

## Popular Culture and Urban Creativity in Helsinki and Berlin

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### 1. Introduction

*‘Paris is a meeting place, swarming with talent, for all the forceful vigorous young men who spring up like wild seedlings in French soil. They haven’t a roof over their heads, but they are equal to anything and set on making their fortune. Your humble servant was just such a young man in his time and I have known some others.’ (Honoré de Balzac: ‘La Cousine Bette’, 1846)*

‘La Cousine Bette’ is part of the enormous Comedie Humaine, the series of novels written by Honoré de Balzac about France in the restoration period (1815 – 1848).

This short quote reveals, in a powerful way, the main aspects of what we refer to as creativity, and how it intertwines with the city.

Balzac is a master in digging into the spatial and social components which built the 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris (see: Harvey 2003 about the fetish, p. 54). His work is still a useful instrument in understanding the city and this example confirms it vividly; the French writer is able in a few lines to describe the elements which are the essential features of a ‘creative city’ and of its magnetic power.

To be truly innovative, a city must be a ‘meeting place’, where it becomes easy to encounter other ‘young men’ and women, with the same dreams, expectations or projects and with the same determination to pursue them. Innovation is a social process, which often relies on a certain level of precariousness and instability, both socially and spatially, on the side of the actors involved (‘equal to anything’) and on the side of the physical built environment (‘They haven’t a roof over their head’). A ‘nothing to lose’ factor allows artists to concentrate on their activity. This is true if we consider that the ability to succeed is often bound to the ‘coolness’ in facing poverty, unusual living conditions and other impediments, which become incentives, when used as materials for the artistic production. The romanticism connected to the *bohemia*, is still nowadays an important factor of attraction. Bohemian districts are used by sociologists as case studies, are underlined in guidebooks as tourist attractions and are identified by planners and politicians as ‘cultural districts’.

At the same time, it is important to consider that the above quoted text is contained in a novel, a work of art. As such, it is a representation, a simplified and abstract image of an urban process. It fixes itself on the imaginary of the readers according to its aesthetical values, shaping a way to perceive and conceive the urban experience.

In this paper, I would like to analyse the importance of culture, and popular culture in particular, within the creative shaping of cities. The first chapter will deal with urban planning and representation, stating their role as actors shaping the urban creative processes. The second chapter will introduce popular culture and popular music in particular, as basic factors in the contemporary representation and regeneration of cities. The case studies described in this chapter are taken from Helsinki and Berlin. The conclusions will try to generalize some aspects of the comparison between the two considered cities.

## **2. Technological innovation, creative cities and culture**

To begin this analysis, it is important to refer to the two urban dimensions, which character the urban studies discourse: representation and planning. Representation refers to the way a city's image is reproduced, consumed and circulated, while planning addresses the way a city is physically arranged. The first 'soft' level works on the imaginary dimension of a city, on the way a city is perceived, abstracted, thought of, dreamt, seen, heard, and its main actors are artists, cultural promoters and all kind of people involved in the production of images and texts (see: Bottà, 2006a).

The second 'hard' level, the planning one, is much more concerned with the materiality of a city, with its physical dimension made of concrete, wood, steel, glass, asphalt and with the way the shaping or, in case of a post-industrial environment, regenerating of these elements can provide new ways of living, working, and experiencing. The main actors in urban planning and regeneration are of course city officials, architects and planners (see: Hall, 1988).

According to my hypotheses, the relation between these two dimensions of the urban studies discourse can be of three different kinds.

First of all the planning level can be seen as structural and the 'aesthetic response' of representation as a 'superstructure' reacting in accordance to the interventions of the above-mentioned actors. This would mean that a physical intervention on the city built environment always lies at the basis of cultural life and creativity. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean that a successful regeneration project always imply a positive representation.

A second kind of relationship could be the mutual shaping and determining of each other, where representation and planning are a single bundle, a unique 'urbanity' complex.

The third typology, would see representation, the 'image' of a city, symbolically determining its physical shape, as if all material actors on the city's built environment would have a same image in their mind and a same 'script' they would have to play out.

