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Heritage Claim through Urban Exploration

The case of 'Abandoned Berlin'

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Summary

Berlin is not a glamorous city, but it has its own style: that is to say a set of abandoned buildings as a consequence of the historical changes that the city underwent over the last decades. This contributed to shape the 'poor but sexy' image of Berlin that bears no relation with the monumental features of the neighbouring European capitals. However, the on-going commodification of tourism and increasing gentrification processes cause a radical modernization of the city which is threatening Berlin's alternative character while respecting only its more glorious past.

Moreover, Berlin's population is a synonym of youth and dynamism, making the city to be considered one of the meccas of subcultures. From these, the one with the strongest relation with its peculiar derelict heritage is urban exploration. Urban explorers focus on visiting buildings where one is not allowed to enter; former military complexes, abandoned industries, etc. Their objective is to experience the urban space without restrictions, and they also register graphic documentation. These actions should not only be understood as a way to idealize modern ruins; it is also a protest. Urban exploration is an illegal trespass of a property that pursues the legitimatized objective of making these areas more transparent; it is a *warning* to society.

The aim of this research is to claim the right to alternative heritagisation for those places that official institutions have neglected. Over a span of four months, I trespassed over 20 abandoned sites in Berlin, and I accompanied the urban explorer known as Irish Berliner in some of his infiltrations. Apart from collecting pictures, I carried out on-line investigations and I enriched the theoretical background I was using by conducting three different interviews. Following a committed urban exploration perspective, the final goal is to demonstrate how Berlin does not need to reinvent itself to be relevant in heritage terms. The existing subcultural attributes in abandoned buildings require to act cautiously so Berlin can keep its particular way of being unique.

Acknowledgements

I know it sounds strange to start expressing my gratitude to a person I never met and who did not contribute directly to help me writing this work. Nevertheless, the truth is that I was so fascinated by Bradley Garrett's wonderful book '*Explore Everything: Place-hacking the City*' that I drafted the provisional title of this thesis on the margin of one of its pages while tackling the research. Thank you for such inspiration. Thanks to Rafael de Lacour, extraordinary professor who introduced me to the world of 'dérive' and exploration of the city many years ago now. Certainly, the following pages would not have been possible without the interviews I conducted to Thilo Wiebers and Nathan Wright; your contributions were essential to shape every argument. I also owe a debt to my colleague Emil Bakev and lecturer Manuel Peters, whose comments during our Study project led to develop further the first parts of this writing. Thanks to Courtney Hotchkiss who helped me with the proofreading and general comprehension of the topic. Of course, many thanks to both Leo Schmidt and Max Guerra for accepting to be my supervisors and whose encouraging advices motivated me to improve the work. Special mention to a key piece here: Irish Berliner, who played the role of inspiring subject of study, interviewee, and ultimately, friend. I really appreciate your open-minded character and I enjoyed all the time we spent together; it has been a great pleasure to deal with a person who loves Berlin that much. My deepest thanks to Cristina Santiago for being there to listen to me in the good and bad times; every word coming from you helped me to be confident with my ideas. And finally, lacking any external funding support, my sincere gratitude to my parents José María Arboleda and Paula Gámez for trusting me and believing that education is always the best investment. To all, thank you.

Introduction

A short walk through Berlin should be enough to comprehend that it is not a beautiful city – if we consider beauty in its classical sense. Anyone who visits Berlin expecting to see an outstanding historical centre and monuments everywhere will certainly miss something else after the mandatory tours in Museum Island and the Brandenburg Gate. The visitor will be surprised to realize that Alexanderplatz is not as picturesque as Piazza Navona, Friedrichstrasse is not that majestic if one compares it to Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II and the sights from the bank of Spree River include factories and empty spaces that developed, in opposition to how the Seine has shaped the riverside in Paris. After such disconcerting evidences, the visitor will finally find some time to take pictures of the Berlin Wall remains at the East Side Gallery or buy Cold War souvenirs at the former Checkpoint Charlie boarder control. These parts of the city reflect a recent past that a large number of visitors had to live through – at least when reading the newspapers 25 years ago. These parts of the city make Berlin to be what it is today, catching the attention of those visitors who will automatically feel that they are, to some extent, main characters of the show because their generation was a part of it. Yet this perception of the city will be interesting for them. Interesting, but not necessarily beautiful.

Certainly, Berlin is not expected to compete with Rome, Milan or Paris. It is not that glamorous; it is hard to find elegantly dressed people wandering the streets. But it has a certain style, its own style: the countless train stations are like scars that break the continuity of the urban fabric, many of its façades at street level are scribbled with spray pretending to be graffiti of questionable

taste, and a whole set of abandoned buildings as a consequence of the historical and political changes that the city underwent over the last decades. Whether we like it or not, all of these things contributed to shape the humble and unique image of Berlin that bears no relation with the monumental attributes of the neighbouring European capitals. On the other hand, its population is a synonym of youth, dynamism and alternative culture. Berliners are responsible for the winds of freedom that constantly blow in the city, finding in its derelict architecture the perfect ally with whom to identify. Yet it is not surprising that Berlin is considered to be one of the meccas of subculture, since glam rockers, punks, squatters and the techno scene have also found a place here.

A worldwide recognized subculture with a particular interest in abandoned buildings is 'urban exploration', and the peculiarities of Berlin's architectural remains make the city to be a hotspot where such movement is encountered. Urban explorers trespass 'No Entry' sites and are driven by the curiosity to see what nobody else is allowed to see. In order to put such places on the map, urban explorers usually take pictures of the interior part of the buildings – an aestheticisation of decay that, by rendering visible, becomes a way of celebration and protest at the same time. Urban exploration puts the focus on neglected sites, which, in the case of Berlin, are essential to understand its uniqueness.

Railways

However, the humility that Berlin breathes through these spaces is in danger. Increasing deterioration became a trendy marketing factor, where guided tours are taking advantage of abandonment as a tourist attraction that relies in letting places slowly disappear. Moreover, imminent processes of tearing complexes down or accomplishing classical renovations to host new commercial uses together with the erection of apartments and offices lead to critical gentrification stages that are threatening the status quo of the city. The question on the table now is, how do we want Berlin to look like in 15 or 20 years? The institutional thought seems to be evident: Berlin is self-conscious for not having a complete set of monumental heritage that refers to a more glorious past and, as a counterpoint, it pursues a process of radical modernization without being hindered by any 'minor heritage'. Yet, perhaps, is it not this 'minor heritage' that

gives a strong character to the city? Is this *authenticity* not the one that Berliners aspire to conserve and the visitor to discover and experience?

The aim of this research is to claim the right to alternative heritagisation – or natural 'city-making' process detached from the pompousness of official heritage designations – of Berlin's abandoned buildings through the practice of urban exploration. It will serve to analyse the interest of certain practitioners for showing an image of Berlin which we should not be ashamed of but rather the opposite, supporting its distinctive aesthetics and potential re-appropriation possibilities. This work does not focus in creating a great crusade against change, although it establishes a framework against radical and uncontrolled policies of development. Then, the intention here is to *learn to perceive* the peculiar spirit of the city through these spaces which, being different, are not necessarily less valuable than any 'high culture'. This research aims to witness how the urban exploration scene through its illegal trespassing, documentation and display of information on the internet contribute to safeguarding the peculiar identity of Berlin. It is intended to frame all these activities under a perspective of cultural awareness and denounciation: a race against time to create a testimony of those spaces we are afraid to lose.

Abandoned housing

The research methodology I followed to tackle this work consisted in trespassing – as long as I was physically able to do so, which was in most of the cases – over 20 abandoned properties in Berlin and its surroundings during a four-months period dating from April to July 2014. During this time, I established a close relation with the well-known urban explorer Irish Berliner with whom I even accompanied on some of his infiltrations. Irish Berliner – I shall refrain to provide his real name due to the illicit nature of his activities – is the author of the website 'Abandoned Berlin', where, since 2010, has been recounting his experiences visiting the neglected *beauties of the city*. Irish Berliner writes about the history of the places he explores and compiles photographic documentation on them. Yet he invites the readers to follow his footsteps by giving recommendations on how to arrive to the place, the difficulty to get in or the level of surveillance one could face. His entirely altruistic and selfless work to obtain any income out of it, together with the documentary evidence of his activities, made it possible to put a whole set of Berlin's

abandoned sites on the map. It is then not surprising that his website is visited by an average of 4000 people every day and has been considered by the British newspaper *The Guardian* as one of the best city blogs around the world by its recently launched 'Cities' site. The reality is that Irish Berliner is one of those urban explorers who seek their activities to be socially committed by being publicly communicated to a larger audience. In opposition to this, certain practitioners within the urban exploration scene consider that promoting an abandoned place is a way of endangering the place itself since it might be ruined or vandalized, and these explorers simply prefer to keep their trespassing a secret. In any case, Irish Berliner kindly accepted my proposal to be in touch with and accompany him since he is perfectly aware that what he does contains serious implications, which are susceptible to be academically investigated.

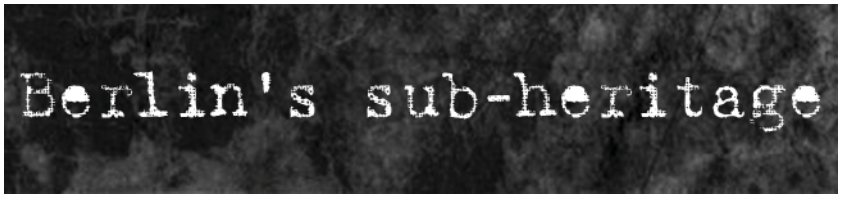
Furthermore, in order to register my own exploration experiences I have always been carrying a *Recesky Twin-Lens Reflex* (TLD) analog-camera using a 35mm film. My intention was to catch the atmosphere of these places with a method that is reminiscent of the past while offering an even more intense image of derelict forgotten heritage. By doing so, I do not expect to promote a sense of beauty in asserting 'if this is beautiful, it should be recognized as formal heritage' but rather posing 'if this is the reality, why is it ignored?' These pictures illustrate this work from the beginning to the end and their associated captions indicate the places where they were taken. During this fieldwork, I have also been collecting fieldnotes that serve as a first-hand testimony on how these spaces are currently maintained and what is – and what could be – the prospective future for them. In addition to this, since the urban exploration community mostly uses new communication technologies to interact, I have been carrying out an on-line investigation in search of comments and opinions in 'Abandoned Berlin' website. This research process was completed with three different interviews that turned out to be essential in writing the present work and in enriching the theoretical background I was using.

My camera and me.
Governmental Klinik

The result of this qualitative collection is expressed in the following chapters and annexes that aim to frame the practice of urban exploration under an academic heritage discourse. In Chapter 1, the historical context in which Berlin developed during the last decades is studied by analysing

its power of attraction to different subcultures, urban exploration included, and how abandoned buildings have become a characteristic entity of the city, which is difficult to take into account under traditional heritage considerations. Chapter 2 analyses the complexities of the urban exploration community with special attention on those practitioners whose activities go beyond the mere subjective experience in the reach of social implications, stating that such behaviour is a proof of heritage awareness towards the city. Finally, in Chapter 3 we look deeper into broader urban issues that catch the attention of the urban exploration scene such as commodification and gentrification. Here, the concern about the never-ending connections between power, space and social criticism demonstrates that urban exploration is not always an end in itself. Urban exploration is rather understood as a way to suggest coherent re-appropriations of the space that can make Berlin to continue its process of modernization and adaptation to the present without neglecting its particular identity acquired over time. Therefore, the final goal of this research is to point out how Berlin does not need to reinvent itself to be relevant in traditional heritage terms, but rather noting that its importance already exists. Its attributes are there, and it is only a matter of acting in a responsible manner so Berlin can keep being unique without pretending to look like any other city.

Chapter 1



"*The city's attraction relies on the fact that it's not quite right, and as soon as it's right, it's wrong*".

– Irish Berliner

City of subcultures: the heritagisation of permanent transition

When looking back to the origins of subcultures studies during the first decades of the XX century, the idea about 'the city' as the perfect breeding ground for subcultural movements was discussed. Robert Park ([1915] 1997), member of the Chicago School of Sociology, anticipated that a *mobilization of the individual* man was only possible in metropolises in which the 'moral climate' is such that one's dispositions are brought to *full and free expression*. Furthermore, he claims that a big city is where exceptional individuals thrive and their talents and eccentricities can blossom, instead of being condemned and scrutinized. Considering this, what was Berlin's particular 'moral climate' for the arising of subcultures?

Berlin's idiosyncrasy is a consequence of World War II destruction, where the West part of the city became an island within a Communist universe. In 1963, shortly after the erection of the Wall, West-Berlin started to gain political relevance to the German Federal Republic since it was the perfect scenario to implement development strategies that could confront their neighbouring Soviet brothers. Indeed, West-Berlin was economically non-productive and it merely represented a capitalist ideological triumph, with subsidies reaching almost 50% of the city's total income (Katz and Mayer, 1983). Within these subsidy policies, the local government launched the '*Kahlschlagsanierung*' – or *clear-cut rehabilitation programme* – and was one of the most ambitious building and urban renewal programs in its history, specifically instigating the city's cleaning process through publicly financed demolition and reconstruction works. According to this, Apicella et al. describe a chronology of what must be understood as an early stage of gentrification:

> "Many neighbourhoods in the city centre were supposed to be cleared of large parts of their older buildings, while poor sectors of the population living there were displaced to newly constructed apartment blocks in the suburbs, as they could not afford to pay the sharply increased rents" (2013, p. 3).

Considering the institutional objectives, this program was successfully carried out in the district of Wedding, although its later implementation in Kreuzberg had to face a reality which is inevitably associated with the presence of subcultures: *resistance*. In terms of subcultural movements, one is always led by the presumption that these are lingering somewhere between acceptance as part of the popular culture, elaborated on Tim Edensor's sense (2002) as *multiple*, *changeable* and *contested*, and condemnation, as something deviant or illegal. In either of those, subcultures emerge as an opposition to a hegemonic society. Subcultures go "against nature, interrupting the process of 'normalization' [...] which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 18). However, from a social perspective involving empowered and less-empowered groups, this conflict should not be viewed as a fatal rupture but rather as a symbol of the liveliness of a civil society. This would be the case in Kreuzberg, a neighbourhood formed by Turkish 'guest workers', who had no right to gain

citizenship, and the discontented youth. In fact, by 1968, as an incentive to bring people to the city, the German Federal Republic had declared an exemption from compulsory military service for males living in Berlin, what made the city to become a magnet for alternative lifestyles. Within these, there were students, artists, the gay scene or leftist activists. This heterogeneous population was opposed to the above gentrification program, and, together with Kreuzberg's south-eastern location that converted it into a West-Berlin urban periphery, it was possible for the area to emerge as a "symbol for this nascent subculture" (Sheridan, 2007, p. 101).

Thus, Kreuzberg's subcultural scene during the 1970s and 1980s provided a framework to remember among Berlin's popular imagery. At that time, the international music scene was being led by punks, who had arisen as a result of "youthful disillusionment with the corporate music industry and angry-opposition to the socio-political status quo" (Drissel, 2011, p. 23). Punks were followed by rock stars like Nick Cave, Iggy Pop, David Bowie or Lou Reed, who also found their place in the city (Bader and Scharenberg, 2010). Yet the subcultural movement that involved all the others would be the one formed by *squatters*. Squatting itself was possible due to the immense availability of abandoned buildings that became products of World War II bomb damage and the increasing industrial decline. By occupying these buildings, squatters had the chance to advocate at underground concerts, through graffiti messages and political demonstrations and riots, which helped the district to consolidate its collective identity as a centre for dissent behaviour (Drissel, 2011). Apicella et al. brilliantly summarize this vibrant period:

Squatted building

"In the wake of the global energy crises of 1973 and 1979 and the wide-reaching transformation of the Fordist production, the conflict between the city administration and Kreuzberg's residents escalated. On the backdrop of rising unemployment rates and lack of housing, one of the biggest squatting movements in Europe emerged. From 1979 until 1984, more than 160 houses were squatted and numerous spaces for projects and collectives were established, where different concepts of cohabitation and organization were experimented. To avoid further confrontations with militant movements, while at the same time preventing new occupations, the city administration decided to implement the so-called 'Berlin Line of Reason' (*Berliner Linie der Vernunft* – which, with mixed success, is active to the present day). This

meant that, from 1981 onwards, all existing occupations were granted a certain degree of protection from violent evictions; in turn, they had to undergo a progressive legalisation process, either by means of rental contracts, long term leases or collective acquisition of ownership. As a flip side, no new squats would be tolerated [...] Even if the squatting movement seemed weakened after its peak in the early 1980s, it had a lasting impact on urban policies and planning [by prioritizing] a preservation of basic building structures, stepwise modernizations and tenants' involvement" (2013, p. 3-4).

In a way of mutual influence, this controlled situation, which should be seen as a squatters' achievement, served to strengthen the squatter group as a subcultural movement. At the same time, Berlin was starting to be recognized as one of the meccas of subcultures, and the years to come brought an even more complex atmosphere where this character was consolidated.

After the fall of the Wall in 1989, Kreuzberg suddenly became a central district of the city and the alternative scene moved to the eastern side of the city – involving around 200,000 people (Katz and Mayer, 1983). The reasons for this shift are associated with the availability of a large amount of abandoned spaces due to mass migration to West Germany, the collapse of the German Democratic Republic's industrial fabric, the unclear state of property ownership and the lower costs of living (Colomb, 2012). Some subcultures disappeared and some others evolved so that new ones were being constantly created. Among the most important subcultures during the 1990s, the techno scene also claimed abandoned buildings to carry out their raves, where the decaying imagery combined with new art technologies was used to create a surreal environment (Richard and Kruger, 1998). It is at this stage when public funding was once again provided within reach of intensive urban development projects and financial attempts to transform Berlin into one of the main spots in the global network. Consequently, the local government conceived a new image of the city that would no longer keep any connection with its subcultural present and recent past:

"Throughout the 1990s large-scale construction sites punctuated the urban landscape of the inner city, in particular around Potsdamer Platz, near the new seat of the Federal Government near the

river Spree and in the historical core of the Friedrichstadt. The transformation of the city was promoted to an internal and external audience of Berliners, visitors, and potential investors through high-profile city marketing events and image campaigns, which featured the iconic architecture of flagship urban redevelopments projects to symbolize the 'new Berlin' of the postunification era. Yet by the mid 2000s the 'new Berlin' marketed by urban boosters was no longer, in the eyes of many, so new and exciting. After a short-lived period of economic and real-estate euphoria in the early 1990s, it became apparent that Berlin would not become an economic powerhouse of global importance on a par with London or New York. Because of the highly polycentric nature of the German territory and urban system, the decision made in 1991 by the German Parliament to relocate the seat of the Federal government to Berlin was not followed by a large-scale wave of company relocations to the nation's largest city. The city's economic rate has, since the mid-1990s, remained low and unemployment has been significantly higher than in other German *Länder*" (Colomb, 2012, p. 131-132).

The failure of these development policies granted subcultures a *period of grace* that remains until today (Apicella et al., 2013). In fact, from 2000s onwards, alternative movements and their spaces have started to be considered a part of the official image of the city – even if this recognition is based on the idea of presenting them in a commodified manner (Colomb, 2012), something that will be extensively argued in Chapter 3 of this work. The concern now is that, considering the changeable nature of subcultures, such a mission is not easy to accomplish; therefore, a more complex and critical approach is required, which will enable society to step away from how 'heritage' is usually perceived as fixed identity.

Indeed, the traditional understanding of heritage is established on the relation between power and knowledge while appealing to national interests, cultural expertise and triumphalism. This perception represents the 'authorized discourse' that legitimises the uncritical and passive attitude towards heritage where people do not "value sites and places that do not fit into the dominant aesthetic" (Smith, 2006, 31). Laurajane Smith (2006) critically refers to a sort of *common sense* to explain the way we assume that something becomes heritage after passing through a certain time filter – the older, the better – and even recent participatory approaches,

such as those concerning intangible heritage grounded on the requirement to have influenced a range from two to seven generations depending on the consideration of each State (UNESCO, 2011). In this context, authorized heritage gained its relevance by looking deeper into an ancient past, a tradition to be proud of, while neglecting contemporary historical traces.

However, a late-modern perspective, where constant change has become the status quo (Harrison, 2013), makes the existing period of time between the origin of a contemporary cultural element and its heritage recognition a relevant framework to delve into. This thought needs to be associated to an analytical way of dealing with current realities, leaving the old-fashioned tendency to relate heritage and culture as 'do-not-touch' concepts. Among those new topics to be studied under a heritage approach, subcultures and their use of certain spaces correspond to particular communities' behaviours that have been present, and at the same time dissident, during the last decades of Western post-industrialization. As mentioned above, in the case of Berlin, some of these behaviours disappeared and some others evolved, but it seems clear that they never reached a formal cultural status in order to miss them enough. Rise and fall are equally assumed in these days; the weight of older and more glorious historical traces contribute to the erasure of subcultures from the popular imagery, and furthermore from a heritage framework. Yet the ephemeral condition of subcultures must be seen as its reason to be, and this dynamism is essential in understanding Berlin's post-modern identity. This is, without a shadow of doubt, more authentic in the connection with everyday uses than with the fixed official heritage that authorized institutions want us to take for granted (Edensor, 2002).

Rodney Harrison (2010) describes 'official' heritage as a top-down approach to the classification of practices and sites made by authorities according to political interests. In this sense, heritage is a subjective act of evaluation that reveals an absolute truth, and its mere recognition makes it something to be labeled with a higher status, being *outside the everyday*. Yet building on the inherent purpose of heritage where something must be protected and conserved for future generations, what is the case of Berlin's subcultures where their (sub)cultural production has an evolving nature? What is the heritage perspective to be applied to those alternative realities

that emerged in a context of rapid change where its appearance and disappearance are equally related and assumed? These inquiries require us to re-think those (sub)cultural practices that our current society took part in, or still does now, that will be the heritage of the future. Thus, to provide an adequate framework, it is important to contextualise the notion of 'contemporary past'.

According to Harrison and Schofield, this frame of reference deals with the past of our own generations, and the generations immediately before and after. Its increasing interest within Heritage Studies relies on "the tendency for the present to become almost immediately historicized" (2010, p. 4). This change of view towards the recent is allocated during the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, and therefore it is not closed to interpretation. In the same way Berlin's subcultural identity has been described, these authors recognize that this perspective is essentially addressed to Western and modern world countries. This does not include people living in small-scale settlements; it is essentially addressed to post-industrial societies and their urban and suburban areas. Indeed, the 'contemporary past' explores modern history through the prism of *a type* of heritage which is strongly related to social action and subjective narrative. In this regard, the romanticism associated to traditional heritage will no longer be a nostalgic image of the past but rather an adequate critical awareness of the complex cultural conditions today. As a matter of fact, we cannot imagine ourselves missing those days in which squatters occupied abandoned buildings, and it is actually a contradiction to think that such movements of resistance intended to be officially recognized. On the other hand, we must consider that the lively atmosphere that made the presence of Berlin's subcultures possible from the 1960s onwards should be preserved so new alternative lifestyles can appear. It is not a question of feeling a traditional nostalgia for a particular movement and its spaces; it is a sort of responsibility to protect the background that favoured it. Jerome de Groot poses it as follow:

Punk.
Eisfabrik

"Nostalgia [is therefore] seen as something which might ultimately allow a critique of culture due to its slipperiness/prevalence in its ability to open up multiple spaces for reflection and dissidence [...] Often it seems that historians wish to mark history out, to control and boundarise it; but it is in the transformations

and transgressions of the historical that culture's desires, innermost workings, and underlying assumptions might be seen" (2009, p. 250).

It is then evident that this perspective provides a new critical understanding since its engagement with nowadays realities brings traditional heritage considerations out of their historical comfort zone; where an idealized and static image of the past is found. Dissent, transformation and transgressive meanings put in question the fact of perceiving heritage as a fixed entity. Berlin's reality drifts in a permanent period of transition which, at this stage, is more appropriate to perceive as something unique and positive to the city. Paradoxically, it is precisely this transition and uncertain nature that became Berlin's permanent state – being the ideal environment for subcultures to emerge so they could breathe their underground attributes to it.

This chapter began discussing the suitability of a big city for the raising of subcultures as reactionary creative communities. In the view of Stuart Hall's '*Creative Cities and Economic Development*', Bader and Scharenberg have extended this notion to how (sub)cultural innovation is focused on cities experiencing transitory phases of crises, suffering from deindustrialization, low growth or shrinkage, rather than taking place in cities with a more stable economic status:

> "But these talented people needed something to react to. We noticed that these [creative cities] were all cities *in transition*: a transition forward, into new and unexplored modes of organisation. So they were also societies in the throes of a transformation in social relationships, in values and in view about the world" (Hall; cited in Bader and Scharenberg, 2012, p. 80, my own emphasis).

As a result of its particular 'contemporary past', these transitions have been deeply acknowledged and described in the case of Berlin: "the *transition* to a united city after a history of conflict and division; the *transition* to a capital city in a nation redefining its national identity; the *transition* from a socialist to a capitalist city; and the *transition* from an industrial to a post-industrial or post-Fordist metropolis" (Colomb, 2012, p. 132, my own emphasis). As previously seen, these realities offered an immense availability of abandoned areas in the

city, so they serve as a factual testimony of Berlin's recent history. Sheridan (2007) recalls that subcultures are often recognized by their intangible attributes such as fashion, style or music, which constructs a mental image of them. On the other hand, he points how subculture's relation to tangible remains is usually neglected, although this should no longer be the case in Berlin. Here, the conditions for a subcultures' apparition were directly related to a series of peculiar spaces, which demonstrates a mutual influence. These spaces are currently witnessing the city's permanent transition and consequently they have been shaped to offer infinite possibilities for the future in the same way subcultures have continued evolving and emerging.

From all the subcultures that are present in Berlin nowadays, the one with the strongest relation to its particular derelict heritage is urban exploration. Urban exploration focuses on visiting abandoned areas that are not supposed to be visited; actually, in most of the cases, the entry is strictly forbidden. Military complexes, ancient sanatoriums or industries from another time form a landscape in Berlin that urban explorers refuse to forget. Their object is to trespass these sites in order to *fully experience* the place. They also provide documentation of the buildings through pictures and video recordings, but the mere graphic registration cannot only be understood as a manner of idealizing ruins and abandonment. As in any subculture, it is also an act of subversion.

Urban exploration is a way to escape from the homogeneous idea of cultural consumerism that is offered in neoliberal societies while pursuing the legitimate object of making the city more transparent for the rest of the people by denouncing and celebrating its derelict state (Garret, 2013). It is a way to attract attention, to claim the right to alternative heritagisation by incorporating certain places that official institutions have neglected to include into an organic understanding of the city. Urban exploration is therefore a *warning* to society; but first, what are the main features of Berlin's spaces to be explored?

'TOADS'

Many authors agree in locating the seed of urban exploration in the Situationist 'dérive' (Pinder, 2005; Bassett, 2004; Genosko, 2009; Garrett, 2014). Described as the "experimental behavioural mode linked to the conditions of urban society [...] following the flow of actions, with its movements, its perambulations, its encounters" (Rumney, 2002, p. 66), Situationist 'dérive' emerges during the mid-1950s as an evolution of Dada urban walks and Surrealist wanderings in the avant-garde period. Both Dadaists and Surrealists conceived their performances rather as aesthetic practices which depended mostly in random journeys as a true way of art. Meanwhile, even if the term 'dérive' contains the meaning of 'drifting', it suggests a more formal critical process which aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the city. In any case, all these movements shared a desire to explore a type of urban area that allowed its practitioners to counteract the legitimised and institutionalised culture which is found in picturesque historical centres (Careri, 2002).

Regarding heritage terms, what is the motivation which causes such a fracture in the establishment? Urban exploration, as an extent of Situationist 'dérive', seeks the inherent authenticity of those spaces that have not yet been 'musealised', those that escape from tourists' eyes. It pursues what Tim Edensor (2002) calls *low* or *wild* cultures, which are essential parts of our mundane and spontaneous everyday life. In this sense, 'mundane' should not be viewed under a negative connotation; as urban explorer Irish Berliner points out:

"When you say something has historical relevance or you say a building is 'mundane', it's a personal judgment. It's like saying a site is more important than another and I guess that's a human thing to do [...] I try to give everything equal importance because buildings are really just bricks put together in a certain way. The events that took place in those buildings are a separate thing. Usually when I go to places I don't look up the history in advance. I just find an abandoned building and I am guided purely through its aesthetic attraction. I sneak in, take some pictures and I do all the research afterwards [...] In a

way I think the places are all important, even the 'mundane' buildings. Something must have happened in them so they were important to someone" (annex 1, p. 116-117).

In urban exploration's jargon, 'TOADS' refer to "Temporary, Obsolete, Abandoned and Derelict Spaces" (Paiva, 2008, p. 9) and the memory contained in them is certainly very dynamic. These areas to be explored and claimed as a city's identity offer new conditions which are progressively adopted. Also, certitude is put in question and alternative uses might be present as an antithesis to the static image of hegemonic cultural materials. In its original sense, urban exploration is related to shifting the way we perceive abandoned and ignored spaces, transforming modern ruins into a pole of attraction. In addition to this, we also find urban explorers who take the risk of scrolling subway tunnels or even 'place-hacking' the tallest skyscrapers (Garrett, 2013). In any case, due to the large amount of derelict properties in Berlin, the attention here will be put on the former. In this city, urban exploration and the areas where it is carried out have the potential to contest Berlin's radical modernization and the reach of a more glorious past. By exploring further cultural possibilities beyond the established boundaries, the idea of what is heritage and what is not is increasingly blurred.

Eisfabrik

In the last decades, many different terms have been coined in the academia to indicate the urban context where 'TOADS' are found, and they all share similar traces: 'Transgressive zones' (Doron, 2000), 'Urban Void' (Girot, 2004), 'Terrain Vague' (Solá-Morales, 1995), 'Actual Territories' (Careri, 2002), 'Indeterminate Territories' (Sheridan, 2007), etc. According to Shaw and Hudson, they are seen as "empty and meaningless by authoritarian figures as a result of their temporary absence of attributed function, and thus they exist in contrast to the ordered and controlled spaces of the city" (2009, p. 3). The idea of periphery or marginal area is inevitably present in this definition, and its existence is not a distinctive trace of any particular city but rather a collateral effect of metropolises' development today. However, in Berlin this is *not only* the case: *Spreepark*, the derelict fun park that in GDR's times hosted 1.7 million visitors per year, the late 19th-century abandoned building at *Eisfabrik*, or the ruins of *Güterbahnhof Pankow*, which is one of the last two railway roundhouses in Germany, are only a few examples of how

these spaces are also found in the inner-city, and they are visible for everyone. Continuing with Shaw and Hudson's definition, these zones are, more than any other, the evidence of Berlin's permanent transition since their informality is not caused by a deliberate act of destruction – beyond the shameful vandalism they are victim of – but rather by an *act of suspension*; a time gap caused by "planning restrictions, problematic site conditions and lack of perceived demand [so] developers and architects are forced to wait" (2009, p. 4), leading sites to abandonment.

It is a fact that many members of the urban exploration scene have a fascination for urban history and particularly for the soul of old things while complaining about the ugliness found in post-modern architecture (McRae, 2008; Nathan Wright, annex 2). However, recalling the above mentioned transition nature in contemporary past, Bradley Garrett, an American researcher who accomplished four-years of ethnographical investigation within one of the most acclaimed London-based urban exploration crews, asks himself: "How much temporal distance is necessary to appreciate a place or the artefacts within it? For urban explorers it seems the answer is very little, in contrast to nostalgic norms normally found in historical accounts" (2011, p. 1055). Just right after, he explains how exploring a brewery days after its closure became one of his favourite trespassings. So transition is present as far as "each new building constructed is another building which will one day slip into ruination" (2011, p. 1049). Transition is therefore an inherent reality in modern societies that constantly provides new and old buildings equally so urban exploration and its spaces cannot be over as there will always be new targets.

