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# Euro-Chic Berlin: Fashion's Bread & Butter

**Susan Ingram**

**Abstract**

This article examines a new kind of European identity, which it argues has emerged from Berlin's approach to street-style.

“Be Berlin!” That was the message of the marketing campaign launched in the spring of 2008 to help brand Berlin as a city of freedom and creativity.<sup>1</sup> It was not the first such campaign the city had undertaken since becoming the capital of reunified Germany. Between 1989 and 1999, as Svetlana Boym recounts,

...the slogan ‘Berlin is becoming’ was adopted by the newly united city. At this point it didn't signify modern forgetting but rather evoked early-twentieth-century modernism as one of the memorable moments of the city's history. It spoke of becoming amidst ruins and construction sites, tracing new maps between nostalgia and history (175-6).

This campaign was followed by a massive “New Berlin” rebuilding program, which “failed to have the desired effect of catapulting the former Cold War outpost into the top tier of contemporary global cities” (Ward 239). Rather, as Janet Ward pointed out in 2004, the regained capital still languished under bankruptcy and high unemployment, a fate only exacerbated by the decision of the German Constitutional Court in October 2006 that Berlin “had no right to a single euro of federal funds to offset its huge budget deficit of 61.6 billion Euro” (Schwarz), and then, more recently, by the global financial crisis, and the EU bailout of Greece.<sup>2</sup> While Berlin's dire financial situation is extreme, it is hardly unique. However, the city's response to the financial challenges it, and its cultural groups, face does have some specific qualities that demonstrate the kinds of interventions that can be made to encourage the mobilization of creative interests to position a city advantageously in the global market. The Be Berlin campaign may have been, and may continue to be (cf. Goehler), heavily criticized for being expensive and tax-draining, but it also demonstrates the city's determination to attract more capital investors, small entrepreneurs, artists and designers, as well as provide a communication platform and multiplier for the local creative industries. A city that came of age in the nineteenth century as a city of manufacturing, and textile manufacturing in particular, reunified Berlin has adapted to post-industrialization without sacrificing the social democratic prioritization of its citizens as workers. In other

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In all of my work on Berlin, I am greatly indebted to Katrina Sark, and this piece is no exception. It builds on chapter six of our *Berliner Chic*. I would also like to acknowledge the useful feedback I received after presenting this work at the European Identities conference in Guelph and at the Crossroads in Cultural Studies conference in Hong Kong (special thanks to Lisa Leung, Nissim Otmazgin, and Oscar Ho for our inspiring session). I am also grateful to both SSHRC and to York's Canadian Centre for German and European Studies for supporting the research that went into this work.

<sup>1</sup> More precisely, the public launch of the campaign was on March 11, 2008 (Colomb and Kalandides 173).

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of German sources are mine.

words, Berlin has attempted to maintain its traditional strength in the fashion and media sectors (cf. Westphal, Fritzsche, Czaplinka), while adapting them to the globalized flows of the twenty-first century (cf. Appadurai).

After first outlining the contours of brand Berlin, this article examines the role fashion has played in helping to code Berlin geo-aesthetically as European. I investigate the fashion trade shows that have come to call the city home, not only because they are a genre of event that has contributed substantially to the success of Berlin's brand, but more pertinently, because they provide a particularly clear demonstration of the subtle way the city has worked to foster a globally oriented European identity, one that liberates "Europe" in the manner Haydn White suggested, "from the illusion that it is not only essentially historical but also incarnates the essence of historicity itself." (np) Rather than make possible "another signification, better suited to the professed desire of its devotees for a community more universalist and generically human than its previous incarnations," Euro Chic, as it has emerged in Berlin, aims to distance "Europe" from its universalist, humanist traditions and resignify it as *not* Eurocentric but precisely its opposite.

While not exactly a political project of the kind championed by Spivak and Braidotti, among others, it does contain elements of a post-national European social imaginary that could be used, and are in any case useful, for such a project in that it provides a possibility to reimagine identity in a non-identitarian or non-unitarian way that, while detached from legal and political subjectivity nonetheless presupposes a critically, politically aware class consciousness. As Braidotti puts it:

We must be capable of imagining a situation... in which your sense of citizenship, or rather your citizenship in the sense of legal and political subjectivity, must be detached from the sense of identity. I am against this closure by which you are something and belong to something: this is mad, it is a form of microfascism. Geopolitically, it is an absolute closure: I am from here, I come from here, this is my land, this is my language, therefore I belong. Postnationalism is thus, for me, a critique of the unitary subject, by which I mean citizenship, politics and the identitarian question.

