

Axel Bullert was born in the final minutes of World War II. In Berlin. In the basement beneath the hospital in Wilmersdorf. He never met his father. In 1947, his mother moved herself and the baby to Hamburg, where she started working at the Harburg theatre.

Axel lived with his grandmother for a while before his mother gave him into the care of an orphanage, not an unusual arrangement at the time. Later on, he and his mother moved to Neu-Wulmsdorf, where Axel started to show behavioral problems that—also something that was hardly unusual at the time—got him committed to a youth center.

In the early 1960s, he and many other runaways roamed the streets of Hamburg, where the scars of the war were still visible everywhere. One favorite haunt of these voluntarily homeless teenagers was the Palette on ABC-Straße just off Gänsemarkt. When Axel clambered down the stairs to the joint one summer day in 1962, his speechless appeal had already won him many admirers. That summer, however, he became an epiphany for the writer Hubert Fichte, his senior by ten years. Fichte's desire transmuted Axel into the "Rose of Sharon," a protagonist in the Song of Songs, sung by Solomon, who was "sick with love".

Unlike the lyric poet Stefan George, who, around the turn of the twentieth century, created a cult around Maximilian Kronberger, a boy from Munich, Fichte was only peripherally interested in idealization. His love for Axel became Axel's love. Axel's speechlessness became the foundation for the writer's projections: he became a vessel Fichte integrated into his literary oeuvre in forever new variations, including as the writer's alter ego. Yet Axel was by no means a victim. He was very much interested in being part of something. As Ingeborg Bullert described her son, he was, despite his autistic disposition, unwilling and incapable of immersing himself in anything: he needed feedback and valued his effect on others.

After a romantic excursus into seafaring came his first encounter with LSD. The drug presumably served him as a social trigger—Harun Farocki recalls Bullert coming back from a trip to Switzerland with entire hospital packs, to the thrill of the denizens of the basement bar—but it probably also helped him in his struggle against heteronormative rituals.

The American philosopher Terence McKenna has described cannabis, psilocybin, DMT, LSD, and other psychedelics as "catalysts of intellectual dissent." In his book *The Archaic Revival*, he suggested that these drugs were illegal "not because it troubles anyone that you have visions" but because "there is something about them that casts doubts on the validity of reality." This makes it difficult even for patriarchal "dominator" societies to accept psychedelics.

This observation sounds like an echo of Fichte's calls for what he labeled "Verschwulung der Welt," "queering the world." The formula was meant as a shorthand for a utopian scenario in which ritual barriers become permeable or vanish altogether. Ultimately, "queering" means humanization: a vision in which human beings are seen as themselves. Axel and Fichte discussed their bi-sexuality in probing conversations. Fichte championed "ideals not idols"—his desire for a relationship, however, remained unrequited.

Axel found what he believed was the realization of a utopian vision in the American theater company *The Living Theatre*. Founded in 1948 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck, both former students of Erwin Piscator, the *Living Theatre* was a troupe of professional actors as well as amateurs who sought to jolt audiences out of their civilized lethargy with transformative experiences of excess and ecstasy not unlike Artaud's theater of cruelty. Their ambition: "Whatever is yet unborn can be born (through theater)." The group had fled the U.S. for Berlin in 1964 after being prosecuted over a tax dispute. Axel joined the group in 1965, in a double role: as an actor in the troupe's outer orbit and as its designated purveyor of drugs.

He'd begun to professionalize his trade in illegal substances; he was hardly the postwar era's first drug dealer, but he stood out for his excellent access to drugs and information. Captagon and Pervitin (two amphetamine derivatives that were popular with beatniks) and Preludin (a synthetic morphine) were among his basic staples. The segue from psychedelics to uppers and downers was characteristic of the period leading up to what is often described as a paradigm shift in the transition from the 1960s to the 1970s. The juvenile home system had instilled a yearning for freedom in him; magazines like *twen*, meanwhile, capitalized on the same longings. Against what the parents, the war generation, meant when they said "we and you," these young people sought a new "we," but in the oppressive social atmosphere of the time, what was initially a vision of gentleness and unity degenerated into a drift toward radicalism. And radicalism needed no artificial second reality, only clearly labeled "On!" and "Off!" switches.