I had a similar feeling when visiting *Pankow Schwimmhalle*. This abandoned swimming pool is hidden behind some trees as if it was a shy building, like if it felt shame by its ruined condition within a well-to-do and quiet neighbourhood full of nice constructions. Almost every window is completely smashed and the space inside, rather than being beautiful, is bewildering. It is not a historical site, but it had to be important for people as a gathering point while it was in use. Now, it is simply the result of failed investments during the last decades that produced a weird space where activity no longer takes place. It is a surreal space, with an empty pool and all the rest of its 'mundane' architecture dating from the 1970s suddenly abandoned. If it was not

for the presence of graffiti and vandalism, one may well say that people had been swimming there until last week. I even found some sprays demonstrating that the action here and now is completely different to the one it used to be. The space is diaphanous and not very high, it is not monumental or outstanding, but it is a place we usually assume to be in use according to our everyday life expectations. However, in this case, it seems that the apocalypse already happened. The abandonment of the swimming pool and its presence in a consolidated urban fabric of the city tells a lot about how these ghost spaces still exist while being completely neglected until the next development project. It is ruined little by little, perhaps waiting one day to be one of those nice buildings that surround it. Could it be the other way around, where abandonment is part of the history of the building and where its transitional state becomes a cultural value in itself? (Fieldnotes).

Graffiti and vandalism.
Pankow Schwimmhalle

The truth is that 'TOADS' no longer have any function except for waiting for the next urban project. Meanwhile, they are not even attractive to be visited by most of people since such decay does not match the usual aesthetic standards. They are not comparable with ancient Greek or Roman temples where the ruin is seen through a romanticism prism that brings the idea of monumentality lasting in time, the success of mankind over centuries from of which the spectator wants to be a part. On the contrary, they represent the so-called 'contemporary ruins', a sort of space which is difficult to incorporate into popular imagery because what they tell us about the recent past brings to mind how an unwanted future might look like. Their emptiness is the perfect ally to be unattended and forgotten, although in Christophe Girot's words, the absence is a cultural value as powerful as presence, and therefore it should not be understood as a problem but as an essential attribute in comprehending Berlin's identity:

"The voids of Berlin are not a result of chaotic urban development or obsolete industrial areas. The voids of Berlin were and remain an elaborate act of erasure. Being so, even empty objects, these spaces retain an immense amount of content and weight [...] The Berlin voids are an inherent part of the city; and it seems that each time they get replaced or filled, the city falls out of balance. This fragmentation and fragility is perhaps the most perfect expression of our times" (2004, p. 39).

Girot's 'fragmentation' and 'fragility' can be read as signs of diversity in the city confronting the common consciousness of urban continuity which is usually presented in official development plans. As Sheridan points when quoting Cupers and Miessen's '*Spaces of Uncertainity*', Berlin's contemporary past is based on this *specific dislodged or discovered fragment* allowing the creation of 'immediate identities', or rational chaos, attached to subculture, a "moment in which the institutional whole is overruled by the everyday" (2007, p. 106). Yet these spaces, for the regular viewer, are no more than dead zones and whose abandonment is intended to last as short as possible by authorities, represent a radically opposed meaning for the subculture of urban exploration. It does not mean that abandonment exemplifies the ideal state of a building since its primary condition is to be in use. However, urban explorers consider that a building has been *ruined* and lost its uniqueness when a renovation process was carried out without taking into account the decay traces on it:

"Abandoned places seem like they're about to fall, with broken windows and missing stairs so 'normal people' prefer them painted and cleaned. For me personally, I look at the buildings and think they're nice, there's a beauty in their decayed condition. I realize it's probably weird and fucked up, but there is some sort of beauty there [...] Usually, when they refurbish them it's not a good job and it loses something. Suddenly it's a healthy building and it's just like all the others, it's not unique anymore. It's like those apartments they built where the *Garbáty Cigarette Factory* was. I used to walk by and it was ruined, and it was precisely this that made it different from the other buildings. It made me to stop, go in and explore it and consequently discover the amazing story behind it. If I hadn't seen it before it was renovated I would have been completely ignorant of any story. I wouldn't have found out that it was run by a Jewish family that was prosecuted by Nazis. The people living in those apartments now are probably unaware of the history. Now it's just a bland looking, non-descript building. In that respect they are no longer ruins because they have been whitewashed – but paradoxically that is why, in my opinion, they are ruined" (Irish Berliner, annex 1, p. 118).

This tragic fate for abandoned buildings, although is frequently encountered, does not have to be omnipresent or even that tragic. Berlin-based urban explorer Nathan Wright expresses the

flip side of the coin:

"Sometimes [buildings] can be renovated in a nice way, for example the old hospital in Urbanstrasse 10. You got the new hospital, the big horrible concrete building, but next to it it's the original hospital and it's been empty for some time, I've never gone inside. Two or three years ago they started renovating it, they made some apartments and houses and they did it really tastefully, the whole thing looks really nice. It's a shame for me because I cannot get in and take pictures anymore, but from the outside they did a really good job" (annex 2, p. 133).

What is remarkable here is how the ruined condition is entirely a subjective perception and obviously urban explorers have a different view from what Irish Berliner calls 'normal people'. I noticed this when exploring the abandoned *Soviet barracks* in Jüterbog with him. While I was taking a picture of a broken window with some Russian inscriptions on it, I heard strange voices coming from not that far away. We were not alone. Right after that, we saw a whole family group, dog included, that was simply wandering on a sunny day, so, instead of trying to hide behind a building, we approached them. Irish Berliner politely said 'Hallo' and he asked if they knew how the rest of the complex looked like and if there were interesting buildings to visit. The older women replied, 'Yes, but it is everything ruined' in a failed attempt to disappoint us. What did 'normal people' think we were looking for? (Fieldnotes).

In any case, 'TOADS' offer a wider spectrum of alternative possibilities compared to traditional renovation processes that seek to give a building its original aesthetic values back. These ruins are not disconnected with the present, they represent the shrinking of our own time, and this time is responsible for constantly shaping them (Torres, 2004). They resisted and did not disappear or collapse, on the contrary, they seem to be patiently waiting for a second chance, claiming their dignity. Furthermore, as the result of being frozen in time, material remains can also be found as if they were objects from an ancient civilization: documents on the floor, rusty typewriters, decrepit dolls, etc. Their presence is what makes a place to be conceived as 'pure', and therefore it becomes more interesting – even breaking *a bit* of the ethic code of 'taking nothing but pictures,

leaving nothing but footprints', and take these objects home (Wright, annex 2).

Similarly, the urban condition of TOADS has been described as areas of *flexibility* (Torres, 2004), and their characteristic *non*-definition reveals a strong linkage to freedom. So ultimately they are not 'dead' but rather they have the potential of becoming a *smooth* space whose discontinuity aspires to turn down boundaries and constrictions allowing a symbiotic relation with the rest of the city (Dovey and Kasama, 2007). In the context of Berlin, Claire Colomb (2012) identifies up to five types of 'vacant areas' that in 2008 represented 3.4% of the city's total surface: abandoned industrial sites, abandoned infrastructure sites such as harbors or railways, disused buildings in the eastern part of the city, disused cemeteries, and around 1000 small building plots. These categories involve the object of study for urban explorers and among them it could be specified that closed sanatoriums, derelict military complexes, bunkers, former office buildings, ghost towns, etc. are their targets in Berlin.

Böhmisches Brauhaus

Aligned with the notion of that "free space is not given; it must be taken" (Bader and Scharenberg, 2010, p. 87), urban exploration is indeed an ephemeral occupation that highlights the freedom of the space. In *Güterbahnhof* roundhouse, I took a seat in the middle of the room, below the centre part of the dome to contemplate such great space of around 20 meters high. During that time I experienced how urban exploration is a way of enjoying the space as if it was public. I was there, in a very natural position as I were sitting on a bench in any park. The thing is that in this case the place was a ruin which remained at my entire disposal. Also, in *Böhmisches Brauhaus*, an abandoned brewery located no more than 15 minutes walking from Alexanderplatz, I looked up the staircase and was impressed that there were so many floors. I could not imagine that at the top there would be such a nice rooftop. Berlin is a very flat city and from there I had a 360 degree panoramic view where I could see the skyline dominated by Alexanderplatz's tower. I stood there for a while, enjoying the sight, and in a way I had the feeling I had conquered the building. Once I was leaving the place, I heard the sound of bells ringing coming from the tower of a church not far from the brewery. I looked through a glassless window and I saw it. It was a magic moment: I was in an abandoned building and at the same time watching the main

representation of traditional heritage, the tower of a church filling the silence with its music. But I was not in the wrong place, the abandoned brewery was just *another* heritage (Fieldnotes).

The historical connection has already been mentioned between Situationist 'dérive' and urban exploration in terms of seeking new spaces for action. However, it is also interesting to look at the primary human condition that makes urban explorers feel attracted by decaying areas. Urban exploration has been described as a practice that brings us back to our days of childhood, a sort of instinctive game which "inspires people to create their own adventures, like when they were kids, instead of buying pre-packaged adventures too many of us settle for" (Ninjalicious, 2005, p. 3). Edensor (2007) asserts that experiencing derelict spaces is a learning activity where every sense in the body is involved. Once more, in *Güterbahnhof Pankow*, when I decided to leave the building I took a moment to look at the large amount of graffiti, many of which very talented pieces, that covered the walls. I realized that there was also a huge door made out of rusty steel left completely open. I am particularly fascinated by rusty steel as a sharp material, with its patina telling us the passing time and whose qualities have been appreciated by many of our contemporary architects. In this case, the metal plates formed an angle similar to Richard Serra's sculptures conceived to walk them through. Crossing the door was an embodied experience involving the five senses, and this took me back again to the real world, a world that has forgotten this site and which is waiting day after day for something to take place here (Fieldnotes).

Güterbahnhof Pankow

This embodied experience leads to a sort of liberation from the pre-conceptions and de-coded visits that traditional heritage sites expect one to experience. According to Edensor (2007), ruins also remind us of those early years in our lives where property and ownership meant nothing and consequently restrictions to access were ignored. Certainly, an urban explorer might find himself as a privileged person when walking around in a desolated building by his own or accompanied by a small group – like if it was the old dream of wandering the empty corridors of Louvre Museum at night. The explorer has done for the place what the place has done for him, a dissent relation that puts into question "who has the right to the city [while highlighting]

how restrictive land and property laws are" (Shaw and Hudson, 2009, p. 9).

The notion of naturally forgetting that one is acting illegally while exploring an abandoned site was evident the day Irish Berliner and I visited the former *Barracks and Pilot Training Camp* in Jüterbog. We kept walking and we found a sort of industrial machinery for processing gas just in the middle of the complex. It was actually working it definitely seemed like recently-installed stuff. Irish Berliner warned me that we should be careful since there could be surveillance cameras, at least, in this part. That was a strange feeling: we had already been walking around for about two hours and his warning reminded me that what we were doing was something illegal. I had completely forgotten that. We were just wandering with a curious-minded attitude, taking pictures and, at this point, our behaviour had become a natural thing for me. How could that be illegal? Irish Berliner had to remind me that we had been for hours in a place where we should not have been (Fieldnotes).

To summarize, the main characteristics of Berlin's 'TOADS' are the (sub)cultural connections attached to them; their fragmentation breaking the urban continuity; their derelict state which is a product of transitional abandonment; their peculiar aesthetics that do not match into the common concept of beauty, and the flexibility and freedom of alternative uses they offer. All these features have been presented as a current reality, something objective and unavoidable, and as such, they form a peculiarity in the city that should not be hidden. But we also saw how Berlin's 'TOADS' are the consequence of low growth, shrinking and the failure of developing plans. It is true that the city should not be proud of these facts, but it is also the case that they contributed to safeguard Berlin's spirit by the impossibility of radically transforming such peculiar places. This is a model example of how heritage preservation does not necessarily correlate with general economic success since, paradoxically in Berlin, the positive was born out from the negative.

Nevertheless, the 'negative' is still a heavy burden for local elites. If there is a truly common feature that involves 'TOADS' is that they have been neglected, ignored, or forgotten for

what they represent. Consequently, threats underlie in confining memory and derelict-erasing. Decision-makers do not perceive abandonment as Berlin's status quo but as a deliberate act of non-recognition and non-interpretation – and this is only a previous step for a potential disappearance. Framing this situation under the already-established field of uncomfortable heritage leads to re-naming such case as *socially* uncomfortable heritage.

Socially uncomfortable vs. the 'new humility'

The consideration of the so-called 'uncomfortable heritage', mainly associated with "human death, pain and/or suffering" (Merril, 2009, p. 155), has been present in contemporary notions of cultural identification since the 1970s. Today, places like *Auschwitz Concentration Camp*, the *Hiroshima Peace Memorial* or *Robben Island* – where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned during 17 of his 27-years confinement – are even found in the World Heritage List. This demonstrates that recent approaches to heritage do not only focus on the good and monumental but also on controversial historical aspects in an attempt to enlarge heritage understanding. However, even if the recognition of this form of heritage aims to build bridges between cultures and political periods, measuring the maturity of a society by its ability to *forget while remembering* (Weissberg, 1999), it has been similarly influenced by nationalism and has commonly left aside self-criticism (Logan and Reeves, 2009). In fact, these heritage designations are always carried out after a reasonable period of time, when it is finally easier to gain the perspective of who were the good and the bad ones, so that heritagisation is strongly influenced by historical conveniences. In the case of Berlin, with its large amount of properties related to Nazi and Soviet regimes, is not an exception. Just as Irish Berliner poses:

> "The historical importance is attached to the events that happened at a site before, so for

example you have *Tempelhof* which is seen as historically important, primarily because of the Berlin Airlift. The Allies flew supplies there for nearly a year after Berlin was blockaded by the Soviets back in 1948. So people say that it's historically important for that fact – a time and an event in a specific place. At the same time the Nazi contribution to the site is played down – they had forced laborers working there during the war, and there was a concentration camp in the north of the site before that. That side of the history is not so well known. But people tell the other side, about the Allies saving the city from the Soviets. The history of specific places is always an emotional thing and it usually serves an agenda. [Also,] Germans bring their kids to concentration camps when they're in schools in order to show them the terrible things that happened there. People value the German effort not to forget with buildings like the Holocaust Memorial. But Germany lost the war, so in a way they have no option, they have to do this. If they had won the war, they wouldn't be doing the same thing" (annex 1, p. 116, 123-124).

To Nathan Wright, the eminent uncomfortable heritage in this city makes it even more suggesting and unique in comparison with other urban explorer's global hotspots:

"The buildings here in Berlin have a darker history than the ones in Detroit, for instance. You have the Nazis and the Soviets, and you cannot get darker than that. [However,] Germany seems quite embarrassed by its Communist history and not so embarrassed by its Nazi history, and the Communist history is put under the carpet. Outside in Brandenburg there are lots of places that are completely disappearing by workers using brick-chewing machines and they have completely eradicated everything from that age. The only thing by which you know there was something there is because the main gate stays for some reason, and the rest is completely gone" (annex 2, p. 131, 133-134).

I confirmed this vision as soon as I arrived at the Jüterbog train station in order to explore the derelict Soviet heritage that is present in that area. Jüterbog is a 15,000-people town located 65km south of Berlin. I had arrived at its train station after a 2-hour trip from Cottbus and was waiting for Irish Berliner to join me as he was coming directly from the big city. As soon as I took a look at the station, the first thing I encountered was an octagonal touristic panel erected to welcome visitors. In six of its eight sides, there were black and white pictures of medieval buildings

to remark the old heritage to be found there. In another side there were advertisements of small business companies operating in the town and, finally, in the last side one could read the historical information about Jüterbog. As I can barely read German, my attention was put on the numbers, and what I could understand from those is that the town is very proud of its more than 1,000-years existence – with special attention on buildings dating from the 17th century. Paradoxically, there was not a single remark on what we had come to visit, no mention of the abandoned Soviet buildings at all (Fieldnotes).

Certainly, urban exploration has been largely associated with dark stories, and certain sites where these took place still remain as undiscovered urban geographies within the urban landscape (Pinder, 2005). The reason for this is that these properties, where interpretation and heritage consideration did not take place yet, offer off-limits possibilities to "explicitly avoid any organized tourist attraction where memory is officially scripted" (Mott and Roberts, 2013, p. 33). So, as Bradley Garrett (2011) indicates, the freedom experienced when exploring also allows one to be detached from authorized narratives by creating new ones that are equally important to keep giving life to buildings after their abandonment. To this purpose, Wright relates how his imagination flows, feeling the tension and paranoia in such sites:

Pilot Training Camp in Jüterbog

> "Sometimes I like to simply sit there and imagine how the place used to look like. Like in *Wünsdorf* – the last place where there were Soviet officers in Berlin. I sat on the stairs and think to myself 'this is insane, not so many years ago I would have been chased for being here, but here I am with my tripod and smoking my pipe!'" (annex 2, p. 128).

In this sense, the practice of urban exploration becomes an integral part of the present history of the building, a sort of intangible heritage taking place within its walls. The paradox here is that, due to the increasing interest, urban exploration has contributed to the 'touristification' of certain dark scenarios in Berlin. Today, *Beelitz Military Hospital*, where Adolf Hitler and Erich Honecker were treated in 1916 and 1990 respectively; or *Teufelsberg*, one of the West's largest spy stations during the Cold War, are the object of *urban exploration tourism*. In a way, they are

no longer abandoned sites, but this is something that has less to do with urban exploration and more about tourism in the city. Further possibilities create a subjective narrative, and having low expectations will be further discussed in Chapter 3 when presenting urban exploration as an ideal of travelling threatened by commodification.

What is remarkable at this point is Garrett's emphasis on the fact that dominant memory is usually exclusionary when avoiding uncomfortable facts to clean up the full historical meaning of a place by making it less dark – something that has also been pointed out by scholars in the heritage interpretation domain (Halsdorfer, 2012). Hence, 'difficult' heritage deals mostly with major events in a society's past, or those necessary to shape a national identity, and therefore it is an important tool of power sustained by elite institutions, whose power, in many cases, tends towards a more convenient forgiveness. But, what if the uncomfortable features to highlight were everyday issues? What if current social problems affecting both our authorities and our people were framed under this discussion?

Acknowledging the empowerment of a place due to its heritage consideration, which allows us to put it on the map, a new set of alternative approaches is required to provide a further meaning of what is *also* considered uncomfortable today. The main question posed here aims to answer whether and how Heritage and Conservation Studies through the urban exploration's prism can contribute to a process of social change. This brings to light Berlin's contemporary difficulties, such as de-industrialization, unemployment, low-growth, urban planning failures, gentrification or mass-tourism, by using their exposure as a way of protest. Certainly, revealing these topics holds a high degree of subversive political connotations, and David Pinder compares this to voyages of discovery and their importance to the construction of dominant geography by building a "disturbing history in terms of the power relations through which [urban exploration] has been conducted" (2005, p. 388). Even if these buildings were once abandoned, which is already an uncomfortable aspect in itself since buildings are designed to be in use, it does not mean that they are empty of meaning. "They represent socio-economic abandonment and dereliction and are excluded from the ideal, as they run contrary to the dominant desired image of the city"

(Shaw and Hudson, 2009, p. 1). This critical perspective is what I coined '*socially* uncomfortable' and it does not only embrace authorities since also the average citizen prefers to forget it as he sees himself reflected and responsible under this framework.

The connection with Situationist dérive's focus on 'mundane' is present once more since urban exploration inherits the fascination for the hidden: "its basis lies in the settings and practices of the streets, in their fragments, everyday material and detritus [...] explorations retain associations of the marginal and even illicit, their significance for developing critical understandings of cities has been increasingly recognized (Pinder, 2005, p. 389). It is then not surprising that homeless people living in abandoned buildings today - as this became the only and arguable possibility of having a temporary right to property - are usually encountered by urban explorers, and they represent a society's edge which is not usually taken into account.

Der Bierpinsel

I also had this feeling when I went to *Güterbahnhof* roundhouse in Pankow. There, I bumped into a pair of boots and a not-so-old jacket, what made me realize that this place was actually inhabited, or at least it had been inhabited until recently. I was overwhelmed by the idea of such difficult situations that certain sectors of the population have to face in their everyday lives. There is a sort of marginal relation between abandoned places and the people who inhabit them, a symbiosis that the rest of the society has assumed framing this under a context of forgetting. It is completely reasonable to state that this kind of places represent an uncomfortable part of how other's lives are also possible in contemporary cities. Here were the sites and here were the people, so close to us that it would only take us five minutes to walk from the nearest train station. Also, when visiting *Der Bierpinsel* in the district of Steglitz, I left behind a couple of homeless people who made their place at the first landing of the staircase by marking their territory with cardboards, sleeping-bags and beer cans. It was the perfect refuge to be unnoticed in the middle of the big city. I passed by without staring at them, no disturbing, showing maximum respect for those who made a home in such peculiar architecture. How is it possible that the city neglects both its heritage and its people? (Fieldnotes).

These could be viewed as ordinary or unimportant momentums, and for some even unpleasant, but they tell more about the wide spectrum of classes in neoliberal societies. Such encounters manifest the idea that urban exploration works in opposition to the capitalist idea where well-fare is achievable for everybody. The evidence of socially uncomfortable situations becomes *socially* uncomfortable for authorities:

> "Such destructive production and consumption of history excludes many of the voices of urban residents whose lives have been deemed less important or marketable. Such broad concerns point to the need to continue the development of multiple historical perspectives, social history, women's history, etc., beyond the 'Great Man' history that has been predominant for so long; a project in which urban exploration can partake" (McRae, 2008, p. 91).

Concerning this *socially* uncomfortable dimension, David Pinder refers to radical geographer Bill Bunge, whose explorations during the late 1960s and early 1970s in the inner city areas of Detroit and Toronto, "brought into focus the daily problems, inequalities and structural conditions affecting the lives of residents [including] spaces of violence and safety, of poverty and wealth, and of starvation and abundance" (2005, p. 388). Similarly, John McRae recounts Australia's Cave Clan and its critical media representations on urban exploration: "With nothing more than a few staged photographs, featuring people 'living' in drains or taking food from garbage bins, they convinced two Australian tabloid shows that an underground Dole Army of those forced to live on the edges of society was massing under city streets" (2008, p. 114).

'Wo ist mein Methadon?'
Waldhaus Buch

It is then evident that, while we recognize a sense of glory in those monumental ruins from ancient times, ruins of our generation are seen as the result of a non-existent or poor heritage interpretation: clashing political decisions, controversial historical changes or management disagreements. Modern dereliction is an absurd image of current societies' indolence and therefore they are no longer objects of desire but unpleasing elements to deal with (Matos, 2012). This view explains why Berlin's 'TOADS' have been constantly ignored by its authorities based on the intention to focus on an acceptable external definition of the city for tourists.

Berlin's highlights erected in the early 1990s – and still part of the official speech today – are *Postdamer Platz* as high-tech capitalist architecture, the new image of the *Reichtag* governing a unified country and *Neue Mitte* willing to imitate the European urban tradition (Colomb, 2011). In Lefebvre's 'abstract space' sense, these areas represented by elite social groups are then "homogenous, instrumental and ahistorical in order to facilitate the exercise of state power and the free flow of capital" (McCann; cited in McRae, 2008, p. 79). According to William Firebrace, after studying this under a potential turn, one might say that undoubtedly the notion of *socially* uncomfortable is present:

> "The existence of these vacant spaces has never been officially acknowledged. On the city map they were covered over with fictitious streets, reflecting of the shame that Berlin is not like other cities with their respectable centres [...] The pomposity of Berlin's imperial monuments is somehow mitigated by the landscape in which they sit in" (cited in Sheridan, 2007, p. 100, 103).

And Sheridan continues:

> "With the Reichtag or other Berlin institutions as a backdrop, these surreal landscapes appeared to critique conventional monumentality and fixed urban architecture by visually confronting them with open, un-institutionalised and implied nomadic space" (Sheridan, 2007, p. 103).

In this regard, Berlin's authorities acquired a sort of inferiority complex towards neighbouring European capitals such as Paris or Rome and were expected to overcome this by designing a more continuous urban fabric that could become a new and respectful artificial identity. The city's alternative character was seen as negative rather than unique since its 'wastelands' are perceived as irrelevant for not being economically useful in policy-makers' standards (Colomb, 2012). Aligned with this, the city is a victim of speculation and, as long as consumerism is not the main reason to engage with, derelict spaces are ignored (Shaw and Hudson, 2009). Such is the case of urban exploration and its 'TOADS': the practice and the place became an uncomfortable evidence of the current global crisis since "urban exploration costs nothing to undertake and

ruins are currently plentiful" (Garrett, 2014, p. 6), so it represents a resistance against commercial interests assumed in our urban space (McRae, 2008). However, the reminding of subcultural practices and abandoned atmospheres have a strong potential. They do not only help to shed light on the rich and dynamic activities of everyday life but they are essential to understand the "under-recognized relationship to the rest of the city" (Sheridan, 2007, p. 98).

Regarding this, Berlin's particular image has been described as *poor but sexy* by the Governing Mayor Klaus Wowereit, and its aesthetics perceived as *trashy*, "a refusal against the amplifying forces of gentrification and global finance capital" (Untiks, 2012, p. 3). This, far from being presented under the implicit negative connotation of uncontrolled dirt, allows us to acknowledge the real condition of the city, its authenticity; "because ultimately, there is nothing more authentic than trash" (Untiks, 2012, p. 8). Or, recalling in Irish Berliner's words: "Part of Berlin's attraction is that it's still slightly fucked-up; it's not a fully functional city. There's always something not right at all and I think that's why people like it. If it became a perfect city then it's ruined" (annex 1, p. 122). Certainly, Berlin's appeal is present in the non-centred and non-hierarchical atmosphere that abandoned buildings provide. The political threats of this shift of perception rely on the fact that it "leaves unexamined and free from critique the processes and outcomes of urban restructuring that are so dramatically transforming cities in the interest of powerful social groups" (Pinder, 2005, p. 403).

'Trashy' Berlin

There is an established parallelism based on marginalization between modern ruins as a minor heritage condition and the humble image of Berlin expressed by its subcultural reality embedded in abandoned buildings. The city has the romantic appeal that is only found in losers, in movements that are condemned to remain in the underground, and they certainly do not seek for something more. In this sense, what if people expect freedom at the time they do not aim to hold the power? What if a city and its subcultural nature are based on a permanent criticism? What if we do not allow the system to swallow it?

Brigitte Desrochers invite us to appreciate the *extraordinary silence* in the 'new humility' of

modern ruins – considering it as an added cultural value. According to her, abandonment presents a dichotomy: it is preferable to classical beauty and nationalist assumptions of the strong, but this is precisely a risk "because it moves towards humility [and therefore] it is also easy to misjudge its importance" (2000, p. 44). However, this possible underestimation can serve as both a challenge and an opportunity to face potential strategies of re-appropriation. Not being overwhelmed by aesthetic values and not considering modern ruins as civilization elements conceived for eternity, can lead us to overcome traditional do-not-touch approaches. Consequently, a sort of sustainable aim emerges from this humility since "we cannot go on forever wasting energy to build new buildings and maintain them, we can learn to reuse whole collections of old buildings we already have" (Desrochers, 2000, p. 37).

The case of abandoned buildings in Berlin exemplifies the two uncomfortable dimensions presented here. On one hand, certain sites make reference to a dark recent past that exemplifies the city's idiosyncrasy for some people, but on the other hand, these places also suppose a breakthrough to be forgotten by others. This confrontation is increased by the buildings' current derelict state: an opportunity to safeguard an acquired humble atmosphere referring to a particular historical period for the former, or an excuse to ignore humility by tearing the buildings down or accomplishing full renovations for the latter. In any case, as Wu Ming Foundation poses, every consideration finds its counter-part:

> "Emergency, decay, lack of care, backwardness. There is, unquestionably, all this, but there is more too, much more. At their opposite extremes. Strategy, decision-making. Very careful long-term analysis of the workings of power and how it is maintained. Ethics and aesthetics: the columns underpinning any style" (2008, p. 203).

Abandonment is nothing more than the consequence of non-existent recognition and lack of interpretation, and it is only one step back to disappearance. To ensure that this does not occur, certain urban explorers demand a quality of perception that allows us to conceive the particular materiality of abandoned buildings in Berlin as an identity to be preserved. Therefore,

this abandoned buildings' aesthetics should be now perceived as a sort of subcultural heritage, a *sub-heritage*, which represents both national and institutional periods in Berlin's history that are officially neglected even if they are a key factor to understand its distinctive traces today. In the same way a subculture can lose its transgressive attributes if it is swallowed by the mainstream system, the particularities of abandoned buildings in Berlin can be erased if we label them as traditional heritage. This is the reason why considering the term 'sub-heritage' is more appropriate, where the prefix 'sub-' means 'subversive', a strong reaction to the consequences of potential heritage designation and enlisting. Abandoned buildings accept and enjoy their own trashy condition and they do not pretend to be appreciated by everyone. They do not represent a socially acceptable aspect of the society; they neither follow the pattern of monumentality nor are displayed as 'must-see' things in this world. The on-going context of rapid development neglects abandoned buildings, but their transitional present and uncertain future must be assumed as a natural condition to preserve so the alternative character of the city can keep evolving.

Chapter 2

"*The more interesting question, to me, is not why we explore but why everyone else stopped exploring*".

– Bradley Garrett

Urban exploration as subculture(s)

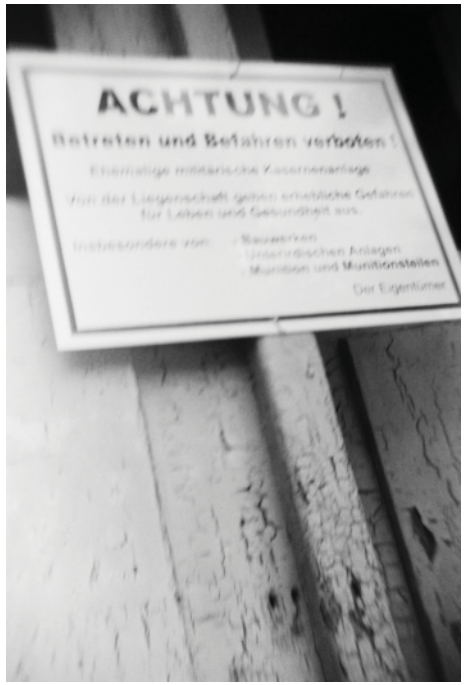
Until now, we have assumed that urban exploration is a subculture. The object of this part of the work is to demonstrate such a thing by framing urban exploration literature – with special attention to Bradley Garrett's '*Explore Everything: Place-hacking the City*' (2013) – under the most acclaimed theoretical contribution on subculture studies, Dick Hebdige's '*Subculture: The Meaning of Style*' (1975). Cross-relating these works will help us to describe urban exploration's main features and it will also make evident the logical fractures in the scene that allow us to talk about *subcultures within the subculture*. This assertion is justified due to the fact that urban exploration "is a community of people who by their inherent nature break rules and expectations. Expecting them to then follow the rules of a community is patently absurd" (Gates; cited in

Garret, 2013, p. 15). These divergences lead towards differences in terms of who can potentially practice it, the variety of spaces to be explored, how to explore them or the decision to make public such activity by making the locations themselves public. Since my intention here is to connect urban exploration with Heritage and Conservation Studies, the focus will be put on the latter.

Subcultures are reactions, they express the tensions between those empowered and subordinate positions, but they are also ways of organization. Of course, we cannot expect a uniform response in an alternative that is based on facing a variety of uniform discourses, and this is what Hebdige refers to as *specificity*, "a solution to a specific set of circumstances to particular problems and contradictions" (p. 81). It is precisely this specificity that defines every subculture and therefore urban exploration also exemplifies a subversive condition since it aims to discover the world *behind-the-scenes*. In Garrett's words, urban exploration is a "reactionary practice working to take place back from exclusionary private and government forces, to redemocratise spaces urban inhabitants have lost control over" (2014, p. 4). It aims to "uncover the places and histories that those in power would prefer remained hidden [...] Urban explorers' response to this situation is not to blame the system, but to do what they wish regardless of the system" (Garrett, 2013, p. 6, 18). It has been largely argued that the main focus in urban exploration is put on derelict spaces and indeed it was by rediscovering these that the movement started to operate. But it is also at this point, and after years of non-stop trespassing, that the first specificity is appreciated.

