



Disko  
16

**Miller, Schwaag, Warner**  
**The New Death Strip**

**blaster of architecture**

# SLAB

No. ①  
1. MMXI

THE HEURISTIC JOURNAL FOR  
GONZO BLURBANISM



# THE NEW DEATH STRIP

MILLER, SCHWAAG, WARNER

**SLAB Magazine**

The Heuristic Journal for Gonzo Blurbanism

## Imprint

Published by:  
Arno Brandhuber, Silvan Linden  
akademie c/o Architektur und Stadtforschung,  
AdBK Nürnberg

Editors:  
Oliver Miller, Daniel Schwaag, Ian Warner  
All photos: the authors

Layout: Blotto Design, Berlin  
Typefaces: Vectora, News Gothic, LiSong

Cover photo: Traffic police filming motorists on  
the A113 in south east Berlin

Printed by: Druckerei zu Altenburg  
Distribution: [www.vice-versa-vertrieb.de](http://www.vice-versa-vertrieb.de)

© Publishers and authors,  
Nürnberg / Berlin, January 2011

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese  
Publikation in der National bibliografie;  
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet  
abrufbar.

<http://dnb.ddb.de>

ISSN 1862-1562  
ISBN 978-3-940092-04-5

## Content

Forward **4**  
Method **6**

Re-Coding the Environs **8**  
Rewe + Aldi = Rewaldi **18**  
Europarc.de **20**  
Kernel Memory Dump **28**  
A Future Squat **30**

Color Plates **33**

La Dolce Ignoranza! **49**  
Hashing out the Grey Zone **56**  
Landscape Rules: The Lessons of A113 **60**  
Free Form **68**  
Hyperbolic Seam **69**  
Striptonwickburgshirehamwaldetinow **72**  
Postscript: For Unreal **76**

List of Projects / Bibliography **78**  
The Authors / Slab Magazine **79**

# FORWARD

OLIVER MILLER

The plate glass storefront of the recently closed gallery 'Feinkost', on the West side of Bernauerstraße, was for the most part obscured by translucent film. A strip of glass, however, had been left clear at the top. It was through this clerestory band that I looked whilst momentarily distracted from an exhibition I'd come by to check out, a group show entitled *Communism Never Happened*. My reflections upon art and life were briefly misdirected as I gazed across the street to see the cropped corner of a building that looked, as my colleague Daniel Schwaag was later to describe it, "as if it had been designed in Wisconsin". At that moment, however, it wasn't the composition of the building's design that first struck me, but rather the quality of its surface. After a few seconds the building had stopped looking real at all, the play of diffuse sunlight upon its monotonous brick veneer transporting me into a kind of semi-virtuality, an impassive world of scanned texture libraries and ray-traced surface renderings. My eye was deterred from looking too closely, and only then did the formal aspects of the design begin to set in. The patterning of façade elements somehow appeared both crisp and awkward in its proportions, the economy of its tectonic means coalescing into a whole that was alien to the scruffy atmosphere that had initially attracted me to Berlin when I moved here nine years before. Still more seconds passed and it hit me that this brand new building, standing solitarily on a vacant swathe of Berlin non-space, was holding down a patch of ground along the old *Todesstreifen*, the so-called 'death strip' that ran beside the old Berlin wall from 1961 till 1989. Communism, it seemed, had indeed never happened.

The death strip was a complex layering of coiled barbed wire, patrol roads, watch towers every hundred meters or so, anti-tank barriers, etc. Now it's 20 or so years on and the mines have long been cleared, the steel of the barbed wire and the concrete of the barricades have been recycled, the guards have normal day jobs, and the land itself is in the middle of a gradual and cumulative process of transformation. The most visible examples of this land development are of course high profile projects such as that on Potsdamer Platz, built up with bags of corporate credit in the late '90s. Similar cases in point include Pariser Platz or the commercial and touristic zone that's built up around the old border crossing on Friedrichstraße, 'Checkpoint Charlie'. All of these developments closely hug the death strip's urban center of gravity; all of them sit on land in the heart of a reuni-

fied Berlin, land that very quickly became prime real estate once the geopolitical map of the Cold War was trashed in '89.

The concern of this study, however, is to look elsewhere: to the forlorn corners of the death strip in 2010. To be sure, this is not the death strip from ten, twenty or thirty years ago. The motivating cause is instead the utter banality of real estate development along the 5,000 or so hectares of land that enclose the old West Berlin. This is the New Death Strip (NDS), a non-location that we've sought to discover not as the mere remnant of times gone by, but instead as a real and present situation. Indeed, the weightiness of the site's history is something that had already ceased to resonate; after a few years of living in Berlin the many tales of a divided Berlin had gotten stale, seeming like a distasteful Technicolor nostalgia for the terrible, indulged in by tourists and history buffs. To put it in more general terms, there isn't any urgency to something that's happened already.

The more we investigated the more it became clear that the development of any over-arching thesis regarding our subject's significance, whether on an aesthetic or a socio-cultural level, would be an exercise in frustration. We instead gained a heightened sense of the senseless, getting in touch with an amplified visceral reaction to things that previously had numbed us with their bluntness. In contrast to its previous guise as a militarized border, the New Death Strip is not, and we trust never again will be, a place motivated by such a deliberate protocol or dictate. The starting point for our investigation is the placid acceptance of this fact, and the resultant understanding of the NDS as neither more nor less than the delineation of a survey's boundaries. That is effectively the point in taking the line of the old wall as the starting point for our investigations: to more clearly hash out the complicated issues of context in order to frontally address the heterogeneous conditions of land development that have occurred in the last twenty years.

Our approach has been to expend our energies in both close observation and extrapolated reaction, weaning ourselves from the urge to research facts at the expense of developing inner mythologies, critical reflections and the quest for higher personal truths. This is, we hope, an intensive look at the surface, if not into it. The things that we found tell their own stories, and we've tried to avoid coloring our intuitive reactions to them with any pretensions to objectivity. ▲

# METHOD

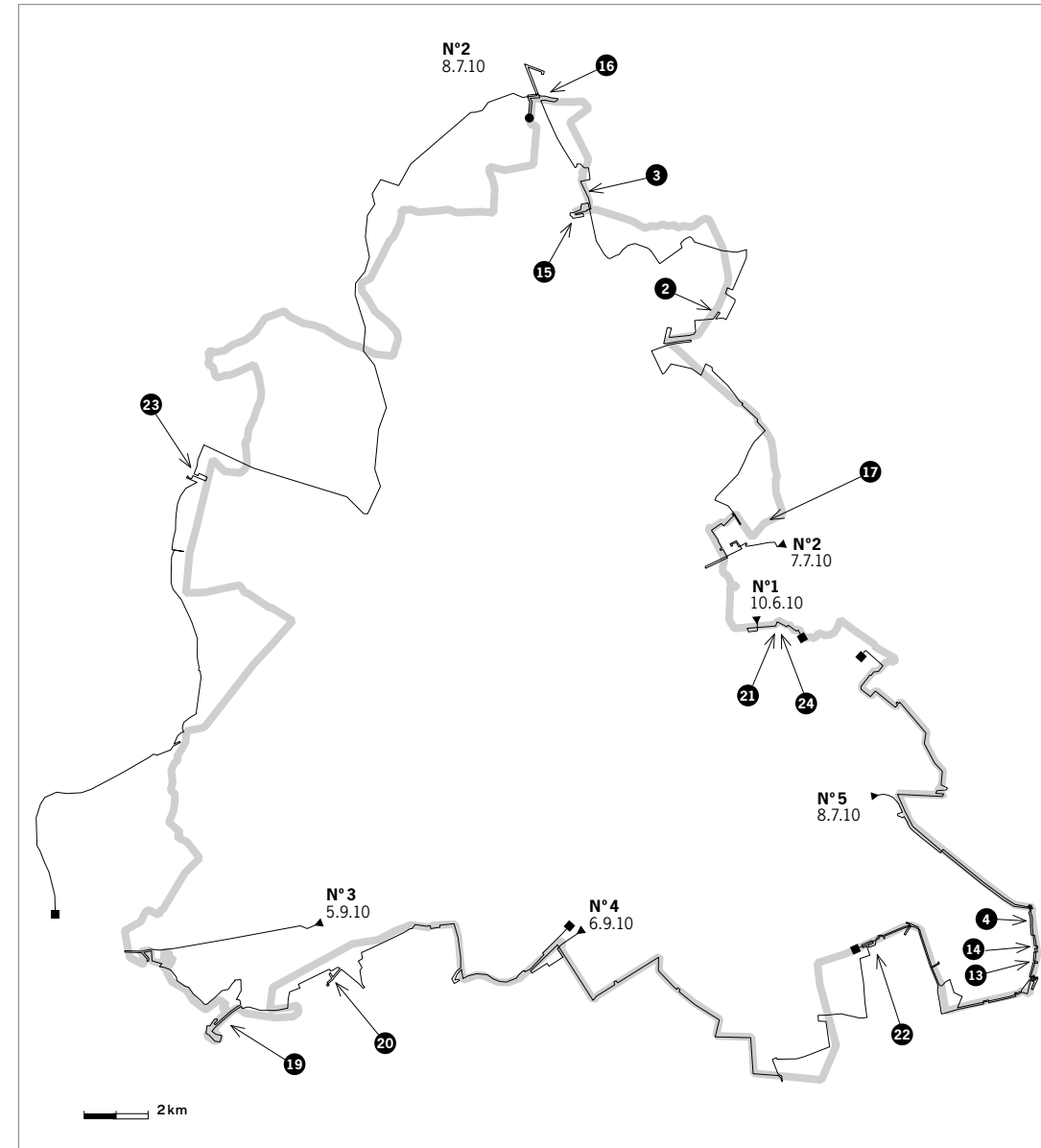
IAN WARNER

We explored the New Death Strip in a series of “squirrels”. The term was adopted after several misunderstandings in which the authors variously misheard the words “swirling” and “squirreling”, during a conversation made difficult to follow by loud engine noise. Its meaning should be understood as a derivative form of “dérive”, the situationist practice of drifting – a “dérivative”, if you will – and shouldn’t be accorded much more scrutiny than any onomatopoeic description of our weaving route.

The squirrels took place between the months of June and September 2010. In order to impart each one with a unique locomotive signature, we resorted to various modes of transportation, thus imbuing each expedition with its own pattern of limitations and freedoms. The first squirrel, which took place in central Berlin, was undertaken on foot, after a meal at Checkpoint Charlie’s recently opened McDonald’s restaurant. The second and longest trip was an attempt to drive the entire route of the New Death Strip on a quad bike and in a dune buggy in two days. The choice of loud and unconventional modes of transport – open to the elements – was part of a deliberate strategy of conspicuous and mildly inappropriate behavior: envisage, for example, the exact opposite of an ornithologist in the field. However, the endeavour had to be aborted after just 18 hours due to massive, sudden mechanical failure, resulting in the kidneys of the dune buggy’s navigator being boiled in a fierce plume of misdirected exhaust gasses. Squirrels three to five were completed on bicycles and concentrated on surveys of the southern stretch of the Strip.

Other parts of the Strip, particularly those in the inner city, were examined in short, spontaneous probes fitted in and around the authors’ various private and professional schedules.

Note: within this text we will often refer to the New Death Strip as ‘NDS’. There are also occasional uses of ‘ODS’ for its historical counterpart. Furthermore, the authors also refer to each other in abbreviated form: hence ‘DS’ signals our author Daniel Schwaag and does not mean ‘Death Strip’. Similarly ‘OM’ is not to be confused with a brief mantra, but refers to Oliver Miller. ▲



## Documenting the NDS

▲ = Route of former Berlin Wall      13 = Color plate reference (see center of booklet)  
▼ = Squirrel      ▶ = Start      ● = Pause      ■ = End

The route of the former Berlin Wall should be considered as an accurate representation. The author’s movements were plotted at the time of travel or from memory. Parts of the route which involved doubling back on ourselves appear as parallel lines.

# RE-CODING THE ENVIRONS

IAN WARNER

The course of the New Death Strip is eminently navigable if one is sharp-witted enough to bike it, or walk it, and maybe drop the whole dune buggy thing for a while in order to regain one's feel for the body in space. I did just this one afternoon



Hatch opening out onto the Autobahn

in September and headed south-east alongside the Teltow Kanal, experiencing for myself the 5.6km of uninterrupted cycle path which also runs parallel to a new stretch of the A113 Autobahn, built directly into the trough left behind by the GDR border fortifications. The Autobahn, enclosed in high, sound-proof brick walls, represents a physical barrier almost as formidable as the *Grenzanlage* itself, a strange superimposition of employment

born of pragmatism, in which a corridor of one kind is replaced with a corridor of another, in a kooky symbolic shift typical for the NDS.

The cycle route is a gorgeously smooth band of information-age tarmac: a swooping homage to the cliché of German engineering, so flat that when one tops out at around 37km/h, one feels as poised and buoyant as a dart in flight, and no longer like the sweaty, thrashing mess that one doubtless resembles. Roller bladders here, unusually, are of the male over-50 variety; paunchy, bearded types with white hair who have spent the better part of the morning jackknifing themselves into super-tight spandex leisurewear for a bit of high-speed Sunday afternoon exercise.

Just south of the science campus in Adlershof, the A113 makes a sudden bunny-hop over the canal, and lurches off south towards Schönefeld Airport. I soon find myself recovering with a snack on a park bench, staring at a segment of the *Hinterlandmauer* which has been preserved for posterity inside a long green cage. It's another part of the whole Culture of Remembrance effort, and a reminder once more of the erratically varying amplitude of significance attached to different parts

of the old border. Who decides, or better, how is it decided that one part of the wall (as artifact) is a more important signifier of the Wall (as condition) than another? After urinating contemplatively but inconclusively into a copse of birch saplings, I move on: the Strip wants to be navigated, people are on the move here, drawn clockwise or anticlockwise along what down here – away from the musings of the inner city – resembles a recreational cyclotron.

But something has changed. Gone is the din of the motorway, replaced now by the sound of insects in flight and birdsong. In fact, the motorway seems to have disappeared entirely, perhaps behind the wall of trees to my right, and I find myself in the wide open plane of an artificial dyke landscape which must have been modelled in an early version of *Sim-City*. The ground-level has been graphically modulated into a binary system of pits and embankments, over which gravel pathways, expensive-looking granite paving and narrow beds of wild flowers crisscross at random. Random? Did I really just write 'random'? That cannot be. This landscape is digital, meticulously planned by CAD fiends who probably started drooling when the plan views began resembling Belgian waffles. You can still see the outlines of embossed polygons right below the grass, which has been left to grow just enough to give the impression that untamed, organic mayhem is poised and waiting to burst through the surface and engulf everything at any moment. This is a domesticated wilderness: bush-country held in check by a higher moral sense of order – just enough to tickle the natives, but not enough to provide serious cover for large predatory mammals. And what is that terrible sound? Is someone actually vacuuming? Or are they chainsawing the trees already for growing in an unruly manner? I need to move on. All this peripheral savanna is making me restless. Maybe I should seek cover by checking out the local architecture, which is what I'm here for after all.

## Box-Fresh Butterscotch Sonntagsbraten

The two freshly-built homes I stumble upon are so new that the windows are still dotted with manufacturer's stickers, probably trumpeting some thousand-year constructor's guarantee or a European eco-standard which has been fulfilled twelve-fold. (Plate 13) The exterior walls, treated in colours that developer NCC probably refers to as "butterscotch" and "vanilla", are so lacking in surface detail or texture, that the structures bear semblance to rudimentary computer models which have yet to be rendered in a fine-grained simulation of natural light. These box-fresh three-storey family homes are instances of a customisable portfolio model NCC

are calling *Wiesenblick*. Some days later I called NCC's communications director, to ask her if she had a nice glossy catalog for me, but she explained that the company doesn't go in for brochures because they're more project-focused than building-focused. I asked her what she meant by this and she explained that each building type is just a template and that individual modifications are made depending on target group. When I asked her if the site itself had any influence on the building's final form, she replied with a chicken-and-egg affirmative, in which the target group defines the choice of site. She confirmed what I'd already suspected: you can plonk these buildings down pretty much anywhere, as long as the right demographic happens to fall inside your catchment zone. As the name suggests, *Wiesenblick* will appeal to those with a rural yearning, whilst other models on the NCC web site, in an excellent nod to current Wilhelmenian trends in the naming of German children, are called *Max* and *Moritz*.