Some authors have tried to achieve a deeper understanding of the modern city and of its innovative power through the analysis of this relation.

For example, Walter Benjamin, in 'The Arcade Project' (1983) examines the impact of iron on the 19th century architecture. The scholar claims that the considered material has been used widely in the construction of arcades, railway stations and exhibition centres, all buildings with 'transitorischen Zwecken' (transitory functions, Benjamin, 1983, p. 46). *Transitorisch* refers not to the above-mentioned buildings *per se*; in fact, their architectural features are defined and apt at persisting in time. It refers to the way the mass uses and perceives them. They are places with transitory tasks, both on a spatial and temporal level. They are places we pass/move through and where we not dwell, besides they are places where we are for a determined period or where we wait. Movement is projected into modern architecture; it responds to an aesthetical need for mobility and becomes the distinctive factor of modern life in its most common manifestations (tourism, shopping, car-riding...).

Marshall Berman in 'Everything that is solid melts into air' (1982) also suggests a link between the factual construction of boulevards in Paris and prospects in Saint Petersburg and the modern experience of 'meeting the other', which in the same period becomes central in the literary work of Dostojewski and Puskin. The street is the place where the subject encounters the various social forces; it represents the showcase of modernity, the place where social classes interact, where strangers bump into each other and where riots and political rallies take place.

Another relevant contribution is 'Flesh and Stone' (1994) by Richard Sennet. The book systematizes the links between urban innovations, in the architectural and planning dimensions, to new understandings of the body and of its functions. For example, the discovering of the blood circulation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century influences a new metaphorisation of the city as a pulsing entity and of upwards mobility as a source of urban vitality.

David Harvey in 'Paris Capital of the XIX Century' (2003) links Balzac's *comédie humaine* to Haussmann modernisation of the French capital. The work of Balzac helps understanding the inscription of moral order in the spatial and social dimension of the urban texture. The literary representation of Paris 'peels away the fetishism' from the newly built urban façade and reveals the emptiness of bourgeois values.

In these books, regeneration on one side and representation on the other are read as forces collaborating to the construction of a myth. According to this myth, the modern city

represents a 'machine', a powerful mechanism of innovation. Modernity symbolizes a radical break from the past, a new beginning which will be able to spread out of the cities and influence all mankind. The main force behind these processes is technology, which will remain a constant factor of city innovation and competition for the most part of the 20th century.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a deep reformulating of the forces behind urban success. Firstly, production started moving away from the city, often leaving factories and warehouses empty and unused for longer periods. This phenomenon projected a new image of the city as something desolate and not vital. Secondly, the political role of certain cities and their centrality within national frameworks began to be affected by globalisation and by the consequent supranational mobilization of people, goods and information. New narratives began influencing the representation and regeneration of cities, whereas creativity substituted the technological myth. Creativity is bound to the re-deciphering of urbanity through new social and economical processes. For example Sharon Zukin (1992) identified the emerging role of symbolic economy, whereas economy nurtures itself on symbols, provided by culture (food, art, design, fashion). At the same time, the 'creative class' concept, developed by Richard Florida in his best seller 'The Rise of the Creative Class', mined, although in a questionable way, the traditional notion of society (Florida, 2003).

There are two main narratives shaping the creative city discourse. The first is the one conceived in key books like Landry's 'The Creative City' (2000) and the above mentioned Florida's 'The Rise of the Creative Class'. These volumes aim to become toolkits for municipalities to boost local creativity and help succeeding in the world competition. They aspire to be adopted as city officials' manuals to attire the mobilized forces of creative talented young men and the lately rediscovered city tourists, besides creating new work places. They want to succeed, in doing so, through the adoption of all possible cultural manifestations (from ice sculptures in Lapland to street children training in Addis Ababa) as boosting factors.

A second narrative, developed by Peter Hall (1988, 1998, 1999) is more concerned with the historical continuities in the development of cities. Hall distinguishes 'cultural/intellectual', 'technological/productive' and 'technological/organizational' cities, describing the main features of each typology, naming examples from the world's history and quoting their geographical and political positioning. Within the 'technological/productive' typology, he identifies 'creative-innovative cities', referring specifically to the birth of cultural industries and mass culture in the US of the 1950s. He identifies Hollywood (for the film industry) and Memphis (for the music industry).

