Cultures of dissent and the production of heterogeneous space

A colourful neighbourhood in Dresden, Germany

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Abstract

My thesis is an exploration of cultural life in the city part Äussere Neustadt in Dresden, capital of the former East German state Saxony. The city part hosts a lively and youthful scene of a range of subcultural practices and lifestyles that, in local and emic discourses, are broadly termed as “alternative”. Although strongly interwoven with the dissenting youth movements in the west in the 1960s/-70s, vast systems of “alternative” signification have developed, and today “alternative culture” circulates as a global cultural conception thanks to the development of transnational mediation technologies. I presuppose, though, that “alternative” culture only makes sense to real, living and sensing human beings when embedded in local life worlds. Thus, the thesis seeks to illustrate various ways by which the “alternative culture”-idea is made real through practices of ‘locality production’ (Appadurai 1996), that is, in social forms of remembering and co-memorating local history, in neighbourhood festival-spectacles, in amateur art-practices, such as street art and musical jamming, and in various ‘carenvalesque’ (Bakhtin 1968) street parades.

I furthermore discuss the broader implications ideas and practices “alternative” culture have on the organisation of urban spaces, treating them as vehicles of cultural heterogenisation (Hannerz 1992). The thesis refers to such particular localities where social systems are integrated through the cultivation of ideas and practices of sociocultural dissent, a phenomenon that is especially relevant in modern urban situations. The field case is used as an example in a discussion of why such localities are produced, and how they persist, in spite of housing highly transitory populations. I argue that the key factor is the investment of sociocultural dissent as an imagined substance of the locality itself. Thus, place is presented as the prime referential medium by which processes of shaping and reproducing stable relationships of meaning and identity are mediated.
Thanks to my friends in Äussere Neustadt
who so graciously opened their lives to me,
to my supervisor Iver for invaluable guidance,
and to family, friends, and my dear Susi
for support and love.
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Introduction

Sketching the field

“The world is too round to sit still in a corner.”

- Poster in a window of an umsonst Laden\(^1\) in Äussere Neustadt, Dresden

During summer holiday travels in eastern Germany in June 2005 my German girlfriend and I made a visit to Dresden, the capital of the province Saxony. Once the home of a grandiose baroque royalty, later a booming industrial town, Dresden suffered greatly from WWII bombardment and the neglect of history in socialist city management. After the German reunion in 1990, however, and mainly due to its unforgotten fame as “the Florence of die Elbe”, Dresden has received considerable funding, from both state and private investors, directed towards restoring and preserving its position as a European cultural metropolis. We were, thus, mainly interested in its widely advertised baroque monuments, such as the pleasure palace Zwinger, the Semper opera and the Frauenkirch. The latter of these was by that time famous due to the action of Dresden's citizen who, over 15 years, and funded by private donations, had restored it from all but a WWII-demolished rubble to a church of baroque glory.

Via hearsay, we had been recommended to seek accommodations in Neustadt (“Newtown”) north of the river, somewhat off the charter tour-infested old town area, and a place that was supposed to be more popular with younger people. In our tour guide we were further intrigued by descriptions such as “[The Neustadt neighbourhoods] pulse with the lively energy of Dresden's young alternative scene”

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\(^1\) A shop where all articles are donated redundant second hand articles and are redistributed for free. The freeshop business idea is based on anti-capitalist and recycling idealism.
and, “It seems like the entire Neustadt spends the day anticipating 10pm. Ten years ago (...) [it] was a maze of grey streets lined with tired, crumbling buildings. Now a spontaneous, alternative community has sprung up in the 50 bars crammed into the square kilometre (...)” (Attanutcci 2004:159,168). Making our way to the backpacker hostel Lollis Homestay, recommended by our guidebook, we dropped “the snail room”, “the “3D-wonderland room” and “the water bubble room” in favour of “the Egyptian room”, where we found the walls warmly decorated in brown/yellow/orange desert landscapes displaying motifs of pyramids, Pharaohs and Egyptian mythology. Accepting an offer from our young, long-haired host, we borrowed a couple of old and rusty bikes and set off through the narrow, cobble-stoned streets that sprawl between the many blocks of graffiti-plastered, Bismarck-age buildings that dominate the area, and which are now and then punctuated by locally designed play grounds. Along the way we passed many small retail shops variably fronting trendy urban clothes, books, locally manufactured handicrafts, vinyl records and water pipes, a range of gastronomic establishments - for example Turkish, Afghan, Iraqi, Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, African, US, Irish and Italian kitchens - as well as various small bars, clubs, concert places and cafés. Making a break, we found our way into the small, lush backyard of the café Planwirtschaft (“planned economy”) where we could savor dishes made from regional agricultural bio-produce and take our pick from 20 kinds of oriental tea sorts.

Through our days in Dresden, we thus came to know that its baroque image was but a small part of its face, and that beneath the “high” culture sported in brochures and on postcards, there also existed a bustling, local cultural scene which had markedly little connection to its wider reputation. The peak of this realization came as we were about to leave the city for a few days in Prague, when our host strongly advised us to remain over the weekend, as it happened to be the time for the yearly local festival Bunte Republik Neustadt (“colourful republic New Town”). Deciding to stay, we were surprised to see how Neustadt’s streets suddenly turned into a huge festival area, comprising outdoor rock concert stages; techno music dance floors; beer stalls; cocktail-bars; stalls selling various pastries, snacks and small dishes; fairs where peddlers sold ethnic crafts, batik clothing and other small wares; flea markets;
installations made by artist cooperatives; various local idealist NGO advertisement stalls; theatre– and– clown– stalls for children; various wandering entertainers and jugglers; jovial costumed parades; collectively organized street-breakfasts and so forth. All in all we learned that the humdrum of the BRN attracted, in total, close to 200 000 young people from the city proper, other parts of Germany and even from abroad. My experience of the area, capped by the witnessing of this event, made it clear to me that it was the site of a peculiar, flourishing cultural life, thereby awakening a curiosity to pierce through the immediacy of the tourist gaze impression and investigate the causes and traits of this cultural abundance.

An anthropological format

In this study, cultural expression serves as the basic point of inquiry through which a broader understanding of the features of human life in Äussere Neustadt is sought. Furthermore, I treat cultural expression as a means by which space can be conceptualized and delineated into distinct places to the extent that it condenses the signification of such expressions. I thereby understand Äussere Neustadt in a sosiosemantic way, that is, as a place which comprises the interrelation of its topographic and geographic features, the cultural practices taking place there, as well as any discursive practice referring to it. This stance is inspired by writers such as Chris Tilley (1994) and Arjun Appadurai (1996), of whom the latter is also concerned with the peculiar ways in which space and cultural practice are interrelated under the conditions of late modernity and the forces globalization. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson claim that: “The irony of these times (...) is that as actual places and localities become more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient.” (Gupta & Ferguson 1992:10). In a world where an intensified flow of people, capital, commodities and cultural ideas and images challenges the boundaries of place, a means to cope is to defend and
produce place-distinctiveness through the active and affective involvement that cultural practice is.

Conceptualizing cultural practice as a strategy for prevailing in a struggle over space must, however, be moderated, as it easily leads to the reduction of cultural expressions to mere inversions a hegemonic ‘other’. More recent resistance-literature tends to lean on neo-Marxist inspired theories of the fine grained, de-institutionalized dynamics of power in social fields, such as for example the everyday forms of power in discourse discussed by Michel Foucault (for example 1978) or James Scott’s illumination of everyday forms of resistance and hidden transcripts (1985). In spite of the unquestionable value of these and other related works, Michael F. Brown warns us that “(...) a myopic focus on resistance (...) can easily blind us to zones of complicity and (...) of sui generis creativity.” (Brown 1996:733). Thus, even though this analysis engages a field where cultural life flourishes with explicitly critical political references, reducing these to mere reflexes of hegemony is a gross undervaluation. Although the manifestation of culture was, as we shall see, in many cases propelled by a dialectic towards an ‘other’ that was envisioned as structurally more powerful, I am just as much concerned to show that their unfolding also abided to various other, equally important dynamics, such as striving for senses of belonging, the affective experience of communal celebration, the will to creative imagination and the thrills of transformation and transcendence.

To avoid the various connotations inflicted upon resistance-studies by recent academic discourse, I rather label many cultural phenomena described in this study as a forms of cultural ‘dissent’, a term which both incorporates reactive and creative dynamics and avoids to overstate the significance clear-cut, homologous and hegemonic ‘other’s. Thus, I follow the invitation from Ulf Hannerz to conceptualize complex field sites in terms of ‘homogeneity’ versus ‘heterogeneity’ (Hannerz 1992), and my particular focus is on the social dynamics of a field in which a marked cultural heterogeneity is at display. To give this cultural heterogeneity a spatial dimension, I suggest that it can be fruitfully understood as a ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault 1967). By this term, Foucault pointed to heterogeneous sites as anchoring points for a
multiple set of spaces, each incompatible with the others. Some examples he gave were cinemas, theatres, gardens, zoos, museums, circuses and folk-festivals. I suggest that ‘heterotopia’ has relevance for any site that displays relatively intense heterogeneous features, for example, as in our case, culturally diverse neighbourhoods. Within macro-societal spaces, Foucault conceptualised heterotopia as micro-cosmoses of society, encompassing, representing and mirroring various societal super-structures, thus also being generic sites of structural transformation.

The thesis explores how Äussere Neustadt can be seen as pole of cultural creativity, trend innovation, identity transformation and political opposition within the space of Dresden.

In the following pages, I examine various examples of how counter-culturalism is manifested in both the minds and practices of Äussere Neustadt inhabitants and I explore how these manifestations work to define it as a distinct, meaningful place. Some overarching research questions are: How do ideas and cultural practices merge to produce shared sense of place? Why have counter-culturalist ethoses and worldviews come to such significance in this particular locality? How is a local brand of counter-culturalism created, reproduced and transformed? In what ways do the particular histories that conjoin in Äussere Neustadt impact on its contemporary meaning and cultural life? To which extent are the counter-cultural phenomena occurring in the area products of counter-hegemonic struggles? And correspondingly, to what extent can they be said to be products of internal dynamics? Which are these?

Finally, the thesis suggests a broader scope of comparison, concluding in a discussion of how the case of Äussere Neustadt might be of value when examining other urban spaces of counter-culture. Are there areas of other cities which have significant similarities to Äussere Neustadt, and, if so, which? Why do counter-culturalized spaces occur and remain within many contemporary urban settings? Do they have particular functions for the unfolding of human life within the conditions of late modern urban settings? What might such functions be?

The next chapter accounts for some of the more general historical and demographical features of the field, as well as my own particular engagement within it. It also
includes a discussion of methodical challenges and how these were addressed. In chapter two, local history is readdressed from an emic point of view to illustrate how a counter-culturalist discourse usurps local historical imagination. Chapter three outlines the topographies of a local landscape of ideas and values in a discussion of the ways these interrelate to local cultural practices, as well as to senses of place. Chapter four discusses two examples of local art practice. These show how counter-culturalist ideas and values are incorporated into engaged aesthetic subjects, and consequently how they also become grounded into the very matter of the city. In chapter five, three different cases of public ritual are treated as examples of how the discussed ideas and values reproduce through feats of collective, cultural performances.

Brief contemplations on toils and fruits of resistance

“Indeed it is painful when buds burst, painful both for what grows and what constraints.”

- Karin Boye, from the poem “Indeed it is painful when buds burst”

At the heart of this study lies a genuine respect and fascination for the creative capacity of human life. Through my study of cultural life in Äussere Neustadt, I was struck by how it seemed to inhere an insistence to unfold in a myriad of shapes and forms. Later anthropological studies of marginalization tend to conceptualize the marginalized as disempowered subjects, supplementing their analyses with calls for justice. In many cases, such perspectives are just and appropriate. Nevertheless, I encourage the reader of this work to condone any victimizing associations, instead focusing on the flourishing life which sociocultural marginalisation can bring about. Across the world, insistence on difference is a central driving force of the boundlessness of cultural innovation. Often, this insistence intensifies under
conditions of pressure. Thus, expansions of cultural creativity are often rooted in situations of power disjuncture.

Without understating the need for a politically engaged anthropology, I hope that this study can contribute to a style of studying sociocultural marginalization-phenomena that has a less pessimistic perspective. This requires a shift of focus from the pains and grievances that the subjects of marginalization experience to a more fine-grained scrutiny of the dynamics inherent in the ways and strategies they develop to meet, process and overcome their disempowered positions. Neo-Marxist and post-colonial anthropology has at times lost sight of the positive, generative effects power struggles have on cultural production, mainly due to a cultural pessimism regarding the forces of globalisation, and to an overt fixation on oppression and victimization. Developing a constructive anthropological focus on the resilience of creativity in processes of coping with domination is a means to encourage and empower efforts developed by marginalized actors themselves. It furthermore reconnects to the classical disciplinary respect and fascination towards the multiplicity and freshness of the ever-expanding flux of human cultural life.
Chapter I: Contexts

This chapter provides some of the most significant historical and demographical circumstances influencing contemporary Äussere Neustadt, giving the empirical narratives and cases described in the following chapters contextual ground. These general circumstances lead on to a discussion of my concrete, methodological engagement in the field, that is, my choice of informants and arenas of interaction, the problems that the field posed to the use of anthropological research methods, how these problems were resolved, and the type and analytical scope of the data produced.

Historical contours and post-Wende senses of place

“Äussere Neustadt is not a city part like the others. To German order-fanatics it’s an abomination, to nostalgics a balm, to politicians a problem or a nuisance, magnet for travel bureaus, journalists and speculators, to many – accordingly – too loud or too quiet, trouble spot, adventure playground, boulevard, battlefield, biotope, reservation, ruin, grid square, object of desire. For many, (...) Äussere Neustadt is quite unsentimentally Heimat.”

- Gregor Kunz, first and only BRN-monarch, from an article in the local street magazine Anton, 1991

Although archaeologists have found traces of human settlement dating back several thousand years on the sandy northern bank of the river Elbe that today is called Neustadt, I will here refer to the most recent 300 years during which Neustadt became an integrated part of the city of Dresden.
In 1701, Dresden’s epic, baroque king, August the strong, whilst ruling a Saxon kingdom in bloom, sanctioned settlement on the north side of the river. About 100 years later the settlement had grown from a commercial outpost to a town in its own right, and was formally included in Dresden, acquiring the name Atonstadt (Jauslin 1997). Throughout the 19th century it saw extensive industrial development, as Dresden became a strong dynamo in the industrialization of Bismarck-Germany. As in many other German cities, its contemporary architecture mainly stems from the late 19th century Bismarck-era (popularly called die Gründerzeit), a time marked by socio-political stability and booming economic growth. The streets are lined with 4-5 storey buildings, preferring spacey backyards over broad plazas, forming a grid-work of narrow alleys (Blockrandbebauung). Style-wise, the buildings resound with the neo-romantic and avant-garde architectural fashions prevalent during the Bismarck period.

Due to its drawn back location on the north side of the river, the area, especially the northernmost rim, escaped the bombings of the WWII largely unscathed. It was around this time that the name Neustadt and the differentiation between an “outer” (Äussere), northernmost part, and an “inner” (Innere) part was established. Due to the vast destruction of the old town area, the name “new town” is somehow misleading, as most of its contemporary structures are older than the now restored old town. After the WWII, Dresden was incorporated in the Soviet occupation zone, which later on developed into the German Democratic Republic (GDR), East Germany.

Rather than pursuing renovation and restoration, the GDR-state sponsored the construction of modern, Eastern-Block-style block-buildings (Plattenbauten), whilst leaving areas such as Äussere Neustadt for gradual decay. In the 1970s and 80s, like in many other Gründerzeit-quarters in GDR cities, the advanced state of decay, and the availability of housing with modern sanitary facilities elsewhere urged many residents to move away. Due to lack of funds to renovate the old buildings, as well as the socialist ideological preference for modern architecture, in the 1980s the city council decided to level large parts of the area and supplant it with Plattenbauten. However, funding issues caused these to be indeterminately suspended. Meanwhile,
the opening up of empty housing had attracted an erratic, disorganized, and partially illegal resettlement by groups of young, intellectual and bohemian people. These had grown up under the moderation of control on cultural policies under Honecker during the 1970s (Urbank 34:2004). Like many German intellectuals of the day, they nurtured a romanticised sense of Gründerzeit-architecture, and protecting the area became a cause of opposition to the GDR-authorities. The first phase of gentrifying the neighbourhood had been entered, as various middle-class agents had started replacing the former working classes.

In the summer of 1989, a group of local activists formed “die Interessen Gemeinschaft Äußere Neustadt”\(^2\), a civil grass-root organization dedicated to halting the razing plans and encouraging modern renovation instead (Urbank 2004:35). In the tumults following die Wende that occurred in the autumn of the same year, IG ÄN was able to get these plans dismissed, and the area was subsequently, formally established as an area of sanitation. The massive sanitary upgrading of the area which followed over the next decade was largely funded by private, in many cases West-German capital, as the real estate was mostly privatized.

In the summer of 1990, inhabitants loosely associated by way of a leftist political scene, organized a festival which has become a peak event in the local historical consciousness. Under the title “Bunte Republik Neustadt”, translating “Colourful Republic New Town”, an important foundational stone was laid in the architecture of a local counter-culture (this event is discussed further in chapter 2). The initials BRN did in themselves represent a satiric protest against the newly reunited German state, the BRD (Bundesrepublik Deutschlands). BRN has been celebrated in early summer every year thereafter, and from being a small event mainly by and for the local inhabitants, it has, in the later years, attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

As the sanitation and privatization, as well as the growth of the BRN-festival indicates, as the local space has been liberalized, post-Wende Äußere Neustadt has

\(^2\) “The intrest assosciation of Äußere Neustadt”.

gentrified rapidly. Its contemporary, widespread reputation as a Kneipenviertel (“pub/bar/cafè-quarter”) stems from a steady growth in the number of gastronomic enterprises that has both fuelled, and become fuelled by its increasingly popular hype. The prototypical Neustädter Kneipen were established in Wende-days. These were small, illegal establishments that combined the serving of drinks and light foods with some form of artistic aspiration. An early example was the popular Gallery-Cafè “die Bronxx”, where the owner had hired a professional artist to paint the interior in flourishing colours (Urbank 2004:52). Throughout the following decade, the number of gastronomies increased from a bare dozen to more than a hundred. Simultaneously, a varied retail market has cropped up, comprising various clothing stores of urban, alternative and exotic styles, head shops, record stores, tattoo studios, hairdressers, book shops and so forth. Although most of these new places attempt to connect to the “enterprise/art”-style lain down by the early Kneipen, the development has been met with ambivalent reactions, as many are seen as exploiting the authentic flair of the area for the sake of commercial profit. Today, the masses of people who come to the area to explore its gastronomic and cultural life can navigate it by the help of a range of nightlife-guides and Kneipen-surfers.

Since 1990, increased sympathies for rightist political groups have led to Äussere Neustadt also experiencing sparks of the rising tensions between leftist and rightist radical political groups in post-Wende Eastern Germany. One example is the aforementioned “die Bronxx”, which, on the new years night 1990/91, was completely burned out after being set on fire by rightist radicals (Urbank 2004:52). Such groups have also attempted to stage provocative marches through the area. In some of the recent BRN-celebrations, there have been a few incidents of open clashes between rightist and leftist groups, also involving considerable police forces. A result has been an increased policing of the area, especially around the BRN. A general malcontent expressed by certain inhabitants, regarding the unrest and litter that the increased commerce and night life has brought along, has led to regulations on the opening hours of gastronomies. Currently there is an ongoing discussion as to whether surveillance cameras should be installed in the area, due to a few episodes of violence as last summer between visiting drunken youngsters and the police.
Through a diachronic study of various local and extra-local print media, Urbank has distilled a set of typical images circulating the discourse of the area. She shows a shift in popular opinions throughout the 1990s. In the early and middle years of the last decade it was dominated by images such as “scruffy-quarter”, “threatened quarter”, “island” and “tumult-quarter”. These have since evolved gradually into today’s images: “contrast-quarter”, “quarter with a special flair”, “colourful quarter” and “Kneipen – and – amusement quarter” (Urbank 2004: 44-48). Thus there has been a shift in the general public discourse from viewing Äußere Neustadt as an area of disturbance, danger and obscurity to an area of the exoticism, plurality and fun. However, an image that has been cultivated and reproduced throughout the whole post-Wende epoch is that of “a quarter with a special identity”. As one informant tellingly informed me, “Neustadt is a city within the city”. The processes of gentrification, social and cultural pluralisation and commercialization are intertwined in strong tendencies to mythologize the area, constructing it as a place of difference relative to the larger city context.
Demographic features

“The average Dresden-Tourist: 57 years
- consumer, hot dog, Zwinger and naturally
the most beautiful brewery in Germany³,
could be the father or mother of the typical
Neustadt inhabitant: 32 years
- producer, Döner⁴, shisha⁵, art and beats
and/or radicalized activist.”

- From the Neustadter satirical street magazine Der Knüller⁶

Considering its centuries-long tradition of bustling commerce and industry, a mixed
demography is not new to Äussere Neustadt. Throughout history, it has variably been
home to shop-owners and merchants, aristocrats and bourgeoisie, industrialists and
land-owners, workers of blue and white collars, craftsmen and artists, as well as
various sociocultural dissidents. Nevertheless, the particular conditions of a decaying
Gründerzeit-architecture and an increasing vacancy in the years prior to die Wende,
the subsequent sanitary upgrading and the return of the Gründerzeit-style to fashion
and the following intensified immigration, have produced the special demographic
features of contemporary Äussere Neustadt.

With nearly 14000 inhabitants housed within roughly one square kilometre, it is the
most densely populated part of the city⁷. It also has the highest number of foreigners,

³ The brewery of the internationally acclaimed beer Radeberger, so self-titled in commercial rhetoric.
⁴ A cheap Turkish fast-food dish, typically lamb meat wrapped in bread with a spicy sauce.
⁵ Arab style water pipe.
⁶ “The blockbuster”.
⁷ This number, as well as the following statistical information, is extracted from the database of Landeshauptstadt Dresden (2006) (http://www.dresden.de/de/02/040_Statistik.php).
as 8.3% of the inhabitants are foreign citizens (as opposed to the total city average of 4%). The majority of its population are between 20 and 40 years of age, with an average of 32.1 years, lower than any other part of Dresden. The average period of residence is 4.38 years, indicating an intense flow of people in and out of the area. More than 70% of the residents live in single-apartment-households, of which a considerable portion is presumed to be Wohngemeinschäfte (single flats where several people live together, sharing the rental costs). The unemployment rate, currently hovering around 11%, is somewhat lower than the total city average, which lies just above 15%. A gross employment rate of 43% indicates that a good portion of Äussere Neustadt’s residents are in the process of education. That nearly 70% of the adult residents are registered as singles strengthens the picture of a youthful, cosmopolitan and liberal environment. As of political sympathies, in the latest ballots of the 2004 regional elections, the majority of votes were shared between the Greens (die Grünen) and the Social Democrats (SPD), with the Greens slightly ahead. The broad sympathy for the Greens and their environmentalist politics is a special trait of the Äussere Neustadt population, as the Greens tend to be a minority party in most other areas.

The pluralisation of Äussere Neustadt through the massive popularization following die Wende, easily renders superficial any attempts to generalize its contemporary appearance and composition beyond the mere statistical facts. A surging social flux makes the area a highly heterogeneous environment, a heterogeneity which in itself is widely celebrated as a signifier of local distinctiveness. A stroll through the area confirms its reputation as a quarter with a specially vibrant life, a place which houses a wide range of people of whom agreeably can be fitted into the labels “alternative“ and “colourful”.
On methods and positioning in the field

How is it possible to approach such a complex, large-scale, dynamic and heterogeneous field as an anthropologist researcher? From the beginning it was clear that, although I wished to use the concrete city part as a geographical frame for my study, I would not within the scope of a half years fieldwork manage to produce an exhaustive, cross-sectional account of the array of social and cultural worlds manifesting in the daily lives across the area. Thus, to study the interrelations between agents, practices and place I had to limit myself to a particular selection of informants whom I evaluated to hold a certain representativeness as to how such interrelations were produced more generally in the area. This study is therefore first and foremost made in rather than of the city (Southall 1998:7), although the analysis also suggests some more general perspectives on the urban dynamics reflecting in the case material. In this respect it flows into the broad tradition of community studies in urban anthropology.

