The Day We Lost the Beat: Techno's Journey From Detroit to Berlin

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Scottish DJ Keith McIvor was set to play a techno festival at the massive Joe Louis Arena in Detroit in 1994. The lineup was stacked with the Detroit artists McIvor had idolized early in his career, and he was excited beyond belief to play techno music in the genre's birthplace. "We really believed we were going to be playing the best party in the world," he said. Only one thousand dancers showed up to the empty arena, which had a capacity of twenty thousand. McIvor spun classic Detroit records, expecting the stadium to explode with recognition of the hometown hits that had defined the sound of European dancefloors in the late 1980s. He remembers not elation but confusion, and local kids asking him where the records he was playing came from. "Here," was his exasperated answer.[1]

A hard-edged, mechanical sound built from the robotic kick of a drum machine, techno is an African-American genre birthed in the sprawling post-industrial city of Detroit. Since its inception, though, the genre never exploded in the United States the way other homegrown genres such as hip-hop, blues, or disco did. Techno found its most adoring fans among Germans, particularly Berliners around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the city's reunification. Today, the genre's locus is firmly positioned in Germany, with its capital as Berlin. Legendary clubs such as Berghain and Tresor draw dancers from around the world and record labels such as Ostgut Ton define the genre's globally exported sound. In 2016, the man attempting to build a temple to techno clubbing in the ruins of Detroit's Fisher Body Plant is, unsurprisingly, a Berliner named Dimitri Hegemann. He has received limited American support

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[1] Michaelangelo Matos, *The Underground Is Massive: How Electronic Dance Music Conquered America*, (New York: Dey Street Books, 2015), 1.

for his project. Ironically, Berghain, perhaps the most storied techno club on earth, maintains a strict door policy, rarely letting in anyone who does not speak German. English is particularly looked down upon, a signifier of tourist status. One wonders if a lesser-known techno producer from the genre's formative Detroit years could find their way into the club without heavy name-dropping.

The story of why the techno sound found a home in Germany is a tale that invokes notions of racial representation of African-Americans, cross-continent unification, and the role of space in the resurgent and the declining city. It is also a story of the transformative power of the dancefloor, where the kick of a Roland TR-909 drum machine loop crafted in a Detroit suburb created the framework for a redefinition of popular music in Germany. Techno's embrace by Germans reflects a confluence of influences in music history. German experimentalists Kraftwerk made computer music for Germans in the 1970s and early 1980s that profoundly influenced the aesthetic direction young musicians in Detroit took over the next decade. Detroit took the impersonal, futuristic sounds Europeans were creating and fused them to a dancefloor-oriented kick drum, building the bedrock for musical culture that found its greatest devotees in post-Wall Berlin. The list of renowned Detroit techno producers who have lived in Berlin, either permanently or for only a few years, is exhaustive; Richie Hawtin, Jeff Mills, Blake Baxter, and Mike Huckaby are just a few. Detroit techno's post-racial sound, largely stripped of identifiably black cues, appealed as dance music to post-Kraftwerk Berliners, its focus on space-age noises and lack of lyrics couching the music in comfortably universalist terms. Berlin, the city, provided an open tableau for creative repurposing of space in the early 1990s, and the city's centrally located abandoned spaces allowed this culture to thrive.

Glossary of terms and individuals

Techno – Rhythmic, kick-based electronic dance music from Detroit. Techno is aesthetically aligned with futurist themes, usually devoid of obvious human presence. Conventional melodic structures are generally used as additional rhythmic components.

House – Disco-derived electronic dance music from Chicago. House features different rhythmic components than techno, prizes melody, and makes attempts to bridge the divide between electronic and traditional instrumentation. This music also often features vocalists. Acid house, a variant of house that uses a Roland TB-303 bass synthesizer, was the first style of music popular in European rave.

Rave – A European subculture based around electronic dance music and ecstasy (MDMA) use.[2] Rave began in Britain in 1988.

Underground Resistance – Pioneering Detroit musical collective. UR were early purveyors of "minimal techno," a stripped-down, fast style. They experienced a rapid rise to success in Berlin in the early 1990s, and their minimal style became a blueprint for early German techno artists.

The Belleville Three – Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunderson were early Detroit techno artists. They are often misidentified as the sole founders of techno, though their recording work and respective record labels were indeed important in the 1980s.

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[2] Drug use patterns have shifted dramatically since rave's origin. Since the mid-1990s, many rave-associated cultures, such as drum and bass, have actively disparaged ecstasy use. See Simon Reynold's *Energy Flash* for an in-depth look at the drug-taking habits of rave subdivisions.

The Electrifying Mojo – Detroit radio DJ responsible for distributing influential music to young black listeners.

Dmitri Hegemann – Early pioneer behind Berlin dance clubs Ufo and Tresor, Hegemann was one of the first creative appropriators of abandoned space in East Berlin. He also played a crucial role in introducing Underground Resistance's music to Berlin.

DJ and producer – Two terms that are often confused. A DJ (disco jockey) mixes pre-recorded music, while producers create that music. Many techno DJs are producers, though in the music's early years this was less common.

The techno sound

At clubs such as Berlin's Tresor, techno found itself moving towards a codified rhythmic framework. This expanded upon the unique synthetic or robotic elements that the first wave of Detroit pioneers added to the basic requirement of a fast, repetitive, kick-based drum pattern. Rhythmically, techno's defining feature is a kick drum on every quarter note, creating a more frenetically paced style of music when compared to house, where the kick drum hits half as frequently. Almost always created in 4/4 time (the same as the vast majority of contemporary pop and rock music), techno moves at a pace roughly between 120 and 160 beats per minute[3], and derives secondary rhythmic forms from the layering of successive elements over the kick drum. The most common of these are hi-hats, snares, and synthetic clap sounds, all of which are among the basic percussion elements available on early drum machines such as the Roland TR-808 and TR-909. Snares or claps[4] sound on the second and fourth beat of the bar. Closed hi-hats are generally triggered at the same high-speed frequency of the kick drum, though separated by an eight note.

This musical information, however, tells a listener very little about the experience of listening to techno, and it does not encapsulate many of the other characteristics that make the music unique. Essentially, the description provided above defines the percussion patterns of a traditional techno track in the mode of Underground Resistance in its fully-formed state. By

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[3] Detroit techno's favorite white son, Richie Hawtin, is famously quoted as saying 128 bpm is the perfect speed for techno, and productions towards the lower end of this scale are much more common that those closer to 160 bpm. North of 160 bpm, techno usually enters the territory of *gabber*, or Dutch hardcore techno, a distinct, relentless style characterized by the sheer severity of its trademark distorted bass drums and a mid-range frequencies at odds with bass-oriented techno.

[4] Or some other equivalent percussion – modern techno has moved far beyond the limitations of drum machines.

fully-formed, what is meant is that all the percussion pieces have been introduced. A techno song does not usually begin with all of these percussion sounds firing at once – instead, it begins with just the kick drum, or just the kick drum and hi-hats. Other pieces of percussion are slowly introduced over the course of the song's running time. This tendency can be traced to early techno's use of the hardware sequencer as the primary composition tool.[5] These percussion loops can be altered in the studio to produce various effects. Other elements, such as bass loops, are also usually introduced into techno tracks, though these are not genre-defining characteristics – and they almost always follow the sequenced, repetitive format that the drums provide. Techno's hallmark is its layering of successive percussion elements over the course of the track. It is quintessential DJ music – the prominent kick drums can be layered over one another so the transition between songs is imperceptible. Techno does not prize melody, unlike the hook-oriented house. Its sheer repetitive nature often elicits complains from people dragged to clubs expecting to hear anything besides techno – this is unyielding drum music, usually played at relentless volume until the lights turn on and the crowd shuffles off the dancefloor. Those unfamiliar with techno often remark that it can sound as if just one song is playing the entire night – and they would be right, if one was listening for the changes is rhythm, chords, and melody typical of Western pop. Techno focuses on the intricate qualities of carefully manipulated sounds, not how those sounds can construct a hook. In *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music,* Mark Butler draws a useful comparison between pop and techno in its sparing use of melody. One typically hears a riff from a guitar or synthesizer as an isolated element in a radio pop song, which then moves on to a

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[5]Hardware sequencers are a piece of technology that were used in early techno to trigger programmed patterns contained within drum machines or samplers.

different melodic idea after its completion. Techno typically uses single riffs as the sole melodic

material, altering and shaping the same melodic in bite-size, repetitive doses over the course of

song.[6]

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[6] Mark J Butler, *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006), 183.

Listening suggestions

For these playlists, please visit the hyperlinks or search "The Day We Lost The Beat" on YouTube.

Chapter One

- Kraftwerk – Trans-Europe Express
- Kraftwerk – It's More Fun to Compute
- Marshall Jefferson – Move Your Body
- Mr. Fingers – Can You Feel It
- A Number of Names – Sharevari
- Cybotron – Alleys of Your Mind
- Model 500 – No UFOs
- Rhythim is Rhythim – Strings of Life

Chapter Two

- Liaisons Dangereuses – Los Niños Del Parque
- Einstürzende Neubauten – Stahlversion
- Front 242 – Headhunter
- Fingers Inc. – Mystery of Love
- Steve "Silk" Hurley – Jack Your Body
- Phuture – Acid Tracks
- 808 State – Pacific State
- Kid Paul & Weird Club feat. The Hitman – Acid In My House
- Westbam – Monkey Say Monkey Do
- Inner City – Big Fun

Chapter Three

- Final Cut – Open Your Eyes
- X-101 – Sonic Destroyer
- X-102 – Groundzero (The Planet)
- 3 Phase feat. Dr. Motte – Der Klang Der Familie
- Jeff Mills – Phase 4
- Basic Channel – Octagon
- Psyche – Elements

Conclusion

- Skrillex – Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites
- Ben Klock – Subzero
- Eminem – Without Me
- DJ Assault – Ass-N-Titties
- DJ Nasty – Child Support
- Juan Atkins & Mortiz Von Oswald – Riod
- Mike Huckaby – The Tresor Track

Chapter One

Proto-Techno in Detroit: They Heard Europe on the Radio

Synthetic electronic sounds
Industrial rhythms all around
Musique nonstop
Techno pop

Kraftwerk's "Techno Pop" (1986)

Introduction

The city of Detroit often seen in the headlines of newspaper features and photo essays, often accompanied by words like "decline" or "ruins." The once-thriving capital of the American automobile industry, Detroit has emerged as a symbolic representation of the deterioration and decentralization of manufacturing in the United States. Yet Detroit's rich musical legacy and its contribution to the development of electronic dance music through the homegrown genre of techno is seldom thought of in the American collective image of Detroit. Techno has found widespread popularity outside of the United States, and exists in its birthplace as niche music – it no longer needs American listeners to thrive. In Detroit, a combination of factors created the perfect environment for the genre to grow. Detroit was close to Chicago, the birthplace of house music, and shares similarities with house in its drum patterns. The key factor that defined early proto-techno was a Eurocentric outlook among the middle-class young black party scene in 1980s Detroit, particularly an environment nurtured by radio DJs who played experimental electronic music. The German band Kraftwerk, in particular, carried the influence of Teutonic electronic compositions into a thriving black dance music scene that would eventually reshape popular music in their home country.

The Electrifying Mojo

The way Kenny Dixon Jr., who goes by the DJ name Moodymann, described it, when

Mojo's show came on in the 1980s, all of young Detroit got a shock of electricity.

> Imagine at a red light you're bumping your shit in your car at a red light,
> motherfucker next to you's bumpin' the same shit, so now you are getting the
> stereo effect. Now you've got a motherfucker behind you on the same shit and to
> the left bumpin' the same shit. Now he gets on the radio and asks you if you in
> your car, flick on your lights, and then you realize you're in a traffic jam and
> everyone is flicking on their motherfucking lights and you realize everybody is
> listening to the same goddamn thing.[7]

What Moodymann talked about was the work of a man named Charles Johnson, a radio DJ from

Little Rock, Arkansas who started spinning records on Detroit-area stations in the late 1970s

after graduating from the University of Michigan.[8] His radio shows were legendary for the way

they connected fans of forward-looking music across the Detroit metropolitan area. His favorite

trick was commanding his enraptured audience to flick their porch or car lights on and off. "You

would see cars doing it at midnight. It was amazing," Detroit electronic musician Don Was said.

"You felt really connected. That doesn't come along that often. You've got to work hard to

maintain community in an auto-based society. People are going around in their own little

bubbles."[9] Johnson called himself The Electrifying Mojo on the airwaves. Mojo cultivated a

scene and an image in Detroit that was fresh and multicultural, aimed at no specific demographic

but widely popular across the region, especially among its middle-class black sons and

daughters. Mojo broadcast on WGPR and, from 1982 on, WJLB, both "urban contemporary"

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[7] Kenny Dixon, Jr. "Moodymann Lecture," *Red Bull Music Academy*, 7 May 2010.
[8] Ashley Zlatopolsky, "Theater of the Mind: The Legacy of the Electrifying Mojo," *Red Bull Music Academy*, 12 May 2015.
[9] Lee Devito, "Concert of Colors Pays Tribute to Detroit's Mysterious and Influential Disc Jockey," *Detroit Metro Times*, 8 July 2015.

stations – code for the R&B format they aimed at black Detroiters. Electrifying Mojo, though, did not stick to the rules that governed what a black DJ could spin.

He began each show with the "Landing of the Mothership," a collage of string music and futuristic sound effects with his own voice, warped, echoing through them, announcing Mojo's landing from outer space atop one Detroit landmark or another.[10] This futuristic aesthetic continued, most importantly, in the music Mojo played. A fan of anything produced with forward-thinking instrumentation, through the late 1970s and early 1980s Mojo favored Parliament Funkadelic and Prince, sounds his audience wanted to hear – nothing unusual for a Detroit DJ. But Mojo also had a deep interest in the alien-sounding music produced by Europeans working with drum machines and synthesizers, instruments that were not getting much American playtime after disco's unceremonious dive from the charts in late 1979. German artists like Can, Tangerine Dream, and, most notably, Kraftwerk captured Mojo's imagination.

"I started to go into the production room," said Mojo, "And I got real curious why they made records that seemed destined to become production fodder. Were they legitimately put in that category? Or were they placed by some of the same people that were programmed like I was programmed [to be a DJ]… I mean, here's a band that's obviously from the same planet that I'm from, right?"[11] Mojo started playing entire sides of European synthesizer records like Kraftwerk's 1976 album *Trans-Europe Express*. After Kraftwerk released their 1981 album *Computer World,* Mojo played almost every song on the album every night.[12] This was not a

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[10] Charles Johnson, "Mojo's Mothership with Mayor Coleman Young," *WGPR Detroit*, 1981.
[11] Sicko, *Techno Rebels,* 46.
[12] Mike Rubin, "Who Knew That Robots Were Funky?" *The New York Times*, 05 Dec. 2009.

universally popular approach – radio station brass frequently threatened to cut the length of Mojo's show or fire him over his extended musical adventures.[13]

Cultural and economic environment of middle-class young black Detroit in the late 1970s and 1980s

Acting European was not a new notion to the youth of Detroit. In the late 1970s, among the middle-class black children of Detroit's automobile industry, high-end European clothing dominated what was in fashion.[14] According to Juan Atkins, one of the pioneers of techno, this represented an attempt "to distance themselves from the kids that were coming up in the projects, the ghetto."[15] Black Detroiters were suffering from the consequences of systemic racism and white flight during this period, and much of the city's population lived in extreme poverty. For those relatively wealthy young black people Atkins spoke of, life was very different, fueled by the metropolitan area's steady employment opportunities in the automobile industry. These class divisions fueled the aesthetic choices of Detroit's middle-class youth culture.

"It wasn't like the white guy standing next to you is getting five or ten dollars an hour more than you," said Atkins. "Everybody was equal, so what happened is that you've got this environment with [black] kids that come up somewhat snobby, 'cos hey, their parents are making money working at Ford or GM or Chrysler, been elevated to a foreman, maybe even a white-collar job."[16] Elitist high school social clubs formed among groups who called themselves the "preps"; social clubs with aspirational, vaguely continental names like Charivari, GQ

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[13] Zlatopolsky, "Theater of the Mind: The Legacy of the Electrifying Mojo."

