FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Your periphery is my center

The political power of music in the margins

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Promotional photo for Polish queer/femme rave crew Oramics' new merch.

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1. Introduction

In this paper I want to outline the increase of global connectivity in the worldwide *underground* of experimental electronic dance music. I will argue that this increased connection might be a valuable place to foster political activism. In a world where a complex system of economic dependency is still at work, it is interesting to see how some of the alternative modes of artistic production are bounding together and influencing each other in a world-spanning alternative culture. This not only fosters interesting collaborations, but also offers valuable routes of information dispersion and increasing connectivity in a global activism nexus of horizontal, rhizomatic order. This paper will thus focus on the following questions: can we speak of a shifting cultural dependency and an increased connectivity, what are the concrete possibilities and pitfalls for this increasing connectivity and where is the political power situated in experimental electronic music? In short: where are we now, and where can we go from here?

To study this, I will start from a series of concepts put forward by Deleuze & Guattari in their seminal 1980 book Mille Plateaux, the second volume in their collaborative Capitalism and Schizophrenia series (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972; 1980). Furthermore, I will also employ some of the ideas imagined by Edouard Glissant in his 1990 book Poétique de la Relation (Poetics of Relation, Glissant, 1997). Glissant also builds further upon Deleuze & Guattari's rhizome. Throughout the paper, I will try and use these ideas as a sort of counterbalance against the ideas of dependency theory, put forward by Amin (1974) and elaborated upon by Wallerstein (2004) with World Systems theory. Departing from this theoretical balance, I will also try to map some of the political possibilities of the experimental electronic dance music scene. The paper thus has one leg firmly planted in political sciences, and another placed somewhere between philosophy and cultural studies. Hopefully, the rather imaginative frameworks offered by Glissant and Deleuze & Guattari will offer lines of flight from the rather grim outlook of global inequality through dependency.

My methodology will consist mainly of autoethnography, departing from Ellis and Bochner (2000) and Chang's (2008) definitions of this specific form of ethnography. I will study my own activity and experiences during my last 10 years of enjoying and working in the Belgian nightlife and music scene, starting in my village, Kalmthout and moving via Ghent to Brussels. This offers valuable data, as I believe I have been involved in quite some different parties and events, not only as a party-goer, but also as an organizer and artist. Further, speaking from my own experiences enables me to stress my personal views upon this, as logically, my music taste and ideas are formed by my personal opinions and background. I have been running a small label focusing on alternative electronic music since 2016, called MONTAGE. This thesis will thus not only function as a way of studying, but also a way of questioning and ameliorating my own praxis as a label manager, booker and artist.

For Chang (2008), autoethnography implies looking at your own experiences through the sociocultural context. I will thus be supplying the autoethnographic data with secondary data, trying to evaluate how my experiences hold up to others' experiences and ideas. This secondary data may consist of interviews, panel discussions, podcasts, music press, literature, videos, prior observations and of course the music itself. For that matter, this text will hopefully offer insights to my peers in the music scene, by critically challenging not only their work, but also my own. I believe that a lot of the problems I have seen or encountered during the past years are not specific only to me or my way of running things, but rather to our times in general. Through the critical lense offered by the theory I employ, I hope to garner valuable insights on how to move forward towards a more diverse, more equal and more honest music scene. Further, I will emphasize the ways dance music culture offers ways of collectivity and being that could be of political value to us all. This text is thus not only aimed at my artist, organizer and booker peers, but also at music industry workers in general. From stagehands via bar personnel to publishers and press agents, we are all in this together and we all need to put in the effort to imagine how our particular niche could be different, better and more politically engaged.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

● Political frame

Dependency theory is a theory thought up by Egyptian economist and political scientist Samir Amin, in which he "defines two distinct patterns: one applying to development at the centre, the other to dependent development in the periphery" (Amin, 1974, p. 9). He thus frames a critical relation between a leading core and a dependent periphery, built upon different production capacities and imports and exports. While a lot of the economic specificities of the theory are of little interest here, the idea of a core and a dependent periphery are a very valuable paradigm to look at art, culture, identity and music. I will thus try to elaborate on the ideas of core-periphery within the social constructs of music, both on an artistic and an economic level. There have been some earlier papers that bring dependency theory into music (Moon et al., 2010; Crossley et al., 2014; Crossley & Ozturk, 2019), but all have had a rather quantitative approach, mostly via network analysis.

Amin's dependency theory is mostly based on a geographical division between what I interpret as the west and the global south. While I think this north-south divide is still true to a certain extent, I will focus mostly on Wallerstein's (2004) vision of core and peripheral processes, which are not necessarily confined to geographical areas. This will resonate the most with the musical modes I will discuss. Wallerstein speaks of the following:

"The axial division of labor of a capitalist world-economy divides production into core-like products and peripheral products. Core-periphery is a relational concept. What we mean by core-periphery is the degree of profitability of the production processes. Since profitability is directly related to the degree of monopolization, what we essentially mean by core-like production processes is those that are controlled by quasi-monopolies. Peripheral processes are then those that are truly competitive. When exchange occurs, competitive products are in a weak position and quasi-monopolized products are in a strong position. As a result, there is a constant flow of surplus-value from the producers of peripheral products to the producers of core-like products. This has been called unequal exchange." (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 28)

His notion of core and periphery is thus more focused on processes rather than geography, where within a country both can occur (think of the rural-urban divide for instance). This is of special importance for this thesis and my way of looking at experimental electronic dance music. Core-like processes are occurring more and more throughout the sprawling urban expansion in the global south. These spaces have also seen "a new wave of global urban music", which is "mercilessly hooligan in its agenda, synthetic by choice and necessity, often produced in a crucible of urban existence yet more extreme, precarious and violent than that which characterizes the temperature of New York, London, Berlin" (Ingram, 2004, quoted in Goodman, 2012, p. 174). Further, the idea of unequal exchange is also an important notion to look at musical processes, as I will argue that both in artistic, cultural and economic capital, it is still very prevalent through processes of sampling and appropriation.

● Cultural & philosophical frame

■ Deleuze & Guattari

Deleuze and Guattari are two French writers who were active throughout the second half of the 20th century. While Deleuze comes from a rather philosophical academic background, Guattari hails from the discipline of psychology. This explains the strong occupation with the human psyche throughout their collaborative work, hence also the title of the series Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1972, 1980). One of the most widespread ideas put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in their second collaborative work, Mille Plateaux (1980) or A Thousand Plateaus (1988), is the idea of a horizontal rhizomatic thought. Through the image of the rhizome, they try to oppose the functioning of what they call "arborescent" thought, which I imagine as vertical, hierarchical, linear or tree-like. Arborescent thought starts from the roots and builds in an all too logical fashion. They put forward an idea of more horizontal influentiality in a freely associating human mind, as "thought is not arborescent, and the brain is not a rooted or ramified matter", the structure of the rhizome is different: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between

semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles", and further, "the rhizome is an antigenealogy" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 15, p. 6 & p. 10). This is important for this paper on multiple levels. Firstly, their writings have for a while been important not only in studying electronic music (Monroe, 2001), but also as an inspiration for electronic music production, writings and reflections about it. See for instance the German label named after the book, Mille Plateaux and the structure of Steve Goodman's seminal 2012 book Sonic Warfare after Deleuze & Guattari's plateaus.

Deleuze & Guattari (1988) identify multiple traits of the rhizome: firstly, it is connected and heterogenous: "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (p. 5). Further, a rhizome is always a substantive multiplicity: "Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudo-multiplicities for what they are" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 7). A rhizome also possesses the "principle of asignifying rupture: against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 8). As I will discuss further, this is also why I will remain deliberately vague about which musical genres or styles this paper speaks, as creating clear divisions between them can lead to arborification. However, that does not mean I will not use any genres at all, as it is the interconnectivity (and the Relation!) between them that makes them so interesting. Deleuze and Guattari often refer to music themselves:

> *"Music has always sent out lines of flight, like so many "transformational multiplicities", even overturning the very codes that structure or arborify it; that is why musical form, right down to its ruptures and proliferations, is comparable to a weed, a rhizome"* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 11)

Finally, Deleuze & Guattari (1988, p. 11) also still discuss how "a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model", which means that it is impossible to trace the rhizome, as this would mean the "rhizome will be broken": "once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it is all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 14).

In this paper, the rhizome will not only function as a way of thinking through the history of electronic music, but also as an imaginative framework to think about political connection in a horizontal way. I will try and employ their frame throughout the thesis, stressing the equality, horizontality and endless connectivity within the rhizome. In a world split apart in core and peripheral processes, the idea of the rhizome is an interesting way of fostering collectivity and new relations, bridging class based, geographical and race based gaps: "a rhizome had no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 26).

Further, I will also try and bring in some of Deleuze & Guattari's other philosophical concepts like the 'plane of consistency', 'striated space', 'reterritorialization', 'body without organs (BwO)' and 'the virtual', as they can all function as valuable paradigms or lenses to look at the ever-changing musical worlds I will discuss. After all, musical culture is a fast changing phenomena, which begs overarching concepts to analyze it. I will now dive a bit deeper in the above-mentioned concepts, to explain their meaning and function within this text.

The plane of consistency or the plane of immanence is one of the core concepts within Deleuze's ontology and is strongly related to his ideas on space. Deleuze & Guattari (1988, p. 310 & 311) suggest:

"*Here, there are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. (...) We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition"*

The ontological effects of their views on immanence and consistency are rather far reaching and are not completely irrelevant to the philosophical scope of this thesis. In short, his idea of the plane of immanence opposes the idea of a transcendent plane "that directs, organizes, and forms nature and becoming from without" (Cox, 2003, p. 2). For this paper, it is especially the way they link this plane of immanence with abstract (electronic) music which is interesting: "Certain modern musicians oppose the transcendent plan(e) of organization, which is said to have dominated all of Western classical music, to the immanent sound plane, which is always given along with that to which it gives rise, brings the imperceptible to perception, and carries only differential speeds and slownesses in a kind of molecular lapping: *the work of art must mark seconds, tenths and hundredths of seconds"* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 311, italics in original). I will argue that the party, club or rave can be an excellent way of entering the plane of consistency, even if "the narcosonic can also function as a means to economic mobilization", with the "lure of these intense experiences used as attractors to consumption" (Goodman, 2012, p. xvi). While Deleuze & Guattari often interact with experimental and avant-garde music in their writings, they both missed most of the boom of electronic dance music in their lives. Deleuze did have somewhat of an idea of electronic experimental music, "which, courtesy of Sub Rosa's Guy-Marc Hinant and Mille Plateaux's Achim Szepanski", he "heard only in the last two years of his then ailing life" (Cox, 2003, p. 19 & 20). For that matter, I think it might be valuable to look into how Deleuze & Guattari's plane of consistency fits in my personal experiences of nightlife, floating through thoughts, music and consumption while on the dancefloor.

Reterritorialization, deterritorialization and territorialization feature heavily through the Capitalism and Schizophrenia series. While in A Thousand Plateaus (1988), they mostly become interchangeable with stratification and destratification, I prefer to use their ideas of territorialization, as I feel they are a bit more precise in their signification. These terms are again a result of Deleuze & Guattari's shared and mixed backgrounds: "The terms territorialization, de-territorialization and re-territorialization link psychoanalysis and political economy by designating the investment of energy in specific areas of the body and the economy, the withdrawal of such investments and their re-investment elsewhere" (Holland, 2013, p.7). Further, "in Anti-Oedipus territorialization is accompanied by processes of coding, de-coding and re-coding, which help guide the investment of energy" (Holland, 2013, p.7). This is important as "Capitalist society is distinctive, according to Deleuze & Guattari, in that it is based on markets, and therefore de-codes (...) everything that had intrinsic value and replaces it with strictly quantitative, monetary value." (Holland, 2013, p.7). Reterritorialization can thus function as a way of looking at capitalist re-appropriation cycles, which are so prevalent in the world of underground music. Further, for Deleuze & Guattari, music might be the most deterritorialized medium (Holland, 2013), as after all in its purest essence, it is just waves travelling through air. This echoes Small's (1998, 1999) ideas on musicking, which I will discuss further on. Reterritorialization, deterritorialization and territorialization will thus be used to look at the nexus of cultural and capitalist appropriation of music, as they are often found in liaison. These terms will thus offer valuable ways to reimagine the tension between what are essentially free travelling sound waves and the societal organization surrounding it. I will use them to look at how autoethnographic and secondary data from the underground interact with society's larger structures.

