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Narrating Berlin. A kaleidoscopic exploration of notions around memory, identity and home

Abstract
Berlin is as popular as never before. By word of mouth an image of the city has spread which evokes a nearly mythical idea of it being a place of endless possibilities and unlimited self-realisation. Thus, every year thousands of people from all over the world decide to pack their belongings and start a new life in the city of their dreams. More than ever Berlin has become a location of multicultural encounters and constantly shifting borders through gentrification and migration.
The article explores how places are created through storytelling. It looks at the potential of the "narrated space" in respect to identity and ideas of "Heimat". Through psychogeographical walks with different participants these questions are unravelled and demonstrate in what way new Berliner citizens create bonds with the space they live in through the stories they internalise.

Keywords
Berlin, place, storytelling, narration

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During the 50s and 60s the Situationists and Lettrists, around people such as Guy Debord, used a playful method in order to conduct research about space and place, and the way people react to and connect with it. This method became known as psychogeography (see Coverley 2006). Researching the relationship between people and their environment is more relevant than ever, with issues around gentrification and migration in the focus of many debates and policies all around the world.

With technology advancing quickly and global communication ready at hand, processes of change are fast becoming more evident. With this push towards globalisation, it seems previously established concepts alter their meaning. If it is true that, as Caroline Mill states, "people make sense of their social identity in terms of their environment" (1993: 150), how then do people create a sense of identity and a feeling of home, in a world that encourages, and often demands the pursuit of a transitory life?

In this article I want to explore this issue through the connection with narration and memory. Similar to Walter Benjamin's "A childhood in Berlin around 1900 (Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert)" (1938) and Franz Hessel's "Walking in Berlin (Spazieren in Berlin)" (1929) the stories I am going to weave into this article will serve as images created by words, imitating the way we remember. Like the changing patterns of a kaleidoscope, every time we remember, we remember different fragments, in varying orders. Thus, I am going to combine different fractions of memories, recorded during psychogeographical walks in Berlin. I conducted the psychogeographical walks in order to grasp how people establish a relationship with the place they live in. These stories will be divided into three different categories and each section will be linked to one picture, which, in the process of narrating, will assume a deeper meaning.

Psychogeography and Photography

An image holds the possibility to convey understanding beyond that of the text, yet at the same time it is also dependent on the meaning associated to it through text (see Daniels and Cosgrove 1993). This dialectic relationship is reflected in the Western favouritism of sight as a pathway to true knowledge, whilst at the same time holding a deep suspicion against images as truthful depictions of 'reality', as it is also the case in the social sciences (Long 2007: 4f; Daniels and Cosgrove 1993: 59; Schneider and Wright 2010: 1). And indeed there is the temptation and danger, and as can be seen, a trend, in the use of photography and film to aestheticise what they depict, rather than to focus on knowledge production (Schneider and Wright 2010: 2). Yet, nonetheless, if one is aware of the underlying discourses and debates, and because of their openendedness, visual methods can also be useful, especially when working in the field. Rather than trying to represent the outcome of fieldwork in equally "artificially crafted texts, that frequently enclose forcible completion", they can help overcome the dichotomy of the synchronicity of fieldwork and the diachronicity of field 'reality' (ibd.: 20; 12). This potential of visual methods also interested me as part of my research in Berlin. Photography in combination with psychogeographical wanderings seemed to be a medium which touches on a lot of the issues related to subjects such as memory, the link between visual and text and its significance for the production of meaning through narration.

In the context of psychogeography, photos are usually used for the visual representation of the places participants talk about. As discussed above, it is here where the ascription of meaning becomes specifically obvious: A photograph on its own can appear quite without any specific meaning.

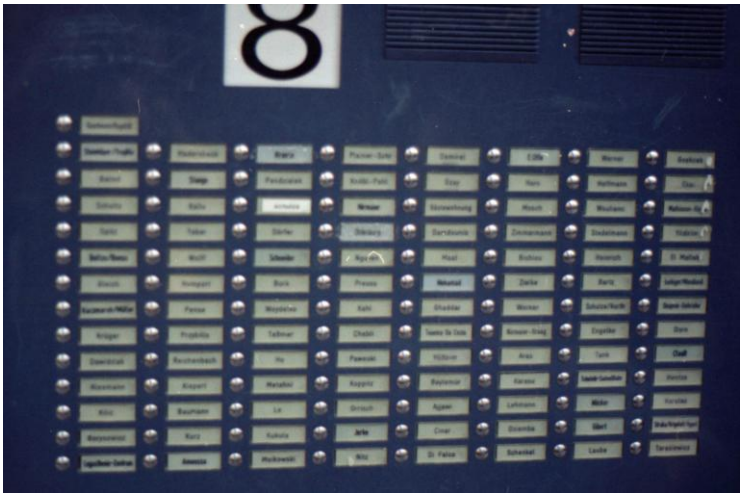
Photographs need to be contextualised in order to reveal their *specific* intention or significance – should there be one (see Long 2007: 4f: 47 and 122). It is this what happens in the process of psychogeography, when using photography. It shows that photos unfold a special meaning and potential within a context, creating this childlike sense of wonder that Walter Benjamin talks about in his writings, by linking the banal, ordinary with little stories, which make the objects depicted on the photos shine in a different light. Thus, photography is especially apt as a medium for urban explorations.

