

## 'Urban art, Intellectual Property and Aesthetic Organization: Understanding 2-3Strassen'

Jonathan Vickery, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, UK

*This is a discussion paper written for a talk given at the University of the Arts London Graduate School, Chelsea College of Art and Design, 30th June 2011.*

2-3Strassen is quite possibly one of the largest public art projects ever undertaken in Europe, indeed if its 'size' is possible to gauge. It involved three streets across three cities (along with a network of provisional offices), and with around 90 full time participants for a twelve-month period starting January 2010.<sup>1</sup> It received thousands of visitors, and as many media and newspaper citations. The participants were not involved in creating one enormous artwork; they all collaborated on the writing of a book. The book, however, was concealed from view, admitting only individual entries online, and published as a single continuous unedited narrative. Through the year, the participants went about their daily lives. Yet in doing this (in the words of the artist, Jochen Gerz), they were at the same time transforming the everyday life of the streets into a 'cultural discourse' (Gerz, 2009). The purpose of my talk is to make some partial sense of this statement, and in doing so discuss some broader issues on the contemporary function of 'public' art.

Public art, by 2005, had become a central feature of most large-scale urban regeneration projects in Europe. It was often used to spearhead publicity and generate popular support for serious urban reconstruction. It is a useful tool for a PR machine, and is routinely rationalized by policy makers as a way of generating cultural capital or expanding visitor resources, or to bolster civic identity by reviving urban memory or the historical narrative of place. 2-3Strassen (which formally ended in January 2011), while subject to an official commission, it did not conform to the usual patterns of policy appropriation and make an empirically 'positive' addition to a specific urban development scheme: it did not involve a central art object or objects. It is not an event or performance as such, even though we could construe its aesthetics in those terms. It is not community art, or a direct participatory exercise involving a set constituency of citizen. It used nothing other than existing social resources and a series of unremarkable streets in three cities of the Ruhr.<sup>2</sup>

The three terms of my paper, admittedly eccentric, simply define my approach, as distinct from mainstream public art studies. I use the term 'urban art' (not to be confused with 'street art') as a way of recognizing the distinction in Gerz's strategy from mainstream public art. Public art invariably involves 'adding' something tangible (usually sculpture) to an empty civic space, thereby using civic space as a site, plinth or platform for art. With urban art, the artist is more concerned with embedding their creative practice within the processes of material change that

animate a particular social context. Gerz, for one, does this through engaging with the public or civic discourses that define, manage and regulate urban life, such as the way civic identity is constructed by official historical narrative.

The use of my second term 'Intellectual Property' is somewhat poetic, but also literal. In urban art, 'property' is made over as intellectual material for new forms of cultural communication and dialogue. My use of the term plays on the strong current discourse of urban policy, whereby IP is deemed central to the constitution of the 'creative economy'. In urban art, IP is a form of value created through ideas, discourse and creative expression made concrete through engaging with the material conditions of urban production and reproduction.

My use of the third term 'aesthetic organization' follows two European scholars I know, Antonio Strati (of Universities of Siena and Trento) and Pierre Guillet de Monthoux (Copenhagen Business School). Moving beyond the Marxist disdain for business that seems to persist in most critical-oriented research, both point to how the European avant-garde was profoundly entrepreneurial, and whose artistic practice was as much about social organization (movements and their political management) and small business management, as the objects of art. The avant-garde, in fact, collapsed the distinction between commerce and aesthetics, art and business. Boltanski and Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005) observe how the language of corporate management in the 1990s was indeed derived from the cultural sphere (i.e. replete with terms like risk-taking, flexibility, polyvalency, initiative, autonomy, mobility, openness, and new possibilities). To say that Gerz's work is a form of 'aesthetic organization' is to say that the aesthetic is lodged in the social organization of the project, not specific and privileged works of art.

My starting point therefore is that Gerz's *2-3Strassen* is best defined in terms of an urban-grounded (i.e. place-specific) act of aesthetic organization, where aesthetic value is embedded in the project's mediation of the socio-political dynamics of its urban space, focused on the dimension of that space we call 'property'. But, first an introduction to the artist:

Gerz is probably one of the most renowned 'public' artists in Europe, largely turning his back on the art gallery circuit in 1990, after high profile 'antimonument' projects like the *Harburg Monument against Fascism* (1983). From the year 2000, his work has been framed in terms of 'public authorship', involving a protracted public engagement that can take up to seven years to complete. The framework for *2-3Strassen* was the commission, in 2008-9, for a role in the official program of the European Capital of Culture, for the first time awarded to a region – the German Ruhr (with Essen as its title-holding centre).

