



The City is Not the City: Two Approaches of How City Writers Compose Images of Urbanity

Anna-Lena Roderfeld
TU Dortmund University

anna-lena.roderfeld@tu-dortmund.de
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0226-9965>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59045/nalans.2023.26>

APA Citation:

Roderfeld, A-L. (2023). The City is Not the City: Two Approaches of How City Writers Compose Images of Urbanity. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, 11(22), 192-203.

Abstract

This paper references two texts from contemporary city writers: *Die Stadt ist nicht die Stadt*, by Juliana Kálnay (2019), and *Graz, Alexanderplatz*, by Barbara Marković (2012). They are analysed in regard to how the authors present the cities they visit and the type of literary images of the cities they develop. The analysis of Kálnay's text focuses on how she interweaves past and present of the city and interconnects both through a water motif. Furthermore, intertextual strategies evident through her referencing Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* are investigated. Marković's *Graz, Alexanderplatz* is analysed according to its twofold structure of copied city text on the one side (of the double page) and commented city text and urban experiences on the other. Moreover, how far the text is connected to Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is briefly discussed. It is shown that both authors use experimental strategies to structure their texts and grasp 'their' cities but that both also subliminally reflect on whether it is actually possible to present the 'real' city, and how far the attempts must remain cut-outs of urbanity, dependent on perspective, time and place.

Keywords: City writer, city text, fact and fiction, Juliana Kálnay, Barbara Marković

Introduction

Many fields today explore how people live in cities and urban areas and how cities are planned, perceived, created, produced and imagined. Writers of early 20th-century literature usually wrote about cities where they spent much time, often all their life. Due to changing, more global and digitalized lifestyles, the spectrum of voices trying to grasp what the city and life within it are like today has become more diverse. Recent research, for example, focuses on transcultural and female perspectives on the city (e.g. Ette, 2011; Yildiz, 2014; Dünder et al., 2019).

In this paper, I focus on the field of institutionalized city writers that first appeared in the second half of the 20th century: In 1974 the small city of Bergen-Enkheim recruited Wolfgang Koeppen as the first city writer of Germany. Winter (2014) has argued that this was not just a philanthropic act free of political and urban interests. The post of city writer was central to measures of cultural politics and urban planning and was supposed to strengthen Bergen-Enkheim's (urban) profile to protect it from desertion and insignificance in the shade of the more

attractive and nearby metropole Frankfurt am Main (p. 75). As such, literature became a means of making cities more appealing and advancing them in urban competition. It is therefore clear that the post of city writer came with certain expectations. Koeppen himself was sceptical about whether the post of city writer would prevent him being a free and unattached author, the expectations of the role possibly placing him in chains (p. 79). When he later returned to the city – without ever actually having written a text about the place or his time as a writer there (p. 82) – he noticed the city had become a literary place par excellence (Treichel, 1995, p. 152). Due to such success and the prestige that a city writer seemed to bring, the project was imitated in many other cities throughout Germany over the following years, for example in Mainz (1985), Dresden (1996) and Erfurt (2002), as well as in other European cities, such as Graz (1988), Venlo (1993) and Zurich (2010).

Here, I analyse two contemporary texts by city writers: Juliana Kálnay's *Die Stadt ist nicht die Stadt*, which concerns the German city Bielefeld (339,419 inhabitants; Reichenbach, 2022), and Barbara Marković's *Graz, Alexanderplat*, referencing the Austrian city Graz (295,424 inhabitants; Stadt Graz, 2022). Both were written in the context of city-writer programmes. Both authors were new to the cities and did not originally live there. Marković stayed in Graz for one year, and Kálnay stayed at Bielefeld for only one week. Regarding their form, the texts differ considerably. They do, however, employ similar strategies regarding how they create metanarrative reflections on approaching the city, through the use of play between fact, fiction and intertextuality. Each analysis begins with an examination of how the texts are structured and in what way they present their cities, followed by an exploration of the intertextual strategies they employ. The underlying hypothesis for my analysis is that city writers, because they consider their cities for only a limited amount of time, merely touch on fragments of these places, and I reflect on how narrative access to the city works.

