

NATALIA FORNARI

I'm not really back yet.

The city buried my idealisms. To look around is to understand that each sector of passage has its turn: first the sidewalk and the pedestrians, then the bicycles, the two lanes of asphalt, the bollards, and the tram line in both directions. It's like a burial, on an autumn sidewalk, with yellow leaves, some dry, mixed with a little bit of dirt. People passed by, the tram, the cars. People parted ways, kissed each other on the cheek, and continued on their separate paths, sectors and passages. Nearby, the street and the tram lines would soon converge into the same center—wider, heavier, grayer, and squarer. It was precisely in that center that my idealisms met their end, fragmented like each sector of the city; this place without ties where one part never finds connection to merge with another.

It's true. I've been here before, but I'm still not really back. Dwelling in a past that I still remember, on this same street, watching this same movement, I feel the weight of failure, the continuity of one of my greatest mistakes. Confused, I took this same tram and got off in front of the church, a long time ago, and went even deeper down one of the streets on the right, searching for a specific soup and a particular café. It's often said that everything can be found in this city; it may be true, as long as one respects the sectors and designated passages. I remember entering that same stationery store on the corner, which I now look at through this large, white-paned window. I picked up a file folder with dividers—everything around here always seems to be divided or dividing itself—and I remember feeling exactly what I feel now: the end of things, an enormous, frenetic lack.

Nothing has changed. The walking and parting ways continue. In the background, a line between the white and orange buildings, an antenna, radial or parabolic, and then many more lined up in a row. I like to say of the parabolic antennas, that they unite desires and requests, like the signals they capture. Every now and then, I tell my friends, the ones sharing this city with me, that I'm sending them a little radio broadcast to reach their antennas—a way to keep our connections, to find a path between the sectors. Some send signals back. Almost always, I stumble over the city's bollards.

Thinking about it, I don't remember things as well as I thought. It's been three or four years since I first tried living here, walked down that street, found the soup and the café on different days, and was equally disappointed. The truth is, by the second month, I fled. I returned to that city that kept my passions alive, where everything was of grand splendor and nature: the autumn and the river, the winter and the wine, the spring and the rains, the summer and the boats. Each sector and passage, the division of worlds, habits, and ways of living, the lives I became accustomed to, were now separated by bollards and tram lines on the asphalt, and the boats on the river's piers. Another couple embraces and separates. One continues down the street, and the other waits to cross.

I see, finally, that today I am very little of those first dreams; I remain enclosed with only a trace of that initial hope, that passion and nature of lighter days, the memories of when to celebrate was to embrace friends and walk down the same street, without cuts and intersections or passages. Everything was open, and there we went—we had the hours and

the days, we had something to look at and splendor, both beautiful and distant from the cruelty that lies here. My idealisms, buried, did not take with them the space I had within and used to cultivate beauty; a major problem with an unused space, be it for beauty or a simulacrum of life, is that something will promptly take its place—divisions, sectors, and passages will settle, depending on the circumstances and location. Here, on this street, at this window and in this memory, I see my body hardened by the days I spend in this city, by the lack, by the courage that faded and by my waiting for something still without form.

The death of the dream, the burial, the hours and days got all cut short, they piled up. I see the radials and the birds that are not free, all sitting in a row atop the antennas near twilight. I see someone from my past pass by, cross the street, pass by the bollards in a hurry, enter the alley to the left of the church, and disappear—all in a few hectic minutes and to my complete surprise. I remembered their violence towards me, and then a new, broad radial of memories opened between the sectors. I think I will let this one drain into the wide square at the end of the passage line: not everything should or can be remembered or diagnosed; some things can be left as their own small, insignificant points in history, occasionally opened only by a crossing of passages and sectors on a street where I no longer go, and which, clearly, I no longer allow any closeness to me.

From the window, inside the Bibliothek am Wasserturm, overlooking Prenzlauer Allee/Immanuelkirsche

Berlin, November 4, 2024