Deleuze & Guattari's notions of space are also important in relation to their ideas on immanence, as they often use images related to planes, plateaus and spaces. To think about space, they introduce the two opposites of smoothness and striation. These are "a conceptual pair to rethink space as a complex mixture between nomadic forces and sedentary captures" (Lysen & Pisters, 2012, p. 1). They use multiple models of space, but the one of most interest here is the musical model, which they get from French composer Pierre Boulez. Boulez asserted that "one occupies smooth space without counting, and counts in order to occupy a striated space" (Holland, 2013, p.42). For that sense, electronic music sits (like all artforms) somewhere between smooth and striated space, as there are often rhythmic beats, but the focus is still on the (narcosonic) trance achieved through them. For that matter, it can function as a counterbalance against state space, which is obviously striated. Deleuze & Guattari (1988, p. 581) however do remark that "smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us". I will thus employ their ideas on

smooth space to structure my own autoethnographic experiences of trance on the dancefloor, trying to think through how this might offer solace and new forms of collectivity.

Another important concept of Deleuze & Guattari's Capitalism and Schizophrenia series is the Body without Organs or BwO in short. It has already been linked with experimental music in earlier studies (Cox, 2003), but also with completely different types of music, like tuba performances (Hansen, 2010). Cox (2003, p. 2) sums up the BwO with the following: "In short, the BwO is the virtual field of the body, the domain of the basic particles and forces ("singularities," "affects," "intensities," "ideas," "perceptions," etc.) from which an actual organism composed". We are thus always a BwO, but seldom a complete BwO, as "you cannot reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 174). Further, Deleuze & Guattari (1988, p. 184) assert that "in order to extract useful labor from the BwO", the organism "imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations". This implies an interesting interaction with any idea of functionality within society and -in liaison with smooth space- will provide a valuable tool for my analysis of my narcosonic experiences, as Deleuze & Guattari themselves already allude to the drugged body as a BwO.

Finally there's also Deleuze & Guattari's concept of the virtual, which ties in neatly with the idea of fabulations and Deleuze's focus on becoming. This is important for my conceptual approach to how I imagine the knowledge I hope to structure through this text. Throughout this paper, I will not be pressing for hard facts, but will try to imagine the world through different poetics, stories and fabulations. To Deleuze & Guattari, a fabulation is fostering "the invention of a people to come" (Bogue, 2011, p. 78). It is more than just telling things wrongly, it is "mythologising with an eye for the future" (Kaiser, 2015, p. 8, my translation). This also ties in well with Deleuze's fascination for becoming as "being is merely a momentary, subsidiary, and largely illusory suspension (or "contraction) of becoming, (...) becoming is always primary and fundamental" (Holland, 2013, p. 18), which in itself connects with how identity is formed through Relation in Glissant (1997). This focus on becoming will be important to see how identity might be changed and structured through nighttime interactions I, and others, have had.

For Deleuze & Guattari, their philosophy is presented as "a correlate of contemporary, non-linear science. The aim of science is to narrow down any thing's antecedent conditions to the point where virtual becomings succumb to actual being" (Holland, 2013, p. 19). It is important to try and think through Deleuze & Guattari's idea of the virtual in the context of this thesis. The virtual is a concept Deleuze gets from Henri Bergson and features most prominently in his book Bergsonism (1988). For Deleuze (1988, p. 96), the virtual is distinguishable from the "possible", in the sense that "the possible is the opposite of the real, it is opposed to the real; but, in quite a different opposition, the virtual is opposed to the actual". His idea of the virtual thus entails that there are things that are at once very real, but not actual. To sum it up shortly with an example: another world is very real, but not actual. I will try and follow their conceptions on the virtual, as "the virtual

is always richer in potential than the actual" (Holland, 2013 p. 20). Eugene W. Holland puts it even more poignantly when talking about the pragmatics of philosophy, which are similar to the ones I would like to bring into this thesis:

> *"it scans the virtual realm from within a problematic state of affairs in order to map its potential to become otherwise, in order to re-submerge inert islands of apparent being in the oceanic flux of becomings with a view to actualizing something else, something different, something better."* (Holland, 2013, p. 21)

As this paper will occupy such a hybrid space between cultural studies, politicology and philosophy, attention to the virtual will be of utmost personal importance to me. What is virtual can be very real and thinking through contingency means we are in dire need of some imagination about our current world. In using electronic music as a vehicle to imagine political possibilities in society, attention to the possible and the contingent is pressing. In my eyes, it is by adding touches of fantasy, myth and poetics that the activist pushes for a new world. There is agency in imagination.

■ Glissant

Edouard Glissant was a French-Antillian writer, poet and thinker. He was born on Martinique and throughout his life he always wrote from the French Caribbean perspective. Themes that feature heavily throughout his work are identity, slavery but also literature and poetry. In his 1990 book, Poétique de la Relation or Poetics Of Relation, Glissant offers some of his own views on how to look at a world in -what he calls- Relation. For this, Glissant (1997, p. 11) bases himself on the theory of Deleuze and Guattari: "The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other". It is about a constant exchange of hybrid identities, rejecting any essentialisms put forward by either European nationalism or even the often rather left-leaning black nationalism. Gilroy (1993, p. 31) offers a telling anecdote about the political character of the writings of Glissant in his seminal book The Black Atlantic: "his translator excises Glissant's references to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (...), presumably because to acknowledge this exchange would somehow violate the aura of Caribbean authenticity that is a desirable frame around the work". This is exactly the type of "Intolerant root" that Glissant imagines Deleuze & Guattari wished to challenge. To Glissant (1997, p. 18), "identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation".

Through his Poetics of Relation, Glissant (1997) actually manages to concretize the rhizome of Deleuze & Guattari to a certain extent. By focusing on literature and both its artistic and

personal/cultural identities, he manages to use the abstract paradigm offered by the two French thinkers to look at how certain essentialisms we think up about ourselves and others are formed. According to him, we need to enter into "the equivalence of Relation" (Glissant, 1997, p. 31), which I find an interesting frame of thought to look at how global inequality is ethically, economically and culturally constructed. This is of special importance for this paper, as he frames Relation as something which is constructed through poetry and poetics. While I will not focus on poetry specifically, music does herald its own types of poetics. Dance music is after all a collective experience, and Glissant's concepts of Relation offer ways of thinking about the social possibilities this heralds. Encounters with artists and ravers alike will be structured through his ideas on Relation.

Interestingly enough, Glissant also actively engages with Amin's dependency theory within his Poetics Of Relation (1997). He identifies three distinct artistic and migratory trajectories which will link "the places of the world into a whole of peripheries" (Glissant, 1997, p. 28). The first goes from the center toward the peripheries, which I read as a Western influence upon the colonies. A second itinerary departs from the peripheries: "Poets who were born or lived in the elsewhere dream of the source of their imaginary constructs and, consciously or not, 'make the trip in the opposite direction', struggling to do so." (Glissant, 1997, p. 29, parenthesis in original). In a third and final stage, "the trajectory is abolished" (Glissant, 1997, p. 29) and the "poet's word leads from periphery to periphery, and, yes, it reproduces the track of circular nomadism; that is, it makes every periphery into a center; furthermore, it abolishes the very notion of center and periphery" (Glissant, 1997, p. 29). Take care to note the interaction between this quote and the cover photo of the Polish collective Oramics' scarfs. While Glissant focuses heavily on literature as his main source of inspiration and data, I think his theory can easily be transposed to electronic music, where I can now see the third stage happening with interesting South-South collaborations between artists like Kenia's DJ Slikback and Shanghai's Hyph11E. The musical *scene* (more on this term later) I want to talk about is arguably even more a meeting place of cultures, *roots* and heritages, where human beings manage to enter in Relation.

> *"The time came, then, in which Relation was no longer a prophecy made by a series of trajectories, itineraries that followed or thwarted one another. By itself and in itself Relation exploded like a network inscribed within the sufficient totality of the world."* (Glissant, 1997, p. 29)

Glissant (1997) also offers some more musical images, like through his term "echos-monde", which "allows us to sense and cite the cultures of peoples in the turbulent confluence whose globality organizes our *chaos-monde*." (Glissant, 1997, p. 94, italics in original), which in the context of this thesis can be interpreted literally. Further, Glissant (1997) also offers some other valuable terms I will use throughout this paper like "neutral relays", which serve in connecting cultures and "flash agents", which is his name for the press. These will both feature as ways of rethinking existing structures I and others identify within electronic music. Through his poetic

usage of language, he manages to offer ways of rethinking certain global histories and relations thought to be set in stone.

3. Contextual framework

After having presented the main takeaways from the relevant theoretical and philosophical literature for my thesis, I will move on to a short review of the contextual literature relevant to my research and particular case of interest. On a practical, musical level, throughout this paper I will choose to talk about a certain subsection of electronic music's underground. There are a lot of terms discussed for subdividing groups within music sociology, among which 'music worlds' (Crossley 2015), 'tribes' (Bennett, 1999) and 'field' (Bourdieu, 1993) are popular academic takes. Throughout this paper, however, I will be using the more popular term 'scene' to indicate a specific subsection of the global network of musicians, punters, organizers, engineers etc. For a large part 'scene' might be interchangeable with subculture, and has, in fact, largely replaced it in recent music studies (Hesmondhalgh, 2005). Even though this term might also be problematic to a certain extent (Hesmondhalgh, 2005), I think the fact that it is more commonly used, adds to the readability in hopes of resonating with a bigger crowd than academia alone. These are, after all, popular cultural currents and genres I discuss. I will, however, stray away from a focus on a particular genre, as I will show that the specific scene I am talking about has a specific sound in the sense that the leading concerts, events and labels specialize in a certain mix-and-match hybridity. This does not mean that I will leave genre out altogether, as it still has advantages (Hesmondhalgh, 2005).

But what will I be talking about then? Big parts of the scene I am writing about have been largely grouped under a couple different genre names, ranging from 'global ghettotech' (Goodman, 2012) to 'shanty house' (Ingram, 2004, quoted in Goodman, 2012). While I think both of these are valuable options, I feel both offer a rather grim look on the scene in question and connect a little too well with a western image of precarity in the global south. What is, however, interesting is that Ingram (2004, quoted in Goodman, 2012) identifies a clear transnational connection (or rhizome!) and a break from the rather problematic 'world music' in this scene, which will be of value in the rest of this paper:

> *"Shanty House is the new strain of post World Music engaging in the same cultural and social dynamics that have given us Crunk and Grime in the first world and Dancehall in Jamaica"* (Ingram, 2004, quoted in Goodman, 2012, p. 174).

Further on, he argues that giving these new genres a name on their own is important because "If they aren't called something specific then they will be less absorbable in their own right, and

conversely will be viewed as an extension of World music" (Ingram, 2004, quoted in Goodman, 2012, p. 174). I will, however, argue that 'global ghettotech' or 'shanty house' have entered into a new age of global connectivity, where they flow freely from east to west and from north to south. Both because of that and because of the above-discussed problems with the terms, I will choose to use the deliberately vague term "experimental electronic dance music" to discuss the scene this thesis talks about, which will be shortened to EEDM, not to be confused with EDM[1]. I believe this name does not lock the scene as much in ghettos and shantytowns, but I will still take every opportunity to stress the global connections made through this scene. Further, it is also not only music from the global south I will be talking about, as I feel a lot of the music released on non-western labels like Kampala's Hakuna Kulala and Shanghai's SVBKVLT or Genome 6.66Mbp really ties in with Europe's experimental or avant-garde club scene with labels and parties like Brussels' Slagwerk or Leaving Living Dakota.

While I often have problems with music sociology and music journalism's love for esoteric neologisms, it does offer various imaginative frameworks to look at music. Another notion which is important to think about music is the idea Small suggested in 1998 when coining the term 'musicking'. It is a term that stresses the relationships and relatability formed through music and tries to think through music while dropping the focus on 'artistry' and 'talent'. Further, the focus on relation within the act of musicking resonates heavily with Glissants (1997) ideas on Relation. Small writes the following:

"*Musicking is part of that iconic, gestural process of giving and receiving information about relationships which unites the living world, and it is in fact a ritual by means of which the participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concepts of how they relate, and how they ought to relate, to other human beings and to the rest of the world. These ideal relationships are often extremely complex, too complex to be articulated in words, but they are articulated effortlessly by the musical performance, enabling the participants to explore, affirm and celebrate them. Musicking is thus as central in importance to our humanness as is taking part in speech acts, and all normally endowed human beings are born capable of taking part in it, not just of understanding the gestures but of making their own"* (Small, 1999, p. 1)

This is a very valuable lense, as Small (1998, p. 8) focuses heavily on the accessibility of music, arguing "that our powers of making music for ourselves have been hijacked and the majority of people robbed of the musicality that is theirs by right of birth, while a few stars, and their handlers, grow rich and famous through selling us what we have been led to believe we lack". This is an important notion in thinking through the rhizomatic connections of electronic music, as Small (1998) identifies there are artificial sociological and economical barriers stopping the real

[1] EDM= Electronic Dance Music, which used to be an umbrella term, but has now become more of a genre identifier for the strains of dance music featured often on the enormous stages of festivals like Tomorrowland.

democratic accessibility of music. To Small (1998) these barriers consist largely of things like stardom and economical accessibility, which tell us music is only for the gifted and talented, which he opposes with the idea that everyone is born musical. Arguably, a lot has happened since 1998 with the advent of the bedroom producer's home studio with cracked DAW's[2], but others argue there is still a strong core-periphery structure active in music (Crossley & Ozturk, 2019). Other writers, like Chauhan (2020), also argue there are clear racial barriers in the accessibility of press and promotion within electronic music.

