

# The Berlin Techno Myth and Issues of Diversity

## About the connections between techno, the muting of diverse perspectives, inequalities and the persisting need for platforms like female:pressure

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### Abstract

In this article I would like to give an overview of the issue of diversity within the field of electronic (dance) music and Berlin club cultures. This perspective is taken from the viewpoint of a member of the female:pressure network and a scholar of popular music studies and cultural studies. This article starts out to grasp the issue of diversity within the context of my PhD research on German and Austrian avant-garde festivals or transmedia festivals<sup>2</sup>. By unraveling the quest for more diversity in club cultures, I will start with a discussion on gender inequality and how these are linked to technology, introduce the platform female:pressure and discuss the muting of diverse perspectives in the history of club cultures. I also point out some of the myths that have been repeatedly contested about Berlin techno, as repeating them does not make them facts, it made these tales just more suspicious; or at least incomplete (at the cost of other groups and subcultures). Subsequently I connect this discussion with the booming business of techno in Berlin and close with pointing out the recent rise of collectives and the challenge of collective problem solving, and end with a bird's eye view of the issues at stake. The title of the book "the new age of club culture" is very much inviting such an investigation. This is done via a mix of personal accounts and discussing the work of other scholars, media coverage and video documentation.

### 1. Introduction

At the beginning of my PhD research project on avant-garde festivals in electronic music, I did an internship at a prominent Berlin festival of this type in 2014. One of my jobs was to help organize the magazine for the festival edition and I had to draw attention to the curator in charge that there were no female\*<sup>3</sup> authors planned for the issue and that we should consider

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<sup>2</sup> I define transmedia festivals, as urban festivals which showcase not only club and experimental electronic music, but alongside a diverse range of other artforms (discourse, media art, sound art, sculpture/installation, or performance) that are often linked to technology.

<sup>3</sup> Female\* is used in this article to refer not only to the biological sex of women but also to trans-artists, this includes trans-men and trans-women as they usually relate (if they have to) rather to females than to males. As the following analysis aims to unmask gender stereotypes, it still relies on referring to male and female\*. See also Rodgers about this dilemma in fn #6.

including female writers as well. My own awareness was not only shaped by personal experience (as a former music journalist but not limited to that) and by the conversations in the female:pressure<sup>4</sup> list serve. In general, female:pressure functions as an international network where members can exchange information. This might be: Where can I play a gig in a city I visit? Where can I find a place to stay? Who can make my webpage or do photos for my portfolio? Who can help to organize an event with me in city X? Or the other way around – open job offers, scholarships, workshops and residencies are shared. Furthermore, the newest media coverage and publications about gender and diversity issues in club culture, and first and foremost the latest musical works of the members are posted into the mailing list. Through special topics of interest also discussions emerge and artists find each other to collaborate on a project – be it an event, an article, a track or CD compilation. In 2012, female:pressure started to count the participation of female artists within club events, labels, festivals. This was the result of continuing discussion in the mailing list on the booking situation of members, there was a feeling that women were treated and evaluated differently than men and were eventually less represented. So the idea came up to look more precisely. The outcome was not very pleasing as it turned out that on average only about 10% of the participants at those electronic music events were female (female:pressure 2013a)<sup>5</sup>. Even more disturbing were the conversations that followed my argument about the absence of females at the festival. Females were thought of as not reliable, less professional, are just not making good music; and why are they not just solving the issue instead of complaining about it? Also Electric Indigo<sup>6</sup> mentions similar experiences, referring to an interview featured in *The Wire* (Allan, 2013: 16) where a festival curator of an avant-garde festival, said that increasing the number of females artists would reduce the quality of the lineup (cf. Vihaus 2018). Some of these arguments I have heard for years and years over and over again, but it was irritating inside the organization of an innovative avant-garde event. This was not some mainstream electronic music festival where the status quo of social conditions is usually not reflected much or challenged. This happened also constantly in more distinctive environments, as Electric Indigo and myself experienced at a female:pressure talk in a club in Innsbruck. That's why we would make ironic comments and jokes in the list serve, often about festival websites where lineups would appear with photographs and you would see 50+ white male DJs. That was the rule, not the exception.

Now about five years later things have changed somewhat. At least in some scenes and circles it is simply the done thing, almost fashionable to include females and non-binary artists. This is also reflected in the facts surveys that focused after 2015 mainly on festivals (as labels, clubs or earlier targeted music media turned out to be too brought to handle for the few troublemakers who are in charge of the facts surveys). And it is worth mentioning that the

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<sup>4</sup> “female:pressure is an international network of female, transgender and non-binary artists in the fields of electronic music and digital arts founded by Electric Indigo: from musicians, composers and DJs to visual artists, cultural workers and researchers. [...] Female:pressure intends to strengthen networking, communication and representation - a standard instrument to obtain information about artists, contact them, and find out about other, maybe less known women in electronic music all around the globe. [...] The network comprises of almost 2400 members from 75 countries as at March 2019.” (female:pressure 2019)

<sup>5</sup> I remember that also media was at stake in the list discussions and counting, but did not make it into statistics.

<sup>6</sup> Electric Indigo is a Viennese DJ and producer. In the 1990s she worked at the Hardwax Record Store in Berlin. 1998 she founded female:pressure. Today she lives in Vienna and performs and DJs internationally.

female:pressure surveys have been done without any financial support or funding. Remarkably enough, it would seem that there is no country, institution or organization which can support such an effort financially. Seemingly, this is for bureaucratic reasons, as research like this fits in no funding scheme if done outside of academia. That is disturbing, also because it would be so important to contextualize the data and explain it, frame it through personal accounts, theories and research studies on similar issues. Also there would be enough academics within the network who could do it; as this would be an intensive research effort no member could do this extra work on top of the rest as it is commonplace that women still earn less, do most of the family as well as care work, and are more affected by the precarious and insecure working conditions of the present, which prevails in arts and culture. Coming back to the survey: The survey of 2017 included all of the statistics on festivals since 2012, and was done for the first time with the help of a professional statistician. The outcome was that female\* participation at festivals had increased to about 17%. To a large amount this is due to the facts surveys in themselves and the following media attention and distribution, the pressure it was able to build up.

## **2. female:pressure – Why haven't they been heard all along?**

In 2018 the female:pressure network (henceforth f:p) celebrated 20 years of existence and one could wonder why only numbers and graphics started to raise attention, even though founder Electric Indigo and other active musicians who became members like Acid Maria, Tina 303, Gudrun Gut, Donna Maya, Chra, Xyramat, Monika Kruse, AGF or internationally Miss Djax have been around in the scene(s) since the nineties. And ever since, they try to bring awareness to the static situation of invisibility (or muting) of female musicians and activists from the scenes and its histories. Why did it need numbers and graphics to raise attention for this issue? Why haven't they been heard all along?

Gender matters gained more attention in the 1990s as gender mainstreaming became a public issue. The Riot Grrrl Movement was in the media or Lady Fests, later Girls Rock Camps, started to happen in Germany and different scenes started to do events focused on female musicians. In the 2000s in Hamburg, where I grew up, f:p was popping up behind DJ names more often on event flyers. Gender Studies started to appear at universities. I was part of a female radio group in Hamburg, Radio Sankt Paula, and though it was obvious that it was still a long way to go, one had the feeling that something was evolving as others also started their own groups or initiatives focusing on female\* issues. I was interested in club music and also started DJing, but I was not part of any specific electronic music scene more popping in and out different club culture scenes. I had also a longer engagement within Hip Hop where the lack of females was notorious. Maybe this optimism towards the techno scenes was due to internationally prominent figures like Berlin radio host Marusha, and artists like Ellen Alien, Miss Kittin or Kemistry & Storm, who were backed up by locally popular female DJs in Hamburg – especially in the drum and bass scene – and somehow I thought there were many more females in electronic music than in other genres.