As Hermann Pfitze noted in his short essay 'Die Ausstellung 2-3 Straßen' (2010), the 2-

*3Strassen* project did not turn into an art 'bienalle' for the ECoC2010 year program. It was, he remarked, 'an empirical alternative to 'event- culture''.<sup>3</sup> In its broadest terms, *2-3Strassen* is defined an exercise in dissent, albeit a dissent that does not drawn on the historical tropes of avant-garde protest, controversy, taboo-breaking and rhetorical attacks on the institution of art. The 'dissent' herein is twofold – a withdrawal from the celebratory thematics of the European Capital of Culture [hereafter ECoC2010], and a confrontation with the Europe-wide discourse of urban cultural policy. Though billed in the official program as 'public art', there were no grand works of public art to view, and whatever activity there was to seen revolved around the property of 80 or so apartments, now occupied by project participants. The participants themselves were also not involved in specific creative-collaborative activities – this was not mainstream 'participatory art'. For the most part they carried on their everyday lives.

### **Two-to-Three Streets**

Gerz was approached by the ECoC2010 in advance, and in 2009 he advertised around Europe for volunteers to occupy, free of charge, over 80 apartments. Out of 1,457 applicants, 80 initially took up residence in each of the three streets, in Duisburg, Dortmund and Mülheim an der Ruhr (the latter a 'vertical street' or towerblock and its vicinity). The project participants were, by their nature, actively interested in the creative aspirations of the project and Gerz's stated intentioned to form a 'living exhibition' out of these disparate sites of mixed housing and social spaces. Jochen Gerz, as artist and orchestrator of the project, remained in a peripatetic capacity, continuing other international projects, but spending a lot of time in the central office in Essen and visiting each places; he was not himself a resident participant.

Each street had an internet café and office space as an organizational HQ, and all apartments containing a laptop computer connected by internet to a central database. The streets were also linked up to a central project HQ in Essen, and two art museums acted as administrators for coordinating publicity and the constant stream of visitors, critics and researchers, as well as related public events like seminars. Many of the participants were artists or designers, many were not and continued to hold down regular jobs or continue their careers 'remotely' (one of them, a nanotechnology consultant, worked over the internet and simply travelled to any necessary meetings). Together, the participants lived in their streets from January to end of December 2010, around 40 of which have remained, with a specific group forming in Dortmund. During the ECoC2010 year, they became part of the urban social community of the streets with a view to making each street a 'living exhibition' of art – 'social art' as Gerz sometimes called it, with reference to Josef Beuys – all the while contributing on their laptops to the writing of a 3,000 word book. The book is now published by as '*2-3Strassen* TEXT' by Dumont (2011), complemented by another, '*2-3Strassen* THE MAKING OF' (also 2011). Neither text seemed

particularly commercially viable, given their size and expense. In the event, on publication, the first runs sold out and they created an enormous amount of interest in the press.<sup>4</sup>

In one sense, *2-3Strassen* exceeds critique on account of its complexity, exposing the limits to our art critical powers of interrogation. For there is no work to 'see' and no easy way to research the year-long multi-site process for the individual critic. Each of the three streets developed quite differently, and the role of the author-artist (his vision, authorial authority, charismatic influence, and so on) is not easy to determine. At the centre of the project were the apartments, largely closed to public view. Most of the apartments were privately owned, many standing empty before the project, and in each case the landlord agreeing to let multiple units to the project at a reduced rent. The participants paid no rent, but were subject to their own living expenses. There are many questions that might follow from this, but at the time many of the visiting critics and journalists were more interested in the concrete question of 'social impact' and the measurable effects of culture on social contexts. Was the local economy stimulated? Or were local residents (with the many immigrants and unemployed) reinserted into the city's civic life? Was employability increased in the participants? These were not Gerz's concerns.<sup>5</sup>

### **Creative Class and Creative City**

Putting together *2-3Strassen* engages explicitly with two major discourses of urban change – both of which are related by have had a distinct and concrete impact on the aims and objectives of urban cultural and urban in European cities in the last few decades. The first is Urban Regeneration and the second is the Creative Class [where I use capitals if referring explicitly to the discourse]. It may seem odd separating these terms – but in Germany, and for Gerz, the terms have very different policy genealogies and meaning. Urban Regeneration has its roots in property redevelopment and so-called urban 'revitalisation' initiatives, a major strategic concern in Germany since the 1980s, particularly after reunification after 1990 (and, it must be said, influenced by UK models).<sup>6</sup> The Creative Class is a discourse is little more specific to urban-economic growth, primarily concerning skills, education, professional mobility and small business in cultural, media and design, and technology sectors.<sup>7</sup>

