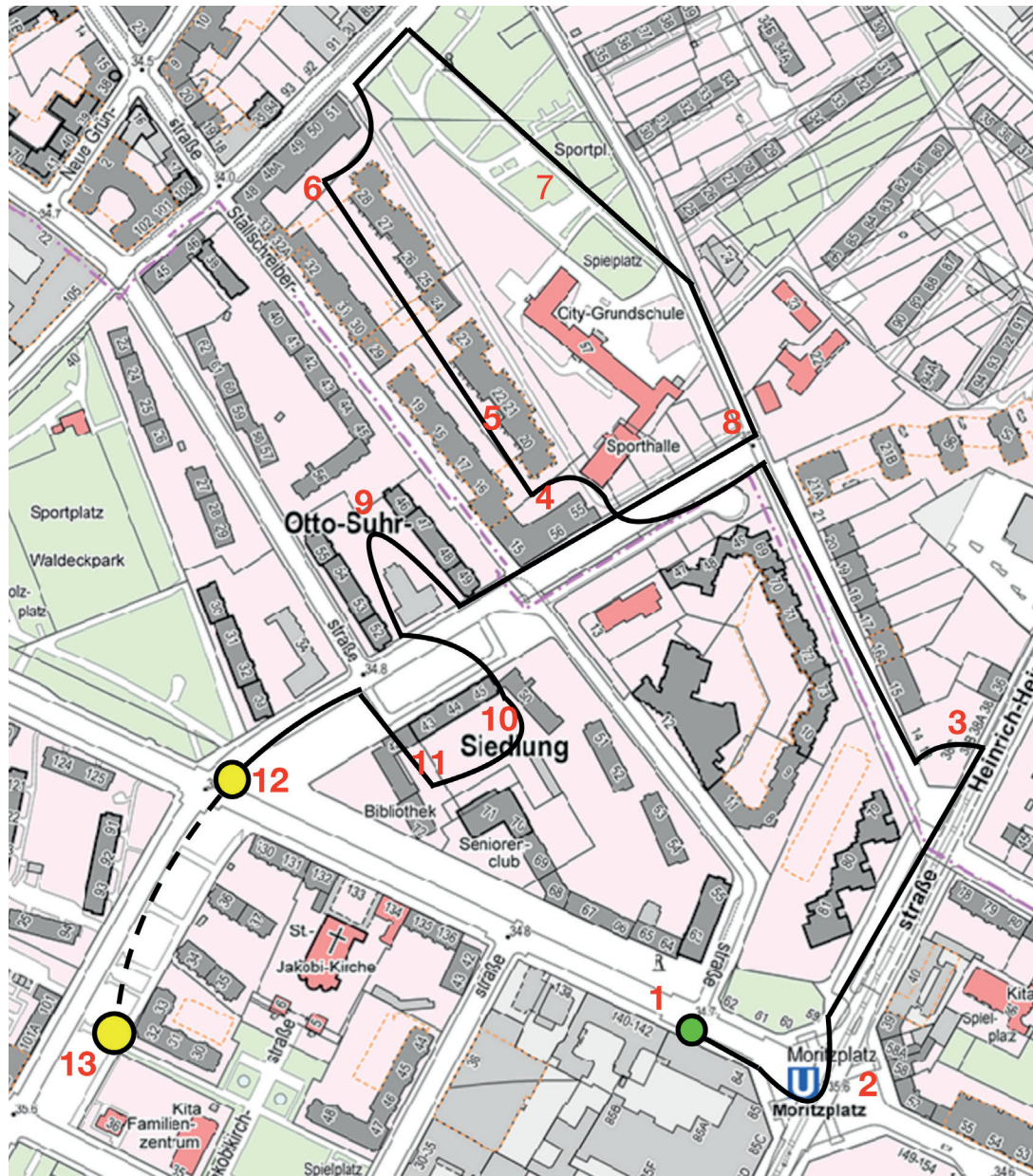


Hinterhöfe, fences, communities - Part 1

soundwalk by Peter Cusack for berlinlokalzeit.de



This soundwalk around the Moritzplatz area focusses on the huge variety of Hinterhöfe there and the multitude of sonic places they create and isolate from the busy streets outside. There are old courtyards entered through narrow arches, exotic gardens enclosed by apartments so new that people are still moving in and green wooded spaces between high buildings planned to be shared at the time of the Berlin wall but now divided by gates and a maze of wire fences.

The walk pays close attention to the acoustics of these places and the sounds of the communities for whom this is home – murmuring voices and rustling shopping bags; the U-Bahn roar that appears from different directions as it reverberates around the spaces; crows in the tree tops; footsteps in autumn leaves; distant motorbikes; excited sparrows; echoes of children at play.

The walk is in 2 parts – north and south of Oranienstrasse – each takes perhaps an hour. Please treat them separately if you wish. The numbers are points of sonic interest along the way. The links are to the radio aporee sound map where recordings can be heard.

1 Meeting point, soundwalk start, CLB Berlin, Prinzenstraße 84.2.

Before starting it is good to acclimatise to the soundscape for a short time by listening to the sounds heard however ordinary or familiar they are. This makes them more conscious again. What are they, who is making them, how do their positions and distances change as you move yourself? On the soundwalk it is good to listen not only to individual sounds but also their relationship with different places, open spaces or built areas. Sometimes sonic borders occur where the soundscape noticeably changes in only a few steps.