That this was not the case became obvious throughout the years, though I have seen plenty of female musicians and DJs and bought their records. Also due to the scenes I frequented, and my personal bias, it was constantly disturbing that at some events and festivals they were not present, also their presence in the media was rare (not only in reports, reviews or cover stories, but also as journalists. In the Hip Hop magazines that I wrote for in the 2000s, there were hardly *any* other female journalists). It became unmistakably obvious that things were not improving when I started researching electronic music and club culture at university. Ten years ago there were far fewer publications on electronic music or club culture than today, and females\* were rarely mentioned in art music and club culture. The number of publications increased throughout the years, and in the 2010s there was literally a boom of documentation and publications on electronic music, especially focusing on Germany and Berlin. In those attempts to write the German history of electronic music, female\* musicians were missing. For example I was surprised that Electric Indigo is not mentioned in one of these histories of Berlin Club Culture, her having worked from 1993 until 1996 at the infamous Hardwax Record Store and having DJed several nights a week on average.

As I had seen many female DJs in different settings, it became obvious that they have been somehow deleted from music history.<sup>7</sup> I assumed that it could be due to the bad reputation of feminism during the end of the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s, where feminism and its appearances in the media seemed outdated, compared to the new technology and startup-mentality infused into urban mainstream. Some female artists would refuse to play at female-only lineups or events, as this could damage their reputation and market value. What seemed to be the most powerful tool in the music business were male networks of support. This is also emphasized by Electric Indigo in the article mentioned above; this is the reason why some fellow DJs and musicians don't want to join f:p – as taking a feminist stance can be a stigma in this industry sector. This is also stressed by Angela McRobbie in several articles, especially in “Top Girls?” (2007), where she explains how young women today are forced into a “post-feminist masquerade” so that they can become hyper-active as creative workers and in consumer culture which they are encouraged to. Their pivotal role in the new global labour market coincides with a fading away of feminism and the women's movement (2007: 719) and young women become an “intensively managed subject of post-feminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality” (2007: 723). Women have to showcase a spectacular femininity in their quest to become part of public life, and the political sphere according to McRobbie (and we can recognize this also in the world of electronic music, where very often, successful female DJs and producers are spectacularly beautiful and feminine. Cases such as US footwork producer Jlin<sup>8</sup> remain an exception). But instead of the much desired independence the biopolitical practices eventually diminish activity in the sphere of formal politics and civic society, McRobbie talks of a “feminist tragedy” (2007:

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<sup>7</sup> Of course this is not only happening in music, as a scholar of cultural studies I was shocked that in a book released in 2006 on contemporary cultural theory out of 44 introduced important thinkers in cultural studies only four were women. And I add for those who don't know that the majority of students in cultural studies are women\*. This amounts interestingly to the first ratio of the female:pressure survey, only that here more women\* than men are involved, at least in the past 30 years.

<sup>8</sup> Jlin is an afro-american DJ and producer from Indiana, seemingly indifferent to codes of femininity displaying a casual gender-neutral style. Her debut album of 2015 was a little sensation in the world of club and electronic music and received critical praise.

734). Coming back to club culture, which is just as much a part of this brave new world of work paved by insecurities, other Viennese DJs and event organizers mention in the same article the unbroken importance of personal networks for bookings in the club scene and that these are still male dominated (Vihaus 2017). And it is probably no coincidence that the musician Astrid Gnosis<sup>9</sup> was booked by same Austrian event organizers at Hyperreality in 2019, after describing her experiences in Kaltblut Magazine 2018: “The most challenging has been to learn to rely on myself alone. To see my friends turn into enemies, to have no mentors. It’s been hard to be insulted and humiliated for being a strong woman. It’s been the hardest to ultimately understand that before my ideas people see me as a threat to an established order of things. It is more commonly expected to need others to be strong [...]. It’s been hard to see the idiots winning. The biggest challenge to getting my work out has been to build an audience, without opportunities to play live. As a solo artist, with no representation, well it feels like screaming inside an empty well” (Hussain 2018). In the same article in *The Gap* musicologist Rosa Reitsamer, who published a book on the DIY music-careers of DJs with a Vienna case study (Reitsamer 2013), mentions that men and women are both facing a tough competition, and that women still have outsider positions due to which they are facing more control and monitoring of their peers. Here quality control is much tighter than for the male peers (cf. Reitsamer 2013). This seems closely related to the discontent members addressed in the mailing list that kicked off the facts surveys.

Scholar and musician Tara Rodgers did an in depth study on the history of electronic music, and interviewed 24 female musicians in the field of experimental electronica in her book “Pink Noises”. In her introduction she explains that “many men were supportive, but electronic music cultures overall seemed to discourage or deny women's participation. This was made clear by the lack of substantive coverage of women in electronic music magazines and history books.” (Rodgers 2010: 3) Presence and diversity of expressions by women working with sound was profoundly underestimated over the last century according to Rodgers. Questions are being raised as to who has access to tools and opportunities for creative expression, and “how women artists are represented in mainstream media”, writes Rodgers (2010: 5). Tropes like noise or experimentalism in existing electronic music histories, have as of yet “conjured a canon of male composers and writers” (ibid.). That’s why a broad critique of gender issues across multiple histories linked to electronic music is necessary, according to Rodgers. Music culture privileges planned obsolescence. Electronic music histories have been setting the parameters of who and what counts as invention, production, or making noise according to certain ideologies and politics, the author believes (2010: 5–6). Rodgers attempts to write a counter history of female\* accounts<sup>10</sup>, because “some of the most important contributions to the study of electronic music and sound have positioned women as outside the scope of study” (2010, 11; cf. Kahn 1999, 13–14); defined DJ cultures as distinctively masculine with relative inattention to women’s participation in

<sup>9</sup> Astrid Gnosis is a multidisciplinary artist working with sound, video and performance, who has Colombian roots and grew up in Spain and now lives in London. As her main influences she mentions Dutch hardcore, hiphop, rave and pop. As though herself and the article locate her in hardcore techno, at a presentation about my book on gabber and breakcore I quote her and play a video of hers, later some of the male attendees and musicians stress that she isn’t hardcore. And genre purism seems like a mechanism to exclude women eventually as a lot of female DJs and musicians don’t want limit themselves to one style or genre.

<sup>10</sup> “I rely on the notoriously terms women and men to frame the project because these social categories significantly affect the organization of electronic music histories [...]” (Rodgers 2019: 4)

these cultures (cf. Reynolds 1998: 274–275) or “used observational statistics, such as fewer than one in ten DJs is female, to explain women’s absence from the text.” (Rodgers 2010: 11) Reitsamer (in Vihaus 2017) stresses that while there might be still less women\* active in electronic music production and DJ culture, underrepresentation is not an argument to exclude them from bookings and lineups and to marginalize them further. Her study, although not focused on females\* is also an attempt to write females\* back into music history and represent their presence.

### 3. Gender and technology

Rosa Reitsamer (cf. Vihaus 2017) explains that the connection of technology and masculinity structures society, and that this leads to coding expertise in the field of technology being perceived as masculine. Rebekah Farrugia, author of “Beyond the Dance Floor” did a test search with the phrases ‘toys for boys’ and ‘toys for girls’ on Amazon and the results featured in the top ten recommendations were “monster truck custom shop, tool kit, science kit and rocket kit” for boys and “jewellery box, tea set, cookware and bracelet-making kit” for girls (2012: 20). The recommended toys for girls have no connection to technology. This might be another reason why women are still largely ignored as music producers. In an interview with Pitchfork (Hopper 2015) Björk stated that she often does not get the credits for her production work, invited remixers and co-producers do.<sup>11</sup> She admits that she did not talk about the issue because she did not want to act defensive, but for the sake of other women she decided to speak up: “I want to support young girls who are in their 20s now and tell them: *You’re not just imagining things*. It’s tough. Everything that a guy says once, you have to say five times. Girls now are also faced with different problems. I’ve been guilty of one thing: After being the only girl in bands for 10 years, I learned—the hard way—that if I was going to get my ideas through, I was going to have to pretend that they—men—had the ideas. I became really good at this and I don’t even notice it myself.” As a possible act of prevention she recommended taking photos in the studio of the production process that the image of women working with production gear gets into the minds of the mainstream. This was picked up by electronic music producer Antye Greie-Ripatti (AGF) who created a tumblr blog dedicated to photos of women making music<sup>12</sup>. Here pioneers as well as women from all over the world are seen in the mix, in the studio and out in the world making field recordings. This is obviously necessary and Rebekah Farrugia gives some arguments why.

