

Felix Denk, Sven von Thülen

Der Klang der Familie - Berlin, Techno und die Wende

Sample Translation by Kári Driscoll

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Chapter: Bürgerkinder feiern Weltuntergang, Pages 135 - 158

Party at the End of the World

JOHNNIE STIELER After the first few *Tekknozid* parties, things got more and more difficult between me and Wolle. Dimitri had asked me if I didn't want to come work at the Fischlabor, since I needed the money. So I did. Earning Deutschmarks. Even that was just great. I didn't have time to spend four hours a day on the phone with Wolle anymore. Communication got harder. We started really getting on each other's nerves.

WOLLE XDP Johnnie was on a different wavelength. He stopped caring. It was a total nightmare. All he did was go out with Dimitri and Achim looking for a new location. So I got together with Ralf Regitz from the Ufo and carried on. Johnnie didn't think that was cool.

ZAPPA Following our success at the *Haus der jungen Talente* things gradually fell apart. We all did our own thing. Wolle with *Tekknozid*, Johnnie started working at the *Fischlabor*, and I started spinning in little youth clubs in East Berlin. For a while there we didn't have a lot to say to each other.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN The second Ufo wasn't really my thing. Werner Schrödel came on board just before we moved the club to Großgörschenstraße in Schöneberg. We were completely broke, and he was one of the few who were a little more settled and had a bit of capital. The rest of us were mostly just resourceful and managed to muddle our way through one way or another. We'd had dealings with Werner through our Interfisch label. He was the head of EFA, our distributor. After a couple of months it was over. We just couldn't work together. Werner didn't believe we'd ever get anything off the ground. I was fired up about another idea. The original Ufo had been in a dingy basement, that's where we'd come from and that's where we wanted to go back to.

JOHNNIE STIELER Achim and Dimitri had been talking about the three of us maybe starting a club together. That was the dream. I was totally hyper and dived in head-first. Which wasn't easy with those two. They were suffering from Berlin-disease. Which referred to a sort of particularly absurd punk that could also be electronic, stuff like Die Tödliche Doris. But it also referred to a particular attitude towards life. Mostly it meant never being able to get your shit together. Just sitting around somewhere with dirty fingernails and no money, hoping someone would come along with a joint to spare.

Complete lethargy. Achim and Dimitri's office—insofar as you could call it that—consisted of two army desks completely covered in paper. Achim had an old swivel chair that only he could sit on. You had to sit on it in a very specific position, otherwise you'd fall off instantly. He sat there for years. Without moving. The epitome of Berlin disease. Like when the wall came down, for instance: Dimitri opened the door, saw the Trabants, closed the door again and went and lay down on the bed with his coat on.

TANITH When the Ufo closed it was obvious there had to be a new club in the East. Right after the wall came down Tacheles and Obst und Gemüse opened. Everybody drifted over there. Nobody could be bothered with the West anymore.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN There wasn't a free square foot anywhere in West Berlin.

JOHNNIE STIELER Achim and Dimitri couldn't really get their arses in gear. It took a huge amount of effort just to get them out of their office or even to get them out of bed a little before noon. If we're going to find anything, we've also got to look, I always told them. Mostly I went out looking with Achim. We were the first ones who went scouting for locations in the East. The others may well have planned to do that as well, but they had to watch a little TV first or just generally explore East Berlin. They didn't have a guidebook. They got off at Friedrichstraße and had no idea where to go. And the way the West Berlin scenesters looked in those days, no East Berliner would have dreamt of helping them. They took one look at them in their bomber jackets and hit the mute button. From the summer of 1990 on we were looking systematically. There were plenty of places. Old State buildings, former ministries in Stalinist architecture. We wanted to go inside everywhere. But there was always some custodian there speaking to us in East German dialect. Everything was caught in this tension between reunification and a new beginning. There was the Deutschmark, but otherwise there was nothing. Nobody knew what was going on. But in Berlin-Mitte, I noticed at the time, there were these Stasi-type notaries trading in real estate. They'd all sit around there, selling stuff under the table. So they knew exactly what was going on.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN Back then Leipziger Straße was a one-way street, where the traffic was always backed up. Johnnie and Achim were stuck there in their slash-8 Mercedes on the way

to Alexanderplatz, bored stiff until Johnnie pointed to an old storefront and asked, 'What about that place over there?' Then they pulled over and got out to take a closer look.