Crossley & Ozturk (2019) base their study on an analysis of Turkish music festivals, in which they identify a core-periphery structure through network analysis (SNA). They managed to "identify an unequal distribution of the resources that, in our view, are likely to contribute to success (defined as core membership)" (Crossley & Ozturk, 2019, p. 193). Further on, they also formulated that "we believe that artists are advantaged when male, signed to a major label and, in the Turkish case specifically, associated with rock music, which tends to be the genre of preference for more highly educated, middle class youths" (Crossley & Ozturk, 2019, p. 199). This clearly expresses the inherently unbalanced character of our contemporary music scene. What I would like to add on to this, is that within this core-periphery structure there are some interesting dynamics of unequal exchange happening not only in economic terms, but also in artistic ideas and styles. Additionally, it is also important to note that the gender imbalance and power structures are markedly different within the EEDM scene from those of pop music, as we will see that there is a bigger attention to diversity. But this is not to say that the EEDM scene is free of problems.

Interestingly, forward thinking styles of electronic music have often emerged from queer and coloured subcultures (Wallace, 2018). The British historian Paul Gilroy (1993, p. 80) argues that "black musics which, produced out of the racial slavery which made modern western civilisation possibe, now dominate its popular cultures". While techno and house have emerged from that position, they are now arguably rather "whitewashed" (Wheeler, 2020), sprouting counter-initiatives like DeForrest Brown Jr's "Make Techno Black Again" (2020). DeForrest Brown Jr argues that "Techno's brutal roots were forged from generations and generations of Black trauma." (Brown, 2020, p. 5). While I fully agree that techno has been whitewashed beyond comprehension, I will argue that contemporary forward thinking music scenes still offer very valuable safe-spaces and upward mobility for minorities. An interesting way to look at this is to see dance music and its corresponding cultures and spaces as 'imaginal machines' (Shukaitis, 2009), where they constantly re-imagine our ways of living together and connecting with each other through musicking.

A last, but very important, framework to look at black music is the one of afrofuturism. Even though I won't explicitly use it throughout this text, it feels weird to leave it out as it has had a big

[2] DAW = Digital Audio Workstation, the digital environment in which most of contemporary popular music is made.

influence on developing black music and art. Mark Dery coined the term in 1994 with his Black To The Future interviews. Dery (1994) writes: “The notion of afrofuturism gives rise to a troubling antinomy: Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of history, imagine possible futures?”. While Dery (1994) wrote mostly about black literature, Kodwo Eshun wrote a brilliant view upon afrofuturism in electronic music in his 1998 book titled More Brilliant Than The Sun. Eshun (1998, p. -001) posits that “The mayday signal of Black Atlantic Futurism is unrecognizability, as either Black or Music”. Within this, he also refers to Gilroy’s (1993) notion of the Black Atlantic, which is a distinct black culture that uses elements from across all corners of the Atlantic. This Black Atlantic culture is what brought forward a lot of the artforms I will be discussing, Gilroy (1993, p. 16) talks about a “playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity.”

Afrofuturism is thus a strain of thought and aesthetics that (within music) spans from George Clinton’s P-funk through to Detroit’s electro duo Drexciya and is still a large part of contemporary electronic music culture. A good example of contemporary afrofuturist artists are the Black Quantum Futurism Collective, consisting of Camae Ayewa (Moor Mother) and Rasheedah Phillips (The AfroFuturist Affair). They bring forward Black Quantum Futurism in the lineage of Afrofuturism, which specifically is “a new approach to living and experiencing reality by way of the manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures, and/or collapse space-time into a desired future in order to bring about that future’s reality.” (Black Quantum Futurism Collective, 2020, para. 1). Afrofuturism is thus a big part of our popular culture and forms an interesting way of reflecting on our current situation, while imagining different futures. Another notably important appearance of afrofuturism is in the 1996 film The Last Angel of History by John Akomfrah and The Black Audio Film Collective, in which Kodwo Eshun also makes an appearance.

Throughout this thesis, I will thus focus mainly on what I identify as the EEDM scene, in which several specific cultural dynamics are active. Heralding from a rhizomatic network of different styles stemming from coloured and queer subcultures, this music manages to incorporate everything between afrofuturist theories and radical new ways of imagining gender. Through the paradigms offered by Glissant and Deleuze & Guattari, I will look at primary and secondary my data, which will show the social and political importance of the acts of musicking within this specific EEDM scene.

4. Methodology

The first ideas of this paper started with the possibility of fieldwork in mind. I wanted to focus specifically on one particular label in Kampala, Uganda, called Hakuna Kulala. This is a sublabel

of the larger and more known Nyege Nyege. The idea was to write specifically about their situation and outlook, by doing fieldwork in Uganda. I was accepted to do an internship within the larger Nyege Nyege label, which would have offered the perfect opportunity to explore their inner workings and aid where I could as a form of participative observation. My proximity to some of the subjects I take interest in, would have allowed me to conduct interviews as well. This would have entailed a different perspective upon my ideas, which at the moment, sadly, is largely missing from this text. As the global pandemic and subsequent lockdown hit just before my departure, it became clear that this would not be possible. It took quite some time to reorient myself towards a new subject. As music passionates me in every aspect of my life, as a filmmaker, an academic, an organiser, a producer, in my dayjob and in my social life, I still wanted to push through on writing about this scene. Further, as participants to a panel discussion I helped organize agreed, "music is resistance"[3]. I thus feel a strong connection to the political power of music. The question arose though; how can I write about global connections from a European hetero cis-white male perspective?

I thought about multiple ways to approach this study, but many of them seemed rather impossible at this moment in time. Fieldwork abroad is no option, quantitative statistical analysis does not interest me and online interviews are difficult to organise and never feel fully spontaneous. Further, as I am talking about rather global events, quantitative analysis would either be rather limited in scope, or it would take too much time to properly gather a diverse dataset. I thus chose autoethnography as my primary mode of operation, with some specific secondary data added on to this, but more on that later. I will be departing from stories, memories, events, ideas and encounters I had in my 26 years of life and I will try to link them to the above-discussed cultural and academic currents. This -of course- means that all my personal data is highly coloured and I will try to evaluate my privileges at multiple points throughout the text. However, as I have discussed above, more diverse data-collection like fieldwork or participant observation are rather impossible at this moment in time, so autoethnography seems like the best route to take. Further, via this specific methodology I can push through on personal experiences, question my practices and gain inspiration for my own work. Through auto-ethnography, my research might ameliorate my own practise and create opportunities for the people on my label, MONTAGE. Further, I -ofcourse- hope the fabulations I will be constructing might offer some lines of flight to the future, by ways of reevaluating existing power structures through music and within music. After all, everyone is born musical (Small, 1998), so how can we herald this power?

But what is autoethnography specifically? Autoethnography is a methodology through which ethnographers take themselves as the central point of data collection. Ellis and Bochner defined autoethnography in 2000 as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739), further

[3] Panel discussion with The Word Radio and Vlaams Cultuurhuis De Brakke Grond on 12/02/21

“focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience, then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.” (p. 739). Chang (2008) adds on to this that she expects autoethnographers to analyze, interpret and reflect upon their stories within their broader sociocultural context. That is why I will bring in secondary data, ranging from podcasts, via interviews, panel discussions and music press to the actual sounds and tracks themselves. This makes it possible to place my experiences in a context and see how what I think holds true to what others have written, made or performed.

It is thus important to sketch what I have done and what I occupy myself with at the moment. I have been involved heavily in nightlife since adolescence, at first mostly as a partygoer, then as a DJ, then as an organizer and finally as a label-owner and now even radio-manager for The Word Radio. Since 2016, I have been working at the counter in a rather small record shop in Ghent, called Vynilla. Initially, all of my activities started in the village I grew up in: Kalmthout, just north of Antwerp. There, I performed in over 100 DJ sets with friends, mostly on small parties of local youth movements or farmer festivals. While artistically maybe less interesting, these village events did provide me with ample technical DJ experience. Upon starting my studies in Ghent, my group of friends and I quickly moved on to organising some of the biggest alternative student parties in Ghent at that time, called Clair Obscur. During my masters in documentary film I decided to move to Brussels, and I have been DJ’ing and throwing events here with my label since then. Though I have for a long time done the label mostly on my own, it is a project that is essentially a collaborative effort with different artists and artforms. My events have always been in collaboration with other collectives and the fact I talk about my experiences as a labelmanager feels weird at times as I think this is not something which I do or run on my own. Without the artists, friends, graphic designers, people who pour the drinks, security, venue staff etc. none of this would happen. I called the label MONTAGE to reflect the “edited” feeling a lot of the music I try to release has. Ranging from the music of épong, who manages to mix hardcore with post-rock and jungle in one song, to the running series of compilations I release, a central line of the label might be the hybridity of contemporary electronic music.

To build further on the perspective of the autoethnography, I will try to supplement my personal data with secondary data. Through my enduring passion for this specific scene of music and my work, I have encountered quite some albums, literature, videos and performances that might be of interest here. This seems like a good addition to my personal autoethnographic data, seeing I feel it necessary to hold my experiences to those of others, and I strongly employ others’ ideas and inventions in my thinking. Further, this secondary data analysis will enable me to show that most of what I think are not isolated thoughts and that I am in fact talking about certain currents within contemporary electronic music. This enables me to better structure my arguments, all while hopefully negating the ego-centric dangers of writing just about myself.

Seeing as “Thought is not arborescent, and the brain is not a rooted or ramified matter” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 15), it is difficult to logically structure the broad array of often rather hazy memories I have of nights of partying, often intoxicated. I thus chose to structure this text by way of different organizatory platforms, as Deleuze & Guattari (1980, 1988) and Goodman (2012) have done before me. These plateaus will feature as different circles of organization, always connecting to one another. The focus will change back and forth between the experiences I and others have had as a punter, musician, dancer and organizer. Dates will be supplied where possible, but it is rather obvious memories are not a pure form of data and are shaped by interpretation, alcohol, drug use and knowledge gathered afterwards.

5. Analysis

● 14th of December 2019: Slagwerk at FFORMATT

Slagwerk is a Brussels based collective I have known artistically and personally for a while. It is one of the biggest Belgian event series and labels in the EEDM scene, even though on their label they mostly release experimental ambient music. In December 2019, they had M.E.S.H. (US), Thoom (LB), Felix Lee (UK), Buga (BE) and their resident DJ’s over in FFORMATT, one of my favourite clubs. A short glance at the line-up already proves the extent of the hybrid sounds these parties employ. You can guess I was looking forward to this event for a while, since I had been following M.E.S.H. especially for quite some time. Something seemed off though, during the pre-drinks I had at some friends’ place beforehand I was quite distraught. I had been trying to date a girl for a while and we had vaguely discussed meeting before the party. As I did not hear from her anymore I had *bad vibes*, and felt somewhat of a rejection. My friends surrounding me tried to colour my hair blue (which did not work) by ways of distraction. Somewhere around midnight we left for the club, seeing as the Slagwerk parties can get quite crowded and I like to see the resident DJ’s play their warm-up, as I know them and their sets are great.

Upon arrival, the party was already going. The club was filling up quite steadily. I wandered around the place a bit, looking for the girl I wanted to meet. I found her in the smoking room, talking with some people I vaguely know. I waved from afar, but did not dare to approach her, as she seemed busy and I was already a bit stressed about not hearing from her before the event. After dancing for about half an hour, one of my friends came to find me. The girl I was dating didn’t seem to be doing good. We went to see her and she was curled up in a ball in her own puke in the smoking room with one of my mates taking care of her. She did not really react to most impulses. Seeing I was close to her, I carried her to the toilets to get her some water, which woke her up a little bit. En route, she banged her head against one of the pillars because she

could not keep straight and was quite heavy on me. People we know were staring. After getting her some water, the club security arrived seeing as she was again rolled up in a ball in the middle of the toilets. At around 1 A.M. I thus dragged her out of the club with one female friend to get her some air. The security was happy to have us resolve the problem ourselves, in order not to get in trouble with the authorities. Overdoses are the worst publicity, and she sure seemed close. The outside air did her good though and we carried her to épong's (one of the artists on my label) apartment to put her to bed. Upon arriving there she seemed to be hallucinating a bit, but doing good. We left her to sleep there and returned to the party.

