Orbit Palace.
Locations and Cultures of Redundant Time

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In eastern Germany, we currently observe how traditional forms of European urbanity degenerate through dramatic shrinkage. My contribution starts from empirical observations collected within an art project, "Orbit Palace," which deals with the complex structures of space against the background of redundant time in shrinking cities. On the basis of three heterogeneous case studies, I will analyze the underlying spatial micro politics and conclude with possibilities of urbanity today.

Having time, the journalist Verena Mayer argued in July 2003, no longer determines whether we do something or not (Mayer 2003: 17). The polite phrase "I don't have time!" has lost some of its argumentative power, because in our society people tend to have too much time. For German standards, the unemployment rate has been consistently high for years, and Mayer claims that this fact, as well as the fear of those who (still) earn an income, but are afraid of losing their job, are the reasons for this development. She concludes that having "spare time has been stigmatized" (ibid). In contrast to the 1980s, when the reduction of working hours and the observance of Sunday as a day of rest were eagerly contested issues, the worth of disposable free time seems to be diminishing, and the value of work is increasing progressively. The distribution of labor and spare time has once again become an indicator of class difference. But today the signs are reversed: jobs are scarce and greatly desired, and time is something for those without a job.

   The following thoughts deal with the unequal distribution of time and labor in the context of Germany's shrinking cities, as well as with strategies that in-

dividuals have developed to cope with little work, little money, and much time. The process of urban shrinking creates not only space but also time. In part the result of radical deindustrialization, space and spare time are widely available in these shrinking cities, but labor is not. In order to explore this issue, I will turn to Leipzig, a city whose population decreased by 63,000, or 11.2 percent, between 1990 and 2003 (Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen 2005). Currently about 20 percent of the city's working population is unemployed (Stadt Leipzig-Amt für Statistik und Wahlen 2005). In reference to the postcolonial perspective, which confronts the normative model of the European City with the urban reality of the rapidly growing mega-cities of the south, I will investigate the opposite of growth: shrinkage. I will assume that the rapid shrinkage of cities questions notions of European urbanity just as rapidly as growth does. The key question I will explore is: How does a city shrink? Where can we observe this process and what exactly happens at these locations? I hope to find answers to these questions by means of micro-sociological case studies. More specifically: how do people spend their time when their days are not—or rather, are no longer—determined by the rigid timetable of Fordist production methods and they live in regions that are characterized by deindustrialization and a lot of redundant space? And: What spaces do they create—often unintentionally—to pursue their activities, or as a result of them?

The artistic research project "Orbit Palace," which I conceived together with an architect, two artists, and a photographer in Leipzig, and which was part of the exhibition "Shrinking Cities" at KW-Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin in 2004,[1] explores similar questions. We used the title "Orbit Palace" as a search word for those locations that have become the home for redundant time. They are spaces that are no longer, or not yet, part of economic and social memories as the result of complex transformational processes. They are locations that signify a breach with the past and whose future appears similarly vague: derelict buildings, fallow land, abandoned infrastructures, ruins, and new cityscapes. At first glance these locations give the impression of being post-urban leftovers or holes in European cities. As part of the project, we documented in great detail how seven such locations are used today and discovered that those using them employ very different practices in doing so. I will now look in greater detail at two locations featured in the "Orbit Palace" project. Subsequently, I will tie the project and related findings into the context of current research on poverty, and will conclude my article by speculating on possibilities relating to the creation of urbanity in shrinking cities.

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1   The full title of the project, which was done by Jens Fischer, Katja Heinecke, Reinhard Krehl, Silke Steets, and Nils Emde is: "Orbit Palace. Time Pioneers in Space," Schrumpfende Städte // Shrinking Cities, KW-Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (Sept. 4 to Nov. 7, 2004).

The spontaneous angler

Leipzig North, triangular junction, rainwater storage facility (*Figure 1*). He can organize his day as he pleases, because the construction companies hire him according to demand. Whenever the weather is right and the construction company does not call him, he goes fishing—sometimes as long as half a day. He travels by bike. In his bag he carries some snacks and canned sweet corn, which he uses as bait. He always crosses the railroad tracks and climbs down the embankment. He always casts his line into the wind because, as he claims, "carps can smell you."

