Folgen
Folgen

A city novel by Michelle Teran

SELECTED STORIES

BERLIN, GERMANY
To Manne
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone at home smoke</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartenburgerstrasse 5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Joschi</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streichkonzert am Alexanderplatz</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mit Stäbchen am Alexa</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Devilcengizz</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakke sein - nach Sonne schrei ‘n Teil 3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear MatureMuscles4U</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear ManyTBy</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 8177-9 Berlin Ostkreuz</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Manne</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Letter
Dear arumhCaksloP,
Dear Kracher70,
Dear ManyTyBy,
Dear SmartVital,
Dear Devilcengizz,
Dear MatureMuscles4U,
Dear JoschiWeLobe,

I want you to know that I’ve been following you.

I watched all your videos, every last one of them. I thought that if I watched you long enough, I would start to know you better. Eventually I decided that I wanted to see if I could find you. That is when I stood up from behind my computer screen and entered into the city.

I decided to follow in your footsteps, using your memories as guides. I tried to imagine how you would experience the city, by looking at it through your eyes.

Why? Because you told me where to go.
You gave me this information.

How? Because you told me how to go.
You gave me this information.
You see, we live in interesting times, where information and cities are woven together in very complex ways. In these times, thoughts and memories become images and images make maps of worlds. This creates a reality that I follow.

The multiplicity of possibilities of looking at an image means that it can be interpreted in other ways than originally intended. History, even a personal one, becomes a type of fiction. Movement through the city is also a process of creating a fiction, writing sentences, assembling narratives.

So I’ve collected you all together, and so we begin...
Alone at home smoke
Ein- und Ausfahrt
Tag und Nacht freibleiben
Widerspruchswirksame Fahrzeuge werden kostenpflichtig abgeschleppt
DEAR ARUMHCAKSLOP/ AKA PAINTER BOY

The first time I saw you, you were at work. It was one Wednesday morning, March 2010. You painted a room of an apartment undergoing renovation on Wartenburgerstrasse 5. You had placed the camera in another room, at the end of a hallway. You were dressed completely in white, a dark handkerchief wrapped around to protect your hair from the falling drops of white paint. You were already painting, somebody else must have turned the camera on. I could hear sounds of construction, it was clear that you had company. You painted a ceiling, a simple action, really; dipping the roller in, then making long sweeping strokes from the left to the right, repeating the same action until you had reached the opposite wall. At the same time it was quite mesmerizing, graceful even. The whole process took a little over a minute, more like 1:48 to be exact. As you walked back towards the camera smiling, brushing a bit of paint off your shoulder, I noticed the beginnings of a goatee.
Later, one year later, you lay in the back of a 4 x 4 minivan, driving somewhere out of the city. Head propped up using a blue denim jacket, you observed yourself in transition. The screen acting as a mirror of how you come to imagine yourself, a young, ruggedly handsome man in his 20s. You passed the camera over to your friend who pointed it out the window, a passing terrain of rotating windmills. Outside, the sky was grey, the clouds heavy with the promise of rain. It reminded me of another view from a moving car, another road trip you made on a summer afternoon, traveling from your home town in Poland towards Berlin.

The videos of yourself at work, as well as at play, have the feel of a newcomer. Of somebody, who upon arrival, starts building his own social map of an unfamiliar city, building up his own itineraries and personal histories.

Work seems to function for you like this.

One day, in the silence of a summer morning, you finally completed a large project, a row of villas, in the countryside by the lake. You gave a guided tour of a couple of the villas, showing all the rooms. The walls were cream-coloured, the ceilings a delicate shade of orange. You caught your reflection in the hallway mirror on the way out and made a gesture to yourself that was both cocky and a bit sweet. I found it quite appealing, that small gesture. It made you seem very sympathetic and I guess I started to like you more then and decided to follow you.
Your colleagues waited outside, impatiently smoking, wondering why you always insist on filming everybody and everything. Still I can understand why you might want to do this. Soon it’s time to leave and you’ll all drive back together, back to the city, back to your own homes and spaces, probably never to return. And if you don’t possess that moment, it’s as if it had never happened. It’s an impulse to capture and hold onto something before the amnesia takes over. Even if you never looked at this video again, at least there is evidence that it took place, that you exist. This becomes your time capsule.
Dear Joschi
DEAR JOSCHI This is my first experience of you. You lie on
on the floor on a mattress, covered in a bright orange sheet.
Your face has a flushed pallor, not a healthy-looking glow, but
more a feverish, mottled look. Your hair is glossy and sculpted
stiff. You have your eyes closed. Someone holds a small snake,
with beige and copper stripes and dangles it above your head.
It’s a feminine hand. I can tell by the slender fingers and the
way it grasps onto things.