JOHNNIE STIELER I had to go see a Stasi landlord to pick up the key. He worked at the East German diplomatic services agency. And the old boss wasn't working there any more, instead there was a young administrator. From Nordrhein-Westfalen, I think. A mid-level pencil pusher gone off in search of adventure. I had more than enough self-confidence in those days and told him up front that we wanted to rent the place. He sat there behind his desk, with this look on his face that just said, 'Excuse me?' Once he'd recovered, he gave it to us straight. No water, no electricity, no gas, no nothing. And what were we planning on using it for, if he might ask? A gallery with a bar area, I said. An elastic gastronomic term that worked well for such places in West Berlin as well.

ALEXANDRA DROENER Everybody used that trick. Any phone booth could be a gallery with a bar.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN The agency where we could have applied for dispensation didn't exist. There simply wasn't anyone there.

JOHNNIE STIELER So the administrator guy called the caretaker. We went right over and checked the place out. He just left us with his enormous bunch of keys when we said we'd like to come back with some friends and take another look. He'd already checked out. For him, like for many others, it felt like everything was over. I could have told him to give me his shoes. And so there we were.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN We'd really been looking for something above ground. But that basement was a revelation.

JOHNNIE STIELER There was a door that had been closed off and painted over. There was a bookcase in front of it. We pushed that to one side, tugged at the door, which turned out to be unlocked, and looked down the stairs. I just thought, 'Well this looks promising!'

DIMITRI HEGEMANN The stairs led down into the basement.

JOHNNIE STIELER And then we went down into this slippery cave with a cigarette lighter, and after we'd fumbled about in the dark for a bit we eventually found the door to the vault. It was incredible.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN As soon as we'd gone through the open

steel door into the vault with those rusty deposit boxes we knew: our search was over!

JOHNNIE STIELER This must be what it feels like to discover a hoard of Aztec treasure. Neither of us said a word. We just walked around in silence with our cigarette lighters. And then we slowly made our way back up the stairs. It wasn't till we were back in the car that we started talking again.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN That evening we went back there with Rok.

ROK We drove over there and really it was nothing but a hole in the ground. Then we were standing down there with our halogen lamp and he said, 'This is it'. Then he asked me what we should call the club. *Tresor* [vault], I said. Just because that's what it looked like. It didn't too take much imagination.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN Johnnie had taken one of the bolts from the door with him. He used that to come up with the logo on our computer at the Fischlabor.

JOHNNIE STIELER Pretty quickly we got the lease. The guy from the agency had got hold of some kind of standard form. It said it was valid until any sort of construction begins. Excellent. Then he told us he'd need a security deposit. Achim, Dimitri, and I just stood there. We must have looked like the Marx Brothers. None of us had any money. I asked my mother, she's a professor, and she went straight down to her bank and told them that she was Prof. Such-and-Such and that she needed a bank guarantee. And the guy just looked at her, he'd probably only been there for eight weeks, and said, 'Bank guarantee? Where do we keep the forms for those?' Without my mother the club never would have happened. They wanted three months' rent for the deposit. A huge amount of money at the time. The guy at the bank didn't bat an eyelid and set up the bank guarantee for my mother right away. And we were able to sign the lease. The rent was 1,600 marks.

REGINA BAER The first time Dimitri showed me the space I was gobsmacked. I wasn't expecting anything and you also really had to use your imagination to see the space as a club. I mean, there wasn't even any electricity. We were standing there on the ground floor and Dimitri handed me a lighter. Then we went down into the basement where it was all damp and nasty, and Dimitri was all, 'This is the bar and back there is the dance-floor.' I just kept on saying, 'Leave it all as it is, leave it all as it is. You just need to clear out all the rubbish.'

DIMITRI HEGEMANN Regina was put in charge of the renovation, even though she had no more of an idea than I did how to apply for a construction permit and all that stuff. We just had these guerrilla tactics. Just open the door, turn on the lamp, and have at it.

