



**Post-Socialist Gender Trouble: Commercial Street  
Ephemera from Eastern Germany**

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## Post-Socialist Gender Trouble: Commercial Street Ephemera from Eastern Germany

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The transitory artefacts of popular culture are by their nature indicative of social change, and the eastern German street objects chosen for this analysis display gender as a prominent but often neglected aspect of the massive cultural, economic and political transformation still underway more than a decade after the fall of the Wall. Taking its theoretical cue from recent scholarship on gender and post-socialism (e.g. Kolinsky and Nickel 2003; Gal and Kligman 2000), in which gender is understood as central to, as well as both effect and agent of, social transformation, the essay argues that commercial street posters and ephemera manifest a distinctly uneven ideological struggle among historically-produced gender discourses in the newly capitalist east. Commercial image/texts carry what Raymond Williams (1977) termed 'dominant', 'residual', and 'emergent' elements of a culture in transition, and thus help reveal gendered and social tensions experienced by easterners as they become targets of western advertising. In combining analysis of commercial street image/texts collected between 2000 and 2004 with findings from extended fieldwork in eastern Germany over the same period, the essay seeks as well to give some sense of the lived experience of the post-socialist reinvention of gender.

### 1. Introduction

The posters and street ephemera examined here were collected during several trips to central Europe beginning in the summer of 2000. What began as mere curiosity became something of an obsession: I found myself roaming the streets of east Berlin, Prague, Warsaw, and elsewhere in search of posters, announcements, advertisements, flyers, stickers, etc., whatever caught my eye.<sup>1</sup> Soon enough, every single object - heavily glued posters advertising corporate products, hastily taped-up announcements for

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<sup>1</sup> See my online exhibition of Post-Socialist Street Posters and Ephemera at <http://gallery.stlawu.edu>. The exhibition is produced and continually updated in collaboration with Cathy Tedford, director of the Richard F. Brush Gallery at St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York, U.S.A. The online exhibition currently has over 300 images/texts available for viewing. They are drawn from the much larger collection of posters and other street ephemera, all of which are housed at the Brush Gallery. The entire collection, totally several hundred items, includes pieces from eastern Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland, with the eastern German portion being by far the largest. The collection includes as well some 70 original cultural and political posters from the former German Democratic Republic, with works dating from the early 1970s through 1989.

demonstrations, tacked or taped up flyers for clubs, bands, bars, apartments, lost cats, and so on - would be pulled down, covered over, thrown away, graffiti'd into oblivion, or scratched out. This is the ephemera of the post-socialist street, image/texts cheaply produced and displayed, meant to draw the attention of passers-by to a coming event, performance or demonstration, to a product, commercial or living space, or even human body for sale or hire. Such paper artefacts of popular culture are by their fleeting nature indicative of social change, and the objects chosen for this analysis display gender as a prominent, though generally ignored, element of the massive cultural, economic, and political transformation still underway in post-socialist Europe almost fifteen years after the largely peaceful revolutions in central Europe in 1989 and the so-called "reunification" of Germany in 1990.<sup>2</sup>

I argue that post-socialist central European street posters and ephemera manifest a distinctly uneven ideological struggle among the region's range of historically-produced gender discourses, which overflow onto the post-socialist street in an utterly public, popular, and mass-produced "reinvention of gender" in the east.<sup>3</sup> This competitive and extremely rapid reinvention, effectively reconstituting gender and sexual subjectivities of women, men and children, is materially derived from a distinctively "western," post-industrial, capitalist mode of production, which, especially as it concerns gender, depends on the mass reproduction and incessant visual reiteration of (primarily, if not exclusively)

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<sup>2</sup> As the literature on the transformation process makes clear, "reunification" is a contested term, heavily over-laden with a profound west/east German power differential, including western ownership and control of "reunified" Germany's mainstream media and thus hegemonic control over the range of meanings ascribed to terms of contemporary popular discourse. In the realm of cultural studies, the classic essay on how popular discourse is produced, encoded and decoded is Stuart Hall (1981) *Encoding/Decoding*. For an insightful, informed, and recent discussion of the post-socialist German transformation process, including summary and analysis of the national struggle over the terms of popular discourse having to do with the transformation, see Paul Cooke (2005). My own ethnographic research in eastern Germany since summer 2000, which includes dozens of formal and informal interviews with east Germans in Berlin, Leipzig, Altenburg, Erfurt, Dresden, Stralsund, and elsewhere, suggests that "occupation" is the term of choice when interviewees have dropped their guard and are willing to speak candidly.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase "reinvention of gender" is from Kolinsky and Nickel (2003: 1-2). Their introductory chapter offers an excellent overview of the subject, including insightful comparison and contrast of the East and West German gender regimes, and how that historical combination informs to the present "reinvention of gender" in the east.

American cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity.<sup>4</sup> Americanisation is clearly dominant in this market-driven, street-level struggle over gender normality, but post-socialist gender trouble arises from the region's partial, and not merely nostalgic, desire for retention of socialist era ideals and programs for gender equality, themselves based on (what was) an outright rejection of everything capitalist, if not of everything patriarchal.

Crucially, both dominant and resistant gender discourses - neither of which, of course, is merely singular - are constructed historically, and it is insufficient merely to distinguish between the newly dominant capitalist and newly declining socialist gender orders to explain the Americanised post-socialist reinvention of gender. In the historically unique case of the divided Germany, gender discourse and practice West and East were laced with Germany's own pre-WWII gender history, bound up as it was with traditional separate sphere performances of bourgeois masculinity and femininity based upon blatantly sexist distinctions between the relative worth of women and men. Kolinsky and Nickel (2003:3) point out that the "gender model of modern industrial Germany depend[ed] on the belief of the uneven distribution of status and responsibility between women and men." In the post-WWII era, this historical gender layering was shared in the particular versions of (capitalist or socialist) patriarchy that characterised West and East Germany until unification in 1990. Built upon and not simply displacing this tradition, the GDR "gender contract," as Irene Doelling (2000:5) terms it, "was based on a dual-earner model, that is, both sexes were integrated into society primarily through their participation in the labour force. This gender contract led to gender arrangements in the GDR characterised by the disappearance of the male breadwinner role, by a trend toward female economic independence and a correspondingly strong position in the family."<sup>5</sup> It

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<sup>4</sup> These days, much like their counterparts in the western metropole, post-socialist urban dwellers have little choice but to contend with the deepening flood of commercial advertising flowing at them through all forms of media, including, of course, in the ephemera of the street. Street ephemera may be the most "democratic" of media forms in that it targets anyone and everyone on the street, in effect "speaking" to people of all social classes.