She lowers the squirming snake, tickling your nose a bit, until
the snake takes over and starts to makes its way across your face.
Then she moves back a bit to watch. You look up, your eyes
blank as doorknobs. Defiant.

Maybe you are not even aware that this moment still exists as a
recorded memory. You probably barely remember it happening.
It’s buried so deep under so many others now, invisible, forgot-
ten. But not for me.
If you looked at this now, perhaps you wouldn’t even recognize yourself. Do you think you would? Do you remember her? Would you like what you saw? Do you like what you see now?

For the most part I don’t.

It would be a complete understatement if I said that we had quite different political views and ideas. If we met, we probably wouldn’t like each other that much.

You’re 33 years old, photographer, raver. You make your political views very transparent. Don’t tell me when you list your hometown as “Reichshauptstadt Berlin” that you mean this in any other way than how it should be interpreted. Or when you filmed that burning car, in June, 2011, calling all leftists, anti-fascists and environmentalists dirty people and that they should all go to hell.

I refer to you as Neo-nazi boy to my friends.

But I want to talk about the trains. Seventy two videos of trains, recorded around different spots in the city as well as outside of Berlin. Videos where you, still as a mouse, wait patiently, sometimes for hours in the middle of winter so you can catch but a few seconds of a passing train.

There’s something that is so disturbing and sublime about them. They take me places. So I have decided to stick with you a bit and see where you will take me, although I might not want to go there.
Streichkonzert
am Alexanderplatz
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>id</th>
<th>20901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>title</td>
<td>Streichkonzert am ALEXanderplatz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summary</td>
<td>Zum Feierabend, eine kleine Konzert, am ALEX...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>author</td>
<td>arumhCaksloP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>url</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTlXX-pMqq0&amp;feature=youtube_gdata_player">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTlXX-pMqq0&amp;feature=youtube_gdata_player</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coords</td>
<td>52.52230453491211 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.414092063903809</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEAR PAINTER BOY Today I decided to make a trip to the Alexanderplatz although I was here so many times before. I wanted to stand in the same place that you had when you watched the string trio play Mozart. Actually, was it Mozart? I was trying to place it. You stood so still watching them play while everybody else passed by continuing on. But you gave them time, you barely moved. I felt close to you, even though I knew that you were no longer there.

I was standing where you would have stood if you were there. I was standing where you would have stood if you were listening to the music. I was breathing the same air.

You were standing on the steps in front of the Galeria Kaufhof.

It’s the same spot where that punk girl is lying now, passed out. Her leather jacket is black, covered with sharp needle-like
spikes, a large spike juts out of her chin as well. Around her pierced navel are tattoos of snakes and skulls. She’s lying on her back, passed out, in her doc martins boots amongst all the scattered flyers and beer bottles. She looks so vulnerable, so peaceful, so oblivious to the people walking around her.
Mit Stäbchen am Alexa
MANNE EATS NOODLES with his grandson by the Alexa shopping mall in the Alexanderplatz.

He’s having difficulty eating with the chopsticks. He lets his grandson Oliver poke fun at him. They eat at a beach bar in front of the Alexa shopping mall, a devastating place. He enjoys the briefest of moments together with his grandson. He realizes that he is getting old. He surrounds himself with his family and all the people he loves, together who help create the memories that he so methodically collects and archives. When was the first time that he looked into his wife’s face and realized that they were no longer young, that their lives were slipping away from them?

Oliver looks through the camera. There is loud music playing in the background.

Grandpa Manne is eating with chopsticks, part one, Oliver says.
What do you mean “try”. I repeatedly tried, Manne answers. Without the fork! Oliver says. Well, the peas fall through . . . well, one pea I will get for sure. Come back in a half an hour, Manne answers.

Oliver turns the camera on himself.

