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ADVENTURES IN COMMUNISM:
COUNTERCULTURE AND CAMP IN EAST BERLIN

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Abstract | *This essay examines the encounter between Western countercultural groups and the urban landscape of East Berlin in the years immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Focusing on squatted houses, the underground techno scene, and experimental art projects, the essay argues that countercultural groups who were active in East Berlin in the early 1990s developed a peculiar set of practices that were characterized both by their campy aesthetics and by their temporal indeterminacy. The essay posits that these experimental temporal practices were only possible due to the layered historicity of urban space in the dilapidated, inner-city neighbourhoods of East Berlin.*

Résumé | *Cet essai étudie la rencontre entre les groupes contre-culturels Occidentaux et le paysage urbain de Berlin-Est suite à la chute du Mur de Berlin en 1989. A travers une analyse des squats, de la scène techno « underground » et des projets d'art expérimental, l'essai soutient que les groupes contre-culturels actifs dans le Berlin-Est du début des années 1990 ont développé un ensemble de pratiques caractérisé à la fois par leur esthétique maniérée et leur indétermination temporelle. L'essai avance que seule l'historicité imbriquée de l'espace urbain dans les quartiers pauvres et dilapidés du Berlin-Est a rendu possible ces pratiques temporelles expérimentales.*

I. Space and Place in East Berlin

In the months and years following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Berlin became something of a laboratory for the German nation, a space in which urban planners, politicians, activists, and artists could experiment with new constellations of what it meant to be German at the end of the tumultuous 20th century. However, as the debates surrounding the Potsdamer Platz, the Palace of the Republic, and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin as well as similar discussions surrounding the Frauenkirche in Dresden and historic architecture in Leipzig clearly illustrate, the attempt to remake the nation through the built environment was a highly contentious process.[1] This was especially true in reunification-era Berlin, a city that anthropologist Wolfgang Kaschuba described as "open, undefined, transitory," a space that, in the wake of the fall of the Wall, suddenly found itself without fixed points of social, cultural, and political reference (235). On the one hand, the indeterminacy that characterized Berlin's urban landscape generated deep feelings of unease stemming from a widespread fear that Germans would be unable to find "a common symbolic grammar" through which they could begin to reestablish the bonds of mutual belonging (Kaschuba 235). On the other hand, many groups experienced the openness of Berlin, and especially East Berlin, in these years as a form of liberation. Indeed, in the early 1990s, leftist activists and countercultural groups from across Europe descended on East Berlin neighbourhoods such as Mitte, Friedrichshain, and Prenzlauer Berg, where they squatted in hundreds of buildings, organized illegal techno parties, and opened experimental art galleries, thus transforming the dilapidated urban landscape of these neglected areas into some of the late-20th century's most cutting-edge environments for experimental cultural production. In the early 1990s, East Berlin was, against all odds, the place to be.

Why, though, were West German countercultural youth, and eventually alternative youth from across the globe, so enamored with East Berlin? What led them to imagine the crumbling landscapes of "real existing socialism" as preeminent locales for adventure, play, and experimentation? Drawing from arguments developed by Hans-Liudger Dienel and Malte Schophaus, we might conclude that the unique affective power of these neighbourhoods stemmed primarily from their lack of placeness, their resistance to the auratic power of the nation. According to this reading, the affective emptiness of these neighbourhoods made them ideal locations for countercultural life. As "wastelands," they were exciting because they "offer[ed] empty spaces where behaviour [was] not so defined by dominant culture" and where youth could appropriate and transform the landscape for their own purposes (133). While true to a certain extent, this narrative places the locus of creativity almost entirely in the experimental practices of the counterculture, thus implying that equivalent forms of artistic experimentation would have arisen in any similarly empty urban setting. Alternatively, drawing from cultural critics such as Andreas Huyssen, we might posit an interpretation in which the empty houses, the crumbling façades, and the obsolete environmental markers were attractive precisely *because* of their historical qualities.[2] As locations that bear visible traces of a different past, the empty spaces of Mitte could serve as authentic refuges from the unsettling temporal velocity of the present, as bunkers where one could resist the modern injunction to "melt into

air." East Berlin, in this interpretation, was a living museum, a space where disaffected groups from across the world could escape into nostalgic enclaves of romanticized authenticity.

Both of these arguments—that urban spaces such as Mitte functioned as wastelands in which youth were free to experiment with alternative subjectivities and that these spaces provided access points to what was felt to be a more authentic past and thus served as refuges from the vicissitudes of modernity—are valuable but insufficient tools for understanding the peculiar excitement generated by the urban landscape of *Wende*-era East Berlin. The anthropologist Anja Schwanhäußer offers an alternate explanation for the lure of East Berlin in her essay "The City as Adventure Playground" and her book *Kosmonauten des Undergrounds: Ethnografie einer Berliner Szene*. According to Schwanhäußer, historically resonant spaces in the city created a unique atmosphere in which participants in techno subcultures could organize events that celebrated the pleasures of the here and now. The urban landscape, in other words, facilitated novel subjective experiences that both drew from the affective power of historical spaces and superseded them. Although convincing in many respects, Schwanhäußer's ethnographic account of the Berlin techno scene fails to fully elaborate on the reasons why the historically resonant spaces of East Berlin proved to be such attractive atmospheres for youth subcultures.