Garrett ethnographical research started, as most urban explorers, by dealing with abandoned properties. But, following Dylan Trigg's statement that urban explorers are not looking for "beauty of decay so much as beauty of authenticity, of which decay is a component (cited in Garret, 2013, p. 79), little by little Garret's crew began to explore the London Underground's disused stations, construction sites and every possible infrastructure from the Forth Rail Bridge in Edinburgh to the sewers in Las Vegas. Yet, Garrett was aware that ruin was not the single appeal in urban exploration since pushing boundaries was gaining importance. Statler, one of his fellows,

Achtung!
Soviet barracks in Jüterbog



states that by doing this they were moving from urban exploration to *infiltration* and added "for me, there's no going back" (Statler; cited in Garrett, 2014, p. 8). Consequently, Garrett brings urban exploration to a further dimension, where the mere trespassing of an abandoned building seems like a naïve activity, and connects with many urban explorers who consider that every "publicly funded space should be publicly accessible" (Garrett, 2004, p. 4). This transition led him to develop high-risk terminology such as 'edgework' or 'place-hacking' (Garret, 2013).

As mentioned, the present work involves the exploration of abandoned sites in Berlin and its surroundings, which means that urban exploration is understood in its classical definition. The first day I met Irish Berliner he told me he would never risk his life to accomplish a trespassing and this gives an idea of how every urban explorer decides where to place his *edge*. In either case, the struggle is evident between urban explorers/place-hackers and the system which, in some way or another, is solved through a radical manner, neglecting any sort of empowered condition. Therefore, urban exploration as subculture rejects, and even ignores, the establishment. But, which is that establishment and what are the reasons for this rejection?

Within the academic discourse, it is interesting how Hebdige (1975) considers that subcultural groups acquire a variety of meanings at different times. Firstly, they can be dismissed or denounced by authorities that consider they are a threat to the so-called public order, but they also can be recognized by certain social sectors that appreciate urban explorer's contributions. Here, I find particularly interesting the anecdote that Garrett recounts when he was arrested and charged by London authorities for his infiltrations. The police officer commanding the investigation appreciated the beauty in the pictures that were presented as incriminating evidences in comparison with regular murder scenes that he had to deal with on a regular basis. Garret was finally acquitted on a public trial demonstrating that "the absurdity of the accusations does not expose us; it exposes the accusers" (Garrett, 2013, p. 240). Urban explorers are presented as heroes to the rest of the society-base and, indeed, it is remarkable how just by taking a look to the comments in 'Abandoned Berlin' website one can see how people usually express gratitude for revealing derelict sites – making evident a generally positive reception. Here are only a few

examples of the comments people have been writing on the blog since 2010:

"I went in today. It was a really sunny day so it was nice but I expect it to be sexier during early mornings. Even some fog could give more feeling to the pics. Thanks for your posts! The blog is great! A lot of info!"

"We were there yesterday. There was no problem at all: we could go in very easily and then looking around with no fear of the neighbors..... There were two other groups there.
The place was really nice! Thanks for the tip!"

"Another great article. Thank you so much for this site, the frequent updates and the guides too. This is seriously my number one website ever."

This hero recognition has been highlighted by Luke Bennett as a potential fracture point within the urban exploration community that is driven through a *competitive dimension* as "imperial 'scientific' explorers of the 19th century did" (2011, p. 428). In this sense, the notion of being 'the first' may create tensions among crews, although Nathan Wright prefers to allocate this pioneer experience into a healthy self-generated level: "It's always nice to feel that you're the first person there though you know you are not really the first person there" (annex 2, p. 128).

Hebdige perceives that subcultures' sense of youth community is established on two dimensions: the necessity to originate a solid image in opposition to the desire of moving away from "parental identifications" (1975, p. 77) while he also refers to the well-known gang's linkage to land/neighbourhood which dates from the 1960s. However, urban exploration as a nowadays phenomenon operates rather within an on-line community, a virtual territory, which was born in a technological era. Like any other current movements, its global cohesion is discussed since the number of explorers increases each year:

"Urban explorers are perhaps a larger community than one might expect, though, as I have

already suggested, it is problematic to view explorers as a homogenous group. There are approximately 10,000 registered users of the urban exploration web forum 28 Days Later, the largest in the United Kingdom and probably about 3,000 active explorers in the UK, many of whom do not associate with web forums. Moving beyond the UK, Nestor (2007) reports that the most popular global urban exploration forum in the world, the Urban Exploration Resource (UER), has 18,000 registered users" (Garret, 2014, p. 3).

Certainly, the analysis of the communities' interaction in web forums is a remarkable resource of study that allows classifying practitioners according to their own interests. By doing so, Bennett, in his research involving people who mostly explore Cold War bunkers, dares to consider this as a *document-based ethnography* because "Internet forums provide an abundance of first-person depictions of and ruminations upon [urban exploration]" (2011, p. 425). This is something that one can easily realize in the 'Abandoned Berlin' website. In its 4-years existence, and by the time I am writing this, there are up to 53 different entries and many of them have been updated several times. Furthermore, in one of our explorations together, Irish Berliner told me he had a list of 83 more places to explore around Berlin. Some of the posts reach up to 200 comments where discussions, arguing or advice is found. Acknowledging the recent origin of this subculture and its contemporary networking condition makes the question of 'when' as essential in order to look deeper into it.

World War II produced a social fracture where youth started to recognize itself within a different context from the one their parents had been raised. Hebdige calls it 'generational consciousness', a state of mind that results in a general objection framed under an increasing permissive society (p. 78-83). The reasons for this may vary but the author asserts that immigration and the every-day-more influence of media played an important role in the post-war world. In this sense, one could easily recognize that early steps of globalisation provided the necessary complexity to frame the apparition of subcultures. In summary, as it was pointed in Chapter 1, subcultures are a set of creative responses to changing conditions and, applied to urban exploration, Garrett wisely identifies them in the period 2000-05. According to him, the global community emerges

after 9/11 in New York, a thought shared by McRae (2008), and London's 7/7. These terrorist attacks were followed by extreme security measures that fitted neoliberalism's infinite amount of legislation: "media saturation, gentrification, surveillance, the constriction of civil liberties and health and safety laws" (Garrett, 2013, p. xiv). Just like any other subculture, urban exploration raises from a society where a sense of freedom is taken for granted, although a B-side is certainly hidden within, and urban exploration aims to delve into that loophole.

Both Hebdige and Garrett allocate the main focus of their works in the city of London. The above mentioned particularities – immigration, social class conflicts, etc. – have been present in most of the biggest Western cities during the last 50 years. The case of London, as well as the case of Berlin, exemplifies this reality at its peak because indeed certain subcultures were the consequence of the existence of a previous subculture (Hebdige, 1975). For Garrett, London is the perfect game board where a series of abandoned buildings are found in the suburban areas. In addition to this, the never-ending idea of material progress makes possible "that many of these adventures are based in global capital cities where everyday experiences and encounters, it has been argued, have been dulled through both sensorial overload and increased securitization of everyday life" (Garrett, 2014, p. 4). As a result, wherever complex social features and transitional space conditions are encountered there turns out to be the ideal flashpoint for the rising of subcultures, being urban exploration being among those.

Giving a whole overview of the social component in these major cities, Hebdige differentiates between Negro and white working-classes as well as the need to underpin masculinity, and it is precisely in terms of race and gender where urban exploration has been put in question. Urban explorers count with a double life: on one hand they have respectful jobs and on the other they commit illegal trespassing. But this transgression can be pronounced depending on the appearance: "a person already under surveillance and scrutiny and subject to racial or other forms of profiling by security agencies, for example, faces much greater risk of harassment and detention than the typical white urban explorer" (Mott and Roberts, 2013, p. 237). In fact, Abdul Greaze, a participant in Garrett's ethnographic research said "only half joking, that he was 'the

wrong colour to be an explorer'" (Garrett, 2013, p. 20). At the same time, many scholars pointed out that urban explorers are mainly a male community in their twenties and thirties where women only represent between 5 to 15 percent (McRae, 2008; Garrett, 2013). The reason for this underrepresentation is, according to urban explorer Nancy Drew, "because society says so... girls are supposed to play with barbie [*sic*] dolls, hate getting dirty, be scared of everything and so on" (cited in McRae, 2008, p. 121) – an argument that Mott and Roberts (2013) recall in defining urban exploration mainly as an embodied male practice. However, even if Garrett recognizes that the community is not as homogenous as it may appear, he states that the urban exploration scene is full of camaraderie and it rejects any sort of implicit and strict discrimination (Garrett, 2013; Garrett and Hawkins 2014).

One of the main points to understand Hebdige's work is the *style*, and the style is purpose, behavior and aesthetics. The style is the code followed by a subculture not only to establish a difference towards the dominant discourse, but it is also needed to identify itself from other subcultures. Shared traces of style lie in the search for risk and excitement, the acting through ritual forms, the use of an encrypted argot, or the adopted dress code (p. 76-78). Urban explorers fulfill all these requirements: they develop their activities under personal integrity while a fear for being caught by police is always present; the integration in crews is normally derived by a demonstration of courage through a significant trespassing – a sort of *tribal mentality*; they operate a specific terminology to refer, for instance, to security guards as 'seccas' and their toolkit would include hooded sweatshirts to protect their identities as well as backpacks to carry video cameras (Garrett, 2013).

Finally, Hebdige focuses on the notion of *society as one* to mark subcultures' breeding ground. Terms such as 'mass society', 'integrated and meaningful', 'hierarchically ordered community', 'sacred function' or 'harmonious perfection' serve to contextualize the idea of culture as a single excellence which must be valid and assumed by everyone. Once more, the eternal relation between power and knowledge is present – moving towards a natural hegemony and cultural homology. In opposition to this uniformity, the tendency is to increase the number of possible

responses. Aligned with this, Garrett suggests that the majority of the people prefer an already decoded sense of history and space, a passive idea of cities' past. The alternative that urban exploration proposes is to construct different meanings through own experiences so explorers are responsible "to take control of these narratives, to create the constellation of meanings that we would like to see created, rather than waiting for those narratives and experiences to be offered" (Garrett, 2013, p. 44). Urban exploration is in this case an active engagement towards something that otherwise would be imposed, and therefore it remains as an exclusionary practice (McRae, 2008; Garrett, 2014).

When I interviewed Nathan Wright he asserted that "not everyone deserves to go to these [abandoned] places, not everyone has the right to do everything" (annex 2, p. 3), which rises as a strong contradiction between a practice that claims rights to the city while being framed under a potential elusive nature. This is the most important inner fracture that I encountered when researching about urban exploration groups and it involves the questionable, but necessary, communication of the sites in the reach of a potential heritagisation.

To communicate, or not to communicate, that is the question

Let's start on the basis that if Irish Berliner had trespassed Berlin's abandoned buildings without publicly informing about it on his website, I could have known about the rich derelict heritage in the city by a quick glimpse, but it would have been impossible for me to account with so much information about history and locations. I was aware that making urban exploration conquers public is not always well-received by the community since I had already read Bradley Garrett's issue concerning a post on his personal blog about Burlington - known for being *the place where the British government was to be rebuilt in the event of nuclear attack*:

"The Burlington blog post indeed became a target of rage for members of 28 Days Later and Dark Places, who claimed we had exploited information they'd 'handed to us on a plate'. Lemonhead wrote on my blog, 'You make it sound like you are pioneers. Many of us have been in and out of here for years. The only difference is the rest of us haven't crowed about it in a way that ensures increased security (and probably official interest). Well done you pretentious prat. Place-hacked? Well yes, hacked, damaged, ruined" (Garrett, 2013, p. 72).

Indeed, it is not difficult to find comments made by 'real' urban explorers where they complain about Irish Berliner's communicative approach. The following one was written by an anonymous reader in Irish Berliner's post '*Zombie Insanatorium: Waldhaus Buch*' (2014):

"First of all, I must say some words about the way you publish those sensitive locations... we were in there some years ago... a few times and it is hard to see those fu**in [*sic*] new graffitis and distortion ever since. We are proudly save the real names of those places and other do so too cause it is a kind of codex you have, a kind of responsibility... Why do you name the places, even with the full addresses? And also about how to get in...? There is really no need for that, if you like to share with someone trustable, you can do so but we all know about those sprayers who are searching for just those buildings where they can "train" themselves without thinking and respecting the precious architecture or the heavy history behind it... please think about deleting the details and maps for your locations, it is really enough to share your photos, don't you think? What is your personal advantage of this? We love this location very much and we always try to avoid all those vandalists there, of course also on all other abandoned places... we do not need an urbex tourism!"

Waldhaus Buch

So when I asked Irish Berliner if he was one of the exceptions among a more hermetic urban exploration subculture he replied:

"I started the blog in a format where I write the exact location, how to find it, how to get in, etc. I did it because I thought it was a shame to have these abandoned places with nobody experiencing them, such a waste, so I decided it was better to share this information [...] I had discussions with people

asking me to stop publishing addresses. It's usually due to fears of vandalism if more people are aware of these places. So they actually care for the places and I can appreciate that. Then, I thought about it for a while and realized that the places would get vandalized anyway. Most of the places I wrote about were already vandalized before I wrote about them, and then you get more comments from people who say 'the whole world is going know, you are going to have tours coming here, etc.' It's not that they don't want the places publicized, it's that they don't want them to become tourist attractions. Like *Teufelsberg* or *Spreepark* are now tourist attractions. Both have tours. But this has more to do with Berlin than anything to do with urban exploration. People have a sense of entitlement to these places and they simply don't want to share it with foreigners or tourists. There is a sort of resentment there. You also have the element of people who have been into this kind of thing for years and who knew about these places before I did. They get pissed off because I'm revealing their secrets and suddenly what they knew – what made them feel special to them – was no longer so special. It was spoiled because it's available on Google" (annex 1, p. 116, 119-120).

I wanted to check this information with someone who was not in favour of displaying the exact locations of the places, and urban explorer Nathan Wright explained to me:

"I don't like publicly giving away where the locations are because within a shorter period of time, if you display where they are and if it's a really good location, it can be vandalized. For example there is a hospital at Jüterbog that has the surgical lights and operation stuff, and everything is getting ruined and rusty - but naturally. People think they are doing a good thing by putting the geo-coordinates and pictures of these on the internet. There is a website, I don't want to say who they are, but they are a quite popular urbex UK-based website, and people go there and put the coordinates saying exactly where locations are. And then people go there and take the material remains to sell them on the internet, or selling them to clients, and that annoys me [...] There are a lot of photographers as well who find a location and then damage it, even in extreme cases lighting fires, which is a bit dangerous, so they have their shots and nobody else can have those shots" (annex 2, p. 126, 127).

As far as I noticed during the months that my research took place, the position stated by

Nathan Wright is the one which is usually found among urban explorers. "Mainstream media sensationalisation is actively discouraged within the larger community to prevent unnecessary attention that would incite authorities to 'crack down' or get locations 'sealed'" (Garrett, 2014, p. 3) – what at this stage is complemented by potential vandalism and radical touristification. Of course, there are common features in the controversy presented here. Every urban explorer shares a fascination for the past and the history embedded in it, although their way of presenting, or simply *not* presenting, such emerging heritage establishes a clear difference between them. Recalling Bennett's work, I shall state that Nathan Wright's approach, the dominant one, is *performative*, and we should not see this under a negative connotation since it represents a cultural value in itself. Meanwhile, Irish Berliner's mission is rather *communicative* and therefore it holds a higher degree of preservationism and social responsibility, making it more relevant in terms of Heritage and Conservation Studies.

Luke Bennett, when researching about the so-called 'Bunkerology', indicates that most urban explorers are concerned with the *performance of the act*. This means that they "enjoy the uncertain legality of their practice and relish the 'cat and mouse' game of gaining access and evading the attention of site owners or their security guards, [...] the 'reward' of that act may well be multiplied by the attendant risk and/or transgression related to the place" (2011, p. 426). This feature is certainly present as Nathan Wright confirms: "Once I know I'm done I walk out and the security guy comes to say 'Hey you!!!' but I say 'It's fine, I'm leaving...' But I do enjoy avoiding the security guard, it's a lot of fun" (annex 2, p. 131). This is a meeting point in both perceptions here discussed, and suggesting a *communicative* approach does not mean to renounce such 'pleasure'; in fact Abandoned Berlin's slogan is 'IF IT'S VERBOTEN IT'S GOT TO BE FUN'. However, this reality should not be trivialized since, even if it does not pursue a deeper study of the places to explore, it says something about the land property in the city as well as the possibility of constructing self narratives.

Superficiality is something that High and Lewis have condemned when comparing urban exploration as "analogous to the sport of hunting [while explorers] say very little about the

history, function and physical layout of the [buildings] being explored" (cited in Garret, 2011, p. 1059). This indicates that practitioners pay more attention to their trespassing activities than the sites where they are taking place. In a way, this criticism over urban exploration has been recognized by Bradley Garrett acknowledging that "urban exploration appreciates history in different ways and does not offer the promise of preservation" (2013, p. 33). According to him, most of urban explorers do not claim buildings to be retaken by an official and institutional image but rather the flow of their behavior makes evident the desire to be part of the urban environment. *Performative* explorers reject any sort of artificial management and therefore they cannot be presented in a way of *heroic preservationism*. Then, the *performative* approach is not a question of denouncing the abandoned buildings' negative presence but an excuse to create an intimate process with the city where explorers learn how to feel places by the use of "individual freedom, imagination and subjectivity" (Garrett, 2014, p. 6). Their concern is not so attached to architecture conservation since they ignore the pros and cons in terms of urban preservation, thus making the act of performance more related to other academic disciplines such as Cultural Geography.

Urban explorers prioritizing the *performative* approach give life to the 'laissez-faire' phenomenon, a perspective that contemplates letting buildings go while avoiding the *temptation to interfere in their destiny* (Lang, 2008). Indeed, when Bradley Garrett asked another explorer if he would like to see the abandoned Belgian hotel where they were spending the night preserved in some way he laughed and said 'hell no, that place is a shithole. Look at it!' (Silent Motion; cited in Garrett, 2011, p. 1053). In line with this, back in Berlin, there used to be:

> "over a million Soviet troops, once they moved, what are you going to do with these buildings? They cost too much to run, they cost too much to repair, they cost too much to put electricity and heating. For what purpose? Just to keep it? To do what? [...] They are just falling to disappearance. I think it's better to leave them as they are, to rot. Nature likes these buildings, wild animals live in there, they are making their home... Nature takes everything back and that is where buildings come from: bricks are made from clay and cement comes from earth" (Nathan Wright, annex 2, p. 126).

Certainly, due to the transitional and uncertain state of abandoned buildings, this 'let-it-go' destiny allows the expansion of invasive wild vegetation which advocates the re-appropriation of sites and the redefinition of landscape (Alterazioni Video, 2008; Torres, 2004). I witnessed nature taking back the abandoned *Barracks and Pilot Training Camp* in Jüterbog. I saw, literally, trees growing from a cement-made floor and I wondered if that is what nature does in 20-years of abandonment, what could nature do to the buildings after 100 or 1,000 years? (Fieldnotes). This is something that for Wright, as art photographer, has a higher value in the comparative dimension between natural decay and human destruction. According to him, the actual ruin in *Beelitz Military Hospital* is a major example:

"The real ruin was never repaired after World War II, it was bombed and the Russians never repaired it like the rest of the complex. And over the years on the fourth floor its ghosts are hidden because it's a ruin, it's a forest! You have a whole bunch of tree bunches growing from the floor. And the building is still there... such a solid structure! Although I wouldn't advise to walk through that forest because the roots have gone through and it's slowly coming away but nature is really fighting. The building is still standing, it came through all, so I think something stays there for a long time, while for other things life comes and goes" (annex 2, p. 134).

Pilot Training Camp in Jüterbog

As seen, far from being perceived as a negative condition, for the majority of urban explorers the organic decay is a cultural asset which deserves to be maintained to make visible how our society does not escape from the passing time. Letting the buildings go is definitely an option and it does not necessary correlate with the traditional interest of a conservation perspective that puts heritage interpretation over decay: "the urban exploration community protects the fragile derelict materiality of sites by not disclosing their locations so that these mutations can continue, so those secret histories continue to be revealed in whispers and through spontaneous embodied discovery, acting as safekeepers of extraordinary affects in a world rendered increasingly mundane (Garrett, 2011, p. 1064).

So there is a deep thought on how this view is rooted and consequently it does not have

to be taken for granted that *performative* urban exploration is less committed than a *communicative* one; it is simply that the former does not consider dereliction as something negative – in opposition to what most of the people perceive. I have argued elsewhere that the preservationism discourse should not create a crusade against how ruination contributes to shape an environment that, in this case, will no longer be understood as pure or untouched. Urban exploration, through the aestheticisation of decay imagery, is a resource that mediates between conservation and abandonment. Both of these are one way roads and they should rather be viewed as intersecting lines, where urban exploration is the necessary dialogue between them (Arboleda, 2014).

We have seen how urban exploration, even if it can be understood as an end in itself due to its *performative* approach, and it inevitably suggests interesting aspects to take into account. This justifies the fact of not communicating the exact location of 'TOADS' so that they are not sealed, vandalized or commodified. Applying a heritage perspective here is unconventional though it opens a whole new dimension in how to deal with contemporary ruins where slow and natural dereliction plays a main role. Building on McRae's (2008) appreciation about urban explorer Michael Cook, it is clear that these practitioners do not feel the need to be considered *activists*, something that Nathan Wright would later confirm to me: "the images I make aren't journalistic images, they are pieces of artworks [...] I am not documenting, I am making it. It is not about how the place looks but expressing how I feel it looks" (annex 2, p. 129).

On the other hand, the *communicative* sphere is not less relevant either: it pursues a clear public visibility and documentation so the city remains legible for everyone who aspires to fully enjoy it. In this case, the considerations in terms of location and prospective opportunities for use are more present, being closer to the idea of conservation and providing the urban space with new alternative possibilities. A minority of urban explorers, Irish Berliner among those, address this topic when reading through his blog. In this regard, urban exploration is definitely not an end in itself but rather a behaviour that engages with the society enabling a responsibility in the way the city is treated while witnessing its dereliction and anticipating or denouncing future

changes. Here, the *performance of the act* is still an input – the risk is always present – but it brings the practice into an implicit critical level at the moment it is rendered public. Neither the *performative* nor *communicative* is better than the other, but considering Heritage and Conservation Studies it seems evident that *communicative* exploration is more relevant. This leads to consider that, apart from the experience of doing so, such *communicative* explorers extend their influence by breaking the rules for a social benefit.

Civil disobedience for a good purpose

Many works have described the figure of Henry David Thoureau, the American author who coined the term 'civil disobedience' in the mid 19th century, and among those, the most beautiful words were written by Henry Miller. Miller pictures Thoureau as the most unusual subject to find in this world, *an individual*: "a kind of person that, if it had proliferated, would have caused the inexistence of governments" (2008, p. 3, own translation). Indeed, the healthy state of a society is for Thoureau inversely proportional to the amount of available legislation by asserting "that government is best which governs least [...] that government is best which governs not at all" (1859, p. 3). According to him, the existence of a law does not necessarily pursue to make men more just, but to punish men. A law tells what one can or cannot do but it is unable to establish what one can consider *appropriate* to do.

To build on his discourse, Thoreau strongly prioritizes the individual conscience over the mass acceptance as long as this behaviour does not restrict others men's freedom:

"Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right or wrong, but conscience? [...] Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects

afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right [...] Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? [...] A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men [...] Any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already [...] Let him see that he does only belong to himself and to the hour [...] If a man is thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free, that which is not never for a long time appearing to be to him, unwise rulers or reformers cannot fatally interrupt him" (1849, p. 4-5, 9, 12-13, 23-25).

By the time Thoureau wrote these words, he had already been imprisoned during one day, a punishment that he accepted, for not paying taxes to fund the American war against Mexico or to sustain slavery in Southern states. One century after, civil disobedience seemed to be equally relevant when Mahatma Ghandi advocated 'nonviolent resistance' as a form of protest towards British colonization in India, or when black-activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in a bus to denounce racial segregation. These individuals, and many more, were considered criminals by legislators and large society sectors. Only time perspective causes us to perceive them as heroes for ignoring unjust laws, for prevailing their consciences over the establishment. Urban exploration may well be the case in terms of rights to the city and urban heritage.

On the basis of John Locke's '*The Two Treatises of Government*' published in 1690 and, factoring in Rose and Seed research work at the end of 20th century, John McRae (2008) defines and justifies property as an *act of doing*. The development of any sort of activity in a building constructs a mental boundary which makes clear what an owner's territory is – a consequence of common sense which is more powerful than any 'No Entry' sign. Property can only be property as long as there is an active engagement by others, but when it is not in use the order can be subverted. Then, the attribute that makes a building to be understood as 'property' is no longer present. The building is therefore a waste and its inviolability is annulled. Not being allowed to trespass an unused building is simply an unjust law. It would be more just if people could

experience that building, something that contradicts the liberal notion that property is rather a mere act of owning. Urban explorers acknowledge and assume trespass laws - as Thoureau, Ghandi or Parks were aware of the reality they were living in – but the fact of making the decision to cross the boundary means practitioners reject societal norms and their actions are morally acceptable and justified not only for personal satisfaction but also for documentation and information, yet for a good purpose (McRae, 2008).

When I tried to visit the abandoned *Nazi Villa* in the Steglitz neighbourhood I had to face a difficult situation that exposes the controversy and lack of understanding towards urban exploration made by ´normal people'. When not even 10 seconds had passed since I jumped the fence, an old man who was very altered approached me from the other side of the lot where I had been just a moment before. He had a camera around his neck and he was holding a sort of ID or some institutional identification. He started yielding German words from which I could only understand '*Polizei*' and '*Vandalismus*'. I was very frightened although it was evident that due to his age he was not a policeman. However, I still did not know if he was saying that he would call the police or he had already done so. In order to calm him down I said I did not speak German but his reaction to that was even worse making gestures with his arms indicating me to jump the fence back. While I was obeying, I was repeating many times '*Kein Problem*'. Once I was next to him I started walking out of the yard. Under no condition would I have tried to argue with the old man trying to convince him that I was not a vandal but that I simply wanted to take some pictures. His behaviour was not like the one from a person who wants to negotiate. Moreover, I was afraid a police patrol was on its way so as soon as I was outside the complex I simply started running, trying to get lost in the labyrinth of adjacent streets. Before that, I looked back for the last time to the beautiful building made of red bricks which had been seriously damaged by bombs in 1944 and was never renovated. I felt bad because I was not even able to take a picture from the exterior. I also saw the old man's face a little bit disappointed for letting me escape, but I was sure he would be proud of himself for safe-guarding his neighbourhood from a 'vandal'. I had mixed feelings, but mostly I felt rage. Rage for having being called a 'vandal', a term that I did not deserve. Ultimately, I felt frustration because such a healthy activity like

taking pictures could be misunderstood by the rest of the society as something completely illegal. The old man who addressed to me in the Nazi Villa was clearly a neighbour from that area, but surely I had a greater cultural awareness towards that piece of heritage compared to a person who was calling it home (Fieldnotes).

Indeed, the term 'cultural awareness' has become a reiterative idea within Heritage Studies works. It is understood as "the foundation of communication and it involves the ability of standing back from ourselves and becoming aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions (Quappe and Cantatore, 2005, p. 1). It plays an important role in heritage as a factor of sustainable human development among the changing processes attached to current globalisation (Cottbus Declaration, 2012). Behind these big words, one can assert that urban exploration, a community fascinated by history and architecture, is a major example of cultural awareness following its principles to their ultimate illegal consequences. As Canadian urban explorer Ninjalicious and his co-editor and wife Liz Clayton point out: "continuing to support considerate exploration and questioning authority in productive, benevolent, and visible ways will allow us to represent ourselves as what we really are: people who love our cities, not those who wish to destroy them" (2003, p. 2).

In certain cases, this love for the urban space leads to an extremely delicate contact with abandoned buildings. As Bennett indicates in his research about exploration of Cold War bunker-posts, explorers' behaviour turns out to be positivistic, reverential and reconstructive, and he underlines an on-line comment of one of his subjects of study: "I gave the post a quick tidy before I left, gave the floor a sweep, made the beds, took the chairs off the bed and put them on the floor around the table, I 're-locked' the hatch the way I found it" (Bennett, 2011, p. 427). This outstanding care for dereliction was also demonstrated by Nathan Wright when I interviewed him: "I've gone to the extent I found a broken window and put the remaining pieces on the floor to not hurt myself, and then put the glass back in, do the building and come back in the same way putting the glass back" (annex 2, p. 131). Similarly to Wright, Irish Berliner and I expressed an extreme sensitivity towards the buildings we explored together. Such was the case

when we got in *Waldhaus Buch*, one of the sanatoriums where the Nazi regime carried out its euthanasia programme. Once we had explored the interior, we went to the same window where we sneaked in, this time to sneak out, and we left the hanging metal plate that served to seal the access in a way that it was difficult to figure out it was broken unless someone knew it in advance (Fieldnotes).

The 'foundation of communication' in the cultural awareness definition is also an important factor in urban exploration's civil purpose. Explorers have the access to abandoned buildings, with the possibility to detour its fate by inviting the rest of the society to encounter them. As Michael Cook writes:

Irish Berliner.
Governmental Klinik

"I think that there is immense social value to be gleaned from revealing and rediscovering infrastructure and other places that we've been made and induced to ignore... our cities are more productive, more democratic, more sustainable, and more secure when we are collectively aware of and understand the infrastructure that serves us, whether in our buildings, on our streets, or under our feet (cited in Garrett, 2011b, p. 3).

When I interviewed Irish Berliner he clearly stated that making sites visible was an essential part of his duty:

"I tell people where the places are so they can go and experience them on their own and gather their own impressions from them. Every time is different and it's nice that other people can get enjoyment from this as well" (annex 1, p. 115-116).

Also in his posts, Irish Berliner makes clear that the information collected should be publicly acknowledged, accessible and shared. In reference to the former *Soviet Military Administration Headquarters* located in Karlhorst, he mentions:

"Please share this with the world, so others may get a taste of Berlin's fascinating past before it's

lost forever. The ongoing gentrification of this great city is shameless and it won't be long before there's nothing worth exploring at all" (Irish Berliner, 2010).

Or concerning the *Olympic Village* built for the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin:

> "This guide is designed to help others get to and enjoy a wonderful site before it's too late. They're still in the process of restoration, so I guess it won't be long before they're charging people in and all the fun's gone out of it. Maybe they already are - I didn't check" (Irish Berliner, 2010b).

This gives an idea of how a *communicative* dimension of urban exploration can be related to social responsibility and documentation that goes beyond a personal experience, an "urge to gather evidence before decay of the physical place eliminates the history that it embodies" (Bennett, 2011, p. 424). In the case of Berlin, the issue is not only about decay but gentrification and commodification may well be included: "it's a race against the clock, trying to document them before the next stage in their evolution. It's only a matter of time before the buildings look like all the others" (Irish Berliner, annex 1, p. 120).

McRae (2008) points out how the data collected by urban explorers is valuable and useful for the rest of the society. According to him, the recounting of history and spatial conditions are relevant and important, and instead of playing them down due to a non-commercial spirit, they can be interpreted as added knowledge in the understanding of the city. It is easy to condemn such activity for not having an immediate practical utility – in the same way Polar expeditions were accused of being pointless in the early 20th century (Cherry-Garrard, [1922] 2013) - but urban exploration has to be based in how documentation has a value in itself so the urban imagery can be developed though empirical facts and not in assumptions. McRae (2008) writes about urban explorer Reduxzero, whose pictures and essays on Edmonton stockyards in Canada are essential to understand a neglected complex which was later consumed by a massive fire. He also provides the example of explorer CopySix, whose work was viewed as a sort of environmental activism when his photo exposure of a polluted site resulted in its cleaning

by authorities. In addition to this, Garrett (2011) refers to urban explorer Winch, who maintains a website on the Cane Hill Asylum, an abandoned hospital in London. In the website, one can find photos of the on-going decay that is taking place after its abandonment, complemented with the gratitude from former workers and patients who complain that official institutions had no intention of preserving the memory of such construction. It was only a few years ago when the British Library contacted Winch to archive all the documentation he had been providing. It is definitely a fact that urban explorers witness changes in the city and those transformation processes would be forgotten if this illicit practice was inexistent.

