Interview with Friederike Landau (FL)

Interviewer: Maíra Endo (ME)

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Presential, public space (Berlim), duração de cerca de 90 minutos

About Friederike Landau: Dr. Friederike Landau is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Department of Geography at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. Her research interests revolve around urban political and spatial theory, as well as modes of political mobilization and institutional critique in the cultural field (esp. artist-led activism and museums). In 2019, her book *Agonistic Articulations in the 'Creative' City – On New Actors and Activism in Berlin's Cultural Politics* was published with Routledge (Political Sociology). Website: www.friederikelandau.com

ME: Would you tell me a little bit about how did you get into such an interdisciplinary research field?

FL: For me, it has something to do with the very interdisciplinary nature of my own background, which also made me do such an interdisciplinary PhD project[1]. I started out studying political science and then moved on to political philosophy, I was interested in feminist philosophy. When I came to Berlin, I didn't continue in academia at first, but I started working fulltime in a strategy consulting agency. We accompanied the public sector and private companies in their networking with the cultural field. And that was also my entry point into the field, I was all new to the city, and I was working in this amazing consultancy because we were touring all over the city, getting to go to all different kinds of cultural institutions and events. And very early on, ((laugh)) I realized how disputed some artists are, there was often a lot of frustration or anger towards the cultural administration. And then, in 2013, this new artist-led group was always on the radar, sending emails and on Facebook, and they were organizing a protest. And that later turned out to be the case study of my PhD.

ME: That's the KFS, right?

FL: Yes, that's the Koalition der Freien Szene (Coalition of the Independent Scene), right. And, in the beginning, I didn't even want to study them because I felt: "Oh, it's just a lobby organization". And then, what the dissertation turned out to be is a question of exploring new modes of political participation and representation with an interdisciplinary drawing on urban sociology and political theory. So, I'm trained as a political scientist or philosopher, I'm now in sociology, but it's also a geographic question to how do artists change the spatiality of the city with the interdisciplinary perspective. It can be hard to find a place in academia because some people are like: "We don't know you, you haven't published in our journals for the last 10 years" and I would think: "I know, but I have an interesting case study here". But that's not how some parts of academia think. But for my project, I think it was good because I was bringing in so many different literatures and thinkers. And I also presented the work at conferences where a lot of people were positively surprised and appreciated the holisitic approach.

[1] https://www.routledge.com/Agonistic-Articulations-in-the-Creative-City-On-New-Actors-and-Activism/Landau/p/book/9781138364639

ME: Do you have any other occupations besides being a researcher?

FL: Yes, I've been teaching last year at the University of Applied Sciences in Erfurt, in the Urban Planning Department, moving to look at people in the city first, because urban planners care a lot about infrastructures and the built environment. I was a bit exotic in that department, but it was really interesting because I could design my own courses. So that's what I've been doing and I'll be teaching again in the fall. And, after my PhD, I was also hired for a consultancy with the Berlin Cultural Senate. Because I had been on people's radar, interviewing people, both with activists from the *Koalition der Freien Szene* and with policymakers who were part of the process of the city tax distribution.[2] So, some of the administrators knew that there was an academic interest in this collaborative policy-making processes and they asked me, after I finished my PhD, whether I would temporarily accompany one of their processes of change as a sort of academic advisor.

ME: And how was that?

FL: It's very interesting because, obviously, when you're still researching and trying to accumulate as much information as possible to then analyze the data, it is a different position than being part of trying to change something. Even though I still remained on the relative outside because I was not permanently employed by them. Accordingly, when you're consulting, you necessarily bring in something of your own perspective of what you think needs to be done and what needs to change, right? That's probably to some extent why they hire you, to point out new perspectives. And then, it's interesting to see the temporality of how an administration works. I generally think the administration or bureaucracy is a very exciting place to make societal change, so that's why I was sometimes thinking: "Maybe I should become a bureaucrat, but like a creative and radical one." But throughout the consultancy, I realized that administrative processes work differently than academic ones.

ME: Besides the academic research, and your work with the IFSE (Institute for Strategy Development), in which other contexts do you research?