The rest of the night felt weird. Both on a personal level, as this was not really an example of a good date, but also on a broader level, I felt the dangers of the drug use so prevalent in my surroundings creeping in ever closer. About a month earlier, I had already carried another friend who did too much ketamine into a taxi to get him home. Later, I heard that the girl had gotten some pills from a DJ/musician I vaguely know, who once called the police on us after falling off the stairs at an afterparty, but that is another story. I had deemed him a shady character, the guy was in his thirties and doing drugs with 19-year olds. He gave her what was probably 2-CB, without saying (or knowing), as she told me afterwards she hallucinated pretty heavily throughout the night at my friend's place.

Drug use and music have always been linked and have always had an interesting relation, starting already with jazz and marihuana (Shapiro, 1988). Steve Goodman also argues there is a specific connection with electronic music:

> *"From ganja to hashish, from cocaine to MDMA, from LSD to ketamin* [sic] *to amphetamine, the nexus of drugs and sonic sensation, the narcosonic, acts as an intensifier of acoustic sensations and serves as both a sensory and informational technology of experimentation, deployed by artists, musicians, producers, dancers, and listeners to magnify, enhance, and mutate the perception of vibration."* (Goodman, 2012, p. xvi)

While Deleuze & Guattari (1988) are rather critical of the dependency drugs can create, on p. 174 they also argue that it is a way to attain the BwO. In fact, the combination of drug use and dancing might be one of the easiest ways to become a BwO, where the body fulfills one function without any organ presiding over another. Brain, limbs, respiration, digestion and music enter into one corporeal assemblage. You feel the bass and react, your body grasps the vibrations, passing to impulse without thought. The dancefloor provides ways to enter into a mass, where individual experience is in constant Relation with others. Deleuze & Guattari (1988) write quite heavily on space, using Boulez' ideas on musical space. Though club music is strongly focused on beats, the format of the DJ-mix gets rid of most compositional structure. There are beats after beats after buildup after buildup. Intoxicated experiences permit us to get lost completely within this electro-acoustic maze, until the space is no longer striated and we are able to enter into smooth

space. Several studies (Wittmann et al, 2007; Campagnoli et al, 2020; Lapp et al, 1994) have already conceptualised the altered experience of time because of drug and/or alcohol usage, and personal experience definitely confirms it.

Especially interesting is the way Deleuze & Guattari relate space to organizational forms. One of the models they use to illustrate smooth space is the Maritime Model, "for the sea is a smooth space par excellence" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 577) and was striated by state and scientific forces in order to make it calculable and thus conquerable. In this sense, their thoughts about striated space reflect Doreen Massey's arguments in her seminal 2005 book For Space. Massey's argument against confounding space and time resonate with the idea of smooth space, as in smooth space, "the points are subordinated to the trajectory" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 556), in the sense that smooth space always permits multiplicities and lines of flight, where every trajectory is separate and none are hierarchically organised, or arborified. Massey (2005, p. 5) argues that the "cosmology of 'only one narrative' obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space. It reduces simultaneous coexistence to place in the historical queue". The smooth space thus enables us to experience multiplicities of our own and others' identities.

For that matter, entering smooth space through the narcosonic might be an interesting act of escapism, not because it necessitates the consumption of illicit substances, but because it means relating to space and time in a non-commodified manner. Arguably, one of the reasons people use these substances is in fact exactly this altered relation to time, but also the altered Relation to each other. While most of our days are divided into working hours, free time and sleeping, surpassing this striated space offers a valuable place of solace in a world where most people cannot decide what they do with their time and how it is divided. The dancefloor might be one of the easiest ways to enter smooth space. Further, while drugs are very prevalent, they are not a necessity. Most clubs and event spaces are constructed in a way that makes it hard to relate to the striated space of the outside world. The darkness inside hulls the break of day and looking at the time on your phone is generally frowned upon. On the dancefloor, choices are made that bear heavily on the productive workweek. Adventures on alcohol, amphetamines or sleep-deprivation mean reduced capacity for half of the week. *What are your priorities?*

I have often felt a certain necessity for these adventures, but in a way that goes beyond societal ideas of addiction, as I do not believe I have any drug dependency or addiction (alcohol might be a different story though)[4]. I remember going to the next Slagwerk night after the one discussed

[4] As a side note, I feel it is important to stress that intoxicated experiences are not always happy sensations, as indicated by some of the events described above and the ongoing global problems of drug deaths and overdoses. Often, I have felt depressed, guilty or lonely on dancefloors, where it was not clear to me how these feelings interacted with my state of intoxication. Even though I might sometimes go out and use substances to forget myself, I do not think drugs are a solution. Further, I have already

above in January 2020, in the Brussels venue Beursschouwburg. It was just two days before my final exam of Area Studies: Maghreb. Seeing the exam period was stressful to me on an academic level and I had quite some personal problems bordering depression, I felt a real pull to go out and lose myself in music and substance use. This is not only because this could help me forget my stress, but also because these events are social gatherings and chemical induced interactions enable me to speak about things I normally find hard to converse about. Chasing the BwO allows me to reconfigure my thought-streams and be communicative in other manners. This meant a clear choice for myself, where I decided to take hold of my own time for an activity of my own liking, in a stressful period where the rest of my days were just limited to studying and sleeping.

While this all might sound very entitled, it does hold value to me personally and I think to a lot of other people around the world. Experiences like these entail a movement through smooth space, where I am able to change myself to a more loving, different person through dance and trance, whether or not aided by drugs or alcohol. Deleuze & Guattari (1988, p. 581) remark that “smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us”.

The smooth space of the club thus enables us to look at our personal problems (how small or privileged they may be) in a different light. Going out enables us to meet new people and have new experiences, which I feel I miss so much during the ongoing lockdown. I have now been fantasizing for months about random conversations I would have with people when going out, discussing the problems of the language barrier in Belgium with a Walloon, for instance. It is these types of conversations with people I would have never met otherwise, that make going out interesting.

On the smooth space of the dancefloor, we are able to enter in Relation with people different from ourselves. Electronic music has enabled me personally to widen my image of the world through encounters with people I would never have met without this niche subculture. I will look at this further on through my description of the power of minorities on stage, where relating to the artist entails new ways of becoming for our- and themselves. I will also go deeper into the liberatory character of dancefloors in my discussion of a gayparty further in this chapter. I am a strong believer that change always comes from the margins, and through electronic music and the smooth space of the dancefloor, people (often minorities) are continuously searching for and constructing new margins. This ever-shifting horizon of cultural invention enables young people to escape the commodified spaces of commercial entertainment and bond together through music and musical invention. Alternative smooth spaces will not save us, but they might offer solace and

encountered drug deaths around me, which is a stark reminder of how thin the line between use and abuse might be.

help us think of new forms of collectivity which our racialized cities deny us. Think of the ways the Leaving Living Dakota parties try to interact with the diverse neighborhood of Molenbeek where they take place, in an effort to negate the gentrification often entailed by (mostly) white cultural spaces like the ones found in Manchesterstraat nowadays. Ranging from reduced ticket prices to active engagement with the neighbours, there is a lot that can be done to be more inclusive. The racial division of Brussels is as such deterritorialized on the dancefloor, where white, black and brown bodies can meet each other in ways the geographical makeup of the city does not normally facilitate. This is one of the political possibilities of the dancefloor, this is the ultimate kind of smooth space that enables us to change the struggle, but we sadly cannot say the same for all dancefloors.

Most dancefloors have largely been territorialized into commercial ventures. Entry fees to a lot of larger clubs are above what most people in more precarious situations can pay. Drinks in clubs like C12 or FFORMATT are even above what I can pay, a white middle class student. For that matter, there is definitely some work to do before we can harness the full potential for social change found within the dancefloor. Drug use is often the cheapest option if you can pay the entry fee and are looking for a daze, which is why club owners charge a lot for bottled water, as it is important to stay hydrated while on most illicit substances. Goodman (2012, p. xvi) writes that “The narcosonic can also function as a means to economic mobilization, with the lure of these intense experiences used as attractors to consumption within the sprawling network that now constitutes the global clubbing industry”. A lot of clubs arguably partly function as a commercialised, controlled and commodified space for drug use. This has brought even a certain memetic humour towards techno, where an often repeated meme under youtube videos of renown techno songs is “drink water” or “stay hydrated”, referring to the need of water while on MDMA or other amphetamines.

Even the free-est of dancefloors, those of raveparties, have largely been territorialized under late capitalism. While during the second summer of love in ‘89 and the couple years following it, raves might have been rather open to everyone, we can see that a lot of these illegal freeparties are now very narrow in their public reach. This reflects the process of codification Deleuze & Guattari argue accompanies territorialization in capitalism (Holland, 2013). We convince ourselves that certain types of music are for certain types of people and that certain spaces and organizational forms are put aside for certain types of music. Raves are now thus codified as spaces for psychedelic music, goa and tekno, and function to please a rather narrow crowd of dreadlock-bearing white youngsters (forgive me the hyperbole). While they still offer a beautiful alternative, they suffer from the same disease some commercialized clubs suffer: it is not at all very accessible. After all, the illegality of their organization heralds a necessity of secrecy.

One of the ways the struggle is changed within the smooth space of the dancefloor is also in the way we enter into what Glissant (1997) calls Relation. Glissant sees identity as something which

is formed in Relation. For that matter, identity is not only formed in view of those we see as different to ourselves, but also in trying to find the niche you feel comfortable in. That is why (as I will show further on), figures like the artist SOPHIE being on stage are so important. Subcultures in general (and music specifically) have for a long time featured heavily in youths' daily lives, and helped them construct their identities (Kveberg, 2012; Ulusoy, 2016). Going out has enabled me to find a niche where I feel at home, surrounded by people I relate with, which feels comforting even coming from such a privileged background. I can only try to imagine how finding your proper safe-space and niche might feel if you come from a less fortunate background, sexuality or gender. Gayparties, for instance, are interesting to look at in this context. For a paper in my preparatory programme for Conflict & Development, I already did an afternoon and evening of participant observation at one of Brussels' reknowned gayparties, Gay Haze, that collaborated with Antwerp's SPEK for this specific event.

What struck me is the transformative aspect of how identity can be constructed within the safespace of a club. During the observation, I saw a young guy arriving, undressing himself, and putting on leather fetish gear. In Relation to the others, whom he knows will not judge in this context, his identity is constructed and reconstructed. Through this action, he manages to deterritorialize himself from his day-to-day appearance, while simultaneously territorializing and codifying his body anew within the context of the club space. His rather simple action of changing clothes in the hallway, was also striking, as I had never really thought about all the liberating nudity and fetish gear I had seen before on other gayparties I went to. Even in the rather progressive country of Belgium, some people still cannot visually express their identity or sexuality without any fear of repercussions. Further, it was also really interesting to see how choices were made on this particular party, as the Gay Haze parties typically start on sunday afternoon and go on until around midnight. The amount of drugs I saw circulating on this event indicated a clear choice for partying and a total neglect of a structured workweek. Though arguably this is a privilege not anyone can enjoy, the room was filled with people of all ages. This indicated to me that there would be quite some hangovers in offices around Brussels the day after and thus not only skipped classes in university or art school (Cant, 2019).

But let me get back to that Slagwerk party I was talking about. Like your mental state partying, this text flows in and out of thought, tries to grasp reality and then escapes it again. After I returned, the security let me back in easily without paying. They recognized me as the guy who saved them from at least one ambulance. As I was still quite struck by the events that unfolded earlier, I felt it was appropriate that I released some steam and stress on the dancefloor. M.E.S.H. had already started his set, which was rather disappointing. One of the dangers of larger clubs is that artists that are rather forward-thinking in their productions might turn it down a notch in order not to scare the bigger crowd. I think he misjudged the openness of the typical Slagwerk crowd though, and I decided to wander around a bit. When I came back to the dancefloor, Thoom was starting.

Thoom is an artist originally from Beirut, who studied in Chicago and now lives in Berlin. Her music is heavy, noisy and dense. I hear heavy influences from industrial, new wave and recent experimental dance music in her productions, and this was also what I got from her dj-set. She played a chaotic and fast-paced set, which matched my mood swinging between emotional, dazed and frustrated with my friends. Is this the type of people I want to surround myself with? People of whom I have to be scared to find them overdosing somewhere in the corner of a party? As the MDMA started kicking in for the people around me, these feelings were quickly superseded by the amount of physical affection I got from them. The people I was frowning upon 15 minutes before overwhelmed me with chemical-induced kindness. I reflected on what Thoom's life must look like. I felt the rhizomatic connection between Beirut, Chicago, Berlin and Brussels through her appearance and through the broad range of influences in her music. The DJ-set brought together every rave-related genre around for the last 30 years. I did wonder, though, to what extent some of these burgeoning non-European artists are not part of some transnational elite. Studying in the US seems like the kind of privilege most people from Beirut do not get to enjoy, which is not to say I do not encourage her. Seeing a different face on stage, even in the haze of FFORMATT, felt liberatory. Beirut has not really been the center of attention of Western electronic music culture, even though it has a strong club scene, uniting its different and diverse communities, as Mixmag tried to prove through a short 2018 focus video on their scene.

