Riding the Bahn, Reading Berlin: Berlin in Transit(ion) from Reichshauptstadt to Weltstadt (1871-1930)

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Riding the Bahn, Reading Berlin: Berlin in Transit(ion) from Reichshauptstadt to Weltstadt (1871-1930)
by
Mikael Olsson Berggren

A dissertation presented to
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of Washington University in
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Riding the Bahn, Reading Berlin: Berlin in Transit(ion) from Reichshauptstadt to Weltstadt (1871-1930) is a study of the relationship between Berlin’s public transit network and representations of the city in literature and film. The ride within the confines of the city differs from journeys with the national railway, and the passenger’s encounter with urban space diverges from the perambulating flâneur. Although Berlin’s intra-urban transit system relied on horse-drawn carriages and busses until the construction of the Stadtbahn in the 1880s, the number of passengers commuting and traveling in and around Berlin grew exponentially each year between the 1870s to the 1930s. The responses to this increase in traffic volume and mobility are varied, but they all underscore that the transit network grew to be synonymous with “modernity” in Berlin.

Riding with the Bahn shaped how, and when, people moved between spaces of home, work, commerce, and leisure. Throughout the five dissertation chapters, I show that this historical transformation in the built environment also impacted the written city. In the introductory chapter, I argue for the unique experience of public transit and highlight what makes the space different from the railway journey and the streets of Berlin. I discuss the social dimensions of the interior
of the public transit vehicle and the prismatic view of the cityscape through the window. In the subsequent chapters, I explore differing—on occasion contradictory—visions of futurity and urban life in relation to the public transit space as mediated in a wide array of textual representation of Berlin, including Max Kretzer’s *Meister Timpe*, Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin—Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* and Robert Siodmak’s *Menschen am Sonntag*. Throughout the chapters, I supplement my literary analysis with visual materials and public and intellectual debates revolving around city life, stressing the intimate relationship between public transit, artistic engagement with Berlin, and the urban dweller’s sense of belonging.
Introduction: Public Transit, Urban Space, and Modernity

In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a ‘metaphor’ – a bus or a train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them.

They are spatial trajectories
-Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

So dokumentiert ein einfahrender Hochbahnhzug nicht mehr die Einzelerscheinung des großstädtischen Verkehrs, sondern wird Symbol des im Zentrum zusammenströmenden Lebens, sich übereinander kreuzende Verkehrswege verkörpern den Rhythmus der Großstadt, ein belebter Platz wird mit Hilfe des Prisms zum Symbol eines Brennpunktes großstädtischen Verkehrs

This dissertation charts the influence of increased intra-urban and suburban transit networks on artistic representations of, and cultural debates in, Berlin between the 1880s and into the early 1930s. Exploring various textual representations and contributions to the urban fabric revolving around city life, I argue that public transportation is inherently linked to visions of modernity in urban space. The notion of vision has a multifold meaning here, as the vehicles and their support structures running above- and belowground constituted objects to look at in Berlin, whilst simultaneously structuring human perception of urban space by facilitating new frames of spectatorship and creating new spaces for Berlin’s residents to interact in urban space.

If the implementation of the railway in nineteenth-century Europe symbolizes the arrival of an industrial and modern age to Germany as a nation, intra-urban transportation structures play an equally pivotal role in the emergence and imagination of what big-city life encapsulated in late nineteenth- and early twentieth century Berlin. The transportation infrastructure provided the city with a “face” that looked modern in the eyes of its residents and made them increasingly mobile
in their day-to-day lives. While the historical contexts of Berlin’s growth into a metropolis and the political, economic, and technological forces behind the advancements in intra-urban transportation in Berlin help shape the contours of this project, I primarily engage with the topic through the lens of literature and film. Rather than an in-depth and detailed historical discussion about the construction history, routes, vehicles, or timetables, this study brings to the foreground the ways in which the public transit system was appropriated by its users and represented by writers and filmmakers. The responses to the new mechanized and fast-paced modes of transportation in Berlin showcase ways in which the streetcars, subways, and busses prompted urban dwellers to adopt new movement patterns and adapt to new ways of seeing and being in urban space. In the chapters that follow we explore how the increasingly mobile nature of urban space informed the urban subject’s understanding and cognition of themselves as subjects in a modernizing and rapidly growing metropolis (Who am I? What is my place in Berlin?) and their surrounding environs (What is our city? Where are we headed?).

Throughout the dissertation, when referring to geographic area of Berlin, I include both the inner city and its surrounding municipalities such as Charlottenburg, Wilmersdorf, Schöneberg and Köpenick that, although technically not part of Berlin until 1920, were well-connected to the city already in the late nineteenth century. Further, the loose terms “urban” and “urbanity” refer in this dissertation to an experiential realm that stands in opposition to the rural—here primarily understood in terms of auditory and visual intensity, temporal acceleration and spatial largeness of the city and its center as a location. Modernity, in turn, encapsulates the time period in which artists and intellectuals displayed a growing preoccupation to shed light on Berlin’s transforming into a modern and urban metropolitan area on par with other large industrial and rapidly expanding European and North American cities. I am not suggesting that public transit is the prime catalyst
of this perceived break from an “old” to “modern” city as depicted in texts, but that the new shapes, forms, and narrative styles employed in fictive renditions of the city are not merely coincidental, but intrinsically connected to the acceleration of daily life through new forms of transit present in the real, lived cityscape.¹

The new perceptual relationship and possibilities between city and urban subject, and the vertical and horizontal proliferation of rails and routes across Berlin, provided key impetus for artistic engagement with the city. Writers’ and other artists’ descriptions and engagement with the pillars, rails, tunnels, and stations, as well as the vehicles and the figure of the passenger, record and reflect social patterns and aesthetic writing practices often omitted—or downplayed in favor of discourses of “walking the streets”—from literary analysis and theories of urban space. The transportation network, I maintain, is key to the production of space in terms of the experience, perception, and imagination of the modern cityscape. In other words, the network is a physical infrastructure one can interact with that shaped and contributed to new systems of mapping, visual representation, narrative form, and semiotics for the real, as well as for the imagined, city of Berlin. Although I acknowledge that similar infrastructural developments were taking place in other urban centers around the world in the time period, my focus lies on the city of Berlin. The following introductory chapter posits the project in relation to railway history, theories of space and place and questions that pertain to the narratability of the city. These are all junctures to which I continuously return also in the subsequent chapters.

¹ As Stefan Höhne notes in his study on the New York City Subway (2017), textual analyses that seek to equate narratives or textual descriptions or imagery to the actual “Gefühlsstruktur der Passagierer” could potentially run into a few pitfalls: “Leicht ist man verführt, von den meist sprachlichen Quellen auf die tatsächlichen Empfindungen zu schließen” (Höhne 187). While it may indeed be folly to assume that textual evidence directly corresponds to empirical reality, literature and other texts show an inextricable link between cultural production, perceptory sensibilities, and sense of self.
Already at this point one might rightfully ask what the public transit space tells us that is different from other spaces of transit, or how the experience of the passenger differs from that of the pedestrian. To speak of the phenomenon that is transit is to refer to infrastructures that exert a strong influence over social, spatial, and temporal practices, all of which are inextricably connected to how we perform in and interact with the surrounding world. Most of us have rushed to catch a bus or sat in a crowded subway car or bus, trying our hardest to shield ourselves from others by reading, looking out the window, and/or plugging in the headphones; and all the well-versed commuters out there have undoubtedly internalized the timetable and station names of their regular routes, be it consciously or subconsciously. Needless to say, such practices or encounters are by no means exclusive to local public transit, but unlike the national railway or airlines, public transit is predominantly contained within urban space and for the majority of us, much more closely intertwined with the practice of everyday life. In contrast to long-distance travel, we might not think of the short commuter trip as particularly thrilling or educational, but the contrasting views of the city that passengers experience over the duration of a ride with the S- or U-Bahn—from an elevated view of the busy streets of the Friedrichstraße, to the dark subterranean subway tunnels running below the lit-up streets—broaden the urban subject’s experience of their lived environment, as they dictate what and how passengers encounter and see other people, their surroundings, and themselves. This revolution in sight and experience directly determines how urban space can be described and narrated, as it prompts a structural rethinking of the city body and has ramifications on both the collective and individual cognitive mapping of space, molding the intra-connected city parts into a coherent “readable language.”

This theoretical assumption is to a large extent inspired by Peter Fritzsche’s 1996 study Reading Berlin 1900. He argues for the importance of the metropolitan newspaper as an entryway into the nature of the urban experience of Berlin in the time span 1900-1914. In this study, I set out with a similar understanding of public transit space as a
The impact of the transportation network on the visual appearance and perceived atmosphere of modern Berlin cannot be stressed enough. As boring or uneventful as one might think a ride with the Berlin S- or U-Bahn can be, the space holds great potential for mysterious encounters and self-reflection, especially in a time when these rides are still something of a novelty. These changes result partly from the new social experience of, and visual encounter with, the city from within the vehicle, as well as from the large-scale construction works taking place all the way from the very city center to the remote suburbs; from the elevated Stadtbahn to the tearing and digging of tunnel shafts for the Untergrundbahn along major streets. While the explosion of spatial enclosures, horizontal expansion, and the creation of specialized districts (residential, business, industrial, proletariat, bourgeoisie etc.) can all be subsumed under the larger historical category of industrialization, many scholars have stressed the railroad’s influence over these urban developments. The intra-urban transportation networks, however, have been given much less attention. The major changes to urban space, both in terms of its physiognomy and the individually perceived effects of the increased traffic volume and large-scale construction works, affect the characters and stories included in this dissertation in various ways. The ways in which writers, filmmakers and other artists have used the network; as narrative devices and settings to stage their stories; and as symbols to explore both the potential and problems presented in the demolishing and re-structuring of Berlin, demonstrate to what degree the public transportation revolution affected not only the dimensions of the physical city as lived experience, but also as aesthetic expression and composed text.

In his influential study, *The Railway Journey*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch points out that the development of the railroad in the nineteenth century reconfigured human perceptions of time, phenomenon that affected the urban experience at large, introducing and accelerating new movement patterns whilst simultaneously changing the physiognomy of Berlin with bold strokes.
distance, and speed, and that this “industrialization of time and space” was first and foremost a learned behavior we came to adapt through our engagement with this technology. Schivelbusch informs us that train travel fundamentally changed how people viewed natural landscapes. The view of nature passing by from the speedy train generated a stark contrast to idyllic romantic landscape paintings. Further, the train space facilitated human interaction and cultivated behaviors that were perceived as inherently different from slower modes of travel by, for example, horse carriage. As far as the impact on vision is concerned, the frame of the train window emphasized the shifting and fleeting qualities of the human eye in movement. Indeed, the railway as a form of movement, institution, and network of transportation impacted human perception and experience of space. Along similar lines, the incorporation of the railway into human travel and commerce also impacted peoples’ relationship to time as it marks the beginning of standardized time. Prior to the institution of the railway, most towns used some local solar time, often maintained by a publicly displayed clock, for instance, the church’s. Moreover, as the train enabled people to move greater geographical distances in a significantly shorter amount of time, railroad travel has often been associated with an annihilation of space and time in the early nineteenth century, a “concept … based on the speed that the new means of transport was able to achieve” (Schivelbusch 33). Interestingly, Schivelbusch’s extensive study ends with two short excursus on the topic of tracks in the city. Looking primarily at Haussmann’s renovation of Paris, Schivelbusch argues that the railway itself did not affect the inner city as the railway stations were generally placed along the outer edges of the city. However, he draws a direct link between the growing prevalence of intra-urban traffic networks and new forms of merchandising: “As Haussmann’s traffic arteries were connected to the rail network by means of the railway stations, and thus to all traffic in its entirety, the new department stores, in turn, were connected to the new intra-urban arteries and their traffic”
(Schivelbusch 188). His inquiry ends with these insights, leaving many questions open about intra-urban transportation technology and its influence on human perception and the city environment.  

What is more, in popular culture, both historically speaking and from the perspective of the twenty first century, the railway space is perhaps most widely recognized for its connotation with thriller movies and crime novels. To name a few prominent examples, we have, for example, Émile Zola’s *Le Bête Humaine* (1890), Castleton Knight’s *The Flying Scotsman* (1929), Josef von Sternberg’s *Shanghai Express* (1930), Christoph Isherwood’s *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and Alfred Hitchcock’s two film classics, *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951); and in more recent memory, some titles include Bong Jong-Ho’s *Snowpiercer* (2013), and the film adaptations of Agatha Christie’s 1934 novel *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017) and Paula Hawkin’s 2015 novel *The Girl on the Train* (2016). All of these texts play in different ways with the thrill of the horizontally organized space of the train filled with random strangers, and the discussions one might (in)advertently overhear or oversee in this sealed universe. Given the attention given to long-distance travel and its central role both in scholarly debates about nineteenth and twentieth century history and art, it seems only natural to explore the effects of intra-urban travel on artistic representations and popular debates revolving around city life.  

Moreover, due to the nature in which cities grow over history, it is worth noting that for many cities, the spaces that used to constitute the urban periphery around 1900 quickly grew to be part of an urban center over the course of the twentieth century.  

Michel de Certeau offers an insightful commentary on the space of the train and the role of the traveler in a short section in *The Practice of Everyday Life* entitled “Railway Navigation and Incarceration” (2002). He notes how the passenger is “contained” in a twofold sense, both in the vehicle, as well as the larger system or grid along which the vehicle travels: “The unchanging traveler is pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car, which is a perfect actualization of the rational utopia” (de Certeau 111). The train is a closed system, “everything has its place in a gridwork” (Ibid.). Using de Certeau’s notion of the contained world of the passenger, we can understand some of the famous narratives that have played out within it (such as the films mentioned above) as exceptional, or deviations, from the strictly regulated “grid” or system. These two phenomena of entrapment and the “grid” are likewise important to keep in mind as we engage with public transit in Berlin. They highlight not only how the increased degree of intra-urban mobility affected urban subjects’ perception of time and space, but also their sense of freedom and constraint, as well as the relationship between the everyday and the exceptional—the *Alltägliche* and *Außertägliche*.  

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4  

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Following in the tracks of railroad studies, I maintain that Berlin’s public transit network affected both the functional dimensions of life in Berlin, i.e., how people moved through the city, as well as introducing a new visual experience and image of Berlin as a modern metropolis. On the one hand, the new architectural features and vehicles of the transit system changed the visual appearance and physiognomy of the city, while the high velocity coupled with the broadened vertical and horizontal dimensions of the transit network impacted the human gaze on the city space, on the other. These two dimensions of functionality and visuality are inextricably connected, and they each highlight two central points around which my argument revolves. The functional side of transportation shows that the modern city dweller had to perform in certain ways to be compatible with an urban space that grew increasingly mobile, prompting the city dweller to adapt and develop new methods of handling time and space. Given the transit space’s connection to these performances that were inherently coded as “modern’ and “urban,” and the very image of rails and transportation vehicles in cities took on corresponding symbolic value. The subjects that we encounter in our texts, use—or fail to use—the new transportation system as a way to keep up with the accelerated rhythms of the growing metropolis. This emphasis on compatibility between the movements taking place in the city, and the people that live in it, signify that urban subjects in Berlin needed to evolve from a “man-of-the-crowd” into a “man-on-the-go.”

Previous scholarship has helped guide my project in various ways, but it has proven difficult to find studies that are similar to the one at hand in geographical, historical or methodological scope. In a 1976 study, Tramways and Trolleys: The Rise of Urban Mass

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5 There are a few noteworthy studies that include a chapter (or chapters) dedicated to transportation/communication within a broader inquiry about literature, culture, and technology. Bernhard Rieger (2005) studies intersecting debates about aviation, transatlantic passenger shipping, and film to show how public enthusiasm and unease about technology “interacted to further technological change in Britain and Germany between the 1840s and World War II” (Rieger 4). Along similar lines, Andrew Thacker (2003) has a chapter on the London subway in his book that examines “historical links between modernism and the production of particular material spaces in modernity”, and how these links fashion literary forms of the modernist text (Thacker 5).
Transport in Europe, John McKay undertakes a comprehensive historical study of public transportation in Europe of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. McKay adopts a broad comparative framework in his exploration of the development of urban passenger transportation and its impact on the urban environment and the lives of European city dwellers. Although McKay’s study shows the importance of the transit network to Berlin’s and many other cities’ growth and day-to-day life throughout the twentieth century, given the historical scope, the project does not deal at length with how the increased use of mass transportation shaped human subjectivity and influenced literary, journalistic, and popular cultural depictions of urban life. Barbara Schmucki likewise notes that the bulk of studies on public transportation has focused on the technical sides of things; “the engineers, entrepreneurs, and regulators” in favor of “the social”—the latter which explores the process of how technology in appropriated, how it evolves from strange machine to convention and tradition (Schmucki 2012). There are, however, successful studies within the field of literature and cultural studies on the topic of public transit to be found. Alisa Freedman, for example, argues that “through describing trains and buses, stations, transport workers, and passengers, authors responded to the contradictions they perceived in Japanese urban modernity, recorded consumer and social patterns often omitted from historical accounts, and exposed the effects of rapid change on the individual” (Freedman 1). Another study similar in scope is the anthology Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840-1940 (edited by Gavin and Humphries) that includes an array of essays that highlight the ways in
which social, historical, and cultural impacts of transportation technology integrate with concerns of fiction and to explore historical machine-human relationships.6

**The Flâneur of the Street and the Passenger in the Seat.**

If the city is a text, how shall we read it?
- Joyce Carol Oates “Imaginary Cities: America”

*Du sitzt mir gegenüber und schaust an mir vorbei. Ich seh’ dich jeden Morgen und manchmal auch um Drei. Du bist mir mal sympathisch und manchmal eine Qual. Aber meistens egal, total egal*
- Volker Ludwig “Du sitzt mir gegenüber” *Linie 1.*

*For the flâneur, it was traffic that did him in.*
- Susan Buck-Morss “The flâneur, the sandwichman and the whore”

After being put into operation in the 1880s, it did not take long before the accelerated and consolidated movement patterns and increasingly accessible mobility provided by the transit network became integral to the imagination of what we in broad strokes can call the modern metropolis. Inevitably, artists and other thinkers incorporated images of trains and passengers in their depictions and narratives of Berlin. By reading and interpreting artistic reproductions of the public transit network as a literary and filmic topos, we can see that its presence and operation, in a way similar to railroad travel, promoted certain novel models of perception in the urban landscape that influenced the ways in which urban space is depicted as text or an object of art in a broader sense. It is my contention that the public transit network constitutes a quintessential object and experience of modernity in the modern urban environment that highlights the dialectics of movement and perception, self and space, and the relationship between the topography of the real

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and imagined Berlin. While many history books have been written about Berlin’s public transit system, its influence over the written city remains an underexamined field, especially in its relation to other urban practices such as flânerie and the emergence of new forms of collective identities and subjectivities in the time period, such as the anonymous urban masses and the blasé urbanite. In this regard, this dissertation seeks to draw attention to the “passenger” as a sort of category or type symptomatic of the explosive growth of transportation networks in Berlin between the 1880s and the 1930s. The passenger’s perspective, I maintain, is valuable and unique for several different reasons: they see many things in a short amount of time (different people, places, stations, advertisement), and they quickly acclimatize to the seemingly contradictory fields of vision of a static interior, on the one hand, and fleeting exterior, on the other.

The relationship between perceiving subject and interiors/exterior is also central to the scholarship on a perhaps more well-known urban dweller in literary and cultural studies on the city, namely the flâneur. Flânerie has a long tradition with its roots in Baudelaire’s poetry and 1863 essay on “The Painter of Modern Life.” The flâneur is a “passionate spectator” and “painter of the passing moment” capable of capturing the essence of the fleeting and ephemeral in modernity. We may think of him as the antitype of the indifferent city dweller, a contemplative perambulator who absorbs, rather than deflects the city and its rich expressions. Walter Benjamin and Franz Hessel likewise typecast a flâneur figure in the Baudelairean tradition, emphasizing the act of walking.

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7 Some early studies on the emergence of the urban masses include Gustave Le Bon The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind (1895), Georg Simmel Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben (1903), Sigmund Freud Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse (1921).

8 In a 2017 study, Stefan Höhne explores the passenger figure in the context of New York’s subway, arguing that modern transit is integral to “Subjektszuordnungen” as it both restricts and opens up the city for its residents: “Sie zielen auf die Schaffung geordneter Zirkulation und eröffnen so neben Anforderungen und Zwängen auch neue Freiheiten. Auf diese Weise aktualisieren sich in den banalen und alltäglichen Praktiken des Transits zahlreiche Instanzen, die darauf abzielen, den einzelnen Menschen Positionen zuzuweisen und sie do zu berech- und steuerbaren Subjekten zu machen” (Höhne 17-18). And Michael W Brooks argues along similar lines in his study on the New York subway: “[rapid transit] would arrange [the city’s] spaces, structure its movement, and define its textures” (Brooks 3).
through the city: “seine Schritte [wecken] eine erstaunliche Resonanz … Die Stadt [ist] mnemotechnischer Behelf” (Benjamin “Die Wiederkehr des Flaneurs,” Gutenberg). Walking through the city, according to Benjamin, is a productive encounter between individual and cityscape. It opens up a point of contact between a collective and a private history: “sie ruft mehr herauf als dessen Kindheit und Jugend, mehr als ihre eigene Geschichte” and, as Hessel points out, the exchange between city and individual is mutual and hinges on vision: “nur was uns anschaut sehen wir” (Hessel, 329). Anke Gleber succinctly describes the figure of the flâneur and flânerie in Berlin as a shift in perspective in literature and art, away from bourgeois interiors toward a focus on public exteriors (Gleber 3). The authors depicting the flâneur, or presenting themselves as part of the tradition, “view flânerie as a visible mode of writing, as an aesthetics of reflection in, through, and of images … For them, flânerie names a mode of thinking that gives shape to the unique theoretical and aesthetic approaches that Weimar thought and literature take in modernity” (Ibid. 5). Timothy Shortell views walking and flânerie as central to understanding the relationship between mobility and freedom in modern cities:

The freedom to move from place to place—migration—was an important part of the politics of modernism in Europe, and the meaning attached to mobility changed the way ordinary people regarded the use of urban space. The ability to move around the city was understood as an important aspect of bring a free man or woman (Shortell 1).

Further, Shortell attributes walking to “the vernacular urban landscape, where ordinary urban dwellers live” (Ibid. 2) and underscores various meaning of walking, such as protesting to assert agency “against official forms of authority” (Ibid. 3). For the scope of this project, the idea of a vernacular urban landscape provides an interesting foil to the early history of public transit in Berlin. As we will learn in the next chapter, the first trains and omnibuses running through Berlin were, after all, not meant for the circulation of “ordinary” people but were mostly used by those
who could afford them. However, over the course of the first few decades of operation, the public transit space quickly became democratized insofar that a greater variety of passengers—of different social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds—were able to afford the fare.

The figure of the passenger holds much in common with the flâneur, but also deviates in a number of significant regards. The experiences of the public transit passenger, akin to the flâneur, underscore an intrinsic relationship between city dweller and urban space, the dialectics of seeing and being seen, and foreground the importance of the individual to adapt their perceptory sensibilities and bodily performance to jive with the rhythms carved out by this new mode of movement. The flâneur is first and foremost an active observer, in a bodily as well as cognitive sense, who sets his own pace and pursues his own, “custom made,” trajectory as he considers both material realities and imaginary spaces along the streets and promenades of the city. The transit network and the figure of the passenger, however, travel along the pre-determined routes of the transit grid at speeds and intervals dictated by the timetable. Likewise, the position of the passenger inside the crowded vehicle challenges the position of the observing subject as they are increasingly subjected to the gaze of others in the confined space of the vehicle. I consider these changes in perspective and agency to be influential factors in the urbanites’ perception not only of the city environs, but also of themselves as individual subjects and part of an urban collective.

In addition to the relationship between the pedestrian and the passenger, we must consider the public transit space’s role within a broader framework of how the urban environment shapes and structures our thinking about history. The city as location has always served a pivotal role in our thinking of history; in terms of our relationship to it, as well as the relationship between past, present, and future. Through its architecture, cultural establishments, and numerous names of places, streets, and districts, we find links to the past. As center of both administrative and
executive political organization, the city organizes and radiates many of the rules and regulations that inform our day-to-day life; and the various renovations, innovations, and trends emerging in and around cities pave our way into the future. All these aspects of history in the city are likewise intertwined with representations of public transit and the passenger figure. After all, the city outside the window of the moving vehicle serves as one of, if not the most central, lens framing the passenger’s gaze. The passenger’s gaze is privy to historical sites, the commotion and bustle that fuel the present, as well as potential visions of the future in construction, renovation, and more recently restoration projects. Moreover, the transit system itself functioned as a powerful symbol of innovation and technology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As is the case with all large-scale urban renovation, parts of the “old” city must be destroyed to make room for the “new.” Given the urban transit network’s intrinsic relationship to the image of a “new” and “modern” Berlin, the transit space signified simultaneously the celebration of a new urbanity and the mourning of what was perceived as a more secure and stable way of life. In his book *Berlin’s Forgotten Future*, Matt Erlin investigates prominent figures and representations of urban life in eighteenth century Berlin, foregrounding the historical-theoretical significance and intersections of various textual representations of urban life and eighteenth century thinking about history. He identifies a tension in textual representations of the urban experience between the ideal, rational city, with an “emphasis on circulation, cleanliness, order, and symmetry” (Erlin 4) and the ill-proportioned and asymmetrical city that has gradually and organically grown over the course of history. The juxtaposition of the old and the new, he informs us, illustrates “the sense of a break with the past and a heightened awareness of the historical specificity of the contemporary. At the same time, however, both the representation of the rational city as an only partially realized ideal and the sensitivity to the burden of the past embodied in the
city center suggest a sense of historical progress” (Ibid.). Notably, the public transit system and the figure of the passenger shape the contours of similar tensions in twentieth century Berlin. The passenger’s adaptation and appropriation to new forms and systems of mobility, such as the carefully carved out and calculated lines, routes, timetables, and tariffs, indicate the adaptation of highly rational and systemized performances in urban space.

Much like flânerie, the history of public transit in Berlin runs parallel to what in cultural studies has been conceptualized as various shifts in human perception and engagement with urban space, both in terms of the actual lives of the city dwellers and in artistic reproductions of the city in film and literature. If we compare the Berlin novels of the nineteenth century by Theodor Fontane, Karl Gutzkow, and Max Kretzer to the likes of Alfred Döblin, Irmgard Keun, or Franz Hessel, it is evident that the literary representation of urban space, and the social interactions and regimes of perception taking place in it, changed between the 1870s to the 1920s. What I am referring to here is the broad trajectory from more coherent and cohesive narratives and depictions of space—that which we may think of as realism—to the fragmented visions of modernism and an urban imaginary of volatile subjects, disjointed plots, temporal displacements, and hallucinatory frames of perception. Scholarly debates revolving around this attitudinal shift toward the city, and methods of representing, or narrating the experience of life in it, often center around questions of acceleration of life and reconfigurations of spatial categories such as work/home, urban/rural, nature/culture and center/periphery, and that these shifts started happening in the city in the late 1800s.9

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While some may argue that the leisurely stroll through the city offers a more personal and immediate relationship to the city by virtue of the slower and self-dictated pace, the public transit vehicle facilitates a close social encounter with other people, crystallizing or rendering certain phenomena more visible than on the street by virtue of the close proximity to others. In her autobiography *Vom Kinde zum Menschen* (1921), Gabriele Reuter tells of a trip to Berlin in 1888:


Reuter’s intent had been to go out in the streets and see if the rumors of the Emperor’s death were true, but it was only upon entering the horse-drawn streetcar that it could be confirmed. Here, the vehicle partly functions as a condensed microcosm of the city, clearly rendering visible a communal consciousness that not only affirms the historical event of the Emperor’s passing, but also marks Reuter as a clear outsider, sitting in her bright clothes amongst a crowd dressed in black veils and bands. The transit vehicle and the figure of the passenger thus open up venues that

mediate the lines of belonging and exclusion in urban space that are perceived as inherently different from the exterior street.

Most passengers and writers that we will encounter in this dissertation are men. This skewed representation of gender can be partly explained by the fact that the vast majority of public transit passengers were men up until the First World War. However, the lack of representation by and of women does not mean that the network influenced their lives any less than men. In an article that takes a closer look at electric tramways and their passengers from 1881-1990, Barbara Schmucki (2002) argues that “tramways as new technology offered a new form of space within the city which was neither fully public nor wholly private. For the brief duration of the journey women and men alike were confined together within a narrow, intimate space” (Ibid. 61). While the study provides an interesting overview of the role of working women and the contemporary discussions and “biological differences” (Ibid 63) deeming women inherently less capable drivers and technology savvy, Schmucki, too, appears to have little to no personal accounts, narratives, or visual representations of the transit space produced by women. I hope that my study can help lay the groundwork for such material to be presented in future projects to open up a more nuanced “gendered” gaze and spatial representation where the female body can be liberated from its position of spectated and assume a subject position of active spectatorship.

The vantage point of the vehicle stresses the dialectics of seeing and being seen on the one hand, and also that of movement and stasis, on the other. The oscillation between stasis and

10 The First World War also marks the first point in time when women were hired as conductors, and even drivers, due to the lack of working men in the city. After the war, however, they were quickly dismissed. After the war and throughout the 1920s, the passenger body, according to Schmucki (2002) grew increasingly equal in terms of gender constellation. In the Second World War, women were once again called in to work in the transportation sector, but this time a law was introduced banning women drivers. Due to the extreme shortage, however, special permissions for female bus and tram drivers were later introduced. Notably, in addition to checking tickets, the “conductresses” were responsible for many similar tasks to that of the driver, such as braking and “replacing the trolley pole when it escaped from the overhead wire” (Schmucki, 61).
movement is commonly known as one of, if not the defining feature, of modernity and its many representations in various artforms and media. Thus, public transit is not just a form of mobility, but also a dynamic mode of seeing. While the vehicle itself is moving, people inside are generally sitting or standing still for the duration of the ride, facilitating a more intimate encounter between people. On the flip-side, the vantage point of the vehicle provides little opportunity for a detailed view of the city outside; the buildings, streets, signs and people that the vehicle passes by are like snapshots. Such a notion of fleeting and ephemeral visions of urban space are by no means exclusive to the public transit space, but the dynamism of the outside city is further exacerbated by the quiet and peaceful interior of the vehicle. Unlike the busy street montage, the seated and static people, signs, and other advertisements inside the vehicle are transformed into informative objects of study for the human gaze. This doubling of interior and exterior views constructs a duality in the passenger gaze. In an anecdote published in 1908, Robert Walser stresses two modes of seeing inside the streetcar: the “Geradevorsichschauen,” a skill which he allegedly has perfected; and a “kleinere Rundreise … durch das Innere des Wagens, über dicke herabhängende Schnurrbärte, über das Gesicht einer müden, alten Frau, an einem Paar jugendlich-schelmischer Mädchenaugen vorüber, so lange bis man von Alltagsstudien satt geworden ist und langsam sein eigenes Schuhwerk betrachtet” (Walser 34-35). Walser describes himself as a figure in control, his gaze wanders around the vehicle and he makes the choice of where and how to look. He stresses the details of peoples’ faces, such as the mustaches and eyes. Indeed, Walser’s self-reflective description highlights the passenger as equal parts contemplative flaneur and flirtatious voyeur. Noteworthy is also the fact that he calls this activity of people-watching a “Alltagsstudie.” Especially this quality of the everyday is something that suffuses representations of public transit
and passenger accounts, yet they tend to simultaneously highlight what, and how, they spectate as something exceptional.

Figure 1. Passengers traveling in the second-class tram cars designed by Alfred Grenander sat facing one another. As such, those who wanted to look out the window simultaneously had to look at (or right past) the face of a stranger. The gaze is virtually unobstructed unless you establish some sort of barrier between yourself and passengers seated across from you, such as a newspaper. "Innere eines Wagens II. Klasse der Hochbahngesellschaft Berlin." Deutsche Fotothek

In other cases, the image of the docile “reading” and “gazing” passenger is undermined by the seething tension of the crowd. In Slatan Dudow’s 1932 film, *Kuhle Wampe*, a political debate between strangers on a train about the world coffee market ensues as a man suddenly begins to read out loud a newspaper headline in the jam-packed train: “In Brasilien haben sie 24 Millionen Pfund Kaffee verbrannt.” The previously anonymous and disparate crowd of people all turn their
attention to the man. Some express their mistrust of this piece of news, whereas a group of middle-aged women discuss all the wrong methods of preparing coffee at home. What had initially been a friendly conversation started by a newspaper headline, however, quickly escalates into larger questions pertaining to colonialism, world politics, class, and solidarity. In a similar vein to Reuter’s streetcar rides almost half a century earlier, the train car in Dudow’s film represents a microcosm of the public sphere, an amalgam of people with varying political views and a platform for discussion. As the scene ends, the crowd marches through the tunnel leading out of the underground station to Brecht’s “Solidaritätslied,” suggesting that the discussions started in the train lives on in the outside world. The film deviates from many other modernist depictions in its take on the inside of the vehicle as a public space of debate and expression for political tensions.

What makes the scene so different, but also highly effective, is how the vehicle represents this liminal space between intimacy and anonymity that highlights the potential of public urban space to not merely serve as the breeding ground for the anonymous and alienated urban crowd we associate with the modern city, but also as a space for open public debate.

The trains running through the city are not only part of the visual and social cityscape, but of course also the soundscape. The modern city, as early expressionist poets often highlighted, is also an auditory experience. In Georg Heym’s poem “Berlin II,” (1910) for example, the “Kremser … Omnibusse … Automobile, Rauch und Hupenklänge” suffuse the streets; in Ernst Blass’s “Ende…” (1912) “[jagen] Wagen klingelnd durch den Abend”; the Potsdamer Platz is in a state of “ewigen Gebrüll” in Paul Boldt’s poem “Auf der Terasse des Café Josty” (1912); or, as is the case in Karl Bröger’s poem “Die singende Stadt” (1914), the sounds of trains and rails become something akin to a song: “Aus Stahlgeleis und Eisenschienen kling / das Lied, das uns die Stadt am Tage singt.” The heavy traffic in the streets constitutes not only new visual impressions but
also auditory stimulation, underlining its all-pervasiveness over life in Berlin. For Mascha Kaléko, the sound of the train evokes ambivalent memories of home after she returns to Berlin for the first time in 1974 after her life in exile. In her poem “Bleibtreu heißt die Straße,” we read: “Hier war mein Glück zu Hause. Und meine Not. / Hier kam mein Kind zur Welt. Und mußte fort. / Hier besuchten mich meine Freunde / Und die Gestapo. / Nachts hörte man die Stadtbahnzüge / Und das Horst-Wessel-Lied aus der Kneipe nebenan. / Was blieb davon? / Die rosa Petunien auf dem Balkon. / Der kleine Schreibwarenladen.” The tensions between Glück and Not, kommen and fortfahren, Freunde and Gestapo and the sounds of the Stadtbahnzüge and the Nazi anthem Horst-Wessel-Lied generate a space where the outside world of the violent Nazi regime undermines the safety of the home realm. The pairing of the sounds of the train and the Nazi song suggest that the presence of the Nazi Party was as intrusive, prevalent, and potentially threatening and violent entity in urban space as the daily noise of the city’s heavy traffic.

The potential that something “extraordinary” is embedded in day-to-day life—what might at first glance appear as something painfully ordinary—suffuses several representations of the transit space. It finds its expression in the journey that is part of quotidian life, the daily occurrence to which we have grown so accustomed that the awareness of time—the duration of journey and the arrival of the next train—and space—where to enter and exit to arrive at the right platform or street—have been internalized to such a degree that the passenger’s performance has become automated. The network carves out not only the lines along which Berliners move, but also the rhythm to which they dance through the busy work week and leisurely weekend alike. This quotidian aspect of public transit, I contend, is one of the most important factors that separates the long-distance traveler from the commuter.11 Sitting in a public transit vehicle bound between two

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11 An argument could be made that such a thing as a long-distance, or global commuter, may exist in an age of super- or hypermodernity. That passenger figure, however, would be the subject of a different study.
spaces integral to your daily life—let us say home and work—your mind is free to wander. The journey by public transit requires a lesser degree of attention or awareness than by car, bike, or even by foot at the expense of spatial and temporal freedom. The timetables and trajectories are set, the lines that connect the two points between which you move are pre-set and indifferent to the individual needs, wishes or demands of the individual passenger (barring any “incidents” of passenger transgression onto the tracks).\textsuperscript{12} The commuting mind is free to wander while its body remains “stuck” in transit.

Various intersecting identities and qualities saturate public transit space. The passenger is part flaneur and voyeur; observing and observed by others, and the transportation vehicle is an object to be looked at and also to be looked out of. Moreover, important to note is that the passenger’s vertical and horizontal alignment with the city shifts: at times seeing the city from street-level, and sometimes distanced by elevation or subterranean descent, generating a space that eludes fixed categories. This rich mixture of different modes and perspectives of seeing adds another layer to the relationship between the passenger, the urban environment, and urban subjectivity. What and how we see our surroundings ultimately conditions how we conceive of not only space itself, but also of ourselves—and our identity—in it. Indeed, during Berlin’s explosive growth from \textit{Residenzstadt} to \textit{Weltstadt}, transportation played a vital role for the city’s physiognomy on the one hand, and of people’s experiences within it, on the other. The social experience of being in a vehicle with others, seeing the trains go by on the elevated and into underground tunnels, or hearing their sound even in your own private home space are all constituent experiences of life in modernizing Berlin. Given this inextricable connection between

\textsuperscript{12} Ever since the first study of suicide on subway systems by Guggenheim and Weisman’s (1972), suicide on tracks in urban centers has been continually reported as a public health challenge (See Ratnayake, Ruwan. et.al 2007 for a general review of literature on the topic). I have yet to find historical research or literary texts that deal with the issue in Berlin.
daily life in Berlin and its traffic-arteries, the vehicles that at a first glance might appear to serve a mere backdrop in front of (or within) which the stories and plots of narratives of Berlin unfold, ought to be taken into closer consideration in textual analysis of Berlin literature and film.

