



The Sinus-Venosus Effect

An annotated walk through an open air gallery in
the wastelands of Berlin between east and west

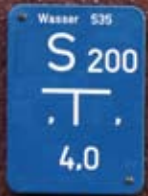
Sebastian Pelz (Text) & Elke Reinhuber (Photography)



The Sinus-Venosus Effect

We would like to join you on a walk through the hinterland of Berlin's inner city, to dusty and abandoned corners. This is the place to find small and inconspicuous things which can inspire artists. Wander around and make your own observations, as long there is something to discover. So let's go.

left: 104 | Which side is the right one? The path of the cobble-stoned road serves only as a symbolic reminiscence. Subcutaneous gases ascend here and there, paying no heed to monikers such as "East" and "West". Visible borders are "so 20th Century" ... such that soon we will not be able to understand them any more.



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200 | Everywhere on walls, fences or lampposts hang these small signs which provide a minutiae of details about the underground life of the metropolis, where hydrants and valves extend their networks over, under and next to the other supply lines.

212 | The majuscule of a lost poem, the first letter of an unwritten novel, the big abstraction of the fight between blue and white, the constructivist dispute between rectangle and circle – here, an intention for art speaks to us which has been crippled by the Stalinist accusation of Formalism.

100 | Forty years ago, we have been told there are beaches to find under the pavements: now we know better. There is only water that is restrained by small rusty shields.

112 | A note to the ambitious floor tiler: disruption of a sternly assigned grid creates irritation, which can stretch itself along several yards of footpath. Carl Andre would have beamed at this patchwork.

209 | One of the lesser-known works of James Turrell was hanging on this wall, until the the appropriate 60-watt bulb disappeared years ago.



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115 | Sometimes the flux is more exciting than the finished product. What of these liquorice cables when they are unplugged, where do they lead to and what do they transport anyway?

101 | Everyday objects made larger than life in order to free their form from the original context: this was a standard method of Claes Oldenburg. In this plate dryer, re-designed to resemble a bicycle stand, the reference to the kitchen is barely visible.

201 | Here you can see a monumental sculpture of scaffolding, hidden under a tarpaulin at Leipziger Platz. Supposedly, as has been announced and re-announced for the last decade, the AvD [German Automobile Association] house is to be erected here, instead of the castle of matchbox sticks you see. But for now, the gap is still celebrated, whilst hiding it from the glimpses of passersby. Behind the façade you can see the splendour and agony of developer architecture: it looks identical to all the others and remains hollow. In the end these buildings do not even have to be built; they will remain empty regardless.

103 | Fronting the Canadian Embassy carpark, these kinetic works of art – ascending out of the floor in a blinking manner before vanishing into it again – long to impress us. Otto Pienes' works pale in comparison to their red lamps and gracious movements. Only a yokel would call them auto-rising bollards.



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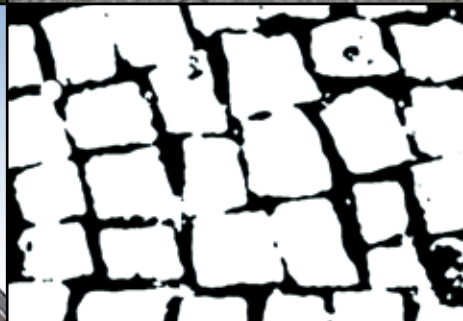
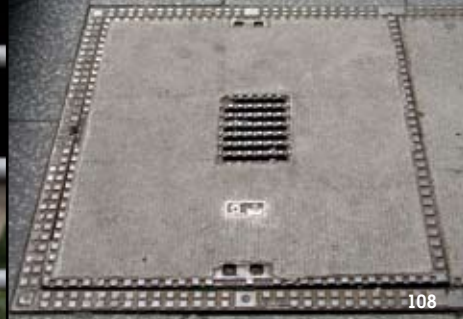
107 | The sound-sculpture in the immediate neighbourhood of the buried Führerbunker is the pièce de résistance on this route. In a set rhythm, sounds emanate through two barred frames from the underground – the cold breath of Hades surrounds the audience and the earth exalts in a roar.

305 | Above the rear entrance to the S-bahn station, a three-flanked installation is hung breezily on a lamppost by the Master of the Gas-Altar. He alone knows how to obtain this particular shade of yellow. Below the frame lies a three-piece gully-sculpture – to both we pay a moment of honorary abidance.

Background | This band of cobblestones circles the eastern part of Berlin, running along the course of the Wall which was levelled years ago; keeping the memory alive like a scarred wound.