Quickly spotting “alternative” and “colourful” as key emic concepts, both in relation to place and selves, I set out to find a group of informants whom I deemed had a personal engagement with these. I ended up living together with two students in their early 20s in a WG in the centre of the city part, whom, upon questions, expressed an affinitive perception of a local “alternative” culture, and whose self-painted, rainbow-coloured kitchen in itself was a telling tale of their identification with a homely colourfulness. As many other young students in the area, they had moved in from smaller towns in the region within the last couple of years, abandoning life as adolescents in their middle-class families to start an independent urban life as students at the city university. Both had affinities for arts, one being a student of landscape architecture, the other an amateur bass player. Through these two I got acquainted to their loose network of peers and started participating in their everyday activities, such as informal homely leisure gatherings, at street-corners, in parks, in clubs and so forth. Within these networks, and as a consequence of my own skills as a
guitar player I got deep access to a local network of amateur musicians, which allowed me to participate in various practice/jam-sessions and public musical performances. Although my informants were well aware of my role as a researcher, the fact that I achieved the roles as a guitar player and fellow explorer of the cultural amusements in the area gave me access to many informal, backstage arenas. The outcome is a rich variety of data of my informants’ everyday lives, involving consumption patterns, social and cultural practices, and ideal and moral discourses. Insights were gained through prolonged, empathic interaction, involving the co-experience of the problems, joys, constraints and opportunities that flavoured and gave direction to their life-worlds.

Beyond this primary circle of informants I attended various local public events, such as meetings organized by idealistic, political and religious groups, openings of art exhibitions, concerts, street parades, and city festivals. Although I strived for deep participation also in these arenas, my position was more observational, as deep participation in social fields relies upon closer, more tediously built relations to the contexts and the people within them. Therefore, understandings of the more emotional, intuitive aspects these events might suffer weaknesses. Broad written accounts and photographic material, nevertheless, provide a rich, supplementary basis for sociocultural interpretation of these events.

I furthermore established a secondary informant circle constituted by a set of people whom I saw as somehow having a deeper, more direct and elaborated relationship to Äussere Neustadt. These included activists in local grass root organisations, local artists, owners of/workers in particular clubs and pubs, organisers of various neighbourhood events, festivals and museums, long time street personalities and so forth. These people I judge as various local ‘cultural specialists’. (Turner 1964:21). Supplementing my day to day interaction with these various informants are several informal interviews, directly addressing their thoughts and relationships to the city part and its cultural life.
Aside from informant interaction, I spent much time exploring the material appearances of the city part, building up broad written accounts, as well as extensive photographic material of architecture, streetscapes, street art and a choice of significant sites, such as parks, backyards, street corners, city squares, clubs, concert arenas, museums, churches etc. Evaluations of their significance was based on their appearing significance to my informants, as well as their importance in larger local discourses and practices. Belonging to this data-bulk is also a mass of printed material, such as flyers, pamphlets, postcards, stickers, calendars, photo-books, tourist-guides, newspaper articles, city magazines, historical documents and so forth, as well as internet material, such as the web profiles of local institutions and blogs on local issues.

In sum, I was able to build up an empirical base marked by the distinctive depth of the anthropological gaze, yet also holding a relatively wide horizon. In it, both fields of variation and fields of comparation are reflected (Barth 1999). The study does not pretend to fully account for all the social and cultural phenomena of Äussere Neustadt, nor does it attempt to present some exhaustive truth about it. First of all, the mass of events and people passing through the field was far too voluminous for one anthropological observer to record through a half years fieldwork. Secondly, many of these events are vastly affected by relations spanning into various extra-local geographical and cultural realms, leaving presentations of local cultural life as exclusively contained and maintained by integral connections bluntly inaccurate. Just as other late modern settings affected by the expansion of mass mediation and the increasing flows of people, things and ideas across borders, Äussere Neustadt remains an open and multiply contested site. Still, I believe I have managed to explore and understand significant circumstances of the peculiar reputation and cultural life of the area. The embedding of my primary informants is typical for many of its inhabitants: People with young, middle-class rural/suburban backgrounds, having lived in the area for up to a few years, aspiring to higher degree education and having amateur involvements in practices of art. Moreover, I assume that several of my secondary circle informants, through their broad and lasting commitment to the area, incorporate
its cultural and ideal characteristics in a profound sense. Together, all these empirical intakes provide a multi-perspectival observational ground for further analysis.

Ulf Hannerz has suggested that one way to study complex fields such as cities is to identify and examine forces of homogenization and heterogenisation (Hannerz 1992). Äussere Neustadt, a field reverberant with counter-cultural practices, can be considered a place where this struggle is relatively intense and visible. In my fieldwork I have minded how various trans-local, homogenetic forces inflicted the lives of neighbourhood residents, and which effects they produced within their life-worlds. Thus, my observations bear witness to how contemporary societal heterogenisation manifests in the practices of everyday urban lives.
Chapter II: Histories of Äussere Neustadt

“Every day of German history is one day too much!”

- Leftist slogan spray painted on a building in the city part

In the year of 2006 Landeshauptstadt Dresden arranged for a major historical celebration of its achievement of formal status as a city in 1206. The event was widely advertised under the label Dresden 800, and was supported by a broad variety of partners ranging from local bourgeoisie NGOs such as Dresdner Geschichtsverein e.V. (Dresden History union) to national commercial enterprises, such as Rheingas Handel GmbH & Co (a German energy giant based in the Rhine area). The hope that such a grandiose historical advertisement would increase the market value of the city, thereby stimulating local industries and attracting more visitors and capital, was an uncontroversial argument in public discourses of the event. Official advertising was dominated by a call for city inhabitants to join in the fest (“party”) and to play a role in shaping the future identity of Dresden. A series of projects were staged throughout the year, such as festivals of classical music, open air pop-concerts, public lectures and literature readings, medieval markets, parades, firework shows and photo contests.

Upon entering the field, one of my ambitions was to examine how this celebration was conducted locally in Äussere Neustadt, producing an analysis informed by recent theories of the relationships between embodied history, memory and sociality. A base recognition in such theory is that history is variably conceptualized across social groups, that is, history is seen as a process whereby groups embedded in specific social and historical contexts narrate particular histories through collective practices of remembering. From post-socialist literature on the former GDR, particularly from Elisabeth A. Ten Dyke’s study of the intersecting memory works of GDR-era Dresden in the lives of local inhabitants in the post-Wende 1990s (Dyke 2001), I had
learned that *die Wende* would be a particularly important reference point. Arriving and settling in the field I was disappointed to find that the 800-years celebration was rather tepidly received in *Äussere Neustadt*. The official logo appeared erratically in the local newspaper *die Neustadt*, usually featuring random micro-historical narratives from the city archives. I also observed it at a few concerts, mainly during the *BRN*-festival (see below). However, the impression I got through participating in the local everyday life was that the majority of the inhabitants remained largely ignorant of the whole spectacle. In the lives and practices of my informants it seemed a non-topic. When any reference was made, it was usually limited to mildly derogatory judgements or ‘absurdifying’ mockery. After a while, my initial disappointment turned into puzzlement and I started asking myself why such a grandly advertised and generously funded event reverberated so opaquely in the area.

Due to the fact that my fieldwork was largely limited to one particular neighbourhood I am in a poor position to evaluate in detail the impact of the 800th anniversary on the wider population of the city. However, it was clear that engagement varied across the city, and that the project seemed to resonate particularly weak amongst the people of *Äussere Neustadt*. To the extent it did appear here, it seemed to be as various alternative narratives of history. This gives rise to a series of questions of sociotemporal variation: Why did the *NeustädterInnen* identify so poorly with the jubilee? Why was ignorance the reaction of choice? When it was referred, why was ironic degradation the typical style? What do these reactions tell us of a historical consciousness amongst the inhabitants of the area? Were there alternate historical narratives pervading the neighbourhood? If so, how were they structured?

To understand indigenous identification between locality and history in contemporary *Äussere Neustadt* it is first crucial to examine some particular local historical events following in the wake of *die Wende*, which have come to dominate the image of the neighbourhood to such an extent that I will argue they have achieved a mythic stature. Questioning whether the prevalence of a particular local historical consciousness can be identified, I will examine an example of how a long time local resident referred and conceptualized local history in relation to the 800-years
celebration. Wrapping up the chapter, I will examine some celebratory practices through which processes of localizing, maintaining and elaborating a distinct historical narrative of the neighbourhood seemed to revolve.

**Bitter-sweet resistance and the birth of an origin myth**

The broad literature on post-socialism has shown that for vast numbers of people living within the former eastern bloc, *die Wende* was not merely a political, but also a major social and cultural transition that caused deep ruptures in a vast array of social spheres (Verdery 1996, Behrdahl 2000, Hann 2002). Times of intensified social transition usually give rise to heightened retrospective attention, becoming subjected to prolonged and expansive social remembering. Lasting celebration, debate and conflict is the ambiguous mnemonic legacy of most historical revolutions. It is therefore unsurprising that *die Wende* is still a prevalent theme; both in private and public spheres of life in the former GDR, and that it will probably remain so in the foreseeable future. It is important here to remind the reader that, in the memories of eastern German people, *die Wende* has a myriad of local geographical reference points, and, thus, is represented by much more than the fall of the Berlin Wall. Within the collective memories of particular social groups, *die Wende* acquires spatial significance in relation to many other places (whether buildings or areas), such as the Nikolai-church in Leipzig⁸ and *Prenzlauer Berg* in Berlin⁹. In many cases it is the events in these local places which define *die Wende*’s most significant imprints on the works of social memory. This is particularly true where people lean on spatial

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⁸ Throughout the 1980s, congregations gathered here regularly to pray and at the same time express their opposition to the regime, inspiring the national church-based opposition which brought on the nationwide Monday demonstration movement. A “peace column” has been raised here in memory of the events.

⁹ Large groups of punks who moved into this area in the wake of the fall of the wall, occupying the empty housing of the area. This led to an immediate period of increased unrest and various clashes with the police. Punk subculture still co-memorate these events through films and music.
belonging for personal identification. Where identity merges with place, the remembrance of local history intermingles significantly in processes of defining self and ‘other’. We shall now, therefore, ground die Wende as a local historical event of Äussere Neustadt.

In the 1980s, empty housing increased in Äussere Neustadt due to the decaying sanitary standards of the century-old building mass and the attraction of newly built Plattenbauten (see chapter 1). Jana Urbank shows how this opened a free-space in Dresden, which in turn attracted groups of people pursuing “alternative” lifestyles (see next chapter). Within the local youth-and-sports centre Martin-Andersen-Nexö, which today bears the name die Scheune (lit. “the barn”) and is the most prominent concert stage in the locality, a grass-root network of rock groups, painters, songwriters, actors and writers developed (Urbank 34:2004). These groups were the local representatives of the intellectual current of leftist opposers-of-the-state in East Germany, who not so much envisioned a unified Germany as the creation of a democratically reformed, socialist GDR state.

A range of Wende-analysts have shown how the East German reformist movement was both marginal and immature, unprepared and out of touch with the general popular sentiment of the time (Huyssen 1991, Lewis 1992, Joppke 1995). Thus, it was unable to effect their wanted reform and preserve GDR sovereignty. The sudden turn of events in 1989/90 and the following reunion caused widespread confusion and disappointment amongst east-German intellectuals, as well as a sense of bitter apathy due to their inability to influence the political development.

In Äussere Neustadt in the summer of 1990, a group of people belonging to the aforementioned local alternative scene responded with humour to the unpredicted transition by organizing a neighbourhood festival around an ironic proclamation of the city part as Bunte Republik Neustadt (“colourful republic New Town”)¹¹. The

¹⁰ Modern east-block style prefabricated buildings.

¹¹ The following information stems largely from the first issue of the Schild Zeitung, discussed and elaborated through talks with long-time residents.
name was a playful distortion of the abbreviation of the newly united Germany (BRD, “Bundesrepublik Deutschlands” - BRN). It was celebrated the weekend of the union of the two separate east/west-currencies into one currency, the D-mark, signifying a protest against the imposition of a new macro-political structure replacing that which had fallen. For the festival, a provisional government consisting of a cabinet of 12 ministers, bearing satirical assignments such as “minister of un-culture and submarines” and “minister of occasions of insubordination”, was appointed. In a public ceremony in front of die Scheune, one of the cabinet members was appointed as “monarch without portfolio”. The provisional government crafted a humorous list of anti-political decrees such as “Decree nr. 1 of peace”, stating that:

“In the total territory of BRN, as well as in a radius of 40076, 6 km\(^{12}\) around the BRN, production, carrying, use and sale of weapons is strictly forbidden.”

, or the third decree of “human rights”, implementing the UN human rights, whilst supplementing the 24. article (right to recreation and spare time) with the following expansion:

“Every human has the right to laziness. Every human has the right to sleep out properly.”

The decrees were sent to the city council, inviting the mayor to come on a diplomatic visit in an atmosphere of friendship and mutual respect (which he actually did!). Within the merry festival-atmosphere, the combination of neighbourhood romantics and the mocking spirit also produced a theatre (Projecttheater), a local currency (Neustadt Mark) as well as a newspaper (Schild Zeitung).

The festival had a large local appeal, leading to the organization of the second BRN-festival already in the fall of the same year. In the following years the celebration of BRN has become an annual tradition which has exploded in magnitude. Nevertheless,

\(^{12}\) = the circumference of the earth.
soon after the BRN of 1993, the king abdicated and the ministry was dissolved because they felt the original intent and feeling of the festival had become corrupted by foreign elements. Onwards throughout the 1990s, different local groups have tried to fill the role as BRN-supervisors, but most have pulled out after one or two years of involvement. Apart from the fact that BRN today has come to attract a stupendous amount of various interested actors, it seems as if any attempt to centralize the management of the festival is hindered by the fact that it would impede the principles of creativity, chaos, dissent and opposition inherent in the humorous ideology, which has formed the basic structure of BRN-conduct.

Thus, the organization of the BRN festival has moved from centralized supervision to de-centralized co-ordination through overlapping networks of private entrepreneurs and various local and regional interest groups. In 2001 and 2002, a set of violent clashes between police and erratic groups of radical leftist youth, variously termed Linken, Autonomen and Punks in local discourse, led to outcries from city politicians to impose stronger measures of control on the festival. Thus, in the latest years the state police has increased its supervising presence. Recent years BRN has gathered up to 200 000 people from all over Germany and even from abroad, becoming one of the biggest out-door events in the country. Its popular image is reproduced through practices which attempt to imitate the particular spirit conceptualized through the imagining of the events of Äussere Neustadt in the summer of 1990, the first BRN-festival remaining the key historical point of reference.

Through the annual BRN-festival, the historical narrative of BRN anno 1990 is variously reaffirmed so that myth of origin is moulded and reproduced in processes of introspective historical narration. Later in this chapter I give some concrete examples of contemporary BRN practices, following Connerton’s point that social remembering happens through ritual performance (1989:59). Now we shall leave BRN for a moment and turn back to the 800-years celebration to examine how historical narration also can arise dialectically in relation to other such narratives.
Managing a myth. A grass root NGO.

“Archaeologists date the findings of the river front of contemporary Neustadt, which confirm the earliest settlements, to around 2500 BC. Therefore we can with right confirm for the later city “Old Dresden” and the contemporary Neustadt that we can be proud of a more than 4000 year long history of settlement. ‘We’ received the right as city in 1403, which again was withdrawn in 1549 because Mortiz, duke and Kurfürst of Saxony joined the two cities (incorporation)... It’s a pity that our 600-year celebration in 2003 turned out so small that people hardly noticed it, or what?!”

- From 2006-calendar published by Republik Neustatt e.V.

Via local hearsay, I got related to and had several informal talks with Volker, the head of the volunteer neighbourhood NGO Republik Neustatt e.V. RN was founded in 2005 by half a dozen of young people related through a shared sense of Äussere Neustadt as Heimat\(^\text{13}\), as well as a feeling of unsettledness that certain post-Wende development trends in the neighbourhood threaten to its cultural uniqueness. Briefly summarized, these threats are represented by foreign elements, such as commercial enterprises, noisy, party-minded youngsters from the neighbouring city parts, and inquisitive tourists, all parts of the gentrification of the area during the latest 15 years. Their response was to organize various neighbourhood initiatives and campaigns, such as distributing questionnaires in local Kneipen, administering web-sites for public discussions, arranging sports tournaments, distributing t-shirts and sweaters advertising local pride, initiating demonstrations to extra-political involvement in the area, as well as actively engaging in the organization and administration of the BRN-festival.

\(^{13}\) This term, literally meaning “home”, springs out of German romanticism. It is somewhat stronger and has an air of mysticism to it, referring to the existence of an essential bond between an individual and a place (usually the place of birth).
The members were handling the fact that their neighbourhood necessarily would be in flux due to its popularity pragmatically; nevertheless they saw it as their mission to act as caretakers of the local residents and preserve its unique, authentic culture and atmosphere, ensuring that the changes did not destroy it. Hence, they for example spoke of their work as “development aid”, as in their recently proclaimed declaration of the *Unabhängigen Nordunion (UN)* (“Independent Northunion”), an initiative whereby they wanted to monitor and intervene in the preparation and celebration of the *BRN*-festival. An excerpt from the declaration reads: “The ideal is to associate a traditional, multicultural and (at once) typical party by and for the Neustädter/Innen\(^{14}\), even with the influences of today.”\(^{15}\). Note also how this initiative connects to the tradition of political satiric expression, masking a message of local autonomy; the abbreviation *UN* is a play on the name of the United Nations. The fact that the prominent old town of Dresden is located on the south side of the river whilst Äußere Neustadt is located on the north side suggests that the humorous label “Independent Northunion” is part of the reconstruction of a divisive south-north relationship which works metonymically to strengthen the imagined conception of Äußere Neustadt as a radically different place.

One afternoon in early June I went to a local *Kneipe* called *Groove Station* to meet Volker. He had from the beginning been open and interested in my project, probably seeing a chance to influence my research through his engagement with the neighbourhood. I had been invited to come to *Groove Station* this evening to attend an informal public session where agents who wished to set up private arrangements on the streets to the coming *BRN*-festival could report their idea and receive counselling. Although holding no formal authority, Volker had been in dialogue with the public authorities and acquired knowledge of the formal rules regulating the use of public space during the festival. Through the counselling he got an overview over a selection of grass-root *BRN*-projects, and had a chance to influence the individual

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\(^{14}\) Men and women living in Äußere Neustadt.

\(^{15}\) [http://www.mobilmachung.com/brn/downloads/text06.pdf](http://www.mobilmachung.com/brn/downloads/text06.pdf)
organizers with his views on how to best set up their projects. Volker was, as so often, dressed in one of the black hooded sweaters that RN had gotten manufactured, sporting various prints playing on the image of the neighbourhood. This one showed several simple, iconographic figures, one swaggering drunkenly through the streets with a beer bottle in the hands, one puking, an third littering, all set within a red circle with a wry line drawn across so as to resemble a prohibition sign, gross fonts reading: “NO PROLL\textsuperscript{16}-TOURISTS IN DIE NEUSTADT”. A similar logo was seen on a sticker on his wallet.

Discrediting the grand historical narrative – For whom is history written?

On the topic of the 800-years celebration, Volker immediately expressed negatively, emphasising that its budget of 3 million Euros could have been much better spent. In his view, this money should have rather been distributed across the various existing Dresden cultural initiatives, rather than on grand projects organized by the state. His call was for a cultural politics calling for a stronger bottom-up thinking. When I mentioned the argument widely agreed on in media that the 800-years celebration would stimulate Dresden’s economy through image building and attraction of more tourists, he expressed disbelief, stating that it would all be passing by in a flash to be forgotten again next year. According to Volker, the national image of Dresden rested on the baroque buildings in the old town, like Frauenkirch and Semperoper, whose market value would remain more or less the same regardless of the 800-years festivities.

\textsuperscript{16}Proll derives from the word “proletarian”, and is today used as a socially derogatory term to denote people who are seen as uncivilised/uncultured. In this case, “Proll-tourists” refers to the masses of youth coming to the area in the weekends to take part in the extensive night-life.
Volker also referred to the city authorities sponsoring the celebration as “[those] on the other side [of the river]”. Asking him to elaborate this differentiation, he plunged into a historical narrative reminiscent in the quote opening this chapter, emphasising how the new town and the old town were originally two separate settlements. He explained that the old town rulers had incorporated the new town only towards the end of medieval times, when it had grown into a notable trading outpost. After having explained that recent archaeology has uncovered traces of human settlement at the northern side of die Elbe tracing back more than 3000 years\textsuperscript{17}, he pointed to historical evidence showing that a germanic new town was founded only at the start of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. Somewhat bitterly, he then added that there had been an attempt to create a 600-years celebration in 2003, which, in contrast to this year’s celebration, had received hardly any public notice.

Volker did not question the historical facts presented in the city-authorized 800-years celebration as such. He did, however, show a strong awareness of how history is written through processes of selection, often used by elites to fortify their position and influence. For him, the 800-years celebration was much more than just a question of history; it was an example of how the city government coupled with big capital to stage an event where history was used by the old town bourgeoisie and the tourism industries to mask their real interests of power and profit. This again brought up his general distaste for the extensive commercial expansion in the city, which stemmed from his experience of the post-Wende transformation of Äussere Neustadt. He thus reacted and rebelled to the perceived effort of essentialising whole Dresden into one historical image by consciously tapping disjunctive historical facts to create alternative counter-narratives, highlighting internal difference in opposition to wholeness.

Volker’s local historical perceptions intertwined with certain of his contemporary long time co-residents, who were engaged in constructing a distinct neighbourhood

\textsuperscript{17} Strands of Slavic peoples, expelled during the Germanic migrations in the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries.
temporal image by gathering and presenting historical facts that documented the neighbourhood past. Examples are the recent IG Äussere Neustadt e.V.’s publication of a book with photography of the past, portraying its architectural diversity and development through the last century, as well as a semi-regular column in the local newspaper die Neustädter of small, unknown stories dug out of the vaults of the city archives. The general ignorance of the 800-years celebration can be partially explained in this tendency of a rather narrow local historical focus. Silence works as a passive form of opposition, whose expression is indirectly out-spoken through alternate memory works.

**BRN - An alternative historical celebration**

“(…) whenever the social institutions for which ‘old’ traditions were designed begin to crumble under the impact of rapid social change, a widespread and instant invention of new rituals occurs.”

- Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*

After 1990, the BRN-festival soon developed into an local institution. That it will take place every year on a weekend in the middle of June is an unquestionable part of public awareness. Large parts of the neighbourhood’s inhabitants spend significant amounts of time in preparation, some starting as early as in the winter to plan their projects. Actors vary from private households to various commercial agents (shops, cafès, bars etc.), local or extra-local. Although commercial activities pervade contemporary BRN-festivals on all levels, I will here, first and foremost, focus on the

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18 Another local volunteer organization, founded in 1989 with an aspiration to work for the preservation of the historical gründerzeit-architecture in the city part.
non-commercial traits of two of locally initiated projects in the 2006 BRN. The reason is that it is in these that attempts to connect with the 1990 BRN are most explicit. The increasing commerciality is interpreted by many residents as a degradation of the original event, thus representing a factor of pollution. Using the event for money-making is seen as cynical exploiting of the perceived true idealistic spirit of the model happening. I will return to the tense debate regarding the essence, purity and authenticity of the city part in the next chapter. Here I will illustrate how locally initiated projects strived, in form and structure, to imitate the model-BRN of 1990, and thus can broadly be seen as ‘ritual re-enactments’ (Connerton 1989:53) commemorating the particular neighbourhood history.

**Seasonal inversions**

One evening at the end of February, my flat-mate Johann, the 22-year-old student of landscape architecture, came home excitedly telling of how he and a friend had figured out that they wanted to set up a venue selling Glühwein for this year’s BRN. *Glühwein* (lit. “glow-wine”) is a traditional German spicy, heated, red wine, served as a warming drink in the winter season, typically at the famous Christmas markets that pop up in cities and villages around the country in the Advent season. The amusing point was the idea of setting up a *Glühwein*-stand selling heated drinks in the middle of June, a season which rather encouraged cooling drinks. Spinning along on this idea, my other neighbour, Robert, suggested, with a chuckle supplementing, the stand with Christmas cakes. As *Glühwein* is mainly sold in the winter season, a trip to the mall was organized within a few weeks to purchase 30 litres of the wine for storage before it went out of sale.