In order to help solidify the link between text, city, and transportation, and to understand the impact of transportation on the urban experience as mediated through cultural representation, the next section seeks to draw out the theoretical implications of movement and space. Scholarly debates on space—and urban space in particular—has a long history that can help provide the necessary tools to explore the complex relationship between human subjects and the spaces we inhabit. More specifically, the following section aims to further underscore the impact of transit technology on human perception and subjectivity as mediated by cultural representations of the city.

**Perception, Performance, and Space: “Doing” Public Transit**

The city as a space which we inhabit has many forms: it is a place to live and work; a measure of economic vitality and technological progress; an architectural project and creation; a political setting. Moreover, the city can and has been understood as both container for, and as a product of these various functions. Today, the reigning idea of space is that it emerges out of social practices and movements rather than its physical materiality. As James Donald notes:

> “the city” does not just refer to a set of buildings in a particular place. To put it polemically, there is no such thing as a city. Rather, the city designates the space produced by the interaction of historically and geographically specific institutions, social relations of production and reproduction, practices of government, forms and media of communication, and so forth (Donald 422).
Within this broad umbrella term for what constitutes a city in spatial terms, transportation figures as a form of communication and movement that is key to the production of urban space. Within the larger context of urban space, the transit vehicle, I maintain, serves as a container for both individual and collective experiences of passengers, not only in terms of empirical models of demographics, economy or urban planning, but also—as we saw in some of the examples outlined in the previous section—in terms of feeling and emotion.

In many ways, the public transit network can be understood within a larger context of modernist architecture. The new buildings and spaces in steel, glass, and concrete redefined or abolished the separation of spaces, volumes, and planes characterized by an earlier architecture in stone. As Andreas Huyssen explains, some architects and thinkers, such as Le Corbusier and Sigfried Giedion, would propagate these spatial qualities as liberating, which provides an interesting foil to the critique of the rational urban plan we find in Kracauer’s work or in Simmel’s warning of nervous overstimulation in the city (Cf. Huyssen 17-18). Furthermore, many influential thinkers in the discourse of space and place, such as Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Marc Augé have commented on the aspects of movement and transit as constituents in the production of space in a (post)modern age. Although they all have their own framework, by and large, these theorists work under the presupposition that our understanding of space, and the ways in which we imagine it, inflect, and reflect power hierarchies and sensory sensibilities.

It is important to note that space, and by extension the transit space, quickly became central to discussions revolving around cultural production in German society at large around the turn of

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13 It is today a consensus both in the humanities and sciences that space and time are processes of material practices, in other words, neither time nor space are conceivable without matter. In light of such discoveries, David Harvey proposes the following: “the conclusion we should draw is simply that neither time nor space can be assigned objective meanings independently of material processes, and that it is only through investigation of the latter that we can properly ground our conceptions of the former” (Harvey 204). Following this train of thought, the transportation network can be seen as a material practice that shapes and informs human conceptions of space and time in the city.
the twentieth century. As we will see throughout the dissertation, the engagement with public transit as a symbol and technological device that affected daily life in Berlin saturated not only the literature and film of the time, but also popular debates and discussions about “modern existence” in a broader sense. In an article from 1900 in the weekly journal “Die Gartenlaube,” for example, Paul Dehn discusses the ramifications of modern transit on human time management:

Alles in allem ist das Nervensystem des socialen Körpers, sind die Verkehrsmittel allzu entwickelt, etwas überreizt. Das Leben ist eine Hetzjagd geworden [...] Je mehr Zeit man sparen kann und spart durch die modernen Verkehrsmittel, desto mehr Zeit scheint man zu brauchen, inmitten aller Zeitsparris haben wir keine Zeit mehr [...] Der gesellschaftliche Verkehr wird hurtiger, knapper. Man unterhält sich am liebsten in rascher Wechselrede mit kurzen Geschichten, man schreibt nicht mehr lange Briefe, man bevorzugs Postkarten, man liest immer weniger Bücher und immer mehr Zeitungen. Was man an Masse gewinnt, geht an Tiefe verloren. Quantitativ und technisch haben wir große Fortschritte gemacht, nicht aber in gleichem Maße qualitativ und geistig. Wenn die Verkehrsmittel die Beine der Gesellschaft sind, dann haben sie sich unverhältnismäßig entwickelt. (Dehn 1900)

Dehn establishes a direct link between his contemporaries’ fascination with, and increased usage of, modern modes of transportation and inter-human communication. He offers a diagnosis in which the nervous system of the “social body” may become overstimulated by means of modern transportation, creating and encouraging people to restructure—or to borrow Schivelbusch’s term, industrialize—their time management. What Dehn witnesses is a world in which traffic has become both the legs and brain of society, directing human movement, patterns of communication, and rational thinking. In other words, Dehn’s observation posits transit as a force that shapes human performance in space. Rather than condemning the new technology, however, he encourages that we think critically about the relationship between technological progress and our
society, and more specifically the connection between the ways we commute through space and how we commune and communicate with people around us.\textsuperscript{14}

Another representative example of the connection between people and traffic lines in urban space can be found in Walter Kiaulehn’s 1958 chronicle \textit{Berlin: Schicksal einer Weltstadt}.


There are several key components in Kiaulehn’s observation about 1920s Berlin that we will encounter in various guises throughout the chapters. To partake in city traffic is a performative behavior necessary to be part of the urban crowd and that separates the urban subject from their private space and self. This behavioral “Tempo” is not only the source of a particular urban persona, but also a defining feature of Berlin’s very own and unique “Weltstadcharakter”.

Moreover, both Dehn’s and Kiaulehn’s observations echo many prevalent sociologies of the modern Metropolis and mass psychology from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as they both underscore that being in and moving along with the urban crowd, changes the urban dweller’s subjectivity in fundamental ways.

If perceptual habits develop in response to the built environment around us, then the transit network and the passenger are key to exploring what Fredric Jameson calls “cognitive mapping.” Jameson has written extensively about postmodernist urban space, arguing that our perceptual habits and sensual understanding of space were formed in the world of high modernism, and needs to evolve to match our current built environment; we need a new “cognitive map” of space. The

\textsuperscript{14} German philosopher Oswald Sprengler drives a similar thesis in his 1931 book \textit{Der Mensch und die Technik}. Sprengler argues that machines dictate the course of their creators, as thusly influence human behavior and how we live our lives in profound ways.
major difference between (high) modernism and postmodernism in Jameson’s work lies in their relationship to space and time, where he argues that the former is dominated by categories of time, and the latter by spatial questions. While Jameson discusses cognitive mapping within the context of postmodern “hyperspace,” representations of transit in modernist Berlin texts are as preoccupied with space and geography as they are with time. Moreover, in a similar vein to Jameson’s argument that “we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace” (Jameson, 80), we see that passengers and other urban subjects adapt (or fail to do so) to new patterns and behaviors in response to the new urban reality produced by modern transportation technologies.15

We can identify a similar emphasis on movement and dynamism in key seminal theories and discussions on space and place throughout the last decades of the twentieth century.16 In his widely cited work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980. English translation in 1984), Michel de Certeau describes space as the result of animating or setting a place into motion.

A place [*lieu*] is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence … A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements … In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of [a place] … in short *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers (Certeau 117, emphasis in original).

Key to Certeau’s theory of space and place is the notion of spatial practice, i.e., the materials and geographic features of a city *spatialize* by taking on practical roles. In this sense, places are generally physically manifested and can often be found on maps—such as New York Grand Central Station, for example.

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15 See also: Thacker (2003) p. 82, p. 220 for a discussion of Jameson’s cognitive mapping in relation to modernist writing.
Central Station, and even its sub-units such as individual tracks. With every new traveler or passer-by, however, new spatial constellations manifest within the place. In other words, he links static and taken-for-given orders to the concept of place and the products of individual freedom and action to space. Rather than moving through space in a vehicle, however, the practice of walking is the central category of movement in Certeau’s framework. Walking, he explains is the “indefinite process of being absent and search for a proper” (Certeau 103), an act which he considers representative of the encounter between the city dweller and the urban landscape. Moreover, Certeau outlines that a city can be viewed either as theoretical space—the “above” view of the city on a map or in a panorama, where locations appear fixed—or as social and immersive—the experience of walking through a city. I believe that the transit space inherently pushes against such a stratification of visualizing urban space as either one or the other, as a trip by public transit through Berlin encompasses both.

Within the larger scope of spatial theory and urban space, modern means of transportation have been discussed alongside the notion of “other” spaces, or “non-places.” In Marc Augé’s 1992 seminal essay on Non-places, he argues that dwellings such as train stations and airports fail to provide the sense of stability that is traditionally associated with place. Augé’s non-place is defined by its lack of certain characteristics: “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (Augé 78). The deficiencies Augé identifies within

17 Identity, in this regard, means that the place can be pin-pointed based on its proper name. As an example, we can think of a local restaurant contra a large restaurant chain such as McDonald’s. The relation aspect refers to a place’s embedment to its surroundings. A true place (he uses the word “anthropological” place), according to Augé, is firmly rooted and incorporated in the surrounding landscape, as opposed to, for instance, the train: “The railway, which often passes behind the houses making up the town, catches provincials off guard in the privacy of their daily lives, behind the façade, on the garden side, the kitchen or bedroom side” (Augé 99). The railway pierces through rather than integrate with earlier “anthropological” places. The third deficiency of the non-place is that it is suspended in an eternal present: “Everything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time, as if there were no history other than the last forty-eight hours of news, as if each individual history were drawing its motives, its words
the non-place designate two complementary but distinct realities: “spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces” (Augé 94). Some noteworthy non-places par-excellence in Augé’s framework include transit hubs such as airports and train stations. These are spaces that you pass through, where your presence is time-limited and transitory by nature of the function and rules that govern the space. Given how Auge’s non-place functions as an umbrella term for a wide range of transitory spaces, it can help us discern similarities between the public transit space specifically, and other transit spaces in general. Moreover, as this dissertation tracks various trends and representations of public transit in film, feuilleton writing, and various other images, Augé’s and Certeau’s socio-anthropological claims concerning the reciprocity between transit and space need to be complimented by theoretical frameworks and discussions closer related to literary and cultural studies.

Marie-Laure Ryan has argued that space is a key constituent in narrative, which she (among many other scholars in the field) recognizes as the discourse of human experience. However, most definitions of narrative “by characterizing stories as the representation of a sequence of events, foreground time at the expense of space” (Ryan “Space” 1). This favoring of time over space, she continues, has resulted in a narrow understanding of space merely as a container or location in which stories unfold. However, Ryan argues that the “importance of space for narratology is not limited to the representation of a world … serving as container for existences and as locations for events” (Ryan). She distinguishes four forms of textual spatiality: spatial frames, setting, story space, narrative (or story) world and narrative universe. The spatial frames are the various
locations shown by the narrative discourse (or an image). They are hierarchically organized (a room is a subspace of a house) and their boundaries may be either clear-cut (a room is clearly separated from other rooms in the same house) or fuzzy (a landscape may slowly change as a character moves through it). The setting signifies the socio-historico-geographical environment in which the events take place: Berlin Alexanderplatz, for instance, is set in 1920s Berlin. The story space is the world as mapped by the actions and thoughts of characters. This can thusly include spaces beyond the spatial frames, such as spaces that occur in dreams or fantasies. The narrative world also includes the reader’s imagination “on the basis of cultural knowledge and real world experience” (Ryan). So, even if the story spaces consist of separate places, readers uses their imagination to create a coherent entity. For example, we assume that the narrative world of Berlin Alexanderplatz extends beyond the spatial frames of the story space centered around the protagonist, Franz Biberkopf. The last category, the narrative universe, is the world “presented as actual by the text, plus all the counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams, and fantasies” (Ryan).

Although the many theories on space and place vary slightly in their definitions of different categories and types of spaces, movement always holds a key position in the varying frameworks. For the scope of this dissertation, there are two categories of movement in space that I want to stress in relation to public transit: recurrent and transitory types of movement. For example, imagine you are sitting on a bench overlooking one of the elevated viaduct rail line leading into the station at the Alexanderplatz (or any other urban transit hub that comes to mind). You are very much at the heart of city life, experiencing the commotion, ephemerality, and fluctuating

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18 These two categories of recurrent and transitory movement have been proposed by me. I have not yet found a theoretical framework that categorizes various types of transportation—it is much more common that transportation spaces get compared to other kinds of spaces, such as the “home space,” “workspace,” or “entertainment/leisure space.”
impressions of urban space. Suddenly a train swooshes by, and while you may not dedicate any more or less thought to the train than anything else that is happening around you at that particular moment, if you linger for a longer period of time, you might take note of the regularity at which the trains come by—at set intervals, at the same speed, along the same rails. If you look at a map and schedule of the transportation network, you will be able to predict the movements of the vehicles with ease. Indeed, the trajectories of the transportation vehicles, and by extension the people inside, are recurrent insofar that they are temporally and spatially determined by a time schedule and the transit grid. At the same time, the visual impression from watching a public transit vehicle, or spectating the cityscape from within one, generates the impression of being in transit—passing through, or passing by space. The former—recurrent movement—inscribes a sense of stability, regularity, and rituality in urban space, while the latter corresponds to the popular turn-of-the-century image of an urban environment in constant flux or a Simmelean intensification of nervous stimulation resulting from swift changes of stimuli. The notions of regularity and stability play particularly important roles in my analysis of modernist texts in chapter 2 as it debunks, pushes against, and develops on prevalent modernist depictions of the twentieth century city as a site of inconsequence, a space of fragmentation that jeopardizes preceding (qualitatively different) notions of coherence, cohesion, and stability. I believe that these two categories of movement are more important to discuss in relation to public transit than to discern its relation to the categories of space, place, or non-place.

The wide range of perspectives of Berlin and urban space offered by narrative texts and other cultural artifacts resist any clear spatial categorization. The routes of the network do not only cut across different kinds of terrain, but also blur the line between private and public. Ever since the construction phase, the pillars and rails cutting through the city have been perceived as equally
marvelous and intrusive. In Kretzer’s novel *Meister Timpe* (1888), which we will encounter in chapter 1, the private property and workshop of the Timpe family faces a great threat as the *Stadtbahn* is built straight across their backyard. In a similar vein—albeit in a more playful manner—Joseph Roth (1922) describes the transit lines intrusion on private spaces as follows: “Der Stadtbahnzug fährt hart an den Häusern vorbei, und seine Passagiere können—wenn es Frühling wird und die Mauern anfangen, Geheimnisse preiszugeben, die Fensterscheiben, Idylle zu offenbaren, die Hinterhöfe, Heimlichkeiten auszukramen—viele fremde und interesante Dinge zu sehen bekommen” (Roth 129).

The close readings at hand aim to unravel in what ways and how the explosive growth of Berlin public transit network influenced narratives of modern Berlin. It has been the aim of this introduction chapter to solidify the connections between transportation and representations of urban space and to provide an overview of the historical and theoretical background that has fueled the research and questions at hand. The main chapters provide a mosaic-like image of how the public transit network has been imagined and integrated in city texts of various kind over half a century. The chapters are loosely chronologically ordered and highlight different focal points and contentious topics in the history of public transit in the literature and film of Berlin. Furthermore, they each emphasize a different quality and directionality of movement in a more abstract sense: the earlier texts emphasize an almost gravitational pull of the city towards which all lines of traffic flow; whereas we in the later chapters see wider range of trajectories within and around the city, oscillating between core and periphery, above- and below ground, dynamism and refuge. The first chapter explores literary responses to the construction and early operation of Berlin’s first major railway thoroughfare, the *Stadtbahn*. The *Stadtbahn* served as an emblem of modern urbanity and prosperity, making areas in and around the city more accessible to those that had the time and
resources to explore the various areas in and around Berlin. While authors such as Theodor Fontane and Emil Dominik express enthusiasm for the new mode of transportation and the many new vistas of the city from above the elevated viaduct rails, Max Kretzer employs the motif of the Stadtbahn to highlight the impact of such large-scale change on Berlin’s social and economic fabrics on people and places “stuck” in a pre-industrial way of life. We see in these early representations of public transit how the new verticality of urban space offered by the elevated tracks—the experience of looking down and perceiving the city from above—become a center pillar in what we in broad strokes can refer to as an urban subjectivity. If the Stadtbahn came to embody a clear hierarchy of above and below, the second chapter takes a closer look at the explosive horizontal expansion of the intra-city traffic network in the 1920s. The electrification of Berlin’s public transit network increased the distance and velocity at which urban dwellers moved through urban space. Consequently, representations of the city from within transit are often depicted as blurred and disjointed. Reading Alfred Döblin’s Berlin Alexanderplatz (1929) alongside Walter Ruttmann’s Berlin, Sinfonie der Großstadt (1927) and Robert Siodmak’s Menschen am Sonntag (1930), we see how public transit has both psychic and bodily effects on human bodies. Transit space exposes vulnerabilities and discomforts for urban subjects unable to keep up with, or synchronize with, the dynamic and hectic rhythms orchestrated by the intra-urban transit network. Conversely, public transit also connects people to spaces of refuge in the urban periphery from the bustling centers. The third and final main chapter connects and expands on the notions of verticality, horizontality, and refuge as we explore representations of Berlin’s subway system, the Untergrundbahn. Rather than seeing the city from above in the Stadtbahn or the passing and fleeting ephemeral impressions flashing by as the passenger looks out the window of the electrified streetcar, the U-Bahn provides a view of urban space from “below,” shrouded in darkness. As we will continuously see throughout
the chapters, the urban dweller learns to operate in these various spaces to navigate their city properly; but I also argue that the various responses we see to the passenger’s shifting position in elevation, velocity, and distance expand on and add nuance to the urban experience as filtered through the walking flâneur.

![Image of a flâneur poster](image)

**Figure 2.** The public transit network did not only make it easier to travel between home and work, but also to various entertainment establishments that we associate with Berlin modern, such as cinemas, department stores, or as is the case in this figure, casinos. "Ein Schritt vom [Bahnhof] Untergrundbahn Alexanderplatz ins Alexandercasino." Stadtmuseum Berlin. Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin.

Bringing texts that center around, or are set against the backdrop of, modern Berlin into dialogue with the history of the city’s public transportation networks enables us to identify structural and thematic links between them, links that demonstrate how cityscape, transportation and urbanite exist in a mutually constitutive relationship in the period from 1880 into the late inter-war period. With the focus on the human experience as represented in artistic renditions and narratives of Berlin, this dissertation complements empirical perspectives on public transportation and urbanism. The chapters are heterogeneous in nature and scope: they are in part examinations of
representations and the experiences of transit within Berlin based on my close readings of literary records, fiction, poetry, and film, but also include empirical data and historical records I see as pertinent to the topic. My method is to focus on individual works, to read them as products of the creative or interpretative imagination of Berlin as a rapidly growing and modernizing entity, and to show them as part of the relationship between city and text. I want to foreground that the texts I work with, although speaking to each other in interesting ways, retain their specificity vis-à-vis each other. What I focus on is their engagement with the public transportation network, both on the level of form and plot, as a central common denominator. What they all have in common is that they posit the space of transit, not unlike urban space at large, as a site permeated by social, spatial and temporal relations that leave a mark on places, bodies, psychologies and subjectivities. I foreground the ways in which the texts depict the transportation network as a spatio-temporal experience from different social perspectives and time periods, resulting in both terrifying and liberating experiences generated by the modernizing cityscape. I consider the texts both as historical documents, as well as aesthetic forms that contain and derive from the historical experience of modernizing Berlin. My hope is that the exploration undertaken in this project can further future lines of inquiry and arguments about the relationship between the historical experience of modernity, urban space and the city as text. Considering the vast number of texts produced in and about Berlin, many books, articles, authors and ideas have to be left out: instead, I have chosen to include texts, historical information and theoretical frameworks that I consider to be important and essential to explore the topic in depth whilst maintaining the broad historical time frame. In discussing and analyzing a number of canonical works of fiction and the modern city through the lens of public transit networks over a long time period, I will at times have to both generalize and summarize. What I am saying about the relationship between Berlin and its public
transit network is that it provides a productive dialogue and point of contact between the city and its artistic reproductions and popular debates of its time. Other cities will be used at times as a point of comparison, but I do not suggest that my readings and conclusions can be applied outside the historico-geographic scope of this dissertation. What interest me are the intersections between daily life in the city, infrastructural developments, and artistic engagement with the city as both subject and setting in what I refer to in broad strokes as narratives of Berlin.
Chapter I: Structural Transformations and New Vistas

Oh Zarathustra, hier ist die große Stadt: hier hast du Nichts zu suchen und Alles zu verlieren … riechst du nicht schon die Schlachthäuser und Garküchen des Geistes? Dampft nicht diese Stadt vom Dumpf geschlachteten Geistes?
—Friedrich Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra

When a new system or infrastructure is added to a city, it will inevitably have ramifications on what is already there. As we will come to see in this chapter, although many authors and artists celebrated and imagined the efficient travel and increased mobility offered by the growing public transit network in Berlin as a sign of historical progress and prosperity, others sought to shed light on the stories of the people displaced by large-scale urban renovation projects. This tension between a celebration of transportation technology innovation and urban renovation and a sense of displacement in a time of modernization and industrialization lies at the heart of this chapter. If we compare these opposing perspectives on the proliferation of intra-urban transportation and place them in conversation with the larger historical context out of which they emerged, we recognize that the public transit network figures as a monument of sorts in representations of Berlin in the 1880s, commemorating the arrival of an industrial age to Berlin, while simultaneously marking the departure of pre-industrial Berlin. In relation to the larger argument pursued in this dissertation about how transit spaces structure perception in, and conceptions of, modernity in Berlin, this chapter contends the following: While the historical development of Berlin’s public transportation system epitomizes the necessity to establish extensive and efficient intra-urban transportation routes as a process of industrialization, looking at writers’ responses to these developments, the network is intrinsically connected to Berlin’s imaginary and cultural self-
imagination as a metropolis. Literary representations of the rise of urban transit showcase this by foregrounding the network’s function in facilitating visual perspectives and vistas that urbanites perceived as extraordinary, unprecedented, and inherently “modern.”

The large-scale urban renovations taking place in big cities around the turn of the twentieth century in Europe and North America were not restricted to public outdoor spaces, but they also exerted influence over private spaces. Urban dwellers perceived the noise and sight of vehicles, drilling and digging in the streets, construction and demolition sites as intrusive and inescapable. One particularly powerful visual representation of the all-pervasiveness of the modernizing cityscape can be found in the famous painting *The Street Enters the House* (1912) by Italian futurist painter Umberto Boccioni. Toward the lower center bottom of the painting, we see a woman looking down from her balcony on a vibrant cityscape. Erected pillars in front of the balcony indicate the planning of a large-scale construction right in front of the woman’s balcony and we see a man in pursuit of a horse fleeing the loud and hectic scene. For the spectating woman, however, there is no refuge or escape to be found. The vivid color scheme and lack of spatial depth create an ambiguous image in which the woman’s private home sphere and the public space of the street blend together. This blurring of borders between the street and the house poignantly showcases what around the turn of the twentieth century was conceived of in the arts as an imminent and unavoidable influence of the modern, public city space, and urban crowds on the private home space and individual subject. The transformations and changes affected the modern city could not be contained or closed-off from the home. This painting’s representation of urban space brings to the fore precisely the aspects that this chapter will deal with in relation to the early history of Berlin’s public transit system: the all-pervasive, rapid changes, and changing physicality of urban space.
Against the backdrop of its inauguration as the capital of unified Germany in 1871, Berlin served as its social, economic, and political center. Given its pivotal role in building and organizing a “new” Germany, what could possibly be a better place for writers and other artists to take the pulse of German modernity? By and large, one can identify two mutually reinforcing attitudes toward Berlin in the works of Berlin-based writers in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, the city as Moloch on the one hand, yet at the same time a space of infinite imagination on the other. From a different but related perspective, it is perhaps the perceived sense of danger that engenders the imaginary of Berlin modern. Wolfgang Rothe notes that the harsh new realities of urban existence posed a challenge to authors and other artists and their craft, a challenge “von furchtbarer, aber doch auch lohnender Art, die sie darum annehmen” (Rothe 10). Decisive contrasts were not only apparent in discussions about city life, but also evidenced by the cityscape itself. The new industrial quarters and growing proletariat along the city outskirts painted a sharp contrast to core of the city, which at the time showed the face of the Prussian aristocracy, adorned with classical monuments, palaces, museums, and the university. Toward the 1890s, the growing industrial and commercial sectors began to make an imprint closer to the city center. Fields, gardens, and modest older buildings were demolished to make room for factories and tenements, transforming inner suburbs like Alexanderplatz and Wedding into working-class districts “where victims of society gathered—whores, criminals, the destitute and sick” (Pascal 128). At the same time, the public transit network and railway systems had begun to diminish distances and borders between suburb and center by connecting smaller, and at the time independent, villages and cities to Berlin’s center.

In line with Berlin’s rapid economic, spatial, and social growth, artistic representations of what city life in Berlin encapsulated also expanded in scope. Not only was the urban and rural divide
around the immediate vicinity of Berlin’s center growing increasingly amorphous, but the huge influx of people moving from the countryside to Berlin, as well as the formation of two new societal classes; the new wealthy bourgeoisie and a poor, working proletariat, re-configured the social stratification of the Berlin population. These large-scale contrasts between the old and the new, the core and the periphery, the wealthy and poor, generated new social complexes of values that writers and other artists sought to capture in their work. The generation of writers we often refer to as naturalists looked to the gritty Berlin-Vorstädte and the daily lives of a growing working class to serve as their artistic muse. These new narratives of life in Berlin paint a sharp contrast to the more narrow scope of an earlier tradition of Berlin literature, such as E.T.A Hoffmann’s *Des Vetters Eckfenster* (1822) and Wilhelm Raabe’s *Die Chronik der Sperrlingsgasse* (1856), who despite their engagement with central urban motifs and vistas, such as urban crowds, stay very close to home, seldom venturing beyond the confines of the private, offering a narrowly framed view around the city center (Cf. Freisfeld 15ff.). While I do not think that the construction of public transportation ought to be considered as the prime catalyst of a more encompassing or prismatic representation of urban space in art, through the lens of public transportation, we must recognize that the two are inextricably connected.

The implementation of the intra-city transportation system in Berlin affected not only the physical environment and layout of the *real* Berlin. The construction project necessitated demolishing or cutting through, over, and later below buildings and streets, processes which exerted a strong influence over the *imaginary* and the aesthetic experience of the city. While the rails within the city transported goods and people in a manner similar to that of the international railway, albeit on a smaller scale, the public transit system also grew to be an integral literary motif and symbol to capture and render readable the causality between the restructuring of urban space
on human perception and experience of space. In order to explore the relationship between what we can think of as the “real” and the “imagined” Berlin constructed in literary representations, this chapter consists of two parts. The first part provides a brief history of the Berlin transportation network, as well as an overview of the cultural life of Berlin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discussing the pivotal role of Berlin as a site for authors and other artists to find inspiration and opportunities to elevate their craft, whilst also zooming in more specifically on the motif of transportation for the figure of the Großstadtarchitekt and the Berlin Großstadtliteratur. The second part centers around a close reading of Max Kretzer’s Meister Timpe (1887), a novel and social commentary depicting the devastating consequences of the construction of Stadtbahn on a small artisan family home and business in Eastern Berlin. These topics cover the initial phase of what I argue to be a development in literary representations of trains and traffic in the city, a development in which the symbolism of the public transit network as a vehicle of change and the figure of the passenger become central objects of depiction for writers and other artists at the time. Although the public transit train and the figure of the passenger continue to be stressed in subsequent chapters as important elements in artistic renditions of life in Berlin, what sets this early period apart from later years is the strongly pronounced connection between transit and historical changes in the city, changes we categorize under the rubrics of industrialization and modernization. The distinction between public transit’s connection with ongoing changes to Berlin and what we will encounter in the next chapter—namely transit as an integral part of everyday city life—is an important one to make as the former emphasizes a transformative process whereas the latter emphasizes the resulting conditions of said process.
From Inter-City to Intra-City Railway: Berlin Picks up the Pace

… durch Nacht und Dunkel hin … ging unsere Fahrt, immer rascher und rascher, denn der eben laut werdende Pfiff der Lokomotive mahnte bereits zur Eil. Abgepaßt! Im selben Momente, wo der Zug hielt, hielten auch wir, und abermals eine kleine Weile, so war die letzte Station und die letzte Gitterbrücke passiert, und in das Bahnhofsgleis eingleitend, wölbte sich wieder der mächtige Bogen über uns. Aussteigen! Ein Strom, ein Gewirr; Pelze, Koffer und Geschrei: der ganze Lärm einer großen Stadt.

—Theodor Fontane, Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg

In 1881, at Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia’s invitation, Fontane travels from Berlin to castle Dreilinden close to Wannsee, today about an hour train ride southwest of central Berlin. He boards a train at the Potsdamer train station, hurries along to catch the connecting train at Steglitzer Station to Lichterfelde, and at Zehlendorf he alights to what is today the S1 that takes him to the Wannsee station. After a day of fun and games at the castle, the royal escort takes him back to the station from where he goes back to central Berlin. Fontane’s descriptions of the journeys to and fro are noticeably different in tone; on his way out of the city, he notes “alles war öde und leer” and going back he describes a sensation as if the train picks up pace and getting louder the closer to Berlin they get. The trip between these two differently perceived, yet infrastructurally connected locations of the urban core and the suburban periphery underlines the transit networks function as a portal between different experiential realms in and around urban space. Indeed, in Fontane’s and many of his contemporaries’ stories of urban travel, the dynamism, rhythm, and pace of city life are inextricably connected to—if not even synonymous to—Berlin’s transportation network.

Fontane’s journey is not a grand voyage over cold mountain ranges and perilous seas, but rather unfolds within his local geography, i.e., the system that structures and affects his everyday life. Traffic networks and routes have always been fundamental to shaping and connecting spaces that are central to human society and daily life. As many scholars have noted, around the turn of the
twentieth century, several new global transportation networks were established, causing old ones to grow or disappear, and new centers and junctions to form. In his study *Restlosigkeit: Weltprojekte um 1900*, Andreas Krajewski shows how the establishing of traffic networks grows into a project of global proportions and ramifications, prompting multiple standardizations of time and space, ranging from the timetable to the width of railway tracks and the coupling of train cars. In addition to Krajewski’s study, other seminal thinkers in the field of cultural studies and transportation history such as Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s *The Railway Journey* (1977), Peter Borscheid’s *Das Tempo-Virus* (2004), and Wolfgang Kaschuba’s *Die Überwindung der Distanz* (2004) show how the railway and other steam- and later electrically-powered transportation technology changed the ways in which human related to, administered and perceived of time and space. While the history of public transportation is inextricably connected to the larger history of transportation and mobility, these previous studies focus on the ways in which these changes play out on a national and international level by connecting peripheral regions to centers of commerce and by linking nations across borders. Such processes stress the railway network’s effects on the natural landscape between cities rather than the dynamics that affect the internal cityscape.

In the larger scope of Berlin transportation history, the public transit network is sandwiched in between long-distance railway technology and airway travel. As such, it inhabits a position between two categories of travel and transportation that are directly connected to, and formative of, our understanding of globalization and world travel. We can make a similar claim about intra-city transportation, albeit on a smaller scale, as it is central to the formation of social practices and movement patterns in the urban environment. Although transportation systems operated by horse carts and ferries had been present already prior to the nineteenth century, it is first around the 1860s that we can really start to see an explosive growth as far as the proliferation and usage of
transportation technology in and around the immediate vicinities of larger cities in Europe and North America are concerned. There are several reasons as to why it took a long time before the broader masses began to utilize public transit, but one of the most central historical factors is that prior to the industrialization of cities, people often lived where they worked, and most places one needed to visit regularly were within walking distance from the home. Moreover, in the case of late nineteenth-century Berlin, it was not an affordable means of transportation to use on a regular basis.

The expansiveness of transportation technology in metropolitan areas in the late 1800s and early 1900s challenged the rootedness of day-to-day life by redefining distances and spatial relationships between the various of spheres that encapsulated the urban experience. In its early history, however, Berlin’s public transit network only affected a select few of the city’s population. In the 1880s and 1890s, most people in Berlin still lived close enough to their workplace to walk—or their home also served as their workshop. Instead, the network’s primary function was to connect the railway stations surrounding Berlin.

London, Paris, and New York were forerunners as far as modernization and technologization in the nineteenth century is concerned, but Berlin—in many respects a dark horse as far as urban growth in the time period—had by the 1910s developed one of the world’s most comprehensive and innovative public transit systems of the world, interconnecting what in 1920 came to be the world’s third largest municipal area. Indeed, we can think of the history of Berlin’s public transit system as running parallel to the city’s transformation from a Residenzstadt, oriented around horse-

drawn carriages, to a burgeoning metropolitan *Weltstadt*, saturated with electricity-powered trains on rails above- and below ground, connecting the city internally, as well as on a global scale by railway and later air from 1923. Jan Gympel provides a detailed history on the topic in his book *Tempo!: Berliner Verkehrsgeschichte* (2015) to which much of the historical information that follows is indebted. After the first railway line opened in Germany between Nuremberg and Fürth in 1835, Prussia finalized their first line connecting Potsdam and Zehlendorf in 1838, and a couple of months later this line was extended to Berlin. Over the course of the following eight years, five major tracks—including the aforementioned to Potsdam—operated to and from Berlin: southward from the Anhalter Bahnhof (1841) toward Dessau and Köthen; eastward to Frankfurt (Oder) from Frankfurter Bahnhof (1842), which was later renamed to Schlesischer Bahnhof and today known as Ostbahnhof; north-eastward to Stettin from the Stettiner Bahnhof (1843); and in 1846 trains took up operation between Hamburg and Berlin’s Hamburger Bahnhof. Beginning in 1848, one could reach both Warsaw and Vienna by train via Magdeburg and in 1851, train connections were established to Nuremberg, Munich, and Prague.

As these major terminal stations were established, horse-drawn omnibuses took up operation between Potsdamer Bahnhof and Alexanderplatz in 1839. It was only in 1847, however, that a regular intra-city public transportation service was introduced. These would run within the city on a regular basis and connected central Berlin to Charlottenburg in the West. Approximately 20 cars and 120 horses operated the lines, and for the price of two Silber Groschen, one could ride one of the five lines between (1) Alexanderplatz to Hohenzollernstraße (today Jannowitzbrücke), (2) Potsdamer Straße/Karlsbad to Jannowitzbrücke, (3) Hallesches Tor to Hamburger Bahnhof, (4) Anhalter Bahnhof to Schönhauser Tor, and (5) the Berlin castle to Charlottenburg. In pace with this proliferation of the transit networks and the construction of new roads, houses, and industrial
areas, the medieval custom walls were torn down in the 1860s. The actual function of the wall as a customs border had been abolished already in 1818, as its material presence had developed into an actual obstacle for traffic in and out of the city. In 1865, Germany’s first streetcar [Straßenbahn/Tram] started running between Brandenburger Tor and what today is the Berlin-Westend station, but since the Emperor refused to have rail tracks along the boulevard street, Unter den Linden, it had to go along the northern parallel street, Dorotheenstraße.

Another important piece of the Berlin railway “puzzle” was the “Bebauungsplan für die Umgebung Berlins,” which was designed by urban planner James Hobrecht. Implementation of the plan predates the unification of the German empire and began as early as 1862 in response to Berlin’s rapidly expanding urban fabrics, both in terms of population growth, industries, and traffic growing increasingly dense in and around the city. Hobrecht drew inspiration from several European constructions, including the sewer system of Hamburg, Baron Hausmann’s open Parisian boulevards, London’s squares, and Vienna’s Ringstrasse. As part of this plan, the construction of the Ringbahn began in 1867. Just as the name suggests, the four tracks—one pair dedicated to cargo and one to passenger traffic—surround Berlin like a ring and remain an important infrastructural pillar on Berlin’s public transit grid still today. Upon completion in 1877, the circular railway encompassed a wide area, running along the outer peripheries of Berlin: Moabit - Charlottenburg - Schöneberg - Rixdorf (now Neukölln) - Rummelsburg (now Ostkreuz) - Wedding. As of 1871, eight major train routes ended in Berlin, and to alight from one station to the other became increasingly difficult despite the investments in omnibusses and streetcars. In an effort to circumvent the crowded streets in the city center, the construction of the Stadtbahn tracks started in 1875, connecting the Schlesischer railway station in the East to the Charlottenburger Ringbahn station in the West. Moreover, the elevated tracks atop a viaduct-like construction were
the first of its kind in Europe. On February 6, 1882, the emperor Wilhelm I. undertook the maiden journey and the next day the *Stadtbahn* opened to the public. The construction and operation of the grandiose *Ring* and *Stadtbahn* sparked a great range of responses, especially as the *Stadtbahn* cut through many densely populated neighborhoods and busy squares, including the Alexanderplatz, Friedrichstraße, and Tiergarten. The 11.2km (approximately seven miles) tracks still run straight through Berlin, operating long distance, suburban, and urban transportation services. Rather than a pillar in the intra-city transportation system at the time, however, the *Stadtbahn* was, as Jan Gympel notes, a “in die Länge gezogene Hauptbahnhof,” and the streetcar network continued to reign supreme until the 1890s as far as commuting and personal transportation within the city was concerned.

