

Against Aspiration: The Psychogeography of Berlin-Kreuzberg in Stephan Geene's Umsonst

Anne Röhrborn

Stephan Geene's film *Umsonst*, whose title translates as both "for free" and "in vain," premiered in the Forum program at the 2014 Berlinale. Reflecting the perspectives of characters in their twenties, it paints a portrait of postmillennial Kreuzberg. In this self-conscious film Geene probes the prevalent discourses and historical mythologies of Kreuzberg and, in so doing, furthers understanding of the people who inhabit it and the ways they interact.

Umsonst shows members of a young generation who are dismayed by the economic imperatives of advanced capitalism. As a result, they refuse to aspire and instead become drifters. This new generation is the product of various changes that have shaped everyday life in a specific sector of Berlin since German unification. As an urban neighborhood, Kreuzberg is "determined not only by geographical and economic factors, but also by the image that its inhabitants and those of other neighborhoods have of it."¹ In its blend of people's conceptions and the environment, a neighborhood has a direct effect on "the emotions and behavior of individuals."² The filmmaker and theorist Guy Debord calls the study of these effects psychogeography. This largely subjective disci-

1. Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," 1.

2. Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations," 9.

pline involves observing people's interactions with their geographic surroundings whenever they are not engaging in traditional consumerist activities. Often taking the shape of experimental film or art production, this type of investigation seeks to disclose a place's true social geography. In the following I would like to demonstrate how *Umsonst* provides a psychogeographic study of contemporary Berlin-Kreuzberg.

Of course, film can never survey a neighborhood objectively, because the medium itself plays a crucial role in creating the images that constitute a place's identity. A filmic representation of Kreuzberg is not "real," which is to say that it is not identical with the experience of being in the place. As it draws on the noncinematic world, cinema itself produces a world shaped by its own means of compression, expansion, refiguration, and expression. To expose the medium's role in creating its depicted place, *Umsonst* employs methods of self-conscious realism well known to Geene from the French New Wave. Its self-reflexive approach culminates when *Umsonst* exposes its characters as actors and reveals a film within a film.

In addition to being a writer and director of film and theater, Geene has translated texts by Jacques Derrida, Maurizio Lazzarato, Beatriz Preciado, and Jacques Rancière;³ he also lectures at the Beuth Hochschule für Technik on the history and theory of television. Most prominently, in 1996 he cofounded the leftist bookstore, publishing house, and artist collective *b_books* in Kreuzberg, which publishes, sells, and promotes publications on political, film, queer, and postcolonial theory. It serves as the center of multiple networks of authors and artists, hosting and curating exhibitions, film events, and talks. One of those projects, *metroZones*, focuses on matters of urban life and architecture. It is therefore by no means a stretch to assume Geene's active conversance with the theoretical concepts under discussion in this article.

Geene's knowledge of film theory and Marxist political theory already figures in his first film, *After Effect* (2008), set in a creative agency in Berlin. The film turns the animal logos of various real-life companies against the advertisers. It also enacts the dehumanization of people in consumerist culture by showing the team repeatedly attempting to transform its human models into animals. While *Umsonst* is not an absurdist comedy like *After Effect* and instead resembles the cinema vérité of the 1960s, both films share a rejection of consumer capitalism, which they seek to expose as an unnatural state of being.

3. Berlinale.de, "Filmdatenblatt Umsonst."

A Mass Time Out

Umsonst begins on the Maybachufer in Kreuzberg. Zach, a street musician from New Zealand, introduces himself to Chloe, who is also a street musician. Chloe announces her song “Two Emails from Andy” and explains that it is based on messages she received from her best friend. In those messages Andy mentions a postcard, which he or she (we cannot know Andy’s gender) sent to Chloe from Istanbul without knowing her address. Andy tells Chloe to ask around for the postcard, suggesting that she might be able to track it down despite the missing address. This mood-setting opening introduces a few of the film’s key themes. Elliott McKee, who plays Zach, and Chloe Lewer, who plays Chloe, are a real-life couple as well as a music duo who call themselves Charity Children. “Two Emails from Andy” is one of their songs. Its text consists of words from a personal email, which are taken from “real life.” Similarly, *Umsonst* shows performances of things that are not “made up.” The “real life” email in Chloe’s song is in fact framed by two layers of performance. The performance in Chloe’s song and the performance in the film mirror *Umsonst*’s nested structure. And the communication between Andy and Chloe bridges the distance between Istanbul and Kreuzberg, evoking associations of the latter’s reputation as “Little Istanbul” (a function of its large number of Turkish and Turkish German residents), juxtaposing this place-name with the neighborhood’s new image as a popular destination for intrepid young travelers.

As Chloe’s song plays in the background, *Umsonst* shifts its focus to a film team on a bridge. We see film equipment, cameras, and spotlights. Actors casually chat with each other as pedestrians walk through the set. Before the film introduces us to the main characters, we see them in their role as actors. An unseen player interviews the film’s “director,” who, with a French accent, speaks directly into the camera (fig. 1). This director is not Geene but the director of the film within the film.⁴ Illustrating *Umsonst*’s cosmopolitan setting, the “director” attempts to explain the film’s project in a mixture of English and German:

Wir machen diesen Film. I’m trying to make this film. Was kann ich dazu sagen? Vielleicht dass ich noch nie so zwanghaft Musik gehört habe, wie jetzt, da ich diesen Film mache? Dann denke ich: Man sollte Musik machen. Music touches people. Sorry für diesen Allgemeinplatz, aber Musik macht man nämlich nicht wirklich. Das passiert einem eher.

4. Geene himself also appears in *Umsonst*. He plays Pierre, the boyfriend of Trixie, the mother of Aziza, the main character. Possibly in an act of directorial self-effacement, Pierre is disdained by Aziza, who thinks that he is “ugly.”



Figure 1. The director of the film within a film and his aesthetics of restraint.