Up until BRN, the idea reshaped and crystallised in a spontaneous manner, as more people got involved and the practical circumstances became clearer. One friend organized for a plastic Christmas tree which it was agreed would be “planted” in a small, inflatable children’s swimming pool. It was also suggested to decorate the tree
with various items, such as Easter eggs, snow spray and rubbish, but eventually none got around to do this. Other friends contributed with an electrical stove, some furniture and a music rack. In informal afternoon gatherings, people discussed various suggestions for a name for the stand, ending up with “Boiling hot Glüh-punch, BRN Vorglüh-oasis” (Vorglüh signalled that it was a place of “warming up” for the festival). Johann took charge of the painting of a poster for the stand. Having acquired a large piece of tapestry from his school, he set about using a crude set of bright blue, green, red and yellow water-based colours. As it was lain out in the hall of our flat during the week before the BRN, different visitors added creative hands to the production. Thus, in the end, it displayed a naively styled desert-oasis scenery with a green, blue-humped camel, elk horns (associating it with Rudolf the Reindeer), and a police-badge across the trunk eating colourful juggling balls. In the sky above, a sun with sunglasses smilingly sent its rays across the scenery whilst puffing on a tuba-shaped marijuana joint.

![The BRN-Vorglüh-oasis poster](image)

In the staging of the stand, the project took an unprecedented turn as the house owner, a private extra-local property firm, suddenly issued that they did not want the common area of their premise to be used for any public BRN-purpose. The stated reason was to avoid disturbance of the residents and damage to the property. Thus, Johann and his circle of friends were forced to reorganize the project as a private, back yard party on the opening afternoon of the festival. Nevertheless, they defied the
rule temporarily by setting up their stand on the sidewalk outside our building for a few hours, receiving some quite amused responses from the growing tide of people passing by on the street. Although sales were moderate, Johann was surprised that enough was sold to cover the expenses of the wine. The prospect of profit had never been an issue; the main point had been to stage a display which would amuse the involved and the by-passers.

At first sight it might be difficult to see how this project was a ritual of re-enactment in the terms of Paul Connerton. Its content was largely shaped by the spontaneous and creative ideas mustered by a loose circle of friends, who had only become tied to the locality during recent years. The intent to create and present something new and unprecedented display was a central motivation. Through innovation they thought they would catch people’s attention, and get positive feedback. How can we then, in this case speak of ritual re-enactment? Connerton emphasises the need to not only focus on content, but to also study the form and structure of rituals, in search of repetitiveness in order to catch their historicity. He furthermore states that commemorative ceremonies where re-enacting rituals are performed “(...) are distinguishable from other rituals by the fact that they explicitly refer to prototypical persons and events.” (Connerton 1989:61). Looking at the unfolding process of the BRN-Glühwein-project, two main structuring principles can be distilled: (1) Humorous inversion of cultural forms seen as traditional and (2) communitarian creativity. Although producing a widely different and unique product as of form, the performative guidelines bear strong resemblance to the various creative produces in the first BRN. Most problematic is Connerton’s claim that reference should be explicit; both of the outlined principles seem to rather be implicit features of the process. My informants showed an amused, but at the same time rather oblivious attitude towards the concrete events the 1990-BRN-festival, and were explicit concerned not to copy the content of earlier BRN-projects, as this was thought to rob it of its genuineness. Beyond words however, one obvious explicit reference pointed to the original historical event, namely the brightly and naively coloured format. This expressive form is directly linked to the aesthetic style developed after the locality was branded as “colourful” in proclamation of the “republic” in 1990.
The *Glühwein*-project was one of many *BRN*-projects initiated by corporate household groups in the neighbourhood in 2006 that played on the style of colourful and humorous creativity which was established in 1990. A few other examples include an artist collective that had set out a giant sized sofa group which would dwarf anyone climbing into it, a pair of linen-clad women quasi-nuns who offered light, relaxing head massage using strange metal devices shaped as a spidery caps, and a first aid station for people who had gotten minor injuries, its *WG*-residents dressed up as hospital nurses with various humorous names. Altogether they were fragments of a massive, decentralized collective commemorative ceremony that re-enacted the *BRN* of 1990. It was performed through the overlapping individual works of imagining and manifesting an image of the neighbourhood that rested on its mythologized historical origin. Participation happened both incorporeally and inscriptionally. Its corporeal dimensions was reflected in artistic performances, be it in painting, playing music, juggling and the likes, or alternately in the arts of cooking, providing the *BRN*-streets with a multitude of home-made foods and drinks. In general, the capability to express creativity through corporeal artistic skills was a core premise of successful *BRN*-projects and, thus, highly socially prestigious.

A-Museal remembering

Let us now turn to the historical inscription of *BRN*. Various references to the original *BRN* appeared in the local print- and- internet media revolving around the festival. In 2006, one considerable project of inscriptive commemoration was the instituting of a temporary, official *BRN*-museum. The project was a volunteer effort by two resident undergraduate students of social sciences. Out of an empathic curiosity of their own neighbourhood and the perception of *BRN* as an exciting chapter of its recent history, they merrily proclaimed themselves directors of the new museum and started activating their personal networks to gather and organize all kinds of evidence.
of its 16 years long history. Establishing a home page on the net and advertising through posters in the area, local residents were encouraged to participate (mitmachen) on the appeal that they in themselves, in effect of their personal experiences, constituted the BRN. Thus, neighbourhood inhabitants contributed a wide range of historical documents: Photos, radio recordings, videos, flyers, stickers, posters, official documents and newspaper articles. The museums web-page humorously added that “even the stolen folding chair” could be of use.

On the basis of their own volunteerism and the goodwill of various neighbourhood actors opened the small museum for the days of the 2006 BRN, and it was well-visited. The exhibits dominating the 3-room display were posters of various BRN-projects throughout the year, accompanied by enlarged newspaper articles. A few small TVs showing clips of amateur BRN-videos had also been installed, mainly films from the earliest years. Although all the years were covered in the exhibit, the early years dominated. Whilst advertising that the museum “naturally” was free of charge, they had set up a small sale of coffee and beer and a tombola where one could win prizes ranging from retro toy trinkets to t-shirts and art posters, encouraging visitors to make some small spending to help them cover their expenses. After the festival, the museum was closed and the premises cleared, as the organizers had their own private occupations to take care of and could not single-handedly afford the continued time and money its maintenance would demand. Nevertheless, the website has remained operational and a large photo gallery constituted of collected amateur photos has been established.

The museal inscription of BRN-history is a vivid example of how a narrative of recent neighbourhood history was attempted crystallized. It represented the BRN-myth as inscribed in an externalised, artificially mediated universe. It was a commodification of its history that resonated with the historical BRN style of performance, as it maintained the structuring principles of humorous inversion and communitarian creativity, explicitly avoiding any association with economic profiteering, which is so negatively judged in neighbourhood discourses. Connerton claims that the transformation of social mnemonics from corporeal practices into textual artefacts
generates cultural innovation through promoting two processes: (1) Economising, that is, freeing communal memory from the rhythms of bodily practice and (2) scepticism, that is, opening communal memory to systematic criticism (Connerton 1989:76). As the museum was well visited, it would be interesting to follow this claim by tracing how it affects local cultural production in the BRN-festival the coming years. Expected signs are an increased occurrence of explicit historically reflexive projects ensuing from the corporeal liberation and stronger discrepancy from the structuring principles as a result of the systematic criticism that inscriptional remembrance entails.

**Socio-local mnemonic process**

The discussion in this chapter has fundamentally relied on a perspective on "Äussere Neustadt" time and history as embedded traits of social life, rather than as series of objective facts. Causal explanations for temporal manifestation have been rooted in dialectics of subjective, situated bi-directional local gaze. These gazes are turned both outwardly towards the Dresden proper historical narration, shown to be constructed as a temporal ‘other’, and inwardly, towards the signifying retrospection and mythologisation of local history through cultural (re)-production.

The local sense of difference from the Dresden proper is the overarching explanation of why the 800-years jubilee was so poorly received. Failing to tap onto the localist landscapes of culture and self, it failed to muster any significant identification amongst the residents, silent ignorance turning out as the typical response. To the extent that it moved residents, it was played out in a distinctly oppositional manner, one in which temporal conceptualisations were wrapped in the local cultural style of amusive inversion. In effect, these localized mnemonic efforts enforced a localist historical consciousness and, thus, strengthened the local sense of difference. As has been shown, the key feature of the "Äussere Neustadt" mnemonic landscape was the
local events unfolding during the transitional phase of die Wende. Through the force of public remembering, these particular series of incidents continue to define a cultural style of resistance and differentiation through humour that is specific to the area. The local ethical and ideological landscapes, which will be discussed further in the next chapter, thus enjoy a temporal embedding in the shape of a myth of origin. The re-imagining of this myth is soaked in, and gives direction to, the contemporary reproductive processes that constitute senses of local distinctiveness in the minds of both residents and visitors.
Chapter III: A counter-active ‘Ideoscape’

In this chapter I discuss how a local collective identity is related to geographical, and how this identity connects to the sociocultural dynamics in Äussere Neustadt. Such claims are of course problematic, as generalizing worldview, ethos and culture across social fields tends to compromise individual variance and camouflage internal disagreements. Therefore, I do no wish to present a collective identity of the area that is absolute, fixed or internally undisputed. On the contrary, as becomes clear in subsequent chapters, the spatial connotations of Äussere Neustadt are constantly at stake, as they are defined and redefined through the attempts of various agents to identify with it.

Nevertheless, in various discourses relating to the city part, there was a certain correspondence in metaphors, ideas and social types evoked to typify what was unique about the area. The key terms were “colourful” and “alternative”, whose meanings and implications will be discussed below. First, however, an analytical framework must be outlined, in which these terms can be understood as discursive phenomena that are integrated in social processes. On the one hand these key terms denote a particular character, life quality and mood as well as a moral and aesthetic style, in short what Clifford Geertz has defined as a people’s ‘ethos’ (Geertz 1973:127). On the other hand, they are ontological images through which the society, city space and persons of the area are conceptualised and essentialised, thus simultaneously working to structure a ‘worldview’ (Ibid. 1973:127). Although Geertz’s ethos/worldview-dichotomy is helpful to understand the social and cultural significance of the “alternative”/”colourful”-terms, a sharp analytical divide between ethos and worldview is problematic, especially when applied to secular social systems in which political and aesthetic ideas prevail over religious dogma. Geertz himself did not deny that the interrelation ethos-worldview was, in practice, scalar. Nevertheless however, he found ethos at its foremost expression in ritual practices and religious symbols, whilst worldview was primarily expressed in reasoned,
abstract religious texts. Removing the religious cape, worldview can be said to be represented by linguistic practices, whilst ethos is represented by bodily practices and symbolic interaction, the former tending to entail a stronger element of reflexive reason, while the latter tends to entail a stronger element of empathic emotionality.

To avoid the pitfalls of an exclusive divide between reason and emotion, an analytic trait which Schepher-Hughes & Lock described as the mind/body-dualism in western epistemology (Schepher-Hughes & Lock 1987:10), I apply Arjun Appadurai’s term ‘ideoscape’ to emphasise the integratedness of ethos and worldview. ‘Ideo-’ denotes both ethoses and worldviews as related to idea-conglomerates, which in turn are expressed as images, that is, representations of something imagined on an ideal level (Appadurai 1996:36). ‘-scape’ evokes the image of a landscape of ideas that is both fluid and irregular, as well as, in Appadurai’s words, “...deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors.” (Ibid. 1996:33). Thus, ideoscapes, although temporally manifesting as intersubjectively recognisable entities that can be distilled as abstract worldviews, spring profoundly from subjective experience. Therefore, they cannot be treated exclusively either as worldview nor ethos, but rather as the dynamic outcomes of the interaction between these domains.

“Alternative” and “colourful” are the two master-terms circulating in discourses of, and denoting practices in Äussere Neustadt. As such, they are the “twin peaks” in the local ideoscape. The question then is which particular features and dynamics these terms predicate and generate in local social and cultural life. Following Lakoff & Johnson I interpret them as metaphors that pervade the inhabitant’s everyday lives, not only in speech but also in thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3). Which particular cultural ideas and values lie entrenched in these metaphors?
Shaping the self as an ‘other’

“Everyone wants to be different and in end-effect they are all just the same.”

- Äussere Neustadt pub owner

The word “alternative” comes from the Latin word “alter”, simply meaning “other”. Its usage as a term describing cultural movements (“alternative culture”) however exploded only as late as in the 1970s when it was appropriated by various critical youth movements of the time. Since then it has broadly and variously been used in reference to cultural movements who, in one way or the other, see themselves as different from, and even more so; better than what they view as established society and culture. Correspondingly, people who consider themselves to be somehow “alternative” tend to apply the term also to describe their particular ideas, practices, style and tastes. Thus, it has spawned an erratic system of classification in which “alternative” is subdivided into categories, such as “alternative music”, “alternative religion”, “alternative medicine”, “alternative lifestyles” and so forth, which in themselves are deeply contested, continuously being transformed and adapted in relation to the contexts in which they are summoned.

During my fieldwork, I often asked people I met to describe the people and the culture of Äussere Neustadt. I recurrently got answers such as “there are many ‘alternative’ people here” and “people do ‘alternative’ things”, whilst when I pursued them to elaborate what they meant by this I got many different responses. Through the repeated talks we had, one young informant ascribed the alternativeness of the area variously to the many clubs and the bustling, youthful street life, the Gründerzeit-architecture and the absence of governmental buildings and big commercial chain stores. To “alternative” people he associated for example environmentalism, eco-mindedness, bio-food, dreadlocks, marijuana smoking,
alternative rock music, punks and leftist politics. Another informant thought about it as making life out in one’s own way, different from the ways of one’s parents, for example raising one’s children in a less authoritarian fashion. A third informant described “alternative” in more philosophical terms, explaining that it was a particular quality of uniqueness, individuality, newness and extraordinariness inherent to someone or something.

These sample statements show that “alternative” is a subjectively applied concept, its meanings being rooted in individual life experiences. Upon challenging informants to define the term in a clear cut way, they were not unaware of its ambiguity, and were often reluctant to attempt fixed definitions. For example, when talking of marijuana smoking as an “alternative” practice, the first informant above quickly emphasised that this alone did not automatically make you an “alternative” person. He explained that there are also many “non-alternative” people who smoke marijuana. Thus, real alternativeness was not just a matter of performing a simple code; it was a trait which stemmed from somewhere beyond mere acts and signs. The philosophically minded informant often complained about the lacking depth of much of the supposed “alternative” image assigned to life in the city part. In his opinion, many people appropriated “alternative” signs, such as second hand clothes or freaked hairstyles, as a part of constructing for themselves an image that would give them social status. Again we see that the mere singling out of a particular set of signs to sum up “alternative” was not satisfactory. For my informants, “alternative” denoted a quality which transcended its manifestations. People who consciously tried to exploit certain signs and symbols to attribute themselves with an “alternative” image, they ultimately understood as false, as “alternative” was a quality that could not be scrupulously and strategically acquired. Such attempts only produced fake, content-less façades. “Alternative” was therefore an essentialist term, in the sense that it denoted certain features of a place, person, idea, thing and/or practice that were seen a primordial.

My informants’ evaluations of alternativeness were personal and affective, and the continuous influx of new people to the area was met with ambivalence. On the one
hand, the liveliness and diversity it furthered was seen as significatory to its alternativeness. On the other hand, though, it was also a source of concerns and sceptic evaluations, as newcomers threatened to corrupt the “real” local alternativism. It seemed easiest to make judgements about the “alternative” when relating to some kind of external referent. Conversely, in conversation they would never apply the term to themselves, claiming for instance “I’m alternative”, or somehow elsewise suggesting directly that their own things, tastes and ideas were “alternative”. Grasping and delineating the “alternative” had to be done by discussing and evaluating things, tastes and ideas seen in my informants’ environment. Nevertheless, the affective interest in other peoples’ alternativeness implied, although non-spokenly, that the definitions and redefinitions of what was “truly alternative” were of relevance for their own alternativist self-identification. Why was it such a taboo to use the term directly to describe oneself? Why did they insist on locating alternatives and non-alternatives in external media?

In the word “alternative” lies entrenched an ideal of a radical type of ‘otherness’. Profoundly, the alternativist enterprise is a project of realizing radical ‘otherness’ as the essence of oneself, which means that the pursuit of the “alternative” implies radical self-‘othering’. The establishment of ‘othered’ selves depends on the certain references by which the ‘othered’ self is differentiated. Since the alternativist project is principally an aspiration to maximize the apparent ‘otherness’ of the self, it implies a radical style of self-distinguishing that undermines social identification. Thus, it is a mode of self reminiscent of what the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton has termed the ‘protean’ self, a mode of self-hood that is distinct to modern human beings, whose search of authenticity and meaning has detached from tradition and ritual to become a highly personalized quest. Due to an increasing engagement in various, dissonant social worlds, the identity is subjected to continuous reinvention (Lifton 1993). Likewise, the “alternative” self unfolds as a continuous project of reinvention, which, moreover, is forced to manifest implicitly and indirectly, as any form of explicit inter-self identification puts the authenticity of the proclaimed self-individuality at risk.
Cultivated as a purely individualised form of self-realization, the pursuit of alternativism is fairly unproblematic. Michael F. Brown suggests that, for some, a full embrace of modern, fluidized forms of self-realization might actually effect experiences of liberation, as the individualisation it entails is elevated to a sacred principle (Brown 1996:733). Nevertheless, when intermingling with the forces of sociality and inter-subjectiveness, alternativism seems to become caught in a paradox. On the one hand, for an “alternative” status to work as a social resource, some kind of consensus for identification must be established. On the other hand, revealing oneself as someone who lives according to such a consensus undermines one’s “alternative” credibility. Therefore, the use of direct, verbal self-description to designate oneself with alternativeness is counter-productive. Thus, as a mode of identification, it differs from modes such as gender, ethnicity, class and religion. Stating “I am a woman/Italian/worker/Hindu” is normally, internal to the corresponding social field, fairly unproblematic. On the contrary, stating that “I am ‘alternative’” is a potential social suicide. Instead, alternativism must be communicated implicitly and indirectly via the use of self-signifying media, such as choice and taste (music, literature, food etc.), ideal sympathies (ideological/political positioning), aesthetical self-presentation (dress, body ornamentation), conduct and practice (daily routines, hobbies). Here, elements of strategy and calculation are camouflaged by the media, and the self is presented beyond verbal designation, reducing plagiaristic signal risks. Common for media which signify alternativism is that they appear as deviant, dissenting, oppositional etc. within the broad societal context in which they are summoned.

The case of Äussere Neustadt displays yet another dimension of symbolic mediation of self, namely the use of place as a symbol of identification. As the very place was broadly conceived to inhere a special, “alternative” cultural flair, interacting with it turned the very city part into a media of self-alternativisation. To activate and tap onto its conceived “alternative” inherency, my informants started appropriating and imitating various signs circulating in the environment, such as the wearing of tattered, freaky or somehow otherwise indecent clothes, of having dreadlocks or tattoos made, ostalgia (romanticism with GDR-objects/practices), engaging in various experimental music styles, juggling, reading philosophical books, turning to vegetarianism,
consuming alcohol and/or marijuana, partying just as well on weekdays as in weekends etc. Due to their mere occurrence within the spatial confine of Äussere Neustadt, these practices/objects/ideas were more likely to become interpreted as “alternative” signs. When activated within the locality, these signs both confirmed and reproduced the alternativity of the locality, at the same time as an “alternative” identity was bestowed upon its subjects. The inter-locus of agents, practices/things/opinions and place, which together integrated the idea of alternativism, did not only reproduce, but also re-enforced and expanded the belief in their separate individual “alternative” features. In other words, they interacted to pool a shared reservoir of socially imagined alternativism from which their vials for independent “alternative” qualities reaped productively.

Figure I: The semantic reciprocity of interactional “alternative” sign-media

The somewhat mystical, materially transcendent emic conception of “alternative” is reminiscent of the “holy”, a conception that similarly tends to be perceived as a ultimately intrinsic quality that cannot be summarised by its singular representations. Nevertheless, when the “holy” is identified and negotiated in social fields, certain representations are usually valued as more “true” than others. The socialisation of such idealist belief systems is highly dependant on symbolic mediation. Just as a Christian person openly claiming to be “holy” risks accusations of blasphemy, the “alternative” person risks social disgrace. On the other hand, the same Christian
person would be likely to achieve recognition of “holiness” by engaging in Christian rituals, practices and symbol worship. In this case, place can also work as an enhancing medium; empathic engagement with, for example, the church-site might further a persons air of “holiness”. Similarly, the spatial confine of Äussere Neustadt, localised as an “alternative” place, donned impressions of alternativism onto agents who engaged in signifying practices that concorded with the symbolic field in which it was constituted.

Nevertheless, alternativism as an idea is structured by the principle of radical otherness, and is therefore less stable and coherent than more institutionalised symbolic fields, such as religions. As agents who “worship” the space of Äussere Neustadt gradually become incorporated into it, simultaneously incorporating it into themselves, they also become aware of the flux of people following in their wake by whom they spot the appropriating and imitating they themselves have gone through. As these observations threaten the trajectories and legitimacies of their alternativist self-conceptions, the awareness of ones own history of imitation tends to be repressed on the behalf of ambiguous and sceptic evaluations of the newcomers. A variety of negative signifiers of the “alternative” thereby appears, that is, signifiers of what it is not. Thus, newcomers and tourists also served as important reference-points the establishment of “alternative”-consensuses amongst those who had lived in the city part for some time.

We see that the alternativist idea of ‘otherness’ is in practice highly diffuse, abstract and relative, and is only socially recognised within the substantiating semantic mediation of specific taxonomic systems. Lakoff & Johnson have illustrated how language produces metaphors which work to substantiate phenomena that are otherwise not clearly discrete or bounded, so that humans more easily can relate to them. Such metaphors enable people to grasp discrete experiences, such as events, activities, emotions, ideas and so forth, they label ‘ontological’ metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3). As an ontological metaphor, “alternative” serves to substantiate and objectify ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ as qualities that can be referred to, discussed and evaluated, their base etherealness being obfuscated by a shine of subsistence.
Locating alternativism at global, national, regional and local intersections

To localize and specify the cultural phenomenon alternativism, it must be situated in a broader, historical perspective. Due to its capacities to substantiate ‘otherness’ and to inspire practices of radical differentiation within social fields, I understand the “alternative” cultural phenomenon more generally as a vehicle of sociocultural heterogenisation. Its ‘othered’ forms therefore likely manifest as negations of societal vehicles of homogenisation, as these represent its anathema of “sameness”. In the broader historical textures of modern societies, three interrelated homogenising factors stand forth: (1) Industrialism, (2) capitalism and (3) the nation state. These are all strong impetuses for the standardization of social organisation in the modern epoch; industrialism by spawning modes of mass production and in commodifying labour transactions, capitalism by imposing a unitary monetary value scale with (near to) universal validity, and nation-states by being trans-local political units that are capable of governing large population masses. The rise of national and trans-national mass media should furthermore be added as another, more recently developed significant proponent of societal homogenisation.

In my field, the shape of alternativist pursuits of ‘otherness’ often mirrored antipathies to the mentioned factors, providing as representations of what “alternative” was an alternative to. Critical perceptions towards the influence of large-scale commercial companies and gross capital investment were typical, as these were seen as threats to the “alternative” style. For example, the influx of commercial entrepreneurs to BRN, such as the many beer stands set up by extra-regional breweries, was critiqued as overtly profit-oriented, disaccording with the original spirit of the festival. An informant once told me of an “alternative” friend who, merely upon hearing the name of Prager Strasse, a shopping street in the old town,

19 The popular yearly festival in the city part. See chapters 1 and 2.
would make big eyes and get angry. Another informant, the same who had appreciated the lack of McDonalds in the city part, once labelled a friend as “alternative” because she had been living for some time in a communal farm-cooperative where they had raised crops for self-sufficiency, thus striving for independence from the mass consumers market. These examples illustrate how the significant ‘others’ reflected in “alternative” ‘othered’ selves were associated to phenomena seen as commercialized, overtly profit-oriented, or otherwise being part of some kind of big-buck capitalist enterprise. Intermingled in the negatory critical gaze on industrialism and capitalism was also German nationhood, with all its specific historical connotations. A telling example is an ironic statement written on the wall of a backyard reading: “Welcome to Ger money 06” (my emphasis), next to a caricature drawing of Adolf Hitler. The writer had here used the football world cup taking place in Germany in 2006 as a reference, both critiquing German nationalism (signified as fascism) and the world cup, portrayed as capital-corrupted.

My informants’ conceptions of the “alternative” also frequently referred “mainstream culture” as an ‘other’, meaning the culture of “most people in society”. Who these “most people” were, was, however, more difficult to fix. Examples included people who watch TV, people with fashionable styles of dress, parents, grandparents, countryside people, bourgeoisie people, tourists, people with conservative political views, people in other city parts of Dresden, people from West Germany, Americans and so forth. The point here is not to exhaustively describe all the multiple and contradicting stereotypes which were used to represent “mainstream”, but to question how and why they appeared as such in the particular environment of Äussere Neustadt.