Out here in all this open space, *Wiesenblick* seems at once bloated and stiff – uselessly enlarged in all directions. Although the third floor and roof terrace (under the lobotomised gable) is responsible for much of the overall height, the vast expanses of empty wall between the ground and upper floor windows contribute greatly to the prevailing sense of proportions gone awry. There just seems to be too much wall and not enough window: as if each floor has been stretched upwards in an afterthought. Or maybe a half-floor has been slotted in between levels: invis-

ible from the outside, but accessible via a hatch in the master bedroom; a floating cellar, or a padded S&M dungeon, who knows? My imagination may be running wild, but with such a big blank butterscotch canvas before me, what am I supposed to do? The German middle class is pretty kinky anyhow, and the developer is keen to report that they've only their client's needs in mind. Their web site outlines the company's core values, which consist of focus, simplic-

ity and responsibility. "With focus we mean putting our customers and the product in the center of our thinking and our work ... simplicity means not making things unnecessarily complicated."

I casually wonder whether the presence of an architect would have made the development of *Wiesenblick* unnecessarily complicated, but this is cynical conjecture. I'm not so much offended by their pastel-toned vision of an environmentally



*Wiesenblick*: Focus, simplicity and responsibility

friendly family home on the periphery of Berlin (although it's an ugly brute), as in awe of What This All Could Mean. The lack of surface detailing such as brickwork, awnings or fluting serve to flatten the building, but has the paradoxical effect of clearly illustrating a sense of inner volume. In contrast, the surface detailing of a historical building, in particular those examples encrusted with gargoyles and mouldings, seem to be all about relief and space, but inhibit a readable projection of inner volume.

But *Wiesenblick* isn't an exercise in formal modernist reductionism, despite the ostensibly minimal exterior (it just looks like someone forgot something). If it has inherited anything from modernism, then it is to be found in the post-industrial economic program it follows, rather than an aesthetic program. Although partially built "brick for brick", *Wiesenblick* is a product of the assembly-line, but it's an assembly line of market research and building norms which leads to a final form. Simpering concessions to traditional building types are largely responsible for exterior variations on the basic 'dumb' box. In this sense, *Wiesenblick* trades a formal aesthetic program for a symbolic program of clichés: its gable roof represents 'house', not in a platonic sense, but in a romantic, emotional sense. Meanwhile, the 'dumb' box underneath is the product of a fantastically huge array of building norms. This piece of cutting edge 'spec-architecture' is unsaleable though, that is until a matrix of building types is superimposed onto a matrix of target markets, and – *pow!* – where they intersect, out plops your future home, already reeking of beeswax, cappuccino and Sonntagsbraten.

### Vitamin-K Chillscape

Moving along the Strip again I'm seriously considering veering off towards Schönefeld Airport to get myself a cup of over-priced coffee, when I'm suddenly taken by a peculiar concrete bulge in the ground just ahead of me. In one of those comic, forehead-slapping moments, I realised that this is the awning of a motorway tunnel, and that the whole landscaping effort behind me has been built on top of the A113. But there is no time to reflect on this because half a kilometer further down it enters a tunnel once again leaving me wondering why it came up for air in the first place. But "good riddance" I say: stick to the surface of things and not contemplate this subterranean tube any longer, save for the fact that you could, in some awesome balls-to-the-wall highway shenanigans, continue down the A113 and reach Odessa within 20 hours, turning right only once in a town called Uman, somewhere in the Ukraine.



But now I've arrived at the next piece of richly legible landscape: a terraced incline rising over the top of the Autobahn, culminating ultimately in a row of 10-storey Plattenbauten on the other side of the Schönefelder Chaussee. (Plate 14) This marks the physical end of the *Sim-City* dykescape, its component parts culminating in four casual flights of steps, and a zigzag of bike path enclosed in some earth-tech gabion walling which worked so well for Herzog and De Meuron's Dominus Winery in California's Napa Valley. I have a real soft spot for a bit of rugged, caged stonework: it's so butch. It's the stuff city folk like myself probably think the 21st century countryside looks like.

Up on top of the embankment, the landscaping looses some of its micro-managed vigor and flattens out totally, culminating in a nursery of saplings planted in a half-arsed grid. Weirdly, this young forest has been strewn with a dozen tubular steel recliners manufactured by Erlau, a Swabian manufacturer of public furniture. These "Tivoli" park loungers don't look particularly comfortable, or particularly practical, despite having been awarded a Federal Prize for Outstanding Design. They are too narrow to be shared, so disqualify themselves as love-park accessories, and so widely spaced apart that a group of people would be hard pressed to hold a coherent conversation between them. It's where the remnants of post-rave chill-out culture meet civic furnishing, but reminds me of one of those superficial initiatives aimed at sprucing up a bad part of town, which swiftly end up looking slightly seedy because public art doesn't solve generations of ingrained social tension. The solo star-gazer, though, might get a kick out of these wiry chaise longues, and might even stand a fair chance of actually seeing something of the heavens out here in Berlin's darker southeastern periphery. The surrounding streets are all named after planets and stars anyhow (Uranus and Venus Streets, Sirius Street), so maybe this is an appropriate response to the neighborhood's underlying nomenclature.

But perhaps "Tivoli" was actually designed with disjointed conversation in mind: I can well imagine this being an attractive destination for a small group to seek out at 5am on a balmy summer night, after twenty-nine hours of raving in some Brandenburg field. Probably the perfect setting for a digestif of ketamines. Low dosages, apparently, are best taken in the dark, and the reported effects of a 150mg intermuscular shot include 'depersonalization' and 'derealization'; the dissolving of barriers between self and the surroundings, or the separation of the psyche from the body; the perception of shared hallucinations in vast indescribable dimensions. What better place, and in what better piece of furniture than a "Tivoli" can one imagine experiencing the effects of an anesthesia capable of inducing cataleptic states of muscular rigidity?

Could I be getting close to some dark and twisted metaphor for the psycho-geographical make-up of the NDS? Imagine the break-down of all barriers separating space, time and collective memory; the course of history doubling back on itself periodically like a folded ribbon, and then extruded artificially through space to create the illusion that the NDS is actually one whole piece of uninterrupted, tangible stuff: a chronotope so derealized that it is no longer perceivable as just another part of the authentic and seamless fabric of everything else either side of



A "Tivoli" outdoor recliner: the ketamine user's chaise longue of choice.

it. Believing in this illusion could be our single greatest mistake in this project.

Seen in the context of the Plattenbauten opposite me, this pastoral chill-out lounge is a substitute garden for the residents, but one which excludes the participatory 'remedy of cultivation' in its program. You won't find anyone planting their potatoes here. Instead, it forms, one presumes – for an inhabitant of the tenth floor – just another part of the grassy vista in the foreground of the

view towards the city center 15km distant: nature as doormat. It's ironic that these prefabricated living blocks speak the language of urbanity, but are stuck out here on the edge of the city looking inwards, and that the view from them is not of more high-rise density, but of fields.

## Dead End Street

I'm moving again, now in the strange gravitational pull of an Aldi supermarket, recalling the words of Georges Perec: "Make an effort to exhaust the subject, even if that seems grotesque, or pointless or stupid." The building is a rectangular box 44 meters long and 25 wide. The base is constructed of reddish-brown brick. The building is capped by a gable roof with brown tiles. There are two aluminium vents on the roof, positioned on the northern side, eleven and a half meters apart. The entrance consists of a set of sliding doors and a window, sheltered by a two meter deep portico held up on two thin columns positioned at each outer corner. There is a metal bay for parked trolleys, a bin and a wooden storage box, secured with a padlock. The gables are filled with 43 grey vertical slats on the street side and 27 slats of the same colour above the entrance. In place of a Hellenic freeze, the tympana are decorated with Aldi logos, which can each be illuminated with their own

flood light. To the left of the logo on the front there is a red lamp – part of the alarm system. There are two closely spaced windows facing the street, each used as a display surface for announcing special offers. To the left of the window, at ankle height, is a light grey air vent. There are seven slit-like windows on the northern façade just underneath the wooden awning of the roof. There is a staff door underneath the sixth window, with three concrete steps leading up to it ...

I feel a mild depression coming on, realising perhaps, that description is probably the only form of analysis for an Aldi. It seems, at first, as if there is little to say about the supermarket in terms of its proximity to the Death Strip, and the exercise is becoming just as pointless as Perec suggests, so I decide to leave. Maybe it's just instinct, or maybe it's the consequence of Perec's lingering strategy, but I take a closer look at a street sign positioned at the southern tip of the supermarket and read: "Lutz-Schmidt-Straße". Above the name is an explanation: "Lutz Schmidt. Victim of the Wall. Shot here during an attempted escape to West Berlin. 08.07.1962 – 12.02.1987"

Lutz-Schmidt-Straße was officially inaugurated in August 2009 as part of the memorial day marking twenty years since the fall of the Wall. Previously the street had been known as "Straße 137", or "Rheingold Straße". There is a remembrance

plaque on the corner, dead flowers piled at its base. The first twenty meters of Lutz-Schmidt-Straße have been freshly tarmaced, but soon give way to a stretch of prefab concrete panels on which a number of lorries are parked. After this, the road surface degrades once more and the street ends abruptly at a fence after a short expanse of dust and gravel: a dead end street pointing at the Strip, but not leading to it. I have

an awful thought, but it's unavoidable: the gradual fading of a life, and its abrupt end, inadvertently finding itself reflected as a grim visual metaphor in this sad little cul-de-sac in Altglienicke.

On the day of its official renaming, the mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, reminded his audience that it was the express aim of the Senate to "repeatedly highlight the values of freedom and democracy" on the occasion of remembering the division of the city. I find myself torn between compassion and cynicism. On the one hand, I am touched that this scruffy little nondescript street should now carry Schmidt's name. But I am also left wondering whether Aldi is a suitable representative of the



The dead end street in memory of Lutz Schmidt

values of freedom and democracy that Schmidt was undoubtedly looking for – for himself and his young family – when he died in a hail of bullets one foggy evening in February 1987. But maybe I'm being shortsighted. Two catalogue homes have gone up near the street: one bright yellow, one bright red, and both so new that they're not even weathered. If there's any expression of the values of freedom to be found here, then it's in the front gate of the yellow house, which has been constructed to resemble a row of 22 coloured pencils.

## **Terraforming the Brandenburg Steppe**

I've arrived in the countryside, or at least, that's what it feels like. The sun has come out and the prevailing smell is that wholesome tang of fresh horse dung. I've put another three kilometers behind me and I'm in two minds about carrying on because architecture has become a scarce commodity. There are plenty of goats though, and chickens, and I pass a man in a field diligently scooping piles of shit into a bucket, and for a brief moment I'm envious of this simple mechanical chore performed in such bracing surroundings. I could write about chicken coops I suppose, but I'm determined to press on towards Gropiusstadt, no matter how tempted I am to lie down in a field for the rest of the afternoon.

Satellite imagery of south Berlin reveals a surprisingly sharp edge between city and country. There is no confusion about where Berlin stops, and the state of Brandenburg begins: suburban density suddenly gives way to fields and hedgerows, and street names speak conspicuously of Other Places. It's a neat arrangement, without the ambiguity of sprawl. But that's not to say that there isn't ambiguity of another kind.

Whilst the future 'Airport Berlin Brandenburg International BBI' is disqualified from the NDS simply by its location, the airport is subtly involved in the re-coding of the Strip. This is what I learn from a prominent developer's sign erected on a plot of land adjacent to Berlin's highest point, Dörferblick, an 86 meter high pile of rubble left over from WWII, and transformed into a nature park in the 1970s. The segment of New Death Strip I'm now standing on is to become an extension of the park, and the BBI is responsible for its pending transformation as part of a comprehensive program of 'Ausgleichmaßnahmen', or compensatory measures, which aim to balance out the enormous environmental costs involved with building a modern airport. The future park "Am Dörferblick" is a subroutine in a program governed by DIN EN ISO 14001, an internationally certified framework for establishing environmental management systems. If that sounds technical enough,

then the developer's sign has been suitably illustrated: the park appears as a cut-and-paste montage of colour-coordinated ground coverings delineating a gamut of easily decipherable human activities, performed by a cast of flat white silhouettes. It would be unfair to judge the park in advance by its portrayal on a sign, and foolhardy too: experience with architectural renderings shows that they're not

even supposed to resemble the finished piece. But more truth is to be found in this kind of representation than in reality anyway. Images are used to seduce, and must appeal to our innermost dreams in order to unleash their full potency. So whilst I'm not shaken by the prospect of another highly mediated slice of faux nature, I am perturbed by the underlying aesthetic message which is characterised by the sort of self-restrained sobriety you'd demand from an aerospace engineer, but which should be thrown to the wind in gay abandon by the landscapers of Berlin's idiosyncratic *terrain vague*.

Ditch these sincere and earnest folk, with their erudite subtleties, their competencies and their reflective gestures. Out with all this unbearable sobriety, and in with a jamboree of semiotic

weirdness: hire the Tim Burton School of Landscape Engineering, or if they're too busy with that project in Azerbaijan, then the Fritz Lang Academy for Expressionist Gardeners are also getting great reviews and have very reasonable rates! If you're going to have fake hills covered in rubber-granule flooring, then dump the whole-some terracotta colour scheme and get Bridget Riley to abstract the crazed floor markings of the adjacent airport runways. And whilst you're at it you can extrude some of those recreational hillocks into candy-coloured termite mounds: what's the point of recreating nature if you're just going to make it comfortable and useful? Or is that the whole point? I mean, we can beat nature at its own game: let's not pretend we don't have the tools.

All these theatrics would be a more honest articulation of what the sign refers to when it speaks of a "nature experience" (*Naturerlebnis*) rather than simply "nature".



L marks the spot: future park at Dörfblick promises a "nature experience".

It's a small distinction, but crucial in understanding much of the New Death Strip, from the Fellini Residences to Europarc: where the banality stops, an 'experience' begins. So why not just take it to the limit? Am Dörfblick will be an odd show anyway. A whole herd of Przewalski's horses will soon call this home, a critically endangered



Authenticity is just a transitory condition on the way to something less interesting

subspecies of wild horse once native to the Mongolian steppe. They were hunted to extinction in the wild, and the captive breeding population dropped to just 31 individuals in 1945 after German troops used one of the world's three remaining herds for target practice whilst occupying Ukraine. But 35 years from now, when the whole of Prenzlauer Berg has turned into a gated retirement community, these serene

progeny of Ghengis Khan's own steed will be down here, thriving on the great Brandenburg Steppe, humping like there's no tomorrow in a skate park populated by day-trip pensioners on all-terrain Segways.

## Distant Ramparts

Although my trip takes me further today, it actually ends here with me surveying the broad ramparts of Gropiusstadt from the mush and squalor of an unfinished park. My bicycle wheels are jammed full of mud after struggling through the ruts left behind by heavy landscaping machinery, and I'm surrounded by huge piles of boulders, awaiting precise and tedious distribution, and I'm thinking that this is probably the most authentic scene of the day. Ahead of me, children are flying kites and I'm occasionally sniffed by the dogs of Sunday afternoon strollers, people content for the moment to just wander through this space unconcerned by it's lack of definition, or carefully re-coded program of experiences. ▲

# REWE + ALDI = REWALDI

OLIVER MILLER

The new REWE+ALDI box at the corner of Treptower Straße/Kieffholz Straße is a modicum of something experimental to be found on the NDS. It has nothing to do with the formal or urbanistic implications of the building, really, but instead with the blunt tautology of its programmatic strategy. I don't presume that there's no other example of a building purpose-built to house two competing chains of grocery retailers and nothing else, but it's the only example of its kind I'm aware of. As a casual observer ignorant of the mechanics behind the trade these corporate giants ply, I don't get it. What does either of them stand to gain from this siamese agglomeration? Didn't the idea to open chains of the same store in different locations start with a notion of creating something unitary, something counter to the pluralism of the agora?

