"Back to the Future": Hearing, Rituality and Techno
Author(s): Tim Becker, Raphael Woebs and Linda Fujie
Published by: VWB – Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41700113
Accessed: 14-02-2019 16:24 UTC
"Back to the Future": Hearing, Rituality and Techno

Tim Becker and Raphael Woebs

Abstract

Techno, one of the latest phenomena of western youth culture involving music, has in the meantime found a place in sociological discussions within Germany. This article addresses the debate within these discussions on an immanently ritual dimension of this music and its theatrical setting in reference to techno as a culturally defined listening event.

The musical style “techno-trance” was created in the framework of an avant-garde and popularistically oriented youth movement. With its “traxx,” made up of stretched-out, long repetitions of patterns, this style suggests an intentional reorientation of music to simplicity and primitiveness in times of increasing musical and social complexity. The central actor (“master of ceremony”) in the technology and actual operation of the “rave” is the “DJ,” who embodies the functional characteristics of the archaic priest. Deriving from the American sentimentalization of the DJ scene, with its need for a controlling model who works out special ceremonies and behavioral patterns, this DJ becomes the personification of “groove” as a God-like creator who takes possession of dancing human bodies. The “club” is a pseudo-religious pilgrimage site for communication and interaction. Here, through the medium of rave music, a psychedelic rite in the sense of altered consciousness is created with the goal of producing a long-lasting, hypnosis-like state of trance among the participants. An essential aspect in this process is the ceremonial shaping of the night with a generally clearly structured musical plan, in addition to a time and spatial experience related to the rave’s own subcultural community and totally removed from everyday experience. This ceremonial experience is supported by merciless light show machinery which is designed to shut out the usual objective experience of the visible surroundings and to promote an attitude of pleasure in experimenting that is inseparably linked to the so-called “designer drugs” (“XTC”). The creation of an extreme, as well as fictitious, world as a pole of opposition to the monotonous, dry reality of everyday life finds its desired expression in a designed kind of abstraction of the technical world, in a violence of presentation and in the aesthetically removed preexperience of the individuation of the individual.
"Youth culture" (Jugendkultur) and "youth movement" (Jugendbewegung) are central generic terms that are used in German sociological discussions in connection with various forms of youthful creativity. These phrases, however, are hardly sufficient to even begin to describe all that they are supposed to designate. What is "cultural" about "techno"? What is "youthful" about it? Are dancers components of a movement that extends beyond local regions?

The ritual dimension of the sensual experience of listening or dancing to techno music is related to the shutting out of everyday life. The youth perceive everyday life predominantly as full of constraints. These constraints are regarded on the one hand as a civilizing pressure of society that strives for the control of the mind over the body, on the other as a moral one that affects each individual with unshakable fundamentals. The given world, with its rules and regularities, arouses suspicion among young people. Moral demands of the "older generations" are often perceived as a form of forced play-acting in which wishful thinking and reality do not coincide. The world of the parents seems hardly adequate to serve as a model for their own lives. Youth culture means a differentiated view of life planning. Contrary to their parents' generation, with its references to the past or resignation towards the present, youth culture is constantly directed toward the future. Idealism and inner demands for the fulfillment of life dreams are the motor behind each generation. Resignation and compromise (as accepted by the parents) are not anticipated at the beginning. Nothing needs to be preserved; everything is subject to transformation towards the goal of making a better, happier world. This uncompromising idealism must be disappointed. The belief that one can lead a completely self-determined life proves itself all too quickly to be a dream, a dream belonging to the process of growing up ("When I grow up, then..."). The bitter truth that one cannot alone make all important decisions over one's life as desired and that one must sometimes succumb to constraints and
pressures that are not at all desired leads to the intractable wish to express one's own feelings, to let off steam and to create an orientation outside the cruel real world.