[14] Sean Albiez, "Post-Soul Futurama: African American Cultural Politics and Early Detroit Techno," *European Journal of American Culture* 24 no. 2 (2005): 135.

[15] Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture*, (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull, 2012), 5.

[16] Reynolds, *Energy Flash*, 39.

Productions, and Courtier threw parties in YMCA basements and their parents' houses. A strict rule was enforced – "no hats, no canes," code for the accessories popular among "jits," teenagers from poorer parts of Detroit. [17] Many of these black young people attended majority-white public high schools on the city's West Side or in the inner-ring suburbs of Detroit, as middle-class black families began suburbanizing in the late 1960s. It is important to note here that while Detroit techno may have been created in this black middle-class environment, by the dawn of the 1990s it was being produced by both black Detroiters from poorer districts of the city and whites from the surrounding metropolitan area.[18]

The Detroit metropolitan area developed a reputation for stark segregation between the city and suburbs in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, perhaps more than any other American city. Films like *8 Mile*, rapper Eminem's autobiographical portrayal of life between the city and suburbs, depict the city's border (8 Mile Road) as an unflinching wall between black and white inhabitants of the region.[19] The "Detroit Wall," a half-mile stretch of concrete erected in 1940 near 8 Mile Road, continues to serve as a useful symbol of this segregation for media outlets covering the nature of race and the city – despite the fact that the neighborhoods on the "white" side of the wall became majority African-American in the 1950s.[20]

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[17] Ashley Zlatopolsky, "The Roots of Techno: Detroit's Club Scene 1973–1985," *Red Bull Music Academy*, 31 July 2014.

[18] Detroit's most visible manifestation of inner-city techno is Underground Resistance, whose work is explored in depth in Chapter Three. White Detroit techno is closely associated with the work of Richie Hawtin, who is from neighboring Windsor, Ontario.

[19] Elvis Mitchell, "Film Review - White Hot: From Rap To Riches," *The New York Times*, 9 Nov. 2002.

[20] Sarah Hulett. "Racial, Regional Divide Still Haunt Detroit's Progress," *NPR*, 11 Sept. 2012. Thomas J Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996), 71.

In examining the origins of techno in the context of the city and the social conditions that created it, it is important to dispel the myth of a rigid racial divide between city and suburban Detroit. The city certainly experienced the effects of white flight as much as any other in the country did, and numerous Detroit suburbs (the Grosse Point region and Bloomfield Hills being among the most egregious) lived up to their reputations as wealthy, white areas off-limits to black homeowners. Yet these distinctions drawn between the city and suburbs favor a narrative of regional segregation at odds with the profound population shift of middle-class African-Americans out of the city of Detroit to predominantly white suburbs in Wayne and Oakland counties.

Despite this trend, few of these suburban towns developed into areas with black majorities, so the perception of the city limits as the dividing line between black and white Detroit remained despite the substantial increase in the black population of Metro Detroit outside of the city itself.[21] This increase in population was not large in individual municipalities, but it was significant across the region as a whole – between 1980 and 2000, the number of black residents living in nearly all-white areas doubled in the Detroit area.[22] African-Americans constituted 34 percent of the population growth in Detroit's suburbs between 1970 and 2000.[23] The telling of Detroit as two cities, the inner-city black Detroit and the white suburban Detroit, does serve to erase the realities of the black suburban population that often found itself isolated and alone in a majority-white area. Cultural theorist Nelson George sees black middle class

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[21]Mark Binelli, *Detroit City Is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*, (New York: Picador, 2013), 132.

[22] Gordon Trowbridge, "Fewer Metro Detroit Neighborhoods Are Integrated than 20 Years Ago," *The Detroit News,* 14 Jan. 2002.

[23] Kurt Metzger and Jason Booza, "African Americans in the United States, Michigan and Metropolitan Detroit." *Center for Urban Studies Working Paper Series* 1 vol. 8 (2002): 16.

aesthetic choices as "post-soul," in Detroit representing a symbolic break with the city's Motown soul music legacy – "many young-gifted-and-black post-soulers practice integration without anxiety… many attended predominantly white schools and took their access to mainstream opportunities for granted… Their experience, especially if it was not informed by romantic ghettocentric identification, makes race consciousness less central to their being," writes Nelson in *Buppies, B-boys, Baps & Bohos: Notes on Post-soul Black Culture.*[24] This found itself manifest in the conscious choices of influences early techno artists took in from their environment.

Late-twentieth century Detroit, and the city's decline, is also often associated with the perceived declining fortunes of the American automobile industry. This period, defined by an increase in the American market-share of foreign-made (especially Japanese) car brands, was undercut by a truth that may be surprising to many Americans – during the 1980s and 1990s, American automakers, due to decades of low oil prices and the successful introductions of the sport-utility vehicle and minivan as new vehicle categories, reached heights of profitability that far outstripped any period in their histories.[25] Ford and General Motors, in particular, began a slew of expansions, buying foreign marques such as Volvo, SAAB, Daewoo, and Land Rover.[26]

Ford left its last factory in Detroit proper in 1910, and its largest facility, the massive River Rouge complex, was in Dearborn, nine miles outside the city. The same general trend applied to General Motors and Chrysler, who moved plants to the suburbs, Canada, or the neighboring state of Ohio to find more favorable tax rules.[27] All 25 of the new plants built by

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[24] Nelson George, *Buppies, B-boys, Baps & Bohos: Notes on Post-soul Black Culture*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992) 6.
[25] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit,* 144
[26] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 138
[27] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 146

American automakers in Michigan between 1947 and 1955 were in the suburbs of Detroit, not the city center, and 55 of the 124 smaller manufacturing concerns operating in the suburbs were ones that had previously been located in the center city.[28] Over the course of the twentieth century, the manufacturing industry in Detroit itself was gouged to a dramatically greater degree than it had been in the metropolitan area as a whole. The city, which was rapidly losing its white population, was hollowed and bereft of manufacturing employment. The same could not be said of the metropolitan area.

It was within this middle-class, suburban African-American milieu fueled by steady manufacturing jobs that the kind of music the Electrifying Mojo played struck a chord. House music, which started as an offshoot of disco in early 1980s Chicago, was popular among the dancers at Detroit social clubs and officially licensed nightclubs, alongside the European synthesizer music that Mojo filled the airwaves with. Cheeks, a formerly white-only venue on 8 Mile Road that decamped for the further-afield city of Pontiac, was one of those clubs that distributed the disco-derived rhythm of Chicago house to nearby Detroit.

Chicago House

House music developed in the early 1980s in nightclubs in Chicago and New York as a practical artistic reaction from DJs to the implosion of the American disco industry in 1979. 1970s disco was a style that blended elements of soul, funk, and pop with a steady kick drum beat. Its first audience was black and Latino gay men in East Coast cities, though it quickly spread across the country and into mainstream pop radio.[29] Disco's era in the spotlight of

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[28] Deborah Che, "Techno: Music and Entrepreneurship in Post-Fordist Detroit." *Sound, Society, and the Geography of Popular Music*, (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 197.

[29] Gillian Frank, "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash Against Disco," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16 vol. 2 (2007): 278.

American popular music ended as a result of backlash from rock audiences that derided the music's gay and often status-oriented culture. "Disco Sucks" was a popular slogan worn on t-shirts across America in 1979 – that disco sucked dick, specifically, did not need to be spelled out, as Gillian Frank argues in "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash Against Disco." This explanation obscures the aesthetic preferences that fueled a good deal of the anti-disco reaction. Many rock fans objected to the sound of disco itself, rather than what it represented, but regardless of the reasons for individual dislike of disco, the music found itself ostracized post-1979.[30] This reaction reached a peak on July 12, 1979, when Chicago radio DJ Steve Dahl hosted a "Disco Demolition Night" at the White Sox's Comiskey Park. Thousands of records were destroyed.[31] At the beginning of 1979, disco record sales accounted for a full 30 percent of the American music industry as a whole,[32] but by February of 1980, *Billboard* magazine noted the "decline of disco on the radio in the U.S., indeed its virtual ban as a format."[33]

New York producer Todd Terry may have famously declared that "House is a feeling" – not an identifiable style – in his eponymous 1991 track, but the music has very clear and traceable roots to the resourceful, inventive ideas that DJs such as New York's Larry Levan and Chicago's Frankie Knuckles applied to make "dead music come alive by cut 'n mix, segue, montage, and other DJ tricks."[34] They manipulated disco tracks, looping a drum-and-bass segment from one track with a vocal hook from another to produce a "new" sound for the gay black and Latino dancers that were deprived of actual new disco records.

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[30] Frank, "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash Against Disco," 289
[31] Frank, "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash Against Disco," 284.
[32] Lynn Darling, "The Prince of Disco," *The Washington Post,* 5 Aug. 1979.
[33] Doug Hall, "Disco Decline Spurs R & B," *Billboard*, 9 February 1980.
[34] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 25.

In Chicago, this style of music first took hold at the Warehouse (where the term "house" is derived from) during Frankie Knuckles' reign as resident DJ. As clubs playing this kind of music proliferated among Chicago's gay black community – the original, loyal audience for disco – producers started making new music for DJs to play. Lacking the resources of disco producers, who relied on major label funding for vast studio arrangements, they used cheap pieces of electronics – Roland TR-707, 808, and 909 drum machines, synthesizers, and samplers. A thumping, fast, disco-derived kick drum provided the danceable structure.

Knuckles and the crew of DJs that played the Warehouse mixed edited disco and R&B records with sampled bass lines, Roland drum machines, and synthesizers to create a driving dancefloor sound. Parties at the Warehouse were extraordinarily popular in Chicago, enough that Detroiters like a young Derrick May took notice and came down to hear the music and pick up records. Two other Detroit house fans were Larry Harrison and Marshall Jackson, who opened Cheeks, the club on 8 Mile Road mentioned at the end of this chapter's previous section, in 1982.[35]

John Collins, a Detroiter, DJ'd at Cheeks during the early 1980s. "What I liked about Cheeks was that it was very eclectic - it was black, it was white, it was straight, it was gay," Collins said. "And house music was just really starting at that time. The people there were more progressive in the music that they heard, because the music that we played wasn't necessarily what was on the radio."[36] The house music played at Cheeks was generally composed of the introductions to disco records, which consisted of rhythmic, vocal-less sections that gradually layered bass over drums, either recorded or produced from a drum machine. Cheeks was

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[35] Zlatopolsky, "The Roots of Techno: Detroit's Club Scene 1973–1985."
[36] Chris Azzopardi, "Still Jammin," *Pridesource*, 26 May 2012.

essentially a smaller-scale version of the nightclubs that thrived in Chicago's much larger gay community, serving as an exportation point for the culture and music.

Influences on early techno and differences between house and techno

Techno is often compared to house music for two reasons. The first is that they are genres of electronic dance music produced using similar equipment that developed in black communities in the American Midwest during the same time period. These factors suggest that the two styles share numerous similarities in both sound and audience, and to a large degree those assumptions are correct. The second reason is that techno and house music were played together as the principle soundtrack to European rave culture, a phenomenon that began in the late 1980s and continues in many forms today. Those intrinsic musical similarities between techno and house were noticed by the club DJs in Detroit playing the city's new brand of dance music.

"If you listen to some of the early stuff that Kevin Saunderson did, as well as Derrick [May]… you think about 'Big Fun' and 'Good Life,' it's a 4x4 beat," said Collins. "They have the keyboard, they have the drums… it's so close to house music, but it did take a step further and add some electronic elements. It just goes to show you how much house music influenced early Detroit techno. Even 'Strings of Life', which is one of my all-time favorite techno records, was very house-y."[37] Collins' statement introduces an idea what some writers (such as Sean Albiez) have argued against – techno, especially in its earliest incarnations, shared much in common with house music, "but it did take a step further and add some electronic elements."[38]

[37] Zlatopolsky, "The Roots of Techno: Detroit's Club Scene 1973–1985."
[38] Albiez, "Post-Soul Futurama: African American Cultural Politics and Early Detroit Techno," 147.

His reference to the 4/4 beat as the defining feature of house that was shared with techno betrays a relegation of the music's other elements to secondary importance. If a listener isolates techno's defining attribute as its kicking rhythm, then its similarities to house are more pronounced than if one places greater primacy on the music's other ingredients. Furthermore, it is worth noting Collins' reference to techno's greater use of "electronic elements" primarily reflects an aesthetic, rather than functionalist, view of the electronic instrumentation used to produce early techno and house records. Both genres owe their existences to then-new forms of electronic production. Early house artists used technology to produce sounds that were somewhat similar to those of mechanical instruments. From the very start, techno music, true to its name, embraced the foreign, futuristic sounds only electronics could provide.

Techno and house have broadly similar origins and today operate within similar cultural spaces, but differ aesthetically due to the different influences that musicians absorbed from their environment. Some aspects of techno are very similar to house – again, the fast 4/4 time kick drum is present universally in both genres, though each style gradually adopted its own specific methods of kick drum arrangement.[39] But others, such as the approaches taken towards vocals and the styles of synthesizer instrumentation, are markedly different.

One area in which techno is starkly different from house is the aural signatures of black American musical tradition. Techno is bereft of many of the disco-derived elements of house that are themselves are derived from pre-disco styles such as funk and soul. Perhaps the most powerful of these links to tradition is the black voice itself, which is omnipresent in early house records. Typical early Chicago house songs such as Marshall Jefferson's "Move Your Body" and

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[39] These differing arrangements became codified during the early 1990s and are examined in Chapter Three's discussion of the Underground Resistance/Berlin school of techno.

Farley Jackmaster Funk's "Love Can't Turn Around" (both 1986) prominently feature

identifiably black voices free of excessive vocal processing.[40] These are voices that are clearly

attached to both race and gender, as well as representing some attachment to the limited abilities

of a human singer.[41] Early house's vocals made it human – and because those vocals could be

attributed to a black American, they imprinted house with "soul," that quality most associated

with the history of black American popular music.[42] If the aesthetic choices of wealthier young

black Americans that created techno can be discussed as "post-soul," as Nelson George argues,

then those of house producers were firmly entrenched in the tradition of "soul." House's links to

this tradition were often explicit in the realm of lyrics as well as vocal presentation. Larry

Heard's 1986 record "Can You Feel It" is the best example of house music's links to this legacy,

through its summoning of a disembodied gospel preacher spreading the word of Jack[43] rather

than the Lord. Over a typical Chicago house instrumental, these words echo with reverberation

reminiscent of a gospel church:

> In the beginning there was Jack … and Jack had a groove,
> and from this groove came the grooves of all grooves.
> And while one day viciously throwing down on his box,
> Jack boldly declared "Let There Be House" and house music was born.
> I am you see, I am the creator and this is my house
> And in my house there is only house music.
> But I am not so selfish because once you enter my house
> it then becomes our house and our house music.
> And, you see, no one man owns house
> because house music is a universal language spoken and understood by all.[44]

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[40] Farley "Jackmaster" Funk, "Love Can't Turn Around." 1986.
[41] Marshall Jefferson. "Move Your Body." 1986.
[42] Albiez, "Post-Soul Futurama: African American Cultural Politics and Early Detroit Techno," 145.
[43] Refers to "jacking," a style of back-and-forth dance popular at house clubs in the 1980s. In this instance, the dance is personified.
[44] Larry Heard. *Washing Machine/ Can You Feel It*. Mr. Fingers. Larry Heard, 1986.

The reference to an origin story, the welcoming words, and the universalism expressed in this piece tell volumes about the attitudes with which house music producers approached their audience. So does the impassioned, pastor-like voice of the unidentified man bellowing the lines. This is religion reimagined for gay black men, doubly outcast from the mainstream of American society. While house music has evolved from its status as Chicago's "church for children who have fallen from grace," in the words of Frankie Knuckles, the vocal track from "Can You Feel It" has lived on. Later released as an acapella for DJs to use whenever appropriate, it continues to soundtrack the peak of countless house mixes the world over.[45]

The influence of disco-derived drum patterns is the clearest link between house and techno. Given that drum beats have primacy in this rhythm-dominated music, this is a substantial point of connection. But the youth culture in Detroit that was producing new electronic music was not mostly gay, as it was in Chicago. One can conclude that this may have eased the desire for a sense of community expressed in the lyrics of early Chicago house. Outside of the drum patterns that were usually programmed with the same Roland equipment as house music, the unique aspects of nascent techno had to do with the way middle-class black young people were picking up on the musical sounds and styles coming out of Europe at the time. Much of this Europhile trend can be accurately credited to the Electrifying Mojo. Unfortunately, much of the current discourse around techno history misattributes the genesis of techno to the isolated genius of a tiny group of suburban Detroit producers.

