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Document Version

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Citation for published version (Harvard):

Garcia, L-M 2018, 'With Every Inconceivable Finesse, Excess, and Good Music': Sex, Affect, and Techno at Snax Club in Berlin. in N Gregor & T Irvine (eds), *Dreams of Germany: Musical Imaginaries from the Concert Hall to the Dance Floor*. Berghahn Books Inc., New York, pp. 73-96.

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**‘With Every Inconceivable Finesse, Excess and Good Music’: Sex, Affect, and Techno at
Snax Club in Berlin**

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This chapter explores the intersection of music, sex, travel, and affect in Berlin’s electronic music scene. In particular, it focuses on a semi-annual music event, ‘Snax Club’ (hereafter: ‘Snax’), where the intimate—and at times messy—entanglement of these phenomena is especially conspicuous. Snax is described by its organisers as a ‘pervy-party’, an electronic dance music event held twice a year at the Berliner nightclub, Berghain, in which the club harkens back to the queer sexual subcultures out of which it initially emerged. Admission is restricted to men dressed in ‘fetish gear’ (e.g., leather, rubber, latex, sports kit, etc.). The event has become one of the largest of its kind in Europe, attracting an international audience of fetish enthusiasts. Drawing from ethnographic interviews, observation, and media-analysis, this chapter develops an account of encounters between travellers and locals of various affinities and affiliations, tracking the shifting tropes of queer sexual and musical conviviality. Of special interest for this chapter is the central role music plays in both facilitating corporeal encounters and mediating between Berliner identity, fetish culture, and gay male sexuality. This chapter is also distinctly affective in its approach, focusing on how feelings are mobilized by various actors to articulate and negotiate complex constellations of musical affinity, sexual subjectivity, and local/national/cosmopolitan belongings.

This study strikes out in a somewhat orthogonal direction to the established research on music and German identity. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter frame their edited volume on *Music and German National Identity* around the historical discourse Germans as the ‘people of music’, tracking the consolidation of a canon of elite art music that has not only served as a

symbolic anchor for Germanness but also as the aesthetic-discursive material through which German identity has been collectively wrought.¹ But like other contributions to this volume (c.f., Sneeriger, Nye) this essay examines a different set of musical practices—popular, subcultural, erotic, dance-focused—that have been left out of the ‘people of music’ narrative. Of particular significance are the different spatial dimensions of contemporary popular music: its historical ‘centre of gravity’, located in African-American musical practices of the early twentieth century, rather than among the cultural elites of emergent European nationalism; its global reach, disseminated through multiple media channels and consumed in a wide range of listening contexts; and, as a realm of musicking, its larger scale of participation tied to lower cultural and financial barriers to entry. With these factors in mind, it is noteworthy that ‘German’ is not the primary ‘unit of identification’ for Snax and the social world that surrounds it; neither the event-organisers nor the clientele seem to be particularly keen on highlighting its specifically German qualities. Indeed, although Germany has been framed in the historiography of electronic dance music as fertile ground for electronics-driven popular genres, this cultural fertility has arisen out of contact with ‘foreign’ influences such as African-American dance music, Italo-Disco, and pan-European synth-pop.² On the one hand (as the cases covered in this chapter demonstrate), Snax appeals to a network of electronic music artists, professionals, and dancers that is transnational in practice and global in imagination. On the other hand, Snax is hyper-specific: it targets a specific range of sexual subcultures hosted in a specific venue as part of a specific local music scene situated in a specific city; in this regard, it seems to be associated more with the city of Berlin and with ‘Berlinness’ than with the region or the nation *an sich*.

As Berlin has emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century as a global hub for the electronic dance music industry, the local actors, venues, music labels, and audiences have

developed a strong identification with the city that prioritizes local frames of reference above national ones.³ This resonates with some of the foundational theorizations of globalization and ‘glocalization’, where global flows of culture and capital overflow national boundaries and undermine the sovereignty of the nation-state.⁴ With the on-going acceleration and intensification of human migration—including the ‘techno-tourists’, touring artists, and the expatriate creative workers of Berlin—group identification seems to be increasingly attached to an imaginative circuit between the local and the global that mostly bypasses the national.⁵ Thus, many of Snax’s participants express affinities that attach both to a cosmopolitan community of queer and kinky dance music aficionados and to a specific urban music scene—even to a specific venue (Berghain).

With its focus on dreams, fantasies, and imagination, this volume departs from earlier research on Germanness in music that has focused primarily on textual discourse, music-analytic representation, and semiotic meaning. In keeping with this approach, this chapter highlights affect through the examination of a variety of modes of feeling arising from music-centric practices that can provide a sensory substrate for felt affinities.⁶ I tend to conceptualize affect as something akin to sonic vibration: waves of excitation that drive a sense of push in the lived world and form patterns that can be perceived as qualities, textures, atmospheres, and emotions.⁷ Importantly, within the stream of affect theory that flows through Spinoza, Bergson and Deleuze affect is always inchoate, becoming, virtual and yet impactful—vaguely perceived but intimately felt.⁸ Thus in this chapter attention is paid to how music, sex, built environments, travel, and crowded dance-floors all contribute to moments of affective resonance and alignment that *feel like* identity, communion, and fellowship beyond the forms of national identity.

Finally, the research conducted for this study is primarily ethnographic in method, based on three extensive interviews as well as more informal oral histories, attendance at several Snax Club events, collection of related ephemera (e.g., flyers, online promotion, social media channels), and long-time immersion in Berlin's queer electronic music scene. The relative absence of such methods in earlier research on German musical identity can be partly traced to the foundation of *Musikwissenschaft* as a discipline, which separated 'historical' from 'systematic' research methods from the outset.⁹ Although ethnographic methods have been more present in the systematic/comparative branch of music research (e.g., ethnomusicology, folklore), ethnography offers additional descriptive and analytic traction in the study of contemporary musical micro-cultures—especially when their actors and activities are absent from the historical record. What follows here is thus a set of three profiles of key stakeholders associated with Snax: Sergio, a regular attendee who has transitioned from 'tourist' to 'local'; Ralf, a bartender who has spent more than a decade working at Snax; Marea a.k.a. The Black Madonna, one of only a handful of women DJs to have been booked for the event. Based on in-depth interviews, these profiles focus on the interviewees' perspectives on Snax, highlighting themes of musicality, sexuality, and mobility. These profiles are prefaced by a brief historical sketch of Snax, Ostgut, and Berghain, while the concluding section provides a comparative analysis of the role of music and affect in all three accounts.