In one of my encounters with Irish Berliner he told me that, just recently, the German Embassy in France had contacted him in order to ask for authorization to translate some of his posts and publish them. Paradoxically, a high-level official institution like an Embassy, which represents legitimacy at its peak, was reaching a person who had collected data through an illegal procedure, because they consider such information is significant. This certainly makes the line between law and social acceptance blurred, or as Irish Berliner poses: "I know what I'm doing is illegal but that adds to the fun, and I feel what I'm doing is for a good cause because I'm documenting a part of history" (annex 1, p. 119). After several years of urban exploration in Berlin and its surroundings, Irish Berliner demonstrates self-confidence in the work he does when accepting the challenge of established institutions that "leads one to question whether they truly consider their activities transgressive and legally edgy" (McRae, 2008, 114) while relaying in the social and good purpose of it.

The truth is that today, many of these abandoned buildings are better documented than traditional heritage sites (Garrett, 2013). For example, if a person is interested in knowing about the history and original material qualities of the *Garbáty Factory* in Pankow, Irish Berliner's testimony and graphic data are one of the main sources of information before it was converted into luxurious lofts. Here is the transcription of the comments provided in that particular entry of 'Abandoned Berlin' website:

"*Anonymous*: There used to be parties in this building, at least in the courtyard in the summer. I guess it would have been in 2003 or 4...

Anonymous: This location is 'over'! They make some lofts inside...

Irish Berliner: I know - it's a shame. You need to move quickly to enjoy these wonders before they're ruined by modern banalities.

Anonymous: IT'S PASSED - from now on, there are people living there inside, you cannot visit it anymore. REST IN PEACE.

AJB: Thank you very much for this report. My great-grandfather worked in this factory from roughly 1906 to 1926, and I've been trying to reconstruct his experience for a book. I visited the factory a few years ago, but never made it inside. This was very helpful. I have some great stories from inside this factory if you would like to hear them.

Irish Berliner: Hey AJB, would love to hear your stories man. Get in touch!" (Irish Berliner, 2010c).

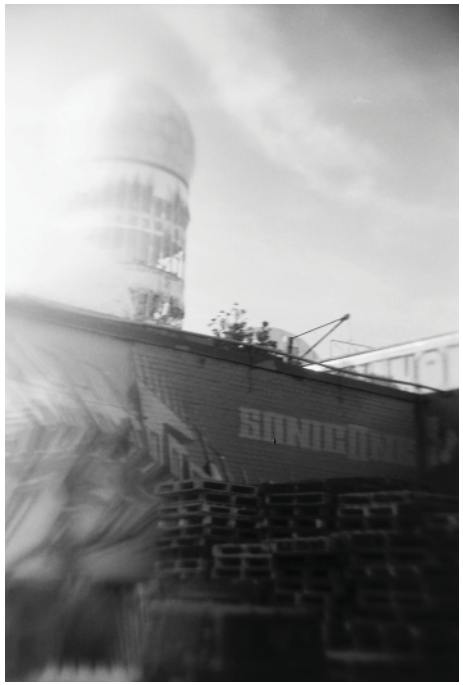
This forum reveals many of the realities that have been already mentioned. It tells about gentrification and renovation processes, alternative uses before this happened and it also demonstrates Irish Berliner's interest in sharing his information so everyone can enjoy a building. Furthermore, it opens a new dimension which is extremely relevant in order to perceive abandoned buildings as pieces of heritage: the notion of people, memory and the relation with the space. During the last few years, it has been evident for Heritage Studies works that people should be at the core of memorialisation and interpretation. With communication playing an important role, it is stated that 'heritage' is not only a building but also what takes – or took – place in the building (Smith, 2006; Harvey, 2001; Dicks, 2000). Being in an abandoned building makes you think about how inhabiting the site might have been, and it raises questions such as:

Recently renovated *Garbáty Cigarrete Factory*

Who were these people? How old would they be now? Would they be happy in witnessing such dereliction? Similarly to Winch and the human stories behind Cane Hill Asylum, Irish Berliner has had some opportunities to contact people who worked or lived in the buildings he visits. Precisely, his trespassing in *Teufelsberg* caused an American veteran to contact him, an enriching experience that he later described in an entry called '*A Teufelsberg Tale*' (2013). When I asked Irish Berliner about this he answered:

"For me that was the most important, the most interesting part of the *Teufelsberg* story, talking to this person who was directly involved and getting information from him. I actually get quite a few comments and emails from people who formerly worked there. Veterans still feel a huge connection to the place – even if it's 20 years since it was abandoned. It shows how special these sites are. These people are concerned about *Teufelsberg*. They feel it's just being allowed to fall, getting trashed, with graffiti everywhere – some of the street art is actually good but I'm sure the veterans wouldn't see it that way. They put a lot of work into it. They were at the front line in the Cold War so it must be disappointing for them to see how the city is ignoring *Teufelsberg* now. It's almost a betrayal [...] They want to see it preserved, and they want to see their mission honoured as well. The person I was talking to was proud of having worked there and he feels, like most of them do I imagine, that he made a huge contribution to world peace. This was at a time where there were genuine fears of being obliterated by a nuclear weapon and that is the reason they were there. They invested a lot in it, so to look at it falling down must be hard for them" (annex 1, p. 122, 123).

Teufelsberg



Once more, it is evident how urban exploration contributes to the civil purpose of making buildings and their stories available even if the practice is based in transgressing the law. Certainly, the social level that urban exploration acquires turns out to be justified while its illegal condition is consequently dismissed. Explorer's good purpose is found in memories, and these memories are often present in TOADS' material remains. When visiting the former *Pilot Training Camp* in Jüterbog, I was fascinated when discovering that the central part of the building was occupied by a theatre, and suddenly I felt like having found an untouched pharaoh's tomb. I told Irish Berliner: 'Wow! I feel like if I was an archaeologist!' and he replied: 'Yeah... That's the

usual feeling!' Although it was very dark and there was nothing more than rows of seats and the stage, it was amazing to encounter such unexpected rich spatiality in the building. We visited the rest of the rooms and we found Soviet newspapers and graffiti. I could not understand them, but '1990' accompanied by Cyrillic inscriptions were quite common so I figured out that this might have been the year when the last soldiers left (Fieldnotes).

It is not surprising that urban exploration has been usually presented as a sort of contemporary archaeology in the reach of social awareness beyond the tangible goods (Sorensen, 2007; Rowsdower, 2011). Today's main contributors to the formal raising of this academic discipline are interdisciplinary UK and US-based organizations and universities. It is a framework whose purpose is to deal with the most recent past by applying new archaeological approaches to contemporary history but, what are these new archaeological approaches? In this regard, Preucel and Mrozowski suggest a *new pragmatism* which is strongly related to social action and responsibility:

> "We thus advocate a pragmatic archaeology that continually challenges the usual distinctions between time, space, process and people. An archaeology that acknowledges the multiple imbrications of recent and distant pasts can more effectively address the problems of our day, many of which are the direct outgrowth of historical forces such as industrialism and globalization. Archaeology can only realize its full anthropological potential by reconfiguring itself, not as a detached science of the Other, but as a conscious, self-informed, socially active science of humanity" (2010, p. 34).

In this part of the work it has been demonstrated how urban exploration, even if it could be seen as an exclusionary practice that mostly focuses in the *performative* experience of trespassing a place where one is not supposed to go, it can also contain a social dimension gained through *communication* that broadens the discourses about heritage in the city. This will now be developed in the following part when dealing with how the collection of images shifts the perception of abandonment into a cultural visual value. The interest mentioned above is the fact that there are urban explorers who are aware of their responsible mission and, for those,

Cyrillic inscriptions.
Pilot Training Camp in Jüterbog

breaking the law is a morally acceptable challenge that justifies their actions. Preservation might not be the main interest for the entire community, but such community is fractured and certain practitioner's will is to take abandoned sites into account and frame them under a holistic urban framework. Only by recognizing the good purpose of this particular way of civil disobedience we can understand Ninjalicious' beautiful statement:

"We must stop designing flimsy, temporary structures that are engineered for obsolescence. We must return to the practice of making buildings that will outlast us by centuries and get firmly woven into the DNA of our urban environments... We should not be repeatedly wasting money, energy and material building office towers designed to fall apart after 30 years. If every generation left behind useful, sturdy structures for the generations to come, there'd probable be no housing shortage today, and many people would probably feel a greater connection to their environment" (2004, p. 2).

The aestheticisation of decay through photography

On Saturday, September 30th, 1967, the artist Robert Smithson took the bus number 30 from Port Authority Terminal on 41st Street and 8th Avenue in New York City and made a trip to his hometown's city margins in Passaic, New Jersey, USA. When the ride was over, he started walking and everything he saw – steel bridges, quarries, industrial sites, etc. – was given the name of 'monument'. The account of his journey, together with a series of pictures taken with his *Instamatic 400* showing such unappealing elements, was later published in *Artforum* magazine under the bewildering title '*A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*' (1967). By calling this experience a 'tour' and suggesting he had seen 'monuments', Smithson was aiming to provide Passaic's landscape with a higher cultural status - "a sort of parody of the diaries of traveller in the 19th century" (Careri, 2002, p. 157). Smithson would even dare to pose: "Has Passaic

replaced Rome as The Eternal City?" (1967, p. 56). Irony and provocation were achieved only by placing a reality out of his usual context, as Marcel Duchamp similarly had done in 1917 when he exhibited a porcelain urinal at New York's Grand Central Gallery stating that such object may well be considered as art. Smithson called this new view 'entropy' - which refers to how contested spaces can acquire a form of beauty by shifting the way those spaces are perceived and through this, he transformed the way we understand industrial and suburban landscapes since then. In this regard, Iñaki Ábalos (2008) calls 'anti-monuments' to those Smithson's irrelevant elements that were not erected to glorify or become symbols although observed as if they were historical sites dating from an ancient time, they could be labelled as sublime. Entropy is therefore a claim in the reach of new aesthetic possibilities.

In my particular 'tour' to *Güterbahnhof* roundhouse, I was able to contrast Smithson's view towards industrial spaces and the non-relevant elements attached to its former use. *Güterbahnhof* is a building of an undoubted beauty, with tall pillars that sustain a wooden structure covering the huge room. In this wonderful context, it was not surprising to find a young hip-hop boy who was using such a peculiar atmosphere to take some pictures of his recently purchased bike. We looked at each other and we kept in silence, like an accomplice relation in which we both knew what we were doing there. Machinery, tubes, metal structures, etc. Many of the things that during former years were used to give life to the building were still standing there and they complemented the industrial aesthetics of the space (Fieldnotes).

Anti-monuments: Industrial tubes.
Güterbahnhof Pankow

It is obvious that decay is strictly associated with time; decay is "what happens to a building once standard maintenance stops taking place" (Fein, 2011, p. 13), and as more time passes dereliction becomes more evident. Zach Fein (2011) makes a brief description of the changeable meaning that the term 'ruin' has been acquiring throughout history:

"Its first usage came in the late 1300s when it appeared in early modern English texts; at this point it was used to mean 'act of giving way and falling down'. Nearly all of the initial uses of the word applied to complete destruction of a thing, with several examples concerning the apocalypse [...]

During the birth of Romanticism in the late 18th century, the concept of ruin played an important role in the development of visual arts. In denying classical style, romanticism placed a special emphasis on emotion with regards to aesthetic beauty; specifically, the realm of negative emotions played a key role. Aside from emotional aspects, romanticists found attractiveness in the exotic and unknown [...] Visiting, documenting, and studying ruins of the ancient world became a popular field of study during the 17th and 18th centuries. Simultaneously, a design and construction concept took the newly attractive idea of ruin into account in terms of landscape design; the English Garden style possessed a very specific concern with the aesthetic of ruins [...] The Enlightenment, which focused on reason as a primary factor, was the first time that the definition of the term ruin transcended from a negative, threatening, and dangerous word to one that possessed an inherent beauty. A beauty that was a combination of reason and romanticism, with values lying both in the historical significance of a given ruin as well as the starling aesthetic qualities" (p. 15-17).

Today, 'ruin' still retains a nostalgic and idealized value when it is applied to ancient civilisation's works (Edensor, 2005), but, relating it to contemporary abandonment demonstrates an already mentioned dichotomy: the *socially* uncomfortable facing a humble space full of possibilities. Photography of decay is urban exploration's most tangible production and, due to nowadays' rise of digital cameras, modern ruins are experiencing an aestheticisation process similar to Smithson's (anti)monuments – a shift of perception that makes us perceive them as undeniable beauties. But, where does this empowerment of photography come from?

When photography was invented in 1839, the painter Paul Delaroche declared that *painting was dead*. Only a few decades later, Impressionists realized that photography was not an actual threat but rather an inspiration in which they saw the possibility of freezing a moment in time by using a particular frame according to the artist's willing. For the first time in history it was evident that any sort of representation makes visible as well as hides. Years after, the term 'representation' also acquired an important meaning with René Magritte's painting '*The Treachery of Images*' (1928-29), where he painted a pipe and an inscription saying 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' – 'This is not a pipe' - putting in question the actual status of the objects we

perceive. Yet, applying this to spaces, every representation is an intentional 'frame of mind' (Rasor, 1994), an image that symbolizes the precise reality that the photographer wants to construct for the public view. In a Foucaultian sense, a picture is inevitably an act of power (Green, 1985) shaping a specific place.

In an era where the bombardment of images plays an essential role in fast-information consumption, one can assume that heritage's perception is equally democratized, but the truth is that "while many people can recall what the Great Wall of China or Taj Mahal look like, most have never been to these places" (Fein, 2011, p. 20). Indeed, we have a mental image of how these sites are: old, monumental, omnipresent, etc. For them, aestheticisation might not be needed, but it is strongly encouraged. The perception is rather a *mental postcard*, as if it was a souvenir that people have in mind before going there. This preconceived image is usually the result of authorities' purpose to convince us that the Great Wall or Taj Mahal are beautiful enough so they deserve to be visited. Having said so, it is appropriate to look deeper into the *mental postcard* of abandoned buildings which is given by urban explorers.

Zein (2011) continues with an analysis of decay photography which has a particular visual language. He highlights the existence of certain photographic elements that contribute to amplify the negligible condition of modern ruins: perspective, balance, point of interest, contrast, frame, and light. He also points out the architectural elements which are usually found in this kind of picture: emptiness, broken windows, standing water, peeping paint, debris and crumbling structure. Yet this type of photography has its own code which is powerful enough to perceive beauty where 'normal people' would only see ugliness. In fact, this particular imagery has been adopted by certain sectors of popular culture, serving as a medium between dereliction and contemporary visual language. Modern ruins are today the scenario for filming movies (Garrett, 2014) or shooting music videos and TV commercials while its recreation and virtual construction also invaded the video game sector (Bennett, 2011). All this demonstrates how abandonment became a pole of attraction that catches the fascination of many.

Broken windows.
Pilot Training Camp in Jüterbog

First thing I saw when I got into *Böhmisches Brauhaus* in Friedrichshain was a huge multi-storey room, very high, completely diaphanous and entirely trashed. The roof was seriously damaged with a sort of cloth hanging everywhere. The floor was full of debris and I had to pay attention on how to take my next step to not hurt myself. Some metal plates were laying there, folded in strange shapes like a Frank Gehry's masterpiece, but in this case they were result of a deterioration process. Such huge room and this set of elements actually made a very sad and yet pleasing composition. Everything being smashed was still beautiful. I tried to make pictures of the room to capture such embracing aesthetics in a single shot but soon I realized it would be impossible. I could not condense everything I was witnessing in one image. Every picture was only a tiny testimony, I could not express what my feelings were only by showing a picture to someone else afterwards. It was an embodied experience, something one cannot easily communicate. All those elements originated in a very particular atmosphere, half natural decay half human vandalism, but everything as a consequence of abandonment and passing time. This hazardous composition was extremely appealing and I wondered if this could be achieved by any of the best interior designers in the world. Such scenario of chaos has to be very difficult to conceive in advance (Fieldnotes).

The beauty of decay.
Böhmisches Brauhaus

As we saw in the previous part of the work, for certain urban explorers 'TOADS' represent "technical challenges of capturing complex and often dark scenes with a camera" (Mott and Roberts, 2013, p. 231). This is something that Nathan Wright confirmed with me due to his preference for tunnels and underground spaces: "[pictures] take me a long time to make. I take many different exposures on a tripod and sometimes when you are working in complete darkness it takes a long while since you have to light torches because the room has no light at all" (annex 2, p. 129). The deliberate intention to increase the aesthetic value of the images follows an artistic pattern that is becoming increasingly trendy with nowadays' technical tools. This establishes a radical breakthrough between representing reality, or documenting, and showing the actual explorer's aesthetic purpose. Precisely, the use of High Dynamic Range (HDR) effect exaggerates the surreal atmosphere of a place, taking back ruins to a fantastical, frightening and apocalyptic perception (Garrett, 2013), a blurred line where Wright and many

others allocate their work:

"These are hyper real images. To me this is pretty much how I see it, your eye actually sees High Dynamic Range but a camera can't. Well, a camera can, but you have to take many shots. If a light is perfectly exposed then the shadows are very dark, there is no detail in them. But if you take many different exposures you could have details right across from highlight to shadows. The next part is the zoom mapping which gives the hyper realism and then I treat them also in Photoshop. I seek to do a cross between a painting and a photograph. There's lot of people doing this, but the truth is that there's lot of people with cameras" (Nathan Wright, annex 2, p. 129).

Another characteristic in the construction of an idealized image of abandoned buildings is the focus on the site's interior part. This is the result of the desire for making off-limits areas visible. The everyday public is already familiar with the image of a random derelict place; all of us have seen them many times although we do not normally pay the necessary attention. Urban exploration and its photography make evident the difference between people who explore and feel curiosity and people who do not. It is the distance from *seeing* to *trespassing*:

"I do take pictures from the exterior parts, but the interior has more things for me. I do take pictures from the exterior but not as many as the interior. I think because anybody can pass by an abandoned building and everybody knows how it looks like but not everyone knows how it looks like inside. For instance, I went to a gynecological practice building that had been empty since the 1980s, downstairs there were all the gynecological tools, the lights, text tubes, everything was there! You could drive past and take a picture and it doesn't look interesting at all [...] So all the interesting pictures are inside, definitely" (Nathan Wright, annex 2, p. 132-133).

Just by googling 'urban exploration' one can find thousands of images of abandoned buildings; the truth is that the practice, although founded in subjectively experiencing a place, uses photography's visual capacity and direct effect to promote its alternative spirit while providing an aestheticized version of ruins. Urban exploration is an international fractured community with

all the complexities that have already been pointed. However, a point of encounter is that its imagery shares the same photography and architectural elements all over the world. Petr Gibas (2010) refers to this phenomenon as *globalised aestheticisation of urban decay*: "The places explored are located in various world regions, the explorers come from different countries, the web pages are in different languages and photographs taken in a similar style" (2010, p. 158). The particularities of the buildings are therefore erased, making urban exploration's photography to be a portrayal of ruin where the stress is put on absence in activity rather than a representation of a specific building. This fixation has been tagged as 'ruin porn' in order to explain "why we can't take our eyes off images of old buildings and decrepit interiors" (Greco, 2012). This definition makes justice if we consider the atemporal and anonymity of the photograph, and it does not intend to be dismissive but rather refers to the way "consumers of porn do not generally concern themselves with questions of its production" (Mott and Roberts, 2013, p. 231). We certainly enjoy viewing decaying pictures from Detroit or Berlin in an equal manner as long as they are able to enlarge our fantasies.

Staircase.
Pilot Training Camp in Jüterbog

However, we cannot only 'blame' explorers for this globalised perception. The reality is that dereliction – nature taking back, weather conditions or intentional destruction – affects every building in a similar way. A ruined state is a buildings' natural process after abandonment and, as if they were humans or any other living organism, they slowly age in a similar way. Pictures of decay are related to each other because there is only a single way of being a ruin, getting old is an egalitarian feature for every building, a meeting point. And even considering this common trace, decay photography, which is mostly consumed on a computer screen (annex 2) so a personal relation is establish with the spectator, "can activate intimate geographies of emotions and experience, they make places to circulate through space and time, and they help in shaping geographical imaginations" (Gibas, 2010, p. 159). A picture of dereliction, as any other aestheticised landscape, as Great Wall or Taj Mahal, makes people want to *be* there. Such is the power of an image.

Inherited from the Enlightenment, this fascination towards aestheticisation of decay has also

a component of classical nostalgia and sublimity. The beauty qualities in photography arouse sadness for some: "as we relished in this amazing photographic opportunity I couldn't help but feel sad. Not only for the people of this once lovely town, but for the lonely town itself (Explonation; cited in Gibas 158). Paradoxically, this shows "another world, which expresses the detachment of the photographer from the scene" (Gibas, 2010, p. 158) in a practice that claims a strong and intimate linkage between the explorer and the place he explorers. This is certainly the case as long as emptiness is captured, which happens most of the times, but does not always have to be like that. "For many urbexers, recording themselves exploring appears to be very important and there is much emphasis on visual self-presentation. Urbex websites and blogs are replete with images of urbexers posing on ladders, inside tunnels or abandoned corridors and so on. They are invariably in a conquering or heroic mode" (Mott and Roberts, 2013, p. 239). This composition that stretches the relation between the derelict object and the relentless subject has been labelled as 'hero-shot' by Bradley Garrett (2013). On this subject, Robert MacFarlane (2013) depicted such imagery as a sort of Romanticism painting, like Caspar David Friedrich's '*Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*' (1818), the conquest of man over what surrounds him. Such hierarchy is consolidated in hero-shot photography, placing the explorer at the core of his achievement. This makes evident that his mere presence changes the way an abandoned site can be mentally retained - no longer being obscure but accessible to self experiences.

It would be unfair not to mention that for Garrett (2011b), urban exploration has less to do with aesthetics of decay than with the fact of *experiencing the world*. But it cannot be denied that urban exploration relies in its particular entropy to gain popular acceptance and curiosity. Its objective of making a more visible and democratic city is strongly linked with photography fixation: "Architecture constructs place; photography transforms place into media" (Schwarzer; cited in Fein, 2011, p. 21), a statement that renders neglected spaces as public domain. Urban exploration strives for a deeper understanding of the urban areas, it proposes the consideration of new sites to be adopted, and this is done not only by a self-justified illicit practice but by setting an original way of perceiving what is *also* beautiful.

In this chapter, it has been stated that urban exploration is a subcultural community which, sharing a common interest for history and urban space, is undoubtedly fractured. Several complexities arouse, and, among those, the majority of practitioners prefer to stay in a *performative* level, meaning that their main goal is to enjoy the experience of trespassing while openly putting space restrictions on the table in neoliberal societies. These explorers care about the buildings and the fact of not making public the exact locations where their adventures take place has to be understood as a way to protect buildings from securitisation, vandalism and commodification. In addition to this, we find a minor sector of urban explorers whose approach is *communicative* and where the illicit nature of their trespassing is also viewed as a sort of social responsibility. This civil behaviour pursues a good object by rendering visible the neglected spaces for the rest of the society. In heritage terms, this has to be understood as an undeniable and justified proof of cultural awareness, a pioneer claim to incorporate what is being forgotten into the imagery of our cities.

Chapter 1

"Where there is architecture there can be nothing else, where there is no architecture anything is still possible".

– Rem Koolhaas

Victim of its own success?

In Marc Augé's book '*The Impossible Trip: Tourism and its Images*' (1998), the French anthropologist criticizes how today, where the bombardment of pictures plays an essential role in fast-information consumption, tourists seek for a preconceived image of the places they visit instead of looking for an authentic experience. In this sense, the illusion of imagining how a place used to look like is more powerful than the current reality. Moreover, when a site has just been declared as 'World Heritage', the local management board receives a letter from the Selection Committee congratulating the candidature for its success, but also suggesting to display a World Heritage logo in a visible part of the property. Augé asserts that this kind of disposition makes tourists to follow the given path, finding what is valuable, so they do not rely

on their own intuition. For the author, the 'impossible trip' is the *voyage of discovery*, the one that brings the possibility to new encounters and prioritizes 'travel' over a fictitious understanding of 'tourism' – which makes "some people to be spectators while the others are the spectacle" (p. 16, own translation). Considering urban exploration as an ideal alternative of travelling within a commodified world (Fraser, 2012), and taking into account the photography of decay as its most tangible production, my intention – similarly to Augé's general view – is to put in question the authenticity of the experience through the snapshot pursuit. The reason of this critical analysis is based on the fact that urban exploration, as a democratic practice that everyone can easily enjoy, may well be a victim of its imagery's trivialization that can lead to the disappearance of its experimental component – which is what truly gives substance to it.

If we look back to the principles of tourism, it is easy to understand that – despite the fact of a different economic status between the people who can afford such activity and the people who cannot – the ubiquitous impulse was the desire to get out of the predetermined way (Macfarlane, 2003), the pleasure of discovering something no one else had seen before. But as important as seeing what nobody had seen was the fact of being able to demonstrate that the tourist actually saw it. This is the reason why John Urry (2002) considers that the 'tourist gaze' was born at the same time as photography, a way to inspire the desire for travel through new possibilities of image reproduction - what created a strong relation between both disciplines as if they were *modern twins* (Larsen, 2006). Obviously, this gaze influenced how a second generation of tourists perceived their *own* act of travelling, and today, with its democratization, as well as the factual omnipresence of digital cameras, people rely on repeating the same experiences they have already seen in previous pictures on the basis of common and high expectations (Markwell, 1997). This is certainly a risk when travelling because those expectations might be difficult to fulfil, as if travelling was a sort of stressful check-list formed by must-see places where it is never enough.

I experienced this when I explored the abandoned *Iraqi Embassy* in Berlin. The *Iraqi Embassy* is a place that only by its name already sounds appealing. It is not only an Embassy, which makes

it even more mysterious since we normally do not have easy access to embassies; moreover, it is the Iraqi one, what brings us back to the days of Sadam Hussein, the Cold War and all the uncomfortable stories that our imagination can recall. Also, when one is checking the place in urban exploration forums to prepare the visit, it is clear that this site is very interesting to people with a fascination for finding any sort of material remains. Certainly, one can find a large amount of documents written in Arabic on the whole building, but it seems that the telephones and typewriters that I had seen in blog pictures had been already picked over or stolen. It is true that I had many expectations about the site for all I had read before and what its name inspired in me, but then I started to feel that it was only a mere abandoned modern construction. It was probably my fault for trying to know too much about the building before visiting it, creating high expectations that I was once inside did not let my imagination flow. I promised myself that I would never do that again (Fieldnotes).

Iraqi Embassy

The tourism industry, which finds its perfectly allied with nationalistic interests, is also responsible for promoting the 'tourist gaze'. The availability of holiday TV programmes, travel brochures, postcards or guidebooks contributes to prefigure tourist imagination and practices (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2011). Consequently, this leads to the virtual impossibility for people "to visit places where they have not travelled imaginatively some time ago, if not many times" (Larsen, 2006, p. 248). Yet, once the tourist is in the expected place he already knows what he *must* look at and how he *must* feel about it - becoming a static entity rather than a being searching for his own narrative. The reality is too similar to the preconceived image he had in mind. And, which is his reaction? He takes his own pictures to keep Urry's 'hermeneutic cycle' going:

> "What is sought for in a holiday is a set of photography images, which have already been seen in tour company brochures or on TV programmes. While the tourist is away, this then moves on to a tracking down and capturing of theses image for oneself. And it ends up with travellers demonstrating that they really have been there by showing their version of the images that they had seen before they set off" (2002, p. 129).

Thurlow and Jaworski consider that "photography is always a mode of appropriation and accumulation, of possession. At the very least, it's about seizing the moment and capturing it for posterity" (2011, p. 238). Indeed, people go to places and take pictures of those places to state 'I was here and here's the proof'. This is aligned with our era's motto 'pics or it didn't happen' so to clearly state that what one experienced was real. It is what Augé (1998) suggests as a travel to the future, where the journey only makes sense as long as it is shared with family and friends once the tourist is back home. By doing so, they all can witness the tourist experience *after* it happened, what inspires, and sometimes convinces, the relatives to accomplish the same or at least a similar trip. If they finally decide to follow the footprints, they will basically find what they intended to find: "A structure of expectation is created, where the pictures circulating around sights are more important than the sites themselves" (Crang; cited in Thurlow and Jaworski, 2011, p. 222).

In a critical sense, this ultimately means that the main purpose of a journey is the photographic representation of such journey and urban exploration, or its recreation, does not escape from this. Certainly, this puts in question the permanent authenticity of urban exploration arguing that pictures can work as final trophies standing over the actual experimental component. One might say the website 'Abandoned Berlin' serves as a sort of guidebook providing exact details about the history of the places and the way to get there. Abandoned Berlin's success can be explained through what Lin and Huang (2005) called 'internet blogs as a tourism marketing medium'. Similarly with the authors' case study referring to a Taiwanese tourist whose blog about a trip to Greece became viral, Irish Berliner's website is not built by any government agency or tourism association. In his posts, the places Irish Berliner visits are obviously the main background but also the informal way he recounts his own experiences is equally relevant and catches the interest of people. The notion of this amateur authenticity is a suggesting added value that raises the awareness of the readers towards the places and arouses the desire to visit them. This is what Lin and Huang refer as AIDA model - "gain Attention, hold Interest, arouse Desire, and elicit Action" (2005, p. 1203) - which is perfectly applicable to 'Abandoned Berlin'. To demonstrate this, here are only some randomly chosen comments that certain readers wrote

in different posts:

"Nice post, will definitely try to stop by there in the summer".

"I've of course seen the abandoned buildings - but never dreamed of entering. Gotta be the good little American girl! I'm inspired. Love the pics/advice".

"I'm coming to Berlin early May and plan on exploring one or two of these great spots you tell us about".

"Great shots, thanks for reporting about this place. I will go there soon".

Following Jin and Huang's theory, another key aspect in Abandoned Berlin's procedure is that the website is non-commercial, it does not reach the readers, but they rather take a look at it and share it voluntarily – giving a word-to-mouth nature which is more acceptable than common tourism brochures, so people do not feel the need of being defensive. Moreover, the website's design is simple: everything is structured in individual posts that contain the history, the experience and the pictures. At the end, everything is summarized answering the 'What, Where, How to get, When, and Who to bring' and, as it has been mentioned, people can freely post their own comments asking questions or looking for updates. These are always replied by Irish Berliner so that a direct communication between reader and writer is established – creating a sort of confident and trustful relation. However, Irish Berliner is perfectly aware of the fact that it is always better to leave certain things unsaid so everyone can enjoy his own experience. In the post concerning *Submarine Bunker Lager Koralle*, one of the readers posted a comment that included a GPS map indicating the exact location of the hatch entrance to the underground bunker. Irish Berliner decided to remove this comment because:

"you gotta leave some exploring for people to do! Part of the fun of this exploration is the exploration itself. If everybody just provides GPS coordinates and pinpoints every location directly, then

half – if not most – the fun is gone. It's about the hunt, finding these places, it's about discovery, uncovering mysteries and finding shit out!" (Irish Berliner, 2013).

