these meetings.

From this there resulted Wilhelmsburg's afore-mentioned "Housing Work Group."

We then jointly organised a discussion event in Wilhelmburg's civic auditorium, to which representatives of GAGFAH, IBA, the municipal government and SAGA GWG were invited. The event was also, however, attended by about a hundred tenants, and there developed a dynamic that strikingly illustrated the levels of rage and indignation in the two neighbourhoods. The representatives of city institutions acted helpless and the GAGFAH employee openly defended the choice to manage the housing stock in a manner oriented purely to the interests of shareholders.

There were several aspects to our desire to become involved in the conflict of the tenants around the subway station and in Korallusviertel. For one thing, we wanted to oppose a dissenting account to IBA's discourses on the neighbourhood, and also to provide an alternative to the themes articulated by the citizens' initiatives. We wanted to lend visibility to those ongoing social conflicts that did not fall within the territorial or thematic spotlight of IBA. This stance was partly taken with other initiatives in Wilhelmsburg and Hamburg in mind, as the Wilhelmsburg initiatives were failing to make reference to ongoing but largely invisible conflicts such as those around the subway station and in Korallusviertel. We also thought of our contribution to this conflict as a way of addressing the urban periphery as the site of a city-wide conflict, not in the form of the usual campaigns, but by organising and/or supporting everyday resistance.[10] This meant that we had to begin by becoming involved in the conflict with GAGFAH, speaking with the tenants and trying to find out whether there might be common ground from which to articulate resistance to both GAGFAH and the city's larger urban policy. This was by no means a matter of taking a fully developed political model or

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[10]   We were of course not the only ones in Hamburg's landscape of political initiatives to take such an approach. Our efforts were paralleled by, for example, highly similar attempts from within the "Right to the City" spectrum: experiments involving city-wide assemblies of SAGA tenants organised by the Work Group on Rent, and rather explicit community organizing efforts undertaken by the Altona Platform Against Displacement that followed the (unsuccessful) conflict at IKEA (see also Füllner/Templin 2011).

programme to the tenants; rather, our activities took as their starting point the conflict that was being articulated in the neighbourhood itself.

Differently from the case of the "World District," none of us lived in the neighbourhood, and the individuals and groups we allied ourselves with were professional social workers or associated with church congregations. We were in agreement, within the AKU, that it would mainly be a matter of supporting tenants' efforts to lend visibility to their demands and speak for themselves. We perceived the very heterogeneity of the different approaches as a strength – but as the AKU, i.e. as a group of activists, it was important to us to act differently from those who were also social workers. And yet it was not always easy, including after the first discussion events, to establish a continuous communication that could serve as a basis for these aspirations. Given the lack of central institutions or places, we began by visiting the local mosque in order to ask what might be a good time and place to begin speaking to tenants. At the mosque, our intentions were received very positively, and we were advised to begin at the mosque following the midday prayers on a Saturday. Having announced ourselves by means of posters, we then ventured onto a lawn between the residential towers of Korallusviertel on a freezing-cold Saturday in February, carrying with us a table and some chairs, tea, coffee and some cookies. To our surprise, about a hundred tenants approached us during the hours that followed. The first of them were already waiting to speak to us as we set up our table and chairs, including many who had already attended the counselling meetings. The majority lived in the most decrepit residential blocks: and it was no coincidence that most of them, and/or their families, had come to Germany as "guest workers" (mainly from Turkey). Many had already been living in the neighbourhood for decades; they had access to correspondingly strong networks and strongly identified with their neighbourhood. This would continue to be the group we engaged with most successfully throughout the conflict with GAGFAH.

