

SONNENDECK, ROSENGARTEN, WC WELLE-7

Sonnendeck, Rosengarten, WC Welle-7 – a group exhibition and its accompanying public programme – are dedicated to the magic of the city. What is it about the city that produces such alluring encounters? The project traces the intimacy that can emerge in urban contexts and asks how it is connected to specific urban infrastructures.

Take, for example, the three titular sites: they exist concretely in Bern and yet extend beyond the city. They are places of leisure and lingering, but also sites where desire unfolds and sexual encounters take place. However, the significance perhaps doesn't necessarily lie with the sex or that these places are "sexy", as the author Huw Lemmey has it in his text *The Gay Right to the City*, but rather on the fact that "the nature of the contacts they enable is different."

Lemmey supports this argument with a quotation from Samuel R. Delany's essay *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999). There, Delany describes the culture of New York's porn cinemas in the 1980s and 90s. Public space, he suggests, enables complex erotic encounters across social boundaries such as class differences. What makes these places special is that very different people encounter one another there and do so in ways that lie outside the everyday rhythms of the city.

Under the guise of urban renewal, New York mayors Ed Koch and later Rudy Giuliani paved the way from the 1980s onwards for the so-called "revitalisation" of Times Square. This led to the closure of porn cinemas and the displacement of a large number of unhoused people to the South Bronx. Prior to this, some of them had occasionally found refuge in these cinemas, which were subsequently replaced by entertainment palaces including of companies such as Disney, catering to a very different kind of pleasure. This example invites reflection on broader processes of neoliberal urban development since the 1980s.

Some of the artistic works in the exhibition appropriate built reality—from so-called "defensive architecture" and prominent tourist sites to the private home and the promises of belonging and upward mobility attached to it. They explore how society is divided into public and private spheres, and who has a right to and place in public space. The displacement of queer, racialised, and economically marginalised communities becomes visible, as do

the regulation and restriction of access to space. At the same time, cunning and wayward strategies emerge, through which people continually create space for themselves.

The sexual architectures described by Delany offered temporary shelter to people for whom society did not provide housing—this can be acknowledged without romanticising these spaces. The project thus brings together practices of social encounter in which sexuality and alternative forms of community and care intersect. It proposes that such practices themselves produce space and the city, are necessary for urban life, and make it more livable.

Sonnendeck, Rosengarten, WC Welle-7 is an invitation to perceive the city as a site of diverse, pleasurable interactions, and to make use of—and protect—its potentials. Two workshops and a picnic in the Rosengarten specifically relate to the city of Bern and invite participants to enter into relation with one another and with the urban space.

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