

# Zine Verschenken

#23 | june 2024 | urban silence



# Editorial

Welcome readers, to our special annual edition of Zine Verschenken in collaboration with 48 Stunden Neukölln.

If you are new here, we are Zine Verschenken, a Berlin-based, non-profit, FLINTA zine collective. Our story started some 22 issues ago. We the creatives believed that giving back to our community was something of value, something to treasure and something that makes Berlin feel alive. So here we are, for you, for us and for Berlin. A small piece of this puzzle of a city, where you can still appreciate some of the quirks reminiscent of the 80's punk, political city that it once was. Which brings us to this year's theme, Urban Silence.

It may not sound like the most typical of segways, but let's explore this thought for a moment. Berlin can be a city of sounds. Loud and proud are those who love to shout. The emergency vehicles of Germany are the loudest in Europe and can be heard often in the streets of Berlin. We live sandwiched between people in apartments which brings an array of noises, footsteps and crying in the early morning as a mother soothes her child back to sleep above, the dull thump of the Sunday morning techno of the beginning of an after-party session below.

And yet.....there are many moments of silence. Pure. Indulgent. Nourishing. All over the city are people enjoying their own personal vortex. Cafes are full of people reading books, creatives sketching in parks and dancefloors are rolling with the blissful movement of bodies, each lost in their own silence.

This city may not be silent in a literal sense, but the space it gives each person to explore and delve deep into themselves is a version of urban silence. In my home country, I was taught that it wasn't safe to go anywhere alone, that I should be socialable, laugh often and keep a positive attitude. What I didn't realise at the time was that I couldn't hear who I really was with all the constant noise around me.

Berlin taught me that to live for yourself, to enjoy exploring places and spaces alone, to say how you feel in the moment, brings up a kind of self contentment. An inner peace. This is how I attribute the theme to this busy city.

And so to you dear readers, I want to say, thank you. For each taking your own time, extending your patience and exploring the depths of your silence. For without the silence, we cannot hear our deepest callings. Enjoy this month's edition, with love from your Zine Team.

## Memorial walk

### **In the triangle between Schönhauserallee, Kollwitz- and Knaackstraße...**

In a high-walled cemetery buried in green-leaved urban silence, the gravestones cling close together. Some lean against each other; some rest flat on their backs, others lie broken where they have fallen. Entangled with ivy and overgrown by wild vines, shafts of morning light trickle through the leaves of maples, linden and chestnut trees, falling on 25,000 graves. Symbols of grief, respect and remembrance placed side-by-side, stones on stones on stone. Here, the peace of the dead lasts forever: a Jewish cemetery can never be given up.

### **Weißensee: “Heaven under the ground”...**

Overgrown paths with sunken gravestones – silent except for occasional birdsong - a forest of trees shade more than 100,000 graves, columns and monumental mausoleums: the simple, the unadorned and the magnificent. Full of history, the Jüdischer Friedhof Weißensee is the biggest Jewish cemetery in Europe. Here, stones commemorate the dead who have no grave of their own. Also an urn field where the ashes of those who died in the concentration camps are buried. “Remember for ever what happened to us.”

### **In the shadow of Brandenburger Tor...**

Giant stones laid down to remember. A field of concrete tombs reflecting grey skies as far as the eye can see. Descending into the depths of the spaces in between, I lose myself in a cobbled labyrinth that leads underground. The deeper I go, the higher the stones, until the sun is blotted out. At the threshold, a heavy heart, a sense of foreboding. All possessions piled onto a conveyor belt, delivered up on the other side. An open doorway points to a vaulted room where letters illuminate the darkness: the last farewells of the condemned flicker and die: despairing, desperate, fearful, resigned... prayers scattered in the silence, fallen fragments lying still on the ground. Next, another room, filled with the sound of the names and dates of millions dead. Years and years it takes to say them all... over and over again.

### **Lindenstraße, Hallesches Tor**

On the other side of town, having climbed the U-Bahn steps to ground level, I stand at the mouth of a bunker, blinking in the sunlight, looking out onto a derelict square. Shapeless lumps of granite lie about, pitted with holes and covered with graffiti... the rustle of scraggy trees... weeds poking up between broken paving stones... windswept leaves roll along the ground.

Where is everyone?

The square is strangely silent.