When ready please walk towards point 2 on the map

2 Moritzplatz U-Bahn downstairs, the underground mezzanine

Sound is incredibly reverberant in this concrete cavern that is both a subway for crossing the road and an entrance to the U-Bahn. Traffic noise spills in from above. People walk down as individuals, but upwards in groups that emerge from arriving trains. Covid restrictions mean less travelers these days, but sonic incidents still happen. Suddenly two girls burst out laughing filling the space with echoing giggles. Trains rumble in and out accompanied by gusts of wind. Doors open and close. Loudspeaker announcements reverberate. Escalators drone. This inhospitable place has a totally unique soundscape.

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51505>

Return above ground and walk up Heinrich Heinstrasse to map point 3.

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3 Small passageway at 38b-c Heinrich Heinstrasse
This passage leads to a different world - a large triangle of gardens sheltered between apartment buildings. Tall trees and the Alexanderplatz Fernsehturm dominate the horizon. Traffic noise flows from the passageway but elsewhere it is quieter. The differences are interesting. There are pebbles to walk on and sometimes children play. It would be nice to walk further through the gardens but, sadly, fences make it impossible. Leave through the opposite passage into Sebastianstrasse. Turn right. This is an older street, more communal, people walk by and sparrows chirp. Continue past the different front gardens and occasional heating drones to Alexandrinenstrasse. Turn left and then quickly right into Kolonnenweg to map point 4.

4 These apartments are so new that people are still moving in. The sounds of work inside still continues. The buildings surround a long narrow garden full of exotic plants, imaginative sculptures in play areas for kids and different surfaces – gravel, small stones, sand – for walking. Perhaps this is Berlin's most up-to-date Hinterhof. There is 'green' design in all directions, except perhaps underfoot - surely more grass would be nicer than so much paving.

5 Cyclists are obviously welcome and there are several groups of metal bike stands provided. These ring beautifully when hit by the palm of one's hand. Please try it. It is a clear sound in the acoustics of the surrounding buildings. There are different pitches – an accidental ready-made percussion instrument.
<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51476>

6 It is worth taking time between points 5 and 6. The buildings enclose an area that contains its own soundscape relatively isolated from outside. It is mostly quiet and still. There is a strong atmosphere, especially at dusk. Sounds of home are heard, cooking, music, cleaning, murmuring voices. It is a very specific sonic community. The designed garden has areas of stones, gravel and sand that can be explored sonically by walking. Sometimes a light wind rustles the exotic leaves. At point 6 there are more musical bike stands to hit and railings that resonates when running your hand along them. This is an unusually musical place. Was that intentional? I do not know. <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51477>

7 Ballgames and kids in Luisenstädtischer Kirchpark
This large open park is a big contrast to the enclosed Hinterhof. One is aware of distance again. The sound of the city is very present. There are many tall trees, including one shimmering aspen with an intriguing hollow trunk. Their leaves are now thick upon the ground and crackle or squelch underfoot. The playgrounds here always seem popular and in fine weather there are a lot of people, kids and ballgames. It is an active place with a busy soundscape. Please walk through towards point 8 listening as you go. Sometimes there are more unusual birds. I heard a woodpecker calling last time.
<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51478>

8 Turn right at this point and again walk down Alexandrinenstrasse. It is worth pausing at the corner by the Caphe HOA café to look up and down Stallschreiberstrasse. Not so long ago the Berlin Wall ran along this street (also Alexandrinenstrasse and Sebastianstrasse). You have just crossed the former 'death strip', fatal for humans, but where hundreds of rabbits lived and nightingales sang. Here West Berliners would walk their dogs in the shadow of the late 20th century's deepest political divide. Do you have sonic memories from that time? If not, can you imagine the sounds and the atmosphere?

9 The Otto Suhr Housing Estate. Otto Suhr was Mayor of West Berlin 1955/57 and responsible for rebuilding this area after its destruction during WW2. The apartment blocks and the green spaces here date from then. There are broad wooded areas between the buildings with some impressive mature trees. Crows constantly call and red squirrels hop amongst fallen leaves. Groups of sparrows may chatter in bushes. In springtime other birds will be singing. The atmosphere is quite different from the exotic gardens of point 4. Waste bins are in full view. There are small sand play areas with minimal plastic rocking horses. Between the apartment are low buildings, former public laundries, now sports halls, neighbourhood centres or a cafe. The community sounds are different, rustling shopping bags, cars parking, phone conversations from balconies above, other languages, older kids playing.

10 The walk from 9 crosses Alexandrinenstrasse, which is open to the wider sounds of Berlin, and passes under apartments into other areas of this large estate. Sirens are rather frequent and it's interesting to hear how the buildings channel and reverberate the sounds when they occur.
<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51479>

11 Sometimes it is good to make your own sounds to discover the acoustics of an area. If you clap your hands here while walking under the apartment building back into Alexandrinenstrasse the echoes are very strong and change in character as you move. At one point fluttering (very fast echoes) occurs. Can you find this spot?

12 Back on busy Oranienstrasse where traffic dominates the ears. This is the end of part 1 of the soundwalk. The start point for Part 2 is found by crossing Oranienstrasse past the roadworks and continuing down Alexandrinenstrasse for 100m.

