



THE BIG POND

A US-GERMAN LISTENING SERIES

Legacies of the Berlin Wall

By Monika Müller-Kroll, Sylvia Cunningham, and Nikki Motson

[Music: "D1 Mauerstadt (RIAS Mix)" by Mark Reeder]

Mark Reeder: I only ever lived here. I live in Manchester for 20 years, and then I moved to Berlin and I've not moved anywhere else.

Gudrun Gut: I was in the music scene and the music scene was not in a very good shape at that moment. It was very druggy. I was thinking of leaving Berlin. And then – the Wall came down and I thought, "Oh my God, this is exciting!"

Dr. Motte: Love Parade. We were not a revolution, we were more a rave-o-lution.

Monika Müller-Kroll: Welcome to Berlin in the late 80s. A divided city, on the brink of change.

[Music continues]

Mark Reeder: Well really, Berlin has always been one thing for me from the moment I got here. If it hadn't been for the east part of the city, I probably wouldn't have stayed so long to be honest. Because the east part of the city was this unknown territory that no one wanted to go there and if they did, they went to visit their auntie or relatives and bring them washing up powder, or coffee, or whatever. So when I got into sort of like this new wavy punk scene with kids in East Berlin that opened up this completely different world to me. So West Berlin was kind of like this crazy mad place where I lived, and East Berlin was this crazy mad place that I visited.

[Music continues]

Monika Müller-Kroll: Artists and musicians were drawn to the city. Mark Reeder was one of them. Another – Ulrich Gutmair. He wrote a book titled, *Die ersten Tage von Berlin - The First Days of Berlin*.

Ulrich Gutmair: You have this great mythology of West Berlin in the 80s already, a lot of people know about that. You know, the city of David Bowie and Iggy Pop at the time. And West Berlin was very special because you had to go through transit from West Germany to come here because it was a walled city, so it was an island in the middle of the GDR. A lot of people who are not European don't really get that.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And on that island of West Berlin, some artists were already putting together their vision of unity, like DJ Dr. Motte.

[Music: "Lucid Dream" by Dr. Motte]

Dr. Motte: So it was the time of acid house was really big in Berlin too. And there I got the idea, why not set up a demonstration to the streets of Berlin, and put some sound systems on trucks or vans and bring all music to the streets and have a street party? Why not call this Peace, Happiness and Pancake? Love Parade. We were writing on the first poster, this year and forever. For us was clear that this will [be] happening again and again, every year. So it was in the beginning, it was clear, it has to be massive, or it will grow massive.

Monika Müller-Kroll: The Berlin art scene experienced something most cities will never know. A wall. Which meant cultural, political and physical division.

Gudrun Gut: My name is Gudrun Gut, and I came to Berlin in 1975. And then I founded my first groups, or I got involved into the music scene, the punk scene, and had a couple of bands. And yeah, I'm still in the music.

[Music: "Your Turn to Run" by Malaria]

Gudrun Gut: There was always a big nightlife in Berlin because we never had the closing hours like in West Germany that had that, but Berlin was special. So most of the people who lived here were like young students or people who didn't want to go to the army or pensionists. There was no business really. So it was pretty different from now. No businessmen at all. It was pretty special.

[Music continues]

Monika Müller-Kroll: West Berlin was a playground, a place to experiment - surrounded by a wall. But East Germany had a rebellious spirit of its own. Artist Else Gabriel belonged to a group that fought for artistic freedom.

[Music: "Kind als Pinsel" by Else Gabriel]

Monika Müller-Kroll: The rebellious voice she found she still exercises today.

[Music continues]

Else Gabriel: This is something very important that we weren't left by the GDR, you know? We left it in advance. We left it, at least mentally, before the GDR was smashed.

Monika Müller-Kroll: Gabriel was part of the artist group, AUTOPERFORATIONSARTISTEN. It's a made-up word. AUTO for self, for ego, PERFORATION, a reference to destruction, ARTISTEN to reference circus artists. One of their works, *Die Spitze des Fleischbergs* or *Top of the Meat Mountain* was first performed in 1986 – in East Germany.

Monika Müller-Kroll: You wore the lungs of a cow on your chest, yeah?

Else Gabriel: Yep.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And you also had a dead chicken with you and you dried it with a hair dryer.

Else Gabriel: Yes. To get this very pathetic piece of meat into the shape of a lively chicken, you know. To make something dead already appearing like something lively. It goes to the very existential questions and to death and life and everything but with a kind of a humoristic or even sarcastic connotation.

Monika Müller-Kroll: Not long after: a cosmic shift.

