Pearls on the River Spree
Berlin: City of Women
advances
adventures
emotions
atmospheres
travails
tribulations
oases

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Berlin is full of different paths to follow, ways of looking, opportunities to experience and explore the city. We looked at the city from a woman’s perspective, searching for traces and picking up even the tiniest clues. Our aim is to invite Berliners and visitors alike to follow our feminist curiosity about the past and present of Berlin’s women. This book offers a panorama of the city. At each location it indicates the presence of women, and especially their efforts to achieve creative spaces, equal rights, and emancipation.

We want to tell a story, not simply draw up a list. That’s why we chose keywords that open up stories about how Berlin’s women have lived, struggled, worked, loved, and suffered. Women’s impact on the city is often hidden, or only emerges at second glance; retracing it takes knowledge, passion, and a spirit of inquiry. The struggles of women for political participation, the right to vote, the power to make decisions about their bodies and their lives, for education and careers, are at the heart of the stories we have chosen. They cover a surprisingly wide spectrum.

Our subject is a city—what happens there, and what happened in the past, always has its own particular location. We present those locations, and often they bring to light things we never expected. The locations reveal actions, changes, and hidden traces, showing what has disappeared, what has been lost, the violence, the many layers and facets that make up the city’s complex fabric. The photographs reflect women’s witty and sidelong views of this town, and they whet our appetite for more.

Gender Equality Office,  
The Berlin Senate Department for Economics, Technology, and Women’s Issues  
The Berlin task group of district equal opportunities officers
From high up on her horse, the gaze of the scantily clothed Amazon roams dispassionately. This strikingly unusual image of female nonchalance was created for the Tiergarten park by Berlin sculptor Louis Tuaillon at the close of the 19th century, years that were not kind to women’s politics. Not far from the Reichstag, where a little parliamentarianism was practiced—under Kaiser Wilhelm’s control and strictly excluding women—here in the park liberty beckoned, in the beautiful form of a mythological female figure who seems to have set aside not only her clothes but also the chains of stifling morality and domesticity.

Almost a century after the Amazon was sculpted, small groups of energetic ladies began to be seen gathering at her feet. After drawing inspiration from her, body and soul, they set off together to run through the Tiergarten, causing consternation when they accompanied their gymnastics with yells or pumped boisterously over the legs of sunbathers relaxing on the lawns. Without an arrow or a myth in sight, women were reclaiming the public space, and women’s sports and self-defense clubs gave them the weaponry they needed. We don’t know what dreams moved the sculptor as he made the Amazon, but for the Berlin women who enjoyed exercise and physical strength long before the days of gyms and women’s runs, she was both a meeting point and the focus of their dreams of a freer femininity (Run, Lola, Run).
Hopes upon hopes of eternity. In the heavenly paradise, the happy hunting grounds, or Nirvana. In resurrection, even if only as a toad or a dog. In the arms of the Virgin or with seven virgins in your arms. Maybe in great works of poetry, music, or painting. Maybe in statecraft. Perhaps as the founder of a religion. Or through crime—the more heinous the better; a killing spree at least. The only thing that counts is to continue living, live again. Second Life. The Internet as an immortality machine. Undeletable.

The heavenly realms are uncertain terrain in every faith. What if they don’t exist? And if heaven is built on the same patriarchal lines as the religions that proclaim it, it may not sound particularly enticing.

Posthumous fame in the collective memory is just as unpredictable, and it doesn’t last forever, especially as the collective mechanisms for wiping women from memory function with amazing precision. And what about our children? Well… unfortunately ancestor veneration just isn’t one of our greatest cultural skills.

In view of all this, the opportunities for self-documentation through publications, photographs, and especially the Internet offer a relatively gender-democratic medium for keeping women’s memories alive. As so often, the principle of do-it-yourself is the modern woman’s ultimate multipurpose weapon.

Nietzsche’s Zarathustra provided a popular quote for German gravestone inscriptions: “But all joy wants eternity.” Maybe women should just turn that around, forget eternity, and take their joy in the here and now.