Watch the pro, Oliver says. Well it’s easy with noodles. Well, I guess it works, Manne answers.
Dear Devilcengizz
Hakke sein nach
Sonne schrei’ Teil 3
Dear MatureMuscles4U
Spectacular

CHRISTIAN, A BEAUTIFULLY awesome man, always works towards perfection. He’s a man of few words, but when he does speak, he just wants to talk about how big and hard he is. It’s exhausting to constantly have to shave his body, his skin becomes quite irritated. Sometimes, when nobody else is around, he lifts his shirt up, grabs one of his breasts and then savagely punches it. When he’s super excited, he traces a finger along one of his protruding veins, then makes a slow circle around his nipple, without ever touching it. Then he puffs out his glorious pectoral muscles until they swell out into voluminous balloons. He gets so immersed in what he’s doing that he doesn’t even hear the telephone ringing. One day he might try just wearing a speedo and black cycle boots.
Raging Werewolf

**CHRISTIAN IS MUSCLE** power personified. He is a raging werewolf, a big sexy man that loves to be watched. He is a hot, hairy wolfman. He’s hard working and determined, despite his diabetes. However he doesn’t really know how to pose well. He is a masterful, masculine, muscular work of art, bringing so much joy and excitement into people’s lives. He has incredibly big breasts, big and hard as coconuts. If he wanted to, he could break your fucking nuts.
CHRISTIAN, ONE OF the most handsome, humble men in the network, stands sweating in the back room of the shop where he works. He moans in pleasure while he moves his strong, beautiful, masculine, nice-fingered hands over his beefy, malleable pectorals. The way in which he slaps his hefty pecs over and over again is so incredibly hot, especially with those glorious nipples. He shows such great muscle control that anybody watching would never get tired of looking at him.
Ready to crush you

CHRISTIAN OFTEN PUTS his camera on a shelf in the backroom of a bodybuilding shop on Karl Marx Allee where he works. He tries to make a quick video before a client comes in. He is a 47 year old man who is trying his best in the gym, but can’t compare with such huge guys. He’s sexy and down to earth, likes to dominate with his rock hard muscles. If anyone came to visit him in Berlin, he would wear his guest down and dominate him in a long, sweaty, pro-style wrestling match. Or even a big bear hug if somebody walked into his shop.
Dear ManyTyBy
TODAY IS THE 26TH OF JUNE, I was released from the hospital on the 24th and the doctor says it is all very good, almost closed. I cannot see anything positive about this, but they are experts and I hope they are right. Today they pulled off the bandage with pincers, or at least part of it. The doctor eventually stopped so as not to torture me anymore. The nurse and doctor say that some people have their whole leg open all the way from the knee down and they would not complain as much as I do. But it hurts pretty bad, as if somebody poked my leg with a knife and then twisted it around in there. The traces of the bandages are still visible. There is the scar from the club foot I had when I was 12. Fifty two years later, one can see clearly those traces. Earlier there were many more red dots, but they faded. Here it’s all red and super sensitive when I press it. It hurts like hell. On the third of July I am supposed to go back to the hospital. The doctor thinks that by then the wound will be closed. Well, her word in God’s ear. Until then.
Traute öffnet Walnüsse

MANNE STANDS IN a darkened hallway listening to the sounds of banging coming from the kitchen. It’s just before sunset. He decides to enter.

Traute, taking a walnut out of a yellow bucket, places each under a tea cloth and opens up the shell using a hammer. She’s dressed in black, reading glasses perched on the edge of her nose. She’s a reserved and silent little woman in her 70s who speaks little but always seems to mean more than she says. Always scrutinizing, always present, letting him take the stage and run amok with his perpetual boyishness. She still has all of her geo-patterned mini-skirts from the 60s, which she occasionally takes out and wears at parties.

Manne approaches her.
Who is this angel standing there? What are you doing there?, he asks.
I’m playing, Traute answers.
What’s under the cloth? he asks.
An iron, she answers.
A what? he asks.
An iron. Yes, she answers.
What are you doing there with the ironing board? And what are you going to do with the nuts? he asks.
I’m secretly going to eat them all, she answers.
Are you going to make a nut cake? he asks.

Perhaps, she answers.
For Gisela and Adam, and for others too … for Oliver? he asks.

She doesn’t answer or look up at him.

A pause.

Isn’t that a bit boring? he asks.
No. Work is never boring, she answers.
Okay well, have great success with that then, he says.
Thank you, she answers.
52 8177-9 Berlin Ostkreuz
DEAR JOSCHI I’m at Ostkreuz station, one of the places where you go to watch the trains. When I arrived I walked around the station and filmed the trains a bit, but was actually more interested in the cops.

Today it’s Sunday. The police are out in full-force and the street is lined with police vans. The police seem to be in good spirits, even a bit bored. They are eating cake and ice cream. In the park nearby, all the punks and anti-fascists are sitting together and drinking beer. There’s kind of a parallel picnic going on.