Interestingly, the two companies have in the last year been engaged in an open low-end price war, the segment in which ALDI has been an industry leader for years. REWE, however, also offers organic, premium and many more brand-name lines in addition to its positively-branded *Ja* discount products, hence profiling itself as an übermarket to suit every need. The combo seems to therefore

be engendering something truly radical within the banal trappings of what at first looks like a typical suburban supermarket: a resuscitation of competition between businesses in direct physical proximity to one another.

For a long time, the myth every individual grocery chain has sought to enforce is that of a self-contained monism, a one-world where you should shop for everything in a context that is

the patent denial of the validity of its competitor's right to exist. Here two worlds are mirrored, as it were, with the 45° angle of the glass sliding door/curtain wall mediating between their perpendicular juxtaposition. Granted, this isn't a perfect mirroring: REWE's roofline bumping up a notch higher than ALDI's, and the REWE side sporting a comparably larger window compared to ALDI's bunker-like slit.



The rebirth of the agora in Berlin-Treptow

The differences are therefore noticeable though quite controlled, strictly bound by the rules of the German suburban supermarket's bland architectural language. The amount of the visible field that each company's brand consumes furthermore establishes REWE's ambition to take hold of the consumer's conscious will from the moment the car door has been slammed shut.

Upon setting foot in the egalitarian entry foyer, the clash of contradictory retail philosophies is further reinforced by the conjunction of their interior façades at a hard 90°. There's honestly nothing between each business as far as these façades' quality of its detailing goes, each having been built at the same time using the same steel-framed glazing system; both are also equally frontal in their orientation to the visitor's encounter of them. It's interesting to therefore compare and contrast how the two chains establish their identities cheek-to-jowl. The white paint on the REWE's window framing sends the universal message of tidiness and tasteful utilitarianism. ALDI opts for shit brown, letting us know it is the real thing, an institution striving to be as cheap and dirty as it can.

Aside from the architecture on its own, REWE dominates the visual field with a rich display of posters and banners, as well as the display of sundry products encroaching upon the lobby. All of it tempts us get jazzed about shopping, and the use of red in combination with yellow and golden orange on the graphic material is reminiscent of the McDonald's makes-you-hungry color scheme. The single set of sliding doors offer a generous opening, beyond which the vibrancy of the fruit and vegetable section beckons. ALDI, conversely, offers little reason for us to step any further, and is, if anything, rather forbidding. Its functionality as a place to get rock-bottom prices is guaranteed not by the presence of signs, but by their absence. As opposed to having one generous opening there are two smaller ones, something determined not by the desire to draw customers in, but by the need to establish a secure zone between the checkout and the exit in order to prevent wares from being shoplifted. It is this unadorned area, reminiscent of a Greyhound bus station, that one first sees before entering ALDI. It says: "I won't waste the money I earn selling groceries on glossy posters or superfluous displays in order to lure you in, I'll spend it to deter and prosecute shoplifters, something I need to do in order to keep prices low".

The signs in front of REWE scream "Welcome" and "Lowered Prices". The anti-aesthetic design of ALDI wails "Go Away" and "I am Cheap". ▲

# EUROPARC.DE

DANIEL SCHWAAG

OM and I were cycling near Potsdam along the southern bank of Teltowkanal on a stretch of West Berlin protruding into Brandenburg. I was already a bit disoriented from continuously trying to figure out where the fuck I was in relation to the former death strip. The Berlin-Brandenburg border jigsaws deliriously here through mixed forests of mostly pine and beech, carving out oddities such as Berlin Steinstücken, a former exclave of West Berlin in East Germany. Following the border, the Wall encircled the community before doubling back onto itself to form a narrow passage to the West. Just south of here lies the Wüste Mark, a twenty hectare plot of West German agriculture formerly surrounded by GDR territory and tethered to the West only by the tilling of a single West German farmer.

On several occasions, I got my whole mobile hermeneutic apparatus honed in on a potential story, just to have it all come down again. "Camp ground in the new death strip!" "No, Just Camping in West Berlin." I suppose that's the point of "reuniting" something, effacing the unnatural separation of things that are deemed

to belong together. I am still not sure it should be done that way, clinically, without memory or trace.

At Hasso Plattner Institute an androgynous looking security guard had reduced my racing bike to an impurity, insisting I remove it immediately from the representational lawn it was supposedly tainting. I had refused to jump earlier in light of her authoritarian tone. So she did it herself, to my surprise with the utmost care, just when I was thinking

I had overplayed my hand and feared she might fling my bike onto the cobble stone drive-way. Her colleague later waved his Prussian upright index finger at me, his elbow resting on a hemispherical, mercurial CCTV eye, one of a thousand, I am sure, mounted on an intercom pole that was still hatching out of some wrapped polyethylene foam packaging. When I caught them talking about me, I pointed my telescopic lens demonstratively at them across the thick, uniform lawn that was the source of our dispute; just the kind of juvenile defensive reaction I enjoy so



Twinned sentinels protecting this corporate fantasy

much. With the odd effect that she came over to chit chat, of all things, perhaps thinking I was connected to people in high places. You never know. The snaking path across the lawn prolonged and intensified her approach to the degree of parody, especially since there was no discernible reason for the path to snake. I feared



Wielding the hand of authority at HPI

this would come to a head. Instead, she talked about Hasso Plattner, Brandenburg politicians and the needs of delicate virgin grass. I explained to her that my early '90s *Fondriest Status* bike was made of super light micro alloy steel and wouldn't make a dent. Unlike that Shih Tzu running up and down, retrieving balls hurled by a stout woman with the help of a plastic sling, which for some reason had gone unnoticed. It threw her

for a moment. I asked her the name of the grass. She didn't know. The conversation ended awkwardly in mechanical, appeasing smiles.

I was starting to feel the effect of a prolonged exposure to the sterility of the institutional campuses, condominiums, discount marts, and prefabricated model homes that dominate the town called New Death Strip. My eyes were tired from flinching at sunlight reflected off glazed and flushified (OM) facades, trying to discern reflection from original from simulation and the fine nuances in between. One, two, four levels of ray tracing, and hyperreal texture-mapped surfaces of infinite resolution that just wouldn't pixelate, no matter how hard I looked. I noticed dryness in my mouth, the taste of airplane air or acrylic render. I was craving a Snickers and mineral water.

We left the sterility of HPI behind to find temporary relief in that stretch of wilderness along Teltowkanal, around Albrechts Teeroven. Lush pastures, gently meandering roads, and ranch fences made this place look like it was inhabited by Bretons, without even trying. I stopped for a commemorative plaque on the canal and was grateful to find out it had nothing to do with the Wall at all. Passing campgrounds and allotments, we found an overgrown stretch of the original *Transitautobahn*, at the former border crossing Dreilinden, forgotten in the forest. Weird, if you think about how meticulous and complete the death strip's erasure has been. Cycling on sandy aisles through lofty pine forests on racing bikes, sand was building up between the rear wheel and frame. As trees fly by us, I think of how long I can grind away with sand at the microns of low carbon steel that supported me.

We were heading for Europarc. The name and its picturesque layout had caught our eye on a map.

There is a kind of emotional build-up as the forest clears. We stop at a pile of building debris. Following the course of an unfinished path that vanishes in the sand in front of us, we spot the color coded floors of a glass and steel commercial building wedge: green, yellow, blue, red ... the corporate colors of Ebay. This looks promising. But is it death strip territory? Had we hit gold?



We dart across an empty road and around the building. A vast expanse opens up in front of us, surrounded by forest and filled with the distant sound of the Autobahn. There's an empty employee parking lot in the foreground. A shiny boom barrier with a bright yellow arm and a brushed steel base sparkles with futility in the sun. It looks lost in this lack of context. It's Sunday, so the lot is empty, exposing large areas of sustainable paving with grass growing through. Without cars filling the parking bays, it's really only decorum that stops you from just driving around the barrier. Across the parking lot, I notice the shiny anodized aluminum backs of disproportionately large signs. Their sheen intensifies the silvery underside of the surrounding foliage, spelling out *Europarc.de* in large cutout letters. Green banners flap in the wind against aluminum poles. There's some sort of folly painted in bright red and blue just beyond the parking lot. In fact, all colors look unnaturally saturated to me. It feels like a brand new minigolf park deserted by oversized Teletubbies, or Paul Bunyan. The folly exerts the strongest attraction. It draws us onto the finely raked gravel surface of a plaza lined with a selection of grasses and dotted with uniformly sized pine trees. It's a well constructed environment. Interspersed are clusters of tables and chairs grouped around Ebay colored umbrellas against a five-story, polarized reflection of the sky in dark, silent glass. Transparency is controlled by bris soleils and Venetian blinds, which are all shut. Back then, border guards checked for *Republikflüchtlinge* by irradiating trucks with gamma rays or by checking the insides of fake cows, as I find out later. Today, this is where PayPal employees eat a light business lunch, on a scheduled recovery from a morning in a call center.

It feels like it should be California rolls, though it's probably *Bouletten* and rye bread. My intuition tells me this is fake, it looks too much like a Silicon Valley cam-

pus, even though all the elements are indigenous: pines, sand, grass. The folly turns out to be a bridge across a fertile looking biotope with large reeds planted around it. I don't pay much attention to it. We soon realize that, too, is a loop and end up pretty much where we were. We hit the main loop road again and cycle past a *Porsche* dealership flaunting its product to office workers on weekdays. We spot the headquarters of *Mobile.de* just across the street, right next to the *Paypal* building, both *Ebay* companies. Dads on bikes show off Porsches to their kids as if they had a part in making them. We stare at some patches of exposed sand next to a heap of debris, mostly polymers – offcut PVC piping, grey cable, fragments of styrene foam. The exposed patch without any landscape treatment recalls computer models that haven't been texture mapped yet. That's how I think of it, the texture hasn't been applied by an advanced technology. There's something arresting about the heightened contrast of these unfinished gaps against an



Paul Bunjan's miniature golf course

otherwise highly finished environment or a Porsche. It's great how the thinness of image is exposed, powder coated, ste-reolithographed, or polymerized out of a suspension. I try to figure out if the overlaps of the Ebay letters are created by actual transparency or just faked. We chuckle at some of the company names. *JuRAsoft*, with the letters R and A accentuated by a stellar orbit. RA is the acronym in German for "Rechtsan-

walt", lawyer. In the context of this business campus park, "Jura" invokes the juras-sic. We think of dinosaurs, not the German term for law. In the age of search engine optimization, all that counts are results. I take some photos of a drab looking hotel, getting a kick out of how immaculate it looks. It's so perfect, it looks unreal, hyper-real, I guess.

Further down the loop road, I stop at the entrance roundabout to have a look at a map. I pay little attention to the highway signage high above me, probably sensing that it is not intended for someone in my position, advertisements for a hotel, fast food, and gas. Oliver is somewhere trying to spot the perfect reflection. The blue and white map shows lots and buildings arranged around a loop road with a waistline, the Albert-Einstein-Ring, that seems to outline a *Barbapapa* or a unicellular organism or the symbol of infinity. It looks copied and pasted from a garden-city design, maybe Sunnyvale. At the center is the large biotope with the folly bridge across it, adding to the cell resemblance. The *Barbapapa's* belly is filled with the

cluster of Ebay buildings, Mobile.de and Paypal. They occupy the focal point of this picturesque design that has some French formal design axes cut into it. From the main loop, two roads branch off to roundabout cul-de-sacs that tap into the death strip, lined by empty lots, Heinrich-Hertz-Straße and Max-Planck-Allee. Oliver is not coming, probably transfixed through his *Bollé* “Alien” sunglasses by the specular on some high performance glazing. I better go and snap him out of it. There’s something weird about the roundabout, though. A sign in low relief depicting a group of Linden trees sits in front of real Linden trees that occupy the center of the roundabout. Can’t figure out why there’s not three of them, as in “Dreilinden”. The crown of the Linden tree conceals two CCTVs that keep an eye on anyone entering or leaving Europarc.de.

Just off the roundabout is some outdoor art. It consists of large granite letters that spell out the word “HIEЯ”, with the last letter reversed. It seems to speak of an

absence. We are not here, but nowhere or anywhere. It’s a strange wink that the makers of this place or non-place are very much aware of what they were creating. Space seems to warp around the reflected R. It is a subliminal cue that draws me down an alley, past more generic office space to which I pay no attention. I find the caustic sheen of large injection molded plastic recycling bins on interlocking pavers more interesting. They flank a large galvanized

steel pole that points upwards beyond the limits of my camera frame.

In the background, the muted hum of cars built for autobahns, finely attenuated by encapsulating foam and manicured berms: so distant you feel intimate about it. I recall rest stops in an orange 5 Series BMW in the Sauerland in the ’80s, the crackling of a hot engine cooling off, staring into the cars and lives of people assembled at random, the sound of progress and speed, to which we would eventually return after my Dad’s cigarillo had gone up in a plume of smoke.

I twist my neck to see the sign high above from an acute angle. It’s an *Ibis* sign. Actually, it is three Ibis signs arranged in a triangle. This situation I already know from the great freeways of America or Belgium. The setup resembles those of mobile phone towers, transmitting its message of two star lodging with 360 degree coverage to distant people. Maybe it is an advertising/cell phone piggy back installation. There are more signs, for fast food, coffee and fuel, all inhabiting



Vacancy at the Ibis

the realm of electromagnetic communication just above us. For an instant, I sense the emitting and receiving of signals and messages as a humming field of vectors, like a superimposition of several games of *Pong*. If I was on the run and looking for a place where I cannot be found, this would be it. I would find shelter under a large index pointing everywhere but here. I like the taste of the sublime I get below these signs, towering like giant sequoias over Dreilinden Europarc.de. I think of all the combined hits of Ebay, Mobile.de, and Paypal and get a sense of a slow, but steady material erosion of place, of matter silently carried away by photons, as waves and particles or perhaps just metaphorically.

Later, from home, I revisit the site on Europarc.de and Google Maps. The business park is located along the former Transitautobahn, now the A115, leading into West Berlin in an area called Parforceheide, just outside the city at the southwestern edge of Berlin. Previous to this assignment, I had often wondered when driving into Berlin, but never bothered, to look up the origins of this peculiar name. The area was originally planted with forests by Prussian emperors so they could go and hunt foxes, boars, etc. by force. That’s what the term means: Parforcejagd, aka fox hunting. So first they planted the forest so foxes can hide in it, then made inroads into it to facilitate hunting them. That’s pretty much what the place still feels like. A field of forest dissected by aisles for the free projection of movement and control – a fox hunt, a class struggle Transitautobahn, a Bundesautobahn, imperial train lines, cold war Death Strip. As part of a land deal in the early 20th Century, parts of the forest located in Brandenburg ended up under the administration of the city of Berlin.

Europarc.de/Dreilinden is a real estate enterprise of Societe General, the French investment bank, one of 36 Europarcs in Europe. One is outside of Cologne.

**Hotel Ibis appears to consist of more ducting than rooms, more cryogenic than climatized.**

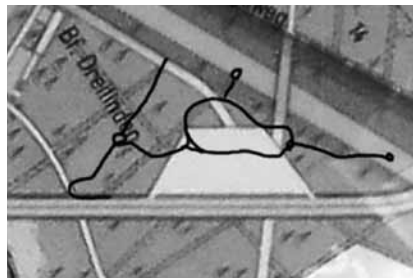
It bears the same signage, a cluster of Linden trees in relief. The business “parc” is a built expression of a franchised real estate fund. Somewhere in Paris – La Defense, capital is pumped into a finely bifurcating financial system that resurfaces through cracks in tax legislation as crystallized bubbles of capital, now

between Brandenburg and Berlin. The web site lists the benefits of Europarc Dreilinden, offering Berlin area codes and a special business tax rate that undercuts Berlin’s or Brandenburg’s. It mentions the historic character of the site as a location positive. Superimposing the picturesque plan of Europarc over the layout of the former border crossing at Drewitz, a lingering ghost of the trapezoid of the

former control bay is revealed. The Europarc buildings cradle the edge of the trapezoid and the line of the forest clearing remains the same. Surely that's part of the reason Drewitz was dropped from the name. Only the name of the Western control point remains, shifting Europarc closer to the former American sector and, perhaps, victory.