I look up to see the sharp, jagged edge of a building thrusting skywards through the trees. Walking towards the street, as if on hallowed ground, I plant my feet in the footprints of those who've gone before and those still to come. And there, a silver-clad 'synagogue' rises up to pierce the clouds. No way in or out along its zinc and titanium walls. Next door, a ramp. I descend into the void...

No room for words now, only contemplation. The empty space plummets from roof to basement, cutting through the centre of the fractured building. A dim well of absence criss-crossed by a myriad bridges. Erasure. Disorientated, I turn a corner. Outside, the muffled sound of footfall, yet inside, a silence that's deafening. Blindly, I take the zigzag path, trajectories of a broken star, from which branch three routes that tell a different story: persecution, exile, continuity.

First, a dead end. An isolated tower so darkly oppressive and entombed, it will make you weep. The ladder against a wall, just out of reach. A sliver of daylight seeps from between the narrow seam where two walls graze each other. I wander between the lines from wall to angled wall, following a script of living words that seem to write themselves as I read. Eventually to tread across an uneven floor paved with pitiful faces cut from metal; like fallen leaves, too many to count, their clanking underfoot make a haunting echo. The Shoah. Humanity reduced to ashes. Shalekhet. Shalekhet. Shalekhet.

Then outside, into the concrete garden... a tiny grove of olives high up and out of bounds, tightly packed into rows, their dizzying concrete trunks tilted on slanting ground, trapped by their proximity, squashed between granite walls on every side. A Garden of Exile, strangely vibrant, disconcertingly green-scented, a breath of fresh air to lift the spirits.

And finally up the steep Stair of Continuity flanked by splintered windows, its narrow summit bathed in light. 82 steps and on... through past and present German-Jewish history... until at last I come up against a blank white wall.

Pausing for reflection, I turn to look back at the climb...



**Berlin, Undoing**  
2023



**maybe I'm a ghost here?**  
2023

## Silence of the Streets

“The smell of the rain is incredible here. Why doesn’t it smell like this in other cities? Ok, wow, run, run. You can squeeze under that little corner with all those people. Will there ever be a summer where I don’t get completely soaked by the rain?”

“I’m with someone else now and they are everything I wanted you to be, but they are not you. “

“You know it has felt like 6 months have passed when I think about it. This year of the dragon has been absolutely exhausting. I am trying to keep up with my emotions or lack thereof. There is just so much going on right now. Send help.”

“I never think I am anything, and then I go outside. I see people from all walks of life. Living in Neukölln, I have the luxury of experiencing fireworks, electric scooters, heroin-takers injecting on the steps of the S-Bahn station, the smell of coffee and döner kebabs, police cars, emergency sirens, wedding ceremonies driving past, football fans cheering, girls giggling and chatting, späti staff smoking on the street, buses stopping and honking, bicycle bells ringing, chains whirring, and kids playing basketball. This vibrant chaos is a testament to the freedom and diversity we often take for granted.

When I am outside on the streets of Berlin, the silence is from within. Everywhere there is stimulation. Nothing is done light-heartedly. I’m trying to be someone, and so are the people around me. Yet, as I walk through these free streets, my mind drifts to Gaza, where people are denied these simple pleasures and basic rights. In a place where survival overshadows dreams, the relentless pulse of the city becomes a stark contrast to the suffering of those under siege. Here, we navigate our ambitions amidst freedom, but in Gaza, even basic human rights are a struggle. It’s a shared pursuit of significance, but theirs is hindered by injustice. As we move through our daily lives, let us not forget those who fight for the very freedoms we often overlook. Our voices can amplify theirs, demanding human rights and dignity for all, including those in Gaza who deserve to experience the same vibrant life that we do.”

“Amidst the concrete, steel, and glass,  
Where shadows of tall buildings cast,  
Lies a secret world unseen,  
Urban nature, wild and green.

In cracks of sidewalks, life will bloom,  
Tiny flowers break the gloom,  
Vines that climb the weathered wall,  
Nature’s touch, however small.

Sparrows chirp on city streets,  
Pigeons coo where pathways meet,  
Trees stand guard along the lane,  
Whispering tales of sun and rain.

A garden blooms on rooftops high,  
Touching softly the urban sky,  
Balconies with pots of green,  
A haven found in urban sheen.