Snax Club

Over more than two decades, Snax has become a combination of gay fetish sex-party and electronic dance music event, approaching both aspects with equal seriousness. With no trace of sarcasm or hyperbole, one can characterize Snax as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Although its organizers

would likely be ambivalent about the Wagnerian associations, there is no denying their holistic, multi-sensory approach and their attention to detail. For example, the promotional copy for the 2015 Easter edition of Snax describes the event as ‘a Bacchanalian feast with every inconceivable finesse, excess and good music’.¹⁰ Indeed, ‘finesse, excess, and good music’ could serve as Snax’s motto, since it enumerates the event-organizers’ priorities: sexual play-spaces are meticulously decorated according to yearly erotic themes; a carefully-curated roster of world-class DJs are booked; and event-planning logistics are thoughtfully adjusted to the practicalities of having dance and sexual-play share the same venue.

What is normally understood as the nightclub ‘Berghain’ occupies only about one third of the former DDR-era power plant in which it is housed. Snax, however, spills out into nearly every corner of the building, leaving only the second-floor ‘Panorama Bar’ space closed off and accessible via a separate entrance for its straight / non-fetish clientele. The doors that usually separate the sex-club, Lab.Oratory, from the main Berghain space are opened, as are the doors to the art/concert space Kubus and other rarely used rooms. The main Berghain space is located in the former turbine room on the second floor, accessible by a set of suspended steel stairs. With a ceiling eighteen meters in height and no external windows, this neoclassical-brutalist space lends a cathedral-like gravity to its dancefloor, which usually features dark, thundering and minimalist techno. Kubus, a similarly cavernous space, extends behind the rear wall of Berghain. The Lab.Oratory is located on the ground floor, deeper into the vast building (and partially underneath Kubus), comprised of a labyrinth of hallways and chambers surrounding a small concrete dancefloor and wrap-around bar. Lab.Oratory’s warren includes spaces designed to serve nearly every sexual practice, including several open-plan chambers equipped with leather slings, a series of cages with slings and bunk-beds, a row of glory-holes, a tiled ‘wet room’

located beneath a metal grate, an empty bathtub, a wide array of padded ‘sex furniture’ in various shapes and forms, a handful of private cabins with lockable doors, and a dauntingly-complex leather sex-swing hanging directly over the bar.

In its current incarnation, Snax takes place in the spring and autumn of every year: on Easter Weekend and sometime in November or early December. While the autumn edition of the event always adheres to the same sports-fetish theme (‘FC Snax’), the Easter edition constantly selects new eroticized themes to guide the design of its spaces. The realization of these goes well beyond decorative accents; an immense investment of time, resources, and energies goes into thoroughly redesigning the dance- and play-spaces according to these themes. For example, the 2014 edition featured a military setting, for which a complete military field-camp was built in the Kubus area, including army-issue canvas tents representing various functions (medic, canteen, bunks, intelligence) filled with relevant furnishings and equipment. Throughout the sprawling sex-labyrinth built in the rearmost section of the building, camouflage canvas netting was draped along with other elements that evoked both a battlefield and a training obstacle course. An earlier edition of Snax took construction sites as its theme, using scaffolding to turn a large portion of the Kubus space into a multi-level play area while also installing the job-site trailers usually found on construction sites and turning them into intimate orgy spaces. For the autumn ‘FC Snax’ events, a full-size boxing ring is usually installed in the middle of the Berghain dancefloor and the rear coat-check area is turned into a locker-room. One year, the organizers built a doctor’s office complete with an examination table, stirrup-chair, (non-functioning) medical equipment, and a banal waiting room filled with popular-interest magazines from the 1980s.

Although this sprawling *Gesamtkunst*-Snax takes place as a ‘special event’ within the framework of Berghain, it actually predates the club by a decade.¹¹ Snax began as an itinerant

‘pervert-party’ in 1994, providing one of the few spaces where queer, fetish-focused sex-play and underground electronic dance music intersected. It eventually found a permanent home at Ostgut, a fetish-friendly gay club that opened in 1999, when the operators of a neighbouring sex-club, Lab.Oratory, were offered to rent more space in their building.¹² Ostgut was located in the empty Ostgüterbahnhof railway shipping warehouse near the Ostbahnhof S-Bahn/railway station in the Friedrichshain district, in former East Berlin. It was spatially marginal to Berlin’s club culture—which was still mostly clustered in central Mitte—and far from any of the established gay areas of the city, such as Nollendorfplatz in Schöneberg or Greifenhagener Straße in Prenzlauer Berg. Nonetheless, its focus on sombre, minimalist techno and festive sexual perversion drew a growing audience of straight clubbers. Ostgut and Lab.Oratory were forced to close in 2003, so that the building could be demolished to make way for the multi-use sports and entertainment arena, O2 World, the naming rights of which were bought by mobile telecommunications company Telefónica O2 Germany in 2006. With some financial support from municipal government and outside investors, Ostgut reopened as Berghain in the autumn of 2004 in a DDR-era electrical plant near the northern side of Ostbahnhof’s railway tracks. The new name, “Berghain,” was a portmanteau taken from the final syllables of the names of the two districts that flank the location: Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain (former West and East Berlin, respectively). The owners, Michael Teufele and Norbert Thormann, preserved, rebuilt, and/or expanded many of the defining elements of Ostgut, including the ‘Snax Club’ series of parties.