In the pages that follow, I extend Schwanhäußer's arguments by suggesting that the effervescent buzz surrounding *Wende*-era East Berlin cannot be attributed either to a decontextualized unfolding of countercultural fantasies in an empty urban wasteland nor to the inherently auratic qualities of historically resonant spaces. Instead, I argue that the urban landscape of East Berlin facilitated the development of new temporal practices by giving residents and visitors free reign to transgress the borders between the past, present, and future.[3] The cultural theorist Phillip Wegner makes a similar argument in his discussion of Rem Koolhaas's engagement with the Berlin Wall, arguing that, in the wake of November 1989, the area surrounding the Wall became "a heterotopia, open to a range of possible 'symbolizations/historicizations,' a place, in short, wherein history might move in a number of very different directions, and thus once again become the site of collective political struggle" (Wegner 291). This is not to suggest that East Berlin's urban landscape was devoid of historical markers. Quite the contrary: it was littered with the fragments of world historical ideologies and the shattered dreams of utopias past. Rather than determinative, all-encompassing temporal structures, though, these materially encoded pasts existed in a state of simultaneity, in what—drawing from the historical theorist Reinhart Koselleck—we might think of as "temporal layers" [*Zeitschichten*]. The peculiar landscape of East Berlin, marked as it was by the fractured material remains of what historian Eric Hobsbawm has termed "the age of extremes,"

came to serve as something of a historical theme park where disaffected youth from around the world could dance with the ghosts of the dead, where they could creatively dwell in the material traces of lost lifeworlds and, in so doing, escape once and for all from the oppressive temporalities of the 20th century. East Berlin offered spaces in which counter-cultural youth could recreate themselves as time-traveling bricoleurs, adventurous explorers who felt as if they had the power to intervene in and transcend the flow of historical time, to live dangerously at the edge of meaningful existence. This essay thus argues that East Berlin—with its wealth of symbolically laden spatial ruins and its discarded material accouterments of world-historical ideologies—served as the perfect setting for the emergence of a new corpus of exper-imental temporal practices (evident in music, performance, video art, and club culture), which I will read as a form of historically oriented "camp consciousness." Before moving into a discussion of camp, however, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the ways in which countercultural groups them-selves described life in the urban landscape of East Berlin, an area they affectionately referred to as "the Zone."

II. The Zone as a Space of Adventure

Long after the champagne bottles had been cleaned from the streets and the eager East German crowds had spent their welcome money, the *Wende* retained a magical quality for the autonomous and countercultural left. Throughout these months, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets in colourful costumes; new tenements were squatted daily; techno parties like the famous *Tekknozid* events proliferated

in empty buildings and abandoned factories; and activists from East and West Germany came together in the streets and squares to discuss their visions for the utopian future. According to Jochen Sandig, youth at the time felt as if they "were in a realm of possibilities where dreams could come true. [They] encouraged, inspired and challenged oth-er. For a brief and precious moment, different rules applied" (qtd. in Fesel and Keller 55).

Clip 1: Sag niemals nie. *Dir. Kollektiv Mainzer Strasse, 1991.*

This sense of unbounded optimism is clearly evident in one of the opening scenes from the 1991 film *Sag niemals nie* (*Never Say No*) in which the viewer is initially confronted with a ruined, almost otherworldly landscape of crumbling buildings in East Berlin. Dramatic ambient music intensifies the feeling of post-apocalyptic gloom as the camera pans across the desolate landscape. Suddenly an upbeat guitar riff

cuts through the existential dread and a whimsical Peter Pan figure skips across the screen. The scene then immediately shifts into one of joyful exuberance and infinite possibility, a Neverland replete with crowds of people in the streets, figures rappelling down the front façades of crumbling buildings, festivals, groups of punks repairing apartments, graffiti-covered walls, fantasy, effervescence, life. In anoth-er film from the period entitled *Petra Pan und Arumukha: Der Traum von ordentlichen Anarchisten* (*Petra Pan and Ar-umukha: The Dream of Orderly Anarchists*), a similar Peter/Petra Pan figure appears again, nonchalantly skipping across the landscape and stopping from time to time to spray-paint a number on a wall, representing the number of squatted buildings in the city. At one point we even see Petra spray-paint the number 1000, thus indicating the belief that this time around the "movement" was unstoppable, that anar-chist youth were ready to take over the world.

Not only did activists find in East Berlin an almost limit-less number of venues in which to realize their dreams, they also found a world that was itself utterly fantastical. Writing about his experiences at clubs and in squatted buildings in Mitte in 1989-90, Anton Waldt noted:

> [Y]ou just walked over—and suddenly you were in the Zone! Museum village East Berlin: an orphaned area, sparsely settled, the stock of abandoned apartments, buildings, and factories was inexhaustible […]. The tem-porary anomaly of East Berlin was not just endlessly excit-ing, but also obviously part of something much bigger. A crazy person [who lived in the squatted apartment facing the street] developed a theory that the TV tower at Alex-

anderplatz was at the center of a particle accelerator for time travel. (Waldt 128)

Similarly, another participant in the scene, Danielle de Picciotto, noted that entering East Berlin "was just like some of [her] favorite children's books where a person could just open a door and enter an entirely new world" (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 109). This fantasy landscape was not, however, merely an Alice-in-Wonderland-style inversion of normal life; it was a world that seemed frozen in multiple different times at once. It was the long 20th century in the form of a miniature. Not only did buildings in neighbourhoods such as Mitte exude a sense of the Prussian past, they also bore visible traces of the Jewish residents who lived there prior to the rise of Hitler, of spring 1945 when the Red Army took Berlin, and of the 40 years of socialism. This layered historicity of the urban environment was not lost on the new residents. According to Henner Merle, for example, "there was a tangible sense of history. We were in the exact spot where all these events we'd only previously read about had taken place. On the one hand it was slightly oppressive, but on the other hand it opened up entirely new perspectives for us to view the present" (qtd. in Fesel and Keller 101). Walking through the rubble-strewn streets of the "Zone," in other words, was akin to entering an uncanny Neverland, a strange combination of Peter Pan and the *Planet of the Apes* where the urban landscape represented both a utopian alternative to the present and an unsettling reminder of the troubled past.

