

Preface

I HAD BEEN AWAY FROM ICELAND FOR OVER A YEAR AND WHEN I RETURNED FOR NEW YEAR I STAYED ON TOP OF A MOUNTAIN. I WENT FOR A WALK ON MY OWN AND I SAW THE ICE WAS THAWING IN THE LAVA FIELDS. ALL I COULD HEAR WAS THE CACKLE OF THE ICE, ECHOING OVER HUNDREDS OF SQUARE MILES. IT WAS PITCH BLACK, THE NORTHERN LIGHTS WERE SWIRLING AROUND AND JUST BELOW THEM WAS A LAYER OF THICK CLOUD. I COULD SEE THE LIGHTS FROM ALL THE TOWNS OF MY CHILDHOOD MIRRORED IN THE REFLECTION OF THESE CLOUDS, WITH THE LAVA FIELDS CACKLING BELOW. IT WAS REALLY TECHNO.

BJÖRK GUDMUNDSDÓTTIR

It's been ten years, and I've still got a major crush on Björk. Well, at least her unwavering championing of electronic music and her casual use of "techno" as an adjective. Granted, using the word to describe geological events in Iceland is a long way away from assigning it to a type of music or the culture that goes with it.

I'm far less sure of the usefulness of genres these days, but the question "What is techno?" is still one worth answering. *Techno Rebels* will always be an attempt to provide definition, but maybe not in the way you or Wikipedia might expect. I can't apologize for tethering techno to Detroit, a city that in retrospect seems less likely to spawn such a movement with each passing day. The post-industrial entropy is nearly palpable here, while

Hollywood readies sound stages around its perimeter. To put it mildly, it is surreal. Detroit's history, its sense of place and purpose, are all about to be recast. There's never been a bigger need to explore Detroit's innumerable and improbable cultural contributions—if not for the fans and students of music, then for the city itself. While its past is quickly discarded, Detroit needs to remember its future.

Even after the Detroit techno story became more commonly known, I was still amazed by how precious its origins really were. And now, I understand much more its necessity, both for teenagers in the early 1980s and for a city grasping at identity in the twenty first century. Revisiting *Techno Rebels* now means an almost inescapable macro-view of this relationship, a look back at the “collective dreaming” of the city and how it has helped keep the music alive and thriving.

Suffice it to say, it was easy to know what *not* to include in this edition. I specifically chose not to explore techno music's relationship with the “rave” concept and the drug ecstasy, and I stick by my decision. I still believe that it detracts far too greatly from the discussion of the music. Nor will you find any more information, schematics, or wiring diagrams of vintage synthesizers, or screenshots of the latest version of Ableton Live. Each piece of hardware or software feature contributes something to the sonic definition of techno, but not nearly as much as the city borders in which the artists wield them.

Yes, this edition tells more of the “Detroit” story. If it were up to me last time around, I would have stayed in chapter 2 and not come up for air until I had cross-referenced every last Italian disco record and Detroit high school social club. Thankfully for all of us, there's a bit more to discuss. Jeff Mills's transformation into “The Wizard” is something I can finally get into in more detail, and it helps introduce a topic that didn't bubble up as much as I thought it would in the first edition. I'm talking about Ann Arbor, Detroit's nerdier younger brother. Aside from scanning through microfilm of the *Ann Arbor News* for pictures of Cybotron, and that fun little anomaly known as “the Belleville Three,” it wasn't worth taking *Techno Rebels* too far west of Detroit. Now it makes a lot more sense once you consider WCBN, Mojo's beginnings, and the emergence of Ghostly International.

A lot more time was spent exploring the mid-1990s this time out, specifically the Detroit party scene that sustained what little infrastructure ex-

isted once techno started propagating around the world, and almost single-handedly defined it ever since. If I leaned a little too heavily on techno's pre-history before, the more modern viewpoint of its many promoters should offer some balance.

It would also be an understatement to say that much has happened since 1999: Detroit's Electronic Music Festival, Ghostly, the steady migration of musicians to Berlin, and the birth and death of dozens of subgenres. All but the last inform a retooled chapter 6. What was once a rather terse world tour through some of the techno scenes of the day has given way to the dynamics of how the "idea" of Detroit techno has turned into something very functional and concrete. Maybe now that the "electronica" buzz has played out to be the sideshow it always seemed to be, discussing the music I love will be that much easier.

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