<sup>5</sup> Doelling cites the definition of "gender contract" provided by Schenk (1995: 478).

"...in every modern society there exists an historically developed socio-cultural consensus jointly supported by both men and women regarding a given pattern of interactions between the sexes, a guide and model as to the 'correct' gender-specific division of labour, family form and way of integrating both sexes into society via the labour market and/or the family."

is these and other socialist-era gender arrangements that, if not yet wholly erased, are certainly in flux at the moment across the region.

My analysis of post-socialist street posters and ephemera is thus not merely about the posters themselves, but an attempt to get at what Raymond Williams termed the structures of feeling of a culture in transition. Williams (1977) uses the terms "residual, dominant, and emergent" with respect to the materially based, presently active emotional experience of culture, and I employ these terms in detailing how the street posters' help us to understand more clearly the ongoing, unevenly competitive, reinvention of gender in post-socialist central Europe, and the particular tensions in easterners' lived experience that result from this struggle. Williams' terms refer to the "dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements" (121), in that "dominant" elements within a culture cannot be fully understood without reference to that culture's "residual" and "emergent" elements. "Residual" elements are the cultural and social "residue" formed in the past (e.g., during GDR times or prior to the post-war division), but effective only in the present. "Emergent" elements are the seemingly "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships [that are] continually being created" (123). In any new social formation, actively residual and emergent cultural elements together form what Williams describes as "a necessary complication of the would-be dominant culture." It is precisely such complications, experienced as waves of social tension amid the would-be dominant culture of post-socialist central Europe, that I argue are strikingly evident in a gender analysis of street posters and ephemera.

Whereas Williams himself had little to say specifically about gender, we are now in a position to do so. Following the poststructuralist feminist lead of Gal and Kligman (2000) in their important recent work, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, we may understand gender as a given culture's historically-produced *ideas about* sexual difference, and then apply this basic understanding of gender to the analysis of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural elements in image/texts of the post-socialist street. This approach to the post-socialist transformation process combines a cultural studies emphasis on the materiality of the popular with feminism's insistence that gender is a fundamental and irreducible axis of social organisation. The general result is that in the

street we cannot but encounter competing discourses of gender, which when studied may lead to a deeper understanding of the multi-levelled, conflicted, and unevenly profitable processes of social transformation throughout post-socialist central Europe.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. The Gendered Street: Initial Examples of Post-Socialist Street Ephemera

In the ephemera of the street, as in daily life, gender is everywhere, variously displayed, encoded, and represented, and manifesting dominant, residual, and emergent forms. For example, in a nostalgic and sexual play on the recent Cold War past, a street poster pulled in the summer of 2002 from a neglected and crumbling building in the northern port city of Stralsund in eastern Germany advertised an American band, *Rich Hopkins and the Luminarios* (See [Fig. 1](#)). The poster features a come-hither image of a blond cowgirl in a skimpy buckskin outfit sitting atop a wooden fence rail. The desert setting suggests the American West, while the Soviet stars on the cowgirl's wristbands indicate that she can go both ways, ideologically speaking. The eroticised spectacle of this East/Old West/Hollywood cowgirl, who fondles a smoking six-shooter in her hand, beckons straight male viewers (among other unintended targets) with the promise of easily acquired hetero-sex. For scholars of the history of gender and sexuality in post-socialist central Europe, the poster thus carries with it a suggestion of, among many other things, the disturbing increase in sexual trafficking of (eastern) women throughout the region since 1989. On the other hand, sexism and its socially damaging effects – women's wrecked lives, heroin addiction, kidnapping and sexual slavery, AIDS, etc. – form the explicit theme of other posters, including those from the Women's Rights Center in Warsaw and other women's and gender centres and non-governmental organisations newly emergent in Poland, the Czech Republic and eastern Germany. Systematically

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<sup>6</sup> Gal and Kligman (2000) offer a coherent and convincing argument for the explicit inclusion of (until now largely neglected) gender analysis in post-socialist European transformation studies. In fact, central European gender scholars from eastern Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic have been producing their own important gender analyses for several years. In the east German case, such work even pre-dates the dissolution of the GDR. In November 1989, nearly a year prior to German reunification, scholars at Humboldt University were able to institutionalize the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Women. The Center was the forerunner to what is now the Center for the Transdisciplinary Study of Gender, Germany's largest degree-granting gender studies department.

ignored under former socialist regimes, domestic male violence against women is emphatically denounced in visually arresting posters such as *Zero Tolerancji* (*Zero Tolerance*, [Fig. 2](#)). In addition to such explicitly gendered image/texts, one may find on the street works not immediately or explicitly about gender, such as *Dem Polizeistaat entgegenreten!* (*Oppose the police state!* [Fig. 3](#)). This counter-hegemonic political poster features a disturbing photo of Berlin riot police bearing down on a young couple (and, it seems, on you, the viewer). That one of the riot police appears to be a woman does not lessen the hyper-masculine quality of their state-sanctioned threat of violence.<sup>7</sup>

These three examples fit at least loosely within one of three basic categories of street ephemera: the commercial, the explicitly political, and what I call the gender-implicit image/text, the intended purpose of which may be commercial, political or otherwise. Since the summer of 2000 I have collected hundreds of examples of such street ephemera from eastern Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic, and here I focus primarily on commercial image/texts pulled from eastern German streets, some found as recently as spring 2004. In the two sections that follow, the first uses commercial street ephemera to identify social issues and gendered tensions emergent in eastern Germany and then focuses on image/texts of women/femininity, and the second section shifts the discussion to image/texts of men/masculinity. Throughout I draw upon extended ethnographic fieldwork in eastern Germany in an attempt to demonstrate how the commercialisation of gender in the eastern streets serves to reinforce, rather than ease, what Andreas Glaeser (2000: 192) has termed the already "highly asymmetrical unification burdens."