FL: Besides my dissertation, I've had various collaborative projects. For example, with my one PhD supervisor from Canada, we went to Leipzig together last summer and stayed there for two weeks and we looked at the art space *Spinnerei* and looked at their internal dynamics, how they embed themselves into the urban fabric and how they changed the local cultural politics of Leipzig.[3] Whenever I meet academics who are either theoretically interested in similar phenomena or who have similar case study interests, it just so happens that you join forces to work together for co-authored publications. I've also worked with a colleague who had the same supervisor, so we were kind of brother and sister in academia for that time.[4] And another one who works on Berlin's creative industries.[5] Sometimes, there's rivalry and tension between "culture-culture" and "creative industries culture", so we tried to merge our empirical insights from those two fields to ask: "How do both modes

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[2] https://www.routledge.com/Art-and-the-City-Worlding-the-Discussion-through-a-Critical-Artscape/Luger-Ren/p/book/9781138346437

[3] https://www.academia.edu/38530235/Assessing_the_local_embeddedness_dynamics_of_the_Baumwollspinnerei_cultural_quarter_in_Leipzig_introducing_the_POSES_Star_Framework

[4] https://www.springer.com/de/book/9783658149802

[5] https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9789811315305

of cultural productions, in the narrower sense of the term "production", and creative and cultural industries, in the larger sense of those terms, contribute to making Berlin a creative city?"

ME: I heard Leipzig has a hot local art scene.

FL: Yeah. We saw that there had been little international or English-speaking academic scrutiny of that context, so we were trying to enter this field and introduce the case of Leipzig's *Spinnerei.* It is an interesting case in terms of how to make a creative quarter that spills over into the neighbourhood and into the city to facilitate other cultural initiatives to either locate and settle around it.

ME: Back to Berlin, which are the gaps the independent art scene fills inside the art system today?

FL: Yeah. So, for example, the project spaces, *Projekträume* in German, fulfil a very important gap-filling function between the commercial art market and commercial galleries and public institutions such as museums and collections.[6] Project spaces are like artist-run centres, that's how they call it in North America, with low hierarchies amongst artists, exhibiting in these spaces you also talked about in your book, where young artists or career-wise young artists have a fairly easy way to exhibit and organize exhibitions of their own work. There's a lot of turnover of exhibitions, so that a lot of art gets shown. These project spaces have popped up and also collectivized in 2009 in the network of project spaces called *Netzwerk Freier Berliner Projekträume und -Initiativen* (Berlin Network of Independent Project Spaces and Initiatives). And because they came together and bundled their common precarious situation, they're performing this gap-filling function both towards politics and also for the artists to have more exhibition opportunities, because these spaces are there and scattered all over the city. And towards politics, they raise a voice to say: "We need structural support in the city to keep these infrastructures because that's basically where a lot of Berlin-based artists put on their first shows and have their first public appearance." Project spaces are very important as nourishing ground for artists to take off and maybe make a more commercial career if they want that. But it's a gateway into the art scene. And, the *Netzwerk Freier Berliner Projekträume und -Initiativen* has been very active. They've also joined the *Koalition der Freien Szene* as one of the positions. So the *Koalition der Freien Szene* is transdisciplinary – including jazz, poetry and literature, music, visual arts, performing arts, dance, cultural production and the project spaces. So they joined forces with the whole independent scene, but then they're also more or less specific about a project space having something to do with visual arts or this exhibition format that we know from the visual arts. But it could also have something to do with sound or performance…but the interdisciplinarity question is very tricky for the project spaces because they came up with a definition of what a project space is. So there are four criteria, but there is something like a paradox about defining their own understanding of transdisciplinarity from *within* the visual arts, because if it's only a music space or a dance space, it's not a project space according to their definition.

ME: In Brazil, during the last years, the commercial galleries, fairs and institutions started to reproduce formats and propositions frequently applied by the initiatives of the independent art scene. I heard about this commercial gallery here in Berlin that has a

[6] https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/art-production-beyond-the-art-market/

“lab” and they call it a “project space”. So, how frequently do you think this happens in Berlin?

FL: I mean, within the arts, there are ways of skill-imitation or reproduction. I’m not surprised that a commercial gallery would come up with something like that. I think the more widespread phenomenon in Berlin is that prestigious and standing institutions would reach out to the independent scene to temporarily invite them in, to say: “Hey, let’s do a collaboration with us as the big, solid institution and the prestige.”

ME: And money, right? ((laugh))

FL: Yeah. Well, I mean, they don’t all have money, but they have more money than the independent scene. To invite them in and to produce something together gives the institutions a bit more of an innovative or progressive spin, but, at the same time, it doesn’t really disrupt their regular procedure of production. It’s called *Gastspiel* (Guest Performance), like an invitation that performance collectives would receive to play one piece…

ME: That’s the name of the invitation or…

FL: No, Gastspiel, that’s the format.