I take a seat in a nearby cafe to eat a salad and watch the police better. One of them is actually quite good-looking; dark hair, tall, slim, eyes that crinkle up when he smiles. He is number 233. He wears a bullet-proof vest and has an ear piece. Sometimes he says a few words into the microphone. When he does, I can hear his voice coming out of the police van.
I think they know I’m watching them.

I finish my salad and walk towards the park.

Now the cops aren’t eating cake or ice cream anymore. The mood has shifted. In fact, the police are standing all around me.

He’s standing right next to me. Number 233. He doesn’t have a wedding ring on. I wonder if that means he’s single. I try to look him in the eyes, but he doesn’t seem to notice me. His finger nails are neatly clipped. He doesn’t bite them, like I do. Now he’s no longer smiling and his left hand is clenched.

All the police are now checking everybody’s bags in the park, or anybody that looks remotely leftist; a guy with a red mohawk, somebody wearing sunglasses, two girls in black hoodies. They go through the bags and check for weapons, pull out black t-shirts and scrutinize each logo. Each person pretends the cop doesn’t exist and continues to joke with his friends.

Suddenly somebody parks a van in front of Ostkreuz station and puts on some loud punk music. A woman using a mega-phone asks everybody to join her. Out fly the black t-shirts, nylon bomber jackets and sunglasses. Everybody assumes formation around the van. Then I see number 233, with his ear piece. He’s the team leader. He’s in front of his squadron, his eyes focussed straight ahead with a serious look on his face. He runs right by me then he’s gone.
Now I’m in the demonstration. We head into the neighbouring district of Lichtenberg to make a tour of all the Nazis living there; the store owners, people living in apartments, a school teacher. I walk with all the others, listening to all the chanting.

“Nazis Raus”

Now the cops are behind me. Suddenly I find myself on the sidewalk walking right beside a large column of police in full riot gear. Then he’s there, number 233. Now he notices me.

He comes up to me and says, “Why are you so interested in the police?”
Dear Manne
Abendspaziergang mit Hanna zum Kletterkegel

Manne walks at night around the RAW Tempel with his 5 year-old granddaughter Hanna. It’s cold out and a thick blanket of snow covers the ground. Faint sounds of fireworks.

Hanna, wearing a large red wool toque, carries a security blanket.

December 30th, here is the skateboard hall, “Skatehalle Berlin”, Manne says.

He pans around to show some graffiti and then looks down at Hanna.

And here we have Hanna, but everybody knows her already, he says.
Manne points up towards an old factory building.

Up there you can see the Christmas tree on top of the climbing wall . . . Below you can see that everything is closed . . . And here you can see where, for those that know, on this . . . Steffi didn’t like this . . . But look at how beautiful the Fabrikhalle is lit up, it looks so romantic, one could think that it looks like a fortress, he says.

What is this then? Hanna asks.

He walks towards a few trees covered in heavy snow and illuminated by a brilliant green light.

Look there’s even more light, and here is the tree where everybody was always jumping from, but now it has too much snow on it, but it still looks good . . . And the willow tree, this is the willow tree, the one that had the platform on it. The platform is in the back here. This is where they had their tree house . . . this is where Stanley and Stuart always . . . he says.

Hanna, following him, presses the blanket against her cheek, her thumb pressed against her lips. A single strand of blond hair falls against her face.

Look over here. Also full of snow. The lawn chairs are of course not there, it would make no sense to lie there now, you would get really cold, right? he asks.

He points up towards a factory building with missing windows.
Oh, and the hall is still broken, it will take some time. . . Until it will be fixed or torn down, one or the other . . . More likely they will tear it down. There’s even a light in there, he says.

He walks through the snow back towards the willow tree. There are suddenly very loud sounds of fireworks.

See they are doing fireworks. I told you they would already do fireworks today. . . I would have been very surprised if they didn’t start, right? I even heard them yesterday . . . Do you want to look in the Skatehalle now? he asks.

No, she answers.
No? Okay no then, he says.

Grandfather, Hannah says.
Yes? Manne answers.
This is terrible … this is stupid, she says.
Yes, for your age, maybe. Come on, let’s go home, he answers.
Libauerstrasse

DEAR MANNE. Today I decided to try to find the apartment building where you live. It’s a place where so many things happened; birthday celebrations, holidays, dinners, everyday moments around the home, watching the FUCK parade from the balcony, the fireworks on New Year’s Eve as well.

