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Between Memory and Myth

Reimaginative Resistance and Mediated Imaginaries of Berghain

Wanyi Zhu

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Supervisor: Mia-Marie Hammarlin

Examiner: Michael Bossetta

Abstract

This thesis investigates how Berghain, a well-known Berlin nightclub, is imagined, mediated, and contested as a queer space in digital environments. Due to Berghain's strict no-photo policy, direct visual representations are limited. In response, users have turned to storytelling, affective reflection, and symbolic representation to recreate its atmosphere and meaning across online platforms.

While existing research often grounds queer spatiality in embodied, physical experience, this research shifts the focus to mediated practices and their role in sustaining or transforming the meanings of space. Berghain is approached as a hybrid site shaped by both collective narratives and digitally circulated imaginaries. Drawing on user-generated content from Reddit and Instagram, along with eight semi-structured interviews with queer participants, the research explores how affective and discursive practices generate belonging in platformed settings.

Combining digital ethnography with thematic analysis, the research examines 190 Reddit comments and interview transcripts to trace narrative construction, affective tone, and symbolic tension. The findings reveal that queer individuals engage with Berghain not only through physical access, but also through emotional connections and collective storytelling. In the absence of photographic evidence, platforms become symbolic infrastructures for co-creating spatial meaning. However, these spaces are shaped by platform norms and are not ideologically neutral. Building on this, the thesis reconsiders Foucault's concept of heterotopia by exploring how its oppositional spatial function is destabilized through processes of mediatization.

To articulate this dynamic, this thesis conceptualizes the form of queer resistance as reimaginative resistance, describing how queer users respond to spatial loss by creatively renegotiating cultural meanings within the constraints of digital media. Rather than erasing queer space, digital platforms become sites for negotiating its meaning and sustaining its presence through shared imaginaries.

Keywords: *queer space, social media, reimaginative resistance, mediated city*

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I have always felt lost. Books often portray a utopia, and whenever I look back at reality, a strong sense of disconnection makes me question whether what I read is really connected to the world I live in. Sometimes I wonder if it is just an unreachable imaginary construct. I never expected I would find a direction that genuinely interests me in Sweden, just as I never thought that one day I would be sitting in a room in Sweden, writing these words.

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Those things that remained hidden and were difficult to speak aloud in the environment where I grew up can only be written in another language. At least now, I finally have this chance.

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Queerness is relational, strange, and both anti-separatist and anti-assimilationist. It's an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning. In other words: it exists as a counterpoint, a reconfiguring agent.

Jaffer Kolb, 2017

Introduction

What do we truly talk about when we talk about queer space?

The phrase “coming out” is rooted in an architectural metaphor—the closet—that reveals how queer space has long existed as a site of contradiction between inside and outside. This spatial ambivalence makes queer space not simply a container for identity, but a form of continuous resistance and reconstruction. As Shane O’Neill (2019) says on *The New York Times* of the 1969 Stonewall riots, known as one of the first gay rights protests in the world, “Stonewall was, at its core, about people reclaiming their narratives from a society that told them they were sick or pitiful or didn’t even exist.” This act of reclaiming was not just discursive, but was also spatial. It occurred in the streets, the bars, the corners of cities that had historically rendered queer lives invisible. In this sense, queer space emerges as a contested mode of inhabiting urban space; it unsettles the normative rhythms and sanctioned architectures of the city, carving out resistant zones of belonging. The club is such a space. As Jörg Heiser (2018: 177) writes, the club is a place in which “certain marginalized forms of artistic and social expression—queer culture, for example—can be lived out, displayed, and experienced”. Therefore, the club is not simply a venue for nightlife. Analyzing queer club life means analyzing the conditions under which queer space is made, maintained, and extended.

Mediatization of Queer Space

Berghain, as an iconic nightclub in Berlin, is renowned not only for its austere techno, industrial architecture, and pristine sound system, but also for its distinctive spatial and cultural symbolism. Emerging from its predecessor Ostgut, which opened in 1999 (Waltz, 2013), Berghain has remained predominantly gay despite being inclusive of all genders. While its contemporary crowd is more mixed, “the club’s values remain the same: concealment, queerness, and excess” (Cagney, 2019). In 2016, a German court officially recognized Berghain as a cultural institution (Josie, 2019), signaling its transition from underground subcultural hub to nationally endorsed symbolic space.

The famous “no-camera policy” and highly selective door policy of Berghain have contributed to its mythical aura. These rules do not merely regulate entry; they actively construct a space of curated opacity that challenges the norm of hyper-visibility and commodification that dominate contemporary media cultures. Paradoxically, because its symbolic value far exceeds its physical boundaries and serving as a cultural touchstone, this enforced inaccessibility has not prevented Berghain from gaining a global afterlife in mediated form. For example, Philip Topolovac created a scale model titled *I’ve Never Been to Berghain* in 2016¹, and the nightclub was recreated in the 2018 Amazon crime series *Beat*. However, visual representations of the club during events are still very limited and mostly appear as drawings. Additionally, “Berghain even initiated a distinctive literary genre”, and a large number of newspaper articles and blog posts have emerged to explore its mystery (Krass & Wold, 2017: 201). Through narratives and media representations, Berghain’s atmosphere and aesthetic continue to spread and evolve, even without direct pictures. Therefore, Berghain is continuously reproduced as a media myth.

In this sense, Berghain exists not merely as a physical location but as a hybrid formation: a queer space, a translocal symbol of affective community, and a mediated construct shaped by platform cultures (Massanari, 2015). The way it is reconstructed through media reflects a broader shift from embodied co-presence to collectively imagined spatialities (Taylor, 2004) shaped by mediated practices. As Thrift (1996: 295) suggests, such mediated space may be understood as a “space-time distribution of hybrid and dialogical subject-contexts, constantly being copied, revised, enunciated.”

In this context, Berghain becomes not only a case study of queer culture but also a site through which to interrogate how digital mediation reshapes the conditions of queer belonging, visibility, and spatial resistance.

Commodification and Club Death

As discussions about Berghain increase, so does its cultural significance beyond its physical

¹ The artist page: <https://philip-topolovac.com/I-ve-never-been-to-Berghain>

space. While the club has strict rules that maintain its underground identity, it has also become a global brand. The first time Berghain entered the international DJ Magazine's Top 100 Clubs list was 2008, then reached the top position the next year. Today, it is still in the top tier, ranked as the 16th most popular club in the world.² Berghain launched its own record label "Ostgut Ton" in 2005. Before its closure in 2021, it was the "dominant force" in techno music and has become a symbol within techno fandom communities (Hawthorn, 2022). The sale of Berghain-themed books, clothing, and souvenirs reinforces its symbolic status while paradoxically contributing to its commodification. Even its famous "no-camera policy" plays a role in this process: by restricting direct visual access, it fuels speculation and desire, making any glimpse of its interior a valuable commodity in itself.

This paradox aligns with broader discussions on the commodification of queer spaces. The mainstreaming of queer aesthetics plays a key role in this process. Berghain's dark, industrial aesthetic was tied to Berlin's underground queer scene. It has been widely replicated in fashion, music, and global club culture. This transformation shifts Berghain from a subcultural shelter into a commodified aesthetic that circulates in global markets, often stripped of its political and social roots.

Media plays a crucial role in repackaging Berghain's queerness for mainstream consumption. Without direct imagery, media narratives, such as articles, interviews, and documentaries, construct a public imaginary of Berghain, making its queerness, mystery, and exclusivity accessible to outsiders. Social media further amplifies this commodification. Contents on various media platforms continuously reshape Berghain's image, turning it into a cultural phenomenon that extends far beyond its physical existence. Some posts show how long the line is outside of Berghain to highlight its popularity, while others feature outfits and ask audiences to guess who will get in. These posts don't include photos of the inside of Berghain, but they contain various symbols and stereotypes that offer audiences an understanding of the culture. These now draw a growing number of tourists aiming to catch the trend and challenge the door policy. This influx disrupts the club's once-protected space for marginalized queer identities, as

² DJ Magazine's Top 100 Clubs list: <https://djmag.com/top100clubs>

the narratives surrounding it shift from a focus on queer resistance to a broader, commodified appeal for nightlife tourism.

Furthermore, queer spaces are increasingly under threat, both from urban redevelopment and political tendencies, leading to what scholars have described as queer spatial loss (Doan & Higgins, 2011; Cofield, 2021; Turesky & Jae-an Crisman, 2023). In this context of shrinking physical space, queer individuals are not only losing places of gathering and expression but also the spatial foundations for shared belonging, privacy, and identity. Faced with these conditions, resistance does not always take the form of overt protest. Instead, it often emerges through negotiation of visibility and belonging across digital platforms nowadays. Berghain is part of this larger, a now shrinking, urban landscape where club culture faces increasing threats. “Clubsterben” (“club death”), a specific German term, describes the mass closure of clubs due to gentrification, urban redevelopment, and rising rent prices (Harrison, 2024). According to CNN (Stole, 2025), Wilde Renate, a nightclub located in a shabby apartment building not far from Berghain which is known for its playful and multi-room dancefloors, is expected to close by the end of the year. Also, Watergate has remained shut since its final New Year’s Eve party, bringing an end to its 22 years as one of the most well-known electronic music venues in Europe. Although Berghain has been granted cultural status, this legal recognition does not shield it from the structural challenges facing Berlin’s nightlife.

Queer spaces in Germany are also facing increasing political pressure, especially from the growing influence of right-wing groups such as the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland). The party has repeatedly spoken out against LGBTQ+ rights and has criticized clubs like Berghain as being incompatible with their idea of national values³. In 2018, the AfD proposed that Berghain’s operating license should be withdrawn (Oltermann, 2018).

These intersecting pressures reflects a broader pattern of resistance against queer and subcultural spaces, situating Berghain as not just a nightclub, but a site of cultural defiance.

³ It is worth noting the paradox that one of the party’s most prominent leaders, Alice Weidel, is openly gay, despite the AfD’s anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and policies: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/21/lgbtq-community-in-germany-rally-against-rise-of-far-right-ahead-of-elections>

This decline of physical club spaces has implicated for queer spatial loss. Queer spaces have historically provided safe spaces, community, and opportunities for identity formation beyond mainstream society. As a minority in society, Queers often navigate limited visibility and stigmatization in daily life. In this context, Berghain offers a space for those who do not belong to mainstream norms, thus compensating for the shortcomings of the traditional social system. However, as these spaces disappear, so do the social structures that support queer belonging. Additionally, nightlife is not just recreational for queer communities, it plays a vital role in constructing “queer temporality” and enabling alternative modes of life (Halberstam, 2005).

Aim and Research Questions

As a club that is simultaneously materially grounded, symbolically loaded, and heavily mediated, Berghain offers a unique case to explore how queer resistance is articulated not only through physical practices, but also through controlled visibility, aesthetic politics, and the affective circulation of place in media cultures. Therefore, this research aims to explore the transformation of Berghain as a queer space and its role in the broader context of the commodification of queer culture and the “club death” social phenomenon. The influence of media in these processes is complex. On the one hand, it expands queer space and blurs the boundaries of physical and digital places, making queer space not fixed but fluid. On the other hand, it has reshaped Berghain’s identity, shifting it from an underground queer safe space to a globally recognized symbol of subculture. This research aims to investigate how Berghain is constructed and transformed as a mediated queer space. Focusing on its symbolic, affective, and discursive dimensions, the research explores how queer participants negotiate its meaning through digital platform practices. By exploring Berghain’s shift from an underground queer site to a commodified cultural icon, the research addresses the broader implications of queer spatial loss and resistance within the context of mediatized urban spaces. Therefore, this thesis is driven by the following research questions:

1. How is Berghain mediated as a queer space?
2. In what ways do queer participants negotiate the meanings of Berghain as a site of resistance?

The first question explores how media, narratives, and platform practices contribute to the symbolic and emotional circulation of Berghain beyond its physical location. The second question focuses on how participants and communities negotiate the meanings of Berghain as a site of queer resistance, and how they reproduce, reinterpret, or contest its significance through everyday practices and engagement across media platforms. While existing research has emphasized Berghain's spatial architecture and its role as a site of queer space, less attention has been paid to how participants and online communities actively negotiate, subvert, or reframe its spatial meaning through practices. This research seeks to address that gap.

In this research, Berghain is understood as a queer space that exists outside normative visibility and follows its own internal logic of access, secrecy, and symbolic meaning. It functions not only as a nightclub but also as a cultural space where queer resistance is enacted through controlled visibility and collective imagination. By understanding Berghain in the context of media representation, this research offers insight into how queer communities continue to assert presence and identity amid the limited visibility and availability of physical queer spaces.

The second chapter reviews key literature related to this research which situate Berghain within broader scholarly discussions. The third includes the methodological foundations of the research, including the epistemological orientation, qualitative research design, and the rationale for using Reddit discourse and semi-structured interviews as primary data. It also details the methods of data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter presents the empirical findings to answer the research question above. The final chapter will revisit the research questions and summarize the main findings, offering reflections on the implications of queer spatial transformation in the context of mediatized urban life.

Literature Review

This chapter explores key theoretical approaches to the research of mediated queer space and includes six sections. The first section situates queer space as a site of resistance, exploring how spatial belonging is negotiated and contested. The second section turns to media city theory to examine how symbolic imaginaries and infrastructural mediation shape queer space. The third and fourth analyze how digital platforms construct, regulate, and commodify queer space. The fifth and last section discuss the tension and explore emergent forms of resistance.

Queer Space: A Site of Resistance

Before turning to the transformation of Berghain as a queer space, it is essential to first understand how the term of “queer” itself operates as a resignified and contested term. Butler (1993: 169) addressed the way queer has been “refunctioned” from a term of degradation into one that carries “new and affirmative meanings”. This reveals broader dynamics of power and discursive resistance. Through “linguistic practice” (Butler, 1993: 172), the term queer has become a site of contestation against heteronormativity and can be used to explore how a queer space is constructed symbolically and socially, rather than given.

Butler’s concept of performativity (1993) is situated within a broader understanding of productive power. According to Foucault’s (1978) formulation of power, it is not simply that which prohibits, but that which generates subjectivities by bringing particular practices into discourse. In this sense, power norms do not simply constrain but also create the conditions for their own redefinition and proliferation (Foucault, 1978). Through what Butler describes as “performative rearticulation” (1993: 73), marginalized subjects have the possibility and capacity to re-enter discourse and space, reclaiming presence through repetition, affect, and community. This process aligns with “representational space” (Lefebvre, 1991), the lived and symbolic dimension of space that resists imposed spatial order. Heterosexual norms function as a “regulatory ideal” (Butler, 1993) and plays an important role in shaping the space where queer identities are performed and contested. Therefore, queer space does not exist outside of

normativity, it is related to it. The resistance inherent in queer space arises from this context: space is both structured by power and open to disruptive reimagining through embodied performance.

Queer spatial resistance not only refer to discourse or institutional critique, but is also embedded in everyday life. de Certeau (1984) proposed a form of the “poetics of everyday life”, which considers people’s “tactics” in everyday practices to understand the “strategy” overarched beneath the practices. Queer use of space in daily urban life, such as clubbing, cruising, cohabiting, can be read as tactics that against normative expectations. These lived, affective appropriations of space are not always overtly political, but they possess a quiet form of resistance grounded in the rhythm of daily life. Building on this everyday spatial resistance, Halberstam’s theory of “queer temporality” (2005: 174) has highlighted the temporal dimension of queer resistance. It emphasizes the “deliberate deviance” of temporality of queer lives: clubbing at night, resisting the life stage of capitalist heteronormativity, building community in ephemeral or marginal locations. Therefore, the resistance of queer individuals is not only focus on how normative structures are destabilized through performative acts and resignified discourse, but how do queer people resist through rejecting mainstream social logic and heteronormative timelines. These “improper” temporalities illustrate how resistance operates not only through space and discourse, but also through time (2005: 174). By placing queer lives outside the temporal logic of productivity and permanence, this development enables a more comprehensive understanding of queer space as not just a counter-site of spatial resistance, but a lived practice that disrupts both spatial and temporal norms.

However, different aspects of queer resistance reveal a paradox: it is structured by power, yet seeks to reimagine spatial logic through embodied and symbolic performance. This tension raises doubts about whether queer resistance can ever be entirely disentangled from the structures it disrupts. As Bell and Binnie (2000) argue that queer space can reproduce new forms of exclusion when institutionalized or commercialized. Duggan’s (2002) concept of “homonormativity” further explains how “assimilationist LGBTQ+ politics” reinforce dominant values such as privacy, domesticity, and consumption. In this context, even as queer space performs resistance, it may also replicate the logics it purports to subvert.

In this case, Muñoz (2009: 1) proposes queerness as a horizon rather than a destination. “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality”, he writes, positioning queer space as a utopian imaginary rather than a fixed social fact. This space is presented through aesthetic practices, affective collectivity, and performativity that resist the “here and now” of normative temporality (2009: 18). Rather than marking a resolved identity or space, queer spatial resistance becomes a mode of longing that remains structurally incomplete.

From these theories, queer space emerges as fluid, both emotionally and temporally, and is shaped through everyday practices. It is not merely a counter-space to heteronormativity, but a dynamic site of negotiation, structured by power and sustained through affect, community, and futurity, which Muñoz (2009) links to queer desire and the imagination of open possibilities. Building on the understanding of queer space as a site of resistance, the following section explores how media contribute to the spatial politics surrounding queer expression.

Media, City and Imaginaries

“(Social) space is a (social) product”, (Lefebvre 1991[1974]: 1). This raises a question: is the city we inhabit a purely physical environment, or a space that is constantly made and remade? To understand the city as a social construct rather than a neutral space, Lefebvre (1991: 33) proposed a triadic model to examine space as both material and symbolic from three dimensions: *Spatial practice*, which refers to the physical and everyday routines that organize how people move through and use space; *Representations of space*, which are the official, planned, and often institutional ways of conceptualizing and organizing space; *representational spaces*, which describe how people personally and emotionally experience space through memory, feelings, and imagination. This research goes along the third aspect, which allows us to see how affective imaginaries, identity, and everyday life interact with urban forms. However, such analysis must also include practices and the underlying power relations that shape them.

The emergence of digital media has further complicated the relationship between space, representation, and practice. McQuire (2008: 1) claims that “social life in the twenty-first

century is increasingly lived in media cities”. His concept of “media city” argues that digital technologies, such as screens, networks, infrastructures, are no longer external tools but have deeply embedded in the perceptual logics and spatial rhythms of urban life. This embeddedness is not only technological but also experiential: the presence of media shapes how people see, feel, and inhabit space. Schulz (2004: 88-89) offers a complementary perspective by identifying four processes through which media actively contribute to social change: *extension*, *substitution*, *amalgamation*, and *accommodation*. These processes describe how media reshape social life by expanding communication capacities, replacing traditional functions, integrating into everyday routines, and prompting behavioral adaptation. Therefore, cities become both technologically and affectively mediated, which is not simply a networked upgrade to the physical city, but a “lived experience” of social space (McQuire, 2008).

This transformation has led scholars to reconsider how spatial belonging is constructed. While early cultural geography has paid more attention to everyday “environmental experience” as a foundation for place-making (Seamon, 1979: 15; Tuan, 1977: v) and human’s *dasein* (existence) rooted in spaces (Relph, 1976: 40), today’s mediated environments require a more dynamic understanding of how space is performed and felt. In rethinking the new senses of “human” and “material” in spaces (Thrift, 2005: 231), Thrift (2007) proposes a non-representational approach that emphasizes the practices, affective, and performative dimensions of urban life. For example, Instagram users capture their views of daily urban life by taking and sharing pictures, adding filters and effects of cities, thus aestheticizing everyday moments (Boy, J.D. & Uitermark, J., 2017). These selective and emotional urban experiences show how media transforms the city into a symbolic and affective narrative.

Media not only reshape how space is perceived, but how it is imagined and socially performed. Building on these affective forms of spatial mediation, recent scholars have turned to the question of how publics imagine, narrate, and practice shared urban spaces through digital platforms. Media is understood as a “practice of place-making” (Couldry & McCarthy, 2004), structuring how people construct shared meanings around places. Papacharissi (2015) further expands on this through the theory of “affective publics”; networked communities are not formed solely on shared content, but by shared affective investments. These publics do not only

consume or represent space, they perform it through digital participation, storytelling, and emotionally narratives. In this sense, media platforms do not simply document the city but are central in generating urban imaginaries: the shared symbolic understandings of what urban places are, and what they mean.