Bielefeld: The city is not the city

Die Stadt ist nicht die Stadt is a commissioned work by German author Juliana Kálnay, in the context of Literaturbüro Ostwestfalen-Lippe's¹ project Aufgeschlagen: OWL. The project series focuses on making voices of and about the region heard (Aufgeschlagen: OWL, n. d.) and has been regarded as one of the many driving forces producing a shared identity of the region, as well as highlighting this identity. Kálnay's text comprises 80 observations of the city (also subtitled). The length of these observations varies from only one sentence to half-a-page- and even one-page-long paragraphs, which consist of many short main clauses, sometimes subordinate clauses with simple syntax, underscoring the attempt to observe and then state (perceived) facts. Through the structure and use of language, it becomes clear that the text does not try to narrate a particular story but simply places observations into context, thus allowing impressions of the city to somewhat speak for themselves:

There are several museums in the city. Museums of natural history and museums of history and medical and pedagogical, and open air museums and museums of art. Some of these museums open daily, others only on the weekends or one afternoon per week. ... It takes several days to study their opening hours and entry conditions². (Kálnay,

¹ Ostwestfalen-Lippe is a region located in the far north-east of North Rhine-Westphalia. Larger cities of more than 40,000 inhabitants include Bielefeld, Paderborn, Gütersloh and Lemgo.

² All quotes of Kálnay (2019) and Marković (2012) in this paper have been translated from the German original texts by the author of this paper for the purpose of analysis.

2019, p. 9)

The narrator remains in the background and presents the observations she³ encounters, offering the text a fact-like, neutral tone. However, by exaggerating how long it takes to study the opening hours, the narrator comments on and ridicules these same facts. This also adds an element of (fictional) plot to the otherwise factual enumeration. Another example of this fact versus fiction is the description of the ‘compulsory class for every course of study’ (Kálnay, 2019, p. 22) at the city university. She is addressing how its buildings equate to a labyrinth in which some students cannot find the library, even after the third semester. Kálnay states that there is an exam for every student at the end of the first semester, testing their orientation capabilities: ‘The exam cannot be repeated, and every student who fails is expelled immediately’ (2019, p. 23). Again, Kálnay is mixing facts – on the complicated building geography of the university – with exaggerated (fictional) side stories, which, at first glance, appear factual.

Bielefeld is never mentioned by name and only referred to as ‘the city’, giving it a neutral, almost anonymous sense. In terms of how the image of the city is produced in the text, three main intertwined aspects can be identified: portrayals of the city today (present perspective); parts of the city’s history, mainly focusing on Bielefeld as an important location of the German textile industry in the 19th century (past perspective); and a reoccurring water motif connecting present and past perspectives.

The first observation of Kálnay’s (2019) text instantaneously establishes the water motif in a factual manner: ‘In the city it always rains one week long’ (p. 5). Allegedly, Kálnay wandered the city streets during continuous rain during her one-week stay (Ludwig, 2019). It might be for that reason that the author not only starts with the mentioned observation but also develops many of her observations based on the rain, city rivers and water. She creates an image in which the city today is defined by a pattern adhering to the weather: after one week of rain there comes a one-day long break during which ‘die Städter’ (Kálnay, 2019, p. 5), the city’s residents, put their umbrellas in front of their houses to dry. In the summer, the rain is just ‘turning warmer’, and a woman in the tram talks about how much her dog loves the rain (Kálnay, 2019, p. 6). Water and rain bind the text and the produced image of the city. Kálnay connects the supposedly permanent rain with local myths on the founding father of the city, Count Hermann von Ravensberg (Vogelsang, 2014, p. 1). According to one character, probably a guide in one of the museums, there had been a river nearby, whose water had fed the city’s moat. Two different stories are proposed as to why it dried out, one being that the founding father’s great-grandson had tried to straighten out the river to establish a waterway to the city. This rather pragmatic explanation contrasts with the legend that his mistress had drowned herself in the river because, due to her status, they were not allowed to marry – which is why, wreathed in sorrow, he ordered it to be dried out. The reader cannot discern whether these stories are fact or fiction. Finally, Kálnay (2019) identifies that it has rained ‘in the city ever since the river dried out’ (p. 13). Therefore, she directly connects the city’s history with its present, with a place (the museum) and with her personal experiences (the rain during her stay and the guide of the museum). Such a connection is established again in her 26th observation:

