

4

“Party on the Death Strip” Reflections on a Historical Turning Point

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The fall of the Wall had a profound impact on people from the former GDR who were involved in popular music culture. The cultural, political and media circumstances in which they produced, released and performed their music changed almost overnight. At the same time, we can assume that the rigid, ideological principles underlying cultural and media policy also impelled young people and musicians in the GDR to do their part to bring down the Wall. They increasingly turned their backs on the state – in terms of the media used, aesthetics and politics – and executed well-rehearsed strategies to navigate between the poles of provocation and affirmation in the international context of pop music.

In the Berlin of the early nineties enthusiastic creators transformed the former site of the Berlin Wall and emerging brownfield areas into an event, club and party landscape; a landscape which without the impulse of recent historic events would not have acquired renown beyond the city limits, let alone beyond the national border, and become so popular that it can be considered to have laid the foundation for a pan-German electro-pop culture.

This chapter discusses the circumstances and opportunities that emerged for those involved in popular music after the fall of the Wall, and how and to what extent this historical event is remembered in the media 25 years on.

Border Crossings – Memories of a Historic Night

November 9, 1989 was a Thursday. Even though it was a weekday, the band in which I played saxophone was performing at a student club in Dresden, barely 200 km from Berlin. We stopped at a motorway service station on the way and, as often happened, we bumped into other musicians who had been playing in the area, in Görlitz, Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz), Zwickau, Plauen or Riesa. Just before midnight we arrived back in Berlin in our rented minibus. We were listening to “Yachtclub und Buchteln” (Yachtclub and small yeast cake), our favorite album cassette by a band whose members were also good friends of ours, AG Geige. The streets of East Berlin were usually deserted at this time of night. When we wanted to turn north just before the Oberbaum Bridge, a border crossing that today connects the districts of Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg across the river Spree, we noticed that there were far more people out and about than usual. They were running towards Oberbaum Bridge, towards the border crossing, towards Kreuzberg. Among them was our manager, at the time carrying a large bottle of champagne under his arm. We

bad-mouthed him and guessed that he had got himself another passport to travel to West Berlin. The lo-fi synth sound of AG Geige was still playing on the car stereo: “(Talking) ein Kaufhaus müsste mein sein, mit zwanzig gefräßigen Rolltreppen; (A heavily distorted voice interjects) automatisch; ... gigantische Ventilatoren pressen dicke heiße Luft rein ...” (a department store should be mine, with twenty voracious escalators; (...) automatic; ... gigantic ventilators blowing in hot air ...) (AG Geige 1987). The situation out on the street started to really irritate us. We turned on the radio ...

... What follows has since been transmitted and broadcast hundreds of times in both German and international media. Günter Schabowski, first secretary of the SED district leadership and chairman of the district administration of East Berlin, had overlooked the embargo on a press release. When asked by journalists when citizens of the GDR would receive permits allowing them to travel to West Berlin or the Federal Republic of Germany, he responded with two sentences that would become iconic soundbites in German history: “The permits will be issued shortly” (Journalist off-camera: “When will this come into force?”) “As far as I know, (pause) effective immediately, without delay” (Schabowski 1989). General Secretary Erich Honecker had already been forced to resign by the Politburo of the SED Central Committee on October 18, 1989. The Council of Ministers of the GDR announced its resignation on November 7, and on the night of November 9, the Wall opened. We quickly took the instruments to our rehearsal hall and went to join the crowds of people who wanted to cross over to the west at the Bornholmerstrasse border crossing. Time and time again these images have been broadcast in the media and have also featured in many documentaries about the fall of the Wall, for example, in *Party auf dem Todestreifen* – Soundtrack der Wende (Party on the death strip – Soundtrack to *Die Wende*), produced by the French-German station arte to mark the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Wall. But more about that later.

“Once upon a time ...” – Cultural and Media Policy in the GDR

That night in November represented a real turning point for most people living in the GDR. Within six months the Deutsche Mark had been introduced in the East and within another three months the two German states were reunified. This ushered in a period of drastic change for musicians from the (former) GDR. The introduction of the monetary union turned the music world upside down almost overnight; market forces and competition took over.