105 | In between these inconspicuous masterpieces a pedestrian crossing finds its place, the hieroglyphs denoting the spot where gentlemen may be led into nothingness. There is no corresponding marking on the other side of the road. Contrastingly, since the other sex enables the survival of the species, they get to the opposite side unharmed.

102 | Even technical gadgets can always be optimised, improved. Out of this gully the water will surely only spray in traffic direction and its lid won't get lost, although in this case parking-in backwards is not advised. It is not clear whether these restrictions of use influence its swallowing-power.



320 | Architecture finds no place in this collection, because it is so bulky and takes away so much space that everything little and inconsiderable vanishes in its shadow. This building therefore is only introduced as an idea; neither its measurements nor its function is important. The Embassy of the Czech Republic was constructed in the seventies in the spirit of Brutalism and envisages such a future. In a few years, intergalactic travel agencies and interplanetary fuel-stations will be doubtless built in the same manner, if the oil suffices. In Prague there are similar concrete buildings with brown-tinted mirror glass: they have been designated for protection – a clear indication that this future belongs to the past.

214 | This front lawn is possibly visited by a coy monkey. Hopefully at least he can understand the sign. Perhaps even the Golem would be stopped in his tracks.

106 | You can still see the rim where skate-boarders tried out freestyle figures or on which the primate of frame 214 sharpened its teeth. In the present – which continues to progress – this aberration has already been repaired, as if to prove how preliminary our observations are.

108 | We halt at an unimpressive square in the sidewalk to honour the silent witnesses of broadband infrastructure. The raised metal cubes on top of these concrete lids (64 in the middle, 32 or 28 along the edges) symbolise the powers of two of megabits whizzing through the dark below.

307 | A concrete wall like one from the workshop of Victor Vasarely recalls a time in which the capital did not surrender to faceless mass-architecture. An architecture which now seals up every gap and destroys the Berlin style, this tightrope walk between ornamental Soviet style and the Charta of Athens.



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110 | The blacksmithing arts of the Wilhelminian era not only block entry to these basement windows but also reveal a mundanely formed bicycle stand. In its time there surely was no need for such a fixture – which makes the construction even more notable.

111 | There is great power in repetition: The never-ending recurrence of the same is not to be perceived as monotonous, but as a confirmation of the seen. This observation is strengthened by thinking of a Paul Klee.

309 | Sixty years after the Battle of Berlin there are still bullet holes in these walls. Behind them the 'Unternehmen Reichsautobahnen' once resided as part of the Ministry of Transport in pre-war times. Some passersby seem to have been angered by this fact. The inscriptions have been scraped off, the boards removed, and the evidence covered up.

113 | At this point we could be dealing with the work of a Naturalist. Or, rather, could it be a representative of Synthetic Realism? Like petrified lava the raised asphalt makes curves as if cut by Lucio Fontana. Shades of black transform the "Black Paintings" of Rauschenberg, Rothko and Stella into plasticity. The ground will open up and swallow the infidels.

109 | This manhole cover, contrary to rumour, does not block the entrance to the underground bunker of the Reichskanzlei which so many tourists seek in vain. Rather it embodies in its oxidation the perished GDR, of which fortunately little remains visible.



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308 | This streetlight metronome is the last memory of the '90s, when Berlin's tourism marketing tried to institutionalise the trade of synthetic drugs: young people came in masses to the Love Parade, moved around hectically – leaving very little money but a lot of dirt in the city.

203 | "Touch me", it reads here, vexingly enough. This invitation sounds as awkward as the „ACHTUNG" of past days. But in the godforsaken town of Berlin nobody thinks about the "Noli me tangere!" of the Resurrected.

208 | The in-between is what makes the difference. That space, of which neither camera has an overview, is the zone in which you are most likely to find Bruce Nauman.

114 | A rusty street sign in the weeds awakens memories of a time in which Berlin looked exciting and unfinished. Soon the last wasteland will have been cleared for the next town villa – shaped in pre-fab concrete – or for another mirrored shopping centre.

304 | Twenty metres above the street a collection of barbed wire, fences and other means prevent prohibited translocations. Very close to the zonal border the memory of illicit crossings is upheld particularly manifold praise.

202 | At the corner of this wasteland, a camera mounting bracket is affixed to the wall sans camera, like a video system without a monitor: an intriguing manifestation of absolute reductionism in media art.