The stories we heard about living in GAGFAH's apartments were more than striking. It became clear that aside from the miserable, hazardous condition of the apartments and buildings – damp walls, leaky windows, mould, malfunctioning heating, ramshackle elevators, littered entrances and stairways: the disrespectful, discriminating response of GAGFAH employees to

tenants' complaints played a major role. The experience our interlocutors reported to us was that of being treated as "second-class citizens." No one took responsibility for the scandalous conditions near the subway station and in Korallusviertel: neither the owner of the buildings nor local politicians. Many people we spoke to directly related the situation in the area to the large construction projects in neighbouring areas: renovation and "beautification" was ongoing all over Wilhelmsburg, while their living situation had declined continuously, at least since the time when their buildings had been sold to a hedge-fund-directed real estate corporation. Following its privatisation in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, GAGFAH had embarked on large-scale purchases of formerly public or co-operative-owned housing and set about valorising the buildings by means of a systematic strategy of disinvestment, literally to the point of making the buildings uninhabitable. The strategy was relatively simple: maintenance expenses were radically slashed (down to about half the usual level), administrative and personnel expenses were economised on at the expense of providing tenants with adequate services; tenants who responded in accordance with the provisions of tenancy law, e.g. by reducing their rental payments, were immediately pressured by means of evictions and monitory letters.

As we learned during the following weeks, many tenants had already resisted this "management" system in numerous ways: most of them were constantly filing complaints with the caretaker or at GAGFAH's headquarters. Since this seldom led to success, they tried their best to, for example, eliminate mould by themselves. Some refused to be intimidated and took GAGFAH took to court: often with the support of lawyers, and with mixed results. The above-mentioned signature collection campaign had been carried out in building entrances and throughout the neighbourhood; the signatures had been presented to GAGFAH's national headquarters, without however eliciting any response.

At this point, the Housing Work Group had already helped establish contacts with the press and with TV networks. Media attention to the "horror landlord" and the "rundown neighbourhood" also developed independently of the local situation, due to tenant protests against GAGFAH in the Ruhr and claims for damages the corporation had been presented with by the city of

Dresden, which censured GAGFAH for not honouring an agreement on the maintenance of formerly public housing. Sensationalising media reports directed some attention to the conflict, but also often suggested a link between the rundown buildings and streets on the one hand and the "social decline" of the tenants on the other, a tendency that reinforced existing patterns of discrimination. Contrary to this tendency, we had learned from our conversations that the statement "No one would freely choose to live there" was simply not true: many tenants liked living in the neighbourhood and wanted to stay there; they simply wanted better housing conditions.

From our conversations with the tenants there eventually developed the idea of renting a bus, driving it to GAGFAH's Hamburg headquarters and holding a press conference there. Preparations for this undertaking: informing the press, distributing notifications in the neighbourhood, technical matters, were taken care of by the Housing Work Group. The action was highly successful and broadly received in the media, something that probably surprised everyone: the Housing Work Group as much as the tenants. In any case, Hamburg's newspapers were for a brief time full of stories about conflicts over housing issues involving GAGFAH. Following this action, it seemed, initially, that our co-operation with the tenants could be consolidated and would assume a permanent character. Some persons pushed for a demonstration in the neighbourhood, with an eye to getting the highest possible number of tenants to participate. It now became clear that the conflict was being taken note of by other local initiatives: the demonstration was attended not only by tenants and groups from Wilhelmsburg, but also by people from the "Right to the City" network.

These "systematic" efforts at organisation (particularly by comparison to Weimarer Straße) were nevertheless only moderately successful. A handful of "activists" were now meeting with "tenants" willing to engage in a form of conflict resolution whose character ultimately continued to be determined by the activists. The overwhelming majority of tenants continued to engage in the conflict with their landlord in their own manner, either individually or with others, but in any case not as part of a network pursuing a city-political agenda. We did not, however, perceive this as a failure, since we had always emphasised that people resisted GAGFAH in their own ways. There ensued

an attempt to support tenants' protests by means of legal counselling. The Housing Work Group organised another collective counselling meeting, which was well attended. "Tenants Help Tenants" was now also offering regular consultation hours in the neighbourhood. The relatively high obstacles associated with such legal resistance probably contributed to the fact that not many tenants chose to pursue this path. Moreover, neither GAGAFAH nor the district administration showed any substantial response to the protests. The senator responsible even denied that there was a political dimension to the conflict, arguing that tenants had to defend themselves against GAGFAH on an individual basis, since there was nothing she or other politicians could do. This was the situation in which the Housing Work Group decided to systematically document both housing conditions in the neighbourhood and the strategies of resistance employed by the tenants, hoping thereby to reanimate public debate. At this time: spring of 2012, about one year from our first actions, we had come to believe that we needed to deliberately address those politically responsible in order to effectively pressure GAGFAH.