ME: Wow, there’s a name for the format?

FL: Yeah. And there’s also money, there’s good money in it. Because that’s something that’s politically being encouraged. Not so much on the city level, but on the federal level. Have you heard of *Hauptstadtkulturfonds* (Capital Cultural funds)? *Hauptstadtkulturfonds* and *Kulturstiftung des Bundes* (German Federal Cultural Foundation) are two federal organizations that have programs where a fixed institution and an independent scene actor can collaborate. So they can apply to the same fund together and get funding…

ME: It’s the Co-financing Funds...is that right?

FL: The *Kofinanzierungsfonds* (Co-financing Funds) goes in that direction. And that’s on the city level of Berlin, and the *Kulturstiftung des Bundes* (German Federal Cultural Foundation) and *Hauptstadtkulturfonds* (Capital Cultural funds) are on the federal level, there’s more money in it. But then, it could also be an institution, like a theatre from Munich and a group from Berlin, or a theatre in Dortmund with a group from Heidelberg.

ME: And these funds (Capital Cultural funds and The German Federal Cultural Foundation) are only for these partnerships between institutions and collectives or groups?

FL: They have different programs, but there’s one module out of many that facilitates or tries to encourage these kinds of collaborations. I think you have to apply together. To say: “Hey, we have a collaboration already”. For example, I have a friend who is part of a feminist performance collective and she just got a grant from the *Kulturstiftung des Bundes* (German Federal Cultural Foundation) to do a project with a theatre in Munich. So she’ll be moving down there, for a few months, they’ll rehearse, they’ll play with the ensemble of the theatre down there. So, she and her colleagues are going to Munich working with the people down there and then, put on their show for, I don’t know, three or four times in Munich and then they can travel with the production to Berlin and show it here.

ME: Did this fund come with the City Tax 15[7]?

FL: No, that's a different fund. It's difficult in Berlin because there are all these different levels of where funding comes from…So, the *Kofinanzierungfonds* (Co-financing Funds) is something that was created in the cultural budget, it came out of the *Koalition der Freien Szene* organizing, because they said: "We need something like this". So, the politicians put it into the budget, but then there are other programs that have a different scope, meaning more money and more time to encourage similar co-productions of the independent scene.

ME: According to the *Netzwerk Freier Berliner Projekträume und -Initiativen* (Berlin Network of Independent Project Spaces and Initiatives), today nearly 50% of all Berlin exhibitions take place in more than 150 project spaces spread by the city. Independent art spaces or project spaces are recognized as environments propitious for experimentation, research, exchange and construction of an effective network. Apart from filling gaps, does the independent art scene have a role to play or a function in Berlin's art system, such as the institutions and galleries? I mean, do you think that the independent scene is only filling gaps or does it really have a proposition, something different that can be considered?

FL: When we were talking about this "filling gaps" function, it sounds like it's a reaction to something, as if it doesn't have its own motivation, that they're just responding to a phenomenon that's already there. But the way I think is that lack always motivates action. You're not satisfied with something, so that's why you go out and do something about it. Why did I do a PhD? Because nobody had done this before, I responded to a lack. So, in that sense, it's not a negative thing to say: "You're filling gaps". But, beyond that, I think that there's an own dynamic of the *Koalition der Freien Szene* because it is more than the sum of its parts. So, yes, they address specific needs and specific problems, and, in that sense, try to fill specific gaps, but also it goes beyond that, to give a voice, or create a voice of the many, many independent producers that haven't been in contact or haven't spoken to each other before. In that sense, I think they unfold a role or function that you couldn't really have known what it was going to be like before they started to talk to each other. In the process of collectivizing, I think they're coming to terms with what their claims are, which is, for example, in the case of the *Koalition der Freien Szene*, to pay more attention to individual producers, and to focus on artistic production rather than presentation. Because a lot of money goes into museums, theatres that present art…And the *Koalition der Freien Szene* really strongly emphasizes that the people who make the art, the living subjects in cities, the bodies who produce art need to be supported. And that's something that hadn't been sufficiently addressed before. I mean, nobody knows the exact number, but if we're looking at 40,000 to 50,000 independent producers from all over Berlin, they're such an important population that keeps this image as a creative city or a hotspot alive. And then, these subjects need to be funded in their own way. That's a unique claim that the independent scene now stands up for themselves. And, obviously, there's funding instruments that give scholarships or that fund studio space, but I think the immensity and importance of artist-producer funding hasn't really resonated with the cultural funding system yet.

