# Rave Capital:

## Struggles over Space in Berlin's Electronic Music Scene

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**Abstract**

      This thesis examines the evolution and spatial manifestation of Berlin's electronic music scene, particularly its techno and club subculture, as it struggles with the dominant culture of the city for space and the right to the city. Through a historical analysis of Berlin's alternative subcultures, the rise of techno music and rave culture after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the recent changes in the techno scene, the thesis highlights the co-optation and commodification of techno and club subculture by neoliberal government interests and investors, as well as the resistance of the techno subculture to maintain spaces of freedom and self-liberation. By analyzing the dialectical relationship between the underground and the dominant culture, this work illuminates questions of the right to the city and the difficulty and determination involved in fighting against hegemony. The subculture's power to create spaces of heterotopias and to contest mainstream culture offers a unique position in dreaming up alternative visions of the future. The thesis suggests that subcultural spaces should be recognized and preserved as resistance movements in providing alternative lenses and ways of being to envision alternate futures in urban spaces.

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction: The Battle over Berlin**


The first week I lived in Berlin, in early March 2022, was the first week the techno clubs reopened after a long winter of closures due to Covid-19 policies. I was eager to experience the famous nightlife and electronic dance music scene I had heard so much about. Techno music is a fast electronic dance genre that is very popular in Berlin, known for its trance-like beats and computer-driven sounds. As a complete newcomer to the German capital, I went out on Saturday night to find any techno club I could. A friend had mentioned one called Club OST. Located in the deindustrialized outskirts of former East Berlin, the club was one of many techno clubs that had popped up in the far eastern part of the city in the last decade. Excitement had been building across Berlin, as techno fans hadn't been able to dance in a club all winter long and now finally had their chance. I waited in a queue that extended a block and around the corner, gaping wide-eyed at the intense black outfits, fashionable clothes, and wild hairdos I saw in the line and around the neighborhood. Growing up, I had the opportunity to explore southern and western Germany and was quite familiar with German customs and people. What I found in Berlin was something completely different.

I waited two hours in the queue, shivering in the dark, cold March night only to find out as I approached the front, that most everyone in the line had purchased a ticket to the party at Club OST online at least a week in advance. It was sold-out and no tickets were available at the door. A man with a leather jacket and black combat boots, who had bought his ticket two weeks ago, kindly informed us club newcomers about some of the basic "ins and outs" of clubbing in Berlin. I spent all night trying to imagine what it looked like inside those walls, how all the

people waiting out here would dance inside until the sunrise. This was my first taste of the techno world of Berlin, albeit without the music itself; this club was just scratching the surface of a larger subcultural phenomenon.

Another afternoon in Berlin, on a hot Sunday in July 2022, I waited in line for the famous Berghain Club. The queue was composed of ravers from across the world, trying their luck at getting into the world's most exclusive techno club. Weekend techno tourist vacations were common in Berlin, as I met people in various clubs and queues who flew to Berlin to spend all night or all weekend in a big, multi-dancefloor techno club. The dominant clubbing scene I encountered in Berlin followed this general demographic: upper middle-class people from around the globe with disposable income spending their vacation time enjoying Berlin's nightlife. While many of the clubs I went to were in repurposed buildings and warehouses, giving off an underground aesthetic, at the core of the business, the clubs were still money-making institutions with a product (dancing and being in the club all night) they sold to thousands of people.

The entire Berlin techno scene, however, was initially built upon an almost anarchist reclaiming of the city in which freedom, equality, and open space were valued over all else. In the first years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the techno subculture reappropriated and reenvisioned mass amounts of vacant urban space in former East Berlin, taking over abandoned buildings and vacant bunkers and in the process, normalized anti-establishment, anticapitalist, and nonheteronormative ways of being in large parts of the city. Early techno spaces operated apart from the dominant culture, in an autonomous network of artists and music fans, reclaiming the city in the form of illegal, community and art-oriented squats and underground raves. The

dominant techno scene I found in 2022, in contrast, was a mutation of the former, relying on the aesthetics of the early, transgressive techno spirit to advance a profitable business.

The fabled anti-capitalist do-it-yourself (DIY) Berlin techno raves, the raves in secret, abandoned airplane hangars or crumbling factory basements of the early 1990s seemed few and far between, and it was difficult to find these spaces still carved out in the city. The techno clubbing scene now was filled with middle- and upper-class folks, was straighter, and was integrated into mainstream culture and politics. There seemed to be a rub, a tension between the spirit in which techno emerged and the scene it had become. Somehow, privatized techno clubs have become the location of networking and professional development, a place for well-off folks to spend their extra income – a stark contrast from the anarchist and leftist roots in which the techno rave was born.

It was only later in my time in Berlin that I started to find the pockets of underground, alternative techno subculture, the spaces carved out, although sometimes only temporarily, where the subculture could practice its alternative ideologies and resist the ever-increasing encroachment of neoliberal capitalism and corporate interests in contemporary Berlin.

For instance, one warm summer day, I decided to go to Volkspark Humboldthain in the Wedding neighborhood to enjoy the sunset. The park has massive flak towers, remnants of World War II air defense strategies, on top of a hill with a great view of the city. When I hiked to the top of the towers, I stumbled upon an open-air, DIY rave. Hundreds of people had gathered to dance to techno music played by a traveling busking duo with keyboards, drum machines, loudspeakers, and a fog machine (Image 1). This techno rave was everything the tourist club events were not: open, free, public, not advertised, transgressive, and subversive to the dominant form of clubbing. The techno fans took the space of the park and the flak towers and transformed

it into a dance floor for the evening. That day, although I came across the event accidentally, I joined in gleefully, dancing on top of the tower in community with other techno music lovers, watching the sun set over Berlin.

This rave in the park was only one of many examples I encountered of the subculture still reclaiming spaces in the city. By remaining active, the techno subculture is visibly challenging a neoliberal government that has a narrow vision of the city's future. The subculture is standing up for its city, for its inhabitants, trying to preserve the alternative, queer, and leftist character of much of Berlin.

In my six months living in Berlin, I gained a large appreciation for the genre as well as the accompanying values and practices of the subculture. I found community in the techno subculture and felt the emotional power of the movement. However, while in Berlin, I also noticed some larger issues at play in the techno world. The city and the subculture often came into conflict. Reflecting on my experience in Berlin has led me to the central questions of this thesis. Throughout this thesis, my guiding questions are how have techno music fans produced space in contemporary Berlin to advocate for a right to the city? What does this reveal about the ties between the production of space, geography, and struggles over culture in a time of neoliberalism? By a right to the city, I am referring to the "argument for profoundly reworking both the social relations of capitalism and the current structure of liberal-democratic citizenship" in urban space (Purcell 2002, 101). Despite my personal connection to the techno scene, I aim to analyze and answer these questions from a more neutral perspective.

*Image 1: Pop-up open air rave in Volkspark Humboldthain*

Over the past three decades, Berlin, Germany's capital and home to nearly 4 million

people, has built a reputation for being the techno capital of the world and the nightlife capital of

Europe. Techno music emerged in Detroit in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but Berlin quickly

became the global center of the genre. It is important to note that techno is a term that only

covers one genre of many electronic dance music (EDM) genres popular in Berlin today. Drum

and Bass, House, Gabbar, Bass, Afrohouse, Hardcore, Garage, and many other types of

electronic dance music have become popular, have gained followings in clubs, and have their

own subcultures within the scene. Many of these subcultures overlap. However, the city's close

relationship with EDM started mainly with techno, and therefore throughout the thesis I refer to

the techno subculture as an overarching term for the alternative communities, artists, and people involved in the underground EDM scene in Berlin.

Since the late 1980s, techno music fans have worked to create and define alternative spaces of nonconformity through rave events and the accompanying lifestyles. However, since the reunification of Berlin in 1989, the city has promoted various efforts to corporatize and commodify the techno subculture in pursuit of profit. Vast trends of gentrification have disrupted and displaced many communities in the city, as historically leftist and alternative neighborhoods, from Kreuzberg and Neukölln in former West Berlin to Friedrichshain and Prenzlauer Berg in former East Berlin, have undergone dramatic transformations in politics, demographics, and rent prices.

Music, nightlife and leftist politics have long been intertwined in Berlin, from the cabaret of the 1920s to the punk of the 1980s. The techno movement inherited the long tradition of producing counter-hegemonic spaces in Berlin through music, fostering spaces of resistance and spaces of hope. The subcultural fabrics are, however, at risk of dissolving in the neoliberal "creative city" of contemporary Berlin. Nonetheless, despite the privatization and commercialization of techno music spaces, techno music fans are still finding liminal and transient spaces of resistance today.

This thesis is a case study of a subcultural movement led by people that desired a life alternative to the heteronormative, capitalist world through music, art, dance, community, and celebration, how they tried to bring that to fruition, and how they fought with the dominant ideology to survive. This is also, however, a case study of a state, hegemonic force working to capitalize on a subcultural protest movement, working to drain the subculture's political power while earning money from the movement's foundations. I argue that the city of Berlin and the

techno subculture are in a dialectical relationship, as the subculture has been both co-opted and shown resistance to the hegemonic culture. It has been a two-sided struggle, and the reactions and interactions between the two sides have created the spatial configuration of the techno scene one finds today. The messy yet dynamic cultural phenomenon of Berlin's techno and clubbing culture is an ongoing result of these forces and processes.

I began this research project thinking I would illuminate the leftist, underground techno scene in Berlin, showing how people use the music and the spaces of techno to fight for a different politic, a different way of life than the dominant capitalist culture in Berlin. However, I discovered that it was not that simple. Techno spaces are contested and messy. In the same rave or protest or club, there are all sorts of people and factors at play. There are definitely political activists fighting for a right to the city and alternative ways of being, but there are also professionals looking to further their careers, hedonists simply wanting to party and experiment with drugs, tourists coming in to check out the scene, and many more.

Berlin and the struggles over space in the techno music scene is at the heart of this thesis, but at a wider scale, this thesis aims to discuss the relationship between dominant culture and transgressive subculture, the spatiality of resistance and transgression, and the implications of the right to the city in today's urban centers. As geographer Denis Cosgrove notes, a study of culture is really a study of power (1989, 124). Cosgrove discusses the relationship between different groups of power, between dominant cultures and subcultures.

When discussing cultural practices and cultural struggles, it is important to keep in mind that culture is produced. Humans are constantly producing and reproducing culture. As geographer Don Mitchell argues, culture, as a product, is farmed for profit in the capitalist system and thus should be thought of in a political economy framework (2000, 73). From the

lens of political economy, culture is a realm of economic production, creating commodities and products to circulate capital. Furthermore, behind all "cultures" are different arrays of power. Culture, or rather the *idea* of culture, is a tool of power in which dominant and alternative ways of seeing are advanced. In analyzing the production of culture rather than just "culture" itself, one can better understand struggles over power, contestations of urban space, and social relations.

