

Loberg, Molly: *The Struggle for the Streets of Berlin. Politics, Consumption, and Urban Space 1914–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018. ISBN: 978-1-108-41764-8; X, 329 S.

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The *Struggle for the Streets of Berlin* contributes to the vast body of work that uses the German capital to map the socio-spatial manifestations of mass culture and modernity. With its main focus on Weimar Berlin, this book is part of the ongoing reconceptualization of Weimar culture as crisis discourse and, more specifically, the perception, representation, and interpretation of crisis. Loberg starts from the proposition „that struggles over urban space shaped, linked, and magnified perceptions of crisis“ (p. 2) and introduces typical urban types and situations to measure its effects at the intersection of mass consumption and mass politics. Writing as a social historian, she reconstructs the specific connection between the economic and the political through the lens of everyday life in the modern metropolis – its dangers, struggles, conflicts and, more generally, its contingencies, incommensurabilities, and particularities. In ways that are both fascinating and at times frustrating, this means an exclusive focus on individual social types and situations rather than on classed and gendered subjects or distinct urban structures and institutions; it also means treating the city street as vaguely synonymous with public life – but without any of the theoretical implications that have made the city street the privileged scene of urban modernity in cultural and urban theory.

The book begins with the profound changes in urban advertising symbolized by the advertising column and traceable in the proliferation of posters, flyers, and illuminated advertisements that made the city street a battleground for various groups fighting over ownership of, and access to, urban space – from rogue pasters to municipal agencies trying to profit from what Loberg calls a veritable paper revolution. The second chapter presents marginal but ubiquitous figures

such as street hawkers whose fights with shop owners draw attention to the precarious boundary between free market and black market. The third chapter connects discussions about traffic congestion and the dangers of city traffic to the management of other kinds of disruptions, namely political demonstrations. In the fourth chapter, Loberg uses repeated attacks on shop windows as a symbol of modern consumerism to connect growing economic precarity with growing political violence. The last chapters trace these developments into the „Third Reich“: with Chapter 5 documenting the forced coordination of the city street, including the „Germanization“ of commerce and advertising, that started with the first antisemitic boycotts in spring 1933 and with Chapter 6 mapping the profound impact on urban life, from the Winter Relief in 1934 to the Olympic Games in 1936 to „Kristallnacht“ in 1938. The epilogue uses Speer’s grandiose plans for Germania and the destruction the German capital during World War II to highlight the forces of instability and destruction that represent an integral part of the history of Berlin and, perhaps, urban history in general.

Loberg’s book contributes to the search for alternative models of capitalist modernity by identifying its traces in everyday life, by privileging the quotidian and contingent, and by validating the particular and specific. The material riches found in the archives (Bundesarchiv, Landesarchiv), which include local newspapers, city ordinances, political pamphlets, and trade journals, are presented in well-conceived chapters and in a highly readable prose. Social historians and urban historians will appreciate the close attention to the materiality of the past; cultural studies scholars will miss the kind of critical reflection that would have made the focus on everyday life also a contribution to theories of the modern metropolis.

In Loberg’s presentation of the material, the topography of the city street is limited to the historical center (Scheunenviertel, Potsdamer Platz, Lustgarten). The typology of city dwellers is almost exclusively male, with a preference for marginal figures; and the presentation of clashes and incidents is largely disconnected from the structural transforma-

tions brought about by urban planning, public housing, and technological innovation. The author references most of the existing scholarship in the footnotes but does not take advantage of the productive differences among architectural, social, and literary readings of the city street. Engaging with the topic of modern advertising and shop-window design or with the localized nature of political violence would have allowed Loberg to clarify her critical intervention.¹

Her discussion of the struggles over the city street would also have benefited from some acknowledgement of the importance of flânerie, or walking, as an important model of modern subjectivity and urban perception in Benjamin, Kracauer, Hessel, and others. In a study so invested in the everyday, the absence of any explicit references to its rich conceptualization, whether in the form of Alltagsgeschichte or through the writings of de Certeau and others, is puzzling.

In letting the sources speak for themselves, the author chooses not to engage with the theoretical and methodological possibilities of interdisciplinary research and instead demonstrates the importance of paying close attention to the big impact of small things. In doing so, she also reminds anyone interested in the culture and politics of the modern metropolis of the limits of broad theorizing in making sense of the instability, fluidity, and general messiness of urban life then and now. And this is undoubtedly an important point to make.

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¹ Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces. Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, Berkeley 2001; Pamela Sweet, *Neighbors and Enemies. The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin, 1929–1933*, Cambridge 2004.