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[7] Collaborative policymaking process between Berlin cultural administration and *Koalition der Freien Szene* throughout 2015.

ME: How important is the independent art scene to the artists and other agents, such as curators, researchers, critics and educators, especially regarding the young and emerging ones?

FL: I think the project spaces are very important and in general the political organizations like *Netzwerk Freier Berliner Projekträume und -Initiativen* (Berlin Network of Independent Project Spaces and Initiatives) or *Koalition der Freien Szene*. They are, in the ideal case, gathering spaces for people to meet and for people to dock onto, for new artists to say: "Oh, apparently here is a crowd where I can learn what's going on". It's not like thousands of artists are engaged in these networks, it's often the work of just very few people, but, at the same time, a lot of people know about them. So that, they are place-holders for other people who don't have the time or the energy to get politically engaged, but the fact that *something* exists that does the work, I think satisfies the scene overall or, in a way, pacifies it, because then you have an outlet of your political claims to address when you have something on your mind. And the question you raised with curators is a little tricky because I was just saying that there's somewhat of a tangent between production and presentation, I think it's not clear whether curators are cultural producers or mediators of cultural presentation. So, for example, in the City Tax process, they were giving out scholarships to all different artistic areas, including music, project spaces, visual arts, performing arts. And within the visual arts, there was a controversy whether visual arts grants should only go to producing artists or whether they should also go to curators because curators don't really have their own collective voice or representation in the city. It's a little difficult to state where they fit in.

ME: As well as art researchers, right?

FL: Yeah. That's another claim that has had no material correspondence, to invest in "phase zero" reflecting what artists actually want to do. That's in the loop between the activists and the cultural administration to design a "Fund for Artistic Research", where you can explicitly apply with an idea or a concept that you want to study and you're not bound to produce anything, like an object or outcome; you don't have to promise to create something with it. But, right now, we don't have that.[8]

ME: Do you see any differences between art projects hosted by institutions, commercial galleries and project spaces in terms of processes and results?

FL: I don't want to essentialize institutions to plead them guilty of only being capable of producing this and that kind of art, because that's stupid. Same thing with the independent scene. The independent scene isn't one thing only, right? So they could do super conventional, boring, lame, uninspired, unreflective, uncritical projects just because they are independent. The way they work doesn't necessarily make them critical. But having talked about these parameters that make certain ways of artistic production possible and not others, I do think these parameters condition the way artistic outputs are created. So, if you have a stable space to rehearse in and to construct things and to work with materials or to work with different soundscapes over a longer period of time, I think that's going to affect this kind of artistic result you'll get. Whereas, if you don't have these resources, you're going to have to be more creative in how you think. Do you know what I mean? You have to scale

[8] Since 2020, not least because of the *Koalition der Freien Szene*, there are research grants for artistic research: https://kuenstlerischeforschung.berlin/.

up and down what the artistic project can be. And then, I mean, I don't love this rhetoric of 'the lack of everything makes you creative', I don't think that's a good inspiration for creativity but, unfortunately, in real life, it might be true for some artists. If you don't have materials to experiment with, you're going to come up with "non-material materials" to work with. Or, if you don't have a place to store your equipment, you're going to learn how to work without equipment. So, in that sense, I think there's a cushioning or contextualization of parameters that will affect what kind of result is produced. But, time and time again, in institutions, really exciting things happen, too. For example, if you diversify the people who program and curate, the people who write plays or who put on shows, you have the opportunity to 'intervene into' the institution and just put on something unexpectedly that has this effect of being innovative and mind-stretching.

ME: Consolidating the independent art scene means establishing a field where the artistic production can happen freely from institutional and market braces, interests and distortions, where the artist's voice spreads unhindered. Do you agree with that? The KFS doesn't use the word "independent", they use "free", right?

FL: Yeah.

ME: And what are the boundaries of this freedom? It's not totally free, it's like, as you said, not totally independent.

FL: So, I think just because your production isn't market-oriented it doesn't mean that you're independent or free from market pressures. So, if I choose to reject something, which, for example, would be to sell my work in a commercial gallery, it doesn't make me completely detached from the market logic that still lingers over the art world. Or when you choose to do a residency as opposed to trying to sell your art online, because a residency gives you planning security and financial security for that time being, I still think you act somewhat in relation to the existing hegemonic system of freaking capitalism and globalization. So, in that sense, I think even if you don't have institutional resources or you don't abide by this market pressure to produce that kind of art because: "We're all working with plastic now." I think you're still somewhat bound to it. So there's this co-constitutive interdependence of the dominant part of the art world and the subversive counterpart, or its counter-hegemonic counterpart.

