

# London – Berlin

Authenticity, Modernity, and the Metropolis  
in Urban Travel Writing from 1851 to 1939

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Authenticity, Modernity and the Metropolis**

In 1855, the German travel writer Emma von Suckow, who published under the bourgeois pseudonym of Emma Niendorf, visited the Vernon Gallery exhibition on *Watercolours* at Marlborough House in London. On display were many visual representations of England's capital which belonged to the pictorial canon of the metropolis. She had already seen an exhibition of William Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* at Marlborough House, who was famous for his cynical and bitter representation of London society. With the *Watercolours* exhibition she could add a collection of paintings by Joseph M. W. Turner to her visual education. With both Hogarth and Turner she was well prepared to understand the English metropolis that was visually dominated by associations to those two painters.

However, pondering the quality and character of Turner's paintings, she concluded on the conditions of her time and found that an apt description of Turner's art would be calling it 'dissolving views'. "Es sind wahnsinnige Gemälde, selbst die Farben sind rasend," she wrote confused and struggling to perceive a fixed meaning of the colours in front of her. "So unruhig alles, so zerfahrend," she continued, expressing one of the most prominent contemporary sentiments when it came to city perception. London itself appeared as an agglomeration of contradicting signs, producing an immense fatigue in her and creating a sense of speed and loss at the same time. London, after all, was primarily marked by contradictions, "ohne alle Übergänge schroff nebeneinander. In den Extremen liegt ein großer Reiz, aber auch eines von den Reizmitteln, welche zum Wahnsinn stacheln in unseren durch jede Steigerung und Hohlheit ihm so günstigen Tagen."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout her account, Niendorf continuously mentioned her fatigue, her confused senses and her incapability of gaining an overall picture of London. Furthermore, despite the speed and the sentiment of temporal acceleration, she already complained about her time's repetitiveness, blaming her age for being void of original ideas, for simply

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Niendorf, *Aus London. Dissolving Views* (Berlin: Stage, 1855), p. 78, p. 115.

producing copies, and for a far too rigid discourse of perception. Narratives of everything perceivable and describable, from the grand scope to the minute detail were firmly established, including textual as well as visual and sensual narratives.

The most disturbing experience of the metropolis, however, was the constant growth of restlessness, the feeling of uncertainty and contradiction, the notion that one was somehow always slightly, or even grossly, out-of-place. Signs would always produce their inherent counterparts and Niendorf, for example, would want to escape from the tumult of the big hub of confusing sights that the London of her present represented, searching for sensual and sensitive refuge at places endowed with a different temporal quality that provided her with stable narratives.

It should not be forgotten that her account was written in 1855. This was a time which, according to many proponents of an interpretation of modernity, was marked by rigid social order, a growing mechanised industry as well as a growing individualism. In the following study, I am less interested in following the project of modernity understood as the expansion of progressive socio-economic processes. Rather, its imaginary dimension will be in the focus of attention. Whatever the individual understanding of modernity might be, it is certainly a common point of departure to state that its quality involved a break with traditional bases of both Western culture and Western art, of both Western economic conditions and social organisation. The advance of modernity thus also inscribed a radical break in the discourses on human beings and society, and established new imaginary significations and new kinds of social and political issues as well as conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, human beings were involved in the dynamics of a modernisation process, which was constantly accelerating and was, supposedly, marked by individualisation, differentiation, and abstraction, as well as by mechanisation, secularisation, and the advance of science.<sup>3</sup> Max Weber's exemplary model of the world as a place that had lost its magic, from which the super-natural had disappeared, and in which nature had been replaced by man-made, artificial, cultural production, was thus a very contemporary conception of the state of the

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Wagner, *A Sociology of Modernity, Liberty and Discipline* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> For the acceleration of time see, for example, Reinhart Koselleck *et al.*, *Das Zeitalter der europäischen Revolution, 1780-1848* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), pp. 303-306; also *idem*, "Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont – zwei historische Kategorien," in *idem*, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 349-375.

world and an expression of modern self-doubt and cultural critique already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