This process often occurs through what Taylor (2004) defines as “social imaginaries”; the collectively held understandings that shape how people imagine their social existence. These imaginaries do not require physical co-presence, but are carried through “images, stories, and legends” (2004: 23). Digital platforms such as Reddit, which this research focuses on, is described as a “participatory culture platform” (Massanari, 2015: 7), thus promoting imaginaries through user-generated discourse, collective memory, and subcultural performance. These imaginaries are powerful when they center on spaces that are emotionally charged, culturally significant, or politically contested. These imaginaries could be also described as what Lefebvre (1991) calls “representational spaces”. They are not official or planned spaces, but affective spaces created through communal symbols and practices. Unlike top-down representations of space, these imaginaries emerge from the bottom-up, rooted in shared emotion and subcultural narration.

However, participation in these mediated spaces is not equally distributed. McQuire (2016: 91) criticizes the straightforward correlation between media and participation, and encourages a re-evaluation of participation instead of using it as a “zeitgeist buzzword”. As he argues:

Participation is neither given nor unitary. Public space is always a striated, contested zone with both visible and invisible barriers. For this reason, participation in public space has always had to be thought on a variety of levels [...] All these factors combine to influence a person’s or group’s sense of belonging or not belonging in a public space [...] (McQuire, 2016: 94)

Platformed cultures, as described by Massanari (2015), expose the barriers within public space in the media realm. For example, the platform architecture of Reddit centers on upvotes, downvotes, karma points, and community moderation (2015: 3-5), which amplifies certain voices and norms while marginalizing others, highlighting how digital spaces are not neutral

stages but structured environments that shape participation and identity through both algorithmic and community norms.

Therefore, the intersection of media and the city must be understood as a site of tension and negotiation. As Brown (2003: 188) reminds us, “everyday life presents us not with phenomenology’s reduction of the world to consciousness, but with consciousness reconceived as something dispersed throughout the material world”. The mediated city is not just seen or used, instead, it is built through everyday practices of living, resisting, and negotiating. This complexity is crucial for understanding how queers engage with space not only physically but symbolically and emotionally. Before studying how queer spatial imaginaries are produced and performed on platforms like Reddit, it is necessary to understand the media city as a communicative construction that is sustained not through its buildings, but through its narratives, practices, and shared imaginaries.

Platformed Queer Identity and Belonging

If queer space is created through performance and affect, then queer identity must also be understood as a negotiated and contested construct. In the digital era, it is significant to consider “mediated identity”. Similar to the term “mediated city”, the mediated identity is also related to how subjectivities are seen, shared, and shaped. Therefore, this research needs to explore the role digital platforms play in this process, which not only host expressions of queer identity, but also shape affect and culture.

Media platforms produce a way to archive and co-create collective memories, all the non-linear queer narratives constitute the history of the queer community. This built a form of “co-creativity sponsored explicitly by digital interactivity” (Cover, 2017: 133), and provides a connection between the individual and the collective community, which also leads to the constitution of queer identity: to expand available discourses through collective archiving. As Ahmed (2004: 9) argues about “the sociality of emotions”, emotions are not simply personal states but are socially mediated forms of orientation that shape how bodies are directed toward

or away from particular objects or communities. On Reddit, these orientations are reflected through community expectations, moderation rules, and user-generated metrics like upvotes and karma points. In this context, the act of self-presentation is rarely neutral. As Goffman (1990) demonstrates by his detailed analyses of social interaction, rather than simply expressing identity, individuals adjust their behavior to maintain their belonging within groups. Hence, queer users often modify their expressions in response to the gaze of both community and algorithm, which is not only an expressive choice but also an adaptive tactic to navigate the “vulnerability” in digital storytelling (Vivienne, 2016).

Therefore, the formation of identity on platforms is not simply about visibility. Online expressions of queerness are often subjected to platformed publics that demand coherence, legibility, and affective appeal. This tension reflects a broader dilemma in Warner’s discussion of counterpublics: “the context of publicness must be available” (2002: 63). Discourses created by marginalized groups must navigate the tension between intimate, embodied forms of expression and the requirements of circulating within broader publics. On Reddit, queer subreddits may offer discursive freedom, but they also develop their own normative pressures about what counts as “authentically queer”. On visual platforms like Instagram, this is particularly visible in the promotion of queer content that fit stylized aesthetics: lip-syncing drag performances, rainbow-themed decorations, or humorous coming-out videos. As Abidin and Cover (2019) suggest, the visibility of queer creators is shaped by platform norms and cultural expectations, which tend to privilege emotionally resonant and familiar personal narratives. Hence, more politicized, complex, or marginal expressions of queerness may be rendered less visible.

This phenomenon reflects what Barns (2020) terms “platform urbanism”, which describes how digital platforms not only support but also actively reshape urban life through the transformation of discourses, practices, and materialities. Media platforms operate as affective infrastructures. They filter visibility, sort content through algorithmic and communal mechanisms, and reward emotional scripts that align with platform cultures. As Couldry and Hepp (2017: 14) argue, under conditions of deep mediatization, media are not just about the digital revolution but are increasingly shape “the basic building-blocks of social life”. Instagram

and Reddit do not simply archive stories about Berghain; they build the frameworks through which those stories are told and interpreted. Thus, the production of urban meaning depends not only on physical infrastructure, but through symbolic and affective codes enabled by digital platforms (Barns, 2020).

Therefore, Berghain becomes a hybrid space (De Souza e Silva, 2006) where physical spaces and digital networks intersect, shaped by interactions on media platforms. These media practices together produce a mediated sense of the club's identity. The way people feel about Berghain, and even the range of feelings they consider appropriate to express, is shaped by how these platforms structure visibility and emotion. But this does not mean that queer identity on platforms is entirely overdetermined by structure. One case comes from the Rainbow Family Tree project, an online community for queer storytellers (Vivienne, 2016: 62-63). By sharing a personal story that redefines the meaning of family, queer individuals assert their identities outside heteronormative frameworks. As Vivienne (2016) notes, such storytelling becomes a form of "everyday activism" that gradually "reshap[es] social norms" over time. Although they may not circulate widely in mainstream media, they increased affective publics that validated complex experiences of queerness.

Still, even these counter-narratives might be affected by the same tensions they resist. As Hall and Du Gay (1996) reminds us, identity is always a site of articulation, a temporary closure in an ongoing struggle over meaning. On media platforms, queer identity is neither fully free nor fully constrained, it is negotiated at the intersection of interface, affect, and discourse. This intersection is deeply shaped by the conditions of platformed visibility, which mediate the symbolic value of identity. These dynamics expose the fragility of queer belonging in the digital era. It is fluid, shaped by platforms, publics, and the everyday practices of narration.

Commodification and the Club Death

To develop a comprehensive understanding of contemporary forms of queer resistance, it is of importance to explore current tensions within queer culture in their broader sociocultural and

media context. Queer identities and spaces have always maintained a contested relationship with mainstream norms, but in recent years, this relationship has become increasingly shaped by the logic of visibility and commodification.

Such a transformation can be understood through what Zukin (2010) describes as the “authenticity” of cities. Zukin approaches authenticity from two perspectives: *origins* and *new beginnings*. Due to commodification and the cultural forces driven by media and consumer demand, the meaning of authenticity has shifted. It is no longer rooted in its origins but increasingly associated with styles. In her discussion of the production of “authentic Brooklyn cool,” Zukin (2010: 35-62) explains how newcomers such as artists, writers, and actors constructed new images of neighborhoods through media. This process produced a “new authenticity” that promoted the city and transformed it from a local community into a globally recognized site of cultural consumption.

If we apply Zukin’s analysis of urban authenticity to the case of Berghain, a similar dynamic becomes apparent. Berghain, once a marginal space of queer and techno, has been reimagined as a stylized symbol within global circuits of cultural consumption. The concept of “capitalist realism”, proposed by Fisher (2009: 15) explains this dynamic. He discusses the generational shift following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, noting how the repetition of “older gestures of rebellion and contestation” has led to a condition in which “alternative” and “independent” cultures no longer exist outside the mainstream, but rather become dominant stylistic modes within it.

As Banet-Weiser (2012: 118) further argues, “illegality” can be seen as a key marker of “authenticity” within subcultural branding. The profitability of certain subcultures stems from their internal contradictions: they are rooted in the discourses of marginalized communities while simultaneously maintaining a “legitimate” position within contemporary culture. This tension renders them both subversive and iconic. Queer resistance once associated with subcultural autonomy and spatial marginality, is now often framed as narratives of inclusivity, pleasure, and diversity on media platforms. Such dynamics are amplified in the context of the increasing numbers of media platforms, where cultural expressions become content, and spaces

become symbols. This phenomenon aligns with Massanari's (2015) critique of "platformed cultures", where algorithmic and communal norms shape who gets seen and what kinds of content are rewarded.

The shift in the meaning of authenticity risks turning spaces that were once rich in emotional connections and everyday queer experiences into what Augé (1995) calls the "non-place," where spaces lose relational, historical, and identity-based meanings, becoming "interchangeable zones of transit and consumption". In the gentrification context, queer clubs are captured as non-places not because they are neutral, but because their symbolic meanings are repurposed as urban spectacle. The transformation of queer nightlife into cultural landmarks or trending destinations risks reducing their capacity for resistance and collectivity.

Additionally, this tension is further complicated by broader urban processes of restructuring. The term Clubsterben ("club death") is used to describe a phenomenon in Berlin and beyond, where an increasing number of clubs have been closing in recent years, where gentrification and neoliberal urban policies systematically threaten the survival of nightlife spaces (Harrison, 2024). Thinking beyond the physical loss of space, Butler (1993) reminds us that queer embodiment is not merely discursive but fundamentally spatial. As these spaces diminish, the conditions necessary for sustaining queer presence in society reduce too. The decline of nightlife is not simply about the disappearance of entertainment, but signifies the erosion of infrastructures through which non-normative life is imagined, felt, and lived.

From Embodied Practices to Digital Acts

Queer activism has long emerged through embodied practices of spatial disruption and community-building. As Brown (2007) documents in his ethnography of the Queeruption network, rather than conforming to claims of "equal rights," these networks advocate for anti-assimilationist politics and reject the commodification of queer identity. Queeruptors in this network do not critique or seek to be included in dominant institutions. Instead, they reframe queerness as a relational process, enacted through acts of social autonomy, affective labor, and

shared space-making (Brown, 2007: 2687-2688). This focus on actively creating alternative modes of being aligns with what Habibi (2020: 45-47) describes as “subtle resistance”. In his study of creative collectives in Southeast Asia, many queer artists and activists practice micro-level interventions that challenge dominant narratives without necessarily claiming obvious political space. These include planning ambiguous performances, creating low-visibility zines, or producing digital art that disappears quickly after posting. Such acts may not resemble conventional forms of activism, but they constitute everyday practices of resistance enacted in conditions of structural vulnerability (Scott, 1985).

These forms of subtle resistance are not limited to physical spaces. They are also reflected in digital storytelling. Bao (2018) explores how queer users post poetic or symbolic narratives about longing, displacement, or coded affection in order to avoid strict censorship while still expressing resistance and solidarity. Abidin and Cover (2019) examine how queer microcelebrities on YouTube engage in discursive activism by negotiating visibility, authenticity, and labor. Through everyday content such as coming out videos and personal storytelling, these influencers challenge heteronormative expectations while remaining embedded in platform norms and audience demands. These “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984) are effective in circulating alternative narratives, operating beyond a simplistic binary of visibility and invisibility.

Resistance in digital queer cultures often takes place in spaces that are visible to those who understand the signals, but subtle enough to avoid censorship or control. These are not spaces of autonomy, but embedded within platform architectures governed by external norms and proprietary algorithms. As de Certeau (1984: 37) suggests, tactics operate within systems they do not control, acting opportunistically as they “must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by a law of a foreign power.” Queer digital practices reflect this logic. Without control over the platforms they inhabit, users rely on improvisation and ambiguous visibility to assert presence. Their interventions may be temporary or fragmentary, but they disrupt normative scripts, inscribing alternative meanings into digital space.

Reimaginative Resistance

As discussed above, the social imaginaries of queer space continue to evolve even when physical access is restricted, commodification threatens its existence, or its cultural aura is mediated by digital platforms. In this context, queer resistance examined in this research is conceptualized as a form of reimaginative resistance. To sharpen the conceptual grounding of reimaginative resistance, this concept draws on but reconfigures Gendler's (2000) notion of "imaginative resistance". Gendler identifies a puzzling phenomenon in which readers willingly engage with fantastical or logically incoherent fictional scenarios such as time travel, but often resist imagining morally deviant claims as fictionally true. This resistance, she argues, is less about cognitive impossibility and more about the unwillingness to adopt perspectives that violate deeply held moral intuitions. Thus, imagination occupies an unstable space between supposition and belief, revealing a tacit ethics embedded in acts of narrative engagement.

This research reorients that puzzle into a media-sociocultural context where the imaginative becomes not something withheld, but something reclaimed. Rather than rejecting moral deviance within fiction, reimaginative resistance refers to the symbolic and affective remaking of space in response to spatial loss, exclusion, or commodification. While imaginative resistance marks a refusal to inhabit problematic narratives ("I cannot or will not imagine this to be right"), reimaginative resistance marks a refusal to accept dominant spatial imaginaries as inevitable: "I will imagine otherwise." This understanding aligns with Giesecking's (2020) analysis that queer space is often produced through informal practices of remembering and reattaching. Her work supports the idea that spatial resistance can emerge not through direct opposition alone, but through the symbolic reconstruction of space as emotionally and historically meaningful. This shift in resistance is especially salient in mediated queer spatial contexts like Berghain's mythologized image, where queers refuse or remediate the space through situated practices.

More importantly, reimaginative resistance is not just about memory or critique. It entails the creative transformation of cultural codes through mediated forms that challenge the hegemonic frames through which space is perceived and valued. In contrast to Gendler's focus on ethical

discomfort within fictional narrative, reimaginative resistance engages real-world representational regimes and reframes platformed users not as passive readers, but as active producers of alternative spatial imaginaries. In this case, van Dijk's (2007: 21) concept of mediated memories offers an important lens to reconsider the relationship between memory and media. She argues that individuals use media to "create and re-create a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others". In this shifting landscape, resistance, which has long embedded within queer spatial practices, migrating into affective rituals, digital traces, and embodied acts.

Additionally, in highly regulated spaces like Berghain, where photography is banned, entry is tightly controlled, and aesthetic codes filter participation. Because of that, queer resistance often shifts into the digital realm, where spatial exclusions are contested through visible acts of critique, witness and counter-narration. Following van Dijk's (2007) discussion of mediated memory, these online practices do more than remember lost spaces, but also actively reimagine queer futurity through archives, hashtags, memes, and networked rituals. Smith's (2020) idea of "spatial poetics" helps clarify how symbolic gestures such as memes, the archiving of club aesthetics, or ironic contents, take apart the usual meaning of signs and reshape them to make their own voices heard.

This shift from spatial tactic to digital declaration complicates the assumptions of "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1985: 29), which requires access to lived urban textures. In this research, where physical access is restricted, digital platforms become the available stage for many queers to perform dissent, irony, or refusal. It results in a more stylized mode of resistance. Therefore, queer resistance does not disappear; it transforms. As Cvetkovich (2003: 8) observes, when dominant culture offers only silence or homophobic representations, queer individuals turn to memory and personal experience to construct archives that preserve both personal and collective histories. This turn to memory functions not as nostalgia, but as an active refusal to forget, a rejection of erasure, and a means of sustaining presence. In this context, reimaginative resistance becomes a crucial practice. It resists the loss of space by reconstructing narratives, affective traces, and cultural values that maintain queer visibility and belonging within structured environments.

Methodology and Methods

Methodological Approach

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to investigate how queer space is constructed and imagined across digital platforms. The core of this research is oriented toward understanding meaning-making as a situated and socially embedded process through “observing, describing, interpreting, and analyzing the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them” (Bazeley, 2013: 4).

The methodological foundation of this approach is interpretivism, which holds that knowledge is dialogically produced, shaped by positionality, language, and cultural frames. It rejects the positivist view of a single, knowable reality, instead, knowledge has been seen as partial and situated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the context of queer research, this is particularly important, because queer methodologies aim to understand “how and in what way ‘queer’ might operate in concert with social science methodologies and methods” (Nash, 2010: 2), especially those that render non-normative experiences illegible. Thus, a qualitative framework provides the flexibility to engage with queer spatiality not as a fixed object of analysis, but as a field of ongoing negotiation.

Additionally, this approach enables affect to be analyzed as structured, situated practice. As Ahmed (2004) argues, emotions “stick” to bodies and signs through histories of contact, making affective discourse a key site where meaning is produced and circulated through repetition and association. The reason to focus on such narratives is that queer spaces emerge not through stable symbols but through moving, recursive acts of narration. In this case, qualitative inquiry is not just a technical choice but a theoretical one. By exploring queer narratives both in physical sites and within mediated contexts, this research aligns with queer theory’s critique of coherence, its attention to the temporal, and spatial complexities of lived experience (Halberstam, 2005).

Digital ethnography was chosen as a core methodological framework because it allows for the investigation of cultural practices in digitally mediated spaces without isolating “the digital” from everyday life. In this case, digital ethnography offers a way to explore “an embedded,

embodied, everyday Internet” (Hine, 2015: 23). Lamerichs (2018) suggests a hybrid method that situates online platforms and the results of digital ethnography within the context of offline spaces. In this research, which combines online communities and physical spaces, this approach enables a deeper understanding of the “rich and social space[s] of production” (2018: 58). Moreover, platformed cultures situate narrative and affect within the specific affordances and algorithmic norms of media platforms, thereby placing media in a “broader context” (Bazeley, 2013: 6). Therefore, the digital is not seen as a reflection of reality, but as a place-making force which can influence reality. Reddit, for example, is not merely a platform for discourse; it is a structure that shapes discourse and spatial imaginaries through its norms and practices.

Digital ethnography provides a flexible and adaptive approach (Hine, 2015) has the potential to “enable more collaborative and open-ended ethnographic work/writing—across time, space, generations, and cultures” (Fortun. M, Fortun. K & Marcus in Hjorth et al. 2017: 13). In studying Reddit as a discursive platform, the researcher does not assume a fixed location or stable identity for users, but rather approaches each thread as a dynamic site of narrative construction and symbolic negotiation. This perspective enables researchers to directly engage with marginalized voices (Harding, 2008), which can reveal “juxtapositions of social contexts” that may otherwise be obscured (Marcus, 1995: 110). In addition to ethnographic methods, this research incorporates semi-structured interviews as the second method. According to Kvale (1994: 3), semi-structured interviews are especially appropriate for research that aims to “seek nuggets of essential meaning,” enabling researchers to understand the world from the subjects’ perspective and uncover the meanings embedded in their lived experiences. In this research, interviews allow for deeper engagement with participants’ perceptions of Berghain, platformed discourse, and spatial belonging. They provide the space for participants to articulate affective investments and subjective positions that may not be readily legible in platform discourse alone.

Both methods are guided by what Flyvbjerg (2001) terms “phronetic research”, which means research that is context-sensitive, reflexive, and concerned with practical reasoning. By combining digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews, this approach moves beyond text analysis or audience studies alone toward a layered methodology that attends to discourse, affect, and mediation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of mediated queer

spatiality.

Data Collection and Samplings

The empirical foundation of this research consists of two core datasets: a corpus of user-generated content from Reddit and a series of semi-structured interviews with queer individuals. This multi-source strategy allows for a multi-layered understanding of how Berghain, as a mediated queer space, is imagined and negotiated across both collective discourse and personal testimony. Following the qualitative orientation of this research, “concrete cases” are used (Flyvbjerg, 2001) to generate insight into place-making and to compensate for the absence of visual material.

Reddit was chosen as a primary site of inquiry due to its affordances for long-form storytelling and community moderation. As Kozinets (2010) notes in his formulation of “netnography,” online communities generate not only social relationships but also symbolic worlds, which can be studied ethnographically. The subreddit *r/Berghain_Community* and adjacent threads offer a rich archive of commentary around Berghain. To collect relevant data, a keyword search for “queer” was conducted within the subreddit *r/Berghain_Community*, focusing on posts published between 2023 and 2025. From this initial pool, 10 posts related to queer space that had a large number of comments were selected, in total 1278 comments. Comments of each post were then sorted by “top” (based on upvotes), and the comments were manually reviewed. Longer comments with high upvote counts, along with the replies they received, were prioritized for selection. This process yielded a final dataset of 190 comments engaged with themes such as queerness, spatial belonging, exclusion, disappointment, anticipation, and resistance. All selected posts were manually copied into a Word document, with metadata noted for each, including the time since posting, the post text, and all associated comments.

