

## Preface

*Berlin Walks* is the second part of a two-part book series. The first part, *Berliner Spaziergänge*, includes excerpts from literary texts of various periods in Berlin's history. *Berlin Walks* gives background information for those excerpts and is intended as a compendium to *Berliner Spaziergänge*. It can also be used as an introduction to Berlin's culture and literature in a course on Berlin taught in English. In both books, *Berliner Spaziergänge* and *Berlin Walks*, students not only explore the layout of the city but can relate abstract historical information to a physical experience within the city's topography. With its selection of literature excerpts, the texts want to present a realistic image of the life average Berliners led under the city's many political systems during the last two centuries, starting with life in imperial Germany, then moving to Weimar Berlin and Berlin's most difficult time during the Nazi period, then on to the postwar years.

Each chapter begins with information on Berlin's topographical layout in combination with the literary text. *Berlin Walks* begins its exploration of nineteenth century life in the Mitte district, moves to Weimar culture in the Western suburbs of Charlottenburg and Tiergarten, and then on to the Nazi period. While only a few monuments of Nazi Berlin still exist, most buildings after 1945 still stand which makes the exploration of post-war Berlin much easier. Each chapter consists of a general introduction into the culture of the district and its history, followed by an outline of the location of the literature excerpts. The text selections are divided in a similar way, with a general introduction, followed by in-depth information on the book from which the text excerpt is taken. The study questions can be used either for class discussion or for essay writing and the bibliography lists the source for the text and gives ideas for further reading.

The articles in *Berlin Walks* were conceived and written by Margit Sinka of Clemson University (chapter 3, intermediate chapter, chapter 4), Rolf Goebel of the University of Alabama at Huntsville (chapter 6, conclusion), and Reinhard Zachau of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee (introduction, chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 5). Most photos are courtesy of the Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (bpk) and Amy Metzger. The map of contemporary Berlin was drawn by Dan Backlund. We thank all publishers for permission to reprint the text excerpts. A complete credit list appears at the end of the book.

# INTRODUCTION

## THE BERLIN FLANEUR

"If Grandma was here, she'd say: "Spazie-ren...  
Go spazieren"! (Peter Falk in Wim Wenders'  
1987 movie *Wings of Desire*)

To the casual tourist Berlin looks like a blossoming city with rows and rows of trees covering sunlit boulevards; it feels like a southern European city, Rome perhaps, or Paris, with boulevards filled with hundreds of cafés of happy customers drinking coffee, wine or beer, flirting, talking, laughing, watching each other, and showing a *joie de vivre* unknown to Northern European cities. People strolling by looking at sitting spectators who in turn observe the passersby – who watches and who is being watched is irrelevant in this street theater, a continuous play with everybody being the actor, everybody being talked to and laughing, theatergoers all dressed up in evening attire on their way to a theater, hot dog in hand, rushing from one event to another, others coming from a bar or restaurant, already animated by their previous company, arguing, discussing, debating matters only they find interesting, and perhaps only this evening. A city in full swing especially on a summer evening, a continuous party for the rich and poor alike; it makes no difference as long as it is outside and in public. A city involved with itself and its public events, offering more events for its four million people than larger cities like London or New York.

Where has all the horrible history gone, Berlin's past as world "capital of hell", as a British historian labeled the city? Has it all been plowed under, has it disappeared in the public party atmosphere of the new Millennium? Not much is left of Hitler's bunker and the Nazi architecture, all that is left is a disneyfied city with cinemas, food courts, boutiques, art galleries, museums, T-shirt-clad tourists with cameras lost in the maze of subway tunnels, train stations and shopping centers.

There are signs that something is lurking beneath Disney Berlin, of the monumental historic events that took place here. There is enough evidence for those who can see, even on Potsdamer Platz where the hypermodern architecture wraps around carefully excavated and reconstructed remnants of the old *Weinhaus Huth*. Others have been reconstructed and rebuilt as they might have appeared fifty years ago, the most prominent the *Hotel Adlon* with its classicist exterior across from the *Brandenburg Gate*.

