



Documentation of ruderal plants on the site of former Görlitzer Bahnhof, 1965.

# Revisiting Görlitzer Park: Material Practices and the Postmodern Landscape

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Görlitzer Park, located in Berlin's formerly counter-cultural and now trendy and highly gentrified district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, recently entered public awareness through news features on illegal street dealing and drug trafficking. However, the Görli—as the park is affectionately called by its users, who often leave it trashed but love it for its Taiga feel—has been a highly contested urban space, claimed by different actors and institutions, since a participatory planning process on the site of former railway station Görlitzer Bahnhof led to a park design competition in 1984. The winning design by Freie Planungsgruppe Berlin offered postmodern symbolism, drawing inspiration from the strategies of the Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 84/87 (International Building Exhibition, or IBA for short). By conserving some historical structures and offering invented meaning and traditions, the picturesque scheme promised to mediate between the myriad factions with claims on the park. As a singular scheme, the design was said to unify the conflicting desires of resident groups, the local administration, and experts involved in planning.—<sup>1</sup>

By analyzing the sociopolitical conditions and the urban context from which the park emerged, the process of planning and design, and the materialization and appropriations of physical space, we offer an alternative reading. We argue that apart from all of the postmodern symbolism

1 An early version of this essay we presented in the context of the conference “Den Protest regieren. Staatliches Handeln vor der Herausforderung von ‘neuen sozialen Bewegungen’ und linken Organisationen in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren” organized at the Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte, Hamburg, Germany, in November 2014. We would like to thank Jane Hutton for the kind invitation to participate in this publication and her thoughtful editorial guidance. Special thanks go to our colleagues Anne Kockelkorn, Gregor Harbusch and Stephan Becker for their critical, yet always constructive feedback.

and sensibilities, the history of Görlitzer Park is closely linked to its material culture and urban ecology. The nineteen-eighties park design, in both its materiality and processes, is a key example of the era's confrontation with the ruins of the modern urban economy, in conjunction with a trend towards *Spurensicherung*, i.e. tracking the material traces of history.—<sup>2</sup> Berlin's alternative scene, engaged residents, and alternative planners developed new strategies for the reuse of existing structures and the recycling of urban wastelands, fostering a new understanding of urban habitat. At the same time, new approaches to public space emerged from the bodily, habitual relations that residents had with their immediate environment, a relationship politicized during the planning process for the park.

### Görlitzer Bahnhof around 1980

By the end of the nineteen-seventies, Görlitzer Bahnhof in the district of Kreuzberg was an industrial and infrastructural site in transition. While freight trains continued to run, the railway station had not been in use for passenger traffic since 1951.—<sup>3</sup> Its main building, damaged during the Second World War, had been partially torn down between 1962 and 1964 and then finally demolished in 1975. In the early nineteen-eighties, when a radical change in urban development happened, traces of the sheds and tracks of the train yards and the brick retaining wall that had once enclosed the station still remained on the plot. Also from a legal perspective, the site was complex. Görlitzer Bahnhof—while located in West Berlin—also carried special political and economic privileges. The property had an exterritorial status within the Federal Republic of Germany and was managed by the administration of former assets of the Deutsche Reichsbahn, which was a GDR institution.

Despite, or perhaps because of this unresolved urbanity and territoriality, different groups of people started to appropriate the grounds. Kreuzberg's district office had

<sup>2</sup> For more on this tendency, see: Anke te Heesen, "Spurensicherung und das Jahr 1979. Über Kunst und Wissenschaft," in *Geschichte denken. Perspektiven auf die Geschichtsschreibung heute*, ed. Michael Wildt (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014), 244–49.

<sup>3</sup> Emil Galli, *Görlitzer Bahnhof, Görlitzer Park*, (Berlin: SupportEdition, 1994), 24.

leased some parcels from the Reichsbahn to sublet them to small businesses:—<sup>4</sup> several car workshops, a trucking firm, a scaffolding company, a gravel supplier, and in the southeastern corner a scrap press that threatened to pollute the groundwater with hydrochloric acid from old batteries and oil spills. These were dirty and, in part, marginalized economies that one would usually find in industrial parks. Besides, the federal state of Berlin, in need of open space, rented parts of the former rail yards for sports grounds and a traffic school for children, and stored tons of briquettes—the so-called *Senatsreserve*—to secure an energy supply in case of a second Berlin Blockade.

The first local residents to make use of Görlitzer Bahnhof as “green” spaces were members of emergent alternative scenes.—<sup>5</sup> Squatters of vacant houses in Wiener Straße appropriated land for house gardens; simultaneously, some parents installed an adventure playground and others managed to get public funding to establish a children’s farm. Soon after, Kreuzberg’s parks department committed to building a “Ben Wagin,” or wild garden, named after Berlin’s artist and tree protector, who was popular in the alternative milieu. Yet, despite first appropriations of a space in transition, the character of the land was still that of a semi-industrialized urban wasteland.