For years it has been a tradition for the lovers of the city to climb up to the castle on the one day of the week without rain in order to attach a padlock to the railings of the castle’s

³ I do not discuss the role of author versus narrator here because it does not seem especially relevant to either Kálnay’s or Marković’s text. I assume Kálnay and Marković to be the authors as well as the narrators of their texts and for that reason use the female pronoun.

yard. There, the lovers are holding hands, looking down to the forest and the city's rooftops and the colourful sea of umbrellas. (Kálnay, 2019, p. 15)

The castle as an architectural entity that once belonged to the city's founder symbolizes the past, and the description of the lover's actions offer a present perspective, on how places in the city are currently used. Both are combined by water: the tradition is practiced on the rain-free day, yet the rain is still present in the form of the colourful umbrellas.

The present perspective portrays the city how it is in 2019. Few places that the reader encounters are unique: there is typically a pharmacy, common supermarkets (Rewe and Netto), a jewellery store and various museums (Kálnay, 2019, p. 8), establishing them as cities like any other. Only the castle above the city, once home to its founding father, makes Bielefeld identifiable. Even its inhabitants remain largely anonymous, being mostly referred to as die Städter (Kálnay, 2019, pp. 11, 15, 18, 21, 25, 26) – the townspeople. There seem to be no individual persons, only a mass of people who, for example, 'buy their colourful umbrellas in the pedestrian zone' (Kálnay, 2019, p. 11) and then proudly present them during their walks. Kálnay observes what the Städter do and say in general, but rarely gives them names, let alone character traits. The description of a few townspeople is not employed to show what the people of Bielefeld are actually like but rather to underline the 'water city's' identity and how it influences the behaviour of the townspeople. One figure, 'K.', who, like Kálnay, visits the city for the first time (Kálnay, 2019, p. 11) is surprised by a shower of rain upon his arrival, with Kálnay once again connecting a figure to the water motif. The similarities between K. and Kálnay – both foreigners to the city, encountering much rain and carrying the initial 'K' in their name – suggest that the figure is employed as another access to the city. The narrator overhears him telling someone on the phone that there has been a discovery outside of the city: a large Roman legionnaire camp.⁴ Now, he concludes, the history of the city has to be rewritten, which Kálnay comments on: "as if there isn't enough to write about already" (2019, p. 28), suggesting that the city is already hard to grasp, without new information coming to light. She seems to be acutely aware that her observations only include a small part of what the city comprises, and subliminally reflects on this. Moreover, the narrative layer of the city's past in her text is arranged in such a manner that the newly found legionnaire camp does not seem to fit.

The past perspective includes Bielefeld's history as a centre of the textile industry, which is especially referenced at the beginning of the book: Kálnay reflects on the poor working conditions that women were subjected to in the city's spinning mill (2019, p. 6f.) and how men were working in the 'Hechelei' (p. 10), where the flax fibres were split. It becomes clear that she obtains her knowledge on the city's past from a museum (p. 10). Museum visits risk strengthening a certain image of the city, for as institutions they function as memory stores and creators of identity (Weiser, 2017). Basing her text on such an access to the city, the author reflects on how selective that access must be. In terms of duration, the past seems to shrink in Kálnay's text: she usually refers to 'früher' (2019, pp. 6, 11, 14) (meaning 'in former times'), which can mean hundreds of years ago (at the beginning of the 13th century; p. 12) or just 39 years ago (1980; p. 10). When speaking of former times, she refers to a time span of almost 800 years, which seems to consist of only the founding of the city and the textile industry, reducing the city's identity to these two elements. However, throughout the text, Kálnay seems conscious of the fact that she presents only selective parts of the city, not the city as it really is. She hints at this by discussing the legionnaire camp and by quoting Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* in her