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[45] Kai Fikentscher, *"You Better Work!": Underground Dance Music in New York City*. (Hanover, NH: U of New England, 2000), 102.

The Belleville Three and proto-techno

Early Detroit techno is often described in both academic and journalistic discussions as the project of three individuals who loosely working together in early 1980s – Derrick May, Juan Atkins, and Kevin Saunderson, usually referred to collectively as the "Belleville Three." Dan Sicko's *Techno Rebels: The Renegades of Electronic Funk*, a popular history of Detroit techno cited several times in this chapter, propagated this idea; it focuses on May, Atkins, and Saunderson to the exclusion of other players in the early techno scene. While the Belleville Three are indeed figures of extraordinary significance in the continuing history of techno, some of their (more recent) importance has come perhaps as a result of the continued attention paid to them as the ostensible sole founders of techno**.** Simon Reynolds begins *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture*, perhaps the most widely-read general account of electronic dance music's evolution in Europe and America, begins with the story of the friendship that Atkins, May, and Saunderson forged in suburban Detroit.[46]

In reality, the Electrifying Mojo's program and Chicago house music were influences shared by a larger cohort of young Detroit producers. This can be explicitly observed in the tracklisting of the first techno album, Ten Records' 1988 compilation *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit*. Only five of the record's twelve songs were produced by Juan Atkins, Kevin Saunderson, and Derrick May. While they contributed a substantial portion, to be sure, *The New Dance Sound of Detroit* reveals the truth that a large number of Detroiters were working within the same musical palette conterminously.[47]

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[46] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 4.

[47] Various Artists. *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit*. Ten Records. 1988.

The 1981 single "Sharevari" by the group A Number of Names is an even more revealing artifact for two reasons. It is, for one, an illuminating example of the influences that young Detroiters were absorbing well before the words "techno music" were uttered in the city. It also demonstrates that those influences were manifested in work produced by a wider array of artists than the canonical story of the Belleville Three tells.[48] A Number of Names was the product of Paul Lesley and Sterling Jones, a pair of affluent black Detroit teenagers who, in the words of Lesley, "Never felt like youth trapped in Detroit. We felt like we already had worldly experiences, even though we were still in high school."[49] According to an account from Brian Bledsoe in *Techno Rebels*, the Electrifying Mojo heard their record at a party, and invited the group to his studio to play it on air.[50] While the Electrifying Mojo is better known for playing the records that influenced Detroit techno producers, he also served as a tastemaker in the music's early days.

"Sharevari" has a disco-derived rhythm similar to the mixes played at the clubs that would birth Chicago house. It is more likely, though, that A Number of Names absorbed those influences from the vast array of European records that used disco's steady kick drum format, given the nascent state of house music at the time, though this conclusion is speculative. The other facets of "Sharevari" can be observed more conclusively. The track begins with the lyrics, "Some bread and cheese and fine white wine/Designer chic but a matter of time," immediately offering the listener a glimpse of the creators' European fantasies. Those words are sung in a pastiche of accents, blending vaguely German and Italian affects with vocalist Ira Cash's

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[48] Paul Lesley, Roderick Simpson, Sterling Jones, "Sharevari." A Number of Names. 1981. Capriccio Records.
[49] Brendan M. Gillen, "Name That Number," *Detroit Metro Times*, 21 Nov. 2001.
[50] Bledsoe organized Charevari, one of the Europhile Detroit-area parties mentioned earlier this chapter. A Number of Names called their song "Sharevari" in honor of the event.

African-American inflection. The sounds of the bassline are reminiscent of those from

Kraftwerk's album *Computer World*, mentioned earlier in the chapter as a favorite of the

Electrifying Mojo. One component of "Sharevari" goes beyond just Kraftwerk's influence – it

samples wholesale a high-pitched synthesizer tone from "It's More Fun to Compute," *Computer*

World's closing track.[51]

In the second edition of *Techno Rebels*, Sicko admitted that he should have spent more

time examining the Belleville Three's contemporaries and the pre-techno Detroit party scene,

writing in the book's introduction that "if it were up to me last time around, I would have stayed

in Chapter Two [The Pre-History of Techno 1978-1983] and not come up for air until I had

cross-referenced every last Italian disco record and Detroit high school social club."[52] The music

Sicko mentioned in that statement, Italo-disco, was one of the Kraftwerk-influenced European

genres that the Electrifying Mojo favored.

Kraftwerk's influence

"Mojo made it okay for young black people to listen to 'white' music," according to

Detroit techno producer Neil Ollivierra. "When they saw that was possible, they realized you

could tear down similar boundaries in terms of fashion and music and literature and style and

friendships and culture. They realized you could change all kinds of stuff about your life."[53]

Kraftwerk, Neu!, Tangerine Dream, and other European (primarily German) electronic pop

records were not just "white" music – they were experimental, strange European acts, certainly

not as popular as mainstream white rock artists were among the white youth of America at the

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[51] Ralf Hütter, Florian Schneider, Karl Bartos, and Wolfgang Flür. *Computer World*. Kraftwerk.
EMI, 1981.
[52] Sicko, *Techno Rebels,* 13.
[53] Matos, *The Underground is Massive,* 8.

time. The black young people of Detroit were, in truth, one of the most prominent American audiences for this European music – Kraftwerk, especially.[54] The Detroit music scene was not unique in this respect, however – black Americans across the country were fans of the Dusseldorf band that was "so stiff they were funky," according to successful Detroit techno DJ and producer Carl Craig.[55] For example, Afrika Bambaataa, the influential New York hip-hop and electro-funk producer, was a fan of Kraftwerk. He was enough of a fan, in fact, to produce a track called "Planet Rock" that took the synthesizer melody from Kraftwerk's "Trans-Europe Express" and mixed it with a TR-808 drum pattern of the bands' single "Numbers." "Planet Rock" was a huge success following its release in 1982. Though Afrika Bambaataa did not directly sample Kraftwerk's work, instead re-composing it on similar equipment, Kraftwerk's record label brought a lawsuit in Germany against him that resulted in a settlement.[56] Simon Reynolds writes that Carl Craig is the closest anyone has come to explaining Kraftwerk's appeal to black American young people, interpreting Craig's statement that they were "so stiff they were funky" as having the coded meaning "they were so white, they were black."[57] On one of Kraftwerk's first stateside tours, electronic percussionist Karl Bartos recalled this memory about the bands' own experience with their African-American fanbase –

> We were in the street and we saw a record shop full of our records and black people stood in front of them making jokes about the covers and about how strange we were looking, but people were making loops out of 'Metal On Metal' and dancing to it. These loops were going on forever! Made from just these heavy metal sounds! They were breakdancing to it. Then we were aware that we had access to this culture.[58]

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[54] Albiez, "Post-Soul Futurama: African American Cultural Politics and Early Detroit Techno," 140.
[55] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 4
[56] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 7.
[57] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 5.
[58] John Doran, "Karl Bartos Interviewed," *The Quietus*, 11 Mar. 2009.

But it was only in Detroit that the sounds of Kraftwerk were mixed with the house-derived kick drums patterns that would transform it into continuously danceable, repetitive techno. Juan Atkins attributed Detroit audience's gravitation towards Kraftwerk to "something about industry and the Midwest. When you read the history books of America, they tell you that when the United Auto Workers formed, this was the first time that white people and black people came together on an equal footing, fighting for the same thing: better wages, better working conditions… Detroit is now one of the most depressed cities in the country, but it's still the city with the most affluent blacks in the country."[59] While Atkins' statement reflects his personal experience of growing up among relatively wealthy black peers, and is not necessarily historically accurate, it reflects the Europhilic, middle-class sentiments of the Detroit-area community he was a part of.

These conditions had incredible importance for Atkins' own contributions to the development of techno. While, as mentioned earlier, the early Detroit musical project was not the work of three musicians producing work utterly unlike anything their contemporaries were making, the Belleville Three – Atkins, May, and Saunderson – each served as a nexus around which other artists orbited. The record labels started by each of them – Metroplex, Transmat, and KMS, respectively – were key early distribution points that made sure that techno reached an audience outside of Detroit radio stations and clubs. The fact that Atkins, May, and Saunderson were behind the first techno labels contributed to their mythos as the sole founders of techno.

The three met at Belleville High School, in a mostly white, suburban, and somewhat affluent area southwest of the city of Detroit. Belleville was, in Saunderson's terms, "still pretty

[59] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 39.

racial at the time," so the three "kind of gelled right away" as some of the school's relatively few black students.[60] The friends shared interests in the kind of music the Electrifying Mojo played, and all three had some ambitions towards producing their own records. The three were fans of the Detroit party scene, and started DJing at gatherings together under the collective name Deep Space. Atkins started to experiment with producing his own electronic music with Rick Davis, a Vietnam veteran with an impressive collection of drum machines and synthesizers, while attending Washtenaw Community College nearby.

The two called themselves Cybotron, and they released a handful of moderately successful singles and an album between 1981 and 1983.[61] Cybotron's first record, "Alleys of Your Mind," showed distant echoes of techno – consistent (though slow) kick drums produced with a budget DR-55 drum machine, and fully synthesized bass and strings coming from Korg and Roland equipment. Davis was inclined towards a more rock-oriented sound, which eventually led to his parting ways with Atkins, and his influence shows in the song's relatively slow tempo and traditional pop-rock vocal patterns. "Alleys of Your Mind" was released in 1981, the same year as A Number of Name's "Sharevari," and their similarities are obvious upon a casual listening. The aesthetic differences between the two recordings are small, though they foreshadow the future of Detroit electronic music. While "Sharevari" sings in a faux-European accent, the vocals "Alleys of Your Mind" are warped, filtered, and robotic, almost unhuman, and sound much like Kraftwerk's.[62] While "Sharevari" imagines a life of continental glamour, Cybotron's lyrics speak of barren landscapes and alienation. The arrangement of the instrumentation in "Alleys of Your Mind" is stark, spare, and entirely electronic. Speaking about

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[60] Reynolds, *Energy* Flash, 14.
[61] Sicko, *Techno Rebels*, 34.
[62] Juan Atkins, 3070, and Jon-5, "Alleys of Your Mind," *Enter*. (Concord Music Group: 1982).

about a 1978 Kraftwerk album in an interview, Atkins said that, "Before I heard *The Robots* I wasn't really using sequencers and I was playing everything by hand, so it sounded really organic, really flowing, really loose. That really made me research getting into sequencing, to give everything that real tight robotic feel."[63] While A Number of Names never produced another record, Juan Atkins continued down the path of electronic music.

After Atkins and Davis ended Cybotron, Atkins continued in a more dance-oriented trajectory with a solo project he called Model 500, or M500. In his book on critical music theory and Afrofuturism *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, Kodwo Eshun argues that the vocals of Cybotron and Model 500 are derived from European "passionless" forms. He writes that "the M500 voice hollows the soul into an affectless, traumatized voice. The mouth is a hole through which the soul drains away. *No UFOs* [an Atkins solo single] has the ominous imminence of whiteness."[64] The record mentioned – 1985's "No UFOs" – in indeed marked by mechanical, repetitive vocals processed with effects that make them sound alien. Its syncopated 4/4 kick drum shares much in common with contemporary Chicago house, while its metallic, driving synthesizers and bass are something new in the context of dance music, though certainly influenced by international electronic groups.[65] The vocals, though, are the clearest link to Kraftwerk and the German pop electronic tradition, through their clear imitation – so cold, so impersonal.

The radio DJ who had the most influence on what would be called techno – the Electrifying Mojo – was also an early promoter of the music, as can be seen earlier in his efforts

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[63] Mike Rubin, "Who Knew That Robots Were Funky?" *The New York Times*, 05 Dec. 2009.
[64] Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, (London: Quartet, 1998), 31.
[65] Juan Atkins, *Wax Trax! Mastermix*. (Wax Trax! Records: 1998).

to promote "Sharevari." According to Atkins, getting his first single, "Alleys of Your Mind," on

the radio wasn't difficult; if it was good, Mojo would play it. The trouble was finding him.

> I was making these demos and – being such a big Mojo fan – whenever I finished a record, I wanted him to play it. Derrick [May] was my best friend at the time and he lived off East Jefferson where WGPR was, the station Mojo was at. When Mojo went off the air, he would stop by this café to wind down. This was when arcade games were real popular, so every restaurant or café had a couple of arcade games like *Pac-Man* and *Defender*. Derrick was a *Defender* fan, and he would play, waiting for Mojo to come through, and of course, he showed up [one day]. So Derrick said to Mojo, 'Man, I've got a friend with this music and you probably should hear it.' Mojo was into this reggae excursion at the time; he would go into these tangents with different styles of music. So we went into his office and he had this reggae record playing on his little turntable – he didn't take the record off the turntable – and he said, 'If your track makes me take off the record, then it's a hit.' He put our tape on and both of these tracks were playing at the same time. Then he picked the needle up off the reggae record and said, 'Yeah, I love it.'" Two days later, "Alleys of Your Mind" was on the radio.[66]

Kevin Saunderson, Derrick May, Eddie Fowlkes, and other Detroit friends gradually started

producing records over the course of the 1980s, generally released on the Metroplex, the label

Atkins started in 1985, or KMS (Saunderson's own label) or Transmat (May's).[67] By this point,

the influences crucial to early techno were codified, and artists were working with shared traits –

May's 1987 single "Nude Photo" shared much in common with Atkins' work as Model 500, as it

did with Saunderson' soon-to-be-crossover hit "Big Fun" and Eddie Fowlkes' "Goodbye Kiss."

Yet all of this music was without a name. That would come later, when Europe, and in

particular English record scout Neil Rushton, discovered the music Detroit was producing.

Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit, Rushton's compilation referenced earlier in this

chapter, was the first record to introduce the term "techno" as the established name for Detroit's

distinctive dance sound, taking the name from the Juan Atkins cut "Techno Music" that appeared

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[66] Zlatopolsky, "The Roots of Techno: Detroit's Club Scene 1973–1985."
[67] Sicko, *Techno Rebels,* 45.

on the album.[68] While techno continued to mutate into various forms over the next several decades, the important work of synthesizing early influences done, however. The Detroit party scene nurtured a Europhile approach towards music that culminated in a serious Kraftwerk influence. In the late 1980s, the sound exploded out of Detroit with astonishing speed, reaching Germany.

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[68] Sicko, *Techno Rebels,* 68.

Chapter Two

Frankfurt, Berlin, and Rave in the late 1980s

"No one had the foresight to collect money to buy the buildings. Nice, actually, that you didn't think like a businessman but were rather driven by your own culture, seeking out abandoned buildings for just one night."

Dr. Motte, Berlin techno musician and organizer of the first Love Parade

Introduction

Techno's ascent to the mainstream of popular culture in Germany begins with the legacy of experimental electronic artists. Kraftwerk and others set the stage for a flourishing of West German avant-garde music in the 1980s, which contributed to a vibrant scene made up of artists making music with whatever they chose to. Just as Detroiters were fusing these electronic sounds with Chicago's disco-derived kick rhythms, Germans were incorporating electronic instrumentation and dark, non-musical sounds into pop song structures. Synthesizers and drum machines worked alongside scrap metal and alienating vocals in the music of this breed of post-Kraftwerk German music. The narrowly defined genres the artists of this era were categorized into – industrial, electronic body music, Neue Deutsche Welle (New German Wave) – obscured the broad similarities in the audiences for the music and the way they were distributed to the listening public. A DJ culture developed around these types of music that was not unlike that of Detroit during the 1980s, but the locus of this scene was in the prosperous West German city of Frankfurt. Indeed, many of the same records were being played across the Atlantic to wildly different groups of people – black, largely drug-free Europhile Detroit teenagers on one side, gothically dressed Germans often strung out on amphetamines or heroin on the other. This

culture of music – the futuristic discotheque party, presided over by a DJ presenting mechanical sounds rather than a cohort of live musicians – was broadly similar, as demonstrated by the eagerness of both cultures to adopt the music of the other.

