

AND LET NO ONE BE FORGOTTEN!

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and let no one be forgotten! is an immersive audiowalk by Berlin-based artists Hannah Alongi, Jeremy Knowles, and Katya Romanova addressing the so-called 'Russenhäuser' (Russian Houses) of Berlin-Karlshorst.

Scene 1

Location: Bakery at S-Bahn Karlshorst

CARO:

I wonder if much has changed or if you'll feel the same being back here.

MARIANNE:

Yes, I'm curious to see it again after all this time.

CARO:

I want you to paint a picture for me of your childhood here. What was it like?

MARIANNE:

Oh, I don't know. Where do I even start? Well... Bakeries like this one didn't really exist back then. Not here. And getting coffee certainly wasn't a thing yet.

CARO:

Karlshorst was a little slow on the uptake huh?

MARIANNE:

You could say that.

CARO:

So what... people just baked their own bread?

MARIANNE:

Ah no, we did have bakeries, but not like this. You couldn't just sit in them like we are now. I do remember as kids, we'd go to the bakery, and since the cakes were baked on large trays, they'd trim the edges. For 20 pfennigs or so, you could get a little bag of cake edges.

CARO:

I wish they'd still do that now. I'd take some cheap cake trimmings.

MARIANNE:

The bags were filled with random cakes, but I used to save all the bits from my favorite cake—

CARO:

Bienenstich?

MARIANNE:

Yes, bienenstich! I'd save them 'til the end.

CARO:

Did you like growing up here?

MARIANNE:

I loved it.

CARO:

What was it that you loved?

MARIANNE:

It was like a little village back then. The world felt smaller. We looked out for each other. And it was slower. Not this 'go go go' of today. People stopped to talk on the street... It was community. We had community.

I remember there were still men who would come around with blocks of ice. They carried the blocks on a frame on their shoulder, hacking into them with ice picks, and brought them into the houses for the old ice boxes.

CARO:

That sounds straight out of a film.

MARIANNE:

Yes (*she chuckles*). And every Wednesday at 6, one of them would ring a bell and call out: "*Firewood for potato peels, firewood for potato peels!*" And we'd all run upstairs, grab the bowl—there was a special brown bowl with a hole in it where we'd been saving the potato peels all week—and bring it down to him. He'd weigh the potato peels and give us just as much fine kindling wood in return. It was important for lighting the boiler. I remember that so clearly!

And on Gundelfingerstraße, there was—even though no one believes it now, but I swear—others remember too. In the front part of Gundelfingerstraße, there was a cow kept in a yard—it was milked every day. And in the next yard, there was still a blacksmith, not for gold but for shoeing horses. We watched from a respectful distance, totally fascinated.

It seemed simple and easy somehow.

CARO:

Easy?

MARIANNE:

This reminds me of Benjamin, in *Experience and Poverty*, who wrote about a generation that went from riding horse carts or sleds to school, to suddenly facing the most modern technology. And that's how it was for me too!

In the 50s, we played in the street because there were hardly any cars. We used to play games like "Master, Master, give us work" across the streets, where one kid would call from the other side. No one told us to get off the roads because it was completely safe.

CARO:

You can bet that's changed now.

MARIANNE:

I also remember collecting glass bottles as a popular activity. It was sometimes even required. Recycling, or "Zero Waste" as we'd call it today, was a big topic in the DDR from the very start.

We'd get a few pennies for each bottle or jar. Sometimes we had to do it for the Pioneers. Otherwise, we'd just go door-to-door with a little handcart, asking, "Bottles, jars, or old paper?" And people would say, "Yeah, check downstairs!" And so we'd collect everything, and that was our pocket money.

CARO:

Where could you take them?

MARIANNE:

Oh, to a collection point. There was one right next to the school. I don't know when they got rid of that, probably when the yellow recycling bags came in. We could do that until about the age of 14 I'd say. No need for any permission.

CARO:

Permission? Hmm... and what about the Russian presence? It must have... I mean... did you notice them? Were they around?

MARIANNE:

Of course. There was quite a large area that was fenced off. The Sperrgebiet.

CARO:

This is where the Russians lived?

MARIANNE:

It's mostly where the higher-ranking soviet officials and their families lived, yes. There was also the barracks.

CARO:

Where was 'the zone'?

MARIANNE:

It kept changing. Every few years it would shrink. But when I was a child I remember the fence ran along Treskowallee.

CARO:

Wasn't it strange to have these areas where you couldn't go?

MARIANNE:

Not really.

CARO:

It just seems so wrong that people weren't able to get into a place they once might even have lived.

MARIANNE:

That's how it was back then. But I didn't know any different. It only seems strange now. That was my world. Some places you didn't go.

CARO:

Hmm... how did you feel towards the Russians?

MARIANNE:

Well, my parents, your great-grandparents, were left-leaning. So I didn't really experience it as a negative. There may well have been a lot of resentment and hostility. But I know for sure that people felt sorry for the soldiers. It trickled down to us how badly ordinary soldiers were treated. Some even tried to escape from time to time. But if they got caught—that was really life-threatening, or they'd end up in a military prison. Apparently, they were poorly supplied in the barracks and didn't have enough clothing. People truly felt sorry for them. They were young men, and they only got about one day off a month. Even then, they weren't allowed to stroll around or anything but had to go on group outings, like to the zoo, for example. I mean, I'm sure that was exactly what young men were most interested in (*laughs ironically*).

So, ordinary soldiers weren't allowed to walk freely around Karlshorst. But the families were.

CARO:

It's strange to hear you talk about them sympathetically.

MARIANNE:

They were just people.

CARO:

Sure. But that's a pretty simplistic way of looking at it, Oma. There was also a huge KGB base here, so Karlshorst especially would have been under intense surveillance.

MARIANNE:

Well yes, but I don't remember that really.

CARO:

Were there tensions between the Germans and Russians though? I thought Russians received more preference for things that were in limited supply. Surely there must have been tensions *there*. A frustration that they were getting stuff before Germans. In Germany...