Culture is struggled over, and the dominant and the subdominant act in different ways to implement their ideologies. Ideology is defined as an overall representation and system of a society; its past, present, and future are integrated into a complete worldview (Mitchell 2000, 78). The dominant power seeks to maintain power through the reproduction of culture. The dominant power aims for cultural hegemony; in other words, it wants the dominant culture and associated values and practices to come across as invisible or as common sense (Cosgrove 1989, 124). Furthermore, the dominant culture builds an ideology by projecting "an image of the world consonant with their own experience, and to have that image accepted as a true reflection of everyone's reality" (Cosgrove 1989, 128). One way a dominant culture does this is by embracing and co-opting a subculture, morphing it into something within its domain. The image or actions of a subculture in defiance to a dominant culture are often subsumed by the dominant culture, lessening the political power of the subculture.

Meanwhile, subdominant cultures, or subcultures, seek to challenge the status quo and offer alternative possible visions of the future (Cosgrove 1989, 132). Subdominant cultures build power by transgressing accepted social behaviors or normal codes of conduct established by the dominant culture. When these acts of transgression are enacted with intent and purpose, forms of resistance to the dominant culture emerge.

Mitchell (2000, 148) defines acts of resistance as an "attempt to redefine or break down the structures of power that govern resisters' lives, to create a new world out of the shell of the old." Transgression is defined as "crossing a boundary" with intent of being noticed (Mitchell 2000, 160). Different layers of power align with different cultures, and the dominant and subcultures are in a constant dialectic state. They both inform each other and exist because of the other. The subculture, the "other", or the "weak" uses tactics as a strategy of resistance. Tactics are a "maneuver within the enemy's field of vision" and "within enemy territory" (De Certeau, 1984). Tactics are blows within existing systems that seek to alter or transform the hegemony.

This brings us to the politics of culture. Mitchell defines subdominant tactical politics as "acts that transgress, acts that throw into question the 'taken-for-granteds' of social life" (2000, 159). Resistance to cultures or hegemony is thus a political act with intention – intention with actions directed against a certain entity with the goal to change it (Mitchell 2000, 159).

Contestation of culture is a contestation of power, and this often expresses itself spatially; cultural struggles are often expressed through spatial struggle. The ways in which people try to control their own narrative and the production of new cultural spaces, over its "control, its production, who is allowed in… and what constitutes transgression of that putative purity" is a dialectic and an issue of cultural politics (Mitchell 2000, 170).

The spaces created and envisioned by resistance movements and subdominant cultures can be seen through the lens of Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of "heterotopias." Heterotopias are places in our society that create a space of illusion that exposes every real space as still more illusory. These places create a space that is "other". Heterotopias are counter-sites, "an enacted utopia where the real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented,

contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986, 24). Thus, using the idea of heterotopias is useful for investigating the spaces of resistance that the techno subculture struggles over.

Music and pop culture have also often been vehicles of resistance and protest. From the Vietnam War era of demonstration festivals like Woodstock to the anti-establishment, underground punk shows in the 1980s, people have used music to express struggle and unite a larger community of resistance against the dominant culture (Kutschke 2015).

All in all, the debate over cultural and spatial struggles in urban space comes down to the debate over the "right to the city." The right to the city, a term first introduced by Henri Lefebvre in 1968, takes on many different forms, but generally, it is the call for people to be able to define how they want to use urban space. It is best understood in how we use urban spaces, placing less emphasis on market values. The right to the city is a response to neoliberal urbanism to better empower urban dwellers (Purcell 2002, 99). As geographer Mark Purcell states, it "reorients decision-making away from the state and toward the production of urban space" (2002, 101). The right or ability to express a behavior or practice an ideology, the right to practice alternate forms of being, of time, or of sociality is contested and always shifting. What is accepted and expected, who is allowed to enter certain spaces, and, most importantly in this thesis, how the struggles are expressed spatially are all issues around the right to the city.

As I move forward, it is important to note that Berlin is a city that has been written about countless times. There are many books surrounding the musical history of the city which provide valuable insight into the city's tradition of being a place of musical innovation and subcultural relevance, such as Melanie Schiller's *Soundtracking Germany*, Theo Lessour's *Berlin Sampler*, Paul Hockenos's *Berlin Calling*, and Tobias Rapp's *Lost and Sound*. There has also been plenty

of work written on the changes in Berlin with neoliberal policies and how the techno scene has been affected.

There are two general narratives about the contemporary techno scene. Some argue that the techno subculture still has a powerful position as a subculture to contest and resist the dominant culture and massive economic changes, and thus, the techno subculture should be preserved (see Novy and Colomb 2014, Flakin 2022, Schofield and Rellensmann 2015, Bader 2010). Other authors claim that the techno subculture has morphed into a depoliticized and corporatized scene for the creative class, tourists, and upper-middle class people, becoming a tool for the city to grow economically (see Oktay 2014, Stahl 2014, Perry 2019, Garcia 2016).

Despite the valid criticism of the contemporary Berlin techno scene and its fans becoming depoliticized and gentrified, this thesis illuminates the still-remaining leftist, anti-establishment and underground elements of the scene. Resistance among the techno community still exists, as the subculture shifts and adapts to self-preserve and counter the capitalist and corporate encroachments from the city. The Berlin underground techno scene is thus an expression of resistance against capitalist development and gentrification.

My thesis contributes to the existing literature in that it analyzes techno fans' use of space in resistance to gentrification and the dominant, hegemonic culture. There has been little discussion on the spatial elements of the changing techno subculture and how techno fans have produced spaces of resistance. This thesis brings in the spatiality of that resistance. Struggle over culture is spatial, and therefore, analyzing the spatiality of the techno music dialectics is imperative. This thesis also brings the right to the city into the discussion.

Going forward, my methods for this project include archival research on the history, politics, and music scene of Berlin. In addition, I draw from my own knowledge and experience

living in Berlin and interacting closely with the techno scene. I also interviewed contacts from Berlin who are active in the techno subculture. Additionally, I have gathered information and data from online club event postings, message boards, and artist collectives on social media platforms.

To give an overview of the following chapters, Chapter 2 turns to the question of how the city of Berlin became a place of the alternative and of the creative. I investigate the historical factors that laid the foundation for the techno scene. Ranging from the decadent cabaret and queer, artistic scene of the 1920s Weimar Republic Berlin to the Cold War era anti-establishment activism and punks, I illuminate the precedence and tradition in Berlin as a place for leftism, queerness, subcultural production, and resistance spaces.

Chapter 3 addresses the massive changes in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall as well as the formation and rise of the techno music subculture. The chapter examines how exactly techno music became centered in Berlin in the late 1980s and early 1990s and goes on to discuss the early years of underground raves, street parades, and clubs. The chapter also touches on the broader changes in Berlin during the mid-1990s, when the techno subculture was becoming commercialized and commodified by corporations as the city transitioned back into the capital of the reunified country.

Chapter 4 wrestles with the intensifying struggles over space and gentrification in contemporary Berlin. The chapter asks how the state has institutionalized techno as well as how techno music fans have fought for the right to the city in recent years. From protesting large scale development to illegal raves to the migration of the subculture out of the city, electronic dance music fans continue to resist the hegemony in creative ways. The chapter also addresses the

changing techno subculture demographics and the more recent economic and development policies from the city.

In chapter 5, my conclusion, I review the large takeaways from the thesis as well as offer further questions and suggestions for future work. I also discuss the implications of the right to the city on urban livelihoods and illuminate the present-day power and positionality that techno music spaces still have to create spaces of self-expression, personal freedom, and continued resistance to the dominant culture.

**Chapter 2**

**Alternative Berlin: The Production of Counter-hegemonic Space from 1919-1989**

While many consider Berlin the techno music capital of the world today, the techno scene in Berlin and the genre itself is relatively new, dating back to the late 1980s. However, Berlin has long been a space of the alternative, the creative, and the artistic. The city also has a long history of leftist and revolutionary activism. The messy struggle for space we see in contemporary Berlin has its roots in the early 1900s.

Starting in the 1920s in the Weimar Republic era, Berlin became the center for queer and leftist Germany as well as a nightlife and party capital. The Weimar Republic was the time between Germany's defeat in World War I in 1919 and the rise of Hitler's National Socialist Regime in 1933. Following World War I, Germany was broken and exhausted, and hyperinflation left the country flailing economically. After a few years, however, with the help of international aid, the country stabilized and an era of prosperity and creative innovation took place, much of it concentrated in the capital city of Berlin. Thus, the Weimar Republic's famous creative, nightlife, and alternative scene emerged in Berlin.

In the 1920s, with artistic movements such as Dada and New Objectivity, Berlin was a center for innovative cinema, theater, and visual arts. Additionally, the city attracted intellectuals and creatives from across the world and an open-minded and liberal scene exploded.

It was also during this time that Berlin gained the reputation of a nightlife and entertainment capital across greater central Europe, especially with the large cabaret scene. Nightlife tourism also increased in the 1920s, as Berlin began advertising itself as a "den of vice" for Europe (Hewitt, 2021). Prostitution and drugs were common in the city. In the Weimar

Republic, with its many clubs and cabarets, Berlin branded itself as a party capital and attracted tourists from across Europe looking for a hedonistic night out.

Additionally, the city became a haven for queer folks experiencing persecution in other parts of the country. In 1871, Germany implemented a criminal code making all homosexual acts between men illegal (Flakin 2022, 215). Notably, the law didn't include women because the male lawmakers could "not picture what that would even look like" (Flakin 2022, 215). Nonetheless, queer people across Germany had to keep relations secret and pushed against systematic discrimination through use of spaces of resistance in the Berlin club scene. Berlin provided a space of loosened gender norms compared to other more rigidly enforced German cities. As seen in the many clubs and spaces for queer folks during this time, Weimar Republic Berlin was notoriously sexually free. Berlin was what "sexual daydreams wanted to be. You could find almost anything there, and maybe everything" (Red. 2022). In the clubs and queer communities of Weimar Berlin, queer folks came together and created spaces where hegemonic social behavior was not as enforced and identities across the spectrum were more easily accepted.

Around 300 gay clubs were opened in the 1920s across Berlin (Flakin 2022, 220). The Weimar-era clubs featured drag shows and same-sex dancing; cross-dressing and androgyny were culturally accepted and prevalent. Furthermore, queer and lesbian magazines such as *Frauenliebe* also provided information on club and community events (Flakin 2022, 229).

Weimar Berlin was not only the queer and artistic center of Germany, but it was also a political and intellectual hotbed. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s a strong faction of communist and leftist thinkers centered themselves in Berlin, especially in the Neukölln neighborhood. Neukölln was a red stronghold, and in 1932, the last year of elections in the Weimar Republic, 39.3% of voters in that district voted for the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). The Social

Democrats (SPD), another workers' party, got 26.2% of the votes. Thus, around two-thirds of people in Neukölln voted for the two worker's parties in 1932 at the cusp of the rise of the Nazis (Flakin 2022, 102).

Another notable event in this era of Berlin leftism was the 1929 Blutmai (Bloody May). Berlin had been celebrating the worker-rights-centered May Day since 1890, but in 1929, Berlin's police chief Karl Zörgiebel prohibited May Day from happening (Flakin 2022, 120). For this reason, the proletarian May Day rally in Neukölln attracted thousands of participants in protest of the ban. The demonstration ended with a bloody two-day battle between workers and the police. Police shot 11,000 rounds of ammunition and killed between 32 and 38 civilians (Flakin 2022, 120). May Day has continued to have significant importance for leftist politics in Berlin ever since.