In its open, processural, post-Bildung urbanity and multiplicity, Berlin's Euro Chic can be seen as paving the way for an alternative, flexible form of cultural citizenship.

### Part I: Branding Berlin

First, what does it mean to "Be Berlin"? "Being Berlin" has come in the first instance to mean being "poor but sexy," a turn of phrase the city owes its colorful mayor, Klaus Wowereit, who in a November 2003 interview with the FOCUS-Money magazine, responded negatively when asked whether money

made one more sexually appealing: “No. You can see this with Berlin. We may be poor, but we’re still sexy.”<sup>3</sup> Berlin is neither the only city to which this kind of a label has attempted to be attached, nor the first:

In 1999 an exhibition staged by the Hong Kong Arts Centre entitled *My Poor Dear Hong Kong—Poor but Cool* attempted to serve as a similar marker of cultural change. In the wake of the Asian economic crisis, the show lauded the creative and ethical value of recycling, and Exhibition Director, Oscar Ho offered a spirited statement about the good that could come from lack: ‘Being poor does not necessarily mean being miserable. With limited resources, one could still create beautiful results. With an ordinary matchbox, I remember, I could make a tank and a basket out of it... In our rich, modern society, increasingly we let the big companies that employ all these creative professionals do the creative works. We are consumers just going to the shops and buying all the fantastic creative products. Creativity and resourcefulness is no longer needed for children, for the parents can take them to toy shops and they can purchase all these wonderful products creatively designed for them... Let’s not romanticize poverty. Being poor is tough... But poverty could force one to be resourceful, and make one be sensitive about alternative solutions.’ (Clark 164)

Given that its world city status is predicated on global financial capital driven by land speculation and an open port (cf. Abbas), the “poor but cool” label was, perhaps not unsurprisingly, unable to stick to Hong Kong.

Berlin, on the other hand, while capital of the reunified, still reasonably prosperous Federal Republic of Germany, is not that country’s or the EU’s financial center, which is Frankfurt, home to the European Central Bank, the German Federal Bank, and the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. Rather Berlin has put itself “on the map of global cultural spectacle” (Lehrer 333) by cultivating a particular reputation. It is known as the city that gave birth to the Love Parade in 1989, the city that puts on the rollicking Carneval of Cultures every Whitsun, the city that the people Tobias Rapp has labeled the “Eastjetset” travel to on the weekend to go clubbing. Building on this reputation, Berlin has also taken to hosting spectacular events like the 2006 FIFA World Cup and the 2009 celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Wall, which featured a climactic falling of the domino pieces along the former path of the Wall.<sup>4</sup>

These events work together to reinforce an image of Berlin as a place where wild and wacky events take place outdoors, in public, that anyone who wants to is welcome to attend and participate in. It is a place of inclusivity, of

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<sup>3</sup> See the “Politik” section of *Focus*, 19.10.2006, [http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/wowereits-berlin-slogan\\_aid\\_117712.html](http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/wowereits-berlin-slogan_aid_117712.html).

<sup>4</sup> Several clips of the event are available on YouTube. One that gives a good impression of the extent of the spectacle is captioned “Berlin Wall Anniversary .. ALL the DOMINOES falling ... SPECTACULAR !!!!” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEpDUp8rGSc&feature=related>).

inexpensive, energetic entertainment, entertainment, moreover, that is staged for a global spectatorship and meant not only to be enjoyed in person but also enjoyed vicariously on a TV, computer or cell-phone screen as a news or YouTube clip. One cannot help admire the amount of creative labor that went into all the dominos that came tumbling down, and to see in them neither labor nor work but action, as Hannah Arendt defines this term in *The Human Condition*; that is, it is neither the labor that merely reproduces life in the *oikos*/ household, nor the work of *homo faber* that generates material products for the *agora*/ marketplace. Rather it is action through which “human beings demonstrate themselves as free, as initiators, when they do something new, unprecedented and improbable” (McAfee 118) in the *polis*, the space of appearance and of history, where “people enter into the public realm... [and] can begin to leave their mark or legacy” (117). Arendt “holds that true action is pointless unless it is done in the company of others and recorded by others. It is not enough for an action to occur; the story of its occurring needs to be told... Th[is] narrative will offer others in the *polis* a way to think about the political... For Arendt, the main task of the narrator is not to invent a story but to recognize ‘the moment of accomplishment’ and to ‘identify the agent’ of the story” (118, 120). We can see in the examples of the World Cup Disco Mile and the Wall Dominoes how Berlin functions as precisely such a *polis*, encouraging those who have experienced these events to recognize them as “moments of accomplishment” that they as agents have participated in.