These grassroots landscape initiatives helped to solidify a broader citizens’ movement for a full-fledged park in Görlitzer Bahnhof. To better understand citizens’ hopes and desires, we have to consider the site’s immediate urban context and location in SO 36, the southeastern part of Kreuzberg. The geopolitical effects of the Second World War, the division of Germany, and the Cold War manifested in the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall, and dislocated the district from a central to a marginal position in the urban fabric that was mostly enclosed by the actual border installation.—<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Berlin’s modernist city planning of the nineteen-sixties and seventies exacerbated the consequences of this

4 Ibid., 24–29. Also see: Dieter Kramer, *Kreuzberg, 1968–2013. Abbruch, Aufbruch, Umbruch* (Berlin: Nicolai Verlag, 2013).

5 For participation procedures and residents’ projects from 1980–1982, see: Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg (FHXB) Museum, Berlin: 49/215.

6 In Berlin, the declaration of the “1. Stadterneuerungsprogramm” by the Berlin Senate of 1963 for the first time defined urban renewal areas.

7 Harald Bodenschatz, Volker Heise, and Jochen Korfmacher, *Schluss mit der Zerstörung? Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London*, vol. 11 of *Werkbund-Archiv* (Giessen: Anabas, 1983).

8 Esra Akean has started to historicize the effects of immigration on housing and urban development in Berlin, see her essay: "Immigration, Participation and IBA 84/87," in *25 Jahre Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1987. Ein Wendepunkt des europäischen Städtebaus*, ed. Harald Bodenschatz, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, and Wolfgang Sonne (Sulgen: Niggli, 2012), 57–74.; and her forthcoming book titled "Open Architecture and the Noncitizen: Urban Renewal of Berlin-Kreuzberg in IBA 1984/87."

9 Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin, ed. "Press Release: Stadterneuerung im Gebiet SO 36," 1980.

10 Barbara Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg. Ethnographie eines Stadtteils 1961–1995* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1998)

marginalization.—<sup>7</sup> On behalf of the federal state of Berlin, public and private housing corporations developed large-scale, tabula rasa reconstruction projects, hence incentivizing de-investment and speculative vacancy. The streets adjoining Görlitzer Bahnhof were designated as an urban renewal area to be cleared and redeveloped from scratch. Consequently, most of the existing housing stock had not been modernized for decades, and owners—speculating on subventions for the construction of new apartment buildings—awaited its destruction. Moreover, according to a general traffic plan fixed in the zoning plan of 1965, Görlitzer Bahnhof was a designated site for a new city expressway that would have cut Kreuzberg apart. As a result, the largest part of Kreuzberg showed symptoms of a downward spiral of neglect, with single flats and, eventually, whole old residential buildings remaining empty for years and falling into disrepair. Due to material decay and a lack of green spaces, the district became notorious as a *Steinwüste* (stone desert). The mainstream media and architectural journals portrayed Kreuzberg as a "ghetto" or "slum," referring to social segregation and other structural problems.

Kreuzberg's social structure, like its physical fabric, was also shaped by West Berlin's specific housing and urban developments and the Federal Republic of Germany's immigration policies.—<sup>8</sup> The former working-class district had become an immigrant neighborhood as better-off German populations left due to material decay. Indeed, a substantial number of Kreuzberg's residents had only moved there since the nineteen-sixties. Around 1980, 30 percent of the population of SO 36 did not have German citizenship—the majority of non-Germans were Turkish immigrants with "guest worker" status.—<sup>9</sup> At the time, Kreuzberg offered cheap rent and many open and underused spaces. This attracted different cohorts: teenage runaways, young male residents (who according to a special law in Berlin were exempted from military service), and those who wanted to experience alternative forms of living and working.—<sup>10</sup>

These people initiated self-run and self-organized businesses, projects, stores, as well as district groups and local projects.—<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of 1968, as in German cities elsewhere, an alternative milieu formed out of the new social and ecological movements.—<sup>12</sup> This scene repositioned the left and tested new ways of life beyond the social democratic model. In Kreuzberg, a network of so-called *Mieterläden* (storefronts run by tenants' organizations) addressed poor housing conditions through empowerment, self-help initiatives, and political lobbying.—<sup>13</sup> At the same time, several more traditional social and religious institutions—such as the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (the German workers' welfare association) and the local parishes—were also active in the district. In addition, a new generation of engaged architecture and planning students and young professionals identified Kreuzberg as an experimental terrain, an object of research for seminars, papers, and projects.—<sup>14</sup> Local initiatives—often with eco-feminist agendas—redeveloped and modernized old housing stock, greened courtyards, façades, and roofs, redesigned the streetscape, and above all created self-run cultural and social centers in abandoned factory and backyard buildings. As identity-creating elements, these projects appreciated the apparent authenticity of the neighborhood's tenement buildings, embracing the patina of the historical, the seemingly unplanned, the crooked and unforeseen, the unique, the unusual, the nonserial, while also positioning themselves as an alternative to modern aesthetics and rationalized planning cultures of the previous decades.—<sup>15</sup> More and more squatters and anarchist youth moved into the vacant, run-down buildings, reaching its peak in 1981. They not only acted against its decay, but also actively fought the wholesale redevelopment and upgrading of Kreuzberg. These so-called *Instand(be)setzer*—squatters who quickly and proactively repaired old housing stock, to make it habitable—formed a movement comprising radical and non-radical proponents.<sup>16</sup>

11 *ARCH+* 55, February 1, 1981: "Kampf um Selbsthilfe."

