

Arrivals, Arrivees: Literary Encounters with Berlin in the Weimar and Berlin Republics

Erhard Schütz
Humboldt Universität, Berlin

Translated by Stephen Brockmann

The Neurotic City

Attention is the hard currency of media society. Attention is a scarce resource (compare Franck, Crary, and Assmann). How does a city generate enough attention for itself, for itself as a city, and as a city for itself? How much is enough? And: whose attention? Berlin at any rate is addicted to self-assurances and certifications of its identity. Berlin likes to be told that it is different, that it is like New York City. For Berlin would always dearly have liked to be New York! Berlin is the city neurotic among the metropolises. While New York does not show a particular interest in who says what about it, Berlin is always neurotically excited, mistrustful, and eager about whether people will talk about it, and if so, what they will say, so that Berlin can immediately repeat what is said elsewhere. Berlin is not just fixated on New York, it is also fascinated by its own past, by the Berlin of the 1920s—but in a pinch it is also satisfied with references to the 1870s, the so-called *Gründerzeit*. It savors to the brim discussions about expressions such as “Germany’s Construction Site,” “Berlin Republic,” “Neue Mitte” ‘new Center,’ or “Generation Berlin.” Berlin is, simultaneously, fascinated by media representations and performances—television series in and about Berlin, Berlin films, and Berlin

novels. The capital city, announced the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* at the end of 1998, is the “illusionary neurosis of literature” (Illies). And it is true: roughly three hundred Berlin titles, including detective novels, appeared between 1989 and the end of the 1990s (see Jaszynski). The newspaper literary supplements, reports, glosses, and essays can not even be counted any more. And the numbers continue to rise. Since the most original experiment in synergy between literature and journalism—an intelligent mix of visually pleasing newspaper literary supplement and the invention of the capital city in the spirit of “pop irony”—the “Berliner Seiten” (Berlin Pages) of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, after they had already been reduced in size, were terminated for financial reasons on 29 June 2002, the judgment made several years ago by a literary critic is now once again indubitably true: “Nowhere is life more jaded than in the Berlin novel” (Mangold 9). True, Berlin and the creative young people who have been attracted to it—all the journalists, media workers, and public relations people—have been particularly hard-hit by the difficult crisis of the “new economy.” And an event comparable in self-celebration to the aging Love Parade, broadcast loudly to the entire world, is not yet in sight. But even the “Berlin-Blues,” tentatively proclaimed as a possible trend of late, would be—if indeed there were such a thing—an event and performance created by those who wish to be—and be in—Berlin (see Mohr and Schiller). A return to the slogan of those for whom the crises of the first “Gründerzeit” at the end of the nineteenth century were simply too hard to take—“Los von Berlin!” (Away from Berlin!)—is not to be expected. Berlin—in literature and in other things—has become a life world of its own. And even what can not be seen as obvious or given is seen as obvious and given in Berlin; at any rate there is no question of possible assaults on Berlin as a field of movement. In what follows I will attempt to demonstrate this by exploring the transformation and ultimate disappearance of a topos which has, in a very specific way, belonged to literary discussions of Berlin: arrival in the city.

Performances of the City

Cities are places of comparability. They become so through quantity and repetition. In our case one can illustrate this by the great number of Berlin novels. At the same time cities are places of competition, of particularity and uniqueness. They are full of unrecognizability, of the inexplicable, the mysterious or adventurous. This makes cities places of fashion. Categories of the new, of the event, of trends and fashions are genuine categories of the city. The city is the place of fashion and of monotony, of the new and of the inescapable, of the monstrous and of the banal, of mindlessness and of diversity. In the large city nearness is unreachable, and strangeness is ever-present. In all of this the city stages the interaction between difference and indifference. Difference and indifference, according to Richard Sennett in a particularly apt formulation, are a couple engaged in tight embrace in the city (Sennett 169). Difference, the diversity of distinctions, the ubiquitous presence of the strange, is one side of the big city. The other, determined by and coupled to it, is indifference. Because of the large numbers of people in cities, similarities, repetitions, regularities, and monotony are more easily noticeable. Diversity demands, at a fundamental level, selection and indifference. One arms oneself against the pressures of the big city with numbness and disinterest. Except at the risk of loss of self, the two permanent messages of the big city—"Buy me!" and "Help me!"—can be answered only by at least partial or selective indifference (Früchtel 771). But these messages are not just communicated by things and people. The city is not just a "sea of buildings" (the conventional image since the nineteenth century), and people have articulated this since the 1920s at the latest. The city also meant newspapers and advertisements. The city was also speech, image, writing. Writing, wrote Walter Benjamin at that time, was being "dragged inexorably by advertisements [from the book] onto the street and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos." Benjamin's almost Biblical apocalyptic image: "locust swarms of writing, which today darken the sun of the supposed