As we have learned, many of the construction projects and innovations in the field of transportation were initially conceived to facilitate the connections between the railway stations along the city’s periphery. The early history of both *Ringbahn* and *Stadtbahn*, as connecting tissue between terminal long-distance railway stations, although essential infrastructures in terms of transit, speak more to the city’s need to improve inter-connectivity to other cities. For a more in-depth and specific understanding of intra-connectivity—the connections within the city—we must turn our attention to the streetcar network [*Straßenbahn*]. Ambitious developments of the Berlin *Straßenbahn* commenced in the 1870s, partly in response to the extreme housing shortage that prevailed in Berlin against the background of an explosive growth in population following the city’s industrialization. At the end of 1871, one fifth of Berlin’s population lived in overcrowded apartments, in other words apartments with one heated room and an average occupancy of five to eight people. Within the lower classes, as John B. Lyon informs us, the housing crisis changed the connotation of home as a stable abode to that of a constantly changing space. In 1871, 34% of all
tenants had to leave their apartments on the so called “Ziehtage” on April 1 and Oktober 1, searching for a new one, or because they had been evicted.\(^2\) Even though Bismarck’s social insurance provided support to the sick and elderly, there was no unemployment benefit and there was no legislation governing child or female labor, hours of work, or factory conditions until 1890 under Caprivi.\(^3\) Another example that showcases the extremity of the situation are the so called \textit{Schlafleute} (also times referred to as \textit{Schlafgänger} or \textit{Schalfburschen}), which roughly translates to “sleepers” who would pay for a bed or sleeping space (they would only sleep there, nothing else). Between 1861-1875, they constituted about 8\% of the population and about 20\% of all households in Berlin housed a sleeper (Cf. Lyon 45). Owing to the dire housing situation, Shantytowns [\textit{Barackenstädte}] and slums emerged across Berlin, the crime rate increased rapidly, and riots broke out in the city.\(^4\) The situation was experienced as dire on both ends of the economic spectrum, as the rich feared the potential dangers of the revolting lower working class, who in turn feared for their lives, lacking a stable home. Needless to say, the improved transportation services may have helped some people seek out living spaces further away from their place of employment.

Although many other cities around the world, and even other growing cities in Germany, such as Munich and Hamburg, had also begun to take on a more metropolitan character in latter

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\(^2\) Even though the 1870s saw an enormous rise in so called \textit{Baugesellschaften}, these companies were in fact more interested in real estate and land speculation rather than actual construction. These building societies would buy land that then would be sold back and forth between different real estate owners, which in turn led to a shortage of areas to actually build houses: “All properties within a two-mile radius around Berlin have been passed into the hands of real estate speculators, without anyone thinking about buildings on this land for years” (Dr. Engel quoted in Lyon 2016:42). By the time someone wanted to construct something, the value of the land had risen so much that the owner would have to build houses that would produce as much rent as possible, creating a housing bubble. Lyon argues that this housing bubble transformed place into commodity to be exchanged, and as such “place could serve neither as a source of identity, nor as a place of refuge”, as opposed to the feudal society, place was now “a speculative mentality that views place exclusively in terms of its economic value, dissociates family, obligation and connection from locale” (Ibid. 43).

\(^3\) The unemployment rates were particularly high in the years 1874-78, 1885-86 and 1890-1893. Caprivi secured a statutory day of rest, placed limitations on child and female labor, and set a minimum period for notice of dismissal. (Pascal 5).

\(^4\) One of the largest riots that resulted from the housing shortage was the so called \textit{Blumenstraßenkrawall} in the summer of 1872, in which the city police was overwhelmed.
half of the nineteenth century, Berlin’s growth was particularly rapid. For example, whereas the population of London, Paris and Vienna grew by approximately 700 per cent over the course of the nineteenth century, Berlin’s grew by an astonishing 1.574 per cent with the most dramatic developments taking place in the latter half of the century (Lyon 33). The exponentially growing number of passengers using the network during this time gives us an indicator of the degree to which the intra-urban transit system became an integral part of day-to-day life. Between the years 1875-1905, the number of trips undertaken yearly in Berlin increased from 32.2 million in 1875 to 234 million in 1890 and 826 million in 1905. Consequently, a large number of reliable trains, streetcars, and busses running regularly was an absolute necessity to meet the growing number of passengers. Private enterprises, however, were discouraged from building by the state out of fear that they would be more interested in profit than reliable service. For this reason, the Prussian government and the city of Berlin contracted the GBS [Große Berliner Pferde-Eisenbahn] and gave them monopoly over the streets, forcing smaller companies and private enterprises to build and operate “around” the tracks and construction plans of the GBS (Gympel 55). The competition over the booming transportation business would not disappear but continued to fuel innovatory solutions to improve circulation in the city. It would, however, take until the early twentieth century before the dynamo started making a significant impact on Berlin’s transit system. After many tests, the first electric train finally took up operation between Potsdamer Ringbahnhof and Lichterfelde in 1903, but it would subsequently take until 1924 before an extensive electrification of the Stadt-, Ring-, and Vorortbahn was conducted. As one might expect, electricity presented harsh competition for the horse-operated lines of the GBS. Thusly, the GBS started working on electrifying their entire streetcar network in 1893, and their first Elektrische Tram took up operation between Gesundbrunnen and Pankow two years later. We will revisit the electrification
era in the next chapter, but it is worth taking note that the rapid development of the transit infrastructure articulates the need to make intra-urban travel more efficient over a long period of time. As we shift the focus of this chapter toward more artistic responses to these developments, however, little emphasis is put on efficiency. Instead, they draw our attention to how these new technologies impacted *what* Berlin looked like and *how* the human eye perceived city from the vantage point of a moving vehicle.

The other great (capital) cities of this period housed world-renowned marvels of modern technology and architecture, such as the Haussmannian facades and Eiffel Tower in Paris; the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge in New York; the Underground Tube and the Crystal Palace in London. On the contrary, Berlin of the 1870s and 1880s remained predominantly neoclassical and neogothic in its architecture. In other words, while housing many beautiful and ornamental buildings, Berlin of the 1870s and early 1880s lacked buildings and monuments projecting a futuristic image of a modern metropolis comparable to those in other cities. Instead, Berlin’s streets and transportation infrastructures became emblematic of Berlin’s modern character and structural transformation from pre-industrial to industrial. In his study about representations of Berlin in American literature, Joshua Parker underscores that visiting authors often complained about the city’s provincialism in comparison to some of the older European “siblings”:

In 1852 Charles Loring Brace compared “quiet, intellectual Berlin’ with Vienna’s ‘streets, whirling with life,” while in 1858, Henry Adams, studying at the University of Berlin, saw the city as “a nightmare [...] in the remote Prussian wilderness [...] a poor, keen-witted, provincial town, simple, dirty, uncivilized, and in most respects disgusting.” For William Dean Howells, Berlin was a “vast, spiritless place”—a description one might be less surprised to hear from a European describing urban America—[and] Adams in 1858 found “[that] the gloom of a Berlin winter and of Berlin architecture seemed to him a particular sort of gloom never attained elsewhere” (Parker, 82).
As a growing nation and colonial power, the Prussian government—and from 1871 that of unified Germany—realized that they had to transform Berlin to a city that could not only be a center of government and administration, but also a figurehead and symbol of the nation’s modernity as large. After the heavy investment in improving public urban space in Berlin between the 1860s and 1880s, however, overseas visitors would drastically change their tune.

In his travel letters from 1891-92 published in the Chicago Daily Tribune, Mark Twain famously referred to Berlin as “the Chicago of Europe”:

I feel lost in Berlin. It has no resemblance to the city I had supposed it was. There was once a Berlin which I would have known, from descriptions in books—the Berlin of the last century and the beginning of the present one: a dingy city in a marsh, with rough streets, muddy and lantern-lighted, dividing straight rows of ugly houses all alike, compacted into blocks as square and plain and uniform and monotonous and serious as so many dry-goods boxes. But that Berlin has disappeared. It seems to have disappeared totally, and left no sign. The bulk of the Berlin of today has about it no suggestion of a former period. The site it stands on has traditions and a history, but the city itself has no traditions and no history. It is a new city; the newest I have ever seen. Chicago would seem venerable beside it; for there are many old-looking districts in Chicago, but not many in Berlin (Twain 1892) (Twain, The Chicago of Europe, my emphases)

The cityscape as Twain describes it gives the impression of a clean slate moving toward the future, unencumbered by its past. He detects no material traces of a past, other than the history of the geographic area upon which the buildings and pavements stand. In Twain’s eyes, it is as if the notion of time as it pertains to the development of the city has shifted; instead of developing out of the past in the present, the present is shaped in the here and now. It is an inherently “new” space. This relationship between the appearance of the city and its relation to time and history highlight how the built environment holds the capability to shape and inform our thinking of history. While the prospect of a temporal break as it pertains to the larger discourse of modernity traces back to the 16th century (Cf. Hunt 2008, 4), it can help us understand more specifically the relationship between the infrastructural features of Berlin and the human perception of the cityscape as
something modern. Thus, the quote draws attention to a central aspect of Berlin’s modernization which simultaneously evokes the discourse of modernity at large, namely a visceral sense of rupture, or cleavage, between the perceived modern—the present now—and what came before.

Twain also points out that the Berlin he visits feels so different from the Berlin “he would have known, from descriptions in books.” In other words, the city he encounters looks remarkably different from the imaginary of Berlin he had previously read about in texts about the city. This discrepancy between the documented “old” city, and the “experienced” new one, underlines not only the rapid changes the city underwent, but also implicitly suggests the need to “renovate” the city’s image as projected and documented in narratives set in, or descriptions of, Berlin. A few years later, in 1899, one of Berlin’s leading industrialists, Walter Rathenau echoes Twain’s sentiment and suggests a new nickname for the city, namely Spree-Chicago, to replace the old nickname of Spree-Athen. This declaration of Berlin’s resemblance to a young American city articulates the desire of establishing a very distinct profile from not only other German cities, but likewise to set it apart from other European cities with their pronounced monumental histories tracing back to the Roman Empire, such as Paris, London and Vienna. Indeed, as both Rathenau’s and Twain’s commentaries insinuate, urban renovation is a project that encompasses the lived experiences, as well as the image reflected in and fashioned by artistic depictions of urban space.

Pre-industrial Berlin, or as Twain would have it, “the Berlin of the last century,” had housed and served as muse to several prolific and important writers such as E.T.A Hoffmann, Wilhelm Raabe, Karl Gutzkow, and Theodor Fontane; yet there was a demand for a literary engagement with urban life in Berlin similar to that of Hugo’s, Baudelaire’s, and Zola’s Paris or Poe’s and Dicken’s London. In contrast to London and Paris, the figure of the Großstadtdichter was still very new to German lands in the 1880s, a nation that had hitherto lacked a defined cultural and political
center such as London or Paris. What is more, the Berlin poet was faced with a significantly more rapid modernization than other growing cities around Europe and their writing took on the character of a “soziale Dichtung” much different in tone and style from the symbolism and décadence of Parisian fin-de-siècle poetry. Instead, they found much of their inspiration in French naturalism, taking on and adapting some of the core ideas of Zola’s naturalist theory. Zola was adamant that naturalism ought not to be seen as a distinct genre of literature, but as the application of an experimental method (Cf. Baguley 45). Thus, following in Zola’s footsteps, the Berlin naturalists sought to establish links between literature as an artform grounded in positivist philosophy, which stresses the importance of sensory experience, as filtered by human logic and reason, in the formation of knowledge.

The most famous German example of naturalist theory can be found in Arno Holz’ Die Kunst: Ihr Wesen und Ihre Gesetze (1891), a collection of essays, poetry, and fiction where Holz sets out to elaborate on Zola’s famous dictum “a work of art is a corner of the creation seen through a temperament” (“Une oeuvre d’art es un coin de la nature vu à travers un temperament”). Holz maintains that “der Satz Zola’s sag[t] eine Wahrheit aus über die Kunst, aber nur eine Theilwahrheit” (Holz 60). Holz maintains that Zola’s two main results as overly descriptive and inadequate to explain or understand the role of art in exploring the link between humans and their environment: “‘Jedes Kunstwerk resultiert aus seinem Milieu’ und: ‘In der exacten Reproduction der Natur besteht das Wesen der Kunst nicht’” (Holz 73). In contrast to Zola, Holz suggests that art has the capability to reproduce and represent nature, but only in proportion to the conditions for imitation, proposing his own formula of \( \text{nature} = \text{art} - x \), where \( x \) represents the artist’s temperament. For Holz and many of his contemporary Berlin writers, it became an integral part of
their mission as writers to achieve the conditions for imitation by being as close to the milieus and people whose stories they sought to capture in their work.

The naturalist theory helps us identify links between the built environment and Berlin texts, as it foregrounds certain systemic qualities of the relationship between human subjects and space. One of the naturalist writers’ primary concerns was the daily existence of the “common” people, people whose day-to-day life in Berlin looked very different from, for example, Theodor Fontane’s. In the eyes of Fontane and Twain, modern architecture—such as the traffic infrastructure—gave Berlin a modern feel. The organized flow of bodies throughout wide streets and on-top of elevated rails gave the impression of a healthy city body, pulsating with life. However, the new transportation technologies affected the day-to-day lives of modern Berliners also in much more mundane ways. The new circulation of goods throughout urban space gave rise to new systems of commerce and re-shaped the ways in which people moved between home and work. In other words, transportation shaped not only what the city looked like, but also shaped how urban subjects lived their lives. Some of the most prominent authors to aestheticize the new technologies and life in modernizing Berlin include the brothers Julius and Heinrich Hart, Wilhelm Bölsche, Bruno Wille, Clara Viebig, Max Kretzer, Arno Holz, and Georg Heym. Moreover, this group of writers represents a growing trend amongst German writers to move to Berlin in pursuit of inspiration and stimulus for their work in the midst of the growing city. In comparison to the modernist writers that follow in the Twentieth Century, the naturalists did not experiment with new narrative structures in response to modern city life, but instead aimed to show the impact of modern city life on spatial and social structures in the city: Taking a closer look at how new patterns in the physical, social, economic, and political fabrics of Berlin affected personal

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5 *Großstadtliryk* (1903, ed. Heinz Möller) and *Im steinernen Meer* (1910, ed. Theodor Heuss) are the two most famous collections of Berlin poetry from the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries.
experience and re-shaped values. Their works depict the lives of the industrial proletariat, a group of society that was concentrated and working for meagre wages in great masses in Berlin’s factories, housed in slums and crowded tenements. Despite the harsh living conditions, Berlin indeed served as a center for multitude societal classes, economic forces, and trains of intellectual and political thought in Germany at the time.

Berlin was not only saturated with traffic networks on the inside, but also served as a central transportation node of national- and international travel. It was the place to be for anyone who wanted to take the pulse of German’s modernity. Berlin as a location and center with a strong gravitational pull is reflected in representations of rail travel at the time, where we can find many depictions of journeys where Berlin is the goal. In addition to being the mode of transportation to arrive in Berlin, the train window constitutes the first frame through which the passenger observes the cityscape. We can find one prominent example in Julius Hart’s poem “Auf der Fahrt nach Berlin” (1885, also at times with the title “Wom Westen kam ich”) in which Berlin is depicted as a threatening yet exhilarating destination. Hart offers a contrasting view of the city from inside a train entering Berlin. looking down at the cityscape from the elevated tracks the lyrical I opens up the windows to get a better look at the city:

Dampf wallt empor und Qualm, in schwarzen / Schleiern / hängt tief und steif die Wolke drüber hin, / die bleiche Luft drückt schwer und liegt wie bleiern … Ein Flammenherd darunter – ein Vulkan, / von Millionen Feuerbränden lodernd, / Ein Paradies, ein süßes Kanaan, - / Ein Höllenreich und Schatten / bleich vermodernd (Hart in Rothe 60).

6 The arrival in Berlin via train is a common trope and motif in literature and film, but the amount of description of the cityscape from the vantage point of the vehicle is unique. Especially the illusory quality of his descriptions and the imagery of a city shrouded in smoke/steam are reminiscent of impressionist paintings from the time (e.g Monet’s series of the Gare Saint-Lazare (1877) while the apocalyptic, burning cityscape echoes Ludwig Meidner’s Berlin paintings.
The hazy look at the city through the steam and fumes around the train opens up an ambiguous panorama of Berlin. The imagery of an infernal volcanic blaze paints a stark contrast to the promised and prosperous lands of Paradise and Canaan and the three dot ellipses, which occur throughout the poem, create an illusory veil between that which the human eye observes and the symbolism and connotative meanings that lay behind this view. Unable to clearly discern the source of the thick smoke obstructing the passenger’s view, the lyrical I conjectures that it must stem from a destructive force of nature, such as a “Vulkan” or a firebrand. These motifs of fire and brimstone evoke biblical imagery of hell and divine punishment, but also of the city as forge; a place that shapes and gives form.

While the passenger’s gaze originates from an authorial and elevated perspective, there are several hints at layers, such as “Schleier[n]” of “Dampf” and “Qualm,” “bleieren[e] Luft,” and “Schatten,” obscuring or perhaps merely making out the silhouettes of actual bodies, objects, or buildings. The train window’s framing of the city conjures illusions, evincing an urban panorama grounded in incessant movement and uncertainty. Upon arrival in the city, the ellipses disappear as urban masses at the station engulf the lyrical I: “schon reißt es mich hinfort in warren Schären” and in place of the figurative and symbolic associations previously evoked by looking at the city from the train, he is now occupied with the more concrete question of “Wohin? wohin?” (Ibid.). Hart’s poem centers on the figure of the passenger, what he sees and how he attempts to impose meaning and structure in space through his gaze. The two chief perspectives and locations of the poem present their own challenges to the passenger. The vantage point of a moving vehicle, although panoramic, does not let the passenger’s eye linger long enough to see what lays behind the surface layers flashing before him. When getting off at the station, however, he is faced with a question to which the pre-determined route of rails leaves few options: “Wohin?” The “shock” or
“rupture” that Hart’s passenger experiences as his body transitions from being carried through from one station in the city to another, only to suddenly having to figure out in what direction he needs to go next. These abrupt shifts between the various stages of transit stress that spatial awareness and perspectives of space can change over the course of a single journey.

There is something inherently paradoxical about travel networks that we ought to remind ourselves of at this point. They make movement between places more efficient, both in terms of duration and distance. Consequently, time and space become less restrictive in our daily lives, which, in turn, modern man might associate with a sense freedom. However, travelling imposes several other restrictions on our bodies; we must be at the right terminal at the right time to catch a train; we must pass through ticket booths and security check points; and seldom are passengers in charge of their own trajectory. While this project by no means intends to scrutinize the sense of freedom many associate with modern means of travel, looking at intra-urban transportation, it becomes clear that public transit space restricts as much as it liberates the urban dweller’s gaze on the city, which in turn conditions Berlin’s cultural self-imagination. The pre-determined rail routes in and around Berlin, while facilitating a dynamic visual encounter with the cityscape, only show a select few districts, quarters, and buildings. This is particularly worth considering in the earlier stages of public transit history, as there were fewer lines running through the inner city, as well as in relation to subway travel, which will be thematized in the dissertation’s third chapter.

The newest and most important intra-urban traffic arteries in 1880s-1890s Berlin were centered around the Ring- and Stadt­bahn. The insides of the stations and vehicles travelling along the rails of the Stadt­bahn and Ring­bahn offer rich and monumental views, such as of the city castles: Charlottenburg, Moabit, and Bellevue, as well as ornate modern stations and well-dressed passengers lining up on the platforms. In 1883, author Emil Dominik published a book with the
title Quer durch und Ringsum Berlin, in which he tells stories and the history of the places one passes by travelling through Berlin on the Ringbahn and the Stadtbahn, the latter which had been inaugurated one year prior. The journey takes Dominik and his travel companion across Berlin with the Stadtbahn, from the Westend to the Schlesischer Bahnhof, where they get on the hourly running Ringbahn from the Ostbahnhof. Next to forceful in its homage to the Stadtbahn, Dominik exclaims that “Stadtbahn-Enthusiasten theilen die Bevölkerung dieser Erde in solche ein, welche mit der ‘Berliner Stadtbahn’ gefahren und in diejenigen, welche dieses Vergügen noch nicht theilhaftig geworden sind” (Dominik 1). Intrinsically connected to Dominik’s praise of the Stadtbahn is the notion of measuring up to other European cities. In particular, he suggests that the Stadtbahn sparked a trend throughout Europe to construct elevated rails for their public transportation systems. Rather than taking inspiration from London’s “unterirdische, schmutzige, feuchte Stadtbahnen”, the Parisian chemin de fer métropolitain and the Wiener Stadtbahn, Dominik maintains, took after the “lüftige[n], höchst saubere[n] und geschmackvoll ausgeführte[n] ‘Berlinerin’” (Dominik 1-2). The Stadtbahn in Dominik’s text serves as more than a mode of transportation, it is a monument of national pride.

Much akin to the flâneur, the passionate and knowledgeable wanderer who walks in the city to experience it, Dominik experiences and attempts to capture the culture and history of Berlin as rendered through the lens of public transportation: “in wenigen Stunden auf einer Stadt- und Ringbahnfahrt [sieht man] die ganze Weltstadt, den vornehmen Westen, wie das internationale Centrum, die Industriestadt im Norden und Osten wie die ganze hübsche Umgebung Berlins.” (3). From the nearly 8-meter elevated tracks, he notes how one can see as far as Wilmersdorf and Steglitz (at the time separate villages) and from the platform at Bellevue he looks toward Moabit and Jungfernheide, noting an ongoing transformative process of these places from rural peripheral
locations to centers of industrial manufacturing and bureaucracy. The comparing and contrasting between the different vistas of Berlin, from the Charlottenburg Palace to the less grandiose industrial districts, highlight the rich and diverse qualities of Berlin’s cityscape rather than the social and economic divides that exist within it. The emphasis on the authorial and elevated position and the passenger’s focus on the aesthetic appeal and relaxing nature of the journey foreground the public transit vehicle as a space for leisured visual consumption. Also, in contrast to other journeys in and around the city that foreground the movement between various places as destinations where one gets on and off the train, Dominik’s journey is purely spectatorial. This constitutes a fundamental change in the concept of place since it entirely revolves around “passing by,” rather than “through” places.

Moreover, amongst the transportation network’s many stations, Dominik emphasizes what he perceives to be an especially perceptible international and intercultural atmosphere at the station in the Friedrichstraße:


The station at Friedrichstraße is right in what we at this time can consider the Stadtmitte, centered around the Dorotheenstadt and Unter den Linden, as well as the Friedrichstadt and the Friedrichstraße and Leipziger Straße.\(^7\) The station here is envisioned by Dominik not only as a central part of Berlin, but as a central node in a larger global network, foregrounding primarily the

\(^7\) The other major transportation hubs in the inner city at the time were the Alexanderplatz, Potsdamer Platz, Leipziger Platz and Belle-Alliance Platz (Cf. Lützeler 43).
international traveler’s presence in the local transit network. Here, an urban crowd merges with the international. However, rather than the mode of transportation for Weimar Berlin’s “mass society” to which the Stadtbahn eventually will evolve, Dominik portrays the transit space as an inherently bourgeoisie realm. Amongst the “Träger von Macht, Reichtum und Intelligenz,” we do not spot any blue-collar workers, for example. Dominik’s depictions of the Stadt- and Ringbahn show a clear interest in promoting the public transportation system as more than a mere mode of transportation, it is a sophisticated attraction and key to the emergence of a new relationship between urban subjects and space that hinges on spectatorship. In contrast to the perambulating flâneur, there is a physical border separating the passenger from that which lays outside the train car. Akin to Schivelbusch’s observation that the perceiving train traveler and perceived objects in the landscape that the train passes through do not belong to the same space, Dominik’s panoramic perception of Berlin is primarily constructed through the moving vehicle. The transit space dictates what and how he observes, both in a temporal (duration) and spatial (distance) sense, providing him with what we ought to understand as a highly privileged perspective of urban space. Unlike many urban dwellers at the time, Dominik and the passengers traveling next to him had access to and could therefore by extension partake in Berlin’s new and highly modern “circulatory” system.

The Stadt- and Ringbahn would remain relatively inaccessible to a larger part of Berlin’s population until the 1890s when two tariff reforms were implemented. In 1891 a new Vorortarif reduced the price to travel by rail in the greater Berlin area, and in 1893, the even cheaper Zeitkarten were made available. What is more, the implementation of more affordable tickets coincide with the relocation of three major Berlin-based businesses in the early 1890s: Borsig set up their works in Tegel, AEG in Oberschöneweide, and Siemens in Charlottenburg (Cf. Gympel). There were also changes made to separate long-distance and intra-urban railway traffic in the
1890s, as new rails were added between Potsdamer Bahnhof and Zehlendorf. At the same time, platforms dedicated to suburban rail service only were added to the Stettiner Bahnhof. Moreover, several *Rangierbahnhöfe* were added further out in the city outskirts to minimize noise pollution from freight traffic. Owing to these major changes to Berlin’s railway network, it became much more practical and affordable for people to move out of the crowded center and to commute between home and work. A decade after Dominik’s sightseeing trip, we may imagine a much more versatile crowd lining up at station platforms around Berlin.

Theodor Fontane, who had curiously observed and documented the early stages of the industrial revolution in England in the 1840s and 1850s, also shows great interest as he witnesses the construction of the *Stadtbahn* and other traffic infrastructure renovations in his home city of Berlin.\(^8\) Akin to Mark Twain’s observation from the 1890s that “the bulk of the Berlin of today has about it no suggestion of a former period,” Fontane had perceived a strong sense of newness to Berlin already two decades prior: “Die Berliner Luft, auch wo sie am schlimmsten Auftritt, ist ein Parvenu wie die Stadt selbst, jung, ohne Geschichte, ohne infernale Vertiefung. So schlecht sie sein mag, sie ist einfach, unkompliziert, sozusagen frisch von der Quelle weg” (Fontane 2004, 25). Fontane’s observations articulate a clear sense of optimism and faith in Berlin’s future prosperity. What is more, he points towards the vital role of transportation infrastructures in generating this parvenu atmosphere in Berlin:


\(^8\) Fontane worked as foreign correspondent in London 1855-59. See *Aus England* (1860) and *Ein Sommer in London* (1854) to learn more about his impressions and experiences from London.
The elegant design of the new horse-drawn trams and the high frequency at which they operate appear as ornaments, adding a particularly modern flair to the city streets. The city, as well as its people, impress with their “Wohlgekleidetheit.” Noteworthy to Fontane is not only the increased traffic volume but also the new vehicles. Already in 1881, Fontane views the horse-drawn carriages as signs of a bygone era next to the modern horse trams, owing both to their superior numbers and conspicuous elegance. Yet it is worth noting that horse drawn carriages, both privately owned and those operating as public transportation vehicles, remained the most important mode of transportation in the inner city throughout the 1880s.

Amongst all the new transportation technologies, the elevated Stadtbahn makes a particularly strong impression on Fontane:


The language employed is full of metaphor and the image of the Stadtbahn as a caterpillar crawling its way over the city is a powerful simile of metamorphosis and evolution. The caterpillar also evokes the association of a dynamic process of transformation toward a more beautiful and glorious life form. However, the caterpillar may also appear discomforting, as it signifies a stage in the butterfly’s life of insatiable appetite for organic life around it. Fontane’s gaze is drawn to the material presence and ornamental qualities of the transportation network over its practical, circulatory function in space. In contrast to Dominik, Fontane primarily foregrounds the visual impact on the appearance of the city and writes from the position of observing the architectural
features of the actual tracks, rather than the view from within stations, from platforms or from inside the moving vehicle. Yet there are some striking similarities in Dominik’s and Fontane’s enthusiastic praise, as they point toward how the rails and vehicles as pieces, or parts, contribute to a new impression of the urban image as a whole and both establish a close relationship between public transit and leisured visual consumption in Berlin.

Hart, Dominik, and Fontane put into perspective the urban scenery as it unfolds from, or near the vantage point of the public transit vehicle. Their depictions vary greatly in terms of literary style and genre, but their descriptions posit the transit network as a space of spectacle and scopophilia. The texts show an inextricable connection between the ways in which the transit space constructs and conditions the human gaze and, in turn, Berlin’s urban image and cultural self-imagination at large. The divergent tone in their responses, with Fontane and Dominik being strongly optimistic and celebratory, and Hart hinting at the darker, murkier, and possible more threatening underbelly hidden behind the façade of modernizing Berlin, would be echoed by many of their contemporaries. However, whether they were skeptical or warmly welcoming the new way of life and new cityscape that the contemporary literati witnessed emerging around them, they were all convinced that it was indicative of the dawn of a new age in Berlin’s history. We must also acknowledge that these figures were all in a position of privilege. In terms of public transit, they were all part of an elite that traveled to or throughout the city, and their written work shows no signs of how the large-scale construction and restructuring of the city grid impacted their personal and private space, such as their home environs.

In the next part of this chapter, I want to draw our attention to the more critical voices present in Berlin around this time. The causal relationship between modernizing city and the deterioration of morality is pronounced strongly in the works of authors of Naturalismus in Berlin in the 1880s.
Public transportation developments find their way into the works of early naturalist Berlin poets and “Arbeiterdichtung” that centers to a large part around the daily struggle “für das tägliche Brot” in the Mietskaserne and factories of the Berlin Vorstadt. Common topics and problems include suicide, prostitution, hunger, alcoholism and a sense of alienation and loneliness perceived by the individual urban subject in the crowded masses.

In contrast to the romantic idea of “Waldeinsamkeit” springing from the solitude and harmony of nature, we can detect the notion of a “Weltstadteinsamkeit” in many texts of late nineteenth century Berlin: “Bist du durch einer fremden Welstadt Straßen / zwecklos und ziellos abends je gewandert, / Verloren in der tausendköpfigen Menge, / die rastlos wechselnd dir vorübertreibt, / dann kennst du, Freund, der tiefsten Einsamkeit / unsäglich herzbeklemmendes Gefühl, / dann weißt du, was es heißt: verlassen sein. (Fuchs, “Weltstadteinsamkeit”). Next to these social and psychological issues surrounding the figure of the urbanite, modern technologies such as transportation hold much in common with figurations of the railway and steam technology in art, as they either figure as a symbol or motif of threatening forces indifferent and damaging to mankind: “Sieh die schwere Walze dampfen, / Milliarden Steine stampfen, / vergewaltigt Stück um Stück: / Arme Menschheit, dein Geschick! / Bist wie Kiesel auf dem Pfade, / wirst zermalmet ohne Gnade ; / Lüge, Trägheit, Unrecht, Raub / dampfen, stampfen dich zu Staub” (Henckell 47). Fontane’s marvelous gaze at the Stadtbahn, impressive in its elevation and reach, obfuscates the other side of urban renovation, namely the destruction of that upon which the new is built. As in Henckell’s Dampfwalze, steam in its symbolic role as the fuel of the modernization process, poses a threat to mankind in a twofold sense: it portrays both the brutal transfiguration of stones into pebbles in the wake of the powerful, rolling steam, as well as the degradation of morality “Lüge, Trägheit, Unrecht, Raub” that many associated with urban modernity.
The relationship between the lower-class working population and their environment lies at the very heart of the naturalists’ work. In their depictions of characters as products of their milieu, their novels of Berlin often showcase the exploitation of the lower working class as a symptom of a competitive capitalist spirit brought about by the new working environments, housing shortage and economic crises. Important to note, however, is that despite the grim undertones of their prose, they viewed the city as an important catalyst in the forward trajectory of art, away from stories of the romantic and ideal countryside to depictions of the predicaments of urban existence. By carefully studying the city and the people within, the recognition was born within this generation of writers that modern industrial Berlin was more than “ein wüster Babelturm aus Millionen Ziegelsteinen” or “ein Korallenbau aus ungezählten öden Zellen” (Bölsche 1905, 31). Max Kretzer was a particularly prolific naturalist writer who was active in Berlin in the 1880s and 1890s. His works provide rich commentary on the encounter between the modern city, artistry, and the social injustices they perceived in the growing metropolis. Rather than Naturalismus, however, Kretzer (as well as many of his fellow contemporary writers) refer to his own work as Realismus, stressing their aim to represent the “real” over the “romantic” [Romantik] or “ideal” [Idealismus] (Cf. Bölsche 1890 and Kretzer 1885). Moreover, Kretzer himself brazenly proclaims to have been the first author to faithfully capture the realities of industrialized Berlin, and thusly to be the first author to give the nineteenth century Berliner Roman “seine richtige Bezeichnung” (Kretzer 1885, 671). Given the many prolific writers actively publishing in Berlin at the time, including names such as Karl Gutzkow, Paul Heyse, Theodor Fontane, Paul Lindau, and Friedrich Spielhagen, his self-proclaimed inventiveness is particularly remarkable. Many of these writers, however, Kretzer contended, marginalized, or downright ignored the experiences of Berlin’s commoners and consequently failed to capture the true essence—the “Lokalkolorit”—of Berlin. For example, it is
safe to assume that Kretzer would not count the crowd of international travelers in the Friedrichstraße train station to be indicative of the commoners’ urban experience.

To determine whether Kretzer was deserving of his self-praise or not is not to be concluded in this chapter, but the comments and critiques that he voices against his contemporaries showcase a strong conviction that stories in and of Berlin must reflect the experiences and images of the harsh daily life in the working quarters—the underbelly of the city—that had thus far never played a central role in literary depictions of Berlin. Kretzer comments on his contemporaries’ and predecessors’ Berlin texts as follows:

Das Volk, das wirkliche Volk ziehen sie fast gar nicht in Mitleidenschaft. Man weiß wohl, dass die Erzählungen in Berlin spielen, aber man empfindet es nicht. Das Lokalkolorit kommt nicht zur Geltung, man atmet nicht die Atmosphäre der Weltstadt … Die meisten unsrer Romanschriftsteller … machen keine Studien, sondern konstruieren am Schreibtisch nach ihrer augenblicklichen Eingebung. Sie lernen mehr aus Büchern als aus dem Leben (Ibid.)

Kretzer argues that stories ought to take on a more positivist style of literary writing, creating characters and milieus anchored in the matter and facts of real life rather than poetic or philosophical fabrications of the mind. Akin to Zola, the notion of the study of the city as a lived experience underscores Kretzer’s belief that literature should be grounded in scientific principles and empirical evidence. Contrary to the numerical data one might first associate with empiricism, however, Kretzer’s empiricism refers to the methods through which writers ought to acquire knowledge namely through their bodily senses. Writers must experience the city through the eyes of the characters they seek to bring to life in their novels: “Wer den Arbeiter, den Handwerker, den Kleinbürger kennen lernen will, muss mit ihm leben, aufgehen in seinem Denken und Trachten” (Ibid.).

The representations of Berlin and its transit infrastructure paint a sharp contrast to than the ones we have hitherto explored. Whereas Fontane, Dominik, and Hart construct panoramic vision
of Berlin and its modernity, Kretzer focalizes the urban experience from a perspective of immobility. He shows us what Berlin looks like for those who are stuck on the ground, below the elevated rails of the Stadtbahn. This is quite literally the case in his novel Meister Timpe. The narrative brings to the foreground the debilitating consequences of the Stadtbahn’s construction on the Timpe family’s home and workshop which lay right beside the planned construction site.

**Urban Space and the Transit Grid: Berlin Takes on New Shapes**

Was dem Hause ein besonderes Merkmal anhaftete, war seine außergewöhnliche Lage. Es stand mit der Front schräg hinter der Straße

—Max Kretzer, *Meister Timpe*

The public transit network impacted the cityscape in several ways. The mobility that it offered, as well as the new “frame” through which passengers could gaze upon the urban environment were integral to the nineteenth-century understanding of Berlin’s modern character. We may draw comparisons to the railway network’s influence over people’s relationship to time, space, and landscape. In addition to such notions of spatio-temporal shrinkage and extension, the network’s infrastructure—the pillars, rails, and stations in metal and concrete—carved out a highly rational grid pattern in urban space. The narrow alleyways, crooked streets, and wood buildings of “old” Berlin did not facilitate effective lines of circulation, nor did they jive with the aesthetics of a “modern” city. Indeed, in addition to the temporal, rhythmic qualities of accelerated modes of transportation, the new shape of Berlin as a planned grid system signifies a shift in the spatial imagination of the urban environment.

In the 1887 novel, *Meister Timpe*, Max Kretzer employs the motif of the Stadtbahn as a powerful symbol of industrial and commercial innovation, and its ramifications on an artisan workshop in a neighborhood in East Berlin. In its reconfiguration of the physical layout of the neighborhood, the construction of the Stadtbahn causes numerous dislocations and disruptions in
living habits, ultimately uprooting the relationship between the home, work, and workplace. While similar conflicts suffuse much of the literature written in and about modernizing cities at the time, Kretzer’s engagement with the Stadtbahn draws attention to the ways in which the city’s material environment reflects clashing values and feelings of alienation and dislocation.

Meister Timpe roughly covers the years between 1871-1879 and centers around Johannes Timpe (from now on referred to as Timpe) and his wood-turning [Drechsler] workshop, who finds himself under siege on two fronts: On the one hand, the workshop is slowly but surely being run out of business by the neighbor, factory owner Urban, while the planned construction of the Stadtbahn is cutting right through the Timpe property, on the other. In this time of industrialization...

