



Underground Identities

A study of the relation between underground electronic music
and queer people identities.

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*Picture of the cover: Spielraum, Amsterdam. Taken from Facebook.

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Abstract

Nightclubs historically served a number of important roles in the lives of queer people, allowing them to explore their identity and find community in a safe environment: from Techno clubs in Detroit and House parties in Chicago, to Ball-rooms in New York, among other places and music genres around the globe.

In current times, electronic dance music has become mainstream, leaving aside all people who are different from the norm. However, there is an underground scene in which dance music culture extends far beyond having a good time, and it is used to form social bonds and assert identity. This thesis aims to explore in what ways this music genre, and the settings where it is played, contribute to develop identities outside of the societal norms at the present time. Thus, the purpose of this research can be summarised in the following research question: how can underground electronic music contribute towards developing queer identities in the Netherlands?

With the purpose of obtaining in-depth answers, the chosen methodology is qualitative, directed through semi-structured interviews to queer people living in the Netherlands, and involved in the underground electronic music scene in one of the following ways: regular audience, DJ, or promoter. Three research sub-questions have been designed to split the study into three main areas involved in the experience of an underground electronic music event: the social aspect of the experience, the identifying and performative aspects of clubbing, and the economic aspect of the electronic music scene. The analysis of the elements involved in these fields of study was done by applying different concepts and theories developed in the theoretical framework.

The main findings can be summarised in that the social element of the underground electronic music provides the foundations to the experiences that will contribute to develop queer people identities. Once queer individuals are on the dance floor of an underground electronic music event, besides being surrounded by people, they behave freed from the expectations and norms of society. That allows them to explore their identities through movements and self-expression, including gender expression. Later on, they take with them the experiences lived inside the party, incorporating the learnings and behaviours that they have performed on the dance floor

into their everyday lives, mostly in terms of freedom of expression, openness towards other people, or incorporating fun.

Consequently, instead of being reproducing normative lifestyles, queer individuals are showing to the world other possible ways of moving, dancing, dressing, in the end, living. Ultimately, they are breaking, to a certain extent, with the reigning societal rules, creating a more diverse and playful world.

Keywords: Electronic music, Subcultures, Performativity, Gender, Clubbing.

Preface

All this adventure would not have been possible without Tereza, Ulufer, Jason, Armand, Katayoun, Vanessa, Divana, Peter, Peter van Langen and Davide. I thank all my respondents for sustaining this research with their time, thoughts and most sincere feelings. Every interview was immensely inspiring, reminding me why I am doing this project, and leaving me full of energy to continue with it.

Nor it would have been feasible without the guidance of my supervisor Dirk Reynders, who was key in initial phases to reach the right research question, as well as to overcome my fears.

Finally, I want to appreciate the company of my colleagues in this rewarding process. Writing a thesis can be a lonely path, but it has been balanced by sharing with them long hours in the library, coffee breaks, stressful moments, laughs and support.

1. Introduction

“Music is thus the cultural form best able both to cross borders -sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations – and to define places, in clubs, scenes and raves, listening on headphones, radio and in the concert hall, we are only where the music takes us.”

- Simon Frith -

1.1. Background

It was during my twenties when I slowly started to realise my values, asking myself who I am and what is my purpose in life. That process was accompanied by increasingly being aware of the social behaviours that reign into society, and how constrained we are by these reigning societal rules, the so-called normativity, a phenomenon in human societies of designating some actions as good or desirable and others as undesirable or impermissible.

It might be also during this decade when people start to take some of the biggest steps in life. Starting with finishing the studies, and following by entering the labour market, striving to maintain oneself economically, maybe meeting a partner in life, maybe choosing a place to live in, maybe thinking about creating a family, and so on. All of these decisions are highly influenced by the normativity within we live. Thus, looking for my own way of living, I started to question why shall we all live the same life scheme, because I believe that by reproducing this scheme without questioning it, we may not give room to other possibilities, to other realities, as valid as the “normal” ones.

One aspect of this normativity is the heteronormativity, the assumption, both individually and institutionally, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality should be viewed as the norm and superior to other sexual orientations. This leads to the stigmatization and erasure of LGBTQ individuals and culture, and preserves the dominance of straight individuals and culture.