spirit of city dwellers, will become denser and denser with each passing year" (Benjamin 103).¹

While Benjamin was thinking of advertisements, pamphlets, and signs, the production of *belles lettres* is part of the dense swarm of writing as well. Since the turn of the twentieth century people have, in ever renewed attacks, complained about the hypertrophy of the "Berlin novel." Not to mention the running text of the newspapers. Whoever is in Berlin, is also in the middle of texts about Berlin. However because one is always already there, in the middle of the city, one always attempts to make new beginnings, to recreate a mythic original encounter, an unmediated urban intensity.

The traditional method is sensation. And the most obvious sensation is always terror. Hence the performance of particularity has the effect that it is taken for normality. In real life this means, for instance, the assumption that the subway is a place of permanent endangerment from crime. Against which—topos of comparability—the city tends to argue with statistics. In literature there is the detective and crime novel. It makes the city into a permanent, ubiquitous subway. The Russian mafia, sexual molesters of children, neo-Nazis, and psychopathic serial killers stand in line.

Or: the city as permanent celebration. The life of the Bohème. Disco, drugs, permanent music. A novel like *Der dicke Dichter* by the Swiss writer Matthias Zschokke is, hence, an important exception, especially when the great contemporary city novel that the fat writer wants to write "becomes thinner day by day," while Zschokke's novel, instead, delivers an ironic story of normality, of exchangeability, of replicability (Zschokke 126). Here is a passage at the highest level of ironic conventionality: "I always walk on the left . . . that's where my bakery is, there I find order. And to the right . . . that's my subway station, which I go to when I go to the office. This is my city, this is my life: now to the left, now to the right" (Zschokke 33).

Such an attack on the city's image of uniqueness and particularity, paradoxically, needs particularity as a foil, and above all it needs a particular kind of performance. The most common particularity is therefore the message of the barbarous: the barbar-

ians are at the gates of the city. Even more effective: the barbarians are already in the city.² Tim Staffel's novel *Terrordrom* is a particularly crude example. And in his novel *Desaster* Bruno Richard exhibits the supposed apocalypse of the city more than he deconstructs it. We find the terror of the barbarians ironized more frequently in poetry than in prose—for instance in Georg Ringsgwandl's *Apokalypse Berlin* of 1992 or Peter Hacks' *Tamerlan in Berlin* of 1997. Barbarians can be either Wessis or Osis, Russians, Romanians, punks, skinheads, even wild boar (see Binder). But the attraction is gone if even the title of a book tempts us with barbaric coquetry (see Vallgren). The newspapers provide the latest updates, and crime novels deliver the sensational promise of their own normality.

A far less common method of distinction, perhaps because in reality it is considered less probable than crime, is love. People in love see the world in a different way. Those who walk through the city with the eyes of love see it anew—for instance the hero of Bodo Morshäuser's *Berliner Simulation*. It is also possible to focus the eyes of love on the city itself, a gaze not entirely without ambition but usually not blessed with success, as in Paul Gurk's novel *Berlin*. (As a substitute, but more generally found in newspaper literary supplements because it is insufficient for a novel, one could list: springtime. And almost as a substitute for the substitute one can offer: Christmas. Every year the particular once again, specifically the return of the cliché.)