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<sup>7</sup> In early March 2004, in the few minutes before what was scheduled to be an antifascist demonstration at 5 p.m. at the Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg Schoenhauser Allee U2 stop, I spoke with a Berlin policeman, one of several hundred dispersed there to control, oversee, and physically delimit the pending demonstration. By my count, there were at least 50 police vans parked on Schoenhauser Allee that afternoon, with dozens of smaller police vehicles in the area, as well as an unknowable number of unmarked police vehicles. Passing as just another American tourist standing among the rush hour crowd, I asked, in English, whether the police were expecting a big demonstration. In perfect English the officer replied, "No, quite small. Maybe 200 demonstrators." Why then, I asked, were so many police on hand (at least twice as many as the expected number of demonstrators). Smiling, he replied, "Safety first." As it happened, no demo occurred that afternoon, despite the barrage of large poster and small sticker demo announcements stuck up throughout the neighborhood in the weeks before the scheduled event.

### 3. Commercial Street Posters from Eastern Germany

By the year 2000 vertical surfaces in the streets of eastern German cities had become spaces for advertising the sale of virtually anything, although some spaces were more "democratic" than others. In the newly hip and quickly gentrifying districts of the former East Berlin, in Prenzlauer Berg, for example, city-managed "Szene Info" Litfaßsäulen (circular display posts some 3 or 4 meters tall and 1.5 meters in diameter) displayed large, seamlessly glued posters for new Hollywood films and major, city-sponsored, corporate-connected cultural events. Elsewhere in Prenzlauer Berg, however, any flat, vertical space left unprotected or untouched – which is not to say 'unprivatised' – was available for the always temporary display of commercial advertisements of all kinds, from the corporate to the personal.

"Mister 6", a long-time Berlin street artist, claims that 1000 new commercial posters go up in Berlin each day.<sup>8</sup> Typically, temporary workers, always young men, are contracted by local marketing companies to ride their bicycles around designated districts of the city to use squeegee and paste to slap posters up in pre-designated areas. One such worker reported that he makes 20 cents in Euro for each poster he puts up. The night I encountered him, he had 300 posters with him, and said it would take him about three or four hours of hurried work to install them at various sites in Prenzlauer Berg. Thus, he would make 60 Euro in three or four hours' work. Beyond his wage, he said, he earns no benefits. Here we have in a nutshell one aspect of the new, and newly gendered, labour realities as they take shape in what was the GDR capital city.

Of course, the influx of commercial posters is not confined to major eastern German cities such as Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden. Like the *Rich Hopkins and the Luminarios* poster, *Komm Tanzen* (Fig. 4) is another eye-catching poster pulled from the wall of a dilapidated, crumbling Altbau in city center Stralsund. The poster combines bold primary colours with German and English phrasing to transform the famous "I want you!"-image of Uncle Sam (originally from a WWI U.S. army recruitment campaign) into an invitation to "Komm Tanzen!" ("Come Dancing!"). The poster's promise of an

"Oft kopiert - nie erreicht" ("Often copied - never achieved") night of "Disco FUN" at the "Lollipop, ihr Tanzcafé" ("Lollipop, your Dance café"), is aimed less at locals than at tourists, a greater and greater proportion of whom are west Germans, whose take on the Uncle Sam image will be differently inflected from that of their eastern counterparts.<sup>9</sup> Once a proud medieval harbour city of Hanseatic tradition, Stralsund in the post-GDR era is now a summer resort town dependent on tourist money and state subsidy for its survival. Although its beautiful inner-city and harbour have been partially renovated since unification, Stralsund, like almost all mid-sized eastern German cities, saw its major GDR industry of shipbuilding collapse immediately after the *Wende*. In the years since, as its population dwindled and its unemployment rate climbed to 25.1% (as of early 2004), the city has had little choice but to develop a tourist-oriented service economy.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, this process has its gendered dimensions. Local workers themselves, as with eastern Germans generally, have been effectively "feminised" by the post-socialist transformation of the last 15 years. That is, by and large, they have been rendered subservient to and dependent upon the generosity of the masculine and dominant West. This has occurred structurally by the massive transferral of formerly West German state and corporate structures that characterised the first years after unification, and bodily, in recent years, by the physical presence of the western tourist, whose class privilege is unquestionable and readily apparent to the local eye. Thus, the "ihr" ("your") of the poster's "ihr Tanzcafé" hails not so much the local worker or resident, but the seasonal tourist, whose English will likely be better than the local's, and whose sense of leisure

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<sup>8</sup> I met with Mister 6, as he calls himself, in early March, 2004. His work, numbering in the hundreds and readily identifiable by the inclusion of a painted "6," may be found all over the Mitte district of Berlin.

<sup>9</sup> Located on the suburban edge of Stralsund, the Lollipop is part of an American-style mall. In a scene typical of the contemporary eastern German post-socialist suburban landscape, *Plattenbauten*, or huge box-like apartment buildings constructed by the state in the 1960s and 70s to accommodate local workers, now stand empty, marking the horizon around the mall. Near the mall one finds a brightly lit McDonald's restaurant, and the Hansedom, a kitschy, tourist-oriented swimming pool and sauna complex. Remove the *Plattenbauten*, and the architectural scene would be similar to that found anywhere in suburban America.

<sup>10</sup> The figure for the rate of unemployment in contemporary Stralsund is from an interview with Herr B., a Stralsund city planner. Herr B., a west German trained as an architect in Weimar after the *Wende*, reports that in addition to planning, designing and implementing renewal of Stralsund's wonderful 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture, the other primary aspect of his job is deciding which and how many of now empty and dilapidated GDR-era buildings should be torn down.

will likely be activated and informed by all things American, at least in comparison to that of the local.