Figure 3. Although taken at some point in the early twentieth century, the above photograph showcases several geometric shapes and urban motifs that are also relevant in the nineteenth-century context. One of the arguably most powerful symbols of industrialization, the smokestack, and the elevated urban railway both create distinct geometric lines in urban space. Unknown photographer and exact year (prior to 1914). "Hoch- und Untergrundbahn. Teilstück Stralauer Thor - Potsdamer Platz (Eröffnung 18.02.1902) an der Mocënbrücken." Deutsche Fotothek.
and frenzied land speculation, threats to small-scale businesses were by no means isolated incidents, but rather a sign of large-scale social re-structuring in Berlin. In the face of these strong economic forces, Timpe stands no chance. In many ways, Kretzer’s novel serves as a counterpoint to the homage to the transportation infrastructure we encountered in the previous sections of this chapter. In contrast to those representations, the novel’s employment of the public transit space highlights the many problems lurking behind the “grandiose” facade of the modernizing city, projecting a city plagued by socio-economic divisions between a growing proletariat in Berlin’s eastern and southern suburbs and the rising middle classes setting up large-scale manufacturing businesses. The novel sets up the two characters of Timpe and Urban as opposites. Urban’s character signifies the cutthroat and business-oriented nature of modern “urbanity” (the name is not particularly subtle) but also because of his role in, and compatibility with, the general message of the story at large: the triumph of industrial manufacturing over artisanal expertise. At the onset of the story, we discover that Urban wants to buy the Timpe residence because of its advantageous location right next to the planned construction of the elevated Stadtbahn. Urban acknowledges this as a prime opportunity to expand his factory, but Timpe, driven by his stubbornness and naiveté—believing that the presence of the Stadtbahn will only increase the value of his property—fails to recognize the crushing fate of his workshop and home in between these large-scale constructions and therefore rejects the offer.

The most intimate change takes place within the family, where the traditional inheritance line of the family business between father and son comes to an end. We may recognize this family conflict motif from other German novels written around the turn of the twentieth century, such as Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks (1901). The multi-layered tensions that suffuse the story, from the rivalry between Timpe and Urban, the spatial othering of Timpe’s house vis-à-vis the modern
cityscape being erected around it, and between father and son, show that the modern, industrial society prompted changes in all realms of urban life. Already at the onset of the story, the narrative builds up tensions between Timpe and his son Franz, foreshadowing Franz’s “conversion” to Urban’s side. The narrator informs the reader of the differences between the father, who embodies “die bidere Geradheit des Handwerkmannes, der sich seiner Unwissenheit nicht schämt, sich seines Wertes bewußt ist” and his son who represents “die große Lüge unserer Zeit, welche die Geistesbildung über die Herzensbildung und den Schein über das Sein stellt” (22). In a similar fashion to Timpe’s failure to recognize the threat that the construction of the factory and Stadtbahn pose to him, it takes a long time before he realizes that his son gradually distanciates himself from the family business. The artisan’s wishes to “convert” and serve as the industrialist’s apprentice, showing a clear separation between lineage and occupation, a change that Urban views as necessary for progress: “[Timpe hängt am Glauben seiner Väter]. Wenn es nach solchen Leuten ginge, so würde die Welt keine Neuerung erleben” (131). Here we can see a direct conflict between two ways of thinking about historical progress: Timpe detects first and foremost a deterioration of moral values in the changing social and urban fabric, a regression, whereas Urban stresses the importance of following a market-oriented logic, seeing progress in efficiency and economic profit.

The central conflict of the neighbor feud is not only apparent from the interactions between the characters but is likewise reflected in the contrasting descriptions of their respective spaces of work. Just as Timpe’s and Urban’s characters, the factory and workshop figure as two spatial embodiments of competing social and economic forces in the late nineteenth century; the artisan and the manufacturer. Noteworthy is that the novel offers little insight into the interior of the factory, but rather as a building that exerts a strong influence over its surroundings. After the
factory opens, the atmosphere and dynamics of the streets around Timpe’s house feel and look remarkably different: “Die Straßen hatten eine andere Physiognomie bekommen. Die Scharen Arbeiter, die sie belebten, machten sie zu einer Verkehrsader des Viertels. Das Portal des Establissements ragte wie ein Wahrzeichen industriellen Sieges” (Kretzer 136). Moreover, the narrator frequently “monumentalizes” the industrial facility by referring to its smokestacks as the 
Siegessäule of modern industry, and the portal as a Wahrzeichen of the triumph of industry (174). The factory’s function in the narrative is twofold as it highlights Timpe’s slow but sure economic collapse, as well as his isolation from the working masses that now enliven the streets. The crowded streets gesture toward the city’s transformation into an industrial metropolis, but these developments run counter to everything that Timpe has profited from in his business. He had hitherto relied on local customers to buy his products and never had to significantly lower his prices to stay competitive. Indeed, just as the location of the workshop “schräg hinter der Straße,” the artisan expertise and way of life no longer fit in the grid carved into the city by the new circulatory system.

Given that the Stadtbahn had not yet been inaugurated at this point in time in the story, we can safely conjecture that the bulk of the commuting factory workers undertook their daily commute between home and work by foot. The growing distance between home and work is one of many historical developments that transformed how urban dwellers experiences space. John B. Lyon argues in his study Out of Place that although urban space was growing in the late nineteenth century, spatial growth posed new challenges that needed to be overcome by individuals: “On a communal level, there was a great deal of space, but on an individual level, space had become a source of restriction, an obstacle to overcome” (Lyon 51). This historical perspective supports and contextualizes Urban’s great interest in expanding his factory business, as the close proximity to
the Stadtbahn would be beneficial to employ a greater number of people—a prospect that would be of no importance to Timpe’s small workshop.

The text illuminates these various layers of conflicts and large-scale shifts both within the private and public spheres of the city, all of which progressively intensify in tandem with the construction of the Stadtbahn. As such, while it would be an exaggeration to consider the Stadtbahn as the main catalyst behind the historical and social shifts portrayed in the story, rather it figures as a powerful symbol of encroaching modernity. Kretzer portrays the construction of the Stadtbahn as an iconoclastic force ruthlessly tearing through the cityscape:

Bis zum Frankfurter Bahnhof war die Gasse freigelegt worden, die dem Verkehr Spreeathens einen neun Weg eröffnen sollte. Eine eigenartige Perspektive bot sich dem Auge dar. Es war gerade, als hätte eine Riesenfaust vom Himmel sich herniedergesenkt und mit gewaltigem Hammerstreich eine Bresche durch die Häuser geschlagen, gleichgültig darüber, ob das eine stehen bleibe oder die Hälfte des anderen falle (Kretzer 186).

The passage highlights the modernization process as rendered visible by the renovation of the urban environment. The imagery of an alleyway being laid open to accommodate busier traffic shows the process of turning “Gasse” into “Straße,” the narrow, windy pedestrian path between houses to a wide, streamlined, organized, and clearly structured transportation vein. The direct reference to Berlin’s nickname Spreeathen appears almost ironic in this context, as what the narrator is witnessing is the city’s very transformation to what Rathenau would later call Spree-Chicago. The personification of these transformative forces, a “Riesenfaust vom Himmel” striking through houses with a powerful “Hammerstreich,” is evocative of a near divine presence, molding and shaping the cityscape as if it were a miniature model. The new grid being imprinted on the city body is indifferent to individual private, home spaces. This progressive development of facilitating better mobility in public urban space paints a stark contrast to Timpe’s immobility. The descriptions of several houses and properties affected by the construction work suggests that not
only Timpe was in danger, but several other homes and businesses too: “Hinterhäuser mußten heruntergerissen werden, Vorderhäuser durchschnitten, ganze Grundstücke durchtrennt werden, um dem Dampfroß einen Weg durch das Steinmeer zu bahnen” (172).

Over the course of the story, the elevated Stadtbahn casts an ever-growing shadow over the Timpe household, both literally and figuratively. At first, Timpe takes pleasure in climbing up on the roof of his house to observe the construction of the Stadtbahn. Up there, distanced from the modernizing cityscape, he maintains a sense of authority and control, albeit a false one, over his surroundings: “Saß er oben zwischen den Zweigen und rauchte gemütlich seine Pfeife, so vergaß er beim Anblick des geschäftlichen Treibens unter sich ein Viertelstündchen lang die Drangsal des Lebens, hatte er nur noch Sinn für die neue Welt, die sich vor ihm aufbaute und immer gewaltiger und kühner emporstrebte” (186). In a way, he becomes a spectator to Berlin’s modernization, yet he fails to understand how these spatial changes may affect his established sureties. For as long as Timpe can observe from a distance, his household still exudes a sense of privacy and security that we can attribute to the traditional sense of home, a place of refuge from what lies outside. However, as the pillars of the elevated rails grow and reach higher than his rooftop, they shatter his authorial and calm gaze over the city:

Einer [der] Pfeiler berührte die hintere Giebelwand so dicht, daß der Meister vermeinte, ihn mit der Hand fassen zu können … Fast gleichmäßig von Tag zu Tag, als wuchsen sie Fuß für Fuß aus der Erde, erhoben die Pfeiler sich … Und je weiter die Steinmassen sich rechts und links ausdehnten, um zu einem riesigen Ringe zu werden, je beengter fühlte sich der Meister … Immer winziger und ruinenhafter erschien ihm sein Häuschen (Kretzer 187).

The spatial proximity of the pillars of the Stadtbahn to the house paint a near claustrophobic scene, where Timpe perceives them to be within grasp of his previously safe home space. By the time it is too late to reconsider his decision to stay put, the city which previously appeared a safe distance
away from his rooftop has crawled up to close for comfort. Next to the massive pillars growing larger and stretching higher toward the sky around him, the familial Timpe Häuschen changes to a ruin, a relic of a bygone era.

The changes taking place before Timpe’s eyes are gradual, steady, and happen over an extended period of time, which is inherently different from the instantaneous, simultaneous shocking impulses of urban life that we will encounter in later narratives about city life and public transit. We can see that although Meister Timpe lacks the intensity of vision of later expressionist texts by writers such as Georg Heym, Gottfried Benn, or Alfred Döblin, Timpe’s degree of vision (or lack thereof) is inextricably connected to his sense of security and control, which in turn is mediated through the motif of the Stadtbahn. Rather than foregrounding the overwhelming and fleeting visual encounters with urban space from the vantage point of a moving vehicle that we will encounter in the next chapter, the Stadtbahn denies Timpe vision of urban space altogether as it rises above his rooftop lookout spot.

Sight and observation have been central to epistemology since the Enlightenment. Afterall, sight is informed by embodiment and sensory feeling, but at the same time “individually subjective and culturally relative” (Synnott, 219). More specifically, the meanings that we construct based on what we see, reflect certain value systems and cultural norms. If observation of the visual world is a precondition for us to gather knowledge and understand the world, then what are we to make of the assault on Timpe’s sight presented by the Stadtbahn? Martin Jay’s insights into the role of vision in twentieth century philosophy can provide a framework to further explore this question:

Vision, it bears repeating, is normally understood as the master sense of the modern era, variously described as the heyday of Cartesian perspectivialism, the age of the world picture, and the society of the spectacle or surveillance. It will come therefore as no surprise that the critique of modernity would find congenial many of the same arguments against the hegemony of the eye (Jay, 543).
Jay’s discussion of the assault on sight in twentieth-century philosophy foregrounds the inextricable relationship between sight and modernity. Given this relationship, Timpe’s impeded vision is indicative of his alienation from the modernizing urban environment. As previously indicated, the same phenomenon will manifest itself also in subsequent chapters, albeit to different degrees and mediated through different obstacles. Even though the novel largely revolves around the local neighborhood, and more specifically on the Timpe household, the narrative also posits the Stadtbahn as a symbol for the large-scale implications of industrialism and modernity in the city. Upon completion, the elevated rails stretch triumphantly over the neighborhood, bringing to full fruition the transformative process initiated first by Urban’s factory: “Auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite der Straße, dort, wo mitten durch die Giebeldächer dem Dampfroß der Weg gebahnt worden war, strebten zu beiden Seiten der Viadukte vierstöckige Paläste zum Himmel empor; und links und rechts von ihnen zeugten Baugerüste für das neue Leben an Stelle der Ruinen” (258). The four-floor “palaces” represent newer and modern forms of housing that have surfaced as what almost appears to be an extension of the Stadtbahn viaducts.

The foreshadowing of the growing rails and pillars, the factory building and the appearance of new, larger houses around Timpe’s Häuschen culminates in a crowning of the Stadtbahn as the city’s new Meister. In the final scene of the novel, Timpe’s body is found in the remains of his old workshop:

The narrative arc of the Timpe house, now a grave on display, foregrounds the experiences and perspectives of those displaced by urban renovation and technological progress. The open door to the streets and the cheering crowds outside build up the expectations of a possible collective honoring or mourning of Timpe’s death. This illusion, however, is shattered by the pompous passing of the *Stadtbahn*. Unaware, or possibly even indifferent to Timpe’s death, the people on the streets are celebrating the inauguration of the new transportation line. The *bekränzte* locomotive marks the definite end of an era and the confirmation of a new one.

The novels’ depiction of the unfortunate events revolving around the construction of the *Stadtbahn* ought not be viewed as a rejection of modern urbanity, but rather as a delineation of the inescapable modern environment and its ramifications on individuals. The Timpe household constitutes an interesting case study in many regards, as it showcases reactions to spatial change on the individual, as well as the entire neighborhood. Further, the Timpe house defies traditional spatial divisions, as it functions as public, private, home, and work space throughout the story. The very co-existence of these spaces in one location runs counter to the plurality of spaces we associate with the modern city. Paradoxically, Timpe’s very rootedness in one singular place derives him of space altogether.

In one of his most widely propagated texts *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies outlines social attitudes that are close to that of Kretzer and other Berlin writers of the 1880s. Tönnies contrasts two sociological models: the *Gemeinschaft* of the close-knit *Bürger* community of an earlier epoch and the competitive bourgeoisie *Gesellschaft* of modern capitalism, centered around an impersonal market and search for profit. The main difference between the two is that a capitalist society separates, rather than joins people together:
“Die Theorie der Gemeinschaft geht […] von der vollkommenen Einheit menschlicher Willen […] aus, welche […] trotz der empirischen Trennung […] sich erhalte … Die Theorie der Gesellschaft konstruiert einen Kreis von Menschen, welche […] wesentlich getrennt sind und […] getrennt bleiben trotz aller Verbundenheiten” (Tönnies S. 8, 39). While Tönnies is clearly indebted to Marx’ capitalist critique, he is not arguing for an abolition of capitalism per se. This is also true for Kretzer, as his text emphasizes the effects of capitalist society on interpersonal relationships rather than portraying its unsustainability. Indeed, the sentiment is rather the opposite: the Gemeinschaft must adapt to the Gesellschaft.

In Kretzer’s text, the Stadtbahn figures as a symbol of industrialism per excellence. Furthermore, the Stadtbahn and factory show many striking similarities both as symbolic and functional spaces in the text. They stand in a causal relation to one another, as the factory grows as a place of employment, larger demands are placed on the transportation infrastructure to help ensure workers move between spaces of home and work, a distance that grew increasingly large at the onset of Berlin’s industrialization. This reconfiguration of the relationships and distances between locations in the city at large provokes an acute sense of loss of place altogether for Timpe. This is where the symbolism of the Stadtbahn deviates from that of Urban’s factory: While the latter slowly but surely drives Timpe out of business, the former robs him of the very foundation upon which he had built his business and where his family had resided for generations. The confrontation between Timpe, his son, and Urban renders visible a shift in both economic and family structures, the looming and constricting presence of the Stadtbahn signals that Timpe’s values and way of life are under siege by a power much greater than that of a greedy capitalist neighbor. Indeed, the symbolism of the Stadtbahn signifies a larger systemic shift in Berlin and becomes equal parts an industrial monument and gravestone for that (or those) left behind.
Meister Timpe is in many regards reminiscent of Émile Zola’s 1884 novel, The Ladies’ Paradise. This eleventh novel in the Rougon-Macquart series centers around the relationship between a rising department store and its surrounding neighborhood. The store and its owner, Octave Mouret, bear a striking resemblance to Urban and his factory, as they are both emblematic of the experience of the modern city, class relations, and the growing influence and power of the bourgeoisie. Likewise, their characters and businesses both serve as symbols of new capitalism, an economic system based on the principles of circulation, turnover, and rapid renewal of capital in the form of commodities, and both texts appear deliberatively ambiguous in their attitude toward progress and urban modernity. What is more, the success of Urban’s and Mouret’s businesses cannot be attributed solely to their refined understanding of modern capitalism but must also be seen in light of the proximity between their respective shops and the city’s transportation network. Their business operation relies not only on efficient turnover of circulation and goods, but also of customers and workers. Timpe’s workshop, too, find equivalents in Zola’s novel:

Bourras was a tall old man with the head of a prophet, long-haired and bearded, and with piercing eyes under the great bushy eyebrows. He sold walking-sticks and umbrellas, did repairs, and even carved handles, a skill which had earned him quite a reputation as an artist … [his shop] was a hovel squashed between the Ladies’ Paradise and a large Louis XIV mansion, its two lower storeys were collapsing at the bottom of the narrow crevice where it had somehow sprung up … the roof slates were crooked and rotten, and the two-windowed façade was scarred with cracks which ran down in long rusty lines over the worm-eaten signboard (Zola 20).

The description of Bourras’ trade and his shop bear a striking resemblance to Timpe and his woodturning workshop, as he also specializes in carving walking-sticks and ornate handles. Akin to the Timpe workshop being crushed between two changing signs of history—the Stadtbahn and Urban’s factory—Bourras’ shop is sandwiched between a grand residence of aristocrats, or very well-of bourgeoisie, un hôtel particulier, dating back to the seventeenth century, on the one hand,
and the nineteenth century department store, which had brought the rise of the bourgeoise to new heights in Paris, on the other. In comparison, it would take until 1897 and 1907 for the massive department stores Wertheim-Warenhaus in the Leipziger Straße and the KaDeWe in the Tauentzienstraße to open their doors in Berlin. Yet as symbols of the modern metropolis, the department store and the public transit system share much in common, as they both emphasize similar types of subject performances and behaviors in urban space that hinge on steady and efficient circulation, navigation, and movement.

This chapter set out to show how the public transit network and vehicle figure as expressive yet janus-faced symbols of urban change, highlighting its mixed effects on both the city at large, groups of people, as well as the individual subject. Another important point to be made here is that the texts bring to the foreground a reciprocity between reconstruction in urban space and the position and perception of the individual subject. The public transit network, and in particular the Stadtbahn as the first major transportation infrastructure that cut through Berlin, rather than going around it, holds a powerful sway over all the texts we have explored in this chapter. The varying examples above underscore the multivalent character of Berlin at the time is likewise reflected in the depictions of the growing transportation network, situating Berlin as center of progress and German modernity on the one hand, but also a cradle of growing societal and individual discrepancies in values, beliefs, and economic welfare.

In addition to its relationship to these larger trends and shifts in the cultural and societal fabrics of turn of the century Berlin, the close readings of transportation motifs and experiences made in transit space show that urban dwellers perceived of their contemporary reality as a time when both man, and space itself, were growing increasingly mobile. Here, I am not referring to mobility in its abstract sense, but in terms of the movement of bodies through space. The
experience of seeing movement, as well as seeing from a vantage point in motion, shifts the perception of the city layout from stable to mobile. This shift, in turn, constructs and conditions the perception of Berlin at large, with the common denominator that the city was progressing toward a more “modern” character. The new modes of seeing in the cityscape were also accompanied by a sense that Berlin, in the process of breaking with a pre-industrial past, had lost a sense of familiarity and tradition in favour of more instrumental, functional, and impersonal qualities.

While we can recognize several examples of literary representations of people escaping the city to get away from certain restrictions, constraints, expectations, and class consciousness that were perceived as particularly prevalent in the city, such as the daily outing to Halensee in Fontane’s *Frau Jenny Treibel* (1892) or Joachim von Pasenow’s excursion to the Havel with Ruzena in *Pasenow oder die Romantik* (1888), Berlin still figures as a center that exudes a strong gravitational pull over literary production in Germany at the time. This latter point can likewise be detected in many of the representations of transportation that we have encountered in this chapter. The journey to Berlin in Hart’s poem, Fontane’s and Dominik’s marvel at the tracks in and around Berlin, Kretzer’s poignant description of the transformation of an entire neighborhood in tandem with the *Stadtbahn* rails carving their way through urban space, Berlin and its inhabitants are set in motion, moving away from a rural and provincial past and into an urban future.
Chapter II: Around, Through, and Away from Berlin Day-to-Day

There is something at once incarcerational and navigational about railroad travel; like Jules Verne’s ships and submarines, it combines dreams with technology. The ‘speculative’ returns. Located in the very heart of the mechanical order. Contraries coincide for the duration of a journey.

—DeCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*


—Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*

Vergilbt in Glas, / Wir sehen Menschen fremd ins Zimmer treten, / und keines weiß vom andern was! … Wenn wir Stadtbahn, Stadtbahn fahren, / Und zur Ruh die Glocken läuten; keiner weiß, was sie bedeuten.

—Mehring, “Wenn wir Stadtbahn fahren.”

Coordinating ship- and railway travel in the 19th century was a prerequisite to effectively transporting people and goods across the world. Standardized timetables and itineraries rendered global traffic “lesbar … und seiner Einhaltung [gerät] zum Motor des Weltverkehrs” (Krajewski 46). World travel with its roots in the nineteenth century is a testament to new forms of experience as well as pleasures made possible by technological progress. Steam ships and railroads were symbolic of a shift to a more accessible international arena and opened new vistas for travelers to see. As Phileas Fogg’s travel companion Passepartout from Jules Verne’s novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) proclaims after a short stop at the harbor in Aden, Yemen: “I see that it is by no means useless to travel, if a man wants to see something new” (Verne 39). As critics have
noted, the presence of transportation technologies in literature and art of the nineteenth century highlight a “fascination with the machine and its miraculous power to shrink the globe, enable communication, facilitate construction, or, in some cases, precipitate destruction” whilst also redrawing “the boundaries of fiction itself” (Unwin 5), shifting the novel’s vision from local to global concerns. Around the very same time as these stories of grand international voyages were undertaken, however, technological innovations in public transportation were carving out radically new patterns in time and space closer to what an increasingly large portion of the European population at the time called “home”—the metropolitan city. Traditional travel narratives often venture beyond the confines of day-to-day life, transporting its reader across great geographical distances. Stories and depictions of journeys undertaken on a smaller scale, in Berlin, show how public transit technology cultivated new dynamics of viewership and movement that fundamentally changed how the human body and its senses operated in urban space. In line with the increased usage of public busses and trains and their growing prevalence in Berlin day-to-day life, the human body stood before the challenge to synchronize with the circular, oscillating, habitual, and swift movements of the modern transportation technology.

As we learned in the previous chapter, the presence of transportation technology precipitated a shift in Berlin’s image toward what authors and other artists conceived of as inherently modern. Akin to the ways in which international railroads and steamships broadened Phileas Fogg and his companions’ horizons on their journey around the world in eighty days, the journey through Berlin by public transit opened up new perspectives and understandings of urban topography for contemporaries of the early twentieth century. In 1928, Serbian author Miloš Crnjanski moved to Berlin as cultural attaché. Reading his essay Iris Berlina (2011), it is obvious that he saw the subways, trams, and their stations as the principal characteristics of Berlin.
Crnjanski describes a janus-faced city “so flach, so banal, so im Barock der Vergangenheit verfangen, dass … nicht einmal die Wilhelminische Monumentalität erhaben und characteristisch wirkt” (Crnjanski 22-23). The monumental buildings along “Unter den Linden” are fading into obscurity because they no longer have anything in common “mit dem Wesen Berlins” (Ibid. 22). To experience and understand Berlin, Crnjanski suggests, one must look out the window of public transit trains: “Erst die stete Bewegung der Züge öffnet einem den Blick durch die Fenster auf die völlig heutige und moderne Schönheit dieser Stadt, bar jeder Vergangenheit, entsetzlich in der Vielzahl gleicher Bilder, Straßen, Durchgänge, Tunnels, Kais und in der endlosen Monotonie des Asphaltlabyrinths” (Ibid. 23). Crnjanski’s observation provides an interesting foil to representations of the Stadt- and Ringbahn in the previous chapter, as it is no longer the physical presence of transportation technology that renders urban space “modern,” but rather the ways in which they condition what, and how, the human eye views, and human body moves within, Berlin.

The representations of mass transit that I bring to the fore in this chapter both echo and expand on the previous chapter. Against the backdrop of the electrification of the transit system in the 1920s, the speed of the trains and trams circulating throughout Berlin increased significantly. If the elevation and elegance of the transit system signified a great socio-economic shift and new power hierarchies in the late-nineteenth-century urban environment, the acceleration, density, and coverage that Berlin’s transit system had reached by the 1920s led to an unprecedented broadening of the urban dweller’s experiential horizon. As I will argue in this chapter, the public transit system constitutes a contentious space where the human body, cityscape, and machine clash. The following close readings demonstrate that transit is a highly paradoxical space that arouses emotions of both freedom and confinement, relaxation and stress, work and leisure; public and private; interior and exterior space. First, I bring to the fore the relationship between Berlin’s transit
lines and the narrative structures and spaces of the perhaps most well-known Berlin novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz. Die Geschichte von Franz Biberkopf* (1929). Not only are Franz Biberkopf’s journeys with public transit indicative of his relationship to, and feelings toward, modern Berlin at large, but the Alexanderplatz as a central location around which the text revolves both structurally and thematically is indicative of the close-knit relation between the modern Berlin novel and transportation. Second, I consider the role of transportation as a motif in Walter Ruttmann’s city symphony film, *Berlin, Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927). Ruttmann’s film reconstructs a “regular” day in Berlin from dusk till dawn, showing several key spaces and daily rituals throughout the city, many of which highlight the central function of transportation. Third, I follow a group of young Berlin residents on a leisurely Sunday trip to Nikolassee in Robert Siodmak’s *Menschen am Sonntag* (1930). This latter film provides an interesting contrast as it highlights how transportation technology so often associated with a hectic working commute and a Simmelean intensification of “das Nervenleben,” also presents access to spaces for recuperation and play on the weekend. Reading these three texts together reveals not only a close-knit relationship between public transit and the “urban experience,” but also how these representations of transit connect several key concepts that are derivative of modernity, such as new forms of sensory stimuli, pleasure, and malaise.

Despite the economic and political instabilities following Germany’s defeat in World War I, the 1920s saw a great expansion of the public transit infrastructure and technology. Previously independent towns such as Charlottenburg, Wilmersdorf, Schöneberg, Lichtenberg, Neukölln, Köpenick and Spandau had been annexed to Berlin through the so-called Greater Berlin act of 1920. To provide a reference that might resonate with someone visiting Berlin in the twenty-first century, essential Berlin sites such as the Olympiastadion, Kurfürstendamm and KaDeWe, all lay
outside the administrative borders of pre-1920 Greater Berlin. As a result of this expansion, Berlin counted as the third most populated city in the world with almost 4 million and the city area increased almost 13-fold (from approximately 67 to 878km$^2$) (Gympel 11). Many singular local spaces were subsumed under a regional one, and the transit lines which had previously interconnected urban with suburban areas (Stadt and Vorort) now created one large, connected city network. Under the initiative and supervision of Ernst Reuter, director of transportation for the Berlin government, all public tramway, bus, and subway companies fused into one large transport authority, the BVG. This fusion did not only make the network easier to manage from an administrative point of view, but also made it more accessible and user friendly. The new transport tariff made it cheaper and easier to travel longer distances throughout Greater Berlin, further democratizing public transport in Berlin.

With more people using public transit in their day-to-day life, a greater degree of the urban population was subjected to the vision of the city from within transit. We can understand responses to the new visual experience and all-pervasive, incessant movement in urban space as a crisis of perception. In his seminal essay “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben” (1903), Georg Simmel elucidates what he identifies as an intensification of external and internal stimuli in the city. He argues that individuals living in a metropolis develop a mental barrier to shield themselves from overstimulation, and he calls this barrier “Blasiertheit”: “statt mit dem Gemüte reagiert er [der Großstädter] auf diese im wesentlichen mit dem Verstande, dem die Steigerung des Bewußtseins, wie dieselbe Ursache sie erzeugte, die seelische Prärogative verschafft; damit ist die Reaktion auf jene Erscheinungen in das am wenigsten empfindliche, von den Tiefen der Persönlichkeit am weitesten abstehende psychische Organ verlegt” (Simmel 117). The result of this shift in reaction, from emotional to rational, is the development of a metropolitans who grow indifferent to their
surroundings. The blasé outlook is a behavior that Simmel links directly to the constantly changing environment of urban space, of which modern transportation technology was part. Moreover, he considers this phenomenon widespread and highly characteristic of city life: “es gibt vielleicht keine seelische Erscheinung, die so unbedingt der Großstadt vorbehalten wäre, wie die Blasiertheit” (Simmel 121). Simmel’s diagnosis of the urban dweller and modern metropolis suggests that the former changes because of changes taking place in the latter. More specifically, his theory suggests that the urban environment shapes urban subjectivity to an unprecedented degree. There are a few parallels between Simmel’s blasé metropolitan type and the passenger in transit that I want to highlight. They are both intrinsically linked to the modern city, their gaze subjected to fleeting and fluctuating impressions, and largely they appear apathetic to their surroundings. I use the Simmelean reading of the relationship between the modern urban environment and urban subjectivity as a springboard for my own argument that posits public transit as a contributing factor to new behaviors and mental dispositions as we encounter them in artistic and scholarly engagement with 1920s Berlin.

It is fair to say that the relationship between the city as the quintessential embodiment of modernity and the human mind has been central to nearly all critical theorists writing about urbanity in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin both understand the city as a space in which the human becomes subject to a perpetual flood of impressions and cognitive stimuli that could potentially be overwhelming. Consequently, the encounter with the city can be seen as perception training to cultivate a consciousness that is able to respond to the city’s heavy load of sensory input. Further, Siegfried Kracauer described what he understood to be a new type of aesthetic representation of the city in his essay “Das Ornament der Masse,” where he suggests that the flow of commodities and human movements reflect the
“ästhetische Reflex der von dem herrschenden Wirtschaftssystem erstrebten Rationalität” (Kracauer 54). In other words, Kracauer articulates a reciprocal relationship between a governing system of circulation and aesthetic expression. In relation to public transit more specifically, it is worth noting that these various discursive frameworks of urban space and subjectivity flourish in the same years that the new tariffs made it possible for virtually all Berliners to travel through their city in a high-velocity vehicle.

Even though the expansion of the network resulted in a higher degree of mobility and velocity in day-to-day life, representations of traffic in and around Weimar Berlin attest that transportation vehicles were as much obstacle as aid in navigating urban space. Learning how to perform in and around heavy traffic is depicted in many texts from the time as a precondition to being a modern urban subject. Erich Kästner writes in the poem “Besuch vom Lande” (1929) about a group of visitors on Potsdamer Platz: “Sie machen vor Angst die Beine Krumm. / Sie machen alles verkehrt. / Sie lächeln bestürzt. Und sie warten dumm. / Und stehn auf dem Potsdamer Platz herum, / bis man sie überfährt.” The image of the visitors to Berlin from the countryside here stands in stark juxtaposition to the shapes and movements of city traffic. Their “krumm[e] Beine” next to the straight lines of the street, they are “verkehrt” as they stand around, waiting and giggling they appear as objects of traffic congestion rather than having trajectories of their own that flow with the “Verkehr,” and as a result they are in danger of being run over—and perhaps having their senses overrun. While I believe it is fair to assume that these visitors know how to find their location, the Potsdamer Platz, on a map of Berlin, the problem arises from their inability to move with and through the urban space which they inhabit. Here, the division between “old” and “new/modern” is not marked in space itself, but on the human bodies in space—those unable to navigate and jive with the rhythmic flow of the city, dictated by animate and inanimate bodies
moving along the streets, are branded as foreign and other.

It is not only people, however, who can be branded as outsiders or outdated based on their performance in the streets. Joseph Roth writes in 1924:

Es scheint mir, daß die Straßenbahnen einen weltstädtischen Verkehr unmöglich machen. Im Zeitalter des Luftverkehrs wirken sie wie Postkutschen. Sie fahren meist in der Mitte des Straßendammes. Sie können an einem Fahrzeug, das zufällig auf die Schienen geraten ist, nicht vorbei. Sie sperren die Aussicht dem Passanten und verhindern, daß er heranfahrende Gefährte auf der gegenüberliegenden Straßenseite rechtzeitig bemerkt (Roth 139).

Roth denounces the streetcars that Fontane had marveled at a few decades earlier as outdated, suggesting that transportation technology is no longer a novelty in and of itself, but a field of innovation and in need of modernization. Again, the traits of modern or unmodern are inscribed on an object in urban space, rather than urban space itself. This idea of parts and bodies in urban space being mobile—not causing congestion or impeding sight—that comes to the fore in these examples align with the contemporary image of a modern metropolis, a Weltstadt. Roth stresses the centrality of sight, and more specifically, that the Straßenbahnen impede or distort the image of Berlin as a Weltstadt. Their slow speed marks them as unmodern and unable to keep up with the envisioned pace of a Weltstadt, which makes their path in the middle of the street possibly dangerous and contributing factors to accidents which obstruct the view of the other side of the street. These two motifs, the visitors from the countryside and the obtrusive streetcar in the middle of the road, focus on bodies that appear incompatible with the urban space in which they are embedded. Not unlike Meister Timpe from the previous chapters, they appear as foreign and disruptive bodies in need of “renovation” or “adaptation,” and we encounter more such instances of incompatibility between subjects and transit space in the close readings that follow.
**Berlin Alexanderplatz: “Elektrische fahren”**

In the opening scene of *Berlin Alexanderplatz. Die Geschichte von Franz Biberkopf* (1929), the protagonist, Franz Biberkopf, has just been released after four years in prison for manslaughter and waits for a train to take him from Tegel to central Berlin. The otherwise simple and mundane action of boarding a commuter train, however, turns into an arduous and angst-ridden process. Leaning towards the prison wall, Biberkopf “ließ Elektrische auf Elektrische vorbeifahren, drückte den Rücken an die rote Mauer und ging nicht … Er stand an der Haltestelle. Die Strafe beginnt (Döblin 15). The habitual movements of the streetcars passing by generate a sharp contrast to Biberkopf’s motionless body, and the preface “die Strafe beginnt” foreshadows a lack of control and power, which run counter to his newly acquired freedom.

Already in this opening scene, several the story’s central ideas have collapsed on the electric streetcar, situating the vehicle in a long tradition of symbolisms associated with rail travel. Unlike the train journey, however, the streetcar journey is embedded within closed city universe and emblematic of quotidian life. The blatant foreshadowing of doom (“die Strafe beginnt”) associated with the vehicle is evocative of a long tradition of train imagery in European art and literature. For example, one may draw a connection to Anna and Vronsky’s ill-fated encounter at the Moscow railroad station in Leo Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina* (1877), or the powerful and violent sway of the railroad over the psychology and familial relations in Gerhart Hauptmann’s *Bahnwärter Thiel* (1888) to explicate the close-knit reciprocity between Biberkopf’s psyche, physique, and the streetcar. As my close readings will reveal, the streetcar functions as an embodiment of the sensory experience of the modern city, which Biberkopf perceives as disjointed and threatening. Indeed, the exterior view of the fragmented cityscape violates his interior mindscape.
The journey with the electric streetcar signifies an abrupt break from Biberkopf’s past as a criminal and convict as he now sets out to be a decent—“anständig”—man in Berlin. The main story arc centers around what we can understand as a struggle between city and protagonist. Over the course of nine books, Biberkopf’s attempts at leading a decent life are undermined by three increasingly severe disasters caused by a combination of bad luck and tomfoolery. What we witness over the course of the novel’s nine books, as many readers of the novel have observed, is the transformation of Biberkopf into a new subject: In the final two books, Biberkopf is interned at an insane asylum in Buch, after which he is resurrected as Franz Karl Biberkopf, a man with a newfound sense of reality. A closer look at Biberkopf’s performance in and around transit space helps us see that the streetcar space mediates a fine line between past and present, the psyche and real, the processes of seeing and understanding that are central to his metamorphosis. The new Biberkopf paints a sharp contrast to the one who was fearful of boarding a train at the story’s onset. Indeed, the “new” Biberkopf thrives in the urban crowd, as he effortlessly moves along with the circulatory motions of the city’s traffic.

In contrast to the historical context of the nineteenth century, Biberkopf’s crisis stems in equal parts from socio-economic struggles (trouble finding a decent job and a place to live) and lack of cognition. The streetcar space is central to understanding how the city affects Biberkopf’s senses, particularly in regard to vision. In his study *Madness and Modernism* (1992), clinical psychologist Louis Sass informs us that an individual’s comprehension of visual stimuli depends on a mental process that deems some input important, and that it is first through this process that an individual becomes consciously cognizant (Cf. Sass 47). I propose that a close reading of the four streetcar journeys that Biberkopf undertakes over the course of the narrative brings to the fore a similar process of an individual growing increasingly cognizant of urban space. Biberkopf learns
to understand the city in a larger context, to see it as an inter-connected body of trajectories of which he, too, is part. It is a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of Biberkopf’s perception and sensory sensibilities; a process in which the physical and material cityscape remains the same but the individual subject’s cognition of it changes.