What other possibilities are there? One can turn oneself into a stranger who interrupts routine and tries to see the city with new eyes. For instance like Franz Hessel, who inserts himself as a fake tourist among "real strangers" on a city tour (Hessel 56), or even like Julius Rodenberg's figure of the local retiree Schellenbogen, who prepares himself every year for his journey into the freshness of summer, only to rent a room in a Berlin hotel and experience his city as a tourist, about whose experiences the author—no Berlin native, by the way—can then write (Rodenberg; see also Heilborn 1, 5).

Appearance above the City—Transit and Oikotopos

In its attempts to perform the particularity of the city Berlin speaks uninterruptedly of itself. "If one could see speech," writes Michael Rutschky, "it would have to appear as a glare of light over the city, which, when one travels to Berlin at night through the darkness of Brandenburg, can be seen as an emanation of the big city . . ." (Rutschky, "Das Reden von Berlin," 9). With that we have finally arrived at the approach to and the arrival in the city. It is, in a sense, the key scene, the one that sums it all up: first encounter, first contact.

"You see," wrote Victor Aubertin, commuter between Paris and Berlin, in 1927, "a strange city, as it really is, only on the first day of your arrival, perhaps also on the second. On the third you've gotten used to it" (Aubertin 22). In 1928 Walter Benjamin took this observation one step further: "What makes one's first view . . . of a city . . . so incomparable and so irretrievable is that it combines distance with the strictest bond to closeness. Habit has not yet done its work. Once we begin to know our way around, the landscape disappears at once like the façade of a building we have just entered. . . . Once we have begun to know our way around the city, we can never retrieve that earliest image of it" (Benjamin 119-20).

For this reason arrival, the first encounter with the city, exercises a profound fascination on authors. Encompassed within the original encounter are the divinatory gaze, and the authorial gaze as its compensation. But when one writes about the first encounter, about arrival, one is always already there. In writing about arrival, one already writes as an arrivee, even if one does not feel welcome. In writing about arrival, one writes against habituation. One writes about a separation from one's origins.³ However one writes a separation not just from one's origins; one also writes against the sense of having arrived, against habituation to what was once new. One wishes—that is the fascination—an absolute caesura. And habit is not just getting used to something new and living there; habit is always already there beforehand, brought along as baggage, incorporated in previous expectations, imag-

ined images or media images, in the stereotypes that one already knew before one got to the city. One can not escape from these stereotypes, even if they are subsequently disproved.

Henry F. Urban writes in 1912 about his arrival in Berlin: "When one comes from New York, one has to go through a huge mass of sand in order to reach Berlin, and once one has successfully . . . arrived, one discovers to one's shock that, in point of fact, Berlin does not exist at all; what exists is only a mass of villages which, taken together, are called Berlin." But immediately Urban defines Berlin as "a washed, starched, and ironed New York City" (Urban 1, 3). And Max Brod begins his 1911 book *Berlin für den Fremden*: "I see only a few details, no total impression. The white steam of the Stadtbahn [S-Bahn, city train] falls from the viaducts, dissolving like snowfall. The hard asphalt, with light shining on it, resembles a soft mass; one is afraid of sinking into it whenever one steps on it." And suddenly, in a comparison with Paris, Brod finds his orientation: "The rental cars here are white, in Paris yellow or red. There is no more important difference in the image of the city" (Brod). Thus impressionistic snobbery stylizes itself as worldly connoisseurship.

Or—because inevitably we must face the most renowned of Berlin novels—let us take what is probably the most famous arrival in Berlin, that of Franz Biberkopf in Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). Biberkopf is coming from the antitopos of the city: for several years he has been locked away in the Tegel prison. In the meantime the city has done what people are always saying that it is always doing: it has changed.⁴ So Franz is afraid: "He shook himself and swallowed. He stepped on his own feet. Then he made a move and was sitting in the tram. In the midst of all the people. And away. . . . The tram roared away on its tracks, taking him with it. . . . Something inside him cried in terror: Watch out, watch out, now it's beginning. The tip of his nose turned icy, above his cheeks things were whirring. *Twelve O'clock Noon Newspaper*, *B.Z.* [Berliner Zeitung, or Berlin Newspaper], *The Latest Illustrated*, *The New Radio Hour*. . . . What was happening? Nothing. Composure . . . pull yourself together. . . . What a swarm of people, a swarm, how they were moving" (Döblin 15-

16). As is well known, Biberkopf accepts the city's challenge. He brings with him what was already inside him and inside the city: power, struggle, and violence. In the end the victory goes not to his own violence but to that of the city; at any rate violence wins.

