

## **Jochen Becker**

### **New Mitte/Helle Mitte**

*Jump cuts between Hackesche Markt and Platte (1)*

### **New Mitte**

*But the times of establishment have long begun. (...) Specifically, we wish to assist the reorganisation of urban development in Berlin's Centre, in order to transform Berlin into the capital of a 'Republic of the New Centre'.*

(from a government policy statement by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, 1998)

The 'New Mitte' is much more than a corporate logo that the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) occasionally likes to be associated with in front of the cameras. For the capital it is both the political relocation and remoulded living space of a social majority. Behind the promise of 'Berlin', the local area as well as the republic, capital as well as the metropolis, all heap up in the newly rebuilt district of Mitte, where winners count. 'We want the capital to become a metropolis. And the difference between a capital and a metropolis is culture', Rolf Breuer, head of the Deutsche Bank, explained at the opening of the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin in November 1997. The main art hall was inaugurated as 'joint venture' between the group of banks and the Guggenheim Museum Foundation, which operates on a transnational basis. The corporate show-room is positioned on the grand boulevard Unter Den Linden and 'lies in immediate proximity to the Museum Island and the gallery area just round the Auguststrasse, thus being at the heart of the dynamically evolving cultural scene.'

*Why is it that more and more young people want to become gallerists or exhibition curators? Because the nucleus of a civil and social type, which joyfully combines independence, an aesthetic lifestyle, the growing need of visual experience and interpretation of the world, mobile publicity, social intervention and global activity, is forming itself within the institutions and scope of activity of the art system. (2)*

There is a concentration in Mitte of a new business culture in private and economically organised show-rooms, that rest on urban leisure centres as a business environment. A new leisure centre has developed all around the Hackescher Markt, involving art consumption, nightclubs and cinemas, as well as stylish gastronomy. Even more so than the Potsdamer Platz, the mixture there between the middle-class and a variety of branches forms a unifying intersection of inner-city culture tourism and the policy of young creativity, business success, estate agents and populism, which constitute the new Mitte. As no.1 on the Hackescher Markt, the newly opened British Council, fulfilling its purposes as Embassy of 'Cool Britannia', is promoting everything from Brit-Pop to young British art. Working and living spaces, offices, restaurants, cinemas and galleries and art exhibitions as well as the salons of the Green Party's Heinrich Boell Foundation are reshaping the backyards of the Hackescher Markt into the luxurious Urban Entertainment Centre. Tourists flock to the restaurants and bars with huge windows resembling aquariums and set a new tone to the area with a demonstratively outward presentation of their consumption of culture, semi-luxuries (3) and space.

## The New Mitte Boys

*In the meantime, London's brilliant Pet Shop Boys gave birth to a new hymn, which became a hit: 'New York City Boy'. In the forge of ideas of Laarmann Wonderland, a German text was thought of and...wow! A hit!*

(from the publicity-magazine 'berlinmitteboys')

Thanks to a few boys from Berlin Mitte's scene, 'New York City Boy' was made into a feast of their own: If we're talking about the Republic of Berlin, than at least we should be in its very centre.

*berlinmitteboys present berlin mitte boy „join in!“*

*London's expensive/Paris is shit/New York is retro/In its own way*

*There is a place, that's a total kick/If you aren't there, your life's nothing but agony/You're informed, so be ready,/You're right in Berlin Mitte, Boy*

*Berlin Mitte Boy/Your party knows no end/you're right in Berlin Mitte, Boy/ Hackescher Markt instead of Broadway*

*Everyone's horny/And everyone's high/All just know/It's not going to die!/Put your foot down/Show what you've got/Throw yourself inside, it's never too late*

*Be ready, time has come / You're right in Berlin Mitte, Boy!!!*

*Year 2000 fresh*

*Cookies, Cibo, WMF/Here it's you the superchef/Lore, Riva, Schwarzenraben/ Here you aren't just out of place/Casino, Oxy, Greenwich, Sage/This is where you spend your wage*

*Party time, party time*

The eternal wish of West Berlin's subculture to imitate New York is now nothing but legend. The song 'Berlin Calling', released on the same CD as 'Berlin Mitte Boy', refers to 'London Calling', the central album of the punk band The Clash, which marked London's pop supremacy twenty years ago. In the accompanying magazine *Weltstaedte im Feiervergleich* (4), the BerlinMitteBoys call for a leading role for Berlin, while simultaneously depreciating the concurrence posed by other metropolitan cities, like London (cigarettes cost 15 Marks), Paris (obligation to wear a tie in the disco) or New York (Zero Tolerance).