At this point, the Housing Work Group's activities assumed the form of an investigation in the narrow sense. In groups of two or three, ideally including Turkish-speaking or at least multilingual persons, we walked through the neighbourhood for a week. We spoke with tenants in 144 apartments, amounting to about ten percent of the total number of tenants. We were told about life-threatening elevators, saw outer walls that had been damp for years, water damage that had never properly been taken care of, balconies and even entire buildings threatening to collapse: but also apartments that had been thermally insulated by the tenants themselves, and stairways repainted on the initiative of the building's occupants. We heard about the daily struggle against mould and about rough but successful altercations with GAGFAH-employed caretakers. At one of our meetings with tenants, we jointly prepared a press conference in front of the premises of the Ministry for Urban Development and the Environment, where we presented the tenants' demands, a collection of signatures and the documentation that had resulted from our visits to the housing units (cf. AG Wohnen, 2012). This was probably the action whose forerun saw us co-operate most intensely with the

tenants. For the first time, it was a tenant who wrote the invitation, most of the meeting was held in Turkish and the Housing Work Group's participation was largely limited to "technical" matters and communication with the German press: contacts with the Turkish press were also taken care of by tenants. We found, however, that the public response was no longer as strong as it had been the previous year. In addition to this, the number of tenants attending the press conference was considerably lower.

In retrospect, the massive conflicts over the situation in the neighbourhood are indicative of a tension that reflects the challenges associated with aspirations to a non-representational politics. There was a persistent rift between the speaking activists and social workers on the one hand and those immediately affected, who were only heard (or not heard), as well (through mediation) represented (or not represented). By our intervention in the conflict and the defining slogan "Between Splendour and Mould," we struck the Achilles heel of IBA's urban restructuring programme: what happens to urban spaces that refuse, prima facie, to be integrated into the logic of "upward revaluation," spaces situated "at the margins" or "adjacent to" historic, *Gründerzeit* buildings that lend themselves to the cultivation of an upscale image – especially when the residents of those urban spaces vocally demand a good life and articulate a conflict? However, the strategy of rendering visible urban spaces not represented within the IBA project, thereby problematising the socially polarising effects of Hamburg's urban policy as a whole, has limits that coincide with the relatively limited outcome of local self-organisation. The possibilities for bringing such conflicts to a head remain dependent on approaches that allow the affected tenants to represent themselves. Given the few resources available to us, we only sporadically succeeded in living up to this ideal.

Nevertheless: the media response was at times considerable. It was none other than Hamburg's largest middle-class daily, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, that painted a sometimes very militant picture of the tenants in the neighbourhood. Those politically responsible were in some cases genuinely alarmed, and responded in their state-specific manner: closed-door negotiations with GAGFAH were taken up, concerning possible state subsidies for renovation measures and corresponding return services; these negotiations were not at all

transparent. GAGFAH has now announced its intention of investing ten million euros into its Hamburg housing stock. This measure would also concern the housing units near the subway station and in Korallusviertel. The effects of such investment will have to be closely watched. It is to be feared that older buildings will be renovated in a way that would make it impossible for a large number of the present tenants to remain in the neighbourhood. In this sense, the conflict is still undecided, and its pace is such that a "project-based" politics (such as ours ultimately was) cannot do it justice.