ME: And they respond to each other, right?

FL: Yeah. So, if you're working on independent spaces and with other independent freelancers, you have certain freedoms that other people don't. Like, if I'm an opera singer who is employed by a stage opera, I can't say: "I don't want to sing this Mozart shit", because, basically, you're contracted to carry out stuff that has been dedicated to you, whereas you can pick up your own ideas and your own thoughts when you're working in an independent production. But then, at the same time, like I was saying before, it constrains your scope of action and maybe even your scope of thought in a way, when you don't have anything to work with. So, I think, it is this a relative freedom. But then, if you get creative to build a niche or a security zone where you won't be judged on your results, I think that's a freedom that you have. Similar to my PhD scholarship, I was free within a somewhat stable situation which makes you less precarious than having absolutely no stability.

ME: During the last decade, the collaborative work between the institutional, the commercial and the independent circuits has been greatly increased in cities like São Paulo

and Rio de Janeiro. How the independent circuit can take advantage of partnerships with institutions and companies from the art market, such as galleries and fairs?

FL: Having published a study on contemporary art galleries in 2013, we found that a lot of commercial art galleries don't make that much money. So, that even though they are commercial entities, it's not all rich and sitting on a load of money. So, when we're talking about them facilitating or giving opportunities to the independent scene, who, assumedly, has even less money, I think we need to consider that not all the actors of the commercial art scene or art world have a lot of financial means in the first place. But, for example, when you were talking about art fairs, I know that at least in Berlin, because we don't have a lot of collectors and buyers in the city, most Berlin art galleries make most of their income through international fairs. So, when we were talking about instruments of facilitation, maybe, we would need something like a fund to help galleries go to art fairs, to make commercial art galleries more flexible to travel and to show their work elsewhere because not a lot of rich people come to Berlin and buy art here. And, I mean as an administrative resource that doesn't come either from the independent scene or commercial art actors. Because I think they both would need something external to encourage their collaboration. I know that some commercial art fairs have a satellite fair or some sort of pavilion where they'll show more innovative and more independent projects and take a bit more risky approach to exhibit something. Maybe, that mindset could be expanded.

ME: This year, SP-Arte, the biggest art fair in Brazil, had this program where they were promoting a specific independent art circuit. So they were using their commercial or market resources to make this circuit more visible. It was, like...

FL: Yeah, it was pretty...

ME: I would say valid.

FL: And, I mean, there is natural progress or development of things having been independent and sometimes they can turn into something more commercial. So, for example, we had an art fair in Berlin, *Art Forum*, which was abolished in 2011. And then we didn't have anything like that, and then in, I think, 2012 or 2013 - you can look this up - they started coming up with new formats of art fairs. So one was called *ABC - Art Berlin Contemporary*[9], the other one was called *Preview*[10] and there is another one called *Berliner Liste*[11], but those were all small scale art-fair kind of projects that never attracted the same clientele as *Art Forum*. But, so, there is like this ambiguity also between what is the commercial art scene and what is the independent art scene. Because, sometimes, commercial spins can also be ignited by the independent scene. And sometimes, I think, the commercial actors also invite independent positions.

ME: Do you think the independent art scene can preserve its autonomy of thinking and proposing inside collaborative networks with the institutional and commercial circuits?

FL: I mean, preserving autonomy… roughly, I would say that there's two different tendencies. There are parts of the independent art scene who are very eager to stabilize their advocacy and stabilize and save the accomplishments they've made so far. So, for example, within the *Koalition der Freien Szene*, this question of "should we turn into a legal

[9] *ABC – Art Berlin Contemporary* operated from 2008 and 2016.
[10] *Preview* operated from 2005 and 2013.
[11] *Berliner Liste* was created by the early 2000s and is still operating.

institution, an organization, an association, a foundation, an office?" is ongoing and some people really want this, because they think this organizational stability will provide the groundwork for long-term political change. And then, there are other people who are almost scared or at least sceptical about institutionalization because they think that turning something into an organization is, basically, going to kill it. I actually just had an interview with the cultural senator and one of the spokespeople of the *Koalition der Freien Szene* yesterday.[12] And the two were going back and forth about whether it needs support of cultural activism, like, if the administration should fund artists' activism or whether they should try to keep on going without any sort of financial support.

ME: Because they aren't paid, right?