Photography has often been criticised as a potential mode of forgetting, sparking the loss of authentic memory (Long 2007: 116; 94). Memory becomes externalised and material, yet only if there is a concurrent process of contextualisation. If the "contextualiser", the person holding certain memories to a photograph, is not present in order to relate this context, this intended meaning is rendered obsolete. Thus here again the link between verbal and visual becomes evident, just as it does when generally speaking about memory, which also works on basis of these two levels (ibd.: 47; 113).

I was curious how I could represent the creation of meaning, a process which is concordant with the making of history and the shaping of our identities. Photography in this respect appeared to resemble what I wanted to explore – the creation of place, that is, the assigning of meaning to space and specific sites. Without context, they are seemingly meaningless, abound with, and open to, a number of interpretations.

The three categories in this essay are titled mapping, identity and home. The italicised parts of this essay are direct quotes or narrated elements, which result from the psychogeographical walks I conducted. Comments and interpretations of these interviews and my experience appear as normal text.

Mapping Berlin



Suddenly it is there, looming in front of us. High-rises as far as the eye can see. Although Robert1 had prepared me for the sight, it came unexpected. The Märkische Viertel, a town-in-itself, the place where Robert spent most of his childhood and teenage years, appeared like a vision in the middle of suburbia. "The West Berliners were looking for a big area which could be used to house many people, especially for people in social need. And then they created this massive bloc (…), with a shopping mall in the middle, so that they wouldn´t have to go to the Ku'damm and bother the beautiful people there… and an industrial area so that they could work right here, too. It's a massive thing." Robert waves his hand at the tall buildings in front of us. "You can imagine how many people they caged in here. I mean nowadays you kind of know what an effect this has, nowadays you can say they were caged in. Even if it wasn't intended like that initially."
We cycle through the streets, the buildings cast their shadows on us. There are rows of trees and clean-cut hedges along the paths connecting the houses, and on the spaces among the buildings which are designated as parking space.
"Well, looking at this, now that I am back here, they did try. They tried to make it liveable, they just underestimated the social dynamics. I think it´s important – you just can´t throw that many people in one pot. They tried to balance it out, but it doesn't work." Robert shows me his old way to school, which leads right through the Märkische Viertel. Even his school was within the bounds of this enclosed, city-like area of high-rises. "It's funny, that's something I wanted to tell you, the Märkische Viertel is like a ghetto, surrounded by… well, in the north and west by the upper middleclass (…) and in the south by middleclass people and in the east by a mix, the east is generally mixed, it wasn´t as divided into different classes as it was in the west."

The "ghetto"-like character of the Märkische Viertel created a particular sense of identity within its inhabitants.

"Most of the people who I grew up with, who lived in this area, were sure nothing great would become of them. (…) And if something became of them, it means they are time contractors or something, who drink away their wages in pubs, or people on the dole – that´s the best part of them. The absolutely greater part of them are criminals or really at the bottom of being criminal, junkies or something."
We stop in front of his old house. "No way!" exclaims Robert. "This is my old neighbour." He points at one of the many names on the doorbell signs. There are rows and rows of them, and this is just one bloc of houses among the many. It really dawns on me now, how many people live in this area.

A little later we leave the Märkische Viertel. Suddenly we are surrounded by fields, and then we enter a village with neat front gardens. There is a girl leading a horse off a paddock. "As a teenager I always thought they only put all this here to show me what I am missing out on."

[1] Robert moved to Berlin at the age of six. He grew up in the Märkische Viertel and now lives in Wedding, Berlin. He is the creative head of an institution for political education.

And not only the social disparities created borders. There was also the wall as a man-made border restricting or influencing people's movements within the city, even after it had come down.

> "I don´t really know this area, even though it's so close [to the Märkische Viertel]. Because this is Pankow and like I said, when I lived here, the wall was still there in people's heads. You didn´t cross this border. And why would you, I mean, what would you have wanted there. We didn't want to know any of the people there and they didn't want to know us."

Robert also explains how the wall and the division of Berlin into East and West influenced the architecture, which developed in Berlin around this time. Thus, Berlin is a city marked by its history maybe more than other cities. Although these borders are now shifting and dissolving, the former separation will be felt for years to come just because of its architectural impacts. In people's minds, especially those who moved here after the reunification, the former division does not influence the way they perceive and explore the city.

When I walked around with different participants, I asked them about their method of "grasping the city". A lot of them said that, when they arrived, they used to do a lot of their initial urban explorations on foot or by bike, avoiding detached, rapid modes of transport whenever possible.

> "I have only been here six months, but I have been travelling around and taken as many different U-Bahns and taken as many different stops - especially when I first came here, I´d spend my days after I got out of class just jumping on an U-Bahn and transfer to different S-Bahns or U-Bahns, and just go to a place of the city that I had never been before just to walk around and get lost. Which is my favourite way of discovering a city, just to getting lost. And then it takes hours and you´ll find your way back eventually. But you end up seeing things and discovering places that you would never... on any map or in any travel book.
> I mean taking busses, taking taxis, taking the S-Bahns and U-Bahns, you have these windows and it´s like kind of, you´re going through the city in this shuttle, this protected little bubble," says Benjamin[2]. "And… to be on a bicycle, to have these two wheels between your legs, being on the streets feeling the wind...in the air and having to deal with traffic and cars and people and all of this you feel just so much more connected and you can go anywhere you want. And again, with like how I like exploring cities and experiencing them, it provides such an amazing way of discovering things that you would never find otherwise. And to get from point A to B in 50 different ways is really cool because you never take the same route there. You know, you can just … wander... and I love wandering."