The key locus for representations of “mainstream” culture was mass media, such as TV, radio and popular trend magazines. Images and products presented through these channels were quickly mocked, simply because they were seen as mass-mediated manufactures of capitalized national and multi-national cultural industries. Thus, consumption was also tied in as an important sign in alternativist negative diagnostics of “mainstream” culture. The “consumer”, seen as the general representative figure of
the “mass consumers’ society”, particularly referred to the consumption of mass-produced and-mediated artefacts. Anti-consumption was an ideal, but only in so far as neglecting certain products, mainly those represented in mass-media. Consuming for example retail, retro, second hand and/or ecological products, as well as subcultural and “underground” trends, was more legitimate in “alternative” self-presentations, as these worked as anti-signs of markets of mass-production, -consumption, and –mediation.

The contemporary overarching ideological matrix of individualism also explains the dynamical success of a cultural mode that, when seen in isolation, seems quite anti-social. As the production as the “alternative” ‘othered’ self continuously depends on the individualisation and marginalisation of the self from its “mainstream” ‘other’, it resounds a distinctly anti-social dynamic that might easily breed alienation and lacking sense of social belonging. The radical nature of the alternativist self-‘othering’ technique seems, at first sight, to conflate its ‘other’ (hence “mainstream”) and deflate its own sociality (hence “alternative”): In the end, the pure “alternative” is supposed to be completely individual and unique. In the light of the broader, neo-liberal cultural and moral discourses of self, in which young people grow up today, subjects are socialized to believe that the ultimate way of self-realization is the pursuit of unique identities. Within such a paradigm of person, where individualised self-presentation is so highly socially appraised, alternativism stands forth as a self-construction method par excellence, and thus also inherits the significant social strength that makes it manifest and transplant as a popular phenomenon. When individualism has become a structural dogma, it (paradoxically) becomes highly socially valuable.

Within global cultural flows there also exists sub-current of phenomena that are more or less popularly recognised as “alternative”, typically ideas and signs historically embedded in political and/or cultural rebellion. For example, my informants were inspired by, and identified with politically satiric cartoons such as “The Simpsons” and “Family Guy”, the politicised icons of the 1968-movement, like the reggae artist Bob Marley, the The Doors-singer Jim Morrison, and/or the freedom fighter Che
Guevara, rebellious musical styles like punk rock or experimental jazz, as well as political emblems such as the peace symbol or the anarchy symbol. These elements are, due to their particular historical and political legacy, representative of a mass mediated, globally extended belief in the existence of the “alternative” as an exclusive cultural substance. When tapped, these signs achieved immediate social relevance within the everyday life-contexts my informants, as these micro-contexts, already soaked in alternativist idealism, allowed them to serve as signs by which my informants could co-identify with friends and neighbours as “alternative” people. Thus practically applied, they were simultaneously globally and locally anchored. Such trans-locally operating alternativist signs, when empathically incorporated in local settings, are best described as ‘glocal’ (Robertson 1995).

“Alternative” selves and their “mainstream” ‘others’ are constrained by multi-layered historical and social contexts. Interfering with the global contexts indicated above, there are structures and events at national, regional, as well as local niveaus which also impacted on the ways “alternative” things, ideas and practices manifested in the locality. One peculiar trait of the “alternative” scene in Äussere Neustadt was the near absence of the type of new religious movements which otherwise often accompany “alternative” communities at other places. Although there was a minute Hare Krishna-community, a small centre following a Tibetan Buddhist tradition, as well as a few bookshops specialising on spiritual and new age literature, most residents I met showed a general disinterest towards religiosity. The East German historical legacy contributes to explaining this absence. Paul Froese and Stephen Pfaff, leaning on a broader scholar debate on religiosity in the East German territory, claim that after 1990, whilst socialist values and political collectivist ideas have remained strong, new religious movements have attracted little interest. According to them, the persisting religious disinterest can be explained by the low levels of religious capital developed and inherited through the scientific, atheist politics of the GDR state (Froese & Pfaff 2001:499).

When asking my informants about their views on religion, they often thought of it in authoritative terms, seeing it as a foreign imposition on their freedom. Decades of
institutionalised scepticism towards religion have imbued large segments of the former GDR-population with a distrustful attitude toward religious doctrine, religion being interpreted as a political instrument for state dominance and population control. Interestingly, however, when I rephrased religion as a personal, spiritual endeavour, I met certain views of respect and understanding. One informant for example drew parallels from the spiritual search that individuals perform within religious communities to the strivings of self-recognition sought by people engaging in communal living, such as in farming communes or housing collectives. Nevertheless, the “alternative” face of the city part is as of yet sparsely marked by the pursuits of “alternative” religions, which characterise many other “alternative” social spaces.

In Germany in general, and in former East Germany in a particular way, alternativism is also significantly afflicted by the legacy of national socialism. In the decades following WWII, western Germany was reconstructed under the conditions of the liberal conservative political paradigm of a people’s capitalism, that is, society was largely de-proletarised and a middle class of petty bourgeoisie grew alongside the democratisation of consumerism (Schulz 2005). Around the turn of 1960, reflecting the wider social turmoil of the cold war West-bloc countries, a growing current of culture critics20 started highlighting problems of modern mass consumer society, giving fuel to the rise of the rise of the anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and anti-technocratic protest movement of 1968. In Germany, the view of the bourgeoisie class was transformed in a particular way, as it was intermingled with the ambivalent process of restoring German history in the wake of the Nazi-legacy. Due to their usurpation by National Socialism in the 1930s, the German bourgeoisie were in the 1960s enwrapped in a critical social analysis in which “(...) the bourgeoisie post-war order [was seen by the student movement] as a continuance of the authoritarian state in a formal democratic costume.” (Schulz 2005:51). Hence, the ghost of national socialism has had a particular impact on post-war critical evaluation of bourgeoisie

20 Strongly connected to the critical philosophy of the Frankfurter school
culture in Germany. Correspondingly, within the local Äussere Neustadt “alternative” discourses, mockery of bourgeoisie culture appeared frequently.

I often challenged my informants with the claim that neo-Nazi groups could also be seen as “alternative”, relative to the mass-representative criteria of “mainstream”. They usually agreed at a rhetorical level, but nevertheless did not comply. To them, “alternative” represented something positive, locally applied to describe the uniqueness of Äussere Neustadt and its people. In Dresden at the time, a recent surge of right-wing support in the region had caused widespread concerns in the “alternative” scene of Äussere Neustadt. One informant excitedly told me of how, in the spring of 2005, the local “alternative” scene had responded when a march of about 1000 right-wing activists had staged a political march through the city part. Local residents had blockaded the streets in masses, transforming the area into a jovial street celebration. Local bands had gathered to perform merry musical outdoor sessions and juggling performances had been staged to hamper the right-wing-march and to vividly signal their distance to right-wing-attitudes. Thus, the symbolic terrains of a local “alternative” culture had been promulgated to communicate collectively that political groups belonging to the right-wing were unwelcome and unfitting in this area. On a political scale, “alternative” was thus a term which locally had implicit leftist associations. Unsurprisingly then, recent city election polls show that large parts of the Äussere Neustadt inhabitants had cast their votes to the social democrats, superseded only by the decisive areal winner, the environmentalist party (also bearing leftist orientations).

These examples illustrate how the intensified tension between left- and- right-wing-radicalism in eastern Germany today has become intertwined in the regional alternativist discourses. The still resounding popular ambivalence towards the right-wing, as well as bourgeoisie and consumer culture, in this region today is connected to the fact that the GDR state was significantly consolidated on the very sponsoring of a demonized national socialist ‘other’ (Herf 1997), an image which increasingly became entangled in bourgeoisie and capitalist images. Until the die Wende, the GDR state had attempted implement in its population an ambiguous, evil ‘other’-image
constituted variably of Nazism, capitalism and the bourgeoisie, as its a temporal counterpart. With the advent of neo-liberalism and the corresponding currents of cultural criticism in eastern Germany in the latest decade, the bourgeoisie class and its various cultural representations is then, variably and unpredictably, still associated both to capitalism and to national socialism.

The idea of “the nation”, thus, also has a particularly strenuous history in eastern Germany. As the intellectual forefront in other east bloc countries in the 1980s were able to lead popular dissent-movements by mobilising national consciousness, such strategies were, due to the German legacy of national socialism, more problematic to east German “alternative” intellectuals (Joppke 1995). Blundered both by the ghastliness of the national socialist past, as well as the experience of a repressive GDR state, the concept of “nation” bears a double ambiguity amongst eastern German leftist critics.

A ruptured alterna(i)tivity

The preceding discussion of a local brand of alternativism risks presenting it in an overtly harmonious way, concealing the many frictions between the views of various local actors as to which phenomena that qualified as truly “alternative”. The process of gentrification had produced Äußere Neustadt as a socially and culturally complex field, causing internal processes of defining the “alternative” to be ridden with fissures. This resounds Manuel Castells’ observation of how space in European cities often look like ‘battlefields’, where commercial interests, the middle-class and various counter-cultures contest each other for the control of the use value of the city (Castells 1996:402).

Because the pursuit “alternative” lifestyles were socially prestigious within the locality, it also produced social fields of negotiation. To illustrate this point I will
briefly discuss an example of a frontier where alternativism was negotiated by various local actors who offered different interpretations.

Kneipenboom – Blooming creativity or commercial usurpation?

“Bratwurst 21 Republik Neustadt”
- Local pochoir 22

The massive increase of new Kneipen 23 in Äussere Neustadt the latest decade has earned it a contemporary reputation as a Kneipenquarter (see chapter 1). Its Kneipen-landscape has been shaped by a multiple set of actors, whose individual connections and relationships to the area vary considerably. Corresponding with the neighbourhood cultural style, no single Kneipe appears quite the same as the others, each communicating independence as of style and concept. For instance, the pub Fiasko has been made up as a beastly, dark cave where devilish metal music blast out of the speakers and hideous monsters crafted from plaster, paint and wire crawl the walls and ceilings, whilst the cocktail bar Wohnzimmer has had its first storey set with 18th century bourgeoisie furniture and the second with 1960s/70s retro designs, tempering the atmosphere with warm mellow lights and popular rock & electronic music. The biggest discotheque of the city part, Katy’s Garage is built within the compounds of an old concrete barracks, a beetle car set on its roof and the interior furnished with various automobile components, in the summers also serving drinks in a large outdoors beer garden. Another popular nightclub, Hebedas, runs red lights,

21 German sausage.
22 A form of street art, see chapter 4.
23 The term Kneipe is a common noun for various gastronomic enterprises such as pubs, bars, cafés, beer gardens, restaurants etc.
electro-pop, retro GDR-TV-series and zebra-hides as its style-distinguishing traits. These four accounts are but a few superficial peeks into the various Kneipen-formats in the area.

As was accounted in chapter 1, the artistically framed use of Kneipe, pioneered around the time of die Wende, played an important role in the restoration of the city part. This pattern of retail art/gastronomy enterprises expanded onwards throughout the booming influx of Kneipen throughout the 1990s, creating the flourishing and plural gastronomic display that is seen today. The massive Kneipe-expansion has, however, also been a point of criticism amongst certain residents, who see many of the new Kneipe-entrepreneurs as predominantly oriented on exploiting the cultural authenticity of the area for their own personal profits. One informant, who had been empathically involved with the neighbourhood since the times of die Wende, classified the Kneipen in the area in three rough groups: (1) City part-Kneipen, (2) Mix-Kneipen and (3) Tourist-Kneipen. To the city part-Kneipen he counted places that had a certain historical significance in the area, for example being active in the coordination of BRN-festivals and being social meeting places for local inhabitants. Tourist-Kneipen were of newer dates, had a clientele of mainly tourists from out of town, as well as being run by out-of-town owners who were most interested in making money. The mix-Kneipen represented to him a kind of intermediate category of Kneipen, mixing elements from the two other categories. It was clear that this informant had his sympathies with the city part-Kneipen, whilst viewing the tourist Kneipen in a far more negative light.

The mentioned Katy’s Garage is a good example of a Kneipe that was a frictious reference point in local Kneipen-discourses. It was owned by the association Preuss-Sculz-Hübner GbR, a band of three Kneipen-entrepreneurs who also owned several other Kneipen in the area. Opening Katy's in 2001, they had developed it along a stylistic concept of red-lights and garage/mechanic workshop gadgetry, and through extensive promotion and central location it had become one of the most famous and visited Kneipen in the neighbourhood. The informant mentioned above described it and its proprietors with scepticism, suspecting their intent to be highly commercial.
For him the evidence of this was their multiple Kneipen-establishing and their heavy promotion. In his view they lacked an empathic, deeper concern with the neighbourhood culture beyond the commercial involvement. He also criticised how they last year, in their promotion of Katy’s Saturday night “Neustadt disco”, had started using the “Mickey Mouse in honorary wreath”-symbol that had been conceived in the first BRN (see chapter 5). Although some inhabitants had responded with a signature campaign protesting this appropriation, to his dismay they had not been able to hinder the usage.

The reactions to the appropriation of the local Mickey Mouse-symbol shows that the Äussere Neustadt “alternative” culture is made authentic through historical premises, and that this culture is felt to be threatened by the impact of historical change and the new forces it brings along. These forces prey on the “genuine alternative” culture by appropriating its symbols, and, thus, needs to be defended from diffusing outwards. “Old-timers” and “new-comers” become, in Simon Harrison’s words, social idioms of cultural purity and ownership (Harrison 1999:12), and form a basis for formations of social in/out-groups within the locality.

Similarly, I also found negative sentiments towards Katy’s among some of my younger informants. One told me he rather did not fancy the place because of the music they played there, which he found too “mainstream”, that one had to pay an entry fee to get in, and that it often was too crowded by Kneipentouristen (people coming from outside the city part to party). Another informant, searching for a job next to his studies, signed up for an evening to try managing their outdoor barbecue stall which they set up in the summers, but soon gave it up because he experienced the staff as treating him rudely and impersonally, taking this as a proof of them only being interested in earning money. On one occasion I also observed a poster plastered on a wall reading “New town! No Preuss-town! Against Preuss and his accomplices!”. The sting was here directed against the Preuss-Sculz-Hübner GbR and their co-expansion of several nightclubs in the area. The emphasis of the “Preuss”-name implements a negatively loaded historical reference that associate the entrepreneurs with the militaristic Prussian state of Bismarck. In between this outcry,
someone had used a marker to humorously add the somewhat ambiguous statement: “Mickey Mouse lives here!” In this case we see that the negotiative frontier was formed variably along ideas of outsider vs. insider, “mainstream” vs. “alternative” and commercial vs. solidaric.

But the sentiments of Katy’s Garage and its sponsors were mixed, and the big crowds of customers they continued to attract indicate that they had also managed to win the sympathies of a considerable amount of people. My first meeting with Katy’s Garage happened together with the hosts who kindly housed me in the initial phase of my fieldwork, as I was still looking for a place to stay in the city part. They, a steady working couple in their late 20s, lived in a neighbouring city part, but went regularly into Äußere Neustadt for nightly amusements. That Thursday they were excitedly headed for “Krieger beats”, the regular Thursday night concept at the Garage, when the local DJ Krieger24 flipped records of genres ranging from alternative rock to nu-metal. Particularly my male host praised the music and the cool atmosphere. The night revealed a mixed clientele of young people displaying freakish styles of tattered second hand clothes, flashily coloured and/or uncouthly cut hair-dos and various forms of facial piercing and extravagant make up, all insignia which resonated the local “alternative” dress-code. Thus, Katy’s Garage clearly stood forth as a stage that for many was well suited for their everyday presentations of “alternative” selves in the locality.

Through talks with a local resident, who himself, together with a few friends, owned and run several other Kneipen in the area, I met more pragmatic views on the Kneipenboom and more sympathetic evaluations of the recently booming night life entrepreneurship. This Kneipe-owner was himself a native of Dresden and had lived in Äußere Neustadt for the past 15 years. He emphasised how, if it were not for the purchase by Preuss-Sculz-Hübner GbR, the open piece of land where the Katy’s Garage lies today would have been purchased by other interests, whom he presumed

24 “Warrior”.
would have set up city blocks there instead, thus robbing the area for the spacious and lively corner which Preuss-Sculz-Hübner GbR had produced. The negative attitudes towards the owners he interpreted as envies and spites that stuck deeper than the concrete clubs they referred to. He also criticised many of the supposedly “alternative” people in the area being too oriented towards the past, which he thought led to a type of negative and pessimistic thinking that he, with frustration, saw as typical of the German mindset. He was of the opinion that, although artists and intellectuals dressed up in stylish and extravagant manners and went to cocktail-bars, it need not deplete them of their “alternative” authenticity. His interpretation of alternativism emphasised a relaxed and opportunistic attitude to the changing local circumstances, apologising its contemporary re-expressions as ways of dealing tolerantly with the more general societal developments.

His own engagement in Kneipe-entrepreneurship he described as a spontaneous and creative process, grounded in the use of personal resources, experiences and tastes. He insistently rejected that he had any larger, preconceived business ideas designed for high profit as a main motive for his Kneipen-developments. As he presented it, his individual Kneipen were products of relaxed, spontaneous and communitarian unfolding of personal ideas and tastes within the framework of opportunities seen in the area by his trained eye. At the same time he argued pragmatically that making a living implied a certain engagement in monetary transactions, whilst at the same time expressing a general scepticism to an overtly commercial development of the quarter. Whilst he made care to communicate respect to the individual style and concept of other of the Kneipen in the area, expressing that he found it “fully OK” that different people do their things in their own ways, he also scorned the idea of chain-store Kneipen. To him, the vast majority of the contemporary Kneipen, however, were not big-profit enterprises, but rather products of various sympathetic entrepreneurs’ creative efforts. His interpretation of a local “alternative” culture was thus more plastic and open to redefinition, less projected on particular historical events. This reflected his embedding in social circles that embodied a stronger entrepreneurial outlook.
The variance in how different local actors related interpreted certain local cultural manifestations as valid “alternative” representations shows the social slipperiness of the concept. The contradicting views relied on the social and cultural sub-embeddings of the different actors within the locality, indicating the disjunctive, yet overlapping traits of the “alternative” concept as it manifested as a feature of the local ideoscape. The Kneipen-classifier held an understanding of the local alternativism whose guiding star were the local cultural events of the Wende-days. My younger informants rather judged on the basis of tastes and styles that they had acquired through their personal, migratory life-trajectories, significantly informed by more trans-locally mass-mediated “alternative” culture-clusters. The Kneipen-owner was, due to his engagement both as a commercial entrepreneur and a sympathiser of the image of the area as culturally distinct, most inclined to elaborate the idea of a local alternativism in an understanding that coupled innovation and creativity to commercial entrepreneurship.

If “alternative” was such an ambiguous, contested and anti-social cultural category, how could it rise as a peak of the local ideoscape at all? It was hinted earlier that modern individualist discourses are seeped in with the celebration of individuality as a socially prestigious value. In Äussere Neustadt, particular historical circumstances had provided the locality with another metaphor that substantiated the ideas necessary to turn the pluralic manifestations of the alternativist endeavours into a social field.
Colour. Poetics and politics of multiculturalism.

“We are tolerant to everything except intolerance.”

- BRN poster

As was related in chapter 2, in the summer of 1990, a small group of young leftist critics set up the first township festival called “Bunte Republik Neustadt”, “colourful republic New Town”, a festival which became an explosive popular success, establishing as a yearly tradition form that time on. Through these yearly celebrations, a perception of the city part as a “colourful” place has melded into in the mindsets of people both inside and outside the area. How does this conception manifest, and what does it mean? Which role does it play in the inhabitants’ sense of self and belonging? How does it intertwine with the local alternativism?

At first sight, a stroll through the area reveals that large parts of the city façade has been crafted, plastered, painted, sprayed and tagged with various graffiti, tags, stencils, stickers and posters (see chapter 4). Some places complete sidewalls of house blocks have been sprayed in elaborate graffiti motifs, some of which, according to one informant, was made collectively by street artist cooperatives. Many retail shops, such as for example the Spätshops, arty late night shops that sell snacks, soft drinks, alcohol and tobacco, also have had their store fronts painted in various, strongly coloured motifs. Other places one passes windows with colourful glass-paintings, or having colourful textiles that hang out on the building façade. During my visits in various WGs in the area looking for a place to stay in the first few weeks after my arrival in Dresden, I observed that colouring ones living quarters was

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25 Wohngemeinschaft, a flat shared by several young people, one of the most common housing solutions in the area.
also a typical in many homes. Flat-interiors had been creatively wrought in various pastiche coloured patterns and decorations. In the WG where I ended up moving in, the narrow kitchen, which also served as a shared living room, was painted in bright yellow, orange green, blue and red colours, patterned as irregular triangles and rectangles sprawling across the walls. My flat-mates told me that they had painted it with the help of their friends during of their moving-in party.

Thus, I learned that the “colourful” image is represented and reproduced by imprinting it onto the very material structures of the area. But colourfulness was not only reflected in the material structures, it was also used as a metaphor to describe a particular style of society that many inhabitants claimed persisted there. In a series of logos which were sprayed around in the area in the weeks prior to BRN 2006, one logo which reappeared was “colourful houses, colourful living!”, indicating that colourfulness also signified a lifestyle. When I asked one informant what the colourfulness ascribed to the city part meant to her, she referred to the many different kinds of people residing there, like students, families with small children, eco-people, alternatives and punks. She also pointed to the mix of nationalities, referring especially to the many Polish and Czech people. We see that the colour-metaphor was used to positively denote the city part as a diverse society, referring to its incorporating people of various social classes, cultures, ethnicities and nationalities. One informant summed it up as a “melting pot”, indicating a view that the mixing of all these different people melted them together, continuously re-moulding and recreating the local community in a culturally flourishing way. This view resounds the broader multi-culturalist discourse that expanded from US post-WWII black minority rights movements, which, in Terrence Turners words, revolves around “(…) [the] claim to stand for a liberating recognition of the de facto heterogeneity of the cultural and ethnic makeup of contemporary metropolitan societies (…)” (Turner 1993:412).

Returning to Lakoff & Johnson, the “colourful”-term can generally be seen as a metaphor which grasps the multi-culturalist idealization of diversity. The rainbow spectrum serves as a vivid and easily applicable representation of how diversity can
be grasped as a positive foundation for a harmonious, aesthetic whole. As it substantiates an otherwise abstract idea in a format that enables positively charged visualizations of multicultural societies, it worked as another ontological metaphor.

The idealization of societal diversity as celebrated in multi-culturalist discourses easily gets entangled in political agendas. The colour-metaphor was also in Äussere Neustadt from time to time evoked for political ends. For example, in the logo-series mentioned above, another recurring phrase which explicitly revealed a normative elevation of the colour-metaphor was “good, better, colourful!” (instead of “good, better, best!”). Sprayed as a celebratory outcry praising the authenticity of the colourfulness of the city part, it signalled that lack of diversity was a lack in societal quality. Another example was the citizen initiative entitled “Colourful Neighbourhood”, which in 2006 was organized the second year in a row by the local Dresden NGO Bürger Courage (see chapter 5). Preparing painting-workshops and a street parade, and appealing to the local inhabitants to hang out coloured fabrics from their windows, they tried to mobilise critical awareness to the rising right-wing growth mentioned above. At one of the painting workshops, an informant told me that the painting of cloths and the production of a colourful cityscape signalled opposition to a “brown” society. In this context, “Brown” (dull, drab, uniform) represented the right political wing and their ideologies.

The observant reader might have noticed the absence of discussions of sexuality. One common marker of many western, multi-culturalist urban localities is a prevalence of sexual minorities. Although not completely non-existent, and most certainly tolerated (a few bars were reputed to be gay bars, and I once observed a gay parade in the area), I observed no strong insignia of sexual dissent in Äussere Neustadt, at least far from its extent in “alternative” localities, such as Soho in London, or Greenwich Village in New York. I did not scrutinize this absence to any significant length, but it might be speculated that the double history of Nazism and socialism might, at least partly, account for it. Dagmar Herzog has indicated that the early, state institutional critique of Christian religion in the socialist east might have contributed to a more thorough and less politically tensed de-construction of its implicit sexually prudent
morality (Herzog 2005). Whereas sexuality became an important arena for alternativist rebellion and the construction of multi-culturalism in Western dissenting culture movements of the 1960s/-70s, as it was associated to political oppression, it might be that sexuality had less political relevance in the East due to this early depoliticisation. Moreover, it might also be that the homophobia and sexual segregation of the Nazi regime served as a further impetus for East German socialist authorities to liberalise sexuality, as it served the project constructing its national socialist ‘other’.