It is important to note that Reddit’s anonymous culture shaped the nature of the data. Unlike platforms highly connected to identity performance, Reddit allows users to generate emotionally complex and normatively ambiguous discourse. This environment enabled the

study to access expressions of queer genuine personal feelings that might be muted or stylized elsewhere. At the same time, the anonymity also necessitated critical scrutiny: user statements cannot be treated as an entirely authentic expression but must be read as affective performances embedded in specific platform conventions. In this case, during analyzing Reddit content, attention was given not only to what was said but also to how posts were structured, responded to, and evaluated within the platform's mechanics, particularly upvoting, downvoting, and comment nesting (Massanari, 2015). Therefore, this research incorporated a layered reading of platform discourse that considered for both content and infrastructural conditioning.

In addition to Reddit data, the research also included Instagram content, which served a secondary and comparative function within the data collection. Instagram provided access to the visual aesthetics and symbolic imagery that circulate around Berghain. However, given the platform's emphasis on curated images and visibility norms, it was not treated as a site for deep ethnographic engagement, but as a supplementary source to understand the visual codes that frames queer space from the outside. Therefore, beyond the images themselves, it is also important to understand their "external" aspects, which relate to the surrounding social context (Banks, 2001). Because of that, Instagram data was not analyzed in isolation but considered alongside interviews and Reddit discourse, providing a visual counterpoint to predominantly text-based spatial imaginaries. Its inclusion helped understand how platformed visibility shape imaginaries and participation, even when direct access to space is restricted.

Another key method was semi-structured interviews with 8 self-identified queer participants between February 2025 and March 2025. The method of semi-structured interviews offers an effective way to study complex issues such as "values and understandings" and gain deeper insight of the research topic. These interviews allowed me to dig into the community and gain a valuable insight of how people experience interrelation between digital and physical environments in meaning-making (Polson, 2015). Interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted both remotely (via Zoom or mobile phone) and in person, depending on participants' availability and preference. Interviews were conducted in English or Chinese and transcribed with consent. To recruit interview participants, I posted a message titled "Looking for interviewees" on Reddit after obtaining permission from the subreddit moderators

(Appendix 3). This approach enabled access to individuals who were already engaged in discussions relevant to the research topic. In addition to the Reddit post, further participants were identified through community networks, including informal contacts within queer and club-affiliated circles. By situating Berghain within a global perspective, this combined strategy ensured a diversity of perspectives while respecting ethical considerations around anonymity and voluntary participation.

The interviews were guided by a flexible protocol that encouraged open-ended responses while covering key themes identified in the Reddit analysis. Questions focused on personal experiences and emotional connections to Berghain, perceptions of media content, and broader reflections on queer culture in urban life. Participants were invited to reflect on how their identity, politics, and media use intersect in shaping their relationship to Berghain as both a real and symbolic site. In this case, using semi-structured interviews helped the research go beyond general ideas and explore the mixed feelings and contradictions in individual story. Qualitative interviewing is not only about eliciting facts but about “gathering meaning”, especially when dealing with emotionally charged or politically sensitive topics (Kvale, 1994). This was particularly relevant in conversations about anticipation, and rejection of dominant norms through expressing belonging or alienation in platform spaces.

In terms of demographic diversity, participants ranged in age from their mid-20s to mid-30s, and included individuals of various gender identities, ethnic backgrounds, and nationalities. Also, all of them were familiar with Berghain. While not statistically representative, the sample was designed to capture each informant’s individuality, ideas and stories (Bazeley, 2013), allowing this research to explore how queer spatial imaginaries vary across lines of embodiment, affect, and access.

Thematic Analysis

To analyze the collected data from both the Reddit community and interview transcripts, this research employs an interpretive, thematic analysis framework grounded in qualitative coding.

The aim is not to impose pre-existing theoretical models onto the material, but to trace how meanings are constructed, contested, and felt across different communicative modalities.

This research faces a core methodological difficulty: how to explore the spatial construction of Berghain on social media in the absence of visual materials, due to its strict no-photo policy. To address the difficulty of adapting traditional fieldwork methods to digital environments, Postill and Pink (2012: 122) suggest that social media ethnography produces “ethnographic places” that exist across online and offline boundaries and are characterized as “collaborative, participatory, open and public”. This opens the possibility to treat Reddit threads not as secondary reflections, but as primary sites of spatial imagination and affective negotiation. Moreover, to understand the cultural meaning embedded in personal narratives, Barthes’ (1972) theory of myth conceptualizes how discourse naturalizes social meanings into shared truths. In this context, Berghain becomes a spatial myth not through visual representation but through discourse. Couldry’s (2003) notion of media as practice further anchors these discursive acts as forms of place-making. Therefore, this research adopts a twofold analytical approach: one that traces affective and narrative constructions in user discourse, and another that interprets how these collectively sustain Berghain’s symbolic presence in the absence of images.

In order to better understand the data, thematic coding analysis was chosen as the primary method in this research to find out new connections and frames among texts (Bazeley, 2013). It is well-suited to research questions that involve meaning-making, identity, and affective discourse. Also, its adaptability across data types also makes it suitable for analyzing both Reddit posts and interview transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) further emphasize that thematic analysis allows the researcher to work within a constructionist framework, which views language as actively constituting rather than passively reflecting reality. This aligns with the aim of this research to understand how queer space is imagined through discourse rather than visual documentation. The analytical process followed Braun and Clarke’s six-phase guide (2006): familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, defining and naming themes, and final write-up. Initial open coding was performed line-by-line across the full dataset, which is crucial to find the most relevant or important information. As Ochs (1979: 44) pointed out that “a more useful transcript is a more selective one”. During this stage, I refrained from

interpreting or labeling emotional tone, and “privilege the participants’ own words to preserve meaning-in-context” (Rivas, 2018). After open coding, I refined the codes into themes using an iterative process involving constant comparison and memo-writing. The coding process followed a hierarchical logic, organized into themes, categories, and subcategories. Each layer was supported by detailed definitions and illustrative quotations. (Appendix 8) This structure not only offers “a structured means of organizing and interpreting qualitative data”, but also remains “open to new patterns that emerge from the field” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012: 11).

While this research engages with both Reddit and Instagram as platforms through which Berghain is mediated, the analytical emphasis is placed more heavily on Reddit. Rather than conducting systematic coding, Instagram was examined through interface exploration and references made by interviewees to its visual culture. While Berghain can be understood as a “bounded, discrete cultural entity”, this approach follows critiques of the holistic assumptions of traditional ethnography (Hine, 2015: 24). This framework emphasizes that ethnographers should trace connections and “see activities on a micro-level as manifestations of macro-level phenomena,” thereby shifting the focus toward meaning-making and practice (Hine, 2015; Marcus, 1989). In this research, Reddit provided a discursively rich environment for exploring spatial narratives and affective negotiations, while Instagram served to illustrate the visual logic and commodified imaginaries that supplement the narrative depth of Reddit.

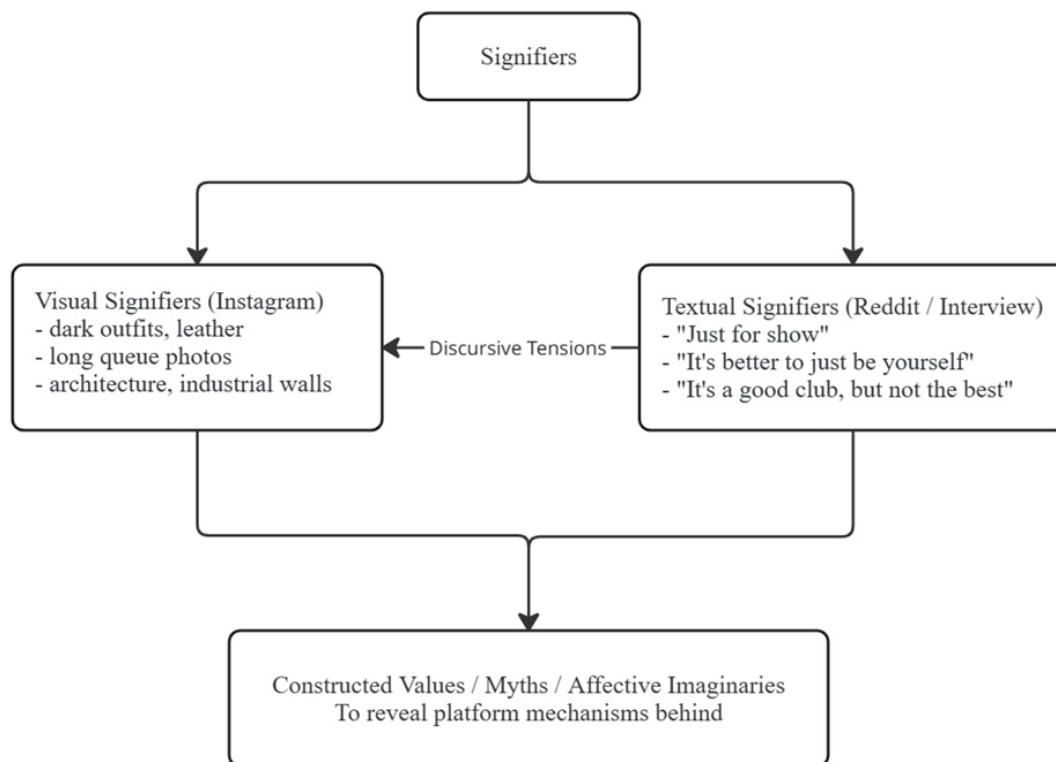


Figure 1 Platform-Based Semiotic Interactions of Myth-Making

To understand how symbolic meaning is co-produced across visual and textual registers, this research adopts a combined semiotic-discursive mapping. Informed by relational semiotic practice (Rose, 2016), Instagram posts were not analyzed in isolation but interpreted in dialogue with platform comments and interview reflections. This approach enables the identification of cross-referenced meanings, where a single image, when contextualized by discourse, reveals underlying values, norms, and cultural myths.

Ethical Considerations

This research follows established principles of ethical conduct in both digital and human-subject research, with particular attention to issues of privacy, consent, and the asymmetrical power dynamics embedded in research involving marginalized identities. All data collected from Reddit were sourced from publicly accessible threads, no private messages or restricted forums were accessed. Usernames were anonymized, and identifying details were removed or altered where necessary to prevent traceability, so that I could get more real reflections on their

engagement (Boyd, 2010). While the subreddit r/Berghain_Community is a publicly visible forum, all the data was carefully been treated as socially situated speech. All interview participants were recruited voluntarily and provided with detailed informed consent outlining the purpose, scope, and their rights (Appendix 4).

However, due to the sensitivity of the topic, many interview participants were highly cautious when discussing their experiences, particularly those related to the interior of Berghain. Some of the content involved elements such as sexuality and drugs, which many individuals are reluctant to speak about openly in everyday life. In addition, accurately describing individual experiences can be challenging, as they are often closely tied to personal emotions and embodied sensations. The emotional density and the volume of memories sometimes led to confusion or narrative fragmentation during the interviews. Queer identity and the experiences associated with it were also perceived as sensitive. Even though I tried to create a relaxed atmosphere, at least at some occasions, participants did not always perceive the interview setting as completely safe. This was especially noticeable during in-person interviews, where some of the participants spoke in lowered voices when talking about sensitive topics. To avoid causing any potential distress or discomfort, any question identified as sensitive by a participant was immediately withdrawn. During remote interviews, participants were clearly informed that they could choose not to turn on their cameras or participate via phone only if they did not feel comfortable with their picture being recorded.

Yet another ethical consideration relates to Berghain's strict privacy policy. I have personally visited Berghain, and initially intended to compensate for the lack of visual data by employing an autoethnographic approach, using diaries and narrative descriptions to reconstruct the experience. However, this strategy risked violating the club's cultural norms, which emphasize discretion and the protection of embodied experience from external representation. Moreover, by sharing my subjective encounter with the club and transform into a research artifact, I risked positioning myself as part of the mainstream culture that seeks to consume and define Berghain from the outside. Therefore, I chose to refrain from incorporating personal experiences and instead, in addition to the collected empirical data, rely upon publicly accessible narratives and mediated representations.

Reflection

Although this research was grounded in a deliberate methodological design that combined digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews, several limitations became evident throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

One notable limitation of this research is the absence of visual materials, caused by two main factors. The first reason is the decision to prioritize Reddit over Instagram, which created an uneven engagement with platforms. While both platforms are included in the digital ethnography, Instagram served primarily as a comparative site for examining the commodification and visual production of Berghain's mythos. The limited depth of visual platform analysis meant that the relationship between visual signifiers and symbolic meanings could not be fully developed. The second reason is Berghain's no-photo policy, which prevents the circulation of visual records from inside the club, creating a gap in traditional visual ethnographic data. As Bates and Rhys-Taylor (2017: 2) argue, "understanding the sensory experience of the city is crucial to understanding urban life," yet in this case, such sensory cues are not directly available. To address this, the research focused on symbolic constructions and affective imaginaries, turning to narrative and commentary as primary data. Moores (2012), extending Morley's theory for a non-media-centric approach, argues that spatial knowledge is grounded in how bodies dwell in mediated environments not only through visual representation, but also through movement and affect. The decision to fill this gap with discourse rather than visual material was not only practical but also methodological. However, this inevitably limited the capacity to perform what Kusenbach (2003) terms "more-than-digital contexts".

Another limitation of this research is the absence of long-term, sustained engagement with the online communities under study, which was not possible considering the timeframe for this research. While the digital ethnography component included extensive observation and close reading of Reddit threads, the lack of ongoing interaction with users and persistent participation within the community limits the depth of contextual understanding and trust-building. Through sustained engagement with both digital platforms and physical environments, researchers can

observe how everyday digital routines become socially and emotionally meaningful (Postill & Pink, 2012: 127). This limitation was partially addressed by complementing digital observations with in-depth interviews, which allowed for deeper contextualization of user experiences and discursive patterns. Moreover, close thematic analysis of high-engagement Reddit community threads helped mitigate the absence of direct interaction. While the lack of prolonged ethnographic presence remains a constraint, the multi-method approach ensured interpretive richness across data sources by tracing meaning-making across platforms and practices (Hine, 2015).

Analysis

The name “Berghain” fuses the Western district Kreuzberg with the eastern district Friedrichshain, symbolizing its hybrid identity after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Emerging from a quasi-anarchic society, Berghain has gradually become a symbol of political disorder and an ideal of freedom. As Aria, one of the interviewees, described, the place naturally grew into a queer space because its origins and atmosphere already matched what many in the queer community are looking for in a safe space today. Since it used to be a gay club, that history helped shape its identity. Nowadays, as Berghain’s fame extended beyond Berlin’s local scene, its identity as an urban space has become increasingly mediated, circulating as fragmented symbols within broader imaginaries. Following the themes that emerged in the interviews and Reddit community, this chapter is divided into three parts. The first and second sections explore how Berghain is constructed as an exclusive queer space; the third and fourth sections investigate how this space is mediated and shaped by different media platforms; the last section discusses how queers engage in spatial practices that not only reflect but also reimagine what Berghain means as a queer space.

Material and Symbolic Dimensions of Berghain

Luna wore almost no makeup when going to Berghain, only a line of eyeliner. On the train ride there, she unwrapped a piece of chocolate and took a sip of beer by habit, fueling herself in advance. Berghain stands as a massive, grey industrial building housed within the ruins of a former Soviet Union thermal power station, with an inconspicuous entrance. “It’s been a while since I last went,” she said. “I miss it.” Like most regulars, she could easily recall the spatial details of Berghain: the towering concrete architecture, the deafening electronic music, the winding corridors, and the diversity of people inside. “You can see everything in there,” she added.

From its simple exterior, it is hard to imagine the atmosphere inside, which many visitors describe as full of freedom and secrecy. But for my interviewees, it is a space that feels deeply

familiar, almost like home. This sense of what Massey (1994: 3) calls “a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” shows that spatial production is never singular; it emerges through multiple spatialities, each experienced differently depending on one’s social position, identity, and practices. This process of place-making is deeply entangled with the queer bodies, performances, and narratives that circulate within and around the Berghain space.

The narratives surrounding Berghain are deeply connected to media representations. Its mediated presence often precedes and shapes people’s expectations, even before they cross its barrier. “But everything on media looks the same,” Luna sighed. She did not understand why, despite Berghain offering so many unique and interesting experiences, what persisted in the media such as newspapers was always the same narrow image. She used the word “demonized” to describe how media outlets tend to portray the club. “People already have this fixed idea in their heads, so when they finally get inside, they think, ‘Ah, it really is like that’. But that’s only a part of Berghain.” Luna’s frustration illustrates how mainstream narratives often flatten the complexity of Berghain. Mainstream media, such as newspapers, tend to rely on “mimesis” (Lefebvre, 1991: 376), repeating familiar and easily consumable content which ultimately, in this case, seems to reduce Berghain to a “non-place” (Augé, 1995), emptied of lived experience, historical depth, and affective presence. Berghain is often portrayed as a dark, exclusive space of raw energy, freedom, and the recurring tropes about hedonism distinguished from “reality”. Meanwhile, on social media platforms, representations take a different but equally reductive form. Rather than focusing on the club’s subcultural meanings, users often describe Berghain in terms of its fame and mystery. Discussions frequently center around the long queue outside the entrance or the outfits of the waiting crowd.

Besides media narratives, it is the regulars who most actively contribute to the production of Berghain as a meaningful place. One of the most enduring forces among the community is oral storytelling. As de Certeau (1984: 120) discusses:

Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice. It allows an effect of displacement and of transformation: the narration creates a displacement; it changes the temporal and spatial coordinates of the space being told. In the telling, it produces a different

place, no longer measurable by geometric lines.

This conceptual displacement, proposed by de Certeau, is useful to understanding how Berghain exists not just at its physical address, but also in the thousands of subjective versions that circulate across geographical boundaries through telling and retelling. Aria recalls first hearing about Berghain was from a friend after moving to Berlin. For Aria, they only felt a sense of belonging when in Berlin, even though they had lived in several countries before. When talking about the reason to this, “This place is crazy, but in a good way.” They spoke of finding people to talk with, to paint with, to dance with. “I wasn’t seen as an outsider or someone strange anymore.” Unlike the way Berghain is often portrayed in the media, many visitors described getting to know the space through specific embodied experiences. They spoke of how the ice cream no longer tasted the same, how ticket prices had increased, and how certain decorations had disappeared while new ones had quietly taken their place. They recalled the friends they had made inside over the years, and the conversations that shaped their nights. Such “being-in-place” (Casey, 1996) shows that places are not abstract locations, but are made meaningful through sensory experience and bodily presence. Visitors do not just enter a space; they become part of it and construct a personal and affective sense of place through this process. Across interviews, such accounts were common. Whether through emotional connections or social interactions, many participants described Berghain not only as a club, but as a lived and remembered environment which tied to a feeling of familiarity and belonging.

These narratives, I argue, create spatial knowledge without physical presence, thus form what could be called a narrative imaginary: a shared vision of space that is accessed through language and emotion rather than entry and movement. Media and personal narratives form multiple layers in the spatial construction of Berghain. Together, they produce a space beyond a fixed location on the map.

Berghain as a Heterotopia

As previously discussed, place-making at Berghain is embodied, involving the development of

bodily, sensuous, practical knowing (Thrift, 2007: 121). The architecture of Berghain itself plays a deep role in shaping the embodied experience of space. Sara described that once they walked into Berghain, it felt as if all the ordinary streets and storefronts outside had disappeared. Inside, the “blackened world” seemed to belong to another dimension. This sudden spatial rupture reflects what Foucault (1986: 24) calls a heterotopia: a real place that exists within society and “simultaneously represent, contest, and invert all the other real sites” in a culture.