With his novel *Generation X—Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (Coupland 1994 [1992]), Douglas Coupland succeeded in creating a concept which was accepted everywhere as a label for the relationship between youth and culture at a specific point in time. However, although (or perhaps, precisely because) Coupland's analyses predominantly hit their mark in terms of content, they were still taken—as is not uncommon in German sociological discussions—from a purely U.S.-American context. Furthermore, German social scientists then tended to generalize the term "Generation X" in a way not originally meant by the author. By "Generation X," Coupland meant the children of the so-called "baby boomers" (the latter being those born between 1945 and 1960), whose main attribute lies in growing up during a time of economic recession and the global resituating of capital. This meant that, for the first time in several decades of U.S. history, this generation would not be able to build upon the material affluence of their parent's generation, much less increase that affluence.

As a result, the mathematical sign for the unknown ("X") can be understood as a reference to an indeterminable future, as well as to a situation marked by uncertainty, social chaos and fluctuating identities. One way the identities of Generation X seem to establish themselves is through sufficient experience with new computer-related technologies, such as in the creation of techno music. Within the sociological debate in this country, however, this conception supplied a global moment of significance, in view of which particular phenomena of the character of the youth culture was to be reinterpreted in the sense of so-called "cocooning." Thus, German sociologists tend to apply "Generation X" to all kinds of youth culture in order to label sensory and social forms of isolation. In the end, this use has proved incapable of providing an adequate evaluation of present developments among the younger generation.

But while marketing experts in the mass media attempt to comprehend the diverse forms of contemporary youth culture in their heterogeneity through constantly changing labels, the majority of the adult world seems to have raised the flag of capitulation in this matter with an ostentatious attitude of denial. By closer examination, the fact emerges however that the potential meaning of youth culture can be understood precisely in its permanent ability to transform. With this ability, a guarantee for a certain limitation of already existing personality patterns can be lent to the youth. Thus, in contrast for example to dealing with the works of Shakespeare, Goethe or Beethoven, which has been made into a "noble" activity, most researchers or analysts of youth culture realism are unfortunately first noticed when they make themselves known through forms of protest and provocation.

In relation to this, the concept of "techno," with its little-noticed numerous subgenres, as description for the young and thus (still) unconsumed phenomena of musical youth culture, is characterized not by an attitude of dissent in the sense of the earlier slogan "No Future." Rather, the "techno"-logical is emphasized by its proponents in an explicit way in terms of innovation, as expressed in the name itself.
Though basically simpler as one would perhaps surmise at first glance, the underlying philosophy of techno is by no means banal. Reduced to its simplest form, this philosophy could be summarized as: “If I can’t beat them (or don’t even want to try to), then I’ll use them for my own ends—so there!”

The following exemplifies how techno is musically produced, that is, in a way that has cut itself off entirely from classical instrumental playing and in the end embraces exclusively the programming of computers.

![Fig. 2. Computer graphic presentation of a techno production. (Generated with Cubase™, made by the company Steinberg™ in Hamburg, 1998 version).](image)

Another important aspect of techno music in Europe is the huge mass events such as Dortmund’s Mayday, Amsterdam’s Inncity or, last but not least, Berlin’s Love Parade. Of particular interest, not least in the United States, is the lack of violence or trouble at such events. Berlin’s Love Parade, for example, with its one million participants dancing and celebrating in the most crowded of spaces, is held each year without any serious incidents, which Americans admiringly observe would be hardly imaginable in cities such as New York or Detroit.

To better understand this fact, it is relevant to review the origins of techno music which actually, contrary to various popular-science reports, is a phenomenon originating from so-called “white” or European music. One can often read the statement “Techno began in 1985 in Detroit!”—an unctuous-sounding statement in the sense of potential mythologizing, but not strictly true. It is correct that the Detroit DJ Juan Atkins first introduced the designation “techno” in 1985 for the title of one of his tracks (“Techno City”—in the meantime a “classic”). In 1981 Atkins had developed, together with Richard Davies, the musical project Cybotron. In this project, both initiators revealed themselves to be inspired by the theses of Marxist economic philosophers and by the futurologist Alvin Toffler. Toffler’s sensation-causing work (Toffler 1994) which rose to the status of a cultural bible for artists living in large industrial ghost towns such as Detroit, examined among other things the struggles for power caused by technological upheavals in present industrial cultures. Industrial culture had completely overtaken global agricultural society as a product of the second wave of innovation within the history of humanity, and it in turn finds itself on a
collision course with the electronic revolution. A general lack of orientation is the consequence, in which particularly the political and social institutions have proven themselves hopelessly overwhelmed and as a result increasingly unable to act.