One of the last DJ's to play the Slagwerk night (before the organizer Otis his closing set) was Buga, a Belgian DJ who is quite renowned in the French scene in Brussels. He makes a sort of neo-rave infused dance music which is happy and quite plasticky. Buga had just released one of his new tracks and did multiple rewinds[5] of it, even going as far as mounting onto the table and rewinding the decks with his foot in an effort to hype up the crowd. It was such a cocaine-infused ego trip it completely weirded me out. As stated above, the way music and intoxication work is interesting, as it allows you to drift in- and out of space. Seeing this drugged up DJ made me reflect all the more of the girl being sick on her own in my mates' flat.

Deleuze & Guattari (1988) think about the world not in the typical immanent/transcendent duality, but they reflect upon the world as one plane of consistency or plane of immanence. As discussed in the literature study, it is interesting to see how they link this plane with musical modes and forms. Even though they missed out on most of the development of modern electronic music, we can see the plane of consistency within the musical space of the dancefloor, in the maze of beats of the DJ-set, often stringed together without a strong narrative nor organizational sound-plane. On the plane of consistency "there are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1998, p. 310). This echoes my personal experiences on the dancefloor: stroboscopic memories catching flashes of unknown faces during John T Gast on Meakusma 2019, bumping into a resonating crowd in FFORMATT, having

[5] A technique in which a DJ stops and rewinds a playing record, creating a scratching sound and hyping up the crowd.

affective encounters and longings within the soundmaze of C12 or Beursschouwburg, ... For that matter, through the dancefloor and the narcosonic Deleuze & Guattari's theory on the plane of consistency manages to echo Georges Bataille's thoughts on transgression and continuity. Bataille argues that transgression is central to human beings and that every culture has "their own forms of transgression: drunkenness, extacy, dance, offer, orgy, ritual regicide, party, potlatch, music, battle, eroticism, crime, tragedy, comedy, crying, laughing, …" (Vande Veire, 2002, p.197, my translation).

Bataille argues that there is a continuity of which we are a part, which is lost through labour. We like to think of our lives as being discontinuous from nature, but death breaks that idea. (Richardson, 1994, Vande Veire, 2002,). This very much echoes the plane of consistency Deleuze & Guattari (1988) talk about, and further resonates with the space of the dancefloor. Within our modern Western world, arguably most regicides and potlatches have disappeared, but partying and transgression are still very much apparent in our everyday lives. On the smooth space of the dancefloor, there is thus an interesting interaction where the reveller wilfully interacts with this continuity or consistency and becomes a Body without Organs. To me, personally, this is also the need for katharsis I hold highly within partying, which has not only, as stated above, an interesting interaction with the productivity of the coming workweek, but also serves as a sort of stress-relief after the previous week. This might be the difficulty a lot of people face with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The need to go out and transgress is analysed as unnecessary within our productivity-focused society, and while you can continue to work during the current lockdown, you cannot let off the steam anymore. The need to go out is further exemplified by youth (and adults!) grappling every occasion to party and go out, be it through lockdown parties or by just filling up the parks and drinking there, even though it is currently illegal in Brussels.

The dancefloor thus acts as a smooth space, where personal struggles can be reconfigured and re-thought as people become BwO's and can enter into new types of Relation with each other. As I will go on to show, this reconstitution might also offer sociopolitical possibilities. Narcosonic experiences allow us to enter into non-commodified relations with sound and space, even though the commercial is always lurking in the corner as clubs become more popular. My experiences with these transgressive and trance-inducing spaces have not only helped me to rethink my personal life, but have offered me countless encounters that have made my path in life as it is. The smooth space can function as an interesting space of Relation and encounter, facilitating horizontality within social encounters in the night. Further, the smooth space of the dancefloor offers us the ultimate space of transgression, which I deem a very human quality.

- 21st of July 2020: email exchange with robogeisha

Since about June of 2020, I have been working on a compilation with a number of international artists. Progress has been slow due to quite some setbacks and due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Compilations are a beautiful way to construct the rhizome, making transnational connections through artistic relatability. Arguably, they often also hold a hefty amount of promotion for the label itself, as it means the label can release music by some artists who are way too large for a full-blown release on an imprint of its size. That is one of the reasons I choose to hand all the profits from the series of compilations I am working on to a good cause, as it would feel weird to me to profit off others' fame. So far it has always been the Brussels based organization BXLRefugees, who provide help to newcomers in the city, and carry a strong political voice.

This compilation has been bothering me for some time now, as I have really been struggling to finish it, and it is starting to get embarrassing. I have planned the release for June 2021 now, which is about a year after I first received the first tracks. On my last compilation, released in February 2020, I had featured the Turkish artist Koray Kantarcıoğlu, who recommended to me his friend Berk Çakmakçıerk, also known under his moniker Age Reform. Through small personal connections, I follow the rhizome. This is further illustrated by one of the other artists, robogeisha. She is a close friend of the Turkish girlfriend of a friend (I know, it is a long way), and I really enjoyed the coincidental manner by which I discovered her music through them. Further, I like the Turkish connection I am constructing with this series, purely by accident.

All of these compilations have featured a sort of socio-political theme for the artists to work around. I hand them a subject or idea, and they can each reflect upon this through music in any way they see fit. This provides the label with a sort of musical think-tank, trying to reimagine certain themes through sound, from different personal and artistic perspectives. First it was the idea of political urgency, then Anna Tsing's assemblage from The mushroom at the end of the world (2015). The particular compilation we are working on now, centers around the theme of referential irony, which in my eyes is very prevalent in contemporary avant-garde culture. In the EEDM scene, and the music related to it, most of the sounds are highly referential towards previous genres. Ranging from Dinamarca re-purposing eurotrance with some added Baile-flavours to Ssaliva releasing caretaker-esque albums of 90s indie-rock, revisiting genres from times before is the new thing to do. I have wondered for a while if this is not postmodernity finally eating its own tail and if this preoccupation with repurposing more commercial genres for underground use is not closing the political space alternative music provides. As these are questions that have no clear-cut answer, I thought it would be interesting to let a team of artists work on their own vision on this subject.

In our email exchange, robogeisha got back to me with quite an interesting story relating to her own vision of the subject. She participated to the Redbull music academy in Berlin a couple years ago, where she got asked some very specific questions by journalists:

"during the academy in Berlin, which was the first time I was presenting my music in the Western world, in one event, one of the journalists asked me if I had elements from "my culture" in my music. I asked him if he listened to my stuff and he said no. I said I make experimental techno. Then I started thinking about this fetish these journalists have with my "culture". It was interesting because I never thought electronic music not being my culture or any music from Turkey being my culture. What I noticed after coming here is: how in music journalism especially, there is this fetishization of identity without being careful to that culture's particularities and this felt a bit immobilizing." (robogeisha, personal communication, July 27th, 2020)

The preoccupation with referentiality I see is thus not only a preoccupation with references towards earlier genres, but also references to personal and cultural specificities. Another instance of this is Kenian DJ Slikback's music being tagged as "global" on Pitchfork (Sherburne, 2019), somewhat echoing the problematic term "world music", which places non-western music in a category of its own, thus isolating it from other cultural currents. This clearly shows the fascination of journalists with the locality of the artist. While this is a fascination I share throughout this thesis, robogeisha remarks quite poignantly that placing people in an essentialized version of their culture may immobilize them, which might also be a danger for this text. This reflects how we construct our identities in Relation to others, as the journalist is clearly searching for what might be different about her music, to be able to codify and categorize it in an article. Glissant (1997, p. 169) already reflected upon the difficulties of essentializing cultures, as for him it cannot "be asserted that each particular culture is plainly knowable in its particularity, since its proper limit is not discernible in Relation". He also states that "the limits -the frontiers- of a state can be grasped, but a culture's cannot" (Glissant, 1997, p. 165), which underlines even more the immobilizing feeling robogeisha felt. Looking at culture in constant Relation, means thinking past the essentialisms our world is divided into.

As touched upon in the literature study, Glissant (1997) departs from Deleuze & Guattari's rhizome to what he called the Poetics of Relation. In the context of club music, Glissant's Poetics of Relation become exceptionally apparent in what robogeisha described above:

"The cultures of the world have always maintained relations among themselves that were close or active to varying degrees, but it is only in modern times that some of the right conditions came together to speed up the nature of these connections." (Glissant, 1997, p. 26)

Following globalization and the emergence of the internet, electronic music was practically born into its current state of hyperspeed. Genre following genre after genre, with rhizomatic sound-references in an ever broadening network even the producer of the music might not hear

in their own songs. Influences are stacked globally, often interesting, often problematic. Cultural appropriation is ever more rampant throughout contemporaneous pop culture, but more on that later. What is interesting in the current EEDM scene is the amount of global connections made through collaborations, bookings and -during the COVID-19 pandemic- even streams. If identity is constructed in Relation (Glissant, 1997), does the current hyperconnection within music not foster more interesting, complex and diverse identities? Internet has propelled this to unknown speeds, but it is important to remark that online culture is still very much a privilege, as touched upon by participants of a panel I led[6].

I like to reflect on how cultural identity can be reverberated within the physical sound of music itself, which is what robogeisha referred to above. What is striking about the EEDM scene is the multiplicity of the globality of the sound and how producers multiply and use their heritages. Angolese Kuduru is combined with heavy sounddesign in Belgo-Angolese producer Nazar's records, Dinamarca makes "an unlikely blend of reggaeton and trance" (Ryce, 2018, para. 1), Mexico's NAAFI combines traditional Latin music with forward-thinking bass music, Slikback manages to incorporate African rhythms in his experimental beats, Portugal's Principe is releasing another specific take on Kuduru, NON brings experimental and exceptionally black music, … These are just a few examples of the current wave of hybridised global music. In a sense this goes further than the Global Ghettotech and Shanty House Goodman (2012) and Ingram (2004, in Goodman, 2012) talked about, as these styles are still "mercilessly hooligan" (Ingram, 2004, in Goodman, 2012) in their agenda, but seem to have a broader reach than some of the ghettotech and shantyhouse Goodman (2012) and Ingram (2004, in Goodman, 2012) refer to. Through their own specific takes on the genre, artists like DJ Marfox and Nazar manage to export Kuduru from Angola and thus make a living out of it in Europe. Something is definitely changing, especially if you see where we are coming from. Wei writes the following in a 2019 article for The Guardian:

> *"In the first half of the 2010s, the western world dominated the conversation in electronic music. White, male producers and DJs, often based in London, New York or Los Angeles, mostly controlled the barriers to entry, and took music from foreign cultures without consequence. Diplo, cherry-picking from baile funk, dancehall and reggaeton and tailoring each rhythm to suit an English-speaking market, is the most high-profile example of this appropriation"* (Wei, 2019, para. 1)

Further in the article, she argues that "along the international club continuum, producers and DJs are reassembling dancefloor sonics in more iconoclastic combinations than ever before." (Wei, 2019, para. 20). By looking at this through Deleuze & Guattari's (1988) rhizome, we can see the complex series of musical developments, influences and technological inventions that were at the base of the emergence of this music, without over-valuing one of them. Through the rhizome,

[6] Panel discussion with The Word Radio and Vlaams Cultuurhuis De Brakke Grond on 12/02/21

Kraftwerk becomes as important as disco and the TB303 becomes as important as the tribal drums influencing the early techno pioneers. On another level, or strata (to think through Deleuze and Guattari's words), I can also use the rhizome as a frame of thought to look at today's global electronic underground, becoming ever-more connected through digitalization and mass globalization, pushed to extremes by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, into which I will go deeper in one of the final chapters.

However, the more the artistic rhizome is constructed, the more problematic the economic aspects of global connection can become, as illustrated in Wei's above quote. Be it Diplo using baile funk or the typical deep- or tech- house[7] tracks sampling Afro american choirs or tribal drums. There is a fine balance between what is cultural appropriation and what is cultural appreciation. To me, it starts to become problematic the moment white musicians are able to profit from black or brown traditions. This is the type of unequal exchange Wallerstein (2004) talks about, where one group clearly has an historic music industry advantage and is able to profit from the other group's artistic work and heritage.

In this context, the act of "decolonizing the dancefloor" (Nkisi in Wei, 2019, para. 3), is as important as listening to the music. If black music is being consistently blasted into our ears through the radio or on the dancefloor, it better be black musicians making the royalties off it. Yet maybe the reach of cultural appropriation in mainstream culture is a bit beyond the scope of this thesis focussing on a small niche of underground music. For that matter, in the global EEDM underground, I find it interesting that we hear more and more "reverberations of racialised violence" (NON collective quoted in Wei, 2019, para. 4) in the EEDM music scene, as most listeners are now apt at tracing these sounds back to their originators. Increasing political correctness within the scene means increased bookings for queers, transgenders and people of colour, although thorough statistical analysis of this might prove there is still a lot of work to do. What I aim at, is that this fresh new music opens up a portal to other continents or diasporas and provides pathways of upward mobility for musicians, like the East-African Nyege Nyege crew who now consistently play around Europe, or Durban's Gqom artist DJ Lag doing a collaboration with Beyonce for her track My Power. Wei (2019) remarks however, that some of these artists still have difficulties acquiring visas to play in the US.