[We are making this film. I'm trying to make this film. What can I say about it? Maybe that I have never listened to music as compulsively as I do now that I am making this film? Then I think: One should make music. Music touches people. Sorry for the truism, but music isn't something one really makes. Rather, it is something that happens to someone.]⁵

A jump cut interrupts these reflections. The camera moves to Zach and a friend, who walk along the Turkish Market. If he bought a stolen bicycle, Zach remarks, he would always worry that the owner might find him and demand it back. "There's a rule about that," his presumably local friend reassures him. "If there's a bike and it's unlocked, you're allowed to take it, because someone else is definitely going to take it." Even though a bike is yours, if you leave it unlocked, this friend explains, the "rule" applies. After this short exchange, we return to the director, who concludes his remarks: "Was könnte ich doch dazu sagen? Man muss sich nichts ausdenken. Es gibt ja alles immer. Oder auch: This light: I don't have to turn it off. Es geht von selber aus" (What could I say about this? One doesn't have to make anything up. Everything is always there. Or: This light: I don't have to turn it off. It turns itself off). Within the film's first six minutes, *Umsonst's* Kreuzberg is established as a place gov-

5. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.

erned by rules that deviate from official statutes and that conventional concepts of ownership do not apply to.

This introduction is framed by the “director’s” speech about creating a film in which “one doesn’t have to make anything up” because “everything is always there,” a film in which the lights are shown as they turn themselves off. Attempting to describe the kind of film he is making, the director talks about music, which he listens to “compulsively” while working on the film. Music, he suggests, is unlike film. Instead of being made, it just “happens.” At the same time the opening moments demonstrate how “made” the film is through jump cuts, montage, extradiegetic music, and the conspicuous display of its actors, equipment, and staff. Music is, of course, also produced. The difference between music and documentary film, the inscribed director seems to suggest, is that music does not attempt to depict an external reality. Instead, it is overtly emotional; as such, it “touches” people more immediately.

The film’s music in fact provides a historical framework for the reality we see. The juxtaposition of contemporary neofolk like Chloe’s song, new wave music from the 1980s by Holger Hiller, political Berlin rock from the 1990s by the band Mutter, and electropunk from the late 2000s by the group Cobra Killer provides an auditory time frame for the world on view. We become privy to a history of Kreuzberg sounds from the divided city of the 1980s through the reunified neighborhood of the 1990s to the present. This history is depicted not as a chronological sequence but as a “nonsynchronism.” As Ernst Bloch argues in his essay “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics” (1932), “Not all people exist in the same Now.” Even though they might “externally” live in the same time, they “carry earlier things with them.”⁶ In a nonsynchronous society, progress in all areas of human life is unevenly distributed, creating a contradicted Now, in which some people feel indebted to such progress, while others romanticize earlier values, societal structures, and modes of production. Bringing together the values and emotions of various epochs in his selection of music, Geene fashions his on-screen Kreuzberg as such a nonsynchronous society.

After the introduction, the title sequence features a static shot from a moving vehicle, which traverses the neighborhood of SO36, Kreuzberg on the border of Neukölln. A shot from above follows, showing the neighborhood as it would appear from a rooftop before the camera descends and zooms in on a young female pedestrian, Aziza. She has just returned to Kreuzberg after choosing, for reasons unknown, to discontinue an internship abroad. Her forty-year-old mother, Trixie, has, in her daughter’s absence, rented Aziza’s

6. Bloch, “Nonsynchronism,” 22.



Figure 2. Aziza (Ceci Chuh) and Zach (Elliott McKee), the intrepid anti-aspirants of Stephan Geene's *Umsonst*.

room to Zach, a *Lebenskünstler* (connoisseur of the art of living) who knows how to get on, as much as possible, “umsonst,” for free. He finds furniture and clothing in other people’s trash bins or in the street and sleeps in the kitchen on a friend’s couch to avoid paying rent.

Both Zach and Aziza (fig. 2), in their own way, refuse to “aspire.” Following a trajectory similar to that of Andy’s postcard, they do not know their destination. Thirty-four minutes into the film Zach saunters down a street in Kreuzberg. We hear him speak in voice-over:

People aspire too much. You know, that sounds odd. I mean, aspiration for everyone is this thing that you should have and that’s really respected, but when you think about it, people aspire, and they aspire to a point where it becomes a contest, you know, and everyone’s trying to beat the other person. I don’t know, I can’t remember who said it. You know, the world would be a better place if we all just sat down and decided not to be great.

Aspiration and competitive thinking, for Zach, are not worth the trouble. He eschews the dictates of commodity capitalism. Instead of aspiring professionally or economically, Zach and Aziza simply want to hang out and spend time doing their own thing. We see Aziza by the Spree, writing in her diary, balancing on a tree trunk, sleeping in a field. We view Zach sitting in a park, gazing at the sky, enjoying the sun, looking at his phone.

Such behavior is typical of young people Geene has observed over the years in his own corner of Kreuzberg. In the “Director’s Statement” of the film’s press kit, he refers to this state of being as a “mass time out.” This group, Geene suggests, might be compensating for university stress or “the worldwide Business School–madness” or, possibly, responding to the economic crises all over Europe. Primarily, though, he regards this behavior as “an intuitive alternative: not-being-needed as self-organization, the organization of one’s own time.”⁷ In this way, Geene’s protagonists take a break from contemporary economic imperatives. We see Zach and Aziza neither working nor engaging in customary (consumerist) leisure activities.⁸ Yet, while they also reclaim their own time through apparently unproductive activities, they perform a kind of active disengagement through movement, which Debord refers to as “*dérive*,” most commonly translated as “drift”: a “rapid passage through varied ambiances” in a “playful-constructive” manner.⁹ Without any recognizable motive, they meander through the urban terrain. In a society where “time is money,” the *dérive* could be regarded as the ultimate waste of time.¹⁰ As such, it can become a form of resistance to commodity capitalism.¹¹

In his early writings on the newly founded Situationist International, an organization of avant-garde artists and political theorists whose intellectual and artistic impetus emanated from a libertarian Marxism, Debord elaborates on the *dérive*: “In a *dérive*, one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.”¹² The movement of those engaging in a *dérive* is guided by the terrain itself and by chance encounters. The etymology of the French word may shed further light on its meaning. The Old French word *dériver* comes from the Latin word *derivare*, which refers to leading or drawing a stream of water away from its source. This image is close to

7. Geene, “Director’s Statement.”

8. Leisure activities in particular, for Debord, have been corrupted by “a vast industrial sector . . . that is an incomparable instrument for stupefying the proletariat with by-products of mystifying ideology and bourgeois tastes” (“Report on the Construction of Situations,” 9).

9. Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*,” 1.

10. See Sadler, *Situationist City*, 93.

11. This idea resonates with Geene’s first feature film, *After Effect*. “Give the animal you love something truly valuable” is the final slogan, projected onto the image of a group of hyenas, which slowly metamorphose into the model Kai Starel. A note, written into the last image of *After Effect* in postproduction, suggests that this valuable thing might be “time.”

12. Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*,” 1. I am referring to Debord’s “Report on the Construction of Situations” and “Theory of the *Dérive*.”

Debord's description of a "rapid passage" through ambiances and his emphasis on a "playful" yet "constructive" manner. A flow of water, which derives from a river, may move playfully and create a new stream in the process. As such, it provides the origin for the English *derive* as well. One word develops into another by taking a new path. In contrast, the English word *drift* does not quite encompass the dimension of the French word *dérive*. When I refer to Aziza and Zach's movement as "drifting," I am using the term in the latter sense.

To be sure, drifting through life without motive and ambition is not necessarily a form of resistance. Niko, the protagonist of Jan Ole Gerster's *Oh Boy* (2012), for instance, traverses Berlin in an attempt to find himself and figure out what to do with his life after he discontinues his study of law. Like Aziza and Zach, he has several chance encounters. On various occasions, he is confronted with German history and his own past guilt toward a girl named Julika, whom he bullied in school. Yet, while Niko may be drifting through life, he does not drift through Berlin unaware of where he might end up; rather, he moves from one chosen destination to the next. His path is driven not by the geography of the place but by the people he meets and their different priorities. *Oh Boy* therefore shows us its images of the city mostly from a bird's-eye perspective and, in that way, denies the viewer ground-level experience of the metropolis. The drift depicted in *Umsonst* is much more focused on geography than that of *Oh Boy*.

For the Situationists, the *dérive* represented an opportunity to reclaim one's own time and, while doing so, to conduct psychogeographic research. The way individuals move and the encounters they have may appear to be random, but, from a *dérive* point of view, as Debord notes, they are guided by the geography of the place itself.¹³ Like a stream of water, a *dérive* will follow the path of least resistance. Consequently, it is not chance that leads Zach and Aziza to various places (the Turkish Market, the Admiralsbrücke, Görlitzer Park, the Landwehrkanal, Schlesisches Tor, etc.). Geography itself takes them there. Intentionally stripping away images and activities inspired and sanctioned by businesses, Debord claims that the movement of drifters off the beaten paths of consumerism makes the social geography of a place visible.¹⁴

The *dérive* offers distinct ways to explore urban space, which the Situationists used to design new types of subjective maps like the *Guide psycho-*

13. Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," 1.

14. Of course, the Situationists' primary interest was in politicizing people and fostering a revolutionary impulse. For that reason, cognitive mapping that would inform social planning was not the main objective of their methodology. See Sadler, *Situationist City*, 92–93.

géographique de Paris (1956) and *Naked City* (1957), which attempted to chart emotions and states of consciousness in relation to a place based on data collected through *dérives*.¹⁵ While Geene's film is unlikely to inspire similar new maps of Berlin-Kreuzberg, its *dérive* certainly offers insight into the place's social geography.

Mythos Kreuzberg

So why is a stance against aspiration, which manifests itself in the film's seemingly random *dérive*, appropriate for depicting postmillennial Kreuzberg? To answer this question, it is crucial that one consider the neighborhood's history. With the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Kreuzberg 36 became a West German enclave, enclosed on three sides by a fortification that separated the West from the communist East. Rents were low and many buildings run-down. The neighborhood became a refuge for low-income groups. Turkish "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*), who had been moving to Berlin since the late 1950s, lived side by side with students, artists, and other natives of the area in a makeshift multicultural community. Kreuzberg became the center of Turkish German culture in Berlin and was, at the same time, known for its dive bars and young artists, drug users, punks, and squatters. Unemployment rates and the number of welfare recipients were higher than elsewhere in the city. The neighborhood became a mecca for escapists and people marginalized for various reasons.

Since 1987 Kreuzberg has also sustained a tradition of demonstrations on May 1: left-wing "autonomous" radicals and antifascist "Antifa" groups still gather in the streets of Kreuzberg 36. Their protests have become a vehicle for expressing civil discontent about the government, the rich, and the establishment; street fights with the police are common. Expensive cars have been burned, storefronts destroyed, supermarkets looted. This tradition of rebellious anarchism is palpable in *Umsonst*—for instance, in the conversation about Kreuzberg's street codes. In the film's Kreuzberg, it is okay to take a bicycle if it is not locked; if you don't, somebody else might. This is further reiterated when Aziza steals a temporarily unlocked bicycle in front of a Döner restaurant at Schlesische Straße. The spirit of the May 1 tradition is also evoked when Aziza writes "I burn your car" on a car's windshield and later watches a car (which she has in fact not set on fire) go up in flames.

This aspect of Kreuzberg's history constitutes what the ethnographer Barbara Lang refers to as the "Mythos Kreuzberg": a local self-image as mul-

15. See Sadler, *Situationist City*, 82–90.

ticultural counterplace, which celebrates nonconformism and the battle against authority.¹⁶ In the words of the Berlin-based writer David Wagner, “An everlasting revolutionary spirit prevailed.”¹⁷ Kreuzberg’s image was that of a “place, where nobody had to grow up.”¹⁸ But as Wagner emphasizes, the battle against authority in Kreuzberg has become the stuff of myth and a privileged resource for local folklore. While it has, to a degree, remained true to its historical legacy, this is not altogether the case. The neighborhood has become increasingly gentrified and is now a popular tourist destination. Even as myth and reality have drifted apart, Kreuzberg remains associated with the idea of counterculture, anarchism, and rebellion.