However, the most important step towards techno's arrival into German popular culture was another American import that relied upon danceable, alien sounds. Acid house, like techno, developed in mid-1980s American Midwest, though it called Chicago rather than Detroit home. In the late 1980s, it burst into the heart of European youth culture with an immediacy not seen since the early punk era. This chapter will examine acid house and techno in Germany as complementary parts of a whole. Acid house and techno are, in many ways, similar categories of music, and their similarities will be discussed later in the chapter. In terms of the German people's reaction to the music, it would be incorrect to divide them into two separate phenomena, as the same DJs who played acid house (as well as earlier German records) often became techno DJs or producers. Acid house was one form of black American electronic dance music that resonated with the youth of Germany, and techno was another, albeit one with substantially more staying power, for reasons that will be examined in the next chapter. In Berlin, during the period between the opening and eventual fall of the Berlin Wall, a dance scene that thrived on acid house and later techno would soon turn the wastelands of the center city into a hub for creative repurposing of urban space. The first Love Parade, which celebrated the united city as much as it did electronic dance music, spread this sound across Berlin. But before discussing Berlin, let us take a trip into the electronic dance music scene of 1980s West Germany.

Frankfurt

If you ask a German music fan where the term "techno" comes from, your answer may depend on where you are. In Berlin, a city where the word "Detroit" often serves as a "byword for high-minded purism, a bulwark against 'commercial' dance music," many a dancer at clubs like Berghain or Tresor could retell the well-worn story of the Belleville Three.[69] In Frankfurt, the answer will very likely be different. Both answers would be correct.

Andreas Tomalla, better known as Talla 2XLC, was born in Frankfurt in 1963. He started DJing pop music for dance classes at seventeen after winning a local mixing competition. In 1981 he had a transformative experience with Kraftwerk's music, like many artists mentioned in this thesis. "I went to a Kraftwerk concert for their album *Computer World*, and it just exploded in me! This is my music! Forget guitars, this is the thing," he later said. Tomalla started investigating what was being produced by other German electronic artists and discovered a wellspring of talent, which he incorporated into his DJ sets.[70]

In *The Ambient Century*, an examination of Western popular music's deconstruction over the course of the twentieth century, Mark Prendergast traces the roots of German experimental music to a near-total ignorance of U.S. and U.K. audiences towards developments in continental Europe rock and pop music during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The young people of West Germany in the 1970s, he argues, were both imbued with a post-1968 revolutionary spirit and alienated from the enormously successful Anglo-American rock groups that toured their country and demanded high prices for tickets. In this climate, group instrumental experimentation was in

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[69] Michaelangelo Matos, "Defining Detroit Techno: The Retrospectives and Reissues Of 2013," *NPR*, 31 Dec. 2013.

[70] "Talla 2XLC Interview - 30 Years of Technoclub," *Vimeo*, Kidson Media, 30 Jan. 2015.

vogue. Then it was "no wonder that electronics took over…. machines became more and more important to the Germans."[71] The many German groups of that era (often referred to derogatorily as "krautrock," an inaccurate term as much of their music had little in common with the blues reference points of rock) did, indeed, pioneer the use of analog electronic instruments.[72] Aesthetically, they can be seen as a reaction to British domination of continental European pop – there are no stars in Kraftwerk's robotic lineup, none of John, Paul, George, and Ringo's public personality play.

This was the music Talla 2XLC fell in love with as a young DJ, but it was not the end-all and be-all of pre-techno German experimental music. These groups that made music with synthesizers, drum machines, sampling and sequencers were from major West German metropolitan areas; Kraftwerk was from Dusseldorf, Can from Cologne, Faust from the outskirts of Bremen. Berlin was not a party to this explosion in electronic music. Berlin's avant-garde was concerned more with sounds no musical instrument could produce, and back in Frankfurt Talla 2XLC was incorporating both genres into his DJ sets.

The music that was in vogue in 1980s Berlin was industrial, a style that drew on punk anti-establishment attitudes, Dada-esque deconstruction, and, above all, harsh, driving sounds produced with whatever piece of equipment seemed to work and was closest to hand. According Sven Röhrig (3 Phase), an industrial musician who later became a techno producer and mainstay of the Tresor club and label, in Berlin's industrial scene, "it didn't matter whether or not you

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[71] Mark J Prendergast, *The Ambient Century: From Mahler to Moby - the Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 279.
[72] Prendergast, *The Ambient Century*, 280.

could play an instrument. The important thing was that it sounded interesting and was your own thing."[73]

S. Alexander Reed (of the influential English industrial group Cabaret Voltaire) traces a "critical history of industrial music" in his book *Assimilate*. He devotes an entire chapter to the music's presence in Berlin during the 1980s. Reed argues that West Berlin represented a unique climate that proved fertile for industrial music due to several contributing factors. One, the generalized leftist movements that swept Western Europe in 1968 had a strong impact on the city, due to its large student populations. Secondly, and most importantly, to Reed, the physical and economic environment of Berlin itself nurtured a way of life that was fundamentally anti-establishment.

The city was heavily subsidized and many young artists lived there virtually for free. Hartwig Schierbaum, of the group Alphaville, described it this way – "You didn't actually have to care too much for a living, because there were so many subventions, so much money being put in. It was the spearhead of western ideology in the heart of the Communist empire. So actually nobody in Berlin at that time really worked very hard. There was no reason. You could just go there and just live there without doing too much for it."[74] Berlin's low cost of living in the 1980s freed many young people from the need to participate in the organized job market. Much of the city was abandoned, and squatter settlements were common in neighborhoods near the Wall such as Mitte and Kreuzberg. Berliners were exempt from West Germany's mandatory conscription, and the local government was kept afloat by high subsidies from the government. In 1981, 55

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[73] Felix Denk and Sven Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie: Berlin, Techno, and the Fall of the Wall*, (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012). 15.
[74] S. Alexander Reed, *Assimilate: A Critical History of Industrial Music*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2013), 87.

percent of West Berlin's budget was paid for by the West German state.[75] College tuition was free, and many students nominally attended the Berlin State School of Fine Arts or the Technical University while living for free in illegally occupied buildings and experimenting with Berlin's drug and avante-garde music scene.

According to Reed, the sounds of Berlin's industrial music echoed that of the environment it was incubated in. The music of Einstürzende Neubauten, Berlin's most prominent industrial group, reflects these realities. During street battles between squatters and the city's understaffed police, "people started to build barricades and they drummed for hours on the metal fences and barricades," said lead singer Blixa Bargeld. "Ours was fundamentally the same music." The vast, empty city proved an inviting playground for artists willing to engage with its spaces. Einstürzende Neubauten recorded the track "Stahlversion" inside the empty interior of a highway overpass, percussionist N. U. Unruh banging out his rhythms with concrete blocks on the steel floor.[76]

During the early 1980s, Talla 2XCL worked at a record store called City Music in central Frankfurt while DJing parties on the side.[77] He was having trouble categorizing the music that he was interested in – the Krafwerk and Can school of West German experimental electronic music, the industrial sounds of Berlin, English, and Canadian groups like Neubauten, Cabaret Voltaire, and Skinny Puppy, and other styles – dark English synthpop (Depeche Mode, New Order) and the emerging genre of Electronic Body Music (EBM), a largely Belgian and German category

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[75] Emily Pugh, "Capital of the Counterculture: West Berlin and the Changing Divides of the Cold War West," *Architecture, Politics, & Identity in Divided Berlin*, (U of Pittsburgh, 2014) 200-40, 22.

[76] Reed, *Assimilate,* 88.

[77] *We Call It Techno!* Dir. Maren Sextro and Holger Wick. Sense Music and Media, 2008.

that combined industrial music's penchant for non-instrumental collage with synthesizers, sci-fi vocal samples and a fast, disco-derived drum machine beat.

Listening decades later, EBM sounds closest to the electronic dance music being created by black Americans around the same time. Indeed, German EBM group Liaisons Dangereuses scored a hit at the Detroit party circuit mentioned last chapter with 1982's "Los Niños del Parque," a stripped-down, driving track with a synthesizer hook that, if sped up a bit, would have fit right in to an early Detroit techno release. [78] Jeff Mills, a Detroit DJ and producer whose influence on techno has been widely repeated and acknowledged across the world, recalled that imported EBM and industrial were both popular among Detroiters after techno had solidified itself as a homegrown genre.

> It was what was happening in Detroit at the time – techno and industrial. Front 242, Nitzer Ebb, the more danceable things… At some stage in Detroit, they used to mix: the techno crowd and the industrial crowd used to party together. It's a very segregated city so it didn't last very long. The club owner got threatened that maybe something was going to happen. The industrial scene was more suburban, more white. The techno scene was predominantly black. We were partying together for a time, so this is when we were integrating, and certain people, certain club owners didn't like it. They cancelled a lot of nights. They didn't like the fact that black guys were walking out with white women, or vice versa.[79]

Back in Frankfurt, Talla developed a reputation as the local expert on electronic and industrial music. Looking for a way to organize this music into a way that his customers could find, Talla coined the term "techno" as a record-bin label. "Technological music' sounds like shit," said Talla, "So I dropped the 'logical' and called it techno."[80] After losing a regular gig as

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[78] Sicko, *Techno Rebels,* 25.

[79] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *The Record Players: The Story of Dance Music Told by History's Greatest DJs*, (London: Virgin, 2012), 326.

[80] "Talla 2XLC Interview - 30 Years of Technoclub." Kidson Media.

a DJ at a dancing school for "playing too much electronic – the owner said I had to play commercial," Talla set out looking for a venue where he could play the music he loved.

He found it in No-Name, a struggling venue in central Frankfurt where Talla threw his first party on December 2, 1984. He called it Technoclub. This roaming party was a small venture for its first two years, but eventually it started gaining recognition outside of Frankfurt and interest exploded. Talla had to move the event three times between 1986 and 1989 – once to the sprawling basement of the Frankfurt airport, which helped the party avoid curfews – each time to a larger location. Technoclubs's final destination, where it stayed for more than a decade, had a capacity of two thousand.

"Talla exerted an inestimable influence on the Frankfurt sound of the late 1980s," writes Reed. In the West German popular imagination of the time, Frankfurt was the center of electronic dance music. In 1989, Talla even founded his own record label, Zoth Ommog.[81] Early Berlin techno DJ Wolfram Neugebauer, who goes by Wolle XDP, recalled that Frankfurt's electronic music scene was a starting point for him to investigate the world of futuristic, space-age dance sounds.

> I liked this space-age aesthetic. It was a space-age-futuristic-sci-fi world. For me the starting point was a report I saw about the airport disco [Talla's Technoclub] in Frankfurt. How these poppers – the guys with stand-up collars, the girls with popper hair – did a robot dance to Kraftwerk.[82]

Talla's influence and the differences between the Frankfurt and Berlin dance music scenes will be discussed again in this chapter, but it is now time to move onto a genre whose relationship to the development of techno in Europe is both crucial (from a cultural perspective) and peripheral

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[81] Reed, *Assimilate*, 247.
[82] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 20.

(from the perspective of the music itself). It is impossible to examine the popularity of black American electronic dance music in any part of Europe without discussing acid house, which gave birth to rave, the largest European youth movement since punk rock.

Acid House and Rave in Chicago and Europe

House music developed in the early 1980s in nightclubs in Chicago and New York as a practical artistic reaction from DJs to the implosion of the American disco industry in 1979. The genre has evolved into a pastiche of innumerable permutations, but looking back, the first clear divergence in house styles began around 1985. One of them, deep house, represented a clear continuity with black American music's recent past. [83] Tracks like Larry Heard's "Mystery of Love" (1985) used soulful, disco-inflected vocals, jazzy riffs, and electronic instrumentation that attempted to mimic analog sound. Last chapter, house music was discussed in terms of continuity with identifiably "black" sounds, with vocals as a primary conduit for this sense of cohesion with history. The other category of house was to have a far greater influence on Europe.

Chip E's 1985 cut "Jack Your Body" is representative of what Simon Reynolds calls "jackin' tracks" – spare, unadorned beats created from just a synthesizer and a driving drum machine.[84] These tracks stripped house of its songful, melodic qualities, while highlighting the fervor that driving, minimalist drum patterns could fuel. Vocals in this kind of house, if present at all, are minimal and repetitive, exhorting dancers to "jack it" (a dance style popular in Chicago's gay black community) or "work your body." Derivatives of this aggressive type of house are still alive and well in Chicago today in the form of ghetto house and footwork. But in

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[83] Deep house produced and played in New York and New Jersey is usually referred to as garage, a reference to Manhattan's Paradise Garage nightclub. Garage is not to be confused with 1990s UK garage, its shuffling, offbeat cousin that spawned grime and dubstep.

[84] Reynolds, *Energy Flash*, 27.

1987, an almost-forgotten instrument from Roland, a Japanese electronics company, turned jackin' house's lean sound into the alien, futuristic music called acid house.

Designed by Tadao Kikumto, who also created the TR-909 drum machine (which has a rich legacy in techno), the Roland TB-303 synthesizer was produced over 18 months between 1982 and 1984. Originally intended as an accompaniment to guitarists who did not have a bassist to practice with, the TB-303 produces a squelching, submerged whine that can be modified in a vast variety of unpredictable ways. It sounds little like a conventional bass guitar, and the 303 was not a commercial success. By 1985 the silver, boxy machine was allegedly selling secondhand for as little as $50.[85]

The Chicago group Phuture was the first to experiment with the TB-303's possibilities in house music, and in 1987 they cut what would become known as "Acid Tracks," an 11-minute, vocal-free exploration of the different ways that bass loop's timbre could warp and change while maintaining a consistent tempo. The origins of the term "acid" as relating to the music are unknown and fiercely debated – Phuture's track only acquired its name after it left the DJ circuit and was released by Trax Records. By that point, other house producers had started incorporating the 303 into their work, and the framework for acid – an impersonal, ever-morphing wail married to the steady kicks, hi-hats and snares of traditional house – was set. The music demanded a laser focus on the tiny shifts and modulation of the bass loop, with the intricacies of the 303 containing the entirety of the acid genre. Between 1987 and 1989, acid was the hot trend in Chicago.[86]

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[85] "The Dummy Guide to Acid House." *Dummy Magazine*, 20 Dec. 2012.
[86] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 25

By the time that use of the 303 petered out in the U.S., Chicago acid tracks had made it to Britain, fitting neatly into the long-standing legacy of the adoption of black American music by white British youth. The music first gained international popularity in the Spanish island Ibiza, a hotbed of nightclubs and inventive DJs that pioneered the Balearic sound, a sonic collage of upbeat, danceable musical styles. Balearic was designed to be danced to under the effects of MDMA (commonly referred to as Ecstasy), then a relatively unknown research chemical legal in most of the world. Ibiza was a popular vacation destination for British DJs, musicians, and club organizers. A few of them - Paul Oakenfold, Danny Rampling, Jenni Rampling, and Nicky Holloway being the most crucial – brought the Balearic vibe, and a fascination with the bizarre sounds of acid house, back to the United Kingdom, where they started clubs and parties like London's Shoom (1987) and Trip (1988).[87]

In the interest of preserving this thesis' focus on techno, I will not examine the far-reaching effects of acid house on generalized European youth culture and music, but a few words on what became known as the "rave" subculture are warranted, given its clear connection to German adoption of techno. During the summer of 1988, acid house exploded in Britain from the pioneering nights in Manchester and London, with an underground, illegal circuit of parties fueled by Chicago acid house and Ecstasy transforming the British popular culture landscape. It sharpened the mainstream of British nightlife from a drinking, fighting, and sex-based pastime into an asexual, loving lifestyle based around nonstop dancing, the empathetic effects of Ecstasy, and acid house. Rave, like punk or hip-hop, was a multifaceted movement that encompassed the following forms.

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[87] Matthew Collin, and John Godfrey, *Altered State: The Story of Ecstasy Culture and Acid House*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1998), 125.