The Tourist/Regular/Migrant: Sergio

When Sergio, a hairdresser in his early forties, first discovered Berghain in 2006, ‘I had no idea that I was going into a gay club’. Considering that he himself is both queer and a long-

time member of the fetish community in Paris, it is noteworthy that his queer / kink networks did not serve as the primary pathway to discovery. Instead, as a passionate lover of electronic music dissatisfied with Paris nightlife, what he had heard of the club focused exclusively on its reputation as a vanguard of ‘techno’ music. Berghain’s visibility was much lower at that time than it is now; *Rolling Stone* had not yet written its sensationalist feature article on the club’s ‘sex-fuelled world’, and Clare Danes had not yet sung the praises of the club on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*.¹³ And so, Sergio came to find Berghain through a combination of more indirect and subterranean channels: word-of-mouth reports from other techno-loving friends returning from Berlin; French electronic music magazines like *Trax* reporting on Berlin’s vibrant scene; internet searches on Berlin nightlife that flagged Berghain as the city’s foremost techno venue; and the realization that most of his favourite recent techno releases were issuing from Berlin-based labels and DJs with bookings at Berghain.

Sergio characterizes his moment of arrival and discovery as a *surprise géniale*, all the more *géniale* because of the circumstances that had inspired him and his partner, Jean, to travel to Berlin in the first place. ‘We came to Berlin’, recounts Sergio, ‘because we are lovers of techno and we were really unsatisfied in Paris—with the music as well as with the clubs’. He recognizes Rex Club as an important and long-standing Parisian institution of electronic music, but at that time he was yearning for a harder, darker style of techno than what was being programmed there. And furthermore, he identifies other frustrations that he sees as emblematic of Parisian nightlife: ‘Everything is forbidden; the clientele are kids in their early twenties; the bartenders are hostile; and the security personnel are more dangerous than the worst thugs of Paris’. For Sergio and Jean, their first visit to Berghain revealed a club that seemed to both redress their dissatisfactions and far exceed expectations.

Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Sergio describes their emotional state in the aftermath of their first visit as ‘traumatized’, but this traumatizing shock was one that awoke an appetite for repetition: ‘We returned two months later, because we had loved it so much. We then came back five weeks later, and then four weeks after that. And then we became regulars, going there every month’. With their regular rhythm of visits to Berlin focused almost exclusively on participating in electronic dance music events, Sergio and Jean had joined the ranks of the ‘techno tourists’ that visit the city in droves every weekend.¹⁴ Approximately six months after their first visit, they adjusted their partying schedule to include a visit to Berghain’s sex club, Lab.Oratory, where they had a similar epiphany. Sergio adored everything about the space, the atmosphere, and the crowd, but he highlighted the venue’s luminosity as reflecting a more open and positive attitude towards sexuality. ‘What I love’, he remarks, ‘is that people there aren’t ashamed of their sexuality’. He contrasts this with his experiences of Parisian sex clubs, which he associates with a retreat into pitch-black darkness to hide what one is doing, with whom, and how (e.g., the shame associated with receiving anal penetration). Although the Lab.Oratory has some darker corners available to those who prefer to play in near-anonymity, most of the space is illuminated with the kind of soft, moderately-low lighting that one might expect to find in a dive-bar—or one of Berlin’s many *Eck-Kneipen*. Also, there are relatively few ‘private’ cabins available for guests, thus encouraging sexual play ‘out in the open’, as a communal activity. It was through their encounters at the Lab.Oratory (and ensuing friendships) that Sergio and Jean learned of Snax.

When asked to describe his impressions of Snax as if to a neophyte, Sergio characterizes it as, ‘a big techno-orgy in a fantastic club, with fantastic music and sexy men. For me, it’s the best 100%-gay party in Europe’. Throughout the interview, he returns repeatedly to this tripartite

combination of venue, music, and erotic conviviality as the defining qualities of the Snax experience. Since the event now attracts men from all over Europe (and, to a lesser extent, the Americas and the Middle East), Sergio especially values the increased diversity of body-shapes and ethnicities apparent in this pool of potential sexual partners:

What's great about Snax is that you have the extravagance of the location—Berghain, the Lab: the most sublime of venues. You have guys from all over Europe...there's every kind of guy: from the big blond, blue-eyed boys from Russia to the hairy, sexy little Spaniards. You have a pretty incredible mix as far as the clientele are concerned, and you have that music...top-quality music.

As with Berghain and the Lab.Oratory, Sergio elucidates his view of Snax through comparisons to similar events and venues elsewhere in Europe. His perception of Snax's diversity, for example, is gauged against his experiences of more homogeneous crowds at national-scale fetish events. He nonetheless points to La Demence in Brussels as a monthly sex party that seemed to provide an enjoyable space for erotic play, but complains that the music was 'unbearable', a complaint that he generalizes to most of the gay sex parties that he has attended outside of Berlin: 'There were bad Madonna remixes and some sort of insipid, out-dated pseudo-tech-house'. By contrast, he values Snax for providing an opportunity for both erotic and musical satisfaction. 'Berliners pay attention to music', he asserts, making reference to the city's current status as a global hub for electronic dance music. Indeed, he locates Berliner identity in Snax's musical programming:

There's a spirit there that is very Berlin. Even if the party attracts all of Europe, there's still this very Berliner venue and proper pounding techno [*musique bien techno qui tape*]. They don't adjust the music to the tastes of the Belgians, Spaniards, or Italians that will attend. They preserve the Berghain spirit with pounding techno. Snax still keeps its Berliner character, I find.

In this passage, 'proper pounding techno' serves as the musical-stylistic anchor for place-specific identity, but Sergio's identifications slide from Berlin to Berghain to Snax. On the one hand, this

speaks to Berghain's prominence at local, national, and international levels as not only a hub for musical production but also a locus of (sub)cultural export. But on the other hand, this also demonstrates how music can serve as a capacious and multi-threaded relay between identity and place, allowing a particular style of music to articulate the identities of a city, a local music scene, and a specific club at the same time. For Sergio, 'proper pounding techno' is all of these things at once.

Sergio also situates Snax's *esprit berlinois* within the extensive overlap of the city's techno and fetish scenes. 'Fetishism is very, very important in Germany', he explains, citing not only the scale but also the wide age-range of fetish events as an indication that 'fetishism in Germany is much more developed than in France, in Paris'. And so he sees the confluence of kink and techno as especially emblematic of Berlin:

In Berlin, you'll see 22-year-old kids already wearing harnesses. There's a culture here of nightlife and the discothèque, a place where people go out and meet each other. There's a social bond that forms out of this in a way you won't find anywhere else in the world.

