

“Steinplatz: A pool of forgotten ideas”

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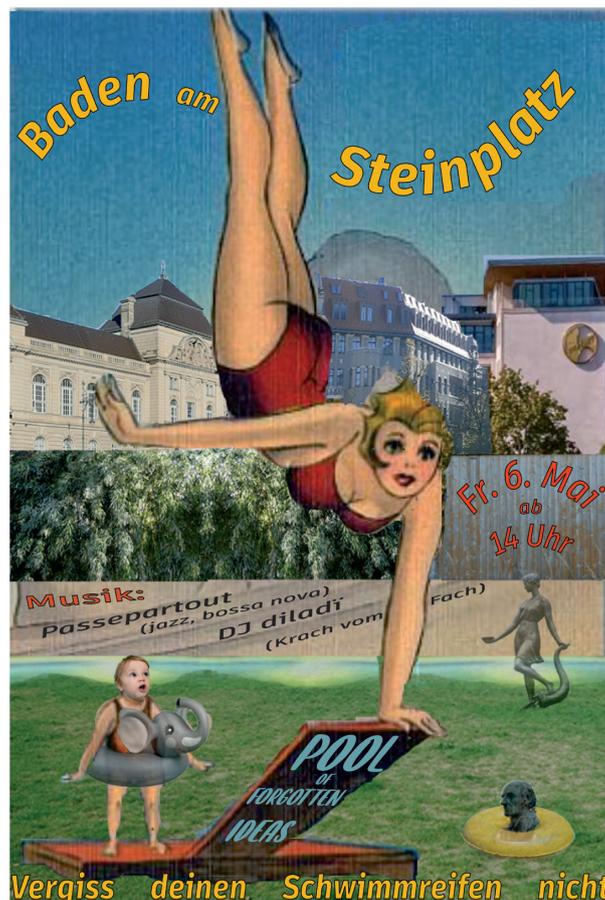


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Fig. 1: Steinplatz 2021 facing northeast and the UdK

In spite of several improvement measures, the last being a re-landscape in 2018, Steinplatz still doesn't work as a public space. There have been many attempts to define or redefine Steinplatz as a time capsule in the form of a “decorative square” (*Schmuckplatz*), but, while it may look more attractive now, its disadvantages have not really been addressed, and these hinder its public enjoyment. In this thesis I would like to analyze Steinplatz and make a proposal. After a historical analysis of its existence and a description of attempts to make it more attractive through temporary installations and public events, I will propose my artistic interventions.

1. Location:

Steinplatz is located on Hardenbergstr., across from the University of Arts (UdK) and Technical University (TU) cafeteria. It is surrounded by the extension of Uhlandstr. on the eastern, Goethestr. on the western and the end of Carmerstr. on the southern side. The plaza consists of a fairly square (trapezoidal) plot of grass, surrounded by a raised stone walkway and benches around the edges, facing inward on all sides. The area is somewhat enclosed by shrubbery with an occasional tree. A wider walkway is located on the eastern side, with a ping-pong table at the southeast end. One enters the plaza at the 4 corners and somewhere in the middle of the plaza's southern and northern sides, as indicated through breaks in the shrubs.

Notable buildings facing Steinplatz are the University of Arts on Hardenberstr., the cafe Filmbühne am Steinplatz (now closed) and Hotel am Steinplatz along the extension of Uhlandstr., a representative apartment building and office building at Carmerstr., and the Hoechst building on the corner of Steinplatz and Hardenbergstr. along the northwest side.

2. History of Steinplatz:

2.1. Origins. Steinplatz, originally called “D Platz”, was developed in 1862 according to the Hobrecht plan, before Charlottenburg belonged to Berlin. The name could have come from its D shape, the spine being Hardenbergstr. This was also before the Royal College of Art (now UdK), as the map on fig. 3 shows. Across the street was an artillery school and horse breeding ground. 1890 shows the artillery school expanded to include engineering, and the breeding ground became a tree nursery. It wasn't until 1902 that a block was inserted on the nursery grounds to accommodate the newly combined Royal School of Art and Music.¹

In 1885, Steinplatz was dedicated to the political reformer Heinrich Friedrich Karl Freiherr vom und zum Stein (1757 - 1831), who initiated several liberal-democratic reforms in Prussia. These reforms liberated the peasants from serfdom in 1807, allowing all citizens to practice any professions they chose. He also enabled the independent administration of cities and standardized their procedures. As prime minister under King Frederick William III of Prussia,



Fig. 2: “D” platz 1883



Fig. 3: Steinplatz 1890



Fig. 4: Steinplatz, “Block plaza” 1885

¹ <https://www.udk-berlin.de/universitaet/die-geschichte-der-universitaet-der-kuenste-berlin/> accessed 12.05.2022

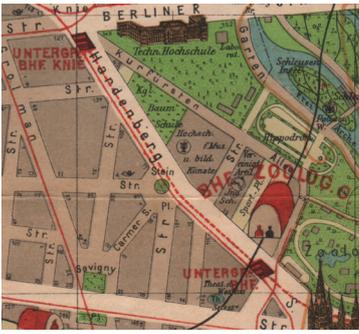


Fig. 5: Steinplatz 1904



Fig. 6: Steinplatz and Royal College of Art (now UdK)



Fig. 7: Proposed sculpture by August Gaul 1907

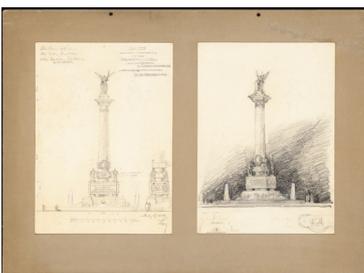


Fig. 8: Proposed sculpture by Heinrich Seeling 1907

Stein tried to create an elected body of parliamentarians who would be voted in by landowners, but this measure did not succeed.²

2.2. Early attempts at sculptures. The present bust of the Baron von Stein only dates from 1987. But since the plaza's dedication to Stein, other statues have been proposed in his honor. In 1907, to mark the bi-centennial of Charlottenburg, a competition was announced for a statue on Steinplatz. Sculptor August Gaul (1869-1921), chair of the Secessionists and renowned for his animal sculptures, won with a fountain of an elephant surrounded by pelicans. In the days of colonialism, these were exotic yet popular animals (see fig. 7). The residents, however, were not thrilled: some thought it unworthy of Baron von Stein and in the end it was never built. Nevertheless, Christian Morgenstern (1871–1914) composed the poem “From Stein Platz to Charlottenburg” in 1914 based on the discussion whether or not to erect this bronze elephant in honor of Baron Stein:³

Vom Stein-Platz zu Charlottenburg

*Den Stein-Platz soll ein Elefant
von Gaul, so hör ich, schmücken;
doch manche schelten dies genannt
und finden keine Brücken*

*vom Elefanten bis zu Stein,
von Stein zum Elefanten und
sagen drum energisch nein
zu dem zuerst Genannten.*

*Und doch! War Stein kein großes Tier?
Ich denke doch, er war es.
Und gilt der Elefant nicht schier
als Gottheit in Benares? ...*

*Ihr wackern Richter, laßt den Wert
des Werks den Streit entscheiden!
Der Stein, den uns ein Gaul beschert,
wird seinen Stein-Platz kleiden.*

*Ihr, die man ein Kulturvolk heißt,
wagts doch, Kultur zu haben!
Und dankt dem Bildner Stein im Geist
und nicht nach dem Buch-Staben!⁴*

At the same time, Heinrich Seeling proposed a fountain with a 25m. high obelisk on a plinth 10 meters wide (see fig. 8).⁵ In the end, nothing was implemented because once World War I broke out, financing for a statue on Steinplatz lost

2 <https://biography.yourdictionary.com/baron-heinrich-friedrich-karl-vom-und-zum-stein> accessed 03.04.2022

3 <https://steinplatz.berlin/stadtspaziergaenge/> accessed 16.01.2022

4 <https://www.visitberlin.de/de/event/wagts-doch-kultur-zu-haben-weltliteratur-und-theater-um-den-steinplatz> accessed 26.10.2021

5 Heinrich Seeling, *Denkmal*, 2 perspektivische Ansichten



Fig. 9: Flora sculpture, 1921 by Fritz Klimsch. Destroyed in WWII.