Urban Regeneration in Germany, like the UK, began, and has largely remained, property-driven in that it has been dominated by traditional forms of urban planning based on civil engineering and concerned primarily for the optimal function of the urban physical infrastructure and its services; and property ownership and investment is a fulcrum of (and usually basis of) the financial planning of urban development. The property-driven basis of urban regeneration is often deceiving as it is invariably accompanied (as it famously was in the UK) with all kinds of civic partnerships, social community-based ideals along with investment in support schemes for 'neighbourhoods'. Moreover, the urban regeneration in both the UK and Germany has played host to the 'creative city' concept, which at once seems to fit hand in glove with the 'creative class' idea but in fact is much more a part of urban regeneration policy discourse (albeit a weak part). The original Creative City concept (by Charles

Landry and cultural policy consultancy Comedia in the later 1980s) was born out of a critique of mainstream property-driven urban regeneration, and centrally concerned with local governance, organizational development and policy process, not just property renewal, civic revitalization and concomitant economic growth. In some ways the Creative City ideal resonated with the older notion of 'urban renaissance' (initiated by the Council of Europe in the 1980s), out of which emerged terms like 'culture-led regeneration', a policy buzzword whose policy aims were never clearly defined.<sup>8</sup>

The Creative City idea was never adopted as a *model*, unlike the Creative Class idea, which has influenced policy makers all over Europe. We could hazard a guess why: first, it demanded a fundamental 'creative revolution' in urban policy-making and governance, centring power around the public requirements of citizens. This, of course, contradicted dominant models of public management as well as the property-driven models of urban regeneration development. Second, it involved the whole city, whereas urban regeneration tended to operate on the basis of limited interlocking 'projects' both in, across and around cities. The limited scope of urban regeneration was, for a large part, to do with the nature of the financing strategies through which they were conceived and managed. 2-3 *Strassen* is based in just such areas – three streets that are part of designated urban regeneration zones.

The Creative Class idea, of course, has a critical edge that re-focuses the urban economy on people (particularly younger people) and not property (see, for example, the Creative Amsterdam or Creative City Berlin projects).<sup>9</sup> Florida's concept of 'creative class', while acknowledging the importance of cultural-urban contexts and the economic hub of 'the city', was principally an economic growth theory whose theoretical basis had been in existence for some years. Its attraction for policy makers was in the fact that a new creative class would (i) sustain an impact on property markets, affecting the dynamics of renovation and value creation central to so-called gentrification but without a necessary public investment; and (ii) the city would become both local and global in that the high-tech knowledge-based industries that the new creative class favoured were not simply profitable but unparalleled in their power of connecting the city to markets beyond its regional and even national borders (i.e. into the global economy). Thus the Creative Class seemed to trump the Creative City, as the former promised all the benefits of the latter without the politically problematic element of massive, systematic public spending.

Since Florida's famous 2004 study, *Europe in the Creative Age* (with Irene Tinagli; London: DEMOS) the discourse of the Creative Class (which I will capitalize when referring to it as a 'discourse') thus re-framed the debates on culture and the built environment within a more expansive framework. In a paradoxical way it made Landry's Creative City look provincial. It also imported a competing (US-derived) concept of 'the economy'. Landry's background in European urban policy was evident in the way that his concept of 'the economy' was not distinctive, or abstracted from 'society' or 'culture'; each

was codependent. For Florida, the notion of 'economy' was a meta-framework through which all other concepts (society, community, city) could be re-conceptualised and reinvigorated. For his hyper-mobile, flexible and fast-moving Creative Class, culture and society were the amorphous 'context' of a developing economy, sustained through time only by their adaptation to market forces. His model is predicated on what he calls a world of 'weak social ties'.<sup>10</sup>

### **The subject of 2-3Strassen**

The streets of the three cities of the Ruhr – Duisburg, Dortmund and Mülheim an der Ruhr – were part of designated urban regeneration zone, and hence their nomination as candidates by their respective cities for the ECoC2010 project. Gerz mobilized members of the creative class, and inserted them into these urban regeneration areas. The implications were obvious, and the publicity of the ECoC2010 stated as much. *2-3Strassen* engaged both property and people, principally through the mechanism of the apartment.