A similar thing occurred in the post about *Krampnitz*. In this case the attraction of an image is simply evident. *Krampnitz* is a huge former military camp and it became a point of attention for people because there is an original Nazi mosaic representing an eagle clutching a swastika with its claws. The eagle was suddenly a must-see element to look for in an exploration day. Up to the moment I am writing this, the post has received 97 comments accumulated over a period of three and a half years and many of those referred to how to find this highlight. Once more, one of the readers had provided the eagle's exact location, and Irish Berliner decided to remove it:

"I'm very sorry but I removed it as I feel it's against the point of urban exploration to provide detailed instructions on EXACTLY where the eagle is located. Surely the whole point of urban exploration is the 'exploration', the feeling you don't know what's around the corner, what you will find around the next wall you look, at the bottom of the next hole you look in? It's not hard to find the eagle if you just look for the damn thing, and looking for it is most of the fun. If you just want to see it and nothing else, then there's a picture of it published on the blog for those who are so inclined. Yes, I know there's a hypocrisy of providing detailed instructions on how to get to these places, but I think once you find the places it's up to you to explore" (Irish Berliner, 2011).

Irish Berliner is not the only explorer in the city who cares about safe-guarding the authenticity of the exploring experience. Nathan Wright also complained about this situation in *Krampnitz*:

"*Krampnitz* is the model example of that because it has two highlights: it has the 'casino' and the 'swastika', two separate buildings. But those buildings are right on the front and only urbex tourists hit both of them and they are off [...] So these explorers don't do the rest of *Krampnitz*, all they are interested in is going inside and say 'look at this, look at that'. Lots of them have full frame cameras and none of them print anything, their images go to Flickr - 72dpi. Why would you take a full frame camera with that

resolution just to see your pictures in a computer screen? [...] They don't explore anything. I explore, and when I go to a building I'll go through every part of that building, every single part that I can possibly get into. I will see everything in that building: I go all the way up the stairs, down the stairs, every single room, cellars, looking on the corners, etc. I literally explore every detail, if there is a tunnel system I want to know every part of the tunnel by the end of the day. It took me lots of visits to fully map *Krampnitz*! (annex 2, p. 129-130).

At this point, Wright mentions two remarkable concepts. First, he refers to urban exploration 'tourists', which in this sense should be understood under a pejorative connotation in comparison to him as a 'real' explorer. The difference is established in the same way we distinguish the 'typical tourists' or *Turistas vulgaris* (Löfgren, 1999) as mass visitors with little interest in *really* learning, juxtaposed with the 'traveller' as more educated independent being and committed with the destination (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2011). The traveller, or real explorer, claims superiority and distinction fitting with the description of "solitary male wanderer – freed from domestic responsibilities, free to look but apparently not to be looked at, free to experience what they choose" (Franklin and Crang, 2001, p. 11). Secondly, Wright talks about seeing 'your pictures in a computer screen', where it is also assumed the tendency to share pictures due to the trendy existence of social networks like Flickr. These democratic methods provide a global and inexpensive display of activities where photographs serve as mass-produced objects rendering the world *visible*, *aesthetic* and *desirable*. The consequences of this were pointed out even when internet did not exist yet. Jonas Larsen has studied this phenomenon in depth on the basis of Edward Relph and Susan Sontag's works. The author refers to 'placelessness' to define when 'the purpose of travel is less to experience unique and different places than to collect those places" (Relph; cited in Larsen 2006, p. 243). To complement this, he also quotes Sontag's words:

"It would not be wrong to speak of people having a *compulsion* to photograph: to turn experience itself into a way of seeing. Ultimately, having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it, and participating in a public event comes more and more to be equivalent to looking at it in photographed form [...] Today everything exists to end in a photograph" (Sontag; cited in Larsen,

2006, p. 243).

However, Abandoned Berlin's influence is not merely to breed the ground for armchair exploration. As a website, its intangible property is to provide a *dream* and in this case dreams "are no longer merely dreams, but rather are realizable" (Lin and Huang, 2005, p. 1204). The possibility of feeling the abandoned place and its uncertain nature distinguishes those who really explore and those who do not. This has a lot to do with what Garret (2011) describes as *mutable qualities* of decay meaning that every exploration is different from the other. Indeed, taking a look to the hundreds of comments in Abandoned Berlin it is easy to find people's interest in recounting their own experiences because they always vary. Many comments start by 'I was there last week and...' or 'I've always seen this place from outside but when I got in...' It is hard to imagine such a thing in different contexts where the experience is already set up and everyone is expected to come across it in the same way. Would these comments make sense when visiting the Eiffel Tower or the Coliseum? Some other comments are useful to update the information given in the website. Those usually make reference to new security measures adopted or the potential presence of police – revealing the adventurous character of the practice and the necessity to experience difficulties so that the visit is not understood as a commodity.

More precisely, this possibility to commodify urban exploration has been perceived by some companies in Berlin to make money using abandoned buildings as if they were actual tourist attractions. This has been seen as a major threat, not only for urban exploration but for the buildings themselves. For urban explorers, the interest relies in exploring the chosen places before the places reach you first, following the ideal of travelling where it is neither necessary to go that far nor to spend a large amount of money to find exoticism on a journey (Macfarlane, 2008). The hope still lies in Marc Augé words: "Perhaps one of our most urgent tasks is to re-learn how to travel, in any case, to the closest regions to us in order to learn to see again" (1998, p. 16, own translation).

Commodification of experiences

During my second year of Master Studies I took an Archaeology course where the majority of the attendants were first-year students. During the first class of the semester, the lecturer presented the case of an ancient temple in Rome which, as far as we could see in the slides, was a neglected ruin standing in the middle of the city where nature had taken back considerable parts in it. The lecturer asked us for our opinion in how to deal with such a case. One of the first-year colleagues raised her hand and, considering she had only taken a few introductory lessons in heritage and conservation during the previous weeks, immediately asserted that the best solution would be to clean up the site and create a museum. I was impressed by her automatic answer. We only had very superficial notions about the Roman temple but the answer sounded imposed – following the common sense in how to manage the past. No alternatives were presented, the fact that the temple was a ruin was already a condition to make it healthier and commodify it as if its importance only dated from what it used to mean and not what it was representing today when surrounded by a modern context. Is this the *only* way to deal with heritage that comes to our mind?

David Harvey (2001), although intending to provide a broader scope in the origins of heritage, recognizes that our current perception dates from 1970s when we started to see it as a market product aligned with commercial purposes. This thought has been shared by Laurajane Smith, who puts in question the cultural implications and social gaining of converting heritage sites into any kind of museum while stating that such development procedures respond to "a symptom of increasing economic interest in heritage" (2012, p. 536). Moreover, this author indicates that the simple act of managing and conserving a site represents an artificial reality, and these obsessed policies "are *done* to sites and places, but are not seen as organically part of the meaning-making process of heritage itself" (2006, p. 94). Then, we can ensure that designating something as 'heritage', with the commodification policies that it entails, may well threat its authentic cultural status, shaping its original nature in the view of potential visitors. It seems clear

that we are forgetting that heritage was already *really* heritage before someone decided to label it as 'heritage'.

Recalling the work of Austin, and Stanton and Stanton, Emerson and Cardow (2009) point out the danger of focusing heritage efforts in transforming it into tourism attractions with a commodified main goal, where:

> "individuals will have pre-conceived expectations of what their reactions should be, or will take part in activities from an entertainment seeking motivation [so] it may be inappropriate to apply neo-liberal accounting principles to heritage, where the value is difficult to measure by dollar returns" (p. 2).

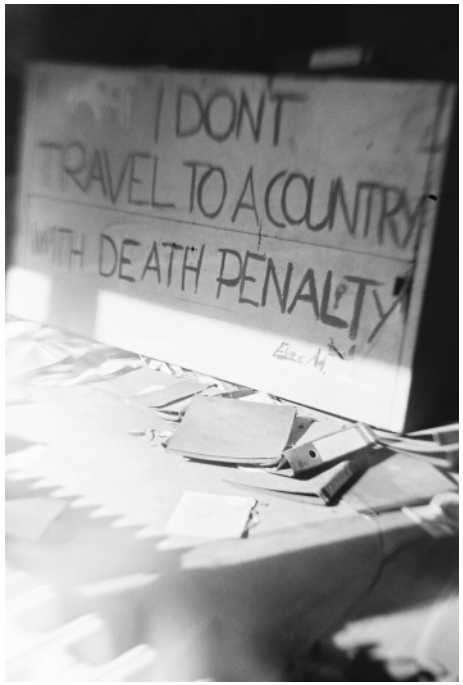
It is evident the general criticism among scholars to define heritage only about activities of economic exploitation where a site only deserves to be actively conserved as long as it can ensure tangible profits. In this sense, Harvey accuses the so-called 'heritage industry' for "simply being portrayed as something else that people do to fill their free time, or as a hostage to the whims of leisure fashion [and therefore] threatening history, destroying an authentic version of the past and replacing it by a simulacra of that past" (2001, p. 6). In terms of modern ruins, Rowsdower exemplified this *simulacrum* of the past when referring to a 19th century pumping station in New Jersey which was abandoned in 1990. The building still houses machinery that spans the technological evolution from steam to electricity. Knowing this, the County institution in charge "requested permission from the state to demolish the site, save for a few remaining fragments that would be converted into an artificial *ruin*" (2011, p. 10)". The question which arises here is whether an actual heritage concern does exist here, on the other hand, this only responds to a make-up strategy to maximize the economic performance of a potential tourist attraction.

As seen before, the heritage industry invests in the creation of *mental postcards* to "choreograph desirable *place myths*" (Larsen, 2006, p. 241) and abandoned buildings in Berlin are not an exception. It seems a contradiction trying to commodify an experience as urban exploration

since its reason to be is completely opposed to enjoy it as if it was a facility. In Jüterbog, Irish Berliner and I were making our way through windows and climbing walls when it was required. There was also a former coal processing plant with all its industrial machinery and black dust everywhere. By that time of the day we were getting really dirty. Irish Berliner told me 'being dirty is a sign of a good excursion' and I remembered when I used to be a kid and had a lot of fun despite being completely stained (Fieldnotes). In addition to this, a couple of days after visiting *Waldhaus Buch* together, Irish Berliner wrote me an e-mail to tell me that he was going to the closest drug store to get a pair of tweezers because he had just noticed that he had some ticks, so I would do well in checking my legs. How is it possible to commodify that?

In any case, during the last few years, several companies have arisen in order to exploit the alternative character of Berlin. 'Berliner Unterwelten e.V.', which focuses in the underground heritage, as well as 'Go2know', that arranges the visits in nine derelict sites, are only two business examples of how to take advantage of photo-tours and the marketing component in urban exploration. There also exists localized companies that manage a single abandoned place as tourist attraction, such as 'Berliner-Spreepark' or 'Berliner Teufelsberg'. One can easily book a tour in internet for prices that vary from 7 to 40 Euros. This is a business model that has been the object of critiques by the urban exploration community for transforming the mere abandonment of a place into economic revenue while erasing the transgressive and experimental nature of sensing ruins and turning it into a commodity. In my interview to Nathan Wright he passionately expressed his anger towards 'Go2Know':

Inside the *Iraqi Embassy*



"I hate 'Go2know', I can't stand them. They're charging €40 to let you go into a building on a weekend and people will pay this money. They are making money out of it and I don't like them at all because they establish limitations of what you can do. What I do is to slip past security guys or sneaking in through small holes and I experience the pleasure of seeing things I wouldn't normally see. But if you make a tour they will tell you what to do [...] I just don't like them at all. I think they are exploiting the sites, they don't put anything back. I have paid a couple of times to get into places, one was €15 and the other €10. And when you look how Go2know is charging €40 for giving you access to a building where there

is nothing in it; actually there are things but they're simply not in use. It's good that somebody is taking care against vandals. Those €15 I paid were for a caretaker so you don't have hundreds and hundreds of people sneaking in. I don't like Go2know, they are only money-making bastards" (annex 2, p. 127, 130).

In general, Wright's view is shared by the urban exploration community. For explorers, it seems evident that "you can't buy real experiences" (Garrett, 2014, p.4) and something actually requiring admission and "labelled an 'experience' is pretty much guaranteed to be exactly the opposite" (Ninjalicious; cited in McRae, 2008, p. 76). In *Waldhaus Buch* I had the chance to experience the building by myself, and the fact of getting lost turned out to be a mystic experience that I would have never enjoyed if I had taken part in an organized tour. I walked all along the corridors in several floors, and I could never know what I would find after the next door, after the next corner. Though the building's layout was symmetrical and every floor resembled each other, after a few turns going up the stairs I was at the highest point in the building. I was standing just below the roof structure and it was simply beautiful, with the particular smell that only wood has. When I wanted to find my way back to the first level, I simply could not. It was like a labyrinth and I could not recall the path I followed to arrive where I started. A frightening feeling invaded my body; would I be able to meet Irish Berliner again in the hall? Just before I left him in the basement he had told me his mobile phone's battery had just died so there was not an alternative way to reach him. I got scared for a while thinking what he would do if I did not show up in the meeting point. Would he try to look for me? I thought so, but what if he did not find me? I started sweating and going around, trying to remember the way I took and making it back. Hazardously, I found it again (Fieldnotes).

Corridor.
Waldhaus Buch

Explorers do not seek for a passive construction of the past built upon official narratives, and they rather propose an individual engagement and interactive experience that leads towards the creation of their own interpretation because "unregulated experiences in ruins tell us much about ourselves as about the places we explore" (Garrett, 2011, p. 1064). It is then not surprising that explorers refuse any sort of institutional recognition towards abandoned buildings that may directly lead to carry out economic tourist activities in them. In a way, sites have to remain

neglected in order to conserve their appeal (Rowsdower, 2011). Any attempt to commodify both the sites and the exploration practice in an artificial manner would only contribute to create new neoliberal consumption spots in the city – putting in question if this unique alternative atmosphere would still be present.

I wanted to confront these thoughts with one of the companies offering photo-tours in Berlin, so I reached Thilo Wiebers, one of 'Go2know' managers, who kindly accepted my invitation to conduct an interview. By the time I met with him, the only version I was familiar with was the one from urban explorers, but Wiebers also expressed his own justified concern about abandoned buildings. The two persons who founded 'Go2know' are actual photographers with a long tradition in capturing the aesthetics of decay and illegal trespassing during the 1980s. Obviously, they do not hide the intention in earning their living from photo-tours, yet Wiebers does not consider that charging €40 for an admission ticket as overpriced. According to him, a certain percentage of this fee goes to the actual owners of the properties with whom 'Go2know' made arrangements to exploit the sites while they are abandoned. He assumes that this price is not affordable for everyone but, on the other hand, their clients' profile responds rather to people that would only visit such places in case it is safe and legal. This is the reason why Wiebers does not perceive urban explorers as intruders who violate his business:

> "I know these people would never book our tours, so I don't feel angry about them and I don't feel supportive either [but] if they are [trespassing] while we are doing our tour, with our clients, then I have to tell them 'please go!' It isn't right if you have people who didn't pay while having others who paid €40. I understand the people who want to do it illegally, they just want to trespass the place and not destroy anything at all, they behave properly. What should I say to them? I am not a police officer! If there aren't any of our customers around I normally let them pass" (annex 3, p. 140-141).

Wiebers assumes that the main interest in 'Go2know' tours relies in the aesthetics and, in fact, most of the visitors are photographers and film-makers. However, as he poses, "you don't want to have people there without knowing what they are taking pictures of" (annex 3, p. 136), and

to overcome this, every tour includes a brief introduction about the history of the place. This demonstrates the existence of heritage interpretation, something that according to him does not necessarily mean that the experimental component of the place is lost. Opposed to urban exploration's perspective, freedom in this sense is rather related to the notion of knowing that you are not doing something illegal, and there is no need to keep an eye on any security guard. To reinforce his statement, Wiebers proposes an alternative definition of how urban exploration could also be perceived – something that goes beyond the performance and reaches social implications:

"But does urban exploration have to be always illegal? I think urban exploration can be more comfortable if you try the legal way, trying to make contact with the owner and trying to figure out what's in there. Explorers could ask 'What are you going to do with the place? Can I help?' That's urban exploration for me, it's not to go anywhere and say 'I found the best places'. It's always to make some deep thoughts about the places. That's the way I see it and maybe for some other people is another thing" (annex 3, p.143).

As we saw in Nathan Wright's speech, one of the main critiques towards companies like 'Go2know' is the fact that they take advantage of an uncertain and decayed situation in the sites that may lead to think that abandonment is the ideal state of conservation to attract tourists. Wiebers does not see it in this way as he reckons that abandonment, and therefore his business, is only a transitional process due to the impossibility to maintain a fixed state of decay. Yet, the major threat for abandoned buildings is abandonment itself and therefore Wiebers considers that the purpose of a building is to be in use and make it part of the city's culture. He is confident that the money which owners earn through photo-tours could be invested in developing the places in a democratic way. Indeed, the company has contributed with some reparations and providing new ideas about potential mixed uses that could include the creation of both private and public areas within the same complexes – even if it means that Go2know would lose an abandoned spot to organize tours:

"I've seen lot of places where heritage can help to develop a whole region like in Eberswalde: you have a lot of industry culture and now they're trying to develop some industrial parks. You see it in Hessen, former industrial landscapes developed into parks and people can walk there, everything is safe, and it helped to attract a lot of tourism to cities now. They're trying that in Eberswalde and I hope it comes to a good end. [*Wünsdorf*] is really big and you could do a nice hotel for rich people and that's O.K. because they bring the money to develop the place. But you also have to keep areas that could be open for the public. The main house in this property could be used for rich people but inside one of the buildings there's a large swimming pool and it's the only one in a 50km-radius, students could learn how to swim there! So it would be very nice to open that for the public, the same for the theatre, there's no theatre in Wündsdorf's surroundings, it could be ideal to renovate it for the public. Maybe it's the same with the *Spreepark*, nobody knows what's going on there, but I think it would be fine if they built 10 houses for rich people while the rest of the places are for normal people" (annex 3, p. 141, 143-144).

In any case, it seems a point of common understanding between explorers and entrepreneurs that the only fate for abandoned buildings cannot be to serve as glass-case museums where an artificial engagement with the place lasts as long as the tour is running. Heritage as a global field, and particularly these sites in Berlin, have to represent more than an occasional leisure activity where people are asked to "re-work it, appropriate it and contest it [as a] part of the way identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, group or nation state" (Bender; cited in Harvey, 2001, p. 15). Heritage cannot simply be a trampoline to frame tourism as a set of economic activities. It has to contribute to create a sense of community so people, including locals, go to places not as if it was an outstanding practice but as a part of their everyday life. For this, natural actions must take place in the sites: the exoticism in heritage has to be replaced by an organic process of 'city-making', a participatory approach that brings back the truly contemporary authenticity of the buildings without trying to simulate the past.

Unfortunately, such is not always the contemplated option in the mind of owners and urban developers. To re-vitalize these buildings has been usually interpreted as accomplishing full and radical renovations of the material fabric to bring the historical aspect back so sites can be part

of the real estate market. This procedure puts together the increasing threat of gentrification in Berlin with the erasure of its unique derelict heritage traces.

Resisting gentrification

Apicella et al. (2013) have shown how the demand of the Berlin market by private developers has increased since 2008 as the real state conditions were 'underpriced' – making it appealing as a profitable investment. This, together with the fact that 80% of Berlin's population lives in rented apartments, constitute the perfect breeding ground for gentrification processes. Gentrification is a term that has been used mostly in Urban Studies since the mid-1960s and, although in its origin was related to 'sustainable regeneration' or 'urban renaissance', it has not been until recent years that scholars started to point out its questionable consequences (Slater, 2013). Objectively defined, gentrification is the process by which working class neighbourhoods are rehabilitated by professional developers to transform an inner-city area into a higher class space in the reach of new residential or commercial uses (Lees et al., 2008). In principle, one could say that such phenomenon pursues a strategy to improve the city on the basis of a better socio-economic status, but taking a closer look, it is inevitable to analyse the critical implications that it hides. Gentrification *also* involves the transformation of the original character of the neighbourhood as well as a change in the population of land-users who can no longer afford to live in a now more attractive area due to the increase in the cost of living (Ahlfeldt, 2011). This led to the main issue related to gentrification: a potential displacement where tenants may face eviction in case they complain or rather they could be trapped if they do not (Slater, 2013).

Moreover, it seems evident that gentrification processes do not follow a truly urban concern and they are ultimately guided only by economic purposes – being "a frontier on which fortunes

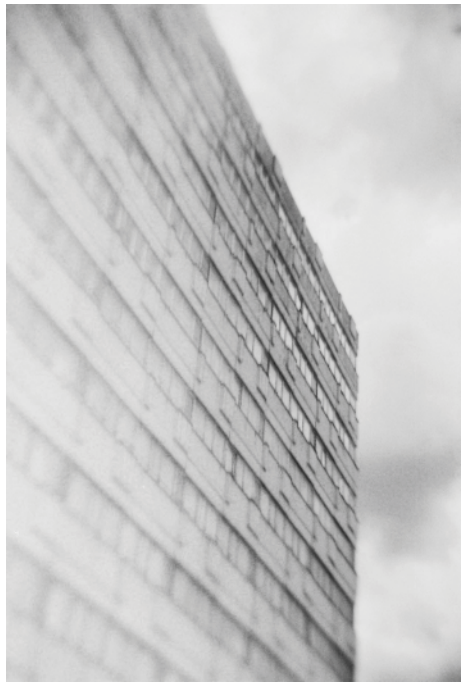
are made" (Smith; cited in Moreh, 2011, p. 12). Harvard Professor Michael Herzfeld (2010) is particularly critical towards this reality stating how the dominant neoliberal ideology uses terms such as 'improvement' or 'development' to play down the interests of local people. To reinforce his argument, the author puts in question how neoliberalism relies on objective and positivistic 'data' as a post-modern circular dogma which leaves no place to contest a self-legitimated truth in gentrification research and thus making it part of the problem. Day after day we are witnessing how more voices arise to make visible the way corporate developers influence political decisions. Consequently, it would be too naïve not to consider that gentrification is fundamentally a political process whose definition order may well be reversed from the one we initially gave – prioritizing yet class succession and displacement over any revitalization project (Levine, 2004; Bernt, 2012;). In this case, the urban concern is rather a means to a political end and, to subvert such scenarios, Tom Slater does not shy away his 'essentialist fantasy': "the only way to defeat gentrification once and for all is to abolish the capitalist mode of production" (2013, p. 16).

We see how gentrification has the potential to modify the atmosphere of a particular neighbourhood and, since Tim Edensor (2002) proposes that it is in everyday life where true authenticity is found, and it is interesting to analyse how heritage reacts to this neoliberal threat. On one hand, historic conservation is the result of heritage awareness and official designation. Cristian Moreh calls this process 'heritagification', by which "gentrification is directed by globalized forces of cultural capitalization, involving a specific value system and having a direct impact on the constitution of the local population" (2011, p. 21). Moreh asserts that this is likely to happen since heritage is just another piece of the economic market and denounces how 'World Heritage' became a trademark that obliges people and places to re-invent themselves. This explains the large amount of historical cities that have been 'musealized' after their enlisting, losing their inhabitants to make room for tourism facilities in the pursuit of money-making (Beltran, 2014). But on the other hand, as Herzfeld poses, "all conservation involves some degree of selection" (2010, p. 259) and it is clear that the neglected condition of Berlin's abandoned buildings responds rather to an act of deliberate forgetting, a perfect context to switch from

historic conservation to mere rehabilitation so gentrification can easily emerge from the ashes of dereliction.

Following urban explorer's concern, I have identified three types of gentrification that abandoned buildings are facing in Berlin nowadays. The first type responds to a building whose historical background is ignored and its present and prospective future is only driven by speculative options. To exemplify this, Myron Levine refers to the *Wasserturm*, or water tower, in the district of Prenzlauer Berg where, "little concern was given to the appropriateness of providing luxury living units in a structure that in the 1930s had been used as a 'beating station' or 'wild concentration camp' where Nazi police auxiliaries imprisoned, tortured, and murdered their opponents" (2004, p. 94). People purchasing these condos are unlikely to know about the history of the place, something that was already discussed in Chapter 1 when it was mentioned the urban explorers' fear to forget the history behind a building due to the radical conversion into apartments or spaces for commercial use. Irish Berliner expressed his concern in the case of recently-renovated *Garbáty Cigarreten Factory* to host condos, although this was only one example among many more: the refurbishing of the former *Soviet Military Administration Headquarters* in Karlhorst finalized last year and today there is nothing left but private housing (Irish Berliner, 2010); only the hangar remains at the World War II *Oranienburg Airfield* and most of the complex serves as a supermarket chain's logistic centre (Irish Berliner, 2012); or the GDR *Central State Office for Statistics* waits in Alexanderplatz to be demolished in order to erect a modern office building in the lot (Irish Berliner, 2012b).

Central State Office for Statistics



One day, after one of our explorations together, Irish Berliner and I were walking down the street and we saw a huge industrial complex that was being renovated. It looked fancy because the works seemed to be about to finish and one of those monumental advertising posters was placed in the main entrance detailing the features of the new apartments that were being constructed. I asked Irish Berliner if he could figure out the cost of each unit and he told me that some days ago he had checked on the website of a similar project where they were selling condos starting from €500,000. He said: 'These guys are crazy, in Berlin there aren't too many

people who can afford such prices. These are clearly addressed to external investors who basically offer the apartment for renting the day after they buy them' (Fieldnotes).

In the meantime, many abandoned building's owners wait for their opportunity to speculate in the city, an opportunity which is not far from reality considering the current real estate conditions in Berlin. This brings us to the second case of gentrification which is clearly related to abandonment. As Thilo Wiebers poses, many owners do not have any cultural concern about the property they own. For example, he refers to Jewish people who left their properties in Germany back in the 1940s; the legitimate heirs are now living in New York and they have never visited the place they own and know nothing about it. This profile of an owner does not need the money in an urgent way while a lack of cultural awareness is evident, so they patiently wait for the market to increase the price of the lot while the building deteriorates as times passes (annex 2).

Burnt car as debris.
Abandoned Bowling Alley

Although it is not an historic building, I had this impression when I got into the *Abandoned Bowling Alley* in the neighbourhood of Stieglitz. This was definitely the most damaged place I have visited in my life. Getting inside the complex was like exploring a dense jungle and I could clearly see tons of debris all around. What once was a polish wooden floor was no more than a concrete surface full of trash now; the metal structure in the roof was bending down due to gravity and the frightening pieces were too close to my head, a real danger. I could hear drops of water filling the space with their sound and some of them were dropping on my shoulders: total chaos. Usually, when I am in an abandoned building, probably due to my background as an architect, I tend not to think too much about how the place was once inhabited but rather in imagining how it could be re-used in the future. But in this case, witnessing such level of destruction, I could not help thinking that the bowling alley was a hopeless case. If the owner of this complex had any intention to refurbish it, I thought he was already too late. It is not an historical place with an important history behind, but at the same time it is difficult to imagine that new stories will develop here in the future. On the contrary, if the owner was only waiting for total devastation so to demolish the building and sell the empty area, I can tell that vandalism, passing of time and weather conditions are giving him a hand (Fieldnotes).

These days, property is a mere act of registration, an act of possession that makes owners to carry the legitimate word to establish the fate of the buildings that form our cities. It is all run by investment interests, ignoring the consideration of neighbours on whether they like to live just beside a building in such conditions where children could easily enter and get hurt. Neoliberalism at its peak, a way of conceiving property where one looks for his own interests based on the right to own and the freedom to do with it whatever he considers appropriate – where letting the architecture to rot until imminent disappearance is simply another valid option as long as it is profitable. Is this the city we have always dreamt about? Ultimately, it is the city we have (Fieldnotes).

Finally, I have framed certain abandoned buildings in Berlin under a particular type of gentrification that focuses in carrying out 'cool' and hip activities inside. The issue here is that the trendy atmosphere is not an end in itself, and it basically serves the property to gain relevance as it is abandoned so the owners can decide in the moment whether to develop or sell the lot for residential or commercial uses once the price has increased. This is something that Thilo Wiebers pointed out during my interview when he admitted that some of the owners saw in photo-tours a marketing tool to promote the 'cool' side of dereliction in pictures that will then be on the internet – making it easier and more profitable as a potential entry into the market afterwards (annex 3). This is aligned with the notion of exploiting the image of Berlin as the 'capital of cool' for economic purposes. But, what does it mean to be 'cool' in this context? Jekaterina Balicka explains what few examples could be:

> "eating a kebab under a scaffold, with people passing by just next to you; or watching a Karaoke event at Mauerpark after some flea-market shopping; or taking a picture in a retro photo booth next to the S-Bahn station Warschauer Strasse; or standing in the long queue to get through the face-control at the legendary Berghain club, or any other scenes of the easyJet influenced touristic Berlin-idyll of the years 2006-2010" (2013, p. 5).

However, for Irish Berliner, the city of Berlin is becoming increasingly mainstream:

"If you look at Mitte, between Hackescher Markt and Alexanderplatz, Berlin has a recent history of local independent stores getting pushed out by the international companies. ExBerliner had an article on it lately, in which one of the landlords was told by a property agency: 'Kick your tenants out. We're going to get you better ones.' Obviously the big international chains can pay more money so the local independent ones get kicked out" (annex 1, p. 121-122).

This previous step towards a more aggressive gentrification is based on Florida's (2002) thesis on 'creative-class', a sector of population who is not necessarily wealthier compared to residents living within the neighbourhoods, although as "highly skilled members [they] appreciate the vitality as well as the cultural and social diversity of the inner-cities (Ahlfeldt, 2011, p. 2). The question whether innovation always leads to gentrification is starting to be noticed in academia (Fasche, 2006) and it remains as an open field of study as long as Berlin is becoming one of the hotspots in terms of the tech startup scene (Ingram, 2013). However, strictly concerning to abandoned buildings, the iconic *Tacheles* exemplifies the notion of hip culture swallowed by gentrification. This case has been studied by Untiks (2012), and it also seemed to touch Irish Berliner's nerve (2012c, 2012d). When I asked him about the situation he brilliantly summarized it:

"It's owned by a bank and they gave a 10-year lease to the squatters, or rather the artists. They turned it into an art centre, did their own thing for 10 years. It's a very short time for a bank because in the meantime the property prices go up and up. It's actually an investment since having artists there helps prices rise by making the area trendy and cool. What really pissed me off about the situation is the fact that that the city did nothing to save it, despite the obvious benefits through tourism and so on. Politicians could have stepped in and stated that *Tacheles* was a cultural center now and a tourist attraction like the East Side Gallery. Of course, they didn't do much to save the East Side Gallery either. *Tacheles* also had the historical importance of being the first place to broadcast a live sporting event to the world, during the 1936 Olympics. For me Berlin did the wrong thing just by letting it close down. Now the bank will turn it in into a shopping center or some such: you will have H&M, Jack & Jones, and all these other shops moving in which have nothing to do with Berlin or its history.

Between past and modernity.
Tacheles

There was a campaign to save it where a lot of people signed petitions to stop the artists getting kicked out. I was there the morning it happened. The place was crawling with police, and all the signatures on the sheets of paper were on the ground, worthless, getting trampled on by people walking around. The bank went to the courts and the court was in favour of the bank because that's the way it works. In any case, the artists' situation was not ideal either. They were fighting among themselves and lots of them were paid off to get out, so there were divisions there that could be exploited. *Tacheles* was the perfect example of gentrification in-progress and a lost opportunity for Berlin" (annex 1, p. 120-121).