As in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the situation of initiation almost always reveals what one will learn about the city. What will transpire in the future is always already embedded in arrival. And since one arrives at places of transit, the city itself becomes a transitory space. Or—for it amounts to the same thing—because the city is experienced as transitory, it begins with the space of transition, with the non-place of the train station (see Augé).

The South German writer Hans Heinrich Ehrler begins a series about Berlin in the *Vossische Zeitung* of 1928 with his origins in the familiar, in Württemberg, in order to enter the pulsating life of the city at the Anhalter train station, where, after having once again briefly been welcomed by familiarity, he immediately throws himself into night life. In the end: "I walk on." And thus the series itself goes on (Ehrler 29).

During the years of inflation the protagonist of August Scholtis' novel *Jas der Flieger* arrives at the Friedrichstraße terminal. He too experiences the obligatory scene of initiation with all the attendant stereotypes: whores, the elevated train, screaming newspaper headlines, and a speeding police commando unit. "Attention, attention! Jas has just landed in Berlin. He . . . sweeps his body down the stone steps of the terminal and throws it . . . into the tangle of people in Friedrichstraße. . . . He sniffs the pleasant smell of coffee from an automat in a mall, coffee being drunk by a whore, her legs spread. . . . Elevated trains shoot into an opening among the garrets of the street, a newspaper vendor screams the headlines of the morning, shrill sirens drown out all other noise, a police commando speeds by in heavy vehicles. . . . Jas is spun around like a top . . . by the impressions raining in on him, and he stares blankly" (Scholtis 82-83). Since Jas, according to the text, has "landed" in Berlin, he will—after having been spun around in a circle sufficiently—ultimately fly high above the city, a pilot in Hitler's Luftwaffe.

Marianne, the protagonist of Max Barthel's 1929 novel *Aufstieg der Begabten*, has already seen a movie about a big city before she arrives at the Friedrichstraße terminal; hence she comes into Berlin as a city of film: "People were rushing and pushing by each other, as if they had no time, as if they always had to run and chase, it was as if they were engaged in breathless flight. . . . Streetlights at the intersections flashed yellow, green, and red, regulating the traffic. Yellow streetcars clattered through Leipziger Straße, automobiles rolled by, and like massive bison the huge double-decker buses shook. . . . Marianne felt as if she had been struck dead. Back home she had once seen a film that showed life and action in a big American city, but the movie pictures had been silent and ghostlike, shadows of a faraway world. Now that world was here, the shadows were concrete, palpable, screaming and dangerous" (Barthel 12, 16-17).

In his 1928 novel *Emil und die Detektive* Erich Kästner paints a particularly successful picture of arrival in the city as a permanent postponement through narration and dream. Emil is sent by train from Neustadt/Dresden to Berlin. He too is supposed to get off the train at the Friedrichstraße terminal. En route, inside his compartment—completely strange people, "as familiar with each other after a few hours as if they had known each other for years"—Emil encounters Berlin not just once but twice. In the first instance his fellow traveler and soon-to-be thief Herr Grundeis tells him fantastic tales about Berlin, claiming, for instance, that there are skyscrapers there "that are a hundred stories high, and they have to fasten the roofs to the sky so that they aren't blown away." Then Emil encounters Berlin in a dream, in which the stories told by Herr Grundeis are mixed with images of home. When Emil wakes up he finds that he has become the victim of a thief. The train stops at the Zoo terminal. And because Emil believes that he sees Herr Grundeis, the thief, in the crowd, he jumps off—against the wishes of his mother—into a dreamlike adventure. "These automobiles! They pushed quickly past the tram; honked, screeched, put red pointers out left and right, turned around corners; other cars pushed into the breach. So much noise! And all the people on the sidewalks! And from all directions

trams, horse-drawn wagons, double-decker buses! Newspaper vendors on every corner. Amazing shop windows with flowers, fruit, books, golden watches, clothes and silk underwear. And tall, tall buildings. So this was Berlin" (Kästner 19, 43, and 65).