Rivers flow through concrete veins,  
Carrying whispers of distant plains,  
Parks where children run and play,  
Wildlife thrives amidst the fray.

Streetlights glow, the moon ascends,  
Echoes of the night transcend,  
Bats swoop low in search of flight,  
Owls hoot softly through the night.

Urban canyons, bustling, loud,  
Hide the nature, pure and proud,  
In every corner, life persists,  
Urban nature coexists.

So pause a moment, take it in,  
The buzzing city’s quiet kin,  
For in the midst of human sprawl,  
Urban nature thrives through all.”

“I got my leg touched up by an old man on the U-Bahn tonight. He was really old—at least 80 years old—and his hands were so cold and wrinkly on my thigh. I was a bit stoned, so I wasn’t aware right away. When I realised, I slid away and got up. His hand was still stiff out there, and he was looking down at the ground.

The man next to me sat between me and the old man. He started talking to me, and I didn’t quite understand because I was quite stoned and my German wasn’t cooperating tonight. I was also just kind of frozen from the shock. I didn’t shout at him because he was such an old man. Eventually, he got up, moved down the train, and started arguing with another man who appeared to be equally deranged in the mind.

When he eventually disappeared and I remained on that train, it really affected me that I just let him slip away in silence. But the truth is, what could I have done in that situation? Everyone was just silently minding their own business.”

“Death is real and makes no sense. Existence makes no sense, consciousness makes no sense, time makes no sense. My own existence terrifies me. Why does anything exist at all? It all seems so completely unlikely, yet here we are.”

“Might as well pick up this other dog’s poop.”

“I spend a lot of time pondering the thoughts of the inanimate objects that are often overlooked. I imagine their personalities. how this post or that seems haughty, or how a bridge can seem so humble. who knows what the feelings and general attitudes could be, if they exist at all. But I keep it as a possibility, sometimes touching the raw steel gently. thinking these structures as they stand and support us gives me a deeper connection to the city, and allows me to express an animistic point of view. I do not presume to know the thoughts of the spirits that inhabit our urban landscape, I only make guesses. But it seems good to make the attempt at communication. Just as the ancients would sing to the Sun and Moon. “

“Urban Silence: A Reflection on Vulnerability and the Absurdity of Social Facades.

In the cacophony of the city, amid the hustle and bustle of urban life, I find a quiet amusement in an inner game I play as I observe people around me. As I walk the streets, certain individuals catch my attention—not because they are inherently extraordinary, but because they embody a certain societal role or demeanor that seems incongruous with the raw human vulnerability we all share.

Take, for instance, a person impeccably dressed in a suit, exuding an air of diplomatic gravitas. In my mind, I strip away the layers of their outward appearance and imagine them in intimate, erotic scenarios. This juxtaposition is not intended as mock-

ery, but rather as a whimsical reflection on the absurdity of the societal masks we wear. In these imagined scenes, the polished exterior dissolves, revealing a body laid bare and emotions unguarded, exposing the fragile and often hidden facets of their humanity.

This mental exercise highlights the stark contrast between the polished, controlled personas we present in public and the raw, unfiltered selves we become in private. It underscores the absurdity of our societal norms, where vulnerability is often hidden, even though it is a fundamental aspect of our human experience. In my reflections, the stern diplomat becomes just another human, with desires and weaknesses, stripped of the social armor that normally shields them.

This thought experiment is part of my exploration into the theme of “Urban Silence.” It is an artistic statement on the invisible layers of vulnerability that lie beneath the surface of our urban interactions. It serves as a reminder of the inherent absurdity in the rigid roles and facades we adopt, and the silent, often unacknowledged, humanity that connects us all.

Through this lens, I aim to offer a deeper understanding of the human condition, inviting others to reflect on their own vulnerabilities and the silent, shared experiences that unite us in the midst of the city’s noise.”

“There sure is some ugly ass architecture in this city”

“60€? On a single bag of groceries? How is that even possible? I guess next week I’ll be eating pasta just to survive until I get paid.”

“I really need a whiskey sour.”

“Was I being too harsh just now? I know I should have said something, but did I have to say it like that? What could I have said? I wish I had said I just need some more quiet right now before I got overwhelmed and shouted.”

“I wish I didn’t have to work this summer. I cannot be bothered to go to work at all. Ah but I need the money, I wonder what it would look like if I got fired? How would I even get fired?”