The underground techno parties of 1989-90, in particular, helped to facilitate these adventurous journeys through the landscapes of the past. In their foreword to a collection of in-terviews on the Berlin techno scene of the early 1990s, Felix Denk and Sven von Thülen write:

> Suddenly there were all of these spaces to discover: whether a tank chamber [Panzerkammer] in the dusty no-man's-land of the former death strip or a bunker installation from the Second World War, whether a closed soap factory on the Spree or an electric substation across from the former Reich Aviation Ministry—all of these spaces, which had been made obsolete by recent history, were suddenly the scenes of dancing and music, which was reinvented on almost a weekly basis. (Denk and von Thülen 9)

Discussing their discovery of one such locale, the founders of the widely renowned Tresor club in Berlin Mitte expressed their amazement at the tangible traces of the past that emanated from the space, which had served as the bank vault for the old Wertheim Department Store in the years prior to its Aryanization in the 1930s. Johnnie Stieler, an East Berliner and one of the club's founders, noted: "This was probably what if felt like to discover some Aztec treasure. None of us could even speak. We just walked around silently with our lighters" (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 139). Techno DJ Terrible remembered how Tresor's founders were constantly joking that they had found a tunnel leading to the subterranean Führer bunker where Hitler committed suicide (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 141). Kati Schwind, remembering her first encounter with the space, noted that one "could feel [its] history" (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 148). Dmitri Hegemann—who had founded the Ufo club in West Berlin in the late 1980s and helped to organize the Atonal Festivals in the early 1980s—called it "magic." Feeling as if "the walls were talking to [him]," he couldn't help but to think "about the life stories behind them, about the joyful moments and the family tragedies" (qtd. in Künzel's film).

The buildings, it seems, were whispering secrets from the past, bearing witness to the lives of those who had lived and worked there, to the countless Berliners whose futures had been cut short by the Nazi regime. They were both archeological sites where one could uncover the mysteries of lost lifeworlds and sacred access points to the buried nightmares of the German past. Although perhaps the most famous, Tresor was far from the only club in East Berlin that exuded a sense of the past. In discussing his experiences in the experimental music space in the basement of the squatted art complex known as Tacheles, for example, Ulrich Gutmaier described the scene as follows: "a laser beam crossed through the club from left to right. Like a finger pointing to the future, which touched a history that seemed to have stopped in 1945 when Berliners spent their nights in the air raid shelters waiting for the Red Army" (12). The Tacheles, and Mitte more broadly, was an "open wound," a historical wormhole that "catapulted you into the immediate postwar period" (27). This time around, though, the postwar turned out to be fun, without a doubt, but also immeasurably strange—an exotic, adventurous trip through the uncanny. Reminiscing about an incident in which squatters in Mitte found mummified corpses in one of the buildings and then brought them into the living room, Gutmaier writes:

[E]ven the dead were for a brief moment part of the everyday. They dwelled in the same space as the living. It was a Carnival

where the low and the high switched places. One did not need to have mummies in the living room in order to see the death and the destruction of the city. One was reminded of it in front of every door. East Berlin was full of remains. Every stroll through the streets took you by ruins, wastelands, faded inscriptions that advertised products and stores that haven't existed in fifty years. Their owners were all long dead. (57)

In another similarly odd instance, the squatters at the Bergstrasse, which was infamous in the leftist scene for housing members of the sexually experimental (and, in many cases, abusive) Indianerkommune, unearthed a 100-year-old corpse from the Sophien Cemetery in Mitte, supposedly to use in some sort of sinister, satanic ritual. According to an official quoted in the *Berliner Zeitung,* "the gravestone, pieces of bones, the cross, and the corpse had been arranged as if for an occult meeting" (qtd. in Palmer). With its domesticated corpses, particle accelerators, occult rituals, ruins, and, of course, its futuristic techno soundtrack, "the Zone" was indeed a strange place, ripe for historical adventure and countercultural exploration. There was, however, a method to this madness, one which in the following section I argue we think of as a fundamentally campy form of temporal transgression.

III. Counterculture as Camp

According to Susan Sontag, camp is a mode of perception that revels in the unnatural and the artificial, that "sees everything in quotation marks" (280). "The whole point of Camp," Sontag argues, "is to dethrone the serious. […] More

precisely, camp involves a new, more complex relation to 'the serious.' One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious." She goes on: "Camp—Dandyism in the age of Mass Culture—makes no distinction between the unique object and the mass-produced object. Camp taste transcends the nausea of the replica" (288-89). Unlike universalist discourses that apotheosize their own values as abstract universals and thus misrecognize contextual specificity as decontextualized truth, and unlike nationalist discourses that recontextualize such abstractions within the overarching geographical, temporal, and racial frameworks of the nation, camp problematizes the relationship between singularity and replication by transforming all fixed definitions into performances, placing everything in quotation marks, and refusing to consistently differentiate between the serious and the frivolous, the natural and the artificial. It is important to note, however, that camp is not necessarily ironic. Indeed, whereas irony aggressively uncovers the constructed nature of social phenomena from an ostensibly objective critical vantage point, camp rejects the very possibility of such an objective locus of critique. Rather than attempting to extricate itself from the inauthentic, camp revels in the interstitial spaces between reality and representation.

