



**Techno in Germany:
Its Musical Origins and Cultural Relevance**

David Robb, Belfast

ISSN 1470 – 9570

Techno in Germany: Its Musical Origins and Cultural Relevance

David Robb, Belfast

This article documents the musical evolution of German techno from Kraftwerk to West Bam and Sven Väth and examines the reasons behind techno's phenomenal success in Germany and its high profile in the media. It charts the convergence of international DJs on the newly reunified Berlin in 1990 culminating in the famous Berlin sound. It looks at how this underground subculture (claimed as the first area in social life where German unification took place) was subsumed by the fashion and musical mainstream. With reference to cultural theory, the article examines, both aesthetically and socially, the significance of club culture and mass youth events such as the Love Parade. It examines the dialectic relationship between the manipulations of the culture industry and the 'creative appropriation of culture' by the ravers and DJs themselves. It probes behind the claims of the German techno mainstream to be a model of functioning democracy and tolerance and looks at the aesthetic philosophies of techno rebels such as Attari Teenage Riot, the Fuck/Hate Parade and the music of the Mille Plateaux label as guided by the theory of Deleuze and Guattari.

It's Saturday 21st July, 2001, weekend of the Berlin Love Parade, the biggest annual techno festival in the world. The railway station at Alexanderplatz echoes with the piercing shrill of whistles, as youth from all over Europe converge and head off towards the *Reichstag*. From there, stretching down *Straße des 17. Juni* past the *Siegessäule* and over into the heart of West Berlin, a staggering 1.2 million dance to the big beats of the 13th Love Parade. Germany's youth are on display. A bricolage of fancy dress and accessories greets the eye: jokers firing giant water pistols into the crowd — welcome showers in the blistering hot day; red cat-suits, gas masks, rubbish-collector jackets and space-age Mr Spock outfits; men in dresses — fleeting remnants of the gay culture which marked the original Love Parades; sexily, scantily-dressed women (and men) with dyed, waxed hair and tinsel-covered bodies. The emphasis is on fun and the sensual body. It's like carnival but with less of the grotesque — rather a celebration of eternal youth and beauty.¹

As the first float of dancers at the Love Parade approaches, a rumbling noise — somewhere between African drums and an earthquake — grows ominously louder as if emanating from the depths of the human soul. Only as the float passes do the happy middle and high-range frequencies balance out the subsonic tremours of the bass. This polarity of sound reflects the

¹ For various photographic examples of Love Parade fashion see Steffen (1996).

utopian/dystopian contradictory unity which, according to Simon Reynolds (1998: xx), is the propelling force of rave music. The crowd erupts into frenzy.

German Influences in International Techno

While techno has been a global phenomenon of musical youth culture since the early 1990s, nowhere has its impact been greater than in Germany. This is reflected in the pop mainstream as well as in the academic field of cultural studies. To what can we attribute this? Germany is universally acclaimed as a creative powerhouse in world techno. The Berlin Love Parade, a trademark for German techno, has since 2000 been exported to Vienna, Newcastle and Tel Aviv. Such a position is new in the history of pop music, in which Germany does not have a reputation as a pioneer. Rock n' Roll, hard rock, punk and latterly hiphop have all been American or British imports. The only distinctively German manifestations of popular music since World War II are the TV *Volkslieder* and *Schlager* or, on the other end of the political spectrum, the *Kampflieder* of Brecht and Eisler, which greatly underpinned the *Liedermacher* movement from the 1960s onwards. But neither of these genres were ever going to penetrate a pop world dominated by the Anglo-Saxon language and musical structures.

With techno, however, the voiceless, computerized machine-music of the 1990s, the balance would appear to have altered. According to Jürgen Laarmann, co-organiser of the Love Parade and former editor of the dance magazine *Frontpage*, techno was the first 'Kontinental europäische Musik und Jugendkultur, die nicht unter anglo-amerikanischer Vorherrschaft entstanden ist' (1994: 15-16). This assertion is open to misinterpretation and has indeed provoked accusations of national chauvinism from within the Federal Republic's own frontiers (see also Reynolds 1998: 392-393). Laarmaan's claim has a certain validity, none the less, when one considers the cross-influences of American and European (including German) disco and electronic music which have culminated in techno. Two publications in particular, Simon Reynold's *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (1998) and Philip Anz and Patrick Walder's *Techno* (1999)² provide useful accounts of the history of techno in relation to Germany.

² Quotations in this article from 1999 revised edition.

Techno originated in the mid-1980s in Detroit and Chicago where avant garde disco DJs were experimenting with minimalist and ‘industrial’ sounds. *Kraftwerk* from Düsseldorf, masterminded by Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider, have been widely cited as the major influence. In particular their albums *Autobahn* (1975), *Trans Europa Express* (1977) and *Die Mensch-Maschine* (1978) contributed to their reputation as the ‘Godfathers of Techno’ (Anz/Walder 1999: 14-15). From the stable of ‘Krautrock’ which had included *Can*, *Faust* and *Neu!*, *Kraftwerk* were the first to create sounds and rhythms purely electronically — from analogue synthesizer, vocoder and beat box. They were famous for their *motorik* sound, ‘a metronomic, regular-as carburettor rhythm that was at once post-rock and proto-techno’ (Reynolds 1998: 2). Their sound expressed their relationship to technology. Hütter stated: ‘Wir spielen die Maschinen, die Maschinen spielen uns. Es sind der Austausch und die Freundschaft mit den Maschinen, die uns eine neue Musik kreieren lassen’ (quoted in Anz/Walder 1999: 15). Simultaneously, *Kraftwerk*’s zany science laboratory worker’s uniforms and gags such as sending puppets of themselves to press conferences betrayed an ironical attitude towards technology. In the 1990s this would be mirrored in the ironical relationship of techno fans to the artificiality of the virtual club night, as expressed, for example, in their cut n’ mix fashion sense, playful use of gadgets and undermining of gender boundaries.