Many interviewees recall their entry into Berghain in terms of sensory disruption. One example of this rupture lies in its temporal structure. Berghain often opens late on Friday night and remains open continuously until early Monday morning. This extended temporal duration suspends normative life schedules and blurs the boundaries between night and day, which reflects what Halberstam (2005) describes as “queer temporality”. Within this framework, time at Berghain unfolds through bodies and feelings, rather than clocks. In this context, the embodied place-making of Berghain can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: architecture, sound, and lived experiences. Together, these embodied impressions dissolve conventional boundaries of social roles and identities, and set the stage for what follows inside. Sara, who was assigned female at birth, identifies as non-binary, and feels more aligned with masculinity, described how they stayed for the whole weekend at Berghain, dancing, sweating, and only wearing underwear. When I asked whether being allowed to wear only underwear was part of what made them feel free, they replied, “No, it’s that you can wear something, or nothing, or anything you want. Everyone else was doing their own thing. No one was judging.” Such practices rely on Berghain’s strict no-photography policy, which people described as a key to the experience. Without cameras, people feel less pressure about their appearance or being captured in images. In Berghain, memories are private, not staged. The no-photo policy can be understood as a “ritual of erasure,” allowing people to enter a space free from external identity markers.

As identity markers almost disappear inside Berghain, the symbolic weight of social roles also fades. For my interviewees, this lack of emphasis on identity provides a sense of safety that feels closely connected to freedom. As what Goffman (1990) described as the “front stage” of identity performance, queers in particular often feel pressure to make themselves

understandable in specific ways, matching their identity with visible and accepted appearances or practices. During the conversation with Aria, they recalled a time in their early years when gender seemed clearer, at least on the surface. They identified as male and, because they were attracted to men, naturally assumed they must be gay. However, each space seemed to carry its own “social code”. When they entered gay male spaces, hoping to find connection and belonging, the fit felt off. In contrast, Berghain offers a different experience, people do not need to be clearly read or recognized through familiar categories. Instead of being placed into a fixed image, people are more often seen as individuals, and their actions are understood as coming from themselves rather than from any assigned identity. As Butler (2006 [1990]) suggests, some spaces allow identity to be experienced not as something stable or scripted, but as something that can fall apart or be put aside, even if only temporarily.

Additionally, Berghain seen as a heterotopia is arguably regulated through “a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (Foucault, 1986: 26). The door policy is the most well-known rule of Berghain. Therefore, it is important to understand the broader rule system of Berghain as a heterotopia. Place-making around Berghain begins with waiting. I would like to contend that the long queue outside the club is a performative space where symbolic belonging is negotiated through aesthetic and affective codes. As Luna explained, “The assessment process begins even before people step inside. It starts as soon as they approach Berghain and enter the bouncer’s line of sight.” People tend to control their behavior once they approach that zone, which marks not only the start of a spatial transition, but of a bodily transformation. For example, it is better not to laugh loudly or keep scrolling on your phone, since these actions might show that you are not a “regular”. These adjustments reveal how Berghain’s queue operates as a space of anticipatory performance, where inclusion depends on the ability to express belonging through both aesthetics and affect.

Unlike classical heterotopias, such as cemeteries or theatres, whose spatial boundaries are quite clear and definitely ceremonial, Berghain’s heterotopia is created by what I refer to as “strategic ambiguity”. The more unclear the standard for entry, the more naturalized the logic of exclusion becomes. This filtering system produces a form of soft spatial control through aesthetic and affective codes. In this way, even though Berghain does not follow the mainstream social order,

it also does not invert it, as Foucault suggests some heterotopias do. Instead, it creates its own distinct spatial logic. This logic is not only related to club culture, but also deeply embedded in queer-coded practices of belonging and recognition. The door policy acts as a selection system not only between inside and outside, but in deciding who seems to “belong” within a specific queer cultural framework. The representation of this system is perhaps most famously embodied in the figure of Sven Marquardt, who is the celebrity bouncer of Berghain. His distinctive appearance, such as facial tattoos, leather attire, and cold expression has turned him into a performative embodiment of Berghain’s ethos. Far from only being a bouncer, Marquardt can also be seen as a gatekeeper of aesthetic alignment. He does not just enforce rules, but also curates an atmosphere, filtering not just who may enter but what kinds of cultural codes are permitted inside. His image circulates widely media, reinforcing Berghain’s mythos of exclusivity while also commodifying its aura, even if this may not have been his original intention. It reveals a limitation behind this system: these codes might become “subcultural capital” (Thornton, 1995: 11). Many first-time visitors, particularly tourists, would shop at Berlin vintage stores before going to Berghain, hoping to blend in with regulars. These acts can be understood as performances through which people perform closeness to the imagined community of regulars, or queers.

This selection process reaffirms the values of a specific cultural order, where inclusion depends not just on who you are, but how you are interpreted in a moment shaped by dress, posture, and affect. As one Reddit user observed:

OG 90’s loveparade type ravers 100% looked down on early Berghain because it pressed all the colorful shades of queer clubbing culture into a monotonous dark aesthetic that takes itself super seriously.

This phenomenon of aesthetic uniformity reflects that even though Berghain is rooted in subcultural freedom, it does not reject structure. Berghain as a heterotopia is sustained through subtle techniques of power (Foucault, 1986), which privilege certain styles and affects over others. The club’s internal logic of belonging functions less through open resistance than through its own aesthetic regime, shaping who belongs to this space.

In today's context of mediated urban space, heterotopia should be rethought not as a fixed space that simply opposes the mainstream, but as a fluid and performative site where boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are constantly shaped through interaction. As some interviewees mentioned, many people come to Berghain not only to dance, but to feel a certain version of themselves become possible. In this way, the emphasis moves from the space itself to the people who create it through acts of imagining what "belonging" might feel like. This leads to a question: under such a complex system of restrictions, especially no-camera policy, how do people who have never been to Berghain still develop a sense of expectation and even belonging? The spatial logic of Berghain appears to extend beyond its material boundaries, the space can be created through narratives, aesthetic framings, and affective projections. In this extended spatial imaginary, place is no longer defined by presence but by affective connections. The next chapter will explore how mediated imaginaries are produced and sustained through digital platforms. In this case, representations of Berghain are repeated, reframed, and folded into new forms of engagement with urban culture and queer spatial desire.

From Physical to Mediated Space

When waiting outside Berghain, most people tend to wear all black cloths, lower their voices, avoid smiling too much. However, many of these behaviors are not entirely spontaneous. For many visitors, especially non-regulars or non-locals, such practices may be rehearsed long before arriving the club's doorstep. These performances are mostly shaped elsewhere, such as Reddit, Instagram or TikTok, as people increasingly rely on digital platforms to search for information. This chapter will explore how the physical space of Berghain is extended and transformed through digital platforms. Its aim is not to demonstrate that media represent space, but to show how space is actively produced through media and how media reshape notions of emotional connections.

In media geography studies, researchers usually focus on how urban space is reconfigured by digital infrastructures, platform logics, and media practices (Barns, 2020; Mattern, 2015).

However, such approaches are limited in highly regulated spaces like Berghain. In this space, photography is banned, and visitors are strictly selected. Therefore, the production of space is not mediated through visibility or participatory infrastructure, but through “social imaginaries”: collectively sustained expectations, myths, and affective discourse that spread across platforms. Taylor (2004: 23) defines social imaginaries as “the ways people imagine their social existence”, related to how they fit together, what behaviors are expected, and what forms of interaction are considered legitimate. On media platforms, Berghain is not only portrayed but constantly reimagined through narratives that reinforce shared behavioral expectations. These expectations are not defined as rules but internalized through recurring descriptions. For example, darkrooms are places where allow people do anything they want. As Josh reflects, “in the darkroom, you never interrupt. That’s just how it works here”. It is not just a matter of personal preference; it reflects a common expectation of behavior, shaped through repeated exposure to similar stories online. Through repetition, these imaginaries shape an informal spatial logic that guides both how people act and how they anticipate being accepted or excluded within the social order of Berghain.

These shared imaginaries do not only prescribe how people should behave, but also shape how Berghain itself is imagined as a spatial experience. In the absence of visual documentation, digital storytelling becomes the dominant mode through which the interior of Berghain is knowable. Platforms like Reddit do not only allow storytelling, but also structure it. One common way these imaginaries spread is through personal stories, which often include shared memories: glitter and confetti, pre- Säule catacombs, and the ice-cream at the second floor. These recollections play a role as templates for maintaining spatial imaginary of Berghain by retelling collective memories. Thus, Reddit has become a digital archive of queer narratives that fills the void left by visual documentation.

This kind of digital archive is not simply collecting queer experiences, but a construction of “collective memory and a complex record of queer activity”, which take the form of digital and networked media (Halberstam, 2005: 326). What is being archived here is not only information, but a feeling. This queer engagement with archiving is staged as an “alternative life narrative” (2005: 314), one that prioritizes what is felt over what is seen. In the absence of imagery, affect

becomes the main medium of spatial connection. The queer space that Berghain creates is often described in Reddit comments in the following way:

When I first entered Berghain I knew nothing about it. I guess that was part of the charm too. More queer, more sexual, more wild, more social and friendly. It was like a different universe... not connected at all to the world outside.

Arguably, this affective storytelling performs a subtle force to build norms. What is repeatedly described becomes what is expected. Aria, who has been going to Berghain since 2015, remains deeply curious about the versions of the club described by others who went even earlier. “Even though people now say they miss the Berghain from ten years ago, when I started going, people were already talking about how it used to be better,” Aria recalled. One detail they heard frequently was about a large cage that once stood in the center of the dancefloor, where the wildest dancers would climb inside, and others would dance around them. By the time Aria first visited, the cage was gone, leaving only an open, empty floor. “People keep talking about it, so I really hope I could have seen that cage.” Through these stories, the memory of the former setting lives on, which align with what Landsberg (2004) defines as “prosthetic memory”. This means that, through their repeated exposure to mediated representations, people might come to possess memories from experiences that they actually never had themselves. These memories are not impersonal or abstract. Instead, they become emotionally meaningful, shaping how individuals imagine themselves in relation to specific histories, places, and events. In digital spaces, prosthetic memory plays a critical role in structuring affective attachment to symbolic sites. When users read story after story about Berghain’s past, such as its atmosphere, rituals, and faded landmarks, they begin to internalize these experiences as if they were part of their own experiential timeline.

These collective memories do not remain isolated. They contribute to a symbolic condition that influences how people prepare for and experience Berghain. What begins as prosthetic memory becomes the foundation of what Couldry and Hepp (2017: 32) term the “deep mediatization” of space. Media do not only influence society from the outside but increasingly structure the processes through which social reality is produced and experienced. Thus, I contend that the

myth about Berghain is not just maintained but continually rewritten by those who project themselves into its atmosphere through online narratives, such as collective memories, outfit advice, speculative bouncer strategies.

This process creates a different logic of media pilgrimage. Traditional pilgrimage routes are often mapped by physical landmarks and sacred texts, however, digital pilgrimages toward Berghain are traced through ephemeral content and communal affect. On Reddit, one post stands out as a farewell to Berghain written by a user preparing to leave Berlin after nearly a decade. Posted at 4 a.m. after their final Klubnacht, the user reflects on their nine-year journey, beginning with the friend who first brought them to the club. The user expressed thanks everything from “the new kids, the old gays” to “the smoothies, the ice cream” and the ephemeral moments of connection in darkrooms, toilet queues, and on the dance floor. This post ended with “I want to say thank you. You changed my life forever”. Posts like this are not uncommon on Reddit. What they record is not merely personal memory, but something closer to a collective archive which layering of emotions and fragments of experience that sustain a shared spatial imaginary. In these writings, Berghain belongs not only to the person telling the story, but to what we might call a collective other: an imagined community that both shapes and is shaped by these narratives. Whether speaking of the physical space or the people within it, once these experiences are mediated through discourse, they are folded into new meanings, charged with layers of affect.

This interaction of physical and online practices reveals a shift: people do not only consume spatial narratives through media, but actively inhabit them. In this sense, they increasingly “live in media” (Frosh, 2019: 91), navigating real spaces through the affective and symbolic frameworks they encounter online. In this sense, mediated Berghain is no longer simply a nightclub. It becomes a site of cultural value through “media ritual” (Couldry, 2003), sustained through repetition, emotional investment, and collective narration. It is not just remembered; it is performed through the act of storytelling, reshaping the space again and again in public discourse. Through repetition and selective amplification, these stories form what Bennet (2002: 89) calls a “mythscape,” a landscape infused with symbolic weight through mediated recollection and emotional labor. This mythscape does not rely on stability. Its strength lies in

its ambiguity and constant re-elaboration.

Even for those who have never been inside, the myth offers a point of entry into a symbolic community. It provides a shared emotional geography, one composed not of fixed coordinates but of rituals, moods, and desires. The mediated Berghain is thus not simply a reflection of the real club. It is an affective infrastructure that transcends geography, giving form to queer longing and fantasy. Sometimes, this queer desire is expressed through a tone of loss and transformation, as users reflect on how the space has changed from what it once symbolized:

Going there since the early 2010s: The crowd back then was way more welcoming, communicating and inclusive [...] I felt like people were there because of the overall experience and less because a certain DJ was playing [...] Whilst Berghain had its “mythical” status for years, I feel the crowd became much more mainstream than it was before.

This kind of narrative reinforces the symbolic structure of what Berghain was or should be in the collective imagination. When people encounter these stories before visiting Berghain, they often develop an expectation within that imagined framework. These expectations do not arise spontaneously but are shaped through repeated exposure to affective cues online. As Cvetkovich (2003) argues, affect is not merely personal but deeply cultural and collective, archived through everyday texts, memories, and practices. The emotions and meanings in these narratives shape how spaces and identities are imagined and felt. In the context of mediatization, such archives are further structured by the cultural logic of platforms, where affect is not only shared but also influenced based on algorithmic visibility and platform norms. Shaped by media content that reinforces dominant imaginaries of what Berghain is and what it is supposed to feel like, the media pilgrimage becomes not merely an act of symbolic belonging, but a process of affective disciplining.

These processes of the extend of space show how Berghain, as both a physical space and symbolic imaginary, is increasingly shaped through collective storytelling and affective participation across digital platforms. However, the production of meaning through media is not a neutral or evenly distributed process. Media platforms allow users to imagine, archive,

and emotionally connect to Berghain also shape how this imaginary is structured, which related to what kinds of feelings are amplified and which narratives are more visible. In other words, while digital spaces offer entry into symbolic belonging, they also establish informal systems of normativity. The next chapter will focus on how platform cultures generate shared behavioral expectations, guide emotional expression, and reshape queer spatial participation through mediated norms.

Platformed Imaginaries

As discussed previously, Berghain is no longer seen solely as a fixed physical location but as a space extended and imagined through media platforms. These platforms do not merely host representations of the club. Instead, as Barns (2020) explains through the concept of “platform urbanism,” they actively shape how Berghain is imagined, remembered, and socially inhabited.

However, within contemporary social media environments, there are two different forces. As one Reddit comment wrote, “Instagram and TikTok is ruining everything”. But this research does not take Instagram and Reddit to be in simple opposition. Rather, they should be considered as complementary infrastructures that each mediate distinct dimension of Berghain’s spatial imaginary. Instagram is more focused on visibility, presence, and symbolically reinforcement, whereas Reddit emphasizes narrative, emotional resonance, and communal sense-making. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two sections to further explore (1) visual presence and symbolic performance on Instagram, and (2) discursive narration and affective resonance on Reddit.

Berghain on Reddit

Reddit is a social media platform structured around interest-based communities known as “subreddits,” where users engage in threaded discussions, share stories, and vote on content. As Massanari (2015) observes, Reddit functions as an ecosystem of “platform cultures” that emerge from text-based interaction and anonymous participation, each subreddit operates with

a degree of autonomy, shaping its own cultural norms and moderation practices. Within communities like r/Berghain_Community, users often produce longform posts recounting their experiences, giving advice, and reflecting on what Berghain means to them.

As earlier described, anonymity is a central cultural mechanism on Reddit. It allows users share intimate, non-normative, and sometimes difficult experiences. Users often hide their real identities by using virtual avatars and nicknames, and most of their posts and comments are written in text rather than shown in pictures. For many visitors, going to Berghain is a very personal and private experience. As my interviewees explained, “even if I join a Berghain group chat, we only talk about Berghain itself.” One Reddit comment also pointed out that “what’s in Berghain should just be in Berghain, forever.” Massanari (2015: 27) defines lurking and anonymity as key elements in establishing trust, authenticity, and emotional safety on the platform. Therefore, on r/Berghain_Community, this culture allows users to express themselves and affections of the space, without the need for identity performance or concerns. In this way, Reddit facilitates a particular mode of space-making by discourse.

This also generates a distinct expressive style: posts often focus on spatial experience rather than personal context. Users rarely mention their jobs, cities, or social identities. This erasure of social identity shows the spatial ethos of Berghain itself. In interview, Felix described what makes a space truly queer: not only freedom, but also “peace”, which related to a sense that inside the space, everyone shares the same goal: to enjoy the music and express the true self. “No one cares what job you have, or where you come from,” he explained. On Reddit, this ethos is reflected through the erasure of social context in storytelling.

But these personal narratives are not entirely freeform; they will merge into recognizable affective scripts over time. Reddit communities tend to reproduce “shared storytelling conventions and emotional rhythms” (Massanari, 2015: 42) which reinforce platform cultures. When talking about past scenes in Berghain, posts often follow similar narrative patterns: slower BPMs in the music, outfits that used to be more kinky or expressive, immersion in sound and light, and feelings of freedom and belonging. Through recognizable and repeatable patterns, these narratives gradually create what Papacharissi (2015) describes as “affective publics”,

thereby shaping not only what can be felt, but how feelings are to be expressed. This dynamic is further amplified by Reddit's upvote and comment systems. Posts that follow this emotional arc are more likely to be promoted through upvotes, attract affirming comments, and circulate as representations of what Berghain is or should be.

This actualizes the question of governance. While Reddit has no formal moderation by the subreddit's users in most cases, it still exerts a powerful regulatory force through its technical and cultural architecture. Massanari (2015: 78) conceptualizes this as "bottom-up governance," wherein norms and values are collectively shaped through everyday participation rather than centralized authority. The process of governance further influences how Berghain is constructed as a queer space within the Reddit community. When one post questioned the appearance of FLINTA* (female, lesbian, inter, non-binary, trans and agender people, the * highlights all gender and non-gender) toilets in a club historically rooted in gay male culture, Reddit users reframed the club's meaning as distinct from its origins in male-only spaces such as Snax Club. One comment noted that "the club was generally quite diverse," and that their personal experiences "didn't revolve around the gay male culture." Such comments exemplify how storytelling on media platforms infuses Berghain with new meanings and values, collectively reconstructing its symbolic identity. According to Barns (2020), Reddit does not only reflect Berghain's culture; it co-produces it through participate in reshaping the symbolic and affective life of urban spaces. This process of reshaping space is not about dictating rules, but about subtly shaping how people feel and behave.

It is also important to note that this form of affective governance raises concerns. If the Berghain experience on Reddit is continuously edited toward emotional coherence and ritual affirmation, then what kinds of experience are excluded? As the previous discussion shows, gender-related issues such as the inclusion of FLINTA* toilets are widely addressed. However, other structural problems such as "a lot of pretty open complaints about the club's door policy being racist" and how "there seemed to be hardly any minorities in Berghain" receive far less attention on Reddit. This silence can partly be attributed to platform moderation practices and subreddit-specific governance, but it also reflects a deeper force of social conformity. As Ahmed (2004) argues, emotions are not just personal feelings, but practices that align individuals with collective norms.

On platforms like Reddit, these collective norms are reinforced through technical structures and community conventions, where narratives are filtered and communal identity is shaped through discourse. (Massanari, 2015). Therefore, Reddit is a space where Berghain is not only described, but normatively constructed. The mediated space of Berghain is not passively remembered on Reddit. Instead, it is actively and repeatedly made through it.

Berghain on Instagram

While Reddit provides a discursive and anonymous environment for affective narration, Instagram functions as a space of visual exhibition and symbolic performance. Its interface is centered on images, algorithmic ranking, and visibility. In contrast to the construction of collective memory on Reddit, interactions on Instagram tend to follow a “like-view” structure, reflecting performative connection rather than interactive sociality. The social architecture of Instagram, characterized by weak ties and low reciprocal interaction, constitutes a form of “networked publics” (Boyd, 2010) driven more by visibility than relational depth. Rather than close and deep interaction, users connect through shared aesthetics, hashtags, and visual styles, forming a loosely connected network structured by algorithmic amplification. As Granovetter (1973) argues, such weak ties are particularly effective in spreading cultural symbols and information across diverse groups, but they lack the intimacy and shared context typical of more tightly bounded communities. In this case, Instagram is not merely a platform of representation, but a system that commodifies affective experience and spatial participation through aesthetic labor. The ways Berghain is mediated through Instagram differ significantly from how it is produced in textual and community-based discourse on Reddit (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). On Instagram, Berghain becomes a brand related to visual exhibition for an imagined queer urban lifestyle.