MARIANNE:

That's not necessarily true. They didn't always get things first. It was a complicated time and supplies would change drastically for everybody. One thing I remember, they used to glue newspapers on the windows instead of curtains. Can you imagine that? I don't know if it was our *Neues Deutschland* or the *Pravda*, but they would put them onto the window panes. You couldn't see inside. And you couldn't see out either! So, getting curtains must have been really complicated for them somehow.

CARO:

In this article I was talking about the other day it mentioned these Russian houses that have been empty since the Abzug. Do you know them?

MARIANNE:

Yes. They were in the Sperrgebiet.

CARO:

It's a really long time for them to remain empty. I can't believe no one has moved in.

MARIANNE:

Well, they're still owned by Russia.

CARO:

Maybe they'll still have newspaper on the windows... shall we go see them?

MARIANNE:

I'll show you where the Sperrgebiet was on the way...

Scene 2

Location: The walk to Odessaplatz

Jeremy Knowles:

'The great play is almost over.'

This was the closing line of a Guardian article published on the 11th of February, 1994, in which the author reflected on the Russian withdrawal from Karlshorst. At the time, General Matvei Burlakov, head of the Russian forces in Berlin, assured the press that no Russian "bullet, grenade, or mine would be left on German soil." Yet, over thirty years later, the final curtain has still to fall on this great piece of Cold War theatre. The Russian ordinance and ammunition may be gone from Germany, but other relics linger.

Welcome to *and let no one be forgotten!* - an audiowalk through Karlshorst inspired by the peculiar history of several houses here that have remained empty and largely untouched since 1994. This story is not only about the houses themselves but also about the different people who have come into contact with them, directly or indirectly, over the years. **It is a story about what (and who) gets left behind after empires fall.**

My name is Jeremy Knowles and I'm one of the three artists who have collaborated to create this audiowalk. Collectively, we represent three of the four allied nations that signed the German Instrument of Surrender in 1945, thus ending the Second World War. Though we are not German and did not grow up in Karlshorst, we share a part in its history. **Our lives have been touched by the events that took place here.**

The inspiration for this project came from a walk I took through Karlshorst in 2023 from my home in Lichtenberg. It was then that I first came across the houses on Andernacherstraße and Königswinterstraße and stood in bewilderment at their emptiness - their quietness - their stillness.

I wondered what the people who now live closest to the houses might think of the history they embody so clearly to me. I wondered how it might feel to live in such proximity to these crumbling and seemingly forgotten monuments to the Soviet occupation of East Berlin. Does this turbulent period of German history still feel present in Karlshorst, three decades later?

It's 'all a question of memory and forgetting', noted the author of the same Guardian article back in 1994.

...Memory.

...And forgetting.

It's as if, even at the time that this article was written, there was an awareness of the near-impossible task lying ahead of East Germans to close one chapter of history and simultaneously bear witness to the unshakable present moment - one coined by Francis Fukuyama as 'the end of history'.

We're going on a walk together.

Turn around with your back to the station. You should be facing the Havanna Bar now. Follow Treskowallee north until you reach Odesa Platz. It's about a two-minute walk but take your time. We're in no rush.

In unravelling these questions about Karlshorst's Soviet past, about memory, division, and identity, I was reminded of the sci-fi novel *Roadside Picnic*, written by the Strugatsky brothers in 1972, in which the protagonists venture into mysterious forbidden zones.

These zones are presumed to have been visited by aliens, though this visitation was never witnessed - no aliens were actually observed. Instead, the humans depicted in *Roadside Picnic* are forced to reckon with the prospect that extra-terrestrial beings came to Earth and found nothing of interest. The aliens didn't stick around long enough to realise that pinnacle moment in Western sci-fi stories: the first encounter between species.

Only the most expert scientists are allowed to enter the zones. But there are those who cross into the zones without permission - the Stalkers. In turn, the Stalkers become consumed by the zones, returning home each time having been changed. Their worldview altered. Their very humanity unclear.

For me... *Roadside Picnic* is a story about inclusion. It asks the question: what does it mean to live in a world that is defined by borders we're not supposed to cross?

Early in the novel, a scientist explains his theory about the aliens through his metaphor of a picnic...

Quote - Roadside Picnic:

Noonan jumped. "What did you say?"

"A picnic. Imagine: a forest, a country road, a meadow. A car pulls off the road into the meadow and unloads young men, bottles, picnic baskets, girls, transistor radios, cameras ... A fire is lit, tents are pitched, music is played. And in the morning they leave. The animals, birds, and insects that were watching the whole night in horror crawl out of their shelters. And what do they see? An oil spill, a gasoline puddle, old spark plugs and oil filters strewn about ... Scattered rags, burntout bulbs, someone has dropped a monkey wrench. The wheels have tracked mud from some godforsaken swamp ... and, of course, there are the remains of the campfire, apple cores, candy wrappers, tins, bottles, someone's handkerchief, someone's penknife, old ragged newspapers, coins, wilted flowers from another meadow ..."

"I get it," said Noonan. "A roadside picnic."

"Exactly. A picnic by the side of some space road. And you ask me whether they'll come back ..."

Scene 3: The Sperrgebiet

Location: Odesaplatz

CARO:

What are you thinking?

MARIANNE:

The buildings haven't changed that much. I feel a bit like I'm in a dream. It looks the same but then it almost doesn't.

CARO:

Tell me more about this area. What about the shops, for example? How did you buy things? Were there special stores or something with ration cards?

MARIANNE:

No! I'm not that old. The ration cards were no longer used, but you always had a special place to go pick up items. At that time, in the early 60s, things still weren't that plentiful. That's how it was in the DDR: even if there were no more ration cards, there was still a store you were registered at or something like that.

In fact, there used to be a Russian store - *The Magazin*. Back then, the supply situation wasn't that great. But at *Magazin*, they had the things people really wanted: Swiss cheese, fish, butter—BUTTER! That was like a magic word. You couldn't just buy butter whenever you wanted, of course. You were only allowed a certain amount of butter per month. You could get that from the store, and they'd make a mark in the ledger. I still remember that sometimes they'd say, "You can have two extra pieces," because someone else hadn't picked up their share.

