

BPA// Exhibition 2022
at KW Institute for Contemporary Art
Benjamin Busch

A Psychedelic Double

Spaces are co-constitutive in forming desires and identities. They provide us with orientation, stability, and comfort; they can also function in a different way, by creating excitement and inviting us to lose ourselves, to reinvent ourselves. The use of space is an exercise in shaping one's habits, in exploring and establishing routines and rituals with friends or strangers, and in gaining a different relationship to oneself. By entering or leaving a space, we become someone else.

For queer people the question of space is particularly fraught with consequences. A heteronormative public is policing our movements, gestures, and the connections we make with others. The private-public distinction, so fundamental for modernity and its social and economic organization, also conditions the creation and organization of queer spaces: in private spaces, one is no longer exposed to surveillance, they can offer a form of safety. On the other hand, public zones are being used queerly: parks and public bathrooms are turned into cruising grounds, particularly for gay men. Not just sexuality, gender is also a defining force in the making and availability of spaces, also in the queer world. Not everyone gets easy access to public sex.

Space is subjected to the logic of capital, especially in cities. While other social minorities, religious ones for example, can stabilize the existence of their communities through institutions hosted in buildings, queer culture, for the longest time, didn't have such a protection plan enabled through donations or tax money. Queer communal spaces such as bars have a fragile life on their own: They emerge, and they disappear. Their potentially ephemeral existence is bound to queer culture at a specific historical moment. We can never know whether they will survive, or for how long. By losing such spaces, we are losing parts of ourselves.

How do we remember spaces? Photographic documentation is not always possible. People don't take selfies in a sex club. Famously, Berlin's nightclub Berghain has a clear policy against taking pictures inside. Often, memories about queer spaces are the material of private memory—waking up the next day with the haunting sensations of image, sound, and smell, or sharing anecdotes about last night's events over the phone.

Benjamin Busch's multi-part artistic project, *Scanning the Horizon: An Immersive Archive* (2022), promises to give us new access to the memory of queer spaces. Since 2021, he has visited thirty spaces of significance to Berlin's contemporary queer culture: legendary bars like Neukölln's Ficken 3000, or long-running institutions such as BEGiNE or the Schwules Museum. Busch takes a 3D-scanner to these places and uses the technology of spatial LiDAR-scanning to create a specific form of documentation.

With a VR headset, the scans can be reproduced as an immersive spatial experience. It seems like we no longer have to reassemble the memory of the location in our minds. Right before our eyes, we are moving through the space again. The environment gains a powerful presence. We are there, in the room. We recognize the spatial dimensions and the distances. If space is co-constitutive for the construction of desire and identity, a certain version of ourselves can be recreated in this moment.

Busch's project gives us access to a version of us that we lose when we close the door of a bar behind us and go home. Of course, this experience is uncanny. While we are back in the world from last night (or from ten years ago), what made this world, our world, us, is also missing. In the VR of Busch's project, we are the only visitor and we remain alone. Busch also interviewed the owners of several of Berlin's queer locations, and the people working there. Audio files complement our visit to his virtual spaces. From a distance, people connected to the site contribute to its historiography. Yet, the social interaction, the very purpose of entering the space in the first place, perhaps, is missing. No encounters, no conversation, no touch.

Therefore, a certain sadness lingers in the air of these digital worlds in 3D. Everybody has left already, why are we still here? The lack of a revolving social context gives the spaces a different aura. The people have left, but the space, its walls and its furniture, is still there. Material objects are our witnesses to the stories of the past. They are complemented by field recordings and oral histories. It is almost like investigating a crime scene; we are looking for clues for what was going on earlier.

In religious settings, sublime architecture functions to turn the force holding a community together into a sensual experience. Long corridors, high ceilings, and the light from above, for example, make a promise about its presence (in this context called "god"). Busch's project moves into the opposite direction. He is not interested in transcendence, but materiality.

Yet the visual representation in *Scanning the Horizon* is digitally produced. While we immerse ourselves in the three-dimensional space of an existing location, the colors and the light are not exactly realistic. Point cloud scans are the basis for the artistic representation of, at this stage of the work, three places in Berlin: Ficken 3000, SO36, and Sonntags-Club. Busch's portrayal of Ficken 3000, for example, appears more like an impressionistic painting, day-glo painted. More a hallucination than a reproduction of reality, as if the drugs have not waned. For Busch, the visual distortion produced by the medium is welcomed as a self-reflexive moment: the technological conditions of what we see in front of us do not disappear. The supposed shortcomings of LiDAR technology—distorted colors, unstable and lossy imagery, even black holes in the picture—are aesthetically valuable. 3D technology has its own forms of representation. Far from

believing in the reality of what we see, the mediated character of this representation cannot be overlooked. Busch's *Scanning the Horizon* is an investigation of the aesthetic possibilities of 3D art and archival practices. Three-dimensional representation creates its own world, not a mirroring of reality but its psychedelic double. A queer world we gain, and have lost at the same time.

by Peter Rehberg

Benjamin Busch is a US-American visual artist living in Berlin. First trained as an architect, he received his MA in Spatial Strategies in 2017 from the Weissensee Academy of Art, Berlin. He has collectively and individually engaged with the social production of space through his artistic practice. He co-directed the collective project The Institute for Endotic Research from 2018 to 2022, he most recently exhibited at the 39th Kasseler Dokfest, and he will exhibit in 2023 at the Kunstverein in Hamburg.

Since 2018, **Peter Rehberg** has been Head of Collections at Schwules Museum, Berlin. Currently, he is appointed DAAD Professor at the University of Cincinnati. His book, *Hipster Porn: Queer Masculinities and Affective Sexualities in the Fanzine BUTT*, was published by Routledge in 2022.

Poster Benjamin Busch, *Scanning the Horizon: An Immersive Archive* (detail), VR installation, 2022
Courtesy the artist

Visit <https://queerspaces.berlin> to see and hear the spaces shown in the VR installation and more.



Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für Kultur und Medien

Between Bridges



BPA// Berlin program for artists

www.berlinprogramforartists.org