Since German unification, the neighborhood has undergone dramatic transformation. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Kreuzberg was suddenly in the center of the city and, as such, economically attractive to investors.¹⁹ As a result, much of the area has been restored, rebuilt, and gentrified. Rents have increased, and the media cultivate a lustrous new image of Kreuzberg as “Yuppie Town,” adding a different dimension of symbolic value and cultural capital to the “Mythos Kreuzberg.”²⁰ Because of its unique history and alternative self-understanding, however, the area has manifested a stronger opposition to gentrification than other Berlin neighborhoods. The opening of the first McDonald’s in the area in 2007, for example, occasioned large-scale protests and media attention. “Bürger gegen Burger” (Citizens against burgers), read the headlines in multiple newspapers.²¹

In addition to financial investment and the shift in public image, Lang points out that a generational change has altered life in the neighborhood. While the generation born between 1950 and 1960 exhibited acute awareness of the ecological and social problems that resulted from industrial growth and industrialization, the generation that followed has been far less politically active. Instead of a unifying political agenda, this generation has found a common ground in the ideals of pluralism, individualism, and radical heterogeneity.²²

16. See Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg*, 28. The term *Mythos Kreuzberg* was also used by the Green Party–associated Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, which organized a conference in 2005 to discuss the “results of a multicultural experiment.” See Am Orde, “Kreuzberg war immer einen Schritt voraus.”

17. Wagner, *Welche Farbe hat Berlin?*, 43.

18. Wagner, *Welche Farbe hat Berlin?*, 44.

19. Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg*, 72.

20. See Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg*, 28–33.

21. Two examples are Seith, “McDonald’s in Kreuzberg”; and Krohn, “Bürger gegen Burger.”

22. See Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg*, 69–74.

The transformation of generational ethos is a central theme of *Umsonst*. Unlike the members of the older generation who so ardently protested the opening of the McDonald's, Aziza's chums feel indifferent. One of her friends who used to work at McDonald's has quit her job. "But McDonald's was good," someone says, and the group teases the girl for having been employed there. Working at McDonald's is seen as funny. Given Kreuzberg's fraught history with the chain, it is curious that this employment does not become a political issue. Times have changed, albeit not completely. A marked resistance to gentrification becomes apparent, for example, when Aziza's acquaintance Blanche walks into a small art gallery and without hesitating takes a beer from the fridge. Providing free beer, she insists, should be an obligation for the many new arrivals to Kreuzberg whose presence has contributed to rising rent prices. Generations, as well as nonsynchronous values, commingle in an international place where those who set cars on fire, protest the opening of a burger franchise, and steal beer live side by side with international travelers and young urban professional *Zugezogene* (newcomers) like Aziza's mother, Trixie, whose accent marks her as originally Viennese.

New phenotypes of Kreuzberg's tradition as "Little Istanbul" also figure in the film. We see the Turkish Market, one of Kreuzberg's big tourist attractions, where Zach seizes the opportunity to practice his newly acquired Turkish vocabulary with the local vendors. We see him strolling through a Turkish supermarket and buying "Cola Turka," which he sips on a sun-lit park bench. Aziza's best friend, Seynep, is also of Turkish descent and helps Zach with his Turkish pronunciation. For the most part, though, Turkish German culture remains peripheral in *Umsonst*, unlike in many recent features with Kreuzberg locations. Thomas Arslan's Berlin Trilogy films *Geschwister* (1997), *Dealer* (1999), and *Der schöne Tag* (2001), Feo Aladağ's Kreuzkölln melodrama *Die Fremde* (2010), and Neco Çelik's *Alltag* (2003) feature Turkish heritage protagonists and center on identity crises, gang and drug milieus, and the oppression of women in patriarchal Turkish families. Indeed, *Die Fremde* suggests that Kreuzberg's Turkish German culture and Turkish culture are identical in many ways.²³ With unrelenting grimness, *Die Fremde* pictures Turkish women as objects of Turkish violence. Even Kreuzberg films that focus on ethnically German protagonists offer a very different Kreuzberg milieu than *Umsonst*. A prominent example would be Bettina Blümner's documentary *Prinzessinnenbad* (2007). While friends, boyfriends, and classmates of its three female teenage main characters are ethnically diverse and primarily of

23. See Gramling, "Oblivion of Influence."

Turkish heritage, these three, all of whom have grown up in Kreuzberg, struggle with their single mothers and their macho boyfriends. The girls use rough language, inhabit a rough-and-tumble environment, skip school, commit petty crimes, drink, and take drugs. They resent the “Ökoladen” (organic supermarket) in their neighborhood, because “Öko” is for “Spießer” (the bourgeois).

Geene’s feature departs from the many films that represent Turkish Germans as being at odds with local German culture. *Umsonst*’s only character of Turkish heritage, Seynep, is depicted as no less (if not more) independent than her friend Aziza. She is confident and social, she moves with ease through the streets, and she is gainfully employed. Turkish German culture is shown to be identical with German culture, a depiction that arguably diminishes or sidelines existing differences and conflicts.

The Kreuzberg milieu of *Umsonst* is certainly more polished than that of *Die Fremde* or *Prinzessinnenbad*. One hears hardly any foul language or even argot; Aziza’s mother is sufficiently well-off to finance her daughter’s internship abroad and to purchase fresh food from the local market. Zach’s bare-bones lifestyle corresponds to his own modest expectations; neither he nor anyone else in *Umsonst* seems to have financial worries. Instead of depicting Kreuzberg as a home to ethnically diverse low-income groups, as many other films have, Geene’s film centers on a more recent Kreuzberg demographic. This demographic also better serves the film’s resolve to stage a *dérive*, an act of intentional reappropriation of the urban space. For Zach and Aziza, the *dérive* is less a response to economic hardship than an existential choice. Their *dérive* sustains Kreuzberg’s mythical resistance to commodity capitalism, albeit in an updated fashion suitable for a much less self-conscious or politically engaged generation.

Myth, argues Roland Barthes, is a “type of speech,” a meaning that we automatically associate with a signifier. It is the way one characterizes something, even if it is no longer (or not at all) grounded in reality.²⁴ Kreuzberg’s mythic status as a site of anticapitalist counterculture can easily be deconstructed in the twenty-first century, but certain meanings nonetheless remain attached to the signifier. As a mythical site of counterculture, *Umsonst*’s Kreuzberg resembles a heterotopia or “other” space, which Michel Foucault characterizes as an “effectively realized utopia,”²⁵ a real and simultaneously impossible place. The rules at work in the Kreuzberg of *Umsonst* deviate from conventional norms, but for people who live there they assume the status

24. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 107.

25. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 352.

of common law. As a community that lives by special rules, Kreuzberg becomes a site of both deviation from and compensation for the shortcomings of the places that surround it.²⁶ Aside from working in compensatory ways, heterotopias foster illusions that contest the “real.” Simultaneously impossible and possible, the heterotopia shows the current state of the world to be mutable.

Refashioning Kreuzberg as a heterotopic locus of counterculture, *Umsonst* charges its image of that neighborhood with a subversive potential. A *dérive*, in theory, could be staged anywhere in the world. By locating his drift in Kreuzberg, however, and presenting his version of Kreuzberg as heterotopic, Geene makes use of the neighborhood’s self-understanding to reinforce the *dérive*’s political project. Despite his sensitivity to the neighborhood’s historical transformation, he portrays his Kreuzberg as a place where opposition to the prerogatives of neoliberalism is an everyday reality. To serve this resolve, the film omits more conflict-charged aspects of its nonsynchronous milieu and presents its drift as a form of political resistance. Of course, Zach’s and Aziza’s drift constitutes a limited alternative to economically participating in society; they are both reliant on other people’s—that is, Aziza’s mother’s—participation and benevolence for their own survival. Instead of a tangible alternative lifestyle, we may understand the depicted drift as the temporary denial of a reality that both main characters will eventually have to face again. The film, however, does not emphasize this. Its project is not to judge conduct but to portray how psychological dispositions alter how people experience their surroundings and how the myths and history of a place in return influence this mind-set.

Inspired by the New Wave and Situationism

In a 2009 collection titled *Film, Avantgarde, Biopolitik*, which he coedited, Geene discussed attributes of the New Wave that had a strong influence on *Umsonst*: “Among them are the quasi-documentary depiction of (urban) everyday life, the reflexive reference to [the film’s] own conditions of production, but above all the direct reference to the extra-filmic (extradiegetic) reality of the actors.”²⁷ In *Umsonst* the “quasi-documentary depiction of (urban) everyday life” is achieved by embedding the actors in an authentic city environment where pedestrians walk around in the background and the general movement and atmosphere of the surroundings become visible in wide-angle shots. The staged story line and the unstaged backdrop interact and commingle, very much in keeping with the perspectives of New Wave films such as Agnès Var-

26. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 356.

27. Geene, “1967, Zeit und X-Beliebige Filme,” 239.

da's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) or Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1960) and *Bande à part* (1964).

Very few shots in *Umsonst* take place indoors; by and large we see the protagonists navigating the city on foot. The specific importance of the walk as a medium to portray urban space has been emphasized in Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). People, Certeau maintains in his chapter "Walking in the City," have always desired to see the city from above. This elevated way of looking at a city is like "reading a text." The city's complexity becomes readable when viewed from a high angle.²⁸ Walking down city streets, in contrast, is like speaking. Pedestrians create the "urban text" without necessarily being able to decipher it.²⁹ Certeau describes the act of walking as well as other small, personal actions of everyday life as spatial practice. Such acts transform the panoptic, planned, controllable city, which one can see from above, into individual experience and memory. In this way, walkers create a migrational, metaphorical city.

Umsonst initially shows us Aziza from above and then cuts to the street level. This cut is the beginning of a process wherein the film depicts the transformation of space into place, of Kreuzberg viewed panoptically into Kreuzberg witnessed experientially. This emphasis on the everyday, the personal, and the nonspectacular as forms of resistance to the objectification and commodification of life differentiates both the New Wave and *Umsonst* from conventional Berlin features, as well as from iconic representations of the metropolis such as *Berlin: Die Sinfonie einer Großstadt*, both Walter Ruttmann's 1927 classic and Thomas Schadt's 2002 remake of it. These city symphonies present Berlin through a rhythmic sequence of still images, rapid cuts, and shots of the city from a bird's-eye perspective. This can be seen as an attempt to "read" the city rather than to portray the experience of being in it.

Geene also adopted the self-conscious awareness of his players' off-screen personas from the New Wave. For example, Ceci Chuh, the actress who plays Aziza, likewise grew up in Kreuzberg. Aziza's friends are cast from Chuh's real-life circle of friends and even greet her as "Chuh" when she

28. Certeau, "Walking in the City," 92.

29. "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple 'enunciative' function: it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation is an 'alloction,' 'posits another opposite' the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action). It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation" (Certeau, "Walking in the City," 97–98).

meets with them.³⁰ McKee, who plays Zach, was found by Geene playing music on the Maybachufer. Both Chuh and McKee go back and forth between acting and “being themselves.”³¹ The idea of casting actors to play characters who resemble their real-life personas is something Geene admires, for example, in Varda’s film *Le petit amour* (1988), in which Varda cast Jane Birkin’s real-life daughters to portray her character’s daughters.³² Corinne Marchand, the actress who plays the protagonist in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, is, like the film’s namesake, a real-life chanteuse, reminding us of Zach and Chloe’s real-life identities as musicians. There was a script, claimed Geene, but the cast never got to see it.³³ His actors essentially played versions of themselves and improvised their dialogues.

Umsonst’s players, however, are not identical with the characters they portray in the same way as the principals of Polish director Michal Marczak’s 2017 Sundance entry, *All These Sleepless Nights*. Marczak’s film, set in Warsaw, follows two male art students’ nocturnal excursions for more than one year.³⁴ The film won the festival award in the documentary category, because its protagonists were not trying to portray characters different from their real-life personas. Still, it is clear at every moment that they are aware of the camera and are, in fact, consciously performing for it. Rather than show us how the characters would behave in the absence of the apparatus, *All These Sleepless Nights* captures their behavior as it is filtered and manipulated by the camera’s presence. This gives the film a hybrid status between a documentary and a fiction film. *Umsonst*’s film within the film resembles *All These Sleepless Nights* when it follows Aziza and Zach on their seemingly random promenades through Kreuzberg, but the characters are separated from their actors by more than just their names. Chuh is not identical to Aziza. Similarly, McKee and Zach, despite their resemblance, should not be confused with each other.