Farrugia (2012) argues that the status quo relationship of gender and technology as masculine was constructed by discourses and subsequently became naturalized. This affects women’s

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<sup>11</sup> “I didn’t want to talk about that kind of thing for 10 years, but then I thought, “You’re a coward if you don’t stand up. Not for you, but for women. Say something.” So around 2006, I put something on my website where I cleared something up, because it’d been online so many times that it was becoming a fact. It wasn’t just one journalist getting it wrong, *everybody* was getting it wrong. I’ve done music for, what, *30 years*? I’ve been in the studio since I was 11; [...] I’ve sometimes thought about releasing a map of all my albums and just making it clear who did what. But it always comes across as so defensive that, like, it’s pathetic. I could obviously talk about this for a long time.” (Hopper 2015)

<sup>12</sup> <http://femalepressure.tumblr.com/>. Accessed 20 May 2019.

access to electronic music technology, the networks and spaces in which they circulate. Technology is not inherently masculine but has been labeled as such as a result of “constructed narratives, rhetorical devices and material practices.” (Farrugia 2012: 20) She agrees with Rodgers when she stresses that women have been systematically written out of technologies’ collective memory (ibid.). It led to the point that femininity seemed incompatible with technological competence. The innate relationship between man and technology begins with childhood and continues into adulthood and is expressed across popular music genres, the music industry, scenes or practices (ibid.: 21). Through the marketing of radio technology to high fidelity systems, women have been distanced further from audio technology, which leads to ways of participation in music scenes that are coded as ‘feminine’ (ibid.: 22). The classroom is another influential place where gender stereotypes about audio and music tech are reproduced. For subcultural engagement this means that in contrast to the ethos of active male rebellion, girls’ involvement with music has been linked to consumerism and passiveness instead of creative practices in the history of subcultural studies: “In many cases, the efforts of women who chose to play instruments and form bands have been overlooked or written out of the picture.” (Farrugia 2012: 24)

Also Brewster and Broughton state in their celebrated book “Last Night a DJ saved my Life” on the history of the DJ that in the 94-year history of DJing, women have been largely frozen out of the picture with few exceptions (Brewster and Broughton 2000: 377). They claim that new club culture scenes offer more possibilities for women, but end there without explaining this further. Thus for Farrugia it is not surprising that “EDM has developed as a male centric space that mirrors most other popular music genres and the mainstream music industry.” (2012: 27) Angela McRobbie (1994) observed that EDM reproduced “the same sexual division of labour which exist[ed] not just in the pop music industry but in most other types of work and employment” (cited in Farrugia 2012: 28). Referring to several authors (McRobbie 1994; Redhead et al. 1998; Reynolds 1999), Farrugia recounts that women in the 1990s would take part in EDM mainly as participants; and when women engaged in roles beyond the dance floor, they were usually in low-level positions such as helping out on the till/entrance, working behind the bar or distributing flyers. “This is not to dismiss women’s participation in these capacities, but rather to highlight how women’s ability to pursue both power and pleasure further up the hierarchy of rave and DJ culture was limited.” (ibid.: 28)

According to Farrugia, the changing climate of sexual politics in the 1990s due to third wave feminism, popularized in music via the Riot Grrrl movement wasn’t noticeably reflected in EDM culture, while record collecting is another factor that she defines as “homosocial” (ibid.: 28). Referring to Sarah Thornton and her book “Club Cultures” (1996), she notes the masculine bias of subcultural capital and the gatekeeping mechanisms of club culture. Also Simon Reynolds (1999) attests that the presence of women on the dance floor is not reflected by the proportion of women in the ranks of professional DJs. This is due to the tricks of the trade which are passed down from mentors to male acolytes which include the accumulation of exhaustive and arcane information about labels and producers. If female DJs appeared on public relations materials, Farrugia notes, they would rarely be rhetorically constructed along the same lines as their male colleagues: “despite early rave culture’s philosophical grounding in peace, love, unity and respect” (ibid.: 31). These gender inequalities strengthen Reynolds’

(1999) assessment that even at rave's height, the agenda of peace, love, unity and respect was more myth than reality.

#### **4. The construction of electronic music history and the muting of diverse perspectives**

Most overviews of club culture past or present are overwhelmingly positive and note that hierarchies are less restricting and limiting than in other subcultures; they offer more freedom for women and men alike. In accordance with other scholars (Weinzierl 2000, Gilbert & Pearson 1999, Reynolds 1999) Farrugia (2012: 32) notes that this equality “does not apply to participation further up the ladder for DJs or producers.” Various scholars claim (cf. Thornton 1996, Reynolds 1998) that certain aspects shifted throughout the 1990s for EDM, e.g. the celebrity star status first absent in club and DJ culture. It also shifted location, from rave spaces to club venues – largely due to law enforcements that sought to stop illegal raves and anarchistic attitudes. Due to commodification processes, celebrity thus becomes important, as it is increasingly necessary to attract consuming visitors to clubs for revenue. While at first everybody was important to shape the party experience the attention now shifts again to stars. She concludes that “the freedom women experience on the dance floor is not reflected on the stage or in production studios” (ibid.: 33).

The erasure of females is demonstrated vividly by Rodgers through the example of the documentary “Modulations: Cinema For The Ear” (1998) about the evolution of electronic music in the twentieth century. In the credits about 80 informants are listed and all of them were men. The only time women are visible is in a factory in Japan where women engage in repetitive labor assembling and testing keyboard synthesizers: “The wide shot of anonymous female laborers contrasts sharply with the close-up angles and star treatment of the individual male experts in the surrounding scenes. [...] Women are aligned with the reproduction of mass-produced goods, while men are positioned as cultural producers and arbiters of aesthetic innovation” (Rodgers 2010: 14). Rodgers suggests in her analysis that women are not completely absent but used as contrasts and metaphors of the feminine or maternal “to establish a male subjectivity in sound and reproduce priorities of a male-defined culture” (ibid.: 14–15). This reveals a particular ideology and politics of gender.

Judith Keilbach (2016) comes to similar conclusions in her analysis of the film, “We Call It Techno!” (2008). Following Keilbach through the documentary, fragments, interviews, conversations, and statements are selected and combined in a way that they resemble a whole new narrative. This is a very popular way of documenting contemporary history. There are endless other video or film documentaries on techno (Sub Berlin. The Story of Tresor (2012), Sound of Berlin (2018), Berlin '90s. Der Sound der Wende (2015), Party auf dem Todesstreifen (2014)) and also popular books on techno in Berlin are following this ‘talking heads’ collage pattern (e.g. Denk & van Thülen 2014). For Keilbach, this is a decontextualization and it is opposite to what oral history is trying to accomplish. Here the interviewees are transformed into witnesses of history and their role is to verify through their testament the intention of the filmmakers/directors (Keilbach 2016: 98). Keilbach sums up the

narrative by some main tropes, these are: artists/producers and audience were identical, everybody could participate, techno was a democratic sound a sort of dancefloor socialism, techno united Eastern and Western Germany, techno was a (sub)culture made in Germany. For Keilbach, techno as a democratic social experience seems more like a myth, the given evidence turning out to be ambivalent as “We Call It Techno!” hides its intention behind the words of the interviewed witnesses. This hidden narrative authority only accentuates certain selective aspects of the history.