Housing was always a component of property-driven urban regeneration, if problematic. Residential housing was usually a component where so-called 'mixed economy' development generated new models of finance and cyclical investment in the face of declining political confidence in the public sector. An element of housing provision could offset a city government's costs by providing a quota of low-cost subsidised social accommodation, and also offset the costs of the regeneration project itself by providing a bulk of instant cash-return luxury apartments. Arguably, both types of housing contributed little substantial to the urban economy in the medium to long term – for the former involved cycles of depreciation and institutionalized welfare dependency, the latter catered only for a small, select and often non-residential niche market. Furthermore, with the capricious and uneven patterns of labour migration, which seemed intrinsic to the creative class, unpredictable forms of gentrification made long term urban development planning a self-defeating process of guess-work.

The apartments in *2-3Strassen* were not incidental to obvious need for accommodation; they played a significant symbolic as well as cultural role. Housing is not simply about accommodation, but play a specific role in the development of a social culture. Within the urban regeneration project, Gerz's *2-3Strassen* created a thematic connection between the home, street, local community and local economy. Where standard Urban Regeneration discourse evaded anything 'private', social and cultural (i.e. concentrated on the citizen purely in terms of labour value – skills, proximity, education, employment, etc.), Gerz placed these as fundamental to any functioning economy.

Housing and the social culture of housing within economic life is an area of neglected research, certainly art and cultural research. The private sphere of housing, in times gone past, was central to the public sphere of social communication, interaction and allegiance. Industrialization itself only developed in and through laboring communities, whose community function involved crucial processes

of shared knowledge, local intelligence and mutually-enhancing skills. The street is an interface of personal and social, family and community, domestic and urban cultures. While all these distinctions have morphed in complex and unpredictable ways through internet communications and mobile media, they remain distinct as categories in urban policy discourse.

*2-3Strassen* makes the apartment the central fulcrum of a project featuring the mobilisation of the creative class within urban regeneration. A focal point of both the Creative Class and Urban Regeneration discourses is the tangential, yet essential, role of housing. In *2-3Strassen* the participants used their apartments for all kinds of gatherings, events or activities, of production (their own art objects) or consumption (communal meals; screenings; discussions) or sites of encounter (with others, particularly the residents, or provisionally housed immigrants). The space of the units of accommodation were not hermetic, like the domestic bourgeoisie culture of the nuclear family, but rather they became nodal points in growing networks of spaces, whose rationale was never set but aimed for urban cultural development. The project was not the sum total of apartments, for it existed in and around the streets and its other locations, such as the offices, central office in Essen, the virtual world of the written text of the book, '2-3StrassenTEXT', the ECoC2010 event, and the international art world, whose critical responses appear in person, online or in publication.<sup>11</sup>

One of the themes of Jochen Gerz's 'public authorship' was to work at creating the conditions for public action in an as-yet-unavailable public space. It often takes place in the context where the role designated for public art by urban policy is as contributor to a new civic space, that in turn represents a developing civil society. However, this 'new civil society' is bereft of an emphatic 'public' dimension. New forms of governance, while emphatic in their political incorporation of 'civil' elements, allow the dominance of corporate forms of organization (whether large institutions, commercial corporations or business alliances). In the new political terrain of the neoliberal economy, the civil society of institutionalised non-governmental actors are selectively apportioned lobbying opportunities in the cause of their private interests, with the media and their political sponsors the arbiter of the form and content of broadcasted communications.

The gradual dissolution of a social dimension from corporate interests (where 'the corporate' was once conceived as industries representing workers, communities and the productivity of society as a whole), has had long term repercussions for 'the public' and the idea of a public sphere. Where 'public' was once a 'sphere' or realm of delimited discourse and representation, informing and providing a court of common judgment on the actions of authority or political executive, it has now a series of marginalized spaces for cultural projects, new social movements and third sector or religious enterprises. A delimited continuous and coherent field of discourse called 'public' cannot now be conceived, and has arguably not been replaced by a more complex multi-nodal realm for a complex multi-nodal social economy. The historical tripartite constitution of public as space-citizen-action (or place-identity-

agency) is arguably no longer available, apart from provisional acts of a public spatial imaginary like a public art project.