REGINA BAER Dimitri had wanted to impress me with that space. And he did. After that we were together.

ALEXANDRA DROENER When I came on board the renovations were already underway. They recruited me because I'd already shown them that I could tend bar at the Fischlabor. My count was always right. Or mostly. And I never lost the key. The second reason apart from my reliability was that I was the team raver. Dimitri and Achim knew, she'll do everything here anyway, because she loves the music so much. At some point I went with Achim to the Tresor. They all had these RAF Mercedes with a couch in the front. When we got to the place there were people standing around with masks and protective caps on, totally covered in dust. Somebody came out of that hole with a wheelbarrow. It looked like they were in the middle of a mission to Mars.

TANITH The walls were a metre thick. Nothing went through them. The world could have ended, an atomic bomb could have gone off, and you would still have been partying down there.

CLÉ Achim and Dimitri had been going on at me and Terrible the whole time. But when we went to see the place while it was being done up, we were fired up. That space was just begging to be turned into a club. There was something dark about it, something forbidden.

TERRIBLE At first there were endless jokes like, 'Dimitri, we've found a tunnel over here, it leads straight into the Führerbunker.'

TANITH And strange rumours like, 'I left that place with a cough. During the war they used to store poison down there. There's mould down there, because it's so damp.'

ALEXANDRA DROENER Treuhand was across the street, and there were always security guards there. But the rest was a landfill. Leipziger Platz was one big wasteland. There was nothing there. Absolutely nothing. Rocks, debris, a fence here and there. Today you can't imagine how it was. The buildings were

derelict. Plus the odd tower block from the 80s. Like a ghost town. Like after the Second World War. A real zero hour atmosphere.

ROK It was a desert in the middle of the city. The wall was right there and you could still feel the division.

TANITH Achim said it was a good business location. In the East, but right on the border to the West. So it was easy to get to.

ALEXANDRA DROENER Coming from the aseptic Ufo by the Kleistpark with the illuminated dance floor—a real *disco* disco, you know—to this place was just crazy. It wasn't a question of 'if' but of 'when': when can we start and how loud can we turn the music up? You knew: you're underground; you're in a bank vault with steel walls all around, that was the greatest thing. It was a hell of a thrill to be dancing in the ruins of this bank.

REGINA BAER The vault also had these lockers for suitcases. I went to the library and checked some old phone books to see what had been at Leipziger Straße 126a before the wall was built.

JOHNNIE STIELER It was a strange building with a very strange history. The Wertheim department store was there before the war. That went all the way up to no. 126. Next door was a travel agent's. Part of the travel agent's was Globus Bank. We even found some Globus Bank stuff. And there were the deposit boxes where various things were stored. On the ground floor after the war there was the first duty-free shop. After that it quickly came under the administration of the Diplomatic services agency. So this thing had Stasi written all over it.

REGINA BAER Next door to us was this place called Intourist. Supposedly it was an East German travel agent's, but it was more of a Russian import/export thing. You could really just sit there and watch them make it. At first it was Russian army jeeps and military types in uniform. In and out all the time, like clockwork. You kind of felt like you didn't even want to know what sorts of deals were being made in there and what they were buying and selling. Later you'd see the same jeeps, but the guys sitting in them were much more casual, in shell suits. Before long the jeeps were repainted and you could no longer tell they'd been army vehicles. And suddenly these guys were all dressed in business suits.

JOHNNIE STIELER At some point the company shut up shop, but they must still have been doing something in there, because the telephone still worked, for instance. And it was connected to the co-called S-network, a special secure network, bug-proof. It still worked. We used to make phone calls on it. And there were also bags full of customs seals. The attic was full of banknotes. I found them when I was going to check out the roof. 1,600 East German marks. Strewn all over the floor. Like someone had just thrown them away.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN In December 1990, when we started renovating, we made sure Regina had enough workers. Whoever happened to be available. The Space Cowboys, for instance, Danielle de Picciotto's band. They were just coming from their practice space and wanted to know what we were doing. So we put them to work.