The strong queer, artistic, and leftist community of Weimar Berlin, however, faced hostility and decreased in visibility following 1932 and the rise of the Nazi regime, which strongly opposed and suppressed the free-minded, creative scene of the Weimar Republic. With the growth of the authoritarian, intolerant Nazi Regime, the decadent, liberal clubs and cabarets were shut down (Hewitt, 2021). Conditions worsened for queer people, as many were arrested and later violently executed in the Nazi death camps.

In the early 1930s, Nazi powers transformed former spaces of alternative social norms and resistance in the famous clubs like Moka Efti and Eldorado into meeting spaces for the party's interests (Hewitt 2021). This transition officially marked the end of the Weimar Republic. Berlin entered a new phase of history, one marked by an intolerant and bloody authoritarian regime which suppressed subversion, queerness, and radical politics.

It was only after World War II, in the messy, split-city Cold War years, when Berlin slowly re-emerged as a city of leftist politics, queerness, and nightlife. These Cold War years of art and activism laid the groundwork for the post-reunification techno revolution and the Berlin we see today.

*Cold War Berlin*

Cold War Berlin, roughly from the end of World War II (1945) to the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), marked a period of spatial and ideological division across Berlin. West Berlin, partially governed by the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, became an island-city of capitalism and Western ideology surrounded by the Soviet Union and its socialist satellite state of East Germany (German Democratic Republic, or GDR). Global western powers heavily funded West Berlin, as the capitalist United States wanted to maintain the strategic location close to the Soviet Union, furthering their fight against communism. Tensions increased as East Germans flocked to the West to escape the harsh living conditions under the largely dysfunctional socialism of East Germany. Thus, in 1961, the Soviet Union constructed the Berlin Wall to keep the East Germans in, and the divisions across the city became not only ideological but also physical.

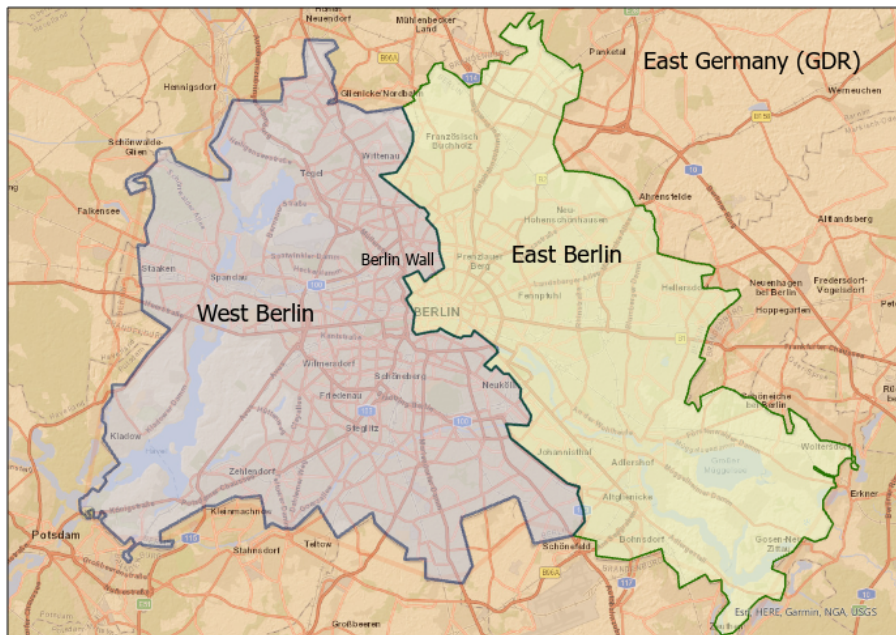*Image 2: Map of Cold War Germany, with West and East Germany (GDR)*



*Image 3: Map of Cold War Berlin. The Berlin Wall completely surrounded West Berlin.*

Although West Berlin was an outpost of the capitalist world, many people in the city began opposing this ideology. The 1960s marked a time in which many young, queer, and leftist people started reoccupying West Berlin. Following World War II, West Berlin had a unique status as an occupied zone. While American, French, and British troops were all stationed across West Berlin, the city was not under the military supervision of broader West Germany. Therefore, those living in West Berlin were precluded from the draft of the Federal Republic of Germany (i.e. West Germany), which attracted antimilitarist young people from West Germany. This specifically attracted leftists, pacifists, artists, and queer people to the city (Kutschke 2015). Many of these people found their way to Kreuzberg, a neighborhood in West Berlin, which at the time was considered by many to be a slum.

Kreuzberg was geographically situated in the city in a way that allowed a particular community to form. Kreuzberg was divided into two postal codes, SO 36 and 61, and the differences between the two areas remain today. Kreuzberg 61 is slightly wealthier and has a reputation for being cleaner and more family-friendly. Kreuzberg 36, on the other hand, is known for its large Turkish and Arabic communities as well as its leftist and artistic communities.

*Image 4: View of Kottbusser Tor from the U-Bahn station. Kottbusser Tor is a central area in Kreuzberg 36. The area has been central in the squatting movement and housing rights activism. Source: Wikimedia Commons*
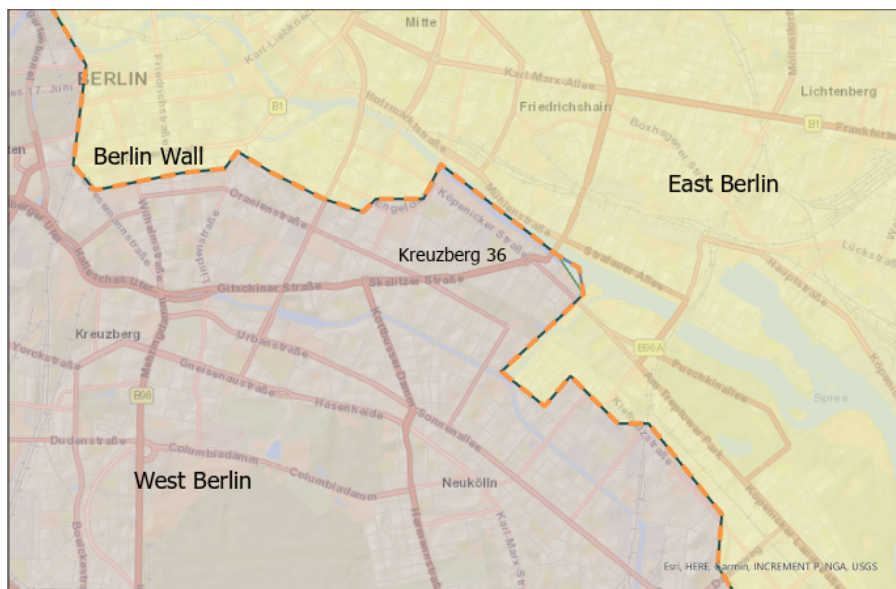


*Image 5: Kreuzberg was bordering the Wall, sometimes surrounded by three sides.*

In the Cold War era, the Wall cornered in Kreuzberg 36, surrounding the neighborhood on three sides (see Image 5). This neighborhood specifically attracted a vibrant leftist and queer community, and many people moving to the city looking to join the leftist communities came to Kreuzberg 36. With very cheap rents and plenty of open apartments, Kreuzberg 36 started to transform.

Kreuzberg became the prominent space of alternative Berlin subculture, but by the late 1960s, across all of West Berlin, many different people started becoming agitated with the hyper-capitalist economy and war-centered politics circulating around the West, especially with the Vietnam War in full swing. For example, in the late 1960s, the student movement gained a lot of momentum across all of West Berlin. Led by Free University student Rudi Dutschke, students gathered in large numbers through the Socialist German Student League, protesting against the Vietnam War and pushing an anticapitalist agenda against what they saw as an authoritarian state of West Germany (Flakin 2022, 132). The Red Army Faction (RAF), a more extreme and confrontational group, grew out of this movement and eventually split away from the more peaceful and theoretical approaches of the initial student movement (Flakin 2022, 143).

Furthermore, in 1967, the famous Kommune 1 was also founded. Regarded as Berlin's first living commune, a group of free-thinkers and socialist idealists emerged from the student movement, living communally in an apartment together (Carrasco 2022). The commune occupied the empty apartment of author Hans Enzensberger and later the empty apartment of author Uwe Johnson while the writers were abroad (Carrasco 2022). Kommune 1 was a model of living in opposition to the nuclear family associated with the conservative politics from the West. The commune started a trend in West Berlin of many more communes and squats practicing other forms of social living, defying the dominant capitalist culture (Carrasco 2022).

In the 1970s, people on the left continued to struggle with the dominant culture and fought to preserve a more just and equal city. For example, housing rights and anti-gentrification activism emerged in Kreuzberg as early signs of gentrification started appearing, an issue that the neighborhood has only had to deal with more and more since then. Specifically, the "battle committee" of 1973 combatted Berlin's plans to convert the Bethanien hospital, located in the Kreuzberg 36 neighborhood, into an artists' center targeting middle-class people and intellectuals (Kutschke 2015). The Bethanien hospital was in a central location in Kreuzberg and helped many working-class people. Led by local avant-garde musicians, the activists feared the development and transformation of the building would displace local workers to the outer edges of the city.

Anti-capitalist behavior and action continued in the 1970s, as the squatter movement continued to grow. Occupying buildings, radical leftists and local shop owners alike prevented the city from tearing down old buildings and building new ones which often had rent four times as expensive as the old buildings (Flakin 2022, 159). The movement expanded in the 1980s, with around 5,000 people squatting in 170 buildings (Flakin 2022, 160). Many of these buildings were in Kreuzberg.

*Image 6: Former squatter house in Berlin-Mitte. The building was cleared by police in 2009. Source: Wikimedia commons*

Cold War West Berlin also saw the reemergence of queer visibility. Despite the struggles and persecution during World War II, queer activism continued in West Berlin. In 1971, the Homosexual Action West Berlin (HAW) was founded and attracted a wide variety of people among the West Berlin left. The goal of this group was to "liberate homosexuals alongside the working class" (Flakin 2022, 226). HAW founded the SchwuZ, the first formally open gay club of its kind (Flakin 2022, 227). Also, Berlin's first pride parade was held in 1979, by the name of Christopher Street Day (CSD) (Flakin 2022, 227). All in all, the queer movement remained closely aligned with the leftist movement in Berlin throughout the Cold War years.

The 1970s also marked another time of Berlin creativity and artistic importance. With rockstars like David Bowie and Iggy Pop as well as famous cabaret performers such as the legendary transgender figure Romy Haag all living and creating music and art in the city, Berlin again was a city full of creative producers and queer communities (Hockenos 2017). German Punk music also gained a lot of popularity in the isolated island-state of West Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s, with Kreuzberg and notorious punk club SO36 (named after the postal code in Kreuzberg it was located in) being the center of that underground subcultural movement in West Berlin.