### **The spatial politics of 2-3Strassen**

2-3Strassen is situated within an international cultural event, a series of urban regeneration-designated urban areas, imports a 'creative class' of participants, and targets housing as the locus and fulcrum of its activities, around which a spatial imaginary develops. Visitors and media are invited to visit the streets, and whatever activities emerge; the participants are free to improvise and extemporise in their new social existence and identity as 'creatives' (as they were also identified the Press). A variety of urban sites become a co-extensive space animated by an indefinite address – 'everyday life becomes a cultural discourse', as Gerz had said. The transformation of the everyday life of social habitation offered the opportunity to reimagine the possibilities of aesthetically-bankrupt urban spaces by shifting the axes of their spatio-temporal norms. The project was not calling for new capital investment, or more social welfare, or new revitalizing creative industries. It was a pragmatic act of cultural labour, reorienting the social as it had become inscribed into an economy that increasingly dissolved the cultural dimension of the social.

The dyad 'people and property' is of course (in simplistic terms) the structural contradiction of *capital* itself: property becomes commodified and made intangible as a medium of financial transaction and relations between private actors (and their State beneficiaries); people become 'human resources' or property of a labour market, where their social existence is gauged in terms of the material outputs of their labour. The cycles of production and consumption are based on a fraught demand for increasing speed, efficiency and spatial expansion in a world of limited resources and radically uneven patterns of development. The relation between 'production and consumption' is one of the great engines of confusion in our time (and of course a central problematic in recent research on culture and urban space).

My observation regarding production and consumption is this: 2-3Strassen mediates the terms of the powerful urban policy discourses of Urban Regeneration and Creative Class by a few radical inversions, which in turn open out a specific type of discursive space. The first is, as indicated above, where 'property' (in this case, the apartments) is taken out of the cycle of production and producer-dominated urban regeneration, and animated by the spatial flow of creative labour (the activities of the participants, who for the moment we class as 'consumers'). As long as the dialogue continues, these spaces were withheld from the pending forces of regeneration (and there was no guarantee that the participants would willingly vacate their spaces at the official close of the project). Urban Regeneration is a discourse of producers (or those who control production), and has been demonstrated (at least in the UK) to be in the interests of producers (the private investors and developers, and their Inland Revenue beneficiaries): *production* is the organising principle of this discourse. Often, production was



imposed, or conducted without sufficient preparation or register of need or use. The consumption-value of urban regeneration is therefore a contingent factor, however much the consumer was at the heart of local regeneration strategy rhetoric.

Here in 2-3 *Strassen*, the object of production becomes a field of consumption. The creative participants are actually not simply the agency of 'the artist', they are participants, 'being themselves', carrying on with their lives (albeit in a spirit of improvisation) and whose principle activity is connecting their private self-interest with the offer of free accommodation. Though of course, their social designation as consumers in this is subject to an inversion. The consumers become the producers. Their participation is oriented around their properties, the streets, the social vicinity, where the organisation of an art project becomes an expanse of socio-aesthetic experience. Their extemporisation and responses to the unfolding social dynamics is where they attempt to fulfill their general mandate, given by the artist, that the streets would become sites of an 'exhibition' of social art, where everyday life becomes a cultural discourse. They become a social mechanism of cultural production.

For Florida, the 'creatives' of the creative class are not primarily actors in an already existing industrial infrastructure, nor are they simply employees of the creative industries. They are consumers, consumers of places, lifestyles, new ideas and cultural experiences, which they both mediate and generate, and incrementally impact on economic and thus public policy development. (In a broader sense, they are also citizens-by-default, as Florida's 'gay Index' reveals how politically inscribed subjects make a concrete impact on the cultural politics of places and spaces of industry and habitation). As provisional dwellers whose principle objective is the consumption of spaces (through which is forged a career trajectory), their impact on a city could only be the length of an economic or career-advancement cycle, before they move on.

A central theoretical principle of the thesis of *The Rise of the Creative Class* is that 'economy' must be understood primarily as 'human behaviour and social organization', not physical infrastructures. The latter develops in response to the former.<sup>12</sup> In Britain, property-driven urban regeneration (and, for example, the demise of many massive National Lottery cultural projects since 2001) proved perhaps that Florida was right: the discourse of urban regeneration insisted that landmark facilities and new branded spaces will themselves stimulate new forms of economic activity. They did not, and often cannot. They can certainly stimulate new ways of consuming culture – but not actual cultural production or developing a real material economy. And yet, this is not itself an argument for a creative class. As Jamie Peck observed, the creative class is as much symptomatic as neoliberal economic forms of alienation and the normalisation of perpetual migration, and its new creative networks.<sup>13</sup> While it can stimulate local infrastructures for creative and cultural production, they are often specialist and exclusive and do not present a model of sustainable urban change involving a city's population.