12 Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 502, 518–71.

13 Rainer Graff, "10 Jahre Instandsetzungsbe-  
setzungs-förderung. Doku-  
mentation eines politischen  
Kampfes," *ARCH+* 55,  
(February, 1981): 20–24.  
See also: Dieter Hoffmann-  
Axthelm, "Instandset-  
zungs-förderung und Haus-  
besetzung. Notiz zu den  
gegenwärtigen Konflikten  
in Kreuzberg," *ARCH+* 55  
(February, 1981): 19–20.

14 Harald Bodenschatz,  
"Zur Instandbesetzerbewe-  
gung in Berlin. Stellung-  
nahme aus dem ISR der  
TU-Berlin," *ARCH+* 55  
(February, 1981): 25–26.

15 Uli Hellweg, "Ausweg  
Selbsthilfe? Zur aktuellen  
Situation der Selbsthilfe  
und der Mietermobilisa-  
tion," *ARCH+* 55 (Febru-  
ary, 1981): 14–18.

16 Rolf Lindner, "Von  
'Freakland' zu 'Slumland'.  
Zur Mythologie Berlin-  
Kreuzbergs," foreword to  
Lindner, 1998, 9–16.

## Designing Görlitzer Park

Seven years prior to the 1984 competition, another ideas competition for the park called “Strategien für Kreuzberg” had been primarily directed at residents. Klaus Duntze, a local priest who was engaged in the neighborhood, had initiated this first competition as a call for locally based strategies to improve the district, which started a new kind of participatory practice from below.—<sup>17</sup> The competition objectives were of both material and social character: to improve residents’ living conditions, their identification with the district, and their social interaction. Supporting Duntze’s good intentions, the Berlin Senate issued the call for ideas as a new experiment of urban policy that would both stop the flight of the German population and encourage remaining homeowners to invest in the building stock—almost without public funds. As a result, a citizens’ commission selected eleven projects to be further developed, among them the project for a citizens’ park on the grounds of the former Görlitzer Bahnhof. The park had a strong lobby in Kreuzberg’s emerging alternative local press, as it was featured recurrently in the monthly newspaper *Südost-Express*.—<sup>18</sup>

Ecologists and urban planners, debating the ecological value of former traffic landscapes isolated by the Berlin wall, influenced the neighborhood initiatives. Abandoned or underused spaces were identified and analyzed not as wastelands but as ecosystems. Citizen protests to protect a unique habitat in the former Anhalter Bahnhof in Berlin Schöneberg led to the founding of the Bürgerinitiative Schöneberger Südgelände.—<sup>19</sup> At the Institut für Ökologie at TU Berlin, a research project run by botanist and ecologist Herbert Sukopp mapped the rail yards of the former Görlitzer Bahnhof. Here, pioneer and ruderal vegetation and unique birds and small mammals had thrived since the Second World War due to favorable microclimates, the physical structure of the elongated plot, and the lack of a continuous vegetation cover. The representatives of this

17 See *ARCH+* 34, (June 1977): “Strategien für Kreuzberg”; see also: Galli, 1994, 29–30; “Strategien für Kreuzberg,” 1979. Source: FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum, Berlin: 64/370.

18 *Südost-Express* No. 1, 1978 (ed. Bürgerinitiative SO 36).

19 Eventually, Park am Gleisdreieck designed by Atelier Loidl opened in 2011/2013 linked to Natur-Park Schöneberger Südgelände, which functioned as ecological compensation sites for developments at Potsdamer Platz, by the Flaschenhalspark (2014).

fairly new field of urban ecology thus ascribed high ecological relevance to the site of Görlitzer Bahnhof and were inclined to preserve its “third nature,” since it had become a refuge of threatened or delicate plants and animals. In a coauthored 1979 article, published in the urban design magazine *Stadtbauwelt*, Sukopp called on the professions of architects and planners to support the preservation of the former rail yards as an open space, and campaigned for the reconception of Görlitzer Bahnhof as a new kind of ruderal park that could serve as an ecologically significant space for recreation and playground for children.—<sup>20</sup>