Kraftwerk were a major stimulus for Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson, the young black school friends from Bellville near Detroit who learned the art of ‘mixing’ and later achieved legendary global status as ‘The Bellville Three’ (Reynolds 1998: 2). Their new minimalistic music shunned melody in favour of rhythms and textures, an approach mirrored by the ‘industrial’ bands of the time including *Einstürzende Neubauten* from Berlin. Forerunners of this aesthetic were the German composers Arnold Schönberg and Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage and, more recently, Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Following in this modernist tradition, Detroit techno aspired to align music with altered outer perceptions and listening practices (Henkel/Wolff 1996: 39). This was particularly apt in the city of Detroit, which in the mid-1980s was undergoing traumatic cultural transformation in the wake of the destruction of its car industry.

If Detroit techno had a link to Düsseldorf, Chicago ‘house’ had a Munich connection. It was here that Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellote had created the 1970s Eurodisco synth pop sound that Donna Summer made famous. The beginnings of ‘house’ could be heard in the four bass-drum pulses in the bar, and in the extended mix length. Additionally, Summer’s 1977 international hit ‘I

Feel Love' displayed the 'gaseous, eroto-mystic vocals' over the 'grid-like juggernaut of percussive pulses and clockwork clicks' (Reynolds 1998: 16) which was a precursor of acid house. The latter, whose distinctive sound was created in Chicago in 1987 on the Roland TB 303 Bassline synthesizer, returned to Europe before the end of the decade in a mutated form. This reflected the 'creative misrecognition' (Reynolds 1998: 33).³ which lies at the basis of all new trends in pop music.

The Global and the Local

The German contribution to techno is universally vouched for. Some, however, would reject the practice of dividing the genre into various national styles, arguing that it is a global music and a youth culture that transcends all boundaries. But as Gabriele Klein points out, the inner dynamic of the techno phenomenon is caused by the tension between unifying tendencies of globalization and local centres of creativity (1999: 65). While, on the one hand, a giant global network is formed by MTV, the Internet and the international DJ stars, on the other hand, each local 'island' has, both culturally and musically, its own indigenous characteristics shaped by particular aesthetic tastes and socio-historical conditions. A major shaping force of German techno, for example, was its proudly nurtured relationship to Detroit.

In 1989 the Love Parade had began as a small insider party. It aimed to emulate British rave and the happy spirit of the legendary parties on Ibiza in the mid-1980s. In the unrestrained hedonism of the Love Parade there was a subtle rejection of political ideology. As Claudia Wahjudi writes: 'in Berlin [galt] das Tanzvergnügen [...] als Symbol des Überlebenswillens und der Phantasie gegenüber den düsteren Visionen der desillusionierten Punk- und Besetzerszene' (1992: 15). While there are globally shared factors in techno's success, it is here that one sees an important local difference between the respective zeitgeists of Britain and Germany. If in Britain the excesses of rave had emerged, as Reynolds claims, as a liberating reaction to straightjacketing social pressures of right-wing Thatcherism in the late 80s, in Germany techno celebrated the liberation from ideology in general — in the West from the hegemonic liberal values of the parental 1968 generation, and in the East, from the ideological utopias of the SED. This historical circumstance

³ See for example the 1989 international hit 'Ride on Time' by Black Box.

undoubtedly abetted the meteoric rise and subsequent cultural institutionalization of techno in the newly united country.

The first 'house' parties in Berlin had been organized three years prior to the *Wende* by local West Berlin dance entrepreneurs in Kreuzberg and Schöneberg. DJ Westbam and Dr. Motte put on acid house parties in the club 'UFO' and co-founded the *Love Parade* in 1989. After the Wall fell, this scene gradually moved to the underground of the Eastside where a growing network of illegal rave parties was orchestrated by fliers. It was also promoted by 'D-Jane' Marusha's 'Dance Hall' on the cult ex-GDR youth radio station *DT64*. On a local cultural level, the underground explosion of techno in Berlin in 1990-91 was in no small part due to the reunification of the old capital city. In a transitory period of legal uncertainty in the aftermath of the collapse of the GDR it was possible to stage illegal parties in the tradition of the British acid house raves of 1988-89. The GDR's legacy of derelict bunkers, ex-army warehouses, unused factories and closed-down supermarkets offered ideal locations for a burgeoning dance scene. Indeed, for youth from both sides of the former Wall, techno offered 'die neue kulturelle Identität in der Wendezeit' (Henkel/Wolff 1996: 64). According to the East German DJ Paul van Dyk, techno was the first area in the social life of Germany where unification took place (Messmer 1998: 26).

When the illegal clubs 'UFO' and 'Planet' closed in 1991, the scene moved eastwards to 'Tresor' in Potsdamer Platz, the 'E-Werk' in Wilhelmstraße and 'Der Bunker' in Albrechtstrasse (see Henkel/Wolff 1996: 81-83). Together, these formed a Bermuda Triangle in the derelict area close to the old Wall. All three were internationally renowned for their excess in terms of heat, fashion (in Tresor a trend in paramilitary camouflage gear was started by the hardcore DJ Tanith; see Reynolds 1998: 112), drug consumption (see Reynolds 1998: 392), the ravers' endurance, and the power and speed of the particular 'tekkno' produced in Berlin. German DJs played an important role in the evolution of acid house into European 'hardcore' in the early 1990s. Described as 'nicht nur schnell und hart, sondern beinahe unfaßbar, schräg und schwer erträglich' (Schuler 1995: 123), this music form celebrated its heyday in the newly unified Berlin. 'Tekkno' (or 'Bretter') emerged amidst a maze of international musical cross-references. On one hand there was Dutch 'gabba' and Belgium hardcore, these forms themselves influenced by the *Underground Resistance* DJs from Detroit and from Canada's +8 label who formed the so-called 'second wave of Detroit'. These forged the Berlin sound together with the local avant garde which included DJ

Westbam (in the days before his rave anthem chart successes) and DJ Tanith (see Reynolds 1998: 108-112 and Henkel/Wolff 1996: 84). John Aquaviva of +8 records stated (1998): '[The Germans] had their own scene, but we certainly gave them the impetus [to become] one of the techno powerhouses' (quoted in Reynolds 1998: 215). Invited over by Dimitri Hegemann and staggered by the response as well as the high wages (Henkel/Wolff 1996: 85), the American and Canadian DJs performed regularly in Berlin, Jeff Mills and Blake Baxter even making the city a temporary home (Reynolds 1998: 215). Meanwhile in Frankfurt the *Force Inc.* label created new inroads in hardcore. Rhythmically, early 1990s European hardcore was influenced by *Front 242* from the 1980s Belgian school of Euro Body Music (EBM) with its 'stiff, regimental rhythms and aerobic triumphalism' (Reynolds 1998: 110). It was a speeded-up (far surpassing the 'normal' 130 beats per minute), harder and noisier variant of original Detroit techno or Chicago house.