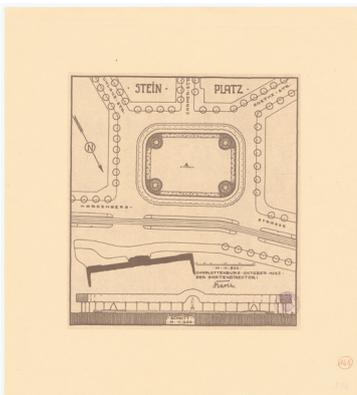


Fig. 10: 1925, by the landscape designer E.A. Barth



Fig. 11: Steinplatz 1945. Dark blue are destroyed buildings; light blue, damaged buildings.

priority.⁶

In 1921 Fritz Klimsch (1870-1960), at the time a professor at the Royal Art School, made the first actual sculpture for Steinplatz, called “Flora” (see fig. 9). based on a Roman fresco from 100 AD found in Pompeii. The statue stood on a triangular plinth but was reportedly destroyed in WWII. Strangely enough, the top of the plinth is still standing on Steinplatz.

2.3. Post-war reconstruction and activity. Steinplatz itself was spared allied bombing during WWII, although the buildings along the western side of the street were destroyed. (see map, fig. 11)

With Berlin divided after the war, the now-centrally-located Steinplatz took on representational importance. In 1950 it was redesigned by Joachim Kaiser “with bushes to shield the garden from the active street traffic”⁷. In 1951 a memorial was added to the victims of Stalinism on the northwestern edge. Two years later, in protest to those who denied the responsibility of the NS regime, a similar memorial was dedicated to the victims of National Socialism on the northeastern edge.

Shortly after the war, the bar “Volle Pulle” (1950 - 1972) opened in the Hotel am Steinplatz and became a public magnet (see fig. 13). Ironically, this bar led to the fact that Berlin has no closing hours today. At the time, West Berlin had been competing with East Berlin over closing hours, each side staying open one hour later than the other side. The owner of the Hotel am Steinplatz at the time, Heinz Zellermeier, knew the commander of the Allied troops overseeing Berlin and convinced him to deregulate bar closing hours in Berlin.⁸

In 1954, Hoechst (formerly IG Farben: generous donor to the NS party and notorious for manufacturing Cyclon-B) threw its shadow of dark history on the plaza with a historic preservation building by the architects Hans Geber and Otto Risse.

Due to its proximity to the TU and UdK universities and, in spite of the presence of Hoechst Pharmaceuticals, Steinplatz became a podium for the left-wing student movement of the 1960s. Many demonstrations originated there (fig. 14) and were discussed at the Cafe Filmbühne am Steinplatz. In addition, with the Literaturhaus “Buchhändlerkeller” nearby on Carmerstr., the plaza was the center of artistic and student life after the war.

2.4. Forgotten decades. During much of the 80s and 90s, the plaza was left to the “Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo” and the nearby “Bahnhof Mission”. Residents complained that the plaza was too full of people sleeping on the benches and using the bushes as a toilet, a state which continued through to 2018.

The present bust of Baron von Stein was donated by the city council in 1987 (fig. 16) to celebrate the 750th anniversary of Berlin. East Berlin received a duplicate bust as a gift, which today stands at the City Hall in Mitte.

2.5. Revitalization measures. In 2018 the plaza underwent a renovation as the result of a city-sponsored TU student competition to address some long-standing problems. Since then, the district of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf has been actively striving to enliven the plaza. By holding annual meetings of neighborhood businesses and institutions, they brainstorm ideas to attract the public while calling attention to the existence of the surrounding institutions. Especially in the summer, there have been diverse events and artistic activities, which I

6 <http://steinplatz.berlin/stadtpaziergaenge/>

7 *Berlin und seine Bauten*, p. 160

8 guided tour with Michael Bienert, 04,12,2021



Fig. 12: Steinplatz 1950, redesigned by Joachim Kaiser.



Fig. 13: Volle Pulle bar, Hotel am Steinplatz. 1950-1972.



Fig. 14: Student protest Hardenbergstr. at Steinplatz, 1968

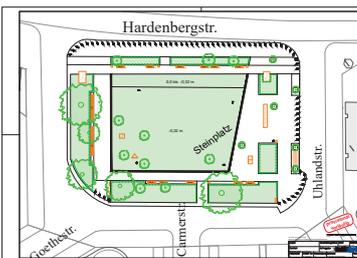


Fig. 15: Steinplatz, 2022. Note exit points.

will later describe in more detail.

3. Current Disadvantages of Steinplatz:

3.1 Traffic surrounds the square, the loudest side being the 4 lanes of Hardenbergstr. Strangely enough, the bushes on that side of the square are the shortest and thinnest, and do nothing to block the noise or view of the traffic. In fact, the visitor is most connected to Hardenbergstr., because the other three quieter streets are almost completely cut off by tall, thick shrubbery.

Though it strives to be a residential square, Steinplatz is still a traffic island “... the most open of all urban spaces, around and through which the constant flow of modern traffic swirls. As such it has usually become isolated from pedestrian usage - a forlorn vestige of times when men and carts could mingle in the crossroads without danger.”⁹ Except for Hardenbergstr., traffic surrounding the plaza is one way, with parking on both sides of the streets. That means three lanes of cars between plaza and sidewalk.

The small entry points on the side streets are awkward and even treacherous, as there is no indication how one should then cross the street. In fact, the cars coming from Hardenbergstr. turning left on Goethestr. turn a blind corner just where an entrance point is located.

I suggest a zebra crossing at the Carmerstr. exit, thus warning cars about pedestrians. In fact, I would change the exit position from the plaza to the west side of Carmerstr. to funnel two exit points to one zebra crossing. Note figure 15, which clearly shows the three side streets where one can exit from Steinplatz, but not a clear crossing. The shrubbery is not shown on the map. In truth the real problem on the plaza side is that there is no sidewalk to navigate the situation. Tall bushes are planted to the curb so there is no place to wait for cars, and there is no view of the pedestrian from the car.

3.2 Vegetation is placed in such a way as to block the view of activity from the three quiet streets, including a restaurant and hotel on Uhlandstr., while along the noisiest street, Hardenbergstr., the vegetation that was there has been severely cut back. In my opinion, the vegetation should be planted so as to open the square to the three side streets and block the noise and view of the traffic on Hardenbergstr. “Vegetation in the city plays a major environmental role with regard to noise reduction, visual screening and control of airborne pollutants.”¹⁰ A 2-meter tall row of foliage along Hardenbergstr. would solve these three problems immediately, as well as lend a sense of intimacy and respite from the busy area.

In summer there is little shade. One must grab a bench on the south side to avoid direct sun. In winter the only sunny area to sit is along busy Hardenbergstr. There are three tiny trees randomly planted on the grass, but it will take many years before they provide shade.