The Görlitzer Bahnhof park initiative with the IBA paralleled a major planning event in West Berlin. As a para-institutional organization, the IBA—which was inaugurated in 1979—stood for new, postmodern urban planning, and rallied against Kreuzberg’s mega-structural developments from the nineteen-sixties and seventies, as well as the large housing estates in West Berlin’s periphery.—<sup>21</sup> In order to regenerate the inner city as space for living and working, the IBA followed the two guiding principles—that of *Kritische Rekonstruktion* (critical reconstruction) and *Behutsame Stadterneuerung* (careful urban renewal). The IBA encompassed both new construction of public housing in different sites (*Neubau*) and—primarily in Kreuzberg—the house-by-house modernization of *Mietskasernen*, the old housing stock of the Wilhemian era, by the inhabitants (*Altbau*). Moreover, having an urban ecological focus, it fostered the greening of Kreuzberg’s streets, rear courtyards, façades, and roofs and enforced an ecological turn of architecture and planning both as profession and discipline. Advocating for the reuse and preservation of dilapidated tenement and former factory buildings, and for the construction of new social and cultural centers in Kreuzberg, however, the IBA remained a quasi-institutional actor until the principles for urban renewal were approved in 1982 and confirmed in 1983. As the IBA-Altbau also became active in Kreuzberg SO 36, the conception of a citizens’ park then fell within

20 Hermann Matthes and Herbert Sukopp, “Anmerkungen zur ökologischen Bedeutung des Geländes am Görlitzer Bahnhof,” *Stadtbauwelt* 33 (1979): 1362–63.

21 Harald Bodenschatz, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, and Wolfgang Sonne, *25 Jahre Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1987. Ein Wendepunkt des europäischen Städtebaus* (Sulgen: Niggli, 2012).

the considerations of the building exhibition and the project for Görlitzer Park attracted the interest of IBA planners.—<sup>22</sup>

Görlitzer Park was one of the major infrastructure projects supported by IBA in the district, but without broad popular support it would not have been realized. It was sustained by various local citizens' initiatives and action groups:—<sup>23</sup> for example, the Bürgerinitiative SO 36, which since 1977 supported the maintenance of vacant, squatted buildings; Verein SO 36, founded in 1978 with the financial support of the Berlin Senate to concretize the *Strategien*; Aktionskreis Südost e.V., which primarily fought for the relocation of the scrap press; and Initiativgruppe GRÜN. Although each group had a specific agenda—a fact that led to what local historian Emil Galli called a complex tangle of interests—almost all of their members were part of the alternative scene's less radical wing and the older German population in the district. Moreover, most of them were inclined to engage in a dialogue with public authorities alongside their protest activities. From 1982 onwards, a district-initiated working group, AG Görlitzer Bahnhof, became the leading agent of communication. As disseminator of the park concept, AG Görlitzer Bahnhof took over the control of the participatory planning, communicating central ideas and aiming to represent all of the resident organizations: for example, by producing a newspaper on the planning process; by holding meetings in local nursing homes, daycare centers, and church halls; or by speaking publicly in the district's committee meetings.—<sup>24</sup> Yet, while they claimed to act for the interests of all the district's residents, the AG did not include guest workers or more radical residents.

Following the advice of AG Görlitzer Bahnhof, the Senate sponsored a competition in 1983, calling upon experts to take on a difficult task: legitimizing the redefinition of the space, the redesign of nature and landscape, while considering and incorporating the intricacies and

<sup>22</sup> Bauausstellung Berlin GmbH (eds.), *Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 84/87: Projektübersicht Stadterneuerung und Stadtneubau* (Berlin, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Galli, 1994, 36–37 & 38.

<sup>24</sup> In press statements, the AG Görlitzer Bahnhof persistently demanded a speedy lease of the entire plot from the GDR.

complexities.—<sup>25</sup> Leading up to the competition, they organized a public symposium followed by several topical seminars.—<sup>26</sup> In this framework, AG representatives presented reports on the state of the terrain, on existing vegetation and future uses, as well as on soil contamination and waste problems. Their avowed opponents were the semilegal commercial users—small businesses whose activities were termed “temporary use” and whose contribution to city production remained unnoticed. The conceptual considerations addressed in the seminars included participatory planning and decision-making. Also for the first time in the park project, a planning group was consulted, which was composed of architects, planners, and other experts who made recommendations, defined immediate measures in special reports, and prepared a planning concept.—<sup>27</sup>

During this series of events, the groups involved in the planning process made the first demands about the actual design and use of the park, and their divergent claims clashed. The district administration intended to use the land for much-needed sports facilities; whereas IBA-Altbau insisted on the establishment of work and training facilities on-site, due to its sociopolitical agenda. The residents and activists opposed the segmentation of the park for the sake of what they considered to be special interests. Under the slogan “Ein Park für alle” (one park for all), they promoted a fence-free, open park with a durable lawn and only sporadic trees, on which various activities should freely develop. This plan also argued against the park’s use by sport clubs and schools, integrated the presence of the farm, but protested a building used as a mosque by the Islamic community, and indeed put an end to the small businesses on the site.—<sup>28</sup> One member of the committee, though, opposed this unifying and beautifying solution and declared himself in favor of a piecemeal strategy; architectural and urban historian Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm was a polemical critic and strong proponent of the special *Kreuzberger Mischung*

25 Galli, 1994, 43–48; see also: Der Senator für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz, ed. *Engerer landschaftsplanerisch-städtebaulicher Ideen- und Bauwettbewerb Görlitzer Park*, 1984. Source: FHXB Museum, Berlin: 11/64.