CARO:

What was it like shopping in *Magazin*? Could they speak German?

MARIANNE:

They definitely understood German, so it wasn't complicated to communicate what you wanted. It wasn't like you were trying on clothes or anything; it was usually clear—today they had bananas or maybe some meat. And they must have received supplies in large enough quantities that the officers didn't buy everything up first; otherwise, they wouldn't have sold any to us.

But that gradually got better over time. Then it was about other things, like household appliances. You had to organise those or keep an eye out for when something became available. It was like this: if there was a line somewhere, you knew there was something there, and you might want to check it out. You'd stand in line, and maybe you could buy some bananas or something. It sounds a bit crazy today, but that's how it was.

Look, this is where the fence was.

CARO:

For the Sperrgebiet?

MARIANNE:

Yes. There were gates in the fence for pedestrians. People who lived there had to show a pass every time.

CARO:

So, you never went inside the Sperrgebiet?

MARIANNE:

Oh, I didn't say that!

CARO:

You snuck in??

MARIANNE:

Not really, they always let us kids in. I had a friend who lived in the Sperrgebiet. On Rheinsteinstrasse.

CARO:

I thought only Russians were allowed to live in there?

MARIANNE:

There were exceptions. Normally, yes, that was the rule. My friend's family was anti-fascist, and they were allowed to live there because of it. The family got the house and garden after 1945. We always played in that garden. And the soldiers would always let me in without a pass. They knew my friend, of course, since she went through every day to and from school, and I guess they didn't mind children; we were little, after all. So, we would play in her garden. I remember that they had this beautiful, large willow tree we could swing from.

CARO:

What about your parents? Were they allowed in?

MARIANNE:

No, never.

CARO:

So kids just had the run of the place?

MARIANNE:

Not exactly. But we certainly had more freedom. We used to come into the park here too. That's where I had my first kiss.

CARO:

What?? Who?

MARIANNE:

Sacha Kazakov. He was a Russian boy.

CARO:

Ohhh, a Russian lover.

MARIANNE:

My first love! We used to race from one end of the park to the other. I was quite the runner, you know. But he was faster. Nothing quite like the adrenaline hit we would get sprinting through the trees. One day when I caught up to him, completely out of breath, he grabbed both my arms and pulled me into a kiss with such a force.

CARO:

(Caro laughs) That sounds sweaty.

MARIANNE:

He caught me completely unaware. That's what I liked about him. It was hard to surprise me, but he always managed to do it. Maybe it was because we were so different.

CARO:

I thought there wasn't mixing.

MARIANNE:

There wasn't really. There was a lot of *talk* of German-Soviet friendship, but that didn't really exist. Not in practice. But *we* put it into practice.

I only met him because of my friend who lived there. We were in the park, and he marched straight up to us and told me he thought I was very pretty.

CARO:

So forward.

MARIANNE:

I loved it. I found him so interesting. His whole life and culture were a complete mystery to me. He seemed like an adventure.

CARO:

And, of course, the forbidden love.

MARIANNE:

Yes, I think we thought ourselves invincible. We even used to ask for cigarettes from the soldiers. Rebels without a cause!

CARO:

I never knew any of this.

MARIANNE:

He lived in one of the houses from the article.

CARO:

Really? Did you ever go in?

MARIANNE:

A couple of times. It wasn't easy. But I wanted to see where he came from. We would meet in the park and sneak in through the back. He would run upstairs and check no one was home before coming to get me.

CARO:

Imagine if you were caught.

MARIANNE:

Yes, it was very stupid. We weren't THAT young, you know. If we were caught there would have been consequences. More so for him, I think.

CARO:

(Breathing out heavily) How hard it must have been to live with the constant fear of punishments hanging over your heads...

MARIANNE:

Don't be dramatic. It wasn't like that. Yes, there was the threat of punishment, but not really. Everybody knew the line and how to walk it.

CARO:

Sounds like you were trying to bring down the system.

MARIANNE:

I was never that political. I didn't want to stand out like that.

CARO:

But Mum told me you got into trouble once for starting a club.

MARIANNE:

Oh! *(She laughs)* Well, that was just stupid kid stuff. In our little group at school, we would inform ourselves through Western television and had our own ideas and plans.

CARO:

I thought you couldn't watch TV from the West.

MARIANNE:

It was forbidden, yes. There was a time when people would be caught by how their antennas were positioned—you could tell who was watching Western TV. I remember being at friends' houses, watching Western TV after school. That somehow got reported to the Party leadership where their father worked, and as a result, he was punished. He had a salary reduction.

CARO:

So is that what gave you the idea for the club?

MARIANNE:

No, I don't remember who had that idea first. There was a core group of us, maybe four or five people. But sometimes we would have more, and at some point, there were 13 of us. Then somebody suggested we call it Club 13.

It was a blast. We would just go to the cinema or hang out in the streets, sometimes go for a swim at the pool. At that time, buttons were all the rage at school. So we all came with these buttons on that said 'Club 13'. The teacher freaked out, and then all hell broke loose. "What is this? These are obviously state-enemy conspiracies."

They really chewed us out for it. Those buttons were quickly taken and stored away. We had to swear an oath that we would never again come up with such stupid ideas. Club 13... it was just us trying to be 'cool'.

CARO:

You're lucky they only took the buttons away.

MARIANNE:

Oh, we were also interrogated. But I think it was obvious we were just a bunch of nobodies and it was all a joke. And one of our friends, a girl who lived on the same street as me, had a father in the Stasi.

CARO:

How did it feel to be around her? Were you scared?

MARIANNE:

No, it was fine. It was never a real problem. We were just a bit more cautious. When she was around we would just avoid talking about certain topics. So, in that sense, it was pretty straightforward. But I'm sure her father got involved when we were caught with Club 13. We probably owe him saying, "Nah, they're harmless, this is all nonsense." We were at that age where, honestly, we could have been hauled in somewhere. If we had done anything serious, we would have been in real trouble.

(Pause.)