At this point a third of the book is already over. But by the end of the book Emil's dream will come true: Berlin is at one and the same time the fantastic city of Herr Grundeis the liar and thief and the familiar Neustadt/Dresden. It becomes clear that the supposedly intimate community of the train compartment was actually more dangerous than the supposedly dangerous society of Berlin the city, which is capable of true community—at least among children. What for grownups is a transitory space becomes, in the dream brought along from Dresden, a familiar space, a neighborhood, an oikotopos—for children. And even though Emil leaves Berlin in the end, the autochthonous detectives remain behind.

"No one who has experienced the pleasure of traveling to the south of our country will be able to deny that seeing the iron railway bridges . . . at the Anhalter terminal again after a long absence . . . ranks as one of life's most terrible moments," writes Gabriele Tergit. Nor is she alone in seeing the city as a place for traffic and its spaces. "There . . . lies Berlin.—Berlin?" she asks: "Most of the space is taken up by trains, by tracks, by railway sheds, by iron scaffolding . . . Lehrter terminal, Anhalter terminal, Potsdamer terminal. In the spaces in between lie the buildings we call Berlin" (Tergit 13-14). Likewise Bernard von Brentano begins his observations "Berlin—As Seen from Southern Germany" with traffic. Then he comes to work. "Maybe that's why Berlin is so unpopular in Southern Germany. Because in Berlin the assembly line has been flowing through the streets for years, and everyone can see how everyone else turns his screw" (Brentano 99).

Berlin seen from southern Germany appears as an aggressive space and reminds us of the resentments and enmities directed by the German provinces against Germany's self-confident centers. In his book *Berlin Seen From the Countryside* (1932) Ernst Bloch makes this his theme: With respect to the topography and

feeling of Berlin's train stations, he writes, it is more than just a joke to say "that the Silesian terminal is already in Poland, that the Anhalter terminal is also the terminus of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the Zoo terminal implies the Paris route" (Bloch 414). In this way Bloch plays with provincial accusations about Berlin's internationalism. He cites the right-wing, anti-metropolitan stereotype about Berlin as the "hydrocephaloid of the German Reich," a stereotype quite virulent at the time, but he declares it to be a tired joke that the provinces "were already telling thirty years ago" (Bloch 417). The entire essay, which imagines viewing Berlin from Brandenburg and thereby opens up all of the stereotypes about Berlin, is intended to level out the differences between the city and the countryside, not just the city's differences from its immediate surroundings but also its differences from the more distant provinces. Bloch constructs Berlin as an "empty space" in which a possible better future is being prepared. In doing so Bloch counters Berlin's suspicious proximity to the East by speaking of it as a city of the North. Berlin, embedded in its landscape, reclaiming the terminology of the *völkisch* enemy: "The place is more Nordic than its light and its warmth appear . . ." (Bloch 409). Such attempts to situate Berlin among the points of the compass once again show how conscious Berliners are of the provinces' aversions to their city; they show how inconceivable Berlin is even to itself—how fragile metropolitan self-confidence really is. Hence the slogan of Berlin's public relations then was: "Everyone comes to Berlin once!"—not really the authoritative demand that it may appear to be at first glance but rather a plea for attention, so that Berlin's self-confidence can be strengthened.

The traveler, the "uncle from the provinces" who comes to Berlin in order to have his stereotypes confirmed, is therefore one of the clichés with which Berliners reassure themselves of their specialness. Thus, at the beginning of his 1932 novel about the enervating life of white collar workers in Berlin, *Herrn Brechers Fiasko*, Martin Kessel describes how the obligatory traveler steps into "the bowels of Berlin from the train station," without even suspecting the true dangers of the city. "Hence we have nothing to

fear from travelers, and we see that . . . harder and colder measures are necessary in order to gain control of life in this city, measures of the sort the city has used on its inhabitants" (Kessel 8-9).

