

The day before my recent departure for Berlin, two gay-punk 'zines arrived in the mail: *J.D.s* and the debut issue of *BIMBOX*. I figured the magazines ought to impress Berliners. They certainly impressed me.

The new *J.D.s* boasts pinup girl Jena VonBrucker (of the band Human Ashtrays) dressed in a James Dean T-shirt on the cover. Included inside is a candid interview with porn icon Peter Berlin, the moving confession "I Was a Skinhead's Boot Slave," and G. B. Jones's female drawings, evocative of Tom of Finland.

BIMBOX states that it's for a "secret network of lesbians and gay men . . . who can barely ride a bus without vomiting out of disgust and contempt for the walking heterosexual abortion sitting across the aisle." It features such delicious items as a complete critical discography of the recordings of Nancy Sinatra and a telling tribute to *The Advocate's* own advice columnist, titled "I Fisted Pat Califia."

The magazines made good traveling companions, although we weren't the only imports to come from the West Coast. Shortly after my arrival, I discovered that despite a boisterous reputation and a population four times that of San Francisco, West Berlin and its gay bars are ridiculously quiet on weeknights. One disco, Lipstick, proved to be the exception, but the dude who looked most Berlin in the crowd (shaved head, studded-leather dog collar, earring, and tank top) was a busboy from the Stud in San Francisco. We had come over on the same plane.

ON THE TAIL OF TWO CITIES

In West Berlin, LSD sells for six times what it does in San Francisco, and heroin sells for one sixth. On my first night, I saw a cute 16-year-old in a blue nylon jacket shooting up in the doorway of an imposing office building. Maybe that's where the boys were.

I went on to find a congenial dive called Club Anal. It's a small venue that boasts a floral logo derived from a photo of a scrotum and anus. This "flower" decorates one wall while trash bags highlight another. The quiet crowd sips cheap champagne and fancy beer to a playlist of the Pixies, Bavarian folk songs, and anonymous Eurotorch tunes.

On Friday night, I headed to Busch Alle, the best bet in East Berlin: a modestly decorated high school cafeteria, which is nearly the only game in town. I ordered gin-and-kiwi-juice cocktails to the strains of Jimmy Somerville's "Read My Lips,"

and for once it sounded like the disco anthem he intended. Later, couples slow-danced to Sinéad O'Connor and then clotted the floor for Madonna. One youth, probably a West Berliner, dressed in bike shorts and a Madonna T-shirt, had obviously memorized Madonna's every move.

I say he was *probably* a West Berliner because in the six months since the wall came down, the two populations have become increasingly indistinguishable. The basic sound track here was acid house: Cuts like Soul II Soul's latest, "A Dream Is a Dream," and "Power" by Snapp are ubiquitous. As for Berlin—city of knowing decadence and old-world charm—I'm sorry, but it seems a lot like Cleveland. Except that it has better beer, worse food, and way, way ruder people. If you hold out your hand to a Berliner, expect him to respond as if you'd just proffered a communicable disease.

SCARY MONSTERS

On Sunday, photographer Marc Geller and I visited Tuitenhau, a gay squatters' place in East Berlin. The squatters, who all came from the West, draped the series of deserted buildings with East German flags and some lavender banners. In East Berlin these days, you see *only* West German flags: One even hangs from the headquarters of the city's Communist party.

Five gay boys originally occupied one building in early April. The group expanded to 20, and four other buildings on the street were claimed: one by a lesbian group, another by lesbian mothers, a third by feminists, and yet another by artists.

After five weeks, though, the gay men were still hoping to attract some *East* Berliners and blanketed the city with fliers announcing a Sunday tea and open house. Almost 20 East Berliners showed up, but only one—a 19-year-old who was tired of living with his parents—agreed to move in.

We arrived to find 20 or 30 rebels lounging around the graffiti-covered inner courtyard, sharing cake and coffee and cutting carrots for a communal meal that evening.

One squatter, Louis, who was 26 and had a blond Mohawk and luxurious lips that barely moved when he talked, chatted with us while his lover, who was dressed in a silly taffeta dress and too much rouge, tottered around in heels. He told us that people were a little rattled after two attacks the previous night by a gang of fascist skinheads. A group of about 50 had stormed the street at 1:30 a.m. and again four hours later, throwing stones through windows and chanting, "Hitler is coming back."

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I asked Louis how old the attackers were and how they were dressed. "They're mostly 20- to 25-year-olds," he explained. "They wear knee-high boots, T-shirts, and bomber jackets. And the thing is," he winced, "they're so fucking attractive." We all laughed.

NERVE ENDING

That evening we were invited to filmmaker Rosa von Praunheim's regular Sunday salon. He is currently mounting a European tour of his *AIDS Trilogy* to be shown with lectures and entertainment. Singer-activist Michael Callen flew in from New York to perform with the film in Hamburg, Berlin, and Leipzig.

Von Praunheim sat on a sofa with one hand on the leg of his wry young boyfriend, who had a big target painted in wax pencil around one eye. I handed von Praunheim my copies of *J.D.s* and *BIMBOX* with a brief explanation. He grunted politely, flipped their pages, and passed them blankly to his guests.

As it turns out, both *J.D.s* and *BIMBOX* are already available at Berlin's local gay bookshop. I didn't care. Berliners act professionally bored, even with themselves. The whole city was beginning to work my nerves big-time, so I decided it was time to move on.

By the time you read this, I'll be in Hungary and hopefully far enough east so that *J.D.s* and *BIMBOX* will inspire at least a touch of astonishment. Stay tuned for more notes from the road.

—Adam Block