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204 | A real artist will not be stopped by the obstacles of everyday life, if he is not as capricious as Cy Twombly. He just paints away with his genial gesture. Even if it is only with a tube of glue and the canvas is merely an old canopy.

206 | On the pavement we stop in front of a sarcophagus which is described by the local heating company as a ventilation box with a tendency to produce moist vapours. The construction and measurements instead suggest a Lycian dwarf's tomb. Plain design and reduced decoration imply a low ranking official. The escaping steam makes us believe that a curse may have been involved.

205 | The possibility of putting an end to everything rarely reveals itself so succinctly. As if it were so easy to hit the red button "Rupture" and simply be able to start again.

207 | This is a completely different type of sarcophagus. Clearly composed on the long-side, almost martially structured, the arrangement suggests a warrior's gravesite. Perhaps a stout foot soldier, who became a hero, but one whose name could not be unearthed, because everything personal is missing here. Or maybe it was swallowed by the centuries, just as successive generations deleted the names of unpopular Pharaohs, and with that, every memory of them.



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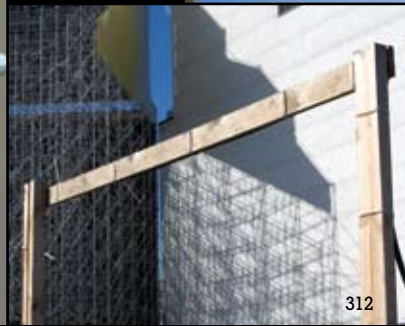
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210 | Was it criticism from neighbours opposed to numeration or were the tenants themselves not really happy with the number on the letterbox? At any rate, the negative implications of the number one seem to have taken over. Alternatively, it could concern an unfinished work out of the oeuvre of Hanne Darboven.

303 | The maple trees are a reference to the tenants of the house on the corner – the Canadian Embassy. Many years still must pass until syrup can be extracted from the sap.

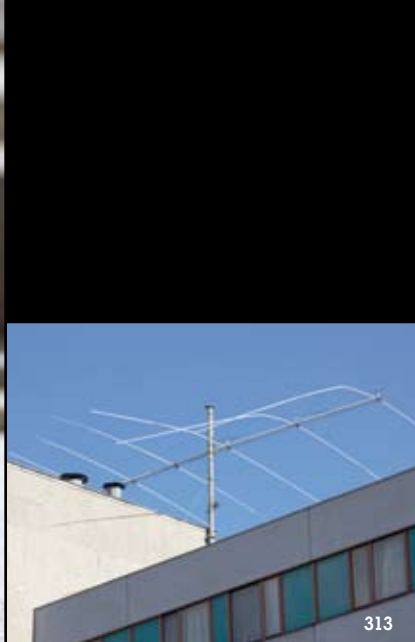
213 | A brutish joining method pulls together elements which obviously do not want to have anything to do with each other. Two different principles of going about the world are here involuntarily tied to one another and must adapt to the reality of their counterpart.

300 | In the city, the elements do not have a chance to confront a citizenry estranged from nature in its raw form. Civilisation forces the sheer power of nature into silver tubes, in order to not have to witness its strength. Those who let the sublime grace of these pipes sink in can confidently abstain from Olafur Eliasson's splashings.

312 | A small triumphal arch on the corner of the road surely commemorates only a small victory. In fact the statistics for the metropolitan area are little cause for celebration: hardly any births and almost no economic growth – not a real cause for jubilation.



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301 | Whether the heavy house attached to this little propeller can fly, whether it is even able to be lifted by the three little wings is rather questionable. But maybe it is actually the propeller of a boat, so that in this case, the melting of the ice caps and subsequent flood is already borne in mind. In such a case an outside propeller would definitely come in handy.