I have divided this visual exhibition into two parts. The first one involves appearance and door policy. Instagram users frequently post at the club’s entrance or on their way to the party. Hashtags like #berghain, #technofashion are common, often paired with emojis and photos about their outfits such as leather, mesh, or black. For those who manage to enter Berghain,

these photos are visual proof of access. Also, these might become clues for others trying to understand the selective door policy. Ironically, its no-photo rule as one of the most iconic policies has not diminished its visibility, but intensified it. The second kind of posts capture the environment around the club: the queue that snakes along the graffiti-tagged concrete wall, the wide industrial forecourt, the minimalist style of the Berghain gate itself. These photos do not depict the inside of the club, but they serve as symbolic approximations of access. Additionally, users often post images of the long queue outside Berghain as a way to emphasize the club's fame and exclusivity. Through these repeated performances, Instagram users have crystallized the Berghain's "authenticity" into "a product with cultural buzz" (Zukin, 2010: 50). Some interviewees interpreted this practice as a subtle way of reinforcing a sense of superiority: "Look, I'm one of the rare few who made it in."

More broadly, Instagram flattens Berghain's spatial complexity into a replicable visual fantasy. While the club occupies a specific geographic location embedded in Berlin's urban and cultural history, its Instagram presence abstracts it into a symbolic space, thus becomes a visual template that can be reproduced, simulated, and consumed globally. These images accrue value not because of what they depict in a literal sense, but because they are culturally intelligible to a specific audience. Visual posts thus contribute to subcultural branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012) through a form of "new authenticity" (Zukin, 2010) that is not tied to origins, but instead produced through aesthetic codes and stylized forms of rebellion. Growing discomfort with the space transformation reflects how mainstream media representation and the pursuit of trends on platforms like Instagram are reshaping what the space means to its participants:

I remember someone on here recently saying Berghain was a place where you went to not be seen, now it's a place you go to be seen. Now everyone focuses on what they wear to the extreme and how they're perceived by the digital world, and that for me has ruined a lot of clubbing experiences.

Therefore, Instagram plays a paradoxical role in the construction of queer space. On the one hand, it offers a way for global users to participate in Berghain's culture; on the other, it dilutes and commodifies the original ethos of this space. The affective labor of queer nightlife, such its

ephemerality, risk, and resistance, is rendered into stylized images, recoded for circulation and consumption. Even though Berghain once signified a space of queer subversion and discretion, platform logic of Instagram recasts it as a public spectacle governed by aesthetic normativity and symbolic gatekeeping. The queer heterotopia once imagined through Berghain's walls risks becoming a myth tailored to the consumer demands of mainstream norms.

Reimaginative Resistance

From previous analysis, the space of Berghain has been shown to extend from a physical site into a mediated spatial imaginary. However, beyond the dynamics of spatial production, the mediated Berghain imaginary also reveals deeper issues related to power relations and normative expectations. This situation leads to a question: how do queer individuals respond? Following the framework of queer spatial imaginaries (Butler, 2006 [1990]; Muñoz, 2009) and everyday practices (de Certeau, 1984; Giesecking, 2020), the key feature of resistance practices in this research is the notion of “imaginaries.” However, unlike the spatial imaginaries discussed earlier in the context of place-making, the form of resistance explored here is not entirely opposite. Guided by Reddit community commentary and qualitative interviews, queer individuals rearticulate identity and community in ways that challenge dominant spatial narratives. In this context, resistance is more accurately defined as “reimaginative resistance”. In a space like Berghain, resistance becomes a practice of reclaiming presence through interaction, affect, and symbolic critique.

The following section explores three interconnected themes related to resistance: the construction of belonging in response to existential threats in Berghain, the dismantling of myths and the remediation of queer spatial imaginaries. In this case, reimaginative resistance can also be seen as a mode of cultural production that makes space through everyday practices, affections, and narratives.

Resistance from Below

“For me—and for many others—Berghain is like a church. A new-age religion.” (Phillippi & Hanke, 2017). This opening sentence from a blog post has an implication: the space of Berghain can be described as a complex site of non-conformist expression, where queers can express themselves without judgment through appearance, dancing, social interaction, and a shared sense of liberation. However, from empirical data, Berghain is not a queer utopia as a fully realized or stable space of liberation. In this research, it is understood as a “horizon” (Muñoz, 2009) that can be felt in moments of embodied expression and affective connection. Its promise of freedom is still limited and shaped by broader social forces.

Based on empirical data from social media and mainstream media outlets, three forms of power from above are responsible for influencing and reshaping Berghain in different ways. The first one is right-wing political movements, which appeared in the news in 2018 that the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) party has put forward a claim to revoke Berghain's license (Oltermann, 2018). The second one is the threats from commodification, urban redevelopment and rising rent prices that have led to the closure of an increasing number of clubs (Harrison, 2024). The third one is the persistent influence of mainstream norms, including binary constructions of identity and the gaze of tourists driven by “gay and lesbian tourist economy” (Giesecking, 2020: 48). The second and third forms of power sometimes interact with each other. When people who are unprepared to engage with the subcultural environment enter the space, their curiosity and potential misunderstandings can become a source of discomfort or disturbance for the queer community. Many interviewees pointed out how certain behaviors, such as inappropriate questions, negative attitudes toward queer expressions, or staring can disrupt the sense of safety and respect in the space. One Reddit user described this scene through a narrative of loss:

I feel the crowd became much more mainstream than it was before [...] There are more and more judgmental and—dare I say—conservative people who seemed to not have understood that this always was a queer club and the reputation came from “everything goes as long as you are friendly” [...] it’s been enough to put me off for this very reason.

These forces competing for spatial control over Berghain in distinct but interrelated dimensions. Political forces aim to reassert nationalistic and moral authority over what they view as deviant cultural spaces, thus challenging the legitimacy of Berghain as a queer shelter. Under the framework of commodification, Berghain risks being stripped of its radical, resistant character and reduced to a spectacle of “cool” for tourists. Meanwhile, cultural pressures from mainstream norms emerge through the bodies, gazes, and expectations of tourists and outsiders who regularly enter queer spaces. On the one hand, they pass the door policy thus “gain the right” to stay in this space; on the other hand, their practices reshape not only the internal dynamics of Berghain but also influence its perceived image in the public.

Therefore, queer practices at Berghain can be understood as a bottom-up negotiation that asserts a collective claim to space in response to power exercised from above. By observing that bodies are “here” and dwelling places are “there,” Ahmed (2006: 8) points out that the “intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places” offers an important perspective for understanding spatial forms. This discussion explores how and why people arrive in certain spaces, and the way they become situated, which are closely tied to how a sense of being “in place” is socially and materially constructed (2006: 10). Following this framework, the crowd at Berghain can roughly be divided into three groups: locals, newcomers, and outsiders. Unlike formalized power structures or visible signs such as the door policy, spatial ownership among queer individuals is expressed through embodied presence and performative practices. These groups have different affective investments in the space, which led to different practices. Among them, locals have the strongest place-attachment to the space that Berghain creates. Although there are no images to visually document their experiences within the club, their narratives on Reddit offer a way to explore how they relate to the space. Many posts and comments on Reddit recall collective memories of Berghain, including long closing sets, former architectural layout and hidden places, old crew of regulars and conversations on politics, philosophy, or art in the lounge areas.

Such narratives reveal how queer attachment lingers in temporal but specific moments shared within the community, making Berghain not only a safe space for expressing themselves, but also a container for collective memories. These memorable moments are the expressions of

intelligible and coherent identities across time, and through interactions in this space, they foster a sense of belonging among people (Cover, 2017). Some interviewees described participating in protests during a time when the club was under threat of closure. They recalled that the protests included music played in designated areas, along with participants giving speeches to explain the reasons and handing out flyers to those passing by. Those events followed a planned route set by the city, and the groups moved along it together. By transposing the queer practices of the club into a public space, queers as co-producers and protectors, symbolically reclaimed the street as an extension of queer space, asserting not only visibility but also ownership.

For newcomers, Berghain still functions as a queer space, but their emotional connection to it is not as deep as that of the locals. By the time they began entering the space, what locals described as “the best times” had already passed, making it more difficult for them to experience the strong sense of community that earlier visitors recalled. For example, rather than expressing nostalgia or frustration, many Reddit comments reflect an acceptance of the changes and describe Berghain more as “a good club to enjoy”. However, it is important to clarify that in this research, newcomers are not the same as outsiders. While some newcomers may include tourists or non-queer individuals, the distinction between the two groups lies in whether they respect the queer community and are familiar with its culture. Although newcomers may lack the same attachment as locals, they often remain invested in the idea of Berghain as a queer space, even if their participation takes different, more transient forms. In this case, their presence sustains queer space not through continuity, but through adaptive belonging and a subtle preservation of queer culture.

Hence, the analysis of queer spatial ownership should move beyond binary frameworks of identity and instead consider how individuals actively negotiate and manage their identities through spatial and social practices (Valentine, 1993). The unspoken understanding of how to move, how to look, and how to interact within Berghain forms a hidden contract of respect and alignment with the space’s historical and emotional codes. Rather than an overt protest of identity, the resistance explored in this research is a continued reimagining of queer presence and values through acts that reclaim spatial belonging from below.

It is worth noting that resistance has spread in cyberspace. Due to Berghain's restricted access, many experiences are displaced onto digital platforms like Reddit. While the content often reflects offline encounters, the act of retelling, commenting, and reframing these stories constitutes a discursive negotiation of space beyond the physical boundaries. As Cavalcante (2018: 63) argues, the internet provides "unprecedented connectivity," which has enabled new forms of political engagement and fostered collective critical awareness among queer communities. In this context, media platforms do not just archive queer memory, but become spaces where imaginaries of Berghain are deconstructed and reconstructed.

Resistance from Inside

If the resistance from below challenges external forces, the discursive practices on media platforms represent a more complex negotiation of queer space that dismantles the myth from within. Berghain is often portrayed as a queer temple in both cultural narratives and subcultural imaginations. Its myth centers on total queer freedom: a space where the body is liberated, boundaries dissolve, and identities are fluid. However, as Bell and Binnie (2000: 84) point out, the production of queer space and relations contains potential inequalities, providing "inclusion for some, but also imply[ing] the exclusion of others."

The alternative and liberatory features that Berghain emphasizes reveal a deeper structure of power relations, identified by Foucault (1995). The regime of expectations disciplines queers through micro-powers such as aesthetics and behavior, establishing norms of what is considered normal and abnormal within queer space. Within this normative framework, queerness is not only expressed, but evaluated. These regulatory mechanisms are not peripheral to Berghain's identity, but are central to its myth-making. The club's strict door policy, often perceived as a test of "familiarity with sexual subcultures" (Andersson, 2022: 584), has helped generate a codified imaginary through mainstream media. Through implicit standards, the promise of queer freedom becomes paradoxically tethered to a curated ideal of queer visibility. Therefore, the deconstruction of the myth of total queer freedom is the beginning of reimaginative resistance. Resistance from inside does not contradict the idea of queer space, but reflects an

ongoing negotiation of what queer space means. This argument may need further elaboration: the collapse of the Berghain myth is not due to the existence of its selective norm, but to the underlying standards by which it operates. In other words: How to define who belongs to the club's audience? Sara explained the necessity of the norm:

In a queer space, you need to have a certain level of exclusivity in order for the people inside to feel a sense of inclusivity [...] I think the key is about making the people inside feel safe. People often say that exclusivity goes against the values of queer culture, but if you cannot remove people who don't respect us, then the space is no longer a queer space.

Nora previously worked as a bouncer at a queer club in Berlin, explained her selection standard: "You need to know what kind of space you are entering. You can't come in and bother others." These perspectives complicate the binary of inclusion and exclusion. They suggest that gatekeeping, when grounded in community can function as a protective boundary rather than a normative filter. Most arguments are about whether they are aligned with shared values of safety and mutual respect, or instead reproduce aesthetic and social hierarchies that reflect broader norms. This distinction is critical, because it turns the conversation from "should there be limits?" to "What kind of limits?"

Even though the initial purpose of Berghain may have been led by the desire to create a protective and liberatory queer safe space, it has increasingly become a symbolic performance through myth-making. In response to this mythologized narrative, one way of resistance is affective refusal. "Berghain has become the one thing that it was never meant to be: interchangeable," one Reddit user criticizing the impact of Instagram trends, "putting on a silly leather harness because you saw that on Instagram doesn't make you less prude, it just makes you trite." This reflects a broader dissatisfaction with the space becoming increasingly touristy and commodified. Other comments similarly express feelings of loss regarding queerness and undergroundness. Some recall that Berghain "wasn't so serious, so sceney, so speedy, so gloomy, so expensive, or so desperate", some feel that Berghain is "slowly losing the queer identity due

to articles like this⁴ because they make venues about places to be seen”. These comments show the discomfort generated by Berghain’s transformation, and expose a deeper structural misalignment between the ideal subject imagined by the space and those who actually inhabit it. This affective refusal grows not from open confrontation, but from embodied disillusionment with the fantasies that commodified imaginaries sustain. As Joy said:

One reason many queers that I know choose not to go to Berghain is that it has been talked about too much. None of us want to become part of someone else’s story, or to serve as a plot twist in someone’s personal experience.

Here, the “someone else’s story” metaphorically points to the commodified narratives that have increasingly captured Berghain’s symbolic space. This space was originally created as an “autonomous queer space” that allows queers “free from the sexual and gender constraints of the quotidian world” (Brown, 2007: 2696). However, the space has gradually been absorbed into broader patterns of consumption and storytelling, where the authenticity of queer experiences is weakened into performative fragments for outsider gazes. Rather than embodying lived resistance, queerness becomes an element in someone else’s tourist memory and a consumable cultural product.

The discomfort expressed by Joy and her friends reveals the emotional consequences of this shift. Their choice to not go to Berghain is not just an act of dissatisfaction, but a withdrawal of affective investment from a structure that no longer aligned with its original meaning. In this case, affective refusal functions as a political and spatial intervention: it interrupts the narrative reproduction of Berghain as a site of “total freedom,” and thus deconstruct the symbolic power of commodified imaginaries. This kind of resistance is not a direct opposition, but disengagement from an unreal fantasy produced by normative queer imaginaries shaped through commodification and dominant cultural forces (Giesecking, 2020).

Therefore, this shift is not about avoidance, but an important form of reimaginative resistance:

⁴ “This” refers to an article from *The Telegraph*:
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/germany/berlin/how-to-get-into-berghain-berlin-dress-code/>

it challenges not through direct opposition, but by withdrawing the emotional engagements that sustains dominant fantasies. As Halberstam (2011) discussed, the “queer art of failure” enables individuals to step away from dominant success narratives and to imagine alternative ways of being. “It’s impossible to really change this space by myself, it already has a successful, fixed mode.” However, Joy is still in the Berghain Telegram group and continues to follow its updates. Affective refusal becomes a mode of quiet and subtle resistance, build alternate structures grounded in autonomy and everyday practices in urban life.

There is another form of reimaginative resistance related not to refusal, but to active and situated practices. When considering queer resistance in Berghain within a mediatized context, it is useful to rethink Schulz’s (2004: 88-89) concept of *accommodation*, which describes how individuals and institutions adjust their behavior in response to media structures. However, this concept emphasizes on adjustment, while giving limited attention to how resistance may emerge within systems of compliance, especially through affective experience and situated practices. As previously discussed, the space of Berghain has been reshaped by queer practices and imaginaries through media, leading to the suggestion that the values and meanings of this space are not fixed, but fluid. This transformation perspective aligns with Brown’s (2007: 2697) argument about how activist queer practices create a “discursive space” where “alternative modes of living” move beyond existing power relations and start to redefine the city.

These practices demonstrate how mythic imaginaries surrounding Berghain are not simply rejected but reinterpreted through lived experience, where personal narratives and affective engagement gradually transform symbolic distance into everyday familiarity. Aria reflected on their changing relationship with Berghain. They described Berghain as “a temple” or “a sacred place,” associating it with a kind of quasi-religious awe. However, this myth diminished over time: “At first you put it on a pedestal, but later you realize it is just a club.” The shift in Aria’s perception happened after they became friends with the club staff. Aria described how surprised they were when they discovered that the bouncer who had once rejected them coldly turned out to be a kind and approachable person, greeting them warmly in the park together with his wife. The bouncer, often seen as an unshakable enforcer of rules, was humanized through these interactions. Breaking the distant and authoritative image of those working at Berghain made

Aria realize that the club was not an untouchable institution, but a space constantly shaped and reshaped by ordinary human relations and interactions. The shift from the extraordinary to the ordinary can be understood through what Weber (1946) called “disenchantment”⁵. The myth of Berghain is gradually declining, as it loses its aura of mystery and symbolic power.

Therefore, the grand narratives gave way to “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984) of care, community, and shared memories. This shift toward everyday practices is evident in negotiations of community within Berghain. As some Reddit comments noted, when talking to others about the club and its atmosphere, they try to raise awareness that everyone collectively creates the vibe and that individual actions influence the surrounding environment. This dynamic is further reflected in debates around spatial practices within Berghain, where users emphasize the importance of community values. For example, Reddit comments reflect how queers reinterpret Berghain’s institutional norms through personal and collective understandings. When outsiders reduce the door policy to simplistic criteria like “wear all black” or “don’t smile, don’t look like a tourist,” regulars often challenge these standards by emphasizing the idea of “being yourself.” They explain that there is no specific dress code; it’s more about whether someone appears to belong to the environment. By detaching Berghain’s rules from normative frameworks and linking them to performative practices that define and regulate identity (Butler, 1993), the queerness of Berghain becomes rooted in what Chauncey (1995: 224) describes as “spaces used by queers or put queer to use”. Reinterpreting rules is only part of the resistance; the broader spatial reimagination lies in reclaiming space piece by piece from within the constraints of dominant narratives.

When Asher described what Berghain meant to him, he did not frame it as a sacred queer heaven. Instead, he called it simply “a way to release pressure”, similar to karaoke or shopping, something embedded in the rhythms of everyday life. Even as he observed that queer clubs were becoming increasingly popular and diluted by mainstream crowds, “felt like a glass of cola getting watered down, the interesting people disappear”, he still said he would not stop going. For Asher, good music, good lighting, and being with close friends were the real sources

⁵ The term “disenchantment” is from Max Weber’s 1918 lecture *Science as a Vocation*

of joy. His attachment to the space was not based on a desire to preserve an idealized queerness, but rather on the felt, relational experience that the space offered. Asher also expressed frustration with the all-black dress code often associated with Berghain, particularly when people wore it only to gain entry, as he preferred colorful clothing. Recalling his first time entering Berghain, Asher said, “I wore a white sweater and light blue jeans.” Through such choices, he asserted his presence on his own terms and subtly contributed to the rewriting of the space. These practices transform Berghain from a centralized and monumental space into a set of “decentralized and fragmented” micro-networks (Giesecking, 2020). Through retelling stories, personal narratives, and making collective memories, queers destabilize the dominant myths surrounding Berghain and open up spaces for ongoing reimaginative resistance.

Conclusion

This research has investigated the mediated construction and contested meanings of Berghain as a queer space through an analysis of comments from the Berghain community on Reddit and semi-structured interviews with queer participants. When heading towards the end of this thesis, I would like to return to the research questions and the aim of the research. The purpose has been to explore how Berghain is mediated as a queer space, and in what ways queer participants negotiate the meanings of Berghain as a site of resistance. This arises from broader concerns around queer spatial loss in cities, the commodification of subcultural aesthetics, and the restructuring of urban place in platform cultures. The research has contributed to a deeper understanding of how queer space is extended, inhabited, and negotiated through media, explained in more detail in the following.

Berghain as a Mediated Queer Space

Berghain operates simultaneously as a physical venue and a symbolic space of queer culture. Rather than only being defined by material settings, it is increasingly shaped by media discourses and ritualized engagements (Couldry, 2003). The media construction of Berghain unfolds across several layers. In mainstream media outlets, Berghain is often reduced to its spectacular elements, such as selective door policy and darkrooms. This reductionism aligns with what Lefebvre (1991: 376) describes as “mimesis,” wherein mass media endlessly reproduce stereotypical images, rendering the space into what Augé (1995) terms a “non-place” which is emptied of affect and lived meaning.