Figure 1: Spontaneous angler (Photo: © Nils Emde, 2003)

He is very alert and knows where to find a shoal of fish. He returns every single fish he catches back to the lake. He only likes salt-water fish and the only carp he ever took home he brought back to the lake the following day.

He calls this place "paradise." It is peaceful at the lake, and once he has turned off his cell phone he is all by himself. He hates having to stand in line and wait. While fishing he only waits for himself. He needs nobody's assistance to do so. He refuses to have anything to do with fishing clubs and he has no fishing permit. He does not need one anyhow because the lake is outside anyone's jurisdiction. It is the product of a coincidence that was created in the course of the great modifications that were applied to the infrastructure of Leipzig North. A rainwater storage pond located in the midst of a triangular

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junction—found between the exhibition center, the highway, and the new manufacturing plants of Porsche and BMW. As a result of the development of certain parts of Leipzig, a new landscape is emerging.

Fernando S. is forty-two years old, divorced, and lives together with his girlfriend. He came to the GDR from Cuba at the age of twenty-two. Upon his arrival he trained as a railroad builder. Later on he was an engine driver at an opencast mine—always in the better-paid three-shift system. He has been un-employed since 1992. Today he gets by with the help of welfare and the occa-sional small construction job. He claims he is a good handyman. He has reno-vated and modernized several apartments already. Fernando says he did such a good job renovating one apartment that even the West German landlord was impressed with it. The neighbors in the allotment colony were equally im-pressed. Initially they were skeptical when a foreigner moved into the sum-merhouse next to theirs. After he renovated it for a whole summer he invited everyone over, and from that moment on his neighbors accepted him. He likes it in Germany. But if it should get too cold one day, he will return to Cuba. In terms of his private life this would not be a problem. His girlfriend speaks perfect Spanish.

The in-between trader

Leipzig West, a residential area built during the late nineteenth century, empty buildings. The lobby (*Figure 2*). The sweatshirts, which advertise the waste-paper collection facility, read, "Money is lying in the streets." He and his wife appreciate the value of trash and they are still familiar with the GDR's SERO system, the secondary raw material recycling system. Today's massive recy-cling industry inspired their business idea, which will hopefully enable them to break out of the job brokerage cycle of the unemployment agency. Their clients collect wastepaper for them and deliver it to their facility, they pay them at the current rate and, after having separated paper from cardboard, they resell it. The price their buyer pays is not guaranteed. They know that "the price for a kilogram of wastepaper fluctuates like that for pork." The prices arrive via fax in their "office," which is the telephone in their apart-ment. The profit margin is approximately 4 cents per kilogram. They have monthly expenses—including accounting, rent, public liability insurance, and the transportation of the paper—a minimum of 120 euros. This means: They make a profit if they sell more than 3 tons of wastepaper a month. Most of their clients live in the immediate vicinity of the collection facility. Many of them are superintendents, who collect the wastepaper in the lobbies of the buildings they work in and then drop it off.

Figure 2: In-between trader (Photo: © Nils Emde, 2003)

But private individuals, neighbors, and friends are also among their clients, even many children, who seem to enjoy collecting wastepaper. Their opening hours depend on two factors: the season and the job center. Their business is located in a house that awaits demolition. Their landlord has given them permission to use the building's lobby as a shop until the building is demolished. But there is no electricity, and therefore no electric lighting, which greatly restricts winter opening hours. The second factor that influences their business is the job center. They are only allowed to work fifteen hours a week. Anything else is illegal. But according to *him*, there is so much to do that they could work around the clock.

Günter P. is forty years old and a trained bricklayer. Due to back pain, he has been unable to work since the early 1990s. He is married to Ursula, who is thirty-seven years old and a trained nursery school teacher. She lost her job in 1992, and in the years that followed she gave birth to two sons. Since then she has been on maternity leave, received unemployment benefits, and been on welfare. During the nineties her husband held countless jobs, ranging from "maid" in a hotel to a forest ranger. In 2003 both of them had had enough. Something had to change, and one day they saw an advertisement for a wastepaper collection facility. "We can do what others can do, too!" Many visits to the social security office and the unemployment agency followed, then a useless seminar for people interested in founding a small business, until *he* finally founded a so-called *Ich-AG*, a one-man business. They will receive support from the state for a period of three years. All net profits go directly to the social security office. During the period that they receive support they must succeed in turning their company into a viable business. This is why *she* too started to work fifteen hours per week—the amount approved by the un-employment agency—for the company.