Although Sontag does not go into great detail about the relationship between camp and temporality, she does note at one point in the essay that as a creator of distance, time can increase the campiness of an object, arguing that "things are campy, not when they become old—but when we become less involved in them, and can enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt" (285). Temporally oriented camp consciousness, then, is a way of relating to past ob-

jects and narratives in which one neither dismisses them as irrelevant remnants of bygone times nor regards them as all-determinative patterns of experience. The past, like the present, is constructed—it is "real" but only within its own historical conditions. Objects and places that are saturated by the past are thus simultaneously authentic/auratic and constructed. Adopting this campy perspective on the past allows its practitioners to simultaneously dwell within the concrete spaces of the real and transcend them altogether. The past becomes a series of masks which one can put on and take off at will while still recognizing them as contextually embedded realities. Michel Foucault makes a similar, if ultimately more nihilistic, point in his discussion of genealogical history writing: the critical, genealogical historian "will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing. […] Taking up these masks, revitalizing the buffoonery of history, we adopt an identity whose unreality surpasses that of God, who started the charade" (94). Campy perspectives on the past, in short, allow people to come to a more objective, distanced understanding of historical contingency, even as they induce an experience of transgressive joy stemming from the vertiginous occupation of multiple different temporalities at the same time.

This is a useful way for thinking about the unique scenario that arose in the eastern sections of Berlin in 1989-90. As the overarching temporal frameworks of socialism crumbled, they both left behind a diverse array of discarded and disconnected fragments in the form of Lenin statues, Red Army uniforms, Trabis, abandoned buildings, consumer goods, furniture, and photo albums, *and* revealed a layer

of Nazi-era historical remains, which the conquering youth armies of Kreuzberg, Hamburg, Freiburg, Amsterdam, London, New York, and Tokyo could collect and reconfigure into magical tools for traveling through time and space. In navigating the fractured temporal landscape of East Berlin, activists mobilized this form of historically oriented camp consciousness in order to assume a more "authentic," more anchored, identity by dwelling within the embedded, auratic objects of the past. It also allowed them to transcend such temporally and contextually specific modes of existence altogether, to travel adventurously through the layered sediment of lost lifeworlds. Instead of attempting to create new abstractions by re-anchoring these fragments of shattered pasts into some preexisting, overarching narrative of historical progress, the cultural anarchists of the *Wende*—primed by over a decade of regenerative cultural fantasies that had been kept alive through the small-scale activism of the *Autonomen* (unaligned, anarchist activists) and through the cultural products of new wave movements such as the Neue Deutsche Welle—used these traces of the past to a create a cosmology of campy experience, an identity that was both real and simulated, rooted and rootless. The interstitial spaces that emerged during the *Wende* functioned as the necessary stages upon which the practitioners of countercultural camp arranged the talismanic objects and belief systems of utopias past. In so doing, they managed to both call attention to the underlying historicity and contextual specificity of putatively ahistorical ideologies *and* forge a new sense of self—a campy mode of existence in which the adventurous subject stood at the threshold between undefined, interminable expansion through time and space and contextual sub-

jective coherence. Camp, in short, allowed its practitioners to dwell in the ecstatic spaces of the "betwixt and between."[4]

Clip 2: The Battle of Tuntenhaus. *Dir. Juliet Bashore, 1991.*

Perhaps a few examples are in order here. In a particularly outrageous performance at the Mainzer Strasse *Tuntenhaus*—a notoriously kitschy locale replete with "curtains in the windows and any number of pretty pictures on the walls, and frilly candle holders and pink chiffon around the lamps" (qtd. in Arndt 45)—a group of men, some of whom were dressed in drag, donned Free German Youth (FDJ) uniforms as they sang socialist songs and waved the East German flag in front of a raucous and appreciative crowd (Bashore). One might reasonably look on this episode merely as an indication of the countercultural left's terrible taste, but it is diffi-

cult to deny the truly astounding nature of the performance. Here we see a group of (presumably) western autonomous activists in drag, wearing uniforms from an East German youth organization, all the while illegally occupying a building in the heart of East Berlin, which at that point was still the capital of the GDR—a historical carnival indeed! The actors and the audiences in these campy performances occupied a position of extraordinary power. In the interstitial spaces of the squatted landscape, they took centre stage in the reconfiguration and rescaling of ideological totalities and created new forms of oppositional sociability that were premised on campy misappropriations of volatile episodes from the German past. This was historical pastiche as subjective liberation, a campy masquerade ball that mocked time itself.

In another example from the Mainzer Strasse, squatters mocked the legacy of the West German left by holding a dinner party at which the attendees, most completely naked save for their ski masks, sat down for coffee and cake at the famous table from the late 1960s Kommune I in West Berlin, which they had previously stolen from the offices of the *tageszeitung*.[5] In a flyer announcing the fact that the table was stolen, entitled "Be wild and do awesome things!" and signed by the "Central Committee of the Roving Hash Rebels," they wrote: "This table is a social-revolutionary relic and has for a long time had no business being with you. You have nothing to do with social or revolution" (Zentralrat der umherschweifende HaschrebellInnen). The editors of the *tageszeitung* promptly responded in an article with the comparatively underwhelming title "Give the table back!" in which they angrily wrote: "The table has served the antiauthoritar-

Fig. 1: Mainzer Strasse squatters standing beside the Kommune 1 table they previously stole from the tageszeitung newspaper. Umbruch Bildarchiv Berlin.

ian and leftist movements over the past twenty-one years ten times more than it will a group of West-squatters in an East Berlin house" ("Gebt den Tisch zurück!"). The editors of the *tageszeitung*, it seems, were clearly not in on the joke.