However, against this mainstream context, the spatial meaning of Berghain is rebuilt through personal storytelling. Following de Certeau’s (1984) insight that storytelling is itself a spatial practice, users reconstruct Berghain through digital and face-to-face conversations. The staircase leading to Berghain’s darkrooms, the ice cream shop on the second floor, the sculptures on the concrete floor, and the regulars in their diverse outfits—these vividly remembered physical details are repeatedly evoked in narratives, becoming emotional anchors for the

reconstruction of space within online and offline communities. The absence of photography due to Berghain's no-camera policy, further intensifies the reliance on narrative mediation. In this context, the body itself becomes a medium, and affect becomes the key for spatial knowledge. Through such narratives, Berghain is made into a symbolic site produced by collective affects and memories.

On digital platforms, the mediated imaginaries of Berghain diverge depending on the logic of each space. On Reddit, spatial construction unfolds through anonymous, fragmentary narration. Users document their experiences and emotional responses in the form of long posts or comments. In this case, the Berghain subreddit functions as an informal queer archive, where memories and affective investments circulate as forms of symbolic codes between users. Instagram, by contrast, relies on visibility and aesthetic reproduction. Berghain becomes not only a place to be remembered but a brand to be seen with. The repeated visual motifs such as all-black outfits or same hashtags consolidate into a standardized aesthetic script, shaping who and what is considered more like "Berghain style". This script is reinforced through platform algorithms, which favors certain styles over others.

A hidden line running through the analysis concerns the transformation of Berghain as a heterotopia (Foucault, 1986) as it migrates from the material world into the mediated environment of digital platforms. Its selective systems not only to exclude the discriminative gaze but to sustain a form of spatial and temporal resistance to binary social norms and commodified nightlife. It was a space where non-normative desires were not just allowed but structured into the spatial experience itself.

But as the previous discussions have demonstrated, the extension of Berghain into media space marks a significant shift in how its heterotopic meaning is produced and received. Once rooted in bodily experiences and spatial immersion, Berghain becomes abstracted into a set of visual and narrative fragments, such as Instagram posts and the decoding description of its atmosphere and rules. Through these practices, Berghain is, I argue, stripped of its original, lived meanings and re-inscribed with new cultural associations, thus becoming a myth (Barthes, 1972). The exclusivity and subcultural characteristics of Berghain have gradually been incorporated into

the “symbolic economy”, turning into markers of status and “new cultural commodities” (Zukin, 2010: 51). As shown in the analysis, Instagram’s aesthetic labor often re-inscribes norms around trends, recoding queerness into a performance that aligns with platform-driven economies of attention.

Thus, a physical site as a heterotopia may need to be reconsidered in today’s media context. Although media infrastructures constitute the conditions for presence, enabling forms of social connection that extend beyond physical location (Frosh, 2019), my analysis demonstrates how Berghain’s status as a heterotopia becomes increasingly unstable once it is successively removed from its physical and embodied context. When the space is no longer experienced directly but instead circulated through media representations, its original oppositional function is weakened. The mediated version becomes more vulnerable to mythologization, as it is stripped of its political and affective depth and absorbed into the normative structures and aesthetic expectations of platform culture. While heterotopia implies constant tension, this research offers new insights into the mediated and platformed Berghain, which risks becoming a flattened symbol, reducing its inherent ambiguity and undermining the contradictory and transient features that heterotopia relies on.

This does not mean that heterotopia cannot exist in digital form, but it does suggest that their oppositional function becomes based on how people actively resist dominant narratives and reimagine spatial meanings within platform constraints. This leads to the second research question, which related to the practices of resistance and will be concluded in the next section.

Resistance Beyond the Visible

While Berghain is heavily mediated, it is not a passive object of discourse. Rather, it is a site where queerness is actively negotiated, not only in opposition to normative spaces but also in response to the pressures of commodification and platform normativity. Yet it is important to note that, unlike many studies that approach queer resistance by emphasizing the inherent subversiveness of queer spaces, this research demonstrates that the resistant character of

Berghain as a queer heterotopia has already been eroded by political, commercial, and normative forces. In this context, the resistance explored here is not an affirmation of what the space currently is, but a reimagination of what it once was and what it could still signify. It is a practice of reclaiming the subversive affect and sense of belonging that have been displaced, through discursive, affective, and embodied negotiations.

The forms of resistance discussed in this research can be broadly categorized into two layers. The first concerns resistance against external forces such as political regulation and commercial appropriation. This layer of resistance often takes the form of reasserting queer spatial ownership and emphasizes the right to inhabit and define urban space from queer perspectives. It appears not only through discursive claims, such as recalling Berghain's past scenes, architecture features, and unique atmosphere, but also through embodied practices rooted in collective memory. These include activities like dancing, playing music, or gathering in officially designated venues, which function as acts of spatial affirmation and cultural continuity. This resistance is not merely about defending a physical location, but about keeping its queer meaning alive through public and performative presence.

The second layer of resistance emerges from within the space itself, especially after its character as a queer space has been weakened or become a promotion. Rather than directly confronting external pressures, this form of resistance is grounded in everyday practices that reimagine what the space can mean. It does not attempt to restore an idealized past, but instead works through affective attachments or refusals, and alternative narratives that challenge the dominant meanings imposed upon the space. Through online discussions and emotional recollections, participants do not reclaim Berghain as a physical space in its current, commodified form. Rather, they engage with it as a symbolic site whose queer potential persists through reimagination. This research defines such practices as reimaginative resistance: an effort to recover the lost affective charge and subversive promise of queer space through ongoing reinterpretation and personal narratives.

A key dimension of reimaginative resistance lies in how it is not only directed at visible external forces, such as political regulation or commodification, but also at more subtle forms of

symbolic erosion. In today's mainstream discourse, queerness is no longer wholly marginalized. On the contrary, it is often celebrated in the language of "diversity," "inclusivity," or "freedom." Queer culture has become hyper-visible in media. However, many participants in this research expressed unease about this apparent acceptance. Rather than interpreting this visibility as unequivocal progress, they saw it as part of a strategic repackaging of queerness that serves broader commercial or aesthetic agendas. Nancy Fraser (1990: 67) has a concept of "subaltern counterpublics", and describes as "parallel discursive arenas" where subordinated groups "invent and circulate counterdiscourses" to challenge dominant interpretations of identity and belonging. In the case of Berghain, whose spatial formation crosses both physical and digital dimensions, queer resistance cannot be understood solely through confrontation or visibility. Therefore, this thesis describes it as reimaginative resistance: a mode of resistance constituted through everyday practices, affective refusals, and counter-discursive engagements. Through this, queers reassert not only their right to occupy space, but their capacity to construct and reconstruct it on their own terms.

Although Berghain remains physically intact and even officially recognized as a cultural institution, many of the participants expressed a strong sense of queer spatial loss. This perceived loss highlights a central feature of reimaginative resistance, that spatial belonging is not only tied to physical continuity, but also to the preservation of affective meaning. In this context, narrative emerges from and acts upon the emotional experiences associated with the space. Emotional connections and narrative reinterpretations are able to shape space through both symbolic and embodied means. Together, they function as spatial strategies for reclaiming and resignifying spaces. Reimaginative resistance, as a form of such spatial strategies, is particularly suited to mediated spaces, because such spaces are not fixed terrains. It involves a dual movement: first, the deconstruction of dominant imaginaries, and second, their reconfiguration through alternative forms of meaning-making. This cyclical process of representation, negotiation, and re-representation makes mediated space become fluid. Therefore, this form of resistance must begin with a recognition of how space has already been imagined in order to imagine it otherwise.

During the interviews, many participants expressed a complex sense of loss. On one hand, this

came from internal tensions in their own processes of queer identity formation. Even while rejecting binary frameworks intellectually, they often found themselves unconsciously slipping back into mainstream definitions of gender. On another hand, the feeling of loss was tied to the erosion of queer space itself. As local friends left Berlin due to rising living costs, many described a growing sense of disconnection. Queer venues, once central to their community life, have been continuously displaced by urban redevelopment. Future research could focus more on and explore how queer identity is shaped not in isolation but through the material and affective infrastructures of urban life, and how urban spaces are transformed, through the interactions between individuals, media platforms, and broader structural forces. When asked why they attended a protest for the preservation of *about blank*,⁶ Aria said:

I remember the government wanted to replace that place with a bridge⁷ as part of an investment project. What made me sad was—if that bridge is built, will the bridge between us and the world be broken?

⁶ A queer-friendly club remains under threat due to the planned expansion of the federal A100 highway, which could lead to its demolition: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/regional/berlin/a100-techno-100.html>

⁷ Interviewee referring to a planned highway construction project commonly understood as a “bridge”

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Interviewees

Interview	Name of the participant in thesis	Sexuality	Gender	Occupation	Interview date	Duration of the interview
Pilot	Luna	Queer	Female	Student	23rd Feb 2025	1 hour and 05 min
1	Aria	Gay	Non-binary, AMAB	Co-founder and creative director of a company; freelance model; artist	30th Mar 2025	1 hour and 09 min
2	Joy	Pansexual	Female	International humanitarian worker	18th Mar 2025	1 hour and 41 min
3	Asher	Gay	Male	Previously Student	21st Mar 2025	55 min
4	Felix	Gay	Male	Previously Student	19th Mar 2025	1 hour and 11 min
5	Nora	Lesbian	Trans woman	Student	26th Mar 2025	1 hour and 20 min
6	Sara	Queer	Non-binary, AFAB	Student; Programmer	5th Mar 2025	1 hour and 06 min

7	Josh	Queer	Non-binary, AFAB	Photographer; Artist	11th Mar 2025	1 hour
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Note: Some participants preferred not to disclose their exact age, which is why specific ages are not listed.

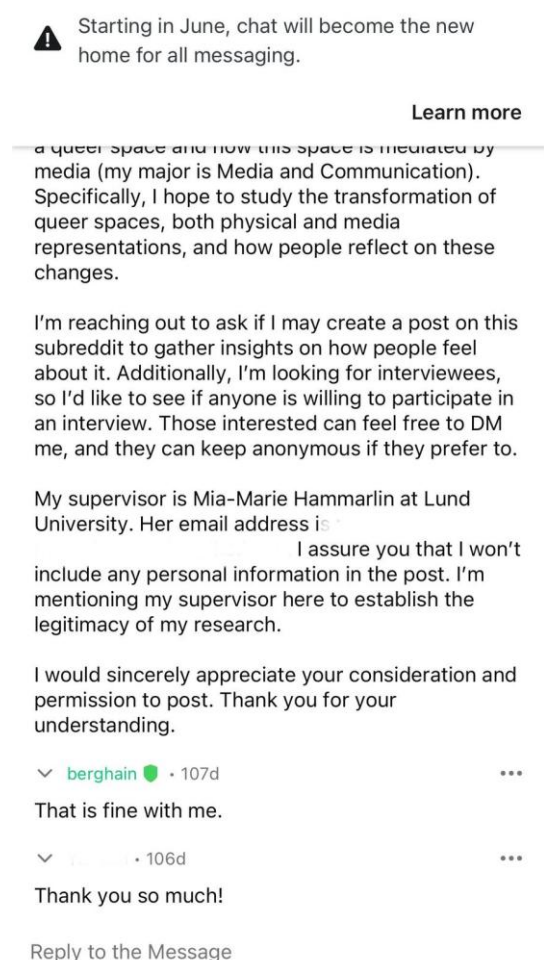
Appendix 2: Sample of Reddit Posts and Comments

No .	Title of the Post	Link
1	Berghain isn't politic.	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/185sbq4/berghain_isnt_politic/
2	Berghain for Lesbians	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/17230o7/berghain_for_lesbians/
3	Popular UK newspaper on Berghain.	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/1c8ijzo/popular_uk_newspaper_on_berghain/
4	Not gay at all!	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/1g72p5u/not_gay_at_all/
5	Is Berghain becoming too straight?	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/17oijt11/is_berghain_becoming_too_straight_i_heard_2_girls/
6	BH changing over the years	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/1fdn4np/bh_changing_over_the_years/
7	Berghain is over. And thats ok.	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/13v9lbz/berghain_is_over_and_thats_ok/
8	heteros taking up (queer) space	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/1aekre5/heteros_taking_up_queer_space/
9	If techno/house is about inclusivity then how do places like	https://www.reddit.com/r/Techno/comments/16qi9qe/if_technohouse_is_about_inclusivity_then_how_do/

	Berghain get away with being so judgement al?	
10	Is it still a queer place?	https://www.reddit.com/r/Berghain_Community/comments/107rver/is_it_still_a_queer_place/

Appendix 3: Finding interviewees on Reddit

It should be noted that the Reddit post I used to recruit interview participants was published in a different Berghain-related subreddit than the one from which I collected data for analysis. As I am not an active Reddit user, I did not have enough karma (the score Reddit assigns based on user activity and engagement) to post in the largest and most active Berghain subreddit. That subreddit requires users to reach a certain karma threshold before they are allowed to post. Therefore, I published my post for finding interviewees in another Berghain-related subreddit, which also has a substantial number of members. However, all the posts used for textual analysis in this thesis were collected from the larger subreddit with the most user activity and engagement.



Note: The original messages contained the name of researcher's private Reddit account and e-mail address of the supervisor and was removed from the one provided above.

Appendix 4: Consent Form



Lunds Universitet
Faculty of Social Sciences
Wanyi Zhu

Consent to participate in a Master Thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project, which takes place from January 2025 until May 2025. This consent form will provide you with information about your involvement and your rights as a participant. The information obtained from this research will be used in the completion of the Master's thesis in Communication and Media Studies. The research will be conducted by Wanyi Zhu, a student at the Department of Communication at Lund University, Sweden.

Your participation:

1. What is the Purpose of the Study? This study aims to explore the transformation of Berghain as a queer space, the impact of media and its role in the broader context of the commodification of queer culture and the "club death" social phenomenon. As a study of queer space, this research needs to understand the concerns towards media representation and how queer communities reflect on the current situation. By understanding the ways in which Berghain is mediatized and how its evolving role relates to queer practices of identity expression, this study will explore the implications of queer spatial loss in urban nightlife.

2. How long will it take to participate in this study? The study will take about 60 to 70 minutes to complete.

3. What will happen during this study? During this research study, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview. Interview questions are related to your general background, personal experience about the club, and your reflections of the transformation of queer space. The researcher has a set of questions designed to help you relate your perspectives; however, over the course of the interview, additional clarifying questions may be asked. During the interview, you can refuse to answer any questions or withdraw completely from the study at any time with no questions asked.

Information on the processing of personal data

The interview will be audio recorded. All of your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. Except for the researcher, no one will be able to access any identifying information associated with you. Your name will be changed and other identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research.

However, your background information like your personal experience, gender, and sexual orientation, will be used to form the findings in the final paper. The researcher will thoroughly anonymize all your responses for the research. The thesis will be published with an open access.

This Informed Consent Form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Informed Consent Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been/will be answered, and that you voluntarily agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

We do not share your personal data with third parties.

Lund University, Box 117, 221 00 Lund, Sweden, with organisation number 202100-3211 is the controller. You can find Lund University's privacy policy at www.lu.se/integritet

You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at dataskyddsbud@lu.se. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data incorrectly.

Declaration

I, _____, agree that I have understood the terms of the agreement and the study.

Date: _____

Signature of the Participant:

Note: The original consent form contained the private phone number and e-mail address of the researcher and was removed from the one provided above.

Appendix 5: Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for joining this interview, now I'm going to explain my research and the purpose of the interview to you.

This research aims to explore the transformation of Berghain as a queer space and its role in the broader context of the commodification of queer culture and the "club death" social phenomenon. The influence of media is complex. On the one hand, it expands queer space and blurs the boundaries of physical places, making queer space not fixed but fluid. On the other hand, it has reshaped Berghain's identity, shifting it from an underground queer safe space to a globally recognized symbol of subculture. As a study of queer space, this research needs to understand the concerns towards media representation and how queer communities reflect on the current situation. By understanding the ways in which Berghain is mediatized and how its evolving role relates to queer practices of identity expression, this study will explore the implications of queer spatial loss in urban nightlife.

In this case, the focus of this interview is on personal experiences, media narratives, and the broader changes in the queer nightlife scene.

Anonymity

- Your name and other information will be completely anonymized. All personal information will be treated confidentially and the questions will only be used to create an understanding of the participants' experiences in this specific study.
- All information you provide, as well as during the interview, will be treated confidentially and used to create an understanding of the participants' experiences. Your interview will be anonymous, your name will be removed and replaced with a code name. After the project, the material will be deleted.

Ask for permission to record the conversation if needed.

1. Personal Experience & Connection to Berghain

- Why do you identify as a queer?
- Do you feel like you are a minority in real life? If so, what makes you feel like that?
- How would you describe your life as a queer?
- How did you first hear about Berghain?
- Why did you decide to go to Berghain?
- How would you describe Berghain?
- How would you describe your relationship with Berghain?
- When did you first go? What was your experience like back then?
- How often have you been to Berghain?
- Do you still go there now? Why or why not?
- Have you noticed any changes at Berghain over time?

2. Identity & Belonging at Berghain

- As a queer, how did you feel when you were at Berghain?
- Do you feel Berghain provides a space for the queer community? Why or why not?
- What about now? Do you still feel the same?
- Have you ever had experiences there that made you feel particularly included or excluded?
- Have you joined any Berghain communities? If so, what kind of community and how do you feel about it? If not, why?
- How do you feel about the increasing number of non-queer visitors? Does it impact your sense of belonging?
- Do you think Berghain is still an underground queer space, or has it become something else?

3. Media Narratives

- Have you seen any media content about Berghain? If so, what kind of content?
- Did you see it before or after you went to Berghain?
- How would you describe contents about Berghain on media?
- Do you think this portrayal reflects reality, or does it distort the experience?
- What role do social media platforms play in shaping Berghain's image?
- What role does Berghain's "no-camera policy" play in shaping its media presence?
- Have you ever engaged with Berghain-related content online (e.g., TikTok, Reddit, news articles)?
- Has the portrayal of Berghain on social media influenced your experience?
- Do you think the way Berghain is represented in the media affects its role as a queer space? Why or why not?

4. Commodification

- In your opinion, has Berghain become a commercialized brand? Why or why not?
- Have you noticed changes in the crowd at Berghain over time? If so, what reasons do you think caused this?
- Do you think the increasing global attention on Berghain has affected its identity as a queer space?

5. Queer Community Perspectives

- Some say the door policy still protects queer culture, while others believe Berghain has become too commercialized. What's your take?
- Do you believe Berghain is still a queer space? If not, what has changed?
- How would you describe Berghain's role in Berlin's queer community?
- What do you think are the essential factors of queer space? Why?

6. Broader Discussion on Queer Spaces

- Besides Berghain, what other spaces do you consider truly queer in Berlin?
- What do you think makes a club or party genuinely queer?
- In the broader nightlife scene, have queer spaces been changing? If so, what role do you think media and communication play in this process?
- Have you noticed changes in Berlin's queer club scene over the years?
- What do you think are the biggest threats to queer nightlife spaces today?
- Do you see the "club death" as a form of queer spatial loss?
- How do you think the queer community is responding to the challenges of club death and changing queer spaces?

7. Closing

- What do you think is the future of Berghain and spaces like it?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add about Berghain or queer spaces?

Thank you for your time, your answers are really helpful.

If you would like to receive any updates about the research, please let me know.

Note: I didn't ask all the questions. During the interviews, the questions were adjusted based on the answers from my interviewees.

Appendix 6: Sampling of the interviews

The manuscript from the interview with Joy, 1 hour and 41 minutes

Could you start by introducing yourself?

Joy: I live in Berlin permanently, but right now I am spending six months in Nigeria. I am 28 years old.

Would you identify yourself as queer?

Joy: Yes, I do. I am pansexual. I am married to my husband, but we are in a poly queer relationship. Since he is a cisgender man and I am a cisgender woman, we may look heterosexual from the outside, but we are not. I also think the definition of queer is actually quite broad, but people often misunderstand it. For example, I once posted online about the grand queer wedding I had with my husband, and someone commented, “Does your husband not identify as a man?” And I said, that’s none of your business.

Are you working as a volunteer in Nigeria?

Joy: No, I am working with Doctors Without Borders. I get paid for my work. I am not a volunteer, haha.