The modern conditions could be found on all levels of society; it lay in the connection of subject and object, of the individual as well as the state, which were connected by ethical values and the notion of individual freedom. However, on both levels, interior contradictions or, rather, oppositions were at work. On the one hand, the individual's will and right to freedom was constantly challenged by existential fear and the weight of being self-responsible. On the other hand, the state, or social organisation in general, was put under constant scrutiny. The dynamics of crisis and critique worked on modern societies since the Enlightenment. The establishment of the individual, of the citizen and of this citizen's natural and civil rights endowed the growing bourgeois strata with the legitimacy for critique and the legitimacy of state authority started to be modelled around a temporal dialectic with a strong reference to the future.<sup>5</sup> While society's technological development was thought to have the power of shaping and guaranteeing the individual's freedom and general well-being, and would thus also be capable of designing the future, it was constantly suspect of enslaving modern man. At any moment it could be accused of being a simple but all-determining machine dehumanising its inhabitants instead of providing them with a secure basis for their lives on which they could evolve and develop more, and essentially human, qualities.

This two-sided condition of the perception of social progress is represented in urban travel writing as well. London and Berlin, though at different points in time, are both represented as cities of the future, as cities with the power of guaranteeing freedom, progress, a civil society as well as economic and political stability. Inversely, both cities were also represented as oversized, dehumanised and mechanised agglomerations of merely functional houses, streets, industries, and, logically, human beings that would appear as automatons and void of all human qualities.

The preoccupation with freedom, and the precarious conditions of guaranteeing its safeguard is crucial for the modern age. In the begin-

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<sup>4</sup> Certainly, Weber's notion that a modern state was directly connected to its bureaucratic efficiency cannot be ruled out. It is true on another level of discourse, though. Frederick the Great's Prussia just as Lenin's Soviet Union and even Mussolini's fascism were expressions of a modern state system which were thought to be expressions of modernity by their contemporaries. See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity. Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Krise und Kritik. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1973 [1959]).

ning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Georg W. F. Hegel, for example, believed that the Prussian state was a realisation of institutionalised freedom provided by civil society based on law, morals, family, and, enlarging the circle, on society, the state, and even history as such; this civil society could only be maintained by adherence to law. Hegel distinguished between a subjective and an objective ‘spirit’ (*Geist*), manifesting itself in precisely the human individual on the one hand and social forms such as family, society and the state on the other hand.<sup>6</sup> In a curious way, he connected individual history with social history, combining the typically modern oppositions of the subjective mind and the objective, material limits set for this mind.<sup>7</sup>

With Hegel, and indeed ever since the French Revolution, modernity was not understood anymore as being merely a tool of progress, rather it turned into a moral-psychological or ethical term, again culminating in the idea of human will and human freedom. A shift toward the subject had taken place in the understanding of the world. It remained a constant criterion throughout the modern age, which grew ever more self-referential and, fostered by historical developments, finally turned humans into the very fundament of life itself. At the same time, modern freedom, based on ethical and moral ideas that were supposed to be implemented and guaranteed by the state or by any other social form, created constant doubt and criticism. The insight that all legitimacy for human actions was not granted anymore by any god or any god-like government, but rested instead on humans themselves, created the infernal fear of failure and a feeling of at times seemingly super-human responsibility. Freedom is always coupled to existential fear and responsibility, and thus has its very anti-thesis within itself.<sup>8</sup> Thinkers such as Georg Simmel set their minds to the task of building new scientific categories on the basis of this loss.

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<sup>6</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Bamberg: Goebhardt, 1807). Hegel, it should not be forgotten, adds a third ‘spirit’ to the subjective and the objective ones, the absolute spirit, which was represented by religion, art, and philosophy.

<sup>7</sup> On Hegel and modernity see for example Jürgen Habermas, “Hegel’s Concept of Modernity,” in *idem, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998 [Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1995]), pp. 23–44.

<sup>8</sup> This existential fear is a common theme in literature as well as in social thought, or any critique of civilisation. For example Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, can be depicted as one of the first to express this modern ‘feeling’, which is not really surprising, since he was a student of Hegel’s. In his *Entweder-Oder* from 1843, he discussed the discrepancies between aesthetics and ethics. Ethics, for Kierkegaard, are coupled with categories of decision and self-choice, while his idea of the act of choice, of the stand we take in history and in our life, is the very kernel of freedom by which the subject becomes aware of and constitutes itself.