On the other hand, in reference to ‘cultural/intellectual’ cities, the author affirms that (they) ‘are not likely to be stable or comfortable places; but they must not have surrendered to total disorder either. Rather, almost invariably, they are places in which the established order is under prolonged challenge by the new creative groups, whether or not that challenge takes an explicitly political form’ (Hall in: Verwijnen & Lehtovuori, 1999). With this example (which is strikingly close to Balzac’s quote at the beginning of this article), Hall unfolds a very important aspect of urban creativity, i.e. the people involvement. In fact, in the view of many scholars concerned with popular culture, people are not only passively consuming goods, as ‘mass’, they are also creatively determining the production and circulation of culture (Chambers, 1986; Fiske, 1989a, b) and shaping accordingly their view of the city.

In reference to the future, Hall states the fact that the three typologies he identified are going to melt more and more into each other and underlines the fact that the growth drivers of a city should be identified in the artistic and intellectual creativity and in technological innovativeness. My claim is that, today, a ‘creative city’ is the result of combining Hall’s ‘creative-innovative’ city, with its stress on the mass production and the ‘creative-cultural’ with its stress on the presence of ‘new creative groups’ challenging the industry.

Lately, artistic and intellectual creativity has become crucial in the ‘construction’ of cities on the global level and the representation conveyed by popular forms of culture has been a basic element of the urban image. The ‘sense of place’ conveyed by cultural representations of urbanity has been increasingly influential also to the regeneration of cities. The balance between representation and regeneration of place seems to be more and more pending on the former, following a narrative of visual primacy, which has been typical of the post-modern debate for decades. In my opinion, the investigation of the logics and mechanisms of popular culture, which Hall already found crucial, could lead to a higher understanding of the real mechanisms behind urban processes, affecting the European cities right now. The exploration of popular music seems to be most fitting for this kind of analysis.

### **3. The role of popular music in the representation and regeneration of cities**

The production, circulation and consumption of cultural commodities, and popular culture in particular, has always found place in cities (Chambers, 1986). Nowadays this has emerged as crucial because of the spread of supranational economies, where cities work as ‘nodes’ in the global flow of people, goods and information. ‘Creativity’ has been particularly appealing, both to politicians and academics, as an instrument to assert cities of a new economical and social development. Nevertheless, the cultural mechanisms behind this concept have been often misunderstood or superficially adopted. Under these circumstances, the study of the

production of popular culture and its entwining with both city planning and place representation, can be illuminating.

In much of the creative city literature (in particular: Landry, 2000, p. 17; Florida, 2002, p. 228 - 229), pop music and the music industry in general are ornamental, although their lucrative power and their role in national exports (especially in USA, UK and Sweden) are unquestionable. In the above-mentioned books, music becomes a mere instrument to detect the 'image' of a city (meaning here its *folklore*), but there is little consideration about the importance of the pop music industry in the regeneration and representation of the urban tissue. Pop music is able to implement places in a credible authentic way, forming new modalities to conceive and perceive them. A place can manifest itself in three distinctive ways in pop music products: first as a 'textscape' in the lyrics and titles of songs. Secondly, as a 'soundscape', it shapes a band distinctive sound, for example in the use of local music or typical city sounds and noises. Thirdly, as a 'landscape' it appears in a band's visual elements (scenography, CD covers, posters, clothes, photo shootings, videos...). All three aspects often appear together and their medial circulation deeply influences the listeners' place perception. Places mentioned in songs, or used in CD covers acquire a mythical status; they attire thousands of fans and tourists and often determine the reputation of a city as a whole. Turning to the regeneration level, we must note that music in itself is ethereal, but its production, circulation and fruition rely on material factors (recording studios, record shops, concert halls, distribution retails...), located in cities. For example, a significant part of contemporary urban regeneration is bond to the reconverting of empty industrial premises into live venues and concert halls.