CARO:

I have to say I'm a little surprised. I thought you'd remember the Russians as a kind of oppressive force or something. You seem very casual about it all.

MARIANNE:

It's hard to explain it but that was my normal. It's only with hindsight that you can see how much it affected our lives. The lack of freedom. You know... they would stop to ask for ID in the street.

CARO:

Yeah, I thought they also would just take people off the street if they didn't have papers on them. I'm sure I read once that if the Russian guards noticed that the number of prisoners no longer matched

because one had escaped, been shot, or beaten to death, they would simply grab someone from the street who happened to be near.

MARIANNE:

That probably did happen but it wasn't my experience. You need to understand that before this, they were our liberators, you know? Or that's how we were taught, at least. At the end of the war, everyone had been so fearful of these 'Soviets' and then they came in with flowers on their tanks. Your great-grandparents passed down a more sympathetic view to me.

CARO:

Ok, but look at the real estate they took away... people must have been struggling even back then to find places. Surely it would have been incredibly frustrating to have all this space, all these houses and villas, taken up by the Russians.

MARIANNE:

Yes, I suppose that's true but they had to live somewhere too, didn't they?

CARO:

I think you're giving them too much credit. It's not as if they didn't know what they were a part of. They were willing participants.

MARIANNE:

(She sighs in frustration) You're looking at things too literally. The world is not black and white. And a lot of the Russians living here were families just doing their best to get by. We all had to exist in these very complicated systems.

CARO:

Yeah, I know. I get they weren't all willing or whatever. It's messy, I guess.

Scene 4: Interviews

Location: The walk to Andernacherstr./Königswinterstr.

Quote - Roadside Picnic:

The sidewalk's getting closer and closer, there's the shadow of the boot inching over the brambles ... Here's the Zone! **And instantly a chill runs down my spine.** I feel it every time, but I still don't know whether it's the Zone greeting me or a stalker's nerves acting up. Every time I figure I'll go back and ask others if they feel it too, and every time I forget.

Jeremy Knowles:

Do you mind if I walk with you? We'll follow the road down Rheinsteinstrasse, and then take a right into the park.

Wolfgang Schneider:

The entrances to the restricted area were at the front on Rheinsteinstrasse, corner of Ehrenfelsstrasse, that was the main entrance. When the restricted area was reduced in size, originally, between 1945 and 1949, the entrance was directly under the S-Bahn bridge. That was ideal as an entrance because they didn't have to close off much. That was where the barrier was. In 1947 it was moved back to the level of Dönhoffstrasse. That was the first one. And then, after 1949, it was moved back to Rheinsteinstrasse, corner of Ehrenfelsstrasse.

My name is Wolfgang Schneider. I'm a teacher by profession and have lived in Karlshorst since 1957. And when I retired in 2015, I thought about what I was going to do in my retirement. And that's when I joined the Karlshorst History Friends. And since 2015 I have been intensively studying the history of Karlshorst.

So back to 1945, around 1000 houses here in Karlshorst were requisitioned by the Soviet occupying forces. 1000.

And because the capitulation was supposed to take place here - the official meeting - the people of Karlshorst had to leave Karlshorst on May 5th. Karlshorst was evacuated with megaphones and leaflets.

The people were all afraid of what would happen if the Russians came. They were all very scared. Then they went to church, huddled together and then the priest came and said, we all have to get out. Within twelve hours, Karlshorst was evacuated. And they were only allowed to take what they could carry with them. So they had to leave all their furniture inside, their furnishings and so on. Now you might say, oh, terrible. But that was actually normal for the end of the war. And Karlshorst is not unique in that respect. The same thing happened in the western occupation zones, or in the western occupation sectors of Berlin.

Jeremy Knowles:

If you've already made it to the park, head in and take the path that goes through the middle, past the statue on your left side and the ping-pong tables to your right.

Marianne Streisand:

Oh, I love Karlshorst! I love Karlshorst. And we once had a discussion with friends from the West about what home actually means to us. And then I said, well, if I have any kind of feeling of home, then I still have it for Karlshorst.

My name is Marianne Streisand and my connection with Karlshorst is that I spent the first quarter of my life there. From birth to the age of 26, I lived on Gundelfinger Strasse. I went to school there and so on. I also lived there when I was studying.

So the restricted area was part of our everyday life, so to speak. It just existed. It kept getting pushed back over the years.

The policeman always stood there at the open door. And I think they also had some kind of guardhouse or something. And there he stood, well, I can't remember them opening it - in any way, it was open. But everyone who went in there was asked for their pass, or they smiled and let us through.

What is also known is that we felt really sorry for the soldiers. They were not in the restricted area, but in the barracks behind the 'Trabrennbahn' somewhere. Barracked and there, they had to live really, really badly, not enough to eat and very poor, they didn't even have underpants.

Wolfgang Schneider:

You have to imagine, put yourself in the shoes of a German who had his house here in 1945 or 1946. Just try to imagine it. You had, you were a woman, that was your house that your husband built for you. That was your life insurance, your income, maybe you got rent and so on. And suddenly that was gone. You had nothing left except your life. And then there was the Agaschewski family, for example. Mr. Agaschewski was an architect. He had built entire houses, rows of houses here in Karlshorst. They were his property and after his death the inheritance was divided up. And his wife had gotten most of the houses. She was 75 years old at the time. Now the Soviets have requisitioned her house. She had to leave and she had nothing. There was no way you could go to the townhall and apply for citizen's allowance and housing benefit. No, there wasn't any in 1945. You had nothing. And there was no prospect either. When will the Russians leave again? In a year, in five years, in ten years, I'll already be dead.

She didn't wait until they were transferred to public ownership or anything else, but in 1946 she said, well, I'll accept the offer now, I'll sell my houses. I don't know when the Russians will leave here. When they're gone and give me back my property. But I'll take it now and at least have a little money so that I can live. That is the story of the houses in question on Königswinterstrasse and Andernacherstrasse.