The mystical, pagan-inspired practices associated with the far right were also campily incorporated into the squatted urban landscape of East Berlin. In a flyer entitled "Germaneninfo Nr. 1" from August 1990, the authors initially conformed to the established patterns of a formulaic self-introduction. They began by noting that they were a group of Westphalians who wanted to convey their ideas to the public. These ideas, however, were far from typical. They included: "the retention of archaic shamanism […] the conservation and protection of magical places of worship and hallucinogenic plants […] complete information against collective stultification [*Verdummung*] and the creation of a creative chaos—using all media from computers to telepathy" (18). This same group also submitted a video to AK Kraak, which opened in a wilderness setting with people in leather jackets and jeans methodically building a phallic shrine atop a spiritually significant rock formation. After a few minutes a naked man emerges from the nearby pond and begins drinking from a skull while another semi-naked man discusses the politics of squatting, the healing power of the sun, and the fascist misappropriation of mysticism. Contributing yet more absurdity to the scene, a cat scrambles to remain perched on the speaker's almost naked body, eliciting pained breaks in the mystical soliloquy as well as peals of laughter from the camera crew (AK Kraak, *Magazin #3*).

Clip 3: Video Magazin # 3. *Dir. AK Kraak, 1990.*

In another particularly telling instance, the electronic musician and club pioneer Daniel Pflumm transformed the name and the damaged aesthetic of the sign on the electrical shop he squatted into the label "Elektro," which he then put on t-shirts, records, and advertisements for his events. This tactic of ostentatiously incorporating aesthetic traces of the German past into the squatted landscape was quite common in these years. Indeed, other locales such as Farben, Friseur, Obst & Gemüse, and WMF also assumed the buildings' names in East Berlin that they had illegally occupied. For Ulrich Gutmaier, such aesthetic appropriations of socialist culture were a "stroke of genius" since a "damaged logo is more seductive than one that is intact because it conveys a sense of ephemerality." He goes on to argue that Pflumm's logo for Elektro managed to "compress a particular time and

a particular place into one sign" (193-94). In other words, Pflumm and his colleagues combined the fragments of the past with what they envisioned to be the sounds of the future in order to produce new constellations of experience in the present.

Other countercultural activists went well beyond the incorporation of aesthetic traces of the GDR and, like the squatters at the Mainzer Strasse Tuntenhaus, began incorporating material objects from the socialist past into their everyday lives. Some used the abandoned objects of socialism as fashion accessories; Marco Bölke, for example, remembered taking protective helmets and masks from an abandoned factory to create clubbing costumes (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 170). Similarly, Ulrich Gutmaier recounted a particular instance in which a group of squatters were thrilled to find a box of hats from the East German children's circus that they could use in their own performances (107). Others took furniture to decorate their clubs, bars, and homes (Denk and von Thülen 108). Bastian Maris happily remembered how he and his friends drove by the Humboldt University every Wednesday to pick through the refuse of "forty years of GDR history in the form of scientific equipment," which they then installed as art pieces at the Glowing Pickle, one of a number of experimental art galleries that popped up in the Scheunenviertel in the early 1990s (qtd. in Fesel and Keller 184). The group of artist provocateurs connected to the Mutoid Waste Company took this proclivity for exhibiting the abandoned objects from the socialist past to new heights when they displayed tanks and even abandoned jet fighters throughout the city. Refusing to abide by accepted temporal frameworks and to respect the borders of historical epochs,

the activist-artists of this period thus took part in an effervescent carnival of history, a transgressive reenactment of multiple temporalities at once.

The musical practices associated with techno were also important elements in this campy reconfiguration of the past. According to Dmitri Hegemann of the Tresor club, historically saturated venues such as the Tresor generated "a sense of astonishment at the real history of the building [that] went hand in hand with the pleasure of appropriating the locations. […]. History had washed up this space at your feet, and now it was a matter of making it your own somehow" (qtd. in Rapp 63). The repetitive beats and pell-mell sampling associated with techno proved to be a particularly useful tool for making the past one's own. Music, according to the theorist Simon Frith, is one of the preeminent media for experimenting with time: it "enables us to experience time aesthetically, intellectually, *and* physically in new ways. […] Music, to put this another way, allows us to stop time, while we consider how it passes" (149). He goes on to argue that musical performance "offers us not argument but experience, and for a moment—for moments—that experience involves *ideal time*, an ideal defined by the integration of what is routinely kept separate—the individual and the social, the mind and the body, change and stillness, the different and the same, the already past and the still to come, desire and fulfillment" (157). Writing about the proclivity of current music to reenact the past, Simon Reynolds makes a similar argument concerning the nature of recording and sampling. As "ghosts you can control," he argues, recorded music "is pretty freaky, then, if you think about it. But sampling doubles its inherent supernaturalism. Woven out of

looped moments that are each like portals to far-flung times and places, the sample collage creates a musical event that never happened; a mixture of time-travel and séance" (313). As a musical form that consists of fast beats and sampled quotations from other musical genres and from everyday life, techno fits these descriptions well. It enabled dancers and musicians to reorganize the rhythms of the body and of the location into a collective algorithm for experiencing and experimenting with space and time.