Terence Turner claims that multi-culturalism is a reaction to processes of state-delegitimation and the erosion of cultural hegemonies in late modernity. The application of the colour-metaphor to propagate and celebrate an image of a culturally diverse society in the area is a good example of how, in Turners words:

“...culture has come to serve as the basis both of imagined communities and individual identities deemed to be ‘authentic’ in contrast to repressive, alien, or otherwise ‘inauthentic’ normative codes, social institutions and political structures.” (Turner 1993:424)

As culture is the source of authenticity and rights within the multi-culturalist paradigm of diversity, cultural expression becomes a tool of empowerment. The romanticised colour-metaphor provides as a poetics of life and society that works to substantiate and naturalise the multi-culturalist worldview. In consequence it moves people to engage in culturally diversifying practices because these are interpreted as manifest realizations that represent a colourful society. Pursuing creative artistry, such as music, painting, street art and handicraft, were, thus, significant sources of social prestige in the city part because they were embodied representations of colourful diversification. Likewise, the empowering effect of the pluralised style of cultural expression that the colour-metaphor mediated gave people an impetus to orient their styles and tastes towards exotic and multi-ethnic cultural fields, as these served as alternate sources of creative cultural expression. By establishing diversity as a key social value, the colour-metaphor enforced social integration via the variable of cultural pluralisation.
The twin-ethoses of difference and diversity

I have now briefly sketched the features of two metaphors that dominated discourses and practices of identity and belonging, shaping the ideoscape of Äussere Neustadt. I have argued that “alternative”-metaphor enforces a radical form of self-differentiation, an effective medium of compliance to the broad prerogative of stylistic individuality pertaining to modern societies. Its effectiveness is, however, complicated by its shortcomings of working socially integrative. Thus, I have argued that the “colour”-metaphor works complementary to the “alternative”-metaphor by grasps and channelling the idea of diversity in the positive rhetoric of multiculturalism, furthering social integration on the premise of cultural pluralisation and giving the individualist trajectories of alternativism social significance.

These two value-systems thus work together in a complementary fashion. Whereas the alternativist project has its social shortcomings, the image of a colourful society works to build a basis of socialisation that positively sanctions the otherwise anti-socialising endeavours of self-differentiating. Conversely, in societies that celebrate cultural diversity and the ability of cultural mutation is seen as an important social value, the “alternative” culture-mode is a potent social path. In this manner, ideas of individualised cultural difference and social diversity operate so as to feed and breed each other, thereby securing mutual reproduction. When mediated by place, a further dimension is added to the reinforcement of the beliefs in the qualities that the metaphors signify. Via the metaphors of alternative and colour, the triadic semiotic interaction of agents, their practices, things and ideas, and place, thus, pools the abstract concepts ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ as qualitative, seemingly real substances. In turn, these continue to re-seep out of the very sociocultural textures in which they are soaked. The effects of the interplay between these twin-ethoses were a continuous pluralising of the cultural scene, shaping the ground for the reproductive maintenance of the locality as a heterotopic space.
Since the concepts ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ are to a lesser extent abstracted and canonized in Äussere Neustadt, relative to more institutionalised social systems, such as religious or academic corporations, a unitary collective local worldview is difficult to identify. Although residents abstracted and reflected opinions of the world and the locality variably, it was my experience that most sympathised to the values of self-differentiation and societal diversity at the level of affect, and that these sympathies to a large part defined their empathic affiliation to the locality. As these sympathies were less visible in the immediately disjunctively appearing individual styles and opinions, it was only through a gradual process that I came to see them as woven into the locality as dynamical keys in local aesthetic forms of expressivity. These features were first and foremost expressed as patterned, signifying practices, both collective (ritual) and individual (performed self-presentation). In the next chapters I explore how the concepts of diversity and difference not only existed and reproduced in the locality as ideas and verbal discourse (at worldview level), but in the very affects of its residents, that is in their collective and individual bodily practices (the level of ethos).
Chapter IV: Sociospatial transgressions of anti-aesthetics

“Art transports things elsewhere; it is the death instinct.”

- Jean Francois Lyotard, from the essay “A few words to sing”
in *Music/Ideology: Resisting the aesthetics*

The aim of this chapter is to show how the production and performance of art produce and reproduce social space according to the peculiarities of these practices. The focus on art practices derives from the fact that they dominated fields of cultural practice in my field. At the social level, art is a medium with which agents can establish meaning that can be shared with other agents. Thus, serving as a form of communication, it entails processes of signification. Cultural practice, of which art is but one type, has the power to signify basically any phenomenon that people experience. My concern is here their power to signify sociospatial confines, in this case a neighbourhood, substantiating social forms as ‘localities’. I use the term locality in the sense lain out by Arjun Appadurai, who describes a locality as “...primarily relational and contextual rather than spatial or scalar.” (Appadurai 1996:178). More than being an objective, physically observable phenomenon, a locality is an entity of meaning, constantly remoulded through social processes of interpretation, negotiation and contestation. Thus, space is continuously re-bracketed into meaningful localities that exist just as much in peoples’ minds as being independent, objective sizes. A locality is a social achievement in which places, such as neighbourhoods, maintain (more or less stable) inter-subjective meanings over time. Cultural practices that signify place profoundly determine the success of locality maintenance because they locate subjects in a meaningful space. Localities are therefore incorporated entities. In *Äussere Neustadt*, the engagement in various art practices was a way in which actors developed their sense of spatial belonging by constituting the spaces they inhabited with personalized meaning.
Two art practices will be addressed here. The first is street art. The architectural space of Äussere Neustadt is strongly subjected to a multitude of artistic forms and styles, another marker of its plurality. Although street art is found scattered all over the city, its multiplicity and presence is by no means as densely condensed as in this city part. As both street-artists themselves and consumers of their street art have different opinions of its style and purpose, artistic and ethical disagreements enmesh in the appropriation of locality through art. During my fieldwork I learned that these public art works were recurrently subjected to active and empathic interpretations and judgments by my informants. Although none of them were active street-artists, it was an aesthetic trait of the area that concerned them personally. Street art served as a reference of meaning in their processes of weaving themselves in as natives of the locality. Because I was situated outside the field of street art production, the street art case points to a neighbourhood-aesthetics from more position that is a more observatory than participatory. It is therefore a scratch comparative supplement in this chapter.

The primary ethnographic case of the chapter is the art practice musical jamming. As my informants were active practitioners themselves, and because I was able to participate extensively in these practices, the case provides deep-insight material upon which my broader arguments are based. Musical jamming is widely democratized as a leisure time activity amongst Äussere Neustadt residents. It is an important contribution to the apparent cultural vibrancy of the area, and can be said to be a central local manifest form of aesthetical representation. Because it is mostly performed as a complement to other, more subsistence-related activities, such as studying or paid work, it is usually of amateur quality and is practised with modest ambitions. I therefore presume that it is of significant relevance to collective processes of identity, lifestyle and sociality in the locality, holding significant sociolocal importance beyond its mere musical expressions.

As will be clear, these two art practices diverged on several points, such as in technology, mode of performance, participation and inclusion. The question is then how and why exactly these art practices worked as social techniques that contributed
to the production of the Äussere Neustadt locality. My exploration attempts to throw light on a set of general, underlying set of aesthetic principles that spur on the shaping of key social and cultural peculiarities that prevailing in the locality.

Architecture as canvas for public anti-art

“...a city like Munich is really horrible, it is destroyed...destroyed by cleanliness.”

- NOLOGO, Dresden street artist

A striking feature of Äussere Neustadt was its rich and flourishing array of street art. Although the term “street art” could be used to encompass all sorts of art work performed at street level, I use it in its more conventional way, referring to pictorial artworks placed on public architectural façades by non-governmental agents. The perhaps best known street art form is graffiti, that is, large, elaborate and detailed images, in a style often reminiscent of naive and comic cartoon drawing, sprayed onto bare building faces by urban youngsters. In the wake of graffiti a multiple range of street art forms have emerged. The graffiti works described above, pieces, are accompanied by tags, that is, simple, hastily drawn signatures. In the street artist use of spray-cans, a more recent phenomenon is pochier (from French, “stencil key set”), that is, the use of an image formatted on a stencil through which the image can be spray-copied and reproduced in rapid succession. Many contemporary street artists have also developed the use of various other instruments and materials that supersede the classical spray-can. In Äussere Neustadt, street art works wrought with paint-rollers, adhesive markers, chalk and even chewing gum bore witness of the expanding technological horizons of contemporary street artists. One example was various types of paste-works. These included politically engaged stickers of leftist political groups, retail shop advertising, football clubs, the use of postal stickers with personalised messages, as well as a range of different thematic poster series, designed, cut and
copied to be spread around by more professional and dedicated street artists. Finally, some street artists also integrated the very substance of buildings, producing installations that encompass various styles and techniques.

In its modern forms, graffiti and street art grew out of the underground hip hop-communities developing in New York around 1970. Soon it started diffusing as an urban cultural phenomenon across cities in North- and South America and Europe. Street art works as a source of identity and prestige within communities in which it is embraced. But it also has wider consequences: Today, it has become a widely known subcultural form of expression that is used to signify political and/or social protest. It is for example widely used by anarchist and punk subcultures, anti-war movements, in the propagation of ethnic minority rights, and in anti-consumerist protest action. It has also become a popular medium for adolescent protest. In other words, street art has developed into a globalised cultural means of counter-hegemonic action. Just as in the case of musical jamming, street art is strongly intertwined with ideas of creative dissent: It is a cultural medium through which mainstream conventions of pictorial art can be challenged, corrupted and reinvented by various actors. Dissent from aesthetic convention is not a matter of mere aesthetics: It is also of significance as a form of social and political critique.

One particular poster series in Äussere Neustadt was nearly impossible to miss: The pixel-art. Pixel-art works comprised a series of approximately a dozen, rather small, simply coloured iconic figures. Some figural examples were a DJ, a space alien, a robot beetle and a rocket. Their common feature was that they were all composed by pixels, that is, crude, square points. This graphical style is inspired by the earliest generations of animated computer games, a reminiscence which dons the pixel-art with a comical, techno-retro appearance. Asking around amongst my informants, they all knew the pixel-art well and many expressed a liking for it. What they knew of its progeny was, however, mostly rumours. One informant claimed that it had been made a few years ago by a guy whom he called “the pixel king”. He told me that he had heard that the pixel king had dropped pixel-art when the style had become popularized via its copying, printing and distribution through a skateboard retail shop called...
“NoKopi”. This informant, along with several other ones, also associated pixel-art with a widespread series of roller-painted labels reading “NO NAME, NO FAME, NO LOGO”. Due to the obscurity surrounding the pixel-art, it was however only towards the end of my fieldwork that I came to stumble across the artist himself, coincidentally discovering that that he was hosting a street art exhibition in a run down building in another part of Dresden.

He told me that he was a student in the art academy of the city and had more than 10 years of experience with street art, both locally and in networks spanning across other western European cities. In later years he had adopted the artist name NOLOGO, which for him was a way of underlining that street art should not be used as a means of establishing fame and status. He first and foremost saw street art as a matter of personal realization and artistic creativity. Thus, he was deeply critical to many of the currents within the street art culture that he interpreted as attempts to earn a name, or people who made street art without a sincere personal affinity. The pixel-designs, he told me, had been a fun-project he had developed some years back. Apart from being a style which had brought him amusement to develop, it had also been a protest against conventions of fine arts. However, when other people had started copying and printing it for sale, he had given it up, as the popularity and commercialism had, in his words, made him “sick”. Later on he went on to develop his art in new directions, emphasising that for him, true street art was a continuous process in which the artist interacted with his artistic media, continuously moving on, unconstrained by motivations of fame, convention or money.

An interesting aspect of street art is its employment of urban cityscapes as its canvas. Once installed, it is incorporated into the architecture, and in turn comes to be experienced as an integral part of the building mass. As street art is situated out on the streets and continuously attracts the attention of by-passers, it also becomes a matter of interpretation for its beholders. Thus, street art affects space not only aesthetically but also socially. It influences the ways in which people relate to their surroundings and, consequently, to each other, as they ascribe space onto themselves by developing relationships of belonging to the place. By contesting to define spatial
meaning, it also affects subjects who identify with it. Some street art bears explicit meaning that affects the individual beholder to a further or lesser degree, for example sprayed slogans such as “Nazis, get out”, or “Germany, you asshole!”, or sticker/poster-works using socialist symbols, such as red stars and banners. Nevertheless, as many street artists are affected by the ideas of individuality and do-it-for-the-fun-&-the-passion that NOLOGO expressed, a large part of the street art in the area was more obscure and unclear as of imposing clear cut meanings onto spectators. NOLOGO expressed a negative attitude towards using street art in a calculated, pedagogic way: It should rather speak differently to each beholder. Each and everyone should find their own personal meaning to it. That is not to say that his, or other street artists efforts were stripped of political associations. One poster-series by the hand of one of NOLOGO’s friends for example included various jester figures holding different signs, such as red stars, dollar signs and flowers. This illustrates how, at a detail level, street art was some times used to communicate a plural set of messages in purposely ambiguous compositions. These were open to a wide spectre of interpretation, constituting what Appadurai has termed ‘multiplex interpretative sites’ (Appadurai 1996:184).

The dynamical process of street art production in the area had profound impacts on the relationships between subjects and space. It unfolded along two basic traits: (1) Plurality and (2) transformation. Pluralisation is an effect of the fact that street art was performed by many different actors using varying techniques and styles. For example, NOLOGO took his nightly strolls of street art performance together with other experienced street artists, whereby each competed to work out their own, individual styles and themes. Additionally, street art was in Äussere Neustadt conducted by many other people, such as the various different poster-&-sticker-pasters, graffiti sprayer-crews, private house owners, taggers, as well as various social institutions that had elaborate street art works made at their compounds. As a consequence of the continuous amassing of various agents and stylistic expressions in the area, impressions of a city space that was in continuous transformation was left upon resident observers, producing a sense that the very matter of the urban confine was flourishing. By experiencing these ongoing processes in their day-to-day
inhabitation of the area, inhabitants became familiar with the street art, many also developing empathic relationships to it. The multiply expressed unfolding of the local street art scene inscribed the plurality and transformation into the very matter of the architecture, thereby mediating the collective impeding of an image of the place having an inherently colourful and creative essence. Adding on that street art was reputed to be an unconventional, underground and illegal art form, its prevalence furthermore worked to signify the locality as a haven of counter-culture.

In street art we see the contours of an aesthetic following principles of radical dissent, an ‘anti-aesthetics’ so to speak. Providing a potent artistic medium through which subjects could pursue alternativist self-differentiation, and manifesting so as to give reference to the celebration of diversity, it resonated well with the twin-ethoses of difference and diversity. In effect, it worked to reproduce the reputation of alternativism and colourfulness as essential traits of the city part by oscillating these ideas in highly visible and readable formats, written and wrought onto its very walls.
Photographic examples of local street art

“Mr. Mic”, NOLOGO pixel-art

Block-covering graffiti, made by a graffiti-collective

Joker paste-work series

Pochoir
(Reading “Shit home”, “for wanna-be natives” is added with a marker)
Enter the jam

Let us now turn to the practice of musical jamming, a case of particular interest because it is a form of sociocultural communication that is not primarily mediated in language or other visible symbols, but in non-verbal expressive forms. Therefore, by studying it, light will be shed on the multiple local processes of social, ideological and ethical mediation that unfolded beyond spoken words. A particularly interesting feature to non-spoken interaction is the simultaneity of individual expressions. I term the dialogic interaction in such synchronic multi-vocal fields as ‘polyphonic’, lending on Mikhail Bakhtin (1984). He used this term to analyse how the Russian novelist Fjodor Dostoevsky introduced a range of different characters in his works, each representing different ideas, whilst letting the dialogues between their polyphony of voices remain unresolved. This idea is reminiscent of Foucault’s heterotopia: In polyphonic communicative spaces a range of utterance-sequences exist and unfold simultaneously, without their oppositional tensions becoming ultimately resolved: They are audial heterotopia. As will be elaborated below, musical produces are also polyphonic systems of representation, containing internal tensions that leave them open to continuous re-interpretation. In musical jamming, a particularly type of discordant musical polyphony is pursued, hinting that it is a referential system wrought with tensions. How do such internally tensed processes of polyphonic communication expand in broader social fields?

Musical jamming is commonly seen to have appeared in the US jazz scene between the two great wars. A central trait of the jam session is the technique of improvisation, that is, spontaneous and creative instrument-use. Relative to other forms of musical performance, jam sessions are often free, spontaneous and erratic events, possessing a notable lack of clear, pre-agreed plans or schemas. Thus, they have lesser structure and boundedness than musical sessions unfolding around sets of

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26 Certain music historians trace its roots to traditional forms of African music.
pre-arranged themes. Jam sessions do not only accept divergence of performance: Rebelliousness is celebrated in itself. Therefore, at first sight, musical jamming seems to entail a paradox. How can a cultural practice that explicitly celebrates dissent work socially integrative?

Our empirical case is a loosely knit jammers’ network that developed in Äussere Neustadt during my fieldwork. By exploring its peculiarities, I address the general theme of non-verbal socialisation and the question of how dissenting cultural practices can work to integrate social networks. More specifically, I try to illuminate why and how my informants embraced the jamming practice, and how their jamming practices reflect and contribute to the institution and reinstitution of the twin-ethoses of difference and diversity (see chapter 3). Finally, I ask if and how they served to produce Äussere Neustadt as a particular locality.

The contours of a grass root jammers’ network

The jammers’ network largely developed in the temporary premises of a local volunteer culture organization, Art der Kultur e.V.27 through the winter and spring of my fieldwork. Providing a meeting-locale for small, musically inclined friend-circles, the ground was prepared for the consolidation of an informal, subcultural grass-root network of local amateur musicians. From its conception in Art der Kultur, its members eventually started staging jam sessions in other public places in the area, such as in cafés and bars, and, as the change towards summer temperatures permitted it, in parks, under bridges, on the side walks and in private backyards. It is important to emphasize that the demographic and social character of contemporary Äussere Neustadt forwarded a highly fertile environment for the development of the jammers’

27 Art der Kultur e.V, the name literally meaning “Way of culture”, was one of many small, locally minded NGOs that have popped up throughout the former East Germany after die Wende, as civil society has been democratised. e.V. is an abbreviation for eingetragener Verein, “registered association”, which indicates its official status, granting official funding and tax benefits.
Making music was a hobby of a significant number of its inhabitants. The area hosted a lively amateur band scene, as the wellspring of concerts in the dense variety of clubs throughout the week bore witness to. Jamming was by no means a novelty in the area. Several clubs had periodically throughout the latest years hosted open jam sessions, at times on a weekly basis. Nevertheless, the sessions that unfolded in *Art der Kultur* exposed certain peculiar twists of the subcurrents of local musicianship.

I was drawn to the jam sessions through my informants, who saw it as a fresh opportunity to *Mukke machen*. *Mukke* is an East German slang word for music, meaning “to make music”. It was often used by my informants to describe the activity of meeting up together to play music. These musical gatherings were predominantly social events. The main motivation was to hang out together and use music as an open medium for spontaneous bonding, more than producing finished musical material. Their growing interest for the numerous public jam sessions taking place around in the clubs of the city resounded a wish to get more familiar with the local public musician scene. Prior to their involvement in the Monday jam sessions, my informants had been meeting either in a rented practice locale in an old, run down factory, or in my informant Helge’s 15 m² *WG* room. There he, a 23 years old student of philosophy and music history, had ingeniously crammed in a bricolage of second hand musical equipment amassed through the years, such as a drum set, a piano, several amplifiers, a set of turntables, as well as recording equipment.

*Art der Kultur e.V.* was founded in 2004. By the time of the Monday jam sessions, it was run by a group of 7 people, mainly students. It was dedicated to sponsor a “manifold of cultural alternatives”²⁸ through the establishment of a platform for “the forwarding and networking of regional art”²⁹. In 2005, they had acquired a small locale in the area that they could use as an administrative base. They also started

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²⁸ *Sächsische Zeitung*, 11.05.2005.

²⁹ [www.artderkultur.de](http://www.artderkultur.de).
hosting the main portion of their activities here, including weekly concerts with bands from the region, a super-8 movie-club, small art exhibitions, meetings for discussion and exchange with other local culture associations, literature reading evenings, as well as culturally oriented meetings for children. Through the initiative of the neighbourhood mystic Georg (described in depth below), the jam sessions started taking place every Monday evening, starting around 10 pm and lasting until 1-3 am. The premise was a small concrete room, painted in red and white, dimly lit with lamps casting their light on a rotating old disco-sphere, giving the room a spinning feeling. In the one end, a 3 inch tall stage with a pair of old vocal-speakers presided over a floor set up with a bunch of second hand furniture. In the back, a simple, seemingly home crafted bar had been raised from where beer and free snacks were served by a stern woman, the representative of the association set to watch over this particular event. In the early days, as winter slowly gave way to spring, there were usually no more than 10-20 people showing up, giving the event a somewhat run down and misshappened flair. As summer approached however, more people started coming, to a point where the event had transformed into a packed, noisy, smoky and jovial happening.

The sessions were constituted by a series of shorter or longer jamming performances, in which people who had shown up to participate, alternated at will between the role as performer and the role as spectator. The number of participants ranged from two up to almost a dozen. When approaching the latter number, the group would transgress the border of the small stage, often assuming a loose circular formation in which the musicians were oriented inwardly towards each other, rather than outwards towards the spectators. A typical performance lasted up to 10 minutes. Its expression was usually somewhat monotonous, revolving around one fairly simple theme, initially improvised by a random participant at the beginning. A basic openness to the application of musical technology reigned. Principally anything which could produce sound was acceptable. Thus a diverse range of instruments was assembled, creating jamming pools that were variously and shiftingly composed of basses (electrical & non-electrical), guitars (electrical, acoustic, picking), e-bows (an electric device used to imitate violin sound with an electric guitar), violins, vocals, accordions, organs,
drum sets, cymbals and various other exotic percussion devices, mouth harps, harmonicas, clarinets, flutes, trumpets, and saxophones.

There was no strong emphasis on particular musical genres. The participants were free to mix in whichever musical orientations they had, resulting in potpourri styled performances. The spectre encompassed blues, rock, jazz, funk, hip hop, pop, reggae, classical music, as well as European & world traditional folk music. A notable lack though, was more aggressive rock forms, whilst blues had a certain prevalence, a trend which often gave the sessions a rough flair reminiscent of the American, alternative hippie-rock music scene in the years following the youth movement of 1968. The expectation of technical skill was very modest; a norm of generalized participation was cultivated before technical brilliance. This further diversified the line-ups, but also imbued the performances with a somewhat mediocre quality. Participant age spanned from teens, to people in their 60s, with a slight overweight of the people between 20 and 30. Although dominated by regional ethnic Germans, quite a portion had extra-regional origins, such as former West Germany, the British Isles, Spain and Morocco. Although male dominated, quite a number of females were also at times involved.

As this account indicates, even though the jam sessions had recognizable traits that gave them a distinct form, they were at the same time markedly open, composite and diverse, encompassing a broad range of instruments, genres and participants. Their wide space for improvisatory and creative musical expression indicates that they encompassed a set of highly partial and erratic dynamics. The implications and consequences of these dynamics will be elaborated below. Here it suffices to note that their significant degree of openness, at least initially, was an important cause for the networks speedy social expansion and integration because it made them highly inclusive.
The presence of a neighbourhood mystic

It was through the jam sessions I got to know Georg, a 56 year old resident, to whom I was often referred by other inhabitants of Äussere Neustadt when making inquiries about the locality. Supposedly he had more intimate knowledge of its people, culture and history than most, as he had seen it at street level for more than a decade. Later on, I learned that, through his contact with the people of Art der Kultur e.V., he had taken the initiative to establish the Monday jam sessions. His suggestion seems to have been accepted by the staff mainly through an informal, friendly consent with the sound of the idea. The importance of Georg’s presence in the dynamics and structures, along which the jammers’ network developed, became increasingly clear to me throughout my own participation. He was nearly always present and seemed to know everyone who turned up personally. In the jamming, he participated broadly, varying from active performance, to the administrating of technical equipment, to subtly correcting the performance of other participants. Later on I also observed how he, in his everyday life, which he largely spent out in the streets of the area, made keen efforts to recruit all kinds of people whom he thought might have some musical inclination.