⁴ This discovery actually occurred in 2017, but the public was informed about it in May 2019 (LWL, 2019), circa when Kálnay was likely preoccupied with her text on Bielefeld.

text, which is discussed in the following paragraph.

‘Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves’ (Calvino, 1974, p. 30): Kálnay places this quote at the beginning of her text and thus places the work in a larger context of literary attempts trying to describe and understand cities. In the book, Marco Polo and Kublai Khan discuss (fictional) cities of Khan’s empire that Polo describes to him, until in the third part of the book Khan decides that *‘From now on I shall describe the cities and you will tell me if they exist and are as I have conceived them’* (Calvino 1974, p. 43, emphasis in original). The whole dynamic is highly surreal: something seemingly factual (the description of cities that someone has been to) is turned into something fictional, and even absurd, in the moment Khan himself wants to describe the cities without ever having been there. Sheringham (2006) has argued that for ‘surrealism, the possible is contained in the actual; what might be is always already present within what is’ (p. 67). This synopsis of surrealism is analogous to *Invisible Cities*, as well as *Die Stadt ist nicht die Stadt*. The whole point of Polo’s and Khan’s conversations seems to be to experiment with ideas of cities, with models and possibilities and with utopias and dystopias, and Polo ultimately concludes that he likes to imagine putting together *‘piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them. If I tell you that the city toward which my journey tends is discontinuous in space and time, now scattered, now more condensed, you must not believe the search for it can stop’*. (Calvino 1974, p. 164, emphasis in original)

The search for the ‘real’ city can never stop, because it is composed of ‘fragments’, of images that contain what is and what might be, simultaneously. What Kálnay is doing in her text is observing different layers – fragments, to say it in Marco Polo’s words – of the city and reporting on them in a reduced fashion. What comes into being is a city that might still, such as the stories Marco Polo tells on Kublai Khan’s cities, not be the real city. In fact, the question is whether there even can be a real city. After all, Kálnay (2019) finishes her text with the observation, ‘The city is not the city’ (p. 29). Kálnay, analogous to Calvino, is subliminally discussing the possibilities narrations have to form certain images, and the inadequacy to describe the real city. She tries to approach the city by presenting cut-outs of its history and present, and stresses her own self and experiences by focusing on rain and water. Marković, on the other hand, tries to describe the city as real as possible, discussed in the following paragraph.

Graz: I am writing down all texts of the square. Nothing dangerous.

Serbian author Barbara Marković’s *Graz, Alexanderplatz* was written in the context of her city-writer post in Graz from 2011–2012. Her text refers to three town squares of Graz, all located in the inner city: Jakominiplatz, Hauptplatz and Griesplatz. They represent three important junctions, with much traffic, many people, stores, restaurants, etc., and are triangularly connected to each other. Marković’s experimental attempt to write on the city literally comprises of city text?: between October 2011 and February 2012, she spent time on the three squares writing down every piece of text she encountered. Judging from the text, she spent a period of seven days on Jakominiplatz (26th October to 1st November 2011), 23 days on Hauptplatz (2nd November to 24th November 2011) and 50 days on Griesplatz (1st of January to 27th February 2012). However, she apparently did not spend every day of those periods on the squares. Instead, the reader finds dates scattered throughout the text, marking the days on which her ‘copying of the city’ took place. These include five days on Jakominiplatz (Marković, 2012, pp. 8, 10, 18, 26, 34), five days on Hauptplatz (pp. 40, 54, 62, 72, 78) and 10 days on Griesplatz (pp. 98, 106, 112, 114, 118, 120, 128, 134, 142, 160). *Graz, Alexanderplatz* lacks a narrator in the classical sense and rarely uses punctuation