- *Fashion:* baggy, brightly colored clothes, the more flamboyant and easy to dance in the better.
- *Visual art:* elaborate party fliers and light shows accompanied events (rave's trademark signifier was the blank, vapid yellow smiley face, commonly found on t-shirts and fliers in late 1980s-early 1990s Britain)
- *Music:* Chicago acid house played in a continuous mix by a DJ, usually at an extremely high decibel volume. Detroit techno was also played, though few records were available in Europe in the late 1980s.
- *Drugs:* Ecstasy use was virtually ubiquitous, though LSD was also very popular (as was the combination of the two: "candy flipping").[88]

Rave culture began in Britain in 1988, and quickly spread across the continent and into North America. While this thesis does not focus on broader cultural perceptions of electronic dance music as white music, the widespread success of rave as a cultural phenomenon lies at the root of this. American re-appropriation of black electronic dance music can be traced to the exportation of Britain's rave culture to a new, white audience, which occurred over the course of 1990 and 1991, finding its first manifestations in events such as New York's "Storm Rave" and Los Angeles' "Stranger Than Fiction." Rave was loud, garish in its visuals, and, like so many great youth subcultures, impossible for parents to decipher. Its blatant focus on the effects of the drug ecstasy, which was virtually nonexistent in the early Detroit techno and Chicago house communities, exacerbated the news media's focus on it. Though rave never reached the heights of mass popularity it did in Europe, 1990s American rave was a visibly national phenomenon in the United States that attracted a scale of interest that far outmatched the attention paid to the localized African-American cultures that birthed techno and house. And yes, American rave reached the Midwest, black electronic dance music's spiritual home, but in a format so foreign to its origins as to be unrecognizable. A Detroit TV station's 1999 segment "Crave The Rave"

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[88] While the nickname "acid" for LSD may indicate to a casual observer that acid house was named after the drug, there is little evidence supporting such assertions, and Phuture's original "Acid Tracks" single included the anti-drug B-side "Your Only Friend."

provides an illuminating look at the perception of American rave. Crowds of white, "mostly suburban" teenagers flail their bodies and wave glowsticks as the host expounds at length on the drug-taking habits of her subjects. Not mentioned: the local origin of the piece's blaring techno soundtrack.[89] Both Mireille Silcott's book *Rave America: New School Dancescapes*[90] and Michelangelo Matos' recent *The Underground is Massive* take pains to emphasize that American rave was a separate phenomenon from the dance music cultures that developed the music played at raves.[91] To avoid misconceptions, it is worth mentioning that 1990s American rave was a separate phenomenon from "EDM," the promotional format that introduced several styles of electronic dance music to a mainstream American audience.[92] "EDM" will be given a brief overview in this thesis' final chapter as part of an assessment on the state of post-1990s American techno.

Berlin, Ufo, and the Love Parade

The story of electronic dance music is, as much as it is a story of musicians, a story of DJs, the people who distribute a kind of music that cannot be reproduced live. Club DJs may get the most attention, but those who worked in the medium of radio often proved more important by introducing new music to larger audiences. In Detroit, the Electrifying Mojo had a huge role in providing the influences that shaped techno's pioneering musicians. Berlin's Monika Dietl played the same part in introducing acid house to Berliners. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dietl hosted a Saturday-evening show broadcast on the West Berlin station SFB-2, later moving

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[89] *Crave The Rave*. Katie Trexler. *YouTube*. Fox 2 Detroit, 1999.
[90] Mireille Silcott, *Rave America: New School Dancescapes*, (Toronto: ECW, 1999), 4.
[91] Matos, The Underground Is Massive, 4.
[92] A few popular artists that fit the current "EDM" format, for a reference point: Skrillex, Deadmau5, Avicii, Calvin Harris, Kygo.

to the youth-oriented Radio 4U.[93] She was the first DJ in the Berlin area to broadcast acid house on her show. "When acid house arrived, I suddenly knew where I belonged. The smiley rose over the city and real life began. It satisfied me completely: buying records, doing programs, going out," said Dietl. "I had to fight hard for my program on SFB. They thought I was out of my mind. It was a terrible bureaucracy with endless meetings. This was public radio, after all. But they did realize something was working in terms of listener numbers."[94] Though her show was based in West Berlin, it was available to all Berliners. The radio shows of the divided city were key in exposing East Berliners to music that was otherwise very difficult for them to hear. In the East, fans taped her shows to throw their own small parties, complete with handmade UK or smiley face flags.[95]

As Monika alluded to via here reference to the "smiley," Berlin was heavily influenced by Britain in its adoption of acid house. The earliest acid house parties in Berlin were presented as straightforward imitations of the phenomenon that was sweeping Britain. The first was started by Dmitri Hegemann, who had moved Berlin in 1978 to study at the Free University of Berlin. In 1982, he organized Berlin Atonal, the first festival for the city's avant-garde industrial music scene.[96] In 1988, Hegemann, alongside a few other acid house fans, started Ufo in the basement of a ramshackle apartment building in Kreuzberg, then an isolated, poverty-stricken area of West Berlin in the shadow of the Wall. Initial promotion was conducted by Monika Dietl, who broadcasted subtle messages about who was DJing or "where the Ufo would land," though she made a point of never revealing the club's exact address – it was illegal, after all, though law

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[93] Thaddeus Herrmann, "Mix Der Woche: Monika Dietl," *Das Filter*, 10 June 2014.
[94] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 36.
[95] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 46.
[96] Robert Defcon. "Dimitri Hegemann on the Legacy of Berlin Atonal." *Electronic Beats*. 19 Aug. 2014.

enforcement was not much of a concern in late-1980s Berlin.[97] Harald Blüchel (Cosmic Baby), a DJ in Berlin's early years of electronic dance music, later said that "Monika Dietl was as important as the most important artists in the city. Without her, I would never have known that there were others out there."[98] Those sentiments are echoed by others – Clé, another popular German techno artist, described Dietl's program as "a revelation… We sat at home and listened reverently. Everyone had to keep quiet."[99]

The location - Ufo was underground in a literal sense, and attendees had to climb down a ladder to enter – was a magnetic draw to Berliners dissatisfied with the city's music climate. The party props were the same as those favored by British ravers – intense strobe lights and fog machines. Techno DJ Dr. Motte (Matthias Roeingh*) recalled that in 1988,

> A few people who had been to England knew the appropriate dance style.
> More brandishing of arms. A few whistles could also be heard. It was clear this
> was the new thing. It abolished everything you knew from before. A new
> sound. A new style. Totally electronic. No more song structures. Everything
> was new.[100]

UFO embodied Berlin's now-established tradition of appropriating abandoned space towards cultural purposes. Acid house also fit Berlin's recent musical history of countercultural music created without the support of the established record industry. The music was produced and distributed in Chicago by independent artists without the support of major record labels. Uwe Reineke, who went on to found the techno record label Interference Berlin, said that the independent spirit "reminded me of the late '70s in Berlin. Back then you banged around on

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[97] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 33
[98] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 36
[99] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 36
[100] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 32

metal containers. Now, a small silver machine from Roland was taking over."[101] But acid house was not a genre that would have tremendous staying power in Germany. Partly, this can be attributed to the city's countercultural avant-garde that embraced in the first place distancing itself from the music once it inevitably reached mainstream audiences. This happened after the summer of 1988, after Berlin's first home-grown acid house hit, WestBam's "Monkey Say, Monkey Do," reached the German pop charts.[102]

"Naturally, some clever industry types immediately tried to bring the English trend to Germany and make something really big out of it," said Clé. "That happened in normal club according to the old club rules with five bouncers, a coat check and gin-and-tonics for 10 marks. It had nothing to do with use. We sought the dark and dirty." Helmut Josef Geier, founder of the Berlin techno label International DeeJay Gigolo Records, declared that "after two summers [1988 and 1989] people couldn't stand it [acid] anymore."[103] Ufo represented the strand of acid house culture that was in line with that of Berlin's bohemian image, while a mainstream club that jumped on the acid house bandwagon was not representative of the city's musical legacy. As techno producer and journalist Mijk van Dijk later said, "In the Berlin clubs house and techno was perceived to be the 'avant-garde,' as avant-garde music like Einstürzende Neubauten [industrial music] was in the '80s. As a decent avant-garde Berliner you had to be involved."[104]

The opening of the Wall in 1989 was momentous for Berlin's electronic dance music scene, because it introduced two things – a vast portion of the city that was abandoned to a far greater degree than West Berlin was, and the population of East Berlin, who heard acid house

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[101] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 35
[102] WestBam. *Monkey Say, Monkey Do*. Maximilian Lenz. 1988.

[103]*We Call It Techno!* Sextro and Wick.
[104] *We Call It Techno!* Sextro and Wick.

and descriptions of parties on the radio from shows like Monika Dietl's. The derelict bunkers,

apartment blocks, and warehouses of the GDR provided an ideal location for the music of

Berlin's avant-garde.

The zenith of the post-Wall acid house craze was orchestrated by a handful of DJs led by

Dr. Motte. The first Love Parade marched through Berlin on July 7, 1989, during Europe's true

Second Summer of Love, when acid house and rave exited the underground and drove itself into

the mainstream of popular culture. Motte said that,

> The idea for the Love Parade came spontaneously… I was hearing stories
> about illegal parties in England. When the police came and confiscated the
> system, the people kept partying on the street with boom boxes. I thought that
> was cool… We asked the DJs in advance if they'd make us tapes. We wanted
> the same sound on every float, so we asked for three C90 cassettes. They'd
> have to be turned over in sync. The tapes came from Westbam, Kid Paul,
> Jonzon and me. It was clear what we'd play, after all: acid and nothing but
> acid.[105]

West Germans had the constitutional right to register an open-air demonstration, so the parade

went off without a bother from the authorities.[106] The parade was a modest success, gathering

people to follow its DJ floats as they snaked their way across the city. The love for the

impersonal, robotic sounds of black American dance music was infectious, even though many in

the parade saw it as a last final hurrah of acid house. After the parade, Dr. Motte reluctantly had

to skip the afterparty at Hegemann's Ufo club, having been booked to play a routine hip-hop

party.[107] "It was especially hard that night," he said. "You're in the process of starting a

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[105] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie* , 40.
[106] Elizabeth Pond. "West Germany Affirms Right of Citizens to Demonstrate Peacefully." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 15 Aug. 1985.
[107] Robb, Dave. "Techno in Germany: Its Musical Origins and Cultural Relevance." *German as a Foreign Language* 2, (2002): 141.

revolution, and then you have to rattle off the old program again."[108] Mijk van Dijk looked back

positively towards the first Love Parade, saying "we danced to the ruins of acid house, but we

knew something would develop from those ruins that may be even bigger than acid house.

Which of course was correct."[109] The Love Parade was momentous, introducing electronic dance

music to average Berliners in a similar way to how M25 orbital raves attracted the attention of

the British mainstream, though acid house as a specific trend was on its way out.

"It wasn't until around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall did I and many others first

consciously become aware of the term techno or techno music. I knew the Technoclub in

Frankfurt, but that was something totally different," said Dmitri Hegemann. That was not

entirely true, but the essence of it was – Technoclub in Frankfurt was operating in a different,

though closely related, world of music. Through the compilation *Techno: The New Dance Sound

of Detroit*, released in Germany in 1988, Detroit techno slipped into the Berlin scene alongside

acid house. The term was quickly adopted as a generalized term for the Detroit techno and

Chicago acid house that was popular in Berlin, similarly to how techno was used to describe the

array of different styles that Talla 2XCL played at Technoclub.

For a brief period, a war of words erupted in the reviews section of *Frontpage*, a

Frankfurt-based electronic music magazine started in 1989, over the definition of techno.

Frankfurt writers argued that their older definition – EBM, industrial, and new wave – was the

true form of techno, while Berliners scoffed at them while singing the praises of black American

electronic music.[110] "Techno was defined differently in Berlin and Frankfurt, even if it did come

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[108] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 44.

[109] *We Call It Techno!* Sextro and Wick.

[110] "Frontpage Archives 1989-1996." *Technomag Archives*, 22 June 2013.

out of the same primeval mud," said Tanith, a resident DJ at Ufo. "Johnert [*Frontpage* editor-in-chief] always celebrated macho Front 242 marches or Suck Me Plasma stuff by Talla.[111] I preferred Underground Resistance."[112] Tanith, in that statement, presents two important ideas – one being that the Frankfurt school was beginning to look dated, given its reliance on musical styles that had been enshrined years earlier by the pioneers of Electronic Body Music and industrial. The other is the Detroit-Berlin connection, which is epitomized by the group Tanith mentioned – Underground Resistance, a collective that would rise to prominence in Germany with the influential "minimal techno" of artists like Jeff Mills and Robert Hood. The story of Underground Resistance is one of the most interesting in the history of techno, and it is one explored extensively next chapter. *Frontpage* magazine opened an office in Berlin in 1990. Soon the amount written about Berlin's different techno scene overwhelmed Tall 2XLC's sensibilities, and the Frankfurt wing of the magazine closed in 1992.[113]

At this point, the Detroit style of techno was still in its early stages of exportation. It was not the now-ubiquitous sound of Berlin's nightclubs – compared to acid house, it was an interesting oddity. Detroit's Kraftwerk-inflected rhythms were appealing to many German electronic music fans from the moment they heard it, but the music had little international distribution beyond English Neil Rushton's *New Dance Sound of Detroit* compilation – which, incidentally, was manufactured in a West German pressing plant.[114] There are unfortunately no

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[111] EBM-style dance music
[112] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 132.
[113] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 237.
[114] Various Artists. *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit*. Ten Records. 1988.

existing reports of factory workers dancing while manufacturing Kevin Saunderson's techno hit "Big Fun," which nonetheless made it to fifth on the West German charts in November 1988.[115]

With acid house's increasing unfashionability – not to mention the fact that the genre was essentially dead in its hometown of Chicago, with few new records produced after 1988 – Detroit-style techno assumed the banner of the soundtrack to Berlin's rapid reunification process. Much of this can be attributed to the work of Dmitri Hegemann, Underground Resistance, and the Tresor club and record label. Acid represented a kind of proto-techno for Berlin – an appealing, though limited, form of futuristic electronic dance music. The fall of the Berlin Wall opened up vast, largely abandoned areas of East Berlin near the Wall to opportunistic artistic development from Berlin's nascent electronic dance music community. It was a moment of celebration and unity, and the culture that united young people living on either side of the Wall was techno.

But it was not until Berliners started establishing connections with the Detroit techno community that techno became the soundtrack to German reunification. The club Ufo closed in 1990, but Hegemann's legendary acid house club would prove to be just a trial run for his techno empire that continues to this day. To launch Detroit techno into the mainstream of German popular music, it would take a chance encounter between Hegemann and an anonymous demo track he found in a Chicago record store.[116]

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[115] "Inner City Charts." *Offizielle Deutsche Charts*. Kategorie Single, 14 Nov. 1988.

[116] Defcon, "Dimitri Hegemann on the Legacy of Berlin Atonal."