We just mentioned that people often misunderstand what queer means. So how would you define it, or what does queer mean to you?

Joy: I think the word “queer” has been used for a long time by people who feel different from others but do not want to be put in a box or labeled. People have been calling themselves that for ages. For me, queer is a very inclusive term. I have also seen some debates, for example, whether people in poly relationships count as queer, or in kink communities, if you are really

into BDSM, does that make you queer? I also have some friends who are cisgender and heterosexual, and do not feel particularly different in terms of gender identity, but they do not like the way society defines them and want to live their lives on their own terms. Whatever they do, people say they are strange, and for them, they also call themselves queer. I think everyone defines queer in their own way. At least for me, I have many more friends who identify as queer than friends who are correctly categorized by some official standard.

I saw online that there is a word used in Germany, FLINTA. It excludes cisgender men. Do you have any thoughts on this term?

Joy: I actually quite like FLINTA. Because I think many queer spaces have been taken over by gay men. For me, this is not just a matter of sexual minorities, it is more of a gender issue. Even when we are talking about sexual minorities, I still feel that most of the space is occupied by cisgender men. For example, I worked at the Pride festival in Berlin last year. It was the biggest Pride in Germany, and my biggest impression was just how many gay men there were. It was exhausting. I had imagined a grand Pride festival with all kinds of queer people, all kinds of gender identities, all the different “colors of the rainbow” coming together. On the outside, yes, the parade and the events looked that way, but within the smaller working environment, in our team, among the people I interacted with every day, if I met ten people, eight of them were gay men. Really a lot of them, and almost all white Germans. They have no idea what it is like for people of other genders. Or they do, but as men, it is still hard for them to understand. And especially as Germans, it is even harder for them to consider others. They knew my German was not great, but all our meetings were still held in German. The result was that after two months, my German improved a lot. But that environment was not inclusive at all.

I think this problem exists in LGBTQ spaces around the world. In many places in Germany now, people are starting to focus more on FLINTA events. Because often, once you organize a queer event, some gay men will just show up and it turns into a big sausage party.

You mentioned before that in your view, gay and queer are two different groups?

Joy: Yes, I think they overlap to some extent, but how should I put it, some gay people consider themselves queer, but many queer people do not consider themselves gay. Especially the term queer, I think it is a more inclusive term, and it should include many different kinds of people, like the colors of a rainbow. Gay men are just one color among many.

For example, there is another party in Berlin that claims to be a queer party. I will not name names. They say it is one of the biggest queer parties in Berlin, but if you look at the dress code, it is all straight-male, cis-male, gay-man stuff. And the photos they post, 80 or 90 percent are muscular men. People ask me, “Aren’t you queer? Why don’t you go?” And I say, it’s not that I am not queer, it’s just that there are too many men there.

From a queer perspective, how would you describe your daily life in Berlin?

Joy: I think my daily life in Berlin and outside of Berlin is quite different.

How is it different?

Joy: Outside of Berlin, I just look like a very “normal” person. There is a term called straight-passing. As long as I do not tell people otherwise, they assume I am a straight, ordinary girl, maybe even a bit of a crazy straight girl. Especially because I am married to my husband, which makes things very convenient for me when I work in Nigeria. I talk about my husband all the time. As soon as people hear that I am married, they do not question me or make assumptions about my sexuality. Because being gay is illegal there. It is not something you can talk about at all. So this “straight-passing” has saved me from a lot of trouble.

But sometimes it is also frustrating. One time, we finally decided to go, but it was a last-minute decision. We said, let’s not use the guest list this time, let’s just line up. When we got to the door, we were turned away. We complained to our friend, saying, “You organized the party, and we still got rejected.” He said he couldn’t control the bouncers. The bouncer said we looked too

straight, so we were denied entry. We stood there feeling frustrated and helpless. We thought about calling him to come get us, but in the end, we decided not to bother him and went somewhere else instead.

Later our friend said, “Next time, I will put you on the guest list in advance.” Especially in the winter, we get rejected more easily because we dress too plainly. My husband actually enjoys wearing skirts out. He even plans for us to wear Japanese high school girl sailor uniforms next time and asked me whether that would count as cultural appropriation (laughs). It was really cold that day. Both of us wore thick coats. A girl in front of us in line took off her coat and changed into something flashy and alternative right before reaching the entrance. The bouncer looked at her and said, “Alright, go in.” But the two of us were dressed too plainly, one with a big scarf and the other in a puffy winter jacket. The bouncer looked at us and said, “Ah, two tourists. Goodbye.” And we were denied entry. I felt helpless, but there was nothing we could do.

Do you think you are better able to express yourself in Berlin because you live there long term, or because of Berlin’s social environment?

Joy: I think it is because of Berlin’s social environment. Like I said earlier, Berlin is more inclusive when it comes to the concept of queer. Some other places are inclusive too, but among all the places I have been, Berlin gives me the most freedom. I do not have to wear a mask or be labeled. Some places may appear to be free for sexual minorities, but they are not equal. You still feel a lot of other pressures. For example, at some rainbow parades I attended in other places, if I was not a woman or not transgender, people would react like, “Why are you here?” But that does not happen in Berlin. No matter who you are, when you walk down the street, people just see you as part of the rainbow. Also, because of Berlin’s environment, I have some gay male friends who came to Berlin and then realized they are actually not gay.

What does it mean?

Joy: I have gay male friends who came to Berlin and realized, “The world is beautiful. People of all genders are beautiful. Why should I only focus on men?”

I think Berlin is a very pansexual place. It is diverse and distant from the mainstream. We often joke that Berlin is a gathering place for people with mental issues. Many people who are not mentally “typical” or are neurodivergent can find their own space in Berlin. Every time I go to Berlin, I feel it is more inclusive and vibrant than Sweden. I lived in Sweden for a few years before, and I feel like Sweden looks inclusive, but it is a kind of “middle-class inclusiveness.” I remember I learned a term from a podcast years ago: “sunny middle-class gay.” I thought that was such an accurate and sharp description. Just being a sexual minority is not enough—you also have to meet certain social expectations and become their ideal version of a minority. You have to be successful, good-looking, keep in shape, go to certain places, right? You also need to have money and be able to afford things that make you “acceptable.”

When did you first hear about Berghain?

Joy: That was a long time ago. I had already been to Berlin a few times by then, but my knowledge of music genres was limited to what clubs played. Then it was early 2020, and I was living in Berlin for a month or two. I remember that before that I had seen many posts online about Berghain, but they all had a kind of mystery vibe—like “the hardest club to get into in the world” and “you have to do this and that to get in.” I had already heard about Sven, the bouncer, from those online posts.

But the first time I really learned about Berghain in a physical sense was in early 2020. There was this Facebook group for women in Berlin. One woman posted saying she wanted to try going dancing on Sunday morning and asked if anyone wanted to join her at Berghain. So I started chatting with her. I told her I had no idea what it was, but I liked the idea of daytime dancing. Because I had worked at a lot of music festivals in Beijing, and I’ve always preferred daytime raving over clubbing at night. I said, “You’re telling me there’s a place where you can dance during the day? Then I definitely want to go.” So she said let’s go together.

She also told me about all the requirements: you have to wear black, you have to look a certain way. But I really did not have any black clothes. So I ended up wearing—looking back, it really did not look like I was heading to Berghain—I wore a black puffer jacket, plain black pants, and maybe a short black shirt or something like that. We went on a Sunday morning. We waited in line for just three minutes. When we got to the door, the person just said “bye,” and we left. The funny part is, just before reaching the entrance, she and I even said, “Should we hold hands to look more ‘queer’?” But it did not work. We still got turned away.

That was my first real physical encounter with Berghain. I remember I messaged a friend right after, and he asked me what I had done that day. I said, “I tried to get into Berghain but got rejected.” He said, “Haha, if you haven’t done that, it’s like you haven’t really been to Berlin.” He also said, “If you didn’t get rejected, then why did you even go?” Of course, he was joking. He said, “Next time you go, tell me in advance. I have a guest list.” And I was like, “Why didn’t you say that earlier?”

Could you describe the first time you actually went dancing at Berghain?

Joy: It was two years ago, just two or three weeks after I met my husband. I had just moved to Berlin and wanted to experience a new life. So I decided to try out all kinds of clubs in Berlin. The more, the better. But after going to maybe the tenth or twelfth club, we decided not to waste time on boring ones anymore. A lot of clubs were just not fun, so we started sticking to the ones we actually liked [...] Then we got to the entrance. He was so annoying, you know? On the way there, my husband was glued to his phone, talking, chatting with people—while I had read so many posts saying you should not talk at the door, you should not interact with others. You’re supposed to look cool, act like you don’t care, just there to dance. No phones, no loud talking.

He didn’t follow a single one of those rules. It was fine when we were far from the entrance. We waited for less than an hour in total. At the back of the line, we chatted casually. But once we were near the front, in that zigzag part of the line, when we were just one bend away from the door, he was still talking non-stop. I said, “Can you stop talking? We’re almost there.” Then he suddenly pulled out his phone to show me some funny reels he had saved. He said, “Look,

this one's hilarious!" I laughed and said, "Let's stop watching, we're in line." He laughed and said, "I just wanted to show you." He kept chatting and joking. I gave up trying to stop him. Then he pointed at someone and said, "Hey, those pants are nice." That person replied, "Thanks." I said, "No worries."

My husband is a total extrovert, he can talk to anyone. What's even funnier is that even though Berghain has really strict security, checking everything in your bag, when we got to the ticket counter and paid, my husband said, "Did you see that ticket seller looked like she was about to cry?" I said, "What?" He said, "I said good morning and chatted with her a bit, and suddenly she looked like she might cry." He said, "You were the first person to smile and talk to me today." Because everyone else in line was just cold, trying to look cool. He found it really funny.

How would you describe Berghain as a place?

Joy: I think it is definitely one of the top clubs in the world. Especially for people who love techno, it really is a celebration. The sound system is great, and the vibe is also great. A lot of regulars there dance in ways you would not see anywhere else. Some of the dance moves are really exaggerated, and some of the outfits are extremely over-the-top too. Sometimes you wonder, where are these people during the rest of the week? You never see them on the street. I think it really represents Berlin. If someone wanted to film a documentary—an epic documentary that captures the spirit of Berlin—Berghain would be a fitting choice.

What kind of "spirit" is that?

Joy: You see all kinds of dance styles. Some are dramatic, some are laid-back. It feels like a space where people can release who they really are.

And while you were inside, what was your more personal feeling?

Joy: My strongest impression was how dark it was. Later I realized that one of the reasons I

prefer daytime raves is not just because I'm more mentally active during the day, but because I like dancing in the sunlight. When I was doing some research before, I read that Berghain used to be a gay club and also had a lot of queer people, with space provided for them to express themselves freely.

As a queer, how did it feel being in that environment? Was it very inclusive or exclusive?

Joy: We have actually been to Berghain quite a few times. One time we didn't go was because they canceled a set by a Palestinian DJ. Another time was when they hosted a Women's Day event. It was meant to be a special Women's Day party, but it ended up being a kind of "European alliance" party. It wasn't just FLINTA, but more like a "European crew" event. A friend of ours who went in complained to me afterward, saying there were still so many gay men inside. I couldn't understand it. Why are there still so many men on Women's Day?

But Berghain, historically as a gay club, should know what it represents. It has a branch called Lab.Oratory. Although Lab is a part of Berghain, it is not the whole of Berghain. Many of Lab's parties are gay men only. But in queer spaces, there are not that many events for queer people who are not gay men. For me, once a place has too many gay men, and especially too many lazy ones, that sense of oppression starts to show up. It feels like your own space is being squeezed smaller and smaller.

You also mentioned that Berghain is very well-known. Have you noticed any changes in recent years?

Joy: I haven't lived in Berlin for that long, so I don't know what it was like many years ago. But in the past few years, because of social and economic reasons, a lot of the "old Berliners" have moved away. Many of the older generation artists have moved to cheaper places. What's left now is a mix of the last traces of old-school folks and a bunch of "new Berliners." A lot of these new Berliners actually prefer smaller parties. Especially in recent years, many of my FLINTA friends have started going to FLINTA-led, more niche spaces. Berlin now has more

and more of these FLINTA-only spaces. For example, there's a flat party I haven't been to yet, but I saw their promotion and thought it looked interesting. The party is called "FLINTA-only naked rave."

You mentioned earlier that some "old Berliners" have moved out while "new Berliners" are moving in. How would you describe the difference between the two groups? What kind of changes have they brought to Berlin?

Joy: Among the new Berliners, at least in my experience, there are a lot of immigrants and newcomers. That makes Berlin more international. But there's also a group of new Berliners—how to put it—some people who are a bit too "just being themselves," and they sometimes distort what Berlin used to feel like. Many people used to move to Berlin saying, "I want to make art here and express myself." But now a lot of people come just because it's trendy. We sometimes joke, "Are you here to liberate yourself or to liberate others?"

Do you feel that they've taken away part of your sense of belonging?

Joy: I think no matter who comes, there will always be some people who are unhappy about it. No matter who you are, someone will be annoyed.

Some online comments say that places like Berghain or other big clubs have become a kind of betrayal to local culture, a betrayal to club culture. What do you think about that?

Joy: I think it depends on what kind of "betrayal" they mean. If club culture means a space for gay men only, then I think that kind of betrayal is a good thing. If club culture is supposed to belong to Germans, then I also think that kind of betrayal is a good thing. But if the betrayal is about people no longer going for the music, and instead going just to check off a box or say they've been there, then yes, I do think that's a problem. For us, we now go to Sisyphos more often because it gives us what we call an "affirmative musical vibe"—a kind of musical feeling

we can't find elsewhere. These days, we usually go on Sundays because tourists crowd the place on Fridays and Saturdays. Sundays have become the time when locals go to dance. That's when you really feel a sense of belonging. With Berghain, its "coolness" has become too famous. No matter when or what event is happening, it's always full of visitors from far away. Some people come to Berlin multiple times just trying to get in. Some people "fail once, twice, a hundred times"—like applying for grad school.

Do you feel that the growing number of tourists affects the sense of belonging for your queer community? In what ways?

Joy: I don't think tourists necessarily harm anything in themselves, but when a place becomes a social media check-in spot, it often loses its original purpose. For example, many clubs in Berlin have a strict no-phone policy, but we often see tourists sneak photos inside and then post them online, and that creates serious safety concerns.

For example, I was at a club—not one of the ones we just talked about, a different one—during the summer when they hosted a free party. I was really happy to go. At the entrance, they put stickers over the front and back of your phone to cover the cameras. But when we were dancing in the garden, someone in front of me peeled the stickers off and started taking pictures openly. Maybe it wouldn't be such a big deal in other places. I sometimes take photos too. But this place had clearly set the rule, and even put stickers on your phone. I told that person, "If you can't follow basic rules like this, then I don't want to see you here again." I said directly, "If you don't delete that photo now, I'll get security and have them throw you out." More recently, in Sisyphos, someone in our group chat shared a video they found on social media—someone had secretly recorded the main dance floor.

Do you think the door policy is protecting the queer space inside the club?

Joy: I think it depends on who the bouncer is. Not everyone can be a bouncer just anywhere. As for Berghain's bouncers, I can't really say—I just think they're very random. Other clubs at

least have some kind of logic, like judging based on a dress code. I understand why bouncers exist, because if you're not dressed a certain way, other people inside might feel like they're overdressed. But at Berghain, the bouncers really feel random and illogical.

That's also one of the reasons why we and our friends don't go to Berghain that much. We often go out with a big group, like ten or more people, especially when friends come to visit Berlin. We'll all go out together. But if we're talking about Berghain, it becomes really difficult—unless every single one of us is on the guest list. We don't want a situation where half the group gets in and the other half is left outside trying to figure out what to do. And sometimes we have friends who are definitely queer, but they don't "look" queer. Even within queer communities, there can be this kind of tension—people thinking, "You don't look like one of us," or "You have to look more queer to be one of us."

Do you think the way bouncers judge people is itself a kind of exclusion?

Joy: I think clubs are always a mix of inclusivity and exclusivity. You have to set a certain level of exclusivity before a space can truly become inclusive. I don't know if that makes sense. It's the same with events we host among friends. You might say my birthday party was really cool because there were all kinds of people there—different skin tones, different backgrounds. But at the end of the day, my birthday party is about making me happy. I'm not going to invite a few loud neighbors just to ruin the mood. So I think inclusivity and exclusivity are always relative. There's no such thing as pure inclusivity. If you imagine a totally inclusive party, I don't even know what that would look like. A free venue might not actually feel safe for women or sexual minorities, so that's not inclusive either. But if you charge money, that becomes a barrier for low-income people. If you have a bouncer, people might say the place isn't queer-friendly enough. So in the end, it's really hard to reach some kind of "pure inclusivity." What matters more is making the people inside feel safe. I think that's the key [...] People say inclusive spaces should be permanent and open to everyone, but if you can't remove people who are discriminatory, or people who don't respect consent, then the space is no longer a queer space. It's like the paradox of the safe space. We say we want safe spaces, but we can't be "too

safe.” If you over-emphasize safety, you might take away space for others to express themselves.

Do you think Berghain is still a queer space?

Joy: Berghain is still a queer space in some ways. But many of the people who go there now have nothing to do with queer culture. They go to Berghain not because it’s the biggest queer space in Berlin, but because it’s the most famous club in the world.

Do you feel that Berghain has now become something more commodified, like a brand?

Joy: I think it’s a kind of “soft commodification” that you can’t easily label. You see people showing off their wristbands, people selling “experience guides,” and even others offering paid escort services to accompany clients to the club. It has become a kind of dinner-table story. I’ve done club companion work in Berlin a few times. Some people messaged me asking if I could take their clients to Berghain. I asked them, “Why does it have to be Berghain?” And they honestly said, “We just want to brag about it when we get back home.” I think a lot of people, especially those going to big clubs, are drawn in because Berghain has been so heavily mythologized. If one day Berghain allowed absolutely everyone to get in, maybe fewer people would be interested. Right now, people treat the bouncers and the outfits as a kind of challenge, asking things like “Do you think I’ll get in if I wear this today?”

What do you think about that?

Joy: I think everyone’s performing, and it’s all a bit cheap. People dress in such exaggerated ways that it’s obvious they’re trying too hard. Like the time my husband and I got in—we were wearing the exact same clothes we’d wear to any other club, just our usual puffer jackets. We didn’t change at all. And that time the bouncers didn’t even seem to care about any “rules.”

Among your queer friends, how do they feel about Berghain now?

Joy: Maybe because of the kind of people I hang out with—my friends are very colorful, peacock-like queers. Every day they dress like they're bursting into full display. People say Berliners all wear black? Then they haven't met us. When we go out, we look like a bunch of turkeys or flamingos. A lot of my friends don't go to Berghain anymore. They've already been to all the major clubs in Berlin, and they know people at many of them. But they still don't go to Berghain.

You've also mentioned seeing some online content about Berghain. What do you think of that?

Joy: People are just bored (laughs). One reason a lot of us avoid Berghain is that it gets talked about way too much. We don't want to become part of someone else's story. We don't want to be a plot twist in someone else's "epic experience." Sometimes I do browse the posts online, including some messages in Telegram groups for Berghain and Sisyphos. You can see a very clear difference. I can show you right now—I've joined two unofficial Telegram groups, one for Sisyphos and one for Berghain.

In the Berghain group, lots of people are selling drugs, asking for first-timer tips, or posting things like "I went to Berghain yesterday, met a beautiful girl—does anyone know who she is?" Others ask, "Which clubs are open this Tuesday?" There's some communication, but it doesn't feel like a real community. Most of the time it's questions like "Who's the bouncer today?" "What are the chances of getting in?" "How long is the line?" In the Sisyphos group, people also ask questions like that, but more often you see someone posting a photo of ducks they saw, or selfies, or sharing music. DJs post their mixes. People actually interact. Someone might say, "I lost something—did anyone see it?" and the next message will be, "I found it—here's my contact." You really feel a sense of human connection in the Sisyphos group. Sure, there are tourists, but many of them eventually become part of the place.

Like the first time I went to Sisyphos, I was just a happy tourist. But the more I went, the more I became part of the scene. At Berghain, you can feel that a lot of the people in the club don't actually live in Berlin. There are just too many tourists. I don't think having tourists is inherently

bad, but for us, it's no longer the space that suits us best. Many of our queer friends are neurodivergent in some way—they're sensitive to stimuli and get overwhelmed easily. They prefer a gentler atmosphere. Like I said, we're peacocks. We like sunshine, rainbows, and places where we can dance around happily. Berghain is a very industrial space. It belongs to some people, but not to us.