Umsonst thus constructs situations rather than documenting its actors’ lives.³⁵ For the Situationists, a constructed situation offers a break from every-

30. Heymann, “Kreuzberger Treibsand”; Busche, “Kritik zu Umsonst.” When I asked Geene about the curious way of addressing Aziza/Ceci, he stated that he had himself been confused about it. When he confronted his cast, however, they assured him that it was not Ceci’s name they were calling but that “Schuh” was an expression used by youth: *einen Schuh machen*—to disappear, leave. Aziza’s friend, however, yells it when Aziza arrives, which would seem to contradict this claim (Stephan Geene, interview by author, Berlin, October 14, 2016).

31. Heymann, “Kreuzberger Treibsand.”

32. Geene, “1967, Zeit und X-Beliebige Filme,” 239.

33. Bake and Dorow, “Mit Ohne.”

34. Macnab, “*All These Sleepless Nights* Director Michal Marczak.”

35. Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations,” 8.

day modes of thinking and seeing.³⁶ Situations are “moment[s] of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events.”³⁷ As a departure from and disturbance to the “Society of the Spectacle,” constructed situations, much like heterotopias, can foster revolutionary consciousness. The Situationists wanted to create a city for a classless society based on noncontiguous encounter and play rather than on capitalism’s aspirational strategies and power structures. The Situationist legacy is echoed in the synopsis of *Umsonst* on the back of the commercial DVD. “The film develops an almost documentary portrait of a Kreuzberg ‘situation,’” it reads, employing this claim to veracity as a marketing strategy.³⁸

The creation of situations endeavors to change one’s “way of seeing the streets,” rather than change people’s way of seeing works of art.³⁹ Situationist art, particularly documentary film, should seek to be truly “current.” It should, like an archive, preserve the significant moments of a situation. We find such an impulse, for instance, in *Umsonst*’s studied use of improvisation. A related impulse is to foreclose psychological identification with the “hero” so spectators might maintain an active role. Debord writes: “The situation is thus designed to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing ‘public’ must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, ‘livers,’ must steadily increase.”⁴⁰ Actors become “livers” when they live the situation they construct and become emancipated from a filmmaker’s authorship. In *Umsonst* this happens as the actors create their characters based on their own personality and interact with their environment in a spontaneous and improvised fashion.

The formerly passive public, then, becomes part of the performance when its role as spectator is redesigned and recast. In his book *The Situationist City* the architect and urban historian Simon Sadler describes these dynamics:

The constructed situation would clearly be some sort of performance, one that would treat all space as performance space and all people as performers. In this respect, situationism postured as the ultimate development of twentieth-century experimental theater, the energies of which had been dedicated to the

36. See Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.

37. This definition was published in the first edition of the Situationist International Bulletin in June 1958 (Situationist International Online, “Definitions”).

38. B_books, “Umsonst, Inhalt.”

39. Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations,” 11.

40. Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations,” 10.

integration of players and audience, of performance space and spectator space, of theatrical experience and “real” experience.⁴¹

To expose all space as performance space and all people as performers, the Situationists wanted to create a new form of post-Brechtian experimental film, which would destroy the boundaries between spectacle and reality and create a “lived experience” in which the lines between performance and “reality” blurred.⁴² In his own films Debord would employ means such as montage, repetition, stoppage, and gazing into the camera. Giorgio Agamben writes:

Since his early films and ever more clearly as he went along, Debord has shown us the image as such, that is to say, according to one of his principles from *The Society of the Spectacle*, the image as a zone of undecidability between the true and the false. . . . The image exhibited as such is no longer an image of anything; it is itself imageless. The only thing of which one cannot make an image is, if you will, the being-image of the image. The sign can signify anything, *except the fact that it is in the process of signifying*.⁴³

To create the appearance of “imagelessness,” *Umsonst*, too, exposes the image as an image and the film as a performance. This reflexivity gains expression in several ways. Throughout the film the camera is perceived as visible to both the actors and the nonactors. The fourth wall is regularly broken, and with it the diegetic space. Yet, instead of permanently disrupting the closed space of the film, such breaks intensify it by exposing the illusion it entails.

The gaze into the camera, however, is not the most striking way in which Geene stages his “break.” In the film’s last nine minutes, the filmic reality is disrupted by a sudden cut to Aziza taking a pair of scissors and cutting her own skin. Before the physical cut results in an on-screen wound, a sharp filmic cut relieves the viewer from the on-screen blood, and we suddenly return to the film set on the bridge that we remember from the opening sequence. A makeup artist creates the illusion of a cut on Aziza, now exposed as the young actress Maria. After the makeup artist has created the imitation wound on Ceci/Aziza/Maria’s arm, the film takes us back to the scene with the scissors in which Aziza/Maria cuts herself. After the cut, in an instance of discontinuous editing, we observe Aziza as she walks around in Kreuzberg, speaking to the camera about her desperation after reading her mother’s diary, and riding a stolen

41. Sadler, *Situationist City*, 105.

42. See Sadler, *Situationist City*, 106.

43. Agamben, “Difference and Repetition,” 319.

bicycle into a thunderstorm. The film fades to black and cuts again to the sunny film set on the bridge. We learn that Maria, the actress of the film within the film, has in fact cut her “real-life” skin. She justifies the act of self-violence as an attempt to help the makeup artist, who would have otherwise had to “make” a wound. This “cut” brings a sudden conclusion of the film within the film: Maria’s mother, who is identified in the credits as “echtere Mutter” (more real mother), protests to the crew and drags her daughter away from the set. With Maria’s exit, the film within a film remains incomplete. True to its title, it is “umsonst,” in vain.

The Being-Image of the Image

What are we to make of the film’s curious conclusion? In a conversation that I had with Geene in 2016, he insisted that he needed to show the break because his notion of realism required it.⁴⁴ In keeping with the initial resolve of *Umsonst*’s fictional director to show things as they are, he sought to bare the apparatus and to expose the film as a film. The break also undermines the viewer’s ability to identify with the narrative’s characters. *Umsonst* shows a fictional actress who identifies so strongly with her on-screen persona that she willingly inflicts harm on herself. Identification with a character, it would seem to follow, likewise causes people to lose control over their own actions and persons. What applies for the film’s central figure, then, also applies for its audience. When *Umsonst* reveals an actress who plays Aziza, it becomes difficult to identify with the fictional character. This actress, however, is also fictional; she is “Maria,” not Chuh. The film leaves to the viewer the work of recognizing that this character is also a function of a filmic construction.