To many, Georg was just known “the Neustadt window cleaner”, as he for many years had been washing windows on the town’s façade. Through this work, he had developed his distinctly street-near life style, as well as earned a reputation as someone who knew everyone and everything that one would want to know about Äussere Neustadt. Upon asking a saxophone playing informant of how he had gotten acquainted to Georg, he told me that: “Georg is just that guy I always saw around here and knew that I would get around to talk to sooner or later, when the occasion got right” (which it had done a few months earlier, when Georg had approached him and his guitar-playing companion after a small public gig they made, inviting them to come to play in Art der Kultur). Upon relating this, he shrugged in a way that underlined the unquestionable naturalness of the event. In an interview, Georg related how he, somehow by chance, had ended up in Dresden in the early 1990s, shortly
after die Wende. Coming out of Thuringia\textsuperscript{30} minded on going to Berlin, he had picked up a hitch-hiker on the way and brought him to Dresden. Here his car had broken down and, lacking money for its repair, he had simply decided to stay as a room happened to open up in an occupied house in the city part. His loose and vague story stressed that the succession of events was unplanned and incidental. Its factual credibility is of less significance. Most importantly, it illustrates the pervasive attitude of carefreeness and spontaneity with which Georg strived to meet his life. As we shall see, this attitude also resonated strongly in the practices of the jammers’ network and furthermore reflected a broader current in the ideas of life in the city part.

Reflecting upon his personal history in our various talks, Georg elaborated further his perspectives on existential matters of life. He told me how he in his youth had lived what he in a warmly ironic tone called “a successful” life: Studying, having a nice girlfriend and playing in a band. The cause of irony was unravelled in his explanation that the “successful life” also entailed an excessive lifestyle, involving many late evenings, unhealthy food and extensive intoxication. He summed up this mode of life as living mainly “from the outside and in”, relying on external pleasures for happiness, which by the end of his twenties had led him to “hit the wall”\textsuperscript{31}. Losing the ability to stand upright in the life he had relied on up until then, he had turned his back to the world and isolated himself in his apartment for several months. When he gradually managed to piece himself together, he started a life that seriously questioned the way of life that had led him to the breakdown. He related of how he had searched in mystical practices such as Zen Buddhism and Celtic esotericism, participating in various projects, for example in idealistic communes on the countryside that strived for self-sufficed and ecological living, and in grass-root associations sponsoring neighbourhood culture. He had attempted to expand his new life in accordance with ideals of simplicity, autonomy and generosity. This had entailed taking humble accommodation in for example occupied housing or in bed

\textsuperscript{30} The state bordering Saxony to the west.

\textsuperscript{31} This expression hints to a sort of psycho-social breakdown.
sits, and working as a window cleaner, as a babysitter or earning money from single, spontaneously organized cultural events, such as musical performances or flea markets. His lifestyle, constituted upon such rather coincidental and immediate subsistence activities, not only allowed, but also required of him to spend large amounts of time hanging out on the local street corners. Although remaining unstressed by Georg, who rather emphasised its idealistic aspects, sustaining a life that denied the accumulation of private capital beyond immediate needs is highly dependent on the fruits of stable and elaborate social networks which can provide. To maintain these subsistence networks required of him a daily street-side life in which he could observe the various people and fates passing by and engaging in expanded small-talking with the broad range of persons with whom he saw it fit.

Within the Monday jam sessions, as in many other local events of notice, Georg was an expected requisite. He typically greeted his acquaintances (which would usually be at least the half of the roughly 10-75 people who on average showed up) with a smile and a heartily hug, but steered clear of deeper conversations beyond friendly small-talk. He often urged the earliest arrived musicians to break through initial stage shyness and encouraged them to rig themselves up on the stage to get started. He thereby inspired individual responsibility, gently reminding that the collective success of the event depended on the efforts of each and every of the participants. As the jams were played out, he immersed himself naturally in the scenery. At times he actively participated in the jam session as a guitar and vocal performer, before retreating to more secluded spots amongst the audience, where he watched the unfolding events, reflectively sucking in and evaluating the atmosphere. Through his engagement, he committed himself repeatedly to various efforts of balancing the performance. These ranged from arranging more microphones to let more people on the stage, taking care that the sound-mixer equipment was balancedly adjusted, to urging more passive and shy musicians to get involved. When performing, he actively invited others to step up and add initiative to the performance by looks, smiles and gestures. Least conspicuous, though particularly interesting, was his occasional movement about and between the various participants during the jam sequences, whispering indications in the ears of the performers that they should bring their performance a bit forward
within the audial spectrum, or back a little down to let the others come more forth. Thus, Georg was subtly trying to orchestrate the flux of the jamming through a multiple set of strategies.

Discussing the dynamics of the jam sessions, he once told me that what he found of crucial importance was the ability to “make oneself small”. This trait he contrasted to the type of performance where individual artists try to impress the audience, wresting the spotlight onto themselves through the display of technical excellence. Motivated by an urge to de-individualize and collectivize the jam session, a central emphasis in Georg’s approach was placed on the skill of **listening**. In his view, the excellence of the individual performer relied on the ability to listen to the ensuing fluctuations of the jam session, reflexively adjusting the level of engagement with a profound sense of one’s place within the unity of the group.

One Monday, as I was on stage with my guitar, Georg, with reference to the participation of a rookie pianist in the assembly, explicitly asked me to develop a theme for a jam that was not too complicated. At first, this request somehow startled me, being accustomed to yielding my best when stage-performing. The experience was remarkable: Letting go of my self-projected idealized imagery of the musician as a de-contextualized technical genius, I could relax into a performance technical simplicity. In its wake followed an experience of empathic immersement in the unfolding music, manifesting as a co-produced entity shared by all the participants. Aside from increasing the harmony of the co-performance, at the personal level I experienced the listening-approach as a very soothing way of entering the stage. I could more easily release any feelings of stress due to fears of failing to live up to my own personal expectations of my individual stage-self. Georg’s approach thus seemed to have a therapeutic dimension, which might not be all coincidental. Georg often conversed morally around a worldview placing love in the centre of human nature. His explicitly compassionate behaviour, as illustrated through his pervasive habit of meeting acquaintances with big hugs, indicates that he saw himself as an agent within a grander scheme of releasing people of their sufferings, a motivation reminiscent of his dabbling with various spiritual traditions.
Although representing a somewhat generative, guiding element in the unfolding process of this jammers’ culture, Georg was by no means authoritarian in style. His involvement was subtle, careful and suggestive rather than bastant and instructive. It is therefore wrong to ascribe him any position of formal leadership in the network, or to derive the ways the Monday jam sessions flowed to his sole efforts. He rather worked as a cultural expert who had an intuitive knowledge of the local ideoscapes, gained through a long decade of active neighbourhood involvement. The practical impact of his ideas and knowledge seeped into the jam sessions, as into other events in the area as such (another example is given in chapter 5), because he consciously positioned himself in between the textures of the flows of cultural practice. Thus, his influence was significant, but still not all-powerful and absolutely determinative. Although he was fairly successful in socializing his listening-approach to the sessions, other participants could at the same time define their own spaces of action.

**Jamming - a localising sociocultural practice**

As previously discussed, seemingly contradicting sets of values circulated in the locality, namely those of cultural plurality versus social unity. Whereas the first condensed ideas such as freedom, individuality, creativity and uniqueness, the latter condensed ideas as solidarity, collectivity, integration and equality. The jam sessions provided a micro-cosmic field of practice in which the tensions between these value sets could be resolved. By studying their structures and dynamics it is possible to uncover the interlinkage between dissent and integration.

At the level of cultural expression, the jam sessions abided strongly by norms of improvisation, spontaneously free performance, and divergence. When practising, the jamming performer utilised instruments and skills to challenge and thereby erode musical plans, schemas and genres. He or she thus strove to rebel from conventions of predictability in tightly organized musical groups, such as bands or orchestras.
Music that was identified as overtly predictable, strongly adhering to particular musical conventions, was by my informants typically located in the main stream music industries of popular radio and TV. Such music, though to be reflexively designed to accommodate popular tastes, they judged as products of a commercialist musical strategy that was primarily directed towards making money. Its progeny was seen to exploited music to drive on the wheels of a mass culture consumption market. The market of musical mass culture was felt as a threat towards artistic freedom and individuality. A means to rebel was to reject and reverse any principles seen as structuring such musical produce. Jamming served as means by which musicians could reject such mass consumption. By exploring individuality through musical mediation, they realized the value set of cultural plurality, simultaneously demonstrating opposition to mass society.

How then could a sense of communalism develop around a musical code of conduct that propelled the individuals in diverging directions? The accounts of Georg reveal several features that help to understand this. One is the norm of generalized inclusion. To Georg the stage was principally open to anyone. In its most profound sense, to him the musical jam represented an arena where people, through expressing their individuality, eventually would come closer to each other. A key normative prescription was elevating participation and expression above the mere technical quality of performance. This trait was vividly revealed one Monday evening in the sudden exclamation of a clownish Irish vagabond artist who sometimes appeared. After witnessing a rather mediocre performance, judging from harmony, coherence and eloquence, he sprung to his feet, clapping exaggeratedly whilst yelling: “Bravo, bravo!... I applaud now for the expression, not the quality...well, maybe also some times the quality..., but the expression itself!” The open stage bred a culture among the jammers of inviting anyone who somehow had an interest in musical performance to come along. Although the ability of improvisatory innovation remained a guiding star, the cultivation of democratic expression provided a basic atmosphere of appreciation for all involvements, regardless of skill. What was cultivated, was the mere act of expressing in itself, more so than a particular quality of expression. Georg’s instigation of the listening- and making oneself small-approaches
simultaneously encouraged the participants to maintain a balance of expression between individual exploration and supporting one's co-performers, working to temper any radical expressionist endeavours, which otherwise would risk undermining the principal openness of the stage.

Another integrative aspect of the sessions was the emotional resonance that the experience of shared musical performance produces. Ethnomusological studies have shown that music works as a medium that catalyses emotion and meaning in a distinct way. Working from Piercian semiology, Thomas Turino states that “...the power of music to create emotional responses and to realize personal and social identities is based on the fact that musical signs are typically of the direct, less mediated type.” (Turino 1999:224). He is referring to Pierce’s processual sign-model, the ‘semiosis’, in which a sign is constituted by (1) its actual appearance, the ‘representamen’, (2) an ‘object’, that is the meaning assigned to it by an observer and (3) an ‘interpretant’, the effect the sign has in the observer, ranging from sensations and emotions to thoughts and ideas. Seen as meaningful entities, musical utterances can also be understood as signs that simultaneously appear to a perceiver as (1) mere sound (representamen), (2) a bearer of meaning, relative to the interpretative horizon of the perceiver (object), and (3) responsive impulses in the perceiver, of both sensual and/or intellectual kinds (interpretant).

Turino argues that musical semiosis involves a special kind of direct and low-mediated interrelation of these three aspects, because musical sounds (representamen) invite responsive impulses (interpretants) of a more sensational and emotional character. The more material and fixed appearances of linguistic representamen (words and symbols) more easily allow responsive impulses, or interpretants, that are more reflexively and abstractly organized, that is, those of thought and intellect. On the other hand, semiotic musical unfolding happens significantly through its particular power to produce emotional and affective before intellectual responses in its listeners. For the jammer, the affect of the musical semiosis is presumably intensified as the bodily involvement is not only one of audial consumption, but also of interactive production. A wider range of physiological and mental capabilities of
the individual is utilised in a direct, willed and active effort, not only to appreciate, but also to channel the flow of the music. This sensual character of semantic mediation explains the special social power of music. When several people co-engage and communicate in musical interaction, the experience is significantly seeped in affect and emotion, lending on to strong experience of natural solidarity. In everyday social interaction, my informants enjoyed to retrospectively co-memorate- and evaluate the sessions, as well as spending much time planning ahead those to come, proof that the sessions were loci of strong social excitement and bonding.

But the effects of this ‘jam-iosis’ had broader implications beyond its immediate social effects: It produced semantic fields that were of wider collective significance, that is, it provided a cultural frame for the moulding of social identities. Music as a system of meaning is composed by specific sets of codes that can be understood and interpreted intersubjectively. The basic code-sets are harmony, melody and/or rhythm, which in turn provide the ground for the development of specific types of performance, style and genre. Naturally, the performances in Art der Kultur also relied on basic harmonic, melodic and rhythmic compositions. Nevertheless, this fails to explain why the plural and improvisatory jamming form prevailed over, for example more tightly organized rock bands or brass orchestras. To understand this, it is necessary to see that the jamming practice corresponded in a meaningful way with the jammers’ lives. Turino, referring to Becker and Becker (1981), writes that: “Musical forms that ‘sound like,’ that is resemble, in some way, other parts of social experience are received as true, good, and natural.” (Turino 1999:234). Thus, musical forms can serve as representations of wider subjective life domains.

Reviewing the jamming practice in the light of the twin-ethoses of difference and diversity, its formal traits of dissent and divergence seem to have a particular resonance. Jamming was a field of practice in which people socialized into distinct, localised ethoses could realize their self-reflexive identities as well as reproduce social identities as a consequence of collective recognition. Musical instruments and the basic codes of music (harmony, melody, and rhythm) served as means to signal dissent from the conventional compository schemas that the jammers recognised as
popular, “mainstream” music. Jamming was a mode of musical performance that, in and by itself, was structured by the principle of dissent, producing distinctly disjunctive styles of musical performance. This structuring principle transgresses into neighbouring semiotic fields, reproducing and reflecting as principles of significance also in wider social and cultural spheres. Dissent and divergence was enforced and reproduced as more general values amongst the jammers and in their social networks.

Although expressed in different words, Georg was not oblivious to the socializing power of jamming in this Äußere Neustadt. When I asked his intention of initiating the Monday jam sessions, he modestly replied that he had wished to “create a place where people could meet each other”. His ability to identify jamming as a particularly powerful social medium for this purpose sprung from his intimate understanding of the particular social experience prevailing in the neighbourhood. In fact, jamming fitted particularly well to integrate communities within this social field because it was strung up on cultural ideas of creativity and dissent. Public jam sessions were smoothly appropriate forms of social practice exactly because they allowed participants to generate communities that celebrated the local ethos through representational action. Thus, the technique of jamming constituted fields of cultural practice where the social experience of the locality was incorporated in the practitioners. Correspondingly, being celebrated as events that signified the uniqueness of the city part, it contributed to the reproduction of the locality. Evidence of the interrelatedness of the jamming-practice and the production of locality sometimes appeared quite explicitly. An example was the improvised, hip hop-inspired lyrical jamming of one informant, who recurrently praised Äußere Neustadt as a unique place, rapping about it as a place where people could live relaxed and realize their individuality through free creativity.
Spatial jamming

“Culture jamming is also known as ‘semiological’ (Dery, 1993) or ‘meme’ (Lasn, 1999) warfare, a contest over meanings and forms of representation, particularly as propagated in society through various media of communication.”

- Culture Jamming: A sociological perspective, Vince Carducci

In the two cases explored in this chapter I have uncovered how the two different local art practices street art and musical jamming represent a broader, primary aesthetic principle of the locality. This principle is that of ‘anti-aesthetics’, or the attempt to invert aesthetical styles and forms that were seen as somehow conventional or “main stream”. In its turn, this anti-aesthetic prepared the ground for forms of sociality and culture that unfolded along dynamics of divergence, dissent, plurality and diversity. Furthermore, it has been argued that these practices worked to reinvest and reinforce these dynamics as parts of the local ideoscape. Their localising into an ideoscape was significantly mediated through the city part in which the art practices were performed, so that place served as a referential point of meaning in art practitioners’ life-worlds. The art practices, and the ideas they represent, were, thus, bounded, invested and substantiated as finite spatial features, producing the sense of a distinct locality. The Äussere Neustadt locality therefore existed as a meaningful entity at the intersections between objective space, subjective horizons and the sociocultural practices by which these were merged.

Musical jamming and street art can furthermore be seen as examples of ‘culture jamming’ (Carducci 2006), a structure of cultural expression intended to disrupt more homogeneous cultural complexes. Thus, beyond effecting to invest a particular ideoscape in the material structures and the resident subjects of the area, the
pervasiveness of the culture jamming practices, performed as localising activities, produced the very city part as a pole of culture jamming within the larger city space. Appadurai has emphasised that localities generate contexts of interpretation. Context generation takes place both inwardly, through the incorporation of localities in local subjects, and outwardly, that is, in competing for influence with other context-generating entities (Appadurai 1996). The cases above are vivid examples of processes of inward context generation.

The outward context generative force of Äussere Neustadt was most evident in the ways its reputation attracted masses of visitors. Through various sources, they had heard of its colourfulness and the liveliness, and wished to come to experience it for themselves. Thus, in weekends, in holiday times, and especially for the BRN festival, thousands of non-resident people fluxed in to engage in its cultural life. Visitors were variably affected by the peculiarities of the locality, bringing these experiences along out into their everyday lives elsewhere. As such, the locality worked as a beacon for ideas of sociocultural dissent and diversity. On the other hand, the masses of people were received with ambivalence by many of the more inbred inhabitants. To them they often represented a threat to the locality, bringing along traits from the outside, such as gross capital and “mainstream” culture, traits that risked undermining the perceived counter-cultural spirit of the area. Similarly, the forces of gross capital investment, exemplified by the continuous expansion of shops, nightclubs and the investments of private house brokers were other examples of external contexts which imposed on the locality. A third competing context was city politicians who tried to impose increased police patrolling and surveillance onto the area as a reaction to some recent clashes between left-wing and right-wing radical youth in the area.

The anti-aesthetics reflected a deeply locally rooted critical view of culture and society, organised in the binary opposition “hegemonic” vs. “marginal” culture. The field of art provided the jammers and the street artists with battleground where they could pick up and apply the corresponding instruments to challenge and destroy some of these perceived hegemonic structures, as well as create new, “better” cultures and societies. In Äussere Neustadt, the joint efforts of the various counter-cultural
practices throughout several decades had instituted these principles as integral parts of the locality itself, thus securing them certain persistence in spite of the fact that few inhabitants remained residents more than a handful of years.

The anti-aesthetically structured art practices had over time flourished and multiplied in the area so as to produce a locality that appeared distinctly heterogeneous, displaying a wide range of diverging, incoherent cultural fields of expressions. Since any anti-aesthetic effort relies on a conceived dominant form of aesthetics, just as any counter-cultural effort relies on the spotting of a dominant culture, they however united in reflecting some other, already observed broader cultural phenomenon. Thus, in their inversions resonating broader societal cultural traits, they were recognisable and open to reflective interpretation to most visitors. Their corrupted and malformed character had a strong potential of producing ambivalent feelings, both fascinating and repulsing, as the disrupted forms easily disturbed more broadly manifest aesthetic and cultural opinions and tastes. The anti-aesthetic plurality, both in its inner incoherent appearances and in its ambiguous, condensed reflectiveness of broader cultural structures, was a strong indicator of the heterotopic quality of Äussere Neustadt: It encompassed a multiple space of sociocultural deviance, condensing in a queer mirror-image of broader societal structures.
Chapter V: Carnivalesque subversion

“During carnival times life is subject
only to its laws, that is, the laws of its
own freedom. It has a universal spirit;
it is a special condition of the entire world,
of the world’s revival and renewal,
in which all take part. Such is the essence
of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants.”

- Mikhail Bakhtin, in the introduction to
Rabelais and His World

Mikhail Bakhtin established one of the most thorough sociocultural perspectives on the European folk-tradition of carnival in western intellectual history. At the base of the renaissance carnival he identified what he termed the ‘carnivalesque’ spirit, further distinguished by three interrelated key traits: (1) Ritual spectacles, (2) comic compositions and (3) mockery (Bakhtin 1968:5). In contemporary western cultural and subcultural currents, much evidence can be found of how the carnival tradition serves as a reservoir for artefacts, practices and ideas that work to signify sociocultural dissent, as well as in productions of communitarian ideologies. In Äussere Neustadt everyday life, I frequently saw signs of the carnival, such as costume-like nonconformity in dress, various spectacles of playful entertainment and juggling in public places, as well as recurring spontaneous and jovial festivals and street parades. A particular tone of parodying humour often stuck to such displays, a tone resounding also in more general oral discourses and local print media. Furthermore, a festive type of communitarian idealism tended to reverberate in everyday speech and leisure time practices, as well as in local art practices and public events.

The introductory quote of this chapter indicates Bakhtin’s pioneering role in developing the kind of experiential, subjective and sensually informed social theory
that figures so strongly in contemporary anthropology. He saw carnival a means of mediating social tension, the main instrument being the grotesque body. As Bakhtin, many other anthropologists have emphasised the special representational qualities of the body in defining and redefining societal structures (Douglas 1966, Ardner 1987, Martin 1992, Turner 1995). In Bakhtin’s renaissance carnival, seen as a folk- and, hence, low-cultural phenomenon, social tensions were mediated through the temporal reversal of structures of high - low, concretely performed through mirthful exclamations of bodily vulgarity. Thus, the body functioned as a key symbol in a collective signification of social dissent. Understanding the symbolic body in the terminology of Victor Turner (1964), Bakhtin’s point would be that the temporal translocation of its poles leads to a transgression of societal structures so that power-inequalities are temporarily suspended. In other words, manipulating the symbolic body makes it an instrument of social subversion, a locus of agency and empowerment for the lower social strata of society. In Bakhtin’s carnival, essential to the achievement of symbolic translocation is a particular application of humour, ridicule and laughter. The genuine carnival laughter he described as “(…) universal in scope (...), “(…) directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants.”, concluding that, through its all-encompassing lens, “The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity.” (Bakhtin 1968:11). Through an atmosphere of totalized mockery, social structure is temporarily relativised and broken down, uniting all participants in a jovial, juicy and abundant play of life. As in Foucault’s heterotopia, a temporary suspension and transformation of societal structures is the reflexive consequence of signs that signify these structures in corrupted styles.

Bakhtinian ritual theory adds to the sociological debate of hierarchy and resistance, presenting carnevallesque practices as instruments by which underprivileged social strata can rebel temporarily against their oppressors through the inversion of hegemonic symbolic orders. In the resistance-debate, a major tension is whether ritual opposition actually produces any real change, or whether it ultimately only contributes to reaffirm hierarchies. I assume that in its dialogue with hegemony, all resistance produces change, but that this not necessarily means the immediate toppling of larger power systems. Power fluctuation usually happens slowly and
through bypass-routes, often unnoticeable to eyes trained on short time-spans. I will not attempt any exhaustive accounts of the effects carnivalesque practices in my field had on larger power-systems. Instead, its carnivalesque features shall be exposed to focus on how they worked socially integrative and culturally generative. Connerton points out a particularly interesting feature of the Bakhtinian ritual carnival, namely its ‘anticipative representativity’ (Connerton 1989:50). His point is that in Bakhtin’s carnival, the symbolic categories refer just as much to utopianist views of an open and unforeseen future, as to present categories, which means that the horizon of the carnival is *transcendental*. Thus, more than being mere acts of structural inversion, carnivalesque practices are rather, as some writers on Bakhtinian carnival theory, like Stallybrass and White have emphasised, acts of *structural transgression* (Stallybrass & White 1986). I choose to see them as collective attempts of de-structuring, tuned toward temporary establishments of ‘flattened’, or, to borrow a term from Victor Turner, ‘anti-structured’ communal modes of social organization. Such efforts naturally embark from certain given social taxonomies, as no action can be made unembeddedly, but, once propelled, they tend to transcend their power contexts and unfold along a set of inner dynamics and logics.

I will not provide a complete, exhaustive account of all carnivalesque evidence that I found during my fieldwork, as this would imply a listing project that easily dulls readers and risks clouding the more general insights into the implications of local carnival phenomena. Instead I proceed to illustrate and interpret the carnivalesque *Äussere Neustadt* through three particular street-parades. The first was a local variant of the carnival, which today is celebrated world wide in February, the second an anti-Neo-Nazi parade organized by a grass-root NGO, and the third is a parade which formally closed the *BRN*-festival of 2006. Paul Connerton sees rites as “porous”, stating that: “(...) whatever is demonstrated in rites permeates also non-ritual behaviour and mentality.”, and furthermore: “(...) [rites] are held to be meaningful because rites have significance with a set of further non-ritual actions, to the whole life of the community.” (Connerton 1989: 44-45). Thus, he implies that the study of public ritual behaviour can give access to more general features of the sociocultural sphere in which it is played out. This view concords with the Geertzian presumption
that the dramatized symbolic play of ritual action can be understood as texts, which, through deep anthropological interpretation, can illuminate the more general features of ethos and worldview in a given group (Geertz 1973:127). Depth semantic interpretation of a few singular public peak-events is therefore chosen before cross-sectional, empirically quantitative and emically centred accounts of everyday life.