Reminiscing about his experiences in these years, David Wagner, a participant in the scene, wrote:

Once upon a time, Berlin-Mitte was a wish-fulfilment zone [...]. Mitte was a frenzy of repurposing. The magic phrase was "temporary use." Jet fighters abandoned by a retreating superpower managed to become monuments in the very heart of the city. And the names of the new occupying forces? Art and amusement. Empty streets, crumbling façades—was the war still on? Or had it perhaps not even taken place here? Didn't everything look like the 1920s, didn't it all look like a film set? [...]. It was so easy to be amazed. Mitte had dropped out of time— and was stuck in several different pasts at once. Pre-war and pre-pre-war, partly GDR and partly some strange inbetween-era where once again Germany had ceased to exist but its new version hadn't actually come about yet. Mitte was in a gap. It became the magic city of the inbetween. It became a wish-fulfillment zone, everything was possible. There was dancing. There was dancing and drinking. And the eyes of the ruin-dwellers sparkled with the happiness of those who are in the right place at the

right time [...]. It was tremendous in the rubble, it was a gigantic playground. (5)

This unique combination of the unsettled temporal landscape of East Berlin with the transgressive cultural forms developed by Western countercultural groups gave the "Zone" its extraordinary affective power and made life in the rubble so shockingly tremendous. In spaces such as Tresor, Tacheles, Elektro, Friseur, and the Mainzer Strasse, countercultural youth could travel through various historical epochs and dwell within the world-historical ruins of crumbled utopias and, in so doing, they could both undermine the putative inevitability of temporal progression and joyfully transgress the boundaries of time. Much like the participants in the youth movements of the early 1980s, the anarchists of the *Wende* felt themselves to be "the fleeting mercenaries of humor, [...] the world bandits, driven by the wonderful essence of the unreal, drunk and living in the here and now" (Vidon 305). In 1989-90, anarchism reigned supreme in Berlin once again.

IV. An End and a Beginning

Yet once again, the chaos and anarchism of these years fell victim to the world's harsh realities. Indeed, the efflorescence of campy experimentation met a serious roadblock with the brutal eviction of the Mainzer Strasse squatters in November 1990. The chain of events leading to the eviction of the Mainzer Strasse commenced on November 12th, as activists gathered to protest the clearance of the Pfarrstrasse 112 and the Cotheniusstrasse 16.[6] The situation quickly escalat-

ed over the following days as masked activists from across northern Europe—and, if the authorities are to be believed, particularly from the Hafenstrasse squat in Hamburg—built barricades in the streets, threw rocks and Molotov cocktails from rooftops, and adamantly refused all demands that they vacate the area. Thousands of police officers moved in on the morning of November 14th and, after hours of violent conflict with squatters and their supporters, successfully took control of the street. In the wake of the eviction, in which numerous people were injured and almost 350 arrested, many reacted with anger, sadness, and disbelief. Whereas conservative city officials depicted the events as mere criminality and argued that the Mainzer Strasse residents "manifested an appalling rejection of all the peaceful values that constitute our society" (Senatsverwaltung für Inneres 2), others harshly criticized police violence and state duplicity. An essay written in the wake of the eviction, for example, noted: "the fact that leftist and antifascist literature was destroyed, reminds us of bygone times and throws a large shadow on your supposed 'understanding of democracy'" ("Herr Momper, Herr Mendiburu!"). Many of the neighbourhood residents joined the critical chorus with some claiming that the police actions were reminiscent of fascist times and others lamenting the fact that without all of the squatters, the Mainzer Strasse was once again "damned gloomy" (qtd. in Engwicht and Engwicht 5).

In the wake of the Mainzer Strasse eviction, the boundless optimism and the campy anarchism of 1989-90 began receding into the background. Following the "Müsli" strategy of the early 1980s, a number of squatters shifted their focus towards developing alternative lifestyles within the squats

and securing long-term rental agreements.[7] Activists in Mitte even looked into the possibility of following the example set by squatters in the early 1980s by securing *Paten* (sponsors) in order to insure "that the squats can remain as cultural and social food for thought [*Denkanstoss*]" (Form Letter to Potential Paten). Others followed the pattern of the "Mollis" by abandoning countercultural infrastructure in favor of ever more radical modes of violent opposition.[8] In the Volxsport declaration, "Klarheit für Berlin" ("Clarity for Berlin"), for example, the authors noted that they "deglassed" the SPD offices and desecrated those of the Alternative List. They then reproduced statements of solidarity from cities throughout Germany and Europe. One statement from Hannover seethed: "Our hate is boundless. We know that it is not just about Berlin but about all of the squatted buildings and centers, and about all those who are involved in the fight" (Volxsport 10). A solidarity declaration from Italy entitled "A Fire Unites Us" noted:

[A] line of fire and revolt against the ruling classes has erupted, against their banks, their cities, and their decisions. It is a fire that leaves marks, a fire that unites us and above all our indestructible joy and anger to fight, to destroy the linchpins of the imperial society, to weave a network of oppositional forces and to work our way along the path of liberation. (Volxsport 12)

Employing the violent rhetoric of the *Autonomen*, they argued that the battle must be taken to new heights, that Berlin represented one small theatre in the increasingly global conflict between Us and Them. Although it lies beyond the scope of this essay, it is safe to assume that many of the more radical activists of these years subsequently shifted their at-

tention to the anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s and 2000s such as the 1999 Carnival against Capitalism, the anti-G8 protests in Genoa in 2011, and the recent Blockupy protests in Frankfurt/Main.