Techno is depicted as a movement free of hierarchies, dominated by unity, equality and democratic principles. Aspects like technology or music industry are not picked up by the directors. The concept of techno as a German pop culture has been invented too – by taking techno out of its transnational context and discussing it as a phenomenon born out of German reunification, and even mapping it as such (Keilbach 2016: 100–101). Furthermore, references to the gay scenes are not taken up. By following this narrative other groups are blanked out. The montage evokes the impression that gays entered techno after it turned mainstream, whereas gay scenes have been vital within techno since its inception (ibid.: 101–102).

In the film the early techno scene is displayed as a group of white hetero guys and as such the film undermines its own hypothesis of techno as a democratic community where everybody could participate (Keilbach 2016: 102). Out of 25 interviewees 24 are white males and German speaking; only one woman is interviewed. Keilbach shows that the interview with (and of) Elsa for Toys is different from the others as all the others are shown as music experts whereas she is introduced as a visual artist who ran into the Loveparade accidentally while shopping. After this another statement mentions that fashion designers were present at the Loveparade. For Keilbach this puts Elsa for Toys in the stereotypical role related to female interests like fashion and shopping. Whereas the guys talk about the music, she talks about the visual aspects<sup>13</sup>. “The selection of the interviewed and their fragments suggest that responsibilities within techno are split and distributed according to gender specific aspects: the guys did the music and the women the decoration.” (2016: 102, translated by the author)

Keilbach believes that ambivalence is normalized through montage. She closes with the statement that documentaries like this are full of contradictions and ambivalences and thus they ask for counter narratives, counter statements, and opposing accounts<sup>14</sup> (ibid.: 103) – just like what Rodgers is trying to do regarding women\* in electronic music and sound history. Rodgers concludes from her in-depth research that the question of “who is counted in electronic music historiography is inevitably informed by the politics of social and professional networks, and by limited definitions and standards of achievement” (Rodgers 2010: 15). She stresses that the public face of electronic music be it on releases, magazine

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<sup>13</sup> This is also stated by Therese Kaiser of Femdex: “I think that this is the dynamic of a certain development: the guys do the music and the women do the entrance, the flyers or decoration” (Vihaus 2017, translation by the author).

<sup>14</sup> Another crucial aspect in my opinion is that always the same artists are interviewed over and over again in latter books and documentaries as if there were no other relevant protagonists involved in the making of Berlin techno. Obviously it is not about an indepth research that brings forward new aspects but rather about attaching popular names to ones work.

covers, international festivals, scholarly publications or films, “is typically male and does a certain kind of symbolic work” (ibid.). Even though this might happen unknowingly in films or books due to a lack of awareness, the outcome stays the same and this kind of symbolic work is reproductive. For Electric Indigo society at large is reflected in scenes “nothing is isolated and thus structures are reproduced. This is only obstructed when gender justice and the like become explicit objectives of the scenes.” (Vihaus 2017, translated by the author)

## 5. The myth of Berlin Techno and the reunification

In many video-documentaries, books or journalistic essays about the emergence of Berlin techno in the 1990s club culture is portrayed as a white phenomenon. The various manifestations of “black music”, which was a huge influence on the Berlin club scene due to the presence of American soldiers and the GI Discos in the city, is largely neglected. This blends perfectly into an image of a city where East and West are united and in which techno is the soundtrack of a new Berlin. In this newly constructed image as a story of German reunification and the birth of Berlin club culture, techno is described as very open and heterogeneous scene, in which all are welcome and usual prejudices are swept aside. It is presented as an upheaval of previous hierarchies, and radical openness within the arena of the dancefloor and many new liberties and opportunities. But this narrative has some blind spots. That is stressed in some analytical works of Alexander G. Weheliye, professor of African American Studies at Northwestern University where he teaches Black literature and culture, critical theory, social technologies, and popular culture. In an interview Weheliye mentions:

“I see narrativisation of the reunification and the birth of Berlin techno and the Berlin republic as part of a much longer tradition of thinking about Germany and German-ness. [...] The reunification is typically imagined in mainstream histories as a seamless blending together of East and West, which leaves out the virulent racism and violence during this period, especially against non-white bodies.” (Goh 2015: 41)

For Weheliye, and also for me, it is incomprehensible that in these narratives the pogroms are still largely omitted. A series of violent racist attacks took place in Hoyerswerda in 1991, Hünxe 1991, Rostock Lichtenhagen 1992, in Mölln 1992, or Solingen 1993 (and we can continue this until the present to the NSU trial<sup>15</sup> as a prominent example). And these were just peaks of constant racist incidents in Germany. The seamless narrative of East and West together in harmony on Berlins dancefloors endangers the extinction of the pogroms from the German and international collective memory of the reunification period. The ambivalent encounter of German remembrance culture and the Berlin techno narrative was also addressed by Matthias Pasdzierny in “Techno and German Contemporary History” (2016, translation by the author) where he tentatively criticizes<sup>16</sup> the entanglement of techno history with the

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<sup>15</sup> The *NSU trial* was a trial against several people in connection with the National Socialist Underground (NSU) – an extreme-right terrorist organization in Germany – and the NSU murders. It took place between 2013 and 2018 in Munich. The trial was notable for being one of the largest, longest and most expensive in German history and made public claims of institutionalized within the German police force who for years ruled out the Neo-Nazis as potential suspects in the killings and instead focused on suspects with Turkish backgrounds.

<sup>16</sup> “Possibly this is connected with the importance of pop music for the construction of a ‘new’ German identity in the post-reunification period, which has increased to an unprecedented extent since the 2000s. The techno

construction of German identity in the 1990s and after. To him the (postcolonial) approach to deconstructing existing material (books, films etc.) which Weheliye or Keilbach are largely following does not count as evidence, but he follows Keilbach in admitting that these documents are not representing oral history and thus if we want to really analyze these entanglements we would need real oral histories that take the specific forms of remembrance through popular music into account, thus a serious historiography of techno in Germany hasn't happened yet.

For Weheliye it is also problematic that these accounts “are also constructing a very particular story about musical cultures in West Berlin during the 1980s before the advent of techno. What is generally left out are the not very elaborate but nevertheless very present black music cultures in GI discos and other clubs that played black music in West Berlin.” (ibid.: 41) In his analysis these are attempts to disassociate Berlin techno from black musical influences. Ultimately this prevents a perspective on diverse histories of Berlin techno and of German subcultures and other forms of clubbing. Weheliye wants to highlight that there existed other forms of clubbing and musical cultures, “which are once again being written out of history. This ensures that Berlin techno, Germany, and German-ness are continually being imagined as white” (ibid.). In his argumentation it was necessary for Berlin techno to be imagined as something specific to Berlin and to Germany, “it had to separate itself from Blackness, whether imagined or real” (ibid.). He adds that German public and academic discourse denies the existence of race because if the topic is addressed, critics are often put in the position of being too sensitive or of being racist themselves

This is also emphasized by Paul Gilroy, who conceptualized (about the same time when Berlin techno was rising) the important idea of *The Black Atlantic*<sup>17</sup>, for him slavery is an integral component of Western civilization and this also continues in Western patterns of thought and argumentation and leads to “racialized reason” (Gilroy 1993: X). For Gilroy the practices of *The Black Atlantic* describe a counterculture of modernity, which is not just relevant on behalf of black (Atlantic) peoples “but of the poor, exploited, and downpressed everywhere” (cf. Ludewig 2018a: 75–77, Gilroy 1993: 77). This conception helps to understand the production, circulation and consumption of music as an elusive dynamic of “politics of race and power” (cf. Ludewig 2018a: 77, Gilroy 2013: 105). So if we even consider DJ techniques, which have been invented by Afro-American youth or sound system culture practices created in the Caribbean, it becomes obvious that techno culture owes a lot to the Black Atlantic and its new modes of cultural production. In an ambivalent way, tribute is given to Detroit's Underground Resistance within the history of Berlin techno. Weheliye has some, in my opinion unfinished, thoughts about this (cf. Goh 2015), and it is up to future research to analyze this more precisely.