Similarly, Petra[3] remembers her first contact with the city as a period of aimlessly taking an U- or S-Bahn to different places, walking around on her own wherever the trains would

[2] Benjamin is a philosophy student from the US. He has been living in Berlin since March 2013.
[3] Petra is a student of African Studies. She has been living in Berlin since 2010. She grew up in Romania.

take her.

> "I walked around on my own, until I got tired. And that's my plan for this summer too. I am thinking, I am going to take my bike and then I'll see every street in Berlin. I don't know why I have this plan. I know I'll never be able to achieve this, but I always plan on doing it. And then I have essays to write or I visit my parents in Romania and so I keep living with this feeling that I don´t really know Berlin, or that I don't really understand it. That's always slightly obsessive, compulsive, this idea that I have to see everything, in its totality, every street, so that everything forms a complete image in my head. But I just love this city so much that I have this urge to see more."

Dylan[4] compares different ways of getting around. For him it is interesting to know different paths reaching somewhere.

> "So yeah, I have taken a train here before and it's really not that far of a walk or bike ride because Berlin is a city but if you have the time. You miss a lot when you don't have the time, when you go on trains and stuff, the underground. And so I would connect these places and I'd know how to get there. So – Kottbusser Tor, I usually take the train there. But I know how to walk the fastest route and know which route to take with my bike is the fastest route. And when you do it on the street it's so different to being on the underground in a small compartment."

Getting around the city is also a way for him to memorise his surroundings.

> "I always pay attention to where I am. I am like an ant… like when I go somewhere in the city I lay down a mental pheromone trail of where I have been before you know. And I really like, have a really good memory, I really like don't forget where I have been, so it's not like oh have I been here before because there is a city casino, all the Spätis are everywhere."

Concordant with this way of exploring the city, the aimless wanderings, getting lost in the urban jungle, a lot of the people I walked around with said that they avoided using maps. Maps to them are the stigma of tourists, and they, with the intention of settling down in Berlin, wanted to make a clear distinction between themselves and the tourists visiting the city. Yet, besides this conscious detachment from the image of a tourist, there is another element that comes into play. Maps are not only a means of pointing out the way or helping you to orientate yourself, they are also structures of power relationships, reflecting social values. They organise the hierarchy of space, pointing you to places that are meant to be visited or intended to be perceived as important (Long 2007: 130; 132).

Thus, by rejecting maps as a means of orientation, and by creating your own map through your explorations and personal experience, you can discover a personalised city, a city which you can feel connected with (for the appropriation and personalisation of objects

[4] Dylan is from the US. He came to Berlin to study art, but is currently looking for work in order to pay for German classes to prepare for the entry exam for his course.

and the city see also de Certeau 1980). This was also the case with Nikki[5], who did use maps but also felt their inadequacy for what she needed in order to get to know the city.

> "I look at maps all the time. And if someone tells me of a place then I get my map out to find out where it is on the map – just out of interest, even if I don't go there, just to get a sense of where stuff is. But I think walking around is the main thing that I do. I am quite rubbish at reading maps and also I have got a terrible memory but I remember things like… like this square I remember. And like this place is quite a big… like this brings up a lot of memories up for me. Because my sister brought me here for a vegan waffle breakfast, on my first morning. And it was the first time I had an experience of going out and being able to get a vegan breakfast."

In order to gain knowledge, the flickers of recognition in urban space, we can construct maps "not as 'mirrors' of a pre-given world, but as 'modes of access, ways of orienting ourselves to the concrete world we inhabit' (Raymond Boisvert 1996: 65; cited by Bingham and Thrift 1990: 292). This leads us back to the "narrativisation" of spaces into places, as it happens when we make a city our own and create a sense of identity through our environment. Personal maps, which are based on our personal experience can reshape power relations and hierarchies by treating them as overlapping territories and intertwined histories rather than static entities (Gregory 1990: 327). "More specially, considering particularly the word's double etymology, we might talk of 'legends': legends as stories of their own right, and legends as aids in reading a map, of making sense of a world." (Bingham and Thrift 1990: 292). This way, we can constitute something which Donna Haraway calls a "cartography of identities" (Gregory 1990: 335) – a method which would certainly allow us to understand urban processes in the light of gentrification and migration better. "Continual attention to content will ensure that the geometries 'come alive' and become energised by the real everyday struggles that people face when seeking to negotiate their way around (often acutely unhelpful) geographies of production, reproduction, and consumption." (Philo 1990: 227)