In the rebuilding that followed reunification, Berlin thus did not follow the typical model of gentrification that we know from Sharon Zukin's account of the gentrification of New York's SoHo district in the 1980s. According to Mark Banks, Zukin's account speaks to the experience of many de-industrialized Western cities, “where grassroots cultural zones in the city fringe have been pervasively gentrified and sanitized by local authorities seeking to attract middle-class residents and consumers” (142), something which usually has led to the erosion of public space in favor of corporate retail and office structures. However, Banks continues, European scholarship has been quick to offer alternative models of development. He details the success of efforts made in cities “like Berlin, Brussels and Helsinki by artists and ‘informal actors’ to develop ‘free,’ creative production spaces” which have been “able to flourish because of the mixed approach taken by (European) planners and governments to their ‘strategic’ economic development” (142).

Certainly a factor in preventing Berlin from descending into the more brutal neoliberal condition, which characterizes countries with less of a tradition of social welfare, is the investment the government makes in its creative sector. One example is *Projekt Zukunft* (Project Future), an initiative of the Berlin Senate for Economics, Technology and Women's Issues that is funded by the state of the Berlin and the European Regional Development Fund and supports projects identified as building on established expertise in Berlin's creative industries, such as in mobile broadband communication, print media, the art market, design, interactive entertainment software, and music. As a result of

such efforts, “despite being a third-tier global city, Berlin actually ranks as a first-tier ‘global media city,’ according to Krätke’s ranking of cities according to their level of networked media company clusters” (Ward 251).

This clustering points to a key organizational strategy of Berlin's creative industries, namely a form of self-organization that Bastian Lange has termed “culturepreneurship.” Culturepreneurs

in structural terms, are communicative providers of transfer services between the sub-systems ‘business related services’ and ‘creative scene’ and, in doing so, seem to satisfy a necessary demand by operating in flexible social networks.... [They] create their own relational spaces of interaction where borders blur: competition and cooperation, exchange and isolation, private and public, work and leisure coexist and are hard to tell apart. They invent forms of self-organization to gain access to power structures, based on informal conglomerates and extensive networks (Lange 2009, 13, 22).

An excellent example of Berlin culturepreneurship is the Create Berlin design-initiative, which was founded in 2006 by fifteen Berlin-based companies in the creative industries. The network sees its mission as follows:

By supporting innovative projects CREATE BERLIN promotes the economic potential of Berlin’s design industry; it strengthens Berlin’s reputation as a unique and aspiring major city for design and as the UNESCO designated ‘City of Design’ [in 2005, Berlin became the first... European city to be included in the UNESCO Network of Creative Cities as a ‘City of Design’]. CREATE BERLIN projects create awareness and steer the focus of an international audience toward the German capital, its creative scene as well as its economic potential. CREATE BERLIN aims to connect and bring together Berlin’s creative talents with political and economic decision makers. Consequently, city mayor Klaus Wowereit and other political and business representatives have participated in various CREATE BERLIN projects. As a communication platform spanning all design disciplines CREATE BERLIN promotes Berlin’s creative scene as an economic factor to be taken seriously. Since 2006 the initiative has already managed many various projects in Europe, the US and Asia.

[http://www.create-berlin.de/Background\\_en.html](http://www.create-berlin.de/Background_en.html)

Not only does Create Berlin organize pop-up stores and arrange for different temporary fashion retail locations in Berlin, but it also ensures that Berlin designers are represented abroad, at events like the 2010 Shanghai Expo. From this example, we can see that contemporary Berlin designers have become as flexible, disorganized and alliance-oriented as the capitalism that attempts to structure and define their work (Banks 128-31).

