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*Jill Winder is a Donors' Fellow of the Institute studying post-reunification Germany through the work and attitudes of its artists.*

## Berlin's Bread and Butter: Selling Street "Cred"

By Jill Winder

JULY 2005

BERLIN— On a Saturday morning this July, I took one of the strangest trips on public transportation I've experienced to date. I boarded the U-Bahn (the city's metro system) ten minutes from my apartment for a nearly hour-long journey west to the Berlin district of Spandau. I was traveling 23 stops on the U-7 to Paulsternstrasse, just 4 stops from the end of the line. As the train made its way from the city center, the kitschy, post-war tiled interiors of each station became more and more ornate and colorful, almost ecstatic, as if to entertain passengers on a long ride. Inside the cars, the number of riders dwindled and the demographic divide increased.

I shared the train with two very different camps: a well-dressed, hip crowd of 20-30-somethings, and working-class travelers who were obviously heading home. Right across from me, the contrast was comical, if not down-right uncomfortable: a Turkish man carrying five shopping bags from Domäne, a discount housewares store, struggled to share the bench with a stylish young woman clutching a \$1,000 handbag. The man looked over and caught my eye, shooting a questioning glance in my direction that seemed to ask, "Did all of you hipsters miss your stop? Do you know where you're going?"

We did, in fact, know where we were going although it's fair to say that our destination was, in terms of the normal travel routes of the city's young, fashionable elite, certifiably in the middle of nowhere. Spandau is an industrial and residential part of Berlin, most famous for being the location of the prison where Hitler's architect Albert Speer and Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy, served long sentences after being convicted of war crimes at the Nuremberg Trials. Today Spandau, home to decaying industrial buildings and working-class families, is not a frequent destination for many Berliners. But for three days each January and July, the sprawling former Siemens Kabelwerk (Cable Factory) in Spandau becomes the magnet of choice for Europe's fashion-industry elite. They come from far and wide to attend a wildly successful fashion trade show called BREAD & butter.

Karl-Heinz Müller founded BREAD & butter in Cologne in 2001. Created as an "off-show," an alternative to more traditional trade venues for selected brands, it sought a more international platform, and in acknowledgement of Berlin's draw as a young, dynamic city, it relocated and has been hosting bi-annual events here since January 2003. BREAD & butter's reputation has grown and become legendary in the fashion industry — an independent trade show that combines the power of established international fashion houses with the innovation and energy of small, up-and-coming labels, all within the boundaries of one of the coolest cities in Europe.

### City as Brand

For a city to earn the coveted term "hip," at least three things are arguably required: interesting art, music and fashion scenes. Though Berlin has long been known for art and music, its reputation as a fashion capital, lost after the rise of

National Socialism, has only recently made a comeback. To many in the fashion industry, Berlin is the center of a style increasingly known as “street couture” with “street credibility” (street “cred,” for short).” BREAD & butter has played a significant role in the transformation.

Berlin has never been famous for *haute* couture, but clothes designers in the city have a well-deserved reputation for innovation. Before the rise of National Socialism, Berlin’s industrious German-Jewish tailors and retailers, mostly based in the city’s Mitte district, helped establish the international reputation of Germany’s garment industry. During the Weimar Era’s “Golden Twenties,” revealing flapper dresses, short bobs and dramatic hats set the standard for European fashion, and Berlin chic was widely regarded as more daring and wild than Parisian couture. Although that industry was irreparably damaged by the destruction of the Second World War, by the late 1970s and early 1980s West Berlin was once again famous for the street-wise style known as the punk aesthetic, a look emulated by musical legends Iggy Pop and David Bowie. In fact Vivienne Westwood, the British designer widely credited for introducing the punk look to high fashion, has been teaching at one of the city’s fashion-design schools, the University of Fine Arts, for the last ten years.

History notwithstanding, Germany as a whole has a long and dismal reputation as something of a fashion wasteland, compared to the traditional centers of Paris and Milan. As recently as five years ago, promising young German designers like Bernard Willhelm and Markus Lupfer felt compelled to move to Paris and London to develop their careers. Lupfer explained the problem recently to fashion critic Clive Freeman: “Very often what-

ever comes from Germany is at first kind of rejected. Someone else has to say it’s good first. Somehow, Germans are not confident about their fashion sense...but I think something is starting to happen in Berlin.”

Indeed, Berlin’s local fashion scene is making headlines these days. When pressed to describe “street cred” to friends, I usually say that the prevailing look is “Oops, I’m fashionable.” To be more specific, the street style of Berlin is characterized by a disheveled combination of vintage t-shirts or camisoles, jeans and trendy accessories like wide belts, dangling earrings and expensive bags for women — or name-brand jeans, funky sneakers and vintage- or limited-edition print t-shirts for men. One rule of thumb, for example, is to wear only one item with a recognizable brand name or only one very expensive piece (a handbag, a pair of shoes) at a time. The finished look is so casual and unkempt that the uninitiated would not catch on to the carefully constructed choreography of the look. Let’s call it spending an inordinate amount of time on looking like you spent no time at all getting dressed... That’s typical Berlin fashion.