It marked the end of a period in which the state, which adopted a highly ambivalent attitude towards rules and their implications on culture, organized and controlled the destiny of this social realm. In the GDR, anything that had an influence on society was, as far as possible, “planned, regulated, managed and, in particularly, controlled by state organs” (Wicke 1996, 12). These mechanisms were dependent on the country’s political and cultural climate, which was characterized by cold spells as well as periods of thaw. Two of the most significant incidents to affect the creative industry, perfectly illustrating one such cold spell, were the results of the 11th Party Congress of the Central Committee of the SED in 1965 and the “expatriation” of critical singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann in 1976.¹ Following the 11th Congress, a new law was introduced in 1965 that regulated the performance of music for dance and entertainment purposes before an audience (in other words, in public). This law (Order No. 2; 1965, 777) typified the state’s ambivalence towards culture in a particularly remarkable way. Anyone who wanted to perform or play at a youth club, at a festival, in front of students or at a cultural association needed a permit. Performers received a classification from a state classification committee, which

decided which band or group would be granted a permit. The Committee assessed not only the performers' musical skills, but also – and perhaps more importantly – the band's ideological integrity and whether it followed state doctrine. Bands had to submit the lyrics of their songs and the Committee documented their assessment of individual musicians and any elements that needed to be “monitored” in a report. The permit also indicated the fees to be paid to each individual musician and the band for each performance. The band Der Expander des Fortschritts, in which I played at the time, received the highest classification in the amateur section: “Special permit with concert authorization.” AG Geige were classified as an “Outstanding folk collective,” because the Karl-Marx-Stadt district used different classifications than Berlin. Thus, the social landscape was regulated by the state rather than market forces, which also meant that event organizers, such as a FDJ (the official youth movement of the GDR) club, had to pay musicians the amount specified on their permit. Given the importance of popular music to those living in the GDR, regardless of whether musicians or bands supported or resisted the state, musicians could count on finding a loyal audience. But even if the hall was empty, they still got paid.

Economically speaking, the production of records turned out to be another sore point. The VEB Deutsche Schallplatte was the only record producer in the GDR and thus had no competition. Not only was there a rigid system that decided who was allowed to produce a record and who was not, shortages (vinyl had to be bought on international markets using foreign currency and CDs were not produced in the GDR) also resulted, in the view of musicians and the general public, in an absurd policy for releasing and distributing records. It was impossible to keep up with international trends, flexibility and diversification, which had been commonplace on international markets since the late 1970s, due to the scarcity of resources and the cultural directives that were introduced to ensure a balanced presentation of genres, even though record sales had raised considerable revenues. Production capacities were set in advance for the individual genres (*Schlager* music 25 percent, rock and pop 25 percent, blues and jazz 15 percent, singer-songwriters and folk music 15 percent, lullabies and children's songs 10 percent, musicals and operas 10 percent) and published by the AMIGA label, which was responsible for “light entertainment” (Rauhut and Rauhut 1999). Despite the fact that the distribution policy was very much dependent on the availability of resources, VEB Deutsche Schallplatte's relationship with the comparatively moderate Ministry of Culture was much more liberal than, for example, the state's relationship with the two other producers of popular music: radio and television. They reported directly to the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the SED and had to follow strict political guidelines. Sometimes, tracks produced on records were never aired on the radio because they did not make it past the radio editors (for example, because they contained inflammatory lyrics) and were locked away. This despite the fact that a lot of money went into producing them in VEB Deutsche Schallplatte's studio.