*Berlin Punk*

The punk subculture of the early 1980s in both East and West Berlin laid a strong foundation for the techno subculture that followed. The German punk subculture had a DIY ethos, from playing old, found instruments to sewing one's own clothes. The ethos also meant that anyone could make music or clothing, despite income, sexuality, or "closeness" to the scene (Hockenos 2017, 71). The punks of the 1980s saw the older antiauthoritarian rebels like the 1968 student movement and Kommune 1 as institutionalized and integrated into mainstream politics (Hockenos 2017, 70). Therefore, the punk revolution brought about a new energy of anti-establishment, anti-capitalist action, building further on the discussions the student movement had begun. Additionally, punk music was seen by many as the antidote to the commercialization of the rock'n'roll of the 70s, breaking conventions of traditional society with its "willful unprofessionalism" and "raw edge" (Hayton 2017, 357).

The West Berlin punk scene created another era of experimentation in party styles as well as gender identity. As Hockenos states, "everybody was challenging gender and sexuality cliches

with what they wore," (2017, 77). The re-queering of West Berlin was in full force and was reminiscent of the Weimar Republic. As punk was critical of mass consumption, the market economy, and the culture industry, it carried the anarchist spirit of past radical movements in Berlin into a new generation (Hockenos 2017, 79). The punk movement differed from the 1968 activism in that the 1968 movement was driven by heavy leftist scholarship and diligent community organizing, while the 1980s punk subculture brought about a "jeering, raucous attitude of defiance into West Berlin," (Hockenos 2017, 81). Both generations, however, shared similar goals of direct democracy, autonomous communities, and carried a deep distrust of political parties.



*Image 7: Photo taken in Kreuzberg 36 during May Day celebrations near Mariannenplatz on May 1, 2022. Punk music, fans, and politics can still be found across Kreuzberg today.*

Punk music also played a role in subversive East Berlin political movements. East Berlin's social environment was marked by authoritarian socialism, heavy policing, and deep surveillance. This, in turn, led to very controlled art, cinema, and pop culture. What East Berliners consumed was heavily monitored. Fearful of Western capitalist ideologies filtering their way into the minds of their citizens, the East German government was highly skeptical of Western media. However, radio waves were not always controllable, and through these radio waves from West Berlin, punk music found its way into East Berlin and gained a strong subcultural following (Hayton 2017). As the East Berlin government became less influential over its citizens and living conditions suffered under the authoritarian socialist government, spaces of punk music in the East became spaces of defiance and subversion of the GDR's politics.

Punk music traveled across the Wall, making the divisions across the city more porous than earlier. Punk bands and fans from West Berlin were known to travel across the Wall into the East, albeit undercover, and play pop-up shows in East Berlin. East Berlin punk bands would also perform for West Berlin punks when the fans traveled into the East. Music, fashion, and news were exchanged in these interactions (Hayton 2017, 356). The punk scene was slowly merging the two halves of the city, shedding opposing ideologies and demonstrating to people in the scene that people were like them on the other side of the Wall. The GDR tried denouncing punk as a product of capitalist society and tried to stifle the growing subculture in the East by preventing the playing of punk music on the radio, but these efforts only increased the East Berliners desire to hear the music and participate in the transgressive practices of punk.

To illustrate the ideological war and messiness across the Wall in Berlin during the late years of the Cold War, punk was at the same time in the East portrayed as a capitalist invasion of socialist society and in the West seen as an anti-capitalist and anarchist movement led by people

in fierce opposition to the Western institutions. On both sides of the Wall, however, members of the punk subculture were resisting their government and fighting for individuality (Hayton 2017). Deficiencies of state socialism in the East and deficiencies of capitalism in the West drew people to punk as the genre was an antidote and initiative to fight the substandard reality of the divided city (Hayton 2017, 365).

By the mid-1980s, punk music had matured and grown into new genres of post punk and new wave. The punk movement decreased in potency, as big stars like Nick Cave made the music and energy around the scene more mainstream and macho, going against the original ethos of a genre with no stars (Hockenos 2017, 94). However, the punk movement had done a lot for the city, as Berlin was now, once again, on the map for "politically minded creative types and as a place where trends were born" (Hockenos 2017, 93). As noted in the next chapter, only a few years later does Berlin again produce another subculture-oriented creative movement with the birth of techno.

Despite the waning power of punk, increasing action and visibility from the left continued into the late 1980s and can be seen most clearly in the 1987 May Day riots. May Day celebrations and demonstrations in Berlin, as discussed earlier, have been violent and, at times, deadly (such as Blutmai in 1929). However, the revolutionary attitudes one sees during leftist demonstrations and Labor Day protests in Kreuzberg in contemporary Berlin were largely reignited by the 1987 Kreuzberg May Day riots. In 1987, social conditions in the divided country were already tense, as the divided Germany was going through a low economic period. Organized by anarchist and radical left groups calling for better working conditions and housing rights, the 1987 May Day demonstration in Kreuzberg 36 turned violent, as protesters clashed with police on the streets (Dundon 2018). That night, cars and buildings around the

neighborhood burned. This battle marked a turning point in Berlin's history, and every year on May Day since then, protesters have gone out to the streets of Kreuzberg 36 with a revolutionary spirit, demanding for better worker rights and battling with the police.

Two years later, Berlin went through two massive changes that echoed across the world. First, with new technologies, instruments, and sounds, most notably drum machines, sequencers, and turntables, techno music took over the artistic and musical world in Berlin, and new forms of nightlife, resistance, and community formed. Second, in November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, and the two halves of the city started to put their ideological differences behind them as the city finally reunified after decades of separation. Berlin entered a new era in the 1990s, one marked with rapid social, economic, and spatial change. Throughout this process, techno music was the soundtrack.

## Chapter 3

## Unifying Berlin: the Rise of Techno and the Claiming of Space

Today, Berlin and techno music are intertwined, as the genre and the subculture have rooted themselves deep into the identity of the city. Following the fall of the Wall, the techno subculture played a crucial role in reunifying and redefining the city, pushing for new spatial imaginaries and uses of urban space. Yet, as I demonstrate in this chapter, the techno scene and the club scene have been contested from their start, shifting spatially across the city and constantly struggling over autonomy, ideology, and space.

The story of the techno music scene's rise to importance in Berlin starts, however, in the deindustrialized, urban landscape of Detroit, where the genre formed its roots. In the 1970s and 1980s, Black teenagers in Detroit started using basements, garages, and empty spaces to make a brand-new genre of music: Detroit Techno. The computer technology that led to the shutdown of factories in the city was some of the same technology that these teenagers appropriated to make techno music. Furthermore, many of the early techno sounds drew inspiration from the hum of traffic and drone of the automated factories across the Detroit cityscape.

Techno was, from the start, a political intervention. As Lipsitz (2007, 261) argues, "it is not simply that people retain the capacity for fantasy and self-expression in the face of depersonalization and dehumanization, but even more that the very mechanisms of domination provoke expressions of opposition, alterity, resistance, and transcendence." Techno emerged as a unique, creative response to the urban economic abandonment of Detroit, using those same computer programs and tools to subvert and oppose the economic devastation. Furthermore, Lipsitz (2007) argues that oppositional movements such as the techno subculture succeed

because they see weakness in the fully integrated systems of production and consumption. After the capitalist growth machine exercised its unforgiving spatial fix on Detroit and moved industry elsewhere, Black youth of the city reclaimed their "abandoned" city through the sounds of techno music. In the Detroit techno scene, large corporations were "antithetical to the interests of the techno scene" (Lipsitz 2007, 250).

Detroit was filled with abandoned factories, warehouses, and vacant buildings, which were the perfect conditions for underground and DIY style techno parties to form. This new resistance movement brought new life, community, and spatial imaginaries to the city. Likewise, alternative communities in Berlin adopted this strategy of resistance with techno, as Berlin shared many similarities in vacant buildings and "empty" space, using techno music to reclaim space following the fall of the Wall.

Detroit Techno quickly found its way over to Europe and the electronic dance sounds of Detroit merged with proto-techno sounds emerging in Germany, such as with the band Kraftwerk, and a new version of techno music started to develop. Synths, drum machines and sequencers laid the foundation for a new form of German dance music.

However, the music took on much more meaning than just a dance beat. Techno music in Berlin became its own subculture, enveloped with its own political context, as the political tension between East and West Berlin became a driving factor in the music's mutating nature in the late 1980s. The techno subculture of Berlin manifested in particular political and social conditions which increased its power as not only a musical movement, but also as a movement of resistance and alternative visions of an urban future. Just as techno music began to take off in Berlin, the city changed forever as the Wall came down. Using techno music and the rave events

that accompanied it, the people of Berlin made political and social interventions through their claiming of space in reunified Berlin.

*1989 and Reunification*

1989 was a transformative year for techno music on many accords. For one, 1989 marked the first year of the Love Parade, a techno march through the streets of West Berlin (Sextro and Wick 2008). The first Love Parade was only about 150 people, but those 150 danced boldly through the streets of Kurfürstendamm, the main commercial and shopping area of West Berlin, with trucks blasting techno into the city streets (Sextro and Wick 2008). Over the following decade, however, the Love Parade morphed into a massive, global, commercialized street party (I discuss this further later in the chapter).

More obviously in 1989, the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, which forever changed the geography and politics of the city. The fall of the Wall had a massive impact on the techno scene, as the city could now come together as one, bringing the energy from the East Berlin youth into the club scene developing in the West. The overlap of the fall of the Wall with the sudden rise of techno in Berlin only augmented the political importance of techno in the reunification process. With the fall of the Wall came a rush of euphoria across the entire city. A massive party ensued as people from both sides of the Wall came together in disbelief and ecstasy. During this time, what was first an avant-garde and experimental genre of music slowly transformed into an accepted nightclub music and the soundtrack for a post-Wall, alternative Berlin.

Schofield and Rellensmann (2015) claim that divisions between East and West Berlin were broken down through techno, thanks to the democracy of the dance floor and the open politics of the rave. After 28 years of a divided city and divided ideology across the Wall, people

reclaimed the city in the collective experience of techno music. It did not take long for former

East and West Berliners to come together and collaborate on club events and music. For

example, West Berlin DJs would work with party organizers from East Berlin. As techno DJ Paul

van Dyk conveyed, "techno was the first realm of social life where unification actually took

place" (Schiller 2018, 184). Techno dancing itself, the act of different people together on the

dancefloor for hours at a time, also provided a sense of community that was "absolutely free of

ideology" (Schiller 2018, 184). Feelings of equality and freedom echoed across the reunited city

with techno beats as the driving force.

With the fall of the Wall came the liberation of opposing ideologies (Rodgers 2019). In

the last years of East Berlin, there was decreasing trust and interest in politics, as the GDR had

failed to establish many job prospects or education. After the Wall fell, young people from both

sides leaned into the utopian hopes of geopolitical neutrality, of ending authoritarian socialist

aspirations, and of ending capitalism (Lessour 2009, 303). Initially, techno was closely aligned

with the break from past ideology and claimed to be independent from the city's history.