I watched your videos so much that I started to turn them into scripts, using them to perform all the different dialogues between yourself and the various people in your life; your walk with Hannah, talking to Traute in the kitchen, dinner table conversations with your family, all those times with Jannis, Stanley and Stuart in the skatepark. I tried to understand the importance and meaning of these everyday moments, moments that could just as easily go by unnoticed.

I performed them so much, that everybody started to became characters that I created.
I came here today, because I was looking for evidence that you do exist. That’s why I sit now at a cafe across the street looking up at your balcony, knowing that you could at any moment appear and I would really see you.

This morning, when I first arrived, I walked up to look over the list of names by the doorbell and saw your name on the door. It’s exactly where you marked it. It’s a bit startling to find your name on the door. I didn’t expect to find it that quickly. Your name is typed out in small crisp letters. It looks like it’s been there for awhile. These small crisp letters, they have a feeling of permanence. You live here. You have lived here. You will live here, until . . .

Actually that’s another reason I’m here. The last video you posted was on January 1, 2010. You pointed the camera at the computer monitor, showing a row of photo albums and then went to the balcony to film the fireworks. It was a bit dark and I couldn’t see anything. I just heard the loud explosions. You stood there for a bit and then returned to your computer, saying that in few days you would get a bigger hard drive. Then that was it. I never saw you again. After four years and 515 videos later, you a 74 year old pensioner that grew up in the GDR, decided to stop.

Can I just say that from everybody, you are my favorite?

I look up at the balcony. The geraniums are in full bloom. This means that Traute is still there. She always has such nice flowers on the balcony. Then suddenly I see her. She is walking down the street. She looks so much tinier than I thought she would.
She always has such a quiet strength around her, a kind of stoic determination. I watch her walk along the sidewalk, past the trattoria towards the door of the apartment building. A neighbour holds the door open for her. She smiles and talks with him for a moment, standing by the open doorway, before finally disappearing inside.
Unserm Bismarck
die Bürger
Weissensees
30. Juli 1909
DEAR MANNE

Yesterday I made a trip up to Weißensee to try to find the cemetery where your father is buried. He was an anti-fascist freedom fighter.

To prepare, I spent the entire day before yesterday watching every single video you made of your visit to your father on his 101st birthday, 14th July, 2009.

I found a nice spot in the library by Hallesches Tor where I carefully scrutinized each video, repeating segments, replaying them over and over again until I had memorized every gesture, every comment, every feature. These are the experiences that I carried with me on the journey towards the cemetery.

I started off cycling in the morning from my apartment in Kreuzberg; first heading towards Köpenickerstrasse, then to Alexanderplatz and finally up Berliner Allee.
I usually begin these trips around the city, following the footsteps of others, with a bit of hesitation. Maybe it’s the uncertainty of what I will find or why I am doing it at all. Why should I be interested in somebody else’s life? Is it a drive to understand how one marks out one’s place in the world?

However it usually happens that I find myself go away and something else takes over; when I let myself go and start living in the present… via somebody else’s past. As I cycled north, I became aware that I was leaving my place and entering your domain. You became my guide. I was in your hands.

It took me awhile to find the gravesite. Actually first I went to the wrong cemetery and only after trying in vain to find the statue of Jesus located at the cross-roads did I realize that I was at the wrong address and the wrong cemetery. The one I was looking for was just around the corner. I parked my bike again, entered the cemetery and instantly recognized the Jesus statue.

I started to feel a bit odd again, not really knowing what I was doing there. I walked around a bit, checking out the names on the gravestones, trying to remember where the grave was in relation to the statue. Apart from the groundskeeper I was completely alone, just like you were that day. I got a bit disoriented, no longer trusting my memory from the previous day. I must have walked around the same area three or four times before I finally saw it. “BERNARD GARLING 1908–1978”. I must have walked by several times without seeing it. Strange.
The gravesite was as neglected as when you first found it. I tried to imagine when was the last time you visited him. What did you think of when you arrived at the cemetery and realized that his gravesite was so . . . forgotten?

Did you also imagine yourself in his place? Did you think about when you would cease to matter?

Is this what you were thinking when you made that trek alone to the gravesite and then quickly went looking for the garden shears and rake to clear away all the weeds? Was this on your mind when you went to the florist by the cemetery entrance to buy fresh flowers?

Is this why I also decided to go to the same florist at the entrance of the cemetery to try to buy the same type of flowers and place them at your father’s grave?

By the end of the day it was starting to get cold, with rain imminent. I tried to follow the last steps that you made through the cemetery before getting on the bus, heading back to your wife. This was the last thing I did before heading back to my loved ones as well.
Folgen