4. Critique of City Marketing

The texts and brochures IBA has produced would probably fill several metres of shelf, not to mention IBA's internet presence, advertising spots and use of artistic work (cf. Birke, 2013a). Orienting oneself in this ocean of publicity and preparing adequate interventions (in the form of counter-publicity) presupposed a process of self-clarification. This in turn required placing IBA and igs in the context of the larger city-political developments and strategies that were and continue to be discussed, in Hamburg, in terms of a critique of the "entrepreneurial city."

From 2007 onward, a total of three brochures distributed in Wilhelmsburg by the Work Group on Urban Restructuring were devoted to criticising IBA and igs. In early 2012, a fourth brochure documented our research into the housing conditions around the subway station and in Korallusviertel. With hindsight, the hope that the spotlight cast by IBA (and to a lesser extent by igs) would help draw attention to social conflicts otherwise scarcely thematised appears somewhat naive. Nevertheless, this hope initially played a role in our activities as well.

There was another aspect to the project of lending visibility to criticisms that would otherwise have been ignored, and this aspect played a particularly important role with regard to the tenants' struggles described: persons otherwise not perceived as "political" subjects began to speak for themselves. The attempt to draw greater attention to the urban peripheries (which, in the case of Hamburg, are located not just at the edges of the city, but dispersed in areas outside the centre) was also addressed within the "Right to the City"

network. In fact, the debate "Right to the City – for Whom?" (and a critique, formulated within the network, of the hierarchies of visibility and spaces of articulation available to different city-political initiatives) retains its importance to this day, and is now also playing a certain role within the scholarly debate.[11]

Search processes

In the course of the public's critical engagement with IBA and igs, we experimented with different types of publication and public performance, in an effort to find a form of action adequate to our object: but also to our target audience. We thereby received a different sort of attention and were addressed in new ways: against the backdrop of the post-2009 "Right to the City" movement, the position we had assumed by publishing our brochures quickly led to academic circles contacting us in the already heavily researched space of Wilhelmsburg. After 2011 in particular, and even more so in the year when the International Building Exhibition went on display, we received dozens of requests by researchers writing theses on Wilhelmsburg and the IBA: researchers who seemed concerned to adopt a balanced view and therefore sought to take critical voices into account. While "large" research projects associated with university departments remained the exception, there was a sense that an entire generation of students of urban planning, sociology, geography and social work was bringing its research projects into the neighbourhood. All of a sudden, we too were considered an "interesting population," in spite of the fact that the authors of this text are themselves academics. We responded by means of a role-playing game and acted as "experts" on one occasion and as "activists" on another. We asked renowned urban scholars who distanced themselves from IBA to participate in public discussion events. In 2010 and 2011, pressured by the public debate on gentrification, IBA commissioned an expert opinion on social transformation ("structural monitoring"); on this occasion, we even played the role of "coun-

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[11] For the German context, cf. for example the debate in the journal *sub/urban*, [http://zeitschrift-suburban.de/sys/index.php/suburban/issue/view/24].

ter-experts," justifiably and quite successfully questioning the scholarly value of the expert opinion. In this, we benefited from the fact that the data collected by IBA's subcontractor supported our hypothesis that massive processes of gentrification were to be expected in Wilhelmsburg, even if IBA was quite creative in reinterpreting these data to accord with its own view of the world.

All of this occurred against the backdrop of an asymmetric public perception of the plans for Wilhelmsburg and the changes occurring there, a public perception that we had not succeeded in influencing substantially. With a few exceptions, Hamburg's dailies behaved like a branch of IBA's press department. There was a prevalence of success stories about "model renovation and participation measures," technologically advanced experimental buildings and "education programmes" putatively designed to improve the residents' chances of upward social mobility. A pink smokescreen: success stories and promises of a prosperous future, occluded the reality of horrific rent hikes, displacement and the social costs of "model" renovation projects in, for example, the World District, as well as the consistently precarious housing conditions of many tenants.

It remained an open question how to genuinely oppose something to IBA's media machine during the year of the exhibition. In an effort to find an answer, we eventually experimented with forms of action situated at the intersection of mediatised politics and artistic work.