At the same time as small creative culturepreneurs are gathering support and momentum, the larger corporate players have been rethinking their investment

strategies in the city. Corporate presences have, of course, also contributed to the reshaping of Berlin's city-image. In 2004 Janet Ward commented on how struck she was by the "tirelessly corporate" nature of developments in Berlin, noting similarities between them and those in New York and London:

indeed, Manhattan's Times Square redevelopment under the aegis of Disney can be regarded as a precursor to the purchase and rebuilding of Potsdamer Platz by Daimler-Benz and Sony.... While London's financial center has been effectively moved eastwards by the 1980s development of Canary Wharf out of once deserted docks, Berlin's plans for the Osthafen area [i.e. the infamous MediaSpree development that has been a popular target of techno and club culture protest] are perhaps no less ambitious" (247, 252).

As it turns out, they have also proven no less volatile. Potsdamer Platz turned out to be the site of a struggle its two largest tenants decided they were not likely to win. Both Daimler and Sony sold their eponymous buildings (in December 2007 and February 2008 respectively), while the Mercedes-Benz portion of Daimler made the canny decision in 2007 to become the sponsor of Berlin's Fashion Week.

One of the spin-offs of the city's focus on developing and marketing itself as a global media city has been in tourism. Berlin is now known as a "cheap, yet cool, destination for holidaymakers." In 2008, the city attracted 7.9 million visitors, "breaking its own record for the fifth consecutive year with a gain of 4.2 percent from 2007," while 2009 proved the best tourist year for Berlin on record with 8.3 million visitors. Moreover, Berlin attracts "a significant number of international consumers with above-average spending power" (2), as one can read in *Fashion in Berlin: The Place to Be*, the 2008 publication of Berlin Partner, the self-described "chief contact agency" for businesses interested in establishing themselves in the city (21). Unlike the modern approach to tourism, in which travelers expect to visit a noteworthy locality only once and therefore attempt to soak up as much of its unique history and culture as possible (a legacy of the Grand Tour, which is also still a factor in Berlin tourism), in a turn we might term postmodern, travelers visit repeatedly, and sometimes even decide to live and work for periods of time in, places with amenities they like. If, as Ute Lehrer reminds us, "the social construction of [a city's] images... represents a strategic attempt to position the city within the accelerated global interurban competition" (333), we can see that Berlin's strategy has involved positioning itself globally with an image as "poor but sexy."



## Part II: Euro Chic

An aspect of brand Berlin often overlooked by sociologists and urban studies scholars such as Lehrer, Lange and Colomb is one of the effects of the city's championing of the creative industries, specifically those involved in fashion: namely, its subtle allegiance to Europe and a European identity that precisely takes its cues from fashion.

A satirical example that pinpoints this identity with razor-sharp precision can be found in Ralph Martin's 2009 *Ein Amerikaner in Berlin: Wie ein New Yorker lernte, die Deutschen zu lieben* (*An American in Berlin: How a New Yorker Learned to Love the Germans*). In detailing his attempts to adopt his metrosexual, white-scarfed, New York sartorial sensibilities for Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg, Martin describes an unsuccessful shopping experience as follows:

My friend Annie in New York knew of a boutique in Mitte that was, as she put it, the 'non plus ultra' of Berlin fashion. When I finally found the address, it looked like the boutique was hidden behind an unmarked metal door in a back courtyard. I pressed the metal door open and followed a cement staircase downstairs into a small, dark basement, which was only illuminated by a purple neon bulb. The walls were painted black, if there were any at all. Behind the counter stood a tall youth with large, black-rimmed glasses and a black zip-up sweatshirt. He had his hood up so that his face seemed to float in space. He ignored me while I groped my way through the store looking for clothes. Finally I found something: a long board made of unfinished wood. On top of it lay a sweatshirt and a pair of sneakers. I bent over and attempted to see something in the purple light. The sweatshirt seemed to be grey, with a blindingly white fleecy lining. After I had stared at the price tag for some time, the floating face with the glasses said in English: '300 Euros. [...] It's hand-made,' said the boy. I held it to the purple light. If I had had a sewing machine, I could have made something like that myself. (Martin 50-2)

The store Martin describes so evocatively but does not name actually exists. It is called *Apartment* ([www.apartmentberlin.de](http://www.apartmentberlin.de)) and, indeed, a sweatshirt-sneaker combination there can easily set one back 1,000 Euros.