Chapter Three

Tresor, Underground Resistance, and the Berlin sound

> *"The enthusiasm we met in Berlin was surreal… It seemed to me that they wanted to escape their past. And we wanted to escape our past, too, the one so full of racism. Remember the past, but look for a better world. That, I believe, was the common thread. We were all looking to these futuristic, experimental sounds as an escape vehicle, as a spaceship with which to get away, to transport ourselves into the future where we're all one, where divisions of race and religion and culture are torn down just the Berlin Wall."[117]*
>
> Robert Hood of Underground Resistance

Introduction

1990 was a good time to be a techno fan. Two years prior, *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit,* the music's first global showpiece, was released. Since then, many of the compilation's featured artists found unprecedented success in Europe. Kevin Saunderson, whose track "Big Fun" proved to be a massive success in the United Kingdom and Germany, was inundated with requests for remixes and DJ gigs. Derrick May's slow drip of new singles made his records prizes that quickly sold out in the few European record stores lucky enough to grab them. The music had moved beyond the province of high-school party soundtracks – this was a big business now, with an established audiences in Europe. Neil Rushton, who played a pivotal role in bringing the music to a wider audience by compiling *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit*, knew that there was an opportunity for this music to grow into an established genre. Released in 1990, Rushton's *Techno 2: The Next Generation*, true to its name, ushered in a group of younger Detroit producers influenced by the music's pioneers. Though the influence of *Techno 2* was certainly less than that of the original compilation, it introduced a sense of

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[117] Felix Denk and Sven Von Thülen, 155.

permanence and codification to the music. Techno was no longer a one-off, the sound of black

Detroiters who came from the same social circles – by 1990, it was an element of living Detroit

history as well as a product sought out overseas. "I watched regular guys rise to stardom in front

of me,"[118] said DJ and producer Kevin Reynolds of his time working at the Detroit techno shop

Record Time. His perspective was shared by many other musicians in Detroit who took techno

into their own hands, ushering in the music. Techno, by this point, was established as a set of

musical and cultural signifiers – signifiers that would be warped and reworked by a new

generation of Detroit producers and the embrace they experienced from a post-Wall Berlin. This

chapter explores two pillars of Detroit and Berlin techno. On the Detroit side, Underground

Resistance introduced a new breed of hard, mechanical techno, though their sound overshadowed

their militant vision for a post-racial society. In Berlin, a network of distribution developed

between the Tresor club, the record label of the same name, and the record store Hard Wax,

which all served as crucial distribution points for Detroit's music. Tresor spawned a network of

similar clubs that existed in the shadow of the Wall, while Berliners influenced by Detroit sounds

began to develop a complimentary one. Meanwhile, in Britain, the first stop on techno's

international journey, the rave movement reoriented itself towards domestically produced

sounds, leaving techno behind as it did acid house. Berlin was poised to become the star around

which techno's various worlds orbited, its centrally located abandoned spaces the fertile ground

where a unique clubbing culture blossomed.

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[118] Will Lynch. "Record Time Calls It Quits." *Resident Advisor*. 23 Feb. 2011.

Techno's departure from the UK

Techno 2 arrived in a Britain that was moving on from the imported American dance

music that characterized the early rave scene. Unlike in Germany, where early Detroit techno

found a following as a direct successor to acid house, the early tracks by artists featured on *The*

New Dance Sound of Detroit were usually played alongside acid house. There was a recognition

of its distinct sound, but techno was subsumed by yet another British cultural movement that

adopted the sound of young black American as its own. This happened in the late 1950s when

rock and roll artists like Chuck Berry gained popularity across the Atlantic. It happened again in

the 1970s during the Northern Soul movement, where mods across industrial England danced to

rare Motown B-sides until dawn, strung out on amphetamines.[119]

Each of those waves of importation spawned an indigenous British reaction. Black

American rock precluded the explosion of blues in the UK and the British Invasion. In the 1970s,

the "plastic soul" of David Bowie's *Young Americans* can be directly traced to his experiences

with northern English dance halls of the time, and that same influence can be heard in the warped

soul of Phil Collins and countless anonymous imitators from London and Manchester.[120] In the

early 1990s, Britain's early flirtation with acid house paved the way for breakbeat hardcore, the

indigenous soundtrack to rave's expansion into the vast suburban and rural heartland of

Britain.[121] Variously described as "music for nutters" and the soundtrack to "zombified

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[119] Tim Wall. "Out on the Floor: The Politics of Dancing on the Northern Soul Scene." *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (2006): 431-45. 436.
[120] Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman. *The Bowie Companion*. (London: Macmillan, 1993).
[121] The term "hardcore" is basically meaningless when it comes to describing any particular style of popular music – it can connote anything from Washington, D.C. punk to Dutch gabber. The one aspect that is generally shared is a commitment to going absolutely berserk at performances. What is described here is early UK breakbeat hardcore, a genre that represented a fundamental shift from the 4/4 kick drum that both techno and house share.

dancefloors" filled with the casualties of wonky E, hardcore represented a fundamental split with the 4/4 kick-drum that acid house and techno shared.[122] This came via the introduction of sampled breakbeats, the frenetic drum-only segments from funk and soul tracks.[123] When introduced into the framework of acid house, breakbeats "break" up the consistency of the beat, lending a frenzied, constant energy to the music. While the UK rave scene moved on from American imports towards the vast array of homegrown stylistic innovations that would sustain British electronic music for the next few decades, Detroit techno was primed for a rapid expansion across the North Sea. Due to Neil Rushton's techno compilations, the United Kingdom was the first place that techno was popularized outside Detroit, but it never reached the kind of popularity or social significance there as it would in Germany.

A trip to Chicago

Dmitri Hegemann, the founder of Ufo, the pioneering Berlin acid house club, is one of the most important figures in the history of techno in Germany. A self-described "country boy" from Westphalia, Hegemann moved to Berlin in 1978, seeking a bohemian life free from the realities of military service and steady employment that defined young life in West Germany. "They called me 'dorftrottel' or 'village trash,' and at the time, West Berlin collected all these 'dorftrottel' from all over Germany," said Hegemann. "I wanted to live in a flat, be in a band, something that was not possible in my small hometown… Berlin at the time was like an island, it was this crazy time."[124] Hegemann echoes the statements of many artists from all disciplines

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[122] Reynolds, *Energy Flash,* 140.

[123] Sampled breakbeats can also be easily recognized as the drum sections in many early hip-hop records or as the "drum" component in drum and bass, a direct descendant of hardcore. Breakbeat hardcore represents a fusion of contemporary hip-hop production with electronic dance music.

[124] Richard Brophy. "Tresor Reflects On 20 Years." *Little White Earbuds*, 9 Nov. 2011.

who lived in West Berlin in the era directly before the Wall fell – it was simply a place free of

the pressures that life in West Germany demanded. Yes, the city's industrial base was nearly

gone and virtually every major Berlin-based company had relocated in the post-war years, but

for people uninterested in traditional career advancement, the city's sheer affordability made it a

mecca.[125]

During the 1980s, Hegemann was one of Berlin's most prominent organizers of

experimental and electronic music. In addition to running Ufo during the height of the acid house

craze, he was responsible for Berlin Atonal, a yearly industrial and ambient music festival held

between 1982 and 1990 in Kreuzberg, then a run-down West Berlin neighborhood in the shadow

of the Wall.[126] Hegemann's interest in this sort of industrial music led him to found a small

record label named Interfisch in 1986. From the beginning, Hegemann was interested in

releasing music from outside Berlin, and one of the groups he signed to the label was a band

from Sheffield in Northern England called Clock DVA. In 1989, Hegemann traveled to Chicago

to license some of Clock DVA's work that was stored at Wax Trax, a record store critical to the

development of American industrial music. At Wax Trax, while flipping through a stack of white

labels,[127] he discovered a demo record with just a band name and a Detroit-area phone number

written on it. The band's name was Final Cut, and its members were Anthony Srock and Jeff

Mills.

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[125] *Berlin: Towards an Integrated Strategy for Social Cohesion and Economic Development.*
(Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003). 36.
[126] Defcon, "Dimitri Hegemann on the Legacy of Berlin Atonal."
[127] Refers to the simple white paper label that is usually affixed to dance music demo records or
one-off singles from independent producers. The term originates with the English Northern Soul
subculture mentioned earlier in the chapter. Soul DJs would often cover up the label on their
prized records with white paper so their competitors would not know what tracks they were
playing.

"There was a 313 number on the white label, so I called it straight away and said, 'I'd really like to put you out in Germany," said Hegemann. "I remember how difficult it was to get their record, *Deep Into The Cut*, into circulation—nobody was interested in it. These industrial beats and heavy-machinery sounds were the beginning of something new and were still a bit rough."[128] *Deep Into The Cut* was Final Cut's debut album, and was out of production for twenty-seven years until it was reissued in 2016 by London label We Can Elude Control.[129]

Final Cut was a mixed-race duo, a rarity in Detroit. Anthony Srock was from suburban Macomb, Michigan, while his partner Jeff Mills graduated from Mackenzie High School, one of the many Detroit schools suffering from precipitous declines in enrollment as the city endured the pains of white flight.[130] Srock was interested in the types of industrial music that Hegemann was seeking for his Interfisch label, while Mills had a background as a renowned DJ in the nascent Detroit electronic music scene.

The music's similar origins drew Detroit's industrial and techno scenes together, in Mill's words – "At some stage in Detroit, they used to mix: the techno crowd and the industrial crowd used to party together… the industrial scene was more suburban, more white. The techno scene was predominantly black."[131] Despite the racial divide that separated industrial and techno in Detroit, it made sense that the two groups would connect. Early industrial was connected to the same audiences who imported the first American electronic dance music to Germany, and

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[128] Defcon, "Dimitri Hegemann on the Legacy of Berlin Atonal."
[129] Final Cut. *Deep Into The Cut*. Interfisch. 1989.
[130] David Riddle. "Race and Reaction in Warren, Michigan, 1971 to 1974: "Bradley v. Milliken" and the Cross-District Busing Controversy," *Michigan Historical Review* 26, No. 2 (Fall, 2000). 12.
[131] Brewster and Broughton, *The Record Players: The Story of Dance Music Told by History's Greatest DJs*, 326.

Detroit techno's originators have often namechecked industrial artists as critical influences. The hard-edged aesthetic of industrial music shares much in common with techno's obfuscation of the human imprint on music.

Listening to Final Cut's debut *Deep Into The Cut* today, its connection to the forms of techno that would sweep Germany in the early 1990s are clear. It is driving, mechanical, and danceable, though composed with the slower tempos and affection for maximalist sound collage that characterizes other mid-1980s industrial dance music. But the Final Cut record Hegemann released was not incredibly important, either in influence or in sales – the album was vastly overshadowed by "Take Me Away," a modestly successful single featuring vocalist True Faith the band released the same year. While historically interesting and certainly a strong example of contemporary electronic dance music, *Deep Into the Cut* is not quite an underrated classic deserving of mass adulation. It pushed relatively few new musical boundaries upon its 1989 release. *Deep Into the Cut* is most noteworthy for the fact that it was both Jeff Mills' first record and the one that introduced him to Dmitri Hegemann and Germany.

After Final Cut released their album on Interfisch, Hegemann invited them to attend the 1990 incarnation of Berlin Atonal, which would be the last until the festival's revival in 2014. After British acid house group 808 State cancelled their gig last-minute, Interfisch called Final Cut onto the stage. Carola Stoiber, who handled artist support services for Atonal, met Jeff Mills, describing him as "more reserved, but he was also the real mastermind, as we found out. It was his first big trip. The first one to Europe anyway. They were shit scared, then very surprised to find out that it's actually quite nice."[132] Not long after Final Cut's performance at Berlin Atonal, Mills left the group over creative differences with Srock. "I decided to leave the band because

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[132] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 144.

the satanic thrash rock direction Srock wanted to go in wasn't something I care too much for," said Mills. "I wanted to stay focused on dance music."[133] Their show in Berlin was not representative of the success that Mills found in his later journeys to Germany.

Underground Resistance

Back in Detroit, Mills was known as "The Wizard," and performed as a resident DJ at Cheeks, Detroit's first house club, where he honed his precise mixing skills with early disco and house cuts.[134] "An intro generally has about one minute, one minute and a half before the actual singing starts," explained Felton Howard, a longtime Detroit DJ who performed at Cheeks with Mills. "Jeff was fast enough just to play the intro. If you listen to disco tracks, they're always rhythmic in the beginning. Jeff would play 30 to 45 seconds, maybe a little more if it was a long intro and put another record on, and before that record started singing, Jeff was on it with another one, and another one."[135] Mills skills as a DJ and producer gradually earned him extensive renown outside the electronic dance music world, and today he frequently collaborates with European national and city philharmonic orchestras in experimental classical-electronic performance pieces.[136]

Mills was also a regular guest DJ for WJLB's Electrifying Mojo, who provided critical influences to techno's originators in the 1980s. Among the groups that passed through Mojo's studio while Mills worked there was Members of the House, who contributed the track "Share

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[133] "The Essential… Jeff Mills." *FACT Magazine*. 4 Nov. 2011.
[134] See Chapter One's section on Chicago House for more on Cheeks.
[135] Zlatopolsky, "The Roots of Techno: Detroit's Club Scene 1973–1985."
[136] Ashley Zlatopolsky. "Jeff Mills: 'These Visions Aren't Supposed to Come from Black Guys from Detroit," *The Guardian*, 22 Sept. 2015.

This House" to the original *New Dance Sound of Detroit* compilation.[137] After Mills' split with

Final Cut, Mike Banks, who fronted Members of the House, asked if Mills was interested in

forming a new group called Underground Resistance. Speaking at the very first Red Bull Music

Academy lecture, held in Berlin in 1998, Mills recalled the founding philosophy of Underground

Resistance.

> We talked about it for a while and the most important thing at that time was that we looked at what everyone else was doing in Detroit and what they had failed to do and where they made a mistake. At that time Kevin [Saunderson] had just... he had just finished the second album for Inner City and we had heard that Virgin was kind of jerking him around and they wanted him to mix much more commercial music and Juan [Atkins] was making much more commercial stuff too, and Derrick [May][138] was trying to sing or something like that and so we thought that that was not the way to go, that the original idea of Detroit techno was being lost. We thought we should be bolder, that we should do everything that they failed to do, so that's exactly what we did. We didn't license music out to everybody.[139]

Dismayed by the influence that the commercial record industry was having on techno's

first-wave artists, Banks and Mills planned to distribute their records independently. They chose

to perform with their faces covered, as well, because according to Banks "at this time a lot of

African-American musicians were getting their nose pointed, skin lightened and all type of crazy

shit. We weren't with that shit so we said fuck it, we're going to do our thing facelessly for as

long as we possibly can."[140] In interviews, Mills, Banks, and Robert Hood, a Detroit producer

who joined Underground Resistance shortly after its inception, highlight their philosophical

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[137] Various Artists, Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit.

[138] Kevin Saunderson, Juan Atkins, and Derrick May – the "Belleville Three," Detroit's most successful first-wave techno producers.

[139] Torsen Schmidt. "Jeff Mills Lecture Transcript 1998." *Red Bull Music Academy*. 3 Mar. 2014.

[140] "Underground Resistance (Slices Feature)." *YouTube*. Telekom Electronic Beats, 20 Aug. 2012.

connections to rap group Public Enemy and other artists influenced by post-Panthers black

militancy.[141] As Hood explained,

> The Underground Resistance message was militant. It was about a city trying to survive and recover amidst unemployment, the crack epidemic, Reagonomics. Automotive factories were closing, people were losing their job and turning to drugs. We had struggling single parents just trying to survive. But the message was also about hope and rising up. It was a message against the music industry, against dependence on big, corporate music, against selling your soul to the powers that be. Our attitude was confrontational: we make no compromises. We can't be controlled. We take control.[142]

Underground Resistance's work is tied explicitly to the poverty its founders experienced

in Detroit, and the group continues to fund after-school programs and youth baseball teams in

Detroit alongside distributing clothing to the city's homeless. In "Beyond the Hood? Detroit

Techno, Underground Resistance, and African American Metropolitan Identity Politics,"

Christoph Schaub argues that "Underground Resistance can best be understood as an attempt to

situate itself in regard to a Black radical tradition and to (re)establish allegiance with African

American inner-city communities while, simultaneously, promoting political and cultural

identities that explicitly move beyond ethnicity and race."[143] Underground Resistance used the

militaristic aesthetic associated with black nationalism in service of the post-racial futurist

dreams of techno's originators. At a time when rappers Public Enemy were fighting for a black

planet, Underground Resistance adopted the same creative palette towards music that rarely bore

an aural trace of humanity, whether black or white. Furthermore, the lack of lyrics involved in

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[141] Andrez Bergen. "Jeff Mills Does Solo Flight." *Daily Yomiuri* (Tokyo), Sept. 2006.

[142] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 141.