“Oh, a box of free stuff on the stuff. Hmmm it looks like good stuff, I wonder if anything is my size.”

“Oh look, another Sahara. They are on almost every corner these days. And always busy. But none of them are as good as the original one. I should go there again soon.”

“Isn’t that Julia? Should I say hi? We don’t know each other that well, will she remember me? Um.....uh, moments lost. I’m sure we will see each other again.”

“Yuck, more cigarette smoke, is it getting more than usual? Or am I just getting old and more sensitive to it.”

“A big group of men, ok they are looking at me, try not to make eye contact, eyes to the ground, please don’t draw any attention to me, act small, get away fast.”

“It’s amazing how many stars you can still see in the sky in the middle of Neukölln. A bit hard to believe people saw the northern lights here though. It must of been a hoax, after the lion and the snake, I guess nothing surprises anyone here anymore.”

“Not taking drugs doesn’t make you look cooler.”

“Hopefully, we are not running to late.”

“It’s already 2 pm and the sun is gone. I mean, it is still up, but the buildings are so tall, I can never find it, it’s always behind something. Maybe if I keep chasing it, if I turn a corner there. I hate winters here. At least if there was some snow, but it’s just this annoying rain. Not even a real rain to get it over with, just this tiny rain drops that are enough to mess with you. Especially when biking. And biking while listening to music is really what’s keeping me sane these days.

Is that sport? Huh, I really am doing sports. I thought this is what really driven people do, people who want to be healthy, and already wake up with a good mood. If someone had told me this is what keeps you from rumminating, I would have done sports earlier.

You bike on the rythm. Even when your tired. You try to push, even if you are tired, even if it hurts a bit. You’re one with the music, and keep going, keep going, feel like you’re sliding. Your mind is finally slient, there is nothing but the music, and you feel it in your body. You’re finally free.

Have to be careful though, when I go with the flow sometimes I don’t see the cars.”

“Oh she is really running. I hope she makes it. Go! Go! Go! Yes she did it. Love it when people run for the bus and get there just in time.”

“13, 14, 15. Is that all of them? I’ve really lived in 15 different apartments in Berlin? No wonder I never feel settled. It’s like my home life is its own full time job. Ha I wish. I’d actually rather move flats again than go to work tomorrow. “

“I wonder how much subconscious racism I have. Does my curiosity, fascination, even undeniable attraction to people from other continents come from a curiosity about a culture I was not exposed to? From an alternative to the shortcomings of my own culture, too catresian, too individualistic, denying the body, self expression, or commnity?

Or does it come from subconsciously enjoying a slight position of power I have in relation to these people? Is it because that position of power makes me comfortable to explore and enjoy what their culture has to offer? Would I ever be able to get rid of such subconscious tendencies?

How do they see me if I never had their experiences? I would probably never really truly know how it feels, no matter how much I try to educate myself and empathize.”

“What is it with men who start a conversation with you and almost immediately ask you if you live alone? Are there so many violent people out there, or men are making casual conversation and don’t realize how creepy that sounds? Even if you are inquiring whether we could have sex later on at my place without my housemates listening in, how can that be an innocent concern of yours? Before even asking me more about myself?”

“There is so much history here, every turn I make, but I am none the wiser to it”

“I find all things German very irritating, why? And I am not even thinking about ww2 or what is happening now politically. I mean even nice neighborhood bakeries, the beautiful renovated buildings, the efficient public transport, the slight German accent when someone is speaking English, I find insufferable! Why? There is nothing bad with those things, if anything, they are something positive.

Is it about me or them?

Is it my frustration of not coming from the West?

Or an intuition that I will never be understood, because my experiences in a much poorer country are almost unfathomable here.

Is the accent and the way they speak really intrinsically annoying, or am I associating it to the society, or even worse, the subjective negative experiences I had here, that have nothing to do with Germany, just my poorly chosen career move? Is this how one starts to hate a people? Is it really so easy?"

"Should I smile?"