I meet Oliver in front of the Ibis. He looks more tanned from increased levels of UV-light trapped between UV resistant glazing. The Ibis has a sinister aura. Is it the front of a money laundering scheme? It must be, or why would anyone want to stay

there? I don't see anyone going in or coming out. The sign says "climatized". No shit, I said to myself, as the building is peppered with large, shiny HVAC ducts and manifolds. It appears to consist of more ducting than rooms, more cryogenic than climatized. It makes me think of the scene in 2001 when the astronaut fades into dark, cold, space. That's the kind of climatized it looks like: insulated, mirrored surface and ducted air, polycarbonate spheres and degrees



Super superimposition: tapping into the death strip

Kelvin. The reception window has one-way mirror film. What goes in there, doesn't come back out. Yet in a totally different way than in fictitious renditions of the motel genre in such films as *Vacancy* or *Psycho*. I long for the good old vacancy sign. So much atmosphere and expectation, of raw life, of prostitution, crack, death, pubic hair. I suspect in its basement a bubbling well of capital that leads back to Paris, under the Eiffel tower straight to La Defense.

But I'm not really getting anything out of this. I feel a bit forlorn. I'm done here, and head to the direction of the McDonald's sign the size of a redwood. Over a Filet-O-Fish and Apfelschorle we do a little reflecting. I say how harmless it all seems, that the McDonald's new interiors are kind of all right, that Europarc is kind of all right, that we have spent enough time now living in simulations that they're becoming real. I am happy with my meal choice. The Filet-O-Fish muffin has such a perfect taint it must have been airbrushed. It's just the most perfect business park lunch to me. I wash it all down with Apfelschorle, watching bubbles of carbonation pop on the walls of the paper cup that says "erfrischend spritzig" – refreshingly fizzy.

Let's get out of here. We are almost across the Autobahn bridge, when we spot the former watchtower. Today, it houses the Checkpoint Bravo exhibition. A few

scraggly concrete fence poles with corroding steel bits stick out between brand new Autobahn signage and green Europarc.de banners. We find assurance that this was very much NDS material. I feel relief at first, then disappointment, at this token memorial that seems to do just enough to acknowledge the past; and the beginnings of my stomach contracting around my Filet-O-Fish and a brownie. We have a last look from the Autobahn bridge across Europarc.de. It seems to hover inches above the forensic sand of the death strip, severed from the tax legislation of Brandenburg and Berlin – like an offshore business park – by the thin drop-shadow of a Powerpoint effect. ▲

*Japan is already a satellite of the planet Earth. But America was already in its day a satellite of Europe. Whether we like it or not, the future has shifted towards artificial satellites.*

Jean Baudrillard, *America*



# KERNEL MEMORY DUMP

IAN WARNER

Early evening, Wednesday 7th July, sun low in the sky, flattening the surfaces of buildings and casting long, hard-edged shadows about the place. We had arrived at the northernmost point of the NDS, and had aimed the buggy and quad into a light industrial park at the southern end of Hohen Neuendorf. The place was deserted. Everyone was poised in beer gardens for the Germany vs. Spain quarterfinal game of the 2010 World Cup.

I ran the buggy up a curb, and yanked on the handbrake. Dan and I got out, and stalked around on foot. Oliver had disappeared up a side street for the tenth time that day. The road we were on was called Gewerbestraße, and characterised by

two and three storey boxes with version 2.0 *Microsoft Paint*, pattern-fill, brick-look façades, and window fittings I associate with British suburban leisure-pools from the late 1980s. Signs said things like “De’nime Outlet”, “City Jeans Handels-gesellschaft” or “SMC Elektronik”, and the spacious yards around each building were stacked high with building materials, or dotted with remarkably tall conifers which had to be scrutinised for

some time to lessen the impression that they might just be well disguised mobile phone antennas. There was land for sale on the Strip, but the two office workers we spoke to were oblivious to the old border.

Our big discovery was a nameless factory or depot which seemed to be a parody of post-modernism. (Plate 16) One half was clad in the kind of rigorous, sand-stone grid synonymous with Hans Stimmann’s Berlin. The other half was covered in vertical aluminium slats typical of out-of-town warehouses. But the two materials met in a jagged diagonal overlap just to the left of the front entrance, where the same attitude had spawned chimeric pseudo-ionic-order columns ‘cleverly’ exposing their steel innards. But just as the Ritz Carlton corner of Potsdamer Platz



One of your regular pattern-fill-façade, denim storage facilities

resembles a one-fifth-scale Chicago skyline, this gimmick was a Tinkertoy version of Site architect’s *Best Product* stores. You couldn’t read it as a parody because there is nothing about post-modernism that it did bigger, better or brasher. At best it was an anti-parody: unintentional satire. Once again, we were asking ourselves what kind of an architect had been involved? Had they even heard of Site? Or was this what happens when local building suppliers go out drinking with neighborhood factory owners? It seemed like a realistic scenario, and one which I could definitely warm to.

“Everyone should have a container in New Jersey.” In the spirit of this excellent Andy Warhol sound bite I began to imagine the strip as a grand storage facility for the citizens of Berlin and the surrounding counties. Between the stuff you want to keep and the stuff you want to throw away, there’s often a vague category of things you don’t want to look at anymore, but which might one day be useful or valuable. The Strip imagined as a vast storage and retrieval device for all this demi-junk: a ring of thousands of subterranean bays serviced by conveyer belts and autonomous robots, a giant hard drive for the physical bits and bytes of everyday life. An old kitchen cupboard, not yet antique. A painting by a dear friend, too ugly to hang in the living room. Or maybe even whole buildings ...

The idea isn’t so far fetched. Earlier in the day we’d stopped on Umlandstraße to admire the singular pleasure of a freshly built Málaga holiday home (Plate 2) overlooking a rampantly overgrown stretch of the old death strip. Grass grew shoulder high, oak saplings stretched well above my head, and scattered in between



A micro-architectural graveyard: physical data flagged for deletion on Berlin’s hard drive

were the rotting carcasses of nine little kiosks and caravans. I recognised them immediately: they used to be old friends. For years, a vacant lot on Rosenthaler Platz had been home to a jumble of semi-permanent market stalls selling *Chinapfanne*, crepes, börek, drinks and antipasti. I’d even interviewed Selçik, the crêpe guy, for a Slab article in 2007, and had complimented him for his beautiful home-made pancake vending box,

just big enough for him, two hot plates and stacked tubs of ready-mix. Now it stood out here, in a graveyard for microarchitecture, graffitied and rusting in a forgotten corner of Berlin’s hard drive, flagged for deletion but not yet overwritten. ▲

# A FUTURE SQUAT

OLIVER MILLER

It is anomalous to see signs of resistance or protest on the NDS, though unsurprising that if one does it should fall along the border between Kreuzberg and Mitte; it's these two districts that in the recent past have most consummately embodied and engendered the cultural underground in Berlin. Shout-outs should also go to Prenzlauer Berg and Schöneberg (though those scenes' activities largely predate any direct experience of my own). Here is the solitary example of any such activity that I came across on our tour, seemingly in protest to the construction of a slickly-designed condo block on Dresdener Straße. Perhaps it was all too much for the neighborhood *Antifas* (radical leftists) considering that right across the street another building was built with the same kit of architectural parts; we can presume that it was all constructed by one developer as part of a greater ensemble. At the end of the day, this statement has as much relevance here as anywhere, though it's not the kind of expression that one would ever reckon radical lefties bothering to voice upon the polished glass out at Europarc.de, for example. No doubt the architectural offense committed here is seen by those who throw stones to be more serious, regardless of the fact that everything built along the length of the NDS exists in a socio-political twilight zone. The real irony, it seems to me, is this: once upon a time, the building that houses the squat or cooperative that is the domicile of whoever proclaimed their revolutionary sentiments here, was itself nothing more than the product of another generation's unscrupulous real estate speculation. ▲



Opposite: encounter with a resident of the Entenschnabel, or "duck's beak". The street Am Sandkrug was surrounded on three sides by the Berlin Wall, creating a narrow East German peninsula that reached several hundred meters into the West Berlin borough of Frohnau. Border fortifications were only three meters wide at this point, and locals consisted solely of citizens deemed by the State to be reliable.

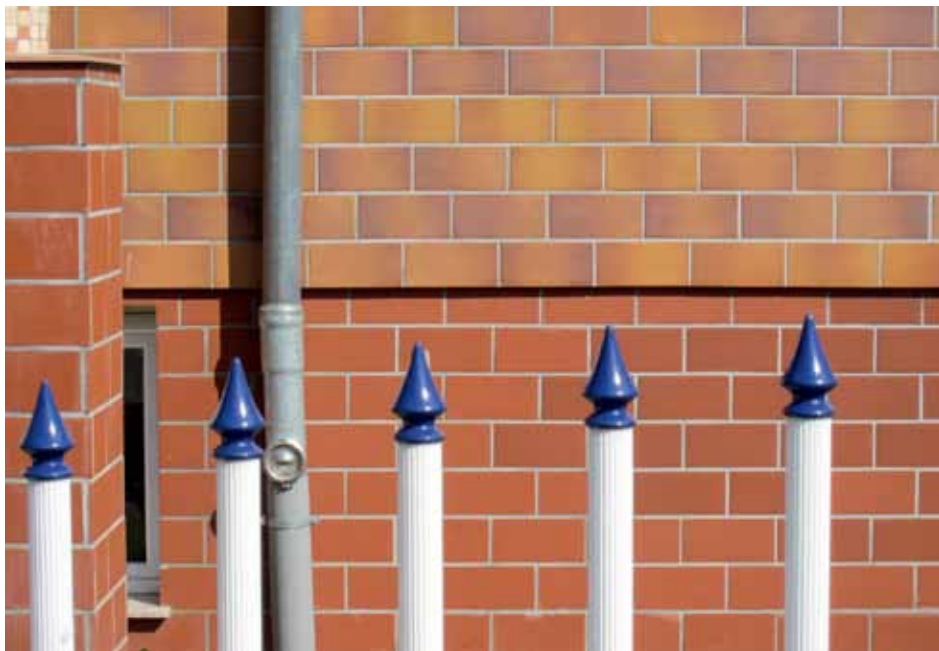
We got chatting to an old fellow whose house stood closest to the end of the beak. He told us about how he'd been in the East German armed forces, and that when he married his wife, they'd moved into the house with his in-laws, to whom it had belonged. In the front garden stood an elaborate home-made sundial. He showed us a book with photos of Am Sandkrug before and after the fall of the Wall, and told us about how residents' movements were restricted by border guards.

The empty zone of sand which occupied the end of the street and acted as a security buffer, has since been developed. East Berlin born retired footballer Stefan Beinlich has built himself a shateaux there.

## COLOR PLATES







- 1 Traumschiff or Schwarzwaldklink?
- 2 Suburban fencing on Uhlandstraße, Berlin-Rosenthal

- 3 Consens Immobilien GmbH, Oranienburger Chaussee 31–33, Glienicke/Nordbahn
- 4 Acoustic barrier at the A113 landscape park





5-12 Signage on the NDS



13 The birth of a new vernacular  
14 Brandenburg, as seen from Berlin





15 The Jheri Curl mansard Pickelhaube











**18** Haus "Mailand II" from Helma Eigenheimbau AG  
**19** The Hasso Platner Institute: where ideas for the future are made



**20** The hard work of maintaining the mirage at Europarc (Drewitz)



**21** Axel-Springer-Straße 54a: a hyperreal alpha-male wolf, lurking silently but ready to pounce



**22** Gulf coast Tuscano just inside Schönefeld on Grenzstraße  
**23** Situation Norma, All Fucked Up. Glienicker Straße, Falkensee





# LA DOLCÉ IGNORANZA!

IAN WARNER

Author's note: this piece is based on an article which originally appeared in Slab on 29th June 2008. Since then it has become the cornerstone of an ongoing series of articles called "Property Marketing Balls", which explores new metropolitan real estate as a marketing phenomena rather than as an architectural one.

For several years now I've been observing the development of a piece of no-man's land between the districts of Kreuzberg and Mitte. It's literally a prairie in the middle of the city, a lush biotope of wild flowers, insects, birds and dog walkers, a vast remnant of the death strip stretching for 600 meters through the center of the city. In developers terms it represents 62 vacant lots of prime real estate spread over five city blocks: an intolerable situation for any capital, obviously. But a mad development frenzy never really took off here, held back for years, or so I think I heard, by the urban planning department.

But in June 2008 a conspicuous sign sprouted up out of the ground on one of the plots, advertising the pending erection of something calling itself the Fellini Residences. The sign came as no great surprise: some weeks earlier I had cycled passed the opening party of a show apartment which had been built on an adjacent plot of land. It was quite a sight: a specially constructed wooden veranda, furnished with dark whicker lounge chairs was teaming with people drinking *frizzante* underneath outdoor heaters. Hundreds of oleander bushes had been shipped in to simulate a lush Mediterranean garden (Plate 24) under the grey Berlin sky, and La Dolcé Vita was playing on a huge screen in the background. I had no time to gate-crash the event, and I wasn't dressed for the occasion either, but it was obviously a Slab article waiting to happen.

During work on an earlier piece about a housing development called Choriner Höfe, I'd had a chance to acclimatise myself to the cretinous gibberish which passes for prose in the world of real estate marketing. My technique was to sit down and read every single word of the developer's web site from top to bottom, to download and scrutinise all available PDF files, and to pay particular attention to the kind of imagery used and to the general atmosphere conveyed by the design. Once I'd broken through the natural bodily instinct to retch repeatedly, the pastime

became kind of entertaining. Texts read as if they'd been penned by Vogue magazine staff writers suffering from late stage rabies, and photographs of completely unrelated objects had been yanked out of context to bolster some underlying lifestyle program I wasn't privy to fully understand. But despite all of this grueling preparation, little had primed me for the web site of the Fellini Residences.

Granted, there is evidence of an actual idea behind the Residences' campaign, so one can assume that its boosters were in possession of at least a dozen or

so brain cells. For example, an attempt has been made to justify the style of the building by referencing local architectural history, which is a lot more sophisticated than the kind of prophetic lifestyle engineering to be found at the Choriner Höfe, where the music tastes of its future inhabitants have been confidently predicted. If a hammy pastiche of 18th century Italian architecture was the desired result, then judging by the



Berlin's Italian quarter begins here

pastel-toned water colour drawings of architect Marc Kocher, the design has been a complete success. Historical mimicry here has been used to evoke a seductive set of essences that will probably appeal to "cosmopolitan multi-homers", but the question of why the Residences choose to take their cues from Italy looms large. Much of the web site – particularly the "concept" section – is dedicated to an answer, but the historical rationale doesn't stand up to even the slightest bit of scrutiny. For this reason, syrupy hyperbole has been liberally spooned in:

"Welcome to the Italian quarter of Berlin! But do not worry; in addition to Italian you will also hear many other languages in this island for metropolitans. All the inhabitants have just one thing in common: they love life and have used perhaps the last opportunity to acquire an apartment in the direct proximity of the Gendarmenmarkt (7 minutes by foot) ... Whoever lives here does not have to do without anything. The subway stations Hausvogteiplatz and Spittelmarkt are a few minutes away."

Let's go through this quote piece by piece. Firstly, and most obviously, Berlin has no Italian quarter. Common knowledge, but I did search for it thoroughly on Berlin's official web site to make sure. The closest I got was a recipe for "Antipasti mit Mozzarella" in the health and beauty section, and a similar search at Lonely

Planet pointed me towards San Francisco and Dublin, but not Berlin. But fine, okay, I don't need to feign naïveté to make my point: the idea that Berlin has an Italian quarter is probably the kind of swaggering conceit which passes for good humor in real estate circles. But there is still some ambiguity here: elsewhere on the web site we read that the Fellini Residences aren't actually in the Italian quarter after all. No ... of course not. How silly. They're not *in* the Italian quarter, they *are* the Italian quarter! Oh mirth! Oh merriment!