“Since the middle of the 19th century, ... under the pretext of returning them to general “civic” use, the square surfaces, some of which had remained completely untreated for centuries, were paved and planted with lawns or shrubbery in the center, probably following the English model, which was then often fenced in. This limited the general use of the center of the square. It could often only be regarded.”¹¹

9 French, *Urban Space*, p. 14.

10 Ibid. p. 19.

11 Berlin und seine Plätze, p. 81

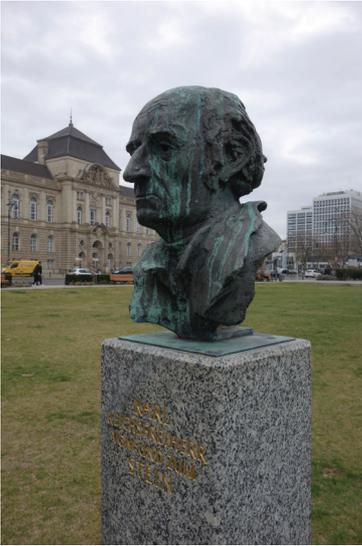


Fig. 16: Bust of Reichsfreiherr von und zum Stein, 1987



Fig. 17: Football fans sitting along the edge of the plaza, 2021.



Fig. 18: Ceremony at the memorial to the victims of Stalinism, 2021

Steinplatz isn't fenced. However, the grass is 32 cm. lower than the sidewalk. Could it be that the authorities try to make it a square that is only to be viewed from the sidelines? The lowered bed of grass acts as a psychological barrier of sorts, making it difficult to enter. This fact renders the lawn unappealing to some extent, as one cannot test the grass to see if it is wet before climbing down onto it.

3.3. Recreation. The square itself has no center. It is literally a square of grass surrounded by a walkway. Benches placed along the periphery face the empty grassland. No one is sure whether one is allowed to use the grass, so most visitors sit on the benches, or on the raised edge of the stone walkway above the lawn (see fig. 17), gazing at the lawn as though waiting for a show to begin.

*“Italian squares are concave, “they literally pull people toward the center. People want to settle into them... French squares are convex: they are meant to be looked at from the periphery...They are objects that do not invite and which no one explores. People do not go there to talk. One might carry on a conversation on the periphery.”*¹² Perhaps Steinplatz is modeled on the French square typology.

There is the occasional cautious football practice, with the other visitors watching nervously from the sidelines. On the Uhlandstr. side of the square the walkway is wider and accommodates a metal ping-pong table and a long, concrete-framed wooden bench which often becomes a makeshift skateboard area, the noise competing with that on Hardenbergstr.

3.4. Memorials. *“The most striking thing about monuments is that you don't notice them. There is nothing in the world that is as invisible as monuments. They are undoubtedly erected to be seen, even to attract attention, but at the same time they are impregnated by something against attention.”*¹³

On the northwest corner of the square is a memorial to the victims of Stalinism (fig. 18). Made of gray stone and set back from Hardenbergstr., it is often overlooked unless colorful flowers are placed at its base. On the northeast end is another, similar memorial to the victims of National Socialism, built two years later in response to the first memorial, and similarly hidden. On the west side of the lawn stands a small bust of the square's namesake, the Baron vom Stein. Lastly there is a raised triangular plinth with no explanation whatsoever, but was in fact the pedestal for the Flora statue.

3.5. Relationship to UdK. Although right across the street from the University of Arts (UdK), the plaza shows no trace of its proximity. Art from the school is rarely displayed there and the immense traffic flow makes any real connection to the institution difficult. Nevertheless, Steinplatz is an ideal forum to display works by the UdK students and staff and initiate a dialogue with the community. Why is it ignored?

4. Why Steinplatz?

Less than a kilometer from Zoo station, across from two major universities and situated in an affluent neighborhood, Steinplatz is an extraordinary location. In fact, if it didn't have historical significance, it would be the site of an office building today. After all, Savignyplatz and Tiergarten are nearby. What is its

¹² *Public Art*, Daniel Buren, p. 161

¹³ Musli, *Prosa*, p. 480.

place in the urban structure?

In the 1980s, Steinplatz was a forgotten place, overrun by undesirable types. However, in recent years it has come to the attention of the district and the TU, who organized the re-landscape competition. What are people's expectations with regard to this plaza? A survey from a workshop held in 2018 **after** the renovation of Steinplatz revealed the following comments:

“*Steinplatz is for me...*

- *an oasis for a break*
- *a dead spot currently*
- *an asset*
- *an insignificant lawn on a 4-lane road.*
- *a public place that is still too little used.*
- *a place without a presence*”¹⁴

Considering that the plaza had just been renovated, the number of negative comments is unsettling and revealing. The plaza does indeed seem like a place without a presence. It is lacking a soul. It is more a neutral, empty spot that wants to say nothing, rather than a welcoming space of celebration. It does not ask one to linger. Its message is more utilitarian: stop if you must, rest, continue on your journey. There is nothing that begs me to remain longer than necessary.

If it is a representational plaza, then what is it representing? Baron von Stein? If so, then how to explain the 100 years of its existence in which there was no reference or memorial to Stein? And if it is supposed to be representational, that does not mean it has to be devoid of character.

To make a brief comparison, Viktoria Louisa Platz in Schöneberg has a vibrant soul. One is aware of the history immediately. It has so many options to linger, that it is hard to walk by it without the desire to stop. Though it has different origins than Steinplatz, it is a plaza which, by the large number of visitors at any time, seems to satisfy the public. I would like to find out why, in spite of its history, significance and central location, this plaza doesn't satisfy the public equally.

5. Methodology:

5.21. Research. A more detailed history of the plaza, art in public space and former artistic interventions at the site will be researched. These will play a vital role in informing any artistic interventions.

5.2. Event. I will be holding an event on Steinplatz, incorporating the artistic intervention described later in this paper. How will people use the space when attracted by an art event? Will it get crowded? Will they participate by dancing to the live music or by using the swim rings, lounge chairs, wine and food bars? What will make them stay?

5.3. Funding. Since the renovation of the park in 2018, the district Charlottenburg/Wilmersdorf has been eager to organize exhibitions and events on Steinplatz. In cooperation with nearby institutions and with funds from the EU, artistic events, informational stands and/or discussions are held monthly during the open-air season. The goal is to build up the area profile by networking local businesses and institutions, and presenting them through common events on Steinplatz. I have received permission and funding from the district to hold an event with my proposal for an artistic intervention.

District city counselor Oliver Schruoffeneger wrote about our project: “*As the district office, we are delighted when Steinplatz, which is steeped in history, is staged in such an unusual way and brought into the public eye - and can thus once again serve as a stage for the ideas and work of students from the two major neighboring universities, TU and UdK Berlin.*”¹⁵

14 http://steinplatz.berlin/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/steinplatz.berlin_workshop_nutzung.pdf

15 <https://mein-berlin.net/performancekunst-livemusik-und-illumination-am-6-mai-auf-dem-steinplatz/> accessed 14.05.2022

6. The role of plazas

Public plazas (from Latin, *platea*; place or widened street¹⁶) or squares (named for the original shape of the British version) have been around since mankind settled from a hunter-gatherer culture to an agrarian one. Plazas have acted as markets, podiums for political discussions, announcements, public hangings: the only open location where the citizens could get together freely. The first indications of a gathering place within a settlement have been found at primitive communities such as Machu Picchu (Peru), Toba Batak (Indonesia) and Gbande (Liberia).

The purpose of a square is the opposite of a city park. *“The square is a gathering place, a centralized concept, a nucleus of urban activity. The city park evolved from the need for respite from traffic, commerce and crowds.”*¹⁷ Plazas are set within the urban fabric and, as cities become denser, are increasingly looked upon as a respite from the crowd, letting more light into the area and creating more expansive views. Now, in times of increasingly privatized space, public squares also play a vital role as a forum. *“If new places, urban meeting places, are not created, in which the differences of opinion can manifest themselves with political consequences, then indeed the substance of city-born freedom will be extinguished.”*¹⁸

There has been increasing hesitation to invest in plazas, or to make them too comfortable. This has less to do with waning use or a lack of funds; rather it is the result of homelessness. This social problem and the lack of interest by the state to deal with homeless and mentally unstable people is revealed in public space. Odd and disruptive behavior chase others away, leaving the plaza to the disruptive people. Often, the real impetus for renovations of public space is to prevent undesired people from feeling too comfortable in the space and abusing it. But the space is often changed in a way that makes it less comfortable for the rest of the community. Benches are designed so one cannot lay down or even sit for an extended period of time. Foliage is removed that might enable hidden behavior, until one finds oneself sitting next to a busy street. Since the disruptive people have nowhere else to go, they don't care about these measures and occupy the plazas anyway. The end result is a loud but well-surveilled, sterile, unattractive space whose original beauty and purpose is overshadowed by the need for control.