FL: No. I mean, a lot of them work for genre-specific associations where they are employed. So, for example, the visual arts representative of the *Koalition* is the managing director of the visual arts organization and he's also a speaker for the *Koalition der Freien Szene*. So, in that sense, he indirectly gets paid for being on the *Koalition*, but basically it's voluntary and volunteer-based. And so, how to preserve this persistence and this ongoing constant engagement is a very, very tricky question and it's related to turning into an organization or a legal association. But, I would say, the independent scene is divided in terms of whether it needs an organization to preserve their position or not.

ME: And what's the difference between financing art research or art spaces and financing activism?

FL: See, I could have asked the senator that, right? That would be interesting. I think, because, I mean, obviously, a lot of this advocacy also is tied to very particular interests. So, it's basically lobbying for, say, the dance association to say: "Hey, the 4,000 dancers in Berlin need more fellowships, they need more travel grants, they need an exhibition and rehearsal space that should be co-funded by the city." So, they're asking for all these subsidies and all these means to continue their work, where, in a way legitimately, the culture administration can ask: "Why should we spend tax money on this? What's the greater good of funding individual dancers?" So, I think the cultural administration is shy or sceptical of funding this activism or advocacy because they fear that they would directly fund particularist or interest-driven politics. So, the Senator's response, in short, was that he thinks that the artists should be responsible themselves to continue the work because if they're successful, they'll also benefit from it. But that's like a chicken and egg problematic - if you don't have the capacity or the resources to critique your precarious situation, you're going to stay precarious. And, if you're precarious, you have no power and no voice and no energy to try to change something about your situation. So, it's this discourse of neoliberal individualism and responsibilization. To say: "Well, if you're not happy with capitalism, you yourself have to go to stand up and try to change it, but it's impossible." This conversation stops where there's a clear political message to say: "We are not going to fund activism. No way. No matter what." And, in a way, that's an ideological statement, but that cuts off the conversation, because that's basically what the artists or activists have to build upon. I don't think they can change or, at least, not in this political government, they can't change this attitude.

[12] https://howlround.com/commons/friederike-landau

ME: If they turn into an association or foundation, they can fundraise with the private sector.

FL: Exactly. Because there are foundations and think-tanks and maybe they could even raise money themselves. I don't know how well crowdfunding works in the arts, but maybe they could even raise money from within the scene to fund what they're doing. If I was an individual artist, I would see this union that tries to speak on my behalf, that tries to make my own working conditions better, would I maybe be capable of paying 5 Euros a month into their common pot? But that's also related to the problem that they don't have any fixed representative mandate, right? The speakers, for a long time, weren't directly elected. So, it's like, if now they're introducing this element of formalization, I think they're also worried about losing part of this latent support that they've had. Because right now, it's like they keep on doing as long as anybody tells them *not* to do it, but if they said: "We are now turning into a legal organization" or something like that, they could also lose part of this diffuse support.

ME: Who do you think is interested in financing the independent art scene? Or how can you justify the necessity of public budget, public money, to finance this?

FL: I recently came across this manifesto from a performing arts coalition in Dresden, which is in former East Germany, Saxony. And they were giving this interesting elaboration of why it's important to pay attention and maybe also then pay money ((laugh)) to the independent art scene. Because, I mean, in times of rising right-wing populism in Germany, and there have been horrible inhumane right-wing activities in East Germany, aggressing people who don't look German and there's a party called the *Alternative für Deutschland*, *Alternative for Germany*, which is a very cruel, homophobic, xenophobic, racist and very nationalist party. So that, within Germany we have this horrible, rising tendency of nationalist politics again.

ME: Is this recent?

FL: This is recent, yeah. So, for example, in the national election in the fall of 2017, they got 14% and they're now in the German Bundestag and they're also in the regional parliaments. It's basically a right-wing populist party that's playing on people's fear that's caused by immigrants. And in Dresden, I'm saying, this performing arts network was trying to relate the function or the uniqueness of independent cultural production with the imagination of new forms of democratic societies and new forms of political agency and citizenship that could circumvent this rise of right-wing populism. And, obviously, there's a little bit of a danger of functionalizing the arts to make a democracy better, but, like I said, I'm not super opposed to functionalizing art. I don't believe in the absolute autonomy of art. In a way, art is more or less political already, in that sense, it already has a function. But, I think, if in that context, which is obviously a chosen one where this connection between art and a democratic space or publicness would better be understood, people who would want to fund independent cultural production would be committed to foster this democratic vision. It could be political foundations, could be institutions that take care of political education, that take care of cultural education and stuff like that because then, cultural funding and also independent cultural funding becomes a matter of education rather than only aesthetics. I think it lies within that public sector that is interested in questions of the future of society and the future of democracy rather than a private company, like, why would they fund the independent art? To look cool, yeah, and to do good, but that's classic philanthropy. That's,

in a way, not a sustainable mechanism to give a basic premise or a basic support to the independent art scene.