Leipzig PlusMinus

Leipzig is located on the edge of Germany's most intensively industrialized region east of the Harz Mountains, and much of the region's brown coal min-ing, energy-generation industries, and chemical industries have been located here since the late nineteenth century. For that reason, the number of plant closures and the massive layoffs that took place in the region after East-West reunification have been unrivaled. Between 1990 and 1993 more than eighty percent of industrial jobs were cut. In Leipzig alone this amounted to roughly 90,000 factory jobs (Rink 2004: 636). It was impossible to compensate for this loss by creating jobs in the third sector. However, the economic decline of the region is only one reason for the population decline that Leipzig subse-quently suffered. A second factor is the declining birth rate, and a third factor is the West German, or rather US-style, suburbanization of living and work-ing. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that Leipzig holds a special place in the discourse on urban shrinkage, because the city is shrinking and growing at the same time. At least that is the conclusion drawn by authors of the research project "Leipzig 2030" (Lütke Daldrup/Doehler-Behzadi 2004). This research projects the development of the city for the two decades to come, and accord-ing to the authors the product of this bipolar process is the "perforated city." Leipzig is characterized both by empty apartment houses and extensive decay as well as by selective growth and the successful renovation of the city's his-toric district that dates back to the late nineteenth century. This explains why,

especially in northern Leipzig—the area around the highway, the airport, the exhibition center, the brand-new DHL logistics center, and the plants of the automobile manufacturers Porsche and BMW—is booming. The simultaneity of growth and shrinkage produces a spatial dynamic, and the significant structural changes make this most visible. Borders are redefined, territories are used differently—and therefore their relevance for society is changing as well—and many spaces appear barren. As a result, locations emerge that do not correspond to the traditional image of European urbanity but are nonetheless part of the everyday lives of people living in the European city of Leipzig. The two places I am talking about serve as examples to illustrate this process. The lake frequented by the spontaneous angler is located in the midst of the economic growth zone in Leipzig North and it is a by-product of infrastructural construction measures. The late nineteenth-century building awaiting demolition used by the in-between trader is located in Leipzig West, a borough that is affected by decay and urban shrinkage. Yet, contrary to what one might be inclined to assume, neither transitory location is fallow. The activities that take place in these locations might just as well symbolize that urban space is used in new and different ways. But how can we comment on spending time in these places?

Autonomists, entrepreneurs, and creative people

In case he does not receive a call from the construction company, the spontaneous angler spends his day as he pleases. He considers spare time to be a gain in personal freedom. No clock determines his day. For him, fishing is a contemplative activity, something like meditation. While at the lake, he disconnects his personal time from society's macro-time—for as long as he wants. Yet despite his spontaneity, his life does not lack temporal structures. He very clearly differentiates between, for example, those workdays during which he goes fishing and the weekend, which he prefers to spend with his girlfriend. The in-between trader organizes his time much more around external influences. The wastepaper collection facility determines the rhythm of his day and its opening hours depend on factors over which he has no control: the season and the stipulations of the unemployment agency. Yet there is also plenty to do after the store has closed. He must collect, sort, and separate paper and cardboard. He never has much time and this requires him to be very organized. He has no time for hobbies such as tending a garden plot or going on excursions with his children, not even on the weekend. These two examples illustrate how different people, for whom the early 1990s marked a decisive point in their biographies because they lost their jobs, experience and design time. The spontaneous angler uses the surplus of spare time, the result

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of his unemployment, to his advantage and thinks of the benefits caused by a slow-paced life and greater freedom. By founding an *Ich-AG* that deals with waste paper, the in-between trader created a new job for himself and he feels —also in terms of time—the economic pressure that comes with being self-employed.