It is however not the constant relationships in the course of history that Toffler referred back to in his thoughts, but rather the diametrical discontinuities, the historical Zeitenwenden (turning points in history), through which the New that shapes the future is declared. Toffler answers the raised question regarding the face of a humane civilization by referring to a society that takes on technological advance for itself and is extremely sensitive towards erroneous developments.

In reference to music, Atkins and Davis, just as other so-called “founding fathers” of techno (e.g., New York DJ Afrika Bambaata), were influenced by four German graduates of music conservatories. This group—best known under the name “Kraftwerk” —has symbolized since 1969 the stylization of the symbiosis of man and machine. Their 1978 conceptual album, Die Mensch-Maschine, a work musically far ahead of its time, playfully dismisses the irrational anxieties of humanity towards the continuously advancing technologizing of their surroundings, which tends to place time over merit.

This is not the cultural pessimism of fifty years ago, which reached its peak in the work of Adorno and Horckheimer (Dialektik der Aufklärung, 1969), but rather the conscious application of the computer as a medium and symbol of the own action. The machine is practically individualized and given a soul. It has infiltrated all areas of life as a constant companion, for leisure and for work. That which filled older generations with fear and oppressive visions has been taken over by the youth in a creative way. Bold social transformation seems to have slid out of the hands of the “ruling generation,” which cannot keep up with the pace of the process of change. The youth transforms this energy into a creative potential for the own ways of expression, so long as they are not caught up in mere consumer behavior. The technical change is transformed here for a sense organ that is only insufficiently talked about in normal circumstances: hearing. Techno creates its material from the radicalization of informational-technical transformation. The seemingly unmerciful periodicity of musical material and the exacting, mechanized division of time (“not humanized”) approach the exact regularity of the computer: human and machine become one. This however precisely the synthesis which first makes possible a mythical dimension. The one-hundred-percent structuring of time makes room for the perception of that which can lead to a state of trance—in spite of, or even because of, the supposed “inhumanity” of the music. The exaggerated structuring of time, stretched out to its limits, creates a feeling of timelessness.

The musical Zeitenwende created by Kraftwerk was taken up enthusiastically (and, incidentally, to the astonishment of the band itself) by numerous fans of so-called “black” music. So while techno has experienced constant influence from the U.S. to the present (e.g., Derrick May, Kevin Saunderson, etc.), particularly with the stylistic fusion of genres that appeared from 1990, it remains above all an original development of “white” European music.
It is however also characteristic that Kraftwerk has suffered the aphoristic fate of being a "prophet in one’s own country." Thus, while in Germany today the mention of their name usually provokes looks of incomprehension, in the United States and especially in Great Britain just the word “Kraftwerk” can set off effusive reactions from trance fans, something we experienced ourselves in various London clubs.

Returning to the peacefulness of the participants of techno mass events, it is evident that—leaving aside a certain touch of the apolitical imparted by the techno scene itself—memories of slogans like “Make love, not war” of the hippie generation are awakened with techno-propagated slogans such as “Love, peace and unity.” Still, because the scene otherwise seldom uses the language of political engagement, the mass media in Europe brands it as “escapist.” But one can also say that this so-called escapism actually becomes a political message of first order in that it intentionally removes itself from the language of the media as a reaction to political and social grievances.