Die zeitgeschichtliche Auflösung alles Substantiellen, Absoluten, Ewigen in den Fluß der Dinge, in die historische Wandelbarkeit, in die nur psychologische Wirklichkeit scheint mir nur dann vor einem haltlosen Subjektivismus und Skeptizismus gesichert, wenn man an die Stelle jener substantiell festen Werte die lebendige Wechselwirksamkeit von Elementen setzt, welche letzteren wieder der gleichen Auflösung ins Unendliche unterliegen.<sup>9</sup>

Solutions to the given situation of multi-perspective conditions in which every certainty creates at least as many uncertainties, had thus to be found by accepting the dynamic processes of change within modern society. It had to be a new form of certainty built on the recognition of uncertainty and relativity.

Yet along with the cogent demonstration that modernity emerged as the dynamic element within a seemingly unlimited and open temporality, which was characterised on the grounds that “Erwartungen [sich] immer mehr von allen bis dahin gemachten Erfahrungen entfernt haben,”<sup>10</sup> arose attempts at linking experience and expectation ever more closely to one another. It is in this sense that the past played an essential part in modern concepts of society. At the same time the use of the past in modernity had a paradoxical function since it guaranteed the sense of continuity in conditions of constant change. Moreover, in the desire to prove that current conditions were transformable and could be improved, all visions of the future, including ideologies, must resort to history. History is used to make new history, is thus becoming historicity, which is defined by

the use of the past to help shape the present, (...). [H]istoricity means the use of knowledge about the past as a means of breaking with it, or, at any rate, only sustaining what can be justified in a principle manner. Historicity in fact orients us towards the future. The future is regarded as essentially open, yet as counterfactually conditional upon courses of action undertaken with future possibilities in mind.<sup>11</sup>

Even though a clear periodisation is difficult to define, especially for a hybrid historical phenomenon as modernity, I understand the changing economical situation of production and distribution of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the beginning of a liberal capitalist economy including Benedict Anderson’s notion of print-capitalism, the slow shift from a feudal to a liberal or bourgeois society beginning already in the middle of the

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<sup>9</sup> Georg Simmel, “Anfang einer unvollendeten Selbstdarstellung,” in Kurt Gassen and Michael Landmann (eds.), *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1958), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Koselleck, “Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont,” p. 359.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 50-51.

17<sup>th</sup> century with thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza but only in full thrive during Enlightenment,<sup>12</sup> and the birth of the idea of the state's social responsibility in the 1830s as well as the emergence of popular nationalism and the growth of the industrial city as factors determining the beginning of the modern period – i.e.: the modern period takes shape between the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a period often interpreted as transcendental and during which a fundamental shift in social, political, and intellectual paradigms took hold within European societies.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the establishment of a public discourse on contemporary conditions through the advance of an early media public sphere created by distribution of printouts and images was a decisive historical shift.<sup>14</sup> National narratives began providing stability, a past – which would in fact locate the origins of each nation outside temporal dimensions and render a certain religiosity or creed to the idea of the nation – and a meaning for the present as well as the future.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Koselleck, *Krise und Kritik*.

<sup>13</sup> On the shift of paradigm see Reinhart Koselleck: *Einleitung*, in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997), Vol. 1, pp. XIII-XXIII; and also *idem: Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), who calls the roughly one hundred years from 1750 to 1850 the 'Sattelzeit'. I am aware that there might be said to be misunderstandings at this point since the existence of what historians call the Early Modern period cannot be ruled out. However, often the term Early Modern is used to delineate the Renaissance from the Middle Ages, to construct a similarity between Greek and Roman Antiquity and the Renaissance and to understand the period of roughly a thousand years simply literally as the Middle Ages. Furthermore, I want to understand modernity here as a phenomenon that was experienced by contemporaries rather than a concept for periodising history. At the same time, I acknowledge the difference between the literal meaning of the term, simply referring to contemporary affairs and already used by Pope Gelasius II in 494-495, and an understanding of contemporary conditions that turns some phenomena into modern and others not, even though they might be just as contemporary. Anders Schinkel, "Imagination as a Category of History: An Essay Concerning Koselleck's Concepts of *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont*", in *History and Theory* 44 (February 2005), pp. 42-54, criticises Koselleck for missing out on the category of the 'imagination' in between *Erfahrung* and *Erwartung*. While Schinkel's criticism is not always convincing, his insistence on inserting 'imagination' into the terminology of modernity is fruitful. Koselleck has not paid much attention on the quality of the present but focused on versions of pasts and futures, yet Koselleck's categories of *Erfahrung* and *Erwartung* are generally open and it is obvious that the present generates new pasts and futures, and that in order to achieve this creative process, imagination is a pre-condition.