Four Dutch researchers had already established a similar spectrum of micro-social time cultures among long-term unemployed and illegal migrants (Engbersen/Schuyt et al. 1993). It should be emphasized that their study concludes that people without work experience and spend time very differently, because this result stands in stark contrast to the findings published during the 1930s in the so-called Marienthal Study (Jahoda/Lazarsfeld et al. 1975). The Marienthal Study called attention to the different attitudes towards unemployment, but—with regards to how these people spend their time—it paints a very homogenous picture. The Dutch study "Cultures of Unemployment," which uses the concept "culture" in an anthropological way, differs: "Culture pertains to the social environment in which people function, but [it] also pertains to the symbols, ideas and convictions that regulate and justify their actions and serve as a basis and justification for their social relations" (Engbersen/Schuyt et al. 1993: 158). Mental representations, as well as individually created structures of time, may thus be seen as a part of culture. And where the Marienthal Study only determined four types of long-term unemployed people, the Dutch study identifies six different ones: the conformists (36 %), the ritualists (9 %), the retreatists (25 %), the enterprising types (10 %), the calculating types (9 %), and the autonomists (10 %) (Engbersen 1993: 157).

Significantly, the characterization of the autonomists resembles what we have already heard about the spontaneous angler. According to the study, the so-called autonomists

have neither a problem with spending nor structuring their time. Being able to determine how they spend their time is the most precious good for autonomists. While retreatists, conformists and ritualists often capitulate in the face of a surplus of time and the enterprising ones as well as calculating types complain about the lack of time, the autonomists assume a totally different position: they shape time according to their will and they do not experience it as a threat or obstacle to their social life. The autonomists claim that they are hardly ever bored. Instead they greatly value their freedom and spare time, which come along with unemployment. The autonomists spend their time according to their ideas, and they use it to grow in character independently. They ignore social pressure exerted on them by other people, groups and institutions (Engbersen 2004: 110f.).

In contrast, the in-between trader is perhaps best described as an enterprising type, who tries to augment his welfare benefits by taking on formal and informal jobs. Enterprising types often (65 percent) keep a calendar, which suggests that they try to structure their time effectively. They cannot complain about a lack of meaningful activities in their lives, and, as a result, they are

integrated into a network of intense social contacts—clientele in the case of the in-between trader.

Describing further protagonists of "Orbit Palace" could expand the spectrum of micro-social *Zeitkulturen,* or, time cultures. In addition to the figures described above, it includes the figures of the club maker, the free riders, the cat's mummy, the snack bar family, and the football partisans. At this point I would like to cite one more brief example. The location I am going to talk about is a former stove-fitter's shop, located near unhitched railroad tracks.

Figure 3: Club maker (Photo: © Nils Emde, 2003)

During my interview with the main activist at this site, I showed him a photo of the site (*Figure 3*) and asked him to tell me what he saw. Simon P. replied:

(Laughing) it's an interesting photo, for sure. Because at first glance you don't suspect anything. You only see this sign, which is broken anyhow. We're going to get a new sign, too. So, you just don't expect anything further. Behind the door. You're thinking, dunno, basically nothing. Because if you want your gig to be a commercial success you normally would have to advertise it properly. Somethin' like that (laughing) (Interview Distillery, Fall 2003).

The photo showed the entrance to a quite well-known techno club in Leipzig. Between 1992 and 1994, ten students ran the place without a permit, but now the club has a lease and a liquor license. Legality brought a number of administrative obligations, but also the ability to plan ahead when, for example,

making a deal with a brewery or booking artists. Today the club is no longer run by the ten students, and the person whose name is on the trading license is chiefly responsible. This man spends ten to fourteen hours every day booking artists, creating the program, accounting, paying bills, organizing volunteers to help with the renovation of the club, taking care of press relations, ordering beverages, maintaining the club's website, and organizing the graphic design for the flyers, the visuals, and, not least, the music. The club is open for business Friday through Sunday from 10pm until 6am. As a former member of Leipzig's subculture, the club owner has learned that you cannot separate work and leisure. He is one of the protagonists of the local culture industry, people who were once "flexible rebels and girlies" (Holert/Terkessidis 1996: 9). Today many of them are flexible entrepreneurs who work in fields that promise a high degree of identification, but also bring great economic insecurity with them. Angela McRobbie explored the fashion and club scene in London and discovered that the commodification of cultural activities gave rise to an exciting mixture of self-realization and coolness on the one hand, and consistent poverty on the other (McRobbie 1999).