At the same time as I hoped to create personal cartographies, I also noticed that the way people perceived and interacted with Berlin was based on drawing borders around certain areas and ascribing "identities" to places; identities which recurred with the same areas but were ascribed to them by different people. This is something which Gregory remarked in his ordeal to "rescue" geography from geometry, the particular from the general, or experience from "fact", whilst still respecting the differences that spatial structures necessarily make on the conduct of social life (Philo 1990: 227). We have to be able to differ between these naturally occurring differences and the borders that are being put in place by power structures, although it is not always easy to distinct the two. In this context Edward Said talked about "rethought geography", describing an awareness of ideologies surrounding and constructing place (Gregory 1990: 335). Talking to the participants of my psychogeographical walks, I came across different methods of drawing borders. Some of them seemed to construct borders based on social factors, which were partly experienced and partly embedded in a broader discourse, which had been taken on by the participants. Other borders were, due to Berlin's history, of a more geographical nature. It was interesting to hear

[5] Nikki moved from Manchester, UK to Berlin in June 2013. She is working as a cook in a vegan restaurant.

that the different Kieze evoked very similar images in the participants' minds. Here geographical and social distinctions were mixed.

> I am walking with Valeska[6], who arrived in Schöneberg, then lived close to the Tempelhof and now has got a room in the so-called Kreuzkölln. We are on the old Tempelhof airport. As we talk about her relationship to the different areas she lived in in Berlin, she says to me, "Berlin developed out of different villages, which are the Kieze nowadays. And yes, I think when people move here they are not moving to Berlin but to different villages. (…) And then you have a different way of living too."

Benjamin was confronted with the different images that the Kieze have in people's eyes from the very beginning.

> "I found out that if you are American studying at the Goethe institute, they always put you in like Charlottenburg or Mitte or Prenzlauer Berg. But if you are from anywhere else they put you in Neukölln or Kreuzberg or Friedrichshain, so any of the like shitty parts of Berlin. But they take all the Americans and put them in the posh places. Which is kind of insulting to me but I also understand that Americans can be very annoying about stuff like that. I think it's two things. I think that because the Goethe institute is so expensive you have a lot of wealthier people coming out. And Americans aren't used to actual travel, so I think they think they'll just send them around a lot of white people. (…) But that's the opposite of me, I like living... around... where things are happening. And where things are changing and where things are... I don't know, where life is pumping. And I think a lot of that's why I ended up here, right by Hermannplatz, because I feel like Hermannplatz is the heart of Berlin."

The Berlin that is known beyond its borders is a very particular Berlin, only describing a few of its many districts.

Petra explains to me that to her Berlin is very fragmented and her knowledge of it is limited to certain places.

"Sometimes I can't even explain to myself what is specific about Berlin. Because, to be honest, to describe Berlin, I would say, yes, Neukölln-Lichtenberg, you should see those areas. And that's not the same, or, for example, I never spend time in Steglitz or… very rarely in Schöneberg and hardly ever in the West in general. I haven't even been to Prenzlauer Berg that much over the past years. (…) You see all the hip parents there and gay couples, who are designers or graphic designers or programmers… It's a cliché. And you don't want to explain it that way, but still, that's exactly what you see."

Through these stories we can see how people draw on history and lived experience when relating to the place they live in. This happens to different degrees, but there is always an awareness of socially embedded memories and embodied memories being at play in this context.

[6] Valeska has lived in Berlin for four years now. She grew up in a town close to Hannover, Germany. She just finished her MA in international politics.

Memory, Narration and Identity

One of the places where the hustle and bustle of Berlin seems to concentrate momentarily, before being released again into different directions, is the Kottbusser Tor. Cars drive below the U1-train, cyclists fight their way around the roundabout, passersby cross the streets on their way home or steering towards one of the many bars on Oranienstraße. Petra walks down the Kottbusser Damm from here, it is the place she always picks to meet friends at, if she doesn't know where else to go. "I think I link a lot of things to do with my identity with a lot of places in Berlin. Because I moved here when I was 18 and my indepen- well, my individual development started here. Because up until I was 18 I lived with my parents and I went to school." Berlin for her is very tied to meeting people who shaped her sense of self. " My Berlin-identity is connected to bars, clubs and the flats of my friends. Or the flat of my ex-boyfriend, because I spent a lot of time there. (…) So generally just places where people are. [The place] where I met my ex-boyfriend is really important to me, it marks a strong point in my development. As a person – because I think a great part of how grown up you are depends on your degree of emotional adulthood. (…) I remember when I was younger, my first love, my first boyfriend – I couldn't walk past the place where we broke up for three years. I have got the same feeling with this place, where I met my other ex, but in a positive way."
As we walk around Neukölln a little later, she stops in front of a bar. "Ah, this is great! It's fashion, art, a café, events…" It's a place I have walked past a few times, but it always seemed to be closed, so I never went inside it. Petra knows some of the people who own the place. She met them through some friends. "These friends have influenced me quite a lot. They made me think. They occupy a big space in my Berlin memories."
She points at a sticker which looks a bit forlorn on the big window it was stuck to. I did not notice it at first. "Ah, this is a friend of mine, Viviana. She is from Romania and a

photographer and performance artist and she also works at the monster cabinet in the Schwarzberg. She comes here quite often. And that's a photo, a self-portrait. That's her sticker. Viviana Dura. Yes."