(except for when it is already used in the writings she copies). It can best be described as a collection of city text that not only includes names of restaurants, pharmacies and banks but also text from advertisements, graffiti and cigarette machines and from signs and other types of surfaces (e.g. bins). One example, from the beginning of Marković’s text, is as follows:

(26.10.2011) storm flood I inner city jakominiplatz i am move festival for ethics discussions & music rettetdiemur.at ...nazis be...abso... pizzeria da pina pizzeria open from mon-sat coffee sorger sorger sorger sorger light roast with the power of the shoot no alcohol under 16 dear customers! moist, fresh organic rye bread 0,70 without sunflower seeds. (Marković, 2012, p. 8)

This short passage reflects the way in which all of her text is composed: the words (normally written in miniscule) she encounters on the squares are placed next to each other and are without any context. The reader does not discover where she reads what she writes down or whether she prefers any particular space of the square over another. This has the effect of equalizing every element of text on the square and simultaneously seems to remove any narrative elements. There is no narrator, no plot and no characters. Still, even without narrating or describing in whole sentences, the author provides an image of the square, and it is possible to place single or groups of words into semantic units of meaning and association. Regarding the quote above, the units of meaning and association could, for example, be divided per Table 1:

Text	Meaning/Association	Further Information
(26.10.2011)	the date	
storm flood	graffiti/a poster/a comment about the weather	
I inner city jakominiplatz	street sign: location	The ‘I’ at the beginning stands for the district – <i>inner city</i> being the first district of Graz.
i am	advertisement/graffiti/name of a store	
move festival for ethics discussions and music	poster	The festival in Graz no longer exists but took place in 2011 as well as in 2012 (Move, 2012).
rettetdiemur.at	internet address	Address is still accessible; project that was originally established to stop two hydroelectric power stations from being built at the river Mur (Rettet die Mur, n.d.).

...nazis be...abso...	graffiti	
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pizzeria da pina pizzeria	restaurant name	Used to be at Jakominiplatz 19 but does not exist anymore. (Today, there is a betting shop under the same address called <i>Tipico</i>).
open from mon-sat	sign: opening hours	
open from mon-sat coffee sorger sorger sorger sorger	sign: opening hours sign/poster: advertisement café name	Bakery chain, cake shop and restaurant.
light roast with the power of the shoot	sign/poster: advertisement	
no alcohol under 16	sign: things that are prohibited	
dear customers! moist, fresh organic rye bread 0,70 without sunflower seeds	sign/poster: advertisement	

Table 1: City text meaning

Even when there is no description of the place, the mind of the reader starts ordering the list of words in Marković’s text into units of meaning, thus forming an image of the squares. These images must, however, remain highly ambiguous: as can be seen above, there is no way of telling whether or not the sign of the opening hours belongs to the Pizzeria da Pina or the bakery Sorger. It is even harder to place words that can mean many things into context. These are especially dependent on how they are presented, and might require knowledge from certain social groups or scenes (which is especially true for the understanding of graffiti). In the example above, ‘i am’ and ‘...nazis be...abso...’ could be identified as graffiti, but ‘i am’ could also be a slogan, an advertisement or even the name of a certain place (e.g. restaurant or store). Without further explanation of the words, the readers decide what the words might refer to based on their former experiences, but can rarely be sure whether or not their assumptions are correct. The produced image of the city must remain highly ambivalent. In the case of these endless lists of words, the readers are especially dependent on their own city experiences because, as Mattheis states, the reader ‘participates by building his own city into the narrative, either on top of a universalized narrated city or as a simultaneously existing one that simply has not yet been mentioned’ (2021, p. 37). Here, there is not a ‘worldmaking process’ happening (meaning that Marković does not narrate the city) but rather a world-copying process, with the readers depending on their previous urban knowledge more so than would likely be the case with a more narrative text.