I cannot tell you which Soviet officer lived in which house. I can only say, yes, there were Soviet officers who lived here. Perhaps I can then differentiate: Yes, it was a `KGB` employee. It was a `Gru` employee. It was a military employee, an officer. Or it was the Soviet doctor or the Soviet teacher who worked here at the school. We can differentiate that far, but we cannot record names.

Jeremy Knowles:

When you come out of the park on Andernacherstraße, take a right. You'll soon notice the empty houses. When you get there, find a spot where you have a good view of them.

Scene 5: Breaking in

Location: Andernacherstr./Königswinterstr.

CARO:

I think this is them - the houses.

MARIANNE:

Hmm they're smaller than I remember.

CARO:

The bins are full of branches. See? Does that mean someone does some sort of upkeep?

MARIANNE:

Well, some of the windows seem freshly boarded, so I suppose someone takes care of it.

CARO:

Look at the paint peeling off. Over there in the balconies. It kind of reminds me of flaking ash. They're beautiful.

MARIANNE:

Beautiful?

CARO:

I don't know. Kind of. They feel so alive with the past. I wonder what stories they hold.

MARIANNE:

Stories, yes. But more like memories trapped within the walls.

CARO:

Do you think anyone cares about them anymore?

MARIANNE:

They seem very otherworldly, don't they? Stuck in time.

CARO:

(Pensive) What's that saying? "The past is never dead; it's not even past."

MARIANNE:

Let's go in.

CARO:

WHAT?

MARIANNE:

Come on.

CARO:

Oma, no.

MARIANNE:

Why not? I know these houses. I want to see inside.

CARO:

It's illegal.

MARIANNE:

What's gonna happen if we get caught, huh? They're not going to punish an old woman.

CARO:

You're not that old. And that's not how the law works.

(The sound of Marianna moving closer or perhaps shaking the fence)

Oma!

MARIANNE:

Come on.

CARO:

(Gives a resigned sigh) How are we going to get in?

We could climb over the fence. The boards are just made of chipboard. Wouldn't take much to break them.

MARIANNE:

I can't climb over that with my hip, look at me!

CARO:

Well, how do you suppose we get in?

MARIANNE:

Let's go round the back.

CARO:

Ok.

MARIANNE:

I feel like a naughty child! *(laughs)*

CARO:

You are! I can't believe we're doing this. I'm telling mum this was your idea if we get caught.

MARIANNE:

There's a lock.

CARO:

Yeah, a pretty pathetic one. We just need to break that part of the door.

MARIANNE:

Use that rock there.

CARO:

Alright.

(Sounds of them breaking the door.)

CARO:

Oh gosh, I don't know if it's safe to go up these stairs.

MARIANNE:

Come on, let's at least go to the first floor.

CARO:

Which apartment did your 'Russian lover' live in?

MARIANNE:

I think it was the one on the right.

(They climb the stairs.)

Here! This is it.

CARO:

This is actually a very nice apartment *(impressed)*. Much nicer than mine.

MARIANNE:

This was the living room, I think.

Through there was his bedroom. He shared it with his little brother.

CARO:

Can we get through?

MARIANNE:

The floorboards there don't look like they'll take much weight.

CARO:

Yeah, the hole in the floor is giving me a 'no thank you'...

MARIANNE:

My younger self would never have believed this is what this room would eventuate to.

CARO:

Watch out for the shit over there.

What animal do you think that is?

MARIANNE:

Raccoons, probably.

CARO:

Look at this beautiful old furnace.

MARIANNE:

We had one just like it.

(Sounds of them walking around.)

MARIANNE:

It's so... bare.

CARO:

What did his parents do?

MARIANNE:

I don't know. His father was some sort of high-ranking soldier. We weren't really concerned with our parents or politics or anything. And there was a language barrier. We just liked each other's faces.

CARO:

So vain. *(laughs)*

MARIANNE:

I remember he once showed me this album - a beautiful book his father had made showing his military career. There were pictures of him in uniform decorated with cut-out paper flowers pasted around, and illustrations he had drawn. It seemed like a strangely artistic tradition for a soldier.

CARO:

Oh, I can see you both sitting here falling in love. Making plans together. Did you dream about the future?

MARIANNE:

I don't know. We must have. I think we used to make jokes about running away together, but it was never serious. We didn't really mean it.

CARO:

Were there things you wanted to do in your own life?

MARIANNE:

I remember really wanting to travel and feeling like that wasn't possible. I longed for freedom. The freedom to travel. You couldn't even travel to the Soviet Union, except in rare cases.

The lack of travel was really something that gnawed at me.

And that feeling of being trapped. I felt trapped.

CARO:

(softly) How did it end? Was it a tragic heartbreak?

MARIANNE:

I honestly don't remember. I think the novelty wore off. Or maybe it started to get harder to see each other.

CARO:

Oh, Sacha Kazakov. Where are you now?

MARIANNE:

Very far from here.

CARO:

This house really is quite beautiful. I wish I was rich and could just buy it and renovate it all. Imagine bringing this back to life! Right now it's just... empty. It's so wrong! It almost feels like it's in mourning. There's a sort of grief in this room.

It feels a bit like a graveyard, doesn't it? Not haunted, necessarily. Just... dead.

MARIANNE:

I want to go now.

CARO:

What?

MARIANNE:

Let's go. There's nothing here but forgotten memories and raccoon piss.

Roadside Picnic:

"How do you think it's all going to end?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The Visit. Zones, stalkers, military-industrial complexes—the whole stinking mess. **How could it all end?**"

For a long time, Valentine stared at him through his opaque black lenses. Then he lit up a cigarette and said, "For whom? Be more specific."

"Well, say, for humanity as a whole."

"That depends on our luck," said Valentine. "We now know that for humanity as a whole, the Visit has largely passed without a trace. For humanity everything passes without a trace. Of course, it's possible that by randomly pulling chestnuts out of this fire, we'll eventually stumble on something that will make life on Earth completely unbearable. That would be bad luck. But you have to admit, that's a danger humanity has always faced."

Scene 6: Research + Interviews

Location: Andernacherstr./Königswinterstr.