'Fetish gear' such as harnesses play an important role in kinky communities as markers of belonging, expressions of erotic affinity, and cues guiding inter-corporeal encounters. 'People here love accessories', remarks Sergio, referring to the wide range of *accoutrements* associated with fetish practices, 'Everybody is in leather, latex, harnesses, and so on'. Thus, the greater visibility of fetish gear in the sartorial repertoires of Berliner clubbers is meaningful to him as a hallmark of local identity to which he can also feel connected. He also reports that he and Jean are usually positively received when they show up in fetish gear to local techno clubs that are not associated with fetish or queer scenes, perhaps because their kinky presence serves as a mark of local authenticity. Sergio thus folds the erotic practices associated with fetish scenes into local

electronic music culture; in his nocturnal world, dance and sex share prominence as corporeal modes of conviviality.

Sergio and Jean are now well-known ‘regulars’ in Berghain and at Snax. As they continued to visit the city on a regular basis, their social world came to be located increasingly in Berlin. And so, after nearly seven years of monthly visits, they finally decided to emigrate—at least partially. They began to take German lessons. They sold their apartment in Paris and bought one in Berlin. Sergio closed and sold his hair salon in Paris and moved to Berlin to find work there. Jean continues to work in Paris, but he sleeps in a small rental flat during the weeknights and ‘returns’ to his home in Berlin every weekend. ‘I’m single during the week and partnered during the weekend’, quips Sergio, chuckling.

The Bartender: Ralf

Working as a bartender during the first year of Berghain’s existence, Ralf heard his co-workers speaking excitedly about an upcoming event called ‘Snax’. ‘I had no idea what was waiting for me there’, he recalls, ‘I was only told, “You’re working the party and need to be there. You’ll be doing such-and-such tasks and you need to be there at such-and-such time”’. And so, when he finally showed up for work to the first Snax party in the new Berghain venue, what he witnessed there came as ‘a complete surprise’ [*ein völliger Überraschungseffekt*]. Although he had worked at other ‘pervy-parties’ in Berlin at other venues in the past, the scale and intensity of Snax was overwhelming to Ralf at first: ‘I was suddenly standing in the middle of the whole thing, stressed out, and thinking, “Oh no, what I have gotten myself into?”’ After the mini-culture-shock of his first Snax shift, however, Ralf found himself joining his colleagues in their excited anticipation of Snax events. Like them, he would explicitly request to work the

Snax party and would enjoy pre-event preparations such as assembling a fetish-appropriate outfit for work. Ralf recalls Snax as one of his favourite dates in the Berghain calendar.

With extensive knowledge of Berlin's gay nightlife, Ralf rates Snax as the largest event of its kind in the city. But it is not necessarily the scale of the event that impresses him:

What I like the most about it is that the environment/décor [*Ausstattung*] is designed not only to provide a bare space—'get in there and get it on'—but instead attention is paid to music and music-programming, play-spaces, scenery and so on. The effort invested in order to make the whole thing good is, I believe, incomparable.

Ralf nonetheless goes on to compare Snax to typical Berliner sex-parties (where he often also worked as a bartender) noting that, even if they were located in interesting venues, other fetish events often 'just threw all of the [sex play] equipment in there and called it a day—and often rather uncaringly [*lieblos*]'. At Snax, however, 'they create real playgrounds [*Spielplätze*] and theatrical environments, with an unbelievable eye for set-design'. Although he never attended Snax as a partygoer, Ralf enjoyed spending time during his breaks and after his shift meandering through the party space and enjoying the 'scenery'; he would admire the sculptural installations and erotic playgrounds 'because they simply look beautiful, because they're interesting, because they are made with humour and a great deal of reflexive irony'. He notes that Berghain's founders and owners (as well as a substantial portion of the club's staff) have long-standing roots in the local fetish scene and took part in the early years of Snax; and so, they have both a wry sense of humour about the event as well as the necessary practical and scene-specific knowledge to oversee the design of optimal, exciting, and captivating play-spaces.

In contrast to Sergio's experience as a regular patron, Ralf's decade-long career as a Snax bartender enables him to provide not only insight into the labour and organization behind the event, but also observations of intriguing patterns among the party's clientele. For example, he

notes somewhat bemusedly that drink orders at Snax involve far more ‘light’, sugar-free soft drinks and alcohol-free beer than on regular Berghain nights. This pattern of consumption is common to fetish-oriented gay events anywhere, he suggests, remarking that, ‘you can’t have a pervert-party without light drinks’. Although he does not speculate on the factors influencing these event-specific drink preferences, one could see this as a side-effect of the hypermuscular, ‘spornosexual’, taut-fleshed body ideals that still predominate most gay sexual cultures—even though habitués of Snax repeatedly remark on the relative diversity of body-shapes there in comparison to similar events elsewhere. In a similar vein, he also points to a scarcity of long-drinks (i.e., combinations of soft drink and alcohol usually served in a tumbler glass). ‘Things need to be practical’, he notes wryly, hinting at the impracticalities of vigorously engaging in sexual activities with an open glass in-hand.

But the most striking difference that Ralf has noticed at Snax is the increased presence of out-of-town participants, both over time and in comparison to other Berghain events. ‘There’s been an incredible change’, he observes, ‘At the beginning, it was primarily a Berliner affair, much like the techno scene ten years ago. There wasn’t this party-tourism at the time’. But as Snax grew in size and extra-regional visibility, the crowd it drew soon shifted towards extra-urban visitors. According to Ralf, expectations adapted accordingly: ‘Before, there were a lot of familiar faces [at Snax] ... people would make plans to attend because they would see people they knew there. Now, people go because they won’t know anybody!’ From the perspective of the members of Berlin’s sex-party scene, a roomful of kinky strangers signifies a vast increase in novelty, variety, and anonymity for one’s pool of potential sexual partners. Ralf points out that, at smaller local events, ‘probably everyone has already had sex with one another’, a point that was also made by Sergio when our interview turned to the topic of tourism. In this case, the

influx of strangers comes to be seen as an exciting expansion of erotic possibilities as well as a liberating break from the insular dramas of the local scene.