+8 artists Speedy J. and Ritchie Hawtin greatly influenced the evolution of German hardcore into the 'hardtrance' that was soon to appear on labels like Frankfurt's *Harthouse* and Berlin's *MFS* (Reynolds 1998: 215). 'Trance' embodies a mystical side of techno where the DJ functions as a shaman figure (see Böpple/Knüfer 1998: 76-79). It emerged as a major force in 1992, with 'Der Klang der Familie' by the co-founder of the Love Parade, DJ Dr. Motte, becoming one of the biggest club hits of the year (Koch 1995: 137). After the rush of hardcore, Motte's trance expressed a hard yet fresh minimalism and stateliness. *Resistance D* from Frankfurt represented the more harmonious and peaceful aspect of trance. A rigidly *motorik* ('teutonic') dance form, lacking the funk and sensuality of Detroit and Chicago, trance has also been described as a musical hybrid of the German 1970s cosmic rock band *Tangerine Dream* and Moroder's Eurodisco (Reynolds 1998: 184). Internationally renowned German protagonists of trance include the Frankfurters Sven Väth (1993)⁴, DJ Dag and *Jam & Spoon* (1992).⁵ Most trance is a 'hyperkinetic' version of 'ambient techno', the pastoral, dreamscape music often used in 'chill-out' rooms at raves to soothe the come-down effects of Ecstasy.

Trance and ambient have been said to re-introduce an elitist approach to pop music akin to 1970s progressive rock. But, as Harald Fricke wrote, pop in Germany frequently consisted of projects dedicated to the brain such as *Ash Ra Tempel*, Klaus Schulze, *Tangerine Dream*, *Popol Vuh* and

⁴Sven Väth, *Accident in Paradise* CD (Eye Q, 1993).

⁵Jam & Spoon, *Tales from a Danceographic Ocean* (R & S, 1992).

Kraftwerk. For this reason the Germans' appreciation of Cosmic Baby's eco-utopias, and Sven Våth's musical incursions into Indian folk practises was a logical conclusion (Fricke 1992: 15).

A Berlin label which has built an international reputation around 'intelligent' techno is *Tresor*. They pursue a 'purist Detroit' path, endeavouring to fulfil the visionary aims of Detroit pioneers such as Derrick May and former *Underground Resistance* member Jeff Mills.⁶ Distancing itself from the straight 'four-to-the-floor' rhythms of the mainstream *Low Spirit* label on one hand, and the syncopated breakbeats of *jungle* on the other, *Tresor* preserves a dignified jazzy, funkier Detroit feel. Whilst acknowledging Detroit's unimpeachable legacy, Reynolds criticizes May and Mill's approach of favouring 'elegance over energy, serenity over passion, restraint over abandon' as elitest and 'anti-Dionysian' (Reynolds 1998: 221-222). The ultimate expression of German 'intelligent' electronic music can be found in the deconstructionist 'art-tekno/post rock' of the Cologne school (e.g. the group *Mouse on Mars*) and the Frankfurt label *Force Inc.* and its subsidiary *Mille Plateaux* (Reynolds 1998: 385-394). *Force Inc.* began in the early 1990s experimenting with breakbeat hardcore. Already by 1993 it was being lauded by *Spex* as a post-structuralist label (Fricke 1993: 16), one of its groups, *Spacecube*, described as 'hovering on the point of dissolution with no beat the same as the other'.⁷ This statement had particular significance in view of the increasing commercialization of German rave and its standardizing effect on the music.

The Commercialization of German Rave

By the winter of 1991-92 Wahjudi was noticing a change: 'Von der Intimität zwischen DJ und Tanzenden, wie sie auf der ersten Love Parade herrschte, war [...] nichts mehr zu merken' (Fricke 1993: 16). The growing popularity of techno was going hand in hand with sponsorship from business giants such as Camel, West, Philip Morris and Marlboro. But in 1992 techno was still seen as an underground force — the major record companies still had no influence on the music (Fricke 1993: 16). Eighteen months later, however, as Reynolds writes: 'rave went overground in Germany [...] With [the] degeneration of the underground sound came the consolidation of a

⁶ May had already disowned the European acid-house movement of the late-1980s which proclaimed him a forefather. See Reynolds 1998: 221-223.

German rave establishment' (Reynolds 1998: 387). This consisted of 'The Friends of Mayday' and 'Planetcom' organizations behind the *Love Parade*, the affiliated record company 'Low Spirit', Jürgen Laarmann's mass circulation techno magazine *Frontpage* and the music channel *viva TV*. The German charts became full of Westbam's 'Low Spirit' rave anthems which laid a techno beat under popular words and melodies. Marusha's version of 'Somewhere over the Rainbow' sold half a million copies. A related development reflecting the 'degeneration' of the Berlin sound was the merger with the commercial mainstream of trance, as represented by the Berlin DJs Paul van Dyk and Cosmic Baby. Koch writes: 'Die typischen Flächen (Strings), die Sequenzen und die Harmonien mutierten immer mehr zu instrumentalen Hooklines' (1995: 140).

Other indications that techno was no longer underground property lay in Marusha's radio and TV shows for ORB (*Rave Satellite* and *Feuerreiter*), events such as the 'Rave-Train' — Germany's first travelling dance temple with 'chill-out compartments' (see Sonneborn 1994: 17) and *E-Werk* proprietor Ralf Regitz's 'Chromapark' techno art exhibition (see Klemm 1994: 48) which the *Goethe-Institut* exported abroad as a standard bearer of German culture (Henkel/Wolff 1996: 167). Meanwhile the Love Parade had grown from 150 participants in 1989 to 200,000 in 1994. Sections of the media began celebrating Germany's preeminence in the world of techno. In a reference to a Camel-sponsored techno flight to Nevada which culminated in a rave in the desert, Henkel and Wolff wrote: 'Airave und Desert Move exportieren symbolisch deutschen Techno in das Techno-Entwicklungsland USA' (1996: 152). Camel representative Uwe Deese reported: 'Dann legt DJ WestBam in Nevada auf, und die Amis flippen total aus (...) Ich denke, inzwischen sollte man versuchen, Techno dorthin zu exportieren. Die Szene hat ja hier ein derartiges Know-how entwickelt, das es sonst nirgends gibt' (quoted in Henkel/Wolff 1996: 153). Techno began to be institutionalized in Germany in a way elsewhere unseen. Dimitri Hegemann from *Tresor* stated in 1996: 'Techno ist ein deutsches Thema, deshalb wird es weiter gepflegt werden' (quoted in Henkel/Wolff 1996: 163).