Gudrun Gut: I remember it. I was watching TV, and I thought, this can't be true.

Ulrich Gutmair: I think it was on the radio or we got a phone call that the Wall was open.

Gudrun Gut: And then I went outside, and I saw a Trabi, and I thought, it is true! And then friends of mine had, like a little birthday party around the corner. And I went to their place, and they didn't know because they didn't watch the TV.

Ulrich Gutmair: And so we said, let's go to the next checkpoint. And the next checkpoint from Neukölln was Prinzenstraße.

Gudrun Gut: And I told them, "Hey, the Wall came down!" And they said, oh, you're crazy. And nobody believed, I mean it was like such an accident. Nobody expected it. It was really cool.

Else Gabriel: We went into this pub and there were construction workers from West Berlin and construction workers from East Berlin, and they all stood there and they all had their beer in their hand and it was completely silent. They looked at each other, and no one could believe what was going on at this moment.

Ulrich Gutmair: Really the Wall was open, there was a constant stream of people, and were welcomed by West Berliners with champagne and beer, and it was like an incredible party mood.

Monika Müller-Kroll: The party was just getting started.

Dr. Motte: It was a certain vibe going on on this planet in '89. Maybe it was infecting many, many people, it was like, also infecting musicians, me. Also, later on I got a dream, where I met the Space Teddy, yeah? And so he told me in the dream that I should open up a record label. And we did. And he is still there, yeah.

Ulrich Gutmair: East and West would meet on the dance floor that's for sure, yeah. In these East Berlin clubs.

Dr. Motte: I wasn't keen on questioning – “are you from East or West?” – because it doesn't matter to me.

Gudrun Gut: The energy, which came from East Berlin, for me, I felt it was really different than how it was before because they seem to be very friendly and warmhearted. Because they had to really you know help each other all the time. They were very different from the cold 80s feel we had here, and that was very refreshing.

Ulrich Gutmair: It was an inner city that was more or less free to your fantasies. You could find a basement and make a crazy party there without you know a lot of capital. You needed to know somebody who had a PA and two record players, and two DJs. And then you had a party there.

Dr. Motte: It was more like, let's build up something like a club, because we started a club called Planet and out of that came later came the E-Werk, next to Tresor in Wilhelmstraße. Next to Love Parade, what we did. But it was all together, it was a fantastic thing that we could actually go into free spaces and build up our ideas.

Ulrich Gutmair: It was the spirit of the anarchist punk culture a bit. So people went to these places, very adventurous places. Sometimes they were just used for one party and then abandoned again.

Gudrun Gut: It was chaos. It was total chaos. But the good thing about the chaos was that there were lots of empty places which were occupied and you know, all the people who moved to Berlin after – in the 90s – they always moved to East Berlin.

Dr. Motte: The basic of the electronic music from now, it's based in that time, in the early 90s and stuff, because we were starting a do-it-yourself-culture. So you had the chance to do your own club, you had the chance to do your own music, be a DJ and so on. So it was an open field and you could just be creative.

Ulrich Gutmair: And also, maybe in the background was the feeling that really, there was a new age starting which was true because it was the end of the Eastern Bloc. I mean you know the Cold War had determined people's lives, in Europe definitely, but also somehow all over the world, even in Africa. And that was over. Definitely over, so that meant everything was possible. I mean if something like that, like the Soviet Empire collapses – if that collapses – anything can happen.

Peter Zach: I mean it will never happen again, it was just a special time, because you know, you had this non-regulated state of living. You know, nothing was regulated. Flats were not regulated, rents were not regulated. The traffic - nothing was regulated.

Monika Müller-Kroll: That is filmmaker Peter Zach. Zach captured the spirit of the early 90s in his film *Gestern Mitte Morgen*. Once part of East Berlin, Mitte became the heart of a unified city.

Peter Zach: It was really a time warp, it's like Joe Unett, one of the protagonists said: "It's a time warp and it's not forever." It's just a short time. I guess this was the reason why it became so international, you know, because in the 90s, it changed because these young people came to see what's happening and when they left in the mid-90s, they brought the idea of Berlin and they spread it all over the world. They went back to Australia, to Barcelona, to France, and they influenced the people there or the Italians. All the people who lived in Mitte at that time, they told them at home, that's a great place to be. And that was the reason why all the people came then afterwards and had this myth of this open and free Berlin was created at this time.

Monika Müller-Kroll: That idea of Berlin as a creative free-for-all spread to performers, sculptors, painters, and other artists from around the world. They took over empty spaces and created studios, galleries, and even entire artist communes. The most famous of them all, Tacheles, in Berlin Mitte.