Despite the celebration, the fall of the Wall also produced a sense of loss on all political

sides. With the dissolution of the socialist East Berlin, leftists and socialists had failed on the

GDR political project and were faced with the task of integrating into a fast-paced capitalist

economy. On the other side, right wing politicians didn't have a communist or socialist target

anymore and had to manage integrating the entire city into one functional system. For all these

reasons, the scrambled political atmosphere following reunification was the perfect vacuum for

techno music to rise in popularity and cultural importance.

From the beginning, the techno movement worked to break free from dominant

ideologies. This initially was a result of a split East and West Berlin, in which both sides were

forced to live in ideologically very oppressive systems; westernism and capitalism dominated West Berlin while authoritarian socialism dominated the East. The techno subculture could thus be described in Cosgrove's terms as an emergent subculture (1989, 132). As Cosgrove states, "it is the nature of an emergent culture to offer a challenge to the existing dominant culture, a vision of alternative possible futures" (1989, 132). In reclaiming and repurposing the deindustrialized landscape and urban decay of the city, where many techno events happened initially, as well as leaning into new forms of future-oriented techno music, the techno movement aligns with the futuristic and utopian aspects that often come with emergent cultures. As an emergent culture in Berlin starting properly around 1989-1991, techno was an anticapitalist, antiauthoritarian vision of the future, of autonomy, of freedom, and of a new way to celebrate together.

It is also important to note that from the beginning of techno, queer communities were at the heart of the subculture. Many early techno clubs and raves were claimed and envisioned by queer people, which set a precedent of techno clubs as queer spaces for decades to come.

Berlin techno clubs also developed a unique temporal element early on, as there were no city closing hours like there were in Amsterdam or Hamburg, allowing for clubs to remain open all weekend long with no breaks. High unemployment in East Berlin, especially after reunification, when East Berlin suffered economically as it attempted to integrate into the broader capitalist city, meant no reason to wake up Monday morning. Therefore, parties lasted for days, often beyond the weekend and into Monday morning. This was a bold opposition to the "rigid capitalist version of time that is enforced in any other city in the world" (Schofield and Rellensmann 2015, 121). The techno clubbing experience and practices claimed to be something completely different and new; this manifested itself physically in the transgressive repurposing of vacant space in East Berlin.

*Early Techno Club Spatiality*

Importantly, with the fall of the Wall came the possibilities of utilizing East Berlin spaces for more techno parties and underground clubs. Across the city there were many vacant spaces, but particularly in East Berlin, there were many unused or deserted buildings, bunkers, underground stations, supermarkets, old military grounds, closed-down factories, and ex-army warehouses (Lim 2018; Schiller 2018, 184). Such spaces allowed for many secret, illegal, or underground techno events to occur and facilitated more encounters between East and West Berliners (Schiller 2018, 184). The creative techno subculture flooded into the former East, claiming and changing urban spaces during the early years of reunification.

One contact I interviewed, Christian, moved to East Berlin in 1987 and became very active in the clubbing scene in 1993 (C. Perseke 2023, personal communication). Christian described the "wasteland" that was East Berlin following the fall of the Wall. In one East Berlin neighborhood, Prenzlauer Berg, he notes there were over 6,000 empty flats resulting from so many folks moving out of the East (C. Perseke 2023, personal communication). The migration started even before the Wall fell, with people leaving for West Germany via Hungary. Following the fall of the Wall, even more people left, as many didn't trust that the Wall would truly remain open for very long. They took the new opportunity to flee to the West, leaving entire apartment buildings empty. Christian conveys that these empty flats were in shambles; there was often no running water, and mold and fungi was everywhere. Much of East Berlin had not been renovated since the 1930s. Most buildings were still heated with coal. Restaurants and stores were few and far between. "Bomb gaps" also existed across the city, where empty lots resulting from bombs in World War II were never filled in. These bomb gaps often left buildings standing alone on a block, surrounded by concrete, shrubs, or debris (C. Perseke 2023, personal communication).

Christian describes the large movement of artistic and creative people going into this desolate East Berlin and appropriating the space. Spaces to throw parties and start unofficial clubs were abundant. While many buildings didn't have heating, you didn't really need heating to throw a rave. To throw a techno party, one only really needed some speakers, maybe a strobe light, and a space to do it in. If the space allowed itself to have parties repeatedly without police ending the event, which in East Berlin at the time was not difficult to find, then the organizers would apply for a license to the city for an official club status, arguing that they already had proven the space was appropriate. This is how early East Berlin techno clubs such as Exit, Walfisch, and Eimer came to be.

During the first years of reunification, the Berlin government had a large task at hand, trying to manage the logistical problems of reuniting the city, such as regulating traffic and keeping the economy alive. This allowed for around five years of vast cultural freedom in the techno scene, in which authorities were not strictly shutting down bunker raves, warehouse parties, or the hundreds of squats that formed in East Berlin (Lim 2018).

The squats of East Berlin were closely aligned with the underground techno subculture. Squats and clubs often occupied the same buildings, such as with the important Tacheles squat. Squats provided transgressive forms of housing for the creative and alternative-minded people involved in the techno subculture. They created spaces of community that were not produced or envisioned by the dominant culture. The secrecy surrounding much of the early techno events was also done in part to minimize the influence from the dominant culture.

Initially, underground parties, almost anarchic in nature, were kept secret and were only advertised by word of mouth or with special, small lights marked outside of a building to indicate a pop-up club location in order to keep the parties hidden from the police (Lim 2018).

Shifting locations were convenient for avoiding the mainstream. "These temporary autonomous zones [were] important areas for cultural engagement and production," Schofield and Rellensmann argue (2015, 111). These improvised, underground techno locations are described as the "second city", or a space of liminal subcultural activity (Schofield and Rellensmann 2015, 116). The techno scene converted urban vacant spaces for the explorations and enactments of the scene. As illegal ventures would be shut down or the vacant spaces claimed by techno fans would become redeveloped, techno clubs continued to shift locations and names. The techno scene in the 1980s and early 1990s was constantly moving, operating almost secretly, to maintain its alternative and oppositional character.

However, as the techno scene became more established in the city in the mid 1990s, more and more clubs in former East Berlin started to gain popularity and recognition and would market to a broader audience. Tresor was one of the first official mainstream techno clubs to open in East Berlin following the fall of the Wall (Dicker 2021). The club was located in the depths of an old department store near Potsdamer Platz, which was a vast open, vacant space at the time (now a corporate space filled with the Mall of Berlin and the Sony Center). Tresor became one of the most important locations for techno music in the city, hosting many famous DJs and attracting tourists from across the world.

The clustering of clubs around Leipziger Straße and Potsdamer Platz in Mitte in the mid-1990s marked the first "club mile" in Berlin (Uhlig). This area was still extremely deserted during the daytime, as very little infrastructure or business was in this district. Potsdamer Platz was heavily bombed in World War II and was never properly rebuilt during the years it was in East Germany (Uhlig). The space was otherwise unused and there were "less people on the street during the day than at the night" (Uhlig). At night, however, the big techno clubs like Tresor,

E-Werk, and WMF attracted hundreds of techno fans, transforming the vacant space into a night of thumping bass and drum machines.

The rush of creative activity in East Berlin following the fall of the Wall allowed for techno to spread quickly across the city and cement itself as the transgressive, subcultural movement of the first years of reunification. Through creative repurposing of space, the subculture established itself as a bold, new form of sociality in the new Berlin.

*The Love Parade and the Splitting of the Scene*

The summer of 1991 was another marker of growth for techno in Germany. By 1991, the Love Parade became a large national gathering. For the first time, the techno movement was not just an underground, small subculture in Berlin, but rather seen as a national movement, with Berlin at the center of it all. The entire techno movement became much more connected across the country, as people from other cities traveled to Berlin just to experience techno raves. This event was such a landmark that some coined the summer of 1991 as the "German summer of love" (Sextro and Wick 2008). The Love Parade only continued to grow, solidifying Berlin as the global center of techno music.

Throughout the 1990s, the Love Parade skyrocketed in popularity and experienced a shift from underground to hyper-commercialized. Perry (2019) argues that the Love Parade is a prime example of Berlin adopting neoliberal economic policies post-unification, which in turn made techno music more mainstream and commercialized. For example, in the 1996 Love Parade, there were trends leaning toward eventization, or "the corporate appropriation and promotion of celebrations, festivals, and events for publicity and profits" and the attendance of the parade grew dramatically (Perry 2019, 562). The event became heavily marketed and corporate techno

companies such as Planetcom, Mayday, Low Spirit, and Loveparade GmbH started mutating the festival into a commercialized party (von Thülen 2022).

By 1999, there were over 1.5 million techno fans dancing in Berlin in the Love Parade. The Love Parade became a global event and connected people from across Europe and the world, as techno fans would travel to the rave capital from far and wide to join the party. The city moved the parade from Kurfürstendamm to Strasse 17 Juni, Berlin's historic street full of national symbols. Now, the parade filled the streets around old landmarks of the German nation, such as the Siegessäule and the Brandenburger Tor, merging techno music and the German nation into one image.

The Love Parade started initially as a protest festival and an extension of the subculture's claiming of space, demonstrating for peace and global understanding, but the parade turned into a massive tourist attraction and cultural product for the dominant culture of the city. While the event was commercialized and somewhat stolen from the original movement that created it, the underground techno subculture did not die out. Rather, the techno scene mutated and split, and many in the techno underground went their separate ways, rejecting the new form of mainstream, state-sponsored techno that the new Love Parade represented.

In response to the commercialization of the Love Parade, the Fuck Parade, a counter demonstration from leftist techno fans, emerged in 1997 (von Thülen 2022). Born out of the hardcore techno and gabbar fanbase and the alternative, hardcore electronic club Bunker, the Fuck Parade opposed everything the Love Parade had turned into. The Fuck Parade (first advertised as the Hate Parade) was composed of leftists, punks, and gabbar techno fans who rallied behind the closing of the club Bunker after the club was raided and sold to investment companies.

Bunker repurposed and reclaimed an old World War II air-raid shelter in the Scheunenviertel, right in the center of the city, and gained a large hardcore, underground community. Other popular clubs in the mid-1990s like E-Werk and Tresor were already becoming tourist attractions, but Bunker was still practicing the anarchist, post-Wall, non-marketed style of party. When the club was raided and forced to close in 1996, a feeling of frustration washed over the techno underground, as it was seemingly "no longer possible to occupy these forgotten spaces for ages without anyone taking a closer look" (von Thülen 2022). Divisions over what should be marketable in techno, as seen with the commercialization of the Love Parade, split the community further, and out of these factors came the Fuck Parade.

Christian noted his participation in both the Love Parade and the Fuck Parade. He attended the Love Parade in 1992, 1993, and 1994, but he stopped after that, claiming it had become too commercialized. He also noted the shift from the city streets of Kurfürstendamm to the more governmental and park-like area of Straße 17. Juni made the transgressive spirit of the event feel missing. After 1994, Christian started marching in the early iterations of the leftist Fuck Parade and did so every year until 1998. By shifting from the Love Parade to the Fuck Parade, Christian decided to "stay in the scene" rather than go commercial. He also conveyed that during the mid-1990s, when the Love Parade lost much of its integrity and made techno mainstream, he and many people originally in the techno subculture shifted their music taste slightly to other electronic dance genres like drum and bass, gabbar, and house in protest to the co-optation of techno (C. Perseke 2023, personal communication).