<sup>14</sup> For example Jörg Requate and Martin Schulze-Wessel (eds.), *Europäische Öffentlichkeit. Transnationale Kommunikation seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 2002) in their "Introduction."

<sup>15</sup> See Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

In a broadly summarising way, modernity can be said to be characterised by two main explanatory categories. On the one hand, modernity is a notion of the present; it refers to events, ideas, phenomena of each historical present, simply describing an actuality. Modernism, however, is a different term with different connotations not identical with the term modernity. Modernism, belonging to terms describing a movement, was introduced, following Perry Anderson, in 1890 by the Guatemalan poet Rubén Darío as an aesthetic movement, drawing on French schools.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, modernity is a concept coined *post factum* that combines a number of different movements, expressions, phenomena (social, cultural, economic) within the category of ‘modernity’.

The notion of authenticity is a decisive element within the discourse of nationalism and national identity, and thus within the framework of modernity. Authenticity is not conceived of as a fact-based truth here. Rather, *authenticity* is understood as referring to autochthonous traits of culture, constructed by narratives that suggest an eternal past and an undisputable cultural identity. The authenticity searched for by travellers thus mirrors the authenticity generated by the host country’s cultural self-construction and is mainly an imagined authenticity.

The metropolises London and Berlin were representatives of each respective nation and full of places and narratives that were attached to a national idea, that were thought to be capable of revealing insight to the traveller as well as the host when the question as to what characterised the foreign country visited were put. Travel routes lead along signs of authenticity, which brings them close to the notion of the nation and of national identity. While the nation is designed as being unique and outside temporal parameters while clearly located within space and taken as a major ingredient of cultural authenticity, the nations’ capitals generate signs and narratives revealing this presumed authenticity. In London and Berlin, just as in any other major capital, signs of authenticity are sought for by travellers.

The importance of interpretative space, in which those signs of authenticity are located, comes to the fore very strongly in this context. I understand as interpretative space a form space that serves for an interpretation of a society. The historical scenery or the takings into account of spatial realities of historical events are not referred to with the concept of interpretative space.<sup>17</sup> While there are important representative

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<sup>16</sup> Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> For representations of space throughout history see Iris Schröder and Sabine Höhler (eds.), *Welt-Räume. Geschichte, Geographie und Globalisierung seit 1900* (Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 2005).

spaces such as public libraries, theatres, opera houses, etc., interpretative space should be understood as a form of space that is created by interpretation. It exists along with representative space and is surely part of the whole network of social, cultural and economic display, and it experiences interpretative changes. Space, in the big city, in London and Berlin, is crucial for finding an access to urban narratives. Space and the narrative effort at unravelling a city are closely linked. Travellers walk through the city, visit the representative places and the private ones as well, and they interpret some forms of social, private, or public space in order to transmit a meaningful interpretation to their readers. Historical space is dynamic, it changes and can become meaningless, or experience a change in interpretative exercise, i.e. a different meaning is connected to the same space.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, time is one of the crucial concepts for the understanding of urban travel writing as it is for the understanding of city perception in general. The temporal dimension of modernity endowed the present with a sense of the past and at the same time aimed at providing security for the future. The future itself grew to become an almost obsessive idea and was regarded as something essential to be guaranteed by modern societies. The inherent contradictions of modern conditions did not help this matter. In fact, it has to be recognised that categories that are today attached to a so-called second modernity – such as insecurity, ambivalence, contradiction, and cluelessness – are integral parts of the prevalent conditions already during the, consequently, first modernity beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> The notion that during the first modernity all social conditions were rigid and rational, were presumably without magic, is not accurate when contradictions, nostalgic counter-worlds and insecurity were predominant sensations. In fact, to assume such rigidity is itself part of modernity that is characterised by the trademark of contradicting memory: while the past is often nostalgically distorted and images of social cohesion and simpler but happier days are conjured up, the same past is often presented as being rigid and repressive, clearly structured socially and generally oppressive. Both versions of national and social memory are far from being an apt representation of the past.