In the case of Berlin techno, this elimination of diverse strands of genre and subculture is not only a question of ethnicity or race, as this is also true for other “white” dominated scenes,

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memory boom should therefore primarily be understood as an important forum for today's negotiation of national identity in reunited Germany and also for the self-image of the new and old capital Berlin as a new 'capital of lightness', whose founding myth today transfigures and commercializes the history of the techno and club scene of the early 1990s.” (2016: 118)

<sup>17</sup> *The Black Atlantic* describes the historical and contemporary movements of people of African origin across the Atlantic - from Africa to Europe, in the Caribbean, to America and later vice versa.

(including female artists or gay scenes) but Germany seems to have a special tendency for 'whitewashing' its own history, according to Weheyile<sup>18</sup> or Hito Steyerl, which I will now turn to.

The historic entanglements in the case of Berlin are illustrated vividly in an early documentation by artist Hito Steyerl (1998) focusing on the construction site Potsdamer Platz at the end of the 1990s, which was the biggest construction site of Europe at that time. It is an important analytic contribution about contemporary Berlin and questions on power and exclusion. A central theme of the documentation is that where borders are torn down, new ones immediately emerge. Using the history of the construction site as a narrative, where until the end of the Second World War the center of 'German' power was located, the documentary illustrates how new manifestations of power arise and also new forms of exclusion. The film unmasks the myth that the fall of the Berlin Wall brought "freedom" to the citizens of Berlin or Germany (though for single individuals this might be true).

The film starts at the Potsdamer Platz construction site where Dong Yang, a Berlin student of Asian origin, who had been beaten up by Nazis, is interviewed by the filmmaker. He says, "After the fall of the Berlin Wall the Germans we're very excited, I have the feeling that they have forgotten what they are. It would be better for the foreigners if the wall would still be here." (Steyerl 1998, 03:10–03:27) The voiceover reports that after the fall of the wall, the empty strip between the walls was sold to investors. After two months protesters came with tents occupying the death strip, because – as one of them explains "Daimler-Benz got the site for nothing and we want to protest against this situation that only the richest of the rich get again these historical places in the city's center. There won't be any more room for people with different attitudes and life-styles, it's all about money." (ibid., 6:10–6:34) Like Dong Yang, the squatters, who tried in vain to save a part of the "empty middle" for the general public, belong to the excluded of the post-reunification period.

The documentation blends present events on the construction site with retrospect on significant historical events which happened decades or centuries before near Potsdamer Platz, such as the Berlin Conference of 1875, where "a system of buffer zones, satellite and vassal states was created in the Balkans, [...] where the conflicts continue to this day (ibid., 15:40–16:10). Or a few years later, in 1884, the Congo Conference, where the borders for Africa were defined, and according to the narrator, a historic milestone in the economic plunder of Africa was planned and then implemented. And of course events related to the Second World War, for instance the arrival of more and more forced laborers who had to work in agriculture and in the German industry – Mercedes too relied on the employment of forced laborers.

The occupiers on the construction site are interviewed again. They admit that they don't know how long they will be able to stay, because they are afraid of the increasing nationalism in Germany, which went along with the fall of the wall and grew especially in East Germany. In

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<sup>18</sup> For Weyehile German history and historiography "which to a degree are due to the fact that large-scale German colonialism 'only' lasted from the Berlin Conference to the end of World War I. As a result, colonialism and the longstanding presence of people of colour in Germany can be continually disavowed, because not doing so would mean 'un tuning' the white harmonic scaffolding of German collective memory" (Goh 2015: 43).

East Berlin, they say, many squats were attacked by organized fascists. Towards the end a young Chinese woman says that the wall has now gone, but that the purpose of this wall was to regulate territorial relations between people and in that way the wall still exists. The voiceover reports that while Germany is reuniting and the former no-man's-land is being opened for market opportunities, borders elsewhere are consolidated. Several hundred people die on the borders of Europe: they drown, suffocate, freeze to death or die of thirst. And also within Germany national liberated zones are being put up.

## 6. The business with club culture

D. Strauss (2013), former senior editor of *Exberliner*<sup>19</sup>, believes that physical altercations, drugs, conspiracy, money and reputation are the building blocks of nightlife. Today Berlin's after- and before hours became a farce and are currently pure industry. "In 2013, Berlin is a 'hip' city – a brand – and this is something it has never done very well, unless mismatched H&M is one's idea of creativity. The specificity of its ugliness was, at one time, inspiring." (Strauss 2013: 207) Due to globalization, Internet, and gentrification Berlin's fall is inevitable for Strauss. As an example he takes Bar 25 and its endless and excessive parties dedicated to its nearing end. Admitting that Bar 25 was fun nonetheless, it was to him the end of the beginning of the end for Berlin. Soon after it expired the same people were building a luxury hotel on the same spot. And he wonders how one should respond? He argues that money laundering investments created the breeding grounds of Berlin as a life-style city: "The economy of Berlin does not actually expand, but resides on a series of bubbles: real estate, tech, restaurants. The only consistency is European crime money and clubs." (Strauss 2013: 207) Even the city's government is now promoting its nightlife and meanwhile it is selling off iconic symbols like the East Side Gallery to investors. He calls Berlin a *moneyed* world without money. He mentions Bar 25 also as the playground of aristocratic kids rebelling against their families. And adds that "[t]hose aristocratic manners would edge into self-satire, and then over the last couple of years, attain their mature form with Bars such as KingSize, Trust or Tausend, bars that feel like Munich [...]. Class is the unspoken root of all German nightlife activity." (ibid.: 208) This is confusing he admits as Berlin used to be a city one fled to specifically to avoid the rich.

Ina Wudtke, who lost her apartment when the building she lived in and two adjacent houses at Prenzlauer Berg were sold to Mr. von Münchhausen in 2006, also stresses this point. Her account of many years fighting the investor includes horrible stories of unruly methods trying to get her and the other tenants out, such as lying and telling every tenant a different story, throwing away all her belongings from the basement, endless and noisy (though often aimless) construction works, gluing black plastic to the windows for months, up to taking off the roof above her, leaving her below a tarpaulin, causing rainfall to pour into her apartment and damaging her belongings, and endless parties by the Münchhausens, their kids and their rich friends, who all moved in as time went on. And the list continues (cf. Wudtke 2018). Wudtke mentions that Mr. von Münchhausen explained on Wikipedia that his father tried in vain to hide Adolf Hitler's former vice-chancellor Franz von Papen from allied forces. And

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<sup>19</sup> Berlin Magazine in English, originally for Ex-Pats, founded in 2002.

also Heidrun von Papen moved in: “The kids usually parked their BMWs on the sidewalk right in front of the house and had parties in rotating constellations on the newly-built roof terraces and in the sanitized courtyard [...]. The noise of construction by day and parties at night created a horror scenario for the working residents” (Wudtke 2018: 67–68). After seven years of fighting the investor in endless court cases she had to move out in the name of modernization, as after its modernization she wouldn’t afford the rent anymore. The adjacent apartment was sold for €360,000, like most apartments in Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg, Neukölln or Friedrichshain, as most of them have been bought by international investors.

