

EPICENTRE – Kurfürstenstraße / Potsdamer Straße 120, 124, 109, 111

Fredrik Torisson

The street corner explored by *Epicentre* is, or has been, a *hinterland* – both literally as the area was located on the periphery of West Berlin during the division, as well as figuratively: the hinterland is also a metaphor for absence and presence. This absence and presence is the most fascinating aspect of the locality explored in the exhibition. In terms of urban design, the site is a mess, simultaneously characterised by absence and presence. The street corner is by no means empty, and yet the presence (until the art world decided to make it into another Berlin artist- hotspot) was mainly centred on vice and shady activities – hinterland activities. The art circus provided another presence, but still a presence superimposed on the absence historically defining for this urban space. The result is paradoxical with multiple interpretations, and understandings of the context remain juxtaposed, at least for the moment. A dominant narrative is absent for the time being; it has yet to emerge and subjugate the space. It is this contradictory reality that Fassler sets out to explore.

What you see is what you get. As a starting point, this seems simple enough, if somewhat prosaic. It is a catchphrase made perhaps even more apt by the notoriety of Kurfürstenstraße's sex trade. However, as soon as we pay attention to the words of the phrase more closely, the image becomes more complex. *What you see is what you get* – in other words, we all experience a space differently. What to some appears a derelict street corner of questionable vice is to others part of the epicentre of the Berlin art-phenomenon. Berlin is a city in both rapid and constant transformation – one could just as well read this corner as a scar from that transformation – resulting in a proliferation of ways of seeing the city in a multiplicity of (equally true, or rather untrue) realities, realities coloured by memory, by preconceptions, by prejudices, and by anticipations. Bluntly put: Who you are defines your reality, and that is truer in Berlin than in most places. What you see is what you get, conversely: what you don't see, you don't get.

What you see is what you get. Fassler's work is a two-part operation – seeing what is there and then re-presenting this and only this. The first part, seeing, using the sensory apparatus and the body to experience a space without resorting to abstractions or idealism, requires rigour and a sound empirical starting point – the body and its sensory apparatus. It is, to borrow a concept from French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, a question of documenting *perceived space*. Perceived space is experiential space, it is lived space and where we spend our everyday. In Lefebvre's work it is contrasted with *conceived space*,

the space of urban planners and architects, among others. Conceived space is abstract, meaning that it is a representation of reality where all the complexity of the everyday is reduced to statistics and abstract numbers.

The tension between perceived space and conceived space is essential here as the perceived space is re-presented back to us through the techniques and materials commonly associated with architectural practice and the production of conceived space: plans, cardboard scale models and so on. This is the second part of the operation; *what you get*. Yet – and this is essential – there is invariably a slight shift. The cardboard model still uses the measurements of perception, both in terms of measurement, paces, and in terms of perspective, the facades are presented as though the onlooker were coming up from the U-Bahn rather than the abstract and flat *en face* that habitually characterises the architectural counterpart. The *perceived space* is superimposed on the *conceived space* – as opposed to the other way round which is considered *de rigueur* – in a move that challenges our habits of mind to accept the conceived as the ‘true’ in terms of spatial production. As a result, the mapping opens up for another reading of both absence and presence in the hinterland that is Potsdamer Straße/Kurfürstenstraße.

Catalogue Essay.

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