Berlin's vibrant atmosphere is a result of the public space Berlin provides as a city. Some of these spaces such as the boulevard *Unter den Linden* have been there for centuries, others such as the *Kurfürstendamm* have been transformed over the years by adding and modifying its architecture and some, such as the *Potsdamer Platz* or the

Schlossplatz with the city palace, have been completely demolished and have been or will be rebuilt. Berliners are painfully aware of the many layers of history that these radical transformations represent. Berlin's vibrancy is not the vibrancy of the innocent but of the knowing, of people who have been through terrible history, but are willing to suspend that knowledge to finally have a good time after the city's unification.

Since it is difficult for outsiders to understand Berlin's devastating history we need to explore its causes. Berlin's fictional literature can show us past life in the city's long history better than summary historical introductions can, as fictional texts are the richest expression of past and present cultural knowledge. The assembled texts present excerpts from the works of famous writers such as Theodor Fontane whose experience gives a sense of authenticity. By exploring a text and the history behind it the city comes to life since these texts lead us into Berlin's many districts and their buildings. With these literary texts the book provides a topographical and cultural exploration of Berlin.

Writing fictional literature about Berlin began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the city had been transformed from a sleepy town with a medieval core into the Prussian capital we currently know. Karl Friedrich Schinkel became the premier architect of Berlin's transformation by copying the grandiose Roman and Greek architecture of great capitals such as Paris. The boulevard Unter den Linden became Schinkel's masterpiece that provided a model for Berlin's new architecture and consequently, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Unter den Linden was one of the very few places where Berlin looked like a grand capital. Around the turn of the century Western Berlin's Kurfürstendamm became an even more successful example of boulevard architecture without ever achieving the quality of its model Unter den Linden. Even in recent times the often-maligned eastern boulevard of Stalinallee/Karl-Marx-Allee attempted a blend of Unter den Linden's neoclassicism with a socialist inspired architecture.

Very few 19<sup>th</sup> century writers incorporated Berlin's architecture into their literature; even Theodor Fontane, at that time the most popular Berlin writer, limits himself to writing about Berlin's nature and its suburbs. Schinkel's architecture must have seemed overpowering to Berliners who were slow to accept their redesigned capital, a process that should take until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Berlin was no longer the small Prussian capital but had become the capital of the new German Empire. Now, after 1890 when Wilhelm II began to develop his imperial strategies for Germany Berlin's grand neoclassicist architecture suddenly seemed to match the dreams of grandeur the unified nation was developing.

Many early 19<sup>th</sup> century writers presented a very different Berlin from its bombastic neoclassical style. Wilhelm Raabe was one of those early literary writers of Berlin who shied away from writing about the grandiose. Raabe was very popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and presented Berlin's fictional city street of Sperlingsgasse as a model. Raabe devised his text as a diary, which reflected his personal conditions as a student at Berlin

University where he lived in a tiny room in nearby Spreegasse. In his novel *Die Chronik der Sperlingsgasse* Berlin is still the small medieval town it had been until the late eighteenth century. Raabe's fictional character Heinrich Wacholder hardly leaves his room but explores the history of his family and his friends through his writing and his observations from his window.

As Raabe preferred the Romantic image of the medieval city with the almost immovable writer observing the world, so too did Walter Benjamin fifty years later. As a child in the western suburbs of Berlin he reconstructed in his memoirs *Berliner Kindheit um 1900*, the introductory text in *Berliner Spaziergänge*. While growing up Walter Benjamin tried to grasp the physical dimensions of his environment, the rooms in the house, the apartments of his grandparents and parents and his own bedroom where he explores his fantasies. As Bernd Witte argues mainly areas of transition, the courtyard, the staircase, and the balcony stimulated the child's imagination. And therefore the chapter "loggias" (Loggien), reprinted in *Berliner Spaziergänge*, became Benjamin's model text for the entire *Kindheit* project. The loggia in the back of his parents' house in Berlin, which bordered the courtyard, represented a boundary area, where the inside of the house was linked to the garden, and where the imitation Renaissance loggia was linked to Berlin's life outside. Real Renaissance statues Benjamin saw on his travels to Italy thirty years later became his departure point for entering the world of his childhood memories.