For Strauss the upcoming new paradigm became obvious with a change of aesthetics. This is also reflected in sonic aesthetics, with Berlin’s sonic ambition seeming extinguished as almost every bar and smaller club has a sound system ruled by limiters these days. He takes the reader on a walkabout starting in Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte and lists endless names of places now (long) gone, replaced by hotels and bagel shops. Approaching the fall of Berlin, Strauss states that whereas most Berliners did not have money and never expected that they would need it, the tourists who came to stay did not think that way: “the expats, even the poor ones, didn’t plan to live as if they were coastal Pakistani fisherman with bottle pfand instead of seafood” (Strauss 2013: 212). Around 2005 he states everybody began moving West en masse, first hitting Kreuzberg at Schlesisches Tor, continuing to Kotti and then inevitably spilling over to Neukölln, formally one of the cities’ poorest districts and causing the rents in these areas to increase, and the prices in Neukölln to buy flats are today more expensive than in Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte: “It was all so sudden, and felt like gentrification by confetti bomb – the quickness of the transformation has brought out a touch of nationalism and meanness in the locals, and there are spots like Sameheads, at which one probably has to buy a round every time one hears a word of German.” (ibid.)

Strauss says that “the government attempts to promote culture – club culture – as a means of attracting investors.” (ibid.: 214) On the other hand it is hard to explain to American Christian Billionaires<sup>20</sup> that a primary appeal of Berlin is about clubbing, gay culture and doing drugs and he believes that could be the reason why the city is just selling the existing cultural places. He also assumes that is why nightlife empires are more interested in high-end restauranting these days. Strauss concludes “that Capitalism appears to be transforming in a sort of global Feudalism and Berlin seems to be a particularly active petri dish for the experiments that will affect future generations of potato diggers (under the guise of Soundcloud programmers).” (ibid.: 214) To him, almost every spot of Berlin is now being transformed or abused in the name of marketing, where the aristocrats work hand in hand with politicians<sup>21</sup> which results in new venues like Soho House: “Older clubs build from relative scratch such as Cookies, Watergate or Berghain will be grandfathered in as nouveau riche: never quite respected, but allowed to sit at the Round Table.” (ibid.) He closes with what is on

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<sup>20</sup> The builder-owner of the Mercedes Benz Arena (until 2015 O2 World Arena), was the Anschutz Entertainment group one of the largest investment companies who owns and runs the biggest arenas, theaters and entertainment places worldwide. It is owned by Philip Anschutz, a US billionaire, who owns various venues and sports teams in Berlin and against the protest of many the property at the Spree was sold to him. The protests were due to the fact that he is a conservative republican who financed e.g. campaigns against gays and owns media and research institutes through which his conservative world views are promoted. Strauss refers here to him and the harsh contrast of the promoted image of Berlin opposed to businesses affairs of the city.

<sup>21</sup> For a very good overview how sleaze, corruption and old boy-networks are ruling Berlin since a long time, unbroken by the reunification, see Rose 1998.

its way: the imperial castle<sup>22</sup> that rises before our eyes “and few who pass by wish to storm its gates” (ibid.: 215). Wudtke also created a video work about the resurrection of this “imperial castle”, connecting it to the parallel gentrification processes: No money for social housing, but for imperial status dreams.

I wonder if Strauss still lives in Berlin; but he is not the only one painting an uncanny picture of what was, is and will be in Berlin, I collected about a dozen texts, which also relate the city to music and club culture (e.g. Stahl 2014, collective volume; Bader and Scharenberg 2005 & 2010, Henkel & Wolff 1996).

The Tagesspiegel, a local Berlin newspaper, recently published (2018) a report on the Berlin techno business with the teaser-title on the cover: “Techno in Berlin is a million-dollar business. How do you get involved without selling yourself?” (translation by the author) For the Tagesspiegel it is obvious that Berlin’s nightlife is legendary as it attracts people from all over the world who come “to witness this party, to celebrate, to immerse themselves once in this myth” (Afansajew & Erk 2018: 16). And they also admit “nightlife is a hard business, about a lot of money, hard work, contacts and likes” (ibid.: 16).

## **7. The rise of collectives and the challenge of collective problem solving**

As nightlife is tough competition a strategy for survival has always been about building bonds. Generally, for men this is a familiar practice crucial for a successful career; for women however, this is far newer and still a bit unusual if done for the sake of career and not family. Today, almost every intimate contact is used for networking, and as insecurities like freelance work on temporary basis are increasing, there is a need for more stable bonding. Therefore, I want to argue that this is the so-called ‘collective’. Farrugia states that in response to exclusionary practices “many girls and women have since taken a do-it-yourself approach to creating girl- and women-centered spaces in male dominated music cultures” (Farrugia 2012: 25). Thus they were able to bypass gatekeeping structures and to engage in music production. But the setup of spaces only for females\* is highly contested within the music communities by males and females\*. Especially when it comes to fostering female\* dominated lineups, male DJs and producers have been somewhat reluctant. It is maybe due to stress with ongoing competition which they feel both genders are exposed to or they feel that the business is just a question of professionalism, reputation and hard work that women are not willing to fully engage with. Also, competition for event funding is becoming a tight squeeze. This increases also the competition between female\* collectives. Though it was a great achievement that Musicboard Berlin<sup>23</sup> tried to support marginalized groups in the music industry and put a

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<sup>22</sup> Imperial castle refers to the Berlin City Palace that was demolished in 1950 by the German Democratic Republic authorities. The Palace of the Republic was built in 1970 on that spot. In return, after the reunification, the German government decided to demolish the Palace of the Republic and rebuilds the Berliner Schloss since 2013.

<sup>23</sup> “The Musicboard Berlin is the only institution of its kind nationwide with the aim to fund pop music in new and creative ways, and maintain a dynamic discourse on pop music in Berlin. [...] The Musicboard provides a new and courageous form of pop music funding. [...] Since the beginning of 2013, the Berlin Senate set up Musicboard Berlin under the lead of Katja Lucker. Its task is to strengthen the local pop music scene by supporting projects of national and international scope which are able to enlarge the visibility of Berlin as a

focus on female\* led projects in 2017 and artists with special abilities in 2018. Furthermore, it established a 50/50 quota in 2017, which was received with a lot of anger by the music industry's representatives (see more in Ludewig 2018b). Though lots of great projects were funded, our regular event Meetup Berlin<sup>24</sup> applied several times without success at Musicboard. This can happen due to tight competition, also more and more temporary projects and events focus on females\* after the new guidelines came out. As a feedback, we were told that the jury had a problem with exclusion as only in its first two hours it gives room for discussions and presentations limited to female and transgender attendees and thus the jury found our concept too restrictive and not inclusive enough as males are excluded in parts of the event<sup>25</sup>.

| It remains very *uncool* to offer women\*-centered spaces today, and it's hard for them in many social spheres to get financial support at all. Also, within panels and public discussions inside and outside of gender aware networks, it is frequently discussed if music (still) needs those kinds of (safer) spaces, quotas or gendered groups and networks. It is disturbing: once one feels that this has advanced to a general standard, it often turns out that this is not the case and that this is still limited to personal or subcultural 'bubbles' or mainstreaming tokenism. Or have we entered already the phase of backlash McRobbie anticipated in 2007?

One impact for Berlin funding institutions and event organizers was for sure the female:pressure survey, and it was presented prominently at the Musicboards Festival "Pop-Kultur" in 2017. Far beyond Berlin it induced a shock-effect to some: While gender mainstreaming, gay marriage, and anti-discrimination laws were established in some countries, it turned out that the club scene with its reputation and self-image of being progressive, democratic, diverse and egalitarian, wasn't as advanced as it seemed after all. Whatever the cause has been – since 2013 many individual female\*artists, groups and female\* led networks in all areas of the arts were getting organized and have been raising their voice and became more visible: filmmakers and -directors, music industry workers, fine artists, architects, etc. Also, the 2000s saw the rise of the collective in the (fine) arts as an effective tool for more visibility and outreach. Female\* musicians have also been making use of this model since the 2010s, and music groups like Discwoman (US), Femdex (AT), Bliss (AT), Mint (DE), Drömfakulteten (SE), Soundsystems (DE), Creamcake (DE), our collective Meetup Berlin, and many others have all surfaced. Most of these collectives are comprised of five to ten members and have a network that connects further. Though many of the networks do not know each other, which is also true for the same city sometimes.

