

What's next for Eastern Europe?

◆An artists' squat in East Berlin lends insight into the future of Germany and the Soviet bloc

BY JACK SHULER
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It seemed that the whole night was spent crossing streets on wooden planks, or walking single file through narrow corridors surrounded by copious amounts of construction work.

All of East Berlin appeared to be under siege. They were creating and building, building everywhere. It made travel difficult—too many obstacles, too many dead ends.

"It is just up ahead," said Alex, my Austrian friend who told us that he knew his way around this part of the city. "I was here just last year. You guys will love this club, the DJ's are unreal."

But we couldn't find the club he was looking for; we found another dead end.

"I'm getting tired, I'm gonna head back," said Chris, a guy from Anaheim, more interested in the Dead than the drum and bass we were searching for.

"No, let's just try one more place, the next place we see," said Alex.

So we walked for a little while, past prostitutes in patent leather pumps and fish-net stockings and past more construction.

"What about this bar, Alex? The sign says, Tacheles," I said.

We walked in. The music was right—dark, drum and bass, techno. The walls were covered with beautiful paintings that were also grim and frightening. Dress code appeared to be all black. We ordered drinks and sat around, but soon noticed that everyone was leaving and walking out a back door. Our curiosity was piqued.

Following the herd through this door, everything began changing, shifting to some strange metallic dimension, some otherworld. Behind the bar was an empty lot, about one acre, full of sculptures created from found objects: trees made out of metal chairs, school desks stacked on top of one another, thirty feet high, iron men, and, my favorite, a bus buried head first in the ground. I was enthralled.

As we meandered about, we noticed a red light in a far corner of the sculpture garden and began walking slowly towards it. It rested above an entranceway to another building. Inside this building were several rooms connected by doorways about three feet wide.

The walls were stuccoed, and imitation stalagmites dripped from the ceilings. Glitter and fake gemstones had been pressed into

the stucco, creating awesome patterns, that shook in the dim light. Inside the largest room were two DJs and about 50 people, dancing furiously. The DJs were moving quickly, as if they were feeding on the energy of the dancers. A symbiotic relationship in rhythm and joy sent ecstatic palpitations through the room—something awesome was going on in East Berlin.

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Potsdamerplatz, at one time the center of Berlin, was divided by the Berlin Wall. Now it is reemerging as the new center of Europe, a link between Eastern and Western Europe. It is the largest construction site on the conti-

nent, with hundreds of cranes and thousands of hands being put to work. The construction should be completed by 1999, when the German government returns to Berlin.

Before the government is officially in place, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust will be erected in the center of the city. The idea has been brewing for ten years, but an agreement has yet to be reached. People question whether or not Germany should memorialize its own victims. Most support the effort, though, saying that it should be a monument for Germany to warn future generations of the dangers of hate and fascism.

And this is why Tacheles is so important, because the government may never come to a consensus about a memorial. We found out later that it is not just a bar but an artist cop and squat. All proceeds from the raves and concerts go to support the artists. But the whole sculpture garden will be demolished in the next couple of years if the banks and large corporations have their way.

The garden itself is supposed to remind people of the waste of fascism and the beauty that has emerged since the days of the communist regime. Most passersby might shrug the sculptures off as junk put together by a bunch of crazy, idealistic artists. But if the garden goes, only money and greed will remain. A whole community will be destroyed.

There is hope for Germany. The hope is in the beats of the music, the message of the artwork, and the emotion of the nightlife. The hope is in the coming together of young minds, trying to stave off the greedy hand of capitalism, trying to keep one building, one acre of land open to the artist, to free ideas. And it is always this way, art always fights back, amidst



Today, artwork decorates remnants of the wall that once divided a city.

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When great change occurs nowadays there are always two shady parties involved: those in it for the money and those in it because they are angry. One could argue that there are large contingents from both groups in Berlin. I am grateful to have experi-

enced Tacheles, for now I recognize another group, the artists, the hopeful ones. And maybe they are the hope for the whole world.

Asia recovering from crisis

BY GREGORY RINALDI
Staff Writer

Sony Corporation chairman Norio Ohga recently warned that Japan's economy "is on the verge of collapse." His comments stunned the world, and directed worldwide concern towards Japan's struggling economy.

Last week the Bank of Japan polled consumer confidence at its lowest level in three years. Monday, Ryutaro Hashimoto, Japan's prime minister, hinted at an upcoming plan to aid his nation's economy.

"The economy at the moment can be said to be facing very severe conditions with probably the first accumulation of completely negative factors since World War II," said Hashimoto. This recession in the Japanese economy comes on the heels of the Asian financial crisis that has only recently shown signs of ending.

"The crisis in Asia is not over—not yet. But the approach is working, and there are a number of encouraging signs," said Michael Camdessus, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) managing director, this past Thursday.

Camdessus mentioned that South Korea and Thailand have "made good progress" with economic reforms. He also added that Indonesia risks another financial crisis if unwise reforms there continue.

The Asian economic crisis began last year as stock markets plummeted across southeast Asia. The collapse is mostly traced to a failure in the banking and investment systems of the region. The nations primarily affected were Thailand, South Korea, and Indonesia, although 13 other nations suffered moderate losses as well.

"Over-investment, over-lending, and over-building were the prime causes," stated Lee Hamilton, an Indiana congressman. "This was the largest economic crisis in recent years, far larger than the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s, or the Mexican peso crisis in 1995."

Indonesia's current lack of a reliable program has cost its economy valuable time. The rupiah, its currency, threatens to plummet further in value as inflation increases.

Hashimoto's program for Japan will be unveiled within the next few weeks. Masaru Hayami, governor of the Bank of Japan, is hopeful.

"I expect to see permanent income tax cuts, and I hope to see corporate tax cuts and more efficient public spending," said Hayami.

Last Friday, President Bill Clinton also encouraged Japan to cut taxes. An across-the-board tax cut might aid the Japanese economy and prevent the same sort of inflation that has been haunting Indonesia.