Conclusion: In-between spaces

The idea of the European city has long been considered a guiding model for worldwide urbanization. Urbanists only spoke of cities when the following characteristics applied: The physical body of the city had to be dense, heterogeneously used, and clearly defined, public trade had to flourish, civil society needed to be committed, and the public and private realm had to be clearly separated. In recent years it looked as if this model had become obsolete. Walter Siebel, for example, called the European city a "backwardly oriented utopia" and a leftover "shell of nineteenth-century society" (Siebel 29.07.2000: 7). Yet lately, the model has been regaining popularity:

It seems like the "European city" and the myth that goes with the concept radiate imaginary powers that affect not only the nostalgic but various analytical and political theories also perceive it as a possible anchor that might offer protection against the trials of "globalization" and the unpleasantries that stem from it: A social division on a global scale, for example, which would manifest itself in the urban sphere as fortified gated communities for the affluent and marginalized slums and boroughs for losers, could be juxtaposed with the model of the European city, which tried in vain to integrate all social groups. In addition, the futile but unconditional mixture of and encounters between members of all social strata and the blend of the unfamiliar within the realm of the bourgeois-European city can be pitted against the commercial privatization and repressive surveillance of urban space (Becker/Burbaum et al. 2003: 8).

I would like to propose a perspective that differs from this line of argument, which complains about current urban developments and considers the (backward) utopia of the European city a way out. For this purpose it is useful to

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recall the discourse on the postcolonial city, which systematically undermines the geographic unambiguity of "the West and the rest" as well as ideas of a civil Europe and a chaotic South. If we assume a postcolonial perspective when looking at a European city like Leipzig, it is possible to articulate the variety of current urban products "from the outside in." Furthermore, it so happens that the "perforated city" does not have holes: it only has them if the European urban model serves as a backdrop for their discussion. However, these holes are actually sites where what Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel call "placeless urbanity" is emerging. Häußermann and Siebel argue that:

> Urbanity has […] not disappeared but like modern labor it has become placeless […] You cannot build urbanity because it rejects being purposefully staged, and it does not emerge overnight. But it is connected to locations, where it both takes shape and can be experienced. Such locations result from the city's aging and decaying, which create gaps inside which urban life may unfold. […] Because the retiring industrial society abandons empty factories and leaves outmoded infrastructure behind, cities age much faster again and, as a result, urban spaces may emerge. […] Urban planning may only influence these processes by tolerating them but most times they build on top of them. In order to preserve urban cities, planning must allow for in-between spaces and transition zones, and build architecture that has the capacity to age and survive gaps, decay and misuse (Häußermann/Siebel 2000).

And perhaps these "placeless locations" will—due to the activities of club maker, spontaneous angler, in-between trader, and others—give rise to new forms of economic activities and social actions. These sites could serve as the nucleus for an economy of solidarity: an economy that does not only include the affluent and is not exclusively based on commerce. In short, an economy that constitutes a counterweight to the destructive tendencies of neo-liberalism. Looking at the informal sectors in African, Asian, and eastern European countries, Elmar Altvater and Birgit Mahnkopf report on local forms of economic and societal cooperation that seek to transcend direct dependence on the market: cooperative consortia in Chile, barter trade in Romania, or so called "orçamento participativo," a democratic instrument of city planning and budget participation in Brazil, are examples of such emancipative projects (Altvater/Mahnkopf 2003). If local initiatives were supported and networked on a global level—through NGOs for instance—Altvater/Mahnkopf believe that "new forms of socio-economic security that will prevent a possible 'globalization of insecurities' will emerge" (ibid: 29). In this sense, the title of the "Orbit Palace" project symbolizes the utopian spark, which—despite all inhospitableness—is inherent in all the locations about which I have spoken.

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