The Fuck Parade grew every year as a visible leftist counter demonstration until 2001, when the city denied the Fuck Parade status as a political demonstration. In the same year, the city of Berlin authorized the Love Parade as a commercial street event and even supported the

parade organizers financially with trash cleanup services (von Thülen 2022). Fuck Parade organizers claim the city supported the Love Parade, as it was a mainstream, co-opted event and feared the Fuck Parade, as it was organized by the radical left and had more serious political goals (von Thülen 2022). Following the loss of status, the Fuck Parade fought for the next six years and finally in 2007, was granted the status of political demonstration once more. By then, there was a clear split between the techno subculture that still aligned itself with alternative subcultures and the techno scene that reified the hegemony.

*A New Berlin*

The early years of techno marked a time when young people from both sides of Berlin implemented a new subcultural spatially across the city. From underground bunkers to empty apartment buildings to the streets of Kurfürstendamm, space was reappropriated and re-envisioned as the techno movement grew. New forms of sociality, ones made possible by the punk movement before, emerged in these liminal rave dance floor spaces, as people moved past political differences and began the social process of reunification. The early techno parties were a movement of resistance to hegemony; it was a movement of alternative social practices and a movement of world-making. Furthermore, the right to the city, or the democratic practice of collective self-management in urban space, can be seen in the claiming and maintaining of vacant space in the former East. With squats and techno clubs, the subculture implemented their right to the city as they reclaimed access to producing urban space. Through their creative use of space, Berlin techno music fans were able to create a subculture that eventually spread across the world. However, with growth comes popularity, and the corporate and capitalist forces in Berlin

were quick to bring the underground movement into the commercial realm, as seen with the Love Parade.

Techno music and the surrounding club culture has risen to the forefront of the city's image and reputation. The electronic dance subcultures are now a driving force in Berlin's tourism industry and redevelopment plans. As Christian noted, "techno built the city back up again" (C. Perseke 2023, personal communication). As the city re-emerged from the unification era in the 1990s, the city strategized and underwent many changes in the "New Berlin." Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Straße, where early techno clubs were once located, is now completely redeveloped and is a space of commercialism, corporatism, federal government, and capitalist dominance in Berlin. The Mall of Berlin, the Sony Center, the headquarters of the Deutsche Bahn (German Railway), the Bundesrat (the German federal council building), and many more high rises now mark the landscape of the redeveloped Potsdamer Platz. The transgressive and radical techno clubs that occupied this space in the mid-1990s have been displaced and replaced, as the subculture continues to be pushed to further eastern parts of the city.

Now, nearly 35 years since the rise of Berlin techno, the city is in a different position economically and demographically. With economic pushes for the creative city model in Berlin, increased gentrification and struggles for space have made the techno subculture adopt new spatial strategies of resistance and survival. The current spatial manifestations of the techno subculture and the interaction with corporate and governmental interests all bring about the debate of the right to the city. It is these more recent spatial struggles that I will focus on in the next chapter.

**Chapter 4**

**Rebuilding and Resisting Berlin: Intensifying Struggles over Space and the Right to the City**

If chapter 3 illustrated the rise of the subcultural techno movement, then chapter 4 shows the fall of that movement from subcultural or political potential. With massive growth and change happening with the national capital moving back to Berlin, the techno scene changed and became co-opted as space became more expensive, cosmopolitan, and developed. The techno scene still remains a key component of the city, but most of the dominant fanbase now is marked by professionals, wealthy tourists, and people not initially involved in the more radical scene early on. Yet, the city's underground subculture has not completely disappeared or given up. There are still legacies of queer and alternative Berlin in the crevices of the neoliberal landscape, carving out spaces for alternative identity politics and leftist values.

This chapter shows the last of the underground techno scene in Berlin and what the original movement has become: a co-opted space at risk of dissolving completely in the face of development and gentrification. As techno spaces and culture are struggled over, people in the subculture are fighting for their right to the city. For example, the evolving fight over techno spaces, over who is allowed to define them, where they can be, and how they can be expressed can be clearly seen in the Bar 25 MediaSpree protests that emerged in the 2000s.

Along the banks of the Spree River close to the city center, Bar 25, a space carved out and appropriated by the techno subculture like many other clubs in the vacant space from the Berlin Wall strip, opened in 2004. The club was wildly popular and created a Berlin Neverland, a circus-esc energy of social experimentation and celebration. It was an "autonomous magic kingdom with its own radio station, restaurant, open-air cinema, circus tent with concert stage

and everything else you need for a hedonistic life" (Wlada-Kolosowa 2009). The club was built up from the ground by a community of alternative techno fans, changing an empty, abandoned lot on the banks of the Spree into a green, tree-covered club and village where 13 people lived full-time (Mischer and Yuriko 2012).



*Image 8: River view of part of Bar 25 on a quiet afternoon at the banks of the Spree in July 2010, surrounded by the trees the club planted. Source: Wikimedia Commons*

Bar 25 best exemplified the unique social space than a techno club could create. Rather than just being a club, the whole space embodied an anti-establishment life principle, attracting all sorts of people across the alternative, subcultural communities of Berlin.

However, a few years after the club's formation, the club's longevity was threatened due to the city's "MediaSpree" development plans. MediaSpree was a plan to create a creative cluster of media and music industry along the Spree waterfront in central Berlin in between the *bezirks* (districts) of Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain, where many techno clubs and artistic hubs were

already located (Novy and Colomb 2012, 1824). The MediaSpree project followed the "creative

city" model, using the already flourishing creative community and techno subculture of the

district to gain investment while also building new developments and displacing many clubs and

artists. Down the river, the influential techno club Ostgut had succumbed to these development

plans in 2003 when the city tore down the club to build the Mercedes-Benz Arena.

Many different folks, from radical leftists to techno subculture members to the

marginalized to the middle class came together to form MegaSpree, the activist group fighting

the MediaSpree development, voicing concerns about "gentrification and the displacement of the

area's subcultural fabric" (Novy and Colomb 2012, 1825). Through techno rallies, video

installations, and neighborhood walks, the coalition of activists fighting against MediaSpree (and

for preserving Bar 25) were able to gather enough signatures for a "non-binding public

referendum conducted at the scale of the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg" in hopes to stop

the development plans (Novy and Colomb 2012, 1825).

The battle was a struggle over space. Bar 25 supporters marched with signs such as

"Spreeufer für alle" (Spree banks for all), "Die Stadt gehört alle" (the city belongs to everyone),

and "Wir wollen Freiraum… Freiraum bedeutet Freiheit," (We want free space... free space

means freedom) (Mischer and Yuriko 2012). Protests increased tension between the city and the

activists and the demonstrations were eventually met with police violence. The massive support

of Bar 25 showed how much the people of Berlin wanted to maintain these clubs and the unique,

heterotopic spaces they create.

The referendum, held on July 13, 2008, was successful in that it extended Bar 25's lease

temporarily and put pressure on local politicians to change plans for the proposed site and

consider alternatives (Novy and Colomb 2012, 1826). Nonetheless, despite the temporary win,

the club officially closed in 2010 after increased pressure from the city, losing its license for good.

In the face of defeat, the club owners, residents, and fans stood up to the city, claiming that the electronic music subculture has a voice that deserves to be heard, as they are an integral part of the city (Mischer and Yuriko 2012). As one former operator of Bar 25 notes, "people from Colombia and Japan come to Berlin specifically for the club scene, and the city is destroying a piece of it with its own hands" (Wlada-Kolosowa 2009). Bar 25 is an illuminating example of the city hurting its own attractive subcultural pockets in favor of new development. MegaSpree and the fight to save Bar 25 showed the techno subculture not just as a community of hedonists, but as an invested group joining broader leftist and anti-gentrification movements to fight for a right to the city.

*Redeveloping Berlin*

The MediaSpree development plans follow a trend of repurposing urban space in Berlin stemming back to reunification, when the city began its transition to the "new" Berlin. Along with rebuilding the city came a rearranging of the political landscape.

The German federal government had many challenges in reuniting the nation, and one big debate was where to move the capital. Berlin had been the capital city prior to the split of the country following World War II, when Bonn became the West German capital. In 1991, the federal government finally voted that the capital would return to Berlin, but this transition took a while (Rosenberg 2019). It wasn't until 1999 when the German parliament finally met in the Reichstag building in Berlin (Rosenberg 2019). This meant that for ten years, the city of Berlin was undergoing a slow transition back to being the capital city and center of the federal

government. In general, the city center became increasingly closed off to radical or subcultural groups as the federal government became more cemented.

The 1990s was thus a period of urban renewal, with the modernization of neighborhoods and public transportation. Berlin was known at the time as "Europe's largest building site" (Arandelovic 2018, 2). The skyline was full of cranes and the city was composed of construction sites. This trend was especially visible in the former East Berlin neighborhoods with its vast amounts of empty or vacant urban space present at the time of the fall of the wall. This vacant space, as noted in chapter 3, was the same space that the techno underground claimed. The techno scene's desire for open space and techno clubs came into conflict with the city' plans to redevelop and create a new, global, "creative city." The MegaSpree protests exemplify this tension.

The creative city model is an urban renewal strategy first proposed by Richard Florida. Florida (2005) argues in favor of a creative city, and discusses the role of the "creative class", claiming this new social class contributes to urban economic growth. The economic function of the "creative class" is to produce new ideas and new cultural commodities (Florida 2005). These producers are artists, musicians, tech start-up workers, and others contributing to the "creative" market. Florida argues that economic growth is centered in urban areas, and thus the creative city should be a priority. In other words, like Mitchell's concept of culture as political economy, in Florida's argument, creative art expression can and should be channeled into capitalist growth in the city.

Florida's theory on the creative city to develop and further a city's economy has received a lot of attention and critique. While Florida's model can attract new people to the city, many times this comes at the price of dissolving subcultural fabrics and displacing past city residents,

often along lines of class and race. The creative class model is, in essence, a strategy to keep subcultural artistic movements from gaining power and momentum and instead, subsumes them into the dominant capitalist system. As a result, the creative class model eventually undermines the spaces of the original art movement.

For Berlin, building a creative city meant capitalizing on the existing subculture of techno. From the mid-1990s to today, the city of Berlin has co-opted and commercialized this formally underground resistance movement in an effort to bring economic success to the city. Through branding, tourism, gentrification, and institutionalization of clubs, the city of Berlin has altered the techno subculture drastically. Berlin adopted neoliberal economic policies that were common in the 1990s and followed the trend of growth machine politics (Molotch 1976). Profit was sought out through the "increasing intensification of the land use of the area" (Molotch 1976). Nightlife was an integral part of this growth. Clubs, bars, music venues, record labels and hotels were built quickly to drive up the land use and increase profit. Old warehouses and factories were also repurposed. This redevelopment of the city and the embrace of "creative class" economics changed how the electronic music scene relates to politics and how it looks spatially.