The supposed love-hate relationship between the “underground” and “mainstream” scenes increasingly takes on the character of a fake battle in view of their mutual fertilization. After all, mainstream does live from the permanent artistic fertilization it obtains through stimulation from the underground movement—and that movement also needs the mainstream to define their own limits.

Techno parties (“raves”) indeed has taken on a real political character at the latest through the so-called “Pay Parties Act” of the British Tory government in 1990. This law made the act of using buildings such as empty warehouses for party locations—up to then considered a misdemeanor—a more serious breach of the law that could be punished with an unusually high monetary punishment or even imprisonment. The defiant “Now We’ll Really Begin” reaction of the scene lent to raves from that point on a mythical touch of the forbidden, together with a scent of the mysterious.

The German star DJ WestBam once described a techno location as something like a “sensoric temple of Reizüberflutung (inundation of stimulation).” All kinds of elements that stimulate an aesthetic-suggestive emotionalization among participants are abundantly applied. Related to this, concepts such as “night” and “music” emerge often, and in the world of techno the significance of torches and fire for the mythicized, archaic world is transferred effortlessly to light machines and strobes.

The musical operating procedure, which in the meantime can be described as practically infinitely variable, generates states of trance principally through the fundamental components of rhythm, repetition and dynamics. What follows is a “letting go of oneself” in the framework of the principle of hypnotic rhythm that flows into movement “controlled by someone else.”

In addition, each rave is characterized by its “master of ceremony”—the DJ—who puts the participants in a collective state of trance through sound collages and thus is frequently described as a modern shaman. The techniques of inducing states of ecstasy are known to be an irrefutable element of all cultural regions, and particularly the dance choreographies called for by the rhythmically monotone accompaniment of techno prove appropriate for reaching a trance-like state of consciousness.
States of physical and spiritual ecstasy are stimulated at a techno party through the perfect coordination of repetitive and monotone rhythms as well as through colossal light machines. The strobe storms produced by these machines create virtual spaces that seem to freeze the movements of the dancers and thus evoke permanent interdependencies between the aspects of ritual time and space in the sense of their disintegration.

Comparable to the so-called ‘mind-machines’ (darkened glasses that are supposed to put the brain into a exalted, entranced state by means of small built-in blinking lamps), the atmosphere of a rave affects its participants like an oversized generator of psychedelic worlds. This generator allows the regression of usual, frustrating everyday experiences, personal problems as well as existential fears for the future through a hedonistic ‘forgetting yourself’ and ‘dancing it all away.’ The motto is: ‘Live for (or rise to) the experience of the moment!’ Out of this develops a dance event that pushes the limits of physical capabilities and that has a component immanently narcissistic and exhibitionistic. This component is however necessary in its excessiveness in order to make experienceable the complete return to the own body in the framework of ritual ‘self-presentation.’ This will be further explored below.

This process of letting go in the anonymous crowd underlies mutually heightened animation and is as a result clearly a model appropriate for confirming the theses of mass psychology as developed by Gustave Le Bon (1973). According to these theses—developed already at the end of the 19th century but nevertheless still useful today—consensus in action and perception produces rather primitive reactions in individual behavior. Individual hesitation to ‘let go’ can be more easily overcome as a part of the ‘masses’ than alone in one’s home, for there the deeply rooted habits belonging to so-called ‘common sensical’ everyday behavior can again take over. The oft-cited feeling of community becomes for the youth a practically indispensable antidote against their isolation and individuation within the society.

Actually, contrary to the indifference of the surrounding society, the lives of youth today are extremely emotional. The imponderability of life, as well as fear and anxiety, are some of the unknown regions of life whose influences must be overcome. Hidden powers and transcendental experiences are not to be sought for outside the individual but rather within him. The spiritual lies in the own breast. Everyday life remains outside the mythical sphere of influence that is drawn for a certain time around the place of techno dancing. The transformation of the state of consciousness under the influence of ecstatic dancing paves the way to encounter the own ‘Ich,’ outside of logic and control. This occurs in an emotional dimension which cannot be reached in the bleak everyday world. That which must be suppressed during the week is expressed on the weekends.