The arrivals of the heroes of New Sobriety [Neue Sachlichkeit] are of a different sort. Precisely because of the instability of his supposedly objective hardness, Heinrich Hauser is a case in point. The hero of Hauser's *Donner überm Meer*, the pilot Fonck, still comes into the city as a pedestrian (Hauser, *Donner*, 49-53)—but precisely as if he were the imaginary observer-traveler in the opening sequence of Walter Ruttmann's mythographic film about the "tempo" of the city in motion, *Berlin—Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927). In 1932, however, Hauser's reporter-ego, in a series published in the national revolutionary journal *Tat*, approaches the city by car in order to perform a purported sociological experiment and to prove, as the title of the first part of the series already announces, that: "Berlin ist Deutschland" (Hauser, "Berlin"). Small wonder that Hauser sees on his approach what he already knows: "Typical for Berlin: shreds of magnificence, enterprises that go beyond its own strength, work half done, left stranded at the beginning." The true purpose of this journey, however, is to leave the—"sick"—city. Thus Hauser sees "a huge and true movement of the people," specifically a "flight from Berlin." But, Hauser warns darkly, escape is impossible: for "only people rooted in the earth from childhood on can return to the earth" (Hauser, "Flucht," 766, 769).

Hauser demonstrates that it is not so much the traditional opposition invoked by Döblin between the whore of Babylon and the heavenly Jerusalem that represents Berlin but rather the third city which encompasses within it the two others⁵: the city of brass, as described in the *Thousand and One Nights*.⁶ This is the city of beautiful but dangerous appearances. One approaches it through a vast desert of sand, prepared by numerous signs of warning. Those who climb its walls cry "You are beautiful," for they see virgins "who look like moons," they see water and jump in, only to be "completely pulverized, skin and bones." However those who approach it from the sea see the city unharmed and see nothing

but corpses, “their skin . . . shriveled up and their bones . . . eaten by worms; they were a warning for those who heed warnings” (“Die Geschichte von der Messingstadt,” 241, 242, and 245).

After Transit

Of course even before 1989 there were literary arrivals in Berlin, but, as far as can be determined, they were almost exclusively arrivals in West Berlin, where travelers poured not into a city of speed and light but, rather, were usually spellbound by the dark, oppressive procedure of transit through East Germany. The uncanniness of transit obscured the gleam of Berlin, which was not particularly strong anyway. Instead Berlin was sought out because here one could find a refuge from the order of life in the West German Federal Republic: liberation from the military draft, contact with one’s sexual or social milieu, and of course hefty financial subsidies for artists, Bohemians and academics.

This nexus is invoked retroactively by Friedrich Christian Delius, who, in a separately published afterword to his longer autobiographical narrative about the era of the beginning of the student movement in Berlin, *Amerikahaus oder der Tanz um die Frauen* (1997), wrote: “He got out under the roof of the zoo terminal after a day-long journey, exhausted by the slow, shaky trip, exhausted by constant pauses en route in front of signals and borders, indifferent after two-fold and four-fold examinations of his face, of his passport, numbed . . . and confused by the real unreality of an interzonal train. Rolling slowly above the streets of Charlottenburg and grabbing for his two cheap suitcases when he heard the squeaking of the brakes and saw the long station platform, Martin reached the shining island of Berlin, a night traveler from the Hessian forests . . .” (Delius, “Bahnhof,” 11-12).

The most exhaustive and pointed arrival scene after 1989 comes from Jakob Arjouni. In this scene Arjouni’s protagonist travels from habituation toward the habitual, and Arjouni mixes disillusionment with fascination, difference with indifference. Fred, the hero of *Magic Hoffmann*, is a Franz Biberkopf from farther away: specifically, he has just been released from a prison in the south of Hesse and finds himself on his way to Berlin:

Fred pressed against the window. So that was the city that he had seen so often on television! But soon it seemed to him as if he were making a quick tour of Hesse. First there were massive halls of tin, gray and windowless, surrounded by expressways, which reminded him of Mannheim and Offenbach. These were followed by large buildings from the 1950s next to tar-colored official structures—Darmstadt—and then by older buildings with stucco façades in various pastel tones: Wiesbaden. Where were the skyscrapers, the palaces, the television towers, the Brandenburg Gates? The more the train came into the city, the more Mannheim, Darmstadt, and Wiesbaden were mixed together, the more brick, chrome, and cement, old walls, modern church towers, buildings like bunkers and buildings that looked like UFOs seemed to be pressed together randomly. Fred recalled the hymns of praise sung by his history teacher about Berlin's rubble women—probably his teacher had never actually looked at the result.