[143] Christoph Schaub. "Beyond the Hood? Detroit Techno, Underground Resistance, and African American Metropolitan Identity Politics," *Forum For Inter-American Research* 2, no. 2 (2009): 188.

their techno removed the possibility for their political message to be spread by playing their record in techno's performance format, the DJ mix.[144]

Alexander Weheliye argues that Underground Resistance, despite being arguably the most race-conscious group in the history of techno, appealed to Berliners primarily through their harsh, industrial sound, which stripped out vocals and any remnant of funk and disco's orchestrated legacy. Underground Resistance's sound was "less black" than the first-wave of techno artists. The biggest hit from 1988's *Techno: The New Dance Sound of Detroit* was Inner City's "Big Fun." Paris Grey's vocals on that song would not have been out of place in many disco songs from a decade ago. Four years later, Jeff Mills' *Waveform Transmission Vol. 1*, his tightly wound first solo album for Tresor, began with the incredibly tough, metallic groove of "Phase Four" and continued for 35 relentless minutes, taking the techno framework to a ferocious extreme. Weheliye sees the mechanical, robotic aspects of Underground Resistance as appealing to "white brothers with no soul," as Berlin DJ Tanith described his fellow techno ravers. His suggestion is that Underground Resistance's popularity among Berliners was at least partly due to a misreading of their presentation.

> The underground ethos has not been a central part of Black popular music, which is usually very aspirational, so not about occupying dingy basements, but more typically embodying 'the "good life'" in the form of financial success or designer clothes. UR did not take this path, which aided their popularity in Berlin. I see it as very convenient; because UR were so political, because they were unabashedly Black politically, it was an easy exception to the rule. Their sounds were much harder and much more confrontational, with track titles like *Sonic Destroyer* or *The Riot EP.* These have very particular meanings within Black freedom struggles, but that isn't necessarily how they were read and received in Berlin.[145]

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[144] Alexander G. Weheliye. "White Brothers With No Soul? — Un-Tuning the Historiography of Berlin Techno." *CTM Magazine* (Berlin), 2015.
[145] Weheliye. "White Brothers With No Soul? — Un-Tuning the Historiography of Berlin Techno."

Underground Resistance debuted their first record *Sonic EP* in 1990.[146] It was not an immediate success in Germany. But that would soon change. Mills, Banks, and other Detroit artists traveled to New York during the summer of 1991 to attend that year's New Music Seminar to distribute records, t-shirts, and promote their nascent collective.[147] In New York, Mills encountered Dmitri Hegemann and Interfisch for a second time. According to Carola Stoiber, an assistant then working for Hegemann at Interfisch,

> "I was sitting at a panel one day and someone slipped me a note: 'Hey, I know you." It was from Jeff who was sitting a few rows behind me, grinning. He was there with 20 Detroiters, all in UR t-shirts…At some point during the seminar, Jeff pressed a promo of their X-101 record into my hand and said they were looking for a European label to license them. I told him we had a club now, and they had to play. When I was back in Berlin, I said we had to book Jeff – he's a DJ, he has a new label. Then I played Achim and Dmitiri the X-101. We were all very excited about it… Through Interfisch, we already had a label structure and a distribution. Musically, though, Interfisch was still somewhere else. So we created Tresor Records specifically for the X-101.[148]
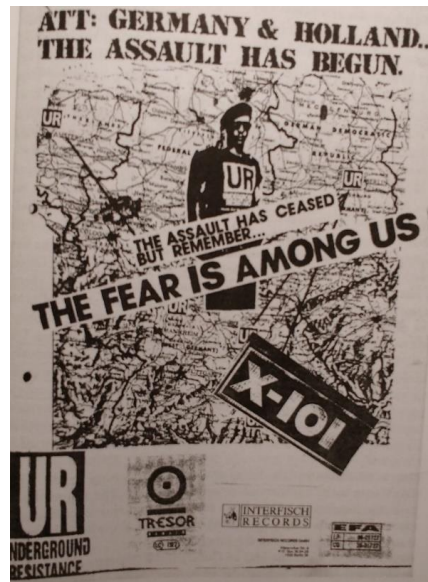
Tresor Records debuted in 1991 with Mills and Banks' album X-101, a hard-edged, ferocious piece of minimalist techno. It was particularly successful at Hegemann's new club, also named Tresor, and at Hard Wax, Berlin's most prominent dance-music record store. One month after X-101's release, Mills and Hood were in Berlin, ready to headline Tresor for Underground Resistance's first international performance.[149]

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[146] *Sonic EP.* Underground Resistance. 1990.

[147] At the New Music Seminar, they witnessed a self-congratulatory speech from *The New Dance Sound of Detroit* compiler Neil Rushton. He proclaimed himself the discoverer of techno in a speech that earned him consternation from the techno producers in the crowd, notably Blake Baxter, who "pulled off his belt and stormed the stage to thrash him," according to an account from German techno producer Thomas Fehlmann in *Der Klang Der Familie*.

[148] Denk and Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 146.

[149] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 146.

ATT: GERMANY & HOLLAND...
THE ASSAULT HAS BEGUN.

THE ASSAULT HAS CEASED
BUT REMEMBER...

THE FEAR IS AMONG US

X-101

UR
UNDERGROUND
RESISTANCE

TRESOR

INTERFISCH
RECORDS

EFA

150

The New Geography of Berlin

While Underground Resistance was organizing and putting out their first few records, West and East Berlin were reuniting. East German officials officially opened border crossings in November of 1989, and the Berlin Wall was torn down in stages between 1990 and 1992.[151] While West Berlin was seen by many West Germans as an oasis of easy living, the opening of the Berlin Wall exposed East Berlin as a bastion of abandoned property open to new interpretations. In the central districts of East Berlin adjoining the Wall, such as Friedrichshain and Mitte, there was a significant amount of unoccupied space easily accessible to the major population centers of the city, both in the East and West.[152] In the years immediately following the Berlin Wall's construction in 1961, the urban fabric of the city's two halves reoriented themselves away from the central districts that had served as hubs of commerce, transit, leisure, and industry. What was once the city center became the periphery of each city, close to the

[150] Tresor's promotional poster for X-101, found in *Der Klang Der Familie*.
[151] Laurence Dodds. "Berlin Wall: How the Wall Came Down, as It Happened 25 Years Ago." *The Telegraph* (London). 9 Nov. 2014.
[152] Hanna Katharina Göbel. *The Re-use of Urban Ruins: Atmospheric Inquiries of the City*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 101.

heavily policed Wall. It is no accident that West Berlin's Kreuzberg, bordered on three sides by the Wall, was populated almost entirely by squatters, Turkish immigrants, and the poor. In the East, much of Mitte, Berlin's historic center, lay abandoned until the early 1990s. It, too, was surrounded by foreign territory on three sides.[153]

Law enforcement in the newly reunified city was not able to keep up with individuals repurposing the urban space, as post-1990, the West Berlin police force took over the jurisdiction of the entirety of Berlin. The East Berlin police force was dissolved and restructured over a period of several years. This left a situation where issues that would shut down clubs in other cities were not dealt with consistently. Violations such as illegitimate property deeds, incorrect licensing, and noise violations were overlooked by an overstretched police force and a Berlin bureaucracy overwhelmed with managing the reunification of the city's many different services and departments.[154] In *The Re-Use of Urban Ruins: Atmospheric Inquiries of the City*, Hanna Göbel devotes a chapter towards the aesthetics of abandonment with regards to clubbing in 1990s Berlin.

> For the volunteer 'location scouts' who find and design abandoned buildings for temporary clubbing events (legal or illegal), the aesthetics of the place is a determining factors in its occupation… the ruined object of the building is introduced into a perceptual performance that goes beyond the usual everyday conception of the built environment as a static context. The building achieves this through the technique of overstimulation.[155]

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[153] Göbel, *The Re-use of Urban Ruins,* 176.

[154] Belinda Cooper. "The Fall of the Wall and the East German Police." *Policing In Central and Eastern Europe: Comparing Firsthand Knowledge with Experience from the West*. Ed. Milan Pagon. (Ljubljana: College of Police and Security Studies, 1996), 346.

[155] Göbel, *The Re-Use of Urban Ruins*, 95.

Göbel examines the choice of the abandoned building as a novelty component that enhances the overstimulation a visitor experiences during a night at a club. This is by no means unique to Berlin – the most famous nightclub during Britain's acid house phase, the Hacienda, was housed in an abandoned warehouse in an industrial section of Manchester.

The exotic space works in harmony with the other elements of a techno club. The "thumping bass of the music rumbles through bodies and walls, leaving vibrational effects on the moving body."[156] The interplay between darkness and strobe lights reorders the built and human environments, creating dissociation from fixed senses of position in space – people appear and disappear, and the room itself can feel like it is moving. Commonly used drugs such as alcohol, ecstasy and amphetamine further this overwhelming sense of escaping reality. The real space of the building is "redesigned to overwhelm clubbers, limiting their ability to perceive the environment as coherent."[157] An event manager who planned techno events in Berlin had this to say of the freedom to use space in the post-Wall years:

> Out of this incredibly exciting time in Berlin, when the Wall broke down and suddenly there was this second part of the city with the same size that was available and at the same time was completely out of control. There were police who had no training. There were people and developments that no one could predict… the most courageous at that time were the party people… these were guys who simply opened the doors and said: All right! Set up the stereo, turn the lights on, and let's go![158]

The attitude expressed in this quote was behind much of the artistic appropriation of space in post-Wall Berlin. The barriers to entry were low, so repurposing of abandoned buildings was commonplace.

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[156] Göbel, *The Re-Use of Urban Ruins*, 96.
[157] Göbel, *The Re-Use of Urban Ruins*, 96-97.
[158] Göbel, *The Re-Use of Urban Ruins*, 102.

Tresor Club

It was this combination – the aesthetic preference for unusual, abandoned locations, and their widespread, loosely-regulated availability in centrally located portions of East Berlin – that led to Dmitri Hegemann opening Tresor, the club mentioned by Carola Stoiber in this chapter's previous section. Tresor, which opened in 1990, translates as "vault" in English, and this description is entirely accurate. Johnnie Stieler, who worked with Dmitri Hegemann as "location scout" for temporary parties, came across an abandoned building in Mitte, near the city's central Potsdamer Platz district. It once housed the safes of Wertheim, the largest department store in Europe when it opened in 1904.[159] Acquiring the property, in the confusion and chaos that permeated East Berlin at the time, was easy, according to Stieler.

> In Mitte, I noticed there were these Stasi-type notaries everywhere trading in real estate. They were all sitting around there, selling stuff under the table… I had to go see a Stasi superintendent for the key. He worked at the East German diplomatic services agency. The boss wasn't working anymore, so instead, there was this young administrator… the administrator called the superintendent, and we went right over and checked the place out. When we said we wanted to come back with friends for another look, he just left us his enormous key ring. He'd already checked out. For him, as for so many others, it felt like everything was over. He'd have given me his shoes if I had asked.[160]

What the discouraged East German bureaucrat delivered to them was a vast basement with virtually soundproof walls, safes stacked against the wall, without plumbing, electricity, or heating. "That must be what it feels like to find an Aztec treasure," said Stieler. "None of us said a word. We just walked around in silence with our lighters. Then, very slowly, we made our way back up the stairs. It wasn't until we were back in the car that we started talking again."[161] The

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[159] Lawrence Carlos,. "Tresor: Off the Beaten Path." Diss. U of Westminster, 2014. *PAPER* 11 (2014): 17.
[160] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 101
[161] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 101

discovery of the space vividly illustrates Göbel's notion that clubbing represented an escape

from the outside world, with unusual spaces as one piece of a whole that worked towards the

creation of temporary sensory overload.

Thanks to Tresor's location on a rubble-strewn street, its incredibly thick walls, and

location physically underneath the Berlin streets, there was virtually no limit to how loud the

music could be turned up. The new club quickly became the focal point of Berlin's techno dance

scene upon its opening in March 1991. "With Tresor it was immediately obvious that this was

our place, this is where this music belongs, and everything is defined purely in terms of the

music," said Mark Ernestus, who ran the city's techno-focused record store Hard Wax.[162] The

music policy at the club favored hard, minimal techno – techno in the style that Underground

Resistance was pioneering in Detroit, Tresor Records was releasing, and Hard Wax was selling

to DJs. Hard Wax's best-selling record of 1991 was Underground Resistance's Riot EP. "We

found our style," said Hegemann, speaking on Tresor's music policy. "Minimal Detroit

sounds."[163] Stefan Schvanke, who worked as an event promoter for Tresor, recalled that,

> 1991 was the decisive year for techno. Before, DJs still had to dilute their sets
> with Nitzer Ebb, Liaisons Dangereuses, Meatbeat Manifesto [industrial and
> electronic body music] and stuff like that so they'd have enough records for the
> whole night. That was no longer necessary. You could concentrate fully on
> techno… Underground Resistance was played a lot. With their ski masks and
> hooded gigs, they fit perfectly to the martial element in the music.[164]

Schvanke's statement supports Alexander Weheliye's assertion, mentioned earlier in this

chapter, that Berliners read Underground Resistance's militaristic appearance as a purely

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162 Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 106
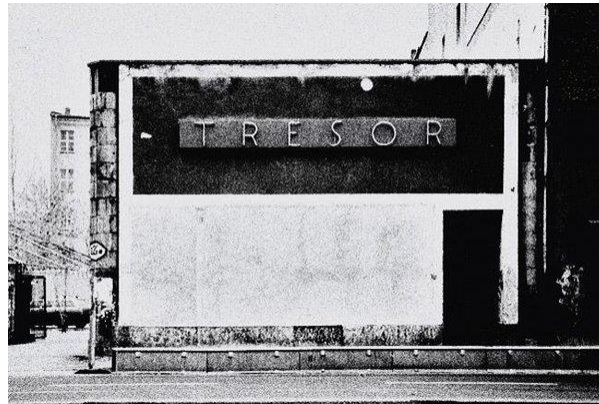163 Sicko, *Techno Rebels,* 120.
164 Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 150.

aesthetic choice, rather than as a visual manifestation of their philosophical links to black liberation politics.
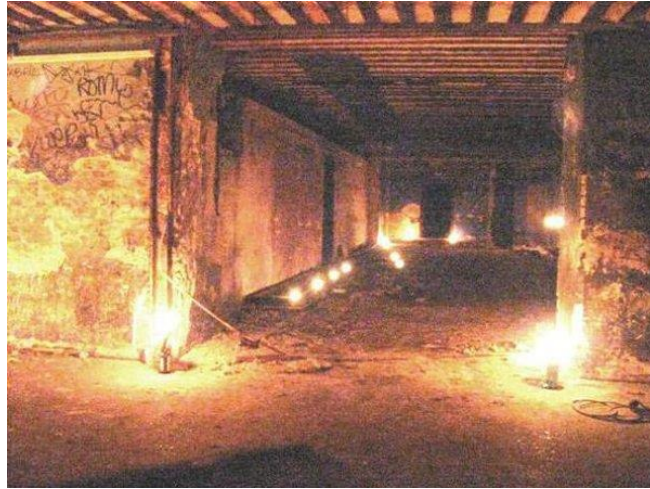
Interior and exterior of Tresor's location on Leipziger Strasse.[165]

Tresor spawned a host of similar techno clubs that operated in abandoned, loosely-regulated areas of central Berlin. Bunker, which opened in the summer of 1992, continued Tresor's tradition of literal naming – the club was located in a five-story air raid shelter built in 1943. So did E-Werk, which opened the doors of a former electrical substation near Checkpoint Charlie to

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[165] Felix Denk and Sven Von Thülen. "Nightclubbing: Tresor." *Red Bull Music Academy*. 8 Apr. 2013.

clubbers in 1993.[166] Tresor's aesthetic set the stage for the Berlin techno blueprint – minimal sounds in stripped-down industrial locations.

Hard Wax and Basic Channel

Hard Wax, which opened in the fall of 1989, was the center of Berlin's distribution network for techno records. Mark Ernestus sourced records from overseas, tapping into house and techno's middling popularity in the American Midwest as an opportunity to procure records that were languishing in the caches of stores and record labels in Chicago and Detroit. Detroit producer Lawrence Burden remarked that the staff at Hard Wax "knew more about what was going on in Detroit than we did."[167] When new releases would arrive at the shop on Tuesdays and Fridays, techno fans and DJs waited hours for a chance to hear them. It was rare that an average person could buy a new record from Detroit on its first shipment to Berlin; they were tightly rationed, with several copies reserved for Tresor's resident DJs Westbam and Tanith.[168] According to Mike Huckaby, a Detroit artist who has regularly played at Tresor since its opening – even naming the tracks on a 2012 EP after the club's different rooms – Detroit records were coveted like no others in Berlin.