There are different types of plaza. Some are forums to stop and gather; others are traffic islands to disperse traffic and movement. Steinplatz seems to have started as a traffic island, formed as the result of several streets coming together (fig. 3, 5). But over time it has also developed into a residential square. These two needs still compete with each other. A traffic island tends to be an open square, *“so much so that it loses much of its usefulness as place.”*¹⁹

*“With the growth of traffic in the second half of the century, the relatively small green islands became increasingly isolated from the street activity. From the beginning of urban life, the city squares were public crystallization points where the long-distance roads met,...,where people greeted, said goodbye, stood, strolled, chatted, traded and presented themselves, where all areas of communication aggregated. They were hit by this imposed mono-functionality [as a traffic island] in their lifeblood.”*²⁰

In general, squares fall into two categories: centric or enclosed. Centric squares either have a focus on their center, with a fountain or statue for example, or the axes radiate outward to other visual termini in the distance. Traffic islands tend to be centric, radial squares.

The second type, the enclosed square, contains *“an open center and strongly defined enclosing structures.”*²¹ If there is nothing to give it direction and scale, it may seem static. The strongest means of defining open space is a visually dominant enclosing structure, which can be a tower or building. A vertical element should counterbalance the horizontality of the open square. *“Without vertical relief the quality of the square suffers from dullness.”*²² This holds true for both centric and enclosed squares, the difference being in the element's position. Of the two types, Steinplatz's appearance leans toward the enclosed square. It has neither a central axis nor external sight lines, and it is surrounded on 4 sides by buildings. One could say it is most dominated by the

16 French, *Urban Space*, 23.

17 Ibid, p. 16.

18 Mitcherlich, *Unwirtlichkeit*, p. 83

19 French, *Urban Space*, p. 84

20 Ibid., p. 81

21 Ibid p. 21.

22 Ibid p. 22.

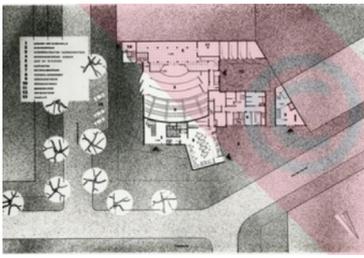


Fig. 19: Kabarett am Steinplatz 1956



Fig. 20: Treffpunkt Steinplatz 1962



Fig. 21: Winning plan of design competition, 2015. Leon Giseke, Lasse Malzahn, Lucas Rauch



Fig. 22: Steinplatz 2021

UdK on Hardenbergstr. but when one looks at the plan, the UdK is across a busy 4-lane street, and its facade does not face Steinplatz. Perhaps the Hoechst building should therefore be considered the most dominant enclosing agent of the square. While not taller than the other surrounding buildings, its windowless, marble facade featuring a large bronze logo is certainly the most outstanding vertical element.

Another characteristic of a square is its axes. Rectangular plazas have a major and minor axis. A square shaped plaza has bidirectional axes. However, at Steinplatz, there is no real axis, and that is perhaps a weakness. It tries to be both a formal, geometric plaza as well as an organic, empirical square. For instance, an entrance is located at each corner, but the path - instead of continuing diagonally through the green - changes direction and forces one instead to skirt the edge of the green trapezoid, thus having to parade in front of several benches of people. One must then turn 90 degrees to continue in the original diagonal direction. There are two more entrances somewhere in the middle of the longer axis, but they are at different locations front and back, and again with no direct access across, either visually or physically.

The exit at Carmerstr. has no sidewalk, while the exit at Hardenbergstr. lands you randomly on the sidewalk, at no particular location. It is disorienting, as there are no axes, or real sense of arrival or departure. At almost all the exits you are immediately confronted with traffic without a pedestrian safety measure, such as a traffic light, zebra crossing or even a sidewalk. The encircling streets separate the square from its enclosing agents with three lanes of cars: one moving lane and two parked. *“One does not idly pass through the [traffic island] square of this design, but must make a conscious effort to reach it, seeking the pedestrian crossings - which exist like bridges over moats filled with high-speed steel alligators.”*²³ In fact, I always make a conscious decision to enter the plaza: to navigate to the nearest entrance and deal with the flaneur qualities of the plaza or just walk anonymously - and more easily - on the sidewalks across the streets from it.

To somewhat ameliorate this situation, I would propose blocking the extension of Uhlandstr. to traffic. This has been proposed several times previously. To achieve this, one side of parking on the remaining streets around the plaza must be replaced by two directions of traffic. This would not reduce the number of cars driving around the plaza, but it would transform the island quality of Steinplatz to a peninsula, thus enabling more activities to occur with relation to the adjoining block of restaurants.

7. Former proposed improvements to Steinplatz:

7.1 Two bachelor theses:

Kabarett am Steinplatz, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1956

(Bachelor thesis by Kurt Dübbers, TU Berlin)

Proposal for a theater on the corner of Carmerstr. and Goethestr., facing Steinplatz. This would renew the former cultural importance around the square. (see fig. 19)

Treffpunkt Steinplatz, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1962

(Bachelor thesis by Willy Kreuer, TU Berlin)

Proposal for an extension into Steinplatz from Uhlandstr., replacing the street with a building, and thus making an important connection by extending the

²³ Ibid p. 89.



Fig. 23: , 2018
Photo: Astrid Busch

square over to the neighboring block. (see fig. 20)

7.2 Design competition 2015. Out of “general dissatisfaction” with the existing plaza, the Berlin senate and district of Charlottenburg cooperated with the TU to design a competition of TU landscape architecture students to improve conditions on Steinplatz. The task addressed a number of ongoing issues: “as a ‘traffic island’ difficult to reach, gloomy planting, noise, unattractive seating”.²⁴ Yet the actual renovation in 2018 did not implement several of the winning solutions. Nor did it improve the situation much, as evidenced by the district’s continued efforts to enliven the plaza with regular events. I would argue that some of the actual changes have even worsened the quality of the plaza. See figure 21 and 22 (left) showing the winning design idea and the current map of Steinplatz. Two notable unresolved issues are difficulty reaching the square and the noise on Hardenbergstr. Their proposal to block the southeast side of the plaza to traffic, and thus reduce the ‘traffic island’ status, was also not implemented. While admittedly this is the most difficult change to put into effect, it has been proposed since Willy Kreuer’s bachelor thesis in 1962 (see fig. 23).

8. Recent art on Steinplatz:

There are several exhibitions and events on Steinplatz every year, but I want to focus on the artistic interventions. All events, past, present and future, can be found on the website www.steinplatz.berlin.