Memory is creative, a means of being and a strategy of defining ourselves as social beings (Tonkin 1992: 112). Memories and recollections, when we want to share them, are acted out through some form of visual or literal means. They are concepts tied to imagination and narrative (Fuchs 2004: 21ff) through mimesis, the representation of direct speech, and diegesis, the description of nonverbal events. Even the process of *thinking* about the past involves words as a form of representation (Tonkin 1992: 7; 2). Through narration, we establish meaning and create a coherence, which is not given otherwise (Smith 1993: 82). People feel more in control of situations and link to space by creating meaning through the stories they tell (Tonkin 1992: 48). The stories establish a sense of identity and familiarity.

"I am not very typical of a Berliner but I don't even know what a typical Berliner would be. It's so many different things that I think that once you accept the city and have the same revelation as everyone else who has moved to the city and fallen in love with it – then you become a Berliner. (...) I think you become a part of it. (…) And here – I love living here, everyday I am thankful for it, and really appreciate it and love the people and I accepted it and have fallen in love with it and that makes you… you know I don't think that when you are born in a place or you grew up in a place you are automatically that person." Dylan takes me up and down Hermannstraße in Neukölln. At the one end of it, coming from Hermannplatz and walking towards Leinestraße, there are slight signs of gentrification – the odd hip, slightly distressed bar, cyclists with old racers. As we walk further up the street, it becomes more like Neukölln used to be: Turkish and Arabic shops, Döner Kebap places, ugly high-rises.
Benjamin sits down on one of the huge steps opposite the old Görlitzer train station building. A girl starts playing the violin singing loudly. It is quite amazing to hear what power her voice possesses – she entertains everyone sitting around this area, in the café, on the grass, on the steps. Benjamin ponders whether he feels particularly American here or whether his national identity has changed since coming here. "I think maybe living in Berlin, living in this place that's so different I feel comfortable just being whatever, dressing like, expressing whatever it is I feel like. It is so rooted in my family, my blood, and I don't feel the need to rebel against it anymore, I don't feel like it's been imposed on me, I feel like it's much more my decision to dress and live and act the way that I feel and that I feel comfortable with. I have almost become more American living in this... you know, German major city, than I ever was living in the United States. Which is kind of ironic, but also kind of more appropriate. So... it feels more... I don't know, more acceptable almost, than it did in the United States. It felt kind of kitschy and weird there. But here it just feels like... good. Like I have got this Icelandic hair and trying to speak German, wearing this cowboy outfit... like it's... it feels very comfortable. It's not one particular thing but it's a conglomeration of all the things out there which I have experienced... it's funny."

Memory is the underlying glue for the narrativisation of one's life. It is a strategy of defining oneself as a social being (Tonkin 1992: 112). It also lies at the heart of forming concepts of "nation". Roughly speaking, the identity as a nation is established through shared

memories and the consent to live together (Renan 1990: 19). Thus, in the context of this article, looking at issues around home and identity, memory plays an important role. Usually, there is a distinction made between embodied and embedded memories (Fuchs 2004: 28). Embodied memories are of a personal nature, whereas embedded memories are more linked to the social, including social relationships and scenes experienced with other people. These are the kinds of memories we draw upon to (re)interpret the present.

> "As far as I can tell from the stories I have heard and people that I talk to, Berlin is one of the last remaining major metropolitan cities that is still like that, you can still be someone somewhat poor, working in a bar making enough money to survive and you can pay rent and you can go out to drink and go to shows. And you can live very comfortably on a very low budget. And I think that provides for, like I said, just an incredible ability for people to share ideas, for art and creativity just to blossom and flower. But I was also warned about it. Berlin is one of the most creatively inspiring places of the world but you have to be very disciplined. You can get here and feel so inspired to make and create things. (…) that was a lot of my experience getting here, like having all these ideas and thoughts about things to write about but they have been in my head and I wasn't making the time to actually sit down and make them. Which is another part of the reason why I am so excited to have my own flat now and to be here. And not just that but being at a time in my life where I don't feel like moving or going anywhere. And I didn't intend on staying in Berlin, I was planning to go back to Reykjavik, Iceland. ahm.. because I had such a good time there and I did so much and wrote so much but upon getting to Berlin.. I mean it's just... Neukölln itself has the population of all of Reykjavik. So the diversity of life and all the things happening made me want to stay here.
> I really wanted to come see Berlin because of what I had heard about it. And I wanted to experience that myself. And it's funny too that it just happened to coincide with me being more settled and feeling less need to move again and see somewhere else. Because I feel that possibility exists here. And for years I have been talking about wanting to have a home base from which I could go and explore other places but I could always come back to. I could have my library, I could have my desk, I could have my things. And Berlin was perfect for that."

Similarly to the difference between embedded and embodied memories, there is a distinction between different kinds of identities – ones that are shared with the whole group or ones that are particular, meaning they are shared by a given group or individual in relation to others. Then there are singular identities, which describe the differences that distinct a group or individual (Augé 1995: 51).

Since Ben's girlfriend moved in with him, his perception of Neukölln and his way of engaging with it has changed again, through taking in the experiences of her.

> " (…) With Nikki it's been interesting because I got a different perspective on that. Because I am a guy and I don't have to deal with people hollering at me, or like yelling at me or commenting on me. Ahm... But I have become much more aware of that. Which is the other part you get when you live in a place where there's a lot of different cultures. And.... ah... you have to deal with all sides of that part of town."