26 “Beitrag der AG Görlitzer Park des Stadtteilausschusses SO 36 zum Symposium am 22. Oktober 1983.” Source: FHXB Museum, Berlin: 50/225; see also: Der Senator für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz, ed. *Wettbewerb Görlitzer Park: Vorbereitungskolloquien*, November/December 1983. Source: FHXB Museum, Berlin: 50/222.

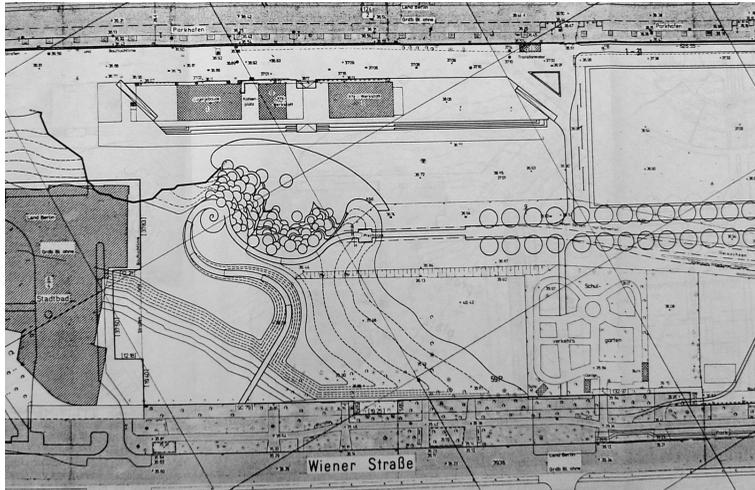
27 The committee included: Eduard Neuen-schwander (Switzerland) and Gunnar Martinsson (Sweden); Erhard Mahler, the department head in the Senate’s administration for construction and housing; local architectural historian Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm; and the architect Bruno Schindler.

28 As another temporary use of the site, the fundamentalist Fatih-community occupied a former service building in August 1981 and transformed it into a mosque. See: Rochus Wiedemer, “Fatih Moschee und Pamukkale Brunnen. Migration und bürgerbeteiligte Freiraumplanung am Görlitzer Park” (Studienarbeit, Universität der Künste, 2002.) Wiedemer is working on a doctorate on the architecture of mosques, which also features the mosque conflict at Görlitzer Park.

(Kreuzberg Mix) of living and working in the same block. At the same time, he pleaded for the preservation of historical buildings, the consideration of topography, and a focus on existing structures as both identity markers and guides for the inhabitants of the neighborhood.

When the ideas competition for the park was officially announced by the Senator for Urban Development in the summer of 1984, a forum was created to combine the goals of residents and activists with those of parties, politicians, administration, and offices—a total of eight offices contributed.—<sup>29</sup> The competition brief asked for a master plan and a first step for realization; furthermore, the decision-making process was presented as democratic, since the jury included experts, professional judges, as well as citizens. Still, a major problem continued to be the confrontation of actual uses and the availability of the land, because there were twenty-four leaseholders left and the territorial issue with the GDR was still unresolved.

29 The participants were Schaal, Pfrommer, Lehndorff, Partner (Attenweiler/Stuttgart); Kluska and Schröder (Munich/Berg); Jacoby, Martin, Pächter, Kippschild, Müller, Wehberg (Berlin); the group Ökologie und Planung (Berlin); AG Luz / Luz (Berlin); the group Freiraumplanung (Hannover); Behnisch / Grzimek (Stuttgart) and Freie Planungsgruppe Berlin. See Galli, 1994, 73–81.



Section of the plan for Görlitzer Park by landscape architects Freie Planungsgruppe Berlin, showing the Pamukkale-Brunnen, 1984.

In November of 1984, the local collaborative office Freie Planungsgruppe Berlin (FPB) emerged as the winner of the competition, likely because the team was already familiar with the tasks and processes of the district's

administration, because they had previously been involved in the “Strategien für Kreuzberg.”—<sup>30</sup> Their winning design seemed to satisfy the contradictory and conflicting claims and ideals previously brought forward by merging them into a promising design of material, social, and symbolic nature. Indeed, the planners proposed the comprehensive design as a solution to the problems that the interest groups involved in the discussions had stated during the planning process.—<sup>31</sup> They took up and synthesized these different expectations, and offered answers to at least some of the lofty aspirations.

In so doing, Freie Planungsgruppe drew aesthetically from the strategies explored by the IBA in Kreuzberg and included some of the emerging ecological concerns. Görlitzer Park thus became a precursor of many revitalization projects of derelict industrial and infrastructural sites. Both existing architectural objects and urban structures were kept and integrated in the scheme: the railway sheds and the rail yard’s enclosing wall remained standing and were renovated only slightly. The central axis of the design, the so-called Lindenallee, retraced the direction of the railways that had once crossed the site. A former pedestrian underpass underneath the tracks was excavated and burst open—its ruins remained on-site and paralleled the now open pathway. The remains of Görlitzer Bahnhof were thus translated into symbols and interpreted as key markers of identity that stood for Kreuzberg’s past as a working-class district.