Nevertheless Fred was impressed. He had never seen so many buildings in one place. Like many people from the provinces he was torn between "It's just a pile of stones!" and "Wow! Nothing but stones!" . . . The train went into a curve, and in the window Fred saw two churches, a half-church and a Mannheim church stuck in among department store boxes and movie-house boxes. Soon the train stopped in the zoo station. . . . Fred looked around in wonder. The entire terminal of the capital city consisted of four platforms, two beer stands, and a little shed for conductors. . . . Gift shops, fast food vendors, places to buy coffee and drink it while standing—just like in a hundred other train stations in Germany. Via a revolving door Fred stepped onto the square in front. . . . The usual big-city assortment of fixers, hustlers, and drunks were hanging around the entrance to the train station, and the stench of carnival and decay wafted over the square. (Arjouni 49, 53-54, and 56-57)

Here the approach from the provinces is transformed into an arrival in the provinces. Thus disillusioned and determined to see only the ordinariness of the legendary city, Arjouni's hero stumbles into a crime novel—into one that could happen anywhere, but one that gives the nod to fashion by flirting with the milieu of Berlin.

The many recent literary arrivals in Berlin show that authors are well aware of the topical status of arrival scenes. "Let us have our hero arrive not at the zoo terminal today or even at the Lehrter station of the future, not with the ICE at the eastern terminal,

which until recently was still called the main train station. We also don't want to have him emerge from an airplane at one of the three airports and then use the complicated public transportation system." Thus begins a text by Ralf Bönt from September of 1999. Writers who write about Berlin write with the consciousness of their coexistence and competition with other writers and other texts. Moreover, the images that one can somehow pry from the city or force onto it are always already affected in some way by the media. "She recognized Kurfürstendamm from many movies. . . . Berlin also appeared frequently in the nightly news broadcasts"—thus a mother from the provinces comes to Berlin in search of her gay son in a narrative by Mario Wirz from the spring of 1999. Images of the city are always long since there when one arrives—through expectations, dreams, imagination, and wishes, but above all through narratives and media images, whether in books or newspapers, film or television. Literary arrival scenes must always write against what is already there; they must bet on either surprise or disappointment.

Even dispirited arrivals like that of Arjouni's Magic Hoffmann are more the exception than the rule. Generally one is already in the city and thinks back with a certain mild sentimentality to the provinces from which one once came, like the first-person narrator of David Wagner's *Meine nachtblaue Hose* (2000) when he remembers Bonn and his childhood. Even for those not born in Berlin, the here/there contrast is displaced by the now/then pattern of indigenous Berliners. But only in the East is this pattern connected with the approach toward the past once taken by Walter Benjamin and Franz Hessel. Otherwise the past is present mostly from history books, especially the past of the "Third Reich." Perhaps the most impressive such attempt is to be found in Michael Kleeberg's utopian historical novel *Ein Garten im Norden* (1998), a novel explicitly in the literary tradition of urbane humanism: the imaginary utopian displacement of the real Musée Albert Kahn from Boulogne near Paris to Berlin as a kind of "What would have happened if . . ." is a civilizing utopia, an urbane enlightenment of the darkened north, and thereby a wide-ranging panorama of history and anti-history.

In other novels—one can almost assert that this is part of the standard repertory of novels that take place in Berlin—one finds attention at least to the traces of Berlin's Nazi history. Again and again one hears echoes of the fatal past, even in those spaces where one has contented oneself with the "simple life" and with "minimalism," as Elena Agazzi has pointed out with respect to many post-1989 texts.