Such 'now we are back on the map' utterances were greeted with contempt by the marginalized underground. Alec Empire perceived the emergence of a new nationalism and cited examples of foreigners being turned away from raves (quoted in Reynolds 1998: 392-393). His agit-tekno-punk group *Atari Teenage Riot* rallied against neo-Nazism with titles such as 'Hunt Down the

⁷ See Fricke 1993: 16. The Deleuze/Guattari theoretical influence behind *Mille Plateaux* and its relationship to the

Nazis'. Another target of their rage was rave's commercialisation. In 1997 the Fuck Parade announced itself as a counter-demonstration to the Love Parade. It was initiated by a group of people who were refused access to the parade because they played the underground gabba style (Neugebauer 1999: 19). The dictates of sponsorship ensured that all music on the Love Parade floats was reduced to the level of mass compatibility. The Fuck Parade returned successfully in subsequent years, pursuing a route from *Reinhardtstraße* in *7 Mitte* via *Hackescher Markt* and ending up at *Rotes Rathaus*. In 1999 it received the support of several big Berlin clubs.⁸ In 2001 it took the form of a demonstration in Friedrichshain for the right to demonstrate, simultaneously adding their voices to the loud chorus of criticism of the Love Parade for causing environmental damage in the Berlin Tiergarten.⁹ Musically, the rebellion of the Fuck/Hate Parade is articulated in hard gabba and the syncopated 'breakbeat' rhythms of '!te jungle', sometimes known as 'drum & bass'. The breakbeat is a feature of hip hop, a soul drum-break sampled and 'looped' into an extended sequence. In the late-90s it made a multicultural statement in serving as 'an antidote to Germanic techno's Aryan funklessness' (Reynolds 1998: 392). The 'Rumpelbeats' and overlapping of cross-rhythms in Empire's *Atari Teenage Riot* and his prodigees *EC8OR* — pronounced 'Icätor'— (see Bartels 1996: 34), reflected the jungle principle of 'destabilizing the beat' and painted 'a sound-picture of social disintegration and instability' (see Reynolds 1998: 239). This clashed with the happy unified image portrayed by the *Love Parade* and the conformity of its metronomic beats.

The Theoretical Argument

a) Adorno versus Cultural Studies

As stated, the phenomenal cultural importance attributed to techno in Germany has also been reflected in academic writings. In general, pop theory since the late 1970s, as pioneered by British Cultural Studies theorists such as Stuart Hall, Ian Chambers and Dick Hebdige has been at odds with Adorno and Horkheimer's 1943 theory of the hegemony of the capitalist culture industry and its ability to manipulate the needs and consciousness of the masses. Instead they have rather

German techno scene will be analysed in the final section.

⁸ Events, *Minitip*, July 1999, 11.

⁹ For information on the Fuck/Hate Parade see http://www.bembelterror.de/fuckparade/2001/fp2001_about.html

stressed the dialectic relationship between dominant and popular culture. It is no longer just a question of dominant culture imposing its will on the masses, but of a dialectic relationship whereby the consumer also has an active, creative role in his or her 'appropriation of culture'. Techno culture has been singled out as illustrating this 'sampling' process, both in terms of music and fashion: the DJ digitally records sounds from other records and stores them up for use in new combinations. Similarly in fashion, this 'cut n'mix' ethos, termed 'bricolage' by Lévi-Strauss (1968, see also Meueler 1997), is evident in the forming of new styles (see Hebdige 1979). Demonstrating a 'symbolic creativity' the raver appropriates items of clothing, accessories and advertizing motifs and 'transforms' them by subsuming them within his or her own aesthetic.¹⁰

In her book *Electronic Vibration* Gabriele Klein takes this theory of appropriation further, developing a theory of rebelliousness which articulates itself via the body and dance. Making use of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* (Klein 1999: 249; Bourdieu 1984: 59-72) she sees the body sign language of the ravers as expressing their distinctive relationship to surrounding culture. Klein notes a certain dialectic in this relationship. While it is determined by external social factors including class, the individual simultaneously creates his or her own *habitus*. In the rave milieu this occurs in a creative appropriation of fashion and current dance routines, which Klein sees as a process akin to traditional mimesis. This process reflects the ravers' ambiguous relationship to the cultural industry: on the one hand mimesis has a socially conformist function in that the body aligns itself with media images. On the other hand its creative aspect enables the individual to develop a 'leiblichen Widerstand' to counter homogenizing trends in the cultural industry (Klein 1999: 283). Klein's argument thus attempts to relativize the common view in the bourgeois press that ravers are a mass of 'Image-Äffchen' und 'Konsumflittchen'.¹¹

Behind the British cultural studies' and Klein's stance is the rejection of a traditional elitist concept of the 'mass'. Following on from Benjamin's observations on the reproducibility of art in the age of technology (see Benjamin 1966), art is no longer seen as an object for contemplation for the privileged few. Its easy accessibility has led to it becoming a means of mass communication. It can be sampled for purposes that take it far beyond its traditional borders and which influence everyday life itself. As Martin Jankowski writes: 'das Gemälde wird als Postkarte (...) zu sehen sein, das Musikstück läuft (...) als Untermalung eines Werbespots, der Roman wird verfilmt und

¹⁰ Willis et al, 1991, described in Klein 1999: 235.

strukturiert als Kultserie im Fernsehen den Tagesplan ihrer Anhänger'. This has led to a democratisation of art. Techno is accordingly heralded by its supporters as a DIY culture in which everyone can take part. We live in a post-material age of artificiality and virtuality to which everyone has access. The body movements and fashions of the dancers combine with the computer-generated music, slide projections and strobe lighting effects to produce a self-created 'total artwork' (Terkessidis 1998: 177).