+ The Walk to Ehrenfelsstraße/Loreleystraße

Hannah Alongi:

What you are hearing is a recording from one of our onsite research days back in June, taken right here at the corner of Andernacherstr and Königswinterstr. Hello, my name is Hannah Alongi, and I'm one of the collaborating artists on this audio walk.

In the summer, we set up a mobile kiosk here on the pavement - a public forum we called the Kiosk of Memory - to invite passersby to share with us what they thought and knew about the houses. We also offered a program of talks and a neighbourhood walk led by local experts to provide historical insight into these houses and foster a space for exchange between neighbours.

Through this exchange, we began to recognize the houses not as relics from the past but instead current and topical. Many residents hoped the houses would one day be part of the community again; others were wary that intervention could threaten what's left.

From the onset of this project, we hoped to speak to a former resident who was still living. But since the apartments were filled with military officers and their families from 1945 until they were left empty, it's unlikely we'll ever hear first-hand of life inside.

A turning point in our research was our discovery of telephone and address books featuring the names of people who once lived in the houses - of course from before the DDR, when the residents were not Soviet officers but ordinary, predominantly German, civilians. Documents cannot tell us a complete story but they do give us glimpses into the lives of people in the past. Although we only know their names, the years they lived here, and their occupations, we can begin to build narratives of who they were.

For one name, however, **Rudolf Mandrella**, no imagination is necessary. His story has been pieced together through extensive records. Here is some of what we know.

Mandrella was born in Auschwitz in 1902 and grew up in poverty. In 1923, as a penniless student, he moved to Berlin to study law, and after passing his exams became appointed a district judge in Köpenick, in 1933. Three years later, he moved into an apartment at Königswinterstraße 24. Mandrella was completely opposed to the Nazi regime. To avoid being conscripted into the Wehrmacht, he volunteered for the navy - perhaps calculating his chances of engaging in close combat to be slim. In Stettin, where he was stationed, Mandrella met servicemen equally against the Nazis and the war. But their group was discovered. Mandrella was executed in the Brandenburg-Görden penitentiary on September 3rd, 1943. He is listed amongst the names of resistance figures and martyrs during the Nazi era on a memorial plaque in the crypt of St. Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin-Mitte.

The portrait we paint will never be complete, but with the clues we do know, we can commemorate those whose names may have been shouted down these hallways.

I invite you to join us in filling in the gaps.

It's time to go. Follow Königswinterstraße in the direction leading away from the park. When you reach Ehrenfelsstraße, turn left. You'll see the next set of empty houses right there on the right. As we go, I will read you some of the names we found - the names we know...

Frieda Knippel, Secretary, Andernacherstr 5a, 1943
Ernst Keppler, Salesman, Andernacherstr 5a, 1943
Günther Leibig, Doctor, Königswinterstr 24, 1935
Katharina Schmidt, Pensioner, Königswinterstr 24, 1937
Heinrich Erdner, Gardener, Andernacherstr. 5a, 1940
Else Siewfe, Housewife, Königswinterstr. 25, 1943
Erich Gromabla, Engineer, Andernacherstr 5a, 1933
Rudolf Mandrella, District Judge, Königswinterstr 24, 1937

Marianne Streisand:

So, my grandfather was Jewish and had a bookshop in West Berlin, an antik bookshop, where he specialized in scientific socialism back in the 1920s, and really great people, like Walter Benjamin for example, they bought from him, crazy, right?

Yes, my father and my aunt, the children of the two of them, they were so-called half-Jews, according to Nazi terminology.

Yes, and for them it was of course a real liberation when the Russians took Berlin, you can imagine that.

Wolfgang Voigtländer:

My father never spoke about the war. He was a soldier and I don't even know if he was a prisoner. I think he was in Norway or something. But he never spoke about it.

My name is Wolfgang Vogtländer, I was born on March 15th 1951 in Erfurt and then in 1963 or 1964 I moved to Karlshorst.

In Karlshorst I lived at Hentigstrasse 33, which is one street away from Krümelhardt-Gundelfinger, so it wasn't easy of course and at the beginning we didn't like leaving the area where you have friends and so on, but I didn't think it was that bad, well, of course I was the 'Sachsenscheißer', I don't know if you know this term, I came from Thüringen. And well, Thüringen and Sachsen is a whole other story. The dialect takes some getting used to and at the beginning I tried my best not to speak my dialect, of course that goes completely wrong. Well... and a common term back then was 'Sachsenscheißer'.

Let's put it this way: you never saw Soviet soldiers alone anyway. They were in the barracks or wherever, but not in contact. Usually an officer would be out with one, two, three soldiers, organizing something or something.

That was OK,
But that was it. As I said, personal contact... that was not wanted.

Scene 7: Birch Trees

Location: Ehrenfelsstraße/Loreleystraße

CARO:

Here it is.

MARIANNE:

Yes.

CARO:

Somehow they look more beautiful because they're falling apart. Does that make sense?

MARIANNE:

I don't know. They look sad to me.

CARO:

Shall we break into this one too? *(She asks jokingly)*

(Marianne doesn't respond.)

MARIANNE:

Look at the birch tree on the balcony.

CARO:

The house is at war with nature.

MARIANNE:

You never know, they might be working together.

CARO:

It's wild that these houses have so much history. They were once so alive and now they're so... quiet.

MARIANNE:

They're still alive. They still feel alive to me.

CARO:

But I wish new memories could be made here. Allow them to keep living. It just feels like they're housing ghosts.

MARIANNE:

In a way, they are.

CARO:

I wonder what the future holds for them. In the article I read, it mentioned a dentist who basically tried to con everyone so that he could buy the houses. He pretended to be like a 'representative' of Russia. Then the Russian embassy was like 'hmmm no. These are ours'.

MARIANNE:

That sounds about right.

CARO:

It's not fair! We should just take them back. I mean, why are we respecting this ambiguous ownership? It's not like Russia followed that line of respect. They came and took away houses from the people who were living here. Why should they get to keep hold of the houses now and just let them disintegrate?

MARIANNE:

You don't know what you're saying. I wouldn't want to interfere. Anyone from the East knows to stay away from unclear property rights.