This holds especially true of our experiments with "subvertising": i.e. the ironic reinterpretation of motifs taken from IBA's own public relations campaign. "Bloomers from Glossy Brochures" was the title we gave to a dramatic reading that was essentially based on a montage of various IBA and igs publications. This type of intervention also reserved a special role for the role of academic knowledge producers, who often participated in the marketing of the neighbourhood by more or less uncritically supplying IBA's brochures with the requisite catchwords. The speaking part of our character "Dr. Smart" featured statements by various renowned representatives of academia; these statements expressed contempt for the residents of Wilhelmsburg, albeit in a suitably academic tone. The unusual situation seemed to justify formulating and articulating suggestions for Wilhelmsburg that belong, in our view, in the realm of the unspeakable. One of the quotes was taken from a Hamburg-

based professor of urban studies who proposed, in an interview, the estab-lishment of a low-wage sector, in terms highly reminiscent of "sweatshop" production.[12] Playing with literal quotations was also a way of coming to terms with the fact that in spite of their explosive nature, such statements never really provoked a scandal in Wilhelmsburg.

By means of the dramatic reading, which was staged in a left-wing bookstore, a cultural centre and the public space of an exhibition area, it was possible to foil the discursive supremacy of the festival in a different way as well: by means of "subversion." We were concerned to convey criticism in a playful manner, in the context of a situation in which the exchange of argu-ments had already occurred and the roles seemed to have been permanently fixed. Thus this form of subvertising was also part of a search process that saw us responding to an unequal distribution of resources by searching for gaps that could allow us to act outside the schedule of our opponent, but on his terrain.

The exhibitions

When the two exhibitions were held, in the spring and summer of 2013, we perceived the possibility of lending particular visibility to critique and re-sistance. The anticipated political mise-en-scène of the neighbourhood and renewed efforts on the part of IBA and the senate to favourably present their programmes promised a corridor of perception that we wanted to make use of.

We agreed that the year of the exhibitions called for special forms if we wanted to be successful in spite of our limited resources. In our book publica-tion *Unternehmen Wilhelmsburg* ("Enterprise Wilhelmsburg"), whose publi-

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[12] "We have very good fashion designers in Hamburg, but virtually no clothing is produced here. And yet there are thousands of Turkish and Sinti women who can sew very well. If we could provide some basic security for the seamstresses at a cost level that makes it possible to produce here, that could set off a tremendous dynamic. Such textile workshops exist in Paris, Milan and New York, providing thousands of jobs, tied into creative districts where design, production and marketing take place. Here, we are simply subsidising unemployment" (interview with Dieter Läpple, IBA Blick 3/2007, p. 3).

cation date coincided with the inauguration of the Building Exhibition in March of 2013 (see AKU, 2013), we tried to reach a circle of readers wider than the one that had taken notice of our earlier brochures. In doing so, we were also concerned to place an "alternative" text within the library of (critical) urban research. Publication of the book was accompanied by a series of discussion events on the various topics addressed in it. For a time, we achieved a kind of media breakthrough: our website received an unusually high number of visits in 2013, and this led to a corresponding increase in interview requests by journalists and several weeks of presence in the most varied local and sometimes national or even international media. This was also partly due to the campaign "IBA?NigsDA!," an anti-IBA campaign that itself received considerable media attention and led to our actions being perceived more strongly as well. The campaign was a product of the successful networking efforts of various IBA-critical initiatives and individuals. It quickly transpired that there was a sort of race to the spotlight, especially with regard to the inauguration of the two exhibitions: school directors and teachers drawing attention to the catastrophic staffing situation at their schools, protesters opposing the construction of the planned highway, conservationists and critics of gentrification: all of these now took to the stage.

The media enthusiastically welcomed the promise of a critical campaign, and there resulted a brief period of successful mobilisations, particularly under the heading "Gentrification in Wilhelmsburg." The responsible politicians and planners had hitherto hardly had to comment on rising rent and displacement in the neighbourhood, but now they received an onslaught of interview requests from the national media. The "model project" had become the "controversial building exhibition." Public television showed images of the demonstration against the inauguration of the Building Exhibition, a demonstration heavily escorted by the police; this added the finishing touch to the media deconstruction of the notion of a socially and ecologically exemplary form of urban development.