This democracy has been claimed to be reflected in the ravers' tolerance towards race, class, sex and political opinions. It is also evident, according to Klein, on the dance floor itself. It is no longer a small floor in front of a stage on which the band plays down to its audience. The now decentralized and extended dance floor in clubs denotes a 'revolutionary spatial perspective' (Klein 1999: 168-169). There is a new relationship between the dancers, one in which sexual hierarchy is dissolved. No more do the male voyeurs stand around the edge of the dance floor waiting to pounce on the female bounty in the middle. Rather everybody dances with everybody. For 'die Kinder von Safer-und Cyber-Sex' the sex is no longer real but is simulated reality as everything else in this virtual world. 'Der "gendered body" wird auf der Ebene des Ästhetischen inszeniert' which allows an ironical perspective whereby 'ein unverbindliches Spiel mit Sex und Geschlechtlichkeit' (Klein 1999: 171) is possible. The dance floor becomes a 'Maskerade der Subjektivität' (Klein 1999: 172).

Further evidence of the democratising principle of rave is cited with regard to its celebration of body culture. The body has been 'regained' (Klein 1999: 205) as a tool of public communication from 'civilizing' trends since the Renaissance. This is seen in the physical abandon and exhibitionism of the ravers. This rediscovery of the body has been paralleled by the shift of technology from factories to the place of urban amusement. No longer required for industrial labour, the body acquires a new creative significance in the new dance locations of leisure time. An ambivalence emerges, according to Klein, who suggests that the Love Parade be seen not only as 'an instrument for manipulating and depoliticizing the mass' but also as 'a medium through which urban space is revived, communal experiences are created and public culture of festivity is discovered' (Klein 1999: 108). In this light, in a society of increasing atomisation, the rave could be said to symbolize a new decentred market place.

¹¹ 'Weltstadt Berlin!' *Die Zeit*, 14.7.95, 5. Quoted in Klein 1999: 18.

b) Ravers: Carnival Clowns or Objects of the Advertizing Industry?

‘Die Love Parade ist unser höchster Feiertag. Sie ist für uns Raver das, was der Karneval für die Narren ist’ (Marcos 1995: 30)

To take Klein’s argument further, the ‘Ersatzfunktion’ of rave (see Blask/Fuchs-Gamböck 1995: 77-136) is reminiscent of the Medieval and Renaissance carnival as described by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984). Comparisons to carnival are tempting in view of rave’s temporary state of wild abandon (in this case induced by Ecstasy and music), its emphasis on corporeality, its ironical ‘upside down’ use of fashion motifs and gadgets, and in its ritualized form of mass enjoyment. Both carnival and rave are essentially apolitical, rather aesthetic revolts. Both are temporary deviations from everyday social normality, both taking place within carefully delineated spatial and temporal parameters. When this ‘Auszeit’ is over, their participants return to their lives within conventional society. In carnival and rave, the political significance lies in their symbolizing of an ‘Anders-Sein’, in their enactment of roles and social models unattainable in everyday reality. The rave, as Jankowski writes, is a reaction to atomisation and increased isolation of the individual in society, the show of body sensuality an ironic display of unrealisable community experiences (1999: 32). By comparison, the carnival with its inversion of roles (e.g. the knave swapping roles with the King) was an ironic response to a rigid social hierarchy. In both carnival and rave, the ‘Anders-Sein’ is expressed via dressing up. These in turn say a lot about their respective societies. In carnival the mask was a parody of the official mask of seriousness and authority. The ‘mask’ of rave, according to Jankowski, reflects the artificiality of society itself — it is an empty surface onto which self-made dreams are projected (1999: 33). Both masks symbolize transformation. The carnival swapping of roles reflects the utopian longing for change, while the techno mask denotes that the raver can be anyone he or she wants to be — everyone can be a star!. Everyone can be together.

Where the comparison falters, however, is in the image of carnivalesque grotesque which is absent in rave. Rave’s ‘mask of dreams’ is a cut n’ mix of ironical but harmless and familiar images. This reflects rave’s social conformity: the youth and beauty projected can be marketed without contradiction in today’s ‘event society’ where ‘youthfulness’ has become the defining metaphor (Klein 1999: 65). In this respect the Love Parade has more in common with the more stylised Venetian carnival. While, according to Rudolf Münz, the mask-wearing exposed the deceptions of

social etiquette and role-play, the parody ceased at the point where the mask became an idealisation of this way of life: ‘Die Ent-Larvung der Maskenhaftigkeit des Lebens durch Masken war durchaus möglich, kaum aber die Ent-Larvung der idealisierten Maskenhaftigkeit des Lebens’ (Münz 1979: 98). And just as in Venetian society where distinctive facial expressions and body gestures reflected an ideal role image, the compulsory ‘gut drauf sein’ and fixed smile of enjoyment at a club rave can be equated to the mask of today’s work place.

c) The Dystopian and the Utopian

If the carnivalesque grotesque (with its associations of death) is missing from the image mainstream rave projects of itself, an intrinsically darker side lurks not far beneath the surface. According to Reynolds, a nihilistic ‘dystopianism’ forms an inseparable duality with rave’s utopianism, reflected in the simultaneously vitalizing and obviating powers of the drug Ecstasy: ‘The utopian/dystopian shift from ‘paradise-regained’ to ‘pleasure prison’ is a recurring narrative experienced by successive E generations all around the world’ (Reynolds 1998: xxxi). Already in the days of Chicago acid house, there was a dystopian element in the ‘sinister disorientation’ of the sounds (e.g. the ‘deranged screams, groans and madman’s laughter’ in Sleezy D’s ‘I’ve Lost Control’) leading to a perceived disintegration of subjectivity (Reynolds 1998: 26-27). Just as the 1967-68 LSD hippy culture descended into the darkness of Altamont, the European techno scene of the early 90s — after the initial euphoric utopianism — plummeted into a dystopian darkness as the effects of drug misuse took hold. The young Berlin DJ Alec Empire stated: ‘People got into heroin and speed, there were parties in East Berlin with this very hard industrial acid sound, *Underground Resistance* and +8, 150 b.p.m.’ (Reynolds 1998: 392).