In this residually gendered situation as in others, gender operates not simply at the level of the human biological and sexual difference. Its structural and bodily operations cannot merely be detached from social, national, or global differentiation of all kinds. In this case, the *Komm Tanzen* poster, playful as it may seem and in fact is, nonetheless carries for its tourist target audience a historical residue of U.S. military hyper-masculinity, of defeat and humiliation in World Wars I and II, of postwar U.S. military occupation and Marshall Plan Americanization of West Germany, and of Western corporate and privatised buying power. For Stralsund locals who care to think about it, and who, if employed, are likely temporary or seasonal service workers in the new "democratic," market-driven economy, the poster's stern Uncle Sam might as well be saying not "I want you!" but 'You may serve me now, and if you do well, maybe I'll leave you a tip.'

Employment, or lack of it, remains a major problem in the so-called *Neue Länder*, despite Helmut Kohl's 1990 promises of a second German economic miracle, this time in the east.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, western bosses in start-up companies seem alert to the demographic trend that eastern women appear more flexible than their male counterparts. That is, women are more willing than men to adjust the shape of their post-socialist lives to the temporary, part-time, or flex-time realities of a postindustrial, service-based economy. Just as employment segregation according to gender is nothing new in the east – one aspect of the GDR version of patriarchy was its channelling of women into a specific range of labour force possibilities presumed to be suited to women's 'natural' capabilities – many posters are suggestive of residual elements of historical, gendered social layering established prior to the postwar division.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Historian Pol O'Dochartaigh (2004: 42) helps put the "economic miracle" of 1950s West Germany into perspective: "The 'economic miracle', as it has sometimes been called, was not particularly miraculous. [Ludwig] Erhard himself [FRG Economics Minister from 1949-1963] disliked the term. Rather, the West German economic recovery benefited from sound economic planning, favourable external circumstances such as the Korean War and European cooperation, and a constant supply of new labour from the GDR, estimated by some as having been worth DM 2.6 billion per year."

<sup>12</sup> On eastern women's place in the new labor realities of unified Germany, among many others, Beck (2003: 172-189), Nickel (2003: 31-52), Peinl (2003: 231-239), and Schenk (2001: 214-230

For example, *Job* (Fig. 5), a flyer found taped to lamppost in the gentrified neighborhood of Kollwitzplatz in Berlin-Prenzauer Berg in summer 2002, could be found that summer all over inner city east Berlin. It beckons job seekers with the beaming face of a young woman who seems to really love her work, or is very happy because she's finally got a job in a city that as of spring 2004 had an unemployment rate over 18%. Of course, this poster, new versions of which have appeared around Kollwitz Platz just recently, is a street-level marketing ploy to attract young people – that is, young women – to be direct market service operators in what is no doubt a temporary, low wage, poor benefits job. The poster's image itself is interesting because it features a rising sun, the signal of a new day, shining brightly behind the young woman, whose beaming face, youthfully pretty features and unmistakable ethnicity (a white girl) combine to hail jobless viewers to take on such happy attitudinal and facial features or to exploit the gender and ethnic features they already possess.

Temporary direct marketing is one kind of job available to young women of the east. While Fig. 6 is not a job advertisement, it does give some indication of the forms of paid labor available to women in the east. 'Sex?Escort' is in fact a business card-sized image/text found slipped underneath the window shield wiper blade of a parked car in old city Prague. Yet this and other such advertisements for the sexual marketing of young women are pervasive in post-socialist cities, including those in eastern Germany. Often enough, like this one, such ads feature an image cropped so that the woman's head and face do not appear and the sexualised display of body parts itself becomes the tool for interpellating the subjectivities of moneyed straight men as constantly in need of a willing and shapely woman ready for 'a good fuck'.

In such image/texts the line between dominant and residual cultural elements gets blurry, for the sexual marketing of woman is such a staple of commercialised western culture, and has such a long history, that westerners, German, American or otherwise, new to the east who see such image/texts on the streets (and in tabloids, magazines, on television, in films, etc.) may take such displays as quite "natural" to the human landscape, wherever

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and 2003: 53-77). In addition, Doelling (1991), writing immediately after the *Wende*, offers prescient commentary on the difficulties eastern women would face in the years following unification.

one might be.<sup>13</sup> Yet of course this was not openly the case in the former Soviet bloc nations, where prostitution and pornography were officially, which is not to say actually, unavailable.<sup>14</sup> I want to suggest that gendered image/texts such as these, now pervasive in the east as well as the west, go some (unquantifiable) distance in commodifying the gendered desire of both men and women. At the very least, such images contribute to the gendered self-presentation of post-socialist people who previously did not have to "sell" themselves in the ways familiar to those of us born into advanced capitalism.

Indeed, for any sighted person on the streets of east Berlin, at every turn one encounters commercial images of women on billboards large and small, on fences lining construction sites, at bus, tram, and subway stations, on *Altbauten* walls, on shop windows, even on lampposts and rubbish bins. Figures 7-9 and 12 (*The Red Ska; Die Sex and the City Fashion Party Tour!; Miss Germany; Unno for Women*) show commercial image/texts drawn from the streets of east Berlin that feature young, beautiful women, some anonymous and some well known, in various states of dress or undress, in various modes of audience engagement (e.g., direct eye contact or not; full front or body profile shots; etc.), and variously targeting women or men, or women and men, depending on the product being marketed. However, as a group, what is striking about this series is the narrow range of female facial and body types on offer, even as each image/text activates both emergent and residual cultural elements in distinct ways.

Consider, for instance, *The Red Ska* (Fig. 7) and *Die Sex in the City Fashion Party Tour!* (Fig. 8). Found hand-taped to a lamppost in Berlin-Mitte near the club for which the poster advertises, *The Red Ska* plays with the memory of forty years of Soviet domination, transforming the familiar hammer and sickle symbol into a psychedelic 1970's dance floor on which a mini-skirted and ultra-thin young (Russian?) woman twists and turns. My eastern informants suggest that this poster is designed to appeal not to eastern youth, but to the thousands of young middle class west Germans who, beginning

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<sup>13</sup> For example, in central London for a conference in April, 2004, I found similarly explicit ads (marketing women for sex) plastered inside every public phone box within walking distance of the conference site.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the post-*Wende* autobiography of Markus Wolf, head of the counter-espionage unit of the Stasi. Wolf makes clear that although prostitution was officially illegal in

in the early 1990s, have moved into the now "cool" inner-city east Berlin districts of Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, and, most recently, Friedrichshain, displacing aging eastern pensioners who can no longer afford increasing rents in these districts and for whom such Soviet references hold little but the memory of dictatorship. On the other hand, the poster *Die Sex and the City Fashion Party Tour!*, one of the perhaps hundreds of *Sex and the City* images to be found everywhere in Berlin between summer 2003 and spring 2004, was part of a well-oiled corporate media campaign that advertised not only the highly-rated American television series – available on German television as it is everywhere else – but also a major line of cosmetics, fashion accessories, and, as the poster indicates, even fashion "tours." As of late winter 2004, new posters featuring life-sized images of *Sex in the City* cast members, with the text "We love Sex in the City", could be found protected (from vandals as well as poster-stealing ethnographers) under clear plastic coverings at bus stops as well as high above the street (and out of arm's length) in city/corporate controlled, sometimes rotating, display kiosks and billboards.