The city has no shortage of places to shop for the basics of this elusive style. Dozens of small boutiques can be found in the Berlin districts of Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg, offering pieces that are often sewn in a back-room atelier. Slowly, small Berlin-based labels such as Apartment, Lucid 21, Macqua, Little Red Riding Hood and Uli Dziallas are making their mark beyond the borders of the city. Not surprisingly, Berlin’s cheap rents and low cost of living have made it a haven for designers and artists alike. Dave de Boer, Dutch manager for the Fashion Solutions Agency, explained the lure, “The multicultural atmosphere typical of Berlin is similar only to Amsterdam, London and New York. People come here for inspiration... There are lots of really creative people here who work with limited resources.” The results are increasingly cementing the city’s renewed reputation as a fashion capital.

BREAD & butter both relies on and generates this hype about Berlin as a fashion metropolis, and the hype is increasing not least because of the force that the trade show has become in the industry. In contrast to the other pillars of urban cool — art and music — the fashion scene is arguably the only one that can function as a major economic force. For the bankrupt municipality of Berlin, supporting BREAD & butter is part of a policy to revive tourism and encourage business to be done in the city. After unsuccessful attempts to promote the city as a business and political center, the “branding” of Berlin as a hip destination is arguably the city’s only successful branding attempt of the last 15 years. Only this year has Delta Air Lines begun offering nonstop JFK-Berlin service.

When I opened BREAD & butter’s glossy promotional magazine, the *BB Bulletin*, I was taken aback to find a greeting from Berlin’s Mayor Klaus Wowereit gracing the front page. But the numbers show why the city gov-





*Ulrich Weingärtner, an architect working with S1 Architektur for BREAD & butter. Photo: B&B*

ernment works closely with BREAD & butter, offering incentives and issuing the necessary permits to get the trade show underway: Each event brings around 30,000 professionals to the city for a weekend. These people fill hotel rooms, eat at fine restaurants, shop at the city's boutiques, drink cocktails at expensive bars and place orders with many Berlin-based small businesses, providing a much-needed boost, albeit brief, for the city's revenues.

### **An Insider Tour through BREAD & butter**

BREAD & butter is an exclusive event, not open to

the general public — in business parlance, it's accessible only "to the trade." Accreditation is required, and one needs to be a "rep" for a fashion label, promoter, boutique owner or buyer to attend the fair. Though I was in no position to be granted professional accreditation, I happen to be a friend of Ulrich Weingärtner, one of the architects working with S1 Architektur, the firm responsible for the architectural concept and design of BREAD & butter. Uli offered to give me an unofficial tour, to talk about the location where BREAD & butter takes place, and how the trade show manages to transform this rather gritty part of town into an *überhip* locale for a few days a year.

One of the first things you notice as you enter BREAD & butter's neighborhood are hundreds of taxis lined up at the fair entrance.

I must admit that the sight soothes one's sense of being lost in an industrial wasteland. Spandau is nearly 30 minutes from downtown by car, and taxi drivers love BREAD & butter weekends. Many people attending BREAD & butter ride constantly from the fair location into Mitte and back again, at 30 Euros (\$40 USD) per ride. Uli told me that one of the drivers characterized the weekend as "Christmas and Easter in one go."

No matter how odd the setting, slickly designed BREAD & butter signs proudly displayed at the entrance promise a stylish and street-incredible experience inside. The promise does not disappoint. The transformation of this



*A sea of taxis patiently wait at the entrance of BREAD & butter for trade-fair participants and the lucrative fares they bring.*

(Right) Empty interior view of one of the industrial halls used by BREAD & butter for exhibitor space. Photo: B&B. (Below) View of the Sport and Street section of BREAD & butter, July 2005.



meter section of the former factory. As BREAD & butter has expanded, the trade show now uses as many as 80,000 square meters of the complex.

My tour began when Uli met me at the entrance, handed over my guest pass, and led me directly to a staff-only lounge. The BREAD & butter creative team comes up with a theme for each trade show, and a Dutch design firm, Wink, does the interiors, which can be ornate and on-the-fringe at the same time. The lounge, decorated all in black and white, looked like a combination of a swanky hotel bar and the set of one of Madonna's old videos.