Let me proceed to my second point. Notice, in the above quote, the obvious importance of the Gendarmenmarkt, a square in central Berlin where Schinkel's Konzerthaus stands, as well as the German and French cathedrals. Gendarmenmarkt, "the heart of the heart of Berlin" as they put it, is the point towards which the Residences gravitate, time and time again, and where they claim to have learnt so much about Italian architecture. "In an instant, you will feel as if you are in Rome," we are assured. Now, whilst I do not contend that Schinkel, Martin Grünberg or Giovanni Simonetti (who was Swiss, but probably completed his stone masonry apprenticeship in Italy) weren't heavily influenced by Italian architecture of their time, the tenuous association the Fellini Residences are making to the buildings of Gendarmenmarkt is laughable. Forget history, what's being sold here is a hope-

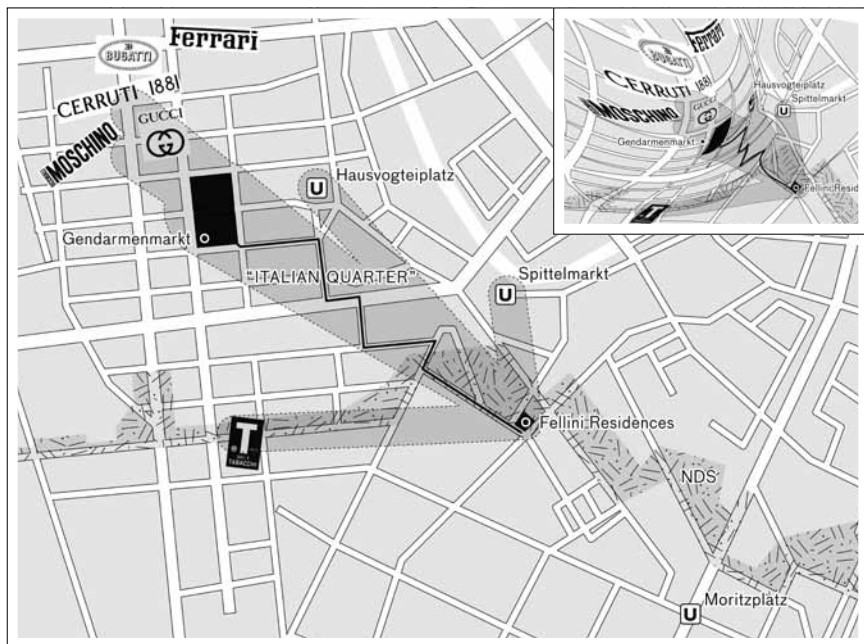


An appalling ham actor, creeping around on the film-set of urban development

lessly clichéd northern European notion of "Italian flair", something which the Fellini Residences hope to evoke through name alone. And incidentally, the Gendarmenmarkt connection has nothing to do with a sensitive reading of architectural history, and everything to do with the fact that the square is surrounded by some of the most luxurious shopping possibilities the city has to offer. Read further, and the Fellini Residences web site gets right to business. "Want to go

shopping?" it asks. "How about Gucci, Moschino or Cerutti. You could also pay a visit to Ferrari and Bugatti. Or you could dine exquisitely at Bocca di Bacco, at Borchartt or at Sale e Tabacchi." Why not just say it right from the start? Buy a third home in Berlin, shop yourself crazy!

The third thing I'd like to come to, is the forced aggrandisement of location through an extremely selective information policy. The hoary real estate truism is that it's all about location, location and location. But even here the Fellini Residences are on shaky ground. The diagram overleaf attempts to explain why.



Above: Berlin's previously unknown Italian Quarter imagined as an array of highly focused reality-distortion beams emanating from a single point. Insert: an approximation of the effect beams might exert on actual terrain.

Revealed is that whilst the Fellini Residences are happy to associate themselves with the “glamour” of Gendarmenmarkt and the practicality of Hausvogteiplatz underground station, they are situated closer to Moritzplatz in neighboring Kreuzberg, somewhere decidedly lacking in Tuscan flair. Even the mantra-like phrase “7 minutes by foot”, which crops up on all promotional material, neglects to mention that you'll have to cross Leipziger Straße – a six lane drag strip for taxis – in order to get to Gendarmenmarkt. Assuming all pedestrian crossings have magically conspired to turn green, you'd have to be walking at around double the average human speed to manage the 1.2km trip to heart of of Berlin's Italian designer label district in that time.

To date only a dozen of the 70 apartments and penthouses have been sold, which explains why construction has not yet began. It would be satisfying to blame this on a duff advertising campaign, as it would suggest that people who can

afford to spend 4300 Euros per square meter on a second home have a little integrity after all. But that would be to ignore the obvious effects of the global financial tsunami which came crashing down on European shores in 2008. The swirling waters are slowly receding, but a lot flotsam and jetsam has been left behind. And so the Fellini Residence showrooms still stand, stoically, and somewhat battered looking, washed up on the edge of an inner city prairie, waiting for fantasy to finally become reality.

Whilst Dutch developer Dr. Harry van Caem waits for another twenty apartments to be sold so that building can commence, the project is dormant. To pass the time, and to woo more potential buyers, a Fellini Residences blog was hastily slapped together in October 2009, with the regrettable effect of pushing Slab's article about the project back to the third page of Google's search results. The blog

### **“Start your day in the bathroom”, advises the Fellini Residence blog.**

is even more hilarious than the official web site, and reads like the captain's log of a slowly sinking ship. On the 19th of October we're told that van Caem “hopes for starting [sic] the construction at the end of this year, to get done with it in 2011”.

On the 24th we are reassured that “the floors and the stairs fit together great”. Three days later, taking stock of the new government, “the economy has already improved and is definitely on the way up”. By November things are getting desperate. On the 9th, figuring that future homeowners could have problems acclimatising themselves to their new Italian lifestyle, advice is bestowed under the headline: “Start your day in the bathroom.” In December, with Christmas looming, the long-forgotten health benefits of living in a 2 Million Euro apartment are revealed, based on evidence provided by “the result of a couple of surveys doctors made”. Later on in the same day we are reminded that “all you need to have a great life is just a regular bike and an [sic] luxury apartment”. Dr. Harry van Caem should know: he “has earned so much money that it is not his worry anymore to start new projects,” and “lives meanwhile in a villa in the sunny Marbella, Spain”, where he is presumably also financing a Prussian beach condo.

So what is my big objection? And what of the New Death Strip? Railing against hair-brained marketing is good sport, but what is the larger picture? I think I object to the underlying contradiction at the heart of the project. The Fellini Residences, as a financial venture, are reliant upon the perceived value of Berlin as an attractive location for real estate: it feeds on the city's reputation as “a hip place to be”. But as soon as it gets serious about the town, it starts daydreaming about Italy. Lost in masturbatory self absorption, the Fellini Residences are only able to engage with



the parts of Berlin it already sees reflected in its own fictional construct. In fact, one could suggest that the campaign was in place long before an architect had been found to create a suitable product. The campaign doesn't justify the product, the product justifies the campaign, and the campaign is the program. How else then to explain the complete lack of awareness of the Berlin Wall, which ran not five meters from where a Fontana di Trevi inspired "antique" fountain is planned for the center of the Residence's "jewel garden". Just how far removed the program is from its immediate context on the former death strip is demonstrated by a text clarifying the Fellini concept. It begins with the words, "You do not have to die to arrive in paradise. You have it right on your doorstep."

The Fellini Residences aren't malicious, they're just dumb. And dumb usually works. In 2009 I visited the showrooms during daylight hours, and was given a tour through a mushroom-toned vision of luxury by an immaculate young salesman keen to emphasise the quality of the black marble flooring in the bathroom. The walls were so smooth that my eyes had difficulty focusing, and I was surprised by how much money had to be thrown after quality materials to attain the exact same feeling I have when flipping through the photographic perfection of an Ikea catalog. At one point I casually brought up the subject of the death strip in a roundabout

manner, but was quickly ushered off to inspect some tiles and a thermostat. Sensing I was about to be thrown out soon anyway, I approached the subject again, this time more directly. The sales guy first gave me one of those serene smiles, made difficult to read by the piercing look in his eyes: was he about to leap over the Eric Kuster mahogany dining table and stab me in the neck with a Mont Blanc fountain pen? Luckily

an ugly scuffle was avoided, and we ended our encounter instead by both agreeing that the death strip would make pretty difficult raw material for a successful marketing campaign, and he politely led me to the front door clutching a cordless phone, thumb poised over the speed-dial number of a local security firm.

Despite its historic cues, real history is an insignificance compared with the heavenly delights on offer within the Fellini compound. And lost on the Residences too is any sense of historic irony; an appreciation of the transience and incongruity residing in the very fabric of the city, which could have instilled the development with a modicum of genuine dignity beyond its fetishisation of form and material.

Standing back-to-back with the future Residences are Zvi Hecker and Faber+Faber's unpretentiously named "Apartmenthaus", which seems to have had no problems financing itself and is nearing completion. A cinematic rebuttal to *La Dolce Vita* around the corner, the sci-fi swooshing Hecker/Faber project resembles a set piece from *Minority Report*, and is advertised on the Burkhard Biermann real estate agency web site with a simple one liner: "Where a Wall once stood". And leaves it at that. ▲



*La Dolce Vita meets Minority Report*

## Hashing out the Grey Zone

Oct. 7th, 2010

The following exchange was created in *Google Docs*. This online service enables multiple authors to edit the same text file simultaneously, in real-time

**IW** How close do you both think we've come to finding the New Death Strip vernacular?

**DS** You mean like a NDS yurt or shotgun house?

**IW** Exactly. Something indigenous to this space. I've seen lots of stuff I could have seen anywhere, if you disregard monuments. Which probably shows how artificial our reading of the NDS is.

**OM** So we really want to delve into that again? Jeez ...

**IW** Definitely. I thought we were getting close to something yesterday talking about the development near Bernauer Straße. It came right at a point when I'd given up on the vernacular.

**OM** I thought the conclusion we came to is that there is no conclusion. Strelitzer Gärten's not it, no way. Its way too micro-utopic. Is the entire NDS supposed to be occupied by architects living in townhouses with their offices on the ground floor?

**IW** That's an irony I'm happy to revel in for a while. But it's as good a reason as any to disqualify Strelitzer Gärten. My argumentation was that if we talk about a vernacular, we can't just use one definition of the word: using it as a container for everything we've found. We have to use it in the sense of an indigenous architecture, unique to the conditions of the strip, and preferably built by the people on the strip. And Strelitzer Gärten comes so close.

**OM** Myth making! You're just playing games with yourself, and I don't think that's a very healthy thing to do. By definition a vernacular is something that grows organically from a culture. Strelitzer Gärten is like a genetically modified architecture, one that's stronger and more resistant to the onslaught of our reckless critique. But a true vernacular can't be understood as an invention. On the level of a more well-founded definition of the term, those fucking lame catalogue

homes would be much more defensible as NDS vernacular.

Here's an idea: let's design a new roof type for those houses, just for the NDS!

**IW** I don't agree with you about calling the catalogue homes an NDS a "vernacular" because you could find them anywhere. They're endemic to the strip, but not exclusive to it. But calling Strelitzer Gärten "genetically modified" made me think of IVF treatment: in vitro fertilisation. Strelitzer Gärten and the catalogue homes are both petri dish cultures that have been implanted into a new organism. Whatever the comparison we draw, the NDS remains a literary device for this study. It brings a whole bunch of signifiers with it, but they're like an inert gas: nothing seems to react to them. We might just as well have chosen a line of longitude to study.

**DS** It's an interesting thought, the question of the vernacular. Maybe it's one of these things that should stand as a question. The development of a vernacular is something very bottom up. You would need some supercomputer to shortcut the bottom up, open system, including feed-backs, in the span of a lifetime, possibly much quicker, as the condition that this vernacular might sit in is probably successfully smudged out completely. You cannot possibly design a vernacular, that seems fundamentally impossible. Posing the question is, in a way, a design brief. So we need to keep in mind the futility of the question.

**OM** Okay, let's get back to the issue of the vernacular before we argue about the "any line of longitude" thing. When you think about it, the catalogue homes are way less IVF than Strelitzer Gärten is. Any vernacular takes pre-existing methods of construction and adapts them to the immediate cultural and material context. And every vernacular is not a style but an entire retinue of techniques, cultural references, site influences, etc, that compounds against the will of a pre-meditated aesthetic program, e.g.: architecture without architects, à la Christopher Alexander. And Wiesenblick, for example, is a definite candidate for an architecture without architects. We love to trash it for that reason and say, "why didn't you hire an architect?". And then most of the time when they do and it sucks, we wonder why there can't just be some feel-good vernacular

out there. The catalogue homes are the vernacular. We only need to wait a little while for the form to be better inflected by the cultural and physical setting, something that takes generations, really. But no one's ever willing to wait. We're all looking for immediate answers, quick-fix solutions to the testing problems of architectural theory. Speaking of which, any ideas for that roof design?

**DS** The prefabbed homes are the vernacular in the sense that they so vividly express that there is no vernacular indigenous to the death strip. Morphing all the prefabbed houses we've seen into one, the NDS vernacular house would be an Italianate villa with northern German Krüppelwalmdach and some Prussian Pickelhaube adornments on the roof, or polycarbonate gas lamps.

**IW** I keep thinking about Norwegian stave-roof churches. On the strip we've seen a lot of references to southern architecture: faux-Italian villas in Reinickendorf and your Dead-Tech Santa Monica beach houses in Mitte. So I'd like to see something northern. What I'd love to see is part of the Strip turn into a neighborhood where the Strip is still readable. So you'd need long fields of vision on one axis, and a sense of shallowness on the other, depending on which way you were looking. I loved the dyke landscape in Altglienicke, but it wasn't extreme enough. So I think I'd like a long raised dyke, covered in wooden houses – almost black – with extremely pitched gable roofs. All the houses should have a different orientation and vary in height. Like a burnt forest. And you'd have to bring someone like Hejduk back from the grave to draw the master plan, or use some kind of arbitrary method for planning the distribution of the houses. The roofs have to be blackened wood, so that the satellite dishes really show up nicely. Let's get a northern gothic vibe going on the Strip ...

**DS** That's a great proposal. But please, no runes! Maybe people would go more for a Pipi Longstocking Swedish country side thing. But I like it a lot, a heterogeneous collection of roof pitches. That seems really appropriate, since roof pitch angles is such an old hat of establishing continuity, even though I had previously said that I kind of feel the appropriate gesture would be to build invisible buildings; buildings that are of the

ground, and mostly subterranean, or buildings on poles. But to just slap some catalogue surface materials on there as if nothings ever happened seems a bit insensitive. I think the compressed earth church could be an influence that surrounding houses pick up on.

**OM** I feel what you're saying, Ian. Maybe the satellite dish is a detail that some special kind of indigenous armature can be designed for, a prefab wrought iron design. But for the roof itself, I wonder if we shouldn't look more at what's already there, as opposed to projecting something from the outside onto the context, which is really not that different than anything to catalogue homes companies are already doing; just going north as opposed to going south seems pretty reactionary. My idea, then, is this: its a simple pitched roof, but it absolutely has to be asymmetrical, like the Wiesenblick home. And it absolutely has to have the deck on the side that's been amputated. If you just do that over and over again, it could really start to look like something, and its a "design" that actually took seed on the NDS semi-organically, or at least according to the process of speculative land development that is the operative mode there. Also, Arno Brandhuber did a house in Aachen that, I hate to say it, kind of has a similar look, albeit without the deck. And that's just the kind of thing that looks good as far as foreshadowing a new vernacular mode in the post-industrial world, it having been hip or new like 10 years ago. Another part of the vernacular kit of parts could be those blue ceramic roof tiles that look like they're made of co extruded ABS with a PMMA top layer. The main point is that certain rules are always followed, certain details and materials like those mentioned are always employed.

**IW** I don't remember Wiesenblick being all that asymmetrical, but I agree that the pitched roof houses need some kind of mildly twisted geometry. Maybe if the houses all had a different orientation, but the decks you're talking all pointed in the same direction, you'd get that kind of effect. As for the roof, I'd have difficulty accepting those "vernacular" blue tiles. If they could be modified too – elongated like horse teeth, and made pitch black – then I could start getting friendly with them. But I'd like to stay with the wooden roof just

for a moment, or with the wooden construction as a whole, as wood offers a great opportunity for story telling. You could involve the residents in community wood-carving projects so that a high level of customisation takes place. Or if no one can be bothered, some other initiative which allows a narrative to be told through the structure of the buildings: like a modern Bayeux tapestry.