The faux-inclusivity of Apartment's kind of understated, high quality fashion gets coded European in a particular matrix of imaginary relations: first, as edgier and less conservative than equally understated, high quality Asian styles; second, as the opposite of the faux-exclusivity of American outlet stores, where one pays as little as possible for bourgeois designer labels like Ralph Lauren that are intended to evoke exclusive, country manor lifestyles; third, as a mode of Europeanness that rejects the opulent formality of real aristocrats that celebrities turn to in order to lend special occasions the requisite solemnity, and finally, as a tasteful yet still street-wise alternative to the flashy bling urban-wear associated with visible minority youth, who in the global imaginary

stereotypically inhabit the streets, thereby rendering them dangerously desirable. It is crucial to remember that we are here in the connotative realm of imaginaries and image creation that branders and other forms of advertising and marketing specialists work hard to manipulate to their companies' advantage. I would not want to be misunderstood as claiming that Europeans don't wear Issey Mikaye, Ralph Lauren, Armani, or bling. The point here is a subtler one, and its specificities can be uncovered by examining the looks promoted by the Bread & Butter and Premium fashion trade shows, and how these looks and shows play with locationally coded tendencies while subtly tempering the exclusive elements associated with fashion with the inclusivity that Berlin's *Eventkultur* has come to stand for.

Starting out in 2001 in Cologne with a concept for "an innovative trade fair event for the progressive, contemporary clothing culture," Bread & Butter originally ran biannually as an off show parallel to Cologne's *Herrenmodewoche* (Men's Fashion Week) / InterJeans, and its immediate success encouraged organizers to become more ambitious and more involved in the branding battles that cities now wage mercilessly for coveted "world" or "global" city status. Two years after moving to Berlin, the trade show was again set to expand. Barcelona was very interested in hosting Bread & Butter and made it an attractive offer it hoped couldn't be refused, involving "much space in a central location and sunshine" (Drier 27). However, instead of committing to Barcelona completely, Bread & Butter decided to hold back-to-back events, with the first in Barcelona followed by another in Berlin two weeks later. Not only did this allow the trade show to boast of being able to cover "the complete European market by establishing a north-south axis," but it also doubled the number of exhibitors and visitors. However, the coordination of two events proved too much, and Bread & Butter decided for the winter 2007 event to concentrate its activities on Barcelona, holding a scaled-down event at the Berlin Kraftwerk. By summer 2009, however, Barcelona was seen to be watering down the fair's concept and taking it in a direction director Karl-Heinz Müller found too southern ("Interview" 12). Bread & Butter's new slogan was "Bread & Butter is coming home!"—in other words, back to Berlin.<sup>5</sup>

Premium, whose name embodies its aspirations to provide "a contemporary trade platform for choice collections, international newcomers and *exclusive* trend products" (<http://www.premiumexhibitions.com/press/>, italics added),

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<sup>5</sup> His exact words were: "Durch die Dominanz der südeuropäischen Marken, die alle in Barcelona zeigten, wurde mir unsere Veranstaltung ein bisschen zu süß. Dadurch verwässerte unser Konzept. Diese Entwicklung hat zunehmend nordeuropäische Marken abgeschreckt. 2008 dachte ich dann wieder darüber nach, nach Nordeuropa zurückzukehren" (On account of the dominance of the southern European brands, which all showed in Barcelona, our event became a bit too much. It watered down our concept. This development increasingly scared off the northern European brands. In 2008 I reconsidered returning to northern Europe). More material on the history of Bread & Butter can be found on its website:

<http://www.breadandbutter.com/winter2011-absolute/metanav/about-bb/bb-history/>.

has been, in comparison, something of a homebody, moving only from the conversation-worthy section of an unused underground U Bahn tunnel beneath Potsdamer Platz, where it debuted in 2003, to the equally centrally located former postal freight depot at Gleisdreieck. Bread & Butter, it should be noted, made a similar move, starting off in a derelict, crumbling factory in Spandau on the outskirts of the city and then moving to an old hangar at Tempelhof airport. These converted transportation sites operate in the same inclusive key as denim and sneakers, evoking image-based mediated fantasies of travel and mobility for Tobias Rapp's "Easyjetset." Bread & Butter may identify itself in its promotional materials as "an international specialist trade fair for Street and Urban Wear," but it also claims that it "represents a marketing and communication platform for brands, labels and designers from the areas of Denim, Sportswear, Street Fashion, Function Wear and Casual Dressed Up"—even its "dressed up" category is casual.