From the mid-1980s, radio started to get involved as a producer of music and cooperated with VEB Deutsche Schallplatte. On the premises of the GDR radio broadcasting center a pop studio was opened and fitted with the latest equipment. As VEB Deutsche Schallplatte, the concert industry and radio started to become less popular around the mid- to late 1980s, radio officials started to send a mobile studio even to the newer bands, so they did not have to go to the broadcasting center, which was subject to tight security measures. At the same time, throughout the 1980s more and more successful musicians set up their own studios and leased them to interested parties. They either purchased equipment when touring in Western countries or got it through diplomats whose luggage was not checked at the border crossing. Overall,

however, getting your hands on high-quality technical equipment and the appropriate hardware and software to produce modern music was somewhat of a problem. Drumstick shortages were just as much a part of everyday life as being on a waiting list for a new car and fuel quotas. You could only get digital equipment (samplers, and so on) if you were willing to pay the exorbitant exchange rates (1 Deutsche Mark was worth 5 to 8 East German Marks). As a result, the black market flourished.

A musician's daily life consisted primarily of live performances up and down the country – in a country that was geographically speaking very small: just 500 km from north to south and 200 km from east to west. Only very few musicians toured abroad (either to the East or West). East Germany had a number of popular concert venues and locations which were run by organizations such as the FDJ, district cultural offices, cultural centers and other state-run organizations. Privately-owned pubs and bars very rarely opened their dance halls for touring bands to perform. ~~Not least because state organs, such as the Ministry of State Security (the Stasi), always kept an eye on them, which meant that private owners kept themselves to themselves and focused on their own business.~~ Bands that did not have an official permit had to seek their audience in unofficial settings (such as open youth centers organized by the evangelical church, galleries or privately organized meetings), on which the Stasi kept an even more watchful eye. The ubiquitous red tape surrounding permits, the neurotic fear of being arrested as a dissenter and the labyrinth of power ultimately created a system that was not only difficult for musicians to understand, but also one that they rejected and which became increasingly difficult to control. Musicians and their audiences, however, did not live on a secluded island. Mass media (mainly radio), record circles and the bands and artists invited to East Germany to perform in the late 1980s introduced them to international trends and developments in pop music and youth culture.

Despite the virtual state monopoly on producing, distributing and presenting popular music, there had always been successful attempts to circumvent that structure. Throughout the 1980s small, independent cassette labels emerged for punk and new wave music. And even before that, concerts, performances or readings were available on Super8 film or tape cassettes. People published books with accompanying cassettes themselves and printed slightly fewer copies than were allowed according to printing regulations to get around the red tape of the responsible authorities. As a result, a market and communication network emerged alongside the state-run system, although we must not forget that nothing was safe from the prying eye of the Stasi; its informants were active in all walks of life.

The years towards the end of the 1980s, the period just before the fall of the Wall, were characterized by considerable inconsistencies and contradictions. The state allowed broadcasting formats, events and records that would have been unthinkable ten years earlier. The state apparatus, and especially those responsible for the FDJ, started to realize that overly rigid measures and a uniform pop sound could neither meet the expectations of the young audience nor prevent the younger generation from disengaging and breaking away from the ideals of their parents and the idea of socialism. For example, the youth radio DT64 introduced a program called *PAROCKTIKUM*, which played tracks sent in by punks and “alternative” bands. In the late 1980s, international acts such as Bob Dylan, Joe Cocker and Bruce Springsteen played on large open-air stages and Depeche Mode performed at the Werner Seelenbinder Hall in Berlin, all invited by the state. It cooperated with international record companies and even allowed some East German bands to produce records in West Berlin recording studios. At major events, bands read

out sections of the Communist Manifesto rather than submitting their own lyrics for approval time and again. The provocation elicited but little response. Neither side took the other seriously anymore.

“Dancing is allowed...” – Changes in the Weekly Routine

On September 18, 1989, a group of well-known rock musicians, songwriters, jazz musicians and other artists joined the New Forum movement, which published a statement on September 9. The declaration, titled *For Our Country*, read: “Communication between the state and society has obviously broken down in our country” (Aufbruch 89 – Neues Forum 1989). In the summer of 1989 countless citizens, especially young people, left the GDR and made it to Western Europe via Hungary. In the spring of 1989, bands interrupted their concerts to read out the New Forum’s proclamation. That was a significant moment for a lot of people. On November 4, the first officially approved mass demonstration which was not organized by the Party took place at Alexanderplatz in Berlin. The final rally was organized by artists and staff from several East Berlin theatres. Well-known actors, representatives of artists’ associations, the New Forum, Gregor Gysi,² and the previously quoted Günter Schabowski spoke at the event.