ALEXANDRA DROENER When I got there with Achim, they put me in safety gear. A kerchief and a mask, and then we went below ground. The old deposit boxes were covered in a layer of rust as thick as your finger. We cleaned out each one with a steel brush.

JOHNNIE STIELER At that point I basically never left. Running back and forth the whole time, doing one thing or another and keeping an eye on the workmen. It was freezing down there, but when you're manic like I was it doesn't matter. I spent days going over all the rooms again and rummaging through the debris. The renovations lasted three months. We had no water because the pipes were always frozen.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN I had this theory that since we were in East Berlin we would have to hire a company from the East as well.

REGINA BAER We thought Western electricians would just throw up their hands at these cables and installations. The power lines were all old East German lines, they couldn't handle anything at all. They used to fizzle and spark—a real fire hazard. You could sit there and watch the sparks flying.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN So we hired Hummel & Co. from Köpenick to do our bathroom facilities. We figured they'd just install a water pipe and that would be that. But it wasn't so simple. And Hummel & Co. always knocked off work early. Very early.

REGINA BAER What we didn't know was that plumbers in East Berlin all act like they're doing you a favour. It was even worse

than with the ones in the West. They promised us they'd finish the job. And then they sneaked off and called it a day at around two o'clock. It was Friday, after all. They didn't give a shit that the toilets still didn't work on opening night. And there was no way to reach them since they didn't have a phone. And neither did we. Everything else more or less worked, but we still had no water.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN We took a cheque for 150 marks and went and got a hydrant. In the basement there was a pipe that connected to the main line on Leipziger Straße. So we tried to hook it up. It was completely hopeless. We desperately needed a pipe wrench but none of us had one. The Tresor almost didn't open for want of a pipe wrench. But I decided to improvise so I jammed one pipe into the other pipe and then wrapped the whole thing up with an entire roll of duct tape. Then I shouted 'go!' The stuff was leaking everywhere, I was completely soaked, but at some point I heard them shouting 'water!' from upstairs.

JOHNNIE STIELER We were literally still fastening the last screws when the doors opened. The electrician had worked I think for 72 hours straight before the opening. The bar had to be built. Then we brought in the booze. And finally the sound system.

TANITH Of course us DJs tested it right away. And it sounded exactly the way I wanted techno to sound. Back then I wanted to play as hard as possible. Dimitri and Achim wanted it a bit softer, and tried to get me to play house. That's how it had been at the Ufo. Rok also played hard whenever he could do as he pleased. So it was clear: House? Here? Forget it. It was hard techno all the way. As a test I put on 'Little Fluffy Clouds' by the Orb. It sounded like a drone symphony. Nothing fluffy about it.

JONZON The first time I dropped the needle on a record there at full volume I was impressed by the crackle. It was almost frightening. We were pretty loud. But that's the way it had to be. The space itself required a remorseless sound.

ALEXANDRA DROENER Later on there were all sorts of clubs, but none of them had that rawness that you associate with that music.

JOHNNIE STIELER The sound seemed completely normal and reasonable to me the way it was. But that probably also had to do with the fact that I had spent so much time down there.

I practically lived there. When you move into a flat and spend time furnishing it, in the end you're not really surprised by how it looks. I had been there from the first cable and for every step of the way. It didn't seem all that raw to me. I never thought there was nearly enough bass.

REGINA BAER There's a nice story about Tanith, about how he went and stood on the dance floor and turned the system all the way up. The point at which his jeans started flapping was 1T, as he called it.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN The space was immediately approved. It clicked right away. The music, the intensity, the sweat, the shouting. Just how I've always imagined the Blue Note in the early days of jazz.

JOHNNIE STIELER We weren't really nervous before the opening. But after a certain point my anticipation couldn't get any higher.

ALEXANDRA DROENER Those were the days before everything. No internet, no mobile phones. Only Andreas Rossmann always had one of those big portable car phones. So of course the channels were different. You always had to spread the word. Facebook was the Fischlabor, the bar where you'd go if you were cool.