Throughout *2-3Strassen* we find such ‘inversions’ by which the spaces of production become the spaces of consumption and vice versa, with the process changing the nature of production and consumption (i.e. making these ‘everyday’ spaces a ‘cultural discourse’). Another motion of inversion take place in the relation between the project and (its positioning within) the RUHE.2010 European Capital of Culture. In one sense the ECoC2010 project has all the visible hallmarks of classical British urban regeneration: the prominence of ‘starchitecture’ or high cost landmark capital projects, branded spaces for temporary high-profile events, and oriented to recent trends in the international cultural tourist economy. *2-3Strassen* is billed as just one more attraction. And yet, in the *2-3Strassen* project the event-aesthetics of the grand cultural spectacle was abruptly halted. There was no visual glamour or contrived spectacle for visitors to see in the three lower-class and immigrant neighbourhoods and their streets. The streets were not even ‘notorious’ for social disorder or crime, and were not decorated by ostentatious installation art or graphic decoration, as one on such an occasion would have hoped. There was, if anything, an absence of identity, which in turn served as an inversion or even negation of the event branding, which was its aegis of operation. The event became everyday life, though of course, it was not ‘normal’ life but everyday life as a cultural discourse. In other words, the grandiloquence of the event was inverted into a series of puzzling questions about the social conditions of the cultural event.

Further, this inversion extended to the regime of expectations that governed patterns of viewing in cultural consumers, such as art world aficionados. The project, while organized by the artist’s central office, was not strategically managed as a themed cultural experience. It was ‘de-clustered’ from local creative industries, there was not creative ‘milieu’ unfolding, and it did not set up an explicit dialogue with the local ‘art world’, attempting, for example, to make the streets a part of the economy of the city’s cultural infrastructure. The ‘cultural’ content of *2-3Strassen* was embedded in the non-professional social everyday and the spaces of habitation and local communal interaction. On arriving, there’s little to photograph except what was already there – and visitors find themselves wandering around wondering what they are supposed to be looking at. *2-3Strassen* foregrounds what Edensor et al. called the ‘abject other’ of urban regeneration.<sup>14</sup> At the same time it was not a return to what Millington et al, calls ‘vernacular creativity’, as the creative participants were from elsewhere and those of them who worked as artists were still carrying on with their usual internationalised art practice. (It is perhaps right to say, however, that the project inhabits the spaces that would have been animated by vernacular creativity).

The participants were situated in their position as catalysts of creative change, but the project only provided the conditions and not the content for change. The artists did not micro-manage the project and attempt to effect social developments. The participants could only explore and find out for themselves, by interaction, walking around, using the open spaces, leaving their apartment doors

open, constant questioning. In this way, and taking a few months to manifest itself, a new sense of curiosity and a need to know animated the street and its surrounds. The street residents were subject to a process of de-familiarisation for sure, where they found themselves an inadvertent part of a process of change. The creatives use the pubs or bars, converse and debate with the locals, identify the faultlines in social relations, popular characterizations and perspectives on the various ethnic groups, encounter some social problems, face the threats and see the potential. In one sense, the process of change involved the creating of a provisional 'habitus'. What Bourdieu called a 'habitus', or a place of habitation embedded with cognitive horizons, allowed the development of explicit and articulated experiences and histories, communicative interaction and a growing means of cultural expression. Contra Florida, the creatives here do not become a designer sub-culture around which a new creative industries coalesce; they become a social sub-culture for the abject of the new creative economy – around which a small and random social populace discover another way of thinking about their lives.

For an ethic of 'openness' permeated the daily life of the participants, gradually embedding new social norms of civility in the streets, which made imperative a constant face-to-face interlocution, sharing of resources, conversations on current events, questioning the state and shape of the immediate environment or the city itself. The project brought a pervasive expectation of change, a critical framework of expectation, but no strategy, no plan, or urban-cultural planning document for back-up. The very terms and idea of social-to-cultural change had to be forged through dialogue in each street, discovering the limitations and refusals of change, as well as its potential. This was done through a new street life of events, gatherings, discussions, interactions and information-dissemination. This could only have happened over a long period of time, where a commitment to live in a place happened, and where social relationships actually developed.