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<sup>18</sup> See Hagen Schulz-Forberg, “Zeitreisen nach London. Deutungen englischer Vergangenheit in Berichten deutscher und französischer Reisender, 1851-1939,” in Arnd Bauerkämper, Hans-Erich Bödeker, Bernhard Struck (eds.), *Die Welt erfahren. Reisen als kulturelle Begegnung von 1780 bis heute* (Frankfurt/M., 2004), pp. 133-159.

<sup>19</sup> See Ulrich Beck and Wolfgang Bonss (eds.), *Die Modernisierung der Moderne* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2001).

I would argue for an understanding of modernity that accepts an intensification of its essential qualities – the increase of information density, communication on a global scale, acceleration of time perception, and a growing difficulty of getting to grips with the world’s manifold possibilities and choices and their implications on the individual, the contradictions of a growing individualism in a mass society, the increasingly decentralised economic production, the feeling of a lack of originality and authenticity, the narrative conquest of the interior human world and of the complexity of a godless universe – and not concentrate on possible caesuras, breaks and shifts presented by an ongoing regeneration process that presents new or recycled versions of theoretical conceptions of modernity. This is not to say that concepts such as multiple modernities,<sup>20</sup> which very usefully breaks up the Eurocentric perspective, or the search for significant shifts within the modern process are invalid heuristic categories, but to argue for a singular, ongoing modernity that includes dynamic discursive variations and social changes, i.e. without an ignorance of power shifts, inequalities and variations of the theme, appears more fruitful heuristically when turning towards the metropolis.

The metropolis is the prime expression of modernity. It sets the standards on all levels. Within the metropolis kaleidoscopic and contradicting narratives of modernity are both created and found. In fact, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century a general metropolitan narrative developed that, in a modified way, is still shaping our perception of urban society until today. Emma Niendorf’s sensation of speed, contradiction, fuzziness and a general impression of fleeting moments impossible to freeze in time and fully understand, is thus an example of the modern conditions of her time and shows that what is conceived of today as a second modernity has in fact started much earlier.

To be sure, the claim that modernity should be understood as a singular altogether does not include the level of democratisation, liberalism, gender equality, and a general improvement of social conditions. Certainly, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, societies have been more rigid, less flexible and less mobile to an enormous extent. The modern effect was the same, however: the temporal perception and general

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<sup>20</sup> For the beginning of the concept see Shmuel Eisenstadt, *Modernization, Protest and Change* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), and more recently *idem*, “Multiple Modernities,” in *Daedalus* 129, Vol. 1 (2000), pp. 1-29. And even more recently *idem* (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2002), Eisenstadt’s article is the same as in the *Daedalus* edition.

understanding of the world functioned alongside similar parameters at least from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until today.<sup>21</sup>

To study the perception of the metropolis as represented in urban travel writing implies a study of how both travel writers mediated their understanding and interpretation of modern conditions so obviously visible in the big city, and which signs and events they chose as being representative of the foreign culture. Urban travel writing is understood here as a narrative that is written in order to represent and explain a foreign city. Furthermore, it is a genre that developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the introduction of the newspaper feuilleton, when it changed in form and content in the 1820s and 1830s, and when it fully thrived in the 1850s. Urban travel writers would represent the metropolis in all its kaleidoscopic shapes and forms, in fact expressing an anthropological interest in the foreign culture by asking questions concerning all strata and all facets of society, the public as well as the private sphere.