TANITH There weren't any posters. Monika Dietl said on her show that something major was on its way but she didn't give out the address. And then there was the party line. Wolle had organised that after the Ufo closed. But because he didn't have a phone in East Berlin he abused Roland 128 bpm's phone and attached an answerphone to it for all the dates and times.

WOLLE XDP The party line was supposed to replace handing out flyers. But it wasn't enough if it was just for *Tekknozid*. Which is why it was supposed to be available to anybody who was throwing party. The hardest thing was recording the message. The deadline was every Thursday at one p.m. I used to go to a phone booth in West Berlin and listened to the messages and then recorded one remotely myself. I was always terrified I'd get it wrong and have to start from the beginning. The new announcement went out at three. After that the line was always busy.

MIJK VAN DIJK After the second Ufo had closed, I had no idea

where to go. Then Johnnie Stieler hinted that in two or three weeks there'd be a new place opening.

JOHNNIE STIELER Every day there were twenty people who wanted to see the place. Musicians, DJs, their friends. And so right away we were making waves. There was an unbelievable amount of interest. We didn't have to worry about publicity, it was all just word of mouth.

TANITH For me the period around 89/90 was a bit of a leaden period. Apart from *Tekknozid* I found it pretty depressing. There weren't any clubs, the scene was just bobbing along, wallowing in its own juices. I didn't have much hope for the future. But that all changed with the Tresor—overnight.

ALEXANDRA DROENER On opening night we were working right up to the last minute. Painting the walls, putting in lights. We opened at around eleven. The walls were still wet, there was black paint on the ceiling. Downstairs we hadn't painted anything. I had originally wanted to go back home first but I was living in Schöneberg and that was too far. So in the end we said: fuck it. We didn't change, we just stayed in our stupid overalls that you could buy for five marks.

REGINA BAER We all looked like shit. Alexandra and I didn't have any clean clothes to change into except for our blue overalls, so we just put them on over our dirty clothes. The week after there were people who turned up in overalls like those.

ALEXANDRA DROENER We'd probably been painting each other as well. We were just kids. We were excited. Achim and Dimitri were grown-ups, they were completely cool about it all. I was jumping up and down and totally hyper. Totally stressed-out. Happy, at a hundred miles an hour. All at the same time.

REGINA BAER And when we were finally ready, much too late, we went out into the dark. Outside there was nothing but a single lightbulb, a dim little thing above the door, and there were all these people standing there waiting. The entire car park was full of people, all just standing there politely and waiting for us to let them in.

ALEXANDRA DROENER There were people there wearing cowboy boots, trainers, suits.

REGINA BAER Some women were a bit off the mark and had turned up in stilettos.

ALEXANDRA DROENER There were these industrial types like Paul Browse. Gabi Delgado from D.A.F. It was a weird mixture of West Berliners. And then there were the East Berliners as well. But no casual clubbers. It was eccentrics only. A far out personality show.

REGINA BAER The first ones there I would have preferred to have thrown out right away. They were Johnnie's friends, East Berlin hooligans, or at least that's the impression they gave me right away. Real meatheads. When I saw them I thought, if this is going to be my clientele then I'm quitting right now.

ALEXANDRA DROENER Johnnie had all sorts of things in his past that we knew nothing about. He was very active in East Berlin, something to do with the punk scene, on some level we all knew he had been a hooligan.

REGINA BAER I went up to those guys and said they should leave, which of course they couldn't see why and started getting pretty stroppy, like, as if, who did I think I was, and so on. There was a bit of a row and then they left.

JOHNNIE STIELER Some of them had political views that meant they wouldn't necessarily have joined the socialist student union that I was active in at uni. But they were friends of mine and they were happy and didn't cause any trouble when they were at the Tresor.

UWE REINEKE I'd got there very early. I'd given Jonzon a lift, who was spinning that night. There were maybe three other people there. We were standing around downstairs and it was bloody freezing. No need for a smoke machine. I was surprised. What is this place? It looked really grim. Damp, too.

KATI SCHWIND I went straight downstairs, through the puddles, past the wooden wall, and walked into this room that was glinting with rust. I walked around with my jaw hanging open. It was at least as cool as walking into the control room at the E-Werk. You could really feel the history in there.