Soon enough, Axel was involuntarily institutionalized. It was his second stint in a psychiatric hospital; a few years earlier, he had committed himself in the vain hope that he would find illumination in a therapeutic setting (“I’ll take assisted living over living a lie!”). This time he was forcibly admitted after a breakdown; it took the dedicated efforts of a young lawyer, Otto Schily, to get him out. As a condition of his release, the court ordered Axel to stay away from Berlin and return to his mother’s apartment in Hamburg.

As luck would have it, the *Living Theatre* was just then—this was in early 1967—beginning preparations for a production in the main auditorium of Hamburg’s university. Yet the project ended on a disappointing note for Axel: he learned that the ensemble would leave without him for its first appearance in the U.S. after three years in exile. He started shooting up synthetic morphine and made a first attempt to take his own life.

A few days later—on June 27, 1967, three weeks after the murder of Benno Ohnesorg—Axel asked a female friend he knew from Palette to stay with him as he overdosed. Coming home, Ingeborg Bullert found her son dead on her bed. They’d made plans to see Peter Brook’s movie version of Peter Weiss’s *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean Paul Marat* that night. Axel had been very fond of the play, especially the final scene in which the mental asylum inmates led by de Sade threaten to tear down the barrier separating them from the audience—inaugurating the triumph of irrationality and the unconscious over Marat’s cool reason and the social principle he represents.

Helmut Schmidt

The first spy mirrors were installed in 1964, when Helmut Schmidt, who would later become chancellor of West Germany, was Hamburg’s senator of the interior; the last mirror was placed in the public bathroom on Rathausmarkt in 1973, after the second reform of section 175 of the German penal code had decriminalized homosexual acts. The authorities argued that observations of public bathrooms were necessary to put a stop to the “disgusting advances” (police spokesman Peter Kelling) by importunate homosexuals reported by “unsuspecting normal users” of these facilities.

twen & Peter Moosleitners interessantes Magazin

twen also regularly broached political issues such as the Nazi past the majority of West Germans preferred to forget, or the student movement. Its basic tendency was leftist-liberal, and the magazine’s writers moved in the same circles as the makers of *konkret*, *pardon*, and the popular-science periodical *P.M.-Magazin*. In this regard, *twen* may also be regarded as part of the media environment of the extra-parliamentary opposition and, subsequently, the “movement of ’68” broadly conceived.

Behind the green door

Marilyn Chambers is abducted and taken to a sex theater, where she is forced to perform various sexual acts before a masked audience. In the opening scene, a female pantomime appears on the stage with a green door in the back. Back-stage, Marilyn is seduced or hypnotized by Lisa Grant. Then the green door opens and Marilyn is led onstage, where six women undress and sexually stimulate her. Group sex and other scenes follow. Marilyn Chambers says not a single word in the entire film.

St. Pauli at night

Otto Retzer’s pseudo-documentary film *Babystrich im Sperrbezirk* (1983) about the various forms of prostitution shows the director in—usually staged—interviews with underage as well as adult prostitutes, both female and male, in the streets of various German cities (the different locations also prompt funny dialogue in local vernaculars without which the flick wouldn’t be a true *Lisa* Film production). Unfortunately, Retzer’s interviewing technique leaves no room for truly surprising insight. Time and again, his interest, which may well have been genuine, is undermined by his sensationalism.

The room sheet

The two-dimensional universe of images and surfaces may be an evolutionary step forward, but it is not the final destination. It gives way to writing, which satisfies the need for cause-and-effect connections; causality promises order and persuasive explanations. This new universe of writing and history is linear and one-dimensional, accommodating the narrative and process-based logic of beginnings and endings, events and their repercussions and giving rise to the “world of ideas” and the “conceptual universe of texts, calculations, narratives and explanations that serve as projects for non-magical action.”