Simply stated, BREAD & butter is a professional forum where fashion-label firms can sell their wares for the upcoming season to buyers major and minor, from international chains to the smallest specialty boutique. BREAD & butter makes money by contracting with "exhibitors" to rent floor space at the show. Exhibit stands range from relatively small to hundreds of square meters, and rental costs run from 180 Euros/square meter (\$230) to 220 Euros/square meter (\$280) for premium "studio" space. The trade

complex into a temporary fashion paradise is truly remarkable: just look at the "before" and "after" pictures of the empty hall and how things appear during a trade show.

show is divided into an elaborate maze of sections: the Superior Area, milk & honey, Fashion Gallery, Denim Hall, Sport & Street, Sportswear and Streetcouture.

Working under principal architects Ansgar Schmidt and Henning Ziepke, the team of S1 Architektur is responsible not only for organizing the layout of the trade show and working with individual exhibitors, but also for making sure that the buildings used for BREAD & butter comply with safety regulations, have proper heating and other amenities and that everything is up to fire code. The task is especially complex because BREAD & butter is held in a series of industrial halls that make up the former Siemens Kabelwerk (Cable Factory), now under *Denkmalschutz* (protected monument status). BREAD & butter first used the location for its trade show in January 2003 after purchasing a 20,000-square-

According to Uli, "The financial basis for BREAD &

(Top) An artist's rendering of the Siemens Westend Cable Factory outside Berlin in what was officially known for some time as "Siemensstadt" (Siemens City), circa 1900. For years the finished site was the largest industrial complex in Europe. Courtesy: Siemens (Bottom) The former Siemens Cable Factory in the Spandau district of Berlin, part of which is now owned and used by the fashion trade show BREAD & butter. Photo: B&B





*A view from a stand in Milk & Honey, a section of BREAD & butter devoted exclusively to women's clothing. Photo: B&B*

butter are the Denim and Sport & Street sections. That is where what we call our 'key accounts'—Nike, G-Star, Hugo Boss, Pepe Jeans—exhibit. Their popularity also feeds into the idea that Berlin is known for a certain street-style and we obviously market that to increase the credibility of the whole show. Most mainstream trade shows feature many 'big' labels, but we've made a name for ourselves by including a large number of smaller, more

up-and-coming brands as well. The way we manage this is that our key accounts draw the smaller labels in. Many times, a representative from a small label will debate whether the investment to come is worth it, but I often hear about someone saying, 'Well, if G-Star (or Nike) will be there, we'll show up'."

As for the vibe that makes BREAD & butter unique,



*The Hugo Boss presentation in the Superior Area of BREAD & butter. Boss is one of the fair's most important exhibitors.*  
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*The Denim Hall at BREAD & butter, exhibiting key accounts such as G-Star Raw and Pepe Jeans. Photo: B&B*

Uli explained, "Well, you know the motto for BREAD & butter is 'fun and profit' ... And our success is based a lot on our reputation as a good place to do business and have a great time doing it." BREAD & butter offers an extensive side program of events that are free to trade-show visitors. At the show itself, there is a "Luna Park" (a small amusement park), complete with trucked-in sand, food stands, stages and bars. The equivalent of a "coffee break" at a conference, the idea is to allow professionals to meet, chat — and also make deals both inside and outside the walls of the show. Another popular offering are fashion shows. The major event of this year's BREAD & butter was a fashion show featuring the creations of Vivienne Westwood's last design class at the University of Fine Arts (she will no longer teach in Berlin). I attended a fashion show featuring the collection of five different small labels — a great way for the unknowns to generate a bit of buyer buzz.

Another way that BREAD & butter distinguishes itself from its local and international competitors (a trade show called Premium started in 2003 and is the most direct competition for BREAD & butter in

the city) and establish its reputation as a "taste maker" is to include contemporary art at the show. The increasing link between fashion and contemporary art is a defining feature of both fields in recent years. This is not surprising, since both the hottest artists and the hottest fashion are often promoted as "brands" or "trends." Having art at BREAD & butter plays on the notion that the show not only has the best that fashion can offer, but offers culture and leisure as well. It sells not only clothing, but perhaps more importantly, a "lifestyle." By far the most interesting participants in this section of BREAD & butter were Johannes Schweiger and Wally Salner, two Vienna-based artists who have made a second career for themselves as designers for their label "\_\_\_fabrics interseason."

Activities go on into the evening after BREAD & butter closes down at 7 p.m. Trade-show organizers schedule events at the city's most exclusive clubs (three or four parties can string out or carry on in a single evening), as well as a massive closing bash. That Berlin is famous for its great clubs, innovative DJs and interesting locations (one club is in an underground, former GDR bank vault)



*German supermodel Eva Padberg on the runway during a BREAD & butter fashion show presenting the graduate projects of Vivienne Westwood's fashion design class at the University of Fine Arts, Berlin. Photo: B&B (Right) Model appears on the catwalk at BREAD & butter's July 23<sup>rd</sup> fashion show, "5 is better than 1" presenting five young designers. The model is wearing a dress by Macqua, a small Berlin-based label.*



is just another reason why people are drawn to BREAD & butter over other shows they could attend in Europe. One Japanese buyer I chatted with during the U-Bahn ride to the fair couldn't stop talking about Berlin, "Are you kidding?," he said, "The three buyers for my boutique have to draw names out of a hat to see who gets to go to BREAD & butter. There are more established shows in Italy and France that we go to every year, but this is the one we fight over. I've never seen so many cutting-edge, small labels in one place, so for business it's great. But I have to admit that it's hard to work when there are so many clubs and events to take in...I'd kill to live here. Berlin has it all..."