### **The cultural politics of 2-3Strassen**

What did the 2-3Strassen project amount to? Ostensibly, the stated aim of the artist Jochen Gerz was to turn the 'everyday' into a cultural discourse – where the routine forces of economic appropriation that govern social spaces like apartments and streets are inverted and made to serve new forces of cultural production. Necessitating this inversion is the profound ways in which urban culture and its spaces has become a symbolic as well as material resource for global capital, or at least the forces of political collaboration with global capital. That is what happened, but it was left to the many intellectual interlocutors, like critics, writers, researchers and other artists, to sustain the cultural discourse through articulating the possible assertions, questions or ideas that this project provokes. The project continues beyond its official closure in January 2011 with a new group in Dortmund. For us, what do we learn from 2-3Strassen?

As I attempted to point out, the project revolved around a 'people-property' dyad. Policies for property-

driven urban development have been governed by a separate (and separate spatio-temporal framework) than policies for social-citizen-community. The tensions and even contradictions between the two are still with us (for example, community cohesion programs for neighborhoods subject to bulk house-purchasing by speculators or 'landlords'). On a large scale, the project indicates the increasingly tenuous interconnection of the public sphere, public culture and urban space, as well as how the 'public' is being emptied of its constitutive conditions (shared ethical norms; common identification and representation; collective reciprocity; heritage and history). And this process is serving a covert reconstructivist agenda, whereby civil society is being divested of social actors and handed over to corporate agents, making the civil and civic largely a politics-free realm of private interests lobbying the institutions of government.

Conversely, this project 'asks' a series of questions, and so engages with the cultural politics of urban space, locating the ideological relation between land and space (between 'private' housing, social housing, public space and public culture); it inadvertently flagged up the lack of mechanisms of social representation within each city, and through a series of improvised spatial maneuvers constructed some discursive mechanisms for creative agency for its inhabitants.

My last concluding point, therefore, is the way *2-3Strassen* as a project is oriented within the 'neoliberal' capitalist economy (notwithstanding the differences between Germany and the UK). We may have no argument with a city's need to compete in the global market place. And *2-3Strassen*, renting private apartments as well as 'public', is no quasi-marxian project forging new counter-communities of political activists, nor are they romantics attempting to locate essential human bonds outside of politics and economics. *2-3Strassen* rather, works with a critical pragmatism that is unafraid to live within the contradictions of systemic urban organisation. Within its contradictions it locates the fault lines of social practices as much as the misrecognition of the social inbuilt within the mechanisms of urban governance. It uses direct social engagement and privileges social relations over the property-compartmentalised fixed-boundary system that governs the everyday. It refuses participation in the branded arts-driven cultural sponsorship, and instead chooses risk, uncertainty and improvisatory forms of creativity. The culture is displaced from mainstream artistic practices, and without 'works of art' the project relocates culture within the post-vernacular spaces of street, club and park life. The management of the project (the role of artist Jochen Gerz) revolves around shaping a dialogue and not a mono-conceptual directing of artistic production.

Public art has all too often been derided as a marginal and aesthetically retrograde form of civic decoration or populist affectation. It can certainly be this. Jochen Gerz's 'public authorship' however locates itself within the urban processes that are formative of public life within the city. Here it is around a complex of spatial relations between housing, streets and a major European cultural event. It registers the developing spatial boundaries between public and private sectors as they are manifest

in everyday (residential) life. It uses urban sites to manifest, represent and engage with the processes of political (il)legitimacy, whose discursive are seemingly irresistible yet morally bankrupt.

### References and Notes

This essay was written after visiting the 2-3Strassen project and interviewing 14 participants; the visit was by invitation of NRW KULTURsekretariat and Jochen Gerz. I am grateful for their hospitality.