CARO:

Why not just take them back? Especially now, with the war in Ukraine.

MARIANNE:

I don't really want any sudden expropriations because of the war situation. I'd find that worse than letting the houses sit empty for a few more years. I don't believe for a second that the Russian government would agree to just let people move in.

CARO:

But it's not right! There are so many people here in Berlin who need homes.

MARIANNE:

I'd prefer for everything to be resolved peacefully, if possible. Anything else frightens me terribly. Doesn't it scare you, too?

CARO:

No, it just makes me angry.

MARIANNE:

Anger is a youthful emotion. But I'm scared to rock the boat. The whole world seems frightening now. I don't know. Maybe I'm not remembering it right, and there was more fear than I'm recalling. But I feel more scared now.

CARO:

You don't remember fear?

MARIANNE:

I remember my parents' generation talking of fear. Don't forget I was born after the war. I don't remember a time when the Russians were our 'enemies' per se. To me, they were just 'other.'

What does enemy mean anyway? It's a trivial concept. Your enemy changes from one day to the next as soon as a new political wind blows through.

CARO:

What do you mean?

MARIANNE:

I remember my father telling me right after the war that there were neighbours they had known for years who suddenly claimed they had always been Communists. Even sometimes pretended to be victims of fascism. My parents were left speechless. How quickly enemies turned into friends. These people puffed themselves up, started showing off, and quickly gained small positions of power. Suddenly, there were house leaders or street leaders who had to monitor their areas. They meddled in everything and reported to newly established police stations or the Russian command posts.

CARO:

See, that's what I think of when I think of the East and the Russians.

MARIANNE:

Yes.

CARO:

You don't remember things like this?

MARIANNE:

I remember being *told* things like this. I don't think I saw it myself. Even the stories of how the Russians came into these houses. They would break down the doors; people thought they were going to be shot, but the Russians would shout in broken German, 'Out, tomorrow' – pointing to the 12 on their watches. And that was it. They had to leave their homes.

CARO:

That's awful.

MARIANNE:

But they were also following orders.

CARO:

Yeah, and at some point, I guess... I guess it also happened to them with the Abzug. They also had to leave. Without much warning. Just up and go.

MARIANNE:

(Sighing) These buildings have had so many owners.

CARO:

Yeah, but owning doesn't seem to mean much, does it?

MARIANNE:

I guess the houses now belong to the raccoons...

CARO:

How do you think they get in?

MARIANNE:

Maybe along the roofs? Or climbing the trees and leaping onto the balconies? Honestly, there are so many ways in for them. Ways we can't even see.

CARO:

They're probably having raves in there. Listening to a bit of techno. Got the turntables out. Lasers going. Popping pills and having a little dance.

(She's trying to lighten the mood for her grandmother, who seems rather melancholic.)

Or having fierce political debates on who deserves which room. Do you think raccoons have hierarchies?

MARIANNE:

(Not listening to Caro) You know what's funny? They have the freedom I craved. The one we were promised.

CARO:

True. They're free to come and go in a way so many occupants probably never were.

MARIANNE:

Strange to think that something not even from here seems to belong the most. They're just using them for shelter. The most natural inhabitants of the houses!

CARO:

I tell you what, it's going to be very hard to move them, if anyone tries to. Raccoons are persistent, no?

MARIANNE:

They're harmless.

CARO:

I don't know about that. Have you ever seen one? Cheeky things don't look so harmless to me.

MARIANNE:

Anything seems harmless when you compare it to humans.

They have a resilience I admire.

CARO:

Should we tell them they're trespassing?

MARIANNE:

(Ignoring Caro again.)

It's a sort of bittersweet chapter in the story of these houses. They're not empty; they belong to these little survivors, who, even when the odds are stacked against them, find ways to thrive.

I think in another life, I would've liked to have been a raccoon. The freedom to roam around as they do.

CARO:

I don't know what to do with this feeling. These houses feel so alive with the past, but what do we do with them?

MARIANNE:

We remember them. That's what we owe these places.

Katya Romanova:

Birch trees always remind me of Russia, where I grew up.

If you turn down Loreleystraße and look up, you'll spot a few young birch trees growing right from the balcony.

My name is Katya Romanova. When I first moved to Berlin, I was curious to search for traces of this city's Soviet past. I wondered how events that took place in the Second World War were perceived in Germany, compared to in my home country where these histories are always shared from the perspective of liberators.

The capture of Berlin is still viewed in Russia as a hugely significant moment. And so, in Russia, they try to persuade us that talking about that war is to view everything through the lens of being a winner - a saviour. Never giving space for the darker stories, for the pain and loss that came with it. Over time, Victory Day has shifted from a day of remembrance to a celebration of military power.

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, I feel like I'm watching a familiar story unfold, but this time, my home country stands on the side of the aggressor— yet still trying to cast its actions as liberation. What do we choose to remember from history, and what do we try to forget?

That's why this project resonates so strongly with me.

When we set up our 'kiosk of memory' in summer 2024, people came and shared their own experiences, their family histories, and their opinions. And I realized that these personal stories, all of them different, sometimes even contradictory, are the pieces that make up the bigger picture.

These birch trees here? They make me think of resilience. Of survival. The birch is strong, able to thrive in the harshest conditions. It is birch trees that you will find along the barren strips of the former Berlin wall. They quickly filled the vacuum.

Look up at these ones. Imagine their journey—from a tiny seed, carried by the wind, slowly pushing through the brick and plaster of the balcony. How old do you think these trees are? Were they there when the last residents left?

Do the trees make any sounds? Close your eyes and listen. Do the leaves rustle? Is there a gentle creaking of branches? I've read that trees emit low-frequency sounds as they grow, which could help them "sense" and communicate with other trees. It makes me wonder: what stories do these trees tell? What have they witnessed by standing quietly as time has moved on around them?

We're going to walk back now. Follow Loreleystraße until Stolzenfelsstraße and then turn right. This road leads back to the station.