#### *a. Helsinki*

Helsinki has been, since the 1990s, a model of technological and informational innovation, based, for example, on the achievements of Nokia (see: Bell & Hietala, 2002). Lately, this success has also brought forward the need for a cultural image of the city. The city officials took this at heart and were able in a few years to set a whole range of new and creative activities. Events like the Night of the Arts (since 1989) and the European City of Culture 2000, the Total and later Global Balalaika Show (1993 – 2003) have shaped a new understanding of culture in the city (see: Cantell, 1999). At the same time, Helsinki-based designers (Artek, Iittala, Marimekko), rock-bands (HIM, Nightwish, Lordi...) and film directors (Aki and Mika Kaurismäki), have contributed enormously to the popularity of the Finnish capital on the global market.

The shift in the city perception could be also analyzed in the way the city was represented in popular music, on the three identified levels of urban representation: textscape, landscape and soundscape.

An example of a poignant Helsinki textscape could be the song ‘Helsinki’ (from ‘Vapaaherran elämää’, 1996) by the band Ultra Bra, who gained a huge national popularity in the 1990s, before splitting in 2001.

### **Helsinki**

*ennen Bulevardin päässä  
tuoksui maltaalta  
tulín polkupyörällä  
kolera-altaalta  
nyt Bulevardin päässä  
on telakka  
jossa rakennetaan suuria laivoja  
ne viedään Karibialle risteilemään  
mutta minä en lähde mukaan*

*kaupunki on muuttunut mutta  
ei järin paljon  
muistamme sen värin  
joka oli harmaampi  
silloin ei ollut yhtään  
euroopalaista vaateliikettä  
olutta oli vain ruokailijoille  
koko paikka muistutti  
Neuvostoliittoa*

*ennen Mannerheimintietä  
ajoi viitonen  
silloin ilma oli enemmän  
lyijypitoinen  
nyt Mannerheimintiellä  
on varikko  
jossa varastoidaan vanhoja vaunuja  
uudet vaunut Italiasta tuodaan  
niihin minä lähdän mukaan*

*At the head of Bulevardi before  
it smelled of malt  
I came by bike  
from the kolera pool  
now at the head of Bulevardi  
is a dockyard  
where big ships are being built  
they're being taken for an excursion to the  
Caribbean  
but I'm not going along*

*the city has changed but  
not too much  
we remember the colour  
which was greyer  
at that time there were no  
European clothes stores  
beer was only for the eaters  
the whole place reminded  
of the Soviet Union*

*Earlier on Mannerheimintie  
drove a fiver  
the air, then, was more  
lead containing  
now on Mannerheimintie  
is a depot  
where old carriages are stored  
the new carriages from Italy are brought  
I'm going along in them*

The song refers directly to two significant streets: Bulevardi and Mannerheimintie, besides it describes Helsinki on two temporal levels: the city of the author's childhood and the city of the 1990s, stating its huge development, along the lines of time, memory and melancholy. It is very interesting also to realize that ‘modernisation’ of Helsinki occurs, in the song, in reference to elements of mass culture: the European (sic!) clothes stores and the licensing laws. Both elements, fashion and nightlife (signified by the alcohol consumption) are deeply connected to the experiencing of popular music and to how they were perceived as engines of ‘creative urbanity’.

The jazz band ‘Five Corners Quintet’ uses Helsinki landscape in a very convincing way. To begin with, the ‘Five Corner’, *Viiskulma*, inspiring their name, is a real place and has always detained a certain meaning for the Helsinki citizens. It is a node in the district of Punavuori,