ME: And what about this interest of the galleries, for example, this gallery I mentioned before that created its own project space? Couldn't they just associate it to an existing project space and take advantage of that, for example?

FL: I'm pretty sure they could.

Me: I'm sorry, I really don't remember the name.

FL: It could be Gerd Harry Lybke gallery (Eigen + Art), which is a very famous gallery, he has a lab… I do think the independent scene can easily be taken advantage of if people are clever enough and ((laugh)) cruel enough to do that. Because it's not a trademarked form of production, like, they can't save themselves because it's a part of the identity, I think, of the independent cultural production to be flexible and to be permeable. But, obviously, they're more vulnerable than other positions within the art system. Because the other positions have concrete walls around them and they have incoming operational funding from the cultural budget every two years or something like that. So, this systemic element of being open belongs to the scene and that's why they always have to adapt and that's why they always need to find refuge under somebody's umbrella, and then keep moving forward. And I don't think that can be overcome and, maybe, it shouldn't be, because then when you turn into an organization you don't maintain this inherent flexibility anymore.

ME: What was the role of public policies in the development of Berlin independent art scene during the last years? I read in one of your articles that thanks to the KFS the budget for the project spaces doubled. So, how important is this money to the independente art scene? In Brazil, specially during the period between 2003 e 2015, the public policies for this scene were really important for its development, particularly in some capitals like São Paulo.

FL: So, if I understand correctly, in São Paulo this led to the growth of the scene, right? To have more funding instruments led to more spaces developing, is that right?

ME: Yeah.

FL: In Berlin I think the discourse is hinged a little differently with regards to a lot of the public policies following after the actual development that has already taken place. So, for example, the phenomenon of project spaces has been built and organized all by itself without any public support. And, I think, now, only that the general ramifications of rising rents and the rising cost of living in the city becomes so urgent is that cultural producers and these network activists turned to the public sector to say: "Hey, we need you to help us maintain these infrastructures that we have already created". I mean, obviously, there is also a growth and there is also a lot of fluctuation and movement, but I would say that some funding instruments are actually created retrospectively. So that they react on already existing conditions. So, if we're talking about increasing the number of individual artist grants, that speaks to the population of artists that's already here. Like, with the funding instruments that the culture administration is now imagining, they're trying to give the people who are already here better working conditions. In that sense, it's not so much a growth-oriented policy, but it's more focused on sustaining and maintaining and saving what we already have. And, there are other programs focusing on international artists. For

example, they just introduced a new non-German-speaking literary scholarship, so for people who write in Polish, in Arabic, in Greek, etc., to get funds from the cultural administration. That's, obviously, to attract non-German-speaking Berliners, but, at the same time, these people have been in the city already and these people have been working here already without this support. So, all I'm saying is that, for example, as opposed to Leipzig, where they would create location factor to provide good conditions for artists to come to the city and work there, I don't think we need that in Berlin (anymore). In Berlin, there are so many artists already working and living here. They need favorable conditions and support to keep on doing what they're already doing.

ME: Yeah, I don't think these public funding instruments in São Paulo attracted more artists to the city. But I think that with more money the independent art spaces have more power to self-organize, to grow and to collectively do something. And that's not about the individual artist but how they can self-organize in a way, proposing things.

FL: And I think, in Berlin, there's a politicization and collectivization that has just created the momentum for more awareness in the policy-making realm to say: "Hey, apparently, we really need to get our act together, because otherwise, the artists are going to move away, and Berlin is just not going to be the cool, hip, creative place that we all want and need." Because we don't have big industries and big money coming into the city, right? Why do people come to Berlin? Because it's a cool and fascinating place, so, in the widest sense, independent culture also works as a touristic resource and that is what the independent art scene is strategically arguing, they're contributing to vibrancy that is to be experienced by people who come to the city and spend money.

ME: Do you think the tourists go to the independent art scene?

FL: They might. And, also, the image of who's a tourist is also dissolving, right? You've been here for two months, you've lived in an Airbnb, are you a tourist?

ME: Kind of.