The eviction of the Mainzer Strasse may have signaled a nascent split in the countercultural left of the *Wende* period, but it was far from the end of the campy cultural forms that rose to prominence in these years. Just as the West German youth movements of 1980-81 left an indelible mark on the culture and the politics of the 1980s, so would the campy activism of 1989-90 fundamentally transform the cultural landscapes of 1990s Berlin. Indeed, those who experienced the Neverland of East Berlin in the months and years after the fall of the Wall are still leading groups of eager pilgrims back to the future. They come from London, New York, Tokyo, and Barcelona in search of the city's oft-touted alternative atmosphere. After making a quick pass through the city's official sites such as the Brandenburg Gate and the Museum Island, they flock to the techno clubs, art galleries, street cafes, and cultural centres to experience the *Rausch* (intoxicating electricity) of Berlin.

Some of the main venues for experiencing the effervescence of the idealized Berlin are the techno clubs that stubbornly cling to the city's landscape. Indeed, whereas many of the illegal squats were cleared (or legalized as alternative housing) in the early 1990s, the techno clubs remained open spaces. According to Anton Waldt these clubs represented "states of exception" that bore "striking similarities" to the "energy, intensity, [and] brutal pathos" of the three-day long battle over the Mainzer Strasse. The Tresor club, Waldt goes on to argue,

was premised on a radical sense of inclusion. Indeed, the dance floor was a point of subjective "intersection," which, at times, seems like the "navel of the whole damned universe" (130). Located in an old industrial building near the River Spree, the Berghain offered similar experiences:

[It was the] birthplace of memories, Heimat for drag queens, shelter for the insane […] and the residence of atmosphere […]. No one who entered Berghain could ever forget the moment when they moved from the steel steps to the dance floor. The spirit was palpable in the entire Berghain that here everything was possible. […]. The moments in Berghain were always enormous. The feelings were too intensive to be real. You didn't know whether you had landed in the middle of hell or heaven. You just constantly transgressed your own boundaries and when you finally came out into the old world, you needed days to work through everything that you had done, seen, and heard in these twenty hours. (Aire 187-88)

At times, the dancefloor ecstasies spilled out onto the streets and began to resemble political protests. Writing about the Love Parade, in which tens of thousands of Berliners and visitors danced their way through the streets, Slavko Stefanoski noted that "it was a movement, a philosophy of life. We were living at the center of the world" (qtd. in Gutmaier 207).

Although techno clubs are certainly among the most popular locations for experiencing the uniquely campy subjectivities associated with fin-de-siècle Berlin, they are far from the

only such venues. Describing a peculiar bar named Sniper, for example, Andreas Busche writes:

> *The Sniper knows no beginning and no end: a loop that one can enter and leave like a video installation in a museum. The club as temporal medium. […]. On a screen in the back of the shop the most bizarre video collages were running every evening: news clips, B-movies, pornos, carpet bombs over Baghdad, obscure music clips from 3rd generation VHS, everything cut together, chopped up, superimposed, reassembled, looped, stretched into eternity. [These loops] put the audience into a moronic [debilen] trance-like state. (171-173)*

Added to all of this was a "nerve inducing sound […] an unrelenting muzak of Euro-Disco, gabbers, classical, white noise, Asian plastic pop, easy listening, and trashy film dialogues. Plunderphonics."[9] Despite all of this, "the chaos had its method, every object had its place" (171-73). As the aesthetics of the Sniper bar illustrate, the camp consciousness developed by the urban countercultures during the *Wende* is not only far from extinct, it seems to be an all-pervasive mode of alternative expression in post-unification Berlin and, increasingly, in experimental youth scenes from London and New York to Tokyo and Seoul.

Performance art, especially in and around the formerly squatted apartments and cultural centers of the eastern sections of the city, also remained an important vehicle for initiating curious onlookers into the peculiar rites of anarchist camp. Visitors to the increasingly fashionable neighbourhoods of Berlin-Mitte in the late 1990s, for example, would

likely have been struck by the absurd activities taking place in and around the formerly squatted building on Auguststrasse 10, better known as the Kultur und Leben (Culture and Life) Project, or KuLe. The slogans painted outside of the building read: "Destroy what," "Resistance requires," and "are pigs"—all of which were comically incomplete versions of popular political slogans from the squatting movement of the early 1990s. The resident artists created a wide variety of subversive theatre performances.[10] For example, in one piece entitled "Moths in the Light," two artists from Prague problematized the relationship between public and private spaces by engaging in an intimate, acrobatic dance on the outer scaffolding of the building, thus transforming the façade of the house into a "vertical stage" for the "public performance of private intimacy" (Rada). Another project, entitled "Catwalk," also played with the borders between public and private by projecting scenes from inside of the building onto the outer façade such that onlookers could, in a sense, see through the walls.

V. Camp, Capitalism, and "Profane Illuminations"

Whereas alternative tourists visiting Berlin tend to find such experimental cultural forms highly appealing, a number of leftist critics in the city have called attention to the urban counterculture's troublesome lack of political perspectives. Uwe Rada, for example, published an article in the *tageszeitung* in which he was simultaneously amused and perturbed by these performances: "where does the space of self-irony end, and where does seriousness begin" (Rada)? The author of a shorter article accompanying Rada's piece was much

less ambivalent, acerbically noting that the "Tacheles is now nothing but a ruin of its former self and simply waits to be cleared. There are hardly any more political impulses coming from the squats," and the only thing remaining of the once politically powerful squatting movement in Berlin, the author concluded, was "Art, commerce, fashion" (wera). Joining a long and illustrious line of leftist critics ranging from Jürgen Habermas and Rudi Dutschke to Wolfgang Kraushaar and Bernd Rabehl (who was well on his way to becoming the voice of right-wing nationalism that he is today), these commentators thus dismissed the anarchist absurdity and campy cultural forms of the counterculture as apolitical, unreflective tools of capitalism. Indeed, in much the same way that the ideologues of the 1970s had laughed off the counterculture, and just like the Müslis and their supporters in the mid-1980s had dismissed the absurd experimentation and outrageous anarchism of the non-negotiators, so again did the "serious" leftists of the mid-1990s deride the irrational performances and hedonistic dance parties as counterproductive and fundamentally narcissistic harbingers of gentrification and commerce. As Andreas Huyssen has perceptively noted, "the left's ridiculing of postmodernism" should be considered as part and parcel of its "often haughty and dogmatic critiques of the counter-cultural impulses of the 1960s" (Huyssen, "Mapping" 199).