A similarly symbolical—and for some unsatisfactory—answer was found for the informal mosque that operated on the site. In 1984, during the competition, AG Ausländer (working group of foreigners)—a subgroup of Verein SO36, two-thirds of whom were Turkish immigrants—proposed erecting a cultural center with a place of prayer on the site, which would have given the neighborhood’s Turkish community an officially recognized place to assemble. This idea found political support and the group even forwarded a design; however, the advance was discarded during the

30 Der Senator für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz, ed. *Görlitzer Bahnhof*, February 1985. Source: ZfB Zentrum für Berlinstudien, Berlin.

31 From a sociological perspective, the problem focus and solution orientation is at the heart of the professional role of the designer, see: Silke Steets, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der gebauten Welt: Eine Architektursoziologie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015), 106–14; 148–63.

32 Previously, Meinhard von Gerkan at the TU Berlin in 1979/80 had made a cultural center for the Turkish community in Kreuzberg the design task for the diploma. Following the initiative of the AG Ausländer, a coalition of the new political party the Alternative Liste and the IBA-Altbau campaigned for a Turkish cultural center; see: Ulrike Harnisch and Özcan Ayanoglu, *„Mit-Bürger-Beteiligung“ am Gülizar Bahnhof* (Berlin: IBA, 1985). Source: FHXB Museum, Berlin: 128/70. In the end, the district administration removed the controversial program from the competition brief.

decision-making process.—<sup>32</sup> In the end, the planners, sensitized through the local conflicts and the intervention of the interest groups, included a symbolical—and highly questionable—homage to Kreuzberg’s large immigrant population in their design: the Pamukkale-Brunnen, designed by artist Wigand Wittig, an infrastructure for recreation, play, and bathing that was supposed to be reminiscent in its materiality and topography to the lime terraces of the acclaimed Turkish region of the same name.

Although Freie Planungsgruppe only partially opted for preserving the ruderal vegetation on site, the overall approach to the park design was meant to grant residents a unique experience of artificial “nature” in the city. Access to the park was organized through a few openings in the wall, and to enter one first had to pass through an “overgrown” edge zone of native shrubs. Inside, a huge meadow for games, BBQs and picnics, sunbathing, and relaxing allowed for a clear view of the sky, almost free of obstructing trees. The material selection for surfaces, elements, trails, and furniture reflected the park’s scenography as pastoral urban landscape; maintaining the concrete ramps and rail yard’s brick buildings, the designers chose granite for horizontal surfaces (e.g., flagstones) and similar bricks for vertical structures (e.g., the pergola).

The park design was successful in the competition not least because of the powerful pictorial scheme and the varied scenery it suggested. Görlitzer Park comprised three horizontal strata: two artificial hills at both ends, the green ground layer with leisure uses, and a man-made depression in the middle of the site. The park as a whole—with its juxtaposition of “nature” vs. planning, wilderness vs. orderliness, and its ambiguities of integration vs. exclusion—could be read as a huge postmodern ornament: a postindustrial, yet landscaped, almost baroque garden, that followed a picturesque and playful approach to a central visual axis in southeastern-northwestern direction.

## Materialization and Appropriation

For a moment, the park design had fueled the hopes of the citizens' initiatives, as it elegantly pushed certain claims and sublimated others, transferring them to a new level of symbolical representation. The proposal proved satisfactory to the representatives of the park initiative and to at least some of the experts and city officials, because it produced a convincing image onto which they could project their ideals. Yet new problems sprang up following the competition. First, the realization of Görlitzer Park was delayed by the disinterest of the authorities and the unruliness of the terrain. Moreover, as the first segments of the park materialized, it became clear that the daily practices of some resident groups, as well as their ideas of the site's future, differed from what had been stated during the planning process. In particular, those residents who had thus far not participated in the debates with the planners and city officials—because they had not been interested or integrated previously—proved sensitive to the transformation of their material surroundings and openly opposed the realization of the design.

In 1986, the Berlin Senate had accorded a budget of DM 37 million for the park, which was to be released in tranches to allow for a piecemeal realization of the winning design. In the years to follow, Görlitzer Park Verein (an association that stemmed from AG Görlitzer Park), continuously had to argue for the actual payment of the annual tranche, which was only accorded with considerable delays. In the meantime, the negotiations between the Senate and the GDR proprietors proceeded slowly. Over the years, the park remained a work-in-progress, a visual patchwork realized through acts of protest and appropriation coordinated mainly by the park association. In parallel with a media campaign, citizens employed creative protest strategies that engaged with the site and strived to change and improve its material conditions. According to the pragmatics of the day and the practices of DIY preservation, renovation,

33 “Wie kam die Schiene auf den Lauseplatz?” *SO* 36 3 (June 1986). See also: Rainer Sauter, “Entgleisung,” *SO* 36 18 (September 1988).