It is interesting to look at these evolutions through the lense Glissant offers in his 1997 Poetics of Relation. To start, the struggles for visas still echo Glissant's ideas of the poets trying to cross the sea in the other direction, but struggling to do so. Further, Glissant talks about how culture can function as a form of neutral relays, where "the great planetary swell of gut-wrenching music" (Glissant, 1997, p. 177) is able to convey cultural elements from one area to another. Through EEDM we are thus able to experience a global aural diversity, where cultural connection is

[7] Deep- and tech- house are specific genres of house music, though pioneered by black artists, now are mostly associated with white DJ's.

employed through sonic reference. But as stated above, it is important to keep an eye on who is actually profiting off these sounds, references and events.

It is these rhizomatic international combinations, styles, parties and artists we in the west come to love and fetishize. This can also be problematic as this reflects “the west’s leering gaze and attention deficit” (Wei, 2019, para. 18). Where the media jumps from genre to genre launching and crashing artists’ careers at an ever faster pace. This also reflects the way Glissant (1997) describes the media as flash agents, echoing the idea that journalists are focusing on newness rather than content. To a certain extent, this new focus on music from Asia, Africa and Latin America has created a form of artistic dependency within Western popular and underground music, where a lot of new popular artistic forms have come from black and brown cultures (Gilroy, 1993). This is an interesting evolution, as economically, many southern nations are still dependent on the west, but artistically there is a more complex pattern arising, where Western culture is becoming dependent on Southern artists. This is also why I chose the title for this thesis as “your periphery is my center”, as new artistic currents start to center different parts of the world, which before often were imagined as ‘lagging behind’ in space and time, as critically questioned in Massey’s (2005) For Space.

Both in my personal practise and in the writing of this thesis, I find this fetishization and opportunism by western media, labels and events a difficult thing to think through. How do I organize parties, events and releases with people of colour, without them being token characters in the story of the label? For an earlier instance of the compilation series robogeisha is featured on, I asked one of NON’s cofounders Nkisi, especially since I had met her in real life and she was very kind in person. After a follow-up email and still no response, I saw that she posted a now long gone Instagram story saying that she was tired of being asked for compilations to fulfill white labels’ quota[8]. This really hit a spot with me, as I asked her not only because I really like her music, but also because she is a female and black, and I thought it important to feature diversity on the label. How do I, as a white male, relate to this? Are my good intentions enough?

Through my personal practise, I have thus encountered different ways of looking at how our post-modern sound world works in referential ways. These are not only references to genres from before, but also feature fetishizations of cultural essentialisms, which can be immobilizing, as robogeisha described. Further, within the construction of these referential soundworks, it is interesting to see new patterns of dependency emerging, where on the artistic map, the global south becomes central and the west peripheral, as both Gilroy (1993) and Wei (2019) discussed. But we are yet to see the economic shift, and the question remains how we could herald these new structures of cultural dependency, which is difficult within the Western industrial funding complex, as I will write about in the next chapter. Finally, paying attention to dynamics of tokenism

[8] Due to the nature of instagram stories being available for just 24 hours, this post is now long lost, and cannot be quoted or cited exactly.

and appropriation could offer a step forward to our scene, if this means a redistribution of royalties and wealth.

- 13th of February 2020: Absurd Trax x MONTAGE at VOLTA

On the 13th of February 2020, I hosted what was to be my second-to-last event before the global pandemic. The Absurd Trax crew from Hongkong were on their European tour, and I got in contact with them through HE4RTBROKEN's Liyo, so I booked them. Liyo thus also played the night to complete the line-up. Seeing as this was a tour, I quickly set up the event to fill in one of their left-over dates and provided them with a room in my house. ASJ (HK), Kelvin T (HK) and Thegn (CA/JP) were the artists off the label who performed. Volta was so kind to jump in last-minute and provide the location in Studio CityGate in an old industrial estate in the South of Brussels. Foreshadowing the current and ongoing crisis, the Hongkong based artists told me they only just escaped corona in their country and were satisfied to be in Europe.

I was really happy to book them, as I had been following Absurd for a while and loved their sound. Further, it had been bothering me for a while that while my line-ups are somewhat gender-balanced, I hardly book people of colour with MONTAGE. My collaboration with Absurd would thus help resolve a personal frustration I had with my events so far, how vain it may be. While clearly this is not the primary reason to book them, but their music, it was an important factor as I would love for my label and events to mirror the diversity of our world. I also try to look at music from a DIY perspective, and helping touring artists with a bed, food and a place to play is very fulfilling to me.

The night itself turned out okay, we had quite some people over, which I did not completely expect. Just after Liyo started playing her closing slot at around midnight, someone called me into the entrance stairway of the venue. A party-goer had tried to climb an YTONG[9] wall and it collapsed onto the stairwell, almost killing ASJ in the process. This clearly ended the party, so I had to stop Liyo's set. This was both embarrassing and very unearthing, as the events had almost seriously injured one of the artists I had booked, and I doubt I would have been insured for that. Further, the deal for the night was that what was made at the door would be split between artists. This ended up being around 70 euros for each artist, which is very little. I imagine that for Liyo, it felt like I was giving alms for an unfinished set, as she normally asks around 250 euros. I am not sure if this fee would have been any higher if she had finished her set though, as we were nearing the end of the party… Volta kindly asked not to post any pictures on social media of the collapsed wall as it could get them in trouble with the city.

[9] Specific type of lightweight stone bricks used to construct walls quickly.

The performing artists were however quite nice about the whole situation and they seemed to grasp this was out of my control. They were quite shook by the experience though, especially ASJ. We still spent the night partying at a nearby bar and went to see the city the day after. The fact that I could not provide a full event to these artists meant that I further questioned myself as an organizer, ultimately resulting in a panic attack on the following night.

I paid all fees in cash, as paying taxes on the 70 euros each artist made would have meant there would have been even less left. I reflected quite heavily on the monetary situation, as I felt like I was profiting off these artists to further the standing of my label, without paying them properly. Being as it was part of their tour, it made the situation a little more complex, as otherwise they would not have had a free place to sleep nor a fee. Still, it reflects the complex relation of dependency still active within this music. Where on an artistic level there is a turn towards Asia, Africa and South America, one could argue that on an economic and promotional level there is still a dependency on the European and North-American scenes. To make it as an Asian artist in this scene, touring seems somewhat of a necessity. It seems as if we're in limbo between Glissant's (1997) second and third phase of the peripheral trajectories, as the trajectory from periphery to center is not completely abolished, yet these peripheries are slowly developing into centers of their own.

Internationally, most music press still have a strong focus on the Western music scene and their artists though. Polish collective Oramics made an analysis of the home countries of DJ's featured in some major international dance music magazines, finding somewhere between 2% and 6% of features holding Eastern European DJ's (Oramics, n.d.). They put it quite clearly: "why do international magazines still promote people from one or two regions?" (Oramics, n.d., para. 1). It is exceptionally pressing as the press (supposedly) does not make any direct money off the artists they feature, so in the progressive climate they uphold on their socials, it would be no more than normal to have some more balanced reporting. This, again, reflects Glissant's (1997) way of putting the press as flash agents, jumping from subject to subject, never pushing through to real and equal content. Further, this way, the press also pushes music fans in a particular, western, direction, as it obscures the musical work being done in other parts of the world.

Though thorough statistical analysis is mostly missing, African and Asian artists have to travel a lot to get economic viability. A short scroll through some of the 2019 social media posts of one of the bigger African names in the EEDM scene, DJ Slikback, shows he played quite a lot throughout Europe in that year. Further, his international booker is from LittleBig Music agency, one of the bigger alternative music agencies in Europe, who also represent artists like Aphex Twin. I have always hated interactions with booking agencies, as it means exproportionate fees, of which up to 30% can be lost to management and booker. Though I understand this can take quite some organizational stress away from the artist, there is some form of inflation active in the EEDM scene I find hard to navigate as an event organizer. Booking offices charge fees at gallery

and museum rates, which small organizations like mine just can not handle. Personal experience trying to book some of the female artists off the Principe label showed they charge fees above what a white artist their size would charge. While I think it is good for them as it means they make a living off their music, possibly heralding upward mobility, I question if politically correct quotas do not bring inflated fees for bigger black alternative artists through supply and demand. Some statistical analysis could be at hand here, but might send out messages I do not want to convey. Let it be clear, that I cheer them on and I am in no position to judge what they ask for their performances. If this means black people can make money off white organizations because, maybe it is even a good thing. My way of working and the size of my label just means I cannot pay them and that they might move out of DIY spaces and culture towards more institutionalized settings.

This strong dependency on international bookings for artists from the global south makes festivals like Nyege Nyege or the Gqom Oh! label so important. By building a strong local scene, a festival like Nyege Nyege makes sure that the locals profit off the music. Food stands, technical crew, camping etc. can be handled by Ugandan organizations or enterprises. Even though it is run by two white men (a Belgian and an Armenian expat), they manage to attract quite a varied local and international crowd to Uganda. Wei puts it quite clearly:

"Festivals like Nyege Nyege and clubs like Cakeshop in Seoul, South Korea significantly boost a city's cultural capital, leading to sustainable local economic development." (Wei, 2019, para. 19)

This is also one of the questions put forward in a talk about the Eastern-European music scene that Polish collective Oramics organized on July 20th 2020. They clearly identified a dependency upon Western media and bookings and a need for themselves to construct their own scene and support each other. One of the panel guests put forward the following: "We need this Western approval to actually feel worthy or make a living, and we absolutely shouldn't have this feeling." (Oramics, 53:45).

For artists it is thus a difficult balance of supporting and investing in their own scene and trying to break through in international media, which could provide economic viability for their project. This is hard, as the Western media outlets are so little diverse. In a 2020 essay 'A letter to RA and the rest of the UK music press', Roshan Chauhan writes:

"*On one side I can see an active and diverse scene filled with a loyal and passionate grass roots audience; filled with talented, hardworking DJs, promoters, and label heads who grind away while their progress is sadly limited by external forces largely invisible to them.*

On the other side I see a machine of journalists, industry heads and artists, where international touring schedules, organised press coverage and regular visits to British Airways lounges are the norm." (Chauhan, 2020, para 4 & 5)

Chauhan thus shows two different 'camps', as it were, with flash agents on one side and hard working small labels and artists on the other side. Further, he also words clearly my problems with how the music press is becoming more and more a 'pay-to-win' situation, valuing good contacts with marketing and publishing firms over pushing for new artists. Further on in the article, Chauhan (2020) still goes into quite some depth about how certain UK journalists like Andrew Ryce neglect the complex rhizomatic structure of genres developing in the UK, to go for an arborified -and much critiqued- continuation of Simon Reynolds' Hardcore Continuum[10]. Even though he does not literally use Deleuze & Guattari's literature, their terms and vision always seem lurking just around the corner, which is not to say I want to claim he got his ideas of them. Rather, I feel Deleuze & Guattari's ideas could be an adequate framework through which to read the problematic topics discussed in his article.

In structuring their thinking like this, the white journalists cater to a middle class white narrative about genres, leaving out the complex and racialised histories of genres within the UK's many lineages of dance music, with influences that also tend to cross the Atlantic. This echoes the whitewashing DeForrest Brown Jr (2020) talks about in relation to techno, with Chauhan employing the term himself. Chauhan (2020, para. 165) even goes further and states the following: "Years of writing for a white audience, about white artists with white voices will not be undone quickly and techno, as Resident Advisor and most of its readers define it, might never have a Black or at least a more geographically representative mixed audience again". This is a sentiment I echo and also why I have abandoned going to most more mainstream techno nights.

It is thus not only about the artists themselves, but also about all the companies, enterprises and organizations working in the music business at large. For the whole world, there are still just a couple leading channels like FACT, Resident Advisor and Crack Magazine, upon which we are dependent for the music press. A diversification of the flash agents to herald more POC, women and non-European nationalities within their ranks could herald a new wind, as I will argue further on. It is not only on the stage we need to break the Western monopoly, but also behind the scenes. If a European festival is able to compose a balanced line-up, most of the times the technical crew and engineers are white cis-men. "A 2016 survey by AES[11] found 7 percent of its members were women" (Lanzendorfer, 2017), clearly indicating that behind the scenes the numbers are even worse than on stage. For that matter, the new focus on African, Asian and

[10] Simon Reynolds coined the term 'hardcore continuum' after a series of texts for The Wire, digging through different strands of UK music he saw related in some sort of continuum (Reynolds, 2013).
[11] Audio Engineering Society

South-American music should also be directed to economic viability for indigenous or diasporic initiatives, and not only fulfilling a quota to tick off our own political correctness.