When, at the end of the song 'Berlin Mitte Boy', Jurgen Laarmann calls out „We're far from the end“, most of these clubs have already closed down. The chaos of unclarified returns-before-compensation (5) is cleared away, so it's time to make a grab. The times of illegal and informal clubs are great material for fashionable Berlin novels. With the old Techno-fan magazine *Frontpage* - born again as *jlFrontpage* - 'jl' systematically transferred Techno into the consumer society and the world of advertising. Techno became an industry, Laarmann a young entrepreneur, and the 'Love Parade' a highway for publicity and advertising.

On the cover, the drawn BMB (berlinmitteboys) protagonists pose before the Brandenburg Gate and the TV-tower in Alex, twin icons in Mitte. It seems that since 1989, Techno and Berlin have become inseparable, and even the Afro-American inventors of Techno from Detroit are considered to be resident DJs in Berlin's Club Tresor. The club's boss, Dimitri is among the primary movers of West Berlin's subculture. Now, with his expensive restaurant *Schwarzenraben* - mentioned in the song - Dimitri has opened a giant VIP-restaurant near the Hackescher Markt. The Tresor Tower, where creative business compatible with techno is to be launched on the club's ruins, functions the blueprint. The Mitte-boy's and girl's subculture is becoming a social background in itself.

However this is far from the end, this is the eternal promise for high spirits: The new economy as a drug, let's spend our wage in the 'After-hour-club'. „You're informed - so be ready“ is the intro's call in the backstage mix. 'All of Berlin Mitte's secrets -revealed here!' is the publicity banner to the BMB magazine. To be informed and to spread news about the fashionable bars: That's how the publicity-financed gazettes, who attract customers, work. Finally, Berlin's centre has the highest density in bars. 'Why do we love our part of town?', they say, as if the area's manager personally distributed advertising leaflets:

*“Creative super guys from all over the world come here to show off and to party. Everyone has a job he can't explain to his parents, and anyway most people are Internet billionaires. Almost everyone is capable of continuing his business via mobile phone while sitting in a café, thereby squandering his resources. Upheaval is always present in Mitte. One of the reasons we live here, is because places are constantly opening or shutting down, being torn off and re-erected or refurbished. Every day in Mitte, films are being shot and produced. Everyone has his own film running. Complete Mitte a single gallery. Pamela Andersen, George Clooney, Leo di Caprio...and Chancellor Schroeder and his mates are sitting at the neighbouring table in the restaurant, having Schnitzel. Our small paradise is endangered. Not everyone allows us to go about our own business undisturbed. There's a real need for gentle tourism.“*

We in the hood, we remained: 'Here we are 'Mitties' among ourselves! Almost every inhabitant is an artist, a film producer or a scriptwriter. Our flats? In the next Wallpaper!' The division of Mitte, thereby, is striving ahead. The rest of former times are being pushed aside into the green. 'Berlin Mitte is everywhere', concludes the small-printed acknowledgement-list. Prenzlauer Berg is designated as 'North Mitte' and Kreuzberg as 'South Mitte'. At least regarding 'Mitte's twinned areas', Hellersdorf doesn't appear.