“If the government stands down in the next few weeks,” in the words of the famous playwright Heiner Müller on Alexanderplatz, “dancing is allowed at demonstrations!” When my band introduced the A-side of our first record, which we were allowed to record at the VEB Deutsche Schallplatte studio in early 1990, we used those very words. The record was released on the German market in the autumn of 1990 under the name *ad acta* (Der Expander des Fortschritts 1990). VEB Deutsche Schallplatte had changed its legal form and was renamed Deutsche Schallplatten GmbH Berlin. AMIGA also ceased to exist; the label was renamed Zong.

Between September and November 1989 events in the GDR came thick and fast: starting with the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, vigils in the Gethsemane Church in Prenzlauer Berg (Berlin), the founding of the New Forum, arrests at demonstrations on the fortieth anniversary of the GDR on October 7, the mass demonstration on Alexanderplatz and finally the opening of the Wall the night of November 9. This period went down in history as a so-called peaceful revolution. Although it was not always peaceful there were no major riots, which many had feared. In the months following the fall of the Wall people expressed a lot of different hopes.

A lot also changed for and in the music scene. Bands were finally able to travel, bands from the West played in the cities of the GDR. Anyone who could afford it started to replace their vinyl collection with CDs.³ That development in particular benefitted the German recording industry. New labels, magazines, publishers, clubs, and free radio stations started to emerge. East Berliners worked in West Berlin radio stations and vice versa. People were curious on both sides.

Despite all these developments, the once-cherished myth of resisters and conspirators evaporated very quickly. Many musicians from the East not only lost their audience to international bands and artists, but also the hated yet at the same time comfortable and familiar infrastructure of the former production environment and distribution platforms. At the same time, the entire music scene, from state supporters to punks and dissidents, suffered as a result of more and more revelations about many members, even the most dedicated, having worked as unofficial collaborators for the Stasi. Concepts of music and livelihood had to be re-interpreted. Scores of bands broke up, cultural centers and district offices responsible for cultural activities soon closed their doors and nationally-owned organizations suspended cultural activities long

before the Treuhandanstalt (agency established by the last GDR government in March 1990 to (re)privatize East German enterprises) took over. Almost all print media outlets were bought by Western publishing groups, and radio and television stations adapted to the dual system (public and private) and underwent a thorough overhaul. What marked the beginning of a new era for some, was the end of a once promising career for others. Inevitably, anyone who wanted to continue dedicating themselves to their music had to get to grips with the mechanisms of market structures and consistently develop appropriate marketing strategies. Fixed fees were a thing of the past; competition, demand and supply ruled. In hindsight, only a few managed to make a name for themselves on the German market (Die Prinzen) and on the international market (Rammstein and Paul van Dyk). Today, almost 30 years later, numerous other musicians, rappers and DJs can be added to the list of individuals who have shaped – and continue to shape – the German music scene; Marteria (born in Rostock) and Kraftklub (Karl-Marx-Stadt, now Chemnitz) grew up in the former GDR. Other bands that enjoyed some success in GDR times managed to hold on to their fans (Puhdys) and others, with a new line-up, continued playing also their old hits (Silly).

As for the system for the production and distribution of pop music, a substantial difference has materialized between urban centers and rural regions. Apart from huge festival areas, to which thousands of people make their pilgrimage in the summer months, well-known bands very rarely schedule tour dates in rural regions. Interestingly, big festivals, such as Melt! and Splash, have also sprung up on the former sites of closed opencast mines and unprofitable industries (Ferropolis – “the city of iron”). The influence and role of rural areas is now largely insignificant. Things are different in the big cities, and the eyes of the world are on Berlin.