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center of artistic productivity." (Musicboard Berlin, n. d.)

<sup>24</sup> Meetup was originally an offspin of female:pressure activities in Berlin. It is a new and growing community of female\* artists in the fields of music and arts in Berlin. There are 10 meetings throughout the year to discuss and exchange ideas, develop projects and combine forces to make things happen. Meetup provides an opportunity to meet likeminded individuals for collaborating on projects.

<sup>25</sup> For some of us who are dealing for two decades with gender issues, it is odd that one has to explain why this still makes sense today, especially when one applies for a funding with a gender quota. The jury, of course, includes women, but also women often don't agree with quotas or female\* spaces, especially when they themselves had successful careers and male mentors or supporters (and as a matter of fact, male support seems still to be the most effective way to build a career).

Although female:pressure is the biggest network and platform, not all of these groups are part of f:p. This is also due to the fact, that f:p is very diverse concerning styles of electronic music, political/feminist attitudes, personal agendas or geographies/origins (which can result in different forms of expression when discussing in written form, different knowledge and access to information, educational backgrounds, different political and economic contexts, etc.). This is already true for the f:p group in Berlin which is member-wise the biggest hub and set up its own Facebook group to make communication easier for local issues. As obstacles for members can be fighting the flood of mails in the international list serve that can amount at times of specific discussions easily to 50 per day. In such a large community of course single members might not feel addressed anymore and pressing issues of the everyday can get lost in the shuffle. This might be a reason for inactivity. As Christina Nemeč (2019) summarizes it is also a constant process of negotiation and often sensitive, especially in the connection to identity issues: “Who is f:p?”, “Who can talk as f:p?”, “Who is making f:p-radioshows or events?”, “Who can use the logo?”, “In what language and wording are we talking to each other?”, “What initiatives should we support as the f:p-collektiv?” or “How do we address members?” The latter has resulted in a discussion that has been going on for several months on the mailing list, which was caused by members being corrected for saying something as seemingly innocent as “hey ladies”. A member of the mailing list was blogging via the mailing list in response anonymously an article about this topic under the title “stop policing my language”, where they explain possible reasons for gender neutral ways of addressing each other:

“One of the main reasons (for me) is that trans and nonbinary people are already excluded from many parts of society. Many trans and nonbinary people speak languages that can’t accurately express their gender, excluding them from language itself. Many can’t feel safe or comfortable using public amenities such as toilets, swimming pools, fitness studios, shopping for clothes, etcetera. Complications with official documents can also cause a lot of problems in education, employment, at airport security, and more.” (Unknown Author 2018)

The text offers a link to a list of privileges cis-gender people have, but are mostly not aware of (Killerman 2011). The dispute went off with lots of emotions, hurt feelings and led sadly to some longtime members leaving the group. However, it also resulted in lots of diplomatic ideas, innovative comments, and more experience and knowledge about what it means to be a community of women, nonbinary and trans-members, some notions about better practices, possible codes of conduct and new gender neutral vocabulary. Also, it raised again the question of what one understands as feminist practices or mindsets and what these should or could be today?

As difficult as emotional discussions with overflowing mail accounts might be inactivity; the Viennese f:p group has a separate list serve, but communication is lately limited to about five or ten mails a year. Furthermore, there have been no more local meetings happening for some years. The same is true for Berlin, where the last regular meetings have been happening connected to the planning of the Perspectives Festival around 2015. This was a reason why Aiko Okamoto and myself founded the Meetup Berlin, so we could have regular meetups again were females\* can showcase their music and discuss topics related to music and/or diversity. It was also a possibility to meet women who are active in electronic music, but who

are not part of f:p and to connect with other groups of similar interests. Though there have been two big international gatherings in Berlin related to the Abelton Loop summit in 2016 and 2017, born out of individual effort of single f:p members (Akkamiau, Mo Chan), as a number of international members would travel to Berlin to attend the summits and it was one of the rare opportunities to meet in person.

Also the Heroines of Sound Festival founded in 2014 by Bettina Wackernagel, which tries to bridge electronic music as part of the art music world and the club scene, served as an annual meeting point for Berlin members and other international ones either performing there or visiting the event. Also other female\* activists organized events related to gender and music as the We Make Waves<sup>26</sup> (in 2017) and the following connected DICE festival<sup>27</sup> (in 2018) which served as meeting points. But generally the situation in Berlin is spread out, at times it seems a bit atomized, lots of singular groups are active in the field of arts which embrace gender issues – be it the queer scene, trans-gender related or female\* activism. This is also true for the club scene. This is amazing and necessary, but it also feels strange sometimes that those groups and scenes are too seldom connected and thus are not supporting each other. This might be due to the increasing networking pressures in our specific fields and agendas, as competition in the field of music and events (cultural gentrification) is increasing and thus with few resources networking with the “right” people who have impact is important. In the case of Berlin also more and more artists came to Berlin to profit of the (formally) cheap living conditions, increased network possibilities and accumulated arts and culture institutions as well as with likeminded artists. Others could simply not live this kind of life in their city, village or country – especially gay and transgender artists or those who look different or queer and for them Berlin is still a refuge.

Despite opposing needs, opinions, contexts and situations, f:p manages a lot of projects. The most important project remains maintaining its primary tool – the mailing list – for 20 years now which has been done mainly by Electric Indigo throughout the years until today. Special projects have been realized by other individual members, such as the femalepressure.tumblr.com realized by AGF, the female:pressure radio show in Hamburg by Xyramat, and further f:p shows and podcasts done by teams in Berlin, Vienna, and elsewhere. Furthermore the previously mentioned facts survey done by The Trouble Makers, which was supported by other members to collect all the necessary data. Other projects like events and compilations have been realized by many combining energy and resources to make the effort<sup>28</sup>.

Electric Indigo said in an interview in 2014 that her motivation to start f:p resulted from comments in the 1990s on her gender as a DJ and especially that people did not know about

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<sup>26</sup> We Make Waves took place in November 2017 and is an “first-of-its-kind organization designed to support the work of women, trans and non-binary people working in the music industry. [...] Beyond its year-long activities, WMW hosts a three-day festival and conference [...]. Our work goes beyond the annual festival and conference. Our goal is to nurture a vibrant independent community not only by exhibiting the work of emerging artists but also by providing essential support systems for those who otherwise have none.” (We Make Waves, n. d.)

<sup>27</sup> Dice took place in November 2018 in Berlin and appears to be some sort of follow up to WMW: “DICE Conference + Festival is a three-day event including workshops, panels, lectures and live performances featuring female, trans, and non-binary artists and speakers.” (Dice, n. d.)

<sup>28</sup> E.g. the Perspectives Festival 2013, 2015, 20 years of female:pressure in Berlin, 21 years of female:pressure in Vienna, international single and regular f:p events, solidarity cd-compilation for Pussy Riot, solidarity compilation for women of Rojava, Open Sound Vienna/ Open Sound international DVDs/CDs.

other female\* colleagues. Guys could name maximum of two female\* DJs (and I experienced the same in Rap/ HipHop), so the incentive was to offer more knowledge and to show who is out there. Important for her was that this database was not limited to club music but that it would include fine arts as visuals, photography or graphic design as they were crucial elements within club culture (cf. interview 2014). Through the years also other experts like bookers, event organizers, researchers and journalists became likewise part of the endeavor, as it is necessary to have all of what constitutes club culture within the platform.