1. See, Jochen Gerz, *Konzept 2-3 Straßen*, in: *2-3 Straßen MAKING OF*, hg. v. Hermann Pfütze, DuMont, Köln, 2011. By the end of the year over 1300 people had visited the streets. The project's commissioning was first planned in 2006 by NRW KULTURsekretariats (regional cultural affairs directorate). The financing of the project involved the European Capital of Culture RUHE2010, the Ruhr Ministry of Construction and Transportation and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy NRW, along with local housing associations. See Gerz, J. (2006) '2-3 Streets: An Exhibition in Three Cities in the Ruhe', Wuppertal: NRW KULTURsekretariat.
2. See the 2-3Strassen project website: <http://www.2-3strassen.eu/> (assessed 10/02/12); NRW KULTURsekretariat (2009) 2-3 Strassen: Presse Kit : p.8. See official European Capital of Culture website: [www.ruhr.2010.de] now hosted on <http://www.essen-fuer-das-ruhrgebiet.ruhr2010.de/> (assessed 20/02/12).
3. *2-3 Straßen von Jochen Gerz in Dortmund, Duisburg and Mülheim an der Ruhr als lebensweltliche Alternative zur 'Event-Kultur*, as quoted in Jochen Gerz: *Konzept 2-3 Straßen*, in: *2-3 Straßen MAKING OF*, hg. v. Hermann Pfütze, DuMont, Köln, 2011: p.16.
4. Jochen Gerz (2011) *2-3 Straßen TEXT*, Cologne: Dumont (forthcoming 2011), complemented by *2-3 Straßen THE MAKING OF*, Cologne: Dumont (forthcoming 2011).
5. There were a number of university research projects assessing the project: these include Prof. Dr. Volker Kirchberg's 'Urban impulses for creativity in '2-3 Strassen' (2-3 streets)? At <http://www.leuphana.de/en/volker-kirchberg/research-projects/research.html#c162766>, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, and Prof. Dr. Betina Hollstein's 'Ethnography and network analysis within the exhibition "2-3 Straßen" of Jochen Gerz in Duisburg, Dortmund und Mülheim (RUHR.2010)', at Universität Hamburg Fakultät Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften Fachbereich Sozialökonomie. <http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/en/professuren/prof-dr-betina-hollstein/forschung/aktuelle-forschung/applied-network-analysis/>
6. For a relevant German reference point here, see Didier Vancutsem, 'Urban regeneration in Germany', *Integrated Urban Regeneration in the European Union: Toledo Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development* (Presidencia Espanola): EU, pp. 732-756. Tetsuya, I (2004) 'The regional pattern of renewal in urban residential areas in Germany since the 1970s', Institute of Geoscience at the University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, 305-8571, Japan. German Federal Office (2000) 'Urban Development and Urban Policy in Germany. An Overview', Bonn: Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning. Couch, C., Fraser, C., Percy, S. (2003) *Urban Regeneration in Europe*, Oxford: Blackwell Science.
7. In his introduction to the concept of 2-3Strassen, Gerz makes special mention of three texts: Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, Basic Books, 2002); Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives* (New York, Harmony Books, 2000); Richard Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, Knopf, 1974). See Jochen Gerz (2006) *2-3 Streets: An Exhibition in Three Cities of the Ruhr*, (Wuppertal: NRW KULTURsekretariat. For key texts see Florida, R. L. (2002) *The rise of the creative class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life* (Basic Books, New York, NY]. Landry C. (2000) *The Creative city: A toolkit for urban innovators* (Comedia: Earthscan, London), including this study in its embryonic report-form: 'The Art of Regeneration: urban renewal through cultural activity' (Landry, C., Greene, L., Matarasso, F., and Bianchini, F., 1996: Stroud, Glos.: Comedia). John Howkins (Howkins, J. (2001) *The Creative Economy: How people make money from ideas*, London: Penguin). Charles Leadbeater and Kate Oakley (1999) *The Independents: Britain's new cultural entrepreneur*, London: DEMOS.
8. See DCMS (2004a) *Culture at the Heart of Regeneration*, London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport/ Stationery Office; DETR (1999c) *Towards an Urban Renaissance: Urban Task Force Report*, London: Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions/Stationery Office. See also McCann, E. J. (2007) 'Inequality and Politics in the Creative City-Region: Questions of Livability and State Strategy', *International*

*Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 31/1: 188–196; Ley, D. (2003) 'Artists, aestheticisation and the field of gentrification', *Urban Studies*, 40/12: 2527–2544.

9. City of Amsterdam's Bureau Broedplaatsen and its partners (2008) Building the basis for a *Creative Amsterdam Metropolitan Area: Art Factories Programme 2008-2012*, City of Amsterdam; see also the web portal project of Kultur Projekte Berlin ([www.kulturprojekte-berlin.de](http://www.kulturprojekte-berlin.de)), and the state sponsored Creative City Berlin, (<http://www.creative-city-berlin.de/en/>: accessed 12/02/12).

10. *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life* 'weak social ties': 221.

11. The project continues to track its own reception by way of a website archive: <http://www.2-3strassen.eu/pressearchiv.html>

12. Florida, R. *The Rise of the Creative Class*: 203

13. Peck, J. (2005) 'Struggling with the Creative Class', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Volume 29/4 (December): 740–770.

14. Edensor, T., Leslie, D., Millington, S. and Rantisi, N.M. eds. (2010) *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: rethinking the cultural economy* (London: Routledge).