Connecting the present to the past by contemplating a place, a building or an object was Benjamin's approach to triggering memory, Benjamin's culture of remembrance (Erinnerungskultur), which reconstructs not only his own past, but also the life of an era influenced post WWII Berlin writers both fictional and autobiographical. Memory culture can be applied to personal memory as well as social memory and has helped Berliners excavate the ruins of their city and explore their personal experiences. Benjamin's childhood reflections set off a large body of Berlin memory literature that extends into our time. Inspired by Benjamin and an initiative by the current writer Michael Bienert the city has embarked on the memory project "Berliner Kindheit im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert" that includes a number of Berlin authors.

Closely connected to Benjamin's concept of the armchair explorer is the city walker, or "flaneur" in French, a concept adapted by writers who had experienced the great European capitals on foot. Benjamin himself had visited Paris and had written about it in his *Passagen* text where he explored Baudelaire's concept of the flaneur, an uninvolved but highly perceptive pedestrian. Benjamin wrote about the flaneur first in a review in 1929 of Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin*, a famous flaneur book where Hessel recommends „walking as a kind of reading the street where faces, window displays, cafés, streetcars, cars and trees become signs or letters which will form words, sentences and pages in an always new book.“ Walking the streets is to Hessel like reading a book, decoding the environment with a method a linguist or a social scientist

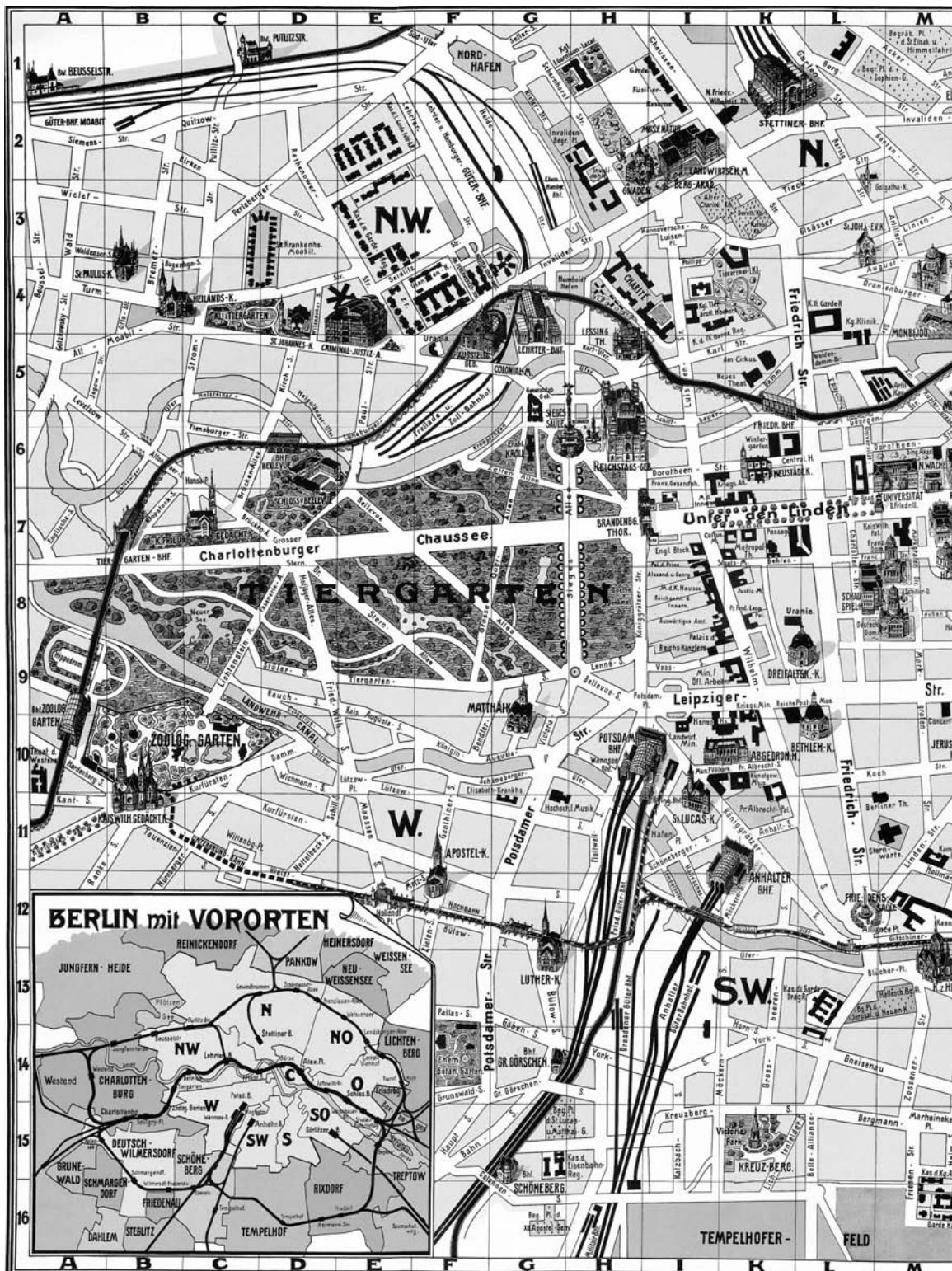
uses. According to Hessel the flaneur has to see the street from a distance, which the native no longer possesses. Thus Hessel embarks on a sightseeing tour with American tourists who visit Berlin for the first time. By emulating the stranger the flaneur will explore his familiar space with different eyes, and by walking the city he will recreate the city in his mind. In this manner 20<sup>th</sup> century flaneur writing has become a form of interaction with the city.