For Reynolds, the utopian/dystopian duality embodied the contradiction between ideal and reality inherent in hardcore. It ‘simultaneously affirmed rave’s utopianism yet hinted at the illusory nature of this heaven-on-earth, which can only be sustained by artificial energy and capsules of synthetic happiness’ (1998: 132). Hardcore and gabba were essentially ‘Dionysian’ as opposed to the ‘Apollonian’ genres of ambient and trance. For Nietzsche, Dionysus was the god of frenzy, oblivion and decadence, while Apollo presided over logic, light and clarity. This reflected, for Reynolds, the perennial class conflict within pop music culture: ‘The struggle between intelligent techno and hardcore was a bitter contest, waged across class and generational lines’ (Reynolds 1998: 185). Where the Dionysian ‘smidgeon of underclass rage’ and the ‘druggy hedonism’ forms

a recipe for musical innovation, the heady Apollonianism of ‘intelligent’ techno hinted at self-importance and stagnation (Reynolds 1998: xvii).

Indeed, the absence of this darker, dystopian side to rave and the rejection of the class argument is typical of much academic writing on techno in Germany. These tend to highlight the happy smiley hedonism of the Love Parade. When the theme of intoxication is dealt with, it is tamed within the totality of the tribe’s ritual trance and the democracy of the club’s virtual world. Nobody loses out. For Rainald Goetz, the ego of every raver, far from disintegrating into drug-fuelled nihilism, constituted a perfect universe: the individual remains intact while simultaneously becoming one with the voluntary ‘unity of commonality’ (Terkessidis 1998: 181). Jankowski addresses this with a hint of irony:

Die Geburt einer *raving nation* aus dem Geist der Maschinen: Bachanalen der Künstlichkeit [...], Stammesritual der Atome, demokratische Ästhetik aus dem Computer — angesiedelt im toten Raum der zerfallenden Industriegesellschaft, mit genau geregelter Anfangs- und Schlußzeit, Merchandising- und Müllkonzept [...]. Eine gelungene Revolte — ohne Opfer (1999: 33).

This image of harmony is a convenient one on which to hang all-embracing theories which unite mainstream and subculture and accommodate the multifarious ‘tribes’ and ‘Lebenswelten’ of post-modern society’s ‘big mix’. There is no more the idea of ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ in a vertical power hierarchy because, as Klein states, pop culture is not the educational privilege of the few but rather a component of every-day practice. The cultural industry and its consumers therefore share power in a dynamic democratic relationship. Categories such as educated/uneducated class and subculture/mainstream no longer form oppositions but rather an inseparable dynamic. The various cultural fields are no longer closed-off cultures or classes but numerous socially differentiated part-cultures, ‘tribes’ or ‘Lebenswelten’. Continually in flux, these are no longer defined in terms of what divides them but what joins them (Klein 1999: 292ff).

Such theories are, however, so abstract and general that the tensions between social and aesthetic groups within rave itself with their style and philosophical deviations become peripheralized. Sarah Thornton’s useful idea of ‘subcultural capital’ (1995: 11-14) is often invoked without its full implications being explored. Following on from Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital’ (1984), ‘subcultural capital’ is an attribute of people with style-instinct who are at the cutting edge of innovation. It illustrates how rave is no different from previous pop movements in the crucial respect that it is only ever a few hipsters for whom the acquisition of culture is a genuinely

creative act. Klein does not embrace this. While her argument of mimetic simulation demonstrates the dialectic relationship between the industry's production and the people's appropriation of culture, her (and others') emphasis on rave's democratic, DIY aspect often leaves the impression that 'subcultural capital' is as easily accessible as the Internet.

Not that everybody can even afford a computer! For Mark Terkessidis, rave's claims to democracy are a sham comparable to Blair's 'New Labour' (1998: 189). While the rave may provide a model of a functioning democracy, it can increasingly only be enjoyed by an elite minority with the money to take part. The techno scene then forms a mirror image of a middle-income society in that 'all the new measures serve to protect that minority in their post-historical paradise' (Terkessidis 1998: 185). In a time where 'otherness' is being increasingly marginalized, the Love Parade sets out to accommodate everyone, but finds the 'otherness' of those who don't want to (such as the Fuck Parade) or cannot take part somewhat 'unpalatable' (Terkessidis 1998: 184).

Terkessidis sees connecting lines between pop culture and 'a new hegemoniality' while noting that pop still retains a potential to subvert. He writes: 'One will have to differentiate exactly what is being put on in pop culture in the broadest sense,[...]: emancipatory desires for change, the concerns of marginalized groups and social conflicts or the harmonious vision of a new hegemonic order.' Angela McRobbie echoes this concern stating that we should limit the field of our study, and give up our demand for totality and unity in favor of what Ernesto Laclau terms 'die Würde des Besonderen' (quoted in Grossberg/Nelson/Treichler 1992: 719-730). With this in mind let us continue to look at distinctive aspects of German techno.

Outwith the Harmonious Vision

a) Spiral Tribe on Potsdamer Platz

The nihilistic hedonism of *Spiral Tribe*, for example, the group of underclass, travelling 'crusties', presented an example of a dystopian utopianism which sat uneasily with the party spirit of the beautifully groomed teenagers of German mainstream techno. Yet back in 1993, this British rave co-operative briefly formed an integral part of Berlin's illegal party scene. *Spiral Tribe's* loud and hard 'terra-technic' music lay 'somewhere between gabba and acid house' (Reynolds 1998: 147).

It set out to combine the ‘voodoo pulses’ of primitive African tribal music (Reynolds 1998: 143) with technology with a view to unlocking ‘the primal energy of Mother Earth’ (Reynolds 1998: 138). Their anarchic philosophy was influenced by the writings of Hakim Bey, for example, his *The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (1990) summarized here by Reynolds:

‘For Bey, the TAZ is an advance glimpse of utopia, a ‘microcosm of that ‘anarchist dream’ of a free culture’, but its success depends on its very impermanence. ‘The ‘nomadic war machine’ conquers without being noticed’, filling ‘cracks and vacancies’ left by the State, then scattering in order to regroup and attack elsewhere’ (Reynolds 1998: 143).