Further, as Chauhan (2020) shows, it is rather depressing that most of the efforts to diversify the back-end of the music press have largely been focused on tokenism and commodifying diversity. If we are talking about diversity, I do not think it should be handled within the company, but within the field. The monopolisation of the music press by whitewashed outlets might be the most straightforward hurdle to tackle. Change should come from the margins, and maybe it is just time to leave the sinking ships of these big music press companies behind, as their structures might be fundamentally privileging white organizations, artists and spaces.

In a 2021 article for Dweller called 'All Eyes On The Margins: The Culture Industry and Labor Relations in East Africa', Ugandan artist Authentically Plastic goes even further. In her Marxian-Deleuzian analysis of cultural production in the area surrounding her, she identifies that the Western "funding industrial complex is essential for capitalism, it provides valid relief channels for Western overaccumulation" (Authentically Plastic, 2021, para. 2), which is supposed to delay the crisis of capitalism in the center and further humanizes capitalism through cultural production. As such, she manages to analyze ways in which global capitalist interests interact specifically with African artistic practise, where these capitalist ventures often come disguised as social or artistic charities. What is more, most of the Western funding projects of which these African artists could profit need some sort of white middle man as she defines the following problem:

> *"Conceptual contribution to musical/artistic projects, in general, is difficult to quantify, this is problematized further by the inability of many African artists to transpose their conceptual ideas into concrete, institutional language. This inability is inessential, as it is the result of the disparity in access to education between the global north & south. This, however, has no bearing on the infinite value of the conceptual, technical & social knowledge of African artists. Here we have a scenario in which the person who has mastery over language becomes a medium of capital."* (Authentically Plastic, 2021, para. 3)

As such, she states that the usage of a colonial language is necessary to attain funding for projects. This is thus another structural way in which white systems can profit off black art and should be rethought in conjunction with the press. This is also the reason why the blog site Dweller is so interesting, as it focuses specifically on the black perspective on mostly electronic music but also film and art. Further on in the article, she also engages with the aura of authenticity which is attributed to the African artist, which attracts Western institutions and which is easily exploited as there are hardly any local or indigenous cultural institutions.

In the second part of her essay, she dives deeper in a Deleuzian analysis, showing how Western powers produce striated individuals who navigate striated bodies & spaces (Authentically Plastic, 2021). For this she bases herself on Deleuze's 'Postscript on the Societies of Control' (Deleuze,

1992), in which he defines the way power relations become ever more humane and complex, which is exactly what the Western cultural institutions are playing out in East-Africa now. However, Authentically Plastic (2021) identifies that these more complex cultural power relations still depend on subjugation, often still through the tactics of infinite debt Europe has always used to subjugate Africa. This is not the formation of a rhizomatic connection between the north and the south, it is an arborified structure of power, stemming from colonial times. She goes on to conclude:

"*This imperceptible form of subjugation is no less extractive, and it is one in which the western artist, or cultural worker can participate. In the relations between the western manager and the African worker, you perpetually see an effortless transmutation between the False Ease of automated control into the cold, hard, disciplinarian of 'unruly African bodies'. The conflicted, and dislocated expat boss perpetually jumps between these two positions, and in this, we are confronted with a uniquely schizoid form of operational terror."* (Authentically Plastic, 2021, para 9)

As such, in Africa, the creative industry is even more exploitative than here, where there is not only an imbalance of profits between producer and manager, but also a racial one in which Western cultural workers often earn more than the African ones, if they already earn something at all. She goes on to make more valid points on the complexity of how gender, class and race interact in the cultural field, as even females or members of the diaspora manage to interact in capitalist ways with the East-African cultural scene. This article might shine a different light upon African artists like Slikback being booked by big European agencies like LittleBig, as it means a certain percentage of what he earns will always stay in Europe, and further, that the relation with the European agencies might be structurally unbalanced for a lot of African artists. Authentically Plastic thus proposes to "develop a parasitic relationship with the capitalist economy, while nurturing an alien logic that moves in very different directions. We have to find ways of occupying this Neoliberal present, while setting off sparks of futurity that pre-figure a post-capitalist world to come" (Authentically Plastic, 2021, para. 16).

So, even if there are more complex patterns of artistic dependency arising on the international music scene, Chauhan (2020) shows there is still a strong monopoly on information dispersal, led by a couple bigger Western outlets. Further, institutional colonial language makes African art ripe for exploitation, as Authentically Plastic showed in her 2021 Dweller article. Authentically Plastic (2021) and the Polish crew Oramics (2020) also identified that focusing on a strong local scene means both acknowledging and negating this dependency on Western music press and funding infrastructures. To move to a more diverse future, means seizing the means of production and doing it ourselves, with our own music press, creating our own strong scene and our own success, as the media and funding structures we have right now might be fundamentally white-privileged, as Chauhan (2020) and Authentically Plastic (2021) showed. As a small

organizer, however, this remains hard to navigate and I am yet to discover what my exact place in all of this can be, as I cannot always offer the financial compensation I feel adequate for the artists I book. Finally, as Authentically Plastic identified, it might be good to develop a hybrid parasitic relation towards capitalist enterprises, profiting off them without them profiting off of us.

- 3rd of June 2017: B-Complex at Straatfeesten, Kalmthout

I actually started out organizing parties with some village friends from Kalmthout, Antwerp. After doing a run of somewhat known student parties in Ghent, we got asked to do the “alternative” stage of our local village festival. For this festival stage, we mostly focused on booking some friends, locals and one or two bigger international names. For the 2017 edition, I booked the biggest artist I had ever booked at any event I was involved in. B-Complex is one of the drum and bass legends of my adolescence, who’s music I thoroughly enjoyed around my 16 and still holds up today for its great melodic qualities, though sometimes bordering on the cheesy. Arguably, it is music of a different kind than most of what I talked about before in this thesis, but I still think this story might hold value.

Some years ago, B-Complex changed her gender to female, which sadly made her lose part of her fanbase. I (ofcourse) really did not mind her personal choices, so I went through and booked her, as I thought it would be a suitable DJ to headline the stage and entertain the local youth. What I did not really think through though, is that I had booked a transgender artist to the local village festival. I always imagined that for quite some of the spectators, this was the first time they saw a transgender in real life, which is not to say that I want to take credit for that. Rather, as I did not really think it through, I felt this position might have put the artist at unease. Especially since it was not the typical crowd of drum and bass heads she is used to playing, who might have already been informed about her gender choice. She held a great presence on stage though and managed nicely to please the crowd with some bigger hits like Nirvana’s Smells Like Teen Spirit. It is not that she was harassed or laughed at, but I did feel people were looking at her differently than the other, mostly cis-gender male artists.

In fact, most of the bigger artists I have booked personally so far have been transgender people, without doing it on purpouse. While I would not count B-Complex to the EEDM scene, Ziùr and AYA (formerly known as Loft) definitely are bigger names in this scene. I remember that throughout the e-mail exchange with Aya, she started using Aya instead of Joeli as her name, which was already an altered version of her birth name, Joel. I remember asking her which pronouns she wanted me to use and she replied she just started using ‘she’. For me, this was my

first encounter with thinking about pronouns and my first interaction of this kind with a transgender person.

The stage presence of the three aforementioned artists was a real eye-opener to me. The fact that these people were so convincingly themselves, knowing they do not fit into society's gender-roles felt freeing. Especially Aya, who brings her dj-sets in a sort of almost cabaretier-style, was liberating to see perform. She talks heavily throughout her sets, employing typically British humour, which alleviates the seriousness of the music. Further, when she performed for the MONTAGE event in question, she still had a heavy, masculine voice and did not seem to care at all about it. It is this neglect for traditional western ideas of gender which make these artists so inspiring to me. Non-conformity to societal roles and ideas can be seen as a way of constructing an imaginal machine (Shukaitis, 2009), trying to find lines of flight towards a different world. It is for these imaginal machines that underground culture keeps drawing me in.

For that matter, SOPHIE, is also a good example. She managed to push through from the underground to the mainstream, while never losing her classic sound. It is plastic, bubbly, trancy, but incredibly well-produced. A stream she did for a fundraiser for Black Lives Matter in June even managed to gather over 800.000 views (SOPHIE, 2020), which is a striking amount in the terms of experimental dance music. Further, her productions for pop stars like Madonna and Charli XCX, provided her with a public outreach unheard of for most transgender people.

If, as Glissant (1997) says, identity is constructed in Relation, then it is in Relation to what we know and see. Seeing people of colour, people who do not conform to classical Western gender-norms and females on stages, makes them infinitely more relatable and opens new lines of flight out of society's conformism to gender roles, genders and races. I remember when French DJ Sentimenal Rave performed in Beursschouwburg in Brussels, I was struck by how many females were suddenly at the front of the stage, feeling comfortable so close to the female DJ. This felt empowering to me.

Further, one could argue seeing an artist like SOPHIE perform has meant a lot to teens worldwide, opening up their eyes to the possibilities they can go with their lives. This is not only in her appearance, but also in the way she managed to so effortly combine styles. She was "renowned for her radically inventive, genre-bending take on pop" (Hess, 2021, para. 2), managing to produce pop records with sounds no producer had dared before, and equally, producing underground tracks with bubbly pop-sounds no-one had done. I still vividly remember being enormously puzzled by one of her first underground hits on Glasgow's Numbers label, Lemonade, as it broke the rather masculine seriousness of bass-music in such an eloquent manner.

To look at it through the lens of Deleuze & Guattari (1988), SOPHIE manages to deterritorialize and decode some unwritten societary rules. Through her presence and her music, she

constructed ways of being other than what the arborified western world hands us. In her performances, she makes the link, constructs the rhizome. You and her, she and the crowd, everything in her music tried to bring us to a “whole new world” as one of the cuts of her last album told us (Sophie, 2018, track 9). In her music, SOPHIE manages to crystallize the lines of flight and transformational multiplicities Deleuze & Guattari (1988) speak of. It is not who you are, but who you are becoming that matters.

Even if some of the diversity on stage or in the press might still be a form of commodified diversity for large corporations, smaller festivals, events and labels might offer a vision of a different world to come. By planting seeds of not only how society could be, but also how you could be and become means diversifying peoples’ imagined paths in life and creating chances or lines of flight. Seeing a woman on stage might push more women to become artists, seeing someone like SOPHIE navigating gender and sexuality so fluidly, might offer solace for people struggling with their own gender or sexuality.

● December 2020, Nyege Nyege’s online edition

The Ugandan festival and label Nyege Nyege had already postponed its 2020 edition of the festival to December due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, they decided to host the festival fully online and feature “41 African + Afro centric collectives”, as stated on their website (Nyege Nyege, 2020). Though there were already a lot of online events in the global EEDM scene throughout the pandemic, this one struck me as extra special because of the decentralised nature and their specific focus.

As one of the Nyege Nyege organizers, Derek Debru, is originally from Belgium, the line-up featured two Belgian organizations: Kiosk and Leaving Living Dakota. Actually, the interaction with Leaving Living Dakota was dependent on an even more coincidental relationship. One of the two organizers of Leaving Living Dakota, Célia or Wu-tangu, is the sister of the rather known Swiss DJ and artist Bonaventure, and had accompanied her to an earlier edition of the festival, where she had gotten to know Derek Debru. It is through coincidental interactions as this, that collaborations come to life.

Through the specificities of this year’s online festival, Nyege Nyege made the effort to focus on the rhizomatic diasporic connections forward thinking black music herald. By letting a bunch of collectives from around the world take over their stream, they were sure to negate the arborified structure most festivals hold, where everything is very centralised around a place and locale. This is of course partly due to the possibilities and nature of online streaming content, but their specific take really shined a light upon it.

However, in a panel discussion in which both Leaving Living Dakota, Derek Debru from Nyege Nyege and others participated, they were quite clear to stress that the imagined global collectivity also had its limits through online content. As discussed above, online content is privileged content, as not everyone is online or adept at finding it online. Research also confirms this presupposition, as COVID has shown the challenges inherent to digitalization (Faraj et al., 2021). The isolation of certain content from a broader audience is part of the stratification or territorialization Deleuze and Guattari (1988) see active in society.