Relating to embedded memory, Elizabeth Tonkin points out that "(…) memories are less individual than is commonly supposed in a culture of individualism" (1992: 12). The interpretation and contextualisation of our personal lives and identities draw upon this and thus, these are the kinds of memories that supposedly play a crucial role for establishing an identity in relation to our surroundings. Humans and their interactions are always embedded in a societal context (ibd.: 103), or, as Halbwachs put it, blurring borders of memory, imagination and thought: "Everyone recalls, but we recall our responses to the outside world, and so it is the outside world which gives us our understanding of what we individually are." (cited by Tonkin 1992: 104).

> "What really fills this place with life are the people. Through living together stories are created, which really signify a relationship with a place. Through the relationships with different people. And because some of the – like for example the Portuguese couple which I befriended, they don't live in the house anymore and there are other people now. That's like a detachment. If all people were gone, who I had previously known, then the place would still be there, but it wouldn't be the place anymore, which I used to live in." Valeska looks across the Tempelhofer Freiheit, where people are rollerblading and letting kites fly. It is a warm sunny day and people enjoy the space they are granted on this former runway.

As I walk around Friedrichshain with Nikki, she tells me how to her Friedrichshain feels safe and pleasant because it is the place she encountered first when coming to Berlin. Nikki thinks that the way she perceives a place is definitely linked to the people she associates with them. Before she moved to Berlin, her ex-boyfriend had moved here as well.

> "I haven't really wanted to hang out with him to be honest… I think I don't wanna hang out with him. I didn't want to associate... make more associations with Berlin and him. Because I think Manchester was so riddled with that." Now it is mainly her sister and her partner who a lot of memories around this city are linked to, as they are the people who she discovered and explored Berlin with. We walk past a lot of crowded cafés; people are soaking up the sun and enjoy late Sunday breakfasts. Nikki looks at the graffitied walls.
> "The people that live here sort of like to think that they are living on the edge a bit and they like to think that they are bringing up their kids in a sort of real gritty working class environment but they are really not. Because… I mean the amount of people that are sat out here now having lunch or breakfast or whatever, like I don't think that they… I don't imagine that they work in a Späti you know." She pauses, "It's really weird actually, walking around here I've just noticed that it's way more graffitied than Neukölln. But Neukölln is meant to be shittier than Friedrichshain which is strange."

People and places are closely linked. Without people there are no places. It is only through assigning meaning that space turns into place. This what Marc Augé discusses in relation to his idea of non-places. "[P]lace is completed through the word" (ibd. 1995: 77) – there needs to be some kind of creation of meaning involved in the process. To him the anthropological place is social, whereas non-places signify solitude (ibd: 94). Places are also tied in with history, as they bear the traces of past events (Savage 1990: 42). Furthermore,

"places encapsulate and communicate identity" (Mill 1993: 150) But in order to communicate this identity, there needs to be some kind of translation, a means of mediation, involved. If there is no text but a reader, there is nothing to read; but equally if there is a text and no reader, there is nothing to read either. "If we transfer this way of thinking to landscapes, it means that, where there is neither text nor reader, what we see is denoted to a mere physical location with no meaningful associations." (Stock 1993: 316).

As discussed before, when we try to define ourselves, one major point of reference is our environment – the people we are surrounded by, the places we live in (for a discussion of the connection between space, place and perception see also Casey 1996).

This is aided by the representation of past events through storytelling, in which the narrator decides upon the way he or she wants to (re)present themselves to the audience (Tonkin 1992: 48). The process of storytelling is a process of creating fixed meanings. "In addition to innocence, the memorialised event seems to assume a greater reality than the ephemeral experience. In writing or telling, the event is concretised in the symbols of language, and its meaning is closed, or fixed, and at least partly insulated from the disordering influence of multiple reinterpretations." (Smith 1993: 80) During research, we can see this happen too. We intervene in our participants' lives, "asking them to crystallise themselves at this chance moment in time." (ibd.: 67) This also happened when I conducted my psychogeographical walks. Through my questions I certainly pointed people towards certain memories of theirs, and asked them to define themselves more consciously in regards to their environment.