Even in the defeated case of *Tacheles*, it is clear that every gentrification process provokes a reaction of resistance. We saw this when discussing the subcultures' breeding ground in Kreuzberg during the 1960s and 1970s and in more recent decades a similar reality took place in Prenzlauer Berg (Levine, 2004; Drissel, 2011; Bernt, 2012). It seems evident that there is a long tradition of resisting gentrification of abandoned buildings in Berlin, and such tradition still exists nowadays. Participatory initiatives like *Mediaspree versenken*, or Sink the Mediaspree, faced the transformation of Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain's closest parts to the Spree river into a hotspot of the alternative music scene. Universal Studios and MTV Europe moved their headquarters into an area with an industrial and Cold War background. These parts of the city had been typically used for informal and temporary appropriations of the public space, although a 'better' future promised to serve as a point of attraction for clubs and 'party-tourism'. A public referendum held in 2008 rejected this type of development in the area supported by 87% of the voters (Ahlfeldt, 2011). A similar situation happened only a few months ago at the Tempelhof Airport which has remained abandoned since 2008. Only after its closure, the area was opened to the public under the name of Tempelhof Park and people started to use it for cycling, skating, picnics or sunbathing. However, that was only planned to be a transitional state until its formal reconversion into a new space, including "mixed recreation and living functions" (Balicka, 2013, p. 7) – in other words, something that would most likely increase the price of housing (Wiebers, annex 3). The activist group *100% Tempelhofer Feld* was created and in 25th May 2014, a referendum supported by 64% of the voters decided to keep the area as it was so people can keep enjoying this organic use of the space (Evans, 2014). This is an issue where Thilo

Wiebers expressed his concern because, according to him, neither of the two options proposed in the referendum were ideal, and he demanded a mid-way point to be reached:

"[Politicians in Tempelhof] were trying to develop the place and to erect some buildings; that could be a good starting point to support that area of the city. It would be a good thing, but people are very crazy there. I'm not so sure if I support the result of the referendum, I recognize that they have to leave some parts of the field as they are because the place has its history and it's also important for the inner climate of the city, but I think there should be the possibility to build small houses, restaurants, etc. Those things should be allowed. I do not support the idea of not allowing any houses to be built, I think that's what they planned, to build a library, flats for rich people, etc. I am not really excited about it. I think, give it to the people and let them develop it. I don't know how to come to an end there, I'm just a normal Berliner and I know I want to keep those kind of places here, it's nice to have free places in Berlin. We have a lot of treasures, and we have to be careful with them" (annex 3, p. 141-142).

'Stop Gentrification'.
Künstlerhaus Bethatnien

After the study of these resisting phenomena, Balicka (2013) states that Berlin is not a city suited for master plans, mass interventions and high-end solutions. The presence of abandoned sectors in the city tells us to act cautiously and stop promoting large-scale development projects as it is seen as an alternative cultural treasure by the dynamic population in the city. The paradox still remains of whether the independent scene can take profitable advantage of abandoned buildings, thus becoming its own enemy: a mere marketing factor for tourism and investment which neglects its truly underground character. This is certainly the case for abandoned sites in the construction of Berlin as a hip destination. Even if these places were neglected from the promotional city's image of the 1990s, they are now presented as *unique selling points* for artistic, entertainment and leisure consumption and therefore "valued as a 'means to an end' rather than as alternative to dominant (capitalist) forms of urban development" (Colomb, 2012, p. 143). Obviously, this enhances Berlin's iconic image of subcultural capital, but it also constrains the necessary conditions to sustain an authentic creative process (Bader and Scharenberg, 2010). To overcome this, the local state and the private capital are not required to drive overwhelming interventions and over-protective policies so abandoned spaces safeguard their

free and flexible character, which allows them to continue being original and unique (Colomb, 2012). Michael Herzfeld makes it clear when asserting that "globalization is a fact of life. But is does not have to be a *neoliberal* fact of life" (2010, p. 266), meaning that there should be alternatives to escape from the economic interests. This ultimately requires a use of the space based on consensus and public participation which, even if it is a more complex solution, can ensure people's welfare with an eye on what Berlin really is and not what financial sectors pretend to make out of it.

Self-appropriation: from heritage to 'city-making'

The question now is, how to escape from the above neoliberal vicious circle? We have seen how abandoned buildings form a distinctive landscape in Berlin and we also studied the long tradition of resistance in the city towards transforming these spaces into consumption and speculation spots, a social movement that still persists today. Being fixed on time, and the permanent assumptions that it includes, are the ordinary pillars in architecture and, consequently, in traditional heritage considerations. This non-dynamic perspective enables us to provide an absolute meaning to buildings that aims to be valuable and understandable for future generations. Therefore, traditional heritage prefers to wait until this meaning is created; it excludes from its framework those realities that are not clearly established and where prospective uncertainty is encountered. Self-appropriation of the space belongs to this latter approach where social participation plays a humble role in bringing back the life of buildings after their abandonment.

For squatters it mainly consisted in an existential experience, "because the derelict houses lacked modern amenities such as heating, running cold and warm water, electricity, all of which is today considered standard" (Heinemann, 2005, p. 18). However, this way of living initiated an

actual (sub)culture where *less was more*, which ultimately means that *nothing is the best*. These informal occupations made evident that architecture without architects was not only possible but recommendable since its community value was based on a collective effort. This view contradicts the perception behind traditional approaches to historical preservation and adaptive reuse that seeks to display buildings' old pomposity. It also moves from 'do-not-touch' to 'do-it-yourself', a new approach to consider into Berlin's heritage which allows us to put the focus on the desirable fate for its abandoned spaces: to maintain the aesthetic and cultural value of dereliction as the city's uniqueness where its own citizens are responsible for creating a sense of belonging by accomplishing minimal techniques of conservation in Berlin.

The architectural common sense suggests that there are two extremes in dealing with abandoned sites. On one hand, we find complete demolition and new construction, and on the other we can let buildings go. At an intermediate level, several solutions arouse, but only those taking into account participatory approaches allow architecture to be "released from its elite self-referential framework and steered towards a more inclusive condition open to change and mutation" (Lang, 2008, p. 218). This does not put value into what developers want to make but what is already there, locating people at the core of the action rather than just placing them as another piece in the economic system. It is a fact that abandoned places are ignored because they are currently not very lucrative – due to their tricky spatial or maintenance conditions (Doron, 2008) – and they are simply waiting for the next economic project to turn them profitable. Indeed, implementing a regimented architectural renovation that seeks to take full control of this transitional and uncertain situation may cause that these spaces "progressively lose their charge of vitality and experimentation (Lupo and Postiglione, 2009, p. 2). Yet, in the same way, heritage designation can dissolve the heritage component of a property, an excess of controlled expectations to be achieved after renovation threats the transgressive nature of these Berlin sites. Or, in Solá-Morales' words:

"When architecture and urban design project their desire onto a vacant space, a terrain vague, they seem incapable of doing anything other than introducing violent transformations, changing

estrangements into citizenship, and striving at all costs to dissolve the uncontaminated magic of the obsolete efficacy" (1995, p. 121).

In this context, self-appropriation, that also involves self-building, rises against the excessive legalization in the planning of city-making strategies. It is a reaction towards official institutions driven by financial interests that "do not listen to people and do not try to include their needs and wishes on what is being projected [...], a situation that is also creating a more conservative and less critical citizens' vision" (Cirugeda, 2014, p. 21). Once more, here is the eternal dilemma of constructing our own narrative for places or assuming the one which is given. Self-appropriation establishes a democratic framework between what took place and what will be taking place, a re-signification that "guarantees the involvement of people in the creation and construction of their spaces" (Cirugeda, 2014, p. 21). Self-appropriation means self-recognition and self-experimentation, the promotion of collective design and the creation of a common and plural identity. Why do such words sound so radical within a neoliberal discourse? Was this not the intentional paradigm of heritage?

'Occupy Yourself'.
Güterbahnhof Pankow

It can be stated that self-appropriation and its collaborative dimension contribute to strengthen the notion of *heritage as experience* (Smith, 2006), where the relevance is not the material site but the intangible aspects associated to it. In this sense, the strategy of perceiving a place and contributing in its re-use is an inherent cultural value in Berlin and a consequence of its dynamic population's production which needs to be safe-guarded. The potential creation of networks and the development of pedagogical activities play an essential role in this form of active heritage. Through these experiences, the space becomes a *social engine*, "a logic that moves the action from a simple location in the community, to an asset for the community and with the community, which in itself creates community" (Lupo and Postiglione, 2009, p. 5). This social activism is constantly shaping and re-adapting the significance of these spaces and the permanent transition becomes its fixed state. Without a shadow of doubt, the memories attached to abandoned places are certainly important, but they are not necessarily more important than the attributes that emerge in the present and the progressive meaning that these acquire in time

due to citizens' initiatives.

It is acknowledged that these self-interventions carried out by local actors usually tend to be temporary uses of the space. However, the sum of ephemeral actions provides continuity and a well-defined alternative character to the city. Unlike traditional planning, which pursues an immediate finished product, the notion of temporary is considered as a "positive idea of improvisation and approximation in which the values and characteristics of lightness, transience, mobility and instability reflect a condition of freedom for experimentation and cultural cohabitation" (Lupo and Postiglione, 2009, p. 5). Is there anything more exciting than going to a place that you know will not look the same in the near future? As long as the spirit of the place is maintained, variation in the ways of using it are welcomed so there is always a particular feeling when experiencing the site in the present moment and the infinite possibilities to imagine it in the future.

Further important characteristics in self-appropriation are those connected to sustainability, such as the possibility to re-use material and its low-cost implementation (Cirugeda, 2014). This is aligned and respectful to the existing spatial features and therefore self-appropriation is perceived as a set of minimal interventions that do not impose major transformations. It focuses the efforts towards what is strictly needed, a humble disposition to be implemented in the humility of modern ruins. Without any intention to re-create the past, these initiatives seek the practical implications of occupying the space, the true utility after abandonment.

Certainly, the city of Berlin made possible a large number of spontaneous initiatives during the last decades. Many of these are centred in the temporary use of public spaces and legal contracts following this purpose are stipulated. Lupo and Postiglione focus in three particular projects: the creation of Marie's Park after the demolition of a fire station in Prenzlauer Berg, Rosa Rose neighbourhood garden conceived in the surroundings of squatted apartments in Friedrichshain, and the alternative social housing village of Wagendorf Lohmuhle. The authors observe that "that a substantial length of time is needed to embed those processes in the existing context in an integrated and non-hostile way and to settle them as successful participative

strategies. Because social and cultural changes often require processes of negotiation and a longer time frame than is generally acceptable to a community" (2009, p. 9). Also, when I asked Irish Berliner about a currently successful case study of self-appropriation he directed me to the *Künstlerhaus Bethatnien*, a Prussian hospital abandoned in 1974 which was intended to be demolished. Only after strong protests, a series of redevelopment plans were proposed and, since then, art has been exhibited in a building which shares historical architecture and subcultural additions (Künstlerhaus Bethatnien, n.d.). Another example is the *Center for Art and Urbanistics* located in Moabit. This former train depot was self-appropriated in 2012 to accommodate artists and researchers and today it is the perfect example of a mixture of spaces (ZK/U, n.d.). On one hand, there is a set of private studios and on the other we find a common exhibition gallery surrounded by a completely public park. All this was made by conserving the decayed aesthetic of the site.

Self-built bar.

These are only a few examples, among many more, in the large history of collaborative architecture in Berlin where empowered people made possible a more democratic city. Some of them started this process a couple of decades ago and some others are very recent initiatives. In any case, it seems clear that self-appropriation strategies have been taken over directly by local citizens although substantial political support is certainly required. We cannot forget that in the beginning of 2000s, public funding was available to self-renovate social housing and consequently to resist gentrification. The followed patterns were very similar to the above described in self-appropriation as we see in Levine's explanation of the actions that took place in several buildings in Prenzlauer Berg. This was called '*Selbsthilfe*', or self-help programme, which was carried out by S.T.E.R.N. ('*Stadterneuerung*') agency demonstrating that well-oriented political decisions can serve to make a difference:

"The *Selbsthilfe* program, in particular, helped to assure that a number of economically marginal residents of the district would share in its revival. The program provided aid to housing cooperatives, artisans, and the owners of small local stores. It also sought to assist non-traditional living arrangements, including apartment sharing by young people and former squatters critical of capitalist ideals. The self-

help program also sought to abet social inclusion by providing skills training (in the building trades) for youth and by increasing the sense of identity that former squatter and other alternative groups would have with the neighbourhood [...] To minimize displacement, S.T.E.R.N. bases its neighbourhood development plans on existing use patterns of property; residential sites are kept residential, and commercial sites are kept commercial [...] An effort was made to keep down costs and to maintain the feel of the old buildings, including preserving walls with their bullet holes from World War II [...] As one S.T.E.R.N. spokesperson summarized, 'careful urban renewal' means 'to be careful with the people who are living there' and to be sure that 'at the end of the [renewal] process they are still living here'" (2004, p. 97, 98, 100, 104).

Through this example, it is evident that a 'do-it-yourself' approach is not only a matter of a hip superficial movement but it also involves the social inclusion and the right to participation of those communities that are frequently neglected in heritage production. Homeless, immigrant and refugee groups are occupying some abandoned buildings in Berlin, and this represents the less appealing or socially uncomfortable image of squatting. They are completely disassociated from the city's everyday life and self-appropriation turns out to be a key element to bring social dignity back. As Lang poses, these emerging settlements are *crashlands* that "host globally-connected but hyper-local outsider communities that are proving to be the forces behind the new hybrid, heterogeneous city (2006, p. 206). In this context, self-appropriation can achieve a higher solidarity level "in understanding precisely what kinds of changes are actually taking place in order to share the many undervalued advantages [of their presence]" (2006, p. 207).

The aesthetic consequences and the way of using a building after self-appropriation reinforces the desire of freedom and flexibility. It usually involves the removal of walls, resulting in an increased permeability and fluidity that reflects the collective decision-making process (Heinemann, 2005; Sheridan, 2007). Dereliction remains but the process of decay is inverted. The respect for decay is dismissed in complete preservation and that is the reason why Fein proposes that a collaborative approach must follow a program with a well-defined starting and an uncertain end that encapsulates the apparently chaotic self-appropriation strategy. The before-and-after aspects of this program which aim to change the public perception of modern ruins are:

"the acceptance of decay, a perpetually evolving program, the aesthetic of the confines of that program, and a readdressing of the site of the decayed structure (what the decayed building means to its site and surroundings). [Then,] the aesthetic of decay will ultimately be altered immensely by reoccupation of the space. However, through the understanding of the individual elements of such decay, it will not be forgotten, erased, or corrected as it often is during a typical renovation project" (2011, p. 29, 75).

We have solely put the focus on the positive aspects of self-appropriation although it is important to listen to Levine's (2004) voice when she asserts that the risk of these strategies relies in perceiving them as individual responses to potential gentrification and the loss of public space. In any case, we can certainly conceive these localized actions as a sort of 'urban acupuncture' in the reach of transforming a large urban context through small-scale interventions (Solá-Morales, 1999). Self-appropriation makes evident that there is room for hope in Berlin's abandoned buildings. Participatory strategies turn out to be an ideal way to give life to derelict sites because their reason for existance is to be in use. These low-cost and minimal interventions guarantee that the 'trashy' spirit of the building is maintained and therefore the atmosphere of the city remains both practical and authentic. Public participation generates a sense of community around the building where the intention is not to transform it into a museum or any other space for consumption. It rather creates an everyday activity without neglecting its historical background and it respects permanent transition and soft-change as tradition. It is an organic 'city-making' process that puts on the table everyday life as a way to understand heritage.

The current neoliberal age causes public funding to decrease when funding self-appropriation programmes. With an eye on a more hopeful future we aim that this situation is reversed. Otherwise, the policeman's assertion reproaching David Pinder for taking part in a parade claiming public space may come true: 'There's no such thing as public space. The only public space is your home' (2005, p. 383).

Epilogue

On 12th May 2014, I was on a holiday for a few days in my home town of Jaén (Spain). I noticed that just in front of my place there is a huge concrete complex that was started to be built in 2009 although the construction works suddenly stopped in 2012, and the building remained unfinished. It was conceived to host the *International Iberian Museum*, the biggest museum in the world concerning Iberian ancient culture, and the cost was estimated in €33 million. Over the three-year period that construction took place, several design errors had to be corrected and, in the meantime the promoter bankrupted – leaving the construction halfway finished and becoming another 'ghost' symbol through which the current economic crisis is picturing the Spanish contemporary urban landscape (Tremlett, 2009; Daley and Minder, 2010).

Looking through the window of my apartment, one can easily see how the complex has been fenced and the nature is starting to take back its surroundings. The building looks actually very impressive, designed with the contemporary architectural standards under the premise of different modules at different heights. No symmetry at all: from the spatial point of view is a very rich building. I thought it was simply a pity for this building to be just standing there so I checked that there was a hole that had not been sealed and decided to get in so people – who ultimately funded the project with their taxes – could know how the building looks like from the inside. Once there, I basically did what I had been doing in Berlin for some weeks. I explored the site and took some pictures while enjoying an entire museum just for me even if there was nothing exhibited yet. The only spectacle there was this new ruin, the ruin of absurdity.

When I went back home, I wrote a 1000-words article recounting my experience and stating – in the similar way Alterazioni Video (2008) is doing with unfinished public works in Sicily, which is the topic of my future PhD (Arboleda, forthcoming) – that is simply a waste to invest in such projects and not giving them any use. The point here is that if we shift the perception towards these buildings they may well be considered as part of our culture because they represent the failure of an age, and therefore they are the heritage we are producing nowadays. Although I know it sounds ironic, the final recommendation I was giving in the article was to start re-appropriating the building as it is now because, even if it is unfinished, the structure could perfectly host cultural activities or social gatherings. At the end of the day, I submitted the article with some of the pictures I took to the local editorial office of *El País* – the most important newspaper in Spain. Few days later, the review of the article was published in the regional printed edition and posted on the internet. During the following week, the post remained in the top-10 of the most-widely read articles; it was shared on Facebook close to 400 times and in Twitter nearly 150 times (Donaire, 2014). Then, the local newspaper also contacted me and they published another review in the printed edition (Poveda, 2014).

It is clear that the recently-created ruins in Spain have a completely different 'historical' background compared to those in Berlin, but the role urban exploration plays in making visible these spaces for the rest of the society is actually very similar. Not only people are interested in knowing what is going on in these places, the fact is that they *deserve* to know. As it has been pointed out, most urban explorers prefer to keep their performances secret due to the illicit nature of the activity and for the fear that the sites could be vandalized – which demonstrates an extreme care towards the buildings. But urban exploration can also contribute to strengthen the social component of heritage by making public what is hidden behind a 'No Entry' sign. The intention is not to move from abandonment to conservation per se – which may lead to traditional heritage recognition. Abandonment has its own cultural importance and, in a city like Berlin, dereliction takes part in shaping its alternative identity although it cannot be an end in itself.

On 8th June 2014, I presented this radical view in the conference 'Innovate Heritage: Conversation Between Arts and Heritage', organised by a group of students from BTU Cottbus and held in Berlin. After my speech, one of the attendants asked me: 'Well, and now how could we frame all this under UNESCO's framework?' I looked at her very surprised because I thought I had not explained myself very well, or rather, she did not get the point at all: these buildings, as subcultures, do not need to be officially designated as heritage to be relevant; if they were, this would mean the beginning of their actual end.

It is discouraging how the only fate for heritage is to be enlisted and managed in a professional way, but what I state here is that these procedures go against the inherent nature of heritage. The official heritage discourses are full of big words that at the end of the day are no more than cliché terms meaning nothing: 'capacity building', 'resilient society', 'risk assessment', 'enhancing consciousness', etc. It is a contradiction to follow this encrypted terminology while at the same time it is expected a full integration of heritage concerns into people' lives. In this sense, heritage presents itself as something not to be discussed, something we assume as good with a low level of controversy. Heritage created a technical discourse around it but it does not mean that this discourse is necessarily relevant in academic terms. Indeed, academia must be at the forefront of heritage considerations, being responsible for raising the uncomfortable questions that heritage has to face from time to time.

Heritage is a powerful tool and, ultimately, a tool of power. It is presented to us fitting into political and economic interests. Heritage is a comfort zone where everyone has to feel equally identified and proud towards our society's cultural production. In this sense, dissent opinions are rarely encountered. However, heritage cannot simply give voice and promote these comfortable speeches, it should rather delve into self-criticism and pointing itself as a resource to make visible and improve further social implications. Heritage needs to be committed with difficulties and uncertainties. Such is the '*heritage claim*': a responsibility to raise independent and critical opinions which, under no circumstances, can be swallowed by authorities.

George Orwell wrote that journalism was printing what someone else did not want printed, and everything else, would be public relations. I claim that Heritage should be held to the same standard.

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Interviews Annexes

Annex 1
Interview to urban explorer Irish Berliner

25th April 2014

Irish Berliner is the author of the website 'Abandoned Berlin' where, since 2010, he has been recounting his experiences when visiting the neglected beauties of the city. *Mere for the purpose of information, Irish Berliner writes about the history of the places he explores and he also compiles photographic documentation on them. He also invites the readers to follow his footsteps by providing recommendations on how to find the places, the difficulty to get in or the level of security one could face. His altruistic work, together with the documentary evidence of his activities, made it possible to put a set of Berlin's abandoned sites on the map. It is not surprising then that his website gets on average 4000 hits a day and 'Abandoned Berlin' was named as one of The Guardian's best city blogs in the world by its recently launched 'Cities' site.*

- What are the personal features that made you to get into urban exploration?

Coming from the journalistic background, I am interested in telling stories and when you look at a ruin or an abandoned building you know there is some sort of story, something happened there. It's usually interesting because most buildings aren't abandoned; they are still in use. So it's already something unusual. I like to find out why these buildings ended up that way because it's remarkable, especially when you consider some of them, with their incredible architecture and design, you can see a lot of effort went into them when these buildings were built. Now you will see windows smashed or animals living in them, and there is usually a tragic story behind it. In Ireland there's the old tradition of what's called the 'seanchaí' – the village storyteller who would tell tales to people gathered around the fire. This was in the days before television. So I like telling stories but also sharing my own experiences – by doing so it's not simply a history lesson. I tell people where the places are so they can go and experience them on their

own and gather their own impressions from them. Every time is different and it's nice that other people can get enjoyment from this as well.

It started in *Spreepark* when I heard that there was an abandoned fun park in the middle of the forest. I heard some rumors but I wasn't very sure what the story was. I went in and I couldn't believe such a thing was just simply there. Then I started the blog in a format where I write the exact location, how to find it, how to get in, etc. I did it because I thought it was a shame to have these abandoned places with nobody experiencing them, such a waste, so I decided it was better to share this information. Someone else then told me about *Teufelsberg*. It wasn't guarded at the time so I went there, took pictures and told people about it in the same way. To summarize, the history is the main thing for me. I guess I'm interested in news, crazy stories and so on. And in Berlin the truth is stranger than fiction. You don't need to make up stories. The truth is already strange enough.

- In one of your website's entries you wrote 'there was nothing remarkable but I was captivated'. Do you think we are in the need of an amazing history behind a building to make it heritage, or do we also have to deal with mundane facts which are not that historically relevant?

When you say something has historical relevance or you say a building is 'mundane', it's a personal judgment. It's like saying a site is more important than another and I guess that's a human thing to do. The historical importance is attached to the events that happened at a site before, so for example you have *Tempelhof* which is seen as historically important, primarily because of the Berlin Airlift. The Allies flew supplies there for nearly a year after Berlin was blockaded by the Soviets back in 1948. So people say that it's historically important for that fact – a time and an event in a specific place. At the same time the Nazi contribution to the site is played down – they had forced laborers working there during the war, and there was a concentration camp in the north of the site before that. That side of the history is not so well known. But people tell the other side, about the Allies saving the city from the Soviets. The history of specific places is always an emotional thing and it usually serves an agenda.

I try to give everything equal importance because buildings are really just bricks put together in a certain way. The events that took place in those buildings are a separate thing.

Usually when I go to places I don't look up the history in advance. I just find an abandoned building and I am guided purely through its aesthetic attraction. I sneak in, take some pictures and I do all the research afterwards. *Waldhaus Buch* was a good example. It's a beautiful old hospital building that was very hard to get into and I suppose I appreciated it all the more for that. Then I learnt about the Nazi euthanasia programme, and that mentally and physically handicapped patients from Buch were brought off to be murdered. Others from around the country were processed through Buch too. That was a huge shock for me. When I write I try to keep it lighthearted but when I started researching the euthanasia programme it was just depressing. It makes you even question whether you can have a joke on the same page when you're writing about such horrendous things. But that's my approach. I just focus on writing about the places as they are, with no pre-judgments made and then I go back and explain the history.

In a way I think the places are all important even the 'mundane' buildings. Something must have happened in them so they were important to someone. There is an entry in the website describing a place in Lichtenberg as mundane. It was a former *Bürgeramt* or some kind of local government offices. It definitely wasn't anything nice to look at. It was a horrible building full of rubbish but it had importance for someone so it was probably unfair to describe it as mundane.

- The first time we met each other was in the *Eisfabrik* and when staring at that building you said 'this is what brought me to Berlin'. Were you already aware of these abandoned buildings before coming here?

Before I moved over, a friend of mine brought me to an abandoned factory in Ostkreuz which has since been turned in into apartments. We went to the roof and we were sitting there,

drinking beer and looking at the city. We could watch the sunrise, seeing all the S-Bahn trains going by, people milling around like little ants and so on. And I guess that had an effect. It was cool, not in an artistic way, but it was simply cool to be there. That made a good impression on me and I was aware of that before moving to Berlin but I wouldn't say that was what brought me to Berlin. However those abandoned buildings are definitely a reason to stay in Berlin.

- You called your website 'Abandoned Berlin', but the notion of abandonment seems to be quite diverse. For most people a building is dead when it's abandoned, however, taking a look to your reader's comments, I realized that – according to their perception – 'abandonment' seems to be the ideal state of a building. Then, as soon as they know they are renovating the building they consider the building is now dead. How should we understand 'abandonment' then?

Today we went to see an abandoned sanatorium in Pankow which is being renovated and for me that building already died. We were too late, we missed it. In this case, it's no longer an abandoned building, it's another building with an interesting history nevertheless, but I won't write about it because it's not abandoned any more. I missed the state it was in when I can get in and take pictures.

Abandoned places seem like they're about to fall, with broken windows and missing stairs so 'normal people' prefer them painted and cleaned. For me personally, I look at the buildings and think they're nice, there's a beauty in their decayed condition. I realize it's probably weird and fucked up, but there is some sort of beauty there. It's like finding an old stray dog with three legs and half his ear missing – you take it home anyway because you realize that it's still an animal and it deserves care; it's the same with abandoned buildings. Usually, when they refurbish them it's not a good job and it loses something. Suddenly it's a healthy building and it's just like all the others, it's not unique anymore. It's like those apartments they built where the *Garbáty Cigarette Factory* was. I used to walk by and it was ruined, and it was precisely this that made it different from the other buildings. It made me to stop, go in and explore it and consequently discover the amazing story behind it. If I hadn't seen it before it was renovated

I would have been completely ignorant of any story. I wouldn't have found out that it was run by a Jewish family that was prosecuted by Nazis. The people living in those apartments now are probably unaware of the history. Now it's just a bland looking non-descript building. In that respect they are no longer ruins because they have been whitewashed – but paradoxically that is why in my opinion they are ruined.

It's a shame to let buildings fall to the ground though. You cannot have all those buildings lying around – progressively deteriorating in time – so they need to be preserved in a coherent way. The *Eisfabrik* is another example. They're going do something with it but the original plan was to build some sort of building made of glass. For me that is a tragic fate.

- Bradley Garret writes: "The 'problem' with what explorers do is not that it's illegal but that, in capitalist terms, it's pointless and therefore highly suspect." How do you feel by doing something that differentiates you from 'normal' people?

At first I thought I would be the only one interested in doing this and I didn't know there was such a thing as an 'urban exploration scene'. I know what I'm doing is illegal but that adds to the fun, and I feel what I'm doing is for a good cause because I'm documenting a part of history.

- You have no doubts that communication and documentation of these places should be completely public and available, and this establishes a difference compared to the rest of urban explorers who want to keep the scene as a hermetic subculture. Do you think you are achieving a sort of social responsibility mission by putting these places on the map?

I had discussions with people asking me to stop publishing addresses. It's usually due to fears of vandalism if more people are aware of these places. So they actually care for the places and I can appreciate that. Then, I thought about it for a while and realized that the places would get vandalized anyway. Most of the places I wrote about were already vandalized before I wrote about them, and then you get more comments from people who say 'the whole world

is going know, you are going to have tours coming here, etc.' It's not that they don't want the places publicized, it's that they don't want them to become tourist attractions. Like *Teufelsberg* or *Spreepark* are now tourist attractions. Both have tours. But this has more to do with Berlin than anything to do with urban exploration. People have a sense of entitlement to these places and they simply don't want to share it with foreigners or tourists. There is a sort of resentment there. You also have the element of people who have been into this kind of thing for years and who knew about these places before I did. They get pissed off because I'm revealing their secrets and suddenly what they knew – what made them feel special to them – was no longer so special. It was spoiled because it's available on Google. I can see why people would be annoyed but for me it's worth doing because places are being vandalized and destroyed – if not by vandals by the state, or even by the weather and just the passing of time. Most of them are being converted into apartments, so the ruins are being ruined. It's a race against the clock, trying to document them before the next stage in their evolution. It's only a matter of time before the buildings look like all the others.

- You were particularly touched by the case of *Tacheles* since it certainly exemplifies this race against the clock. Here it seems that squatters, who in some other locations are seen as a threat, were managing the site pretty well. What makes this case so special?

Tacheles is the model example of gentrification. It's owned by a bank and they gave a 10-year lease to the squatters, or rather the artists. They turned it into an art center, did their own thing for 10 years. It's a very short time for a bank because in the meantime the property prices go up and up. It's actually an investment since having artists there helps prices rise by making the area trendy and cool. What really pissed me off about the situation is the fact that that the city did nothing to save it, despite the obvious benefits through tourism and so on. Politicians could have stepped in and stated that *Tacheles* was a cultural center now and a tourist attraction like the East Side Gallery. Of course, they didn't do much to save East Side Gallery either. *Tacheles* also had the historical importance of being the first place to broadcast a live sporting event to the world, during the 1936 Olympics. For me Berlin did the wrong thing

just by letting it close down. Now the bank will turn it in into a shopping center or some such: you will have H&M, Jack & Jones, and all these other shops moving in which have nothing to do with Berlin or its history.

There was a campaign to save it where a lot of people signed petitions to stop the artists getting kicked out. I was there the morning it happened. The place was crawling with police, and all the signatures on the sheets of paper were on the ground, worthless, getting trampled on by people walking around. The bank went to the courts and the court was in favour of the bank because that's the way it works. In any case, the artists' situation was not ideal either. They were fighting among themselves and lots of them were paid off to get out, so there were divisions there that could be exploited. *Tacheles* was the perfect example of gentrification in-progress and a lost opportunity for Berlin.

- Do you think there is such a thing in Berlin that we might call 'best case of study' in the way it's managed?

Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Kreuzberg. I don't know the history of the building because I didn't look into it but it seems quite interesting. Now there are squatters – or artists – who turned it into an art center. They are doing their own thing and it seems they are being left alone for now. I don't know if it will continue to be the case but I hope so. For me that is a better use of the space than yet another shopping center.

- Berlin is not like Paris or Rome, it's not that glamorous, it's something different. Do you think urban exploration contributes to the right to 'heritagisation' of this 'trashy' image of Berlin which makes it unique?

It used to be like that, but Berlin is becoming more mainstream. If you look at Mitte, between Hackescher Markt and Alexanderplatz, Berlin has a recent history of local independent stores getting pushed out by the international companies. ExBerliner had an article on it lately, in

which one of the landlords was told by a property agency: 'Kick your tenants out. We're going to get you better ones.' Obviously the big international chains can pay more money so the local independent ones get kicked out. Part of Berlin's attraction is that it's still slightly fucked-up; it's not a fully functional city. Look at the airport they're trying to build. I think Berliners take pride in the fact it's not yet operational and so far behind schedule. There's always something not right at all and I think that's why people like it. If it became a perfect city then it's ruined. It's a contradiction – you have the question of trying to be like Paris, New York or London, and on the other hand you had this local coolness debate. Every newspaper had editorials and articles recently on whether Berlin was cool anymore and it revealed the city's ongoing insecurity. But it's part of the city flux. The city's attraction relies on the fact that it's not quite right, and as soon as it's right, it's wrong.

- By writing your website you had the chance to contact with people who formerly worked or inhabit the buildings. In your entry '*A Teufelsberg Tale*', you provided this intangible approach recounting human lives. How was your experience in dealing with this?