## **Symbols of resistance**

In the late summer of 1997, newspaper reports of street fights around the backyards of the Hackescher Markt engaged the attention of the public. When on the outskirts of a hip-hop party, teenagers sprayed a night tram the driver called the police, who until then had hardly been visible in the area. The police's attempt to take hold of the suspicious teenagers met with strong disapproval from the partying crowd, reacting as it did by throwing bottles. 'It came to insults, the throwing of missiles and renewed attempts to free those arrested, along with the usual choreographed ballet, that lasted until dawn.' The hip-hop kids seemed to dispute the tourists' and the more moderate techno scene's right to the area around the Hackescher Markt, which suddenly became a contested terrain.

Because on the night of October 3rd rumours of a further street fight was in the offing, the police closed down the area and has been patrolling on these seemingly peaceful grounds ever since. Isolated shattering of glass and graffiti-drawings were reported: 'And that was about it. (...) It wasn't much more than fight for your right to party. But firstly nevertheless [it was something], and secondly and especially considering that towards which the entire area is veering: On the following morning, parts of Rosenthaler Str. seemed to be temporarily embellished, to put it that way.' (6)

## **Living well / Feeling Great (7)**

Berlin-Hellersdorf is situated so far east that a map of 1994/95 shows the area only on the second attachment on the back page of the 'patent folder'. Hellersdorf was founded in 1986 as the third great urban housing estate in the eastern part, becoming Berlin's twenty-third and in many respects youngest district. The decisive phase of planning, reconstruction and settlement took place between 1979 and 1991. The housing area known as Hellersdorf emerged in the breathtaking period of eight years. However, the area doesn't merely include pre-fabricate quarters, but also charming suburban old buildings and villas in Mahlsdorf or Kaulsdorf.

With an average age of thirty-two, the social structure in Hellersdorf is comparatively young, every fifth adult has Hochschulreife (A-levels), and with 3,500 Marks a month these were the wealthiest households of Berlin after Zehlendorf, and the unemployment rate is also fairly low. However, if one studies the numbers more carefully, the posh area Zehlendorf is far better off, with an average income of 4,200 Marks monthly (8). If one places the concept of household in relation to the number of households with two people working full-time – in Zehlendorf sixty percent of all households are financed by a single person - it becomes clear that in the East earnings are less, but people work more. „There is neither striking poverty nor striking wealth; those who become rich usually try to leave Hellersdorf. There is an approximate equality“, writes Rolf Schneider (9). Only twenty percent of this income is earned in the area itself; Hellersdorf is still more of a residential area than a working space.

## **Hellersdorf, GDR**

The star-essayist Alexander Osang visited Hellersdorf on behalf of the accommodation building society Hellersdorf (WoGeHe), whereby he met Beate Schonlein: 'The flats were all brand new. It was as if one were to start life from the beginning again' (10). For many, the first move into Hellersdorf was a long awaited escape from the provincial cramped living conditions. Until 1990, Hellersdorf was a residential area for privileged East Germans. Here, a classless society has found itself together on eight square kilometres of former giant fields, which now would be called 'New Mitte' of the East.

The construction of Hellersdorf was considered to be the collective work of the GDR (German Democratic Republic): through their building combines, each of the fifteen administrative districts of the GDR took part in the erection of Hellersdorf. The transference of construction resources in the GDR from the urban cities to huge industrial estates created a 'New Germany' at the city's edge. The inner city voids left by the war weren't filled up and the crumbling down houses pushed the population out of the urban areas of the 1870s (11). Simultaneously, the GDR tolerated squatters who moved into Berlin-Mitte, thereby laying the foundation for the later bohemian boom.

Hellersdorf stands for the late phase of the GDR, which by this time had assimilated the reform-minded critique of the pre-fabricates and started grouping buildings with a maximum of six stories and a differentiated architecture around yards: differences beyond the capitalism of difference. The guidelines were three to four roomed family and children friendly flats, green spaces and block-like structures: Hellersdorf was to take over the inner city's 'accommodation concept' with its corner solutions and the use of ground floors for shops and services. 'Accommodation areas acquired a centre and a unity. Thereby Hellersdorf took on a certain building shape, which isn't to be found in the big estates of

Lichtenberg, Marzahn and Hohenschoenhausen', commented Heinz Willumat in Quartierskonzept Hellersdorf, published in 1998 by the WoGeHe (12). At that time head architect of Hellersdorf, he now works for the construction administration of the senate.