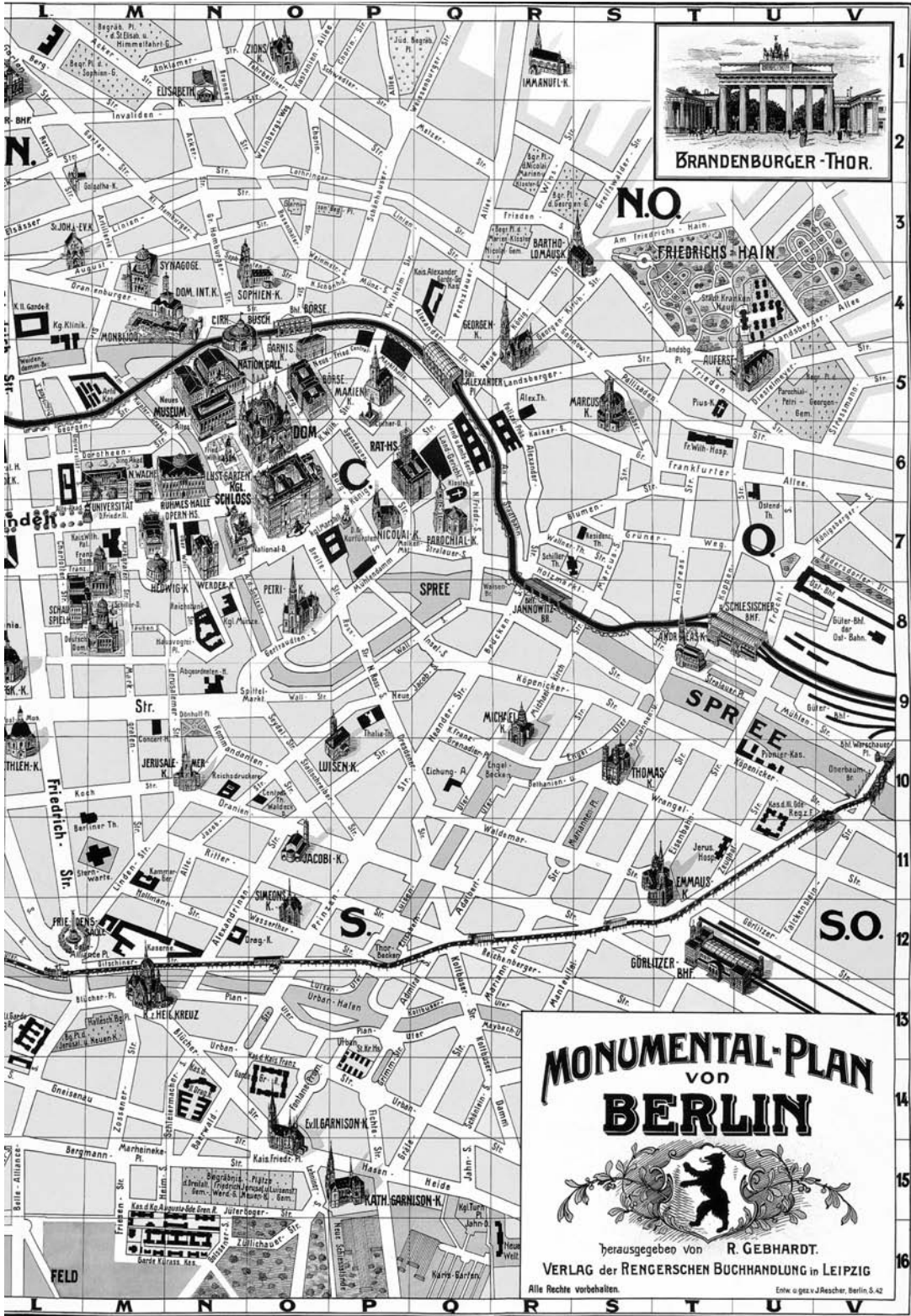
Hessel's flaneur book persuades his readers to follow his model and reinvent their own space. However, as many flaneurs noticed Berlin was no Paris or even Vienna; it was a new city built further east than any of its models which needed to establish its position among Europe's capitals. Karl Scheffler represents Berlin's self-hatred, which has a long tradition among intellectuals. In his book *Berlin - ein Stadtchicksal* (1910) Scheffler describes Berlin as a colonial city that could barely be called part of Western Europe. Hardly disguising his contempt for the East, which encompasses Poland and other eastern countries, the "steppe", Scheffler calls Berlin a remote outpost of civilization without any tradition, not at all like Paris. Contemporary intellectuals such as Wolf Jobst Siedler faintly echo Scheffler's verdict after German unification when Siedler writes that Berlin has lost its attraction since it is too far east to be of central importance to modern Germany.