The absurdity of identifying with a fictional character or a celebrity on-screen is reinforced in the film’s closing moments as we hear an electropunk tune of 2009 by the group Cobra Killer. The song mocks the idea of fame by asking irreverent questions: “Hello Celebrity! / What are you famous for? / Tell me what you do—in between the wonton soups.” It draws attention to the fact that celebrities are always represented through certain activities and props—like the consumption of wonton soup. Such mass-produced images create a phantom personality rather than a full-bodied being. In that regard, Cobra Killer’s wonton-slurping celebrity is every bit as spurious and specious as Aziza/Maria. Adding further poignancy and pertinence to the song’s lyric, a last shot after the credits shows the street musician Chloe saying that she considers Maria’s exit from the film set a “shame,” because “she could’ve been a

44. Geene, interview by author.

really good actress.” By overstepping the boundaries between illusion and reality, “Maria” is spared a possible future as just another vacuous celebrity.

Breaking the diegetic reality, *Umsonst* exposes its depicted moment of life as deliberately constructed with cinematic means. This disclosure of the “being-image of the image” seeks to engender critical viewers, who can see through appearances rather than passively accept a capitalist commodity as an image of reality and the self-understood way things are. In this way, the film resembles other recent German films that have employed similar experimental breaks to see through advanced capitalist reality and probe its “constructed” quality.

Julian Radlmaier’s *Selbstkritik eines bürgerlichen Hundes* (*Self-Criticism of a Bourgeois Dog*, 2017) also presents a film within a film. Elements of magic realism such as talking birds and a selfless monk figure centrally in the protagonist’s tragically failed quest to find the utopia of “communism without communists.” After the film’s inscribed feature premieres at a festival, the director, played by Radlmaier himself, takes questions from the audience. Responding to a query about his film’s pessimism toward the possibility of social change, he insists that global capitalism has become all-encompassing, colonizing mass desire so fully that change has become impossible. Pressed about what he believes might be an alternative, he says, “The only thing we can do is to make art, because to change reality we would need a miracle, and I really don’t believe in miracles.” He then morphs into a dog, proving that miracles and therefore the possibility of societal change may indeed exist when the individual—even if it is in the shape of a dog—acquires humility. This magical element, in addition to the film within the film, contests the feature’s diegetic reality and thereby, like *Umsonst*, seeks to foster the idea of art—and cinema—as a catalyst for social change. As the film exposes its diegetic reality as fictitious, it also invites the viewer to question the reality of capitalism’s immutable all-encompassing presence.

Similarly, Max Linz’s *Ich will mich nicht künstlich aufregen* (*Asta Upset*, 2014) never misses an opportunity to emphasize its own identity as a construction. The film tells the story of the curator Asta and her struggle to maintain her integrity despite her dependence on the influence and funding of capitalist investors. It uses a variety of filmic methods, including monotonous recitals of Marxist theory, laugh tracks, and visual repetition, to sustain its own feat of Brechtian distanciation. In a striking comedic set piece, *Ich will mich nicht künstlich aufregen* shows several people engaging in “Brecht Yoga,” which appears as an intellectual, not physical, exercise. Brecht Yoga, explains an

instructor to her students, “is about comprehending what is sold to you as a natural state as being constructed.” Thus Linz’s film, like *Selbstkritik eines bürgerlichen Hundes* and *Umsonst*, possesses this principle of “Brecht Yoga.”

Both *Ich will mich nicht künstlich aufregen* and *Selbstkritik eines bürgerlichen Hundes* are set mainly in Berlin and share with *Umsonst* a political resolve, a conversance with Continental theory, and a radical desire to make films that break with diegetic reality and question the workings of images. Radlmaier and Linz, however, want to modify the audience’s way of seeing art and society, not its way of seeing the immediate geographic setting that people inhabit, which is the project of *Umsonst*. The Situationists conceived of geography as a vehicle to transform and enlighten the viewer. Geene’s application of their approach offers a decidedly singular contribution to how one might imagine a cinematic critique of neoliberal influence on urban experience in the twenty-first century.

With its focus on the exploration and appropriation of urban space, we can also understand *Umsonst* in the context of the b_books project *metroZones*. Since 2003 *metroZones* has analyzed international urban life forms and architecture in publications edited by Jochen Becker and Stephan Lanz. These studies regard urban spaces as products of societal developments and depict them as the centers of both industrial globalization and practices of resistance and emancipation.⁴⁵ *metroZones* began as a written companion to the interdisciplinary project *ErsatzStadt*, which took place between 2002 and 2006 and was funded by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes and the Volksbühne am Rosa Luxemburg Platz in Berlin, where it was also performed. Becker and Lanz of *metroZones* formed one of two curating teams of *ErsatzStadt*. The first publication of *metroZones* titled *Space/Troubles* specifies: “*ErsatzStadt* forms a counterpart to the existing ‘European city,’ which, being an overly regulated, commercialized, and aesthetically reduced space, restricts informal, social, cultural, and economic means of appropriation.”⁴⁶

Focusing on case studies of informal and participative processes of city development, in which urban structures and practices are created independently of and parallel to official city planning,⁴⁷ *ErsatzStadt* and *metroZones* argue against the idea of *Good Governance*, created in the 1980s by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The concept is criticized as the

45. See Kaltenbrunner, “Im Brennglas die Civitas.”

46. Becker and Lanz, *Space/Troubles*, 220.

47. For instance, the gecekondu settlements in Istanbul.

ideological legitimation of a European-neoliberal understanding of the “Civitas.” Lanz adds that the ideal of an interventionist, globalized, and internationally competitive market economy could not be regarded as the universal foundation of prosperity.⁴⁸ Seen in this context, *Umsonst* might be read as a contribution to a larger project that seeks to counter the image of the regulated and commercialized “European city” to draw attention to a place’s informal and social means of appropriation.