August - October 2018

8.1. Steinplatz Reloaded. This 9-week exhibition by Stefka Ammon and Katharina Lottner brought the history surrounding Steinplatz to the awareness of the public through informational columns spaced according to the Prussian grid system of order. These contained simulated packed statues on which a specific aspect of the plaza from the past was brought to the reader’s awareness. (Fig. 24) Images accompanying the text revealed a diverse and exciting history of this location. This well-researched exhibition was to overlay the past with the present and thus alter the perception of the visitor. During the exhibition, there were guided tours by an area specialist, and recorded interviews with visitors about their perceptions and memories of the area.²⁵



Fig. 24: Steinplatz reloaded, evening view, 2018
Photo: Astrid Busch

3. - 10. October 2020 / 20.-31. March 2021 / 2.. - 8. April 2022

8.2. Painting in public. The private art school *Academy for Painting Berlin* holds yearly painting events on the plaza. Wrapped in winter clothes, the painters brave the cold from 2pm - 5pm to create paintings on site on tarpaulins attached to construction fences. (Fig. 25)

Beginning in 2020, this event was conceived as a reaction to the restrictions of art exhibitions during covid. By taking painting out of the studio and into the public sphere, they wanted to project a sign of presence and transparency. Passersby should watch, and may comment and discuss the works being created. In this way, the creative process was reinforced during the corona lockdown when art indoors was no longer open to the public. An outdoor opening took place on 10. October 2020 and 31. March 2021. The painting murals remained on view a week longer.²⁶



Fig. 25: Students of the Academy for Painting Berlin, 2022

24 Loidl-Reisch, “Steinplatz meets Campus”

25 <https://www.stefka-ammon.de/steinplatz/> accessed 05.04.2022

26 <https://a-f-m-b.de/outdoor-vernissage-public-paintings-auf-dem-steinplatz-in-berlin/>

18 Mar - 19 Apr. 2021

8.3. “The disappearance of the wall” Open-air photo exhibition by the Robert Havemann Society. Photos by Robert Conrad documenting scenes of life in the DDR after the wall started coming down.²⁷

April 2021

8.4. Culture Quarter. Steinplatz is named **Culture Quarter** of 2021. Planned are outdoor cinema, art and organic markets. In this way, Steinplatz should become a cultural hotspot.²⁸

03 June 2021

8.5. Text Transit. Student authors from the intercultural group ‘Text Transit’ read aloud from their work. The group is interested in intercultural topics, where students write in another language other than their native tongue. They plan on conducting further readings in Steinplatz in the future.²⁹

June - Oct. 2021

8.6. Stephanie Hanna: Thinking in motion. “How do we navigate through the un/certainties of the present into the un/possibilities of a humane future?” On site performances in 5 acts, 5 x 3 hours each month, 6-9pm. Audience participation in experiences of how to deal with the present moment and the future, along with accompanying sound artists or DJs. Recorded, edited and shown on her facebook page and website for this project. (Fig. 26)



Fig. 26: Photo collage by Stephanie Hanna / VG BildKunst auf der Basis von Videostills von Henrique Antão

Especially interesting for my project is Act 1:

Act 1. Re:Formen: ‘Which reforms do we need today?’ Steinplatz is named after a reformer. How do we perceive our surroundings physically and subconsciously right now? Can one sense the history in Steinplatz? Does knowledge of the history influence how we perceive the present moment of the place?

Act 2. Re:Cognition: ‘Do we only recognize what we already know?’

Act 3. Re:Generation ‘(How) can we survive capitalism together?’

Act 4. Re:Flections (or Re:Sonances) ‘The limits of Growth’ and the exhaustion of the earth’s resources.

Act 5. Re:Evolution ‘How do we move into the unknown confidently?’³⁰

15 Sept - 31 Oct 2021

8.7. Post-Soviet living environments. Open air exhibition showing society and daily life after communism. Sponsored by the Leibniz Center for Historical Research and the National Foundation of Historical Reappraisal of the SED dictatorship (*Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur*).³¹

Summer/Fall 2020 / 2021

accessed 21.10.2021

<https://www.kreatives-leben.com/public-painting-am-steinplatz/> accessed 21.10.2021²⁷

<http://steinplatz.berlin/jahr-2021/> accessed 26.10.2012

<https://www.morgenpost.de/bezirke/charlottenburg-wilmersdorf/article232148415/Kunst-Kino-Maerkte-Steinplatz-wird-2021-zum-Kulturquartier.html> accessed 21.10.2021²⁸

<http://steinplatz.berlin/jahr-2021/> accessed 26.10.2012²⁹

<https://www.stephaniehanna.de/de/aktuell/> accessed 20.10.2021³⁰

<https://www.facebook.com/events/293878758923651> accessed 20.10.2021

<http://steinplatz.berlin/jahr-2021/> accessed 26.10.2012³¹

8.8. Walking tours of the area

There are regular tours about and around Steinplatz, explaining the history and culture that has taken place in the area, by the “Berlinologist” Michael Bienert. Politics, science, art, literature, music and theater characterized Steinplatz and the surrounding area for 150 years. For the first third of the 20th century the area was called “the industrial zone of intelligence” and was the home of many intellectuals. Arnold Schönberg composed his 12-tone music while living at Steinplatz 2, and Isadora Duncan lived where the Hoechst building now stands.³² Thanks to the literature professor Walter Höllerer after the war, Steinplatz once again became the center of literature, hosting international contemporary authors. For the last 50 years, the “Buchhändlerkeller”, in Carmerstr. 1, has hosted literature events.

9. My artistic intervention:

The plaza signals a place of remembrance as well as establishes a public arena for the citizens. Yet the shape and uniformity of the lawn as well as the 32 cm. raised, slanted periphery of stone resemble instead the edge of a swimming pool (fig. 27). The grass itself is treated like a body of water in that visitors avoid it, distributing themselves evenly around the periphery and gazing in on it, not daring to enter. The center is not the center of activity, rather it is a void around which people circle, much like the behavior around a pond or fountain (fig. 28). This void is most noticeable at night when the unlit plaza disappears like a body of water, a dark spot surrounded by city lights and urban activity.

What could be a better metaphor for this plaza than the pleasant enjoyment of a swimming pool? People are attracted to pools and to plazas. “Swimming pools today are democratic spaces, in which everyone, regardless of social or financial level, can meet each other.”³³



Fig. 27: Hockney, “Study of Water, Phoenix, Arizona”, 1976



Fig. 28: Pool party with bamboo, 2022, photo collage

(collage of blue “water” and bamboo. The people around the edge were real football fans waiting to be transported to a football game)

By temporarily transforming Steinplatz into a pool, I assign the plaza an additional role and, in doing so, emphasize not only its unusual architecture, but reinforce the typical behavior of visitors by placing them in a familiar yet surreal

32 conversation with Michael Bienert, 10.04.2022

33 Torma. *Wasser*, p. 68



Fig. 29: Pool of forgotten Ideas, 2022, photo collage

setting. This will be a site-specific intervention in which I point out an underlying character of the shape and use of the plaza. It is an absurd yet viable scenario that exposes another intention, an alternative perception of the plaza, one which is imaginable.

“It should be as though the public project has existed for a long time already among these other objects surrounding it. That is, it should not represent a juxtaposition, but rather a natural and absolutely normal part of that space where it is located.”³⁴

It is not negating the plaza’s function, or interfering in its common use. It is adding another dimension, an alternative reality, perhaps a subconscious wish on the part of some visitors.



Fig. 30: Intimate, illuminated, Illusion, 2022, 50 x 60 cm. acrylic on canvas

A pool party will be arranged on May 6th, as a “pop-up event”, where references to both swimming pools and the history of Steinplatz will be alluded to. There will be a diving board and 2 pool ladders on the edges (fig. 32, 33), with swim rings appearing to be floating around the grass (fig. 34, 36). In reference to Gaul’s controversial fountain proposal *Elephant with Pelicans* (fig. 7), one extra large inner tube will have an elephant head (fig. 35), and another, a pelican head (fig. 37). Lighting placed around the edges will shine onto the grass in the evening, enhancing the pool-like atmosphere of the space (fig. 36). These horizontal lights will also respond

34 Kabakov. *Public Art*, p. 287



Fig. 31: Baden am Steinplatz, 2022, 60 x 50 cm. acrylic on canvas

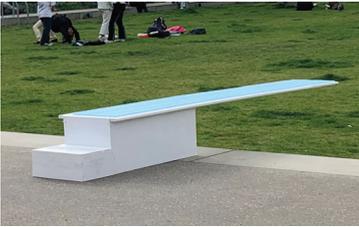


Fig. 32: Diving board, 2022. Wood, paint, styrofoam and bricks; size varies



Fig. 33: Pool Ladder, 2022. Metal pipes, insulation, wood, paint, tape; size varies

to the vertical lighting on the surrounding buildings. Additionally, an artist will pose as a living sculpture of Flora with a cornucopia on the existing plinth (fig. 37), as well as mingle with the guests. A banner reading “to the victims” will stand to the side (fig. 44), in reference to both the student movement of 1968 and the memorials to the victims of Stalinism and NZ. The focus will thus shift from the peripheral to the center of the plaza, where there have been repeated attempts to accentuate it.