Second Life
Location
Alter St.-Matthäus-Kirchhof, Gröggerschenstrasse 12, 10829 Berlin

How to get there
S 1, 2 Yorckstrasse / Gröggerschenstrasse, U 7 Yorckstrasse

advances
To find out more
www.stiftung-historischefriedhöfe.de
www.grabpatenschaften-berlin.de
www.jugendmuseum.de

Not necessarily all the same in death—queer embellishments on Schöneberg graves

To find out more
www.stiftung-historischefriedhöfe.de
www.grabpatenschaften-berlin.de
www.jugendmuseum.de
adventures
At the end of World War II, Berlin urgently needed reconstruction. There were few men around, so it was mainly women who performed the heavy labor of removing the rubble, ash, and debris. Streets had to be cleared, bomb craters filled, unsafe façades demolished. Between 20,000 and 60,000 women and girls, officially called unskilled construction laborers, passed rubble from hand to hand, chipped the mortar from old bricks, salvaged reusable building material, loaded stone and wreckage onto horse-drawn carts, and often pulled those carts themselves. There was little technology to help, just trolley-style locomotives brought from the western coalmines to help carry away the rubble (~ Mount Rubble). The work was unbelievably hard and dangerous, with frequent accidents due to buildings collapsing or munitions exploding. The wages were food ration cards and thus a chance of survival. When the worst of the work was done, when the men came home, labor got easier, and wage packets fatter, gender roles were restored to normal: in the city’s western sector, women were banned from construction work until 1994. However, the Trümmerfrau or “rubble woman” became a founding myth in both East and West Berlin. In the West she sits in Hasenheide park, weary from her work. Perhaps she’s looking forward to her coming life as a housewife and mother? In the East she shoulders her shovel—although, please note, in front of the Red Town Hall, not inside it—and strides boldly toward a glowing future.

What they have in common is the headscarf. Then still free of ideological baggage, the scarf protected women from dirt and rain but also made a subtly localized fashion statement: knotted at the top was considered the urban style, while a knot at the nape was the rural woman’s choice.

**Headscarves**

**Location**

West: “Trümmerfrau,” Hasenheide park, Giesefeststrasse entrance, 10967 Berlin

East: “Aufbauhelferin,” Rathausstrasse at Spandauer Strasse, 10178 Berlin

**How to get there**

West: U 7 Südstern or Hermannplatz; East: U-Bahn / S-Bahn Alexanderplatz, Tram M 4, M 5, and M 6 Spandauer Strasse

**Sources**

www.luise-berlin.de

www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de

To find out more

Die Trümmerfrauen von Berlin, film documentary by Hans-Dieter Grabe, West Germany 1968

http://www.bauhandwerkerinnen.de/geschichte/geschichte.htm

**adventures**
Think back to a time when the Berlin Wall was still standing, when Green Party participation in a coalition government still seemed an act of unheard-of audacity, when West Berlin’s government had neither a Minister for Women’s Affairs nor any other recognition of the importance of women’s issues. In 1989, the Social Democrat/Green coalition’s appointment of women to head eight of the city government’s thirteen departments caused a sensation. One of these was responsible for women’s affairs, and she was also Berlin’s first openly lesbian political office-holder (Anne Klein, 1950–2011). In their previous political lives, those eight women had gathered enough experience to know the truth in the saying “United we stand, divided we fall.” They put that into practice in the shape of an informal, innovative, and cross-party institution called the Witches’ Breakfast. The name was an ironic allusion to the demonization of strong women and the male anxieties that fuel it. It wasn’t just the name that made men suspicious, though: the breakfast was a successful strategy for implementing women’s political objectives. Berlin’s pathbreaking equal-opportunities legislation is one of the fruits of this collective effort. The strength of the “women’s Senate” of 1989–1991 was also fed by mutual support in a turbulent era of kindergarten strikes, political infighting, and the fall of the Wall.
Alte Liebe

"Leise, Peterle, leise, der Mond geht auf die Reise ..."

emotions
The doctor and author Friedrich Wolf (1888–1953) had a sure sense of his topic’s explosive na-
ture when he picked the title for his play attacking Sec. 218, Germany’s anti-abortion law. The
play was called Cyanide. When the movie of the same name premiered in 1930 in the Babylon
Cinema, Wolf was immediately arrested and the film was banned.