STEFAN SCHVANKE At first the space seemed the size of an underground car park. I thought, they'll never be able to fill this place. They'll put up a curtain there next weekend or something, so it's not so vast.

ALEXANDRA DROENER At first there was a lot of standing around, a lot of looking around, and lots and lots of talking. And on top of that music at full blast. Some people didn't even realise

that the actual club was down in the basement. They stayed in the Globus Bar the whole time where there was nothing but a ghetto blaster between the glasses behind the bar. A lot of them were part of that bar-leaning generation. Long-haired men in leather jackets, groupies, band members, rock 'n' rollers. There were a few ravers there too. But not that many at that point. The hard core from the Ufo. People who were way ahead in terms of style. They looked like people in the 90s in London. They were wearing flats, Mercedes-logo chains, waistcoats, crop-tops.

TILMAN BREMBS As West Berlin kids we always used to hang out at the Cha Cha. At some point some guy came along saying there was a new club by Potsdamer Platz. We took a taxi there and then there we were in the Globus Bar. All right, new club, not bad. Then suddenly along came somebody completely bathed in sweat, glowing hot, and said, 'Hey, have you been downstairs yet?' We went downstairs and we were completely blown away. And it's not like we were from Osnabrück or somewhere. We were pretty hard to impress.

MARK ERNESTUS With the Tresor it was immediately obvious that this is our place, this is where this music belongs, and everything is defined purely in terms of the music.

TILMAN BREMBS That unconditional surrender to the music, to that wall of sound, that's what made the difference. Before, you'd go to clubs but be more of an observer. If you liked hip-hop or downbeat you'd maybe go onto the dance floor every once in a while, but you spent much more time thinking about things. At the Tresor that just wasn't possible. You'd come in and you were right in the middle of an inferno. There was a completely different level of intensity. You simply had to take part—or else go home. When we went back to the Cha Cha we were raving about it. They had no idea what we were on about, like typical West Berliners they were unimpressed and didn't believe a word. Then gradually one after the other they would come with us. The ones who weren't interested we obviously just left behind.

JOHNNIE STIELER After opening night I took the U-Bahn back to Lichtenberg and quite honestly I was glad it was over and that we'd managed to pull it off. Everything stank of Tresor. Quite a specific musty smell. You only got that at the Tresor, nowhere else. It was because of the thickness of the walls. They were 1.48m thick concrete. The air was just unbelievable. Despite

the ventilation it was always the same. It was just that Tresor-smell.

ALEXANDRA DROENER The first night itself was really really great. But after that we kind of fell back down. After an opening like that you start to realise all the things that still need to be done. And what's not working. The toilets looked like a bomb had gone off, of course. That was always an issue.

JOHNNIE STIELER At first it was mostly like spinning plates. We were all running around trying to make sure that everything kept going. A week was like a year. A day was a month. Each day we were open was almost like a different universe. With Rok, Jonzon, Tanith, and Roland 128 bpm we already had our DJ crew from the start. It was clear that they had the sound.

REGINA BAER Basically it was always disaster management. The Tresor was always a construction site. We did what needed to be done. The GDR water works didn't exist anymore. So I had to go to the West German water authority. They said I could definitely get hooked up to the water supply, but for that they would need the blueprints showing where the pipes are. I could get those at the former GDR water works. Which was somewhere on the other side of Wuhlheide. Desolate. Just a few old GDR-trailers. A big open space. I went and knocked on the door of each of the trailers. They were all open. But not a soul was there. At some point I found someone who could help me. He took me to yet another trailer. There he gave me a tube with a large plan of the site. I was over the moon. At least until I tried to take pictures of it. There was nothing on it, it was completely blank. I thought they must be taking the piss. It was right on the border. Even the GDR water works didn't have the plans for that. Of course the people at the West Berlin water authority thought I was taking the piss.