Home

As I walk through the downstairs entrance door, I come into a big hallway, like the ones so typical of Berlin. There are bits of graffiti even on the inside walls. I make my way up the stairs. Luckily I only have to take two flights of stairs in order to get to Benjamin's flat. The door is already ajar as I arrive and I walk into the flat. It is a hot sunny day, the big windows are open and you can hear the traffic passing along Hermannstraße. One of the windows is pretty much covered by a big plant. "I've got my first tomato plant here in Berlin. Which makes it feel so much more like home too. To be able to grow something and watch it, watch these little - you know sprouts -come out of the vine and then turn into a flower and the flower to come off and there is this little tiny petal of a tomato to grow... into this giant plump delicious looking edible thing is really cool. And it also marks the time which I have lived here too." Benjamin and I are walking down Kottbusser Damm now.
"To not just go on vacation and go visit a place. But actually to think I´ll move and find a way of establishing myself somewhere else... And it was just, I mean, I can only describe this as a feeling - I mean, I have lived in 27 different places in the United States and been to every state. And really exhausted the country, I crossed the country on road trips multiple times. And had a lot of criticisms and issues with the United States' politics and just didn't feel comfortable living there anymore. And it's also funny because I gained much deeper appreciation for what that place is. And for me and to the rest of the world, but just specifically to me having lived… not living there anymore and having memories of being in all those different places I have so much deeper an appreciation of what the place is and I mean just the vastness of it. And all of the different kinds of beliefs and ideologies and ways of thinking that exist in that one country. And this is the first place I think in my entire life where I don't have any plans to leave – I know that I probably will someday, because there is a big world out there which I haven't seen and experienced yet, but I have no intentions, no plans on going anywhere. That changes the way I engage now, not only with the places, but with the people who inform the places. And... and having my own flat in my name, you know, in this part of Berlin that I love, that I didn't understand how much I would love before I got there. I just – I always had this idea and this concept of living in a place where life was happening and where things where changing and where creative people got together and exchange ideas and thoughts and inspiration. And the trouble I had was always how to find these places."

An essential requirement for feeling at home is human relationships (Schütz 1996: 71; 57; 65). "The feeling of *Heimat* is a fundamental experience of socialisation with things and places, the acquired capability of specific sensations." (ibd.: 73) Notions of *Heimat* and ideas around being at home closely link into the previously established interconnections of place and identity. *Heimat* can be seen as an anthropological space, a space in which the individual obtains a sense of self, through the dialectic relationship between place and non-place, feeling at home and feeling alienated. *Heimat*, in this sense can also be understood as the autonomous relationship to one's self, in the form of self-referentiality.

"A lot of my things have to do with eating and food … yeah, I feel like in this area of town I have a lot that connects me to the past but I feel there is a lot of opportunity like, there is this bar that Ben might end up working in. And also the Goodies- uhm… Veganz has opened here and then there is this restaurant that's gonna open above it. And I am

gonna apply there. and I just sort of... think there is a lot here. and I feel like a bit of a traitor that I am not "doing" Neukölln. but I just don't feel particularly... I mean even though I live there and I have a lot of good memories there, I just don't feel as.. emotionally connected to it. but I think that's to do with time." We cross the street, walking towards the vegan supermarket Veganz, which has the job ad for the soon-to-be-opened restaurant displayed. "I mean I have moved around a lot so I don't feel like... like I never was at home in Manchester. I moved around so much that I don't really know what it feels like to settle anywhere. So being in Berlin (…) seems quite normal..." She pauses. "I think cities are quite difficult to live in. Particularly capital cities. Particularly foreign capital cities.. So like, I picked quite a bizarre place to try and feel at home. But then I don't know if I picked it coz I don't want to feel like that because I am so used to feeling like transient and temporary, that I purposefully picked somewhere that's very difficult to settle in to. And that people probably don't spend their whole lives there. Or if they do it's probably a lifestyle where – like they are an artist or … whatever… coz... I think I've got as good a chance here like anywhere in terms of finding a job, doing vegan catering or whatever. But because it is so big and I am discovering how many things there are to trip you up... like red-tapey bureaucratic... shit... so.. I don't know, we'll see. I kinda moved over here not knowing how long it'll be. It just seems like another big adventure really. So we'll see."

Valeska has lived in Berlin for a few years now, but at first she did not relate to the city to a great degree. She reckons it took her about three years to feel she had arrived.

"I didn't understand all these people who came here with this feeling of 'Yeah, Berlin, Berlin, great clubs, great night life, and crazy and wahhh'. I mean, I like that Berlin is a crazy place but I didn't go with this hype. That made me feel like I didn't really connect with Berlin, because I didn't see Berlin like this. And I thought maybe it's not the right city for me… only to find out after a whole while that I really grew roots here, and to realise that this happened exactly because of me not going with the whole hype. I formed a deeper connection to Berlin, which isn't founded on superficialities."

In contrast to Valeska, Petra felt very much at home in Berlin from the moment she arrived.

"After the first month here, I felt at home. And every time I go back to Romania I feel less and less at home there. I mean, I feel nostalgic because of my youth there. Well, youth, I am still quite young, but I mean my time in school. When you did stupid things and stuff that was considered funny at this age. There are some nice stories… I connect a lot of stories with Bukarest in this respect. But for two years now it hasn't been my home anymore." We arrive at Hermannplatz as she says these words. "I associate a lot of positive memories with Berlin. Because I always link it to home and my development, I also connect it with love, serious love. To me, Berlin is a masculine city. And Bukarest for example is female. That's why a friend of mine always says jokingly that I am in a relationship with Berlin. And yes, I have had a serious relationship with Berlin for three years now. I fell in love with this city."

In the process of narrativising a place or space, they often assume allegorical characteristics. As circumscribed in Edward Said's concept of the "poetics of space", place as a spatial metaphoric is a vehicle for the construction of identity; a universal practice, according to him, which differentiates a familiar space with the unfamiliar (Gregory 1990: 305). Cities assume their own aura or identity (Savage 1990: 45), they become like a person we get to know through living in their vicinity.