In general, within the creative scenes, developers, investors, and the government have promoted gentrification, which has had negative effects on the subculture. In the first years of reunification, the strong subculture and techno creatives could exist because of cheap rent, the vast open space in the former East, and the foundation of alternative artistic communities. However, as Moskowitz points out, "the more disinvested a space becomes, the more profitable it is to gentrify" (2018). After the fall of the Wall, Berlin's vast amount of disinvested space, especially in East Berlin, was ripe for gentrification to set in. Now in Berlin, the cheap

apartments and living conditions that allowed for these subcultures to exist in the first place are disappearing. This poses a problem for members of the subculture who want to live in Berlin and contribute to those alternative artistic movements. The techno subculture as a social and political force in Berlin and the people partaking in it are actively being displaced.

In fact, the more common club-goer or techno music fan in Berlin today tend to be wealthier and less radical. Many of these people have no interest in the subculture's transgressive spirit and simply use club spaces as a social network or a hedonistic party. Scholar Enis Oktay describes these groups as neo-tribes, and rebuts that techno music fans today really have an interest in the anti-gentrification activism that has surrounded the scene. Oktay argues these techno music fans are actually facilitating gentrification, bringing in more upscale restaurants and bars into the formerly grungy, disinvested clubbing neighborhoods (2014, 222). In essence, many peoples' participation in the subculture is only performative and many are invested in the electronic music scene only for social networking, career opportunities, or just to party.

Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that the Berlin techno and electronic music subcultures are no longer proper subcultures, but rather can only be described as scenes. Stahl (2004, 11), for instance, describes a scene as "a cultural space within which sit a number of institutions, ranging from bars, cafes, universities, and clubs, which in concert facilitate the generative intersection of a number of social and cultural phenomena." Scenes are important for cities because they are important "quality attractors" for young creative professionals, investors and artists. In other words, they are a reification of the hegemony and reproduce social power. Berlin, for example, now has the club and techno scene, where an experience economy and tourist industry are important for bringing money into the city. Scenes differ from subcultures in that they are depoliticized, their walls are not as strict, and their social makeup is not as uniform

(Stahl 2014, 15). They are also not always "sub" in nature and often have quite a mainstream manifestation.

The creative class model and gentrification have, indeed, increased revenue and income for the club scene. Average annual club and event organizing company revenue in 2004 was €544,000; in 2005 it increased by 4 per cent (Oktay 2014, 215). Likewise, from 1998 to 2006, creative workers have increased by 35% and their income has increased by 50% as now "one-fifth of the city's population is tied to creative industries" (Oktay 2014, 216).

Just like in the Weimar Republic, Berlin has again branded itself as a massive party destination in Europe. Consequently, the city has experienced an increase in techno-tourism, which has also contributed to overall gentrification of the city, especially in Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain, and Neukölln, three neighborhoods in which much of the nightlife is concentrated today.

In these three neighborhoods, one can see that the formerly organic movements of resistance and opposition embodied by techno in Berlin have now become institutionalized spatially in these neighborhoods of branded cultural and historical significance. Every weekend, clubs and bars are filled with thousands of tourists from across the world, eager to experience the wild, hedonistic, "subcultural" nightlife that the city has marketed and produced as a cultural commodity. Techno-tourists often contribute to the gentrification process which is harming the more radical, non-commercialized electronic music subcultures from thriving and existing in the city. Furthermore, cheap air travel made this club travel possible for a weekend getaway. The term for these people is "Easyjetsetters" (Garcia 2016). Flying in on a Friday and leaving on a Sunday or Monday, techno fans can easily and affordably come from across the continent or across the world and dance all weekend long in Berlin.

*Image 9: Current districts in Berlin. The two highlighted districts, Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain, are two neighborhoods that have many techno clubs as well as high rates of gentrification. Source: Red Relocators*

In the past few years, club entrance prices have doubled, going from €10-15 to €25 for a night. Rents increased in Neukölln by 23% between 2007 and 2010 (Rodgers 2014). More and more people from across the globe come to Berlin to party. It is a dual-edged sword: as the tourism economy does well, the scene itself is put at risk. The "encroachment of globalized mass capitalism into Berlin's anarcho-bohemian bubble" becomes more severe and prices go up, making the abnormal club hours and the DIY, transgressive nature of techno raves less

achievable (Rodgers 2014). All in all, the ever-increasing tourism and gentrification of historically alternative neighborhoods like Kreuzberg and Neukölln have accelerated the death of the techno subculture.

Similarly, Berghain, the city's prized techno jewel and the most famous techno club in the world, has slowly shifted demographically from local techno subculture fans to well-off tourists coming from the United States or the United Kingdom or Italy to party and try their luck getting past Berghain's world-infamous exclusive door policy. Today, Berghain alone brings in thousands of people to the city every weekend.

Berghain opened in 2004 as an explicitly queer club and as a space for marginalized communities within the techno scene. The club attracted many folks looking for experimental and fetish sex parties, people closely associated with Berlin's underground techno subculture, and those politically aligned with the political left. The club was known for being very sexually liberated. While the club has retained some of that energy, the club has become much more straight and upper middle class over the past 15 years as the city's clubbing demographics have also changed.

*The Remaining Underground and Movement away from the City Center*

The more transgressive and underground aspects of the electronic music scene are becoming more and more difficult to find, as the underground needs to search farther from the city center for vacant spaces to claim. The initial anarchic character of techno is fading from the city, but there are still illegal, DIY, and unlicensed techno raves that are fighting to stay alive. This is most notable with the forest techno raves.

One contact I interviewed, Max, who is close to the techno scenes in both Berlin and Leipzig, told me of his experience going to these illegal forest techno parties (M. Berkenheide 2023, personal communication). Open-air raves are a way in which the techno subculture is still claiming space in the city today. With their clandestine nature, these events are only advertised through word of mouth or by sharing coordinates in private groups on encrypted messaging apps. The illegal open-air raves mostly take place in the eastern outskirts of the city. While some are known to take place in the western edges, like in the Grünewald and around Spandau, the underground techno scene continues to be centered in the former East, as that region still has more vacant space and follows the tradition of claiming space for techno that started with the fall of the Wall.

Max described how he heard of a forest rave from a friend of a friend and hopped on the S-bahn train down to southeast Berlin, where large forests surrounding the Müggelsee allow for techno parties to happen far away from other people. The S-bahn was filled with other ravers, eager to join in on the event. Once Max got close to the event, he started hearing the loud bass echoing through the woods. He followed the sound and then found the rave. These illegal forest raves take on a subversive and rebellious energy. At four out of five of these forest raves that Max went to, however, police found the party and ended the event prematurely. While the state encourages techno to exist in the inner-city clubs, the dominant culture and government does not allow for these more anarchic and subversive raves to take place.

To further illustrate the different tolerances the dominant culture has shown to tourist clubs versus underground raves is with the Club Commision. The Club Commision, led by Claud Lederer, the leader of the "Die Linke" party, Germany's left political party, ensures that the institutionalized clubs in the city center (especially those that bring in the thousands of tourists to

the city) are financially stable. Through the Club Commission, the state of Berlin works with a committee of club owners to protect the clubs through regulations, tax breaks, and support (Clubcommission Berlin). While the Club Commission is often heralded as a preserving force of the techno underground and of club spaces, the techno spaces that the Commission protects are a very specific manifestation of the techno scene, one under the guidance and control of the dominant culture, one that advances the hegemony rather than undermines it. The illegal forest raves or the spaces of a more radical techno scene like in Bar 25 are not deemed as useful for the hegemony and thus are pushed out of the city.

Max also commented on illegal indoor events that still occur in the outer neighborhoods of former East Berlin such as Lichtenberg and Marzahn (Image 9). Urban redevelopment and gentrification haven't reached the outer Eastern neighborhoods as much, and techno fans still find and occupy empty warehouses for illegal, pop-up, DIY style techno parties. These spaces are becoming sparser and rarer in Berlin, however, and sometimes events even happen in the outer state of Brandenburg, outside of the city completely.

It is also important to note the movement of techno subcultures away from Berlin. Berlin has undergone so much gentrification and redevelopment that many in the underground subculture have migrated elsewhere. Much of the underground techno subculture has moved to Leipzig, for example. Leipzig, which is only a one-hour train ride south of Berlin (see Image 2), is often referred to as "little Berlin." Leipzig is a major city in former East Berlin and also has a strong tradition of leftist and alternative communities. Squats, anarchist street festivals, and illegal techno parties have all been a part of the Leipzig cityscape. Similar to Berlin following the fall of the Wall, many people moved out of Leipzig and many buildings were left vacant. In the 2010s, Leipzig experienced a similar underground techno movement that Berlin experienced

in the 1990s, and because the city is still less developed, there are more illegal warehouse and bunker parties to be found in Leipzig today compared to Berlin (M. Berkenheide 2023, personal communication). While Leipzig is starting to become more gentrified, the city still has cheaper rents and more open spaces that allow for an alternative techno subculture to thrive.

Another example of the techno subculture still surviving today but moving out of Berlin is with the annual Fusion Festival. Every year for a week at the end of June, the Fusion Festival takes place at an abandoned airport two hours north of Berlin. Fusion Festival not only features electronic music all week, but also follows the politics of techno, aspiring for a world of freedom and equality in what festival goers call "holiday communism" (M. Berkenheide 2023, personal communication). For the duration of the event, the festival creates a temporary autonomous zone without police and without commerce. The 70,000 annual participants join in on the creation of a space of countercultural practice, a space in which people can experiment with individual expression of identity, sexuality, and politics (Burghardt, 2019). Fusion Festival aligns with Foucoult's notion of a heterotopia, as it is a counter-site of the dominant culture and contests the expected social behaviors and use of space. As seen with the Fusion Festival and the techno underground scene in Leipzig, the effects of Berlin's electronic music subculture have partially moved away from the city.

Like Peter Marcuse argues, who belongs in the city, what forms of culture and social behavior is allowed, is a debate over the "right to the city" (2009). The right to techno, the right to practicing alternate forms of being, to the hedonistic yet liberating and healing experience of a rave, to how much these spaces cost to enter and maintain are all contested and struggled over. Neighborhoods and nightlife spaces have altered a lot over the past 20-30 years, and Berlin has changed dramatically. However, artists, leftists, and queer people still fight to be in control of the

future of the techno scene and to the future of the city. They are still showing forms of resistance and transgression despite co-optation.

The notion of creative producers themselves initiating urban social movements, as with the illegal raves and the Bar 25 activism, is in line with David Harvey's hypothesis that "increasing appropriation and exploitation of local cultures and environments might lead to resistance by cultural producers" (Novy and Colomb 2012, 1843; Harvey 2001). Resistance among the techno community has been steady, as the subculture constantly is shifting and adapting to self-preserve and counter the capitalist and corporate encroachments from the city. As Don Mitchell (2000) illustrates, resistance is not only about opposition to something, but also about the production of alternative social relations and spaces. The remaining techno subculture resists and opposes capitalist development and gentrification while at the same time helping to create and preserve alternative spaces and alternative social relations, such as in alternative clubs or DIY raves which are not controlled by the state or commercial interests. In this way, the underground movement still provides a space for people to come together and build a sense of community around radical leftist and queer causes.