**OM** No one's going to bother with the carving ... more pipe dreams! Aren't there enough on the NDS already? We should be talking about garages for the Mercs and Bimmers, how to adapt them to the sociocultural landscape of the NDS. But the idea of murals, like tapestries, I could really get behind. It would be a way to totally literally tell the story of whatever in a predictably kitsch Berlin-Brandenburg style. And if you look at the pics of Wiesenblick again, its really quite irregular, not symmetrical but definitely wishing it were. Its that kind of perversion that I think begs to be transformed into a symbol language.

**DS** This might be outta context, just want to hold onto the thought ... I feel there is something about the ground, the vernacular should either be on stilts, or underground, but somehow it's not conceivable to me that it just occupies this hot turf like houses do in other conditions.

Having come to this discussion a little late, I can sense a polarisation going on. I think they don't need to be resolved. Conjuring up a vernacular, again, is just a device. It's leading to some interesting outcomes, design-wise. Let me think about what I'm trying to say here and get back to you.

**OM** Yes, I feel like strangling Ian. He's resorting to one pastiche in opposition to another.

**IW** This is a design process. I throw some ideas in – pitched roofs, black material, tapestries – and you take them further. I don't see the cause for dismay, I'm happy with where this is going.

**DS** The process seems to be, Ian comes up with some ideas, which sounds entirely valid as speculation, which are then tested against Oliver's scrutiny. So far, it's a very productive draw.

**OM** Actually he's a big inspiration to me. But I think the thing he really did to foster this discussion was to go out and find Wiesenblick in the first place. How did we miss it, Dan? As far as my position regarding the NDS vernacular, I think the roof/deck design there is really "it". It's on the

NDS so it kind of has to look retarded. And I think Ian's onto something as far as prescribing a code for siting the buildings, maybe their orientation could reference sight lines from the watch towers that used to stand there. There was one every 100 meters or so, so that would definitely give everything a nicely jumbled look. The murals, too, would be a must.

**DS** My feeling is that we shouldn't discount ourselves as agents of a new vernacular. So Ian's suggestions I see merely as the way he would want build his house, an expression of his own, subjective personal wishes, given the context, which is entirely legitimate and part of the vernacular form-finding process, as well. He would thereby exert an influence on the development of this vernacular. It just shouldn't take on the air of a code or a prescription. It needs to come from his desires, not from an analysis. I think the vernacular comes through the will as Schopenhauer talks about it, or maybe not, as come to think about it, it seems it's often based in pragmatism.

**IW** Oliver, what exactly did you mean when you talked about the perverse irregularity of Wiesenblick? And how could this be developed? Wiesenblick is all about huge blank walls, lots of surface, and then clusters of windows. Are we talking about odd formal gestures, just restrained enough to be considered normal, but irritating when inspected more closely? And if so, how does this differ from what we've already seen? Do we just need to take what's already there and "turn up the volume"?

**OM** What I mean is yeah, turn up the volume. Just build Wiesenblick over and over again, playing with the details and in different lengths. Its like a sausage that can be cut to size. I hadn't thought about the sheer end walls, but I think that they might as well be kept, too. Nothing to do, really, but keep building Wiesenblick with a few important tweaks. Eventually people with an actual design consciousness (e.g. architects) would move in and start transforming the vernacular, rendering it in more risqué materials, adding slits and jinks to radicalize it.

**IW** I think we're on two parallel paths of radicalism. For me it's not enough to just reproduce Wiesenblick again and again: I preferred the idea of really learning a thing or two from this "trash",

and perverting it in a new form. I can really see our twisted, blue ceramic stave roofed village, with all its decks pointing down the watchtower's lines of sight. Large expanses of wall could be translated as large expanses of roof tiling, and windows should gravitate towards the edges of the structures leaving room for pixelated roof-tile murals ... And I can also see all the Mercs and BMW X3s parked in their subterranean dyke bays. Rather than extruding each house, sausage-style, I see the whole settlement as a chain of sausages, twisted off at intervals ...

**OM** What are you on and where can I get some?

**DS** Some Stein of fermented double-bag tea?

**IW** I have a keg of PG Tips on hand.

**OM** Alright, it sounds weird, but in a good way. Let's draw it up. Now, about that notion that you could just follow any line across Berlin and get a corresponding survey of contemporary building practice. Okay, in a way, yes. But look at what we've just been talking about. That seems to be as strong an argument for an opposing position as any.

**IW** I haven't really expanded on the thought. It's just a sense that much of the Strip is dominated by Business As Usual. I love the fact that you can work in a jeans depot in Reinickendorf and not notice that the industrial estate you're in has popped up out of some convenient DMZ real estate. I love that fact that things are stored on the Strip. Andy Warhol once said that everyone should have a container in New Jersey. Imagine the NDS filled with people's junk piled high in shipping containers. But here we go again, more ...

**OM** ... vernacularization?

**IW** ... preposterousness that Oliver's going to shoot me down for.

**OM** To the contrary, the storage idea is awesome. A living archive of the present! It's quite practical, actually what's going on on the NDS already. Just drop containers all around, between the jumbled villages of asymmetrically pitched "vernacular" houses. Let's diagram it.

**IW** It sounds hot.

**DS** Maybe it should be server farms storing digitally hoarded material? Or both?

**OM** Yes.

**IW** Free-form sci-fi speculation ... but I'd like to know what you both think. I bet you could scale

up this whole endeavor to the size of the entire republic, and just take any line of longitude and come up with something similar. Let's think about what might challenge this notion.

**OM** That's what Slab is essentially about, it seems: licence to have a reaction to anything. Our motto could also be: "We Work Blind".

**DS** I think it's all about what ground it stand on. The building typologies would probably be similar, but the context is unique. It is a context that connects these things we find on the death strip, even though these projects don't seem to be aware of that. It's our job to bang on about that.

**IW** OK, there's a good challenge. The ground has somehow become sacred. I like this, it has something primal about it. Charged earth. It's a sick thought, but I can't help recalling the plot line of *Poltergeist* ... ▲



# LANDSCAPE RULES: THE LESSONS OF A113

OLIVER MILLER

*Cherry blossom shade*

*no one an utter*

*stranger*

Kobayashi Issa

(inscribed on a bronze plaque commemorating  
the planting of 300 cherry blossom trees on  
the NDS)

*There's something between love and hate.*

Felix Ney

For a tourist wanting to understand what the blockade that used to divide Berlin was like, the acoustic barrier along the new A113 Autobahn offers a more convincing example than, say, the hermetically preserved segment of the wall on Bernauer Straße. (Plate 4) Here, at least, the taggers are actually able to have a jolly good spray, and any attempt to climb over it and cross the highway on the other side would be a far more lethal proposition than a jump'n'run over at the official Wall Museum. Aside from that, this tastefully-rendered construction, comprising of stained wooden boards held within a steel framework, displays a usefulness comparable to that of the original Wall. Granted, the visual result is something altogether less forbidding and more friendly to the touch than its predecessor, and the delicate growth of vines thoughtfully planted at its base softens what would otherwise have been a brutally sheer expanse of verticalized condo decking.

Taken as a whole, it is the unassuming authenticity of this wall segment, as well as that of all the other elements making up this particular stretch of the NDS, is what it most clearly has in common with the death strip circa 1961–1989. Paradoxically, it is the reality of the situation at the official wall museum that could not be more the opposite. Here we have what my colleague DS metaphorically dubbed the “Wall on a pedestal”. The base of this piece of wall-as-object consists of a plain sheet of Corten steel at either end, a tastefully restrained way of sterilizing it from

both the immediate urban context as well as the cruelty of its past. It occurs to me that the curator of this exhibition could well have done better by deciding to bind it between two slabs of Miesian Carrara marble.

Back at the A113, another fragment of the ol' Wall has also been preserved and protected, though in a completely different manner. A few absurd meters away



The Wall in a cage

from the acoustic barrier, the landscape architect, Bert Grigoleit, has placed a steel cage over a remaining segment of the *Vorderlandmauer* that blocked off the GDR side of the death strip. This appears to have been a way better approach to solving the problem of how to protect a piece of the wall from being fucked with by wall monkeys chiseling away at it. My only caveat is that it's been painted blend-in green instead

of something more garish that would better celebrate the colorful history of mural and graffiti art which used to adorn the outer wall's western faces, e.g. hot-pink, Day-Glo blue, nu-rave violet, or at the very least fire engine red.

In all, the infrastructural park along the A113 south of the Teltow Canal was perhaps the most enjoyable place that I blazed through on the entire tour. My time spent there was simply too brief, and I fantasized about one day returning there with a lover to spend a few stolen hours frolicking on the evenly-graded slopes of high-end landscape architecture. The project not only succeeds in creating a place that's simultaneously bucolic and artificial, it also demonstrates how to generate something genuine out the flattened ODS. In order to deal with the stigma of the New Death Strip's past, it seems the very ground it is built upon has to be treated. The earth itself is the substance common to the territory's past and present, and it's therefore reasonable to think of it as the best place to begin its transformation. That is exactly what's been done at A113 park, and, significantly, the terrain has been radically reshaped without having wiped clean every condition or artifact of its past. The wall fragments being used as landscape elements, similar to their implementation at the Evangelical cemetery next to the Wall Remembrance Center on Bernauer Straße, represent the most basic iteration of this idea. More radically, the intermittent regeneration of the terrain's old status as a lethal barrier between halves of a divided city lent a degree of meaning and interest to my experience of the A113 landscape, giving the place an identity that resonated deeper than its visual attractiveness alone ever could have. The cropped view of overhead free-

way signage and the enveloping drone of traffic's steady flow were not so much the denial of an ideal as the connotation of a fantastic hyperreality.

It comes as no surprise that it's not enough to randomly plop prefabricated objects down and hope for the best, although this is exactly what has been done in almost every example involving land development on the NDS; practically the only places that seem natural enough not to beg the need for skeptical inquiry are the swathes of derelict land, the overgrown wildernesses where the forward



The regeneration of a lethal barrier

march of real estate speculation has not yet trampled the already flat ground. Even the majority of park lands, including portions of the A113 zone, have a rigorous, forgetful artificiality. This is exemplified by the grids of planted trees found throughout. There are any number of orchards and allées, particularly along the southern edge, all of which were planted according to a geometry whose strictness seems perfectly in

accord with their sites' previous use. The trees themselves, as perfectly-formed as those found in a computer modeling library, look as austere and foreign to the place as "Czech Hedgehog" anti-tank obstacles would.

The foreignness that's so native to the NDS's planting schemes finds its apotheosis in an area cultivated with Japanese Cherry Blossom trees, that strip of Land between Berlin-Lichterfelde and Teltow. In a touching response to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Asahi Television Network in 1990 initiated a fund raising drive to plant trees on the Old Death Strip. The action raised 140 million Yen, or approximately 1 Million Euros, from over 20,000 Japanese citizens. The contributions resulted in the planting of an allée with 300 trees, an amount later extended through local initiatives to over 1,200. Today it's considered to be the longest such row of Sakura in Berlin or Brandenburg, and is the site of a yearly festival in celebration of the trees' blossoming, in parallel to those in Japan. For anyone basically ignorant of tree species, as I am, the appearance of these rows seems at first to be nothing special. This reality is emblematic of many things to be found on the NDS: a strange, invented truth, at first invisible, lies not far beneath the surface.

There are rampant examples of catalogism to be found on the NDS, whether in the specification of horticultural elements or the construction of single family homes. It's a subject that one tries as long as possible to avoid because of its utter banality, and there was a temptation to rush through the residential subdivi-

sions as quickly as possible; going from one to the next I soon became weary of the psychological effects rendered by so many competing systems of speculative house construction. It was the feeling of a restless malaise, and a sense of helplessness. I had, after all, at one point been a devoted student of architecture, and even entered into the profession for three years. At heart I'm designer wanting to change things, to make the world a cooler, better place, and the atmosphere of these contemporary residential developments started to feel not just like the absence of design, but its death. After a while, though, I inevitably started to settle into the feeling of just being "there" ... maybe it wouldn't be so bad to live like a little king in my very own spec castle. By simply reducing one's exposure to inputs from the world at large, as indeed happened to me after a few hours away from the bustle and confusion of my day-to-day existence inside the city, one realizes that there's an interdependent logic of closely-bounded desires that it's possible, even agreeable, to succumb to. A feeling of security and entitlement is something all of us yearn for on some level, and it's just a question of degree if it begins to dominate our decision making. Once it does, the course of action becomes less and less jeopardized by the burden of trying to shoot down ideologies – including one's own – like a duck hunter on the first day of open season. The tendency is to reduce not only the number of decisions or judgments, but also the very parameters within which they fall. I realized that it's in this state of mind that one reaches for a catalog in order to find solutions, or even to define problems.

It was upon my encounter with B&B Baubetreuung's development on Grenzstraße, on the Schönefeld side border between Berlin-Neukoelln and Brandenburg, that I began to sense the mechanics of this reasoning. In this state of mind the pioneers of the NDS evaluate their financial expenditures according to the objective performance that anything, really anything, can be measured by. A window, kitchen appliance, a paving unit, a car, a roof tile, a tree, a motorized gate, or even the physical siting of a building must all be subjected to a process of direct statistical comparison by the consumer. There is no alternative to total objectivization if one is to stay the course, and the tentative effect is one of cozy seriality with slight variations of individual decision making within a repeating theme, e.g. Mercedes vs. BMW. All of this absorption in the comparison between manufactured products, be they architectural, mechanical, electronic, horticultural, or whatever, is the disconnect from a more earthy realism, and it's for this reason that issues of landscape, or indeed cityscape, and the legacies of their development, are not so much rejected as subconsciously ignored. Over a chain link fence dividing the lots of their almost identical spec homes, two wives might be discussing the finer points of Kärcher's new line of high pressure cleaners, while one of their husbands

admires the topiary tree he's taken a pause from sculpting with his Bosch hedge clippers. It's a pedestrian condition, common to many of the world's post-industrial societies, that could really be anywhere in western Europe. Only the street's name, Grenzstraße ("Border Street"), as well as its very placement directly beside the older Schuthirtenweg on the Berlin side, oddly relates the present condition of the site to its history. Against the backdrop of the B&B development's pre-fabrication of a flattened reality, the pathos and humor of this cheeky bit of traffic engineering almost resonates the neighborhood out of its comfort zone.

Because the condition of its physical terrain has hardly been considered, I discovered that the NDS struggles to generate places that either contain memory or are worth remembering. It was with this thought in mind that I returned to good old Bernauer Straße, that hotbed of NDS development. Aside from those stranded

totems of mediocrity standing guard between Mitte and Wedding, things get a bit more interesting around the self-consciously variegated zone around the Berlin Wall Memorial. Surely a favorite among tourists looking for a whiff of the divided city, I've managed to bike past it for years with the dismissiveness of a local, and for the purposes of this study I'd further resisted any temptation to delve into its treasure trove of historical documentation. As usual, the approach was to try to sort stuff out on the level

of the raw urban material, dealing only with the kinds of things that present themselves to a keen observer who's nonetheless ignorant – though hopefully not dismissive, anymore – of prescriptive background information.

The centerpiece to the Berlin Wall Memorial landscape is a small sample of the Old Death Strip that has been "preserved", complete with watch tower, walls both to the east and to the west, carefully raked forensic sand, etc. Across the street, in the old west, an austere public viewing tower has been built, from which the NDS can be optimally surveyed from on high. It was at the very culmination of this project that I broke with my complacency and finally scaled its heights. Up top I joined a few tourists looking down at the piece of ODS across the street. It looked like an elegant rock garden created not out of a serene meditative practice, but rather in order to prompt vicarious experiences of the past in the minds of me and my fellow spectators. A middle aged man from India was telling his teenage son and daughter



Direct statistical comparison that anything, really, anything can be measured by.

what it was like when he'd visited Berlin in the '80s, how the Wall had been "utter madness". An American woman was reading from a guidebook about someone getting shot to death trying to get across. It was stuff I'd heard before but it didn't seem trite; the barren strip was serving its purpose, it was really affecting. The Death-Strip-on-a-Pedestal was more soul stirring, and more broadly accessible, than any other sculpture I can think of. But it is nonetheless a sculpture and artifact, a memorial prefabricated by history. It's made of the very same stuff that's stood there since the cold war, but the material has been treated by both the process of time and a careful curatorial sensibility. Its having been frozen in time does the majority of the work to achieve a stasis, along with the lack of any movement across its barren ground plane. Doesn't legend have it that colonies of rabbits used to breed here? People used to sit in those towers, too, keeping a careful eye on things and smoking cigarettes, and I projected what it would have been like to see their silhouettes through the strip of windows across from me.