We used the confused situation around the inauguration of the exhibitions to experiment once more with the subvertising approach. Dressed up as employees of IBA, we attended the inauguration of the Building Exhibition

and presented a new key topic. Picking up on a recent buzzword of German urban scholarship: "resilience", we suggested the residents of Wilhelmsburg should be taught to be as quiet as possible about their residential situation and the ways in which it had been aggravated by the Building Exhibition. We also suggested a "best-practice" approach to finding ways of dealing individually and creatively with problems such as the growing scarcity of available living space, the goal being to determine cost-neutral remedies to the problems raised by the exhibition. Ultimately, our adoption of IBA's design and style worked almost too well. None of the exhibition's visitors were irritated when we distributed our materials; it was only later that the cynical suggestions formulated therein were discussed, and eventually unmasked as a "heavy-handed fraud by the AKU," on internet forums and in email lists. With regard to subvertising strategies, this raised the question of how to both adapt successfully to another's style and produce a sense of rupture by which to render one's critique perceptible.

The mediatic accompaniment urban planners and the political administration organised for the year of the exhibitions eventually also led to a renewed engagement with the role of the scholar within concrete political processes. A liberal-left daily interviewed Saskia Sassen, a member of IBA Hamburg's advisory board, on the changes undergone by Wilhelmsburg and the charges of gentrification.[13] In her replies, Sassen reiterated IBA's mantra of "upward revaluation without displacement," attested to the "model character" and "socially conscious" nature of IBA's projects and wrote off the Building Exhibition's critics as uninformed, notwithstanding the fact that she was herself citing outdated data from SAGA's and IBA's public relations materials. In an open letter, we sought to remind the renowned scholar that information provided by those responsible for organising the International Building Exhibition should not serve as a substitute for independent research. The ensuing exchange of open letters was very much taken note of in the international scholarly (and activist) community, although the much-needed debate

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[13]   The controversy is documented here, along with a link to Saskia Sassen's reply to the AKU's open letter:
[http://akuwilhelmsburg.blogsport.eu/2013-09-antwort-und-einladung-an-saskia-sassen/].

on the political responsibility of "critical" urban scholars who accept advisory positions and the role of "expert" largely failed to materialise.

Overall, during the media accompanied exhibition year, strategies aiming at the production of counter-publicity received considerable attention. Thereafter, they received considerably less attention, as was most clearly seen in the declining number of interview requests and visits to our blog, as well as in the reduced level of interest in our book. With regard to the changes undergone by Wilhelmsburg, the decline in city-wide and national interest raises new questions. Even after the formal termination of the International Building Exhibition and the igs, the restructuring of the neighbourhood in accordance with the interests of investors and the middle class proceeds at full speed. The "normality" promised for the time after the "temporary state of exception" can be gleaned in master plans that envisage new housing construction measures; while such plans are now presented more quietly, the measures envisaged are quite extensive. The successful public interventions that occurred in the wake of the Building Exhibition must now be followed by a new round of efforts to discover ways of effectively positioning critical voices.

5. Refusal and role-playing games

As mentioned, the AKU proceeded by trial and error. In many situations, we assumed different roles and catered to different role expectations. We also gradually learned to refuse assuming or "playing" these changing roles. Our behaviour varied depending on the field of conflict we were operating in. When in contact with tenants, we did not wish to behave like scholars. And not only that: the majority of us are in fact Wilhelmsburg tenants who are themselves concretely affected by rising rent. On other occasions, we put the role of scholar to playful use; this was especially true of our subverting actions. In these performative actions, we acted in a classically artistic manner on one occasion, and by means of an "intervention/experiment" on another: without however identifying with the role of "artist." We even sometimes assumed the role of "expert." This was the case in our afore-mentioned critique of IBA's "structural monitoring," but also in our investigation of

Korallusviertel and the area around the subway station. And finally, in our brochures, our blog, our book and our campaign, we spoke as "left-wing neighbourhood activists."