One might well ask, who is the "We" of "We love Sex and the City"? Women on the streets of Berlin are clearly urged through such advertising to become the "We" who are willing to go to the expense and to do the self-fashioning labor necessary to properly conform to emergent feminine "we" that beckons them in such ads. Indeed, women are continually urged to embody the hegemonic western ideal of the slim, sexy, white but tanned female beauties depicted by, for instance, *Miss Germany* ([Fig. 9](#)), a poster prominently displayed in the summer of 2003 at the entrance to the American-style shopping mall, the Schoenhauser Allee Arkaden, in Prenzlauer Berg. Yet, as we see in *Mister Germany* ([Fig. 10](#)), men, too, are now subject to capitalist consumer discipline, being urged on by street images to re-gender themselves according to emergent western fashion.

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the GDR, he routinely made use of state funds to pay women to "entertain" and gather information on foreign dignitaries visiting East Berlin.

#### 4. Masculinity and the Post-Socialist Sales Job

For this American male feminist cultural studies ethnographer of eastern Germany, commercial image/texts to be found in the post-socialist street highlight issues of gendered and sexualised self-presentation now facing both women and men of the former GDR. No matter what product is actually being sold, no matter whether it is images of women or men being depicted, commercial images of femininity and masculinity work toward activating our self-critical sensibility, installing in us a self-disciplinary gender conformity that on the surface seems merely a matter of "free choice." Commercial street ephemera clearly acts locally and globally as both agent and effect of transnational capitalist dominance, especially through modes of mass cultural production by which we are exposed again and again to a narrow range of gendered images. Arguably, control over modes of mass cultural production and placement and repetition of commercial images is finally a more effective means of controlling or disciplining a population than sheer political or even military power. Raymond Williams (1977:125) notes that "a distinctive and comparative feature of any dominant social order is how far it reaches into the whole range of practices and experiences in an attempt at incorporation." Although what he calls 'incorporation' we might today refer to as 'commodification,' Williams, nonetheless, writing prior to our own post-industrial age of electronic communications and virtual reality, helps us more fully grasp the acute practical, emotional and bodily difficulties involved in what it means today to attempt to live an oppositional or even merely alternative existence to the dominant. "Thus in advanced capitalism," he writes, "because of the changes in the social character of communications, and in the social character of decision-making, the dominant culture reaches much further than ever before in capitalist society into hitherto 'reserved' or 'resigned' areas of experience and practice and meaning. The area of effective penetration of the dominant order into the whole social and cultural process is thus now significantly greater"(126).

Williams' language in this prescient passage is perhaps unintentionally sexualised, but to say that the dominant order "penetrates" into the whole social and cultural process more deeply than ever before may be an apt metaphor for the masculinised character of not only the American military occupation of West Germany after World War II, but also the West German/Americanised buy out and certainly at least economic occupation of the

former GDR in the early 1990s. One is not too far wrong to recognise in the massive insertion of Americanised/West German political, economic, and media structures a very traditional, albeit contemporary, form of institutionalised, even democratic, masculinist assertion.

With this in mind, let us turn again to street ephemera. Figures 10, 11, and 13 (*Mister Germany; Unno for Men; Held der Arbeit*) display men for sale, or more precisely, the image/texts use representations of men and masculinity in order to sell something. As a group, these images give some sense of the not yet dominant, still emergent, post-socialist, mass-marketed construction of masculinity, and of the commercial techniques of interpellating men as newly democratic, individualistic, and consuming manly beings.

*Unno for Men* (Fig. 11) is of course the complement of *Unno for Women* (Fig. 12). These two ads are not posters but so-called "City Cards," or postcard-sized advertisements put out by mass marketing companies affiliated with or hired by large corporations. The cards are freely available in specially installed kiosks in trendy cafes, bars, restaurants, and cinemas all over east Berlin (and indeed, at this point probably available in every sizeable city in the world, with very few exceptions). What we might term the residual, or even the quaint act of actually buying a non-ad postcard and sending it to a loved one in a distant place, is now largely displaced by the temptation of collecting any number of "free" commercial postcards, such as the complementary "Unno Underwear" cards, and sending one's loved one (at very little upfront cost to the marketers and companies) a hip, sexy advert for, well, underwear.

Let us recall that to "complement" is to make whole, and thus what the two *Unno* cards together represent is a marketer's (wet) dream of gender completion or complementary sexual difference in the two seductive images of culturally ideal male and female human beauties. In a manner reminiscent of the *Sex? Escort* image previously discussed (Fig. 6), the careful cropping of each image cuts the models' faces off just below eye level and cuts the legs off just above the knees. The *Unno* female model strikes the now conventional porn magazine/lad magazine/men's magazine/women's magazine pose of slipping her thumbs under the side edge of her panties as if in the process of availing herself for the viewer's pleasure. The *Unno* male, however, is a bit more reserved, and

thus his pose is perhaps unlikely to be misread as a stylised convention of gay porn (although the straight/gay crossover appeal of such a pose should not be dismissed out of hand, as one can be sure it is not by the marketers). Here the faceless male *Unno* model is "standing relaxed," as they say in the hypermasculine straight/gay male body building subculture.<sup>15</sup> That is, the *Unno* model is striking a relaxed and yet muscles-tensed pose. He is, like the three towel-clad, (body) hairless male models in *Mister Germany*, a trim, cut, buff, shaved, and tanned white male figure, whom we can only presume is looking directly at us, although our eyes cannot meet his and go instead to his culturally ideal, gender complementary, tight-*Unno*-boxer-briefed body. He stands there showing himself. He is sexy, he is in control and despite being faceless, he is an individual because he has chosen to buy expensive underwear and adorn his residually classical Greek male body for our viewing benefit.