To better contextualize the role of the streetcar and the public transportation network in the narrative structure of Berlin Alexanderplatz, it is helpful to discuss Döblin’s work in relation to the larger discourse of modernism and the Berlin novel. Ever since the beginning of his career, Döblin had tried to break free from the traditional bonds of narrative (Cf. Dollenmayer 12). The seamless montage Döblin constructs in Berlin Alexanderplatz zooms in and out between the mass and the individual; the panorama and the singular object; the casual and the personal, all of which registers as an uninterrupted flow of images. The objects in the street, the information in the newspaper, and Biberkopf’s life story all dissolve into a chaotic semiotic melting pot. Lists of stations, views of trains passing by, and vistas of Berlin from within public transit vehicles likewise make their way into the montage.

The rapidly modernizing and technologizing urban space presented a challenge not only on the diegetic level of narratives, but likewise for the very writing process: How can a novel encapsulate the myriad impressions and expressions that saturate Berlin? In 1913, Döblin published a short essay in the German art and literary magazine Sturm entitled “An Romanautoren und Ihre Kritiker”, in which he advocates for new working methods for the novel. In the opening paragraph, he stresses the causal relationship between art and the objective world which it seeks to depict and provide commentary on: “Gewisses ist unverrückbar in der Zeit; Homer läßt sich noch genießen: Kunst konserviert; aber die Arbeitsmethode ändert sich, wie die Oberfläche der Erde … Die Welt ist in die Tiefe und Breite gewachsen; der alte Pegasus von der Technik
überflügelt” (Döblin 119). Döblin’s first insight is that there exists a direct relationship between artistic creation and the material world. His second insight is that the category of space provides a means to theorize and re-evaluate the relationship between author and text. The writing subject, according to Döblin, should posit himself vis-à-vis the narrative as “die Straße die Laterne, dies und dies Ereignis, weiter nichts” (Ibid. 120). In other words, Döblin suggests the narrator assimilates with the narrative space. This would then in turn enable the author to write from the position of an anonymous observer, eschewing elaborate interpretations and illustrations of the psychological underpinnings of the plot, story, or characters. It is not my task or interest to evaluate whether Döblin succeeds in this endeavor or not, but it is worth noting that he sees great potential in and of space to create meaning and generate (hi)stories, and for fictional characters to emerge naturally from their surroundings rather than being consciously and deliberatively constructed and psychologized by the author. What the lens of public transportation brings to the fore in relation to this larger project of narrating, or writing urban space is the central role of transportation in mapping urban space. Even in the midst of all movement, the locations of stations and other transit hubs, and the rails and routes that connect them, provide a sense of stability. Franz Biberkopf, however, is at first unable to identify patterns of regularity. From the very onset of the story, he is lost in transit(ion) between the meticulously structured and organized life in prison, and the chaos of Berlin’s streets.

The scholarship on Berlin Alexanderplatz is vast, encompassing a steady stream of critical and scholarly reactions and inquiries of varying endorsement from the novel’s publication to present day. One contemporary reviewer notes that “Döblin in diesem Roman eine wahrhaft stupende Gestaltungskraft offenbar [macht]” (Sander 143), whereas another compares his narrative style to littering the street: “Einen Müllkasten umwerfen und den Inhalt über eine große Strecke
ausstreuen - dazu gehören weder Kraft noch Talent, noch ist irgend jemand damit gedient” (Ibid. 146). The approaches taken in the secondary literature have also evolved greatly over the years. Psychoanalytic readings have successfully established connections between Döblin’s narrative and the psychic agencies governing desire; post-structuralist theories have sought to dispel the antagonistic relationship between urbanity and subjectivity by introducing interpretative frameworks such as dissemination and decentering (Jähner 1984); and scholars have also recognized the novel as a city text that revolves around “the story of the metropolis itself—the text of the city as an all-encompassing, functional sign system of languages and discourses—appropriat[ing] the territory previously occupied by the book about the city, the image of the city and its residents” (Scherpe 164, emphasis in original). As far as the category of transit and movement in previous scholarship is concerned, Biberkopf’s perambulating around Alexanderplatz has garnered much attention. Sabine Hake, for example, informs us that the transit vehicles do not offer a radically new perspective on the city. Instead, she argues, the act of walking sets the pace of the story, structures story events and informs motifs and narrative structures (Hake 357). While the perspective on urban space is similar regardless of whether Biberkopf is travelling by public transit or by foot, the interactions between Biberkopf and spaces of transit, I maintain, mark decisive turning points in the narrative. Moreover, by taking a closer look at Biberkopf’s reactions to the abrupt transition between vehicle and street spaces, we can identify a few key moments of stress and sensory overload that contrast the more gradual transitions between moments of order and chaos that unfold as he walks the streets.

The electric streetcar marks a spatio-temporal divide between Biberkopf’s past and present. Over the course of the story, he undertakes three journeys between Alexanderplatz and Tegel, and a fourth and final journey from the asylum Berlin-Buch back to Alexanderplatz. The
initial journey with its three stages of reluctant boarding, transit, and arrival in the city center are staged as a steady increase in sensory and physical stimuli: “Mitten unter den Leuten. Los. Das war zuerst, als wenn man beim Zahnarzt sitzt, der eine Wurzel mit der Zange gepackt hat, und zieht, der Schmerz wächst. Der Kopf will platzen” (Döblin 13). Once on board, he turns to his side and his gaze attempts to linger on the red prison walls by the station “aber die Elektrische sauste mit ihm auf den Schienen weg” (Ibid.). As the distance grows between Biberkopf and the prison, the pace of the narrative accelerates and information begins to take over the role of narrative in describing the surrounding space: “der Wagen machte eine Biegung, Bäume, Häuser traten dazwischen. Lebhafte Straßen tauchten auf, die Seestraße, Leute stiegen ein und aus … seine Nasenspitze verreiste, über seinen Backen schwirrte es. Zwölf Uhr Mittagszeitung, BZ, Die neueste Illustrierte, Die Funkstunde neu. ‘Noch jemand zugestiegen’? Die Schupos haben jetzt blaue Uniformen” (Ibid.). The inside space and the movement of the streetcar dictate both the narrative rhythm and Biberkopf’s field of perception. Even as Biberkopf’s nose “journeys” upward to reclaim control of his field of vision, the inside space is saturated with visual and aural impressions. It is significant to note that the environment from which the sensory assault stems is likewise described as meticulously controlled and organized. The narrator mentions a specific street by name, takes note of magazine and newspaper titles and the security guards check for tickets in their blue uniform. Biberkopf, however, is unable to impose a sense of order in this seemingly ordinary and quotidian urban space.

The flood of visual input originates both from the exterior and interior of the streetcar. Outside the vehicle, people are moving, whereas the individual passengers in the streetcar are hidden behind newspapers. The only individual that the narrative can discern from the rest inside the car, is the uniformed guard. Biberkopf’s experience in the streetcar thus challenges the notion
of the public transit vehicle as a social space, as it differs significantly from some of the previous “people-watching” passengers that we have encountered. Instead of looking at others, we can assume that many streetcar passengers spent their time behind a newspaper of magazine or some sort, since Berlin had the greatest newspaper density in all of Europe in the 1920s.¹ Moreover, beginning in the early 1900s, the BVG started to profit from businesses that wanted their ads on display in stations and streetcars in Berlin.² In addition to the different velocities at which the passenger and flâneur experience urban space, the sheer amount and density of text that urban dwellers encountered in and around transit spaces was much greater in the 1920s than before.

¹ The number of newspapers available in Berlin would later be limited by the Great Depression (Cf. Fritzsche).
² While ads had been prevalent in transit space in the southern parts of Germany as early as the 1860s, it would take until the turn of the century for the Prussian government to allow them in Berlin (Meissner, 202)
The acceleration of the narrative culminates as Biberkopf alights close to Alexanderplatz. He is shocked—perhaps even frightened—by the human crowds that appear to dissolve into the anonymous cityscape:


The streetcar has thrust both reader and protagonist into the very heart of Berlin. A place where the relationship between city dweller, urban space, and narrative is constantly being re-negotiated by an ever-shifting flow of information, signs, and technologies. Indeed, even the lack of historical information about Biberkopf—whose time spent in prison at this point has only been vaguely described as “wegen älterer Vorfälle” (Ibid. 11)—suggests that he and the narrative are both trapped in the dynamism of the present. No time is given to either reader or protagonist to explain, rationalize or linger on explanations or stories from the past. The people, houses, shops, and objects dissolve into a singular incessant movement, making it difficult for Biberkopf to differentiate the animate crowd walking in the streets from the lifeless mannequins in the shop windows. Not only Biberkopf’s perception is challenged by the city, but also the reader’s, as the perspective suddenly shifts to an unexpected external view of the street, initiated by “draußen,” aligning our gaze with the mannequins looking out from behind the shop windows. It is as if the boundaries of exterior and interior, animate, and inanimate, movement and stasis collapse and are rebuilt before our very eyes. This process gradually unfolds in the text as Biberkopf moves from the urban periphery to its very core, first by streetcar and later by foot. In this regard, the ride functions as a foreshadowing
element to brace the riding subject for the encounter with the urban melting pot. As we see, however, Biberkopf’s senses are at the time unable to keep up or adapt to urban space. Overwhelmed by the dynamism of the streets and perceived lack of structure, Biberkopf finds himself on an irreversible allegorical journey into the city: “er konnte nicht zurück, er war mit der Elektrischen so weit hierher gefahren, er war aus dem Gefängnis entlassen und mußte hier hinein, noch tiefer hinein” (Ibid.). The journey by streetcar from Tegel to Alexanderplatz presents itself as a one-way-journey, highlighting on the one hand the gravitational pull of the urban core over its surroundings, as well as an abrupt break between Biberkopf’s past in prison and present freedom on the other.

The three journeys between central Berlin and Tegel adhere to the *Dreierprinzip*, which Otto Keller informs us, structures most of Döblin’s works (Keller 1980). Reading the trips to and from Tegel against one another reveals a shift in Biberkopf’s perspective of urban space. In contrast to the first journey, the latter two showcase a positive transformation in Biberkopf and his familiarity with Berlin’s environs. The first journey back to Tegel from Berlin takes place shortly after Biberkopf falls back into his old habit of drinking. In line with this regression in his pursuit of a “decent” life, he gets pulled back to the Tegel area. As if summoned by some unseen power, Biberkopf suddenly turns north in the direction of Tegel prison “wie eine Magnetnadel” (Döblin 283):

[Und dann geschieht es, daß die 41 kommt, hält, und Franz steigt ein. Er fühlt, das ist richtig, Abfahrt und fährt, und die Elektrische fährt ihn nach Tegel … Wohl fühlt er sich! Es ist wahr, daß er hinfährt. Brunnenstraße, Uferstraße, Aleen, Reinickendorf, es ist wahr, das gibt es alles … So tief ist die Genugtuung, die er empfindet, dass Franz … von einem mächtvollen Schlaf verschlungen wird (Ibid.).

The reaction to the streetcar this second time around produces a sharp contrast to the initial encounter. Numbed by the alcohol, Biberkopf is delirious, yet his senses remain unburdened and
he appears enlightened by the locations he sees—or by the very fact that he is able to recognize the stations as individual locations rather than a blurry image. The streetcar now offers a view of the city as a connected entity rather than a conglomerate of disparate impressions. The set travel route helps Biberkopf impose a sense of order on the urban environment. However, this process of imposing structure on the physical space between Alexanderplatz and Tegel ultimately dissipates as he wakes up sober from his delirious state. When a police officer arrives at the station and wakes Biberkopf from his deep sleep, he no longer remembers what brought him there: “Ja, ja, das ist Tegel … wat war es noch, wat wollte ick in Tegel … und der gewaltsame Schlaf kommt wieder und reißt ihm die Augen auf und Franz weiß alles” (Döblin 284). The reader is now left wondering if the trip was but a dream to help Biberkopf come to terms with his attachment to, and longing for, the stability he associates with the past. Dream or reality, the streetcar is inextricably intertwined with the psychological processes of Biberkopf establishing connections and structure between two spaces that are inextricably linked to his past and present.

“Die Elektrische fahren” is a recurring phrase and image that indicates Biberkopf’s feelings of being uprooted and his sensation of aimlessly drifting through the city. The “fahren” presents both in a literal and metaphorical sense the antithesis of Biberkopf’s aim to stand on his own feet; to be “anständig.” Of course, the city’s transportation infrastructure bears no actual responsibility for Biberkopf’s failure, but the metaphor reveals how he conceives of the situation: “Das ist die Strafe, mich haben sie rausgelassen, die andern buddeln noch Kartoffeln hinter dem Gefängnis an dem großen Müllberg und ich muß die Elektrische fahren, verflucht, es war doch ganz schön da” (Döblin 113). The juxtaposition of prisoners digging potatoes in the prison yard and Biberkopf’s traveling by streetcar invokes a rural-urban dichotomy that turns modernity’s promise of social mobility and technological innovation on its head. This transformation of the traditional rural-
urban to a prison-streetcar dichotomy—although ironic in its own right—reminds us of a core idea in philosophical discourses on urbanity from the early twentieth century, namely the rich, and oftentimes daunting, sensory experience of moving vehicles and the human masses.

The label “Elektrische” resonates with the well-established image of the city’s streets and rails as a conglomerate of arteries and veins. We remember the famous couplet from Georg Heym’s Berlin poem “Die Stadt” (1911): “Wie Aderwerk gehn Straßen durch die Stadt / unzählig Menschen schwemmen aus und ein.” This metaphor of the city as a circulatory body, Hinrich Seeba informs us, is best understood in relation to Adam Smith’s explanation of movement of goods in *Wealth of Nations* (1776): “dabei verweist das Wort Warenverkehr als Metapher auf den Straßenverkehr der mit fortschreitender Urbanisierung und Verdichtung der Verkehrsteilnehmer immer mehr in den Körperbildern … vorgestellt wurde” (Seeba 11). Rather than a steady circulation of blood and oxygen (or goods and working force) across the city body, however, the electric streetcar in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is evocative of sudden electrical nervous impulses shooting through the city body. This shift toward imagery that suggests a possible debilitating effect of electricity on the human nervous system and mental resilience can, on the one hand, be understood in the historical context of the electrification of Berlin transit system, but also within the medical discourse of nervous disease, on the other. This scientific discourse on nerves is closely connected to transportation in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, as we see echoes thereof in Biberkopf’s interactions with the electric streetcars and its effects on his interior mental mindscape extends to his bodily functions and senses. Indeed, it is as if the city and its “Elektrische” electrocutes his senses.

Transportation technology and mental health are closely connected. The term *shock* is introduced in 1870 in medical discourse in the context of traumatized victims of railway accidents.
(Cf. Killen 12) and the diagnoses “Eisenbahnangst/Eisenbahnkrankheit/Railway Spine.” Shortly thereafter, in the 1880s, medical specialists began in greater frequency to encounter patients suffering from neurasthenia, which toward the latter part of the nineteenth century was a characteristic “Zeichen der Zeit und Folge der technischen Zivilisation” (Borscheid 169). Popular magazines of the time quickly placed the blame on “die Elektrizität, die wir uns so sehr unterthan gemacht haben“ (Ibid.) and it soon became evident that the ever increasing acceleration of everyday life had a negative impact on peoples’ nerves. Of course, the new military technology and shell-shocked soldiers of the first World War further fueled the skepticism and fear of technology.³

In her 2001 book, neuroscientist and literary scholar Laura Otis explores how metaphors around communication systems (mainly the telegraph) as nervous systems shaped how people thought about technology, arguing for a strong feedback loop between scientific discourse and literary representations of technology in the nineteenth century. She makes a central distinction between the railway as a circulatory system and the telegraph as a nervous system based on the relationship between said systems and the human body (Otis 8-9). She writes that the telegraph, unlike the railway, was by and large represented as an extension—or continuation—of human communication, rather than a container “transporting” the body. She informs us that these two competing visions of communication technology stem from a debate in the 1880s between “neuronists” (those that believed that neurons exist as independent cells) and “reticularists” (those that believed that all nerves in the human body merge and exist as one single network).⁴ These two

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³ Other notable great “failures” that may have contributed to a growing fear of technology include the sinking of the unsinkable Titanic in 1912, and the Hindenburg disaster of 1937.
⁴ Up to the 1880s “many neuroanatomists saw the nervous system as a continuous net. In 1887, when some neuroscientists proposed that the body’s communication system consisted of independent cells, debates arose between ‘neuronists’ and ‘reticularists’” (Otis, 7). The theory of the human nervous system as a single, continuous network is obsolete as of the 1950s.
models of the human nervous system resulted in conflicting visions of the human body and its relationship to communication systems: boundedness/individuality and continuity/connectedness. Otis argues that the tension between the two conflicting visions suffuses both scientists’ and novelists’ representations of communication systems. While Otis’ study can help us better understand and contextualize the shift in representations of transit in Berlin from steady circulation to something more akin to nervous impulse, it is difficult (and unnecessary) to reconcile Biberkopf with either vision. If anything, we see over the course of the story how Biberkopf manages to reconcile his own individuality and independence within the vast network of people, places and objects that constitute urban space at large. The electric streetcar functions as a synecdoche for this process.

The anthropomorphized networked city body, with its carefully coordinated movements and predetermined routes generates a sharp contrast to the fallibility of Biberkopf’s body. The urban environment exerts a strong influence not only over Biberkopf’s mental health, but also over his physique. After Biberkopf’s failure to perform sexually shortly after his first trip to the city, the narrator describes the intricate synergies at play in the male sexual potency as follows:


The graphic image of the internally connected human body as a “System” in which “Spannungen” and “Strom” are guided down the correct path through a “Schaltzentrum” to trigger the
“Sexualapparat” is evocative of a transportation network. The possible psychological inhibitors, however, are absent from the technical network of rails, cables, and cars, exposing the incommensurability of the technological city and organic human body. The analogy established in the text between the male sexual apparatus, the urban transportation infrastructure and Biberkopf’s “short-circuit” showcases the all-pervasiveness of the modern city, posing a challenge not only the human sensory field, but even to the most primal of human drives. In this regard, the technologized city body no longer facilitates, but rather impedes, circulation.\textsuperscript{5}

Biberkopf’s relationship to Berlin is primarily associated with the loss of certain functions and abilities which he regains over the course of the narrative. Initially, from Biberkopf’s point of view, the city provides little to no sense of orientation or guidance. As has been argued elsewhere, “Döblin’s hero makes his way through an endless number of symbolic values. These symbolic values, however, offer little opportunity for identification” (Scherpe 147). However, as he continues to travel between Alexanderplatz and Tegel, he grows increasingly aware of his surroundings. After Reinhold’s murder of Mieze, Biberkopf becomes the prime suspect and once again finds himself boarding the 41 to Tegel as if by instinct:


\textsuperscript{5} Biberkopf’s impotence is likewise suggestive of his struggle to “stand up straight”—to be “anständig”
In this third journey, Biberkopf’s relationship to urban space undergoes a radical transformation. Strikingly, the representation of urban space as a list of stations that has hitherto exclusively been part of the objective city montage—or a possible illusion, dream, or drunken haze in the second trip to Tegel—is now indiscernible from Biberkopf’s subjective point of view. In step with the merging of an objective representation and subjective perception of space, the narrative gains new contours. First, the finite number of stations along the 51’s route and the narrator’s description of Biberkopf’s increased degree of control and alertness, “wie ein Hund, der eine Fußspur verloren hat,” suggests not only an increased familiarity with Berlin, but also an active pursuit of trying to decipher and find meaning in that which he observes. As such, rather than a resignation vis-a-vis the city, the utterance “die können mir hinfahren, wo sie wollen” can be read as a challenge to Berlin, showcasing his newfound confidence to “perform” in urban space. What I mean by performance here is his ability to move unobstructed through urban space. Second, he is now able to map his experiences and memories onto specific locations within the city, underscoring an awareness of the intrinsic relationship between space and experience that he had hitherto lacked. And third, the first-person narration underscores a shift in agency from the previous two journeys narrated by the omniscient third person narrator. Biberkopf is now capable of translating his thoughts and visual impressions into a cohesive narrative.

At the beginning of the ninth and final book, we learn that Biberkopf is admitted to an insane asylum. Mirroring the opening of the novel, he is once again imprisoned and distanced from urban space. In his delirious state, Death visits him, informing him of all his mistakes and naivety, and offering him a new perspective on life: “Ich will dir eine Leiter zeigen, da findest du einen neuen Blick” (Döblin 431). On a symbolic level, the asylum space functions as a correctional facility for Biberkopf’s perception and ideas of how to be lead a successful life in the modern
cityscape. Death scolds Biberkopf in a thick Berliner Schnauze, calling him a “Mißgeburt mit Wahnideen” and reprimands him for believing all will be well “wenn er anständig ist” (Döblin 434). The metaphor of the ladder culminates in a long monologue where Biberkopf is able to see urban space within a larger context, from a point of elevation:


The chanting of “herankommen lassen” can be understood in a twofold sense: It underscores Biberkopf’s willingness and ability to take in and digest the endless and rich stream of impressions generated in urban space, but we can also read it as the city’s acceptance of Biberkopf’s entry. The city of Berlin, in all its complexities, is not to be pushed away, but to be embraced. A central component of this is to understand the spatial contingencies produced by the city’s circulatory organs, from the long-distance express and suburban trains, to the people from different places converging in stations and the city streets. Reading the passage from this perspective, we recognize that Biberkopf’s new subject position in, and relationship to, urban space in Berlin is directly tied to a new, authorial frame of vision. This notion of a bird’s eye, authorial gaze of urban space as a position showing dominance, mastery or control over the city is reminiscent of Timpe’s gaze over the city from his rooftop, or the opening verse in Heym’s famous poem “Gott der Stadt” (1910):
“Auf einem Häuserblocke sitzt er breit.” The narrative structure in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* directly links a sense of control of space to the notion of clear and unobstructed vision.

Upon release from the asylum, a voice whispers to Biberkopf: “Du hast für diesmal eine Rückfahrtkarte bekommen, mein Sohn” (Ibid. 446). The fourth journey from the insane asylum back to Berlin marks the final transformation in Biberkopf’s perception of urban space:

Zum zweitenmal verläßt jetzt Biberkopf ein Haus, in dem er gefangengehalten war, wir sind am Ende unseres weiten Wegs und machen mit Franz zusammen noch einen einzigen kleinen Schritt. Das erste Haus, das er verließ, war die Strafanstalt Tegel … und als er losmachte und die 41 kam und mit ihm nach Berlin fuhr, da standen die Häuser nicht still … Aber siehe, wie er am Stettiner Bahnhof aussteigt, am Vorortbahnhof, und vor ihm das große Baltikumhotel liegt, bewegt—sich—nichts. Die Häuser halten still, die Dächer liegen fest, er kann sich ruhig unter ihnen bewegen … Ja dieser Mann—wir wollen ihn Franz Karl Biberkopf nennen … sieht sich ruhig die Läden und Häuser an und wie die Menschen hier rumrennen, und lange habe ich das alles nicht gesehen (447).

The narrator draws a direct comparison between Biberkopf’s two journeys from captivity to freedom. This second journey back to Berlin from a place of incarceration, however, is characterized by Biberkopf’s calm and collected understanding of the urban environment.

Biberkopf’s initial incompatibility is best understood as a crisis in perception, and more specifically in sight and perspective. Over the course of his multiple journeys via public transportation, we can see different ways in which his body and mind react to the visual stimuli of urban space. We may initially think of him as a victim of Simmelean overstimulation who has not yet cultivated the protective blasé shield, but over the course of the narrative he does not grow indifferent and disengaged from the impressions of the city, but rather the opposite.
The Movements of a City Symphony: A Cinematic Journey Through Berlin

Cinema and transportation have much more in common than one might assume at first glance. There is, for example, the famous 1896 screening of the French Lumiére brothers’ “The Arrival of the Train” that is associated with the well-known urban legend of people fleeing the room in panic the train moving directly toward the camera. And, more specifically in relation to Berlin and public transit, Berlin was home to the first electric tramway (1881) and first movie theater of the world (1895); the movie theater and vehicle both constitute public spaces and technologies that we associate with twentieth-century modernity; they are spaces of spectatorship shared with strangers; and the view of framed by the window in transit, circumscribed by an indeterminate flow of houses, people, stations, advertisement signs, becomes cellular and ever-shifting, like the shots of a film.

The connection between the cinematic image and the movements of bodies in urban space lies at the heart of the rather unusual and short-lived film genre of the city symphony that came into being in the 1920s. A city symphony blends conventions of the realist style documentary and the reflexive essay film, generally eschewing traditional characters and a plot driven storyline in favor of capturing and providing a visual expression of the city as protagonist. Instead of a plot, what drives the city symphony forward are the patterns carved out in space and time by the circulation of human bodies, machines, and information on a day-to-day basis. Through cross-cut edits and various camera techniques, city symphonies abstract and put into motion—or one might even say theatricize—the seemingly mundane forms and movements of cars, shoppers, workers, bridges, roads, rails, and buildings.

In what follows, I take a closer look at the interplay between urban space and transportation technology in Walter Ruttmann’s 1927 city symphony, Berlin, Sinfonie einer Großstadt (henceforth Sinfonie). In direct contrast to Berlin Alexanderplatz, the film foregrounds the
movements of the masses. Rather than focusing on individual bodies in Berlin, the film posits the urban crowd as part of a greater whole. In doing so, Ruttmann’s *Sinfonie* foregrounds a dialectic relationship between living human bodies and the inanimate city body.

Besides Ruttmann’s Berlin symphony, we remember, for example, *Manhatta* (1921) by Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, Joris Iven’s films *Regen* (1929) and Dziga Vertov’s ambitious *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).\(^6\) The reasons why so many of these movies were created in the 1920s can be attributed to an array of reasons; including new possibilities in film craft owing to new technologies, film’s rising profile in both entertainment and the arts, and the relatively low production costs. City symphonies are cost-efficient productions as they rely on editing, i.e the assemblage of shots, and camera functions to generate special effects. Therefore, there is no need to allocate extra funds for a studio or film set. In his portrayal of Berlin, Ruttmann relies heavily on the so-called montage technique, which refers to the ways in which adjacent shots relate to each other in such a way that they produce meanings that are not recorded or shown directly on film. The montage, as Michael Cowan notes, “allows the observer to perceive the internal content and, crucially, analyze the relations between them” (Cowan 66). For the scope of my discussion of the film, the cross-cuts between technologized and mechanized forms of movements, such as transportation and the spinning and pumping wheels and axles of the industrial factories, and moving human bodies, form the basis of my analysis. This juxtaposition of various organic and inorganic moving objects and bodies reveals how the organic human body’s movements through urban space mimic and adapt to the patterns carved out by machines and vehicles.

Initially commissioned as a “quota quickie” by Fox-Europa film studios—a German subsidiary of the Hollywood studio—Ruttmann worked on *Sinfonie* alongside powerhouses of the

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\(^6\) Notably, Vertov unconventionally includes shots from four different cities (Kiev, Moscow, Odessa, and Kharkov).
1920s film industry such as Karl Freund and Carl Mayer. Ruttmann expressed that his goal for *Sinfonie* had been “die Menschen zum Schwingen zu bringen, sie die Stadt Berlin erleben zu lassen” (Ruttmann quoted in Georgen 1989). In Ruttmann’s view, the cinematic depiction of Berlin in *Sinfonie* is tied to a spectatorial response that is less about seeing, and more about “feeling” or “taking” the pulse of Berlin. *Sinfonie* is divided into five acts: (Act I) the early hours before 8am and the factory workers’ march to their respective places of employment; (Act II and III) the period until midday, focusing on office workers and shop assistants around the city center; (Act IV) lunch break, the latter half of the workday and afternoon leisure time; and (Act V) the revelries of Berlin’s nightlife. This dawn-to-dusk depiction of city life is accompanied by the symphony soundtrack composed by Edmund Meisel. In contrast to the five acts of the film, the symphony follows a traditional composition in four movements: the first movement is brisk and lively; the second a bit slower and more lyrical; the third a dancy minuet followed by the fourth and final grandiose finale. Meisel’s score, much like Ruttmann’s arrangement of images, is constructed in blocks that change to new patterns and textures without clear transitions (Ford 162). During the premier in the Tauentzienpalast on 23 September 1927, the montage bombardment of images was closely matched by the aural assault of a 75-man live orchestra. In addition to playing the original score, Meisel included sirens, car horns and other sundry industrial objects to replicate diegetic

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7 Quota-quickies were films produced to fill the quota for home-made films that had to be screened in relation to international productions, i.e., Hollywood movies.

8 In his essay “Malerei mit Zeit” (presumably written in 1919/20), Ruttmann advocates for a fusion of image and music in art, seeing cinema as the perfect technological medium: “Eine Kunst für das Auge, die sich von der Malerei dadurch unterscheidet, daß sie sich zeitlich abspielt (wie Musik), und daß der Schwerpunkt des Künstlerischen nicht (wie im Bild) in der Reduktion eines (realen oder formalen) Vorgangs auf einen Moment liegt, sondern gerade in der zeitlichen Entwicklung des Formalen. Da diese Kunst sich zeitlich abwickelt, ist eines ihrer wichtigsten Elemente der Zeit-Rhythmus des optischen Geschehens. Es wird sich deshalb ein ganz neuer, bisher nur latent vorhandener Typus von Künstler herausstellen, der etwa in der Mitte von Malerei und Musik steht. Die Art des optischen Geschehens wird natürlich ganz von der Persönlichkeit des Künstlers abhängen. Nur beispiels- und andeutungsweise soll der Versuch gemacht werden, zu schildern, was man zu sehen bekommt. Die Technik der Vorführung ist die der Kinematographie” (Ruttmann in Goergen 73-74).
sounds. Further, the careful spread of the musicians throughout the room created a kind of surround sound that emphasized recurring motifs (the trumpeters, for example, played the same rising fifth motif of the score every time a policeman restarts traffic) (Ford 149). The film enjoyed great success and ran for several weeks with the live orchestral accompaniment, and also had two seminal performances abroad: at the Film Society in London in 1928 and in Paris two months later.

The film opens with a shot of a train traveling through a rural community just outside Berlin. The long-distance train journey to the city gestures towards the railway’s historical precedence in shaping the imagination of the modern city and transportation, on the one hand, and highlights the city as a point of arrival, on the other. After the opening credits, abstract shapes, lines, and nature imagery dominate the screen. Linear ripples of flowing water dissolve into straight lines, these straight lines then quickly accelerate and finally morph into level crossings, and a night express train swoops in diagonally across the screen towards the camera. The sequencing of the shots between the serene and aimless flow of water ripples and the train’s highly efficient and destination-driven movement generates a stark contrast, signaling the transitioning from one system of representation into another: the water and nature imagery, the morphing of abstract shapes into infrastructure, and the forward spatial trajectory away from the rural into the urban core suggest a one-way journey through time, from a natural environment to the Anthropocene. The electrical wires, industrial factories, metal bridges—even the train and the tracks themselves—affirm the growing influence of technological networks over rural

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9 See Fiona Ford’s 2011 dissertation for a more in-depth analysis of Meisel’s score in Ruttmann’s film.
10 Unlike work of other abstract film makers such as Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling, Ruttmann’s films achieved a degree of commercial success and led to collaborations in mainstream motion pictures: for example, the falcon dream sequence in Die Niebelungen (Teil 1, 1924), the animated background to Lotte Reiniger’s silhouette film Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed (1924-26) and advertising films for Julius Pinschewer (Goergen 1989: 106, 111-13).
communities and nature. In its depiction of the city’s widespread hold over the surrounding landscape, the film has effectively established Berlin as a metropolis suffused and dictated by technology and movement before even showing the city.

As we follow the train’s journey toward Berlin, the camera is in full control of the viewer’s gaze. Through a variety of angles, the highly mobile camera offers subjective first-person eye-level shots from the passenger seat of trees, grassland, and houses in typical suburban

Figure 4. Poster design from 1926 by Fritz Rosen of a train for a competition organized by the Berlin tourist office. “Nach Berlin!” Reprinted in Strategien der Werbekunst 1850-1933.
communities. In more detached and objective low-angle medium-shots we catch glimpse of the electric wires hanging over the tracks, and from the side of the train, we see the powerful spinning of train-wheels. The fast-paced crosscut prevents the viewer’s gaze from lingering for long at any given object or in any one direction. Rather than staging the train ride as a movement in space, where the viewer can appreciate the scenery, the train ride epitomizes one of the key spatial features of the train journey: the sense of “being shot through the landscape” (Schivelbusch 54). While the prismatic and ephemeral view of the train journey prepares the viewer’s eyes for the multiplication of visual impressions that govern the urban environment, the camera’s alignment with the train’s streamlined forward movement toward its destination, and the close-ups of spinning wheels foreshadow the cyclical and repetitive nature of everyday life in the modern city.

Shortly after the train’s arrival in Berlin, as if having injected the city with human substance, the early morning workers and commuters begin to fill the streets of dormant Berlin. As the morning workers set out along their daily route to work, their boarding and alighting of trains and other vehicles appear seamless and natural. On one occasion, an electric tram even stops for a group of pedestrians who smoothly skips across the street, unbothered by the approaching vehicle. Indeed, the workers’ march and transportation vehicles seamlessly weave into one another. The morning commute stands out not only because of the film’s constant referrals to the monotony and streamlined movements between home and work, but also in its visual portrayal of the human crowd as a singular entity. Around the 11-minute mark, a commuter train disgorges its passengers on a train platform. The rapid pace at which human bodies flood the platform and their quick descent down the stairs to the street bring to the fore the collective experience of being part of an incalculable group of other people—the urban masses. Next to the footage of commuters, trains, and streetcars, several images of marching soldiers, cattle being herded, spinning axles from
the factories, and a man playing the barrel organ appear on screen. The circular crankshaft of the
organ and the pumping factory machine parts underscore the repetitiveness of the workday, and a
crosscut of detached human legs walking the streets to work, cattle and marching soldiers reveal a
critical tone in the film’s portrayal of movement in the city. The commuters, akin to herded cattle
and marching soldiers, exert little to no agency over their movements through space, their routes
are pre-determined, like a train traveling along its tracks. As such, Ruttmann alludes to the similar
patterns in which animate and inanimate, organic, and mechanical objects move through Berlin.
The film foregrounds that transit networks play an important role in dictating and carving out these
spatial and temporal patterns in urban space. Moreover, the crosscuts of commuters, cattle, and
soldiers highlight transportation as an instrument of control and regulation, challenging the
common association of mobility as freedom.

Rolling into the city, numerous tracks converge and diverge into new tracks leading into
the station platform, highlighting the plurality of moving trajectories that constitute urban space.
In contrast to the clear framing of the single train in the opening sequence, the city montage
employs footage that reveals a great diversity of various transportation technologies in Berlin and
the regulatory frameworks around which they are organized. This becomes even more evident as
the film shifts its focus away from the factories on the outskirts to the city center. Over the course
of the third act, commencing around halfway through the film, several scenes of traffic ensue.
Multiple trams, cars, horse-drawn carriages, and busses cut across the screen in all directions and
give off the impression of a looming clash. The traffic, however, is meticulously coordinated by
built structures and human figures. While the ground-level footage showcases the work of the
human traffic officers coordinating traffic and helping people cross the streets, shots from above
focus on traffic crossings and horizontal relocations of traffic through bridges, elevators, and even airplanes.

Although the film portrays traffic running smoothly across vertical lines through the city, there are also several scenes of conflict and nervousness. At the film’s 45-minute mark, one such key image of disturbance ensues, namely that of a staged suicide. Contrary to the rest of the film’s footage, the suicide scene is highly theatrical in nature. A large crowd of people watch in anticipation as a woman is about to jump off a bridge into the river below. In quick succession, leading up to her deathly leap, Ruttmann crosscuts a spiral image of a whirlpool beneath the woman, a first-person vertiginous rollercoaster view, and a close-up of the woman’s wide-opened eyes and deranged look. The woman’s heavy make-up and highly theatricalized performance in front of a group of spectators generate a stark contrast to the film’s documentary footage. This focus on the constructed artifice and performance, I maintain, prompts the viewer to put the scene into dialogue with the rest of the film. The whirlpool, chaotic rollercoaster footage, and the performances of both the suicidal woman and the spectators gathering around her figure as disturbances amongst the otherwise streamlined, and meticulously coordinated trajectories in Berlin. The woman transforms into an “other” of the urban, the one who is unable, or unwilling, to harmonize with the carefully coordinated movements of the city symphony. Further, attributed to the individual subject, these neurotic states have little to no effect on the bigger picture and leave no lasting impression in the urban environment, which is evident from the spectating crowd’s immediate disappearance from the scene following the suicide.

In addition to the suicide scene, there are plenty of images of animals in Berlin that suggest a similar incompatibility with mass movement. The animals of Berlin (other than the flock of birds in the opening scene set outside the central city) are all domesticated, ranging from dogs on leashes
to cages lions at the zoo. In contrary to the animals’ limited and controlled, but also primal and aggressive behavior due to the stressful environs, the human masses have synchronized with the city’s technologized movements; the human and city have fused into a singular entity. Like the suicidal woman, animal life forms constitute an “other” that runs counter to the movement patterns of modern transportation technologies that govern urban space.