As I thought about the elegiac fakeness of the situation, I had to reflect back on the paradox of the A113 landscape's authenticity. In a moment of perverse extrapolation, I imagined the simulations of the Berlin Wall Memorial being taken a step further. Why not hire actors to play the guards smoking cigarettes in order to complete the picture? Why couldn't the rabbit warrens, at least, be reintroduced? Or more elaborately, how about making the place an interactive exhibition where tourists could try their luck crossing a simulated Death Strip whilst being sniped at by guards with fully automatic paint markers? Whether or not such a scheme is ever realized is probably just a question of collective taste, or of time. Its an impossible fantasy that I'm not really sure I'd want to see realized. In that respect its not so different from much of what I found on the NDS: an environment with no concrete precedents that begs the need for radical environmental solutions, of which desperately few have yet been proposed.

From the viewing platform at the Berlin Wall Memorial is visible, however, one very unique NDS project borne of some kind of visionary idealism: the unfortunately named *Strelitzer Garten*. It's a self-contained community of town houses, of all things. As soon as I saw it/them during my first exploratory probes of the NDS, I took a mild, though immediate, disliking to them. There they sat, at the top of a dirt patch just to the north of the Chapel of Reconciliation and the Berlin Wall Memorial. Just there, in fact, where the terrain of the memorial is being expanded up to and will soon be included within. In its present state, the scraped dirt surface of this piece of NDS resembles a virtual beach on the sunny west coast of Mitte, above which the new three story units at Strelitzer Garten appear like updated variations of the "dead-tech post-modernistic bullshit house" that Al Pacino's police

detective character was referring to in the film *Heat*. Looking up at them I caught a fresh, exotic whiff of So-Cal decon. (Plate 17) They really look like they were drawn up by a clique of smart-alecky Germans who met as exchange students at Sci-Arc back in the early '90s. To be sure, they are very consciously conceived and apparently well-built formalist houses with lots of raw metal, expanses of plate glass, irregularly placed slits, natural wood siding, grey rough coat and a few jinky angles.



"Utter madness"

I have to be shamefully honest and say that it's just the kind of stuff I would have gotten pretty excited about back in the day. Even worse, I hate to admit that I still kind of like it. But 20 years on I do have a mistrust of anything so patently designy, or reminiscent of my lost design school idealism.

It's as I now look back at the odyssey of my NDS tour that I see the Strelitzer Gärten as something much more interesting and provocative than an empty indulgence in stylized functionalism. What makes it relevant within the context of this survey is the way in which it self-referentially deals with issues of the site within a small, enclosed frame. Just like the 99% of the NDS that's not some kind of memorial to the Wall, the history

of the site has been eradicated. That's really okay with me, and it seems that to consciously imbue the place with hints of its morbid past would be a futile mission that more often than not would go horribly wrong; indeed, the power of A113 derives largely from the fact that its planning strategy is the result of enough randomness to keep the regeneration of a deadly border condition from feeling forced. The thing that drew me back to Strelitzer Gärten was the fact that the curving pedestrian street along which its townhouses line themselves, is a more positive example of made-up planning strategies. From within it has the scale, proportions and form of a streetscape one might find in the de Pijp neighborhood of Amsterdam or in Whitechapel, London. Using Google, a popular internet search engine, I quickly found out that the development was planned with some pretty visionary ideals in mind. It was done not by any of the architects who gave the place such a characteristic style, but by Norbert Rheinlaender and Markus Heller of Autofrei

Leben! e.V. Both of them are in fact activists trying to intensively re-think how we live in cites, as well as how we develop them.

The result is a proposition based on rules truly of its own making. The project's overall form, which is a couple of stories lower than the surrounding urban fabric, looks from a distance just slightly odd. All of the lots were bought by people for their own use, and each unit was lovingly developed to suit their elevated aesthetic



Sunset on the left coast of Mitte

sensibilities. The garages are conspicuously missing, and the scale and displacement of this architecture would certainly not be realizable if provisions for X5's and Benzo station wagons had to have been made. But through the windows of the various townhouses I saw such objects as a professional espresso machine, high-end prams, a crystal chandelier and a longboard. The vibe is of life being too good; of life being too good and also clearly visible from the publicly accessible central walkway. It's clear that such visionary indulgence has instilled a level of pride in those who have fostered it, causing them to willingly put what they've got out on display. It is obnoxious, but this is a micro-utopic model that only really suffers for being a feel-good yuppie design ghetto.

The curved line of the void running through the project references nothing, but still makes sense on its own terms. Unlike so many of its fellow developments on the NDS, in the middle-to-distant future Strelitzer Gärten stands a very good chance of superseding the vagaries of its current occupants. ▲



## FREE FORM

OLIVER MILLER

Without question the most radical forms built on the NDS are to be found in playgrounds. This is of course to do with the functional requirements of such constructions – to entertain and challenge the activities of children – as well as the difficulty in realizing such complex geometries in the design of anything that has to serve the needs of adults year-round. But it seems that imagination and spontaneity in design have nevertheless been put in their place, on the sidelines of a more hum-drum conception of reality. ▲

## HYPERBOLIC SEAM

An Afternoon of  
Metaphor

DANIEL SCHWAAG

*Soon, they will begin to fold space. Far off in the  
control rooms of Spice gas, travelling without moving.*

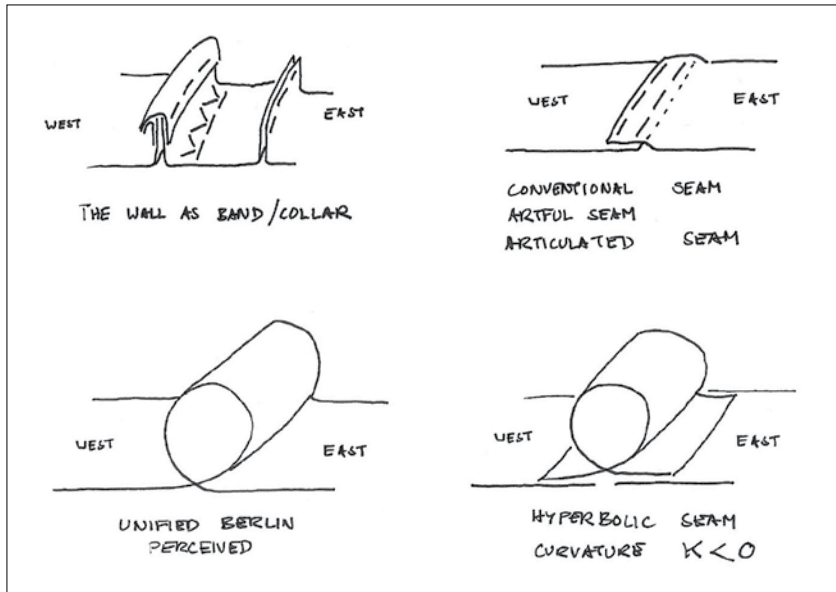
*Dune, 1984*

The NDS – my thoughts spin on an Archimedean spiral towards the perimeter of West Berlin. If I don't know *what* it is, I do know *where* it is. So I go there to start, like retrieving a lost item. But each circular trace puffs into thin air, before it lingers with the substance of a chemtrail. Again and again, I am tantalizingly close, only to bounce back to the start, by a mechanism triggered by braille sized eject buttons. The New Death Strip is a weird architectural section through Berlin, cutting through both the periphery and the very center, then folded back onto itself to form a loop. The New Death Strip is a looped degree of longitude. Is it a place or line? A hatched band, or stippled? It snakes elusively around West Berlin like the track of a sand-worm in David Lynch's *Dune*.

The concern of this topology is the New Death Strip. The New Death Strip is located on the old death strip, but not every place on the old death strip is New Death Strip and some places are more New Death Strip than others. The New Death Strip sounds like an object, but is actually more adjective than noun. I use "the Wall" to describe the entire former border installation, including the death strip.

I turn to Gottfried Semper's *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts*. What the heck. Does this genealogy of architecture still hold anything in store for the condition of Berlin's post-unification urban fabric? The introduction describes the textile arts as the first art of arranging, from which all other arts, including architecture, inherited their formal vocabularies. Primordial humans spun their first threads in order "to tie together and to string", or "to cover and protect", long before they did anything else, apparently. For this topology of the New Death Strip, we begin with the first motivation, of "tying together and stringing".

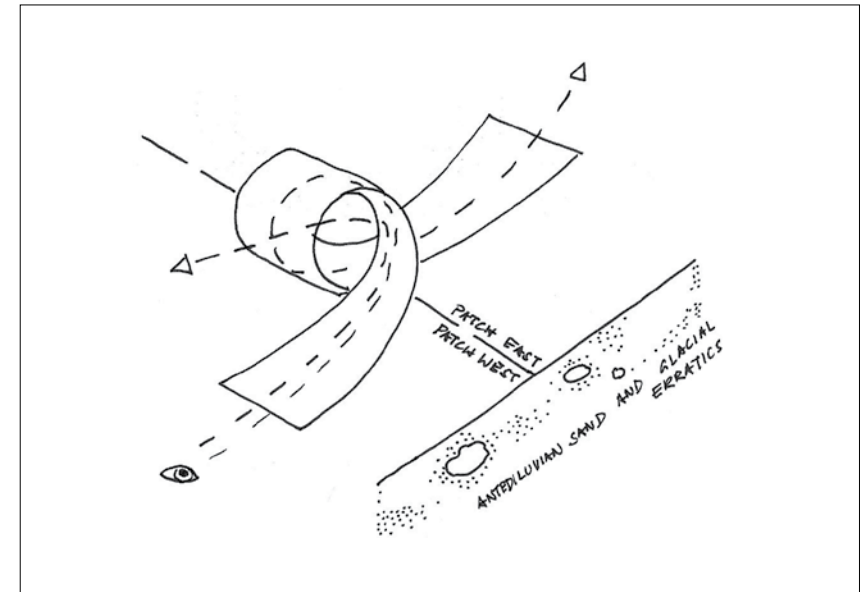
According to Semper:



“the band connects and groups things not part of it, by an act of framing. It expresses itself as a band through an appearance of strength and resistance. The band is characterized by a strip that surrounds something”.

That works. The Wall was a strip that displayed strength and resistance. It tied Berlin together, the Wall “is” Berlin by synecdoche. In the mind of a tourist, it continues to do so to this day, long after its almost complete erasure. It is to Berlin what the crown jewels and the Tower were to London, prior to the London Eye. Which is why it is now in a process of restoration, in parts, at the Berlin Wall Memorial.

If the Wall tied two things together like a band, the New Death Strip acts as some kind of seam. The seam, according to Semper, “is the universal metaphor for the combination of originally separate surfaces into one”. But when it’s done well and in the tradition of art, it should be articulated as such. He argues that the artful expression of the seam heightens the celebration of the existential, creative act of arranging and joining together. At first, the Citroën DS of Barthes’s *Mythologies* appears at odds with this definition. The essay describes the seamlessness of the DS as “a new phenomenology of assembling”. Barthes then reaffirms Semper’s definition of the seam and resolves the conflict of articulation:



“It is well known that smoothness is always an attribute of perfection because its opposite reveals a technical and typically human operation of assembling: Christ’s robe was seamless, just as the airships of science-fiction are made of unbroken metal.”

The New Death Strip joins together without an articulation of “assembledness”, with a seamlessness beyond even a Citroen DS. Rather than grounded in the art of textiles, it must originate from a new art of joining, that of welding or melting. The New Death Strip joins separate things with superglue or a windshield repair kit and its process is one of ultrasonic welding. It was first introduced as an industrial application in the 1960s, a few years after the first publication of *Mythologies*.

The New Death Strip, then, describes a new strategy or process of urban design, the fusion of previously distinct parts with a novel technique of joining that results in a seamless seam or joint in the urban fabric. It does so by means of hyperbole. Excessive smoothness – of façades, landscape treatments and reflectivity – act as a phenomenal decoy that distract from the historical fault line that lies just inches beneath. We are left to conclude that the New Death Strip is a hyperbolic seam. It stitches Berlin together with instances of flushifiedness, saddle points along the hyperbolic surface of a disco ball. ▲

# STRIPTON- WICKBURG- SHIREHAM- WALDETINOW

DANIEL SCHWAAG

Authenticity is out the window. It never existed, anyway. In the New Death Strip, I saw a the head of Foucault on a garden dwarf. It sat at the base of a miniature light house that was actually the flashing light of a domestic alarm. The tracks of a model railway looped around it. Somewhere, slender Walter Benjamin caryatids supported the corrugated, powder coated metal entablature of a discount mart. There was a street named after Rudi Carrell, or was it Bart Simpson? In a former aircraft hangar, a large bust of Michael Jackson sporting aviator sunglasses made of thin film solar panels to match his radiant smile nears completion. The thick engobe



Man hole feng-shui

of anthracite roof tiles give depth to the gloss of his Jehri curls. A Pickelhaube that discharges airborne static offers protection from lightning attracted by the circuitry of computer controlled lithium ion batteries at the core. Around the puffy arm of his black leather jacket made of glossy acrylic render, he wears a yellow armband with three black dots. One day, he will appear on the plinth of a Russian war memorial at Kleinmachnow like a moai of Easter Island, replacing

the pink ploughshares that in turn had replaced a Russian tank. People will wonder how it was erected and marvel at its seamless construction. Solar energy will power the efficient gimmicks of an adjacent minigolf park themed on the *Traumschiff*, Germany's rendition of *The Love Boat*, or guide Boeings 787 Dreamliners into Berlin Brandenburg International at night.

It's the mid 1990s. New found affluence and new property legislation open up the death strip to development. In the West, expressions of individual domestic aspirations are contained by a decorum of continuity, mostly centered on roof forms. Understatement is common among West Germans since the days of

the *Wirtschaftswunder*. They have learned to avoid their neighbor's envy, taking Porsches out for an occasional spin only in the cover of dawn. But what happens here, when questionable taste is projected into a seeming cultural void unchecked by precedence? At first sight, the result seems to be a concoction of *Dallas* style picket fences, the *Schwarzwaldklinik* and locations of *Traumschiff* episodes.

(Plate 1) *MS Berlin* (the name of the last *Traumschiff*) went amphibious and took the *Schwarzwaldklinik* on a cruise around West Berlin, dropping sets in the death



Virtual original and physical pastiche

strip, while *Dallas* reruns play in the salon. Before setting course for Pitcairn. *Traumschiff* was in fact a TV favorite in the East in the 1980s. The series must have exerted a special lure on Erich Honecker, as well. In 1986, the GDR bought the first *Traumschiff*, the *MS Astor*, and with it, the collective Sehnsucht of West Germans. It offered cruises as *MS Arkona* to the GDR elite and model citizens. For a long time, the *MS Arkona* was the exclusive vessel of people's longing for distant, exotic places, like Helsinki or Havana.

The result is 70% half-hipped, 15% mansard, 10% gabled. Most popular are dark glazed roof tiles, followed by dark unglazed, then terracotta. We get half-hipped roofs with Italianate patios, framed by symmetrical topiaries, polycarbonate fin de siècle gas lamps, and brass balls on wavy fences. Kitsch

Roman pastiche sculptures and Chinese miniatures pastoralize this former wilderness or theatre of violence, or whatever one might call the heterotopian antithesis to the space of civilization. They are talismans or totems of affluence in the former death strip. Picklehauben decor – squooshed versions of the Alexanderplatz TV tower – embellish the top of the mansard roof with shiny, glazed, dark-blue roof tiles. What a strange hybridization of the Napoleonic origins of Prussian bureaucracy. If only there was a way to work in a built reference of riding boots. And all that expressed almost exclusively through the restricted vocab of the prefab house that replaces the prefab of the wall. Is this a “Helma Mailand” or a “Frisian

Haus Föhr 158” by Roth with “Mansardengaubenchic” (mansard roof dormer chic)? (Plate 15) And why is never anything from *here*, like a “Haus Kleinmachnow”, or a “Haus Buckow”? I don’t know, but I suspect that 40 years of repressed longing for distant places has something to do with the disregard for the all too local.