### **Stigma: Platte (13)**

The fantasies of decline, which Osang's walk throughout the area often captures, are a contrast to the career promises of New Mitte. Since the fall of the Wall, both the 'Platte' and its inhabitants have experienced a radical reinterpretation. Berlin too is now pondering on a breaking-up of individual complexes, as is already being practiced in Schwedt or Hoyerswerda. The devaluation of 'Platte' under a capitalist portent came about thanks to the interplay between generated wishes of stigmatisation on behalf of individual home-industries and land and tax policies of Brandenburg's surrounding wealthy municipalities. Since then, the area has again been reshaped. 'After the end of the GDR, the architectural fabric was vehemently and surprisingly modified, so that a new layer began to grow upon 'Platte'', is how, by way of introduction, the curator Ulrich Domose describes the 'Hellersdorf-Project'. In conjunction with building accommodation, the government and the federal state as well as societies and private businesses, put millions into the further development and refurbishment of Hellersdorf. The nightmare scenario of US Ghettos and French banlieues spurred the efforts on. The area around Branitzer Platz, not far from 'Helle Mitte', is by far the most striking project. The centre which, during the GDR, had remained fallow land, was now completed by 'expensive accommodation with terraced houses and urban villas', in order to 'convince inhabitants with growing expectations to remain in Hellersdorf.' (14)

The WoGeHe (15), owned by the federal state, manages approximately 26,300 of the 42,000 modern flats in Hellersdorf. 'It is responsible for a part of town', says the technical manager Jack Gelfort, 'which since 1990 suffers from the negative image of complex pre-fabricates and from the growing concurrence posed by Brandenburg.' (16) However, the WoGeHe presents itself not only as a classical estate agent, but is also involved in the improvement of the areas surrounding the accommodation, in 'measures of urban development' and in cliental services. For instance, it supports the 'Hellersdorf Project' (17), which both presents and accomplishes image improvement work. Four photographers were sent out to 'reflect the area's present development with artistic means' (18). In Hellersdorf, art - especially in the construction industry - has the tangible task of embellishment. 'The image of art was consciously recommended for areas that were problematic because of a lack of creative unity or demarcation problems.' (19)

Big objects on roofs, tubular steel knots on the roadside, against 'an optically 'loud' environment', relief-raised trimmings on fire walls and chimes, all seem figurative, decorative and aesthetically classical. The administered upgrading of the area by means of artistic trimmings stands in an awkward contrast to the original gentrification of Mitte's gallery area through art business.

### **Empty Mitte / Helle Mitte**

*„In its development, Helle Mitte is tightly connected with the entire modern settlement. A positive development of this small city-centre will affect the entire area.“*  
(Quartierskonzept Hellersdorf)

The Berlin Wall fell in what seemed to be the last phase of completion, at a time when the only development waiting was that of the centre of this district. The construction of a free terrain for shopping, administration and leisure was resumed in 1992 and completed in the autumn of 1997 as 'Helle Mitte'. Until then, less than half of Berlin's average shopping space was available. For larger shopping requirements, one was obliged to go to Alexander Platz, which took thirty minutes by subway. (20)

With investments of 2.2 billion Marks for a space of 31 hectares, the area was considered to be Berlin's second largest building site after the Postdamer Platz (21). Inaugurating public limited company, a brochure advertising MEGA's development describes the centre it has created as a 'new centre for a dynamic district'. With more than 130,000 inhabitants, Hellersdorf is bigger than Ingolstadt or Trier. When Federal President Rau and his wife, along with their dog Scooter, took their first visit to Helle Mitte, the daily newspaper *Tagesspiegel* covered the story as a 'state visit to Hellersdorf', as though the President were travelling to a foreign country. The head of the council of state used to enjoy mixing with the people - photographs showing Honnecker at a living room table testify to this.