Local stakeholders usually refer to these eroticized strangers as ‘tourists’, but this term is often taken to mean non-Germanophone, international travellers. This risks generating semantic slippage, especially since Berlin’s techno, gay, and fetish scenes have all grown substantially over the past decade through an inflow of non-Germanophone migrants (mostly in the creative, ‘tech’, and academic sectors) who may be mistaken for ‘tourists’ at their events, even though many of them make vital contributions to the scene as organizers, artists, managers, journalists, and so on. Germanophone visitors are likewise overlooked, especially considering that the orgiastic setting of the party discourages the exchange of names—let alone life-stories. Nonetheless, as a bartender whose weekly shifts have made him very familiar with the cosmopolitan membership of the city’s electronic music scene, Ralf is perhaps best equipped to gauge the composition of Snax’s crowd in relation to Berghain’s ‘normal’ crowd. According to him, the proportion of travellers at the event has grown steadily over the past decade. In recent years, he has noted a preponderance of Frenchmen in the crowd; pondering the possible reasons for this, he unwittingly echoes Sergio: ‘Perhaps they don’t have the same play-spaces over there’.

Despite complaints from some quarters of the local gay sex-party scene that Snax has become ‘too touristy’, Ralf is sanguine about these out-of-town visitors, arguing that they bring an ‘extremely charming party atmosphere’ to the event. In fact, he cites these Snax-tourists as a major factor in his eagerness to work there. ‘At most parties’, explains Ralf, ‘there’s always a bit of friction: some patrons are rude at the bar, there’s this exchange of shouting [over the music] that can set an aggressive tone...but this *never* happens at Snax’. He plays on the contrast

between the tough masculinity eroticised in gay fetish scenes and the gentleness of these encounters: ‘No matter how mean they look—big bears or rugged builds—they still come to the bar and they’re friendly, they’re super-nice [*übernett*]’. For him, these out-of-town visitors lend not only novel excitement but also a ‘sweet’ and ‘extremely relaxed’ ambience.

Perhaps stemming from this influx of visitors, he notes that the temporal flow of Snax runs quite differently from regular nights at Berghain. To be precise, Snax runs ‘backwards’:

At a normal party, you meet and get to know each other, and maybe it leads to sex at the end. At Snax, you go there, you have sex, and then you party, dance, and hang out. ... At the start, people arrive and disappear quickly into the darkrooms and play-spaces. Then they come to the bar afterwards to chat and relax.

As a result of this sex-first temporal organization, Ralf feels that the festive ‘party feeling’ of Snax manifests towards the end of the event. Or, put differently, Snax starts as a fetish-sex party and turns into a techno party as the night unfolds.

Although it diverges from Berghain’s regular festivities in many regards, Ralf still feels that Snax is an ‘essential facet’ of Berghain. He situates it within the diverse array of spaces and experiential opportunities that Berghain offers—outdoor Biergarten, dance club, concert venue, art space, experimental salon—all of which appeal to different aspects of the city’s ‘techno population groups’ [*technoide Bevölkerungsgruppen*]. But he also points out that Snax is the *Ursprung* of all of this: it was out of the Snax Club parties that first Ostgut and then Berghain developed. In this sense, Snax serves to periodically re-authenticate Berghain to its clientele and to re-consecrate it as a site of queer musical subculture by reenacting its origins while also continually revising them for the present. This strategic use of a (felt, imagined, mythologized, collective) history as a ‘resource for the present’ by Berghain and its *habitués* suggests that Snax has become an unconventional and highly-localised heritage practice¹⁵.

Indeed, Snax's legacy is not taken lightly in these circles, as illustrated by Rolf's account of the debates that took place among its staff at the time that Berghain was first arising from the ashes of OstGut between 2003 and 2004. As part of discussions about the identity of this new club, the continuation of Snax was brought into question. Although some of the uncertainty was logistical (i.e., which of the club's spaces to use; whether to keep a separate 'straight' space running in parallel), a more fundamental concern was whether the event was still compatible with the changing clientele. Heterosexual participation was already increasing at the end of the OstGut era, and their continued presence was much needed to make Berghain's more ambitious scale successful. 'It could have gone very wrong', notes Ralf, 'The club was running the risk that the heterosexuals wouldn't accept Snax, that they would simply say, "We're not going there anymore"'. There was a lot of discussion and no certainty that it would work'.

More than ten years later, it seems that Snax has done little to hinder the flow of straight clubbers to Berghain. If anything, the weekly intersection of fetish and electronic music scenes inside the venue has given rise to a hyperlocalized 'contact culture' that is more accustomed to fetish practices, queer sexualities, and sex-positive spaces—although not without some concerns about the potential colonization of queer space. Snax's format has also changed over the years. In addition to growing larger, more intense, and more international, Ralf notes that the music programming for the event has become more focused and more serious, thus coming into alignment with Berghain's regular (and world-famous) musical selections. Over time, Berghain's female resident DJs (e.g., Tama Sumo, Steffi) were also brought in to perform in the disco/house-oriented floor of the Lab.Oratory, and more recently this has come to include non-affiliated women DJs such as Jennifer Cardini and The Black Madonna.

The DJ: The Black Madonna

Marea Stamper (a.k.a. The Black Madonna) is one of very few women DJs to have played at Snax. Now in her late thirties, this Kentucky-born artist first began spinning records during her college years, after having been very active in the US Midwest rave scene during the 1990s. She moved to Chicago in 2006 and found a job working for Sole Unlimited, the distribution arm of the local house-music label Dust Traxx, helping to manage the company's entry into digital distribution. She continued to perform as a DJ as well as began producing dance music 'tracks' and, during the summer of 2013, she became both resident DJ and 'talent buyer' (booking agent) for Chicago's highly-respected and longest-running electronic music club, Smart Bar.