> You went to record stores and you got the feeling that Detroit was really influencing electronic music in a major way. It was the force that was driving the club, and it made me feel proud that records from Detroit were driving the club. When Tresor releases came into the store in Detroit it was like mania, you could just put them into people's hands, they didn't even listen to them, they just bought them. People in the store would buy *The Extremist* [by Jeff Mills of UR] or a Rob Hood record without listening to it, or they'd quickly hear just one track on a double pack like *Waveform Transmissions* [also by Mills] and they'd want it.[169]

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[166] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 295-296.
[167] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie,* 217.
[168] Denk and Von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie*, 90.
[169] Richard Brophy. "Mike Huckaby Reflects on Tresor." *Little White Earbuds*, 9 Nov. 2011.

Underground Resistance pioneered minimal techno, a sound that would take hold in Berlin as the

basis of the techno that today soundtracks Berlin's vast nightlife industry. The group's

recordings placed a primacy on the intricacies present in each component of a track, eschewing

the maximalism that shifted some early German techno producers towards trance, techno's

melodic, orchestrated cousin. UR's Robert Hood defined minimal techno as,

> A basic stripped down, raw sound. Just drums, basslines and funky grooves and
> only what's essential. Only what is essential to make people move. I started to
> look at it as a science, the art of making people move their butts, speaking to their
> heart, mind and soul. It's a heart-felt rhythmic techno sound.[170]

The influence of Underground Resistance's minimal techno is obvious on Tresor's first

compilation album, *The Techno Sound of Berlin*, released in 1992. Gone are the orchestral

synthesizer arrangements that characterized many of Juan Atkins and Derrick May's 1980s

Detroit productions. Repetitive bass loops and savage kick drums were in.[171] Underground

Resistance's influence manifested itself in impressive form in the early-1990s music of Berlin's

Basic Channel – Hard Wax founder Mark Ernestus and Moritz von Oswald.[172] Basic Channel

adopted Underground Resistance's minimal techno aesthetics and combined it with the attention

to bass frequencies characteristic of Jamaican dub,[173] themselves influencing countless bass-

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[170] John Osselaer. "Robert Hood." *Spannered*. Overload Media, 1 Feb. 2001.

[171] Various Artists**.** *Tresor, Vol. 1: The Techno Sound of Berlin*. Tresor Records. 1992.

[172] A frequent collaborator with Detroit originator Juan Atkins.

[173] Dub is a genre that originated in 1960s Kingston centered on the manipulation of recorded records, usually instrumental versions of reggae tracks. Its focus on bass sounds and early introduction of the idea of a record as a creative tool rather than finished product influenced many genres of popular music, most directly hip-hop, post-punk, drum and bass, dubstep, and ambient. The production techniques pioneered by dub producers are wide-ranging and codified into much of today's Western pop music. See Dennis Howard's "From Ghetto Laboratory to the Technosphere: The Influence of Jamaican Studio Techniques on Popular Music" (*Journal on the Art of Record Production,* no. 3: 2008) for an argument on dub's under-noted influence on Anglo-American pop music – and a critique of the comparatively minimal innovations introduced by lionized American rock producers such as Phil Spector.

heavy techno producers the world over. In a somewhat dramatic effort to emphasize their connection to techno's origins, Basic Channel even pressed and mastered their records in Detroit. Ernestus and von Oswald sent their tracks Ron Murphy's National Sound Corporation, who mastered records for Underground Resistance as well as laundry list of techno pioneers, before shipping them back for sale in Berlin at their own record store.[174]

Tresor's next compilation album, released in 1993, was appropriately titled to fit the reality of the Berlin sound, given the city's propensity for Detroit's new wave of minimal techno. *Tresor II: Berlin-Detroit – A Techno Alliance* featured three cuts from Underground Resistance members.[175] During the entirety of the 1990s, Tresor continuously released records from Detroit artist – both first-wave stars and unknowns – and booked them to play the club. Jeff Mills and Blake Baxter and were the first Detroit techno artists to make Berlin their home in the early 1990s, both of them playing as residents of Tresor while recording for the club's label.[176] As Berliners embraced the freedom that the fall of the Wall provided over the city's built environment, a new sound – Underground Resistance's powerful, thudding brand of minimal techno. The music today played and produced by Germany's most prominent techno artists – Ben Klock, Ricardo Villalobos, Steffen Berkhahn – can be directly traced to the musical aesthetic Underground Resistance introduced.

Underground Resistance's explicitly political elements, however, carried very little sway in Germany, and their aggressive image was not associated with racial politics – instead, it was embraced as a reflection of the "hardness" of Berlin's dance scene. It was the both the fall of the Berlin Wall, and its creation, that allowed the subcultural class that West Berlin attracted to

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[174] "Ron Murphy." Interview. *Detroit Electronic Quarterly*, June 2015.
[175] Various Artists**.** *Tresor II: Berlin-Detroit – A Techno Alliance*. Tresor. 1993.
[176] Brophy, "Tresor Reflects On 20 Years."

advance upon the unattended urban space now made open and make it their own. "If the Wall

had not come down, there would not have been a techno revolution," said Dmitri Hegemann in

2011. "Techno is all about spaces and the coming down of the Wall was the frame that built the

techno revolution."[177]

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[177] Brophy, "Tresor Reflects On 20 Years."

Chapter Four
Conclusion and Techno Today

It is the summer of 2011, and there is a new trend sweeping America. It seems like the sound is everywhere, blaring in teenager's earbuds and booming out of their car stereos. *EDM*. Electronic Dance Music. Miami's population swells by almost a quarter million the week of Ultra Music Festival, mobbed by young people looking for loud music and the euphoria of MDMA, now rebranded as "molly." Las Vegas discovers a new money pot – nightclubs and festivals filled to the brim with dancers willing to shell out hundreds of dollars to see big-name DJs spin. In September, *Spin* magazine publishes a breathless report on America's newest musical obsession, heralding the EDM boom not as a grand cultural movement, but a chance for America to finally get its head out of the mud and get on with the rest of the Western world. "For most dance-music artists, both domestic and foreign, the fact that America is no longer the impossible final frontier, that the market is being cracked wide open, changes the game entirely," it reads. But the sounds Americans are going crazy for seems like a lost cause to seasoned dance music critic Philip Sherburne – a "melted goo of influences, sticky and chemically sweet… the genre's 30-plus years of rhythmic refinement threatens to devolve into a Pauly D fist-pump."[178] *Esquire* sneers, writing that "EDM shows come laden with the kind of eye-popping more-is-more production values you'd associate with stadium rock: DJ booths on hydraulic platforms, pyrotechnics, umpteen video screens, confetti cannons. They accordingly attract an audience that look like, and sometimes act like, the crowd at a rock show… furthermore, there's a certain gaucheness about the music itself."[179] The music, driven by new styles such as American dubstep

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[178] Philip Sherburne. "The New Rave Generation." *SPIN Magazine*. 14 Sept. 2011.
[179] Alexis Petridis. "How Dance Music Finally Broke America." *Esquire*. 26 Apr. 2014.

focused around anthemic bass drops, shares more in common structurally with pop or rock than the steady kick drum beats of house and techno.

What is the answer to what these writers see as the over-the-top, commercial cheesiness of EDM? Three years later, the American media appeared to have found its answer. A laudatory New York Times piece heralds Berlin's inner-city dance scene, fairly begging Americans to come and try what the Germans have got all figured out. "Someday, perhaps, the clubs' prime riverside locations will become corporate offices or apartments with a view," it reads. "But not for the moment. A generation after the techno takeover, Berlin is still dancing in the dark."[180] Writing for the *New Yorker*, Nick Paumgarten could barely contain his excitement at discovering Berlin's clubland. "It is the most famous techno club in the world – to Berlin what Fenway is to Boston – and yet still kind of underground," he writes of Berghain, a club housed in a former East German power plant. "The people I'd talked to who had been to Berghain—and there were many—conjured ecstatic evenings, Boschian contortions, and a dusky Arcadia that an American hockey dad like me had never even imagined wanting to experience."[181] The list of rhapsodic profiles goes on – *Rolling Stone,* the *Washington Post, GQ, NPR.* In 2013, the *Wall Street Journal* estimated that techno tourism brought close to one billion euros in revenue to Berlin – still, decades after the Wall's fall, the poorest place in Germany.[182]

Could German-style techno be the savior of American dance music culture? Some seem to think so. But how could it happen? After all, Americans gave birth to techno. We had our chance to embrace it as part of our pop culture canon, and we let it pass us by. When rapper

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[180] Jon Pareles. "In Berlin, Still Partying in the Ruins." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 22 Nov. 2014.
[181] Nick Paumgarten. "Berlin Nights." *The New Yorker*. 17 Mar. 2014.
[182] *The Fourth Poverty and Wealth Report of the Federal Government*. (German Federal Statistics Office, 2012)

Eminem spat the words "You're too old, let go, it's over – nobody listens to techno," in his 2002 hit "Without Me," the rhymes stung with a venomous disregard for techno's history.[183] Never mind that those lines were part of a homophobic rant directed at Moby, a genre-hopping DJ and producer only loosely associated with techno. Eminem's words were those of a Detroit native, one who was a teenager during the genre's formative years in Michigan. "Nobody listens to techno." The phrase barely even conjures contempt towards the music, its scorn directed at Moby, and delivered through the intimidating intonation of Eminem's voice rather than his choice of words. Nobody listens to it. Techno as a non-issue, a musical also-ran. Eminem would not have thought to rap about it if someone had not pissed him off. Likewise, it is difficult to conceive of Eminem's words as those of a white rapper consciously stepping on the black musical heritage of his hometown – the human target of his vitriol is white, as well, and techno's cultural legacy is so thoroughly Europeanized as to be, for the most part, a white thing in much of the world.

Hip-hop and techno

It is, of course, not fair to suggest that no one listens to techno in the United States or in Detroit. Its history and international popularity are enough to keep pilgrims coming to the city. Witness the continued success of the 16-year-old Detroit Electronic Music Festival, which attracts tens of thousands of people to downtown Detroit's Hart Plaza every Memorial Day weekend to listen to techno. For one weekend a year, Detroit is the epicenter of global electronic dance music, as dozens of afterparties sprout across the city.[184] But during most of the year, it is

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[183] Marshall Mathers. *Without Me*. Eminem. 2002.
[184] Todd L. Burns . "Put Your Hands Up: An Oral History of Detroit's Electronic Music Festival." *Resident Advisor*.18 May 2010.

no exaggeration to say that the city's culture embraces techno as a minor portion of its heritage. Detroit is a majority-black city, today overwhelming so. In "Claiming Hip-Hop: Race and the Ethics of Underground Hip-Hop Participation," Anthony Kwame Harrison argues that hip-hop culture represents an "inverted version of America's existing race hierarchy," valuing the personal experiences of those black Americans that have confronted the most hardship. According to Harrison, hip-hop's focus on the "authenticity" of one's story inspired young black musicians to embrace the difficult circumstances of their formative years, rather than attempt to obscure the truth of their adversity. This realignment, he writes, is at the root of hip-hop's status as the most popular genre of young black Americans.[185] Hip-hop establishes itself around sets of norms that are unique to urban black Americans, serving to "expose a range of activities and social outlooks specifically associated with white identity."[186]

It is no stretch to conclude that the Europhile tendencies of early Detroit techno fit the bill of a social outlook associated with white identity. While the case of Underground Resistance's militantly black pursuit for a post-racial world may be seen as an antidote to this social outlook, their musical aesthetic obscured the idea that there was a message behind those hard-edged sounds. At a time when Nas was telling stories of "sitting bent up in the stairway, on the corner betting Grants with the cee-lo champ, laughing at baseheads,"[187] during his upbringing in New York City public housing, and Ice Cube was labeling the United States "AmeriKKKa" on his debut album, a listener had to dig to find signs of blackness in Detroit techno.[188] Discussion of

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[185] Anthony Kwame Harrison. "Claiming Hip-Hop: Race and the Ethics of Underground Hip-Hop Participation," *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification*. (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009), 85.
[186] Harrison, "Claiming Hip-Hop: Race and the Ethics of Underground Hip-Hop Participation," 117.
[187] "New York State of Mind." *Illmatic*. Nas. 1994.
[188] Ice Cube. *AmeriKKKA's Most Wanted*. 1990. MP3.

the realities facing black urban America during a time defined by white flight, the war on drugs,

rising incarceration rates, and widespread cocaine addiction was not techno's field of play.

Whereas Detroit techno edged towards the abstract in its brooding rhythmic worlds, hip-hop

strived to capture the details of life in words – whether those were the sexy, party-hard loops of

Miami bass or the lyrically dexterous tales of East and West Coast gangsta rap.

Hip-hop's dominance of the musical landscape in black 1990s America provoked a

reaction from Detroit's electronic music community – ghettotech. In "Straight Up Detroit Shit:

Genre, Authenticity, and Appropriation in Detroit Ghettotech," Gavin Mueller traces techno's

decline as popular music in Detroit to its fusion with hip-hop, namely the bass-heavy, lyrically

simple form of early 1990s dance hip-hop best represented by Miami's 2 Live Crew.[189] Mueller

argues that through ghettotech's assimilation of techno's penchant for futuristic sounds and fast

drum loops into the MC-oriented hip-hop format, techno disappeared from cultural relevance.

"Ass-N-Titties" by DJ Assault, probably the most widely-known ghettotech song, mixes the fast

kick and futuristic synth riffs of techno with vocals mixed so they stand out over the beat, much

like in hip-hop. The lyrical content is similar to that of the bass-driven hip-hop that rattled car

speakers across America in the mid-1990s, with the expected focus on women's bodies.[190]

Mueller sees ghettotech's explicit structural similarities with hip-hop – the beat as something to

be rapped over, rather than the star of the show – as contributing to its decline in popularity in

Detroit after the end of the 1990s. Ghettotech moved techno into hip-hop, a mainstream culture

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[189] Gavin Mueller, ""Straight Up Detroit Shit": Genre, Authenticity, and Appropriation in Detroit Ghettotech," (Thesis: Bowling Green State University, 2007), 1-107.
[190] DJ Assault. *Ass-N-Titties EP*. 1997. MP3.

defined by the increasing prevalence of corporate-owned radio stations broadcasting national hits.[191]

Techno today

Ghettotech was the last major shift to occur in Detroit's techno sound. To describe Detroit techno as particularly innovative music today is a stretch – the city's producers continue to release high-quality records, but techno in 2016 is an established format. Creative ideas are found across the spectrum of techno, whether produced in Detroit, Germany, or somewhere else, but they are not redefining the style. . New technology, most notably digital audio workstations such as Ableton Live, have enhanced the abilities of techno producers to make their ideas a reality. However, the music is a format. The constructive period behind that format is long gone, and if the immediate past is any indication, the future of techno will be defined by incremental changes. Likewise, if the past is any guide, those future sounds will be heard in Berlin's clubs as soon as they emerge. The city's musical infrastructure has reoriented itself around technological changes. As Tresor club, Tresor Records, and Hard Wax served as beachheads for the establishment of a new techno culture in Berlin, so have a new generation of the city's enterprises. Ableton, which produces Live, perhaps the most popular digital audio workstation for techno production, is headquartered in Berlin. So is SoundCloud, the music streaming site that is as close as anything can come to an institution in today's world of digital music. Native Instruments, whose software and hardware products for DJs and producers are revered across the industry, was founded in Kreuzberg in 1996, a neighborhood once in the shadow of the Berlin Wall. Unlike Pioneer or Roland, other companies whose offer products for similar purposes,

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[191] Mueller, "Straight Up Detroit Shit," 70.

Native Instruments has a singular focus on electronic dance musicians.[192] And, of course, the city's vast network of techno clubs distributes this physical music the way it is meant to be heard – mixed by a DJ into a loud, futuristic soundtrack for the assembled masses to sweat to.

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[192] Jordan Rothlein. "Native Instruments: Blurring the Lines." *Resident Advisor*. 5 Feb. 2016.

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