While Brandenburg's landscapes abruptly start appearing at the terminus Hellersdorf-Honow, along with their fish-farms, their combine harvesters and their field paths, the subway station Hellersdorf, only two stops before, is an important crossing for the public urban transport. It centralises the traffic flows producing frequent visits. In this place the project 'Helle Mitte' carries several urban functions and uses on a very dense area, as on Postdamer Platz. The urban plan envisioned a cinema and a town hall, along with an advanced technical college and a centre for secondary school students, a shopping arcade, a multi-usage centre, a medical centre, hotels, discos, a bowling centre, fitness clubs, blocks of flats, underground garages, a park and four city places, all for the future amalgamation of the area. The 2,700 seats in the CineStar cinema correspond exactly to the number of parking places. MEGA promises both a multifunctional leisure centre and a library with super-regional significance. In 2003, the project should be completed, at least provisionally. The Alice-Solomon advanced technical college for social work and education, which before moving from the western part Schoeneberg had opposed this 'exile', has now been relocated in 'Helle Mitte' for the past two years. The specialist on racism Brigit Rommelspacher, for instance, is currently teaching there. For the time being, the FH-cafeteria is still the only semi-public restaurant of the central place of 'Helle Mitte' that is planned to be 'Spanish'.

### **Construction-kit: public-private partnership**

*The urban planning model was the work of a single office, and the entire development, up to the letting out and the administration, was done by a single company. (...) Probably, no structure of ownership and planning will ever get closer to the absolutist hierarchy of power as it existed (...) in the Baroque era. (22)*

The federal state of Berlin sold the privately usable areas of Helle Mitte to MEGA in exchange for the take-over of the reconstruction costs. More detailed matters were discussed in various contracts, concerning realisation, reconstruction and the selling of properties. At the topping-out ceremony, Berlin's mayor Eberhard Diepgen described this unprecedented public-private partnership in Berlin as 'a prime example of an efficient co-operation between public administration and public investors' (*Berliner Morgenpost*, 02/11/96). MEGA develops buildings, which are sold ready for occupancy to institutional investors or as the private 'Immobilienfonds MEGA GbR' (23). Moreover, MEGA acquired

approximately 2,400 living units of the 'Platte' in the proximity of Helle Mitte, which it refurbished and now offers since 1999 to new tenants.

'The reason the realisation of this project in Hellersdorf is being carried out comparatively smoothly, is that, unlike most plans of urban development, it is commissioned and supported by a large accommodation building society. The support of the public administration has proved itself to be equally important. Moreover, it is beneficial that there are few proprietors and decision-makers in Hellersdorf who agree on the mutual tolerability of their planning.' (24) This balanced account from the WoGeHe's 'Quartierskonzept' clearly testifies to the large-scale masterplans, which only require huge units to agree with each other. Thus consultation at a grass-roots level, as it is practised in old parts of the town, seems to be completely ruled out.

### **Where one enjoys staying!/lightening up! (25)**

During his recent visit to Hellersdorf, Alexander Osang met the resident Nicole Thon. 'The fact of there being no foreigners here was a decisive factor for her moving from Mitte to Hellersdorf', Osang quotes the hairdresser trainee (26). „It's not that we're truly right-wing“, she assures with the overtone of a concession. 'Hellersdorf-Marzahn is to be an open-minded, tolerant and multicultural area', the weekly *Berliner Wochenblatt* quotes PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) mayor Uwe Klett. Should one then assume the reverse conclusion; that all this doesn't apply to Hellersdorf? The only recognizable foreigners are Vietnamese cigarette dealers who have to hide from the police. Even the kebab-houses have typically German names. And the flyer to 'the Centre of Helle Mitte' has the subtitle 'Where one enjoys staying! /lightening up!' - Whites only?

On May 1st, 2000, the NPD (National-Democratic Party of Germany) held a rally in front of a new building on the eastern outskirts of Hellersdorf, following the interdiction of their nationwide demonstration. 1,200 NPD-supporters marched up in Hellersdorf, while 150 others were arrested. Two months previously, the neo-nazis had marched under the Brandenburg Gate in Mitte. Outside the compounds of a civil feast in Mitte, all counter demonstrations had been forbidden. However, the only bald head I could see during my second expedition through Hellersdorf, was that of a young man clad in a long white robe and wearing plateau sneakers. „He's got a funny dress“, whispered two girls, who weren't the only ones to turn back for a second look.