I have not had many chances to be honest. The person who worked in *Teufelsberg* during the Cold War contacted me by email. He was very nice and I was interested in finding out more so I asked him to send me another email with more information. I asked permission to publish it and he agreed, and the post came about together with old pictures I got from the US Army Intelligence & Security Command. For me that was the most important, the most interesting part of the *Teufelsberg* story, talking to this person who was directly involved and getting information from him. I actually get quite a few comments and emails from people who formerly worked there. Veterans still feel a huge connection to the place – even if it's 20 years since it was abandoned. It shows how special these sites are. These people are concerned about *Teufelsberg*. They feel it's just being allowed to fall, getting trashed, with graffiti everywhere – some of the street art is actually good but I'm sure the veterans wouldn't see it that way. They put a lot of work into it. They were at the front line in the Cold War so it must be disappointing for them to see how the city is ignoring *Teufelsberg* now. It's almost a betrayal. They did a *Teufelsberg* reunion last year

and I tried to get in touch with the same man but he never got back to me. Maybe he felt he had shared enough information and he didn't want to share anymore.

- Did they ever mention to you any concern about how to preserve or to manage these places nowadays?

There is a bit of concern about *Teufelsberg* but they don't know how it should be conserved or preserved. What do you do with *Teufelsberg*? There was talk of a museum but that's only one aspect. There's no ideal solution. The investor who owns it wants to build apartments but he can't do it now because the whole area has been protected as part of the forest. So that idea is over for him. For the people now renting it from him it's an ideal situation. It's now a tourist attraction and they can make a lot of money by charging admission.

Coming back to the people who once inhabited the building, they want to see it preserved, and they want to see their mission honoured as well. The person I was talking to was proud of having worked there and he feels, like most of them do I imagine, that he made a huge contribution to world peace. This was at a time there were genuine fears of being obliterated by a nuclear weapon and that is the reason they were there. They invested a lot in it, so to look at it falling down must be hard for them. They probably feel Germany should be more careful with it and do more to preserve the place while recognizing the effort they made.

- This is a claim that I find particular because in Spain we have always seen the German example as one of the best cases of study dealing with uncomfortable memory: they recognized their crimes in World War II and they were not afraid of a deeper interpretation of the Communist era. Is it enough?

Germans bring their kids to concentration camps when they're in schools in order to show them the terrible things that happened there. People value the German effort not to forget with buildings like the Holocaust Memorial. But Germany lost the war so in a way they

have no option, they have to do this. If they had won the war, they wouldn't be doing the same thing. I admire the way they commemorate victims with plaques everywhere, *Stolpersteine*, or little memorials in the pavement or on the wall, so they are very aware of their past and you have to appreciate that. They had to show that they were sorry, that they wouldn't do it again. There are Germans today that still feel shame for the things their grandparents did, like a sort of collective guilt. I am not sure it works, but that's another story. Last Saturday the neo-Nazi NPD party (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) wanted to march through Kreuzberg and thousands turned up to stop them. On one hand it's great there's such resistance against them but on the other there are neo-Nazis in Germany marching, or attempting to march, through cities to protest their right to be neo-Nazis. This doesn't happen in Britain, Spain or Ireland. So I am not sure the German approach actually works. It's commendable, but something is not quite right there either.

- Is it then a self-imposed attitude?

It's self-imposed but it's also imposed from outside. I mean the East Germans wiped the slate clean and blames all the Nazi shit on the West Germans. So when they built the Berlin Wall they called it an 'anti-fascist barrier'. So that was their way of dealing with it. Then they had the Stasi and so on. The West Germans took the blame, I guess, and they also benefited massively from development money which was pouring in from America. They held up their hands and said 'OK, we lost the war, we're really sorry, all this is not going to happen again. We'll put up plaques, we'll have memorials, we'll do this, we'll do that...' Yeah, then you still neo-Nazis marching through Berlin in 2014!

Annex 2
Interview to urban explorer Nathan Wright

7th May 2014

Nathan Wright is a British photographer who runs the Cozmic Gallery and Photo Club in Kreuzberg, Berlin. Among his multifaceted work, artistic pictures/paintings related to urban exploration predominate over everything else. In opposition to what Irish Berliner does, Wright and his crew do not agree in communicating and publicizing the sites they explore as a way of protecting them from vandalism. He represents the urban exploration scene in its purest and more hermetic sense where – even if being fascinated by the history of abandoned places – the own experience's value stands over the premise of conservation and heritagisation, marking a clear distance between the subcultural practice and any sort of social responsibility.

- As far as one can see in your website you deal with different photography topics, where does your specific interest for abandoned building come from?

I've done it predominantly all my life. When my father and I used to live in Selby, there were a lot of old RAF airfields leftovers from World War II, control towers, RAF buildings - everything just rotting away. Now there's nothing there at all. Then we moved to a village outside of Hull and as a kid I remember I was fascinated by going to empty houses; things in there give you a feeling of what it's like. We also used to go to Napoleonic forts in a village called Paull and obviously it was refurbished after World War II and it was privately owned. There was a moat so we used to come with ropes to climb the high walls and then we moved around inside the fort the whole day while the owner didn't even know we were there. We opened thick brambles and from the entrance to these tunnels you can watch down both sides, making sure you don't fall any hole. When we get to the end you get the slid on two levels, light comes in and we were the first people there since I don't know when, possibly since World War II. It was a cool

experience to be the first people in there.

- The photographic work in urban exploration idealizes the notion of ruin and decay as something beautiful. Do you think by doing so you contribute to neglect a sort of criticism to the fact that those buildings are abandoned after all? Is these building's ideal state to be abandoned or they might have some other uses?

I don't see it as a negative thing, for me I find it's a positive thing. I like some modern architecture but really going through old architecture and seeing nature is taking back. For me it's best when it takes back without being damaged by vandalism. History used to be there and at some point in life it will disappear all together. And about some other uses I ask myself, 'used for what? For example, where I do urban exploration predominantly in and around Berlin there were over a million Soviet troops, once they moved, what are you going to do with these buildings? They cost too much to run, they cost too much to repair, they cost too much to put electricity and heating. For what purpose? Just to keep it? To do what? Most especially the barracks were all built for negative purposes. There were lots of tuberculosis hospitals around the city, they were built for positive reasons but tuberculosis no longer exists and now you have the hospitals in the middle of nowhere so they are just falling to disappearance. I think it's better to leave them as they are, to rot. Nature likes these buildings, wild animals live in there, they are making their home... Nature takes everything back and that is where buildings come from: bricks are made from clay and cement comes from the earth.

- What do you think about publishing where locations are?

I don't like publicly giving away where the locations are because within a shorter period of time, if you display where they are and if it's a really good location, it can be vandalized. For example there is a hospital at Jüterbog that has the surgical lights and operation stuff and everything is getting ruined and rusty - but naturally. People think they are doing a good thing by putting the geo-coordinates and pictures of these on the internet. There is a website,

I don't want to say who they are, but they are a quite popular urbex UK-based website, and people go there and put the coordinates saying exactly where locations are. And then people go there and take the material remains to sell them on the internet, or selling them to clients, and that annoys me. Vandalism is the classical example; vandals smash whole places and as a photographer is very important the difference between natural decay and human destruction such not nice graffiti which are just not pleasing. That way it looks horrible, it's sad. I still go to *Beelitz* quite often but the first time I went there it was a magical place, it still has a good energy but I feel kind of sad when I see many parts are simply waste piles. There are a lot of photographers as well who find a location and then damage it, even in extreme cases lighting fires which is a bit dangerous, so they have their shots and nobody else can have those shots. It all goes out control. For me it was a lot better when it was common garbage, just trespassing. It was magical; all that glory is now a mess.

- As photographer, what do you think about 'Go2know' or similar business companies that gained the right to organize photo-tours in the buildings?

I hate 'Go2know', I can't stand them. They're charging 40€ to let you go into a building on a weekend and people will pay this money. They are making money out of it and I don't like them at all because they establish limitations of what you can do. What I do is to slip past security guys or sneaking in through small holes and I experience the pleasure of seeing things I wouldn't normally see. But if you make a tour they will tell you what to do. I personally like to go down to tunnels because quite often you find there things you wouldn't find upstairs. Things that got forgotten in cellars and they are normally not that vandalized. So I like to take some things - not big things, just little momentous - nothing valuable. In Poland, and friend of mine and I were caught by two security guys one with a baseball bat and the other with a 9mm automatic and they brought us to a room until police came 45 minutes later, I was kind of worried!

- So you are a person who is perfectly aware of the value of the buildings and it is precisely that what makes you not to communicate them so they are not vandalized. But at the same time,

could this lack of communication contribute to forget these places?

They'll never be forgotten because the fact I take the pictures. But I will only give information to certain people, I won't just give the information freely to anybody because not everyone deserves to go to these places, not everyone has the right to do everything. If people don't know about these places they are not going to vandalize them. Some places are quite difficult to find. Yesterday I was actually looking for places, so I am not following on the internet. I always try to find locations on my own, and when you do so it might happen that you don't find anything as it happened to me yesterday. I got lot of locations from a friend of mine who's from England, he gave me 13 locations and I made 6, he did 13 in three days!

- So when you say some people don't deserve to go to these places it's because you are afraid they could become tourist attractions like *Beelitz*. Does the cultural value rely on the fact that they are abandoned and in the moment they become well-know they could lose their attributes?

I'm fascinated by the history, every location I go I try to find as much information as I can on the internet about it. For instance *Krampnitz*, a huge vast place, that's now going renovated. It's always nice to feel that you're the first person there though you know you are not really the first person there. But when you go somewhere like *Beelitz*, it's so many people are going through it now! It's not abandoned anymore and my imagination doesn't work like that, it lost the connection. Sometimes I like to simply sit there and imagine how the place used to look like. Like in *Wünsdorf* - the last place where there were Soviet officers in Berlin. I sat on the stairs and think to myself 'this is insane, not so many years ago I would have been chased for being here, but here I am with my tripod and smoking my pipe!' And I can feel the tension and paranoia of the place, but when I see people over and over again, that stops the fate.

- At the same time you sell your works and pictures, don't they function as if they were souvenirs? It seems the ultimate meaning of the images is like saying: 'Hey, you don't know where the place is but here you have a postcard'.

The images I make aren't journalistic images, they are pieces of artworks and they take me a long time to make. I take many different exposures on a tripod and sometimes when you are working in complete darkness it takes a long while since you have to light torches because the room has no light at all. So I make a piece of art work: I am not documenting, I am making it. It is not about how the place looks but expressing how I feel it looks. Yes, I sell them and people seem to like them. I think people have always been interested in abandoned things. But when you have so many people in a place like *Beelitz*, their mere presence can make small details to be gone.

- I see you use the so-called HDR [High Dynamic Range] effect and what I've always thought is that this takes out some reality from the image and they are no longer documents of the place.

Definitely not, these are hyper real images. To me this is pretty much how I see it, your eye actually sees High Dynamic Range but a camera can't. Well, a camera can, but you have to take many shots. If a light is perfectly exposed then the shadows are very dark, there is no detail in them. But if you take many different exposures you could have details right across from highlight to shadows. The next part is the zoom mapping which gives the hyper realism and then I treat them also in Photoshop. I seek to do a cross between a painting and a photograph. There's lot of people doing this, but the truth is that there's lot of people with cameras.

- One of the excuses that urban explorers use to justify themselves is to show they are documenting these places before they are gone.

A lot of urban explorers don't. *Krampnitz* is the model example of that because it has two highlights: it has the 'casino' and the 'svastika', two separate buildings. But those buildings are right on the front and only urbex tourists hit both of them and they are off. They don't explore at all the rest of it! And *Krampnitz* is brilliant because unlike *Beelitz*, it didn't get so much vandalism. This complex has its own village, block of flats, the original 1930s barracks, etc. And nature is taking it back! When you walk in these long corridors, you are on your own or you're

coming with people, but since I am a photographer I need to go everywhere in the complex and I have to keep an eye on the security guy. So these explorers don't do the rest of *Krampnitz*, all they are interested is going inside and say 'look at this, look at that'. Lots of them have full frame cameras and none of them print anything, their images go to Flickr - 72dpi. Why would you take a full frame camera with that resolution just to see your pictures in a computer screen? I use Nikon D 300, going full frame to me is pointless.

- So urbex tourists they actually behave like if they were in some other part of the world. It really doesn't matter if the background is the Eiffel Tower or an abandoned building. Are they going there only for the picture so the exploration component is completely erased?

Exactly, they don't explore anything. I explore, and when I go to a building I'll go through every part of that building, every single part that I can possibly get into. I will see everything in that building: I go all the way up the stairs, down the stairs, every single room, cellars, looking on the corners, etc. I literally explore every detail, if there is a tunnel system I want to know every part of the tunnel by the end of the day. It took me lots of visits to fully map *Krampnitz*!

- Would your negative impression about 'Go2know' change if they invested the money they make in preserving the buildings or trying to promote a heritage interpretation?

I don't know, I just don't like them at all. I think they are exploiting the sites, they don't put anything back. I have paid a couple of times to get into places, one was 15€ and the other 10€. And when you look how 'Go2know' is charging 40€ for giving you access to a building where there is nothing in it; actually there are things but they're simply not in use. It's good that somebody is taking care against vandals. Those 15€ I paid were for a caretaker so you don't have hundreds and hundreds of people sneaking in. I don't like 'Go2know', they are only money-making bastards.

- The basic notion for urban exploration is about trespassing a property which makes it illegal,

but I found most of urban explorers really just don't care. Furthermore, by considering they are documenting a place, they think they are doing it for a good purpose. Do you find it like a sort of civil disobedience?

I've always had problems with authorities, I know it's against the law what I do but it's not a criminal offense, it's a civil offense. Places like *Krampnitz* where there is a security guy, I've never been caught there. And even like that, I go in and do what I want to do because I'm not documenting it, I'm making art. And then once I know I'm done I walk out and the security guy comes to say 'hey you!!!' but I say 'it's fine, I'm leaving...' But I do enjoy avoiding the security guard, it's a lot of fun. Getting into places without breaking a window because then you would enter into a different legal frame, so I make sure I don't break anything. I've gone to the extent I found a broken window and put the remaining pieces on the floor to do not hurt myself, and then put the glass back in, do the building and come back in the same way putting the glass back. It's a clean job and if we see the security guard it's because I see him before he sees me.

- Just by googling 'urban exploration' you might find thousand of images that seem to be similar in a way but paradoxically they all have been taken in different locations. Do you think urban exploration photography contributes to erase the particularities of the buildings and after all what you do is to take pictures of ruins in its broader sense?

The buildings here in Berlin have a darker history that the ones in Detroit for instance. You have the Nazis and the Soviets, and you cannot get darker than that. Detroit was building cars and from what I see the buildings there have been smashed the base. But the buildings here, the special ones where you find things in a room... in Detroit you don't get that they are just empty rooms. I've seen pictures of theatres, hotels, and the building from the outside looks fantastic. In Berlin, the buildings have been empty since the 1990s when the Soviets left, Detroit hasn't been empty that long. For me it's always about finding things. We went to the SED Propaganda School and it took a while to get in but we found our way. And there is a movie theatre, and you have rows of seats typically GDR and behind the seats there are these tables

that can fold off and you can read the propaganda. One of my dream places to find was the intact projection room and we found the door was locked and my friend said 'I'm not breaking the entry' and I said 'C'mon!' So in a closer inspection we realize it was a GDR lock made of plastic so it was not that hard to open it for two people. So when we went in, there were two giant projectors, two editing tables, paint brushes, all the chemicals to hand paint each negative, etc. I said 'this is incredible, absolutely incredible!' We were the first people there and within one or two months I've seen pictures of the projectors all damaged. This place has a security guard and the people doing this are photographers because vandals don't go there to vandalize, otherwise they would have vandalized the theatre as well. So we opened that door and that was the starting of it so you could blame me for being smashed.

- According to the way you tell things one could think you play the role of a contemporary archaeologist.

I've always liked old things, I love old cars, I bought lots of minis and customize them to go faster. I've always liked classic cars. Old things have a sort of soul [*he shows me some of the things he found in his urban explorations*]. I broke a bit the rule of 'taking nothing but pictures, leaving nothing but footprints'. These would be trash anyway and they come from many different locations. I found this card of a guy born in 1887 and expired in 1948 so it went through the end of Victorian times, World War I, World War II, beginning of Communism! I have also a doctor's diary here from 1929, a Nazi medical card which was lying on the floor, medical tools, etc. I found things in the Iraqi Embassy with a picture of Sadam Hussein, a book here from a hotel which as abandoned in 1989... So yes, I do break the rules.

- From the photographic point of view, I see most of your pictures are taken in the interior parts, why isn't it that common to find pictures from the exterior?

I do take pictures from the exterior parts, but the interior has more things for me. I do take pictures from the exterior but not as many as the interior. I think because anybody can pass

by an abandoned building and everybody knows how it looks like but not everyone knows how it looks like inside. For instance, I went to a gynecological practice building that had been empty since the 1980s, downstairs there were all the gynecological tools, the lights, text tubes, everything was there! You could drive past and take a picture and it doesn't look interesting at all. The inside is really interesting. There was cloths hanging in the wardrobes, the bed sheets all around, the library had books everywhere, there was wine in the wine cellar, there were rows and rows of medical files, all with this white mould on them. So you look from the building outside and you take a picture of it and it's not very pleasing to the eye. I do document it sometimes; actually I have some pictures from *Beelitz* from outside. *Krampnitz* is very difficult to take pictures from the outside because you have all the trees, and all you see is trees, it is too chaotic to make a composition. So all the interesting pictures are inside, definitely.

- One could say from the exterior part, every building seems to be abandoned – or not!

In East Germany is quite often these days! You say 'that's abandoned' and then 'oh no, there is someone living there!'

- From what I can see you support the fact of letting these buildings go. What is their fate?

Yes! Sometimes they can be renovated in a nice way, for example the old hospital in Urbanstrasse 10. You got the new hospital, the big horrible concrete building, but next to it it's the original hospital and it's been empty for some time, I've never gone inside. Two or three years ago they started renovating it, they made some apartments and houses and they did it really tastefully, the whole thing looks really nice. It's a shame for me because I cannot get in and take pictures anymore but from the outside they did a really good job. Whilst other buildings, Germany seems quite embarrassed by its Communist history and not so embarrassed by its Nazi history, and the Communist history is put under the carpet. Outside in Brandenburg there are lots of places that are completely disappearing by workers using brick-chewing machines and they have completely eradicated everything from that age. The only thing by which you

know there was something there is because the main gate stays for some reason and the rest is completely gone. Nature once more takes everything, foxes, I've seen quite a few wild boars – luckily I was a few floors up – nature loves these places! Eventually the vegetation starts to take it back, slower in some cases like the actual ruin in *Beelitz*. The real ruin was never repaired after the World War II, it was bombed and the Russians never repaired it like the rest of the complex. And over the years on the fourth floor its ghosts are hidden because it's a ruin, it's a forest! You have a whole bunch of tree bunches growing from the floor. And the building is still there... such a solid structure! Although I wouldn't advise to walk through that forest because the roots have gone through and it's slowly coming away but nature is really fighting. The building is still standing, it came through all, so I think something stay there for a long time, while for other things life comes and go.

- What comes after urban exploration? Will you get tired of it?

I've done it all my life and I never get tired of it. Walking into a room, into a building, the electric feeling you get... I'll always enjoy it! I've done it all my life, maybe not as intense as I do it now, but I still love doing it. Anything from abandoned buildings fancies my imagination.

Annex 3
Interview to 'Go2know' manager Thilo Wiebers

27th June 2014

Thilo Wiebers was born in Berlin and since he was a little kid he has been fascinated by photography and abandoned buildings. This fascination turned into a professional career and, together with a colleague, he decided to found 'Go2know'. This company focuses in offering photo-tours and photo-workshops with Berlin's abandoned buildings atmosphere as background. For this, 'Go2know' work in close cooperation with the actual owners of the sites while sharing their profits and developing managing strategies with them. 'Go2know' is currently managing nine different places in Berlin and its surroundings that involves a considerable number visitors every month. But they also became a spot of criticism within the urban exploration scene due to what it has been considered as overprized tours (40€ for around 5 hours visit), the fact of taking advantage of an uncertain transitional situation and putting in question how a potential commodification may apparently take the experience's authenticity out.

- What personal features made you to end up managing a company like Go2know?

We're two persons and we've been interested in photography since we were in school. We used to cooperate but we also had our own jobs, and there was a point when we both wanted to quit our jobs. So we thought about our common past back in mid-1980s, taking photos in abandoned places at Prezlauenberg and then we started managing a tour in *Spreepark* but we couldn't take photos there so it wasn't ideal. It was at that point when we decided to organize photo-tours in similar abandoned places.

- Since you don't own the places, how is the property or leasing status solved in this context? How does the connection between owners, 'Go2know' and clients work?

Every owner has different thoughts about it. Some owners need the money and we give part of our profits to them so they can develop something on the places. For example, at *Grabowsee Sanatorium* there's a person living there who's not actually the owner but he has his authorization to do things there. And all the money he gets from us, he uses it to develop the houses like building new roofs and so on. That's one kind of owner, the other kind only wants to sell the places and our activities became a sort of marketing. They think it's O.K. for the place to have people taking pictures and posting them on internet and that's a good thing for marketing. So every owner has a different way to picture the situation but it's more difficult to deal with this issue when it doesn't concern to private owners but public ones. In governmental properties there're more rules but at the end they all want the marketing. They all want to get some money to pay security guards.

- The company focuses in organizing photo-tours and photo-workshops, did the aestheticisation of decay become such a trendy market?

Yes, we have different people coming but our tours are specifically for photographers. They just want the nice and hidden places that nobody else can find, it's more about aesthetics. Then we have also a lot of people who are not really interested in taking photos but they want to know about the history of the places, particularly people who used to live or work there. They just want to know as much as they can about the place and also to know what's going on with the place now. But the most of our clients are photographers and also film-makers, it's all about the aesthetics.

- Do the photo-tours include any information or interpretation about the history of the place or the only final goal is to take pictures?

The final goal is to take pictures but you don't want to have the people there without knowing what they are taking pictures of. So in every photo-tour we make a short introduction of 10 or 15 minutes where we talk about the place and then we have lots of historical pictures

that we show to the people to explain about historical things, etc. It really changes from place to place: in *Beelitz* one can talk a lot while in a small factory there's only street art to find – which in a way it's also interesting to deal with.

- Do you invest any of the money you make in the places or is it only a question of 'we open the door, we do the tour, and then we all leave together'?

That's also a question of our relation with the owners. For example, once again in *Grabowsee* we help them a lot to cut trees and other issues so we don't only give money but we try to make something positive for the place. Many times we bring artists to the buildings, because a lot of owners – especially the private ones – want to create something there. The place is not in use but they want to sell it and the time it takes to sell it, they want to use it to do something like street art to develop the place. There are small problems but you can help the owners to drive something from here to there or so. But in other places the owner may well be a rich man and he's not interested in developing anything, he doesn't need our help, for him it's only a question of money. We always take care about the places so that's why we don't do tours in sites where there aren't security guards. We know that by making our tours public, the places could be destroyed if there's not security.

- Which percentage of the income is earned by you and which percentage goes to the owners?

That's really different depending on the owner. I won't tell you the exact percentage but I can only say it's very different. We take as a reference the way prices are established for film-shooting in other places. And we know we are not Hollywood! We cannot charge that much but we try to have a look on it to proceed in a similar way.

- Did abandonment become a sort of cultural value in itself so it is not interesting to invest in the conservation of places?

Undoubtedly, these places are abandoned and that's also a nice thing about them, but I think this can't be the normal use of a building. Sites shouldn't get destroyed any longer, we should always take a look to the potential new uses. Some weeks ago I went to Prypiat at Chernobyl and I saw what nature does to places like these after 20 or 30 years, it's just nature again! It's a problem that these buildings are being damaged as time passes, but I don't see it as an owner's problem. The thing is that it requires lots of funds to develop anything there so lot of people are waiting for the place to be completely destroyed so they can build a new one, that's the main problem.

- One might think that since decay and abandonment are so trendy and this situation works to attract photo-tourism, owners or even your company could state 'Let's don't do anything at all to develop the buildings, in an economic sense it's working for us!'

No, it's not working like that. Because it's only a little money what you can get from this. *Beelitz* is a good example once more: there are lots of movie filming sessions from different producers but it's not enough money to keep the situation like today. So places are getting more destroyed because these activities have an impact, also nature as I mentioned before. It's simply not possible for decay to be kept in a fixed state. And that's why you have to invest a lot of money to develop the whole thing like stopping humidity problems; you definitely don't get that much money from our photo-tours.

- Do you consider that what your company does is an ideal way of safe-guarding these buildings or is it only a transitional state to make money before a potential demolition or renovation?

That's it, we always try to use the situation we find in a place right now, we try to make money out of it – we're a company after all – and then we give money to the owner to develop the place. So the intention is not to keep the site in the same decay state any longer because it's not good for it, you have to develop it in some way. If you want to keep the beauty of the houses, I'd say they were more beautiful 100 years ago. But bring them to the former situation is

not ideal, that would cost a lot of money so we only try to make money for the owners and for us. And then, it's absolutely clear for us that the situation will change after some time, we won't be able to keep going with our photo-tours because the owner will want to build something else, that's always the plan. Every minute some buildings are left, we always find new places and it's not only about ruins, in our company there are also secret places and nature to explore too.

- One of the main critiques towards 'Go2know' is that photo-tours are overpriced, what do you have to say about this?

For us they aren't overpriced, they are actually underpriced. Most of the money is to give it to the owners. Then we have an office, we are four people working for the company and we all want to have our money and live from that, so for us it's not overpriced. But I recognize it's a lot of money for a single visitor, they're paying 40€ to get inside a ruin! It's more expensive than going to the cinema! But we cannot change it, the owners want their money, we have to live, that's it!

- 40€ is not an amount of money that a regular person would pay for visiting a building, which is your clients' profile?

Yes, I know it's not something for students and so on. We receive lot of people who are working for public institutions like police officers or firemen and you know, they cannot go anywhere illegally! The other thing is that customers appreciate our organization, they like the way we do things: we provide historical information, we can give them something to eat, something to drink, etc. It's more like an event rather than simply going there and taking pictures. A lot of people come from outside the city, worldwide.

- We cannot deny that your company's success comes from the interest in a subcultural practice like urban exploration. Do you consider that, by selling entry tickets and commodifying the visit, the experimental component of such practice could be erased?

That was never our concern, it really doesn't matter if it's legal or illegal for me. When I used to trespass buildings illegally to take photographs some years ago I could feel the atmosphere but my point was only to take nice shots. I know this from some of our customers, they like to experience the feeling that they're free, that they don't do anything illegal and don't have to keep an eye on any security guard. It's just a little bit more helpful for the people who only want to take photos. And on the other hand, the people who are seeking for an illegal atmosphere they aren't normally people who would book our tours, but I completely understand them.

- So how would you feel about a person who is trespassing the property while you are doing the tour?

If they are doing so while we are doing our tour, with our clients, then I have to tell them 'please go!' It isn't right if you have people who didn't pay while having others who paid 40€. I understand the people who want to do it illegally, they just want to trespass the place and not destroy anything at all, they behave properly. What should I say to them? I am not a police officer! If there aren't any of our customers around I normally let them pass. But we have a lot of places where the owners are having problems with people like that. If an urban explorer breaks his leg in a property and then he takes legal actions, you're making things difficult for the owner. And then I can understand the reason why the owner doesn't want urban explorers in these places. Our company can perfectly tell you 'Let's get in!' It's always a question of communication with the owner and urban explorers don't want to do that.

- Your company normally organizes tours during the weekends meaning that during the week days there's nobody to stop urban explorers from trespassing the property you are leasing. Do you feel like they are violating your business by doing so?

Not at all, because I know these people would never book our tours, so I don't feel angry about them and I don't feel supportive either. I've talked a lot with urban explorers and

we, as a company, have more possibilities because we took our time to get in touch with the owners, but I don't have bad feelings about them. I understand every situation, I understand the owners, the urban explorers and us. It's difficult to manage everything!

- One of the main goals in heritage and tourism management is the creation of a sense of community so people – including locals – can go to places not as if it was an outstanding activity but as a part of their everyday life. After the first visit, why would people come back to any of the places you manage?

For the photographers who come to our tours it's always a question of nice images, finding things that you would never find in a regular part of the city. Normally they're more interested in old abandoned buildings rather than new abandoned buildings. Last weekend I went to a place near Leipzig with a very nice castle. The castle was in the middle of the village and it was abandoned, there was nothing. And the village around is very small, very poor. They probably need only one thing to push tourism, and that could be the castle. I've seen lot of places where heritage can help to develop a whole region like in Eberswalde: you have a lot of industry culture and now they're trying to develop some industrial parks. You see it in Hessen, former industrial landscapes developed into parks and people can walk there, everything is safe, and it helped to attract a lot of tourism to cities now. They're trying that in Eberswalde and I hope it comes to a good end.

- My concern here is how we are using heritage only as a money making sector and no longer as a reason to 'create city' in a natural way.

It's like *Templehof*! The people were trying to develop the place and to erect some buildings; that could be a good starting point to support that area of the city. It would be a good thing, but people are very crazy there. I'm not so sure if I support the result of the referendum, I recognize that they have to leave some parts of the field as they are because the place has its history and it's also important for the inner climate of the city, but I think there should be the

possibility to build small houses, restaurants, etc. Those things should be allowed. I do not support the idea of not allowing any houses to be built, I think that's what they planned, to build a library, flats for rich people, etc. I am not really excited about it. I think, give it to the people and let them develop it. I don't know how to come to an end there, I'm just a normal Berliner and I know I want to keep those kind of places here, it's nice to have free places in Berlin. We have a lot of treasures, and we have to be careful with them.

- So you think there should be free places in Berlin but at the same time you founded a company that charges people to visit these places. Isn't it a restriction to their freedom?

The people who are booking our tours are free and for people who cannot go there without paying that's not freedom. I know that, and it's strange. The thing is that in Germany every place has an owner, I never found an owner in Germany that opens his place without charging, we know it but we can't change it. [*Ironically*] We should have Communism to change that so everybody would own it like in GDR!

- People who illegally trespass buildings value them a lot and they seem to be more culturally aware in comparison to some owners.

Yes, there are some owners who don't do anything because they are Jewish people who left Germany in the 1940s and they're now living in New York and they own the place here but they don't know it! The best thing for any urban explorer is to try to get contact with the owner, it's not difficult in Germany, you just have to go to some public administrations like the Cadastre and ask there. Normally you will get the contact and you can call them, it's the same way we do it. That's something I don't understand from urban explorers, they don't do that. First, they just try to do it illegally and if we catch them, then we are the bad guys.

- How do you feel about it?

At the beginning it was hard, we thought a lot about it. We have tried to talk to urban explorers but it never came to an end. It doesn't matter to me any longer, I don't pretend to state 'you're doing wrong I have the reason here' but I just intend to compare our thoughts. In any case, it really doesn't influence my job, it doesn't change anything.

- It seems like banning urban exploration is pointless.

But does urban exploration have to be always illegal? I think urban exploration can be more comfortable if you try the legal way, trying to make contact with the owner and trying to figure out what's in there. Explorers could ask 'What are you going to do with the place? Can I help?' That's urban exploration for me, it's not to go anywhere and say 'I found the best places'. It's always to make some deep thoughts about the places. That's the way I see it and maybe for some other people is another thing.

- What is the ideal future, not for your company, but for the buildings?

From building to building is a different thing, but I think especially the old buildings where you find a lot of history you have to keep them. You have to make them look nice again, you have to use them again. If there's a building from the War like *Wünsdorf-Haus der Offiziere* you can use it for historical things for universities, it's always a thing about the place. You have to keep it, you have to use it because it's our culture and our culture is getting thrown away, for nothing!

- It comes to my mind when they accomplish a renovation process and all the historical traces are erased.