As is the case with all artistic movements and scenes, there are opposing politics, financial interests, and motives within the same scene. While some groups use techno raves as a form of reclaiming the city in a political form of resistance against gentrification and capitalism, others use the scene as a business opportunity or a chance to further their career in the "kreativen Bereich" (creative industry). The electronic music scene and the spaces that it occupies, whether it be the dance floors of Berghain on a Sunday afternoon, the flak towers of Volkspark Humbolthain at sunset, or a forest far away from the city center, are constantly contested and

struggled over, as various levels of power interact, unfolding into the messy yet dynamic

electronic music scene one finds in Berlin today.

## Chapter 5

## Conclusion: Whose Techno? Whose City?

Berlin has long been a place of the alternative, and the techno subculture has continued to show resistance to the dominant culture. Nonetheless, the subcultural fabric of the city is now dissolving. In a world of ever-increasing capitalist encroachment, housing crisis, gentrification, and burgeoning inequality, resistance spaces are of utmost importance in providing alternative lenses and ways of being to envision alternate futures in urban spaces.

In this thesis, I have told the story of Berlin as a historical site of the alternative. From the Weimar Republic cabaret to the Cold War punks, Berlin has been a center for queerness, leftist politics, and alternative subcultures that have defied the hegemony of mainstream culture time and again. This history set the stage for Berlin's emergent techno subculture.

The techno and rave subculture that materialized around the same time as the fall of the Wall facilitated the reclamation of abandoned urban space in the former East Berlin. The illegal, DIY clubs, squats, and raves that emerged in this time created spaces of freedom and creativity. They represented a vision of the future not dominated by neoliberal ideology or capitalism. However, in the 1990s, the city began its reunification process, and Germany moved the federal capital back to Berlin. As Berlin slowly rebuilt the gaps and abandoned spaces in an effort to establish a "new" Berlin, these unofficial and underground club spaces started becoming increasingly rare. Techno gradually became commercialized, mainstream entertainment throughout the 1990s, marked especially by the popularity of the Love Parade.

In the early 2000s, the city's demographics continued to shift, as Berlin became more international and wealthier. With the rise of neoliberal policies and increased gentrification, the

"creative class" co-opted the underground techno scene, destroying alternative techno clubs like Bar 25. While spaces for the transgressive, underground techno scene became more limited, the illegal, open-air, secret, and liminal pop-up DIY raves and resistance strategies never stopped. Raves in the forests and in the outskirts of Berlin still exist today. Some of this underground style of resistance has, however, moved to other cities such as Leipzig.

In sum, commercialization, co-optation, and gentrification all morphed the techno and club scenes into the mainstream, tourist product they are today. Although techno began as a tool of radical social change and politics, looking at techno spaces in contemporary Berlin reveals the efforts of a dominant culture undermining and co-opting a subcultural movement, commodifying its culture and selling the product to the mainstream.

As this thesis comes to a close, I want to step back and consider why this discussion on a music genre in Germany matters in a wider context. Using Berlin underground techno as an example, in its most idealistic form, in the 1989 post-Wall spirit in which it emerged, one sees the transgressive possibilities and impacts of an emergent subculture. In reenvisioning urban space, the subculture attempted to create spaces not dominated by capitalism. The dialectic between dominant and subdominant cultures, resistance to hegemony, and hegemonic forces co-opting subcultures have physical, spatial implications for urban space and how people live in a city. In other words, the techno movement is part of a struggle over the right to the city.

How the city utilizes urban space, what is valued, and who the city is really for are crucial to the right to the city. A push for the right to the city is a call for urban dwellers to implement their own ways of being, a cry for people to have the ability to shape their own form of space (Purcell, 2002). A call for the right to the city is not a demand for consensus, but rather a demand for the right for alternative forms and uses of urban space to exist, whether they have

value for everyone or not. The right to the city opposes neoliberal urbanism and capitalism; market values should not be valued over the livelihoods and wellbeing of people in the city. Instead, the right to the city proposes an alternative, radically democratic political economy in which the production of urban space and the voices and needs of urban dwellers are centered. In sum, in a time of neoliberal policy and rearranging of cities, wealth, and development, recognizing the right to the city allows for a more just and democratic conversation on the use of urban space.

In examining Berlin's techno subculture story, it is evident, given the autonomy and access to urban space, that many people would utilize urban space very differently from the dominant property and market-centered capitalism we see in global cities today. While techno spaces as sites of resistance to dominant culture have also proven to have their limitations and have been altered and co-opted, they have opened up possibilities for alternative uses of urban space and thus for alternative social relations. The current capitalist landscape one finds across the globe may appear all-encompassing and dominating, but it is important to keep in mind that there are always alternatives, other possible futures, and different ways to live in a city than the trends we find today that only increase inequality.

However, alternative techno spaces as an antidote to capitalism may be too idealistic. The techno spaces that come to mind most often in contemporary Berlin are far from ideal. Many techno clubs have been consolidated into capitalist economics and have been co-opted by the dominant culture, diminishing the previous transgressive power the spaces held. While techno spaces have proven to be powerful realms of self-expression and alternative social relations, they too, have limitations as sites of resistance. Resistance spaces attempt to "redefine or break down the structures of power that govern resisters' lives" (Mitchell 2000, 148). Viewing the techno

subculture as a resistance movement informs us about the difficulty and determination involved in fighting against a dominant culture or hegemony. Subcultures inherently have less access to power than the dominant culture and therefore must resort to tactics and resistance to change the status quo. Furthermore, the power embedded within the dominant culture makes it difficult to properly implement subcultural world-views or keep appropriated spaces as envisioned by a subculture. For example, many contemporary techno clubs needed to make ideological compromises because they needed to survive financially in the city and therefore transitioned to operate on a capitalist business model.

Similarly, looking back on the early years of techno in Berlin, one can see how the underground movement actually facilitated trends of urban redevelopment and gentrification. The techno underground didn't aim for these processes to alter Berlin as much as they did, but the subculture that techno artists and fans created did lead to vast amounts of economic growth for the city. In a way, the early migration of techno artists into East Berlin, although they came with certain anarchic and alternative motivations, were the early gentrifiers of East Berlin. As the techno movement flooded into the vacant and abandoned corners of the city, so did capital. Despite its radical aspirations, techno still created mainstream trends and "cool" neighborhoods. Those spaces led to investment, redevelopment, and displacement of the artists and subculture that initially occupied that space.

Art-driven gentrification in Berlin is part of a larger pattern seen today in cities across the globe. In Toronto with film and Austin with music, for example, artists creating scenes in urban space have led to the cities investing in commercial art industries to stimulate urban redevelopment (Grodach et al., 2014). Just like in Berlin, these processes have only accelerated gentrification and displacement in the cities.

However, in other urban spaces, different forms of urban renewal, processes not focused on investor-centered development or capital gain, have led to improved living conditions while not perpetuating displacement and inequality. For example, the Guangzhou "micro-renewal" initiative in China achieved neighborhood revitalization without remaking social classes or destroying urban communities (Zhu and Ye, 2022). This micro-renewal worked to minimize wholesale redevelopment projects and involved little new-build development. In centering urban dwellers and democracy, urban renewal can be achieved in other ways that don't have to follow the dominant gentrification processes in global cities today. Berlin can learn from these examples.

Despite the shortcomings of alternative techno as a proper resistance movement and the effects of the techno movement on the redevelopment of Berlin, in the dialectical relationship of subdominant and dominant cultures, the subdominant still has some power to inform and alter the dominant in meaningful ways. The subculture pushes back against mainstream, commodified culture and carves out liminal spaces and heterotopias that contest the systems and expectations one has of the hegemonic culture. Thus, subcultural spaces have a special position in dreaming up alternative visions of the future. While not always revolutionary or overhauling, the subdominant culture can make a large shift in what is accepted and how spaces are used. Therefore, in a call for the right to the city, in an effort to push for more just and democratic use of urban space, in re-envisioning how one can live and exercise rights and desires in a city, subcultures and resistance movements are a key force of change.

While this thesis has focused on the narrative of techno in Berlin, it has also opened up more questions for me. In further research, it would be valuable to focus on the queerness of techno clubs, particularly on how queer communities have played a large role in forming and

maintaining the subculture today. More research could also be done in other large European cities such as Amsterdam or Hamburg, which have also undergone changes in their club and nightlife scenes, to notice wider trends of urban neoliberalization as well as the right to the city in different contexts.

Today, techno and electronic music continue to dominate nightlife in the German capital. A new "club mile" has formed in further eastern districts of Rummelsberg and Oberschöneweide, where important contemporary techno clubs like Sisyphos, Wilde Renate, RSO, Club OST and ://aboutblank are located. These outer neighborhoods have not experienced as much gentrification, and the club scene is thus utilizing the cheaper and still-vacant spaces of deeper East Berlin. There are also various activist groups still seeking to preserve and support techno clubs. Efforts such as the Club Commission and Tag Der KlubKultur are working to gain government and financial support for clubs to ensure they can remain vital in an ever-intensifying property market in Berlin. There are also many party collectives, DJ groups, and clubs that have leftist and anti-capitalist agendas. For example, Mensch Meier and ://aboutblank are two clubs that are known for their leftist politics. DJ collectives like the Femme Bass Mafia fight for inclusion of trans, queer, and femme identifying people in the DJ community, as well.

Furthermore, some alternative techno club spaces in the city still have a power in creating a heterotopic space of self-expression and sexual liberation. As techno fan Max noted, club spaces are "bohemian spaces where people escape from mainstream, capitalist society" (M. Berkenheide 2023, personal communication). Compared to other spaces in the city and even compared to other clubs across the world, Max argues there is "no other space where there are so many forms of individual expression" (M. Berkenheide 2023, personal communication).

Alternative techno spaces in Berlin, despite influence from the dominant culture, still provide a one-of-a-kind space in which people can playfully try other identities and contest the social norms of identity politics. Through art, gender fluidity, and creative community, these spaces also often provide personal and sexual liberation for marginalized queer and fetish communities. Many forces have worked hard to make techno music a commodity of the dominant culture. Nonetheless, the actual lived experience of the techno rave, of the many bodies and identities that come together on the dance floor, still have a subversive and transformational power.

The exact way Berlin's urban landscape will evolve or the way the underground techno subculture will progress is unclear. Likewise, the future of urban spaces across the globe are uncertain as they undergo rapid changes in development, growth, and inequality. As capitalism weasels its way into more aspects of urban life and space, it can be difficult to envision a more just and equal city. However, if we recognize and value the work being done by alternative communities, resistance spaces, and subcultures, just like the past resilience and resistance that the queer, leftist, and alternative communities have demonstrated in Berlin, from the Weimar cabaret to the Cold War punks to the techno ravers, subcultures will continue to adapt, shift, and push the envelope to remain potent and relevant in the face of the dominant, capitalist society as people fight for their right to the city.

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