The public will thus be invited to enter the “pool” of grass and use it, which they are normally hesitant to do: “...now grass is ‘unannounced’ - undefined for the visitor. I will define it, act out the space, make a “contract” between the visitor and the redefined place.”³⁵

People will be asked to dress in appropriate pool attire and bring pool accessories. Pink swim rings will be available to wear, and will surround the pool, along with lounging chairs and sun umbrellas. An after-swim “shower” will be available (fig. 40). Additionally, each corner of the large plaza will be activated with music, food and drinks. A live jazz trio will play in the afternoon and then a dj with electronic music in the evening, representing a past epoch and a contemporary time.

Along Hardenbergstr. there will be a visual and acoustic barrier: 46 meters of construction fences will be placed along the street, covered with 2-meter tall reeds. This should give the impression of a wood fence that often surrounds public swimming pools, granting privacy to bathers. Posters showing the history of the plaza will read left to right, and be attached to the reeds in a haphazard way, like the *affiches* on wooden pool fences (fig. 38). A break in the bushes midway will separate the pre- and post-war chronology. This will also be the official entrance point, though all sides are open to the public.

Hung on the inner length of the fence will be murals of plants over the low bushes (fig. 39), reminding the guests of the possibility and need for a natural separation between the busy outer street and the peaceful inner oasis. This 2-meter “wall” should block the noise and view of the traffic, and add to the illusion of being at a relaxing pool. It will show how the square can be a brief escape from the city.

Event text:

Pool of forgotten Ideas is a joint project by Kathryn Nussdorf and Christoph Parke. It is based on a master’s thesis by Kathryn Nussdorf in the department of architecture at the TU Berlin on the design of Steinplatz.

The staging is based on historical research about realized and rejected forms of design of Steinplatz. In connection with the question of the significance of squares in public life, an intimate, illuminated illusion is created.

It imagines a place of peace and security against the noise and bustle of the big city.

The illumination uses the aesthetics of the surrounding lighting and modulates it to create an appearance that echoes the principles of yin and yang.

The result is a place that flirts with a primordial yearning, namely the proximity to water.

With discrete symbols, a space is created in which the visitor dives into a new world and creates its idea, as it were.



Fig. 34: Pink swim rings



Fig. 35: Elephant swim ring



Fig. 36: Evening lights



Fig. 37: Living sculpture with cornucopia, pelican swim ring

So don't forget the life preserver.

What: Art event, live music, catering, performance art, etc.

When: Friday, 6. May, 2022. 14:00 – 22:00+

Where: Steinplatz, Berlin-Charlottenburg

Www.knussdorf.de

Intimate in that a visual and acoustic barrier is erected against the traffic on Hardenbergstr., creating a shelter, a sense of retreat and trust for the visitor.

Illuminated. Lights shining horizontally across the grass represent enlightenment, accenting the plaza against the vertical lights of the surrounding buildings, the light axes creating a balance of the yin-yang principle.

Illusion. The installation objects: diving board, pool ladders, “wooden” pool fence outside with a painted mural of plants along the inside, swim rings that reference Gaul’s elephant with pelican fountain, additional pink swim rings, and the living statue of Flora create an animated forum of interactive cultural activity which allows one to step into an imaginary situation, bringing the past into a present scenario.

“The city must be understood and conceived as a place that enables socialization, communication and creativity. Culture in the city therefore means - promoting communication and counteracting isolation, - creating spaces for play and thus counterbalancing the constraints of contemporary life, - challenging reflection and thus overcoming mere conformity and superficial distraction.”³⁶

This illusion of a swimming pool should promote communication of what a plaza should be, of what Steinplatz should be. It will bring people together to experience an alternative reality of a place they may have known for years, or seen for the first time on May 6th. “

The childhood experience that determines spatial practices later ...floods private and public spaces, undoes their readable surfaces, and creates within the planned city a “metaphorical” or mobile city.³⁷

We are undoing the readable surface of the plaza; rewriting the surface. We want to disturb the resident; to wake them up. We leave aesthetic prints with the lights. We are communicating with the surroundings and returning a feeling of security to the inhabitants. They didn’t want to close the space because they thought it would be dangerous, but we remedy that condition by lighting the space. We bestow a sense of security in an aesthetic way.

Ilya Kabakov describes the audience the artist needs to consider when making a public project:

“The “multi-tiered” viewer is of three types. The first, especially important type is as the ‘master of this place.’ He is the inhabitant of this city, these streets, this country where the artist has been invited to build his work. He is very familiar with everything beforehand, he has grown accustomed to this place, he lives in it. Everything new that will be placed here, he will perceive as the owner into whose apartment something has settled, and he either has to accept it, accom-

³⁶ Weisser. *Kunst im Stadtbild*, p. 141

³⁷ Certeau. *Practice*, p. 110



Fig. 38: Exterior: reed-covered fence with posters showing history of plaza and idea of project



Fig. 39: Interior: Plant mural on fleece floor-covering, 1m x 40 m.



Fig. 40: After-pool shower head

moderate it into his normal life, or he has to discard this extraneous, repulsive and completely useless thing. - a reaction that is entirely natural and anticipated. Hence, the inter-relationship between the public project and the viewer... turns out to be fundamental.

“The second type of viewer turns out to be the tourist. Tourists are a large tribe now racing all over the globe and they are interested in something a bit different than the owner when viewing a public project. A tourist is interested in the unique characteristics of a place he has visited, the unique accenting of it, and for him the public project he sees there should be somehow characteristic, even perhaps peculiar...as reflecting some sort of unique trait of this place he is visiting, ...as an important spot in this locale, this city, this street, this space; something that he should remember among all his other tourist impressions. It is the kind of place to which he is brought by bus or finds in his own wanderings around the city because of the impression it creates as a curious, strange and special object. Therefore, this project must be very contrastive...in its capacity as a characteristically unique feature of precisely this place, connected with a specific cultural field, the cultural circumstances of this place.”³⁸

We are taking part, even though it is not proclaimed, in Berlin’s tourism attraction. We are communicating with those who are passing by as well as those stopping in. We are conducting an experiment to find out what makes plazas attractive. We are inviting people to participate in an area of pleasure, fantasy and thought.

Kabakov’s third type of visitor:

“The third viewer is the passerby (...flanyor), the solitary passerby at the moment of his scattered-meditative stroll, like when we are not really involved in our constant everyday cares, but rather are contemplating various distracting subjects, problems in life, culture, our own memories, sentimental or romantic;...when we find ourselves in a scattered, solitary journey through life. In this case, the public project should be entirely oriented toward this state and toward this kind of viewer who is escaping and is submerging into some other kinds of imagined spaces, such as the past, for example, where certain associations, memories arise. This is that same romantic wanderer, namely the kind of romantic personage and not just a tourist who was described well in the 19th century...who visited other countries and, wandering around his own city sometimes estranged and in a certain state of half-sleep, half-awake, pauses before something that suddenly seems interesting to him.”³⁹

The props are discrete. You wouldn’t notice anything different or unusual if you weren’t looking. They are subtle installation pieces that fit into their surrounding in a suggestive way. Yet they are poetic statements that transport one to another time, another location, to pleasant memories of summer days at the pool. The fence allows a sojourn into one’s daydreams without the disturbing traffic of reality.