In spite of all our emphasis on being unconventional, and in spite of our dissociation both from research approaches based on an interest in a certain "field" and from activist strategies and guidelines such as "(community) organising," it would be wrong to pretend our activities were not guided by any sort of approach. For it was the (local) conflicts themselves that determined the pace of our work, under the conditions imposed by our limited resources. These activities were interpreted within a framework that was decisively shaped by the "Right to the City" network and its demands, as well as by the critique of neoliberal urban policy. At the same time, however, we did not simply project these demands and this critique onto our field; instead, it was a matter of curiosity, and of a fundamental empathy towards the people with whom we engaged in these conflicts. What resulted was an open process; while the forms employed all belong to the repertory of today's urban social movements, we shifted rapidly from one form to another. It is by virtue of this aspiration: that of organising an open process, not only and not simply as "method," but as a decisive contentual aspect, that the experiences described here are perhaps closest to action research. Our activities always presupposed our own involvement in a given conflict, without which that conflict would have remained invisible. And finally, the goal was not that of producing "neutral" knowledge about city politics, but of identifying the sites at which a hegemonic urban policy produces conflicts and allows for ruptures that show up alternatives to what Margit Mayer has recently called the "neoliberalising" city (cf. Mayer, 2013).

However, the often surprising dynamic of these conflicts also created a situation in which we were constantly forced to fine-tune our ideas and procedures. As illustrated above by reference to our actions in the area around the subway station and in Korallusviertel, there was very much a tension, within our activities, between self-organisation and organisation from outside. Ultimately, it has to be said that, for example, the capacity of tenants' from the urban periphery to access the local and even national public is not something that is "simply" given. It needs first to be created, and in

this, the role of "mediators," who are provided by their own biography and social position with more cultural capital, can prove to be decisive. But this role is also problematic, to the extent that it renders permanent the hierarchy of speaking positions. While dealing consciously with such imbalances is very important, it is, in and of itself, far from representing a solution to the problem. Refusing to cater to certain expectations and participate in the above-mentioned role-playing games seems to indicate a way out of this conundrum – but it is a way out that presupposes a great deal of knowledge and resources that are not available to all of the city's residents in equal measure. Overall, the question of how other "spaces of reflection" can be produced, over and beyond our own approaches, in the age of instrumental participation and the local procurement of acceptance, seems to us to be very important. By no means does what we have presented here constitute a reply to this important question.

Within the context of today's urban social protests, the significance of this observation is hardly to be overestimated. For these protests are not simply "open" in and of themselves, as suggested by the notion of a "diverse" urban space so widely received within the "Right to the City" movement. Rather, our work occurs within a field in which the distance between the "speech" of some and the "silence" of many: a silence better described as a situation of "not being heard", cannot be done away with by simply evoking an "open city." Differently from cases in which it is possible to evoke institutional frameworks that can (still?) be relatively clearly distinguished from one another (such as the "workplace" of labour or urban studies), urban space presents itself both as multidimensional and overdetermined, and as profoundly fragmented in social and political terms (this latter feature being reinforced by neoliberal urban policy).

The desire to oppose to this fragmentation the goal of a "right to the city" for everyone was at the heart of the story we have told here. We were concerned to contest, through appropriation and ironic distance, the very forms in which city politics largely operates today: its specific language, its "culture of experts," the well-rehearsed relationships and role-playing games between residents, initiatives/activists, scholars, the administration, political representatives and the public, as well as the exclusions thereby produced. Wheth-

er or not this probing, experimental procedure suggests generalisable, conceptual conclusions is a question we will leave open. But it seems to us to be far from atypical of experiences that are primarily a matter of politicising everyday life: and, to return to our opening remarks, of the attempt to achieve a practical sublation of "scholarship" and "political practice" within the courses of action by which the struggle for a right to the city (and for something more?) is implemented.

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