Scene 8: Racoons

Location: The walk back to the station

Sophia Kimmig:

We mostly move around in space as humans. We don't climb through trees, we don't jump from branch to branch, we move around on the floor and that's why we often don't notice what's happening outside of this horizon. This means that we rarely look up and so it can easily happen that in a busy place in Berlin right next to a bus stop with lots of people around, there is a raccoon lying and sleeping up in the treetops. If you look up, it is clearly visible, but nobody notices because nobody is looking.

My name is Dr. Sophia Kimmig. I am a biologist and I specialize in the ecology and behavior of wild animals with a particular focus on human-wildlife coexistence and animals in the city.

In cities there are many more wild, colorful, natural areas, for example in cemeteries. There you can find beautiful old trees, old gnarled oaks with tree hollows and raccoons like these trees particularly well, for example to raise their young in these hollows and they also like to sleep openly in the branches of the trees.

Old and especially abandoned houses, like this one, are very popular places for raccoons to live in the city. Raccoons are excellent climbers and therefore like to choose places that are a bit higher up. In nature, these are old trees and hollows in trees in which they can raise their young and also sleep. In the city, houses offer a kind of substitute for this. A raccoon likes to move into the attic.

Raccoons have been in Germany since around the 1930s. In fact, the animals actually come from North America and do not belong in our fauna, but were actively brought here and released. That worked very well. Unfortunately, because they have spread throughout the country and also settled in the cities. In their native North America, raccoons are also more common in cities than in the countryside. They are very well adapted to life in cities and have therefore conquered our cities in Germany and discovered the urban areas of Berlin for themselves.

Raccoons are officially classified as invasive species by the European Union. They are on a list of non-native species that can have invasive properties or invasive effects on the ecosystem or ecosystems in Europe. In fact, the question of whether raccoons are actually invasive is a hotly debated issue in science. The raccoon researchers that exist do not entirely agree on this. On the one hand, it is definitely the case that raccoons can eat animals, prey on animals that are already highly endangered. These are particularly amphibians in Germany. On the other hand, raccoons are absolute food generalists. That means they eat a lot of different things and they take what is easiest for them to get, what is most abundant. And these are not the rare species, but mostly much more mundane things that are often found in cities, for example, waste that we humans leave behind. This means that although it is clear that raccoons can have an effect on species, it has not really been conclusively scientifically clarified whether this effect is so great and so relevant that it is really invasive, that it really affects the ecosystem.

The fact that raccoons have spread so much in Germany definitely presents us with a whole host of challenges. On the one hand there are homeowners who fear damage to their buildings and on the other hand there are effects on the ecosystem, the eating of species that are already endangered by humans. At the same time, the raccoon is here and there is nothing we can do about this fact. But that does not mean that we cannot acknowledge the problem. We have to look at where the raccoon is doing what, what effects it has on people, on the ecosystem and what we can do to counteract these effects. Where can we perhaps compensate for damage, support people with advice or protect special sensitive areas in nature, for example from raccoons.

Ultimately, raccoons, just like people, are highly developed mammals that are capable of pain, suffering and emotions, and now they are here. This means that we have to look at how we can enable coexistence between the people who are here and the raccoons that we humans have brought here. A coexistence in which both sides can cope.

Wolfgang Schneider:

I can't look into Putin's head. I don't have a crystal ball. I don't know why they're doing it? Out of spite, we'll show the Germans, they don't want our gas anymore, then they won't get our houses. Or? I don't know. They'll certainly let it go, before they sell it, they'll let the houses collapse. And they're on the verge of collapse. I was in the houses myself, I looked at it. The large roof area collapsed, all the way down to the ground floor. Only the raccoon is in there. You can see its tracks everywhere. If I were a raccoon, I would move in there too.

For me, the Soviet people were always my friends. For example, I went out on New Year's Eve and a Soviet patrol came by. I stopped them and gave them vodka. And then an officer came by and took the vodka and the soldiers stood there and looked at me sadly. I actually just wanted to be friendly and wish them a happy new year. And that's how I noticed that there was something wrong with the Soviets too. And then I saw how the Soviet officers treated their soldiers. And that upset me. The ordinary soldiers were treated like cattle here. And these were actually the elite troops, the Soviets. They were allowed to go abroad. And yet they still have their officers, the way they treated their soldiers, it's indescribable. And that got me thinking, even back in the GDR days. And I tried to find explanations. But I didn't find any.

Jeremy Knowles:

For such a ground-breaking moment, it's often struck me as odd that there's still no official monument or memorial to commemorate East Germany's independence from the Soviet Union. There's the Berlin Wall, of course. But this is more a memorial to itself - to the division and reunification of Berlin - than to independence. Many post-Soviet countries have commemorated their sovereignty by erecting a monument of some kind - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan (to name just a few). But in Germany, you'll find no such monument. No token obelisk, sculpture, or statue marks the end of the DDR and the beginning of a reunited Germany. Not yet, anyway.

What might that monument look like? How could it convey all that one would hope?

The houses we live in become the containers of our memories - like diaries made from mortar and glass.

Look around you. At the houses lining Stolzenfelsstraße with their red-tiled roofs.

Each one has its own story. Though not just one story, we can be sure. Not just one memory. But many. To find such memories... and bring them to the present. To give them a voice and a form so they can finally speak. This, I would argue, is the task of a monument.

And... perhaps, a *house* isn't such a bad form for a monument, after all.

Roadside Picnic:

"He just kept repeating to himself in despair, like a prayer, "I'm an animal, you can see that I'm an animal. I have no words, they haven't taught me the words; I don't know how to think, those bastards didn't let me learn how to think. But if you really are—all powerful, all knowing, all understanding—figure it out! Look into my soul, I know—everything you need is in there. It has to be. Because I've never sold my soul to anyone! It's mine, it's human! Figure out yourself what I want—because I know it can't be bad! The hell with it all, I just can't think of a thing other than those words of his—HAPPINESS, FREE, FOR EVERYONE, AND LET NO ONE BE FORGOTTEN!"

(Recording from Lautarchiv of a Russian Ballad Pt. 2)

END