In general one detects, in recent Berlin literature, a return of that which, in Berlin, has always been the counterpart to the metropolis: the neighborhood as a more intimate milieu. However one does not notice this return of the neighborhood at first glance, because the relevant texts have disguised themselves as quasi-ethnographic studies and because the milieu dealt with is frequently that of Bohemians or creative young people. This is very much the case in Sven Regener's savvy *Herr Lehmann* [see the article by Peter Fritzsche in this volume], and it is also true of a particularly ambitious literary work, Norman Ohler's *Mitte*—a novel which, however, does not entirely succeed. In the latter novel, the literal ghosts of Berlin (Ladd) are intended to play up a city center far different from the one invoked by Chancellor Schröder. At least here one can sense the effectiveness of that productive tension which has always been noticeable in Berlin literature: the tension between a modernism *à tout prix* which frequently confuses itself with worldliness on the one hand and the more moderate or petulant resistance and inertia of the local on the other.

At the moment this tension is being made productive by works that differentiate themselves from the conventional demands of Berlin literature. For instance Michael Rutschky's book, which proclaims in its title: *Berlin: Die Stadt als Roman*. Here the city is called a novel—but consists of a combination of photographs and brief texts, essayistic miniatures and literary glosses, combined with tiny excerpts from the map of the city. These are extreme close-ups, rather like surrealistic dream elements, softened by the sketches that accompany them. There are reassurances like: "One may tell the visitor all sorts of stories, which will remain unheard" (Rutschky, *Berlin*, 21). All of this artistically constructed narrative is a protest against the marginality, of the periphery, which is con-

stantly comparing itself to the central, the pivotal axis, to “Mitte,” but in a playful and allusive way: rotating around it in order to place the narcissism of the city-dweller, in ironic slippage, back into one’s own image: like those shadows of the photographer which every handbook for photographic laypeople declares should not be in the picture. In such texts the urbane and even worldly resistance of the neighborhood milieu is brought to bear in a highly intellectual and self-reflexive way against empty promises of modernization.

In diametrically opposed fashion—not only because she is an author from the East, but also, and above all, because hers is a social romanticism loaded with the resentments of “little people” and marginal existences still living within intact social networks—Annet Gröschner invokes the inertial power of the past, of the evanescent, of what will perhaps return in another form. And Gröschner does this, of all things, in a book that consists of journalistic accounts of exploratory trips around the network of Berlin’s bus and tram lines, a book that has the maliciously clear title: *Hier beginnt die Zukunft, hier steigen wir aus* [This is Where the Future Begins, This is Where We Get Off]. This network of transportation has, of course, an allegorical character. Because while subways and elevated trains roll through the whole city, trams/streetcars exist only in the East, and one finds buses primarily in the West, but also in the East.

Here, with Rutschky and Gröschner, one finds the Berlin of old, the Berlin sufficient unto itself. In Rutschky’s work this Berlin forms an elegant circle; in Gröschner’s work an imperfect one. Both, in their own self-referential ways, are wonderful.

Those longing for arrivals in Berlin, for that childlike amazement of old, for the naive reassurance of the sublime or the equally naive stance of the tough guy, however, should read not Berlin literature but rather the books that German authors have written and will probably continue to write about New York City—not infrequently with the help of stipends from Berlin’s Senator for Culture.⁷

Notes

1 Compare Lyotard's reference to the "immense clouds of linguistic mass . . . that form society" (Lyotard 186).

2 I learned this from Michael Rutschky.

3 The best example of this is still Bertolt Brecht's poem "Vom armen B.B."

4 Compare the notoriously over-cited sentence by Karl Scheffler: "Berlin is damned always to evolve and never to be" (218).

5 Of course this is not the same as the city referred to in Hoffmann-Axthelm.

6 Hauser himself had, incidentally, used the image of the city of brass in reference to the Ford factory in Detroit; see Hauser, *Feldwege*, 255.

7 See for instance Grünbein, "Drei Briefe"; Morshäuser, *Tod in New York City*; Woelk, *Amerikanische Reise*; and Krauß, *Milliarden neuer Sterne*.

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