During that same summer, one of her releases, 'A Jealous Heart Never Rests', became an international summer anthem at electronic dance music clubs—including Berghain/Panorama Bar, where it was frequently played by resident DJs such as Nick Höppner and nd_baumecker. That autumn, Marea was booked to play at Panorama Bar, which was the first international booking of her career. Her debut performance in the autumn of 2013 was well received by the club's crowd, staff, and management, and through the following year the club began to book her as an overseas guest on a quarterly basis. It is indicative of how quickly she built a rapport with the club's clientele and management that she was invited to play for Berghain's massive multi-day *Silvester* [New Year's Eve] party only fourteen months after her debut.

It was then, shortly after her DJ-set in Panorama Bar at the beginning of 2015, that Marea was booked for Snax. 'When you finish up with your set', she recounts, 'you think, "Oh God, I hope they let me do that again!"' And so, even though she had just played at Berghain for the fifth time in a little more than a year, she was nonetheless elated when she received a message

from her manager informing her that she had been invited back for a double-booking on Easter weekend: playing Panorama Bar with her Chicago colleague Derrick Carter and performing in the Lab.Oratory during Snax. ‘I was very happy just to be able to play twice in general’, remarks Marea, ‘but also because I know that very few women have played at Snax. It is a very special honour for a woman to be asked to go into that space’.

Unlike Sergio and Ralf, Marea had a good idea of what Snax had in store for her. Her long-time and close involvement with gay nightlife in Chicago and elsewhere in the US provided her with an extensive network of former Snax-attendees who could advise her. She was told to ‘expect Caligula-level sexual activity in the Lab during Snax’, evoking images of wall-to-wall, writhing flesh. But, perhaps anxious not to discourage her, these same friends and colleagues insisted that she was ‘the right woman for the job’, referring to her extensive experience playing records at sex-positive gay events in the US.

Marea’s account of Snax is particularly illuminating because, as a DJ who has played both Snax and ‘regular’ events in Berghain, she can speak to the nuances of music, crowd, and affect in great detail. Unlike the dark, pounding, minimalist techno played in the main Berghain space during Snax, the Lab.Oratory space usually features disco, house, and early synth-pop styles of dance music, which provides a high-camp contrast to the erotic exertions of partygoers. ‘I played the Patrick Cowley set of my imagination’, she recalls, referring to the legendary disco producer largely responsible for the San Francisco ‘Hi-NRG’ sound associated with recording artists such as Sylvester. During his career, he had also produced electronic music soundtracks for gay pornographic films, which only came to light in recent years.¹⁶ ‘I was trying to imagine: if I were on that dancefloor, what would I want to fuck to?’ She answered her own question with a four-hour DJ-set of ‘very slutty disco, Hi-NRG, a lot of sleaze, a lot of Eurodisco—even more

obscure than I normally would'. Perhaps inspired by Cowley's dual career in disco and porn, Marea sought to build a 'soundtrack to this fantasy realm that kind of lives with one foot in dance and one foot in sexuality'.

Soundtracks served as a recurring metaphor in Marea's reflections on her performance at Snax, for reasons that had a great deal to do with the spatial layout and affective dynamics of the performance space. Unlike the other rooms in the club, the Lab.Oratory's DJ-booth is physically separated from the dancefloor, elevated to a tiny mezzanine-loft that hangs over the entrance to one of the darkened play-spaces. When fully standing, the DJ's head and shoulders are hidden behind a concrete partition descending from the ceiling, while the turntables and other sound equipment nearly fill the rest of the space visible from the dancefloor. 'You're up in a birdcage above everyone', she says, 'They can see your feet and you can see the tops of their heads and a bit of the bar'. She contrasts this layout with that of Panorama Bar—the room in which she has played most often in Berghain—where the DJ booth is a corner of the dancefloor marked out by a relatively slim metal railing, situating the DJ very much *inside* the crowd.

Unlike in Panorama Bar, where there's an eye-to-eye, body-level exchange of energy and information, in the Lab you're more...creating a soundtrack and playing inside your mind—and hoping that everyone comes along with you.

Like most DJs, Marea generally prefers to have direct sightlines and corporeal proximity to her audience, but she sees some advantages in being released from the expectation to sustain a constant exchange of affect with the crowd (which can be very exhausting for a DJ). Instead, she sets a particular musical mood and then holds it there until the rest of the room comes into affective alignment. According to Marea, this dynamic was facilitated by the density of the crowd during her set. Performing at the 'peak' of the party (4:00–7:00a.m.), she played to a dancefloor that was so packed, 'you could not get another dude in a harness into that room if you

tried'. As a result of this constant crowding, it became nearly impossible to 'kill the floor' by losing the attention of the dancers: 'You can kind of do no wrong; they're *trapped*'. This enabled her to be more assertive in pushing the dancing crowd in particular aesthetic and affective directions, to 'compel or enforce a sound', as she describes it. And so, Marea enjoyed the opportunity to take more risks during her set, selecting more obscure and adventurous tracks that took her 'captive' audience on eroto-psychedelic journeys.

Snax is an event that formally excludes women—that insulates homosexual play within 'men-only' homosocial boundaries—and so Marea was hyperaware of her liminal position at the event. On the one hand, her role as a performing artist granted her exceptional access to a gender-segregated sexual space; on the other hand, she was dependent on participants' recognition of her exceptional status. She conscientiously avoided wandering into the areas where the sexual play was at its most intense, but nonetheless on two occasions her presence was questioned by individuals who did not recognize her as a performer. Fortunately, she was able to talk her way out of these encounters with minimal awkwardness. But on the whole, Marea reported feeling very welcome at Snax, which she has since described as a 'turning point' for her career as well as for her sense of connection to her gay fans.

In retrospect, I feel that Snax was such an important moment for me, in bonding with a whole group of men. Because, there are people that I see all over the world who are like, 'I was at Snax! I flew from Brazil to Berlin to go to Snax, and I saw you there. I saw your feet, bouncing around!'