34 Cay Dobberke, “Flickwerk mit hohem Nutzwert,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 22, 1998; “Görlitzer Park wird weiter gebaut,” *Berliner Zeitung*, April 29, 1994.

and modernization popular in Kreuzberg, they practiced the system of “self-help with chisel and wrench.”<sup>33</sup> German reunification in 1990 also caused a new situation regarding territorial matters, since the former owner of the GDR no longer existed. Yet, it was not until 1994 that the Berlin Senate approved the payment of the last tranches of funding—after a long period of doubt and important cuts to the budget.<sup>34</sup> The last component of the park, the Pamukkale-Brunnen, was only finished in 1998.

Görlitzer Park materialized slowly, with great struggle, over the fourteen years following the original competition. Indeed, although the general outlines were realized, the actual landscape never fully matched the plans the designers had drawn for the site. The most drastic failure was the case of the Pamukkale-Brunnen: projected as a



The last rails of Görlitzer Bahnhof before their removal, 1987.

terraced landscape of waterfalls, it had to close only a few months after its construction due to structural and material damage, because the supporting structure was defective and the sandstone-blocks imported from Portugal could not survive the Berlin winter. The site was fenced off for another decade and left to decay. On a more general level, the envisioned ambiance and experience of the park proved difficult to realize. The parts in the periphery,

with their hidden pathways and their playful bridges, did not generate picturesque images as intended, but instead turned into uncanny spaces hidden away from the public eye that took on a swamp-like appearance. Moreover, plans to maintain the site's ruderal ecology were confronted with the fact that, in the southeastern part of the park, the soil was heavily contaminated and the upper layer of



Trash sculptures in Görlitzer Park before the pedestrian underpass was opened, 1989.

two meters depth had to be replaced. In 1993, the Berlin magazine *Zitty* suggested that those who might have dreamed of a romantic quiet and joyful environment had to give up some of their dreams: “Let’s not fool ourselves,” it quoted Dagmar Elbrandt, the district’s park administrator, “nightingales will never breed here in the park.”—<sup>35</sup>

Despite the failure of some of the more symbolical and utopian ideas of the park initiative, Görlitzer Park became extremely popular. Beginning with a small parcel of grass, the park successively emerged and served a diverse population from the neighborhood, becoming a place where “lovers pick bouquets from the bushes, dog owners cut sticks from trees, teenagers gaily climb on ecological slopes and try out their butterfly knives on the young shrubbery, and trash Coke cans on toad habitats.”—<sup>36</sup> The park attracted various groups of people, including those who were under-

35 “Die Stadt, das Grün und der Zoff,” *Zitty* (1993): 16–19; quote p. 17–18 (all translations by the authors).

36 *Ibid.*, 18.

represented in the planning process: “squatters’ dogs romp with dogs of Turks, Die Republikaner (a German right-wing party, with extremist tendencies) voters united in small streams, and at night wild punks burn all sorts of wood from the park in sky-high bonfires.”—<sup>37</sup>

37 Ibid., 18.

Yet, the use of Görlitzer Park turned out to be more controversial than expected. The design, taking up the rhetoric and working methods of IBA-Altbau, had emphasized Kreuzberg’s past as a district of small manufacturers and industries and tried to evoke memories of the train station that had once been the point of arrival for many workers. This clearly appealed to some of the park’s strongest supporters, who still remembered the site as a busy, public place.—<sup>38</sup> For them, the derelict and contaminated urban wasteland of Görlitzer Bahnhof was a symbol of the district’s general decay, and the idea of reviving the site raised their hopes.

38 See the description by Irmgard and Dieter Klette, who were among the leading figures of the park initiative. Ibid., 19.

Nevertheless, other groups of residents had also formed a distinctive image of the material landscape of their Görlitzer Bahnhof.—<sup>39</sup> In 1987, a group that called itself “Wildwuchs” (a botanical term for grown in the wild) committed an arson attack on an earthmover parked on the construction site of the park to mark their disapproval of the park design.—<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the group circulated a pamphlet that articulated a radical critique against planning in general, the state, and the transformation of the site into a neat and clean park. Here, Wildwuchs voiced the interests of young activists who had recently arrived in Kreuzberg, and who had no personal memory of the former character of the railway station, nor attachments to the local working-class identity—be they invented or real. Instead, they were attracted by the open spaces the district offered, with vacant houses and underused lots. In their eyes, the material structure of Kreuzberg stood not for decay and neglect, but for personal freedom.

39 For alternative and radical perspectives on Görlitzer Park, see documentation “Görlitzer Park” at local archive Papiertiger - Archiv und Bibliothek der sozialen Bewegungen, Berlin-Kreuzberg.