where several streets depart; three record shops are located in the node and many other clubs and bars are in short distance from it. The place has a cinematic aura, which could inspire comparisons with similar corners in Manhattan or Montmartre. Those are the New York and Paris districts where, in the 1950s, a particular kind of jazz music was born. The band, which iconographically and stylistically refers to that era and to those places, used a black and white photograph of the Viiskulma, on the centre fold of its first album 'Chasin' the Jazz gone by' (2005). Nevertheless on the back cover they distance themselves ironically from its evocations, by stating that 'looking at the photo on the centrefold of this record, you'd be forgiven to think that Five Corners in Helsinki is comprised of Flatiron buildings, like tiny versions of the famous one at Broadway and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in New York. That is not the case. The camera betrays the eye and turns the chabby classicist buildings into cinemascope variety. It is after all a long way from Five Corners to Manhattan, in more ways than one...'. Besides, the birth of the music video and the spread of its popularity through dedicated TV channels (MTV, The Voice...) also corroborated the use of urbanity as landscape, often using creatively the utmost unusual settings. For example, the single 'Freestyler' by the hip-hop act Bomfunk MC's, achieved an enormous success in 2000, because of its video, set in the Helsinki Metro Line (the Hakaniemi station in particular). The video portrayed Helsinki as a city of the future, where the latest technologies, street fashion and post-modern urban settings were the rule. The often-despised metro would have never been the same again. Who would have told that the historically loaded Senate Square would have been brought into the international pop music landscape by the techno artists Darude and his hit-single "Sandstorm"?

The soundscape of Helsinki is a much more difficult issue to relate to. A 'Helsinki sound', inspired by a certain local music tradition or by certain typical city sounds and noises, is traceable in the use of *slangi* or in the use of music styles which are conventionally linked to urbanity (as in the case of hip-hop and electronic music). Many of its districts have been sung in picturesque and bohemian ways, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see, for example, the compilation: *Suoraan Helsingistä ja 20 muuta kappaletta stadia*, Warner Music Finland, 1998) anyway from the 'soundscape' point of view, it is more fruitful to refer to a certain *Finnish* sound, on a national level, but it is more difficult to identify local styles or genres. Turning to the regenerational level, in Helsinki, the two biggest live music venues, *Kaapelitehdas* (cable factory) and *Nosturi* (crane) keep faith, in their name and in their design, to their previous function, as places of the shipyard industry.

Kaapelitehdas is Finland's largest centre for arts, culture and creativity and covers over 50000 m<sup>2</sup>. As reported by Lethovuori (1999), in 1989, a community of artists occupied it, as Nokia



Oy began to lease premises it no longer needed. The management of the building and the ownership of the land were transferred to the City of Helsinki. The community gathered rather spontaneously and decided to voice out their discontent, as the planning of the Ruoholahti residential area wanted to empty and completely regenerate the factory. The Pro Kaapeli association succeeded in offering an alternative plan, which secured the area and its artistic purposes. Nowadays there are about 100 artists and 70 bands working and rehearsing at the Cable Factory, along other institutions, schools and clubs. Its biggest hall, the Marine Cable Hall is widely used for live concerts and festivals.

The history of *Nosturi* is quite different, as the venue spread out of the experience of *Lepakko*. *Lepakko*, a former hostel for homeless alcoholics, became in 1979 the first squat of Finland, although negotiated with the city through the association Elmu. It could be considered the cradle of the punk movement in the country, besides it was the premise where the first commercial radio (Radio City) started broadcasting in 1985. *Lepakko* offered rehearsal spaces and stage for the first Finnish independent bands like Shadowplay and Kingston Wall. When the place was forcedly closed in 1999 (owing to the fact that, this time, Nokia *bought* the area) some of the people involved had the chance to open *Nosturi* in a shipyard hall near the sea in Punavuori, a central area. *Nosturi* works mainly as a concert hall, but also contains rehearsal spaces for bands.

Both experiences are quite young and haven't yet attained any mythical status in the Helsinki imaginary and in popular culture representation as *Lepakko*, for example, succeeded in doing; it is also very difficult to measure their achievements in boosting local creativity, if not on the level of consumption only.

Creative use of spaces of popular consumption can be found in other consolidated institutions like the rock club *Tavastia* and *Vanha Ylioppilastalo* (old student house). Both buildings are bonded to student unions and to the centenarian creative self-organization of Helsinki university life.

*Tavastia* has been widely represented as landscape (in hundreds of bands live photos) and textscape (to quote one example: 'Tavastia Rock' by Paavo Raittinen) and still nowadays, it is the most well known club in the country. This is confirmed, for example, in the mythical status the place has, in the film 'Pitkä kuuma kesä' (Perttu Leppä, 1999). The film, set in the 1980s, portrays the efforts of a band from Joensuu, to get the chance to play there.