There’s a row of pastiche Mediterranean homes replicated along Grenzstraße. Ballustraded balconies on Tuscan columns offer views of gardens that sit right on the former patrol path. (Plate 22) A Viking ship tree house flies the skull and crossbones. It looks like Seaside. What is the Floridanate doing in the death strip? The Italiante reaches us via Florida. A decorative fence post conceals the flashing light of a domestic alarm as an orange pyramid at the tip, only to give it away with an antenna. “Look, with this American suburban architecture, they’ve imported that suburban fear, too, like spiders on a banana boat”, I say, somewhat premature and eager. “Look behind you”, Oliver replies with the sombre tone of circumspection, “that’s what they are afraid of!”, pointing to the Neukölln tower blocks that rise nearby with menace, offering unobstructed satellite reception and views across the site of Berlin Brandenburg International, set to open 2012. Walking up to the houses, I do a tap test, knocking on the render with my knuckles. It sounds muted and a bit hollow. It is an acrylic render, adding to the prop-up, cardboard feel of the place. Without this haptic feedback, I would have doubted whether this is material at all, or just laminated image. Stuccoed textures emulate the cheap shading algorithms of second rate render packages. This home was conceived in *Cinema 4D* at best.



I know a town called New Death Strip. It’s not in New South Wales, but somehow related to it. Just that with New South Wales, references are clear, the subject of nostalgic replication, of architectural souvenir. I imagine the death strip as a kind of Patagonia:

People migrated into this landscape in the early nineties, a 5000ha sliver of inch-thin topsoil floating on sand and glacial erratics. Most of them came from the former East. They didn’t bring any nostalgia with them about the place they left behind. At that point, there was no nostalgia. And what *would* that look like, an East German emigré town? A New Karl Marx Stadt in Kansas, a Colonia Bitterfeld in Chile, Nuevo Plattenbauwitz in Venezuela. Little pastiche balloon-framed homes

with appliqué finishes and details evocative of Plattenbautowns, grey vinyl siding emulating the rough stucco of the East peppered with bullet holes. With much TLC an inferior concrete look is replicated in plaster and sponge effects. Some-



Indigenous emigré interior in Bitterfeldwick,  
New South Wales

one told me it displays a special pattern of microfissures when it rains. I think of Colonia Tovar, a displaced black forest town in the Venezuelan Andes, or Welsh settlers in Patagonia, or Chinatown, and can’t really put the two together. I cannot come up with an image in my head of what an East German settler’s home or town looks like. No, in the nineties, they really wanted to leave that shit behind. It had just collapsed on them under a giant geopolitical quake. They got away, and they looked ahead, into a pastel future in luscious gardens of capitalist growth. Besides, they were not prepared, no emergency trunk of architectural signifiers stashed away in the attic. They left without a sense of prece-

dence and without traditions, of what the aspirational middle class home, the vernacular of the mortgaged-backed consumer, should look like.

Immigration had not been a mass phenomenon, as it was with the famines or the religious prosecutions that drove people to the shores of distant lands in the past. When it happened, it just happened. This was more a case of my country left me, recoiling all around me into heaps of molten duroplasts and asbestos. It left me behind, stripped of context, standing in an aerosol of instantaneous cellulose combustion. Just as the sulfurous clouds settle, a new dawn. There you are, with these thoughts, as a pioneer on the edge of some wilderness and you are told: here is this land. Build a house, a town in your image, in these blossoming landscapes previously covered with manicured forensic sand and populated by rabbits. What tradition do you turn to, what vernacular? It is a similar question that confronted Charlemagne, the question of tradition and continuity. “I am the unifier or Europe, I am Caesar”, he said, and he built Roman, or at least what he thought it was, to show his lineage, his heritage – the descendant of emperors, of urbane polymaths. ▲

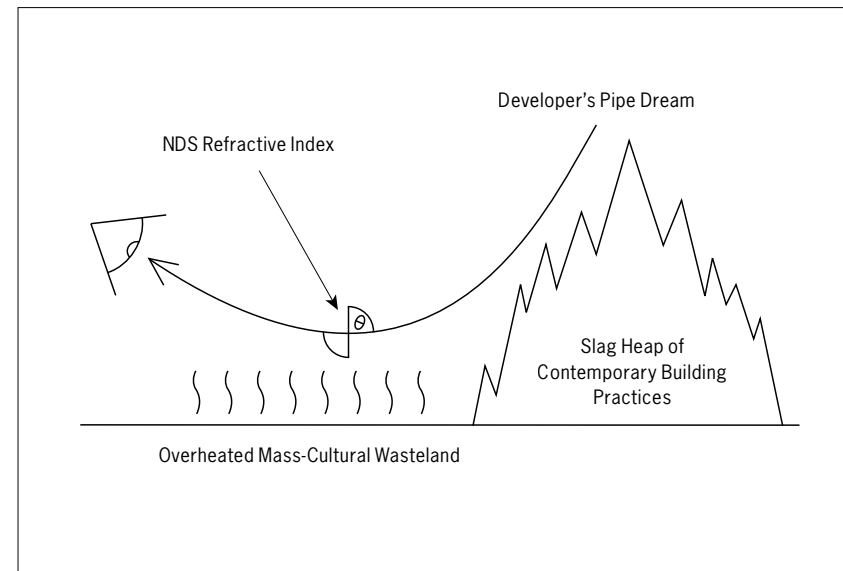


# POSTSCRIPT: FOR UNREAL

OLIVER MILLER

As the production of this edition wrapped up, we decided to set up a workshop at DS's office across from Axel Springer Verlag. It was a fitting location, just beside that part of the NDS running through the center of town, a section that we'd generally done well to neglect in our survey. It had always seemed like our mission was to explore the NDS outside those familiar environs where it just seems to blend in with an urban fabric that does well to mitigate its influence. But lately I've been riding along this edge on a daily basis as we pushed towards our print deadline, and at Axel-Springer-Straße 54a there stands a building that's totemic in its iteration of the NDS's search for an identity. (Plate 21) It at first appeared to be another massive, crudely proportioned chunk of commercial property built according to the present norms in post-Stimmann era Berlin. Only later did I discover it to actually be a hundred-or-so year old crudely proportioned chunk of commercial property built during Bismarck's time, defaced of all ornament by the bombing of Berlin throughout World War II. During the days of the Old Death Strip it stood as nothing more than a naked ruin. But as a more recent afterthought to its design the most curious illusionistic glass panels have been applied to it, and it was these that caught my eye. They're printed to depict a 3D-ified version of the building's façade projected upon its own flat surface, a self-referential simulation of itself onto itself. The effect wavers between being unnoticeable – which one assumes is what it was meant to achieve – and something far more unsettling. It's hard to imagine that its authors could have intended something so sublime as the collision of its *trompe l'oeil* windows-in-perspective with the real windows in all their flatness, or understood what rich fodder for interpretation by post-post-modern cultural critics they have produced.

Though it looks like the desperate attempt to jazz up something that's bleakly mediocre, could the building's developers and/or architects have actually intended to employ this illusionistic technique from the start? It looks like a daft means to make the best out of a desolate situation, but perhaps the plan was to plainly construct a mirage. If that's the case, then Axel-Springer 54a is emblematic of nothing less than the dawn of a new hyperreality in the construction of the built envi-



The NDS as a mirage: post-diagramming a journey across space and time.

ronment. With such large scale imaging and printing capabilities already available, architecture offices have the pos-

sibility to focus solely on creating visions of reality as opposed to dealing with their ever more banal physical conditions; imagine an entire district of flat, generically designed boxes clothed in the image of Schinkel's neo-classicism, Wilhelmenian bombasticism, or perhaps, if one was really daring, in the guise of Peter Behrens-esque functionalism. It's actually a very economical solution that the local building authorities would probably take very kindly to. The die is being cast on the NDS, and architecture is getting unreal. ▲

## List of Projects

*ALDI Berlin-Altglienicke*: architect unknown, Schönefelder Chaussee 174, 12524 Berlin  
*Apartment Building*: architect unknown, Ruppiner Straße 10/11, 10115 Berlin  
*Apartmenthaus*: Zvi Hecker and Faber+Faber, Seydelstraße 16/17, 10117 Berlin  
*Berlin Wall Memorial*: The Government of the German Democratic Republic/Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer, Bernauer Straße/Ackerstraße, 13355 Berlin  
*Consens Gruppe*: bpi architekten ingenieure, Oranienburger Chaussee 31–33, 16548 Glienicke/Nordbahn  
*Doppelfamilienhäuser*: B&B Baubetreuung, Grenzstraße 12–19, 12529 Schönefeld  
*Axel-Springer-Straße 54a*: architect unknown, 10117 Berlin  
*Europarc Berlin/Brandenburg*: architect unknown, Albert-Einstein-Ring, 14532 Kleinmachnow/Dreilinden  
*Fellini Residences*: Marc Kocher, Kommandanten Straße 67–69, 10117 Berlin  
*Hasso Plattner Institut*: Marc Braun et al, Prof.-Dr.-Helmert-Straße 2, 14482 Potsdam  
*Landschaftspark Rudow-Altglienicke*: Grigoleit Landschaftsarchitektur, A113 between Berlin-Treptow und Berlin-Neukölln  
*Parkanlage "Am Dörferblick"*: BGMR Landschaftsarchitekten, Dörferblick, Rudow  
*Rewa+Aldi supermarket complex*: architect unknown, Kieffholzstraße/Treptower Straße 50, 12435 Berlin  
*Strelitzer Gärten*: Norbert Rheinlaender/Markus Heller, Kai Hansen et al., Strelitzer Straße 53, 10115 Berlin  
*Wiesenblick*: NCC Deutschland, Kasperstraße, Altglienicke

## Bibliography

Barthes, Roland: *Mythologies*. London, Vintage, 1993  
Baudrillard, Jean: *America*. London, Verso, 1989  
Benjamin, Walter: *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*. New York, Schocken Books, 1986  
[Hoffmann, Hans Wolfgang; Meuser, Philipp]: *Luftbildatlas Entlang der Berliner Mauer*. Berlin, DOM Publishers, 2009  
[Knabb, Ken]: *Situationist International Anthology*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006  
Perec, Georges: *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. London, Penguin Classics, 2008  
Semper, Gottfried: *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts*. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2004  
Schwenk, Herbert: *Lexikon der Berliner Stadtentwicklung*. Berlin, Haude & Spencer, 2002  
Scott Brown, Denise: *Having Words*. London, Architectural Association, 2009  
[Venturi, Robert; Scott Brown, Denise; Izenour Steven]: *Learning from Las Vegas*. Revised Edition. Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1972  
Schlögel, Karl: *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*. Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006  
Wines, James: *De-Architecture*. New York, Rizolli, 1987  
  
*Poltergeist*, dir. Tobe Hooper. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1982  
*Psycho*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1960  
*Vacancy*, dir. Nimród Antal. Screen Gems, 2007

## The authors

**Ian Warner** (\*1974, Slough, England), BA Communication Design, University of Portsmouth, UK. Stalked Potsdamer Platz for the first time in 1994: the start of an enduring engagement with all things urban. BA thesis on Berlin as modern myth; associated project work explored the history and post-reunification development of Potsdamer Platz as an interactive presentation. Emigrated to Berlin 1996, worked as a freelance graphic designer for Grappa Blotto, MetaDesign and others. Since 2000 partner at Blotto Design.

**Oliver Miller** (\*1972, San Francisco, CA), architecture degrees from University of Virginia and Princeton. After undergraduate studies, moved to San Francisco, worked for Interim Office of Architecture. First came to Germany in 1998 with art team TABI from his home town Santa Fe, NM. Masters thesis entitled *Recreating Recreation* addressed urban blight in Trenton, New Jersey. Concepts from this project further developed with founding of Dr. Pong, a popular table tennis bar in Berlin that he continues to own and run.

**Daniel Schwaag** (\*1972, Detroit, Michigan), Masters of Urban Design and Diploma in Architecture from the Bartlett, University College London. Masters Thesis on terrorism as an agent of urban design (2000): MOUT – Military Operations on Urban Terrain. Undergraduate studies in architecture at the University of Virginia. Worked as an architect and in visualisation for various companies in London, before setting up Elegant Embellishments with Allison Dring, a company developing building products for specific conditions, such as air-pollution.

## Slab Magazine

[www.slab-mag.com](http://www.slab-mag.com)

Slab was founded in 2006 by Ian Warner, as a vent for his personal dismay at the fungal spread of a new Berlin architecture so willfully wretched, that it seemed not to represent a succession of individual failures, but a whole architectural philosophy. Not fully understanding the mechanisms of this development, savage and regular lampooning seemed to be the only answer. A key discussion with Oliver Miller, some months after its launch, helped turn Slab into a personal journal for wildly subjective, cockeyed, and occasionally well researched reflections on the built environment. In 2009 Miller began regularly contributing, and brought in the talents of Daniel Schwaag and Cormac Deane. 2010 saw Slab Magazine's first foray into archi-activism, playing a key role in the global campaign to save a rare John Hejduk building from the pastel-tone whims of property speculators.

## Disko overview

- Disko 1    *Bart Lootsma*: Constant, Koolhaas und die niederländische Kultur der 60er  
Disko 2    *Bruno Ebersbach*: sido, die Maske und der Block  
Disko 3    *Philipp Reinfeld*: Sanierungskonzept Potsdamer Platz  
Disko 4    *a42 et al.*: unrealisierte Projekte, selten gesehene Architektur
- Disko 5    *Christian Posthofen / a42.org*: Theorie und Praxis  
Disko 6    *Jesko Fezer / a42.org*: Planungsmethodik gestern  
Disko 7    *Büro für Konstruktivismus*: Kristalle
- Disko 8    *Kim Jong Il*: Über die Bukunst, Pyongyangstudies I  
Disko 9    *Architekturakademie*: Tafeln der Weltarchitektur, Pyongyangstudies II  
Disko 10    *Martin Burckhardt / FUTURE 7*: Pyongyangstudies III  
Disko 11    *Kim Jong Il*: Kimilsungia, Pyongyangstudies IV
- Disko 12    *Alexander von Humboldt (Laura-Mariell Rottmann)*:  
Entwürfe für die Ostfassade des Berliner Schlosses  
Disko 13    *Florian Thein*: Zeitenössische Pyramiden  
Disko 14    *Sarah Retsch*: Die Bausünde – Karriere eines Begriffs  
Disko 15    *Philipp Stroh*: We are the Web?
- Disko 16    *Miller / Schwaag / Warner*: The New Death Strip  
Disko 17    *Matthias Spielvogel*: Handbuch Verfahrensfreie Bauvorhaben Berlin  
Disko 18    *Tamara Härt*: Psychotropie  
Disko 19    *Budde / Burghardt / Nedo*: Townhouses

All issues can be downloaded as lower-resolution PDF files from:  
<http://a42.org/154.0.html> abgerufen werden.

**SLAB MAGAZINE**  
**THE NEW DEATH STRIP**

Authenticity and artifice, remembrance and concealment, hyperbole and banality: twenty years after German reunification, the piece of land once defined by the Berlin Wall's notorious Death Strip is a landscape of paradoxes. Once the front-line of the Cold War, now a super-charged historical signifier, the Strip is facing up to a perplexing semiotic challenge: normality.



[WWW.SLAB-MAG.COM](http://WWW.SLAB-MAG.COM)

**ISSN 1862-1562**  
**ISBN 978-3-940092-04-5**

**Authenticity and artifice, remembrance and concealment, hyperbole and banality: twenty years after German reunification, the piece of land once defined by the Berlin Wall's notorious Death Strip is a landscape of paradoxes.**

**Once the front-line of the Cold War, now a super-charged historical signifier, the Strip is facing up to a perplexing semiotic challenge: normality.**

**ISSN 1862-1562**

**ISBN 978-3-940092-04-5**