## **8. Collectives, individuals and the bird's eye view perspective**

2013 was the most dynamic year in the history of female:pressure, says Electric Indigo (Ludewig 2014), when 25% of new members entered and the first facts counting with its complementary press-statement was realized and got a lot of media attention. This was followed by the setup of a Facebook group, Twitter account, Soundcloud and Bandcamp page. Also new f:p events and radio shows were set up and the f:p Perspectives Festival was held in Berlin where the discourse on gender equality in electronic music continued (with lots of controversial discussions<sup>29</sup>) and f:p artists were showcased. According to Electric Indigo the main issue was the problem that bookers said, they relied on ticket sales and thus big names and that's why they can't book unknown female artists (ibid.). This contributes to a loop as females who do not play, don't make the necessary experiences and are not talked or written about and this results again in the absence of bookings. Since Facebook and Instagram turned out as the dominating tools for artist and event promotion, you also need gigs to get more followers, and without followers you don't get gigs. This is also put forward by Sarah Farina, who says that likes and followers are the new currency of the event market (Afansajew & Erk 2018: 18). This is also confirmed by Alexa Gansera of Tailored Communication – club promoters check the internet first: "The question is what your name is worth. How many people will come to this party to see exactly you play?" (ibid.: 20) Due to these circumstances creating alternative events where female\* artist can play are needed. Those interviewed and mostly visible in the Tagesspiegel report are women: Farina, Ellen Alien and Gansera, alongside her colleague Melissa Taylor; it can be assumed that this is because of the f:p facts counting and the following media attention as before 2013 mostly men would be presented as experts in such articles.

Only the future will show if this is a permanent change or a tokenism used for marketing or funding opportunities. The #metoo debate, especially in the US, spawned movements of cis-men, like the pickup artists and related groups, who love far right politicians like Donald Trump and the last thing they would do is to mentor or support women careers (they might be accused, falsely for no reason of course). Instead women's fertility is in the center of attention and they seek to stop abortion<sup>30</sup>. General prejudices towards women in music can only be counteracted through educational work, says Electric Indigo (Ludewig 2014). And that is what female:pressure is ultimately about. She also emphasizes how much voluntary work

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<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately the recordings that have been made are not available to the public due to internal conflicts.

<sup>30</sup> Just now many US-States try to pass bills that prohibit abortion, even in the case of rape. The republicans want to force the Supreme Court to a revision of the 1973 law which made abortion legal in the USA.

these kinds of efforts involve<sup>31</sup>. And one can assume that the need for this work will not become irrelevant in the future, even though this is always the aim and great hope.

So coming together, be it in networks, collectives or platforms still seems necessary. As Christina Nemec puts it wisely: “The ‘we’ is contestation, it is anticipation and self-empowerment; the ‘we’ is always against a conservative backlash, the more in 2019.” (2019, translation by the author) Electric Indigo says that more collaborations, solidarity and support are needed. As this would be a win-win situation for everybody in the club-circuit (Vihaus, 2017). This can happen in the form of established artists using their influence towards a more diverse lineup. One of these examples is a popular Berlin-based DJ who prefers to stay anonymous, who has as a prerequisite for his bookings “that I will not play on lineups comprising less than 20% artists who are not cis male, and that these artists must be playing on similarly sized or larger stages to myself” (e-mail exchange with artist 2019). He does not state this in public as he wants to avoid artists being booked as a result of the policy from being singled out by trolls as ‘only booked because of’. And obviously to avoid being put into focus as opposed to those he is trying to support. To not talk about this in public also helps everybody involved to stay flexible under changing conditions and work towards the commitment nonetheless: “I feel these kinds of compromises are more productive than a hard-and-fast rule” (ibid.).

Electric Indigo (Vihaus 2017) says that she couldn’t afford to act this way, as she feels the work for f:p not only had positive effects on her career: “I know that in the past I was not booked at some festivals because of my association with female:pressure. That has changed in part, but overall my role in this respect is certainly not career-promoting”, Electric Indigo explains. She adds that this is also the reason why some of her colleagues still don't want to be included in the f:p database: “It’s sometimes more of a flaw in the industry to promote feminism.” (ibid.) As a leading voice of f:p Electric Indigo promotes now instead of a 50/50 ratio in line-ups a gendered split into thirds comprised of females, males and mixed acts and/or nonbinary artists who resist the assignment of a certain gender (ibid.).

Since some years Berlin groups like Reclaim Club Culture or Clubs with a political self-conception like Mensch Meier or about:blank try to bring more awareness to their parties. This is focused on those who attend the party. But is it enough to make our clubs and parties safer spaces with more awareness if our cities are transformed to purely profit orientated enterprises? This affects our housing situation, our work-places, our solidarity and the city at large. Slowly most of the clubs and event organizers understand by experience, as either their apartments or clubs are sold to investors (after their private and public activities had been

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<sup>31</sup> This can’t be emphasized enough that collectives rest most of the time on the dedication, effort and extra time of single individual members. Some of them are: Andrea Mayr (programming and maintaining the database), Death of Codes, Michelle Endo & Tanja Ehmman (Facts Surveys), Stephanie Roll (statistician Facts Surveys). AGF (Twitter, Tumblr, Rojava Compilation), Acid Maria (gig-collection of members for Facebook), Sonae (Facebook Page, female:pressure concerts in Cologne), Kaltès (Facts, Perspectives Festival, female:pressure @ Tresor nights), Akkamiau (Rituals x female:pressure Berlin, SoundCloud, Facebook, f:p meetups), Mo Chan/Aiko Okamoto (Perspectives Festivals, spokesperson, female:pressure visual pulse group, Meetup Berlin). Xyramat (female:pressure radio Hamburg), Rosa Danner & Anna Steiden (female:pressure radio Vienna), Aschka, Kritzkom & Rona Geffen (female:pressure radio Berlin). Niet! (female:pressure podcast), CO/RE (f:p graphics), Olivia Louvel (Bandcamp).

helpful for valorization processes). In such a situation tougher competition might be an outcome instead of the bird's eye view on the bigger picture. Also the latest debates about police presence at the upcoming Fusion festival 2019 (Thurm & Fuchs 2019) could be a reminder that those freedoms and achievements which are accredited to club culture, which most Berliners are taken for granted, could also be lost (especially due to the far-right entering now the parliaments and committees). Defending them, when they are in danger (and this includes of course the perils imposed by commodification and gentrification) might be vitalizing for the scenes.

While talking to Ellen Alien, the impression of the Tagesspiegel reporters paints a picture of an industry in which the love of music has turned into business, friendships into professional contacts, and a dandy lifestyle into a bone job (Afansajew & Erk 2018: 21). Even worse, they compare it to professional football and its mafialike-business structures: "In fact, everyone knows how much money is involved and that business is slowly but surely devouring passion. But as long as the show is good and the passion seems almost real, that's no problem. The Berlin brand works. The feeling hides the business." (Afansajew & Erk 2018: 22, translation by the author) What they end up owing to the reader is how you make it in the game without selling yourself. Ellen Alien tries to produce harder sounds that don't attract the masses, Farina lives straight edge and believes in the exceptions to the rules to keep her optimism. And yes, one can also see Berlin or the world as a space of possibilities. Maybe there are situations, events, actions, and attitudes coming up we can't imagine yet – by individuals, collectives, networks, and communities. What Hito Steyerl is offering at the end of her rather depressive analysis of Berlin and its long lasting power relations is a bit of humor. And she quotes sociologist, philosopher and historian Siegfried Kracauer, who had his most productive time in Berlin within its darkest period, shortly before the Nazis took over and whose advice is as valid today as it was back then: "There are always holes in the wall we can slip through and the unexpected can sneak in." (Steyerl 1998, final sequence)

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