Spiral Tribe’s story of the early 1990s is consistently in keeping with Bey’s philosophy. Embarked upon a course of confrontation with the British authorities, they were arrested at the Castlemorton festival in 1992. They subsequently fled to Europe amidst a process which led to the British government’s infamous ‘Criminal Justice and Public Order Act’ of 1994 which prohibited all unauthorized outdoor parties with loud music and ‘repetitive beats’. In October 1993 they were to be found camped out in their lorries on the derelict no-man’s-land of *Potsdamer Platz* in Berlin. After only three weeks in Berlin they had already had their 15,000 decible PA system confiscated by the police (Kugler 1993: 11). Their neighbours on the former death-strip were the scrap-art group *Mutoid Waste Company* with whom they put on techno fiestas combining visual art and music. The *Mutoid’s* prime attraction in their ‘Mauerpark’ exhibition were two stolen Soviet MiG jets. An aesthetic ‘appropriation’ of military hardware had mutated these symbols of mass destruction into peace birds (interview with *Mutoid Waste* member Jo, quoted in Kugler 1993). Later they moved to the legendary *Tacheles* before both leaving Berlin in May 1994 complaining that ‘die Stadt ‘settle’ sich, die Zeit des kreativen Zwischenstandes sei vorbei’ (Borrs 1994: 20).¹²

b) Mille Plateaux

It is precisely this creative ‘Zwischenstand’ which forms the basis of the philosophy behind Achim Szepanski’s Frankfurt based ‘art-techno’ label *Mille Plateaux*. Named after Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, whose theory it is guided by. According to this, society is no longer governed by a basic class conflict but is subdivided in a more complex way. Deleuze and

¹²The open air, free techno festival spirit, however, still lives on in Germany unlike in Britain. As an alternative to the official and often over-priced *Love Parade* club events, many ravers spend the weekend at techno events outside of Berlin such as Groß-Köris in the Brandenburg countryside.

Guattari see a social field (a 'plateau') riven with lines and cracks, one that constitutes a multitude of constantly mutating relationships and conflicts between mainstream and subcultures (Holler 1996: 64). In a process termed 'deterritorialization', subcultures continually create new space outwith the bounds of the mainstream. This space is, however, eventually 'reterritorialized' by the mainstream. *Mille Plateaux* represents the search for this new space in music. Szepanski's philosophy is: 'nach Strategien und Fluchtlinien zu suchen:[...] die Schnittstellen finden, an denen man sich an die maschinellen Gefüge ankoppelt [...] und danach wieder an einem anderen Ort sein, an dem man uns nicht vermutet' (1995: 191). Translated into music, this sounds on Mike Inc's albums *Gas* (Mille Plateaux 1996) and *Der Zauberberg* (Mille Plateaux 1998) like an amorphous sound of strings – similar to a plane ('plateau') – which mutates gradually as a result of ever-new subtle rhythmic pulses or sonic effects creeping in from the periphery.

Mille Plateaux' political stance also expresses itself in regard to the process of sound creation. Szepanski relates how western music restricts the sound current by filtering out noise and crackles: 'Perfekte Melodien und perfekte Akkorde bieten uns Volks- und Popmusik täglich, das Zirkulieren eines gesäuberten Klangstroms, gesäubert von all den Geräuschen und Klängen, die den Wohlstand stören könnten' (1995: 189). This has a numbing effect on the listener. For Szepanski the challenge for new electronic music is to reveal the full intensity of the mechanical process of sound creation: 'Man muß das Tor für das Geräusch selbst öffnen, den Kanal für den Klangstrom selbst zum Beben bringen' (1995: 190). Alec Empire from *Atari Teenage Riot* who also released solo work with *Mille Plateaux* spoke of the need for an 'Aufsplitterung von Hörgewohnheiten' in order to expose the media's manipulation of ways of perception, 'weil wir uns auf eine Gesellschaft zubewegen, die schlimmer ist als das Dritte Reich' (quoted in Bartels 1995: 36). The less overtly politicized *Oval* (albeit a non-*Mille Plateaux* act) have a likewise deconstructionist approach, as in their use of samples of noises a CD makes when painted-over with a felt pen (*Ovalprocess*, Zomba Records 2000). Similarly Mike Inc: the fifth (unnamed) track on his album *Gas* forms a diffusely cloudy sound with an endlessly looped unresolving dominant seventh chord (*Gas*, Mille Plateaux 1996). A base kick-drum gives a muffled pulse, but this rhythm is continually undermined by the sound of a record scratch.

Mille Plateaux exploits the potential of technology to create a deterritorializing effect whereby perceptions of time and space are destabilized. It uses, for example, sound perceptions usually

attributable to madness such as rattling, creaking, hissing or screaming. Similarly in the stereo effect where the sound dances from one side of the spectrum to the other. Szepanski writes: 'Schizoides Hören wird notwendig, denn der Schizophrene selbst ist deterritorialisert, er folgt den Klangströmen, er spielt mit der Wirkung und der Kraft der Droge, ohne auf Droge zu sein' (Szepanski 1995: 193). In contrast to this, Szepanski, referring to Deleuze's comment on music's fascist potential, relates how mainstream techno feeds the masses a diet of what they already know: 'Man mobilisiert die Massen mit Images und Wiedererkennungswerten und stellt sie zugleich still' (Szepanski 1995: 194).

Like Klein, Szepanski notes the creative potential of the club's 'Raum der Simulation', not defined by four walls, but by the virtuality of the lighting, music and the dancing-body motion which alters perceptions of space and time. But the locations of mass raves do not encourage this. They do not correspond to the concept of the 'decentralized dance floor', but rather produce areas where lines of escape are cut off; where 'durch visuelle und nichtvisuelle Säule tradierte geometrische Anordnungen der Räume neu aktualisiert [werden]' (Szepanski 1995: 196). For Szepanski, this type of space defines the contours within which the masses can move. It is reflected in the music which is reduced to 'Erkennungsmelodie und stupide Metrik — allein die Bassdrum gibt den Ton an' (1995: 196).