Mocking the traditional carnival

The European carnival has its roots in the religious calendar of medieval Catholicism, where an abundant feast was set to mark the entrance to the 4-week period of lent, in turn topped by Easter. In many places in Germany this feast has been voluminously celebrated until this day, led on by the “carnival capitals” Cologne, Mainz and Düsseldorf in western Rhineland. Here, widespread costumed partying is centred around grand public processions, comprising a wide range of public organizations, collectively dressing up in stylized manners that variously associate traditional folk-culture. The peak procession day is the Monday proceeding “Ash Wednesday”, the Wednesday four weeks before Easter, which marks the start of the lent, a day that in Germany is named “Rose Monday”32. As an inherited tradition ritually reproduced throughout centuries, the popular, democratised German form of carnival is thoroughly artificialised and institutionalised, established as an elaborate system that structures its presentation and performance. Therefore it cannot be said to parallel Bakhtin’s carnivalesque renaissance carnival, since this was first and foremost characterised by spontaneous performance of dissent among disposed social strata, rather than being a democratised, state sponsored, stylishly reproduced celebration. This distinction is important because it highlights the fact that carnival practices need

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32 This name probably stems from the medieval catholic custom where the pope blessed a rose which then was presented to a chosen dignitary. This was performed on the Sunday preceding “Ash Wednesday”, which gave it the name “Rose Sunday”.

not be carnevalesque. Correspondingly, carnevalesque traits can also be identified in practices outside the carnival.

Discovering some small adds in some of the culture-news magazines of the city as well as on the 2006 calendar of Republik Neustadt e.V. (see chapter 2), I curiously headed to the Kneipe Pawlow in the early noon of the 2006 “Rose Monday”, which the adds had stated as the gathering point for a Neustädter Rosenmontagumzug\textsuperscript{33}. Pawlow\textsuperscript{34} belonged to a loose network of Kneipen that by large was frequented by people identifying with leftist political radicalism and punk/trash cultural styles, also appreciated as one of the Kneipen with the cheapest beer in town. This late Monday February noon, I discovered a rather provisional state of affairs. Outside a couple of rugged guys in their 30s were fixing yellow sheets and lines of small, triangular coloured flags on the hold of an old truck. Inside Pawlow, a place where dark walls were set with black/white photos of drab socialist architecture and old wanted-posters of members of RAF\textsuperscript{35}, approximately half a dozen variously costumed people were somewhat inanimately hanging around, sipping Sekt\textsuperscript{36}, beer and smoking cigarettes. One guy was dressed up in old, tattered jeans over a pink pair of tights, a glossily turquoise striped sweater, a Palestine scarf and a nondescript blond wig. Another wore a worn pair of brown cotton pants, a checked blazer and a charcoal afro wig, face and hands coloured in dark brown. A third had dressed up in a top-toe black-white striped, classical prisoner’s uniform. Strewn around on the bar counter lay various party-utensils, such as paper flutes, firecrackers, coloured festoons and single use glasses, plates and cutlery. On the entry door I observed a poster advertising what seemed to be last years local Rosenmontagumzug, a black/white image showing

\textsuperscript{33}“Rose Monday parade”.

\textsuperscript{34}“Pawlow” is a quite common Russian surname.

\textsuperscript{35}Rote Arme Fraktion, “Red Army Fraction”, an infamous German communist terrorist network of the 1970s. The collage of various symbols associating communism was evident, ranging from Russian names to left-wing terrorists to socialist architecture. The random cutting and pasting furthermore indicates an identity process of retrospective romantics, as it ignores the fact that Soviet authorities condemned the acts of the RAF.

\textsuperscript{36}A type of cheap champagne.
grotesquely fat caricatures of three early 20th century bourgeoisie characters going on a procession through the streets.

An hour and a half after the time announced for gathering, a crowd of approximately 20 people, mostly in their 30s, some whom had brought along costumed kids, had finally gathered, and the truck had been properly rigged. The truck, followed by the crowd, could then slowly start moving along, accompanied by two police vans, set up to preside over public order. Amongst the new characters which by now had joined in was a glittering Elvis, a fat man in pink princess robes, a pirate, a Soviet red army soldier, an Arab terrorist carrying a sign reading “Alk-aida” around his neck, a fairy, a few clowns and a jester. Most costumes seemed incomplete, hurriedly composed out of whatever one had had at hand. Several participants wore what seemed as their normal clothes, only adding a small garment, such as a wig or some flashily coloured piece of clothing. From the loudspeakers on the truck, melodies of traditional German folk-music, ironically formatted in the crisp and sweet audial style of modern pop-music, were now and then broken off by the much appreciated “tax song”. This was a 2003-hit from the group *Laz Kanzlern*, a satire version of the 2003 mega hit “the ketchup song” by the Spanish group *Las Ketchup*. The satire version text mocked German politicians, the German tax-system, and democracy as a political system in general.

Mostly, the participants slandered peacefully along, sipping to their beverages and interacting friendly and amusedly with each other, the music seemingly not effecting to carry them away, though some ridiculing dance gestures did erupt from time to time amongst the people on the truck hold. Along the way, these latter ones threw handfuls of sweets to the scarce passers by, mostly young kids on their way home from school. In the buildings we passed, curious faces appeared from time to time in the windows, showing amused smiles and modest waves. After a slow parading of about ½ hour, turning four corners and traversing four blocks, the procession arrived back in front of *Pawlow*. Here it dissolved, whereupon people were invited to continue the party throughout the day inside the *Kneipe*, provided they were somehow costumed.
Puzzled by the low-profiled, small-scaled and provisional character of the whole event, happening largely unnoticed by public attention, I was later on surprised when I turned on the TV at home to discover that regional and national channels were giving extensive coverage of the official parades of many big cities across the country. Costumed, in-action-reporters transmitted kilometre long processions of various groups that were organized along collective costume styles, such as troupes of walking sunflowers, leprechaun squads, traditional south German folk-dance groups, medieval guilds men etc. Although emitting a radiant air of festivity and spectacle, these processions were marching orderly along streets lined with curious spectator crowds, led on by the steadfast, merry beats of disciplined, brightly costumed brass orchestras. Producing such extravagant carnival processions obviously demanded a vast pre-experience and knowledge, as well as considerable efforts of planning and co-ordination. Thus, they were strongly reminiscent of tradition, habitualness and schematic professionalism, quite contrary to the careless performance I had witnessed earlier.

The Rosenmontagumzug of Äussere Neustadt was clearly not quite in concordance with the popular German carnival performance; dissent was visible in several of its dimensions. The unstructured, seemingly random and loose processional manner communicated a lack of any clear, meta-organizational thought. More so than merely staging a deliberate display for the public the participants were intent on being together with peers, having fun with each other. The general choice of music obviously parodied German popular folk-culture, as well as the contemporary market of commercial pop-music, as it messed them up and mixed them together through banalising synthesiser manipulation. Simultaneously, national politics were mocked in the celebration of the recurrently played of “the tax song”. Comic dissent also marked the bodily practice of costuming. On the collective level, the plural and individualistic costume variations refused the more tight collective frameworks of dress visible in the popular form, leaving bodily management a matter of individual choice and creativity. Several of the individual costumes also associated disputed social and political borderlands, such as the fat male princess or the alcoholic al-Qaeda terrorist. Here, ambiguous grotesque perversions of conventional stereotypes
were presented, namely the slim, lithe and beautiful female princess of the fairy-tales and the evil Islamic fundamentalist-puritan terrorist of post 11th September-discourse. Open consumption of beer and cigarettes, as well as the prevalence of piercings and tattoos shining through the costumes, strengthened the impression of a punkedly styled grotesqueness sticking to their corporeal carnival presentations. The poster in Pawlow displayed a hierarchical ‘other’ through an image that mocked the carnival as a custom of the bourgeois classes. The obese caricatures seemed to hint to and criticise the paradoxal situation that upper classes had appropriated the carnival feast, leading them to bask further into their materialist sloth.

Finally it is well worth taking mention of the partiality and incompleteness of many of the costumes. This revealed a prevalent disinterest for fulfilling the formal requirements of elaborately stylized dress that normally accompany popular German carnival spectacles. Apart from proving another dimension of inversion, this point also reveals how communitarianism was a prime momentum of the ritual, as general participation seemed to supersede criteria of formalism and style. Participation was, in fact, hardly sanctioned by formal costume prescriptions at all. Several participants had completely neglected costuming themselves, but this did not hinder their social inclusion. The nationalised carnival tradition presented the local leftist subculture with a form of interaction familiar to all, regardless of the plurality of the paths which had brought its individual members to the area. As the Rosenmontagumzug is a familiar public ritual across the country known to most Germans it served as an intra-regional referential frame that could integrate a mixed social field across its internal differences. Once gathered within its frameworks however, a multi-dimensional set of processes were enacted by its participants to negotiate and erode its structures. This reflected the localised alternativist tendency to emphasise difference from perceived mass-cultural currents and macro-politics. The utopia fixing their idealist gazes was neighbourhood community, defined by equality, solidarity, inclusion and sharing. Collectively resisting the perceived forced stylistic performance implicit in the popular German carnival tradition, critically viewed as a representation of the large-scale, authoritative, formal structures of society, produced a feeling of community.
Coloured cacophony

In the beginning of June, the grass-root political NGO Bürger Courage - Freundeskreis gegen rechtsextremes Denken\(^\text{37}\) pasted the public city space of Äussere Neustadt with posters that advertised a project called Bunte Nachbarschaft\(^\text{38}\). Two consecutive weekends in a row gatherings were organized in the garden of the Kneipe die Scheune, where local residents could come and together paint colourful banners that later on were to be hung onto the local city façades. The campaign culminated in a street parade through the block, intent on rousing all residents to hang their own colourful banners, cloths and flags out of their apartments. Thus, the NGO appealed for the inhabitants to collectively materialise the townships’ colourful reputation. They had also initiated a similar project the previous year, engaged by fears of the recently growing right-wing factions in the region that in 2004 had brought the right-wing party NPD\(^\text{39}\) into the Saxon state parliament. Contemporary German right-wing critics often assign their opponents as “brown” on the political stencil, signifying a drab, dull and uniform society. Colourfulness was a metaphorical opposite to “brown” right-wing currents. As already discussed in chapter 3, the local political economy of the poetics of colour shaped an image of ideal society in concepts such as plurality, manifold and multi-culturalism. On the practical level, the Bürger Courage call to colours in Äussere Neustadt was an attempt to activate this public image so as to rouse residents to counter-action against the growing right-wing currents. At a stand that they kept in front of die Scheune in the early weeks of June they had also set up a series of informative posters displaying texts and statistics informing and warning the residents of recent right-wing developments in Saxony.

\(^{37}\)“Citizen Courage – Friends’ circle against right extreme thought”.

\(^{38}\)“Colourful neighbourhood”.

\(^{39}\)Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands. Their record ballot of 9.2% in the 2004 Saxon state election boosted nationwide concerns of growing right-wing currents.
When I appeared in front of *die Scheune* for the street-parade that Sunday afternoon, approximately 50 people had gathered and were waiting to march off. Most looked to be around 30 of age, of German ethnic origin, wearing summery, second hand leisure clothes, such as light flowery decorated dresses, batik skirts, wide army shorts, t-shirts with urban-style logos, leather sandals, and the likes. Several had Rasta, dreadlock or otherwise scruffy hairstyles, sported piercings, and many men were unshaven. Passing by previous days I had already observed how people had been gathering relaxedly on the lawns in the sun, working together with bright-coloured paint to produce a pile of colourful banners. These had now been loaded onto a hand drawn cart. A broad banner displaying the logo “*BUNTE NACHBARNSCHAFT*” in large and crude, brightly multi-coloured fonts had also been crafted to be borne at the front of the parade. As the parade started moving, various kitchen utensils brought along by some of the participants were distributed and used to turn the parade into a quasi-chaotic, marching orchestra. Some also added the sounds of toy-flutes and rattles to the improvised cacophony. Submanipulatively, the neighbourhood mystic Georg (see chapter 4) gradually managed to orchestrate a common, rhythmic cha-cha-cha-pulse around which the cacophonic procession revolved.

People who passed by on the streets were offered flyers of the project by people of the *Bürger Courage*. As curious people poked their heads out the windows of the buildings we were passing by, they were offered banners from the pile on their cart to hang out their windows. Many accepted and were subsequently met with complimenting outbursts of enthusiastic cheering from the paraders. Although I observed a few sceptic faces among the people witnessing the parade, the general response was positive, ranging from curious smiles to excited cheering. After having slowly marched in a big circle around the core area of the neighbourhood, an hour later we had returned to *die Scheune*, where the march was finalised by an extra intense and noisy cheering salute.

This parade was another example of how the neighbourhood ethos of communitarian multi-culturalism was expressed through ritual spectacle. Again I had experienced the performance of a highly unstructured and informal parade, pervaded by a sense of
equality between all participants, united in a mood of spontaneous joy and merrymaking. The carnivalesque element of comic composition was visible in the style of the cacophonic orchestra, contrasting the normally disciplined performing style of public parading orchestras, both in the types of instrument (kitchen utensils and toy flutes instead of drums and trumpets), sound (cacophony instead of symphony) and inclusion (all could play, not only trained musicians). The attempt to clothe the city façades in naively styled, home-made, brightly coloured banners can be seen as a humorous effort to transform the city space from a drab, grey concrete environment to that of, say, a kindergarten, circus or a fantasy fair. The chosen form of spectacular appropriation was to submerge the urban matter, the ‘body of the city’ so to speak, in the ridicule of splashing, naively blunt rainbow colours that, in their organic and childish associations, disrupted a city space normally toned by concreteness, stasis, asphalt, straight lines, stone, glass and steel.

When contrasted to the other two cases described in this chapter, the transcendental twist towards a utopian community of equals was most evident in this parade due to its explicit political message. Already apparent in the written representations surrounding the project, as well as in the political program of the NGO, were political ideas such as multi-culturalism, pluralism and grass-rooted, bottom-up styled political models. This binary model of social field, one form being the organic community, opposed to the other form, the mechanical society, resounds a deeply rooted idealist tradition in German cultural history, flowing out of German intellectual romanticism. The 19th century sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies formulated this opposition well in his typological dichotomisation of two forms of social organisation: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (Tönnies 1887). In Gesellschaft (“society”), member participation is mainly motivated by self-interest, the sense of collectivity is low, and firm institutions of social control are necessary to regulate interaction between the individual gents. On the contrary, in Gemeinschaft (“community”), individuals are more inclined to see their social engagement as part of the greater whole of the community, intuitively acting in the interest of this greater whole that is integrated in the existence of a united peoples’ will. This latter ideal view, the equality of all within an organically self-regulating social system, an otherwise dominant feature of
neighbourhood ethical discourse, was signalled in the all-inclusive styled of the *Bunte Nachbarschaft* parade. Georg’s subtle efforts to organize a common rhythmic pulse gave the participants access to practice and manifest an experience of living in the midst of a greater social unity, wherein the total performance depended on the collectively oriented efforts of the single participants.

Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft* was a community that ideally was racially/ethnically pure. The 20th century German history of nationalism has rendered this understanding highly politically incorrect. Modern globalism and cosmopolitanism has merged the *Gemeinschaft*-idea with the multi-culturalist ethos, increasingly urging the paradoxical emphasis on difference as the core trait of ultimate community (see chapter 3). Practically however, communities of difference also have their borders, as for example the neo-Nazi exclusion of *Bunte Nachbarschaft*. A critical review of the communitarian aspiration of the *Burger Courage* parade shows that it was bounded by the ‘colourocracy’ of its ideology. Inclusion depended on the acceptance and co-practice of a particular metaphoric code of colour, leaving the communitarian ideal with a somewhat bitter taste reminiscent of George Orwell’s famous statement in *Animal Farm* (1946): “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”. This is the ultimate problem of politicised communitarianism. Appropriating the neighbourhood colour-poetics on the behalf of a specific political cause, *Bürger Courage* made explicit the borders self and ‘other’, thereby making exclusion an unavoidable consequence. The boundaries of their imagined communitarian utopia were exposed, undermining its universalist aspiration.

This ritualized branding of the locality worked to strengthen its assignment as a haven for a particular kind of people, implicitly de-assigning it for others. The spectacle thereby contributed to organise the larger city space into an ordered social system where “alternative” people, in embodying the local code of alternativism, had a particular spatial belonging. Similarly, right-wing youth for instance were both assigned to (in the sense of public discourse), as well as assigned for themselves (in
their own public ritual performances, such as local demonstrations), other suburban spaces, such as Prohilis and Görbitz. Hence, a social balance was mediated spatially through its semantic appropriating by various groups. In this way, opposing social, cultural and political groups could co-exist peacefully as long as they cultivated their self-'other’-worldviews within their own habitats. The ritually spectacular appropriation of space served larger social stabilisation, in spite of the individual groups’ dependence on constructing negative ‘other’-images.

State parade comedy

“We want to have our fun and no war in our streets!”

- From the homepage of Republik Neustatt e.V. 41

The last event to be examined unfolded during the last hours of flattening sunlight on the closing Sunday of BRN 2006. Under the supervision of Volker and Republik Neustatt e.V. (see chapter 2), an unruly orchestra composed of brass-musicians from the local cult-groups Banda Communale and Top Dog Brass Band had been invited to lead what turned out to become a crowd of thousands of people (men, women, young and old, as well as many children) in a jovial procession through the still chaotic and crowded streets of Äusserne Neustadt. The parade had been organised and advertised by RN as the event officially closing BRN 2006, hence its title Abschlusssumzug. 42

40 Other cityparts of Dresden know to be home to right-wing youth groups.
41 http://www.mobilmachung.com/brn/BRN-verein.html (RN homepage)
42 “Finishing parade“.
Having gathered at an intersection in the eastern, less commercially imprinted block of the area, the orchestra set off, playing merry Dixieland-inspired tunes and beats.\textsuperscript{43} Whilst moving along, many in the crowd became engulfed in the merry music, falling into joyous and spontaneous dancing and cheering. Certain people had brought along balls and cudgels for juggling. When arriving at new intersections, the route onwards was usually spontaneously decided on the spot. At certain intersections, the band made temporary halts to engage in circles of dialogic battles where, for example when a trumpeter and a saxophonist alternated in spurting abrupt musical themes at each other in a cumulatively elevating manner, producing centrifugal musical surges. At such occasions, dancing people in the empathetic crowd were brought to ecstatic peaks.

A small juggler troupe, doddering above peoples’ heads on high stilts that they had camouflaged within breeches of bizarre length, was accompanying the procession. They also wore sunglasses and bathing hoods, and their upper bodies were bared and painted with crude colour. Their armament for the occasion was water pistols and long, soft foam cudgels, which they used to fight spontaneous, merry and comic battles amongst each other, as well as sporadically conveying random surprise attacks on people in the procession and on by-standers. To include the crowd further in their moist and merry warmongering they had provided the procession with a set of bathing balls, which were continuously struck and punched erratically to and fro by procession participants.

One overarching structural theme mocked in the parodic performance of the stilt walking troupe and the procession was clearly that of violence and war, as sponsored by nation states through armies and soldiery. The ritual of the privileged put into comic relief was the public military parade, where organized ranks of various forms of armed personnel march the streets in an ordered manner, the pace set by disciplined brass orchestras playing sober marches, typically moving along a planned

\textsuperscript{43} Dresden has held the reputation as capital for Dixieland-music in Germany due to a 30 years long tradition of Dixieland festivals.
route through some sort of governmentised cityscape. The account above relates a series of examples of symbolic inversions of the military parade: Its mixed composition; its random back-alley route; the jovial and at times ‘jamming’ music (see chapter 4); the jugglers “brigade” with its water pistols, foam cudgels and comic costumes; as well as the intermingling and interaction of all participants in the parade, including free, ecstatics dancing and amiable plays of war. Stereotypically simplified, the two listed parade-types embody opposing sets of organizational principles: Structure vs. Chaos.

Again, the latter, the carnevalesque, local parade bore the key elements of the Bakhtinian carnival: (1) The embodied practice of styles of ritual spectacle and comic composition, (2) the dynamics of dissent from prevalent sociocultural categories and (3) the gaze to a universal community transcending that of social structure.

One most interesting incident, a vivid illustration of the temporary disruption of the structuring of violence-legitimacy, occurred when the procession was passing through a police cordon that oversaw one of the entry points to the festival area. Here one of the jester soldiers fired a water salvo at one of the by standing police officers. After a split second of suspended tension, the officers and the jester soldier broke out in laughter. The state representatives were, thus, merged into the jovial, communal atmosphere of the gay spectacle. Through the societal relativism achieved by the universalizing carnival humour, the structural inequality between the police officers and the people of the parade was temporarily vanquished, uniting all present in a community of laughter. This state of structural assimilation, achieved through the carnival spectacle, is reminiscent of the ritual state that Victor Turner labelled ‘communitas’. At one occasion he described ‘communitas’ as:

“(…) a ‘moment in and out of time’, and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties.” (Turner 1969:96)

, underlining both its distinctness from static societal structures, as well as its temporariness. Turner himself on several occasions also suggested the jester as an institutionalized impersonation of communitas (Turner 1969:109-110, 125), as well
as presenting cross-cultural documentation of the frequency of laughter and mockery as a communitarian response to structurally superiority (Turner 1969:101, 110). The encounter between the clown and the police officer was a vivid example of how the universalizing and equalizing tendency of carnival laughter strives to include all, and, if only for brief a moment, temporarily reduces structural differences. The experience of equality invites social mediation, as understanding across sociostructural divides is achieved. Considering the special, deep-rooted position of the carnivalesque, and the otherwise highly elaborated arts of ridicule in western counter-cultural practice, it seems as if such practices express a particular elaborate western cultural style of communitas-production, one in which humour has become a ritualized behaviour.

**Mickey Mouse the mediator**

The study of practices directed towards collective feats that are aimed at reducing social division easily slips into the field of religious sciences. In anthropology, the analysis of culture and religion tend to be strongly overlapping, merging in the analytical domains of semantics and symbolism. Both cultural and religious practices tend to be deeply enmeshed in the use of symbols, as they work as points of reference that can be shared in the integration and mediation of the social communities such practices form. In his book *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner commented on the historical development of symbolic practices: “...as our species has moved through time [we have] become more dexterous in the use and manipulation of our symbols”, and “...[we have] become more adept in devising cultural modes of confronting, understanding, assigning meaning to, and sometimes coping with crisis.” (Turner 1982:11). Although the parallels are many, it is here less interesting whether carnivalesque symbolism is termed as either cultural or religious practice than how it works as a tool for achieving communitas in social processes. Bereaving Turner his taint of evolutionism, his point that symbolic practices change throughout history is important because it gives reason to question the primacy Bakhtin gave the body in
grotesque realism. Might grotesque realism be possible to impose on other symbolic media in other epochs? My case material suggests that, through history, practices of grotesque realism have transgressed the symbolic domain of the body to unfold also in other symbolic realms that have ascended with the development of western, modern ideoscapes.

Several significant metaphorical domains that structure contemporary western societies could be mentioned; the machine, the factory, the city, the corporate enterprise, democracy and science are but a few. In my field, as the jovial self-entitlement BRN indicates, the structuring principle of nationhood was of the essence (see chapter 2). One of the most basic and directly experiential material symbols of the nation is the flag, which, as we shall see, also was a central inventory of the BRN project. During the 2006 BRN-celebration, the national flag happened to have a particularly pervasive presence in the German public, as Germany this year was host to the soccer world championship. By BRN the world cup was already well under way with the German team making a good performance. Thus, during the festival days, in between all the coloured banners sprouting from windows and balconies of the buildings of Äußere Neustadt, there also hung a multitude of national flags, predominantly German, but also from most other nations participating in the championship. Additionally, quite an amount of old GDR flags were observable, the same as the contemporary flag of Germany all but including a centre seal where ears of grain are encircled by a hammer and a compass at the centre.
The GDR-flag

At the eve of the *Abschlussumzug* a particularly queer flag waved the burlesque parade off. At the square where the crowd had gathered for departure, an old, rugged, local fellow had raised a large and old, mechanic chain-swing carousel, which he had been running throughout the festival days for the price of penny donations, mainly to the amusement of neighbourhood kids. As the parade slowly set into motion to the chrome tones of the orchestra, he had climbed to the top of the 15 ft. centre column of the carousel, and, bathed in the rays of the orange afternoon sun, started waving this peculiar flag. Its layout corresponded to that of the old GDR flag, all but the coat of arms at its centre being exchanged with a big black-and-white emblem of a smiling Mickey Mouse-face within the honorary grain ears. The same centre symbol I had observed circulating in sticker format throughout the festival. The Mickey Mouse icon had also shown itself in other local contexts during my fieldwork, such as in flyers advertising discos (see chapter 2), as well as on other comic street posters. The *BRN*-flag had been created by the proclaimers of the first *BRN*. The crowd donned the flag waving gesture, scattered cheers and salutes as it proceeded onwards into the core zone of the “republic”.
The BRN-flag

Approaching this multiplex symbol, it will be useful to conceptualise it as another manifestation of structural inversion. The various parades listed above were practices that all correspondingly incorporated the theme of inversion, reflecting both in their (anti-)structures of interaction, as well as in their formal appearances. In the case of the BRN-flag, inversion was condensed in a vivid and concrete material representation. Sherry Ortner calls flags a type of ‘summarizing symbols’, implying that they “(...) are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them.” (Ortner 1973:1339). The BRN-flag no doubt had the function of summing up, expressing and representing a community of ideas and opinions within the peers of the parade, and the near theatrical and ritual composition of the parade ensured the emotional charge fostering the sense of collective experience. What initially appeared somewhat confusing, though, was how to relate to the BRN-flag as a symbol summing up a shared meaningful system, as it emitted strong ambivalences due to its cut-and-mix composition of seemingly incoherent signs. To interpret this curious phenomenon, Bakhtin’s theory of laughter will be helpful, but first it needs to be dehistoricized.