Ruttmann’s *Sinfonie* and Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* employ the transportation motif to mediate a conflict between human subject and modern mobility in the urban environment. Ruttmann and Döblin’s texts invest heavily into constructing a dialectic between man and technologized movement in their own unique ways, and it is evident that they both identified urban transit as an essential expression and experience of Berlin. Moreover, they establish direct links between human bodies in space and transportation infrastructure. In *Sinfonie*, the individual narratives and bodies fade into the collectives. We see the worker, the commuter, and the shopper as part of a group movement rather than any individual trajectories. We might want to think of Biberkopf and the suicidal woman as bodies that are unable to merge with this larger moving mass body, or perhaps the latter refuses to take them in. Either way, for those excluded from the mass movement, urban space presents itself as challenging and threatening.

The role of technology in shaping humans’ experiential horizons presents itself in myriad ways in Ruttmann’s filmmaking. In addition to the film’s visual and auditory emphasis on rhythmic movement and circulation in urban space, the notion of mobility is inherently connected to 1920s cinematography. By positing the montage editing and the great range of footage of public and private transportation, as well as other forms of mechanized movement within the larger context of film production, we can also open a discussion about the interplay between camera technology and artistic representations of modern mobility. Film history has commonly been
theorized in terms of camera mobility, and the development of hand-held film cameras marked a watershed in the liberation of the camera. Not only does new camera technology enable new filming techniques, but it also impacts the production price, leading to new possibilities in film craft. Ever since its early days in the late nineteenth century, camera technology had been constrained to the immobile tripod for stability while turning the crank, but hand-held cameras changed this. With a hand-held camera requiring neither an electric outlet to charge the motor, nor a tripod for stability, or a dark room to safely change film cassettes, the cameraman could much more easily move through the city. This enabled the camera to come up closer to objects and people without much staging and preparation, and rendered steep perspectives from below and above possible. To Ruttmann’s cameraman, Robert Baberske, the spring-driven 35mm hand-held Kinamo film camera had likewise served a key role in filming Berlin. After a visit to Dresden—one of the world’s largest centers of 1920s photographic industry—the famous Dutch pioneer of

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11 The Kinamo, a compound of the greek Kine (movement) and the latin amo (I love), increased the quality of life for both professional and amateur movie makers in the early 1920s. The camera was released by ICA (Internationale Actiengesellschaft ICA, which through a merger in 1926 came to be known as Zeiss Ikon) under the direction of Emanuel Goldberg, a Russian-born scientist whose intention it had been to create a camera that was easy and practical to use and also produced high quality shots. The first Kinamo camera was marketed in 1921. This first model was known as the “N25” (as it used cassettes containing up to 25 meters of “normal,” i.e. 35-mm -film. A smaller model was also sold that could hold 15 meters of film. The spring-driven motor (a removable attachment) marketed in 1924 for the 5401 model. In 1925, the Universal Kinamo (5439) was marketed. This new version enabled two additional film speeds and included an attachment that allowed it to copy films in a dark room. Despite its small size, the N25 model (15 x 14 x 10 cms) could load twenty-five metres of 35mm film (approximately 90 seconds of filming), featured a light-tight film that lowered the risks of changing cassettes outdoors; a press-down button to mark the film at the end of a scene; a delayed action release mechanism; a second gear for trick photography and a professional shutter for the lens, which at the time was very uncommon for amateur cameras (Cf. Stutterheim 2016 and Buckland 2008, 2009). Around 1933, the new Zeiss Ikon Movikon marked the beginning of the Kinamo era’s end, and by 1938, the company had completely replaced the production (Buckland “The kinamo movie camera” 6). In addition to its manageable size and user-friendliness, the Kinamo could function as a still camera, too, and was still no more expensive than a good-quality still camera. The Kinamo, although primarily advertised for amateur home movies, managed to catch the interest of many professional film makers. Buckland has extensively investigated the strong influence of the Kinamo on film director Joris Iven and notes that due to film historians having predominantly been occupied with aesthetics rather than the technology involved in the filming process, the evidence is scarce as to what extent the Kinamo was used in professional filmmaking. According to his research, however, it appears that the Kinamo was widely used by avant-garde filmmakers, including Walter Ruttmann, Joris Ivens, Dziga Vertov, Sepp Allgeier, Wilfried Basse, Ella Bergmann-Michel, Boris Kaufman, Henri Stock, and later Jacques Cousteau (Buckland “The Kinamo movie camera” 9).
avant-garde and documentary movies, Joris Ivens writes about his experiments using the hand-held Kinamo camera: “I was, naturally, freed from the rigidity of a tripod, and I had given movement to what, normally, would have had to be a succession of fixed shots. Without knowing it, filming flexibly and without stopping, I had achieved a continuity” (Ivens quoted in Buckland “The kinamo movie camera” 9). In other words, the filmic representation of Berlin as a space saturated by coordinated and continuous movement can in large part be attributed to the camera technology used to record the footage.

Ruttmann has been criticized for a lack of social commentary in Berlin. The very simultaneity of the myriad individual trajectories in Berlin deemphasizes the individual psyche as all city dwellers execute their tasks simultaneously. For example, as lunchtime commences, all inhabitants of the city eat, humans and animals alike; at 8 o’clock, the rolling-up of metal curtains declare the opening of all stores and the commencement of all children’s walk to school. All these individual journeys through urban space the film portrays as collective and highly mechanized. Indeed, Sinfonie transforms the city, all its dwellers and their functions into one working body, blurring the line of where individual agency can be located in an urban environment. As Bernhard von Brentano wrote about the film “Er [Ruttmann] vergaß, dass die Straßenbahnen und die Autos nicht von alleine fahren. Jeden Augenblick ihres Daseins überwacht der Mensch, und sie bewegen sich nur, wenn er will. Ruttmann’s Berlin ist eine Metropolis geworden, die von einem elektrischen Knopf in Bewegung gesetzt wird” (Brentano 145). Just as Brentano notes, the lack of human agents is particularly conspicuous in the footage of transportation technology. However, the effects thereof make a powerful impression: with a dehumanization of man and anthropomorphized machine, the line between organic and mechanic bodies is blurred.12

12 The glorification of man as powerful and efficient machine reaches its apex in Leni Riefenstahl’s Nazi film Triumph des Willens (1935), a project which Ruttmann wrote part of.
As an example of “pure cinema”—an avant-garde film movement that sought to minimize story and plot and instead focus on visual composition, movement, and rhythm—Berlin mainly focuses on surface appearances, not directly addressing the larger forces stimulating the city’s movements, such as a capitalist market economy and mass industrialization. What emerges before the viewer’s eyes is a visual representation of Siegfried Kracauer’s the mass ornament, a concept under which he understands the movements of bodies as a visual spectacle and “der ästhetische Reflex der von dem herrschenden Wirtschaftssystem erstrebten Rationalität” (Kracauer Das Ornament der Masse 54). As one might expect, Kracauer took issue with the film’s tendency (and avant-garde cinema at large) to foreground unresolvable contrasts through the montage, offering “a gratifying opportunity of showing much and revealing nothing” (Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler 188). In his scathing review of Ruttmann’s Berlin in the Frankfurter Zeitung, he calls the team “schlechte Komponisten,” relying on their preconceived “Literatenideen” oblivious of “worauf es in Wirklichkeit ankommt”, presenting only a “schauerhafte[n] Eindruck” of Berlin (Kracauer “Wir schaffens” 411-413). He also rightfully criticizes the film’s focus on the areas between Potsdamer Platz and Alexanderplatz, showing little to nothing of Greater Berlin. Taking into consideration the economic restrictions of the production and Ruttmann’s oeuvre of abstract and commercial films up until the film’s premiere, we need to understand that it was never his primary aim to psychologize or center the depiction of Berlin around economic and political issues of 1920s Germany. Instead, the film is best seen as an experimental attempt at foregrounding the dynamism of urban movement, rendering the lines, intersections, rhythms, tempos, and counter movements into material substance and visual stimuli through the medium of film.

In Sinfonie, the journeys undertaken through space generate a dialectic of urban life that hinges entirely on transportation vehicles and other machines. The ways in which people move,
and what group they move along with, foreground a collective urban identity over an individual consciousness and subjective experience. This is likewise reflected in the montage, as every image achieves meaning through its relations to other images, i.e. the collective assemblage of shots and the movements they depict a story far grander, and more visibly orchestrated than the individual snapshot. Rather than contrasting the movements of human and machine, however, the film highlights their similarities. Rudolf Kurtz writes in 1927 “Ruttmanns Film ist keine Sammlung photographischer Aufnahmen Berlins. Diese große Stadt ist als Schauplatz eines unendlich, differenzierten Lebens erfühlt, eines Daseins, das sich in den tausend und aber tausend Episoden des täglichen Lebens verwirklicht und das in seiner Gesamtheit dieses berauschende, überwältigende Gefühl ‘Weltstadt’ ergibt” (Kurtz 1927). The city comes together through its symbiosis of moving trajectories. The attempt to find a kind of universal truth and reconcile temporal, spatial, and social divides between people and their respective environments recurs in Ruttmann’s 1929 advertisement film for the Hamburg-America shipping line, Melodie der Welt. Here, he portrays a vision of a universal rhythm that exists across geographic borders and cultures also in the form of a symphony. Although the ambiguous montage editing in Berlin obscures any clear stance as to whether Ruttmann sought to celebrate or condemn the synchronized movements of man and machine, or bring to the fore the exploitation of workers under the city’s growing capitalist market economy, we ought to see Sinfonie as an artistic engagement with technological innovation that explores the shapes and forms set forth by the rhythm of traffic and industrial manufacturing.

Movement and mobility of bodies in urban space as depicted in Ruttmann’s film predominantly appear in the shape of vertical lines, but at the same time, there are several instances where the streamlined and vertical trajectories of streets, trains, stairs, and tracks clash with
cyclical motions or motifs, such as spinning spirals, whirlpools, and roller coasters. These elements and various motifs and bodies in movement have commonly been read as a kind of aestheticization of machinery (Hake 2008) or as an expression of the confusion prevailing in a modern era of migration (Kaes, 1998). In addition to these previous observations, by looking more closely at the interactions between human bodies and transit spaces in the film we notice that the transportation network creates linkages not only between places in and around the city, but also between human body and city body.
Off and away from Berlin for “das Weekend”

Fünfeinhalb Tage Arbeit und am sechsten Schlag Zwölfle gehts ins Weekend hinein—wir können ja gar nicht schnell genug heraus aus der grauen Stadt, aus der grauen Woche—wir flitzen mit unserem ‘Steuerfreien’ die Landstraße hinaus und lassen alles weit hinter uns im staubigen Dunst, den wie eine feste Mauer zwischen den Alltag und unser Weekend stellt… zwei Tage lang vergessen, was Sorgen macht…

—Das Magazin, “Das letzte Weekend”

Both Ruttmann’s film and Döblin’s novel depict 1920s Berlin as a space saturated with movement, machines, and transportation technologies that influence the urban subjects’ perspective of, and movement patterns in, urban space. The depictions of the increased volume and velocity of transportation technology in these texts showcase the city dweller as a “man-on-the-go,” and underscore that the freedom and well-being of human bodies that fail to conform to the rhythmic movements orchestrated by traffic are jeopardized. Moreover, both texts include clearly delineated spaces of “otherness” connected to the urban center by means of public transportation, more specifically nature in the case of Ruttmann’s films and the prison and asylum in Döblin’s novel.

In comparison to these latter two texts that focus on the urban mass and the individual respectively, the primary focus of Robert Siodmak’s 1929 feature film Menschen am Sonntag centers around a small group of friends, the dynamics of male-female romantic relationships, and same-gender friendships in an urban environment. In what follows, we will continue exploring how public transportation constructs temporal and spatial divisions in and around Berlin, but this time we are going in a different “direction.” Rather than foregrounding the movement from the periphery into the urban core, Menschen am Sonntag revolves around a weekend trip to a lake on Berlin’s urban periphery. The film highlights the public transit network’s role in constructing a temporal binary of workday and weekend in 1920s Berlin, a division between worktime and leisure time that was not merely to be spent away from work, but preferably away from Berlin.
Before delving into a close reading of the film and its presentation of transportation in Berlin, I want to contextualize it within the larger contemporary discussion about the weekend. In her informative article called “Die Erfindung des Wochenendes in der Presse der Weimarer Republik,” (2006) Angela Schwarz examines the role of the press and advertising in the formation of the weekend as a cultural phenomenon in 1920s Germany. She informs us that the bulk of commercial interests intertwined with weekend time in the 1920s targets the working middle-class and white-collar employees: “‘die Erfindung des Wochenendes’ fällt mit der Ausformung der modern und speziell einer Freizeitkultur des großstädtischen Mittelschichten oder noch enger gefasst der Angestellten bzw. ‘des neuen Mittelstandes’ zusammen” (Schwarz 280).13 Further exploring the role of transportation in the formation of this cultural moment adds to our understanding of the ways in which Berlin’s public transit network impacted the day-to-day lives of urban dwellers and shape not only the physical, but also the social fabrics of urban space.

Although people in Berlin had left the city for short excursions during the “Wochenende,” it was not until the English word “weekend” was adopted that it grew into a trend in German speaking lands. In an article by writer Wolfgang von Lengerke from the popular magazine Revue des Monats, we learn about the contemporary connotation of the loanword: “Einen richtigen Begriff, eine richtige Gestalt jedoch gewann die Geschichte erst, als das Schlagwort ‘Weekend’ über den Kanal und den Ozean zu uns herüberschallte. Und plötzlich sah die ganze Sonnabend- und Sonntag-Partie ganz anders aus … jetzt machte man ‘Weekend’ … Und nun wurde ‘Weekend’ zum Begriff, zum Inbegriff schrankenloser Freiheit” (von Lengerke, 1148).14 The idea of

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13 Schwarz refers to Kracauer’s study on the rise of Die Angestellten (1930) in the discussion about the formation of this new class.

14 A similar commentary on the weekend can be found in an article from the same magazine from two years prior called “Weekend – eine aktuelle Plauderei” (1926/27) in which the writer Alexander Binder informs us that “Bisher war Weekend eine … dem englischen Volke vorbehalten Institution” (Binder 786).
unrestricted freedom can be understood as freedom from the constraints of work, and in terms of seeking refuge from the crowded city and stuffy air. The latter point is evidenced not only by the examples of weekend activities that Lengerke points out, such as swimming, picnicking, and hiking, but also by the wide variety of photos, images, advertisements, and articles published in magazines from the time. Most importantly, the weekend, both as time and space, was represented as inherently “other” from day-to-day life in the urban center. It was a time not to work to be spent elsewhere. Consider, for example, the image below of couples ascending from the city below into the heavens above. The dark aura surrounding the city and the geometric shapes and stone architecture stand in stark contrast to the shining sun and fluffy, light clouds above. To take off for the weekend is not just about being off work, but about getting away from the built urban environment.

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15 A couple of examples of photographs published in popular magazines of the time include the “Wochenend-Bilderbogen” which appeared in *Revue des Monats* and “Weekend im Grünen” from *Das Leben*. The photos primarily feature young women, couples or families in bathing suits, generally in close proximity to water, with no traces of built environment.

The weekend was commonly depicted as a couple’s activity. “Paarweise auf dem Weg ins Wochenende.” Scherl’s Magazin, Juli 1933, S. 430

*Menschen am Sonntag* eschews complex plot elements as well as professional actors, in favor of creating a light-hearted feature. The film was shot between July and December 1929 by the production company Filmstudio 1929. Although the German film industry was promoting synchronized sound at the time of its production, *Menschen am Sonntag* is a silent feature—one of the last of its kind. After its premier in Ufa’s theater at the Kurfürstendamm on February 4, 1930, the film was celebrated as a success. Its success at the time did not only come as a surprise because of the amateur actors, but the majority of the film crew were new to the film industry at the time. Lutz Koepnick suggests that the film’s success can be understood by situating it vis-a-vis its historical context: “At the time of the film’s release, German society was haunted by ever-

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17 Koepnick explains: “thereby avoiding the detrimental impact of technical transition problems on the visual quality of German films around 1930” (Koepnick 239).
18 It was produced by the head of Filmstudio 1929, Moritz Seeler, written by Viennese journalist Billie Wilder and directed by Robert Siodmak. Robert’s older brother, Curt Siodmak, assisted with the script, and the man behind the camera—who had also been behind the camera of Fritz Lang’s classic *Metropolis* (1927)—was Eugen Schüfftan. Fred Zinnemann and Edgar G. Ulmer assisted with photography and directing before moving to Hollywood in the middle of the production process. All member of the production crew except Seeler would eventually end up in Hollywood and become central figures of film noir.
increasing financial anxieties and political polarizations in the immediate aftermath of the 1929 New York stock market crash” (Koepnick 238) and that the film “struck contemporary viewers not so much because it offered escapist fare but because it focused on the efforts of ordinary people trying to find moments of lightness, bliss, meaning and playfulness amid the rhythms of modern existence” (Ibid. 239). For example, in contrast to Ruttman’s film that alludes to the impact of the global financial crisis on Weimar Berlin through crosscuts of newspaper headlines, this historical context does not inform or weigh down the bright and light mise-en-scene in Menschen am Sonntag. Instead, the focus revolves entirely around a weekend away from the hectic Berlin for a group of young people belonging to an urban consumer class.

By and large, the weekend was introduced in Weimar culture as a time for the urban dweller to get out of the city and recharge before setting out for another work week come Monday morning. In a similar fashion to popular and intellectual debates revolving around traffic and transportation at the time, the discussion around the weekend was intrinsically connected to matters of mental health: “Zunächst ist festzustellen, daß durch diese Bewegung zweifellos die Nerven und Kräfte des geplagten Großstädters heilsam beeinflußt werden” (Lengerke 1149). While we can read about the liberating and recuperating effects of excursions away from Berlin in many late nineteenth century novels, such as the trip with the steam train to Berlin-Halensee in Fontane’s Jenny Treibel (1892), the 1920s weekend is not a singular or rare occurrence, but habitual and for all societal classes. All people were equally affected by the quick pace of city life, the monotonous routine of everyday life. The formation of the unified traffic company BVG and their new tariff made travelling by rail in and around Berlin accessible to a broader audience, effectively democratizing

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19 For further reading about the weekend outing in Berlin novels from the time, see Katherine Roperi German Encounters with Modernity: Novels of Imperial Berlin and Marilyn Sibley Fries, The Changing Consciousness of Reality: The Image of Berlin in Selected German Novels from Raabe to Döblin. See also Hans Ostwald, Kultur und Sittengeschichte Berlins (Berlin 1921).
public transit space. One of the main sources of overstimulation in the city, the density and volume of traffic, presents a way out. Important to note is that different modes of transportation were necessary to facilitate the “heilsame Bewegung” between rural and urban: “auch die Verkehrsmöglichkeiten der Großstadt werden besser, denn diejenigen, die nicht über ein Auto oder Bekannte mit einem Auto verfügen, müssen den Bus oder die Straßenbahn als gewöhnliche Sterbliche benützen” (Lengerke, 1149). It may be fair to say that public transit was no longer considered a novelty in 1929, but the network remained an intrinsic part of everyday life in Berlin, the intricate network of the S-Bahn, U-Bahn and busses played a central role in connecting the urban center to the fringe. Menschen am Sonntag also includes footage of people travelling by car and motorcycle, yet the vast majority of footage and camera perspectives highlight public transportation vehicles. Placed within this larger context, it is evident that the weekend transformed into something more than the time period off work—which generally started Saturday afternoon and lasted until Monday morning—but a phenomenon that affected the social fabrics of urban society.

As we direct our attention to the film’s plot elements and presentation of city life, we see various key features of the weekend discourse take shape within the first 10 minutes. The feature opens by introducing the five main characters of the story performing their day-to-day activities around central Berlin: the taxi driver Erwin Splettstößer and his girlfriend Annie, gramophone saleswoman Brigitte Borchert, jack-of-many-trades Wolfgang von Waltershausen (officer, farmer, antique dealer, gigolo, and currently wine trader), and lastly the film extra Christl Ehrens. After the short introductions, we follow Wolfgang as he wanders around the entrance to the subway station Bahnhof Zoo. In a shot sequence that shows cars trolleys and trams running in different directions across the screen, he spots Christl aimlessly walking back and forth in front of the station
In what appears to be an attempt to establish eye contact and strike up a conversation, Wolfgang patiently circles around Christl, who appears distracted and evasive of the approaching stranger. From alternating camera angles and perspectives of the location, we see a barrage of images of traffic and pedestrians moving at different speeds, elevations, and directions across the screen, creating a foil against which we can understand Wolfgang’s and Christl’s difficulties to establish a connection and strike up a conversation. Finally, in a shot where neither streetcars nor cars obstruct their view of each other—or the viewer’s vision of them—we see them cross the street together. In the closing scene, the couple enjoy each other’s company at an outdoor seating area of a café, and after walking her home, Wolfgang invites Christl for a trip to Nikolassee the day after.

In addition to setting up for the Sunday trip, the Saturday afternoon sequence presents several moments of crisis and tension around places with heavy traffic, places of work, and cramped living spaces. During these first 10-15 minutes, the film’s presentation of Berlin is reminiscent of Ruttmann’s. We are introduced to the everyday lives of Berlin’s residents and their natural habitat through a panorama of Berlin, but instead of foregrounding the commencement of the work day, *Menschen am Sonntag* sets the Saturday afternoon as its starting point, just as people take off work for the weekend. Although the non-diegetic music composition is much slower, and the duration of each individual shot length longer than in Ruttmann’s *Sinfonie*, the traditional modern Berlin backdrop, with impersonal gray *Mietskaseren*, industrial metal bridges, and smokestacks, exerts a powerful presence in the overall shot composition. As a foil to this backdrop, the camera also lingers on boats floating down the Spree river, children playing on the riverbank, and around a carousel amusement park. While these seemingly contrasting elements of technology and nature, work and play, or cramped and open spaces generate a certain tension, the sequencing
of the scenes and shots of the city panorama is much more cautious than in *Sinfonie der Großstadt*. In *Menschen am Sonntag*, the vehicles and people, flowing water and metal bridges, trees and streets oftentimes share a frame rather than being directly juxtaposed and accelerated by the rapid montage editing.

*Menschen am Sonntag* negatively codes interior and exterior spaces in the city, as well as in the public and private spheres of life, resulting in a broad representation and thematization of the conditions of urban living and its impact on human behaviors. One of the most contentious spaces depicted in Berlin is not out in the streets, but in Erwin and Annie’s small studio apartment. Directly following the shots displaying outdoor leisure activities, Erwin returns home after work to see his girlfriend, Annie, still in her nightgown on the bed. They do not engage in conversation or establish any kind of eye contact, and as Erwin walks around in the crowded apartment and sits down to enjoy his supper, Annie remains static in bed. The dysfunctional relationship is mirrored by the interior of the apartment, which is filled with small inconveniences and annoyances, such as a dripping faucet and a wardrobe door that will not stay shut. Eventually, Annie gets out of bed and the two start to get ready to leave the apartment in opposite ends of the room. Rather than a space of relaxation and human interaction, indifference and pent-up frustrations characterize the home space, eventually erupting in heated arguments over celebrity photographs and whether the brim of Annie’s hat should be angled up or down. The film presents the urban environment as a platform for fleeting encounters between man and woman, but the hectic streets and cramped living conditions provide little opportunity to establish or maintain deep or meaningful relationships.

Come early Sunday, in a medium-long shot a train swooshes diagonally across the screen as the people of Berlin slowly begin to fill the streets. Erwin gets ready in the apartment while Annie is still in bed; outside people board trolleys, streetcars, busses, motorcycles. The camera
shifts to the perspective of a passenger looking out windows of trains and cars and the direction of the journey is clear: Away from Berlin. With the help of a few geographical markers, we can roughly track the camera’s movement westward along Unter den Linden, through the Brandenburger Tor and around Bahnhof Zoo. Along the journey, the surrounding scenery transforms from the built urban environment of bridges and underpasses, to tree-lined avenues and Wilhelmine facades, until the camera is liberated from the inside view and we see a train cut through a forest and eventually stops at the Nikolassee station around the 25-minute mark. Here, the friendly duo Erwin and Walther meet up with their female counterparts, Christl and Brigitte. This journey out of Berlin deviates from Döblin and Ruttmann’s depictions, as it methodically phases out urban space rather than presenting a forceful, abrupt, and overwhelming transition between “rural” and “urban,” resulting in these two seemingly opposite spaces to appear as extensions of one another. Not only is the lake connected physically to the urban center by lines of transportation, but also culturally as a weekend destination for Berlin dwellers. These spatial and connotative connections are significant as they underscore the film’s representation of urban space at large.

We can explore several connections between the weekend space of the lake and the urban center by taking a closer look at the activities and commodities that the weekenders enjoy. We see people engage in activities that may be less prevalent in central Berlin, such as swimming, sunbathing, having barbeques, and playing sports, all against the backdrop of rippling water, lush grass, trees and pristine beach sand. At the same time, we also see people engaging with popular technological media of the time, such as the gramophone and camera. While the main cast gathers around the gramophone, a montage of close-ups of people’s faces from a hand-held camera perspective, ranging from toddlers to senior citizens, shows various poses and degrees of
enjoyment as they have their photo taken. The interweaving of popular technology products of the time and the relaxing nature scenery of the lake testifies to the fact that the weekend itself has become a trend inherently connected to portable modern technology.

Industries quickly adopted the weekend and transformed it into an advertisement technique to showcase how their products could further enhance the weekend experience. Looking at ads in popular magazines and newspapers from the time (as in the examples below), we see that these products were not merely things that one could use during the weekend, but rather a must for a “stimmungsvolles Wochenende.”


At the same time as the “weekenders” enjoy the lake, the camera takes us back to Berlin where we see what a weekend in the city might look like. We see people on their small French balconies, leaning out their windows or sitting on benches along streets and near metro stations—And Annie is still in bed sleeping. The presentation of the weekend both in the film and in other
popular media at the time, such as newspapers and magazines, suggest that there is a “correct” way to spend the weekend, and that is to leave the city. The stark differences between the film’s presentation of the weekend at the lake in comparison to that of the city come to the fore on several levels. Not only do the people outside of the city enjoy more space, but the sense of intimacy provided by the proximity of the camera reveals smiling faces and foregrounds people looking at each other. In contrast, the shots of the urban environment are distanced from human subjects.

We might think that the young weekenders come back well rested with strengthened friendships and potential passionate romances. Yet the film’s ending is rather ironic in its tone and draws attention to the ephemeral and short-lived experience of the weekend. Upon returning to Berlin late Sunday, Wolfgang dodges Brigitte’s question when she asks for their plans for the next weekend. As the two friend-groups part ways, Erwin reminds Wolfgang of their plans to see a soccer game next weekend. The flirtatious relationship cultivated between the men and the women during their one-day stay at the lake is thus only temporary. In an interview, Curt Siodmak explains the basic premise of the original script: “die Stadt geht aufs Land und die Leute nehmen die Stadt mit. Und die Stadt geht zurück. Sie hatten gar kein Weekend.” There are many elements of the film that hint at this irony, such as similarities in depiction of crowds both in Berlin and by the lake, the presence of “modern” and commercial technologies such as the gramophone and the camera as essential components of the weekend, as well as the access to the lake through the same transportation means as the daily working commute; after all, whatever is included in that network cannot fully escape from its center. Rather than enforcing a strict binary of “Stadt/Land” or “Alltag/Weekend,” much of the filmic imagery portrays the lake outing as an extension of urban space and time, situating the lake as an urban green space rather than a separated rural nature space. In comparison to Sinfonie that showcases the role of transportation in the daily rhythm in the
urban environment, *Menschen am Sonntag* highlights transportation’s role in a weekly rhythm of weekday and weekend. A short sequence of intertitles at the very end of the film further attests to this enforced sense of rhythm: “Und am Montag, wieder Arbeit, wieder Alltag, wieder Woche. 4 Millionen warten auf den nächsten Sonntag.”

What the portrayal of public transit has in common for all three texts examined in this chapter is that it serves as an interlocutor between different spatial and temporal borders that are central to the lives of Berlin’s residents. Moreover, the texts showcase the individual use of public transportation as a learned and institutionalized behavior necessary to cope with, and impose meaning on, urban space. All three texts emphasize that regardless of whether the hurried tempo of the urban center or the stillness and laziness of more peripheral areas in and around Berlin is depicted, the visual experience of public transportation is integral to the production of the cityscape as text and lived experience. The process of observation from a vantage point of movement figures on the levels of form through the many vistas offered of the city from within moving vehicles, to more prismatic views of the many moving objects that saturate urban space, to the quest and endeavor to overcome the sense of disunity rooted in perception.
Chapter III: The Untergrundbahn: Connecting Space—Disconnecting Sight

In most mythology, the underworld is a serious and not necessarily pleasant place. It’s a place you want to get out of. Hell, for example.
—Peter Edidin, “A Playful Helper in the Subway’s Depths”

A lame devil in tune with the century, who suddenly threw the entire Paris region out of gear, would discover a very strange arrangement, a gigantic social game, a labyrinth with countless exits, a somewhat decelerated scenic mechanism: several dozen levels in fact that are not only spread out in a network over the entire expanse of the urban and periurban zone, but also staggered on several levels, invaded at regular intervals by a more or less compact crowd of players of all kinds following the commands of a mysterious director, the god-architect of this subterranean universe
—Marc Augé, In the Metro

The three emotional responses and states traditionally associated with modern velocity and acceleration—nervousness, indifference, and sensory overload—take on a new guise as the rails descend into the underground. It is a space of paradoxes, instability, and distance: There reigns eternal night, illuminated by artificial light; literally embedded within the cityscape, the absence of landscape remains unmistakable; and although a central part of mundane city life, narratives of U-Bahn travel are riddled with fantastical and otherworldly allusions. While the U-Bahn ostensibly remains a functional space of transit, on closer inspection the stations, tunnels and subway cars take on qualities that deviate from, and adhere to, thematic links between transit, metropolitan life, and urban subjectivity that we explored in previous chapters in meaningful ways. In depictions of U-Bahn travel, images of death, sleep, boredom, and darkness stand in for the urban vistas flashing by outside the vehicle that dominate many modernist texts, challenging the powerful sway that the
visible and immediately perceptible material realities have held over representations of Weimar Berlin and metropolitan life at large.

In 1924, Döblin writes in his essay “Der Geist des naturalistischen Zeitalters” that it would be folly to idolize and glorify antique architecture and engineering for its aesthetic attributes over art and architecture formed in the present, such as the Berlin subway system: “Es ist freilich schon heute ein Unfug, eine Säule von Phidias anhimmeln zu lassen und die Untergrundbahn ein bloßes Verkehrsmittel zu nennen” (Döblin 174). The reference to the classic Athenian sculptor and architect Phidias in relation to the U-Bahn is emblematic of a larger trend amongst writers and other intellectuals in 1920s Berlin to draw contemporary and day-to-day technology toward the center of cultural production and debates. Technology such as the U-Bahn, according to Döblin, ought to be seen as symptomatic of “der Geist” of modern times. While it may not be entirely clear from Döblin’s line of argument why he chose to draw the comparison to U-Bahn and not to the intra-city transportation network at large, I wish to underscore that U-Bahn travel involves inherently different kinds of stimuli to those of aboveground travel. The U-Bahn traveler’s experience is detached from the outside world, i.e. the aboveground city, by both material and mental borders, including administrative and functional checkpoints such as escalators and ticket gates, and also more symbolically evocative items such as, for example, the steel plate statue of Hades’ three-headed dog, Cerberus, that stands watch over the tracks at the U-Bahn station Rathaus Steglitz (U9). These borders spatially and physically demarcate the underground as someplace “other” or “elsewhere.”

In Foucauldian terms, one can think of the U-Bahn as a heterotopia to the city, a space that by virtue of being an “other” or “parallel” reveals norms, attitudes and social dynamics at play in

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1 The Rathaus Steglitz subway station was built between 1969-1973. Shortly after opening, the station was decorated with the plastic sculpture “Höllenhund aus Edelstahl” by Waldemar Grzimek (1918-1984).
its counterpart. While aboveground urban mass transit sensitized and fractured—or one might even say “urbanized”—the human perception by eliciting new perspectives and movement patterns in Berlin, underground travel de-centers the gaze from the cityscape. The descent into the underground entails a dulling of visual input on the one hand, and an intensification of the human imagination and introspection on the other.\(^2\) The Berlin U-Bahn system also includes lines with outlying sections that emerge aboveground. As such, Berlin lends itself particularly well to an exploration of such shifts in sensory experience between above- and belowground modes of travel.

The notion of the U-Bahn as someplace “else” than aboveground Berlin suffuses nearly all representations of the space that this chapter explores. After all, going belowground entails a movement away from our natural habitat under the sun and the bustling street crowd. Within the larger context of this dissertation project that focuses on the impact of public transit on human perception of urban space, we paradoxically have to re-direct our attention to what it means not to see as we descend underground. The street-level and bird’s eye perspectives of urban space, and the underground tunnels and stations are mutually invisible to one another. Further, the passenger’s peripheral vision is limited to the darkness and electric light flashing by in the tunnels between the underground stations. The “otherness” of the underground takes on various forms, all of which underscore a perceived disconnect between urban subjects and space as they move vertically through the various layers of the U-Bahn.

Building new tunnels, stations, renovating older ones, and connecting these to the already existing aboveground lines, was naturally not a task that could be completed overnight and required extensive digging, drilling, and cutting in the streets. At the very center of this

\(^2\) Previous scholars, such as Graham and Hewitt (2013) have already persuasively argued and shown that studies on urban space and theory have long foregrounded a planar or horizontal imaginary and spread of urban space over a vertical one. Some examples they include in terms of contemporary urbanization include Google Earth, personalized air travel and verticalized surveillance.
restructuring stands the Alexanderplatz which was to be turned into a major interchange station for the U-Bahn in the 1920s. In Walter Benjamin’s response to Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, he describes the scenery as follows:


The digging and drilling are depicted as an ongoing auditory and visual commotion; re-shaping, destabilizing, and disemboweling the very foundation on which the city stands, laying bare “die Eingeweide” of Berlin. In a similar vein, Siegfried Kracauer wrote at length about the construction site, echoing Benjamin’s depiction of the Alexanderplatz by comparing it to “ein riesiger Abstellraum” where “[d]er Wind fegt durch die Lücken ins Bodenlose hinein” (Kracauer 1930 277), and Döblin himself hints at the excavation of underground tunnels in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* on several occasions, including an incident of a horse falling into a shaft “wo sie Untergrund ausschachten” (Döblin 241) and a description of crossing the dig sites on planks: “Am Alexanderplatz reißen sie den Damm auf für die Untergrundbahn. Man geht auf Brettern” (Ibid. 123). These images of a porous, bottomless, and disemboweled Berlin show that the addition of the U-Bahn into the city body also affected the spatial constitution of the aboveground world. Additionally, they provide a strong example of the phenomenological shift that the U-Bahn constitutes in relation to the longer history of literary representations of public transit: Rather than expanding horizontally across the city body as a system of arteries and veins, the vertical, downward expansion of the network shifts the focus to what lies underneath the surface skin, rendering visible the fragility of the foundation on top of which the city stands.
The world below has provided a central backdrop to human imagination and activity for ages, from Hades to cave exploration to Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1867), the importance of the Berlin U-Bahn for the imaginary of Berlin has largely been overlooked in literary studies. A notable exception to this includes a chapter on subway travel in Lutz Koepnick’s book *Framing Attention: Windows on Modern German Culture* (2007), in which Kopenick argues that the subway challenges many of the notions we associate with modern transportation, such as velocity, spatial shrinkage and temporal acceleration, but still “produced practices of seeing completely different from, but no less modern than, those conventionally associated with … the railway” (Koepnick 131). One of the main takeaways from his study is that the very act of not seeing—as in one’s attention not primarily being drawn to spectate the cityscape—transforms both the human subject’s perception, and subsequently artistic representations, of urban space. This change, Koepnick argues, is best understood as a re-centering of human agency over urban space, one in which the human imagination actively shapes urban space, projecting “inner visions” onto “outward realities” (Ibid. 132). In other words, due to the lack of visual distractions outside the subway car, riding the U-Bahn creates a space of refuge where the human imagination and attention remain—comparatively speaking—undisturbed and contained from the outside. Another significant contribution to the scholarship on the Berlin U-Bahn in twentieth-century cinema is Sebastian Bauer’s 2013 study *Welten im Untergrund: Das Motiv der U-Bahn im Film*. Although almost exclusively dealing with French and American films from the latter half of the twentieth century, he offers several helpful approaches to the U-Bahn as

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a motif in artistic representations of the city. Bauer, too, asserts that the U-Bahn constitutes a “verdichtete[r] Sammelpunkt großstädtischer Wahrnehmungsweisen” (Bauer 14) that hinges on a “mythischen Aufladung des Schauplatzes, die seiner characteristischen Lage im Untergrund geschuldet ist … Der Mythos nährt sich aus einer Nicht-Sichtbarkeit des Schauplatzes” (Ibid 11-12). Although Kopenick and Bauer address the lack of sight, changes in sensory responsiveness, and otherworldly qualities of the underground, they give little to no attention to the experience of ascent and descent as the passenger and train move between the above- and belowground layers of urban space.

Additionally, there are three major studies of the New York subway that have helped inform my thinking of the Berlin U-Bahn. Michael Brooks’s *Subway City: Riding the Trains, Reading New York* (1997) and Tracy Fitzpatrick’s *Art and the Subway: New York and Underground* (2009) offer broad cultural histories of New York’s subway. Brooks’s study focuses on political debates surrounding its construction and its role in changing conceptions of race, class, and gender. Fitzpatrick’s study offers a comparative analysis of the built environment and visual and textual representations of the subway. Sunny Stalter-Pace’s *Underground Movements: Modern Culture of the New York Subway* (2013) is more purposefully engaging with literature and the role of the subway as an “imaginative structure” (Stalter-Pace 6). She, too, posits the passenger as an important figure in understanding how urban subjects responded to the new spatial experience of traveling underground, paying close attention to the ways in which the subway space transformed attention and perception of urban space from the vantage point of the underground.