“The work should engage in dialogue with the viewer, who must be able to recognize what the artist is referring to and, ideally, to feel an emotional response to the work. Art may indeed seem out of place or represent a disturbing factor at a given location, but it should not evoke the impression that, by taking

38 Kabakov. *Public Art*, p. 287-288

39 Ibid.



Fig. 41: elephant swim ring.
168 x 152 x 65 cm.



Fig. 42: pelican swim ring.
205 x 176 x 126 cm.



Fig. 43: Living statue of Flora with cornucopia, on existing remains of pedestal

possession of a place, it means to dominate the urban situation. Yet at the same time it must be strong enough to assert itself amongst the myriad stimuli of its surroundings.”⁴⁰

10. Why Pool of forgotten Ideas?

Water looks tranquil on the surface and yet hides many things. In fact its whole history is hidden beneath its smooth surface. How many ships have sunk in any spot? How many events have taken place on the water? All signs are erased, forgotten. History cannot be read on water, unless you go beneath the surface to the bottom, where you might find remnants of a past event.

Similarly, Steinplatz looks very placid. You can't read much history in it. There is a low pedestal, a sign of a possible history. But more than that one cannot decipher while sitting in the plaza. The bust of Freiherr von Stein appeared 100 years after the naming of the plaza. But even there, one has no clue as to why he is the namesake. The two memorials are only visible from outside the plaza on the sidewalk of Hardenberstr. All the other ideas that have been proposed or happened at Steinplatz have been erased. What one sees is a calm square of grass. Perhaps unnecessarily calm.

For the event, I unearth the past events and bring them to the surface.

For more details, please see Subsection 2.2 “Early attempts at sculptures.” and Subsection 2.3. “Post-war reconstruction and activity”.) :

- the “*Elephant with Pelicans*” fountain proposed by August Gaul in 1907, but never realized. (see fig. 41, 42)
- the *Flora statue* existed from 1921 -1943 (approx.) by Fritz Klimsch: a performance artist has been paid to dress and pose similarly to Flora, on the existing pedestal with a cornucopia of a similar size (see fig. 43)
- *Banner reading “den Opfern” (“to the victims”)* referring to the 1968 student movement and the two memorials standing at the edges of Steinplatz, overlooked by many (see fig. 44).

11. Why water?

What is so attractive about water? It can be peaceful and still or stormy and rough, but people are universally attracted to it.

Of course water is necessary for life; more so than food. We can live without food for weeks, but will die within a few days without water. This is in fact the criteria for looking for life on other planets: whether there is or was water. Leonardo da Vinci described water as the “blood of the planet”. This comparison to the body turned out to be more than just metaphor, as modern medicine confirmed that the adult body contains up to 60% water.⁴¹

Many theories claim that water is the beginning of all life. For instance, 3.5 billion-year-old petrified cells have been found in pebbles from the primal Archean ocean. Microscopic embryos found in southern China existed about 570 million years ago, when the oceans were rich with budding life, while the land-masses were still cooling and settling down.⁴²

Sebastian Kneipp (1821-1897), a catholic priest, made people aware of the benefits of water and nature for health (see fig. 45). With his spa, Kneipp preached the benefits of water, both for drinking and for different bathing techniques.

40 Elben. *Public Art*, p. 461

41 Torma, *Wasser*, p. 5

42 *ibid*, p. 18



Fig. 44: Banner “den Opfern” (“to the victims”)



Fig. 45: Kneipp, “Walking bare-foot on wet grass”, 1894

Connecting to the idea of the organic movement in the 1880s, Kneipp created an empire whose bathing products we still see today.⁴³

Public swimming became popular in Germany with the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. At this time many public pools were built, not only to promote fitness and sports for everyone, but to teach the population how to swim.⁴⁴

Today there is another aspect of water to consider: its disappearance as a resource. “In 2000, there was a world water forum that expects that, due to population growth, climate change, water waste and water pollution, the global water supply will be one of the most urgent problems of the 21st century.”⁴⁵

Added to the list should be privatization of water sources.

“...a lesser known predator of world water to the commonly discussed pollution and climate warming is privatization by large corporations, and it is a large cause of water scarcity.”⁴⁶

To create the illusion of Steinplatz as a body of water, I used the following items:

- **Diving board**, regulation size, self-made of wood and covered with blue construction plastic. Filled with bricks to counter its cantilever weight.
- **2 Pool ladders**. Self-made of piping and insulation sleeves, attached to a wood plank painted to match the stone edge.
- **Swim rings**. Both oversized, referencing the past, and many smaller pink rings to create the image of floating on the surface of the grass.
- **Shower head**. Typically found at every swimming location. In fact it seems redundant to wash off water with water. However, the ritual expresses the desire to wash off unknown water with trusted water, and is an integral part of the swimming experience.
- **Partition wall**. Typical at swimming pools are wooden barriers, lending privacy to an intimate activity, namely bathing in clothing that is not meant for the street. The wall is symbolic, allowing the bathers some freedom from social norms of dress and behavior. The posters were placed haphazardly on the fence to reinforce the idea that an empty wall is also a surface for communication, usually unofficially.
- Completing the **image of a pool party** was live music, lounge chairs, sun umbrellas, tables and benches, caipirinhas, wine tent and light food.

12. Inspiration

12.1. David Hockney continued to study water throughout his life. Figures 27 and 46-49 show some of his attempts to capture the look and feel of a swimming pool. I chose these particular images because they portray the same fundamental aspects of a swimming pool that I will feature in my artistic intervention on Steinplatz. I too am trying to capture the illusion of a swimming pool.

12.2. Jeff Koons referenced trivial inflatable balloon figures, and enlarged them as polished metal sculptures (fig. 50). My enlarged swim rings reference a controversial fountain and invite people to interact with them as they float on a pool of grass.

43 ibid, p. 54

44 ibid p. 64

45 ibid, p. 89

46 https://thewaterproject.org/water-scarcity/water_scarcity_and_privitization accessed 14.05.2022



Fig. 46: Hockney, one of “*Four different kinds of Water*”, 1967



Fig. 47: Hockney, detail from “*A Large Diver (Paper Pool 27)*”, 1978



Fig. 48: Hockney, “*Rubber Ring Floating in a Swimming Pool*”, 1971

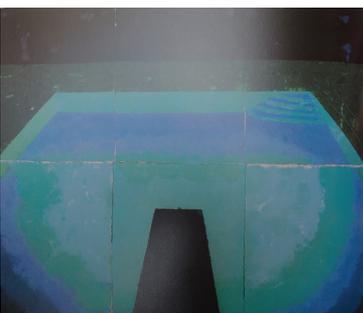


Fig. 49 Hockney, “*Schwimmbad Mitternacht (Paper Pool 11)*”, 1978

12.3. Sun and Sea. At the Venice Biennale, the artists Rugile Barzdziukaite, Vaiva Grainyte and Lina Lapelyte won the Golden Lion for an opera of a beach scene (fig. 51, 52). They sang about problems in their lives and then those of the world, while lounging in bathing suits on the sand. Yet there was no water in sight. Similarly, we are socializing around a pool scene where there is no water. We are pretending in both situations: participating in an illusory vacation spot, yet not able to fully enjoy it.

13. Event Results

Although the event was to start at 2pm, people were occupying and moving the lounge chairs as soon as they arrived at noon. There seemed to be a surge of visitors in the early afternoon, waning somewhat later. Friends then came, making up the gap.