The happy democracy of German rave is therefore undermined by the philosophy of *Mille Plateaux*. As well as the socio-political issue there is an additional issue at stake here: that of the traditional conflict between 'high' versus 'low' art. The art-tekno rebellion is of an intellectual nature as opposed to, for example, gabba and hardcore, which reflect Reynold's anti-elitist recipe for innovation in a druggy dystopianism. While intrigued by the art-tekno protagonists' efforts and theories, he states: 'no amount of wilful eccentricity can impart the lustre of meaning to music; that comes only when a community takes a sound and makes it part of a way of life' (Reynolds 1998: 400). What both Reynold's and Szepanski's approaches have in common, however, is that by redirecting the analysis of techno to the music itself, they rediscover 'die Würde des Besonderen', and reveal the shortcomings of generalizing, all-encompassing theories that blur the important aesthetic differences within the wide cultural spectrum of techno.

References

- Anz, Philip; Walder, Patrick (Eds) (1999 rev. edn, 1st publ. 1995, Zurich: Verlag Ricco Bilger) *Techno*. Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail (1984) *Rabelais and his World*. Bloomington: Indiana.
- Bartels, Gerrit (1995) Der Schaum der Tage. *AZ*, 25.11.1995, 36.
- Bartels, Gerrit (1996) Zu zweit gegen die Mafia. *TAZ*, 9.3.1996, 34.
- Benjamin, Walter (1966) *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Frankfurt am Main: edition suhrkamp 28.
- Blask, Falko; Fuchs-Gamböck, Michael (1995) *Techno. Eine Generation in Ekstase*. Bergisch Glabach: Bastei-Lübbe.
- Böpple, Friedrich; Knüfer, Ralf (1998) *Generation XTC: Techno & Ekstase*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Borrs, Wolfgang (1994) Mutoid Waste Company. *TAZ*, 17.5.1994, 20.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1997) Zur Genese der Begriffe Habitus und Feld. In: *Der Tote packt den Lebenden: Schriften zu Politik und Kultur 2*, ed. Margareta Steinrück. Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 59-72.
- Fricke, Harald (1992) Dem Mischpult Erzählt. *TAZ*, 29.12.1992, 15.
- Fricke, Harald (1993) Von der Motorik weit entfernt. *TAZ*, 19.2.1993, 16.
- Hebdige, Dick (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.
- Henkel, Olivia; Wolff, Karsten (1996) *Berlin Underground: Techno und Hiphop; Zwischen Mythos und Ausverkauf*. Berlin: FAB Verlag.
- Höller, Christian (1996) Widerstandsrituale und Pop-Plateaus. Birmingham School, Deleuze/Guattari und Popkultur heute. In: Holert, Tom and Terkessidis, Mark (Eds), *Mainstream der Minderheiten: Pop in der Kontrollgesellschaft*. Berlin: Edition ID-Archiv, 55-71.
- Jankowski, Martin (1999) Tanz nach zwölf: Techno als Erscheinungsform Demokratischer Decadence Reality. *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geisteswissenschaft*, 1/99, 28-42.
- Klein, Gabriele (1999) *Electronic Vibration: Pop Kultur Theorie*. Hamburg: Roger & Bernard bei Zweitausendeins.
- Klemm, Markus (1994) Tanzen bis zum Umfallen. *TAZ*, 2.4.1994, 48.
- Koch, Thomas (1995) Trance. In: Anz/Walder 1999: 137.
- Kugler, Anita (1993) Leben im Niemandsland. *TAZ*, 29.10.1993, 11.
- Laarmann, Jürgen, quoted in Kessen, Peter (1994) 'Über dem Regenbogen', *TAZ*, 1.7.1994, 15-16.

- Laclau, Ernesto (1992), quoted in Grossberg, L; Nelson, C; Treichler, P. (Eds) *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 719-730.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1968) *Das wilde Denken*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- McRobbie, Angela (1997) Shut up and Dance: Jugendkultur und Weiblichkeit im Wandel. In: SpoKK (Ed), *Kursbuch Jugendkultur*. Mannheim: Bollmann Verlag.
- Marcos, interviewed by Annette Rogalla (1995) Mein Körper flattert wie eine Maschine. *TAZ*, 8.7.1995, 30.
- Messmer, Susanne (1998) Eierkuchensozialismus. *TAZ*, 10.7.1998, 26.
- Meueler, Christoph (1997) Auf Montage im Techno-Land. *Kursbuch Jugendkultur*, 243-250.
- Münz, Rudolf (1979) *Das 'andere' Theater*. Berlin: Henschel-Verlag.
- Neugebauer, Wolle (1999) Interview with *Tip*, 'Aus lauter Liebe'. *Tip*, 15/1999, 19.
- Reynolds, Simon (1998) *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture*. London: Picador.
- Schuler, Michael (1995) Gabber + Hardcore. In: Anz/Walder 1999, 122-133.
- Sonneborn, Martin (1994) Klaustrophobische Anfälle. *TAZ*, 30.5.1994, 17.
- Steffen, Alfred (1996) *Portrait of a Generation: The Love Parade Family Book*. Cologne: Taschen.
- Szepanksi, Achim (1995) In interview with Katja Diefenbach, 'Den Klangstrom zum Beben bringen'. In: Anz/Walder 1999, 188-196.
- Terkessidis, Mark (1998) Life after History: How Pop and Politics are Changing Places in the Berlin Republic. *Debatte: Review of Contemporary German Affairs*, 2/98, 173-190.
- Thornton, Sarah (1995) *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wahjudi, Claudia (1992) Einst Symbol des Willens zu überleben. *TAZ*, 7.7.1992, 15.
- Willis, Paul et al (Eds) (1991) *Jugend-Stile: Zur Ästhetik der gemeinsamen Kultur*. Hamburg: Argument Verlag.

Biodata

David Robb has been a lecturer in German Studies at the Queen's University of Belfast since 1999. He graduated in German from Edinburgh University in 1985 and worked professionally as a musician before doing a PhD at the University of Sheffield (1991-95) on German Clowns *Theater*. He was a part-time lecturer in *Kulturwissenschaft* at the Humboldt University from 1996-98. Publications include *Zwei Clowns im Lande des verlorenen Lachens. Das Liedertheater Wenzel & Mensching* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag 1998).