This appropriation is staged in *Umsonst* through the *dérive*. Studying and documenting Zach’s and Aziza’s movements, *Umsonst* offers a critique of neoliberal prerogatives by presenting an alternative way to experience urban space. Instead of simply suggesting that undirected strolling is a viable form of resistance to capitalist structures, Geene’s critique of neoliberalism takes place on a much more formal level. *Umsonst*’s depiction of the *dérive* proposes a mind-set in which consumerism is not regarded as the only mode of navigating or inhabiting a terrain. The film constitutes an exercise in urban strolling and mental stretching, in considering alternative ways of being much like Linz’s “Brecht Yoga.”

To this end, Geene stages his characters’ *dérive* in Kreuzberg and employs the neighborhood’s historical self-image as a site of counterculture. In doing so, *Umsonst* departs from a long tradition of Kreuzberg films that have focused on the neighborhood as the center of Berlin’s Turkish German culture. Moreover, the director omits certain problematic aspects of contemporary Kreuzberg, such as the battle against gentrification that figures so prominently in *Ich will mich nicht künstlich aufregen*, as well as earlier Kreuzberg films such as Rudolf Thome’s *Berlin-Chamissoplatz* (1980) and *Schade, dass Beton nicht brennt (Too Bad Asphalt Doesn’t Burn)*, (1981). In *Umsonst*’s Kreuzberg, generations, cultures, locals, and newcomers merge with apparent ease and lack of conflict in a new generation of inhabitants, for which Geene finds an age-appropriate music choice in the closing tune by Cobra Killer. While his Kreuzberg still includes elements of punk music, historically associated with the aggressive rejection of societal rules and “bourgeois” values, it now also coexists with electronic music, which has prominent links to popular culture. Although Kreuzberg’s self-understanding in *Umsonst* retains an ideological indebtedness to its countercultural history, its style has become more mainstream and also more international; the song’s lyrics, performed by a German band, after all, are in English. The film’s heterotopic image of Kreuzberg,

48. See Stephan Lanz, “Wo Bosnien mitten in Brasilien beginnt . . .,” in Becker and Lanz, *Space/Troubles*, 7–27.

which takes its cues from the Situationist idea of psychogeography, is concerned less with aspiring to offer a tangible alternative to the neoliberal idea of the “European City” than with its revolutionary impulses on a structural level—specifically, its self-consciousness about the interplay of documentary and drama, and between the spheres of fact and fiction.

Anne Röhrborn is a PhD candidate at Harvard University.

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. “Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord’s Films,” translated by Brian Holmes. In *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, edited by Tom McDonough, 313–20. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- Am Orde, Sabine. “Kreuzberg war immer einen Schritt voraus.” *taz*, May 26, 2005. www.taz.de/!603727.
- Bake, Hendrike, and Thomas Dorow. “Mit Ohne: Gespräch mit Stephan Geene.” *Indiekino Berlin*, July 2014. www.indiekino.de/news/de/magazin/2014-07.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday, 1972.
- B_books. “Umsonst, Inhalt.” Synopsis. www.b-books.de/umsonst/inhalt.html (accessed June 26, 2018).
- Becker, Jochen, and Stephan Lanz, eds. *Space/Troubles*. Berlin: b_books, 2003.
- Berlinale.de. “Filmdatenblatt Umsonst.” www.berlinale.de/de/archiv/jahresarchive/2014/02_programm_2014/02_Filmdatenblatt_2014_20144282.php#tab=filmStills (accessed May 28, 2018).
- Bloch, Ernst. “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” translated by Mark Ritter. *New German Critique*, no. 11 (1977): 22–38.
- Busche, Andreas. “Kritik zu Umsonst.” *Epd Film*, June 20, 2014. www.epd-film.de/filmkritiken/umsonst.
- Certeau, Michel de. “Walking in the City.” In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall, 91–110. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Debord, Guy. “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action,” translated by Ken Knabb. Situationist International Online. www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html (accessed April 10, 2018).
- Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black&Red, 2016.
- Debord, Guy. “Theory of the Dérive,” translated by Ken Knabb. Situationist International Online. www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html (accessed April 10, 2018).
- Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.” In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, edited by Neil Leach, 350–56. New York: Routledge, 1997.

- Geene, Stephan. "1967, Zeit und X-Beliebige Filme." In *Film, Avantgarde, Biopolitik*, edited by Sabeth Buchmann, Helmut Draxler, and Stephan Geene, 236–63. Vienna: Schlebrügge.Editor, 2009.
- Geene, Stephan. "Director's Statement." www.b-books.de/umsonst/presse_umsonst.pdf (accessed April 10, 2018).
- Gramling, David. "The Oblivion of Influence: Mythical Realism in Feo Aladağ's *When We Leave*." In *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium*, edited by Sabine Hake and Barbara Mennel, 32–43. New York: Berghahn, 2012.
- Heymann, Nana. "Kreuzberger Treibsand." *Der Tagesspiegel*, July 11, 2014. www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/film-umsonst-kreuzberger-treibsand/10185926.html.
- Kaltenbrunner, Robert. "Im Brennglas die Civitas." *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 2, 2005. www.b-books.de/verlag/metrozones/rezensionen.html.
- Krohn, Anne-Dore. "Bürger gegen Burger." *Die Zeit*, May 24, 2007. www.zeit.de/2007/22/Buerger_gegen_Burger.
- Lang, Barbara. *Mythos Kreuzberg: Ethnographie eines Stadtteils (1961–1995)*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1998.
- Macnab, Geoffrey. "All These Sleepless Nights Director Michal Marczak on Following Two Hedonistic Partygoers." *Independent Online*, March 28, 2017. www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/why-all-these-sleepless-nights-director-michal-marczak-warsaw-a7652926.html.
- Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.
- Seith, Anne. "McDonald's in Kreuzberg: Bürger gegen Burger." *Spiegel Online*, June 16, 2007. www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/mcdonald-s-in-kreuzberg-buerger-gegen-burger-a-488880.html.
- Situationist International Online. "Definitions," translated by Ken Knabb. www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/definitions.html (accessed June 26, 2018).
- Wagner, David. *Welche Farbe hat Berlin?* Berlin: Verbrecher, 2011.