FL: You're maybe a resident-tourist. ((laugh)) And I don't mean to label you, just as an example. There are so many different modes of dwelling in the city that it's difficult to capture who uses what kind of infrastructures. And I think a lot of people in the independent art scene know that they're not attracting the RyanAir weekend tourists. But they can benefit from that narrative or capture part of that narrative, which is why they wanted money from the city tax, to say: "Well, yeah, this is also still the vibe and the atmosphere that we're creating for people to come." And it's a whole different story whether the independent art producers actually want complete outsiders to see their productions, to visit their spaces, to partake in their discourse of events and stuff like that, where… I'm not so sure, but, in general, I think, there's a loose causal connection between tourism and the wealth of the city and the claim for independent artists to be supported.

ME: So, I heard that the ZKU was born like an independent art space, right? Do you know any other institutions that came from the independent art scene? And do you think the independent art scene has the potential to renovate the institutional environment by introducing new kinds of institutions?

FL: So, for example, *Radialsystem*, next to the Spree (river)... where the *East Side Gallery* is? So, further along the *East Gallery* towards *Alexanderplatz*, like, right by the *Spree* there's

Radialsystem, which is a performing arts and rehearsal space and they were founded about 10 years ago by Jochen Sandig, who's a long-standing cultural activist and he's turned it into an institution. So that, by now, is a well-regarded, well-known institution that puts on shows and plays and stuff like that. And, it's funny because sometimes things have become so professionalized that it's difficult to recognize them as home-grown independent art space. nGbK (*Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst* in *Oranienstraße*) is still legible as an independent institution. They have been around for a long time as an institution definitely coming from the independent art scene, but they also have a standing and a credibility within the bigger and more encompassing art system.

ME: There is this list at the Department of Culture website of institutions that receive long-term funding by the Federal State of Berlin and ZKU is not there.

FL: Well, I mean, it's funny that you name them as an example of institution-building, because obviously they are an institution but I think they themselves consider the residency program... all the programming they do is still considered as a kind of art project. So, yes, they provide space for international artists to come to the city, but, yeah, you're right that they don't get any government funding so they try to make their own money and they're trying to be self-sustaining from making money on the artist residency program. And, I mean, it would be interesting to think about whether… like, what qualifies as an institution, is that to get government funding? A lot of institutions, for example, *Lettrétage*, that's a literary space on *Mehringdamm* (street), they used to work in a very precarious situation of getting some funding here for one project and one lecture series and whatnot. And they now get money from the cultural budget. So they'll have more planning security. They've been acknowledged, formally acknowledged as an institution, but I think they have been an institution before that, too. So, the scope of definition, who is an institution and what qualifies for that... but maybe it's also good that it's not clear because then there are different variations of what an institution means. And that's difficult, because, in a way, it's not only a definition question, but it's a time and context question. So that 10, 15 years ago, the whole art system was different because there was so much more available space. Space was so much cheaper and there weren't as many artists in the city as there are now. I mean, I've lived here for 7 years, and I see prices going up all the time, too. So the speed of this is accelerating. But what I'm trying to say is that, in the early 2000s, when it was dirt cheap to live in Berlin, maybe there was a different possibility for artists to get government funding. If you are organized now, there is going to be no money for this self-organization. Whereas other organizations that have existed since the 1990s, they did get support from the city to self-organize, but now the city basically has this surplus offer of activism. So they're not going to foster it even more by funding it. But I think, what makes an institution, what qualifies as an institution is not primarily government funding. It's more being recognized in the scene. The *Koalition der Freien Szene* uses the term *Ankerinstitution*, "anchor-institution". You are an anchor where a lot of people can land and try to experiment and do things. There's one for dance, *Uferstudios*, there's one for literature, *Lettrétage*, there's nGbK, there's ZKU etc..

ME: I really believe that there is this significant part of the independent art scene that wants to be institutionalized. And that they could maybe make this renovation of the institutional circuit.

FL: Yeah, I was only just very briefly touching on diversity and institutions, right? So, for example, in Berlin, the *Maxim Gorki Theater* has an "immigrant" director, Shermin Langhoff,

I'm saying this in quotes. So to have a "immigrant" woman leading a prestigious theatre institution is perceived by some people as an extraordinary thing, where I am like "Why should this be the exception rather than the rule?!" But, anyways, the way that she brings post-colonial and queer identity issues on stage, that's institutional renovation from *within* because she was working outside of institutions before that. And that's where this moving into the institution can maybe change standing institutions from the inside or will be complemented by new forms of organizations that are just coming into being.

ME: Thank you very much, Friederike.