There should always be a mixture. Again in *Wünsdorf*, it's really big and you could do a nice hotel for rich people and that's O.K. because they bring the money to develop the place. But you also have to keep things areas that could be open for the public. The main house in this

property could be used for rich people but inside one of the buildings there's a large swimming pool and it's the only one in a 50km-radius, students could learn how to swim there! So it would be very nice to open that for the public, the same for the theatre, there's no theatre in Wündsdorf's surroundings, it could be ideal to renovate it for the public. Maybe it's the same with the *Spreepark*, nobody knows what's going on there, but I think it would be fine if they built 10 houses for rich people while the rest of the places are for normal people.

- So you see your company as a mediator between what is happening now and what could happen in the future.

A little bit, we don't take us as main characters here. We always try to give new ideas to the owners. For example, certain owner wanted to convert the abandoned buildings into holiday flats for millionaires and a 5-stars hotel. Now, not only because of us, he's thinking about doing a building for normal people and it's nice to see that. So yes, but don't take us as if we had the last word here.

Fieldnotes

Güterbahnhof Pankow

3rd April 2014

I got off in the closest station, crossed the road that isolates Güterbahnhof from the rest of the urban fabric and I started wandering through a set of paths. Nothing is fenced in this place, it is easily accessible and, though I supposed I was doing something illegal only by going to this site, there was not a single warning that confirmed so. The complex is formed by three main structures: the chimney which is obviously visible due to its large scale, a group of one-storey constructions, and the crown jewel: the roundhouse that in former days was used so trains could turn their direction at the end of the transport line. Only after my visit I knew that in Germany there's only a similar building to this that remains, a major excuse to make the experience of getting into it even more special.

I started my exploration trying to picture a general image of the site and I decided to leave the roundhouse for the very end. I surrounded the complex and I got into the minor constructions whose only particular feature was that they were completely vandalized. Some of their rooms had been burnt and randomly I bumped into a pair of boots or a not-so-old jacket, what made me realize that this place was actually inhabited or at least it had been inhabited until recently. I was overwhelmed by the idea of such difficult situations that certain sectors of the population have to face in their everyday lives. There is a sort of marginal relation between abandoned places and the people who inhabit them, an assumed symbiosis that the rest of the society has assumed framing this under a context of forgetting. It is completely reasonable to state that this kind of places represent an uncomfortable part of how other's lives are also possible in contemporary cities. Here are the sites and here is – or was – the people, so close from us that it would only take us five minutes to walk from the nearest train station but at the same time, so far that one might say time is frozen and only people who are able to give life to these dead zones is admitted.

Getting into the roundhouse wasn't a difficult task either, an accessible broken window invited me to do so. As soon as I was inside I could perceive how the monumental scale and diaphanous space were impressing. Güterbahnhof is a building of an undoubted beauty, with tall pillars that sustain a wooden structure that covers the whole room. In this wonderful context, it was not surprising to find a young hip-hop boy who was using the atmosphere to take some pictures to his recently purchased bike. We looked at each other and we kept in silence, like an accomplice relation in which we both knew what we were doing there. Machinery, tubes, metal structures, etc. Many of the things that during former years were used to give life to the building were still standing there and in a way the complemented the industrial aesthetics of the space. They were like sculptures of a rare beauty that due to their mundane character nobody had appreciated. I took a seat in the middle of the room, below the center part of the dome to contemplate such great space of around 20 meters high and during that time I wondered if urban exploration was a way of temporary and very ephemeral occupation of the space. I was there, in a very natural position as I could have been sitting on a bench in any park. The only thing is that in this case the place was a ruin which remained at my entire disposition as the young hip-hop boy had already gone.

When I decided to leave I took a moment to look at the large amount of graffiti, many of those very talented, that covered the walls. I realized that there was also a huge door made out of rusty steel which was completely open so it was not necessary to sneak out the broken window again. I am particularly fascinated by rusty steel as a sharp material, with its patina telling you the passing time and whose qualities have been appreciated by many of our contemporary architects. In this case, the metal plates formed an angle similar to those Richard Serra's sculptures. Passing through them was an embodied experience involving the five senses to take you back once more to the real world, a world that has forgotten all this complex and which is waiting day after day for something to take place here.

Waldhaus Buch Sanatorium

13th April, 2014

When Irish Berliner brought me to this building he told me it was one of his favourites abandoned buildings in Berlin. The Sanatorium where the Nazi practices of euthanasia took place is a huge building surrounded by trees in the middle of Buch, a liveful vicinity. One just has to leave the main road and it is very easy to find a way to get into the exterior part of the complex. We knew it wouldn't be that easy to sneak in the actual building because Irish Berliner had been there before and he could only make it through a very small hole since all the windows are completely sealed.

The exterior is monumental and the nice architecture make is to be a very pleasing space. We were taking pictures thinking that it might be impossible to get it. But suddenly we saw our opportunity, one of the sealed windows had been vandalized and one could make it as long as he was in a good shape, so we tried our best and after a few minutes we were inside the corridor of the first level, not far from the main entrance. Once there, we went to the hall, a very suggesting space with two stories high, it was a space that caught all my attention because despite the flaking painting and some graffiti, it was pretty good conserved and I could only think that it was a pitty that such building was unused. Irish Berliner told me that since he had been in the building before we wanted to see the basement, a very dark space where he might find something interesting. On the other hand I said that I would prefer to explore the building looking for my own way through the staircases and regular spaces, so we said we would meet at the hall at some point.

Exploring the building by myself was a mystic experience. I walked all along the corridors in several floors, and I could never know what would I find after the next door, after the next corner. Though the building's layout was symmetrical and every floor resembled to each other, after a few turns going up the stairs I was at the highest point in the building. I was standing just

below the roof structure and it was simply beautiful, with the particular smell that only wood has. Again, everything was in a very good condition and such space made me to remember like entering to a chapel. When I wanted to find my way back to the first level I simply couldn't. It was like a laberynth and I couldn't remind the path I followed to arrived where I was. A frightening feeling invaded my body, would I be able to meet Irish Berliner again in the hall? Just before I left him in the basement he told me his mobile phone's battery had just died so there was not an alternative way to reach him. I got scared for a while thinking what he would do if I didn't show up in the meeting point. Would he try to look for me? I thought so, but what if he didn't find me? I started sweating and going around, trying to remember the way I took and making it back. Hazardously I found it.

I still had to wait for Irish Berliner once I was in the hall. We had made our own ways for more than one hour and I've never been happier to see him again when he showed up. We went to the same window where we sneaked in, this time to sneak out, and we left the hanging metal plate that served to seal the access in a way that it was difficult to figure out it was broken unless someone knew it in advance. Such is urban explorers' care for buildings. Once outside we took more pictures of the south façade and the light of the sunset gave a romantic view of the whole complex. Now I could understand why this was one of Irish Berliner's favourite places.

Pankow Schimmhalle

20th April 2014

The swimming-pool in Pankow is hidden behind some trees as if it was a shy building, like if felt shame by its ruined condition within a well-to-do neighbourhood full of nice constructions and where parents teach how to skate to their children under a quiet atmosphere. But a red and white murder tape reveals the crime of its abandonment while avoiding a potential trespassing

in a very naïve way. It is precisely in this kind of pretty populated neighbourhood, where one has to watch out to do not draw the attention of people and making sure nobody sees him. Otherwise, they could call the police and problems are guaranteed. So I easily crossed below the tape and run to look for a safe haven behind the bushes. Once the situation was quiet enough, I checked for a discreet manner to sneak in and again, it didn't seem like a difficult task. Almost every window here is completely smashed and there are multiple options and just watching out to do not hurt myself with the broken glass all around.

The space inside, rather than being beautiful is bewildering. The swimming-pool in Pankow is not a historical site, it's simply the result of failed investments during the last decades that provided a sort of space that we are used to see it in use, with people swimming and children playing. And this is the weirdest thing, there's nobody there and the pool is completely empty. It's a surreal space, all this recent architecture dating from the 1970s which has already been abandoned. If it wasn't for the presence of graffiti and vandalism, one may well say that action was taking place here until last week. I even found some sprays demonstrating that the action here and now is completely different to the one it used to be. Again, the space is diaphanous and not very high, it is not monumental or outstanding, but it is a place we assumed in use according to our everyday life expectations but in this case it seems that apocalypse already happened. Isn't it a cultural value in itself?

I continued exploring the site and found the rest-room area after crossing several glass doors that were broken in purpose, it was actually like walking on a glass sea. Here, the lockers are part of those quotidian elements that, not being architectural, they reflect the former use, they represent the human presence that is no longer. I walked down the stairs to go to the basement and the only thing I found was more lockers which in this case had been burnt. I also found some notebooks with number inscriptions, like swimming statistics related to trainings.

There's not much more. The abandonment of the swimming-pool and its presence in a consolidated urban fabric of the city tells a lot about how these ghost spaces still exist while being completely

neglected from any renovation development. I thought it could be a cool place, with the pool's void that may well be used as a skate complex and, instead of that, it slowly deteriorates due to vandalism. It's ruined little by little, perhaps waiting to be one of those nice buildings that surround it one day. I see it in another way, where abandonment is part of the history of the building and where parents could teach their children how to skate here some day.

Iraqi Embassy

22nd May 2014

Iraqi Embassy is a place that only by its name already sounds appealing. But it is not only an Embassy, which makes it even more mysterious since we normally don't have easy access to embassies. Moreover it's the Iraqi one, what brings us back to the days of Sadam Hussein, the Cold War and all the uncomfortable stories than our imagination can recall. Also, when one is checking the place in urban exploration forums to prepare the visit, it is clear that this place is one of those which is very interesting to people with a fascination for finding documents, notebooks, etc. As any other Embassy, it is located in a nice area of the city and it is a modernist style building surrounded by similar buildings that rather they were never abandoned or they have been recently restored. So the Iraqi Embassy is the single exeption here, the ugly neighbour in the street. With all these peculiar features, it is not surprising that during my whole visit I encountered two couples of explorers that were undisturbedly taking photographs. I bumped one of the couples suddenly after crossing a door and they expressed a terrible fright. I don't remember how many times I had to say 'Kein Problem' to calm them down.

As Irish Berliner had written in his website, this building looks like if it was suddenly abandoned and diplomats and workers had to rush. A human tingling went through my body when I saw a pair of pans just there in a kitchen that has been abandoned for decades. The rest reminded me

one of those Bauhaus houses with large balconies and huge windows that brought light into the main staircase and to each of the rooms. Certainly, one can find a large amount of documents written in Arab on the whole building but it seems that the telephones and typewriters that I had seen in blog's pictures had been already picked or stolen. In any case, it was impressing when I entered into a room where the floor was covered with paper sheets and just in the middle of it there was an empty chair. It was a beautiful and poetic image, like a set for a photography session, like an art installation.

The place is nice in a modern sense and it has a backyard that, if it wasn't for the fierce wild vegetation swallowing the garden, one might say it was like a Biergarten. There was actually some chairs and couches outside like if the place had been recently used for a friend gathering or a barbeque. It's true that I had many expectations about the site for all I had read before and what its name inspired me, but then I started to feel that it was only a mere modern construction which was abandoned. That was probably my fault for trying to know too much about the building before visiting it, creating high expectations that once I was inside didn't let my imagination flow. I promised myself that I would never do that again.

Staring at the buildings in front, one can easily foresee the fate that is waiting for this building. One day, it will be a healthy building, as if nothing here ever happened. Jumping the fence back to get out to complex I had to watch out to do not hurt myself with the barbed wire, the contemporary symbol of what it was once the Cold War.

Barracks and Pilot Training Camp at Jüterbog

30th May 2014

Jüterbog is a 15000-people town located 65km south of Berlin. I had arrived at its train station

after a 2-hours trip from Cottbus and I was waiting for Irish Berliner to join me as he was coming directly from the big city. As soon as I took a look at the station, the first thing I encountered was an octagonal touristic panel erected to welcome visitors. In six of its eight sides there were black and white pictures of medieval buildings to remark the old heritage to be found there. In another side there were advertisements of small business companies operating in the town and finally, in the last side one could read the historical information about Jüterbog. As I can barely understand German, my attention was put on the numbers and what I could get from those is that the town is very proud of its more than 1000-years existence - with special attention on buildings dating from the 17th century. Ironically, there was not a single remark on what we had come to visit, no mention to the abandoned Soviet buildings at all!

As far as we knew at that moment, in Jüterbog there is an immense derelict Soviet heritage spread around its surroundings: barracks, military camps, a pilot training school and a former hospital. We cycled for about 4km until we arrived to a huge complex just beside a smaller settlement called Neues Lager. Once inside - and ignoring every 'Entritt Verboten!' warning – we mostly saw abandoned barracks, storages, garages, etc. Many of the buildings there had their main door open and we just had to push them to feel invited to get in. The floor in certain rooms had suffered strong convex deformations, like if small hills were hidden under the tiles. I wondered what could that be and Irish Berliner told me that most probably water infiltrations made the wood used for the structure to expand, originating such peculiar shapes that looked like undulating contemporary artworks. In some other buildings I saw – literally - trees growing from a cement-made floor. I witnessed what weather conditions and nature had been able to do in 20-years abandonment and I could not even imagine what they would do in 100 or 1000 years.

Suddenly, while I was taking a picture of a broken window with some Russian inscriptions on it, I heard strange voices coming from not that far. We were not alone. Right after that, we saw a whole family group – dog included - that was simply wandering on a sunny day and, instead of trying to hide behind any building, we approached them. Irish Berliner politely said 'Hallo' and

he asked if they knew how the rest of the complex looked like and if there were interesting buildings to visit. The older women replied 'Yes, but it is everything ruined' in a failed attempt to disappoint us. What did 'normal people' think we were looking for? Then, another two members of the family in their thirties – one of them with several piercings in his ears - appeared from one of the ruined buildings wearing full Soviet uniforms as if they were dress up for the occasion. They carried expensive cameras and it seemed they were having lot of fun in such peculiar site. Seeing they were wearing Soviet uniforms was quite shocking - like if they were in the correct place but completely out of historical context. I guess they were not such 'normal people' after all. These two persons were actually young enough so they did not fully experience GDR times at all; this made me think the extent to which is weird to feel nostalgia for something you never lived but, what is heritage after all?

We kept walking and we found a sort of industrial machinery for processing gas just in middle of the complex. It was actually working it definitely seemed like recently-installed stuff. Irish Berliner warned me that we should be careful since there could be surveillance cameras at least in this part. That was a strange feeling: we had already been walking around for about two hours and his warning reminded me that what we were doing was something illegal. I had completely forgotten that. We were just wandering with a curious-minded attitude, taking pictures and at this point, our behaviour had become a natural thing for me. How could that be illegal? How stupid could be to have security in a place which is completely trashed?

We decided to leave the barracks so to cycle a couple of kilometres more up to the next part of our journey, at the neighbouring Altes Lager. That was also a huge complex taken by the Soviet Army to use it as a Pilot Training Camp. It remains abandoned although – separating two main areas - there is a football field where a local sport association plays today. Buildings there match the Prussian architectural standards from the end of 19th century. They are made of bricks painted in a nice yellow tone which makes a pleasant contrast with the green of vegetation taking back the whole complex as if it was a real jungle. Every window in its several constructions had been removed and they had been sealed with wooden panels. In any case,

we realized that the main building – a nice semicircular 4-storey structure – was accessible by the main entrance. As a welcome present, we found a mural painted on the wall that represented a Soviet soldier. Then, we were even-more fascinated when discovering that the central part of the building was occupied by a theatre and suddenly I felt like having found an untouched pharaoh's tomb. I told Irish Berliner: 'Wow! I feel like if I was a contemporary archaeologist!' and he replied: 'Yeah... That's the usual feeling!' Although it was very dark and there was nothing more than rows of seats and the stage, it was amazing to encounter such unexpected rich spatiality in the building. We visited the rest of the rooms at different levels and we found Soviet newspapers and graffiti. I could not understand them but '1990' accompanied by Cyrillic inscriptions were quite common so I guess that might be the year when soldiers left.

We continued exploring the site, making our way through windows and climbing a bit when it was required. There was also a former coal processing plant with all its industrial machinery and black dust everywhere. By that time of the day we were getting really dirty. Irish Berliner told me 'being dirty is a sign of a good excursion' and I remembered when I used to be a kid and have fun despite being completely stained. I knew my mother would then wash my clothes; that day I knew I had to do it by my own.

This second part of the journey was much more interesting for Irish Berliner - and as well for me. He said he was happy to have gone to the Pilot Training Camp where buildings were richer than in our previous trespassing at the barracks although he recognized that the 'act of going' is already an experience in itself and 'no trips are ever wasted'. Certainly we only had a rough idea of where we were going that day, but the fact of having low expectations makes you always to feel happy about what you accomplish. When we were about to leave we saw some people playing in the football field and we had a sit for a while as we wanted to wash our hands and check if we could buy a beer in what seemed to be a bar. Suddenly, the coach of the team asked us to leave because we were not members of the sport association. For the second time on that day someone had to remind me that we had been for hours in a place where we should not have been.

Abandoned Bowling Alley

8th June 2014

Getting inside this complex at this time of the year is like exploring a dense jungle. The huge concrete structure that in former days was a bowling alley is only visible through the tree branches. It is a solid box with no windows, as any other bowling alley. What it used to be the basement is the only part of the building that has no walls and this means it's the only part of the building that I could clearly see: tons of debris and a burnt car. It had rained a lot during the previous days so the basement was basically a huge puddle on which I had to walk cautiously. I easily found the staircase that brought me to the alley in the up floor and from then on I was embedded in complete darkness with the exception of small light spots filtering through the holes of a ruined roof.

I didn't have to see too much to know that the aspect of this building was desolating. What once was a polish wooden floor was no more than a concrete surface full of trash, the metal structure in the roof was bending down due to gravity and the frightening pieces were too close to my head, a real danger. I could hear drops of water filling the space with their sound and some of them I felt them dropping on my shoulders. Total chaos, total destruction. Without a shadow of doubt, that was the most damaged place I had visited in my entire life and honestly, I hope not to visit any other similar to this.

Usually, when I am in an abandoned building, probably due to my background as an architect, I tend not to think too much in how the place was once inhabited but rather in imagining how it could be re-used in the future. But in this case, witnessing such level of destruction and involved in an unsecured atmosphere completely dark, I couldn't help thinking that the bowling alley was a hopeless case. I don't know who's the owner of this complex, but if by any chance he has the intention of refurbishing it, I guess he's already late, too late. It's true that once more it's not a historical place with an important history behind, but at the same time it's difficult to imagine that

new stories will develop here in the future. On the contrary, if the owner is only waiting for total devastation so to demolish the building and selling an empty area, I can tell that vandalism, time and weather are giving him a hand.

Here is how property works in these days, a mere act of registrations, an act of owning that makes you to carry the legitimate word to establish the fate of the buildings that form our cities. And it's all run by investment interests, ignoring the view of neighbours on whether they like to live just besides a building in such conditions where children could easily enter and get hurt. Liberalism at its peak, a way of conceiving property where one looks for his own interests based on the right to own and the freedom to do with it whatever you consider – where letting the architecture to rot until imminent disappearance is simply another valid option as long as it's profitable. Is this the city we have always dreamt about? I don't know, but it's the city we have.

Böhmisches Brauhaus in Friedrichshain

20th June 2014

As Irish Berliner has written in his post 'Böhmisches Brauhaus: World's Saddest Bohemian Brewery', in this place beer was brewed since 1968 until the end of World War II. Since then, it has been used as wine depot, electrical substation or sports center. The last person left on 2001 although part of the complex has been converted into a hotel, luxury apartments and a conference center by a Hamburg developer. In any case, I knew nothing about this in purpose before I visited it because I didn't want this information to influence my experience so I could create my own narrative about the building. The only thing I knew was that it is one of those places which are strangely located in a very central part of Berlin, no more than 15 minutes walking from Alexanderplatz. When I arrived there, I realized there was a construction site full of workers just beside the building but fortunately this had nothing to do with what I wanted to see.

I just entered the site, praying in silence so workers didn't kick me out and I was certainly lucky. As soon as I saw the opportunity, I hid behind the trees and start walking around the building, just to map its exterior huge scale before I found a broken window to jump through. And I did.

First thing I saw was a huge multi-storey room, pretty high, completely diaphanous and completely trashed. The roof was seriously damaged with a sort of cloths hanging everywhere. The floor was full of debris and I had to pay attention on how to take my next step. Some metal plates were laying there, folded in strange shapes like a Frank Gehry's masterpiece but in this case they were result of a deterioration process. Such huge room and this set of elements made actually a very sad and pleasing composition. All that completely smashed – it has been one of the sites with the poorest condition I ever visited – was still beautiful. I tried to make pictures of the room to capture such involving aesthetics in a single shot but soon I realized it would be impossible. I couldn't condensate everything I was witnessing in one image. Every picture would only be a tiny testimony, I couldn't express what my feelings were only by showing a picture to someone else afterwards. It was an embodied experience, something you cannot easily communicate. All those elements there made a very particular atmosphere, half natural decay half human vandalism, but everything as a consequence of abandonment and passing time. This hazardous composition was extremely appealing and I wondered if this could be achieved by any of the best interior designers in the world. I doubt so; this scenario of chaos has to be very difficult to conceive in advance.

I kept wandering and exploring the building, which was kind of complex because it has several modules - each one with a different height. I looked up the staircase and I was impressed that there were so many storey and every room I entered in there was a new collection of recent graffiti, like if it was a do-it-yourself art gallery. I couldn't imagine that at the top there could be such a nice rooftop. Berlin is a very flat city and from there I had a 360 degrees panoramic view where I could see the skyline dominated by Alexanderplatz's tower. I stood there for a while, enjoying the sight and making sure nobody from the adjacent flats could see me so they didn't call the Polizei. I was on the top and in a way I had the feeling I had conquered the building. I

had no previous expectations about the visit and this made me to fully enjoy such trip.

Once I was leaving the place I heard the sound of bells ringing coming from the tower of a church not far from the brewery. I looked through a window with no glass and I saw it. It was a magic moment: I was in an abandoned building and at the same time watching the main representation of traditional heritage, the tower of a church filling the silence with its music. But I wasn't in the wrong place, the real heritage was where I was.

Nazi Villa and Anatomic Institute

26th June 2014

From an urban exploration point of view this day was an epic fail but the events I'm about to recount have a certain interest anyway.

When I went to the area of Berlin-Steglitz, I couldn't imagine that the Nazi Villa was a building located in such picturesque neighbourhood formed by nice buildings, planted trees and the emerging dynamic activity of any other Thursday. When I arrived to the exact location I realized that the villa occupied a big lot with condos at both sides while just in front there's a school. The street was full of people, some of them were running, the others were coming from doing groceries and at the school entrance there were some parents waiting for their children to pick them up. Definetely, it wasn't the best occasion to jump the fence of the only clear spot where I could get in: the villa's main entrance where everyone could see me. With the camera around my neck, I decided to wait there until the situation was calmer. After 10 or 15 minutes there were still lot of people around and I realized that such dynamic street would keep being like that during a long while, so I got impatient. It was then when I had the feeling that people couldn't stop looking at me, I guess I was kind of suspicious. What is a young student at the entrance of an

abandoned Nazi Villa doing while the rest just come and go?

Since I admitted that it would have been insane to try to jump the main fence so anyone could have drawn my attention, I opted to trespass the front-yard of the apartments building just beside. I walked for some meters to check the fence on the side that divides both lots and when I considered nobody was looking at me I sneak in the fence pretty easily. But the problem was that I had actually been seen by someone. When not even 10 seconds had passed, and of course I hadn't have time to take any single pictures of the villa, an old man who was very altered approach to me from the other side of the fence where I had been just a moment before. He had also a camera around his neck and he was holding a sort of ID or some institutional identification. He started yielding German words from which I could only understand 'Polizei' and 'Vandalismus'. I was very frightened although it was evident that due to his age he was not a policeman, but I still didn't know if he was saying that he would call the police or he had already done so. In order to calm him down I said I didn't speak German but his reaction to that was even worse making gestures with his arms indicating me to jump the fence back to the his side. While I was obeying I was repeating many times 'Kein Problem'. Once I was next to him I started walking out the yard. Under no condition I would have tried to argue with the old man and trying to convince him that I was not a vandal but I simply wanted to take some pictures. His behavior was not like the one from a person who wants to make an agreement. Moreover, I was afraid the a police patrol was in its way so as soon as I was outside the complex I simply started running like a fool, trying to get lost in the laberynth of adjacent streets. Before that, I looked back for the last time to the beautiful building made out of red bricks which had been seriously damaged by bombs in 1944 and was never renovated but being taken by nature. I felt bad because I wasn't even able to take a picture from the exterior. I also saw the old man's face a little bit disappointed but I was sure that he would be proud of himself for safe-guarding his neighbourhood from a 'vandal'.

My intention was to go as further as I could from there just in case a police patrol was around the area. Walking about 30 minutes I arrived to the Anatomic Institute also in Steglitz. Once

there I didn't take the same risks again. It is also a building in the middle of an even more crowded street and pretty well fenced. I still was frightened by the previous situation so I just took some pictures from the exterior and decided not to look for more problems during that day. I had mixed feelings but mostly I felt rage. Rage for having being called 'vandal', a name that I consider I didn't deserve and ultimately I felt frustration because such a healthy activity like taking pictures could be misunderstood by the rest of the society as something completely illegal. The old man who addressed to me in the Nazi Villa was clearly a neighbour from that area but surely I had a greater cultural awareness towards that piece of heritage than a person who was living next to it. This incomprehension was killing me. On the other hand I also felt shame. It is interesting how urban exploration is related to the conquest of places and that makes us to feel proud and full of stories and pictures to show to our relatives. It's a question of empowerment for doing something that normal people don't do. But when I was caught by the old man I had been sent off with the tail between my legs, like if my honour had been violated. Now I wonder, what else could I've done? Any other decision would have brought me in front of a policeman and in a way I understood than being caught is as part of urban exploration as place-hacking a building.

Epic fail, but interesting feelings though.

Dammsmühle Castle and Governmental Klinik

6th July 2014

Irish Berliner and I met on the train station at Bornholmestr. The truth is that the train to go some kilometres north Berlin was crowded since the weather was nice and people wanted to spend the Sunday hanging out the – apparently – very popular lakes in that area. Our intention was obviously different, we wanted to visit an abandoned castle built at the end of 19th century that

the Stasi had taken during the Cold War era. The train was full of people and each of those had a bike, pretty much like us. It was such a stressing trip that we missed our stop and we got off in the next one, so we had to ride for a longer time than we expected.

We had our GPS and we were following some bike routes until we arrived to a lake, the castle shouldn't be far from there. We made some tours around and we finally saw it, like hidden behind some trees but dominating the place with its monumentality. It was surprising that along the area there were actually lot of people just wandering, taking pictures to the castle and some of them were looking for a way to get in. But it was definitely a hard task that day, every window and door were completely sealed with metal plates, the castle didn't have any single weak spot. It didn't take too long until we understood that getting in was an impossible mission unless we had some ropes and climbing material because the windows in the second storey were open. 'This is what I'd call a defeat' said Irish Berliner and I thought that when you approach a visit in this way there's no such thing as defeat. Of course it would have been better to sneak in, the fact of trespassing is what makes the difference between urban explorers and any other visitor but, what else could we do? Irish Berliner told me that he would try some other time and he would make sure he was bringing the proper material to climb. He was definitely more disappointed than I was. So we basically took some pictures from the outside, we talked to some people we found and we left the place. There was a 8km ride to our next stop.

The Governmental Klinik was also a hard place to get in. Irish Berliner had told me that he had been there before and during his last visit the alarm went on and he had to leave the complex in a rush. Some security guards showed up few minutes later and when they found him wandering around they asked him if he had been inside. Of course he said 'No' and there wasn't any problem at all, but this gives an idea of the kind of place we were about to enter. We went to the main gate – which could have been the easiest way to have access to the complex, not to the building yet – but there was a car there and a man in his 60s there. He wasn't wearing any uniform so we assumed he wasn't a security guard. Irish Berliner started a conversation with him and the man said that this Klinik was used in GDR times to host members of the Government,

even Honecker had a private space for himself there! It seemed that the man Irish Berliner was talking to was one of those nostalgic persons from GDR times, apparently he was disappointed because one the Wall felt, everything in what he believed, the way he had been raised, was suddenly the wrong way. We decided not to disturb his consciousness and we refuse to simply jump the gate in front of such nostalgic person. So we made some turns and once we found a refuge among the trees we jump a fence on the side.

Those orange lights that indicate the presence of an alarm were at the top of the building and one could see many of those. We didn't want to be responsible for turning them on so we started to walk very cautious and we decided to simply take pictures of the exterior part – once more. We had the feeling that as soon as we touch a door or find our way through a window the alarm would start to ring. Still, the visit was very interesting, the architecture was very particular with solid concrete volumes and the place, although abandoned, seemed pretty new. I couldn't understand that such building, with a very good conservation condition, could be simply standing there letting it to be more decrepit every day. Irish Berliner then told me that its closure was rather a political decision. I said to myself 'Well yes, but now what?', and thinking about such waste we left the area, not having trespassed any building that day but no alarms to worry about either.

Finally, Irish Berliner and I were walking down the street and we saw a huge industrial complex that was being renovated. It looked fancy because the works seemed to be about to finish and one of those monumental advertising posters was placed in the main entrance detailing the features of the new apartments that were being constructed. I asked Irish Berliner he could figure out the cost of each unit and he told me that some days ago he had checked on the website of a similar project that they were selling condos from 500,000€. He said: 'These guys are crazy, in Berlin there's not too much people who can afford such prices. These are clearly addressed to external investors who basically offer the apartment for renting the day after the buy them'. Such is progress in the city.

Der Bierpinsel and Haus der Statistik

11th July 2014

When I went to these buildings, which are not even in the same area of the city, I already knew I would never get it because I had read that it's almost impossible; so I had a sort of defeating feeling in advance. Irish Berliner had recently updated his post about Der Bierpinesel making clear that every entrance had been sealed, and pretty much the same for the former house of Stasi archives. In any case, both buildings had a monumental appealing even to appreciate them from the street.

I started my journey in Steglitz where Bierpinsel is located. Wandering the main street one cannot see anything special apart from the liveful atmosphere of the area. Suddenly a multi-colour concrete mass starts appearing behind some buildings. There it is, like an UFO in the middle of a city which isn't as futurist as it. It's simply a fascinating piece for anyone who loves architecture in every sense, and precisely, weird architecture. Bierpinsel is a gigantic polyhedron that flows in the air only sustained by a concrete staircase. People pass by ignoring it as if they were already used to its presence, which is completely out of context and that makes it even more suggesting. I approached to it as much as I could and started to take pictures like a fool. I walked up the staircase knowing there would be a point where I couldn't go further very easy. I left behind a couple of homeless people who made their place at the first landing of the stair by marking their territory with cardboards, sleeping-bags and beer cans: it's the perfect refuge to be unnoticed in the middle of the big city. I pass by without staring at them, no disturbing, maximum respect for those who made a home in such peculiar architecture. As I walk up I found a fence that makes impossible to keep going unless you want to risk your life since trying to jump around could also mean a vertical drop of several meters. I don't intend to take the risk since I also assume that the doors after the fence will be completely sealed.

But I'm more than happy with such brief visit, I consider such building deserves it. Once more

I pass by the homeless refuge and start thinking about the hard conditions they face. How is it possible that the city neglects both its heritage and this people? I take my way back and keep taking photos, both presences are indisputable.

Then I go directly to Mitte, Alexanderplatz train stop. It only takes a five-minutes walk to arrive to this concrete monster in the corner of Karl Marx Alle, a privileged location in the city for a building that remains unused. Once more I know I'm not going to make it but just to say I tried, I pulled some doors to check if they were locked. Of course they were. I walked around for some time taking pictures of this huge building and its monumental scale, a GDR's palace and example of Communist architecture. An old lady who's walking her dog comes to me and points something up there but she didn't open her mouth. I wonder if she was nostalgic for the former days or she was happy for the building to be closed down.