“Sounds like Berlin”⁴ – The Fall of the Wall and Club Culture

Berlin was a divided city until the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁵ In 1961 the East German government constructed the Wall – the anti-fascist protection wall, as it was known in the GDR – around West Berlin, which was administered by the three Western powers. Both halves of the city enjoyed a special status until the fall of the Wall, which ultimately also had an effect on the music cultures on both sides. In the old West Berlin housing was cheap, there were two universities as well as the University of the Arts, broadcasting corporations (Sender Freies Berlin and the RIAS), there was no military service and much more money was spent on cultural activities, since there was more of it available in the old West German states. This was an ideal breeding ground for a lively sub-culture and independent scene, for cooperative galleries and even legendary recording studios. East Berlin was home to government offices and agencies and the GDR radio broadcasting center, it had a university, several art colleges and many event venues and theatres. The city lived by the anonymity that is common in large cities and there was a lot of very cheap, run-down housing which provided students, musicians and artists with the kind of atmosphere they needed to fuel their stubbornness and creativity.

Famous musicians like Nick Cave, Iggy Pop, and David Bowie spent many, many hours at Hansa Studios and many significant years of their musical careers in West Berlin. They contributed to the myth of the city, alongside Lokomotive Kreuzberg, Element of Crime, Malaria!, Die Ärzte and Spliff. In 1976, Nina Hagen moved from East to West following the Biermann affair and embarked upon her second career in West Berlin.⁶ The Olympic Stadium and especially SO36 and the lofts and pubs in Kreuzberg became legendary locations for art and music production

in the old west of Berlin. Werner Seelenbinder Halle, Die Insel der Jugend and Haus der jungen Talente (HdjT), Duncker-Klub and the Langhansstrasse youth club were doing the same on the other side of the Wall.

When after November 9, 1989 the first “Wallpeckers” started to claim their pieces of the Wall, an entire area was laid bare. It was here that a musical pop culture would take root in the following months – a culture that would go on to play a crucial role in shaping the myth and reality of the city of Berlin until the present day. A 2014 documentary entitled *Party auf dem Todesstreifen – der Soundtrack der Wende* looked back on this period. It is based on the book *Der Klang der Familie – Berlin, Techno und die Wende (The Sound of the Family – Berlin, Techno and Die Wende)* by Felix Denk and Sven von Thülen, who themselves were active club managers and techno fans. The documentary includes interviews with techno DJs who were at the birth of this cultural movement, i.e. those who were working as DJs and event organizers during the reunification period and wanted to make a name for themselves. Even today, they associate the “fall of the Wall” with the development of Berlin’s club culture and its then particularly successful and popular genres of Acid House and Big Beat. The eastern part of the city in particular was a Mecca for fans of techno and club culture in the early 1990s in Germany, in addition to the cities of Cologne and Hamburg, which, as a result of urban policy changes (exodus of large industries, closure of factories and ports) had a lot of empty buildings which became a breeding ground for musical activities within sub-, youth and event cultures. Berlin was a unique case: the special status of the old West Berlin met the equally special status of the old East Berlin. The land along the path of the former Berlin Wall which used to separate and divide the two halves of the city was peppered with old factories, department stores and power stations that had not been used since the end of the Second World War in 1945 or the construction of the Wall in 1961. Cultural activists from East and West started to occupy buildings that remained unclaimed and had no legal owners, and they were transformed into clubs modelled on the Warehouse in Chicago. These clubs attracted hundreds of techno fans day after day, and not just at the weekend. It was during this period that Tresor, E-Werk and WMF also opened their doors, and it was not long before these techno clubs became famous beyond the city limits. These names refer to specific locations, their original function or the names of former owners. They became locations in the physical sense, but also social and cultural spaces that stimulated the post-reunification music culture that very much appealed to young people from Berlin, but also from the rest of Germany and beyond. At the same time, they became commercial brands – companies that not only owned and managed clubs but also produced and distributed their own records. These famous clubs were not the only cultural hotspots in the city; there were countless other smaller clubs dotted around the city center (especially in Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte, later in Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg). Techno impresarios occupied a house or a cellar, installed a lighting system, dragged in a few beer crates, came up with secretive methods of communication using answering machines and then the obligatory flyer, which was regularly used to advertise the increasingly popular club events. “In Berlin you could do things that you wouldn’t even think of doing elsewhere,” recalled Olaf “Gemse” Kretschmar in an interview with the author in the early 2000s (Binas 2003, 129). There was no curfew, an abundance of untrained local politicians, and, above all, a lot of empty buildings. When Gemse, a social sciences and philosophy graduate, opened Delicious Doughnuts in 1993 with friends from the former GDR punk and new wave scene, they did not want to be pigeonholed into a specific genre just yet. Back then, Gemse said, it was important to share sounds, ideas, and premises with other people. Nightclub culture did not differentiate between creators and audience; it was more about “having