The two *Unno* ads work together in that each hegemonically perfect, gendered, desirable and desiring half of the complement may be presumed to want the other, so that we, as consuming viewers, are interpellated in at least one of two ways. We either want to look like the male model in the ad so that we may possess the female complement – who is to look like the *Unno* female, or the *Sex in the City* female, or the *Sex? Escort* female – or we may desire the male model himself. Either way, the point of these ads is that we are made to subjectify and thus discipline ourselves so that we will buy our happy place in gender hegemony and sexual bliss.

This consuming and social pressure to embody the western cultural ideals of masculinity may be described as an emergent, though certainly not an oppositional or even an alternative, cultural element of the post-socialist commercial cityscape. Relatively new even in the west, the marketing of the male body in the east marks a turning point in western incorporation of socialist-era idealisation of the male body. The latter, it is worth pointing out, is of course still on view in east Berlin in leftover epic socialist masculinity memorials such as the Ernst Thaelmann statue in Prenzlauer Berg or the massive Soviet memorial in Treptow park. To be sure, the idealization of the masculine form is nothing new in the east, but now it is actively and pervasively for sale. In this sense it is a residual

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<sup>15</sup> There is now, as it happens, on Immanuelkirche Strasse in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg a Gold's

cultural element from the recent socialist past, which is almost instantly commodified by the rapidly emerging dominance of commercial culture.

A final example of the commercialization of masculinity in the east is in some ways the most unusual and in other ways the most predictable. *Held der Arbeit* (Fig. 13) is yet another free commercial postcard, which, like many images from such cards, may sometimes be found enlarged and repeated in mass circulation magazines and on city/corporate-controlled kiosks and other state/corporate/privatised vertical spaces in poster or even [billboard size image/texts](#).<sup>16</sup> *Held der Arbeit*, a new ad for the now western-owned Club cigarette, formerly manufactured in the GDR, features a handsome white male model in clothes modishly updated but styled after late GDR men's fashion. The model, with an updated quaff styled just so as to appear slightly rakish and unselfconsciously hip, holds up a Club cigarette, which he is apparently enjoying after a hard day's manual labour (which has not mussed up his stylish quaff or clothes in the least). The lynchpin of the ad, however, is not the image alone but how it works with the text, "Held der Arbeit," or "Worker Hero." This phrase, familiar to eastern and western Germans alike, was a title of honour bestowed upon GDR workers who surpassed the state production quotas in their jobs. Here then we have an explicit example of the newly dominant culture's incorporation and commodification of the past, with heroic (if only in title) GDR-era masculinity being "celebrated" in a way that verges on outright parody.

This post-socialist "Held der Arbeit" is a handsome, square-jawed fellow, and if we are savvy, stylish, youthful, and moneyed western men in contemporary east Berlin, we can buy authentic GDR outfits at the Boxhagener Platz flea market on a Sunday, purchase our Unno underwear at the Schoenhauser Alle Arkaden on a Monday, and pay out for our stylish quaff nearby at hip Headhunter's hair salon on a Tuesday, and settle in after with other young yuppies over a *Milchkaffee* and a Club cigarette over at the Café Wohnzimmer on Helmholtz Platz. Among the many ironies to this post-socialist reality is

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Gym, the gym that Arnold Schwarzenegger made famous.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, *Aktivist* (Fig. 14), another Club cigarette commercial image/text, this time with a stereotypically beautiful blond, blue-eyed female model, appeared not only on City Cards but in spring 2004 issues of *Der Spiegel* magazine. Like "Held der Arbeit," "Aktivist" was a title of honor in the GDR, specifically for politically engaged members of the Free German Youth.

that the service workers we encounter on our daily rounds are likely all to be easterners. That is, if they are lucky enough to have a job.

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### **Biodata**

Joel Morton is an assistant professor of Gender Studies at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, U.S.A. His current research examines and documents gender and cultural transformations in post-socialist central Europe, especially eastern Germany. His work includes ethnographic studies of central European feminisms, oral histories of young adult eastern Germans, urban studies of the gentrification of east Berlin, and documentation of street life. His online collection of post-socialist street posters and ephemera is available at <http://gallery.stlawu.edu>.