By writing down text from surfaces, Marković preserves the *Schriftbild*⁵ of a certain place during a certain time and makes it accessible for the reader. The city becomes a space that can be textually experienced without being narrated. Knowing what squares in European cities usually look like, the reader can decipher much of the text, thereby getting to know Graz without ever having been. The city communicates through the text and allows conclusions from it on how places in the city are used and how they function and establish their own identities. The chapter ‘Griesplatz’, for example, establishes the square as highly multicultural and includes many Turkish words in the context of Kebap restaurants (Marković, 2012, pp. 98, 100), graffiti (p. 112) and stores (pp. 132, 162); English obituaries from native Indians (pp. 118, 120); a paragraph in Russian (p. 140); and other languages. Writing down text of the city does not, however,

⁵ German for *script* or *typeface*, literally meaning, *Schrift* = writing, *Bild* = picture.

necessarily make *Graz, Alexanderplatz* a particularly interesting piece of (narrative) literature. It could even be questioned whether it can be regarded as literature at all. Two central aspects preserve the narrative appeal of the text: Marković's commentary on the one hand, and the relation to Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* on the other. These are discussed in the following paragraph, and I argue that Marković especially uses them to reflect on her city experiences.

The double pages of the entire book are divided into two parts: on the left-side pages, there is the main city text, already discussed above, and on the right-side, several selected words and 'phrases' of the city text are mirrored and enriched with comments, sometimes doodles, by Marković. The comments take the following form:

Notes on what several of the words on the left pages refer to, e.g.:

Graffiti (Marković, 2012, pp. 31, 37, 39, 41, 47, 49, 59, 67, 69, 73, 75, 113, 131)

Objects: siemens = (usually) traffic lights (p. 113) and holding Graz services = (usually) bins (p. 17)

Notes on the weather and sometimes how it influences her work,

e.g.: Too wet! Rain. I have to stop. (p. 11)

COOLD! (p. 127)

Many short stories on encounters with other persons on the squares, e.g.:

'Excuse me, what are you doing?' 'I am writing down all texts of the square.

Nothing dangerous.' 'No, it's not dangerous but I have to know!' (p. 131)

The shop assistant is standing behind the letters, watching. I smile at him. He comes out and doesn't say anything. I don't say anything. (p. 127)

Comments about the truthfulness of the city text, e.g.:

City text: open 24 hours (p. 50), mirrored: 24 hours, comment: Not true (p. 51), on the next page commented again: That is just not true (p. 53)

City text taken from passages in the book and combined by Marković, e.g.:

Catalogue of things that are forbidden: For your safety it is forbidden to hang up posters. No selling of lottery products to under 16-year-olds. Forbidden to attach pieces of paper. ... Unauthorized access forbidden! (pp. 77, 79)

Through adding comments, thoughts and short-but-lively stories about the people she meets, the author's text becomes more story-like and her experiences easier to identify with. In an interview, Marković stressed that in Graz everybody wanted to know what she was doing, for whom and why (Sternburg, 2017). The people of Graz come alive on the right-side pages, and the text offers ways of identifying with them. Of course, that includes Marković herself, who, as a foreigner, does things on the squares that do not align with what the city's inhabitants or visitors normally do. Marković (2019) often adds comments on how she feels about being watched (pp. 33, 39, 121), that she is afraid of the inhabitants (p. 19) and that she does not want to be seen by people (p. 133). Therefore, she allows the reader to participate in her work process and experiences on the city's squares. At times she even comments on her own comments, which gives the text a diary-like sense. In regard to the city text, she takes an almost curatorial position: she is the one who selects which words to mirror, and thus stress, on the one hand, combining them and creating a different meaning on the other. For example, she takes the words 'grazer nightline no risk – just fun map of stops and stations graz jakominiplatz the public transport network in your pocket suchard tempting delight with a crispy core' (Marković, 2012, p. 30) and mirrors with 'grazer nightline no risk – just fun tempting delight with a crispy core' (p. 31). By omitting the chocolate company Suchard and information making clear that the 'grazer nightline' refers to public transportation operating during the night, the meaning shifts to a sexual one.