*Vanha* is a very peculiar place, set in the very centre of the city, surrounded by historical highly private spaces with the highest price per square metre in Finland. It was put in Student Association's hands in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the area was somehow at the fringes of the city. It offers a café, a concert hall, stages, ball rooms open to the public. Besides a wide

range of University related groups and associations meet there and the *Ylioppilasteatteri* (the Student Theatre) is located in close proximity. The whole place represents an enormous creative cluster, set right in the centre of Helsinki, although mostly limited to students. These examples show some continuity in the way popular culture was able to be implemented physically into Helsinki: the citizens (as artists or students...) were always able to collaborate in one way or the other with the city officials.

### *b. Berlin*

Berlin in the 1990s represented an enormous laboratory for city gazers. When the interrupted routes, between the two halves of the city, were reconnected, old 'ghosts' and new imageries appeared and contributed enormously to the worldwide cultural revival of the city.

Popular music and Berlin have a complex interaction, based on political history of the city and on its tradition of alternative scenes and subcultures. Concentrating on the period after the reunification (1989), it is useful to note how the image of the city was rebuilt fast, on a fictional 'world city' narrative. This narrative saw Berlin as a city-to-be of services, businesses and florid global economy exchanges, symbolized by the post-modern architectures of Potsdamer Platz, where multinational concerns like Daimler Benz and Sony decided to locate their headquarters. The Friedrichstrasse, formerly divided by the Wall at the infamous Checkpoint Charlie, was redesigned as a shopping and business street with huge media centres (*Mosse-Zentrum*), shopping malls (*Galeries Lafayette*) and expensive office spaces, many of which are still vacant.

At the same time, the grass-root tradition, based on the combination of popular culture with political elements, kept on addressing issues related to the city and its image, often de-structuring or distorting the official narrative.

In relation to popular music, it is possible to affirm that the use of Berlin as a landscape has been widespread since the 1970s. The wall (its west side) represented not only a place to be inscribed and sprayed, but also something perfectly recognizable, as symbol of the cold war, but most significantly of a certain urban angst. The wall was adopted internationally by a series of bands. It constellates the textscape of bands of the 1970s, ranging from David Bowie ('Heroes') to Sex Pistols ('Holidays in the sun') and Lou Reed ('Berlin'). As a landscape, it is present on the cover of U2's 'Achtung baby' (1991). On a local level, bands such as Ton Steine Scherben, involved themselves not only in the aesthetic representation of city elements, but also affirmed the right to squat them for collective cultural use, especially in relation to Kreuzberg ('Rauch-Haus-Song' is dedicated to the former *Betanien* hospital illegal squatting). Other bands, especially the ones bond to the *Neue Deutsche Welle* movement tried to give a

positive image of the city. The band Ideal wrote 'Ich steh' auf Berlin' (I like/ support Berlin) offering a positive and excited image of the city.

The soundscape of Berlin has always been deeply bond to the industrial sound, to the extreme use of urban noises. The West Berlin based Einstürzende Neubauten ('imploding buildings') were one of the first bands to implement the noises of pneumatic hammers and other construction (and destruction) tools into their music and this tendency went on to develop into techno music, whose local importance is well-known.

It is self-evident that, after 1989, such a rich tradition of popular music representation of the city couldn't be cancelled in name of an unauthentic narrative about a vague new economy related 'world city'. Einstürzende Neubauten, for example, addressed directly Potsdamer Platz in 'Die Befindlichkeit des Landes' (in the album 'Silence is sexy' 2000).