Do you feel like it's hard to form a connection with Berghain?

Joy: Yes, I think it's a good club, but it's not my club.

Do you think the way Berghain is shown in the media reflects the real Berghain?

Joy: How should I put it... the "real" Berghain, I think, is questionable. Because everyone has a different experience. It's like eating mushrooms, no one can truly describe what a mushroom trip feels like, because the experience is different for everyone. Even your own experiences can be different every time. I find it hard to say that one mushroom trip felt the same as the next. A club like Berghain is the same. Different people go in and come out with completely different feelings and stories. I don't think there's any single perspective that can be called the "real" one.

You mentioned earlier that you looked at some online content before going to Berghain. Do you think that influenced your experience?

Joy: It definitely influenced my behavior. I was over there saying stuff like, "Stop talking, don't look at your phone!" But my husband is such an unconventional person. And actually, because neither of us are particularly rule-abiding, we didn't run into any issues getting into Berghain. That's just who we are—at Berghain, the most important thing is to be yourself. All those so-called outfits, armor, club uniforms—I think they don't matter. What really matters is whether people can tell you're being sincere. Are you dressing up for others and pretending, or do you genuinely want to go in and dance? People can often tell. Not always accurately, but sometimes

if you're putting on an act, people can see through it.

What role do you think social media plays in shaping Berghain's image?

Joy: It turned something that originally belonged to a niche group into something mainstream. Especially when you hear about people like Elon Musk trying to go to Berghain, or Duolingo shooting ads there. I think it's both a good thing and a bad thing. The good part is that more people get to know about the place. The bad part is that it's become a commercial icon. It's kind of like—Paris has the Eiffel Tower, Berlin has Berghain. But at the same time, that shift takes away the sense of space for people who originally belonged there. So many of them now choose to find other spaces.

Berghain doesn't allow photos, but because it's so famous, a lot of people online still imagine and discuss what it's like inside. What do you think about that?

Joy: Well... some people see that as one of the reasons why Berghain is no longer a safe space. There's too much curiosity, too many people wanting to tell stories about what happens inside. And that makes others worried—what if one day I do something in there and I end up as a character in someone's novel? Then what?

Just like you said before—about not wanting to become part of someone else's story.

Joy: Exactly. That's why a lot of people prefer smaller queer spaces that have a stronger sense of community. Even if they're small, most of the people who go are already part of the scene. You know the people, the vibes are better, the sense of belonging is stronger. And you don't have to worry that anything you do inside will turn into gossip later.

When it comes to Berlin's queer nightlife today, do you think queer spaces have changed?

Joy: There are definitely more tourists. I used to work at one of the biggest queer clubs in Berlin. A lot of tourists came to check in just for the hype. But many of them got really drunk and started throwing up everywhere. Not just vomiting—some would start rambling nonsense or even get into fights. A few of my friends went there and told me they didn't like it when people who had nothing to do with the music showed up. They didn't like it.

I think what makes a party good isn't just how cool it is or how great the music is—although those things are important. What really matters is whether it attracts a good crowd. If the crowd isn't right, then even the fanciest club or the best music won't help. It's like going to a rich club with top-notch lights and sound, but if the people aren't right, it just doesn't work. That's what Berlin is like now. We don't even go out for New Year's anymore. The first year I went to Berlin's biggest New Year's party. The second year I chose a small one with only around 300 people, and that was definitely better. This year we just stayed at a friend's place until 2am, eating cheese fondue, watching fireworks, and chatting.

Would you say that the influx of tourists is the biggest factor affecting queer nightlife today?

Joy: No. I think the biggest factors are economic and political.

For example?

Joy: You know, Germany is going through political transitions right now, and the budget is shrinking. Actually, even before the current government took power, the previous administration had already started cutting cultural funding. Many clubs don't make much money to begin with. Ticket sales and bar revenue don't bring in enough. Rent and utilities are insanely expensive, and so are wages. A lot of these clubs rely on cultural subsidies from the Berlin government. But with the continued reduction of funding, many club landlords have sold their venues to corporate companies. The space for clubs to survive keeps getting smaller.

I came across a German term that describes the phenomenon of “club death.” Have you felt that happening?

Joy: Definitely. The clubs near our home have recently shut down. Right now, there are protests happening everywhere because of the government cutting cultural funds. Many clubs rely on that support, and without it, they really can't survive. On top of that, rents are rising super fast. More and more tech companies are buying up land in Berlin to build offices. Many landlords have sold old club venues. Watergate and Renate, for example, had the same landlord, and he decided to sell the land for corporate development. Renate is on the same street I live on. That street also has //About Blank and a few small clubs, restaurants, and bars. They've been protesting for three years because the government wants to build a highway there. If that happens, the whole street will be torn down.

Are the protests happening online or in person?

Joy: Both. We organize online, and we party in the streets. We shut down the road and dance in the middle of it.

With these spaces disappearing one after another, do you feel a loss of belonging?

Joy: Yes, absolutely. There are still a few clubs we go to that are still around—like Sisyphe, which probably won't shut down anytime soon. It's further out on the edge of the city, more remote, so it's safe for now. But other places aren't so lucky. KitKat, for instance, is under serious threat. We work there, and they're now very cautious about allowing long queues. There have been too many neighbor complaints. The police have said that if there are more complaints and people lining up, the club will be shut down. Even with growing numbers of tourists, it's still very fragile. There are rumors every year that Berghain will close “next year.” It hasn't happened yet, but those rumors never stop.

Appendix 7: Open coding example

Do you think the door policy is protecting the queer space inside the club?

Joy: I think it depends on who the bouncer is. Not everyone can be a bouncer just anywhere. As for Berghain's bouncers, I can't really say—I just think they're very random. Other clubs at least have some kind of logic, like judging based on a dress code. I understand why bouncers exist, because if you're not dressed a certain way, other people inside might feel like they're overdressed. But at Berghain, the bouncers really feel random and illogical.

That's also one of the reasons why we and our friends don't go to Berghain that much. We often go out with a big group, like ten or more people, especially when friends come to visit Berlin. We'll all go out together. But if we're talking about Berghain, it becomes really difficult—unless every single one of us is on the guest list. We don't want a situation where half the group gets in and the other half is left outside trying to figure out what to do. And sometimes we have friends who are definitely queer, but they don't "look" queer. Even within queer communities, there can be this kind of tension—people thinking, "You don't look like one of us," or "You have to look more queer to be one of us."

Do you think the way bouncers judge people is itself a kind of exclusion?

Joy: I think clubs are always a mix of inclusivity and exclusivity. You have to set a certain level of exclusivity before a space can truly become inclusive. I don't know if that makes sense. It's the same with events we host among friends. You might say my birthday party was really cool because there were all kinds of people there—different skin tones, different backgrounds. But at the end of the day, my birthday party is about making me happy. I'm not going to invite a few loud neighbors just to ruin the mood. So I think inclusivity and exclusivity are always relative. There's no such thing as pure inclusivity. If you imagine a totally inclusive party, I don't even know what that would look like. A free venue might not actually feel safe for women or sexual minorities, so that's not inclusive either. But if you charge money, that becomes a barrier for low-income people. If you have a bouncer, people might say the place isn't queer-friendly.

Handwritten notes:

- Not satisfied with current bouncers
- selective door policy
- the reason
- No logic rejection
- dressing?
- The logic? / standards
- affective resistance
- Negative
- Even they are together still
- might be rejected
- Unnegotiable
- It creates rule system?
- safe
- door policy, no photo
- A good point!
- exclude those people who are not familiar with queer subculture
- the core of queer space
- Inclusive / exclusive
- relation
- queer space construction
- performative identity
- atmosphere

A page of the Interview with Joy

Appendix 8: Codebook Sample

4 themes, 13 categories, and 24 subcategories:

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Description	Example
Queer Spatial Politics	Lost of Queer Belonging	Gay Heritage and Loss	Narratives about Berghain's origins as a gay male space have been increasingly challenged by cis-heteronormative influences	Berghain was a gay club back in the day, also if cis hets invade our safe spaces, they have to respect us. It used to be better back in the day. I guess due to money reasons they started to allow cis hets too not for any other reason.
		Gendered Exclusion / FLINTA Invisibility	Expressions of non-male queers feeling unsafe, invisible or secondary within the space	Please go and increase the visibility of lesbians and enjoy yourselves! However, I can't recommend the darkrooms outside of explicitly FLINTA spaces... you'll be regularly approached by men wanting to join. It gets a bit tiring telling them no.
	Exclusivity within Queer Community	In-group / Out-group Markers	Discursive construction of who belongs and who is seen as "outsiders"	Then you have those who look the part (LGBT presenting, or simply a unique and alternative look that makes them part of an interesting crowd). Then you have those who go often and are recognised as such. Then you have everyone else trying to get in.

		Exclusive discourse	Using of phrases like “we all know...” or irony to create group identity	We see each other... straight people just don't get it.
	Construction of Queer Identity	Performative Identity	Users reflect on stylizing themselves to show they belong to the community; queerness performed under aesthetic expectation	Quite a few times have I heard guys constantly talking about their hinge dates and girls in the queue, just to get close to each other and hug/arms around each other as we approach the door in order to pass as gay.
		Platformed Identity and Cultural Memory	Users portray collective memories which related to their identities in the online Berghain community	You will only remember the most rememberable nights of yesteryear. What I miss most of the prepandemic era are the longer Klubbnachts. Before the closing was never before 09 and could go until 16... most of the closings were euphoric... the last closings I have been to the music towards the end has been quite low energy and left me uninterested.
Commodification and Platform Culture	Tourist Gaze and Spectacle	Spectacularization of Queerness	Berghain turned into a performative product because the affection of social media	I remember someone on here recently saying Berghain was a place where you went to not be seen, now it's a place you go to be seen. Paraphrase maybe but that just about sums it up. It's a

				greater shame an entire music genre and culture has been dragged down with it.
		Loss of Subcultural Authenticity	Berghain's original subcultural character has faded and branded because of the influx of mainstream culture	Berghain has become the one thing that it was never meant to be: interchangeable. The vibe inside is soo inauthentic... Just a bunch of normies with mullets in stupid outfits in their friendgroups hanging out because they think it makes them cool... Berghain has no identity of its own anymore.
		Platformed Mythology	Myths about Berghain built and circulated through social media guides, door rumors, outfit decoding	There is no myth to the queue or door policy. But the club and party gains mythical status by providing people this sense of exclusivity and scarcity, for better or for worse.
	Response to platform restrictions	Self-awareness of algorithm	Users show awareness of platform norms, content moderation, and try to avoid expression limits	You can't post that on your main
		Self-protection on media platforms	Emotionally neutral or coded phrasing to avoid Reddit downvotes or triggering moderation	Not judging anyone here but I think people need to stop romanticising gay men and putting them on a pedestal. PS: I'm gay so I've experienced this first hand.

	Subcultural Filtering	Selective door Policy	Door policy as symbolic filter of subcultural capital, style, gender expression, and even ethnicity	Berghain does it one way – by personally vetting people at the door. And you bet your ass they look for people who want to observe and not participate.
Mediated Rituals and Spatial Imaginaries	Meaning-Making	Media pilgrimage	People visit Berghain as a way to show privilege or emotional transformation because of media content	I mean, everyone knows about it and it's so mainstreamed on the media... does anyone else also think that all this popularity Berghain has been gaining in socials might endanger the communities we are trying to keep safe?
		Mythic Space Construction	Berghain as imagined or remembered space that beyonds its physical form	Oh the pain of falling out of love... I used to go to Berghain regularly in my early twenties over a decade ago. It was a lifechanging place, a new home for someone who didn't really have one before. To be part of this ecosystem every weekend meant the world to me. It changed how I related to myself and others, it helped me to get in touch with my desires and what I want out of this world
	Ritualized Access	Aesthetic Rituals of Entry	Description around clothing, behavior, mood, gate theatrics	Sad but it was just a wrong party for you guys to try out. The lineup attracted this

				particular crowd, and I believe the selection was also based on what kind of audience this type of music might attract.
		The circulation of sharing information	Sharing practical strategies through platform language (“do’s/don’ts”) as community co-produced knowledge	They never listened to techno, joked about wearing all black to get in (not true btw), and just generally had no care or interest in techno culture
	Affective Connections with Physical Place	Club Atmosphere	Descriptions of music, lights, sweat, bodies creating an altered queer space	I thought it was way kinkier, especially Sundays but even Saturday nights felt wilder and way less touristy... still drugs and plenty of sex of course (both gay and straight), but people seemed more in control of their destiny.
		Material Aesthetics and Feelings	Comments about physical space elements, such as rooms, sound, architecture	I remember Freddy K's long closings and how everyone came out for them. The old catacomb setup where Säule is today with those stairs leading to hidden places and that little dark room with a passage. I miss the statue of the man with a funnel. Klubnacht was €16 back then. I thought it was way kinkier, especially Sundays but even Saturday nights felt wilder and way less touristy.

Emotions and Resistance	Digital Narratives of Loss	Temporal Loss or Mourning	Expressions of sadness about the loss of intimacy, politics, undergroundness	Its sad to see that something you loved disappeared, but i guess thats just how it is. (And don't come with some bullshit like "every generation has their own berghain magic" because if u weren't there, u have no clue how truly singular and special it was). Nothing compares.
	Negative Feelings	Feeling depression of current situation	Use of irony, anger, sadness to critique commercialization, loss of politics	Now last time I went I felt I was inside a meme where everyone was a clone. It had become just another hip club...
		Sarcasm of Berghain	Use of ironic humor to challenge media narratives of Berghain	Berghain has become the one thing that it was never meant to be: interchangeable. Putting on a silly leather harness because u saw that on insta doesn't make you less prude, it just makes you trite.
	Affective Resistance	Softened Expressions	Using gentle phrasing to express dissatisfaction with spatial or cultural transformations, but accept the changes over time	I still think BH is the best club experience for techno lovers in the world, because of the roots it was built on. And some nights, and some closings - you still get that magical moment where you feel similar to how it was. But - as someone who used to go quite regularly, it's

				just harder to get a nights like this as before. And it's normal - times have changed.
	Tactical Resistance	Anonymity	Choosing to withhold identity, be ironic, or post anonymously to resist norms or surveillance	Normally we don't tell others our personal information, what's in Berghain should just be in Berghain, forever.
		Micro-resistance in Expression	Subtle acts of resistance in everyday life	What I try to do when I am there and talking to people, and we talk about the club and what it's like, is to raise awareness that all of us create the vibe and how our actions affect our surroundings, even or especially the people we don't know personally but are in community with at this place.

Note: This is part of my codebooks which covers the analysis of Reddit comments

Appendix 9: The analysis of Instagram and Reddit

Categories	Subcategories	Items	Denotations	Connotations
Outfits	Instagram	Images of black clothing, leather, hashtags like <i>#technooutfit</i>	Visual aesthetic as entrance ritual	Uniform dark aesthetic becomes commodified queer codes
	Reddit	Comments such as “Don’t smile, don’t look like a tourist... worst advice ever”, “Be yourself”	Rejection of visual conformity and aesthetic expectations	Disidentification with Instagram norms; self-presentation seen as affective negotiation rather than visual performance
Space	Instagram	Exterior only: brick wall, long queue photos; no interior imagery	Media pilgrimage and the construction of myth	Berghain’s mystique is maintained by photographic absence; aura is constructed through visual limitation
	Reddit	Comments like “I cried on the dancefloor”, “It feels like home”, “long talk at the bar”	Embodied, intimate memory narratives of internal space	Storytelling fills the visual void; emotional depth and spatial texture are restored via discourse
Entrance and Gatekeeping	Instagram	Selfies at queue, long queue outside the door, tips to get into	Entry as spectacle and proof of “being queer/cool”	The queue becomes part of the performance; door policy serves as a social marker
	Reddit	“If you need to try that hard, then you don’t belong here”	Entry as informal test of identity instead of a trend or challenge	Reflection on affective and social labor of being allowed in; more than just visual
Emotions	Instagram	Excited about finally get into/feel frustrated about being rejected and ask why	No deep emotional connections	Emotional experience is obscured; visual reduces expressive intimacy
	Reddit	“Berghain changed how I related to myself”, “Still dance through anxiety attacks”	Emotional vulnerability, shared feelings, sense of belonging	Emotion as a mode of spatial belonging and survival

Platform Norms	Instagram	Curated visuals, repetition of fashion codes, likes/hashtags	Visibility governed by aesthetic legibility	Platform incentivizes symbolic repetition; queer visibility becomes commodified
	Reddit	“It’s all a show”, “I don’t feel safe anymore with the crowd”	Critique of commodification, gentrification, and queer erasure	Reddit becomes a space of myth deconstruction; fosters discursive resistance to normativity

Appendix 10: Sample of analyzing Reddit Comments

<p>The first time I went was in 2010. Clubbing back then was a lot more fun and joyous for lack of a better word. The music was slower and groovier. People would be silly and playful, showing up dressed like fairies or sailors or whatever. There was glitter and confetti and lollipops and random things like that. Going to BH wasn't an ordeal. You could pop in for a drink and spend a couple of hours and then leave and come back the next morning for a few hours again. My friends and I would spend a lot of time in the lounge areas just chatting and meeting new people. Now the lounge is like a quasi infirmary where people go to pass out but it used to be really lively and chatty. You could have full conversations about politics, philosophy, or art with a stranger without screaming. It was far more laid back and spontaneous. I don't remember the queues being so long. The bathrooms were always full but so much easier to get into, you'd only enter with maybe 2 people at most, and there was always a stall you could get into quickly. It wasn't so serious, so sceney, so speedy, so gloomy, so expensive, or so desperate.</p>	<p>Contrast between past and present atmosphere→ affects as spatial memory</p> <p>Lounge space transforms from a site of social interaction to a space of exhaustion→ memory as critique of current condition</p> <p>Soundscape and social practices as signs of inclusivity or alienation→ changing rhythms = changing belonging</p> <p>Everyday memories of “chatting”, “confetti”, and “lollipops” signal the spatial poetics of joy→ now replaced by scarcity and fatigue</p>
<p>Lot less phones, techno wasn't trendy back then also (now some sub-genres are literally putting hard techno as the new EDM, same crowd comes with it - less underground ppl). When I first entered BH I knew NOTHING about it - I guess that was part of the charm too. More queer, more sexual, more wild, more social and friendly. It was like a different universe... not connected at all to the world outside. I still think BH is the best club experience for techno lovers in the world, because of the roots it was built on. And some nights, and some closings - you still get that magical moment where you feel similar to how it was. But - as someone who used to go quite regularly, it's just harder to get a night like this as before. And it's normal - times have changed.</p>	<p>Describes the logic of commodification overtaking queer belonging</p> <p>Queer space as transformed by capitalist norm→ from subcultural specificity to diluted accessibility</p> <p>Participation framed in economic terms→ Berghain as brand, not community</p> <p>Signals a transition from affective spatiality to consumer-centered visibility</p>
<p>As Daniel Ryan-Spaulding said some years ago: “Straight people ruin everything”. I'm sure many</p>	

<p>straight people don't do that consciously. It's just that many queer parties and clubs have the best atmosphere. And of course word gets around. We gays take our straight friends with us and gradually the audience changes. Because Berghain is also just a company and wants to earn money. And for the size of the club, purely gay guests are not enough. I have also noticed in recent times, especially after the coron era, a further change in the audience to increasingly straighter people. In my early days at Berghain in 2008, the club was still full of bears, leather guys and transvestites. You hardly see them anymore, which is a shame. How good the atmosphere can be, you saw at the beginning of September, when because of Folsom finally once again a crowd was there that came close to the early years. Unfortunately, times change and it's probably time for us gays to move on and look for other spaces. Nevertheless, I still have fun at Berghain and at almost 50 years old I will leave the search for new places to the new generations. I'm sure they will find those places.</p>	<p>Cyclical structure of spatial belonging→ nostalgia and anticipated departure</p> <p>Affirms the impossibility of reclaiming a past queer temporality, can only accept the changes</p> <p>A generational transition in spatial ownership→ “moving on” as both resignation and resistance</p> <p>Reimagines queer clubbing as transient and perishable→ subcultural time vs. historical time</p>
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These comments are selected from the comment section under the Reddit post titled “BH changing over the years.”

Appendix 11: A photo about the outside of Berghain