### **The basement-kids of Hellersdorf**

...is the subtitle of the TV-report entitled 'Smoking Pot, Stealing, Living Space' of the Bayerischer Rundfunk (27) (ARD, 19/04/2000). Juliane Schuhler presents unruly lives, which rarely appear on TV. Those portrayed – teenagers rather than children - speak of Hellersdorf as it is neither represented by statistics nor by the brochures of MEGA and the WoGeHe. Unlike Mitte, this subculture doesn't seem to determine the area at all; it is more the kids who are exposed to the conceptions of 'normality' as they are represented by the report. In their daily lives, they come to terms with these conceptions in a truly informal manner. Martin, aged 18, is unemployed and sets himself goals for some distant future „when it's time“. What are your dreams? „I always dream of bank robberies and lots of cash.“ What is 'lots of cash'? „Lots of fun –that's what I'd say.“

Then the camera goes round the area which refuses to comply with the refurbishing-descriptions of the accommodation building societies and of the founders of Helle Mitte. „In Hellersdorf, we think in terms of thousands. A rough outline has been achieved, now the whole thing needs to rest, to develop and to differentiate itself“, writes Hansjoerg Gadiant about the future development of the area. ‘Only in old buildings do unplanned utilisation forms develop, and only depreciated houses that have low rents, allow for a much wider range of using possibilities.’ (28) Although time and intense use have left their traces on the new buildings surrounding the youth club 119. The meeting place consists of two basement-rooms, covered in felt tip scribbling and sprayed with graffiti. These traces of colour repeat themselves on the outside and in the staircase of a block of flats, and so connect the meeting points of the „basement-kids“. A camouflage netting hangs on the ceiling, old sofas and a table football desk complete the eternally valid setting of youth centres. Almost all the kids seem to have been thrown out by their parents – because of criminality and drugs, because they had nothing more to say to each other or because of sexual abuse.

Why do you take drugs? „Because it’s cool“, answers Martin. „I mean, I want to live my life like I want. My parents are always on about that this and that is shit. They’re right about that – but I don’t want them to be right.“ And your livelihood is being paid for by the income support? „Yeah, not necessarily. I get cash from other places. That’s no problem here. Not only in Hellersdorf – you can get cash everywhere.“ Yes, but that’s criminal, isn’t it. „So what (...) Everybody needs cash, no?“ But if you do that illegally, you’ll end up in jail. „So what? Then I’d better be careful.“ The society of consumer goods is a fact for the basement-kids; yet their participation in that society must be organised unconventionally.

Juliane smokes cannabis out of „pure boredom“. How’s life? Julia answers „cool“ and „could be better“. Now and then, she lives with a friend, otherwise in the „hostel“. Her father knows about „the drugs and joints“. He heard from advice centres that she first „has to fall down low enough and land in the gutter“, before anything can help. Andy, 19, a carpenter, lives with his parents and pays them half of his income. He earns 1,200 Marks monthly. „You’re the only one who brings home any money.“ His mates are devastated: „Your parents should start writing applications and find a job“, comes the unusual reproach. „Your mum still looks quite attractive“ - whatever that means in the age of self-marketing. Christian’s father is „also self-employed, always hanging around at home – doing computer work, software, hardware.“ As a secretary, his mother earns 3,100 Marks. The income proportions are quite transparent; homework and housework are difficult to distinguish and the classical roles of sexes and generations are all mixed up.