***Die Befindlichkeit des Landes***

*Über dem Narbengelände  
das langsam verschwindet  
so nur Phantomschmerz bleibt  
Es dringt kaum hörbar ein fieses Lachen  
aus der roten Info-Box  
und in den Gräbern wird leise rotiert  
Alles nur künftige Ruinen  
Material für die nächste Schicht  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
Melancholia, mon cher  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
schwebt über der neuen Stadt  
und über dem Land  
Über den Schaltzentralen  
Über dem Stoppelfeld aus Beton  
Über den heimlichen Bunkeranlagen  
die nicht wegzukriegen sind  
Marlene go home!  
auch über dem Marlene-Dietrich-Platz  
die neuen Tempel haben schon Risse  
künftige Ruinen  
einst wächst Gras auch über diese Stadt  
über ihrer letzten Schicht  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
Melancholia, mon cher  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
schwebt über der neuen Stadt  
und über dem Land  
Im zerschnittenen Himmel  
von den Jets zur Übung zerflogen  
hängt sie mit ausgebreiteten Schwingen  
ohne Schlaf, und starren Blicks  
in Richtung Trümmer  
hinter ihr die Zukunft aufgetürmt  
steigt sie langsam immer höher  
übersieht letztendlich das ganze Land  
Was ist die Befindlichkeit des Landes?  
Was ist die Befindlichkeit des Landes?  
Was ist die Befindlichkeit des Landes?  
Was ist die Befindlichkeit des Landes?*

***The Lay of the Land***

*Across the scarfaced terrain  
slowly disappearing  
only phantom pain remains  
Scarcely audible foul laughter seeps out  
from the red Info Box  
making some turn quietly in their graves  
Nothing but future ruins  
material for the next layer  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
Melancholia, mon cher,  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
floats over the new city  
and over the land  
Over the control centres  
over the stubble fields of concrete  
over the secret net of bunkers  
refusing to be wiped out  
Marlene go home!  
also over the Marlene-Dietrich-Platz  
The new temples are already cracked  
future ruins  
one day grass will also grow over the city  
over its final layer  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
Melancholia, mon cher,  
Mela, Mela, Mela, Mela, Melancholia  
floats over the new city  
and over the land  
In the lacerated sky  
flown to bits by the jets rehearsing  
she hangs with widespread wings  
sleepless and with frozen gaze  
pointed at rubble  
behind her the future piling up  
slowly she flies higher and higher  
at last surveys the entire land  
What is the lay of the land?  
What is the lay of the land?  
What is the lay of the land?  
What is the lay of the land?*

The song portrays the square as a future ruin, as nothing else than another lay of the city, to be covered by nature. Berlin is a city whose ruins, destroyed, hidden or empty spaces are continuously hunting it, as ghosts (see: Ladd, 1997). The bunkers the song refers to are the ones where Hitler hid until his suicide and are in close physical proximity to the square. Although the song addresses directly some new issues related to the reunified city, its gloomy tone maintains some of the features, typical of the previous west Berlin tradition.

The 1990s saw new and fresh popular culture experimentations developing out of the meeting of the West Berlin subcultural tradition (located in the district Kreuzberg) with the East Berlin dissident one (located in Prenzlauer Berg) and with the flow of national and international people, who wanted to profit of the unique cityscape, provided by forty years of inner city division (Krüger, 1998). One good example of this ‘mixture’ could be the *spoken word* scene, very active since the beginning of the 1990s. In this case, we cannot talk about popular music, but of popular literature, imitating in many aspects the strategies adopted by popular music. A *spoken word* event works, on many levels, as a live concert: writers organize themselves in groups (bands) and read their texts on a stage, expecting the lively response of the public. The clubs, where poetry slams are organized, are usually the same where pop music is performed (among others: *Maria am Ostbahnhof* and *Bastard*). Besides, it is very common for these authors to publish their texts on cds, or, as mp3 files on the internet, rather than in paper format. Often texts report individual and stranded everyday experiences of the city, using the same textscape strategies, found in music. Spoken word literature has become a market on its own terms, with its own distributions, publishing companies, event agencies and audience, whose centre, in the German-speaking world, is Berlin. The media and the cultural industries discovered the opportunity to work with some of its performers; among them, the most well known is the German-Russian Vladimir Kaminer, author of the international bestseller ‘Russendisko’ (2000). Kaminer has dealt constantly, through different channels (written literature, pop music, spoken word) with its own local urbanity, intervening directly on the city with the re-opening of Cafe Burger (See: Bottà, 2006b).