Bakhtin identified the renaissance carnival as the genuine practice form of ‘grotesque realism’ due to its brimming with bodily gaiety. He thus elevated the body as the key symbolic representation in comic practices of structural inversion. Grotesque realism as an aesthetic principle, flowing over with gay, humorous plays with bodily taboos, holds, according to Bakhtin, a remarkable power of social transformation and
regeneration: “The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis of death and birth, growth and becoming.” (Bakhtin 24:1968). I argue that this transformational achievement is not exclusively restricted to symbolic inversions of the body. On the contrary, I assume that it can principally be achieved through inverting any major summarizing symbol in a given society. The carnival tradition celebrated by Bakhtin belonged to the European renaissance, a time when centuries of medieval religious discourse had produced and intensified a deeply split image of the body. Although the body remains an ever-contestable symbolic domain, modernity has produced other major symbolic domains that vie for representational force towards the management of social structure. One of these are, as earlier mentioned, the nation and nationhood, wherein the flag is a key representation. Evidence of the central and emotional character of nationhood, as expressed through flags today, ranges from the pride invested in them in sports events, the soccer world championship being a prime illustration; in national festivities, such as 4th of July in the US or the 17th of May in Norway; or the uproar caused when desecrated, such as in the recent cases of flag burning in the Middle East and elsewhere in relation to the Mohammed caricature case. The latter example hints to the fact that the desecration of key symbols may work to shake societal structure, as can any desecrative engagement with taboos. Similarly, baring and desecrating the symbolic grounds upon which social structure is built lies at the core of the carnivalesque project.

The BRN-flag was another, one might say milder form of desecration, where the creatively inverted flag variant established a grotesque image of nation. As such, it was not unique; the composition of grotesque models of various features of nationhood was a much appreciated activity in the neighbourhood, as is illustrated by the ironic inventions of local currencies, passport-systems, culture institutions such as museums and theatres, a local “UN” etc (see chapter 2). Such representations had strong, trans-productive effects: Existing structures of nationhood were challenged, regrouped and reformulated in new, humour laden expressions that, although diverging from the seriousness of their progeneric models, did not ultimately threaten their legitimacy. Although challenged and transformed, nationhood remained a key
vehicle of societal re-conceptualization, in spite of it becoming a symbol of a particular locality. The trans-productivity of grotesque representation is nevertheless particularly interesting because it works as a potent source of cultural change and innovation.

Interestingly, Bakhtin identified in the grotesqueness of carnival a death-birth-process which he described as a dynamical interaction between “the two poles of becoming” (Bakhtin 51:1968), one which he called ‘negative’, the other ‘positive’. For the sake of clarity we shall label them ‘destructive’ and ‘creative’, whilst maintaining the central point that the dialogue between these poles is the source of transcendent structural regeneration. In his theory of dominant ritual symbols, Turner was correspondingly concerned with the bipolarity of symbols, stating that they condense and organize meaning around two poles: (1) The ‘ideological’ pole, clustering referents of moral and social orders, such as norms and values, and (2) the ‘sensory’ pole, clustering referents of the physical and affective, the gross and immediately experiential (Turner 1964:30). Indicating that such symbols serve as material representations of the bond between structure and anti-structure (the latter, Turner also variably labelled the temporary, structureless state of ‘communitas’, see above), the ideological pole correlates with the first, whilst the sensory pole correlates with the latter. Seeing grotesque realism as a mode of communitas (because of the anti-structuring tendency in its processes of signification), it falls within the sensory pole in Turners symbol-model. But, adding Bakhtin’s bipolar model, symbols of grotesque realism have yet two sub-poles: The destructive and the creative. It is in the interplay between these that their (socially and culturally) generative momentum is found.
Collective dimension

- Grotesque reference to socially structured reality (institutions, social & cultural conventions, key representational media)

- Ritual or other co-emotional, jovial involvement

Individual dimension

- Abstract, reflexive, reasoned understanding

- Physical, affective, immediate

**Figure II: The structurally transgenetic grotesque symbol**

Let us now apply this symbolic model to interpret the BRN-flag. First, I remind that the flag was conceived in the particularly intense time of transition in 1990, a special context of crisis. Its progeny was people belonging to the reformist intellectual movement that had opposed the old authoritarian GDR-state fervently, and yet pursued a wish of maintaining GDR as an independent, reformed socialist state after the toppling of the old regime (see chapter 1). However, this movement was too small, too disorganized and too unprepared to take appropriate action in the rapidly ensuing events after the sudden fall of the wall in 1989, leading to the somewhat spontaneous union under the initiative of West German chancellor Helmut Kohl. The BRN-flag encapsulates the death of the pre-1989 GDR state by cutting out the traditional hammer/compass seal, a trait making out its destructive pole, together with the disrupted formatting of the BRD national flag, which signifies a demolishing, both of BRD specifically, and the conventional nation generally. The choice of Mickey Mouse to replace the hammer and compass as the centre of the seal was for some time a riddle to me, as my culturally accumulated prejudice led me to conceive it as a representation of US cultural imperialism. However, forwarding this interpretation to local long-time residents who had personal memories of the BRN-flag’s origin
produced oblivious and surprised reactions. They stressed that Mickey Mouse represented the spirit of immediate, down-to-earth fun and playfulness. For them, he was a universal, comic and humorous character, without any larger political meaning. The fact that, in the time leading up to the German reunion, romantic attitudes to life in the West was widespread in the dissenting segments of the GDR-population, substantiates this explanation. Thus, contrary to their leftist, intellectual peers beyond the wall (myself included), who easily interpreted US culture products as representations of capitalist hegemony, East German GDR-critics often had romanticised relationships to them. The Mickey Mouse seal, Mickey Mouse interpreted as a universal jester, makes for the flag’s creative pole, due to its many-levelled dimensions of becoming: New-ness, childishness, fun and undifferentiating naiveté. Finally, the simultaneous preservation of the general layout indicates a sense of (n)ostalgia, as well as a basic adherence to the contemporary German nation. Thus, the flag also incorporated continuity between the destroyed and the created, that is, the past and the present, as well as the nation and the locality.

- *Äussere Neustadt* in the image of the grotesque micro-nation *BRN* and nationhood as a structuring principle

- Individual conceptions, expressions, values and norms constituting the perception of *Äussere Neustadt*’s uniqueness

- The *BRN*-flag

- Hailing the *Abschlussumzug*

- Waving, pointing, laughing, saluting

The jesting, jovial and humorous Mickey Mouse icon and the total comical composition, signifying transgressive *creativity* and innovation

The reminiscent absence of hammer/compass and the total disrupted format, signifying the destruction of the old and the new German state, as well as more generally the stereotypical nation

- The maintenance of the ear of grains and the base colour format of the German flag, signifying a *continuity* between the old and the new state and ultimate adherence to the nation concept

*Figure III: The dynamic structural transgenesis of the BRN-flag*
In this manner, the twofold sensory pole of the BRN-flag encompasses the passing of the old and the coming of the new, in total forming continuity between these states. It has the power of engaging and moving subjects who experience it by evoking sentimental feelings of (n)ostalgia, humorous feelings of comedy, as well as feelings of residential pride, as it is reproduced as a representation of the neighbourhood. The flag condensed and mediated an ambiguous mass of relevant sociocultural themes, a trait identified as typical for what Turner called ‘dominant’ symbols, which roughly corresponds to Ortner’s ‘summarizing’ symbols. It encourages temporary establishments of communitas, both in the Turnerian meaning, inducing a sense of collective affective experience, and in the Bakhtinian meaning, creating a temporary transcendent universal community around a structural inversion.

Finally, completing the Turnerian symbol model, the ideological pole of the BRN-flag is identifiable at three levels: First, it encourages the persistence of specific values, such as solidarity, community, tolerance, neighbourhood pride and humour. Secondly, it advances norms of playful opposition to what is emically summed up as “mainstream” society, here represented by the conventional conception of nationhood. Thirdly, and maybe most importantly, whilst transforming its content, it reproduces nationhood as a structural signifier, as it is re-represented in a locally conceptualized form in which neighbourhood residents feel comfortable to take part. From the shards of the mocked macro-nation BRD rises the idealized micro-nation BRN.

Carnivalesque play – A source of local empowerment?

The three outlined cases are examples of how carnevalesque behaviour is collectively performed in public events. During my fieldwork I witnessed several other local parades that were open to scrutiny for similar features, for example a gay parade and a futuristically styled industrial-techno parade. Moreover, several other public events
that took place during my fieldwork, such as circus fairs, sports tournaments and
neighbourhood demonstrations, also exhibited similar, carnivalesque traits.
Resoundingly, an ironic reflexivity stuck to much informal talk amongst my
informants, approving that also in everyday life interaction, mockery of conventional
culture donned social prestige. Likewise, the pulling of jokes on the behalf of macro-
societal references pervaded local print media and street art. The cases elaborated
therefore seem socially porous, producing modes of talk, practice and presentation
that spill over, and continue to reverberate in broader local discursive sociocultural
fields.

The first case is particularly interesting in highlighting the discrepancy between the
carnival and the carnivalesque, as Bakhtin himself pointed to when criticising much
post-renaissance satire of lacking the regenerative momentum of the renaissance
carnival. When a ritual spectacle, such as the carnival, is established as a
conventionally structured tradition that is sanctioned by the elites, it looses the
structure-destroying capacity of carnivalesque mockery. In this sense, the small scale,
disinterested parody of the carnival in Äussere Neustadt had a sharper carnevalesque
edge than the traditionalised mass-carnival. The second case reveals how
carnivalesque efforts further transcended towards universal, anti-structured
communities, as was attempted in the NGOs tapping of the multi-colour-metaphor.
At the same time it shows the paradox of universalist aspirations: They eventually
have limitations, as the use of particular referents of meaning to integrate a particular
community also must comprise referents of exclusion. This seems the most plausible
explanation to why social manifestations of communitas/anti-structure are always
temporary, unstable states. The third case, which by far was the most successful in
terms of local attendance and excitement, shows that the most popular and celebrated
scapegoat of the carnivalesque Neustäder was the nation-state. This peculiarity stems
from the specific historical trajectory of the city part from die Wende until today,
which has fostered a local cultural conception of self largely dependant on the rise of
the unified German nation-state.
The analysis of the Mickey Mouse-flag is a demonstration of how carnivalesque representation, as a technique of resistance, neither quite manages to topple societal structure, nor solely works to reproduce it. Instead, as a result of both destruction and creation, it contributes to a kind of slow, plastic trans-structuring. In Äussere Neustadt, one representation of societal structure repeatedly subjected to carnivalesque transgression was the nation-state. Symbols, signs and images of the nation were subjected to jesting, bricoleur manipulations. Being a shared cultural production, it also produced social fields, as local residents gathered around a sense of collective identity related to a particular cultural style and place. Finally, the effects of the carnivalesque effort seeped into the field of politics, encouraging residents to organize in neighbourhood unions and make claims towards local political administration for influence on local decision-making. The adoption of carnivalesque behaviour as a response to the disempowerment of the local leftist intellectuals in the wake of die Wende, thus, contributes to explain the massive growth in the recent 15 years of small grass root NGOs, predominantly concerned with local social and cultural matters.
Chapter VI: Wrapping up and looking out

Conclusions and insights gained

“Has there ever been a society which has died of dissent?
Several have died of conformity in our lifetime.”

- Jakob Bronowski, Science and Human Values

Approaching the end of this anthropological tale, it is time to step back, de-focus and question which insights it has brought. We have seen that at the heart of the locality Äussere Neustadt laid a myth of origin, spawned by the specific historical circumstances of die Wende, a time of significant distress due to the impact of intense social transition. This myth worked as a temporal hotbed of the reproduction of a particular sense of distinctiveness, evident both in the local cultural practices and public imagination. Thus, contemporary dissent can at one level be understood as expressions of an embodied local history. Furthermore, we have seen how the complementary “alternative”- and- “colourful”-metaphors allowed residents to grasp and reproduce the ethereal ideal concepts “difference” and “diversity” as inherent traits and a twin-ethos of the locality. This ideal consolidation of the locality happened not only in thought and discourse, but also, perhaps even more so, in the meaningful interactional practices that residents performed with each other and with place. At large, what has been shown is the spatialised prevalence of dynamics of dissent that produced a rich, sociocultural heterogenesis, channelled through a particular ideoscape, embedded and naturalised in the locality.

Consequently, we have seen that capitalism, commercialism, nationhood, the state and mass media-worlds were key loci for the local creative production of negative ‘other’-images. The local culture of launching creative critiques of these references in humorous forms had both culturally and socially transcendent effects. Thus, although
structured by principles of grotesque inversion and working as instruments of resistance, these humorous expressions also self-sufficed cultural innovation and renewed senses of community. Humoristic societal mockery is a form of resistance that is more subterfuged than other, more openly violent resistance forms. Its obscurity reduces the impetus to control by societal authorities, allowing the structural critique to reproduce and seep out to dialogically transform broader societal structures in a gradual and subtle manner, eroding and re-sedimenting it. The local topography of dissent expressed not only in verbal discourses of time and place, but also both in collective and individual expressive, embodied practices that, in spite of their diversity, conjoined in a localised matrix of anti-aestheticism. The production of anti-aesthetic styles as an inherently stabilising feature of the locality has reproduced it as a hub working to ‘jam’, that is, to shake up and disrupt certain broader societal processes of homogenisation by which sociocultural space is attempted structured along macro-institutional lines.

Through the lens of the specific case material, the inherent tension between community and individuality has been explored and specified within a local context. We have seen that it was resolved at intersections between specific global, regional and local historical transactional currents. The local sociocultural scene profoundly resonated the globalised, post-Vietnam war “alternative” culture-movement, both at levels of ideology (communitarianism, multi-culturalism and individualisation), practices (intellectualism, esotericism and expressionism) and lifestyles (grotesque fashion). Its manifestations in Äussere Neustadt illustrates how global alternativist cultural phenomena are submerged and written into, and thus only make sense within the histories of local life-worlds and locality productions.

Therefore, one central finding is that for alternativism, as any other globally circulating cultural current, to achieve real-time/space significance, it must be locally embedded. That is, for any cultural form to achieve social significance, it must conjoin with the everyday life-experiences of individual human beings. Such experiences are irresolvably local because human agents are always bounded entities in space and time. Thus, alternativism in Äussere Neustadt is simultaneously both
global and local, or, in Roland Robertson’s words, it is ‘glocal’ (1995). As many modern urban sub-units are in similar ways transitory spaces for large amounts of people, ideas and things, explaining the manifest locality merely as a product of ‘internal’ and/or ‘external’ forces is imprecise. It has been shown that a mass variety of culture forms, ideas, historical twists and intersections of power conjoin within Äussere Neustadt. As the manifestations that these intersections produce are simultaneously results of intra- and extra-local influences, they cannot be reduced to neither. If there is one moment which is of determinative importance to understanding the forms and dynamics of the heterogenetic surge in contemporary Äussere Neustadt, it is the historical engraving of the particular BRN-myth during the phase of crisis and transition around die Wende. This serves as an eloquent example of how particular intersections of intensified transition in history become hotbeds of subsequent sociocultural oscillation.

Of more general significance to the anthropological endeavour is the illustration of how the trans-local cultural phenomenon alternativism was projected onto and implemented into distinctly local issues and spheres of interaction (for instance the city historical jubilee, the celebration of a city part festival, a march of right-wing radicals in the city, the production and consumption of artistic forms such as music and street art, Kneipen-development and expansion, increased police surveillance in the neighbourhood etc.). It took on a local flavour by which it achieved its crucial socioempathic significance. This local flavour was, however, continuously in flux as internal and external circumstances kept on revolving. Its pioneers, the youth who illegally settled in Äussere Neustadt in the 1980s, are today superseded by new ranks of alternativistic aspirants, whose life-experiences have altered in pace with the ever changing circumstances of history. For alternativism to be affectively meaningful for these newcomers, they need to integrate it in concordance with their personal experiential predispositions. Therefore, the face of Äussere Neustadt alternativism is ever moulded and altered, continuously redrawing fissured social maps within the locality.
A second crucial insight is how alternativism as a metaphoric cultural concept, when manifested as spatially informed practice, becomes transposed as an intrinsic quality of that space. This intrinsic sense is maintained and reproduced by a continuously shifting flow of generic agents so that it seems to stick to and constitute the very matter of place, making it appear distinctly unique and different. Thus, place served as a supplementary medium that was summoned to enforce the gravity of the sociocultural metaphorical concept “alternative”. The particular significance of spatial mediation reflects certain, more general conditions of modern, urban spatial management. As masses of people cluster together, space becomes an increasingly critical resource. This applies not only in an economic sense: The competition for semantic spatial definition also intensifies. Thus, controlling urban space across its various levels of evaluation becomes an increasingly strong means of establishing social control in modern, urbanised societies. Correspondingly, breaching such control holds most promise when engaged as a spatial battle. The result is an intensified battle over urban spatial definition where opposing sociocultural constellations strive to homogenise or heterogenise particular city spaces. Whereas homogenesis is typically represented by larger institutions that strive to universalise, quantify and abstract space, the latter is more often represented dispersed and grass-rooted social forms that fragment, mystify and invest space with exclusive qualities.

The third important point is then that the global alternativist discourse, a significant contemporary cultural reservoir of heterogenetic action, provides actors minded on dissent with ideas and forms of expression through which they can appropriate and recreate space as a heterogeneous entity. A distinct feature of Äussere Neustadt was that it was predominantly occupied in short time-spans, that is, it was a highly transitory space. When these masses of trans-migrating actors grasped space to open small-scale, community style localities moulded in with their own experiential worlds, ideas, practices, places and ideas were interrelated in a processes that can be termed ‘trans-nativisation’. By this I mean that individual alternativist agents, through their practices of spatial identification, simultaneously embodied and wrote into the locality the “alternative” image, so that it became a feature that both stuck to the agent, even after he or she has moved on, as well as to the place itself, regardless
of the flux of individual procreators. In the continuous processes transmigrating agents and transforming cultural manifestations through Äussere Neustadt, alternativism was ‘turned native’.

Possible comparative exits

“The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.”

- Michel Foucault, in Of other Spaces

My analysis has furthered an urban analytical frame where forces of homogenisation and heterogenisation cluster in spatially defined zones. Of course, no physical urban place inhere any of these forces purely: In practice, the sociocultural gravity of any given urban zone is variably intersected by both. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to claim that the density of sociocultural conformity and dissent varies with the unevenness of sociospatial distribution. History reveals many examples of the importance of spatial appropriation to dissenting communitarian movements, for example the pious settlers in North America in the 17th and 18th centuries, the communes of the various alternative life-style movements in the 1960s- and- 70s and the oppositional Lutheran church meetings in East Germany in the 1980s. In David Harvey’s words, such groups seek “(…) to liberate and appropriate their own space for their own purposes (…) [mounting] a practical challenge to the supposed homogeneity of abstract, universalized space.” (Harvey 1986:19).

44 This text is the basis of a lecture Foucault gave in March 1967, but was first published in 1984, unreviewed by the then deceased author.
Michel Foucault also emphasised the importance of space in societal processes of dissent and change, suggesting that a trait of the very founding of society across culture and history is the existence of certain counter-sites, ‘heterotopia’, a type of sites in which all other sites found within society are “(…) simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.” (Foucault 1986:24). Having a capacity of mirroring society, he suggested that they are spaces through which society self-consciously reflects its inner structural disjunctures and paradoxes. This must be particularly evident in heterotopia in which reflections follow logics of inversion.

As the wide range of dissenting and ambiguous cultural forms bear witness to, Äussere Neustadt no doubt resonate Foucault’s heterotopia. Particularly interesting is his tracing of heterotopia into the modern epoch, which he described as one where space was de-sanctified through the development of various new techniques for appropriating, delimiting and formalizing space so as to encapsulate it in a universal system defined by relations of proximity and abstract scales (Foucault 1986:23). Two important examples of techniques of spatial de-sanctification are the global grid of latitude and longitude (Scott 2007) and the commodification of land through the monetary standard (Harvey 1986). These and other techniques have worked to dissolve the medieval hierarchic ensemble of sacred and profane places. Foucault also added that spatial de-sanctification by no means has been completed.

The Äussere Neustadt alternativism evoked a series of mystical, ethereal and insubstantial concepts, reflecting in its tendency to ritualistic and symbolic mediation. These traits seem to associate a certain sacral touch to the formation of spatial relationships in the locality. Thus, it could be purposed that the alternativist locality Äussere Neustadt was produced along the lines of a spatial re-sanctification. These features of spatial sacrality and heterogeneity invite further studies of the various cultural and social spaces that occur within the locality, as well as a greater emphasis on the ways in which they are interpreted and processed by outside actors.

Another interesting study-angle would be to examine more deeply the purposes of the large amounts of young people that moved in and out of Äussere Neustadt, as well as
the relative short average residence. The sample of voices speaking through this thesis has given a superficial and varied set of purposes. Some political motives, such as opposition to the nation-state, international capitalism, “mainstream” mass cultural industries and right-wing politics have been given, as well as some more sociocultural motives, such as the wish to bask in the joys of multi-cultural plurality, establishing neighbourhood communities and pursuing lifestyles of creativity and self-realization. It has also been hinted that the local ideoscapes gave grounds for life-pursuits according to the modernist parable of individualized self-identification.

A deeper, more comparatively informed analysis opens for a further investigation of this, and other similar urban sub-spaces through which youth-populations fluctuate, as spaces in which young people can mould adulthood. A relevant context would be the waning of the role of other social and religious institutions in mediating life-phase passages in modern societies. A series of empirical observations from my fieldwork invite such a claim: (1) Significant proportions of its inhabitants had recently departed from lives as young adolescents within core family contexts, contributing to the markedly low average age of the locality’s population. (2) Most of its inhabitants limited their residency to a rough span of ca. 5 years, indicating that the identification with local life decreases rapidly for many throughout their residencies. (3) The locality displayed a reverberating local cultural scene, centred around distinctly anti-structuring and communitarian ideoscapes. Its prevalently affective and ritual gateways of social inclusion suggest that residency was strongly marked by emotional participation and, thus, has strong transformational effects on participant subjects.

Although religion and tradition have lost much force as bearers of rites of passage, as the passage through life remains an unavoidable feature of human existence, alternative modes of mediation between life phases are needed. Ronald Grimes has shown how the waning of traditional rites of passage in modern societies has brought forth a myriad of examples of how youth re-invent such rites themselves (Grimes 2000). Thus, phenomena like new age religion, spiritualism, recreational self-realization hobbies, peer-group bonding and the likes have been studied as modern
sociocultural forms, serving as vehicles of life-phase transition. It is possible to think that the cultivation of ethoses of cultural dissent, as embedded features of particular (urban) spaces, likewise might provide niches in modern societies where young people can assume states of ‘betwixt-and-between'ness’. The supervising authority of a single authoritarian institution seems less present in such passage-works. In concordance with the ethos of individuality, the adolescent seeker is instead largely left to follow (or at least let to believe to be following) a path of personal choice and preference. In phases of transition, this is better performed in environments that embrace practices of liminality.

Exploring Äussere Neustadt as a liminal zone of adolescent transition relies on more prolonged field studies, following residents on their way into, through and out of the area. Comparative field studies could be conducted in other similar modern urban spaces, a few suggestions being Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, Schanzenviertel in Hamburg, Christiania in Copenhagen, Grünerløkka in Oslo, Soho in London and Greenwich Village in New York.

The main contribution of this thesis has been to demonstrate how a counter-cultural, communitarian ideoscape becomes rooted in a particular urban locality, thereby operating simultaneously as a global and a local process. In spite of its multiple, dissentious extensions, the localizing pulse of Äussere Neustadt beats on, restoring its sociospatial textures so as to provide its residents with a canvas upon which they can mediate the ever-arising tensions that ensue from the paradoxal human master-ideas of liberty and sociality.
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