In his flaneur book Hessel praises Georg Hermann's popular novels as outstanding examples of bringing the flaneur culture to Berlin. Hermann combined the observer and the flaneur in his historical novels and legitimized the idea of walking Berlin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His alter ego, the flaneur Fritz Eisner, embodies Berlin's idiosyncrasies, when Hermann writes "Paris is a city for walking, and this here is nothing more than a hodgepodge of houses, trees, restaurants, people, theaters, lights, music. Vienna is a city for walking, even Copenhagen, but not Berlin. And therefore [flaneur] literature does not exist here." Nevertheless Eisner keeps walking and Hermann offers wonderful examples of viewing Berlin as an impressionist painting when he describes the trains at the Zoo station: "On the bridge a giant express train engine was waiting, a true athlete, such well-built ninety-kilometer racer, and it had fun throwing a beautiful row of sparks into the night sky as if it made fun of the small suburban train engine behind it that wheezed and coughed laboriously before pulling its chain of lights into the canyon of apartment buildings." Hermann was an admirer of Fontane, who had explored the surrounding cultural landscape of Brandenburg by discussing its historical roots in his *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*. *Wanderungen* would later become Hermann's model for his *Spaziergang in Potsdam*, which describes the lost world of German emperors through their buildings. By placing novel characters in a specific Berlin district Hermann elevates them to models as representations of a specific place and time that the reader can relate to.

When we explore fictional characters in Berlin's rich literature, we imagine their past lives. It is exciting to follow Jettchen Gebert and Botho von Rienäcker's walks through

nineteenth century Berlin, or watch Hans Pinneberg and Franz Biberkopf struggle in Weimar Berlin. The results of Hitler's brutal politics can be understood through Ruth Andreas-Friedrich's and Inge Deutschkron's diaries. East and West Berlin come to life through their literary voices, among them Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann, and Peter Schneider and Tanja Dückers show opposite sides of modern Berlin.





BRANDENBURGER-THOR.

# MONUMENTAL-PLAN von BERLIN



herausgegeben von R. GEBHARDT.  
 VERLAG der RENGERSCHEN BUCHHANDLUNG in LEIPZIG

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