This moment of bonding, however, was made possible by a long historical chain of similar moments throughout Marea's personal life and performing career. Friendships with gay men have played a pivotal role in her life since adolescence, and her career as a producer and performer has always been tightly entwined with local queer dance music scenes. As her DJ

career began to gather momentum, many of her bookings were at established queer, sex-positive events such as Men's Room (Chicago), Hot Mass (Pittsburgh), Honey Soundsystem (San Francisco) and the Folsom Street Fair (San Francisco). By the time she was booked for Snax, she was already being booked regularly for queer dance events in Europe. This deep and on-going involvement in queer nightlife provides her with: invaluable 'hands-on' experience playing for queer sex-positive events, a familiar nonchalance in the presence of gay sex, an ever-expanding network of contacts and loyal fans, access to scene-specific information channels, and a deep knowledge of the musical repertoire affiliated with these scenes. Indeed, there is little doubt that her extensive queer-nightlife *bona fides* informed Berghain's decision to book her for Snax.

As a queer-identified woman who has dealt with discrimination, sexual oppression and restrictive body ideals, Marea expresses a 'deep kinship' with Snax's queer, sex-positive crowd. She is an outspoken feminist who has used her recent success to make an impact in global club culture discourses by calling attention to misogyny, racism, transphobia, and homophobia in the electronic dance music industry, insisting that it do justice to its historical origins in marginalized urban subcultures.¹⁷ Notably, there is a markedly affective dimension to her kinship, which she characterizes variously in the interview as 'falling in love with that kind of crowd', 'a very special kind of romance', 'a deep and abiding friendship', and 'holding a very special place in my heart'. 'And no one on this earth', she insists hyperbolically, 'has ever loved a big, huge, fat gay bear more than me. Those are my people'. Although she cannot participate fully in the revelry, she cherishes the opportunity to play an essential role in building this temporary realm of erotic conviviality. Marea articulates a sense of queer solidarity with the utopian impulse that Snax represents, explaining, 'I like to be around people following their bliss'.

Conclusion: Belonging, Music, Affect

For these three ‘Snax-goers’, music plays a central role in sensing and articulating belonging. It grounds their sense of identity, based on shared tastes and appetites. It draws them into scenes and communities that are anchored in specific places like Berghain and at specific moments like Snax. Notably, there is a strong affective dimension to how music works to create these socio-cultural sutures between individual actors, a party, a former socialist-era power plant, a local scene, and a larger felt community of fellow queer music-lovers. Throughout the longer-term fieldwork that I have been conducting in Berlin’s electronic dance music scenes, interviewees have generally been more articulate about how their (local, subcultural, urban) belonging *feels* than what social and cultural form it takes.¹⁸ For many, experiences of affective resonance with their milieu come to signify belonging in the absence of more stable markers of affiliation. Here, belonging is presented primarily in sensory and affective terms, grounded in bodily (musical, erotic) practices.

For Sergio, music was in fact the pathway to discovering Berghain, the Lab.Oratory, and Snax. It was due to the club’s reputation as a venue of techno music that he and his partner visited the club in the first place; the fact that it was also a fetish-oriented gay club came as a delightful surprise. After several years of near-monthly visits from Paris and a recent partial relocation to the city, Sergio reports feeling ‘at home’ [*chez moi*] in Berlin, and especially at Berghain. Although there may be several factors contributing to his sense of being at home—such as social networks and scene-specific knowledge built up over years of monthly visits—Sergio immediately focuses on music: ‘I met people—gay or not—who love the same music I do; that wasn’t easy in Paris’. He goes on to recount how in Paris he would often be disappointed to return to a new acquaintance’s home for sex and/or socializing and to be subjected to their

selection of mainstream pop tunes or ‘commercial’ dance remixes. But in Berlin, similar situations would be soundtracked by techno: ‘I would arrive to a friend’s place and the music was *good*—even better than at my place!’ For Sergio, ‘home’ is not being disappointed by the musical tastes of your friends and lovers; it is the feeling of recognition and resonance routed through musical aesthetics and intimate scenes of listening/dancing.

Ralf continually returns to music during his interview to explain what makes Snax an exceptional event in Berlin. With more than a decade of experience bartending in Berlin’s nightclubs (including sex parties), he identifies Snax’s carefully-considered, stylistically-coherent, high-quality musical programming as a principal factor distinguishing it from other local fetish-focused events. At the same time, he also highlights the event’s unique affective atmosphere, which he describes variously as festive, relaxed, sexually-charged, and ‘almost sweet’. Significantly, he values the presence of out-of-town visitors for their contribution to this ‘extremely charming party atmosphere’, thus highlighting the role of stranger-sociability in generating a scene of capacious belonging. For Ralf, Snax wouldn’t be the same without its tourists.

Towards the end of our interview, Marea reflects at length on the ‘deep emotional bond between me and that building’, a bond that has been forged through music. Indeed, her musical activities made her involvement in Snax possible in the first place. As a DJ, she is especially aware of how music can set a spatialized affective tone that drives corporeal encounters. For Marea, ‘that building’ refers not only to Berghain (and the affective echoes of what has taken place within its walls), but also metonymically to the people who enliven the space with their bodies. She speaks at length about the ‘deep kinship’ and ‘very special bond’ that she feels with

queer, sex-positive nightlife crowds, who enact utopian forms of eroto-musical sociality to which she claims a strong affinity.

All three interviewees identify ‘serious’ connoisseurship of electronic dance music as a hallmark of Berliner nightlife and its denizens, pointing to Berghain and Snax as leading examples. In all three cases, music serves as a conduit—simultaneously metaphorical and literal—for affective resonance between individuals, communities, and spaces. At Snax, passion, euphoria, pleasure, abandon, conviviality, and friendly familiarity all course through the throng of bodies that move through Berghain’s dark and humid passages. And these affective flows are channelled, organized, synchronized, and attuned by the pulsating music that fills the spaces between bodies.

Notably, this musical fellowship binds together a queer affective community that is both cosmopolitan and local, bypassing national imaginaries of musical ‘Germanness’ while remaining grounded in the specificities of Berlin nightlife. Well before the rise of European nationalism, the ‘Grand Tour’ of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries functioned as an institution of cosmopolitan cultivation for young elites, guiding them along a circuit of travel through locales that were considered to represent the apex of European high culture.¹⁹ Although there are vast differences in circumstances, the Grand Tour provides an intriguing pre-national model of culture-driven cosmopolitan mobility and its significance for identity-formation. Snax Club could perhaps be similarly situated in a ‘niche’ erotic and musical Grand Tour, especially considering its growing visibility in queer communities abroad. Over the past decade, this event has become a yearly (or twice-yearly) pilgrimage for many queer fetish enthusiasts from across Europe and beyond. As it has developed into a ‘global underground’ institution, has Snax Club become a destination for the musical cultivation of cosmopolitan queer identities?