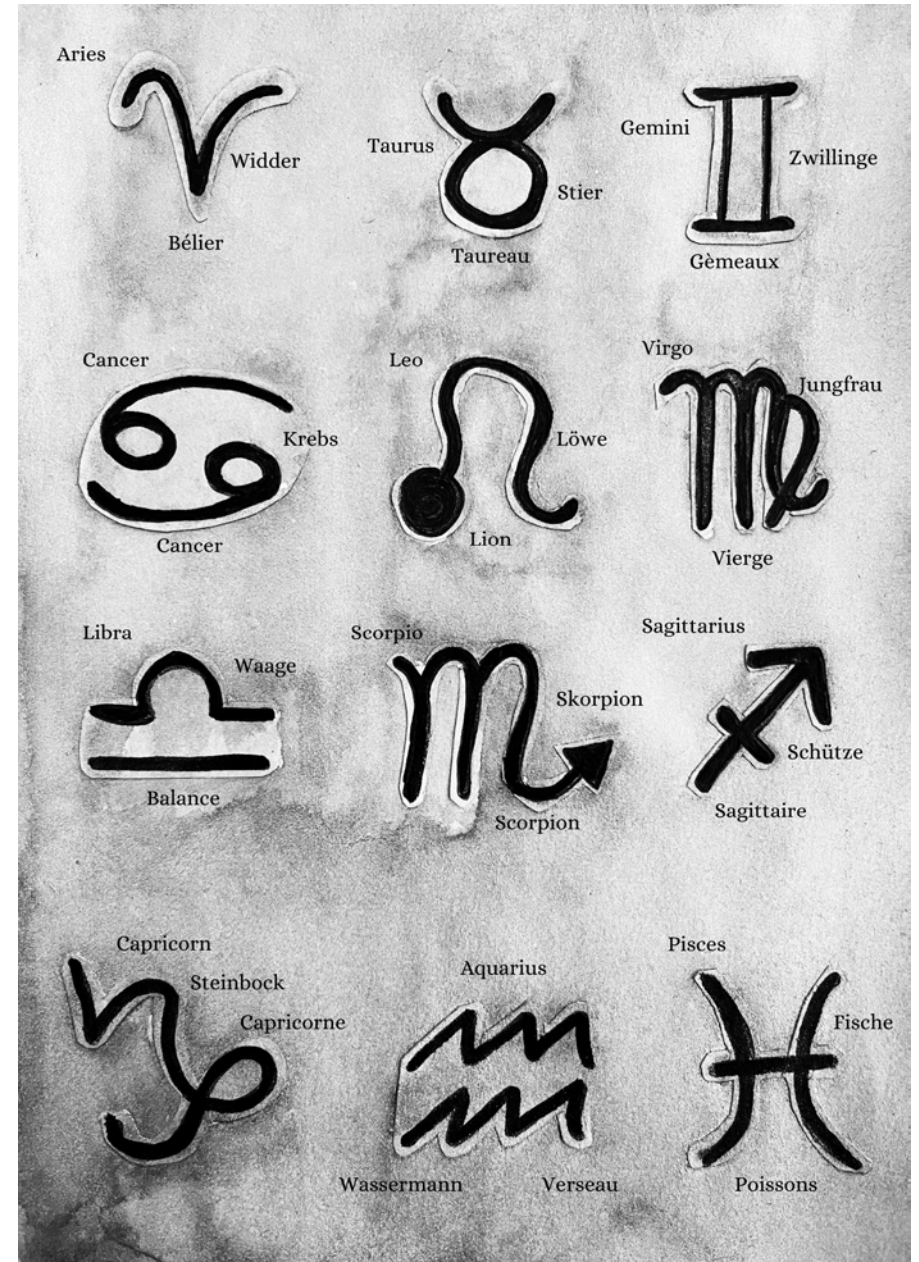
Nope, look the other way, it's Germany."

"Doo de doo doodalee doo."

"I'm afraid of who I am becoming when I live in a posh neighborhood. It's getting too comfortable. I look at all these clothes and jewelry and design stores and it makes me want to buy things, make my room nicer, make myself look better. Almost changes the standards of what is acceptable. It also makes me obsessed with things that are not so important. I miss living in a place like Wedding, that forces me to get out and have experiences, instead of staying in or around and rotting in pretty comfort."

"Taking drugs doesn't make you look cooler."

"Maybe this year the wasps won't come back and I don't need to live in constant fear"





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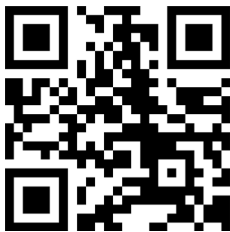
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