ALEXANDRA DROENER Once a month we'd have a burst water pipe. Then I'd stand there with Regina, who liked to come in stilettos, and mop it up. Regina and I basically kept that place running. At the same time I had a lot to learn. I was twenty-two and wet behind the ears. I had to go to the wholesaler, bar supplies. Incredibly boring. Warehouses full of glasses, spoons, and so on. Achim told me what we needed. Which glasses should have measuring lines, and which ones not. Optics, ice cube trays, plastic cups. Making the inventory, how do you calculate beverages. You've got to get that all in order first. At the same time I was dancing till morning.

JOHNNIE STIELER I was completely out of order. I basically never slept, and yet I was happy. If I had had any obligations there's no way it would have worked. It was like warfare; you've got to stay focused 100% otherwise you'll get nowhere.

ALEXANDRA DROENER Of course there were noticeable differences in mentality. At first we had no real idea how to deal with each other. Johnnie was an eccentric with a big mouth and tons of enthusiasm. We were speaking two different languages. Us Westerners had this sort of unconscious arrogance, and Johnnie wasn't the sort of guy who was going to get steamrolled by the whole Coca-Cola thing. He was very supportive of his own people: he brought in Zappa, Felsen, and Arne. He'd known some of them since childhood.

JOHNNIE STIELER I'd known our bouncer Felsen since I was fourteen. Everybody respected him. He had no problem with the police or with the heavies. Besides that, he also had a unique gift for pedagogy. He explained to each and every one why they weren't coming in. He'd start with their clothes and basically justified it purely on the basis of their outfit. He really schooled them. So for example there were these red light district types from Hamburg. They turned up all dressed up in raver gear. At least what they thought was raver gear. Bandanas and that sort of thing. One of them was even packing a piece under his leather vest. And Felsen just told them, 'Fellers, honestly, you look really ridiculous in that getup. Besides, with that pimpmobile over there it's obvious where you're from, there's no point trying to hide it. Where do you think you are?' The guys listened to this, went back to Hamburg and came back the following week. This time without the gun and the getup. And Felsen let them in. After that they were regulars. They were there every weekend because they thought the place was so cool. They were perfectly well behaved the whole time and also tipped generously. Always with a different bird on their arm. At every other club they would just have been turned away. But with Felsen it was different. And as a result there was this unbelievable social circus that developed.

DIMITRI HEGEMANN The Tresor was a bit like an open street project. All sorts of different people washed ashore there. You'd hang out there for a bit and then sooner or later you'd have a job.

TILMAN BREMBS After a few months I started cleaning up afterwards. It was good cash money, plus you always found things. Keys, pagers, glow sticks, torches, water pistols, even a Bible. Drugs not so much, since people would take them. And money of course. Notes of all different denominations that had fallen out of people's pockets. Those were my tips. The worst were the beer bottles in all the deposit boxes. That was a really dirty job. Afterwards you were just covered in dust and grime. Since then I can clean absolutely anything. I've been immunised. Nothing could be worse than the Tresor.

REGINA BAER Tilman insisted on spending the night at the Tresor. He used to clean, seemingly that was his greatest passion. That was all he wanted to do. With people like that it's best just to let them get on with it. Otto was another castaway. He was actually a medical student. He was there a couple of times and then I asked him if he'd like to work as a runner. But he said he didn't want to do that. He said he'd do everything else, just not collecting bottles. So I gave him a job doing everything else.

ZAPPA Right at the start I was the caretaker at the Tresor. Johnnie got me that job. I put in the first toilets there. During the day I was a caretaker at a primary school. I was incredibly proud to be part of this thing. I even brought my mother to the Tresor and we danced together. Johnnie proved that with a bit of perseverance you can really achieve something. You just have to keep at it. To me that's always been a symbol of the reunification.

TILMAN BREMBS I didn't clean because I liked doing it, but because that was my ticket into that whole thing. Free admission, free drinks, getting to meet everybody. It wasn't just a job, it had more to do with self-discovery. It was about being part of a close-knit community. During the week we were often there, with music on in the background, we'd have a beer and solder something out in the courtyard. It was like building your own world. Like in Pippi Longstocking. Dimitri always said someday he'd build the Techno Tower, but then you'd also need a Techno Farm for free-range Techno Chickens. And then I'd picture it there on Leipziger Straße, with that big field. It sounded so visionary, I liked that a lot.