Notes

¹ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

² See e.g., Marcel Feige and Kai-Uwe Müller, *Deep in Techno: Die Ganze Geschichte Des Movements* [Deep in techno: A history of the movement in its entirety] (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, Germany, 2000); Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (London, UK: Picador, 1998); Dirk Waltmann, Sven Schäfer, and Jesper Schäfer, *Techno-Lexicon: Das Umfassende Nachschlagwerk Zur Größten Jugendkultur Europas* [Techno lexicon: The comprehensive reference work on the leading cultural force among European youth] (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, Germany, 1998).

³ Ingo Bader and Albert Scharenberg, "The Sound of Berlin: Subculture and the Global Music Industry," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 1 (2010); Felix Denk and Sven von Thülen, *Der Klang Der Familie: Berlin, Techno Und Die Wende* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012); Feige and Müller, *Deep in Techno: Die Ganze Geschichte Des Movements*; Luis-Manuel Garcia, "At Home, I'm a Tourist: Musical Migration and Affective Citizenship in Berlin," *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1+2 (2015); "Techno-Tourism and Postindustrial Neo-Romanticism in Berlin's Electronic Dance Music Scenes," *Tourist Studies* 16, no. 3 (2016); Christina M. Heinen, "*Tief in Neukölln*" : *Soundkulturen Zwischen Improvisation Und Gentrifizierung in Einem Berliner Bezirk* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013); Sean Nye, "Love Parade, Please Not Again: A Berlin Cultural History," *ECHO: a music-centered journal*, no. 9.1 (2009), <http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume9-Issue1/nye/nye1.html>; "Minimal Understandings: The Berlin Decade, the Minimal Continuum, and Debates on the Legacy of German Techno," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25, no. 2 (2013); Tobias Rapp, *Lost and Sound: Berlin, Techno Und Der Easyjetset* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009); Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture*; Anja Schwanhäußler, *Kosmonauten Des Underground: Ethnografie Einer Berliner Szene* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010); Geoff Stahl, ed. *Poor, but Sexy: Reflections on Berlin Scenes* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014).

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities*, ed. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995).

⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Garcia, "At Home, I'm a Tourist: Musical Migration and Affective Citizenship in Berlin."; John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007).

⁶ Although the field of 'affect theory' is far too broad and diverse to summarize in any written format, the following edited volume serves as an essential primer: Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁷ Luis-Manuel Garcia, "Beats, Flesh, and Grain: Sonic Tactility and Affect in Electronic Dance Music," *Sound Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016); Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

⁸ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Luis-Manuel Garcia, "Crowd Solidarity on the Dance Floor in Paris and Berlin," in *Musical Performance and the Changing City: Post-Industrial Contexts in Europe and the United States*, ed. Fabian Holt and Carsten Wergin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995); Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁹ Guido Adler, "Umfang, Methode Und Ziel Der Musikwissenschaft," *Vierteljahrschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 1 (1885).

¹⁰ 'Ein bacchantisches Gelage mit allen undenkbaren Finessen, Ausschweifungen und guter Musik'. Event-listing viewable online at: <http://berghain.de/event/1281>. The full monthly flyer can be downloaded from: <http://berghain.de/media/flyer/pdf/berghain-flyer-2015-04.pdf>.

¹¹ For a more detailed history and description of Berghain, see Garcia, "Crowd Solidarity on the Dance Floor in Paris and Berlin."; Imre van der Gaag to Failed Architecture, January 28, 2014, <http://failedarchitecture.com/berlin-horror-beauty/>.

¹² Alexis Waltz, "Nightclubbing: Berlin's Ostgut - Berghain before It Was Berghain," Red Bull Music Academy, <http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/magazine/nightclubbing-ostgut>.

¹³ Thomas Rogers, "Berghain: The Secretive, Sex-Fueled World of Techno's Coolest Club," *Rolling Stone*, February 6 2014. Clare Danes appeared on The Ellen DeGeneres Show (September 28, 2015) to promote the latest season of the television-drama series, *Homeland*, which was shot in Berlin.

¹⁴ Garcia, "Techno-Tourism and Postindustrial Neo-Romanticism in Berlin's Electronic Dance Music Scenes."

¹⁵ Amanda Brandellero and Susanne Janssen, "Popular Music as Cultural Heritage: Scoping out the Field of Practice," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014); Sara Cohen, "Musical Memory, Heritage and Local Identity: Remembering the Popular Music Past in a European Capital of Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 19, no. 5 (2012); Brian Graham, "Heritage as Knowledge: Capital or Culture?," *Urban Studies* 39, no. 5-6 (2002).

¹⁶ A brief biography and description of these new discoveries are available on the website of Dark Entries Records, the record label that is releasing his porn-related material posthumously: <http://www.darkentriesrecords.com/store/dark-entries/patrick-cowley-school-daze-2xlp/#tab-description>.

¹⁷ Some notable interviews with Marea on this topic include: Couvreur, Eelco. "The Black Madonna Manifesto," *DJ Broadcast*, May 22, 2015: <https://www.djbroadcast.net/article/121812/the-black-madonna-manifesto>; Leinhart, Kat. "The Black Madonna Starts a Women's Movement in Dance Music," *Electronic Beats*, March 13, 2015: <http://www.electronicbeats.net/the-black-madonna-starts-a-womens-movement-in-dance-music/>.

¹⁸ Garcia, "At Home, I'm a Tourist: Musical Migration and Affective Citizenship in Berlin."; "Techno-Tourism and Postindustrial Neo-Romanticism in Berlin's Electronic Dance Music Scenes."

¹⁹ Rainer Babel and Werner Paravicini, *Grand Tour: Adeliges Reisen Und Europäische Kultur Vom 14. Bis Zum 18. Jahrhundert : Akten Der Internationalen Kolloquien in Der Villa Vigoni*

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