The final aspect enriching her text on a narrative level and rendering it a literary attempt to take hold of the city is the title: in Graz there is no square named Alexanderplatz, leading the reader to wonder why the book is so called. In an interview with the Österreichische Gesellschaft für Literatur in June 2020, Marković claimed that Alfred Döblin was an inspiration for her approach and that she liked his small insertions of monologues of the city in his novel (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Literatur, 2021, Minute 7:00–7:11). Therefore, in the title, she directly refers to Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, one of the best-known German modernist urban novels of 1929. In his novel, Döblin introduces the city text that he beforehand meticulously collected, e.g. articles of newspapers, advertisements, weather reports and statistics. Through montage he then integrates these texts without them being directly connected to the actual story on protagonist Franz Biberkopf. This has the effect of the city text being one level of the novel, the story around Biberkopf being the other. By alluding to *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in the title of her book, Marković references this structure, and by only incorporating city text that can be seen on a square, she takes this technique to an extreme in *Graz Alexanderplatz*, seemingly completely neglecting the level of story. However, this alone seems insufficient to gain access to the city: she, as well as Kálnay, integrates herself and her experiences in the city into her text to establish a counterpart to the overwhelming city text (also mirroring the relationship of the city and Biberkopf, who is overwhelmed by its texts). Scherpe's (1989) standpoint that Döblin's 'text narrates really only one thing: the loss of identifiable meanings, orientations and relationships' (p. 172) can thus be disputed. Döblin, Kálnay and Marković all display a search for meaning in cities perceived in a fragmented manner. One great difference in the depth of their access to the cities is directly connected to being a city writer: Döblin lived in Berlin for years, whereas Kálnay and Marković, as city writers, only spent a limited time there.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to investigate the ways contemporary city writers produce images of the cities they visit and how far they might construct a city identity. At first it can be concluded that both texts employ experimental strategies to grasp 'their' cities: Kálnay's observations include present and past perspectives, combined by a water motif. This water motif is also what gives the city, otherwise presented in a rather neutral way, a unique touch. The city's identity mainly comprises rain and water on the one hand, with the city's inhabitants adhering to behavioural patterns according to the rain, and the highly selective history of the city on the other. Kálnay selects only small parts of the 800-year history she refers to, thereby reducing the city to its industrial background.

Marković, in comparison, establishes Graz in a twofold way: on the left of the double pages the city 'speaks' through its texts, on the right, she comments on these texts and tells the reader about her own impressions and experiences, not only with the text but also with the place. Thereby she produces a city image that is highly neutral and factual on the one hand and highly individualized and curated on the other. It becomes clear that to give meaning to the city, it is not enough to just let the texts of the city speak for themselves. Therefore, she also introduces encounters with citizens and her own commentary to the text.

Finally, by referring to *Invisible Cities* and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, both texts subliminally reflect on what narrations of and about the city can achieve or how far they might stage supposed truths. It also became clear that both texts fail to really construct a city identity in the sense of a collective identity. Both try to grasp the essence of the city through connecting knowledge of a museum or visible city text with personal experiences, but these attempts, I would argue, remain only small cut-outs of the city identity. For future study, it might be enlightening to more closely explore texts by other city writers to discover if they, too, use experimental

strategies to describe their cities and if they also refer to other city texts. As the authors' time spent and experiences had at the visited cities are limited, such texts could reveal more general ways of approaching such (unfamiliar) cities.

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