Throughout the period from 1851 to 1939, marked by the Great Exhibition that inaugurated a new wave of travel literature on London and the beginning of the Second World War, urban travel writing constitutes a corpus of literature, a European, or even global genre. The canon of questions put towards the cities is similar in all three national corpuses of literature. They aim at a complete understanding of the modern society and mutually compare the metropolises. Furthermore, travel writing provides a discourse which is characterised by caesuras different from political ones. Thus, for the study of travel writing, the Great Exhibition of 1851 can be said to be more important than, for example, the revolutionary upheavals of 1848, when a communicational revolution due to a facilitation of travel and printing occurred, boosting even more the consumption of images and of the ideas attached to these images.<sup>22</sup> Visual representations of the big cities, of national stereotypes and characteristics in general had been widely spread already. In fact, travellers felt visually oppressed already in the 1850s, and maybe even earlier. Each thought had an image attached to it and the travellers' imagination felt bereft of originality.

To be able to write the history of the perception of London and Berlin, this study's source material is composed of all published monographs on London and Berlin written between 1851 and 1939.<sup>23</sup> In order

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<sup>21</sup> Koselleck, *Krise und Kritik*; *idem*, *Vergangene Zukunft*.

<sup>22</sup> On the connection between travel, tourism and modernity in reflections on England see Tilman Fischer, *Reiseziel England. Ein Beitrag zur Poetik der Reisebeschreibung und zur Topik der Moderne (1830-1870)* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Certainly, to find all published travel writings seems to be impossible. At least the study's aspiration is to have not overlooked too many publications.

to narrow down the scope of material at least to a certain degree, only books written with the intention of describing and explaining each others' capital respectively were taken into account. However, in order to broaden the comparative perspective and gain a more European view, French travel writings have been taken into account as well.

Thus, the history of the perception and interpretation of London is based on the descriptions of both German and French urban travel writers, and English as well as French authors provide the source material for the perception of Berlin. Furthermore, as a third metropolis, Paris is always implicitly present in the city descriptions and thus also implicitly present in the following study. This method does not only allow for a broader perspective and thus for avoiding a rigid pre-conception of concepts such as the nation and national stereotypes in general and a merely bilateral comparison. It also shows that the genre of travel writing was a truly international one, and that French as well as German and English writing can be used all together since they are part of the same genre of texts, indeed to a certain degree part of the same international discourse. In fact, the characteristics of the genre exerts more influence on the content of the travel writings than, for example, national pre-conceptions. Thus, even though the category of the national is important and at the heart of the interest of urban travel writing itself, it is not used as a major category for this study's investigation since this would imply a national perspective taken from today's point of view while the national sentiments under scrutiny are those of the past as expressed in travel writing.

Rather, a certain dependency on a steadily growing literary market just as conceptions of time and space as well as the common frame set by the conditions of perception – something that might be called a modernity, an ontology of the present,<sup>24</sup> shared by both London and Berlin – are in focus and build the frame of the following study when the chapters on London and Berlin are designed around a temporal axis, and I want to claim that the notion of the present just as notions of the past and of the future, in short, the application of historical time on the interpretation of the foreign metropolis, can be understood as a decisive denominator of modernity as well. An envisioned future and stable narratives of a nostalgic past were quintessential for both cities, and travel writers would often, explicitly or implicitly, design their interpretation according to the supposed possibility of each respective metropolis for providing a secure and promising future.

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<sup>24</sup> Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, the phrase 'an ontology of the present' is Jameson's subtitle.

While the temporal axis constitutes the main frame of analysis for this study, national stereotypes and the role of the capital remain highly important for the general understanding of travel writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as for the nexus nationalism shares with tourism, both constituted by signs of authenticity. The role of the capital as the main representative place in which to find these signs of authenticity motivated the choice of London and Berlin.

From the general conditions described above follows another focal point of investigation for the study. Which were the signs thought to be representative and providing insight? Here, travel writers would usually not confirm official narrations or mention official buildings or classical tourist sights such as Tower Bridge or the Reichstag. Those signs did not reveal meaning, did neither explain England, nor Germany. Rather, both in London and Berlin, as well as in the case of writing on Paris, metropolitan narratives revolving around an internationally stockpiled set of characters and experiences as well as sights and sounds compose the sign arrangements which would allow urban travel writers to deduce on the foreign culture.

The sights and sounds composing the sign arrangement are the semiophores of the metropolis. Semiophores themselves are signs carrying meaning, or, more closely defined by Krzysztof Pomian, they are: “objets reconnus dans une société donnée en tant que porteurs de signification et partant fabriqués ou exposés de manière à s’adresser au regard soit exclusivement, soit tout en gardant une fonction utilitaire.”<sup>25</sup> The routes of meaningful signs leading through the cities are constituted by semiophores, by material and sensual signs which compose the overall image of the foreign society.