This stylistic dressing-down is an attempt to compensate for the resolute exclusivity that is the bread and butter of fashion trade shows, as well as the fashion shows and fashion industry they cater to. This principle is evident not only in their registration and ID procedures but also in the name of Bread & Butter's main sponsor partner: *vente-privee*. Headquartered in Paris since starting up in 2001, *vente-privee* has grown into one of the leaders in the European e-commerce industry. As one can see from its advertising in the Bread & Butter Tradeshow Guide, which prominently occupies the last two pages of the guide and therefore invites being literally ripped off, it is proud to be number one in Europe, and it even writes number one in a way that looks European, namely in French in an otherwise English-language context. Additionally, in its online Press Kit, *vente-privee* boasts of having "More than 10 million subscribed members *in Europe*" and "Over 38 million products sold through 2,500 sales *in Europe*" (italics added), underscoring the area it identifies with and sees itself operating in. Many of the more than 1,200 designer brands *vente-privee* sells in limited two to four day runs are also present at Bread & Butter; to take a random example, the four brands that happened to have sales on *vente-privee* on the day I was working on this part of the project (July 19, 2010)—Diesel, DKNY Jeans, Moschino and Lonsdale of London—were also all in the last Bread & Butter Brand bible.

Perhaps it is because Bread and Butter and Premium offer a relatively similar array of inclusive images and styles, with an emphasis on denim and sneakers that Premium has taken to trumpeting its pride in having expanded to areas outside of the fashion arena. For example, it boasts on its website that at the "Berlin Bicycle Show" in March 2010, "innovative trend bikes, city and mountain bikes, sport bikes as well as concepts of intelligent mobility (such as Pedelec and E-bikes) were presented for the first time to professional visitors and an interested public." Green Living was presented in 2007 to foster "fashion that is ecological as well as ethically correct and produced according to sustainable standards." "Seek" was launched in January 2009 to present "a selection of progressive designers and brands from the youth culture, music and art

segments,” while the “next conference,” which Premium has been co-producing since 2010, features digital trends in Europe (the 2011 theme was “Game Changers and [the] App Economy”). Despite all of this innovation, when co-founder Anita Tillmann claims that “PREMIUM is the opposite of the mainstream—PREMIUM is focused, selective and unique!”, she is taking a line from Bread & Butter’s playbook: namely, mobilizing progressive elements, whether bikes, apps or sneakers, to temper the exclusivity that the fashion industry cultivates to appeal to the high-rolling wanna-be aristocrats among the parvenu (or more recently—“novi”) classes. This tempering or balance is explicit in Premium’s online promotional statement. In the section of their website on “Everything hand-made,” for example, one finds that:

PREMIUM guarantees this in its exclusive selection. Only those designers whose products perfectly fit the concept, profile and audience are exhibited. Because the focus should be 100% on fashion, the exhibition areas provided have a maximum size of 50 sq. meters. Each designer forgoes their own decoration, music and furnishings at the start. *Thus an ideal work environment is created with equal opportunity for all.* At PREMIUM, young Berlin designers are presented alongside established ones, national and international emerging talent alongside top stars. *Each receives the same attention.* (Italics added)

One can thus see operational within this avowedly exclusive environment a democratizing logic that disrupts and opens up that environment to challenges from “emerging talent” keen to push the limits of what “perfectly fits.”

What makes Premium of particular interest in regard to the question of fashioning European identities is that it does not feel the need to demonstratively declare itself “European,” while Bread & Butter, with its streetwear focus, feels it has to play up the Europeanness of its sponsors and competing urban locations (the theme of its first show in Barcelona was “Eurovision”). Premium, on the other hand, takes its Europeanness in stride and declares itself “Totally global”:

A revolutionary, innovative fashion trade show has become an internationally successful enterprise. Many-faceted, progressive, and with an influence on the world of fashion that is beyond doubt: PREMIUM International Fashion Trade Show.

Now as before, the exclusive trade show PREMIUM is the main focus of the PREMIUM team and, has, in the meantime, come to be considered the mainstay of Berlin Fashion Week.

Worldwide, it is the only fair that puts fashion and lifestyle in the high-end segment together in this size and quality.