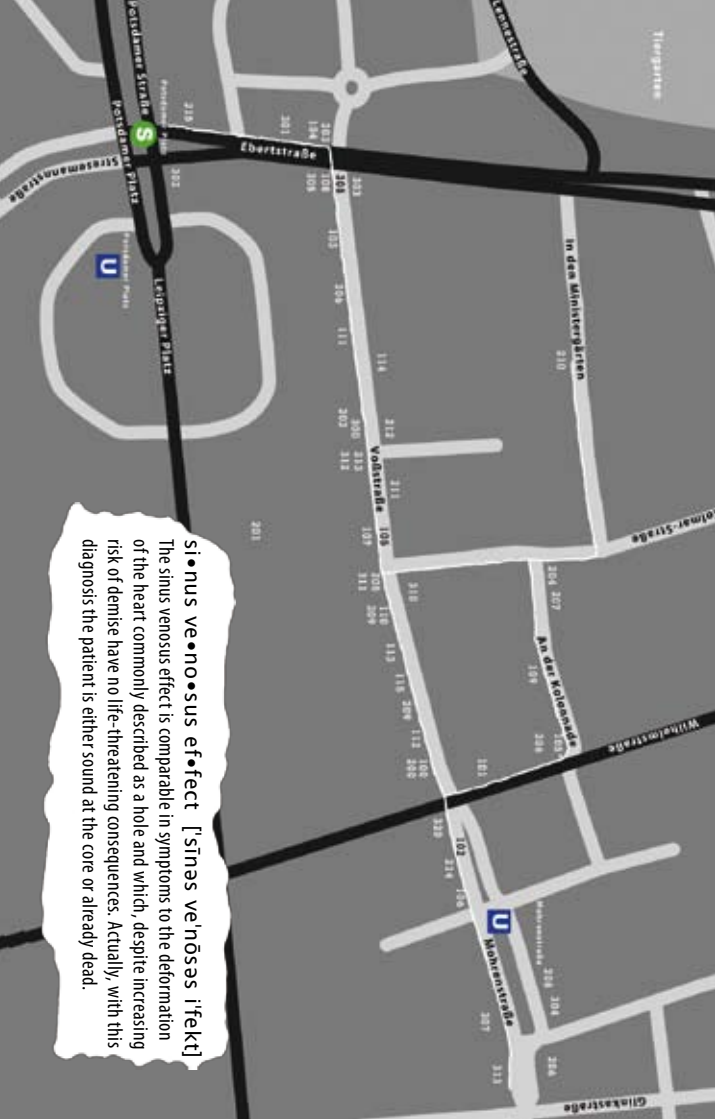
310 | Two systems with opposing concepts of society confront each other. A single-purpose product without embellishment shines on one side of the street – in opposition to the other side, which celebrates its material riches with much glass and steel – shining its light throughout the entire surroundings.

313 | This seemingly-puny-but-in-fact-sturdy wire construction on the roof of the North Korean Embassy can only be seen from a distance. An old-fashioned antenna for short wave radio, it keeps contact with their politically locked country. Yet it is questionable whether developments of the last years have been transmitted completely since the showcase in front of the building is filled with items commemorating times in which socialism was still winning.

302 | The crossover between Leipziger Straße and Ebertstraße is dominated by numerous bright floodlights, which light up Berlin's few skyscrapers by night. Almost the entire skyline of Berlin is gathered here in one very small space. In the daytime, the lights on high masts resemble corncobs and remind the urbanites of the absence of nature, of the simple country life, or maybe just of cornflakes, popcorn and glucose-fructose-syrup.

306 | If Erich Honecker wanted to play a "fancy lamps" themed game of Happy Families with his comrades on the Central Committee, he was prepared. The cards were shuffled in a way that he would get all the trumps, even those with the glass spheres seemingly inspired by Italian models, meanwhile collecting rainwater.

311 | We are already familiar with this lamppost model of the border-crossing type (310). It symbolises the last piece of autocracy on German soil: sans decoration and mouldy in the inside.



Sinus venosus effect [ˈsɪnəs veˈnɔsəs ɪˈfekt]
 The sinus venosus effect is comparable in symptoms to the deformation of the heart commonly described as a hole and which, despite increasing risk of demise have no life-threatening consequences. Actually, with this diagnosis the patient is either sound at the core or already dead.

Sebastian Pelz understands what his palate, his eyes and his ears pick up, how to turn an amusing phrase and thereby entertain his readers. His imagination knows no bounds when it come to developing new stories and hair-raising plots or merely copywriting on short notice.
www.esespe.de

Elke Reinhuber [er] prefers detours to direct paths. On the websites she has designed, which are user-friendly, clear and straightforward, there are - as in her photography - no unnecessary embellishments. In her artistic work she seeks to explore inconspicuous parallel universes.
www.eer.de

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Dray Walk Gallery
 Truman Brewery
 91 Brick Lane
 London E1
 September 2008

Cover: 215 | Next to the glass portal of Potsdamer Platz leftovers of the decoratively painted Wall ensure the perfect photo background. Before posing the tourists habitually adhere their chewing gum to the edge of the Wall. A little pageant of coloured gum-carcasses encrusts the old East-West border construction like corals on a reef.