the audacity to get something done” (Binas 2003, 129). He played the game without having a plan or any capital, swept along by the euphoria of Berlin’s rebirth. His second club, Oxymoron in the Mitte district, had more of a coherent business concept: breakfast available in the morning and good wines, cocktails, cigars and Italian-French cuisine available from 12 noon. If you were lucky, at the end of the 1990s you might even have bumped into Herbert Grönemeyer (musician and successful songwriter), Walter Momper (mayor), Mick Jagger or Peter Sloterdijk (philosopher). On weekends, Oxymoron turned into a real club from 11 p.m., when DJs treated the dancefloor to funk, soul, R’n’B, house and big beat. The prices were comparatively moderate, but not for everyone’s wallet. The clubs were frequented by a generation that had enjoyed a middle-class upbringing. If they came from the West to Berlin they had grown up with video and computer games, had money and “were not afraid of using technology and the urban and economic change after the fall of the Wall was part of everyday life for them” (Vogt 2002, 117). Subversion, entrepreneurial flair, creative spirit and parallel worlds came together in techno and electronic music. It was precisely this mix that attracted so many of those involved in the scene, whether organizers, musicians or fans. The subversiveness of this generation, however, expressed itself in a sense of community that seemed to be free of ideology: respect and freedom were the rules of the night. The sounds of the associated musical genres “no longer wanted to reach the listener as a recipient of messages [...] but as a generator” (Schweinfurth 1998, 61). Clubs, fashion, lifestyle and electronic music became urban symbols of a transformation process that challenged the certainties of traditional social, cultural and economic relationships. Flexibility would soon become the magic word of digital capitalism (see Glotz 1999).

“The Future Started There and Then” – Memories in the Media

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, in 2014/15 public broadcasters produced several programs on the significance of popular music for these events. Two of those programs are mentioned briefly below, because they explain why the fall of the Wall was the driving force behind the electro and techno scene in Germany and because the title of this chapter is borrowed from one of them. The above-mentioned documentary *Party auf dem Todesstreifen – Soundtrack der Wende* (“death strip” refers to the victims and the impregnability of the Berlin Wall) generally follows the pattern of current German television documentaries. It falls into the category of “histotainment.” Historical images from those eventful days in the summer and autumn of 1989 are intertwined with interviews with contemporary witnesses from the techno scene. These witnesses talk about recordings from a Saturday evening radio program, Radio Free Berlin’s youth program Radio 4U: “new electronic dance music, acid house.” A DJ from the former eastern part of the city says that he remembers how “constantly listening to the program and everything that went on there made him realize that he had to leave the GDR.” Another witness explains: “For a lot of people music was a driving force, [...] we all knew that we would leave someday. Everyone always said that they wouldn’t be the last one to turn off the lights. That was one of our sayings at the time.” The dramatic highlight of the documentary is the images of the opening of the Berlin Wall. The viewer is shown shots of Berlin at night, the border crossing at Bornholmerstrasse, Trabants headlights, border officers taken aback by the stream of people trying to cross the border. The press conference with Günter Schabowski flashes onto the screen, accompanied by the now familiar words: “Individuals from East Germany may travel abroad without having to meet the previous requirements, without

having to apply to travel and without having to prove family connections. The permits will be issued soon [...].”