To a certain extent, these critics have a point. Late-20th and early-21st-century Berlin is indeed a hip locale of art, commerce, and fashion, a "creative city" to which artists, musicians, and alternative tourists flock for inspiration.[11] This has not escaped the notice of place marketers within the city who have sought to capitalize on Berlin's particular appeal

for the global youth market by explicitly championing the city's clubs, nightlife, and creative art scene.[12] A 2009 brochure from the Berlin Partner's marketing group, for example, noted: "Here you can be whatever you want [because] Berlin is the place to be for individuality" (qtd. in Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin* 239). Nor has it escaped the notice of property developers throughout the city who have attempted to capitalize on Berlin's reputation for hipness by enthusiastically "flipping" desirable properties in neighbourhoods such as Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. The alternative spaces of Berlin are, so it seems, slowly being incorporated into the urban landscape as the unique quirks of a "creative city," as the unwitting pawns of commodity capitalism. For Marxist geographers such as David Harvey, this incorporation of urban difference into strategies of capital accumulation would come as no surprise. Indeed, in his essay "From Space to Place and Back Again," Harvey argues that political projects based on oppositional identities are "easily dominated by the power of capital to co-ordinate accumulation across universal fragmented space" (24). As an alternative, Harvey, like many other Marxist critics, calls for a mode of oppositional place construction that refuses to succumb to the dangers of, on the one hand, romanticizing place as the locus of authentic being and, on the other hand, propagating a naïve belief in the innate progressivism of mass culture, subjective fluidity, and endless becoming. The only solution, it seems, is for the countercultural left to ground its anarchist cultural practices in a more responsible, more serious form politics.

It is undoubtedly true that the experiential transformations wrought by the countercultural anarchists of the *Wende* period have contributed to the expansion of consumer capi-

talism. The countercultural activists of the late-20th century and the cultural objects they produced have indeed largely reentered the profane world of exchange values and circulating commodities. Yet the fact that one can purchase an album or pay to enter a club does not, I would argue, neutralize the experimental spatial and temporal visions that have been encoded into these objects and spaces. Commerce and atmosphere, certainly. But commerce and atmosphere need not be seen as necessarily anathema to revolutionary shifts in perception and experience. Far from leading to their immediate neutralization, the commodification of these peculiar, utopian anarchist practices can serve as a vehicle, a Trojan horse, for spreading the regenerative, campy temporalities of 1989-90 to ever larger audiences around the world. They can serve as catalysts for moments of what, drawing from Walter Benjamin, we might call "profane illuminations," moments at which we realize that the temporal structures that define our everyday lives are themselves largely illusory, that the world is open and that it can thus be changed.[13] Although these fleeting moments of illumination might not be in-and-of-themselves revolutionary acts, they can pave the way for political transformation by serving as "stepping stones to 'another reality'" (Unverzagt 11).

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Clip and Image Notes

Clip 1: *Sag niemals nie*. Dir. Kollektiv Mainzer Strasse, 1991.

Clip 2: *The Battle of Tuntenhaus*. Dir. Juliet Bashore, 1991.

Clip 3: *Video Magazin # 3*. Dir. AK Kraak, 1990.

Fig. 1: Mainzer Strasse squatters standing beside the Kommune 1 table they previously stole from the *tageszeitung* newspaper. Umbruch Bildarchiv Berlin.

Endnotes

1   On urban restructuring and its discontents, see among many others Bodenschatz; Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin*; Holm; Holm and Kuhn; Strom; and Vasudevan. On the politics of memory in relation to Berlin's urban spaces, see Huyssen, *Present Pasts*; Jordan; Ladd; Meng; Rubin; Till; and Young. For an overview of the debates in these years, see Geyer.

2   On the temporal crisis of the late-20th century and its relationship to urban space, see Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, as well as the essays in Hell and Schoenle.

3   Although I focus here on the role of Western countercultural groups, it is important to note that similar impulses emerged in the East. See, for example, the excellent set of essays in Felsmann and Gröschner. See also the discussion of late Soviet experimental artistic practices in Yurchak.

4   On this concept see Turner.

6   These squats were targeted because both had been occupied after July 24th, the date at which the Magistrat of East Berlin declared no new squats would be tolerated.

7   *Müslis* (granolas) refers to activists in the early 1980s West German squatting movement who advocated for a de-escalation of violence, for a compromise with the city administration, and for individual rather than collective leases.

8   *Mollis* (Molotov cocktails) refers to the activists in the early 1980s squatting movement who refused to negotiate with the city administration and advocated for violent resistance to any attempts to evict the squatters.

9   On the concept of "plunderphonics" and similar experimental music genres like "hauntology" and "echo jams," see Fisher; and Reynolds.

10 For a discussion of this mode of subversive theatre, see Vasudevan.

11 See, for example, Bader and Scharenberg; Heinen; Lang; and Novy.

12 See, for example, Colomb, "Pushing the Urban Frontier"; Stahl; and Stevens and Ambler.

13 See Cohen; and Buck-Morss.