Alex, the street worker, is marking his clients as a typical resident on social security, with housing permits and low education – which is a clear contradiction to the statistics given earlier. Here we can recognise processes of social division. „They’re always seen as difficult people“, he says, although in the end the report leaves a very different picture than most ghetto sketches: Both the basement-kids and their parents appear to be surprisingly clear-sighted, pragmatic and self-confident. „My mum taught me everything, how to steal and all that“, tells Eileen, 16, who works as a milling machinist. Thus the mother organised her own life as an alcoholic. „I can’t imagine what it’s like not to steal and to have little money.“ But now „she says it’s all my fault.“

The basement club is only open from 2 to 8.30 p.m. In the evenings and the weekend, they have to leave –this is the result of pressure exercised by the neighbours. Unlike the „Mitties“, the „basement-kids“, despite their thoroughly outward presentation of their consumption of culture, semi-luxuries and space, have no power in defining the area. That’s

why they take the tram to the disco in Berlin-Mitte. The 'Rotor' is situated under the railway-bend near Alex' place. The brand-named gear shines in the flashing lights. In the early morning, they go home. The pictures resemble the well received documentary feature film *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* when, twenty years earlier, Christiane F. in West Berlin oscillated between the housing estates of Gropiusstadt and the 'Sound'.

„That's Ronnie and his friend Andre. Both without a permanent job, but never without money.“ The screen shows a mobile phone packing passed round through several hands. The details are better spoken of at a distance. „Somewhere, in a way, I don't really like all this illegal stuff, because there's that other society that just stands higher, that's always there and always will be“, confesses a teenager. „To get in there, you've gotta have done something in this society or achieved something. And I could get at least a bit of that. I used to have very high goals, but it just doesn't work.“ The New Mitte stays shut to him.

The ones who are in control put on warlord attitudes. „Hellersdorf, according to the insiders, is one big family. All the teenagers have kept together“. This is how Ronnie, 17 and unemployed, describes his gang-life. He met his girlfriend Isabelle, age 17 and a secondary school student, „out in the open air“. What do you want to do? „I want to be a policewoman. Yeah, that's stark.“ In the meantime, Andre does his business on the mobile. „The quickest way to get to know people is through drugs“, says Ronnie. The future policewoman is also there and snuggles closer. „A life of failure“ is what it is, without this sounding sad.

Racism or right-winged statements don't appear in this report. „I always lied at school when I said that the Turks had beaten me up“, says Eileen. Actually it was her mother. „For example, I hate it that I steal, that I'm a criminal at all, I'd like to be nice and good.“ Which social patterns are being satisfied here, with the reporter as a representative of normative order? Their future incorporation within society is supposed to proceed in normal terms, as if the social conditions, previous convictions and biographical stubbornness didn't stand in the way of this. „I wouldn't dare tell you about my childhood. It's too embarrassing“, says Eileen, as if an adult reflecting on teenage years that have long since passed. They live parallel lives; one unquestioningly informal, the other painted nicely in front of the cameras.

"Why have you cut your hair short", asks the reporter. „I had bad experiences with men, with guys, in those days“, answers Eileen. Since the age of four she was abused at home. „Sometimes it was other people“ than the partners of her mother. The frankness of the conversation is what is extraordinary about this report and shouldn't lead to the belief that child abuse is a common occurrence in this social environment. The causal short crop linking a bad childhood and a career as a 'basement-kid' isn't compelling. „I've also tried committing suicide“, she says pragmatically, but she doesn't want to be bound by the prologue.

Ronnie tells us about his redistribution business. „I'm simply financially independent through illegal business. People come to me, need something, I get it for them and receive the money that I need. Normal people, people who earn their money but can't afford a video player for 800 Marks come to me. I get it much cheaper. I can live from that and they also live better thanks to that. So, in principle, one hand washes the other.“ That's illegal. „Yeah, sure it's illegal.“ Not his girlfriend, but he explains that she finds it all shit. Tears roll down her cheeks – maybe because for their shared happiness he'd like to become someone else? Have you got someone who loves you and finds you special? „Don't know“, answers Andy. „Can you do an ad?“ and promptly announces his search for a „simple and blond girl“ before the TV camera. Julia would like „to get out of Germany, far away, to Jamaica“ and laughs because of the hopelessness. The future dreams are a flat, a partner, two children, money,

a secure future and a long life. So says Christian, holding hands with his mother. The rebellion of the East-kids is tightly connected to parental examples, while those have adopted the norms of their children. As is often the case with the fascists, their uprising is against a symbolic social order represented on the front page of the city map.