But let us focus on this specific digital strata, to use Deleuze & Guattari's term. Due to the ongoing pandemic, digital content has become an ever more important part of my and my peers lives. While it will never replace real life interactions, as stated by respondents of the same panel discussion I led[12], it does offer new ways of connecting us. Nyege Nyege's online edition managed to connect Brussels' Decoratelier through Leaving Living Dakota's streaming event with Uganda's festival grounds. By indicating black music as a global phenomena, the focus came upon the diasporic qualities of contemporary experimental black music culture. Paul Gilroy (1993, p. 16) writes about "the playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity.", highlighting the transnational character of the musical influences within black music. Through these forms of collective online content, it is even more illustrated. Further, it offers a platform for black artists, which might have been unattainable through the real-world festival equivalent. As doing the events online seriously cuts down on travel costs (and thus ecological footprint!), it offers the possibility of an even more diverse booking scheme, further aided by the decentralised character that inviting collectives offers. This creates a platform and upward mobility for minorities that still lack loads of chances in regions such as Brussels and Belgium, as seen on the housing market (Van Den Broeck & Heylen, 2014) and job market (Martens et al., 2005). This also clearly indicates the need for collectives like Leaving Living Dakota, who actively engage with their diasporic backgrounds (being run by black/brown bookers) and the neighborhood, as they host their events in Brussels' colourful Molenbeek. After all, it is these smaller collectives that are the bringers of change, offering everything between first-time DJ-sets and bigger names, engaging in long-time collaborations offering financial advantages to their artists through public partnerships, as a personal conversation with Leaving Living Dakota's Wu-Tangu illustrated[13]. Smaller collectives like this also function as stepping stones for artists to pass from their first sets to bigger bookings, as illustrated by Nyege Nyege festival.

These events focusing on black culture offer not only upward mobility, but they also offer a place to develop new ways of coming together. In his book 'The Black Atlantic', Gilroy states the following:

[12] Panel discussion with The Word Radio and Vlaams Cultuurhuis De Brakke Grond on 12/02/21
[13] Personal conversation with Wu-Tangu just after the panel discussion of 12/02/21

"Black music's obstinate and consistent commitment to the idea of a better future is a puzzle to which the enforced separation of slaves from their literacy and their compensatory refinement of musical art supplies less than half the answer. The power of music in developing black struggles by communicating information, organising consciousness, and testing out or deploying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency, whether individual or collective, defensive or transformational, demands attention to both the formal attributes of this expressive culture and its distinctive ***moral*** *basis."* (Gilroy, 1993, p. 36, emphasis in original)

This illustrates the necessity of coming together (online or in real life), in order to develop these new forms of collectivity and subjectivity. Dance music has always offered a certain activist space, even though it is in constant struggle against capitalist reappropriation by hypercommercial club- and festival circuits. It is also interesting to note that while organizations like Nyege Nyege focus heavily on black and brown music, the public and crew are not exclusively consistent of BAME[14] people, which might be both good and bad. Gilroy (1993, p. 29) talks about "their white revolutionary supporters constitute something like a rainbow army for the emancipation of the oppressed men and women of the new world". Even though this quote is more specifically about literature, I have seen the focus on allyship being further developed throughout 2020 in the context of the Black Lives Matter protests, urging white people to talk to their families, loved-ones and 'weird racist uncles' about race and discrimination. The difference between profiting off and collaborating with is after all a very fine one, as Authentically Plastic (2021) showed in the above discussed Dweller article. For that matter, I think organizations like Nyege Nyege and Gqom Oh! both handle their workings in a critical manner, as their heads are very aware of their privileged positions as white men in Africa[15].

This focus on online dispersion of activist information is also an interesting subject to pick up on, as throughout the BLM protests, the increased online connectivity in the artistic scenes I feel a part of, clearly showed its values. While it took Belgian national media a couple days to really pick up on the protests surrounding George Floyd's death, through music-focused social media it reached me way earlier. While it is important to note that a lot of this activism is structured by corporate channels like Instagram, it does hold value for me, in the sense that I clearly saw an electronic music scene stepping up and showing their support during these protests. Ranging from sharing videos of police violence, via protest tactics to diffusing curfew taxi services for stuck protesters, through the online electronic music community, I was able to experience part of the US protests the Belgian media does not and will not offer. Further, while being all high-and mighty about the problems with police violence in the US, the Belgian media failed to step up when Adil, a youth from Anderlecht was run over by police following a chase after a failed corona-check just a few months before the US protests. This was also a clear act of police violence and in the

[14] BAME = Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
[15] Panel discussion with The Word Radio and Vlaams Cultuurhuis De Brakke Grond on 12/02/21
& an interview with Gqom Oh!'s labelmanager Nan Kolè on 15/06/2018 in the context of my previous thesis

reporting about subsequent protests, most focus went to “problematic youths”, instead of problematic state or police measures targeting youths in problematized milieus.

For that matter, the increased digitalization, pushed by the COVID-19 pandemic, offered new, stronger and valuable networks of activist information dispersion, pushing the electronic music community to become a nexus of political thinking. This activism did not confine itself just to protest actions, it ranged from sharing literature lists on racism, to enormous catalogues of black artists with links to their socials and bandcamps in order to show white labels and bookers a whole world to which they might have been ignorant before. There are still very clear problems with diversity within the electronic music community, so I think this increased clear engagement with activism and race is a good trend. While more and more artists, collectives and fans might be picking up activist speed, the larger music industry still seems to be lagging behind, as I have shown before.

But how do I place myself in all of this, being a cis-gendered white male DJ, with an upper middle class background. How do I relate to all the genres I play, interact with and find so captivating? What am I doing to take on the racial issues once again brought to the foreground through 2020’s protest cycles? In a certain sense, every booking I take on as an artist, is a booking less for females, transgenders and POC. Further, by often playing genres produced and pioneered by POC, am I not claiming them for myself? In a recent piece for Dweller (which Chauhan, 2020 also quotes), Mathys puts it as follows: “There are ethical ways to engage with the music, and it is up to DJs to go through the process of finding their own work ethics. It’s about being self-conscious about what you’re playing.” (Mathys, 2020, Para 27).

What are my work ethics then? I have always taken pride in searching for new sounds, but might this herald an age-old colonial character? Am I misusing the aura of authenticity of African music, which Authentically Plastic (2021) described? This whole text could be a testament to my fascination for the political possibilities I see within different BAME musical genres as seeds for change, but does that mean I just get to play them when I want? I do remember one interesting moment when I was playing in the cellar of Cinema Galeries for an event I co-hosted with KAVIR in 2018. KAVIR is a cultural organization I was in at the time, which focuses on contemporary Iranian art. Being run by three close friends and me, the running joke of the organization has been that it was run by one Iranian girl and three white guys, which is rather weird seeing as we focus on Iranian art. While we did offer interesting collaborations to burgeoning Belgian and Iranian artists, it has always been the achilles heel of the organization that the behind the scenes character was so white, ultimately leading to one of the three white guys abandoning us as he felt inappropriate in his role.

So in February 2018 I played in Cinema Galeries for the first of our events. It was one of my biggest sets so far, so I prepared it quite thoroughly as I was looking forward to it. Quite some

people turned up and I loved the character of the venue, even though it was kind of chique with the Galeries' fancy macho security being forced upon us as an organization. The crowd was rather diverse on the night, which made me happy. I remember feeling uneasy because I was going to play quite some tracks out of Principe's catalogue, and did not want to feel like lecturing black people on their own music nor claiming it as my own. But the moment I started playing some of the DJ Ni*** Fox tracks I had brought, I remember some of the black audience immediately started vibing more with the music. For that matter, my fears were ungrounded and if anything, playing black music ended up feeling more like an inclusionary act, connecting with the full diversity of the audience. This might be what Small (1998, 1999) imagined as an act of musicking, where suddenly I felt equal with the crowd, instead of being 'in charge' as the DJ. This was further enabled by the fact we deliberately chose not to put the DJ's on a stage, but on the floor between the revellers.

On the other hand, it might be important to note that on this specific night I was playing for free, but that on most nights where I DJ, the white guy gets paid for playing black revellers their own musical histories, while they need to pay for entrance. This is one of the reasons why I am trying to actively engage in booking more diverse line-ups, which might mean stepping down myself sometimes. It is not only about claiming certain histories, but about actual differences in economic gain. Arguably, I might not be the biggest of problems for the global scene though, since after all my DJ-career is not exactly taking off. However, international DJ-stardom poses quite the problem, where most of the bigger names are white men who make loads of money off playing music that has emerged from racially and sexually different cultures than theirs.

In the end it is not that I play exclusively black music, and one might even imagine the rhizome constructed through these types of diverse DJ-sets. EEDM's lack of genre boundaries has been a freeing experience for revellers, especially if you compare it with the rather elitist musical character of some other genres like techno or house, where playing different music is frowned upon. For that matter, the total mix of genres in an EEDM set (which I do not take credit for), might be a sonic image of global rhizomatic connection.

As the global COVID-19 pandemic has been speeding up digitalization, we have thus seen the connections between members of this scene increase. This rhizome is more and more able to function as a global activism nexus, offering valuable support and information dispersion for those who have been protesting against racial inequality following last year's troubling events. This has also pushed me to rethink and re-evaluate my choices both as an artist and booker, as I have been confronted with my privileges and have learned from the focus on allyship stressed throughout the Black Lives Matter movement. Heralding and showing the diversity of the music I love means paying attention to where the money is flowing and paying attention not to profit off other peoples' musical efforts and histories.

● 2030, futures of music to come

While the point of this text might be the tantalising amount of possibilities inherent in electronic music for minorities, it is rather clear that we are not there yet. How do we move from here through to where we *should* be then? Throughout this text, I have indicated some lines of flight from where we are, to how our society can become better for artists, industry professionals and punters alike. So maybe it is time to recapitulate some of my former points.

As I have indicated, online and offline connectivity within electronic music has grown, leading to valuable rhizomatic networks of activist information dispersion, and an ever more political scene. Further, this increasing connectivity offers us new and more diverse identities to tread in Relation with, helping to construct our own identity. Spaces of alternative music offer smooth spaces of alternative collectivity, in which life's struggles might be reconstituted and changed by doing human acts of transgression. Further, the music I know and love not only manages to connect us on the dancefloor, but also in thought, where sampledelic references become ever more prevalent, connecting cultures through sound and showing new forms of artistic dependency. Even though we might still be stuck in limbo between Glissant's (1997) two final phases of the change of peripheral trajectories, there are lines of flight emerging. Contemporary experimental dance music provides a platform which shows and values hybridity over essentialisms, bridging time and space in artistic manners. These new types of gut-wrenching music might offer us the neutral relays Glissant (1997) talked about, connecting cultures in a manner which avoids essentialization.

A strong attention for a local and diverse scene might offer spaces of upward mobility for minorities now often lost in the economic maze of the contemporary artworld. Fostering care within our scene means asking where the money is going and moving beyond performative acts of activism and commodified diversity. This also entails being critical of the ways the western industrial funding complex is structured, as Authentically Plastic (2020) shows. Further, placing the spotlight on minorities offers ways of being and becoming that might be hard to imagine in personal situations. If identity is formed in Relation, as Glissant (1997) says, spaces where people can enter into Relation as equals are important to counteract the polarization of our society. Interactions with the diversity of identities within this scene have already proven valuable for me to find my path in life, I can only imagine what it might be for someone with a less fortunate background than mine. In that light, it is important to stress that going out and interacting with dance music culture still might be privileged actions, as the internet and club-pricing are not always very inclusive.

This, again, stresses the need for local collectives like Brussels' Leaving Living Dakota and spaces like Decoratelier, where there is a strong interaction with the neighborhood and the diversity of it, bridging wage, class and race caps in interesting manners. Providing meeting places for people of different backgrounds might offer the ultimate glue to the city, but there is much we still can do to make it all even more inclusive. This way we can fully harness the power the smooth space brings us, where getting lost in the night is not only personal hedonism, but also a way of experiencing forms of collectivity which are hard to find in today's society.

There are, however, still some clear hurdles to tackle to move towards inclusivity and to move on to a scene that stresses the horizontality of rhizomatic connection. One of the problems I and others like Chauhan (2020) and Wei (2019) have indicated is the ways in which the flash agents of the press have been focusing their attention on global scenes, jumping from novelty to novelty. Building a strong local scene and leaving what is hip for what it is, might be one of the ways we can move forward as Oramics (2020) showed. This requires a reconfiguring of revellers and fans' attention to new sources of press. The bigger press outlets I have mentioned might be a sinking ship worth quitting, as their efforts to diversify have been rather performative and unsuccessful, which Chauhan (2020) also showed. More diverse alternatives could offer strength, spreading attention to more and different artists and lowering the wage gap between these small scenes and those couple of superstar DJ's playing the music these small artists pour their heart into. Platforms like Dweller are a good example of this.

A strong focus on a local scene also means a strong focus on local artists, which should not only be changed on the level of the press, but also on the level of bookings. I am wondering if the cut-down on international travel due to COVID might offer us a summer with parties where local talent gets to shine more and grant dossiers don't get exported to some management firm's bank account. Supporting DIY culture means investing in it and creating a livelihood for the artists that make up the scene. Further, supporting smaller, local artists could provide smaller and more accessible events. Do we really need the 20 euro a night superclubs which are so popular now?

While we might not be there yet, I see diverse lines of flight emerging from the diversity and connection within the musical scene I love. I hope that this thesis has shown these possibilities, and has offered ways to rethink locality, press, collectivity and transgression in the function of looking for new forms of collectivity, connectivity, organization and activism.

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