This escapist moment is differentiated within the scene with the terms ‘hard time’ and ‘real time,’ whereby real time designates the time of the rave, the time of spiritual enchantment, and hard time on the other hand means the gray, everyday life experienced until the next rave. This corresponds conspicuously with the ritual categories of ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’ time. Like the dances of non-literate tribal cultures,
Techno is thus heard in a purely functional way. Dance serves thereby not strictly for relaxation or even less for entertainment but is much more a medium for transformed perception through trance and ecstasy. This phenomenon is ascribed in techno not least to the development of the subgenre of "trance" and the further stylistic developments of "Goa trance" (referring to the western Indian province where many drop-outs from Western societies live) and "psychedelic trance."

Besides the natural transmitter substances available in the own physical body (endorphins), synthetic drugs are also used in abundance as aids to guide a person toward a state of ecstasy. Certainly the most popular example of such drugs is that called "ecstasy." The use of drugs from outside the body is however also an element of rituals in traditional and ancient societies. For example at the oracle of Delphi, the hallucigene "Datura" (thorn apple) was utilized to more clearly understand the meaning of the fortune-telling. Some of the known symptoms of datura poisoning are, incidentally, highly comparable to the drug experiences of ravers: from disorientation in time and space to complete disappearance of time- and space-related consciousness, as well as widening of the eye pupils, disturbances in sight and fast heartbeat. In a fast-paced era like ours, the temptation to "disconnect" from the factor of time in order to possibly develop a better relationship with it may often seem irresistible. In this way, psychedelic drugs are again becoming increasing important among youth.

But the rave cannot offer a real way out from the avoidance of the inner self because, in spite of a highly similar pattern of reaction among all participants, no social or communal relationship develops out of this structure. Instead, the rave is characterized by the already described phenomena of mass hypnosis. Because of the individualized public, this "one-way communication model" offers no reflexive action to those issuing communication. This is one reason why techno can only be represented to a very limited degree in the mass media in comparison to its social reality.

In the performance traditions of western cultures, the bodies of the perceivers and those of the performers are separated. The performers become a kind of representative to which the viewers and listeners react with the senses of the consciousness. The theatrical process consists of the transport of a kind of physical and/or linguistic intention to an observer who receives this message with his eyes and ears and processes it according to his intellectual and learned abilities. Setting a stage for this process involves keeping figures in readiness, as in a puppet theater, to which the person for whom this theater is put on can react with his thoughts and feelings.

What actually happens from a sociological view when a large number of people gather in order to dance an entire night long? To clarify this situation, the concept of "scene" can be adopted, which from the beginning designates numerous different meanings. On the one hand, it expresses a characteristic of the theater. To "set a scene" describes the consciously carried out act of connecting an action with an intended meaning. On the other hand, "scene" is a sociological concept. The concepts of "techno scene," "pub scene," etc., designate social situations characterized by internal identification and feelings of belonging and as such are also presented to the outside as significant visual signs of demarcation. A sociological definition of
"scene" has been proposed by Gerhard Schulze in his book *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (1995). Schulze assumes that the milieu-specific behavior of people is essentially characterized by their demand for new experiences. The market for experiences of this kind, which itself reacts to the demands of consumers, has a wide variety to offer. In principle, techno is nothing more than this: a new experience offered by the marketplace. Schulze characterizes "scene" primarily through the possibility of sense perception, that is, persons must gather at the same time and at the same place. The public must be visually perceivable for each individual participant. Schulze defines "scene" as "...a network of publics that consists of three kinds of similarities: partial identities of persons, places and contents" (1995:463). Through the internal communication of participants, forms of mutual influence evolve. By steady repetition of specific patterns of action, a process of schematization forms between experiential consumers and presenters.