Martin Reiter: My name is Martin Reiter. I'm an artist and I work in robots, music, sculptors, pictures, of course the internet, and sometimes politics, fighting the investors, whatever. I came first to Berlin, wow, wow, wow, in 1986, I guess. Yeah, yeah.

[Music: Final concert of IEP im Linzer Posthof, courtesy Martin Reiter]

Martin Reiter: The special thing of Tacheles, at least from the beginning on. That there were the artists from 16 to 70, working shoulder on shoulder. There were no difference in between men and women, I would say the women were more responsible and working more than the men. But there was no, our language was English, because there were so many international artists as well that this was the language everybody understood.

[Music continues]

Martin Reiter: The buildings were ruined and so we artists had the possibility to just go into a house and say, "OK I will stay over here." Then you had to find an electricity line. You connect yourself to the electricity line and you do not have to pay electricity because there was no company who knew "Oh, I have my electricity lines over here". It needed years. And then you didn't have to pay rent. I paid first time rent in Berlin, I think in 1999.

[Music continues]

Martin Reiter: There were rehearsal rooms in the cellars. And there were the legendary Ständige Vertretung disco, one of the birthplaces of the German techno movement. And even the guys of Rammstein were at rehearsal in Tacheles. This worked out in Tacheles. This worked out for 22-and-a-half years. And they tried to shut us down from 1996 on. And a lot of people, thousands of people, learned a lot about politics or the different stages of reality, art. And so what better can you be as an artist? Nothing. This is like, the paradise. The Wall came down and some people said this is the new morning. And some of them realized, yeah, this is a nice gap where we can jump in now, but it's temporary. Because nobody who was really thinking about the world and the rest and the universe thought that somebody will give us the middle of Berlin.

Dr. Motte: At the end it will be like that, that the people everywhere on the planet dance under the movement of Love, Peace, and Pancake, yeah or whatever you call it – Love Parade. And we all become friends and because of that there will be world peace. It's that easy.

Ulrich Gutmair: I mean, you can have a good party now, I mean, come on. People are always chasing for these special moments. And it's part of the story, you know, that what you can have is the 'desirable' – the most desirable – and you are sad that you will not be there. Yeah, I'm also sad that I will never see ancient Rome. So I mean, what can I do? I mean, I'm alive now. So enjoy yourself. I mean, if you if you can, you know, like, take something from that time is, is really exactly that. Enjoy that moment now. Because it will be over tomorrow, maybe, or the day after tomorrow. But if you can have the party now, have the party.

[Music starts: "Your Turn to Run" by Malaria]

Gudrun Gut: I think like the 80s was pretty much punk oriented. Then came the 90s, with the celebration years, you know, the Wiedervereinigung celebration. And we had the big bass drum, combining it, the techno 90s, then the zero years were more like networking kind of stuff, then 2010 years is like the 'Blase' of the social media 'Blase.' And now I think we have we're starting a new era where everybody gets political again.

Monika Müller-Kroll: 30 years after the fall of the Wall, these artists are still contributing to Berlin's legacy. Mark Reeder is a musician, producer, and runs his own record label MFS. Else Gabriel is a professor in the sculpture department at the Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin. Ulrich Gutmair is a culture editor at the German daily newspaper, taz. He's also the author of the book, *Die ersten Tage von Berlin*. Gudrun Gut was part of the bands, Malaria! and Mania D, in West Berlin in the 80s. And she's still releasing albums on her independent label Monika. Peter Zach is the director of the documentary *Gestern Mitte Morgen*. Martin Reiter spent decades fighting court battles to keep Tacheles open for artists from around the world. And...

Dr. Motte: My name is Dr. Motte, and I'm the founder of the Berlin Love Parade.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And you love that.

Dr. Motte: Of course I love that!

[Music continues]

Monika Müller-Kroll: They all still live in Berlin. This podcast was produced for The Big Pond by Sylvia Cunningham, Nikki Motson, and me, Monika Müller-Kroll.

More at www.goethe.de/bigpond and under the hashtag #thebigpond. Radio stations can download this episode and others for broadcast via PRX at <https://exchange.prx.org/series/38468-the-big-pond-a-us-german-listening-series>.

The Big Pond - A U.S.-German Listening Series is brought to you by the Year of German American Friendship (Deutschlandjahr USA), a comprehensive collaborative initiative funded by the German Federal Office, implemented by the Goethe-Institut, with support from the Federation of German Industries (BDI).



funded by



implemented by



supported by