The documentary *B-Movie – das wilde Westberlin (B-Movie – Wild West Berlin)* (Hoppe et al. 2015) also makes a direct connection between ravers and techno and electronic music and the opening of the Berlin Wall. The co-author of the program, the British musician, music producer and label owner Mark Reeder,⁷ who moved from London to West Berlin in 1978, comments on the images of the Berlin Love Parade with the words:

The future started there and then, on July 1, 1989. Nearly 100 ravers gathered on the Ku'damm and turned it into a dance floor. [Pause] Dr Motte, the man behind the Love Parade, like us, had no idea that a few years later more than one million ravers from all over the world would flock to Berlin for this mega event. The Love Parade catapulted WestBam's career to another level. He soon had his own truck and composed a new anthem every year. [Pause] On that rainy Saturday I also couldn't have predicted what was about to happen only four months later. [Pause] Our call for more freedom didn't fall on deaf ears. It had dramatic political consequences that totally changed the city and the world.

Unlike the protagonists in the TV documentary *Party auf dem Todesstreifen*, the program produced by arte and Reeder explored how the wild years and relationships in old West Berlin – the occupied buildings, the pubs in Kreuzberg and especially the punk scene with its mix of bohemians, conscientious objectors and artists – became the founding myths of the new Berlin. While the producers of *Party auf dem Todesstreifen* focus on techno and electro music, Reeder attempts to trace the genealogy of post-punk, new wave and electronic music.

2019 marked the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall; the Wall has now been down longer than it was up (from 1961 until 1989), separating East and West Germany and surrounding the city of Berlin. Nevertheless, it seems that its existence as well as its end is deeply rooted in the memory of those who lived through it. There have been many attempts in recent years to write about or cinematise the recent history of popular music in Germany, not least against the backdrop of the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification. It is an impossible task to reconcile the memories and experiences of all those who lived through and participated in the music scenes in East and West. Their own memories are representations of their own past, seen from modern-day perspectives and reinforced by media images, sounds and the memory of a time when they were still young, curious and went against the grain. This conflict of emotions and memories makes it difficult to achieve any real clarity, not least because many of the authors, including myself, are also contemporary witnesses and thus representatives of their own history. Attempting to answer the whats, whys and the hows of that history is a challenge that requires a self-reflective approach to historiography.

Notes

- 1 See also publications by Michael Rauhut (Rauhut 1993 and 1996).
- 2 Gregor Gysi worked in the GDR as a lawyer defending civil rights activists and critics of the system. From 1990 to 2000 and since 2005 he has been a member of the German parliament and chairman of Die Linke (The Left) political party.
- 3 Citizens over the age of 60 could exchange up to 6,000, adults up to 4,000 and children up to 14 years up to 2,000 East German Marks to Deutsche Marks at a rate of 1:1. Anything over that was exchanged at a rate of 2:1, and debts were also halved.

- 4 See also Binas 2000.
- 5 There has recently been a heated debate as to whether the wall “opened” or “fell.” Using the phrase “the Wall fell” rather than “the Wall opened” in everyday language and in the media is an “understanding of the events of 1989/1990 from a West German perspective, which has since become a meaningless phrase and the ‘norm,’” according to Thomas Oberender, born in Jena in 1966 and artistic director of the Berliner Festspiele since 2012. (Oberender 2017, 47)
- 6 Following a concert in Cologne, the GDR government banned the critical songwriter Wolf Biermann from re-entering the GDR. Biermann subsequently enjoyed a lot of support from both the East and West. Artists from the GDR who had signed a protest letter against Biermann’s expatriation were banned from working and they then often applied to leave the country.
- 7 Reeder managed, among others, the British post-punk band Joy Division.

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