Hand-in-hand with the rationality of the demand for new experiences, the presenters act in the framework of their own rationality (...). Through schematization and profilization, they built up systematically an image of an establishment offering experiences, to be operated by themselves, which can serve the experience seekers as a code: interior decoration, music, advertisement, programs. The presenters and the seekers gradually find common ground. A scene-specific atmosphere originates that, in addition to the offered contents, also includes styles of performance and consuming. In this framework moderate modifications are undertaken whose experience-related appeal is often intensified through suggestion (advertisements, stimulation through disc jockeys, interviews in the local press, performance rituals, etc.) (Schulze 1995:465f.).

Out of the local scenes gradually emerges a multi-local one, that is, it becomes possible to expect a similar experience at different places: a process of generalization takes place. Schulze sees a basic motor behind the growth in this scene in the principle of autosuggestion:

With the strategy of autosuggestion, the *Erlebnisnachfrager* (person seeking a new or special experience) uses the apparent fact that the scene is attractive for a large number of people as a construction element for the kind of events that he expects from the Szene. By perceiving the attraction of the scene on others and by registering the success of the event among other consumers, he builds up aesthetic confidence in the scene and begins to believe that he actually has the hoped-for experience: a self-fulfilling prophecy (1995:465).

At a rave event, every participant is both audience and actor on “stage.” In their common performance, they define signals for each other that are large stabilized through repeated use and as a result become significant for a sense of belonging to the scene. Through common behavior and experiences, a feeling of togetherness appears in the impressions of the participants, a feeling constantly referred to in statements of dancers. According to Schulze, however, new experience consumption takes place not with other people but rather parallel to them, or next-to-one-another, as a result of the individualization of the experience.
For a differentiated description of the expected behavior of rave participants, the ideal-typical construction of an interaction model is helpful, for which the following fundamental suppositions apply:

Several persons must be gathered at the same time and place who are permanently supplied with audio-visual stimulation (by means of techno music, light machines and perhaps television monitors). In addition, due to an auto-suggestive behavioral motivation, each participant has an exact idea of what should happen and desires the highest possible fulfillment of his expectations.

The behavior of all participants can be first of all characterized by non-verbality. In the case of techno, this is conspicuously an inner-musical characteristic as well: language is predominantly avoided, other than in the sense of aesthetic or sound-specific characteristics of signals and rhythmic pulsation. The conveyor of significance for behavior is nonverbal communication on the basis of symbolic interaction. In dance, worked-out signals are expressed. Using a "broadcaster-receiver" plan, the following model can be developed:

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 3. Ideal-typical interaction model of a rave event**

The "sender," here the DJ, controls his technical equipment during the entire event. By means of the medium of music, he reaches the ears of the participants, as he also reaches the feeling-sensors of the body through the volume of the music. With the light machines, in coordination with the rhythm of the music, he reaches the eyes of the dancers. Thus, already three of the five physical senses of humans are activated. To this background, the dancer puts his body in movement. Each uses his own body language and "invents" new gestures and gesticulations to which others can then react. A style develops by which, besides the pure expressive posture of the body, a meaning as well is conveyed in which the emotional situation of the individ-
ual can be perceived. The DJ also reacts himself to the masses of dancers. He possesses in turn the power to decisively influence the event by means of his electronic media. Thus the public has the chance to indirectly influence the contents and structure of the evening in unforeseeable ways.

There is no repertoire available to the DJ in the traditional sense, as normally used in other musical events: there are no songs and no arrangements. The DJ arranges the music live, using his repertoire of sounds and rhythms. This arrangement does not involve a “number event” that evolves only through the selection of pieces and decisions on how to best present them in terms of their dramatic relationship to one another.

Another important point in reference to trance ritual is the theatrical component of dance. If we follow the definition of Erika Fischer-Lichte of the concept “theatricality,” referring to cultural phenomena other than the theater, we can further clarify a frame of reference of the ritual phenomenon of techno trance.