The following chapter looks at depictions of the underground from three perspectives. First, we look “from above” at how the underground connections between widely different places in Berlin accentuated socio-economic disparities in urban space. Second, we follow the train’s
descent into the underground, exploring reactions to the sudden plunge into darkness. And third, we reverse the trajectory and follow passengers’ ascent from underground platform back to the street, which constitutes a shift between distinctly different systems of navigation.

With the excavation and exploration of the underground through the construction and operation of the U-Bahn, Berlin was not only expanding horizontally in terms of its surface area, but also in depth. Although it would take until 1902 for Berlin’s (and Germany’s) first U-Bahn journey in the 11.2km long tunnel between Stralauer Tor and Potsdamer Platz, its construction history stretches back to the 1890s. The two main competitors in technological innovation in the field of public transportation at the time, Siemens & Halske and the AEG [Allgemeine Elektricitäts-Gesellschaft AG] had been looking to invest in new large-scale projects to further improve the public transit network in Berlin. At first Siemens & Halske persisted on building more elevated Hochbahnen in Berlin, whereas the AEG constructed underground tunnels in style of the world’s first subway system, London’s “Tube.” Partnering up with the construction company Philip Holzmann and the Deutsche Bank, the AEG started building a tunnel under the Spree between Stralau and Treptow. They began work in 1895 and had 160 meters ready to display during the industrial exhibit in Treptower Park in 1896. In 1899, the 454-meter-long tunnel was completed and became part of a line running between today’s Ostbahnhof all the way to the riverside exit in Treptow. In the meantime, the Budapest subway—also planned and constructed by Siemens & Halske—had taken up operation in 1896. This had alleviated previous fears of building an extensive network of underground tunnels near a large river. In 1897, Siemens & Halske founded the “Gesellschaft für elektrische Hoch- und Untergrundbahnen in Berlin,”—Hochbahngesellschaft in short—that in 1929 came to be today’s BVG [Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe]. Against the backdrop of the highly successful tunnels of the AEG and the
Hochbahngesellschaft, the GBS made sure to commence construction of tunnels below the two most important axes of the city: Leipziger Straße and Friedrichstraße. In response, the Hochbahngesellschaft instead built around the inner city toward Alexanderplatz. After Charlottenburg had been connected to central Berlin, the U-Bahn craze hit Wilmersdorf and a tunnel was built to connect Kurfürstendamm to the inner city. By 1913, the subway network was 37.3 km (~23.5 miles). The Berlin U-Bahn began operation as early as 1902, but the initial east-west lines mainly ran through the bourgeois areas of Charlottenburg, Schöneberg, and Wilmersdorf. It would take until the 1920s before the network branched out to include the main proletarian residential areas on the north-south axis, such as Neukölln, Wedding, and Gesundbrunnen (today U6 and U7).

The new connections between socio-economically disparate areas of Berlin did not go unnoticed, as several writers commented on the sudden disconnect that they perceived traveling with the U-Bahn through Berlin. Weimar Berlin’s very own rasende Reporter Egon Erwin Kisch, for example, noted:


Kisch’s observation brings several central notions of U-Bahn travel to the foreground that we will continuously encounter throughout this chapter: the invisibility of the aboveground view; the

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4 In addition to the vertical sedimentation and horizontal expansion of urban transit space into aboveground-, street-level, and belowground rails, elevators started becoming commonplace in and around Berlin’s transit hubs in the 1920s. The Hermannplatz station (constructed between 1923-27) was the first station with escalators, and there was also an entrance connecting the station directly to the newly-opened Karstadt department store (Cf. Zerdoun, 59).
notion of sleeping ("Schlafwagen") and distance from other passengers and urban subjects ("kein Bekannter ruft dich … Du liest deine Zeitung"). Kisch’s stark contrast between posh Schöneberg and poor Rummelsburg is further emphasized by his exaggerated analogy of traveling by night express from Munich to Venice, a situation in which you would go to sleep and wake up in remotely different places. His metaphor may not hold in terms of economic disparity, but it underscores the experience of traveling between two places that look very different. Like traveling the night express, the U-Bahn, too, deprives the passenger from observing the gradually shifting cityscape, making the contrast between rich and poor neighborhoods feel and appear even more shocking.

Reflecting on the opening of the new main line in 1930 running between Gesundbrunnen and Neukölln (today part of U8), Kracauer provides commentary of how the U-Bahn brings to the fore the social and spatial disconnects present in Berlin. At the Rosenthaler Straße station (today Rosenthaler Platz), for example, he mocks the “rosig angehauchten Wandplatten” trying to give the illusion “als ob diese Gegend ein Rosental sei” (Kracauer “Proletarische Schnellbahn” 221). Despite the cleanliness and warm colors of the underground stations, the route travels “durchs Stadtzentrum aus Proletariervierteln in Proletarierviertel, von Fabriken zu Fabriken … Wieder und wieder erschüttert die Erkenntnis, daß der Abstand zwischen ihnen durch keine Schnellbahn zu verringern ist” (Ibid.). The clean and neat decorations of the stations, Kracauer suggests, merely form a façade, masking one of the main purposes of this line: to transport the working force between home and workplace—hence the label “Proletarische Schnellbahn.” While the network ostensibly serves the function of connecting, and thus assuaging, social and economic disparity in Berlin, Kracauer sees a different project in the works. In addition to what he perceives to be ironic interior station design, he refers to several archetypal spaces of commodity culture in close
proximity of the line, such as the *Großkino Lichtburg* in Gesundbrunnen and the *Karstadt-Warenhaus* at Hermannplatz. As we can see, his interests lie less in the realm of how movement shapes perception and artistic representations of urban space. Instead, he approaches it in part from a sociologist’s perspective, foregrounding the ways in which the U-Bahn shapes consumer culture over its impact on the human perceptory system. More so than a mode of transportation, Kracauer reads the transit network as a map of Berlin that renders pockets of work, entertainment, and commerce legible to the passenger.

Upon completion of the new partly subterranean transit hub at the Alexanderplatz in 1932, Kracauer compares the three stations (stacked on top of each other) and the connecting passages to shining clean bathrooms: “Sämtliche Räume und Raumteile glänzen wie Badezimmer, so daß man eigentlich nur noch die vernickelten Hähne der Brausen vermißt” (Kracauer 1932 276). This seemingly organized, tidy, and glossy space runs counter not only to traditional ideas of the underground as dirty and unpleasant, but likewise to the realities of the city above. It shows no signs of the turmoil, economic and political hardships of Weimar Berlin “weil sie ein Anachronismus sind, ein Gruß aus einer anderen Oberwelt” (Kracauer 1930 220). In an article on the motif of the U-Bahn in Kracauer’s and Benjamin’s city texts, Benedikt Tremp sees the bathroom imagery as “das klinisch reine, kalte Herz eines ebenso gearteten verkehrsinfrastrukturellen ‘Megaprojektes’ und der Gesellschaft, die hinter demselben stand” (Tremp 154). While Tremp’s reading of the underground architecture as a manifestation and reflection of ideology (in a Marxist sense) is a valid one, it fails to consider the underground aspect of the space that Kracauer continuously returns to in his writings about the U-Bahn. After all, architecture, regardless of above- or belowground, can be read as a projection of wishes, hopes and fears of any given society. The more notable aspect of Kracauer’s observation, I maintain, is
the way in which he designates the underground stations as a manifestation of “eine[r] andere[n] Oberwelt.” In other words, in the newly built stations he sees more than a projection of attitudes present in the contemporary city, but an inherently “other” space. A space that does not correspond to—and is disconnected from—the temporal and spatial logics of the contemporary society and city in which it is embedded.

One possible quality of the underground as “other” that we ought to take into consideration is the deeply ingrained cultural and religious imagery of the underground as the realm of the dead. Irmgard Keun’s 1932 novel Das Kunstseidene Mädchen offers a macabre image of the underground. While admiring the lively city streets and shop windows, the novel’s protagonist Doris informs us: “Es gibt eine Untergrundbahn, die ist wie ein beleuchteter Sarg auf Schienen – unter der Erde und muffig, und man wird gequetscht. Damit fahre ich. Es ist sehr interessant und geht schnell” (Keun 67). The comparison of the train to an illuminated coffin on rails establishes a clear connection between the space of the U-Bahn and the underground as the dominion of the dead. Despite this ghastly image, the stuffy air, and the feeling of being squashed or squeezed, however, at the same time, she finds the U-Bahn to be an interesting and efficient mode of transportation. With this juxtaposition, Doris’ description of the U-Bahn functions as an analogy of the city: Interesting and fast on the one hand, yet suffocating and possibly lethal, on the other.

The symbolic image of the underground as a realm of death remains fully comprehensible to us still today, but we need to understand the relative novelty of U-Bahn, given that up until the early 1900s, what lay below ground had by and large been isolated from the living and reserved for the dead.\(^5\)

\(^5\) The notion of the U-Bahn as a ghastly presence in the city was most acutely felt by Berlin citizens against the backdrop of the erection of the Berlin Wall right over U6 and U8, both starting and terminating in the West. In order to prevent people from crossing the borders, the stations on the Eastern side were walled-in, put under surveillance and were given the nickname Geisterbahnhöfe or Phantomenbahnhöfe. These were all stations that today are central
The discrepancy between the surface façade and what it conceals is a common thread we can find in the scholarship on 1920s Berlin. In many ways, contemporary commentators such as Kracauer and Kisch posit the U-Bahn as part of the surface culture we are familiar with from much scholarship on Weimar Germany. Weimar culture has predominantly been associated with surface appearances with its gleaming displays and dressed up cabaret stars. In her seminal study *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (2001), Janet Ward argues that the emergence of urban phenomena such as the movie theater, display windows and advertisement “revalorized surface as the dominant ‘social space’ of the era” (Ward 2). Trademarks of this surface culture, such as electric lighting and advertisement also suffused the U-Bahn space in Weimar Berlin. However, the main aspects of underground travel that repeatedly comes to the fore in texts are darkness, invisibility, and disorienting illusions. The U-Bahn space exists behind—or in this case below—the shiny and illuminated surface city. It is a space that Kracauer suggests hide the social realities of Weimar Berlin, such as the extreme inflation and the looming rise of the Nazis, away from plain sight. However, this tension between the “surface” and “belowground” culture also holds potential to negotiate new relationships between urban dweller and city. While sharing many aspects of the surface city, such as artificial lighting, ads, and crowds, the underground induces a response that appears antithetical to canonical ideas of transportation and modernity, namely tranquility and rest for the human eyes, ears, and mind. Precisely this tension between the surface and subterranean city holds potential to negotiate new meanings and relationships in urban space.

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transit hubs and popular stops in Berlin, such as Stadtmitte, Französische Straße and the Weinmeisterstraße. Despite being inaccessible and hidden from sight for almost 30 years, they served as a constant reminder of the divided city as the trains operating in the relatively shallow tunnels audible in the East. See the conclusion chapter for a more elaborate discussion of the *Geisterbahnhöfe*.
Going from Above- to Belowground: “Wir sinken, wir schwinden”

A notable feature of the Berlin U-Bahn is that several of the lines run both below- and aboveground. The *Hoch- und Untergrundbahn* therefore offers two widely different views of Berlin—elevated and submerged—and although unmistakably spatially connected by rails, pillars, pylons, tunnels, stairs (and elevators), the experience of moving between these different vertical layers of the city the passenger perceives as a disconnect as the human body re-negotiates where, how, and what to look at. The poem “Hoch- und Untergrundbahn” (1914, see addendum for full text) by German expressionist poet Oskar Kanehl, published in the weekly left-wing politically oriented magazine named *Die Aktion*, provides a vivid and powerful example of the discrepancies between the different levels at which the train travels. The poem begins by describing at length the sensation of traveling along the elevated tracks of the *Stadtbahn*; including descriptions of what one sees and how one feels: “über dem Gewöhnlichen … Unter uns kocht der Tag … Wir gleiten. Wir gleiten … Wie ein Lauscher kriecht man die Fenster entlang” (Kanehl). The elevated tracks offer views of the normal, quotidian lives of people out on the streets and also into more private indoor spaces as the train tracks run right past private homes. The unobstructed view of both public and private spaces and events shapes the imagery throughout the entire poem: “Wir Störendfriede. / Wo küssen sich zwei … Betten werden gemacht. Kafeé getrunken / Ein Rohling schlägt eine Frau. / Wir schweigen. Wir steigen” (Ibid.). The passenger’s sight is as intrusive as it is complacent in its spatial recognition, directed outward, it focuses on what lies outside the vehicle with no detailed descriptions as to how the lyric I responds to the visual stimuli. The multitude of impressions hinder any personal reaction or engagement with that which is perceived: The eye observes in silence, barring any act of self-reflection or strong reaction. The viewing subject perceives what they see as fleeting, ephemeral, distant, and not even the sight of “ein Rohling”
who “schlägt eine Frau” can disrupt the “schweigen” of the passenger and the “steigen” of the train car. The journey continues, unobstructed, upward and onward “über Elektrische in der dritten höchsten Brückenetage … wie hoch oben in gothischen Kuppeln, wo Gott wohnt … Wir fahren ein Haus entzwei. / Aller Widerstand splittert / vor dem bohrenden Willen unserer Maschine” (Ibid.). The train’s upward trajectory evokes associations with gothic architecture and proximity to God, and the tracks’ path through a house highlights the intrusive, all-encompassing, and unstoppable nature of modern mass transit. The elevated and all-encompassing view places the traveling subject and the train above urban space, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. The vehicle, the human gaze and technological progress fuse into a common “bohrenden Willen,” penetrating the city horizontally through its spread and relentless forward trajectory, as well as vertically by means of elevated tracks and subterranean descent.

The subject’s vantage point in Kanehl’s poem evokes a sense of authority on the one hand, but also of indifference over that which is seen, on the other. A comparison may be drawn to Simmel’s notion of Blasiertheit, a shift in reaction from “das Gemüte” to “das Verstand”: “Die Reaktion ist [damit] auf jene Erscheinung in das auf wenigsten empfindliche, von den Tiefen der Persönlichkeit am weitesten abstehende Organ verlegt” (Simmel 117). What happens then, when the train descends into the underground; when the eye operates in darkness with only artificial lighting to guide it? As a matter of fact, the poem comes to an end as the train gradually loses elevation: “Plötzlich sind wir klein und mitten darin. / Auf gleicher Höhe / neben dem stickrigsten Omnibus / und jedem Schubkarren. / Ernüchtert. / Für einen Augenblick. / Schaufensterauslagen.

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6 Kanehl is most likely referring to the “Durchbrochenes Haus” in the Dennewitzstraße 2 in Berlin (today at the corner of Bülowstraße and Nelly-Sachs-Park). This tunnel which was built in 1902 and most of the surrounding area, however, was destroyed during WWII. Werner von Westhafen informs us in an article for the Kreuzberger Chronik (2016) that “Das ‘Tunnelhaus’ zwischen Dennewitzstraße und Bülowstraße war die ‘Sensation der Strecke’. Kaum ein Berliner Restaurant zog so viele Touristen an wie die ‘Akademischen Bierhallen’, die sich im Erdgeschoss unter den Geleisen befanden” (Westhafen 2016). The still-standing tunnel that goes through an apartment building block between Gleidreieck and Kurfürstenstraße, on the other hand, was built in 1926.
Kanehl’s poem depicts Berlin as a three-stratum space, where seeing from an elevated point of view “wo Gott wohnt” instills a sense of power and control “über Sodom und Gomorrah” in the streets below. In the streets “sind wir klein und mitten drin,” lowering and devaluing the passenger from the authorial and pejorative gaze back to be part of the street crowds. The intrinsic and causal relationship between the subject’s vertical position in space and their perception of self in relation to urban space is unmistakable, as the elevated gaze on the city instills a sense of authority in the observer. The “sinken,” the passenger experiences as a “schwinden,” a fading away of the lyric I that signifies an end—or shift—to the strong link between sight, space, attention, and subject. In complete juxtaposition to the elevated track’s proximity to the divine realm, Kanehl’s underground instills a sense of fear and insecurity in the passenger:

[wir fallen] wehrlos unter die Tagwelt. / Licht flamt auf. Augen schmerzen / Aber es stößt uns und schiebt uns und zieht und jagt. / Wir stürzen durch dunkle Schächte / wie flüchtend vor Grubengewittern. Manchmal, wie feiger Überfall, / schmeißt aus dem düsteren Hinterhalt / uns eine Flamme die Scheibe ein. / Es ist so kalt und laut. / Sind wir lebendig begraben? (Kanehl)

In the underground, the exterior landscape is replaced by an assault of flashing lights and darkness, rendering the very activity of observation straining, perhaps even threatening. The lack of scenery upsets the passenger’s sense of security, evoking the sensation of a frantic flight and alienation from the world of the living. If the aboveground and elevated tracks offered a platform of privileged and panoramic visual consumption of urban life, the underground prompts the allegorical question of whether the space belongs to the realm of the living or dead.

For the sake of comparison, let us take a look at a poem from the same magazine from two years prior, entitled “Untergrundbahn” (Wetzel 1912, see addendum for full text). The opening of the poem describes the inside of the car and its movement through Berlin: “Wie immer: /
Rotlederne Polster und blankes Metall im Licht … Mit nervösem Fauchen, in einer Sturzwelle / von Luft und Lärm, / Die jäh über die Stirne der Dächer nach vorne / prallt / Und durch die Fenster schlägt” (Ibid.). In a similar vein to Kanehl’s poem, the train comes across as an intrusive force invading private space with its hissing noise penetrating house windows along its path. Rather than directed outward, however, the passenger’s gaze is heavily fixated on a fellow traveler: “Und ich vor Dir: / Meine Augen ewge Wanderer zwischen deinen / Haaren, deinen Händen / Zu den Schuhen” (Ibid.). The male gaze remains unobstructed as it freely wanders, consuming the presumably female body with his eyes. We recognize the male, voyeuristic gaze of the flâneur; he is part of a traveling crowd, observing but not actively looked back at. The one-way gaze shows a perversion with singular parts of the female body over the whole. Indeed, Wetzel’s train car appears an ideal site for the male gaze in the same way Kanehl’s passenger views the unobstructed, prismatic city panorama. Further, in a similar fashion to Kanehl’s poem, the gaze is interrupted as “Hinterrücks mit uns der Zug in die saugende / Nacht der Tiefe / Und schleift den Lärm seiner Fahrt an den / hallenden Wänden hin, / Im geheimen Blinzeln unverstandner Lichtsignale, / Und an Reihen trüber gelber Birnen vorbei, / aus denen manchmal / Eine blaue Laterne kalt in unsre Gespräche / leuchtet . . .” (Ibid. ellipsis in original). With the descent, the poem’s focus is first redirected back to the auditory “Lärm,” mirroring the first stanza of the poem. The noise of the train, however, is no longer hitting against windows but contained and sharpened as it clangorously resounds against the walls of the dark underground tunnel. The optical, too, operates differently here as the lights are described as deceptive, dull and cold rather than illuminating or warm. Furthermore, the passenger’s visual fixation on the female body shifts into a focus on interactions between a general and collective “unsre” and we can no longer discern the previously clearly delineated subjects of observer and observed, male subject and female body.
Kanehl’s and Wetzel’s poems show that the descent into underground space throws the readability of the city into disarray. It is as if both poems employ subjects and voices that are accustomed to observing and reading urban space from within aboveground transit space; their eyes are adept at consuming and discerning individual details, the panoramic and prismatic vistas that unfold within and outside the moving train. The mode of transportation does not present a challenge or threat to their senses until they descend into the “Nacht der Tiefe,” a space where the city is hidden from sight and the lack of light and loss of clear visual orientation upset the very practices of seeing to which they are accustomed. We can also discern a change in the relationship between observer and observed in Wetzel’s poem. The abrupt shift in both visual and auditory perception disrupts the voyeuristic, consuming, and extrospective gaze of the male passenger, signifying a transformation to passive and contemplative mode of reading visual stimuli.

The experience of underground travel finds its most popular expression in images of sleeping and dreaming. The imagery of the passenger drifting away into a dream world further underscores the idea of the underground transit space as an inherent “other” to the highly alert and well-coordinated urban subject navigating the well-lit city streets. A representation of this phenomenon can be found in the poem “Die Träumer in der Untergrundbahn” (Ringelnatz 67) by author, painter, and writer of satire Joachim Ringelnatz.7

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Die Träumer in der Untergrundbahn
Haben vernebelten Blick.
Sie träumen ihre Zeit, ihr Geschick,
Beidem untertan.

Will keiner von ihnen den anderen sehn,
Will keiner vom anderen hören,
Will keines irgendwie stören.
Sie fahren. Und ihre Gedanken gehn,
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7 Ringelnatz wrote another similar poem called “Schweigende Fahrgäste” in which he employs a similar imagery of dreaming passengers: “Die Fremden mit denen ich fahre, / Gezwungen einander gesellt —: / Aus jedem Augenpaare / Träumt eine andere Welt” (Ringelnatz 118).
Gedanken gehen, langsam, im Rund,
Laufen sich nicht die Sohlen wund.

Die Träumer in der Untergrundbahn,
Sie haben weder Klage noch Wahn.
Sie haben nicht viel zu erträumen
Unter Grund.
Sie werden ihr Ziel nicht versäumen.

The poem emphasizes the passengers’ reluctance, as indicated by the verb “wollen”, to look at what is around them. Given the lack of imagery, leaving us only with the location of the Untergrundbahn, the dreamy disposition cannot be understood as a result of external stimulation; rather, the passengers’ dreamy and detached demeanor stems from their inability to see clearly (“vernebelten Blick”). Indeed, the descriptions of the hazy gaze and the unwillingness to see, hear, or disturb anybody indicates that the human sensory system remains largely disengaged in the U-Bahn. During their ride, the passengers in Ringelnatz’s poem manage to free themselves from the physical woes (“Laufen sich nicht die Sohlen wund”) and psychological inhibitions (“Sie haben weder Klage noch Wahn”) of everyday life by subjecting themselves to their interior dream world. In their dream-like introspective state, they perceive neither time passing, or spaces traversed, yet remain aware of their destination as if being set to an auto-pilot mode. Lutz Koepnick sees in this poem an instance of cool conduct: “Unable to distract themselves with anything, Ringelnatz’s subway travelers—far from being exhilarated by the speed of modern mass transport—practice the art of cold conduct” (Koepnick 132). While I believe that the connection exists between the Weimar attitude and mentality Helmut Lethen refers to as Cool Conduct in his 2002 book, it is unclear as to how this new practice of (not) seeing shapes urban space at large. The core of the cool persona, Lethen describes, is the very opposite of the “ambition to become a self-conscious agent of history… The suppressed sense of remaining subject to blind fate is the underlying motivation for its magical thinking” (Lethen 20). The cool persona is part “self-confident subject”
and other part creature “whose bodily existence dictates its perceptual and behavioral range” (Ibid.). While the attitude described by Lethen echoes the culture of distance at play between the dreaming U-Bahn travelers and their surroundings, the dreaming is at odds with the “suppressed sense of remaining subject to blind fate,” as well as the notion of the subject’s perceptual and bodily range being limited to their bodily existence. After all, are dreams not untethered from bodily existence? Instead, these dream-like and unreal scenarios, I maintain, jive better with the main premises of flânerie. The flâneur seldom describes what he sees “in bewusst gefassten Begrifflichkeiten oder Diskursen … sondern in unterschwelligen, traumartigen Bildern” (Tremp 149). The darkness of the underground seems particularly generative for such imagery and also lets us ponder what larger commentary on contemporary society and Berlin the authors are trying to make through their sleeping and dreaming passengers.

Turning our attention to visual depictions of the U-Bahn space as seen from within, in a similar vein to Ringelnatz’ poem, the underground resembles something more akin to a dreamscape, or mindscape than a cityscape. Let us consider the image below from a picture series called “Unanglaubliche Geschichten” by Fritz Eichenberg printed in a 1932 issue of the Uhu magazine (Fig. 7). The man is situated in a typical urban setting: He is inside a mass transit vehicle, surrounded by advertisement, maps and a newspaper, yet the way he sits there comfortably with stretched out legs and his relaxed look on his face, coupled with the absence of other human bodies inside the vehicle run counter to most of our associations with public transit “Um 6 Uhr nachmittags nach Büroschluß”; crowded, loud and hectic. Just how did this man end up “allein in der Untergrundbahn”? The most likely answer to this question is that he is in fact not alone, but the image represents a dream like scenario. This scenario is Unglaublich insofar that the idea of enjoying any extensive degree of private space in the U-Bahn during rush hours can only ever be
a fantasy, a setting created by the imagination. A closer inspection of the image reveals traces of other passengers, such as tickets on the floor and a newspaper on the seat towards the far-right end. Given these hints and the fact that the vehicle is clearly still in motion (as indicated by the light and dark contrasts in the windows), we can safely assume that this man is in fact not alone. I maintain that what we see is more than a caricature or humorous thought experiment and suggest that the image represents the traveler’s ability to voluntarily disconnect himself from the real, material space of the car to enjoy a short break: A moment of pleasant forgetting or daydreaming. Just by comparing this depiction of the solitary subway passenger to the image on the right (Fig. 8.) from the same magazine, we get a sense of its surreal and dreamlike quality.

Figure 7. Being the only passenger on board a subway train during rush traffic? Certainly, that is an unbelievable story. “Unglaubliche Geschichten: Um 6 Uhr nachmittags nach Büroschluß allein in der Untergrundbahn.” Uhu: 8.1931/32, H.4, January.
The illusory qualities of the U-Bahn space are not limited to the train car but extends to the platform space. Berlin-born Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935) provides commentary on the Berlin U-Bahn in his
picture book *Deutschland Deutschland über alles*, published in cooperation with John Heartfield in 1929. One of the images—originally from Sasha Stone’s *Berlin in Bildern*—shows the *Inselbrücke* subway station (today *Märkisches Museum*) (Fig. 4). In the photograph we see people standing on a platform covered in a film of what looks like rippling water under electrical lights. In Tucholsky’s reading, Stone’s photo transforms the subway into a natural landscape, exemplifying Tucholsky’s—and many of his contemporaries’—critique of photography as a medium unable to ever be a true representation of space given how it is always staged and framed to a certain extent. However, Tucholsky is undecisive in his stance as he slowly realizes that the U-Bahn space might indeed possess some characteristics of a natural landscape. In line with this critique, he begins by dismissing the validity of the photo:

So sieht sie gar nicht aus—so sieht sie nur der Photograph. So sieht sie doch aus. So sieht sie nicht aus. Man sieht die Untergrundbahnstation nicht, wenn der Zug gerade eingefahren ist; wenn man es eilig hat; wenn man mit einer hübschen Frau fährt—man sieht sie gelangweilt, wenn man auf den nächsten Zug warten muss … Aber dann stiert das Auge halbmüde oder halbinteressiert auf die Plakate—Chlorodol—der Wagen der guten Gesellschaft—bims die Füße mit Abrador—man sieht alles und nichts (Tucholsky 115, ellipses in original).

On the one hand, Tucholsky’s description of what and how you see in the U-Bahn corresponds to the notion of the transit space as suffused by distractions and fleeting impressions “wenn man es eilig hat” that challenge the human attention span and visual prowess, noting that only in moments of suspense and waiting, the eye starts to wander. What emerges in between the moments of rushing to the platform and waiting for the train, he describes as a liminal space, or a suspended state of being where you see “alles und nichts.” This half-conscious state of staring without really seeing, or reflecting on that which is in front of you, is the dominant feature in Tucholsky’s traveler, which ultimately enables new frames and modes of spectatorship in urban space.
Tucholsky’s reading of the underground as depicted in Stone’s photograph is inherently paradoxical. He describes it as an illusory clarity that reconciles the technical space of the Berlin U-Bahn with a natural landscape and creatures of myth (“Riesen”). Important to note here is that it is not the medium of photography that enables this, but the features of the U-Bahn space: Dim lights, dark tunnels, and the tedium of waiting and staring blindly at the ads along the tunnel walls. Although it remains unclear just how this blurred vision of the city as a natural landscape occurs, Tucholsky imagines it as a moment where the bodily senses and the imagination run free, where the urban dweller can smell and feel the city as if it were part of them. The “Art Romantik” to which Tucholsky refers posits the below- and aboveground strata of the city in a similar relationship to the romantic notion of society and nature as pure and spiritual; the “other” of society. Here, the underground still possesses qualities of uncorrupted nature and can provide an experience in which man feels at one with nature, albeit short-lived. Moreover, this imagery of the city being inside the passenger (“deine Venen sind voll von der Großstadt”) presents another reverse—or possibly reciprocal—sensual experience of the city dweller and public transit space, one where urban space is confined within the borders of the human body instead of it being immersed in the flows of traffic. The short-lived “romantic” illusion, however, is quickly shattered
as the faint sound of cars aboveground pull the passenger out of their daydreaming and back into their regular disenchanted perception of, and hurried movement through, space.

The abrupt and rapid changes to sight that occur as the urban dweller descends into the underground showcase both similarities and differences to the aboveground passenger. The underground turns the passenger’s attention away from that which flashes by outside the train car in-between stations. Whether the authorial, elevated, and panoramic gaze looking out over Berlin or the street-level submerging the passenger in the crowd, the descent into the underground triggers an introspective gaze. As the woke and attentive eye turns inward, the crowded train or busy platform transforms from cityscape to dreamscape, from mechanized and functional urban space to romantic landscape. What all of these attributes have in common is that they stem from a sudden shift or disconnect in sight that occurs when the passenger moves from above- to belowground. In order to further explore this perceived disconnect between these two vertical layers of urban transit space, we now reverse the journey: from the descent to the ascent, from underground to street-level.

Returning to the Surface: Awakening

Despite the simplicity and streamlined nature of the U-Bahn network, clearly mapped, spatially delineated by tunnels, and filled with signs and arrows to guide the passenger between underground platform and aboveground city, the underground evokes a sense of disorientation and spatial disconnect within the urban dweller. Some describe how these sensations come to the fore upon re-entering the city, and others while trying to find a way through the station. Kracauer, for example, expresses frustration with the newly finished inter-change station at the Alexanderplatz:

Die Bahnhöfe sind in verschiedenen Farben gekachelt und außerdem, der besseren Übersichtlichkeit wegen, mit Buchstaben bezeichnet. Obwohl aber die Farben und Buchstaben an allen möglichen Stellen auftauchen … ist es doch außerordentlich schwierig, den gesuchten Punkt auch wirklich zu finden … Aus einem an sich
begreiflichen Ordnungsfanatismus heraus sind tatsächlich manche Linien und Ausgänge so gut versteckt, daß man sie einfach nicht auffinden kann. Man will nach A und gelangt nach D, von wo man wieder über B oder C zurück muß (Kracauer “Der neue Alexanderplatz” 276-277).

As Kracauer’s statement suggests, the underground is a place of paradox. Despite the effort to clearly map and provide directional signs, ranging from color-coded tiles to text, the “Ordnungsfanatismus” hinders rather than aids the passenger. When underground, passengers have little to no sense of how their position corresponds to the street view. Even if they follow the right signs and find the right exit that leads to the street you want to go, they must adapt to an entirely new spatial layout once you exit the station. This sense of disorientation in the midst of clear signs may not be unique to underground transit—as I am sure we have all struggled to find the way from one terminal to the next at an airport more than once—but what Kracauer’s frustration underscores is the perceived lack of directionality. The loss of directionality may be attributed to the limited peripheral vision and unique geo-spatial markers in the underground “landscape.” The regular subway traveler, as we will see in what follows, does not rely on optically driven modes of locating oneself in relation to their surroundings. Instead, they mechanically and habitually make their way through the station to the exit where they suddenly awaken from their subterranean slumber.

If descending to the underground can be understood as slipping into a dark, dreamy, introspected, and sheltered space, the re-surfacing presents the flip side of the coin. A scene from Paul Gurk’s 1925 novel Berlin illustrates this clearly. The novel centers around the book salesman Eckenpenn who commutes with the U-Bahn between his residence and place of work, a book cart that “seit zwei Jahrzehnten an derselben Stelle hielt” (Gurk 5). Although standing and observing Berlin and its people daily, Eckenpenn marvels as he wakes up from his slumbering commute and exits the U-Bahn:
In der Untergrundbahn schlief er im Schaukeln des Wagens stehend ein, vom Wall der gepreßten, rauchenden Menschen gehalten. Als Eckenpenn ausstieg, die Treppe hinaufstaumelte und die Augen auftat, überwältigte ihn plötzlich das Bild der schwarzblauen Nacht … und [die] unzähligen in die Tiefe abfliegenden elektrischen Bogenlampen … In jäher, glücklicher Wachheit breitete er die Arme aus und rief: ‘Wie bist du schön, Stadt!’ (Gurk 26).

Like a rocking crib, the U-Bahn rocks Eckenpenn to sleep in the crowded, steaming train car. Interestingly, the narration makes it seem as if Eckenpenn had kept his eyes shut for the entirety of his stay in the underground, opening his eyes first as he walks up the stairs and exits the station. There are no descriptions of him making his way out of the train to the platform or from the platform to the stairs where he tumbles up the stairs to the street, instead it is presented more akin to sleepwalking: Automatic and goal-oriented, yet subconscious and wobbly. Back on the surface, his celebratory shout-out “wie bist du schön, Stadt!” expresses not only a joy of arriving and appreciation of the city, but communicates that for Eckenpenn, the “city” is a place to actively observe and behold one’s surroundings. Moreover, the process of waking up under the electrically lit-up night sky draws attention to a spatial shift in elevation rather than a temporal shift between night and day. Indeed, the change in Eckenpenn’s attention, perception of space, and its relation to his location along a vertical axis of Berlin is evident. Kracauer and Eckenpenn underscore two widely different ways of reading the subway transit space, which can be understood by their different degrees of familiarity with the space. Even as the title of Kracauer’s article suggests, the subway station in which he struggles to navigate and orient himself is still new, whereas Eckenpenn is a character traveling between the same subway stations on a day-to-day basis.
Figure 10. There is something rather uncanny about the winding path of this tunnel. The tunnel’s warped shape does not give off a welcoming vibe, at all. Woodcut print by Eduard Braun depicting people entering and exiting the subway station. “U-Bahn-Tunnel,” Der Querschnitt, 13.1933, H.8, November.

Eduard Braun’s woodcut print of a U-Bahn tunnel (Fig. 10.) purposefully blends elements of both these perceptions and interactions with space: A dark, winding tunnel, full of people with lifeless and hollow expressions, seemingly disconnected from their surroundings as their gaze is directed down at the hard, cold concrete floor. Only two figures, a woman and a man, on the right-hand side of the image meet our gaze as we look toward the tunnel’s depths. While a clear boundary separates the crowd into two lanes moving in different directions, the winding path gives off a sense of disorientation and infinity as the path veers downward with no clear end in the far background. As a representation of urban transit space, the image introduces notions of clear contrasts and binaries only to subvert them, as the horizontal grouping of people entering and exiting the platform and the vertical dimensions of ascension and descent are complicated by the twisting tunnel. There is a perceived sense of something inherently other about the underground
in Braun’s woodcut, something that blurs the contours of the carefully measured urban fabrics. It is as if Ruttmann’s streamlined, goal-oriented movements of the urban crowd we saw in Berlin Sinfonie and Biberkopf’s shaky and blurred gaze in Berlin Alexanderplatz have merged.

This disconnect between underground and aboveground city may be most poignantly felt from a person’s perspective who is unfamiliar with the city at large, such as, for example, a tourist. We can find one such instance in Franz Kafka’s diary entries from his first experience with subway travel in Paris in 1911. Being immersed in the streamlined movements of people, doors, and trains, he concludes that the Paris Métro is a space that is easy to navigate even for someone who is not familiar with the city: “Die Metro ist wegen ihrer leichten Verständlichkeit für den erwartungsvollen und schwächlichen Fremden, die beste Gelegenheit, sich den Glauben zu verschaffen, richtig und Rasch im ersten Anlauf in das Wesen von Paris eingedrungen zu sein” (Kafka 1994 “Kafka fährt U-Bahn”). For Kafka, the organized underground transportation system provides a sense of control and mastery over space, generating a comfort zone “inside” the unfamiliar city. The image of being “eingedrungen” in the city further emphasizes a sense of control given its connotations with forceful penetration, infiltration, and intrusion. 8 Interestingly, Kafka’s perceived clarity runs counter to Kracauer’s confusion, perhaps owing to the magnitude of the three interlaced station at the Alexanderplatz, where his issue seems to revolve around finding one’s way around the station rather than finding an exit. Kafka’s description rather emphasizes the feeling that arises the moment you exit the clearly organized subway space. Indeed, upon ascending back up into the city, he explains, the newfound and powerful sense of spatial awareness and belonging fades:

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8 Duden provides the following explanations of the verb *eindringen*. 1: sich einen Weg bahnd in etwas dringen, hineingelangen. 2: sich gewaltsam und unbefugt Zutritt verschaffen. 3: jemandem bedrängen, bedrohen, jemandem [mit etwas] zusetzen.
Die Fremden erkennt man daran, dass sie oben schon auf dem letzten Absatz der Metrotreppe sich nicht mehr auskennen, sie verlieren sich nicht, wie die Pariser, aus der Metro übergangslos in das Strassenleben. Auch stimmt beim Herauskommen die Wirklichkeit erst langsam mit der Karte überein, da wir auf diesen Platz, wo wir jetzt nach dem Heraufkommen hingestellt sind, niemals zu Fuss oder zu Wagen gekommen wären, ohne Führung der Karte (Ibid.).