Section 218 remained explosive. When women don’t control access to safe contraception,
abortion is and remains a social and health problem—often with fatal consequences. Faced
with paternalism, hypocrisy, and double standards, women’s anger over abortion broke open the
route to a new women’s movement. Following journalist Alice Schwarzer’s call in 1971, celebri-
ties including actress Romy Schneider and hundreds of other women proclaimed, on the cover of
the popular news magazine Stern: “We had abortions.” The scandal was enormous. Section 218
was liberalized, challenged, tightened, and debated, debated, debated. While the West German
women’s movement was still fighting, in East Germany women achieved the right to abortion on
demand in the first trimester as early as 1972. But German unification put an end to that liberal
legislation, and unified Germany still grants only very limited options for terminating pregnancy.
For religious representatives of all stripes, nothing seems to be as aggravating as women’s right
to make their own choices about reproduction. Yet all the studies show that the best way to avoid
abortions is to give women an unrestricted right to abortion—the best way to help a woman
decide to bear a child is to work for socially accepted, financially unproblematic, and medically
first-class terminations, embedded in a culture of equal rights that also covers sexuality and con-
traception.

Cyanide

Location
Babylon cinema,
Rosa-Luxemburg-Strasse 30,
10119 Berlin

How to get there
U 2 Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz

Sources
Criminal Code of the Federal
Republic of Germany

emotion

Law on Abortion, March 9, 1972
(German Democratic Republic)

To find out more
Karen Hagemann (ed.), Eine
Frauenache. Alltagsleben und
Geburtenpolitik 1919–1933.
Eine Ausstellungsdokumen-
tation, Pfaffenweiler:
Centaurus, 1991

No outrage over deaths from unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions—only over the right to choose.
When we talk about the ideal, beauty is never far away. Beauty—women’s secret weapon and their Achilles’ heel. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and changes constantly: tough luck for those who do their best to conform, and tough luck for those who don’t. Beauty is the knockout argument against every woman, an argument that just refuses to die.

The proof that beauty is relative can be found in the plump goddess of prehistoric times, the Baroque’s love of earthiness, the balancing act between decency and décolleté, the starvation artist Twiggy—the view changes over the years, but its object is always woman. It’s an unforgiving gaze, taught by the media and cast millions upon millions of times. Especially by women.

The trade shows of beauty demand victims. Thinner and thinner, half-starved, bearing emblems of prostitution, violence, and rape, women tread the catwalk as high priestesses of the beauty ideal. Their bodies are mined for cultural capital and economic profit. All over the world, girls dream of taking their place: a model, not a woman. Women are more than willing to carry out the necessary adjustments themselves, paying a high price in money, pain, vitality, and life expectancy. No dictatorship has seemed so gentle as the dictate of beauty, yet its implacability can compete with the worst of them. Hungry or shivering with cold, their feet bound or their waists pinched, caged and exhibited, cut open, cut down, puffed up, anaesthetized, cauterized—the aids and appliances of women’s beauty would not be out of place in a chamber of horrors, and no police intervention is required.

Some clever woman wrote on the remnants of the now superfluous Berlin Wall: “All women are beautiful, everywhere.” Now that’s a beautiful ideal.
atmospheres
The girls’ club named “LiSA” was born in 1982 in the neighborhood around Klausenerplatz. LiSA has roamed around a bit since then, and can now be found in a villa behind the noisy Spandauer Damm. She’s the brainchild of migrant women who came to Berlin as “guest workers,” got involved in the women’s movement, and wanted to create leisure spaces for their daughters outside the family. Like her sisters Mädchenladen Wedding, MaDonna in Neukölln (*Honor), and Café Pink in Schöneberg, LiSA too believes that migrant and other women of color can’t simply be absorbed into the feminism of their white sisters, that they need a voice and articulation of their own.

