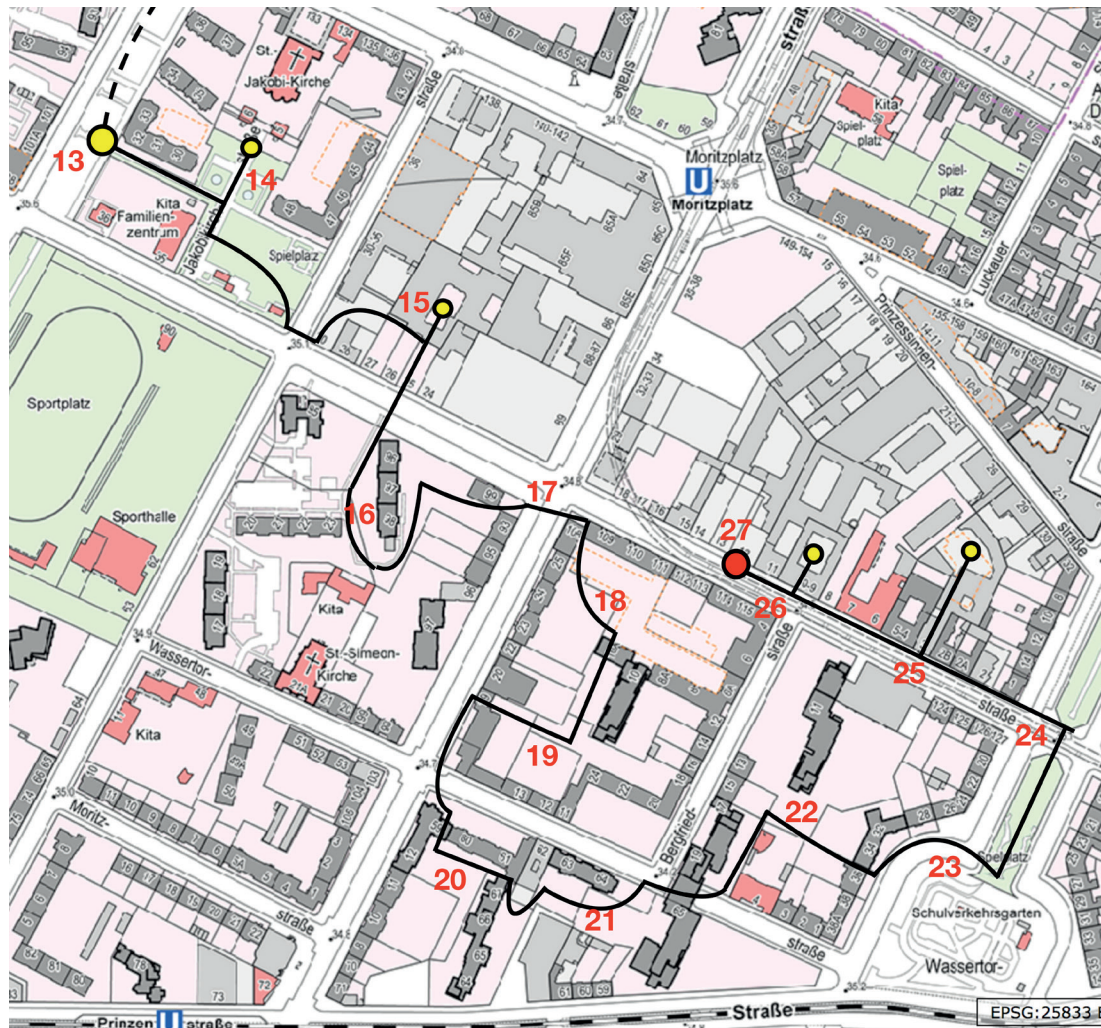


Hinterhöfe, fences, communities - Part 2

soundwalk by Peter Cusack for berlinlokalzeit.de



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.

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.

13 Soundwalk Part 2 start, Alexandrinenstraße 30

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? When ready please walk towards point 14 on the map beside the apartment building along the path covered with autumn leaves.

14 Jakobikirchstraße – cobbles, numbered trees, parked cars behind Jakobikirche. The church is currently being renovated so it is closed, but in the secluded green space behind are two strange, fenced play areas named 'Wildfang', seemingly unused. It is a good place to listen. There are close sounds, wind, occasional small birds, your own movements, steps and thoughts. A few leaves remain on the trees and sometimes fall. In rain, drops spatter on the leaf covered ground, giving a real sense of space. In the nearby street traffic tires flap over cobblestones. Ambulances and fire trucks are frequent here. Road works slow the traffic and they have trouble getting through. Sirens echo from one building to another, but the complex acoustics make it impossible to know where they really are. Distant shouts and whistles are heard from the Lobecksportplatz – hearing all this activity makes me want to sit. Sadly, there is no bench. <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51503>

15 AQUA-Höfe – a historic industrial/office Hinterhof

With its decorative brickwork and proportioned shape this is an attractive place, but in lockdown it is empty. There are businesses and cafes, but everything is closed, no signs of life. Sound filters in from outside, but not so much. It is possible to stand and listen to the atmosphere and appreciate urban stillness. Usually I am the only one here. My footsteps are barely audible. Drain pipes drip softly from recent rain.