Appendix

Fig. 1

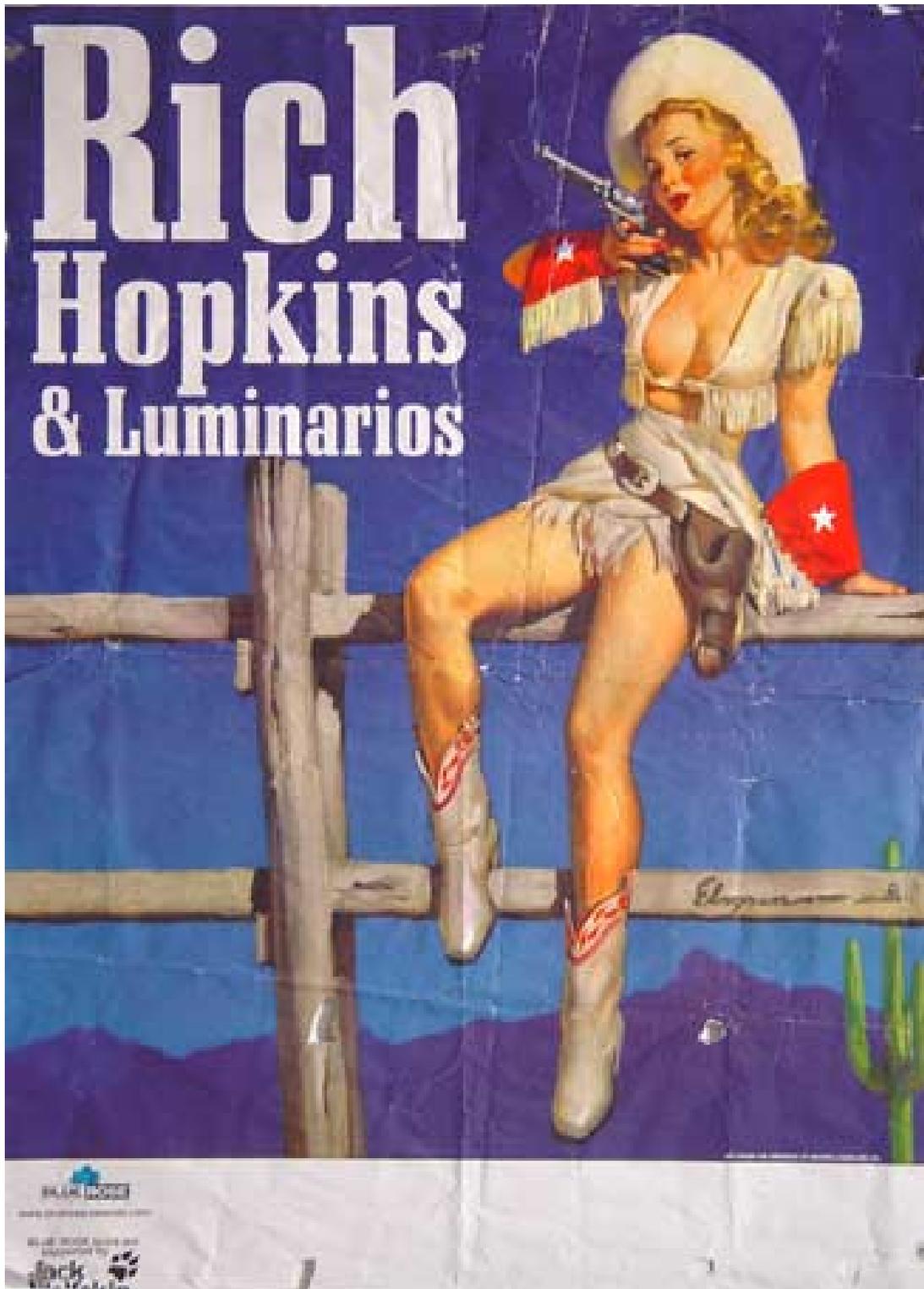


Fig. 2

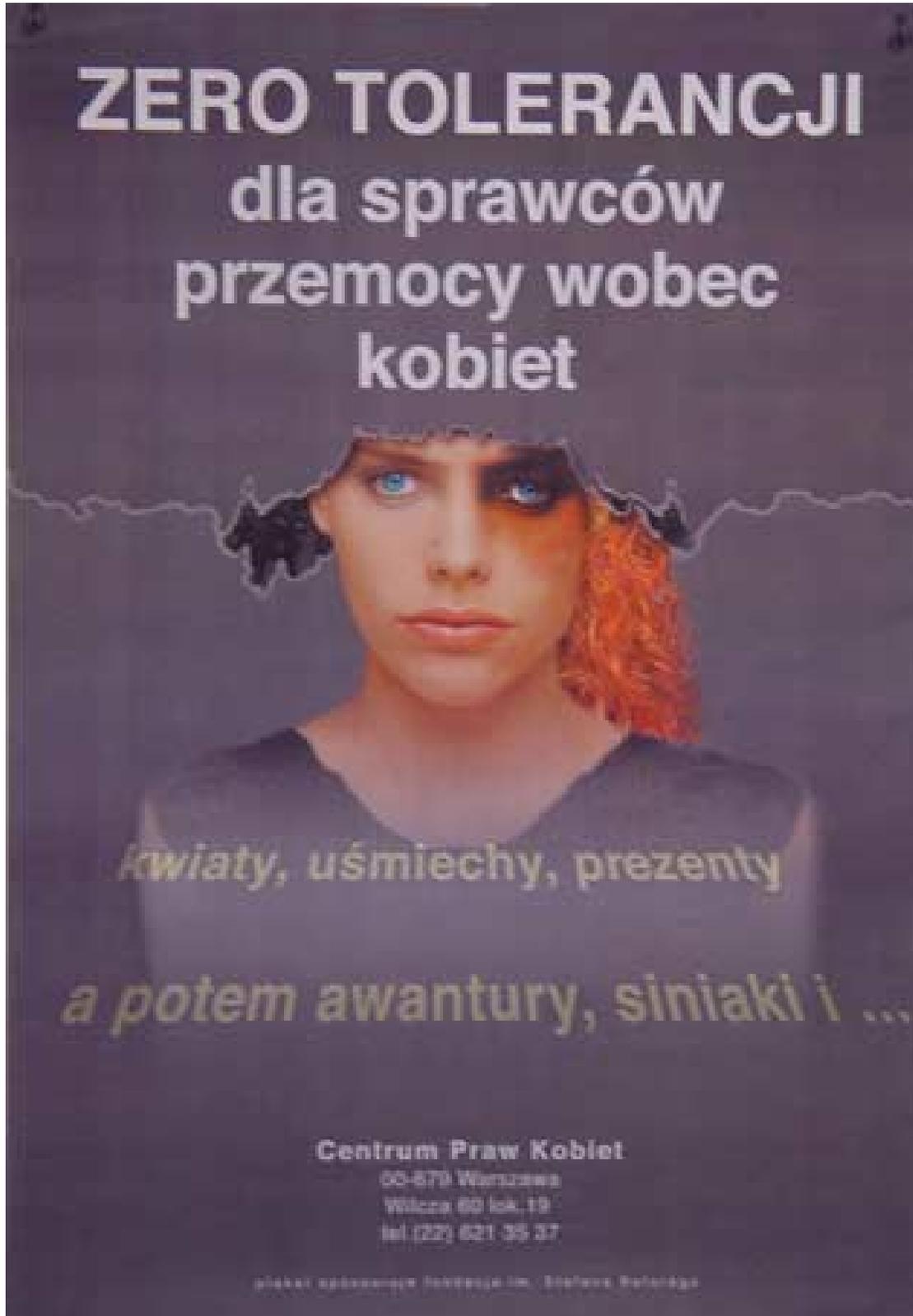


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

**JOB**

DialogDirect

### Bist Du ansprechend?

So wie sie hier. Studentin wie Du. Ihr Nebenjob: Dialoger. Ein Job der Sinn macht. Denn Dialoger sorgen dafür, dass gemeinnützige Organisationen wie Vier Pfoten e.V. unterstützt werden. Rausgehen - Leute ansprechen - informieren - Förderer gewinnen - das ist ihr Job. Der Job ist nichts für Nesthocker. Dialoger sind mit ihrem Team auf Achse und kommen in alle Ecken Deutschlands. Du bist flexibel, reiselustig, teamfähig und willst Deine Kohle auf sinnvolle Weise verdienen? Dann ruf uns an:

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Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

**LANCIA Ypsilon**  
eleganz präsentiert

**COSMOPOLITAN**

# Die Sex and the City Fashion Party Tour!

**Das Original hautnah!**

Die Original-Veranstaltung von 10 Original-Outfits mit der Kultur!