Kafka’s statement draws attention to the fact that underground and aboveground street space adhere to different systems and practices of cognitive mapping. The spatial awareness and movement patterns adapted in the underground no longer apply when re-emerging into the city. As the crowd naturally disperses into different directions, “die Fremden” must try to carve out their own trajectory by adapting to a new spatial reality. The avid and accustomed passenger knows by habit what direction to turn after re-surfacing. The image that emerges of the U-Bahn here is one that highlights its practicality and mobility on the one hand, and a sort of “shock” experience, which stems from the lack of (perceived) spatial coherence between Paris and its Métro, on the other.

Although Kafka is not writing about the Berlin U-Bahn, the phenomenon he describes visiting Paris, it is fair to say that a visitor to Berlin traveling by U-Bahn would have a similar experience. In comparison to the earlier representations of public transit in Berlin that established an inextricable link between Berlin’s unique character and atmosphere and its transportation system, the stories about the U-Bahn have nothing inherently “Berlin” about them. The experience of riding the U-Bahn, and the sterile, streamlined, and narrow tunnels and passages between the tracks and the platforms appear closer to an experience and infrastructure that blur the lines between different cities. Especially the image of the automated and mechanized movements of the subway traveler seems to appear across geographies and decades. For example, Marc Augé describes a similar phenomenon in his 1986 book In the Metro:
The regular traveler on a given line is easily recognized by the elegant and natural economy of his or her way of walking; like an old sailor who calmly descends toward his boat at dawn … the seasoned traveler … can be recognized in the perfect mastery of his or her movements: in the corridor leading to the platform, the traveler walks swiftly but without rushing; without letting on, all senses are on alert. When … the noise of an oncoming train becomes audible … this traveler knows whether or not to hurry, either by assessing the distance to the boarding area … or by having identified the source of the crescendo of din and heard in this lure … the deceptive echo of another train” (Augé 7).

Just like Kafka, Augé identifies a regular traveler on how they move and navigate the space between the street and platform. Akin to the sleepwalking Eckenpenn making his way up the stairs or the spectral and expressionless passengers in Braun’s woodcut, Augé’s passengers move “without letting on” to what degree their senses are engaged. Eye-sight appears to be mostly disengaged and they solely rely on auditory input rather than sight to gauge and assess whether to rush or take their time: As he later concludes “Subway riders basically handle nothing more than time and space, and are skillful in using the one to measure the other … They know how to adapt themselves to the resistance of matter and to the throng of bodies” (Ibid. 8).

The various texts we have encountered in this chapter all have one thing in common: They foreground an entire new set of skills and performances in the underground that are inherently different from those employed by passengers aboveground. The U-Bahn’s position within, and relationship to, surface Berlin show both similarities and differences to modes of transportation aboveground. Most importantly, a closer look at texts that emphasize the movement between the two layers of the city clearly mark the underground as an “elsewhere.” The underground transportation space takes on different qualities that have ramifications on the urban subject’s way of seeing—and consequently being in—urban space. While velocity and crowding have previously figured as two central components in the experience of the twentieth century urban subject, representations of the U-Bahn continuously bring to the fore varying notions of spatial disarray.
through “invisibility.” The invisibility takes on myriad guises as the underground remains hidden from the aboveground view, the passenger’s sight is diminished by the dark and artificial lighting, and the urban subject’s sense of orientation is challenged as the U-Bahn and surface city adhere to new systems of mapping.

The U-Bahn constitutes an Augéan non-place par excellence—a place you pass through quickly and anonymously. I believe everyone that has ever exited a subway station can relate to the sensation that arises as you move from train to exit, and finally emerge back in the street. We might be familiar with this experience from long-distance travel by boat or air, where we do not have the chance to perceive a gradual shift in scenery as we move through space. Instead, we move from one airport or harbor to the other, in remote locations. Traveling underground offers a similar experience but on a local scale; we delve into the underground in one end of the city and resurface in another. A fitting analogy might be drawn to the very way the transit grid looks, where dots are connected on a line without much (if any) cartographical indications of what lies between. The only way to establish a sense of orientation in the U-Bahn space is by looking at the transit grid map and make sure to keep track of the names of the stations in between the patches of darkness flashing by outside the window, or by attentively listening to the conductor’s announcements.

As much as the construction and early history of the U-Bahn underscores the constantly growing demand for more efficient transit lines in urban space, texts that represent the experience of underground travel and finding one’s way through the underground stations subvert the very notion of efficient linear movement. The U-Bahn is perceived as a strange, liminal space that denies its users the distanced authorial gaze of the elevated rails, as well as the immediacy to the crowded street. The descent and ascent between above- and belowground that unfold over the course of the U-Bahn journey generate new experiences of ephemerality. The result is a
transformation in attention and perception that runs counter to optically driven models of locating oneself in space. We can understand U-Bahn travel as an act of going away from the urban rather than “into” it; or possibly as a type of “parallel” or “other” urban reality. This phenomenon mainly manifests through different kinds of introspective and dreamlike visions. Needless to say, the U-Bahn is a highly functional and technological space in the city, but many textual representations of it highlight the mysterious and mythical connotations of the underground over its technological functionality. Going along this train of thought, the U-Bahn is to aboveground Berlin what the dream is to the awake—a space largely created by and for the imagination, a place of temporary abode and refuge. Be it part of the daily work commute, a leisure trip or errand in the city, the Berlin U-Bahn constitutes a liminal space in many respects; between destinations; dream and reality; crowd and individual; landscape and cityscape.

9 Stalter-Pace also pursues this argument in Underground Movements and primarily pushes against Kevin Lynch’s notion of cognitive mapping that is central to his classic study The Image of the City from 1960.
Conclusion and Epilogue: Following the Tracks into the Twenty-First Century

As I arrive at the conclusion of this project, an article I read in the *Berliner Zeitung* some years prior comes to mind. The title “Die BVG bringt gemeinsam mit Adidas einen Sneaker raus” (Herwig 2018) caught my attention, not necessarily because of its reference to the BVG—Berlin’s main public transportation company—or Adidas, but because of the combination of the two in the same sentence. The new adidas shoe featured the signature red, blue, and black camouflage *Flecktarn* pattern found on the seats of BVG’s U-Bahn trains and served as a valid yearly ticket. As part of the campaign, they even created a special music track. Compared to the BVG *Jahreskarte* priced around 1000EUR, the 500 available pairs priced at 180EUR sold out on launch.¹ Even more astonishing than the conspicuous design or bargain price, however, is how Berlin’s public transportation network finds its way into urban culture beyond its primary function as a mode of transportation. Although the sneaker and transportation company initially felt like two completely different worlds colliding, as I have been working through this dissertation, uncovering various guises in which the inextricable connection between the material cityscape of Berlin, life within it, and its public transportation network find expression, this partnership makes all the more sense to me. The products of both adidas and the BVG, although perhaps initially intended for other ends, have transformed into brands that project certain images that are indicative of contemporary urbanity.

A literary and cultural analysis of transit space tells the history of technological progress in the urban environment, as vehicles transitioned from horsepower, to steam and later electricity, and also how urban dwellers reacted to these changes. As I have argued throughout the chapters, ¹ They were exclusively sold at the adidas Originals flagship location, as well as at the sneaker outpost Overkill.
public transit changes the spatial layout of the cityscape, and consequently the movement patterns and interior mindscape of urban dwellers. Thus, the specific focus on public transit in representations of the urban experience in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provide a surface on which concrete aspects of historical change become legible, as well as more elusive impacts on moral, aesthetic, sensory, and emotional aspects of experience. Many of the topics discussed in regard to the role of transportation in the written, imagined city are also of relevance to the real, built urban environment. Urban designers and planners look at the relationship between a city’s infrastructure and its dwellers’ social behaviors and movement patterns in trying to contribute to social cohesion and to create communities. Transportation serves an integral role in linking people and places together, regulating the flow of commerce and dictating when, where, and how bodies move through space. Rather than delving into the empirical reality of such social complexities, however, artistic engagement with urban space shows to what degree Berlin was perceived and experienced as welcoming, cohesive, or modern. The exploration of the literary and filmic imagination of the transit space and its role for Berlin and its people offers new perspectives on urban modernity and reinforces the central role of movement and mobility in the formation of modern subjectivity.

In the dissertation, I have identified various responses to transit documented in literary and filmic texts from the 1880s to the 1920s in Berlin. Over this period, Berlin and its population experienced cycles of boom and bust, both in terms of population and area. Against this historical backdrop, representations of public transportation in literature and film reflect and mediate a transformation in the relationship between subject and space. As I have argued, the public transit space dictated not only the individual response to visual stimuli, but the very qualities of how subjects perceived urban space at large, as well as their own identity within it. The new
transportation technology changed the physical layout of Berlin; opened up the cityscape both horizontally in terms of accessibility and vertically by opening up new vistas of urban space from above and below; and carved out new movement patterns and routes across and between the various parts of the city body, and by extension, established new links and relations between different spheres of day-to-day life. The new ways of moving through urban space prompted processes of learning and adaptation for the city dweller, playing a central role in the formation of an urban subjectivity that hinges on adaptability and synchronicity with the “flow” of the burgeoning “new” Berlin.

Within this larger discourse of the city and transportation, questions and issues pertaining to transit surface in both artistic and popular imagination and discussions revolving around what a modern city looks like, and what life in it entails. The clash between a collective and the individual suffuse many narratives about city life, but the clear rules and regulations around which public transit operate offer a framework onto which the individual can latch on to “flow” with the collective city body. The question of what and who is compatible with the new rhythms and shapes carved out in urban space offers insight as to what, and who, belongs in Berlin. The skill set necessary to navigate the city, move between station, platform, and street; from automatic to manual movement; and the pace set by oneself to that of a public vehicle, we have seen throughout this dissertation, are learned performances. Those unable to keep up with the moving crowd, adhere to the timetable or navigate the network become obstacles, clogging the flow. Those either failing, struggling, or resisting to adapt to the new are weeded out as if by natural selection. We may think of public transit as a cultural technique inscribing certain routines and patterns in public space and delegating how human bodies move through space as a collective, as well as a lens that impacts humans’ subjective views and understanding of their surrounding environment.
To successfully navigate the cityscape, one had to become equal parts flâneur and passenger, and know how to effectively and quickly transition between the two modes of movement, and by extension, frames of perception. The passenger experience supplements the emphasis on spectatorship and performativity that well-known figures such as Georg Simmel, Franz Hessel, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin have tied to the flâneur and urban street life. Akin to the spatial dialectic between the static inside of a moving vehicle and the view of the hectic outside world, there are important differences between the wandering flâneur and riding passenger to keep in mind. In contrast to the passenger, the wandering flâneur sets his own pace and has ample opportunity to experience his surroundings as a coherent entity, whereas the former has a much more limited amount of time to process his surroundings and orient himself in relation to the cityscape flashing by outside—or in the case of underground travel, barely any visual input at all. Consequently, the processes of reading, reconciling, and digesting the impressions generated by and in urban space stem from the tension between various modes of moving in and seeing the city. Now, we may once again want to draw a connection to the BVG-sneaker as an analogy for a successful and seamless transition between walking and commuting, a shift in forms of movement and frames of perception that was experienced as equally stimulating and perplexing in the early history of public transit.

Further, we are familiar with the discourse of sensory overstimulation in metropolitan cities from seminal twentieth century intellectuals, such as Simmel and Benjamin. Simmel informs us that sensory overstimulation in the city leads to a blasé attitude, a self-defense mechanism that trains people to numb their senses to help them cope with urban life. Simmel’s work helps us understand that people adopt different kinds of behavior in different spaces, and what we have seen throughout the dissertation are several examples of people learning how to navigate between
spaces of turmoil and calm, speed, and slowness, in and around Berlin’s transit system. While the traditional Simmelean understanding of the relationship between the modern city and human Geistesleben, I emphasize the importance of urban subjects as moving entities—as passengers—rather than all that which is in movement around them, in exploring how urban subjects perceive and “read” space. Along similar lines, we can also approach the intersections between public transit and the discourse of urban subjectivity and urban life through the lens of Benjamin’s distinction between Erfahrung—the more positive, sustained, and unmediated response to sensory impressions—and Erlebnis—the response characterized by fragmentation, alienation and shock brought about by sensory bombardment. Rather than classifying responses to transit as one or the other, however, we see in it facets of both. This duality in experience is particularly important to note since Benjamin was skeptical about the possibility of restoring genuine Erfahrung in capitalist modernity. As Martin Jay informs us about Benjamin’s theory of experience in the modern world: “The continuum of Erfahrung had already been broken by the unassimilable shocks of urban life and the replacement of artisanal production by the dull, non-cumulative repetition of the assembly line. Meaningful narrative had been supplanted by haphazard information and raw sensation in the mass media” (Jay, 48–49). As I have shown throughout the dissertation, the space of public transit not only foregrounds the high velocity and chaos of urban space, but often facilitates moments of introspection and contemplation for the passenger, especially in the underground. While I do not contest Benjamin’s argument regarding the atrophy of Erfahrung in modernity, the chapters have highlighted various ways in which transit space in Berlin constitutes a plethora of experiences and

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2 It is noteworthy that the German noun Erfahrung, as well as the verb erfahren are derived from the old high German irfaran (ervarn middle high German) meaning reisen, durchfahren, erreichen (“Erfahrung”, Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache). This connection between the focus of this dissertation on transit and the etymology of the German word for experience further cements the intrinsic connection between movement through space and human experience.
modes of perception, some of which do not jive with the familiar image of the modern/post-modern city in literature and film as fragmented and disjointed. Rather than working around this dichotomy in experience, we can posit the transit space as a key location for artists and other intellectuals to engage with experiences revolving around the fragmented overstimulation of the city, as well as a space that induces retreat into one’s mind. Both aspects ought to be considered distinctly modern phenomena.

Chapter one focused on early literary representations and popular discussion revolving around intra-urban transit in Berlin, foregrounding the modern and industrial image with which trams, rails and trains provided the cityscape. As Berlin was transforming from a city framed and contained by a medieval city wall and narrow alleyways to a bustling city of broad roads and rails, the human eye not only had new things to look at, but also a new vantage point from which both the “old” and “new”, the “bourgeoisie,” “industrial,” and the “proletarian” neighborhoods could be seen. While connecting them to each other by means of a transportation network might at first glance signal notions of unity and cohesion, the different neighborhoods and surrounding areas of Berlin were plagued by social, political, administrative, and economic divisions. Such divisions are likewise reflected in artistic engagement with the transit network throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the early phases of construction and usage of public transit networks—particularly the Stadt- and Ringbahn—writers’ and other artists’ responses were divided. As we saw in Fontane’s and Dominik’s observations, they pointed out the majestic and modern pillars and pylons of the elevated tracks and marveled at the upscale station buildings around the city center. What they failed to see, however, was the negative impact on businesses and homes in Berlin’s poorer neighborhoods. The implementation of the network led to a re-structuring of the city’s economy at large. Large factories relocated to the city outskirts now that
the work force could commute there, overpowering small, local family businesses. If we revisit
the story of Meister Timpe, we remember that the construction of the Stadtbahn across the Timpe
family’s property had large-scale ramifications on the private home space, as well as the public
neighborhood. The new, grandiose living spaces and workplaces emerging around the station of
the newly implemented traffic artery become the norm of what is modern, casting a long dark
shadow—sometimes in a very literal sense—over people, places, and objects reminiscent of a
bygone era.

Against the backdrop of the electrification of the network in the early 1900s, the trams,
trolleys and trains picked up pace. The ensuing sense of acceleration of day-to-day life in Berlin
comes to the fore in the texts analyzed in the second chapter. The characteristics of urban space
grew inextricably connected to the incessant movement of people in different directions, and at
varying elevations, throughout the city body. Döblin’s Berlin Alexanderplatz centers around one
of Berlin’s largest transit hubs, the Alexanderplatz, and uses this location as a synecdoche of Berlin
at large. Along a similar vein, Ruttmann’s film Berlin, Sinfonie der Großstadt foregrounds
transience over longevity, superfluity over depth, and information overload over a coherent
narrative in his filmic montage. Both the texts depict Berlin as an entity powered and dictated by
electricity, motion, and ephemerality. The challenges presented by transit in these works, in
contrast to what we saw in the previous chapter, are attributed less to the social or economic life
of individuals, but rather to the human sensory system. The high velocity and quantity of vehicles
passing through Berlin, and the sudden and fleeting views of the city from within a transit vehicle,
constitute a visual duality around which artistic representations, as well as popular debates
revolving around urbanity and Berlin, center. We can also trace this duality to the level of form in
city narratives from the time, as they employ narrative devices and editing techniques that
foreground the high velocity and disjointed visual impressions that characterize modern metropolitan life. For example, the literary montage and cross-cut edits accentuate simultaneity of events and actions in urban space rather than a sequential narrative structure. The reader’s or viewer’s exposure to this information overload can be compared to the passenger’s visual experience while in transit, portraying a fractured rather than a connected, cohesive cityscape.

Parallel to depictions of overstimulation and bombardment of the senses that accompanied public transportation motifs in literature and film, the notion of the “Weekend” as a time to get away from the city to seek out green spaces outside the center, grew in popularity. Of course, the transit system played an important role in helping people leave the city center to visit Berlin’s outlying green areas. This growing trend reminds us that the transit technology was both root and remedy to the perceived hectic nature of urban existence. In other words, it was understood not only as integral in the formation of urban space and representations thereof, but likewise a gateway to leave or seek refuge from urban space proper. Further, with the onset of the “Weekend” trend there was an influx of representations of personal motor vehicles, such as the automobile and motorbike, targeting young urban consumers in popular media. Several products were advertised as necessary to achieve the degree of relaxation to recharge for the next week, and the location of consumption was either implicitly or explicitly indicated to lay outside the urban environment: To fully enjoy your gramophone, tobacco, and swimwear, you were encouraged to leave the city.

In chapter three we followed the passenger into the subterranean Berlin U-Bahn. Entry into the underground transit space was by and large depicted as an act of transgression. The subterranean dark tunnels and dimly lit stations appear distant and displaced from the atmosphere of the aboveground city. The disconnect, I argue, stems from a crisis in the readability of the city, as the darkness and stillness of the underground sever the strong link between visual perception
and urban subjectivity that we recognize from intellectual and artistic engagement with Berlin from the time. The loud, dazzling, and stress-inducing surface culture of Weimar Berlin is largely absent from the underground. Rather than being subjected to visual bombardment, the human sense of sight gets turned on its head; the subway passenger is confronted by the very lack of vision. Thus, the underground transit space holds potential to experience urban space, and contemplate one’s role within it, from a new perspective. Although not a space actively sought after as a means of escapism, in the way green spaces on the city outskirts are, stories of subway travel depict the underground as a sanctuary, a space that brings respite from the bustling streets above. The darkness and stillness of the tunnels between stations present an opportunity for the passenger to direct their attention inward. The internal landscape of the individual forms the primary source of stimuli for the duration of the journey rather than the cityscape flashing by outside. In addition to navigating and adapting to the shifts in perspective and velocities of walking and commuting, the changing elevation between the layers of the city is equally important to bring into the foreground in discussions pertaining to the urban experience. Indeed, the elevation at which passengers travel seems to shape the experience of public transit much more than velocity, or even time spent in the vehicle. The difference between above- and belowground transit space also becomes apparent in terms of how the passenger navigates between the street level entrance and the underground platform. The various depictions of the underground subway space attribute the moments of shock and confusion to the transition between above and below, rather than a shift in speed. The subway passenger develops a unique set of skills and performances that help him seamlessly move between contained tunnel and open street; tunnel-vision and peripheral vision.

If we zoom out and consider the change over time we see across the various chapters, we identify two contrasting ideas in representations of public transit and its impact on Berlin life. The
primary associations in the literary, filmic, and other visual representations we have encountered in the chapters tend to cluster around two different literary topoi: stable circulation and electric nervous impulse. These notions of circulation and impulse, and the metaphorical field with which they are associated, are both key in understanding how city dwellers responded to the presence of the public transit network, as they underscore to what extent and degree the individual perceives changes in urban space as benefactory or detrimental. Akin to the circulatory system of the human body and the modern market economy, a healthy city necessitated a steady and reliable flow of the working force, consumers, and goods. Since at least the eighteenth century, metaphors of circulation are part and parcel of representations of the metropolis, and they continue to form a backdrop for the representation of transportation throughout modernity. Beginning in the early twentieth century, however, this circulatory imagery with its rational and economic implications was counteracted by writers and other artists who, adopting their metaphors and imagery from the realm of the nervous system rather than the circulatory system, foregrounded the sudden expressions, incoherent experiences, and illusory qualities of transit space. Rather than fortifying and establishing streamlined movements through urban space, the new modes of transit threw into disarray the human senses and understanding of time and movement through space. In contrast to the image of good circulation in the “economy” of the healthy city body, the quick and accelerated pace of life associated with modern transportation technology highlight a process of adaptation in the human sensory system. As a circulatory system, the transit network generated a spatial reconfiguration that changed how people move through Berlin in their day-to-day lives, resulting in new relationships between people, work, and home; and the notion of nervous impulse provides a lens to explore the ways in which the human sensory experience of urban space is contingent on the new transportation technology.
If we consider the city as a “text,” then the transit network inevitably influences its composition, and by extension how we read and write it. The issue of space and textuality, however, also comes to the fore when analyzing the interior spaces of the transit network, such as the vehicles and station buildings. Transit hubs and vehicles were saturated with text from early on in their history, ranging from maps of the network and wayfinding signs to navigate the station, to advertisements for various products. Along similar lines, transit maps, with their dots and lines, present a highly abstracted form of urban space. The distances, angles, and lines as represented on transit maps are unrealistic and lack geographical features. However, the degree of abstraction and distortion has changed significantly over time. Maps of Berlin’s public transit network from the late nineteenth century bear closer resemblance to atlas maps but owing to the network’s rapid development in the early twentieth century, legibility necessitated abstraction. Going forward, we want to consider the impact that these texts exert over urbanites’ imagination of their city and their sense of self and orientation. Such a reading of transit maps and advertisements as “living” references can further expand on this project’s literary and visual analyses of novels, films, and periodical culture.

Taking all these different responses, perspectives, and representations of transit into account, we see that the network has held a twofold function as connector and disruptor in the spatial imaginary of Berlin. One could certainly object that other transportation technologies, such as the railway or airplane travel—or even, in more recent memory, the internet or AI technology—have similar effects on individuals. They enable us to go places, both in a literal and figurative sense, and impact human perception of space and time, as well as our understanding of identity,

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3 Interesting work along these lines has been done for railway maps and the London tube. See for further reference: Daniel Häni, Trans Europ Express: Plakatkunst – Poster Art – Art de l’affiche; Maxwell J. Roberts, Underground Maps Unravelled: Explorations in Information Design.
communities, and belonging. Yet, public transit, unlike these other technologies, grew to be synonymous with the notion of urban modernity in Berlin. Much like Paris’s Eiffel Tower, New York’s skyscrapers or London’s tube, the Berlin public transit network was highlighted as a symbol of the industrial city and an ensuing new age, one anchored in the local fabrics of urban space. Public transit in Berlin may no longer evoke associations of “modern” and “progress,” yet it continues to remain integral in the formation of the urban imagination. In the twenty-first century, public transit vehicles and stations remain a staging ground for various encounters and daily activities, in and through which we live and experience urban space, and a location in which Berlin history and narratives of life in Berlin commune daily.

My decision to end the analysis in the 1930s can be attributed to the historical upheavals of subsequent decades, but this decade in no way marks the end of the significance of the transportation network as an emblem of Berlin’s modernity (or postmodernity); or of its role in the formation of urban subjectivities. I want to conclude by considering more closely a few specific historical moments that are chronologically beyond the scope of the dissertation, but which promise to open new perspectives on the relationship between Berlin’s history, its residents, and its transit network.

The dissertation has mainly focused on the male experience, male bodies, and predominantly male cultural figures such as the flâneur, which warrants a closer look at how the public transit system has shaped the female experience to provide further insight into the relationship between mobility, space, and gender in Berlin. Both gender (Butler 1990, Deutsch 2007) and space (Lefebvre 1991, Soja 1996, Harvey 1973) are socially constructed. By extension, who and what we find in certain spaces in society reflects social norms, power dynamics, and
gender relations.\textsuperscript{4} Given the precarious role of unaccompanied women in late nineteenth-century cities, it would be interesting to further examine the link between the rise of public transit and women’s increasing prevalence in public space. In her 2014 article Gender and Urban Space, Daphne Spain explores the ways in which U.S cities have reflected and reinforced gender relations from the late nineteenth century to the present. She mentions the streetcar as one contributor to women’s increased participation in the labor force and consumption culture, and likewise points out how codes of conduct changed as more women began to frequently use public transit, as both men and women were expected to give up their seats for the elderly, rather than the older custom of men giving up their seats to the ladies (Cf. Spain 2014, Sewell 2011). To what extent have female bodies in Berlin transit space been preserved in artistic representations of, and discussions of urban life, and what do we make of them? For example, female workers in the transportation sector during the World Wars can serve as a point of departure to broaden the perspective on the ways in which transit space shapes the urban experience, providing an interesting foil to the current thesis by expanding on questions of belonging and exclusion in urban space. How would, for example, the presence of female employees in the transportation sector called upon to work in wartime, jive with the ideas of circulation and nervous impulse, or shed light on urban dwellers’ conception of who and what belongs in public city space? Besides the female transportation worker, a more detailed and historical analysis of how often male and female passengers used the public transit system, and for what purposes, can help us understand how public transportation

\textsuperscript{4} Kate Henderson explores in an article how urban mobility functioned as a motor for cultivating a gendered, modern consciousness in New Woman short fiction. See: Henderson, Kate Krueger. "Mobility and Modern Consciousness in George Egerton's and Charlotte Mew's Yellow Book Stories." English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920, vol. 54 no. 2, 2011, p. 185-211. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/article/407402.
undermines or reinforces, for example, domesticity, women’s sphere, entertainment-, consumer-, and media culture.

While writers, historians, and literary scholars have highlighted and problematized the train’s status as a symbol of modernity, progress, mobility, and freedom throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, railway space would take on a whole new array of overtones against the backdrop of the second World War and the Holocaust. Deportation is closely connected to Holocaust victims’ trauma and collective memory and constitutes a key site in several literary and filmic representations of forced deportation between ghettos, labor camps and death camps. Scholars such as Raul Hilberg (The Destruction of the European Jews 1961), Todd Presner (Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, Trains 2007), and Simone Gigliotti’s (The Train Journey: Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing in the Holocaust 2009) provide detailed historical studies on the topic and reveal several facets of the intersections between Holocaust victims’ experiences and transit. However, they fall short of providing information about the role of intra-city transportation in moving Jewish and other minority populations and groups between places in and around cities. In 1933, 32 percent (~160,000 people) of the German Jewish community resided in Berlin, and while nearly half of them emigrated from Nazi Germany, the majority of those remaining were deported from Berlin to ghettos and killing centers across eastern Europe. Synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, and community centers were used as makeshift assembly points from where large groups of people were taken to long-distance rail stations, most commonly the Grunewald station, but the Anhalter and Putlitz street station were also frequently used for deportation (Cf. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “The Jewish Community of Berlin.” Holocaust Encyclopedia). Yet, we know very little about how people were taken from the different assembly points to the rail stations. Indeed, in 2020 the Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz issued a
call for photographs and other documentation to help fill this blank space in history: “Gibt es dort [zu Hause in Fotoalben] vielleicht (auch unscharfe) Fotos von Gruppen von – meist älteren – Menschen, die mehr oder weniger deutlich von Uniformierten bewacht die Straße heruntergehen; auf LKW oder in Straßenbahnen verladen werden? Gibt es vielleicht Bilder von Menschen, die mit Gepäckstücken beladen vor einem Gebäude, an einer Straßenbahnhaltestelle, an Güterbahnhöfen oder vor Güterwaggons stehen?” (Tkalec, “Wer besitzt Fotos von Juden-Deportationen in Berlin?”) In addition to further examining the intersections of public transportation, the organization of large-scale deportation and the individual experience thereof in Berlin, it is worth noting that Jewish people were only allowed to ride public transit with a special permit starting in 1941. This ban of certain passengers not only constitutes a clear gesture of who is excluded from public transit space—and consequently part of Berlin’s public identity—the ban also impacted personal mobility. Given how commuting by bus, S-, or U-Bahn had become an integral part in daily life by the 1930s, for school kids and adult workers alike, the ban must have been experienced as discriminatory and detrimental to the practices of everyday life in Berlin.

The deportation trains imprinted new associations of the train and railway motifs in our consciousness, the Berlin U-Bahn tunnel network takes on a new role as shelter during the air raids over Berlin in the Second World War. The Berlin based historical society, Berliner Unterwelten, offers guided tours through the Berlin underground, showing shelters and bunkers that were used in wartime. The usage of the U-Bahn transit space as shelter provides an interesting foil to many of the ideas that we explored in the third chapter, such as the U-Bahn’s inherent “otherness” vis-a-vis the hectic city above. As of now, I have yet to find texts that deal with the experience of seeking shelter from bombs in the subway, but I deem it integral in further fleshing out the intersections between transit space and the production of urban space in twentieth century Berlin,
especially since several new shelters were built in response to the fear of nuclear warfare during the Cold War. I do not suggest that underground shelters and subway travel are commensurable experiences in terms of their respective functions and roles in day-to-day life. However, by comparing representations of the underground space from these two different perspectives, we may be able to learn more about how being underground shapes individual and communal experience and memory.

We can locate another fascinating intersection of transportation and Berlin history and cultural life during the time of German division following the Second World War. The division of Berlin was particularly complicated given the geographic location of West Berlin, a lonely island in a Soviet sea. Starting in the 1950s, the stations of the transit network took on a new function as borders and crossings between the two Berlins (and by extension, Germanys). Yet, it remained a powerful symbol to the entire Berlin population. In a 1954 address to the SED district leadership in Berlin, Max Frenzel, leader of the municipal department of traffic in East Berlin states the following: “Die Erfahrung hat bewiesen, dass die Frage des einheitlichen Verkehrs von der Bevölkerung immer außerordentlich stark beachtet wurde. In dieser Frage zeigt sich, wie tief im Bewusstsein aller Berliner die Frage der Einheit der Stadt verwurzelt ist, gleichgültig von welchem politischen Standpunkt aus er das sieht” (Lemke 72). At the same time, however, the transit network had grown into a huge problem for the GDR. In the years 1959/60, approximately 14 000 GDR citizens fled to the FRG monthly, many of which crossed the border riding the S-Bahn (Effner 32). The transit system became central to narratives of flight and the prevention thereof, and as the GDR administration methodically directed their efforts toward keeping West Berlin
contained and inaccessible to their citizens, we see how the links previously connecting the dots of the network are severed, splitting the former Weltstadt into West- and Oststadt.⁵

With the erection of the Berlin Wall, the transit network was further altered to underscore the city’s enforced division. While the Wall succeeded in physically containing West Berlin, many passengers in the West “visited” the East on a daily basis. Along the U-Bahn lines C and D (today U6 and U8) which started and ended in the West, a total of 11 stations were located below East Berlin. Likewise, along the North-South route of the S-Bahn, a total of four stations were on Eastern soil, including the famous border checkpoint Friedrichstraße. As one of the gateways between East and West, the Friedrichstraße station became a site of greetings and farewells for the rare and short re-unions of divided families—consequently acquiring the nickname Das Tränenpalast.

The stations bypassing the borders enforced by the Wall all are emblematic of the politics of space that governed life in Berlin in the Cold War, as they highlight how close, yet far away the worlds of communism and capitalism passed each other like ships in the night. The stations under East Berlin became known in the West as Geisterbahnhöfe. A passenger on the U6 or U8 would hear an announcement at the last station before the border “Achtung! Letzter Bahnhof in Berlin,” after which the train would proceed to drive at a much slower pace until re-entering West Berlin. On the dark platforms, the attentive passenger might catch glimpse of armed border guards hiding behind a pillar, or the brick walls sealing off the platform entryway. Moreover, while little could be seen of West Berlin in the East due to strict censorships and heavily guarded borders, if they listened closely, they might still hear the rumbling of the Western trains passing by below the city

⁵ Other noteworthy events from the 1950s include the new Außenring that the DDR constructed around West Berlin, as well as instances of successful and attempted kidnappings in the border stations of individuals from the West ordered by the MfS. See Sältzer and Schaller (eds) Grenz- und Geisterbahnhöfe im geteilten Berlin for more details.
center. This interlocking of the everyday and uncanny that dominates the *Geisterbahnhöfe* are remarkably not all that different from many of the representations of subway travel from the 1920s, as they emphasize the connection between the underground and an unknown, mysterious, and potentially dangerous “elsewhere.” However, the boundary between the real and the imagined threats in the underground has grown considerably narrower.

In more recent memory, the stations, and trains of the S- and U-Bahn may no longer be as evocative of “modernity” as they once were. Yet they remain central to life in Berlin. The transit network continues to facilitate day-to-day journeys between places of work, leisure, home, and commerce, and is likewise a central space for many contemporary issues that pertain to questions of community and belonging, inclusion, and exclusion. Transit stations today are sites where the salaried masses hurry along, purposefully casting glances away from the homeless on the ground; where street musicians entertain, and doomsday prophets preach; where the *Spießbürger* sits across the social justice warrior; where the middle-aged couple on their way back from the philharmonic cross paths with a rowdy group of teenagers; and where the black business pumps scurry across the platform next to a pair of red, black and blue *Flecktarn* adidas shoes.
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Addendum (poems)

“Untergrundbahn.” Hellmuth Wetzel. Published in Die Aktion (Nr. 50, December 1912)

Wie immer:
Rotlederne Polster und blankes Metall im Licht,
Das im Stoss der Schienen schüttert,
Hart losjagen, gedruckt in die Hallen gepeitscht,
Giftig die Bremsen in die Räder beissend,
Mit nervösem Fauchen, in einer Sturzwelle von
Luft und Lärm,
Die jäh über die Stirne der Dächer nach vorne
prallt

Und durch die Fenster schlägt. —
Und ich vor dir:
Meine Augen ewge Wandrer zwischen deinen
Haaren, deinen Händen
Zu den Schuhen, die das Lächeln ungeahnter
Räusche tragen,
Auf den Lippen bunte Tänzer mit den Fahnen
meines blöden Knabenlächelns,
Das mich Bergen soll . . . So wirft sich
Hinterrücks mit uns der Zug in die saugende
Nacht der Tiefe
Und schleift den Lärm seiner Fahr an den
hallenden Wänden hin,
Im geheimen Blinzeln unverstandner Lichtsignale,
Und an Reihen träber gelber Birnen vorbei,
aus denen manchmal
Eine blaue Laterne kalt in unsre Gespräche
leuchtet . . .
“Hoch- und Untergrundbahn.” Oskar Kanehl. Published in Die Aktion (Nr, 46/47, November 1914)

Eiserne Muskeln.
Eiserne Arme reichen einander Züge zu,
die uns tragen.
Über dem Gewöhnlichen
hält uns eiserne Sicherheit.
Unter uns kocht der Tag.
Menschen brodeln. Wagen und Automobile.
Farbengesumm. Lichtgeschrei.
Wir gleiten. Wir gleiten.
Häuserspießbrutenlaufen.
Wie ein Lauscher kriecht man die Fenster entlang.
Wir Störenfriede.
Wo küszen sich zwei.
Da schreibt ein moderner Dichter.
Betten werden gemacht. Kaffee getrunken.
Ein Rohling schlägt eine Frau.
Wir schweigen. Wir steigen.
Über ein Eisenbahnschienenfeld,
über Elektrische in der dritten höchsten Brückenetage
spielt unsre Spur.
Durch Eisengestänge,
wie hoch oben in gotischen Kuppeln,
wo Gott wohnt.
Geleise sprechen gegen uns an
mit bunten Wagen,
wie Lanzenreiter.
Wir fahren ein Haus entzwei.
Aller Widerstand splitter
vor dem bohrenden Willen unsrer Maschine.
Kurze Atempause an Haltestellen.
Treppengelauf. Reklamewände.
Ein- und Aussteigen in Eile.
Dann überfahren wir wieder
Kanäle und Plätze,
rasieren Kirchen, hetzen
über Sodom und Gomorrah.
Plötzlich sind wir klein und mitten darin.
Auf gleicher Höhe
neben dem stückrigsten Omnibus
und jedem Schubkarren.
Ernüchtert.
Für einen Augenblick.
Dann sinken wir, schwinden wir.
Und auf abschüssiger Gleitbahn
fallen wir wehrlos unter die Tagwelt.
Licht flammt auf. Augen schmerzen.
Aber es stößt uns ind schiebt uns und zieht und jagt.
Wir stürzen durch dunkle Schächte
wie flüchtend vor Grubengewittern.
Manchmal, wie feiger Überfall,
schmeißt aus dem düsteren Hinterhalt
uns eine Flamme die Scheibe ein.
Es ist so kalt und so laut.
Sind wir lebendig begraben?
Müde mahlt uns der Mut.
Scharren und Knarren.
Bremst und hält.
Im Lichthof eines Bahnhofs unter der Erde. —
Herr Meier mir gegenüber tut,
als wäre das alles selbstverständlich
und saugt gemein an der B.Z.