Yet, when an event in the fickle fashion industry achieves a certain level of credibility, the boundaries need to be pushed even further to maintain the "cutting edge" reputation. BREAD & butter recently branched out, holding a trade show in Barcelona in July under the BB label, and doing another show in Berlin just two weeks later. The combined total of visitors to both events was a staggering 71,000, and according to Uli, 60 percent of their exhibitors managed to participate in both shows. "Going to Barcelona obviously introduced a kind of internal competition within BREAD & butter for participants, but the idea is to establish Berlin as a constant 'north' and Barcelona as our 'south' axis. We're at a point when we have to raise the standard," Uli told me with a smile. Clearly there are visions of an empire.

When I asked how the Berlin government responded to the expansion plans, Uli blanched. "One realizes how much money BREAD & butter brings to the city, if not just from the reaction of the government. They were very



Another view from the "5 is better than 1" fashion show. Models speed past the crowd in a burst of color, wearing rainbow-hued dresses accented with folk patterns and grosgrain ribbon by another small Berlin label, Smeilinener. In the background, the extensive heating system of this former factory is visible.

upset and in the end we had to dramatically alter our plans. Doing two shows in two countries within two weeks is pretty crazy, but we could only maintain our cooperation with the government by having a show in Berlin as well. We didn't really have a choice. If we expand, we still have to keep Berlin as a base." It seems that BREAD & butter will continue to be a force in the branding of Berlin as a hot destination for stylish trendsetters, and as long as the reputation is maintained, the trade show and the party will go on. In this instance, promoting "street cred" is not just empty hype; it can be an economic force to be reckoned with, as Berlin's government is all too aware. □



View of an art installation, "Contemporary Aesthetics @ BBerlin" in the Superior Area of BREAD & butter, July 2005. Photo: B&B INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

# Current Fellows and their Activities

### Alexander Brenner (June 2003 - 2005) • CHINA

With a B.A. in History from Yale and an M.A. in China Studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Alex is in China examining how the country is adapting to economic and cultural globalization following its accession to the World Trade Organization.

### Richard D. Connerney (January 2005 - 2007) • INDIA

A lecturer in Philosophy, Asian Religions and Philosophy at Rutgers, Iona College and the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Rick Connerney is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot Fellow studying and writing about the intertwining of religion, culture and politics in India, once described by former U.S. Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith as "a functioning anarchy." Rick has a B.A. and an M.A. in religion from Wheaton College and the University of Hawaii, respectively.

### Kay Dilday (October 2005-2007) • FRANCE/MOROCCO

An editor for the *New York Times*' Op-Ed page for the past five years, Kay holds an M.A. in Comparative International Politics and Theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*. She has traveled in and written from Haiti and began her journalistic life as city-council reporter for *Somerville This Week*, in Somerville, MA.

### Cristina Merrill (June 2004-2006) • ROMANIA

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and is spending two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceausescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

### Nicholas Schmidle (October 2005-2007) • IRAN

A journalist and researcher for the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, Nick is finishing a Master's program in Comparative and Regional Studies (Middle East/Central Asia) at American University in Washington DC. He is studying intensive Persian — as is his fiancée, Rikki Bohan — in anticipation of his departure for Iran after his marriage in autumn 2005.

### Andrew J. Tabler (February 2005 - 2007) • SYRIA/LEBANON

Andrew has lived, studied and worked in the Middle East since a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Fellowship enabled him to begin Arabic-language studies and work toward a Master's degree at the American University in Cairo in 1994. Following the Master's, he held editorships with the *Middle East Times* and *Cairo Times* before moving to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria and working as a Senior Editor with the Oxford Business Group and a correspondent for the *Economist* Intelligence Unit. His two-year ICWA fellowship bases him in Beirut and Damascus, where he will report on Lebanese affairs and Syrian reform.

### Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • GERMANY

With a B.A. in politics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA and a Master's degree in Art Curating from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Jill is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at Germany through the work, ideas and viewpoints of its contemporary artists. Before six months of intensive study of the German language in Berlin, she was a Thomas J. Watson Fellow looking at post-communist art practice and the cultural politics of transition in the former Soviet bloc (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine).

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