LiSA is generous and combative, always cash-strapped, sassy, and inventive. She invites girls from every country in the world to test their strength as the whim takes them, to be angry (and take advantage of a free anger-training program), cheerful, ambitious, or sad. LiSA encourages girls to become full human beings, self-willed, independent, open to life and to other people. LiSA now also has a little sister, the summer sports project Jackie. Jackie likes to be out and about, and if you can’t find her at home on Jakob-Kaiser-Platz then she may be in the brightly painted construction trailer nearby. Jackie has absolutely no intention of leaving the streets to the boys. She enjoys running riot through the public space just as much as they do. And her band Böse Mädchen, “Bad Girls,” helps create the right mood. But despite Jackie’s company, LiSA has too few sisters—and far too many brothers who have no truck with girls.

LiSA is now twenty-five, and she thinks it’s high time the money available for youth work started being distributed equally between girls and boys.
travails
Business by and for women

Women create jobs for themselves and other women. They run businesses and start up new ones. Women’s businesses are more stable than those run by men because women tend to take less financial risks. In terms of economic and labor market policies, businesses run by women make a lot of sense, so they are becoming increasingly common (*Gold Rush*).

Together instead of alone—a neighborhood of various women’s businesses that profit from one another not only through moral support but also in a business sense: This appears to be what women are seeking. Set up on 75,000 sq. ft. for fifty businesswomen in a prime location in Berlin’s city center, the WöchnerinnenWirtschaft, founded in 1994, is the first, largest, and most elaborate center for businesses owned and run by women in Germany—with stores, trades and services, and restaurants. Smaller centers have followed in the districts of Neukölln, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, and Marzahn-Hellersdorf. The second-largest center for start-ups by women opened its doors in 2005, with more than 30,000 sq. ft. of space for 44 businesses: UCW, the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf Women’s Business Center.

**Location**
Unternehmerinnen- und Gründerinnenzentrum Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf (UCW), Sigmaringer Straße 1, 10713 Berlin

**How to get there**
U 7 Blissestrasse, Bus 101, 104, 249 U-Bahnhof Blissestrasse

**To find out more**
www.ucw-berlin.de
Frauenwirtschaftszentrum Neukölln in the Kindl Boulevard, Hermannstrasse 214 – 216, 12049 Berlin
www.hafen-gruenderinnen.de
www.frauenwerkkreuzberg.de
www.weiberwirtschaft.de

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travails
The legendary telephone operator stands for the phenomenon of a career for working women that developed in the 1920s. Women worked before that time, such as seamstress homeworkers (*Tredling like crazy*), housekeepers, maids, and female servants of all kinds (*Working girls*), as well as countless workers who toiled in the factories during Berlin's early industrialization. But new was the social status of the female employee who was independent, since she had her own income and rented her own apartment or at least a furnished room. The mostly single young women went dancing or to the movies, drove out to the countryside, and even did sports—and they didn't give a hoot that the older generation thought that was unseemly (*Amazon*). Accordingly, they wore pants and shorter skirts—and hair: the bob celebrated its heyday. The young women smoked, went to cafés and restaurants, theaters and cabarets, and then on Monday went back to work in the office, the shop, or, yes, at the telephone switchboard. The new woman had been born—and for the never idle conservatives of the Weimar Republic she would become the new bugbear symbolizing cultural decline and degeneracy. Literature and film, on the other hand, celebrated the new heroines, who were also worthy of wooing as consumers. Mascha Kaléko (1907–1975) and her *Lyrisches Stenogrammheft* (Lyrical Steno-Notebook), Irmgard Keun (1905–1982) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (The Artificial Silk Girl). Titles like *Destinies behind Typewriters*, *Girls from the Office*, or *The Girl at the Orga Typewriter* all illustrate the fascinating aura of these independent, androgynous-looking women.
“Berlin women are not servants,” is what people said around 1870. Instead, Berlin housewives would find a young girl from the countryside or the provinces: inexperienced, modest, and used to meager earnings and hard work.