This approach towards perception and city description allows a method of comparison that avoids strong pre-conceptions of a civilisation model on the side of the historian or a pre-formulated catalogue of questions which then only has to be checked off during the comparison, but, rather, unearths a characteristic narrative attached to each city respectively. Semiophores, by being at the same time physical and sensual as well as semiotic in character can be compared both in their material aspect and in their signifying one. The history of city perception carried out here is thus organised not only around a temporal axis, but as well around a thematic one, connecting the material and the

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<sup>25</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, *Sur l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 167. Pomian continues: “Tableaux, dessins, estampes, sculptures, écrit de toute sorte, manuscrits et imprimés, poids et mesures, sceaux, monnaies, billets de banque et titres divers, objets liturgiques ainsi que toutes les choses décorées (...) appartiennent à cette catégorie.”

signifying character of the semiophores sought for by urban travel writers.

The most important interpretative notion of the respective foreign culture and the experiences and insights connected with the city perception is what I want to call a notion of authenticity. Beside the conditions of modernity, the notion of authenticity represents the second framing aspect of this study. Travel writers would arrange their interpretation of society around signs and experiences thought to be and, when communicated to the reader, designed as being authentic. The concept of authenticity, as it is used here, contains two forms of the authentic. First, *imagined authenticity*, constituted by signs which, however, cannot be objectively understood as truly representing neither the other, nor the self. Rather, the signs understood as representing authenticity are already in the world before travellers interpret them, i.e. they are discursively pre-given, already known to be authentic before they are supposedly discovered by travellers. There existed and exists a certain invisible knowledge of what could and what should be authentic and travel writers know how to find the signs representing this consensus.

Signs of authenticity compose the imaginary of each national culture, of each self-understanding as well as each perception through the eyes of foreigners. They are the, sometimes only discursive, but mostly material and/or sensual materialisation of what allows an insight into a perceived national identity. The second form of authenticity is a rhetorical one that provides the necessary means for expressing the insights connected with the signs of imagined authenticity. It is an authenticity, which renders credibility and originality to the account. *Rhetorical authenticity* represents the writers authority on the subject treated as well as their credibility. This authority is an authority of form, and there are certain writing techniques at hand to reach a rhetorical authenticity effect.

Connected to the question of imagined and rhetorical authenticity is the nexus of tourism and national identity. Both are connected to signs and ideas of authenticity which enable an experience of insight for the onlooker or participant. It is thus a means of providing a narrative security, even though built on contradictions and on imaginary as well as rhetorically formal signs and expressions.

Generally, three questions can be formulated that summarise my interest in the subject as well as its complexities. 1) It can be asked as to how far travel writing can be used as a source for historians and how it can be used as a revealing document for the context of authenticity, modernity and the metropolis. 2) I am interested in the narratives of London and Berlin. Which signs were thought to be representative for

each metropolis? Which were the narratives attached to these signs and by referring to which semiophores could the urban travel writer explain the foreign culture to his or her readers. This question includes the problematic of stereotypes and gender roles. An important aspect of this problem field is the female stereotype and role within the perceived public sphere of the foreign metropolis, their position in public and private places visited. 3) It shall be asked how the long term perspective taken on modernity and the metropolis in this study can be understood, analysed, and in how far historical conclusions might be drawn. In order to be able to do this, I want to follow Fredric Jameson's four maxims of modernity.

For Jameson, the analysis of modernity is a conundrum concerning the necessity of the term as well as its inexplicability. He writes that "it might be better to admit that the notions that cluster around the word 'modern' are as unavoidable as they are unacceptable."<sup>26</sup> However, to grasp the phenomenon he provides four maxims which I want to keep in mind throughout the following study and which will be discussed in the conclusion. 1) Jameson proposes that "one cannot periodize;" 2) he claims that "modernity is not a concept but rather a narrative category;" 3) "the one way not to narrate it is via subjectivity (thesis: subjectivity is unrepresentable). Only situations of modernity can be narrated;" and finally 4) "no 'theory' of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.