The regeneration of East Berlin and of Prenzlauer Berg in particular, was based on one side on the fast emigration of many original dwellers and on the vacancies of cheap flats, which were, in the beginning, simply squatted (Levin, 2004; Bottà, 2006b). Besides, the district offered also long abandoned buildings (former factories, warehouses, but also abandoned restaurants, cafés and theatres) to be transformed more or less legally into clubs, restaurants, pubs, design shops, record shops, tattoo studios, second hand clothes shops and bars.

The biggest regenerations, started in Prenzlauer Berg, deal with the opening of spaces of consumption, where the industry is challenged from the creative grass-root. As in Helsinki

many regenerated projects were connected to the marine industry and to the shipyard, in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg we meet many former beer factories. Two of them are the Schönhauser Allee located *Pfefferberg* and *Kulturbrauerei* which nowadays gather various clubs, concert venues, bars, art galleries and studios.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Following these examples, we could conclude that the physical evidence of popular music in particular and popular culture in general has turned into one of the key factors of a city's success.

This means that the so-called 'mass culture' has overgrown the formal and institutionalised 'high culture', typical of all European capitals until the 1980s. This culture roamed in 'city theatres', 'national galleries', 'royal ballets'; institutions constellating the city centres, highly subsidized by the city councils and distant, at least formally, from any direct economical issue.

Nonetheless, the formal and external adoption of the 'mass culture' by the municipality is not sufficient. The innovative and creative cultural forces, existing within every city, should be constantly fuelled and their logics should be understood within their particular socio-spatial context, with authenticity playing a major role.

What is happening in Helsinki and Berlin is deeply rooted in the cultural history of both cities and their image, both on an internal and external level, is more and more shaped by representations and regenerations, which rely on the involvement of popular culture.

One big difference lies in the active intervention of the municipality in Helsinki, which often turn into a 'top-down' strategy, as in the case of the Kaapelitehdas. The Finnish capital, as specified before, profited of a period of floridity, in connection with the boom of information economy. As we saw in the analysis of Kaapelitehdas and Lepakko, Nokia was directly involved, as donator in the former and expropriator in the latter.

Berlin relies completely on its own grass-roots, which, on the other hand, could fall prey of the private sector and of business related exploitations, as described by Sharon Zukin in relation to New York (1992). Besides, the bottomless financial bankruptcy of the city seems to be two folded in affecting the city cultural activities. One side it leaves and enormous autonomy and freedom for the grass-roots to use abandoned or waiting-to-be renovated buildings. On the other side it lacks the strength to develop a winning cultural strategy, exploiting positively the vivacity of its variegated cultural activities. The regeneration of buildings seems to be something temporary, whereas private construction companies often exploit the scene in creating a certain 'aura' to certain places, which are then renovated in

name of gentrification and sold on the free market. Still nowadays, the presence in the former East of temporary facilities, dedicated to the fruition of popular culture is huge.

In both cities it is impossible to talk about real creative clusters in relation to popular music although new and successful bands are continuously produced by both. Nevertheless it is possible to talk about creative milieus, as places that contain 'the necessary preconditions in terms of 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructure to generate a flow of ideas and inventions' (Landry, 2000, p. 133).

The results, in Helsinki, are aimed at the global market, often branding them internationally as Finnish. In reference to Berlin, bands and music styles are widely marketed and made recognizable also internationally as local (for example, in the case of the Morr electronic record label).

In both cases, the national level must be considered. Berlin competes, also on the music market, with Cologne, Hamburg, Düsseldorf and other German cities.

Helsinki represents the centre of the Finnish record industry: majors, the greater part of independent labels, the best venues, recording studios and record shops are located there; bands aspiring for success move there. In the last years, the city municipality has had a significant role in the promotion of urban festivals and events, often celebrating the global success of the previously mentioned bands or bringing international artists to perform in Finland, in name of 'urban culture'. Helsinki doesn't fear any local competition, although nowadays, especially after the 'Europeans city of culture' bid 2011 (which will see all Finnish cities, but Helsinki competing) and the organisation of the Eurovision Song Contest 2007, the situation may change.

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