40 Wildwuchs K36, “Für einen Görlitzer Wildpark—so nicht,” Berlin, 1987; “Es ist unmöglich, eine Fackel durch ein Gedränge zu tragen, ohne jemandem den Bart zu sengen,” Berlin, 1987; Wildwuchs K36, “... und das Gejammer folgt sogleich,” Berlin, 1987. Source: Papiertiger, folder “Görlitzer Park.”

The park’s construction also annihilated spaces that had previously allowed for specific experiences and daily practices. Over the years, residents had interacted with

the plot's materiality and had discovered and appropriated certain uses that remained hidden to the planners. For example, the former pedestrian underpass of the train station that cut through the site had served not only as a public toilet for passers-by, but also as a giant amplifier for people gathering there to play instruments. To solve the problem of smells and to produce a picturesque ruin, the planners disassembled a portion of the tunnel. But the transformation also destroyed a specific performative and aural space and prevented certain practices and ambiances that had emerged more recently. In response, a group that identified with "Kreuzberg's tunnel pissers, music makers, sewer rats, swamp flowers, and other figures," spread another leaflet in which the destruction of the structure popularly known as "urethra" (due to its foul odor) was criticized.—<sup>41</sup> While the design proved sensible to the memories of a looming past, it was less sensitive to people's direct material interactions in the present. Thus, the destruction of the urethra in a way transformed an appropriated space into an artifact that was charged with rather abstract meanings.

41 "Hey Kreuzberger Tunnelpisser, Musikmacher, Kanalratten, Sumpfbäumen und andere Gestalten," Berlin, circa 1987/88; Source: Papiertiger; folder "Görlitzer Park."

Even if they were partly confrontational and destructive, both cases of local protest against the realization of the park design, utilizing radical actions and rhetoric as a means of expression, proved how deeply members of the immediate neighborhood felt challenged by the supposedly participatory upgrading of their material surroundings. Thus, we consider them within the context of a much broader tendency among residents and park visitors to actively get involved and interfere directly on the grounds. As these interests existed throughout the whole planning and realization process of Görlitzer Park, they ran parallel to the officially recognized discourse and debate and added a tangible, more practice-based commentary on the uses and meanings of the park.

Recently, local initiatives to upgrade the dilapidated space have multiplied. The district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg has pushed forward the redesign of some

troubled areas of the park. To enhance “safety” and to deter illegal activities, wild vegetation on the edges of the park has been sacrificed, hedges and bushes have been cut back, and new entrances have been opened in the enclosing wall. The professionals redesigning Görlitzer Park in 2015, took similar direction: widen the entrances, integrate the peripheries, and reconceive the lawns.—<sup>42</sup>

42 A project with the suggestive title “Wake up Görlitz” was conceived by Atelier Loidl.

While design might be an inadequate tool to prevent drug dealing and social inequalities, there might still be a lesson to be learned from Görlitzer Park’s history for its future development. Analyzing the discussions leading up to the original design and its realization helps to identify certain tensions. On the one hand, the competition of 1984 resulted in a particular image that many stakeholders could work towards. This imagined landscape made it possible for Görlitzer Park to materialize at all. On the other hand, by highlighting symbolical and constructed identities the winning design of Görlitzer Park also hid specific conflicts; the participatory process lacked the representation of certain subcultures, dissidents, activists, nonconformists, dropouts, and fringe groups; what is more, chances for the integration of the migrant population beyond mere symbolism were missed.

To conclude, the postmodern landscapes created for Görlitzer Park did not engage enough with the site’s materiality. Although some of the relics of Kreuzberg’s past became cornerstones of the design, the symbolical narrative of the whole park obliterated those identities that are formed through an interaction with the objects and structures and thus went against some existing interests in the actual landscape. Instead, the design suggested new sites of identification for both the petty bourgeoisie and the alternative German population, as well as the most fragile communities of new migrants. The concentration on picturesque notions of nature not only prevented a critical discussion on what it could have meant to address “third nature,” but also prevailed over the question of how the maintenance of Görlitzer Park could be granted over the years.

In the end, Görlitzer Park exemplifies both the promises of a highly symbolic postmodern design and its social and bureaucratic obstacles, which eventually prevented its immediate and full implementation. The result is that the park—in transcending the boundaries between architecture, landscape, sculpture, and nature—stages its contradictions even more poignantly than a conscious and completed postmodern design would have done.



Local residents barbecuing and picnicking in Görlitzer Park's great depression.

What, then, could we learn from this material artifact? Perhaps it teaches us about the pitfalls of a rhetoric that simplifies claims that are too divergent to be harmonized. When today's residents groups consciously or unconsciously take up the slogan once coined by the Görlitzer Park AG—"One park for all"—we should read this as an invitation not to pacify and subsume the right to the city that different cohorts demand, but to unearth and politicize them. In the meantime, despite the controversial debates, Görlitzer Park in all its incompleteness and untidiness remains reminiscent of Kreuzberg's openness and heterogeneity in the nineteen-eighties—a utopian place at Berlin's center, where park visitors and local residents can hang out and relax, but where they might still be confronted with the strange and the uncanny.