## Helle Mitte Boys

Young in Hellersdorf: according to a press article the police discovered 20,000 ecstasy-pills in a house, which served as a 'bunker', in Hellersdorf. Two men, aged 19 and 23 were arrested. No fun in Hellersdorf.

*(translated from German into English by Dylan Esler)*

### Notes

- 1 Translator's Note: 'Mitte' is the name of the central area of Berlin, but is also an adjective, meaning 'centre'; 'Helle' is an adjective meaning 'light', but also is short for the area of Hellersdorf.
- 2 Ingo Arend 'Profane Andacht' Kunstforum International #139 Ruppichterth, 1998. p.458
- 3 [Genußmittel means delicate food, wine, cigars, etc.]
- 4 [Global cities in compared celebrations]
- 5 'Return-before-compensation' refers to the dealings with properties after the so-called reunification of East and West Germany, which had been expropriated during the GDR: Before compensating the former landlords, the state must transfer the properties back to them. However, the clarification of properties, for instance, which had once belonged to former Jews, proved to be extremely complicated.
- 6 Anne-Kathrin Wolf 'clubland, sozialer brennpunkt des monats' Partisan #19 1997. A free booklet which oscillates between partying and politics.
- 7 Promotional slogan of the accommodation building society Hellersdorf.
- 8 As a comparison: in the poorest area Friedrichshain, forty percent of the population has a net income of 1,800 Marks, which is an average of 2,150 Marks per household.
- 9 Ulrich Domose/Jack Gelfort (eds.) Peripherie als Ort. – Das Hellersdorf Projekt Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Verlagsanstalt, 1999. p.107
- 10 Peripherie als Ort p.50
- 11 T.N.: Period of industrial expansion in Germany. [Gründerzeit is a time of urban boom at the Wilhemenian era in Germany - now Schröder is imagining a renewal...]
- 12 Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Hellersdorf (ed.) Quartierskonzept Hellersdorf: Eine Grosswohnsiedlung wird zum Teil der Stadt Berlin: 1998. pp.8-13
- 13 T.N.: 'Platte' is the shortened form of 'Plattenbauweise', which means the prefab-building-method used by the GDR in order to alleviate the housing shortage. Moreover, 'Platte' is also slang for music-records.
- 14 Quartierskonzept Hellersdorf p.139
- 15 WoGeHe is a housing building society which are organized as associations and govern entire areas.
- 16 Quartierskonzept Hellersdorf p.4
- 17 It isn't an accident that this reminds us of the announced 'Postdamer Platz project' in the centre of Berlin.
- 18 Peripherie als Ort p.7
- 19 Quartierskonzept Hellersdorf p.28
- 20 The only economically serious area was the KaufPark in Eiche with a selling space of 45,000 square metres, which opened in 1994 opposite of Hellersdorf on Brandenburg's border patrol.
- 21 The 'Baukasten' run by MEGA and the WoGeHe serves as an information centre for the local area. It was established for exhibitions and public events, and like the Info-Box at the Postdamer Platz it is intended to advertise the project.
- 22 Hansjorg Gadiant, 'Geld und Geist' [in] Peter Nietzsche, Carl Steckeweh & Reinhard Wustlich (eds.) Centrum 2000-2001: Jahrbuch Architektur und Stadt, Birkhaeuser Verlag, 2000. p.179
- 23 T.N.: 'Estate funds MEGA GbR'.
- 24 Quartierskonzept Hellersdorf p.156
- 25 T.N.: The German 'aufhell' is actually a play of words that combines 'sich aufhalten' (to stay), 'aufhellen' (to lighten) and 'Helle' (short for Hellersdorf).

26 Peripherie als Ort p. 60  
27 T.N.: Bavarian broadcasting company  
28 Centrum 2000-2001: Jahrbuch Architektur und Stadt p.177f