Theatricality “can be differentiated into the following four aspects:

1. the performance, which is understood as the process of presentation made through bodies and voices in front of physically present viewers and the ambivalent coming-together of all participating elements;

2. the stage setting, which can be described as a specific mode of sign application in the production;

3. Korporalität (corporeality) which results from the factor of presentation or of material and

4. perception, which refers to the viewers, their observational function and perspective” (Fischer-Lichte 1998:86).

In the observation of the trance ritual of techno, the central idea of the last aspect involves cognition. For of immediate importance is not the cognitive-sensual experience of rational-logical processes, but rather the complex process of self-experience (self-observation). The bodies of the dancers are an essential element of the performance; the intention of scene-setting with musical and light-technical means consists of the conscious provocation of the unconscious. The production marks out the framework of possible and desired behavioral processes which the dancers bring to life in their own more or less creative way. The production is created by the organizer and/or the DJ and is directed, through the sense of hearing, toward a very particular kind of perception that is to be reached by all participants during the performance. The exhilarating, the archaic, the supposedly uncontrolled is invoked here, like an imaginary transcendence that in the ecstatic dance of its participants takes on the ideal case of physical form. The goal is to experience the own physicality as an extraordinary experience and, through that, to celebrate a sensual-erotic feeling that is not experienceable in the everyday world. Through his own body, each participant becomes a performer on stage, each movement is a direct reaction, each ecstatic expression directly reaches the DJ, who as medium must awaken the powers to be released. A rave is not completely planable: the music reacts to the moment.
In the trance ritual of techno, perception and performance (self-presentation) melt together in a kind of personal union. Each viewer becomes at the same time a performer. A kind of interaction evolves between the performer and that performed. The participants are not divided into actors and audience but rather incorporate both at the same time. And as far as the own bodily perception is expressed in performance, this is a fundamental prerequisite for the emergence of a ritual. The own emotional behavior demands an observer for whom the performance is given, since fundamentally a viewer is necessary for each performance (also when we are ourselves the viewer, whom we ourselves deceive with our own acting as, for example, with so-called “everyday rituals”). Each body is recognized as a performer, and by losing himself in the exhilaration of a communal performance, the potential viewer experiences his abstraction in the “supernatural.” The ritual rise over the Everyday provokes this.

Because the specifics of the scene are sociologically and theatrically given—a relatively large number of people participate, dancers and DJ interact with one another and finally the techno music becomes effective together with the light machinery—an ecstatic atmosphere evolves by which the ritual can first begin. On top of this are the autosuggestive expectations of participants and the organizer’s production, which uses the media of music and light. For factors that result in a kind of accelerated experience, Schulze uses the expression “cognitive instantaneous water heaters.”

Through the socially experienced perception of music and dance, a feeling of solidarity arises that all participants experience simultaneously; it is described as an authentic “we-feeling.” While the dancers approach the condition of ecstasy or trance, they move their bodies to the music in such a way that a process of abstraction is begun which connects the participants with one another through a commonly used, collective signal. Abstracted, the so-called “third body,” a collective corporeality, a collective consciousness, expresses itself in a kind of “Über-Ich,” a perception of transcendence. In this way, from the individual perception of the everyday, a supernatural experience develops by means of the body and through listening to received music.

(Translated from German by Linda Fujie)

Notes

1 On the concept of “Zeitenwende,” see Zenck 1998.

2 For reasons of space, we mention here only briefly the copyright conflict between Kraftwerk and DJ Bambaata (“Trans Europa Express” vs. “Planet Rock”), which was actually settled in favor of the former.

3 The differentiation between individual subgenres of techno is made according to “bpm” (beats per minute), the fundamental starting point of which is 160 bpm and going upwards. To compare: the human heartbeat is around 60 bpm and can be accelerated, for example by shamans.
in some African healing rituals (e.g., Digo), to up to 144 bpm.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. & Max Horckheimer
1969 Dialettik der Aufklärung. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag.

Coupland, Douglas

Fischer-Lichte, Erika

Le Bon, Gustave

Schulze, Gerhard

Toffler, Alvin

Zenck, Martin