The 1.4 m. cornucopia for the “Flora statue” piece was the biggest miracle of the entire event. I found it on ebay, but it was located in Frankfurt and when I contacted the owner he had actually just given it away. In spite of that, he retrieved it and sent it on a train to Hauptbahnhof with a stranger. I was waiting for car number six on the platform. When it arrived and I didn’t see a cornucopia exiting that car, I went in and called for it. Nobody responded but I saw something on a shelf above the seats, which turned out to be the cornucopia. I grabbed it and left the train right before it continued on.

We now recognize the plaza is so large that twice as many people could have attended without it being too crowded. But we had hesitated to use too much social media as we were concerned that too many people would show up and overwhelm the illusion of the pool. It is very hard to control the amount of people who turn up to a public event.

The jazz music created a relaxing and nostalgic atmosphere. When they finished, I explained the references we had on display, pointing out the less obvious ones. A little later, Christoph read the poem by Christian Morgenstern and explained the context. Techno music introduced the evening to a more lively flair.

After dusk, the illumination started, flooding the lawn with light, as it is in a real swimming pool. It was a decent contrast to the vertical lights of the hotel. The image we were looking for was an abandoned pool party, with a lot of forgotten swim rings floating on the pool. The lights and installation were supervised by a security service all night, with the illuminated Hotel am Steinplatz in the background.

Unfortunately, we had to stop the music precisely at 9pm, which prevented a smooth ending to the event. There is a noise ordinance at 10pm and that includes the noise while removing equipment. There was police presence throughout the day, actually, and they enforced the noise ordinance punctually.

The event manager then informed us that we had to take down the art pieces the next morning at 8am, which I thought we negotiated to be later in the day. That was quite a shock, as we had discussed with the district to leave the pieces on the plaza through Saturday, so the public would see them in a peaceful setting. I now see we need to be clearer about details like this.

13.1. Discussion: room for improvement

It is a big plaza and many things, like the regulation-size diving board, disap-



Fig. 50: Balloon Swan (blue), 2004-2011, Jeff Koons mirror-polished stainless steel with transparent color coating.



Fig. 51: Still from: *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, 2019, Rugile Barzdziukaitė, Vaiva Grainyte, Lina Lapelyte, Venice. Photograph: © Andrej Vasilenko



Fig. 52: *Sun and Sea*, audience view, Venice Biennale, 2019 Photograph: © Nida Art Colony

peared in the distance. The self-made diving board should have been bigger and higher to have more of a presence from all vantage points. It should also have had more weight inside so one could sit on the cantilever, as several people tried to do. There was a “closed for maintenance” sign placed on it, as we only calculated the board standing under its own weight, but not being used.

We could have filled the lawn with four pelicans, as were on Gaul’s fountain. We should have kept an eye on the oversized rings we had because the pelican ring was stolen while the event was still in progress.

The lights, which were ordered by the district, were not the same as those shining vertically on the neighboring buildings. They were too directional and too white. They were more like spotlights rather than atmospheric. Everything outside the light stream was in darkness. These were not the lights we had in mind and we did not have a chance to test them prior.

The posters along the outside wall should have been hung on the inside as well. Nobody who was not walking on Hardenbergstr. knew there were informative posters there. Additionally, there should have been small signs next to each piece, explaining its purpose. The plaza is too large to assume everyone will notice the posters and go read them.

We were looking for an image of swim rings blanketing the lawn but there were too few out there at any given time. We were trying to sell them for 5 euro to cover some of the costs of the event, but we should have given them away instead, which in fact we did at around 7pm; hence fig. 34 and 36.

We should have negotiated how long we could keep the art objects on display, which stood there for less than 24 hours. But we couldn’t afford security for several days. Perhaps next time we should leave it all, regardless of theft or destruction, if the district approves leaving the diving board standing. This could be dangerous for a child if not supervised, but without it, the swimming pool motif would be too weak. We could build a stronger diving board that would withstand normal wear and tear. The fence could also have remained with the reeds, posters and plant murals. In fact, there are two fences from another event in April still standing in the plaza.

The music was not loud enough. We discussed with the district having speakers on every corner of the plaza. But instead they only placed a small speaker on either side of the stage. Thus the music and announcements could not be heard clearly on the other side of the plaza.

We wanted an ice cream stand but couldn’t find one in time who would come at their own expense. We should have started looking for that earlier, because there were some positive responses but they were already booked. The caipirinia bar and wine bar did come at their own expense and were satisfied. In fact we didn’t need the district’s caterer to serve food, as they required a minimum turnover or else we would have to pay the difference. We realized too late that we could have asked any local restaurant. Even the wine bar offered to provide some food (and did, in spite of our obligation to the other caterer). As it turns out, the caterer didn’t make their minimum of 550 euro, and are now requesting 290 euro from us.

Another question is how to keep people there once they arrive. Live music, food and drink helped facilitate a small crowd, but unless there is a real circus, people seem to get bored and move on to other potential entertainment. Contrary to my assumption, people didn’t get to know each other over an unusual art installation. Groups of friends stayed among themselves, and singles or pairs

came briefly, sat at the edge and then soon left. Perhaps offering free food and drink would have engendered an obligation to stay longer, perhaps also facilitating conversation. Now I see the significance of free beverages at art openings. The problem is that most activity was dispersed around the surrounding edges of the plaza. Gathering a critical mass would be a daunting task in any type of event at Steinplatz.

It was a large event and perhaps too much for two people to organize, unless they are doing it full-time. That being said, now that I know what to expect, I would like to do it again, implementing the improvements I mention here: reworking the art pieces to become more visible, having more control over crucial elements, contacting outside vendors earlier and promoting the event more strategically.

14. Conclusion

Through a historical analysis and public art intervention, I have investigated why Steinplatz does not claim an identity. When it was designed, there was very little traffic on Hardenbergstr and the surrounding streets. The traffic situation has changed to such an extent that it disturbs the peace on the plaza. But perhaps due to a desire to preserve everything historic, there has always been resistance to updating the plaza.

Although Charlottenburg started experiencing gentrification in the 1980s, the plaza was not renovated until 2018. Since this renovation, all temporary efforts to give the plaza a sense of identity for the neighborhood, in my opinion, have not solved the long-standing problems, and the present condition doesn't do justice to the renowned Steinplatz. Through my artistic intervention, I have tried to redesign Steinplatz as an interactive place for the public and in doing so, hopefully awakened the imagination of the residents and the interest of the authorities to reexamine the potential of this central location.

As discussed in detail in this paper, my recommendations are the following:

1. to provide an acoustical and visual barrier of plants along Hardenbergstr. (Sec. 3)
2. to facilitate entry to and exit from the space, (Sec. 3)
3. to install discrete illumination along the edges of the plaza to invite visitors in the evening (Sec. 9)
4. to commission art on the plaza in a more permanent form - perhaps a sculpture on the grass, perhaps changing exhibitions in conjunction with the neighboring University of Arts. (Sec. 3)

Ilya Kabakov describes the task of creating public art quite succinctly:

“The artist has the position of a medium who not so much dominates and terrorizes the place in which he finds himself, but rather listens to it attentively, or, it is better to say, is attuned to the full perception of that voice, that sound, that music, which is supposed to resound in this place. This music, this sound, these voices are especially clearly heard in those places where the cultural layers are very dense, where deep levels of a cultural past exist. The artist tunes his internal hearing to those voices that constantly - and if you listen to them with strained attention then they are very loud - resound in each place where a public project is proposed....The artistic project turns out to be not something delivered and cut into, inserted into an alien environment, but just the opposite: this environment somehow engenders and forms the very image which is already rushing about in the air, that is already presupposed here, that is anticipated. The artist-medium only hears this sound, this expectation and brings it to fruition...not so much for the very facts no matter how important they might be historically, but more so for the aura of the place that has been shaped here by the past centuries.”⁴⁷

47 Kabakov, Ilya, *Public Art*, p. 288

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