**SEX and the CITY**

Feiert auf den heißesten Partys in den angriffsbesten Clubs und erlebt die Kulturbüchle zum Anfassen mit!

München	PI	10.07.2003
Frankfurt	King Komahamela	16.07.2003
Stuttgart	Perkins Park	19.07.2003
Düsseldorf	Nachtresidenz	25.07.2003
Hamburg	Valentino	26.07.2003
Berlin	50 Grad	01.08.2003
Dresden	Blaue Saton	02.08.2003

Beginn: 22.00 h

**Club**  
Partyszene zum Anfassen

club.de

Fig. 9



Fig. 10

TIGI

CROSS

MISTER GERMANY

OFFIZIELLE VORENTSCHEIDUNG

www.mgc-klemmer.de

MISS UND MISTER PRENZLAUER BERG

Samstag, 12. JULI

Beginn: 22.00 Uhr

SCHÖNHAUSER ALLEE ARCADEN

Schönhauser Allee 80 - Berlin

0 30 - 4 01 29 34

Tastshop

Fig. 11

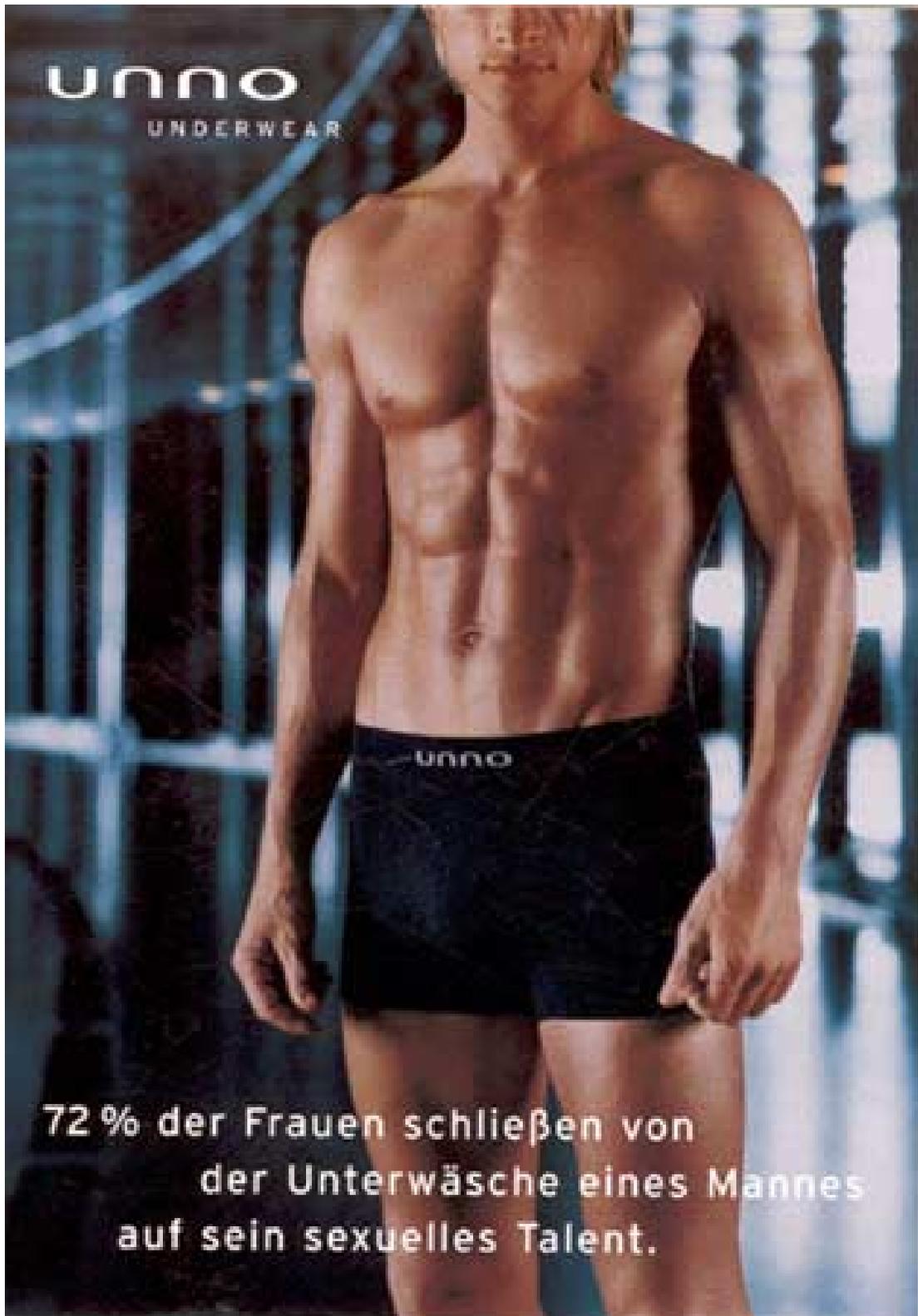


Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

**AKTIVIST.**

WILLKOMMEN IM CLUB. 3.20 €

Die EU-Gesundheitsminister: Rauchen kann tödlich sein. Der Rauch einer Zigarette dieser Marke enthält: 7 mg Teer, 0,6 mg Nikotin und 8 mg Kohlenmonoxid. (Durchschnittswerte nach ISO)