> "And then all the people I got to know and the things that happened to me, which changed me as a person… It has a lot to do with that. I don't know if it was possible for example to have a Berghain in Paris or Barcelona and if I had been the same person now. (…) But it's like… oh…", Petra laughs. " All Berliners, who think they became Berliners on their own terms, if you ask them, they always feel like Berlin is their home country. They talk like that too. And I do as well, I say that Berlin is my home country."
> We are standing in the middle of Hermannplatz, Neukölln's crossroads. "Even though the flats in which I lived in Berlin… they are partly linked to some kind of nostalgia, but very unconsciously, because I wouldn't want to move back to Romania. (…) But I live in a bloc of high-rise.s And for me that's as if I was in Bukarest, in my first flat with my parents. It looks very similar, like the high-rises in Bukarest. And the flat that I lived in with my parents and my sisters, until I was eight years old, it used to be on the sixth floor. And now I live on the seventh floor and I have got exactly the same feeling now as back then. (…) Still, it is strange to long for a home, which is not there anymore; it is not the place you lived in as a child. Because Bukarest doesn't feel like home anymore when I visit it."

Edward Said once remarked that "space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here." (cited by Gregory 1990: 313). So in the process of making a home for ourselves, there is always a dialectic process involved. The here and there are in constant negotiation. People, who move to new places, away from their childhood home, can establish new homes in different places, because our identity is always comprised of fragments. As it is the case with Petra, she differentiates her childhood home from her adulthood home. The site where the self is created is a being-in-the-world. It is not limited, but defined by fluid boundaries. The thus placed spatial self is fragmented, a bricoleur, which comes into being through the constant comparison between one's self and one's environment, the other (Gang and Thrift 2000: 9). This dialectic process does not have to be so much about home, but it can also be a more personal process about experience, which eventually will create connections with one's surroundings.

On our way through the streets of Neukölln, Petra remarks that for her it is experience which establishes a sense of home.

> "Like I said, here I changed from a child into an adult. Well, maybe not an adult, but I am definitely not a child anymore because of all the stories, which I experienced. And that absolutely makes it home for me."

For Dylan and Nikki grasping the city is still an ongoing process of negotiating between their preconceived ideas of Berlin and their own experience of the city.

"I didn't know anything about the German culture. People have an idea of French culture... or all these different world powers. But you really only learn about World War 2 and you don't really get the culture there. So I thought it would be a really interesting place to go live there and figure out for myself what it's all about. So I chose Berlin just because it's full of art and it's one of the last places that you can be poor and … just support yourself still. I mean the rent is really cheap and there is tons of places to live and ... it just seemed like a great place. So I came here (…) and it's just way better than I ever thought it could be." Dylan takes a sip from his beer. "I definitely wanna stay here because I feel like with not having to worry about a lot of money every month and stuff like that, I feel I can focus a lot on my artwork and not only that it's so diverse and I really like people."

Nikki walks out of the Späti. She clutches the change she got from the woman inside in one hand, a drink in the other. "Yes. I think I had a romantic view of Germany in general. And even yesterday when you told us about that TV license thing… I mean getting the Anmeldebestätigung was alright. You know it still felt a lot more stressful than it could have been. And I feel like there is still a lot more stuff to trip us up, that I don't know about yet. And I don't know... like, loads of red tape. And even to open a bank account I had to sign a million things and just … I think my perceptions that have mainly changed are about German people – I mean except for you and Britta[7], who I consider special people because you moved away, I had this image that they are cold and unfriendly. But so far, from my experience of people I've worked with or people you bump into in the street – which happens so much here, that's another thing, bumping into people or people asking you questions in the U-Bahn or on the street…" I nod.

Conclusion

The aim of this kaleidoscopic article was to show how people relate to the place they live in, and how, out of this process, memories, identities and ideas of home are being formed. The people I conducted the walks with had been living in Berlin for varying amounts of time. Some of them had lived in the city for a few years, others had only recently moved there. They all had different stories to tell, stories which were either more connected to the places we walked around in, or more generally about ideas of moving around, establishing a home or being an urban dweller. There is, however, always one common denotation, the dialectic relationship between space and people.

These relationships are established through memories and communicated and strengthened through storytelling. The recordings of the psychogeographical discussions whilst walking with people, together with the photographs I took, to me managed to capture what I had hoped to find. In all its fragmentary nature, it resembles the way we engage with our surroundings: Forming coherent narratives, which are, however, told in incoherent order, at different times to different people. Furthermore I found that the streets I had walked through with the participants changed their meaning to me as well. They are now imbued with the memories and stories I was able to listen to. The photographs I took come to live once I connect them with these stories and think back to the event of walking around with people. They encapsulate both the incompleteness of memory and the factual perception of space (see Zaslove 2013). When visual practices are used to convey place, they

[7] A German friend of Nikki who lives in Manchester.

"are not only defining "our space" from "their space" but also our "reaching into" their space; appropriating that space and "claiming it as 'ours'." (Gregory 1990: 322) To some degree, this is what I did taking pictures during the psychogeographic walks – I claimed the memory which was related to me in the form of photos, now being able to retell these stories and painting glimpses of a personalised Berlin. This method is certainly not fit for an exhaustive attempt of mapping the city and researching processes of migration and gentrification on a deeper level, but it forms an important element in our search for understanding.

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