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51486>

Hinterhöfe, fences, communities - Part 2

16 A once open Hinterhof, now a maze of fences

Opposite the AQUA-Höfe, across Ritterstraße, is a large housing estate of different sized apartment blocks and wooded areas with tall plane trees. Once open, these green areas are today divided by a maze of dark green wire fencing. You can look and listen, but not pass. Why? Is this privatization, safety fears or...? Finding a route through is not always easy, but walking round the first building is possible. Jays and crows squawk in the tree tops and one's footsteps shuffle through fallen leaves. Dogs from another part of the maze yap and ignore their owner's yells. The distant shouts from Lobeckssportsplatz continue.

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51487>

17 Prinzenstraße.

To my ear, one of the loudest traffic spots on the walk. Cross when you can and head for the corner of the opposite apartment building. Take the passage underneath into the Hinterhof behind, map point 18.

18 A huge space surrounded by apartment blocks

This Hinterhof is huge, but the dark green fences have divided it into car parks, playgrounds, pathways and less defined areas. Individual sounds – voices, dogs – often seem distant. Idling motors in the car parks blend indistinguishably into the general city roar from outside. Magpies occasionally chatter high in trees. Music (Turkish) sometimes plays. However, whilst walking different smaller acoustic areas (mini-soundscapes) become apparent. There is a tunnel under a building where voices reverberate noticeably. Fences guide you to map point 19. <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51504>

19 Backyard reverberation

This part of the Hinterhof is more secluded. There are hedges and trees. A robin sometimes sings here. The reverberant acoustics are strong. On one occasion the sirens from outside merged into a continuous tone. Also passing U-Bahn trains from a few streets away can be heard.

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51480>

20 The walk to map point 20 is under the buildings and back to Prinzenstraße and its traffic.

Further down the road the elevated U-Bahn can be seen. Passing trains create one of the most distinctive sounds of the area. Cross Wassertorstrasse and under the apartment block into the Hinterhof behind. It feels quite compact with hedges, a playground and a fenced sports area. The U-Bahn runs along the far end of this enclosed place. The passing yellow trains remind one of the wider city.

21 U-Bahn reverberation from multiple directions

The backyards here are smaller and the path has several corners. They also show a variety of uses. One is devoted to recycling and waste. Bins are ordered in neat rows behind their fences. Next is a sand playground with fish as a theme. There is a silver slide and a few seats placed as if an audience will watch. The acoustics are ear-catching. The high buildings and gaps between them channel the sound of passing trains in different directions. Standing here one hears multiple versions. It is like a Picasso cubist painting, but in sound. It is the walk's most surreal spot. The surface of one building has decayed into linear patterns that suggest pictorial writing or music notation. <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51483>

22 Another large Hinterhof divided by fencing and typical sounds – family football, crows, drilling work inside an apartment. The contrast with the street sounds outside is particularly noticeable walking to map point 23. <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51482>

23 Segitzdamm.

A noisy place. Curves in the elevated U-Bahn is across Wassertorplatz make trains screech or moan depending on direction. Screeching is louder when travelling west. These sounds change with the weather. Humidity and temperature make a particular difference. Beneath the railway, traffic along Gitschinerstrasse is very busy, but not continuous. Traffic lights impose their own rhythm on the flow and the roar rises or falls accordingly. Close by in Segitzdamm cars rattle and flap over cobble stones. At this spot Berlin sounds like a world metropolis with a big-city soundscape. The elevated trains remind a little of NYC or Chicago.

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51481>

24 Turn left down Ritterstraße. The U8 runs underground here. Sometimes if very quiet it can be heard, and vibrations sensed, through air vents or drains.

25 New Hinterhof, Ritterstraße 3

At the end of a longer tunnel than usual this Hinterhof, enclosed by anonymous new offices and media companies, is a peaceful spot. City sounds arrive over the roof tops, audible, but not in your face. Mostly it is a car park. However, one tree and a mini-patch of green is enough for a blackbird that calls at dusk before roosting. There is a small pond with a tiny, bubbly fountain, usually off. Office workers come here alone to smoke and chat. Crows may call from high overhead but they don't stop. I enjoy being here for a while. The city soundscape is distant and one can drift a little. Accessible only on weekdays; closed at weekends.

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51484>

26 Mykita, Ritterstraße 9

This is a striking historic Hinterhof with shiny white and green brickwork. There is a friendly yellow kiosk on wheels that sells coffee, where usually a couple of people are taking a break. The sonic border of walking under the arch into the courtyard is very noticeable in either direction.

27 Building site next to Ritterstraße 11. The soundwalk end.

The soundscape here is city hubbub and passing traffic, usually ignored completely. Maybe it is worth listening briefly just as a reminder of what surrounds us and effects us 24/7. Also this building site makes me smile. Looking down into excavations one sees rows of screw like concrete foundations emerge from the ground. It is as if some ancient temple has been half uncovered by an archeological dig and then forgotten.

PS. The soundwalk focusses on sounds audible to the ears. But cities are also full of those we cannot hear. They may be above or below our range, exist underwater, as electromagnetic signals or as vibrations in the physical environment. One example is the U-Bahn that massively vibrates the elevated structures it passes over. It is possible to feel it with your hand or listen with contact microphone. A recording can be heard at <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=51546>



Peter Cusack on radio aporee



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