Premium can make this claim because it feels confident of being associated with the high-end quality associated with European products. For Premium, being European means identifying with an exclusive and tasteful lifestyle that is

coveted on an international scale as the global middle classes enter social realms open to distinction.

What is significant about the European identity that emerges from these fashion trade shows is the way it is constructed: namely, not intersubjectively in terms of alterity (that is, in the tradition of the Euro-American modernity provincialized by postcolonial theory) but rather in multiple ways, in terms of what could be seen either in terms of Butlerian performativity, Deleuzian virtuality, Agambian potentiality, or, as I am more inclined to do having read Ilya Parkins' convincing "Building a Feminist Theory of Fashion": Karen Barad's concept of agential realism, which, as Parkins draws attention to, "urges us to be attentive to the 'marks left on bodies'... [because t] hose marks are material, and they issue from power-saturated discursive and material fields" (511).

Such a reading draws attention to the fact that, for these trade shows, being European means, ironically, not being Berlin as the city fathers tried to market it in their 2008 campaign. (Figure 1.)



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It means not identifying with the Brandenburg Gate and its many layers of politically charged national symbolism—from the Quadriga on top, which Napoleon had dared to take back to Paris in 1806 after defeating the Prussians at the Battle of Jena and which was triumphantly returned after his defeat in 1814, to having served as the iconic backdrop for Kennedy’s famous “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech. Rather, it means identifying with a kind of both discursively and materially constructed urban culture produced by a constellation made available in certain European urban centers on the basis of the material historical traces these centers contain, which are available to be converted and re-enlivened in ways that are attractive to contemporary lifestyle culture and attract a creative-oriented labor force that is sympathetic to the ideals communicated by aspects of the city’s history. One could imagine that in a few years Stockholm, Helsinki, Glasgow or Manchester will be in a position to tempt Bread & Butter away from Berlin, as Barcelona managed to do for a few years but was not able to maintain because its city brand does not contain the right kind of signifiers for an urban streetwear trade show. While Barcelona may have outranked Berlin in terms of the strength of its city brand on the 2008 Saffron European City Brand Barometer (<http://www.citymayors.com/marketing/city-brands.html>), its combination of World Heritage Site Roman, Gothic and modernist architecture, soccer and the Olympics was not able to create the necessary buzz for Bread & Butter’s Euro Chic clientele. At the end of the day Barcelona proved unsuccessful in keeping Bread & Butter, I would argue, because its organizers chose to ignore the manifest material traces of industrial proletarian labor in the city. Rather, they held the trade-show in the Palau Nacional, which was built for the 1929 World’s Fair and now houses the National Art Museum of Catalonia, and featured it on the event’s poster. Berlin, on the other hand, continues to mobilize both its socialist and 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial heritage to great effect. How long it will continue to be able to do so, is another matter.

To conclude, while Kylie Minogue may be sexy, she is not chic, let alone Euro Chic, and the decision to frame her 2003 “Slow” video against the backdrop of, first, the Barcelona skyline and, then, a pool scene featuring the athletic complex rebuilt for the 1992 Olympics Games is indicative of how that city’s branding has missed the Euro Chic mark.<sup>6</sup> The kind of Euro Chic identity production in question—that fashion trade shows like Bread & Butter and Premium have participated in the making and maintenance of—is a confluence of the forces that collect in the creative industries oriented, skimpy swimsuit abhorring populaces that some (European) cities à la Victor Burgin are able to make possible by drawing on the material traces of their histories. These identities are not defined against but rather with, and those who do engage in such identificatory practices are not encouraged to think of themselves in terms of nationality or, indeed, in terms of any one thing. It is a question of confluences of interests and elective affinities; anyone interested in belonging is welcome no matter their background as long as they ascribe to the ideals

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Marta Marin-Domine for sharing her insider knowledge of Barcelona with me.



implicit in the imaginary of what one might call “sophisticated slumming,” namely a political sympathy for the proletariat on the part of those who take pride in being an anti-bourgeois part of classes that aspire to creativity. If these identities are defined against anything, it is a particular past, insofar as they are as against Eurocentric “Great White Male” hegemony as postcolonial theorists. The Europeanness of the identities produced and promoted at these fashion trade shows that have found a spiritual home in Berlin is thus a new kind of “New Europe” with the potential to fundamentally reconfigure the way we think about who we are and how places and their histories figure in that process.

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