When Berlin became the capital of the empire and started growing by leaps and bounds, young women came to Berlin, especially from the eastern provinces, to escape rural life as a farm-girl—up to 40,000 each year. This left its mark on the city in the architecture of the period. Residences had separate servants’ entrances, tiny maids’ rooms, and the notorious crawl-space above a suspended ceiling that served as the girls’ sleeping quarters; this all bears witness to the disappearance of the willing hands of servants within the bourgeois household. Hard work, limited free time, poor food, little sleep, and being at the mercy of the moods of the lady of the house and often the desires of the master—as a result, there was much fluctuation in the maids’ positions. Employers would note their behavior and industriousness in the servants’ log, thereby determining their future employment chances. Having their own family seemed a desirable destiny, even if poverty and large families were the rule.

When the naïve rural girls arrived at the train station, women were often waiting to pick them up and lure them into prostitution (→ Soup-kitchen Lina). Double standards and the girls’ helplessness brought flourishing business for pimps (→ Red-light).

Today, the currency differential between Germany and Eastern Europe again provides Berlin with inexpensive housecleaning personnel. Many of them work illegally or for very low wages and must have no insurance coverage. But at least most of them can close the door when they finish work and return to their own apartments.

Sources
www.expolis.de
When something is "out in the boondocks" Berliners say it is janz weit draussen—or JWD for short.
Since time immemorial that is where women in Berlin hope to escape the draining, gray rat race of the city. It could be Wannsee at the city’s edge or Usedom, Berliners’ famous bathtub at the Baltic Sea, or as far as La Gomera, one of the Canary Islands, where West Berliners who were tired of coal heating tried to get away from the long dismal winters.
After the Wall came down, West Berlin got a present; it was called surroundings, environs! And it could be reached by commuter rail (S-Bahn). A wealth of hiking groups and tour suggestions and restaurant or event tips shot up out of nowhere, to help the capital’s women discover these environs.
In addition to forests, lakes, and beaches, when you are jwd there are also exciting places to visit where women were at work. Please feel free to explore!

Location
Müggelsee, Licht- und Luftbad, Fürstenwalder Damm, 12589 Berlin
How to get there
S 3 Friedrichshagen, then Tram 61 Licht- und Luftbad Müggelsee

Don’t forget to pack your bathing suits …
There are at least 11,000 people of Vietnamese descent officially living in Berlin, most of them in the Lichtenberg and Marzahn-Hellersdorf districts. Even today the Vietnamese community in Berlin is largely divided between East and West: former boat people from South Vietnam in the West, and former contract workers and their families, mostly from North Vietnam, who worked in East Berlin. The boat people and their families are generally well-integrated. They received residence and work permits upon arrival, as well as language classes and training programs. The contract workers, in contrast, were originally supposed to leave the country after five years. When the Berlin Wall came down, they received residence permits that were tied to other conditions. For example, they had to be able to finance themselves. Many earn a hard living with flower or grocery stores, market stands selling clothing, or snack bars.

Under the Bamboo Roof, a women’s project in Alt-Hohenschönhausen, is an oasis of relief where former contract workers meet and support each other.

Vinaphunu is specifically for Vietnamese women. Here women can learn German, and a social worker is there to help them find a job or apartment, resolve pregnancy or marital problems, advise them in childcare questions, and help in dealing with the authorities. The group also offers free legal counseling with an interpreter, a book and video lending library, group trips, and the annual Tet festival for the Vietnamese New Year.

Integration problems among Vietnamese are rarely discussed publicly. Since education plays an important role in their culture, the children are often among the best in their class in Berlin; many parents stay in a country still foreign to them for the sake of their children (Multiculti).
| Pages 6/7 | Rahel Varnhagen: from Wikimedia Commons, http://projects.exeter.ac.uk/gutzkow/Gutneu/gesamtausgabe/Archiv/Bilder/ZeiGutz/VarnhR1g.jpg  
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