It was into the underground electronic music scene where I discovered new insights that broadened my mind. I started to attend these events during my Bachelor’s years, ten years back in time in Madrid, Spain. Since then, I never stopped attending dance parties oftentimes. These spaces are part of society, and thus, are also affected by normativity. However, in recent years, I was witnessing how club culture started to be more and more conscious, and thus making more room for other realities outside of the

reigning rules. While I was progressively discovering these realities, I found myself eager for new learning, and being still in this process, this thesis was born with the purpose of contributing to this learning.

When I started the Master's degree, one of the first lectures that I attended was about values; Cultural Organisations with Professor Arjo Klamer. As he mentioned in his book *Doing the right thing*:

“The question, then, is in what conversation are you or in what conversation you want to be. Or, if you are a practitioner, what conversation do you want to consult in order to make sense of your world, and in order to figure out what is the right thing to do in your life” (Klamer, 2017, p.13)

I knew I wanted to be in a conversation which has to do with social values, this is the right thing to do for me. Moreover, into the frame of cultural economics, the cultural sector, besides the financial values, provides society with spiritual, symbolic and social values: from meeting people, to contribute to the personal development of individuals, or the integration of minorities.

What we choose to focus on in whatever we create, and how we choose to portray it, reveals a little piece of ourselves. Therefore, this thesis indirectly states my vision of the world, as my ideal world is more similar to a queer world, to a more pluralistic world than the normativity in we are still immerse today. I want to explore what happens in these underground electronic music events to be a space that contributes to queer identities, what are the factors contributing to develop their personal identities.

Before continuing, the study will be contextualised starting with the music. Electronic dance music, also known as dance music, club music, or simply dance, is a broad range of percussive electronic music genres made large for nightclubs, raves and festivals. It is generally produced by disc jockeys who create seamless selections of tracks, called a DJ set, or mix, by segueing from one recording to another. Electronic dance music includes: house, techno, trance, drum and bass, and dub step, among others, as well as their respective subgenres. Dance music producers also perform their music live in a concert or festival setting in what is called a “live”.

This study is focused on the underground part of the electronic music scene, because the more mainstream side of the industry is likely to be associated with the normative groups of society, as mainstream means the dominant culture. Generalizing, underground dance music is ideologically charged, it has a romantic discourse, it is a

niche market and it is autonomous, whereas the mainstream scene is corporate, clearly for profit, market success oriented, considered less authentic, and global. While there is a clear distinction between the more mainstream parties and those that could be labeled as underground, sometimes the latter comes in the form of big-stage production events making the line dividing underground and mainstream highly blurry.

Although throughout the research, I will refer sometimes to dance music, or electronic music for the purpose of simplifying, the study is always focused on the underground side of the electronic music scene.

For its part, queer is a vague word that has different connotations. Firstly, queer was used to mean odd, or different. Following, queer was used to mean homosexual, and then it has expanded beyond meaning only that. In fact, queer does not have a single meaning, except perhaps not heterosexual. Some people who identify as neither male nor female call themselves genderqueer, while others who identify that same way might call themselves gender-fluid or nonbinary. Even the Q in LGBTQ could stand for either queer or questioning. Queer is a label, adopted by some people and rejected by others. So, it should not be used to describe individuals, a group of specific individuals, or their gender orientations, unless their preference is known. Therefore, in this study, this term is used as an adjective, defining a characteristic of identities. This term was chosen because it is vaguer and ampler than LGBTQ, and I thought it was more appropriate in this way because the study is more focused on the non-normative in general, than on specific sexual orientations or genders. Moreover, in academia there is a subject called queer studies.

Last but not least, I found important as well to position myself in the study. I do not identify as queer myself, but I am, or I want to be, an ally. To be an ally is to take the struggle as your own and transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it. Even though I am a woman, I recognise the privilege of being a white and straight cis-woman. Therefore, I am doing this research with the humblest intention of becoming a good ally and understanding the struggle of others.

1.2. Research question

This thesis aims to explore the relation between the identities of people non-conforming with the reigning societal norms and underground electronic music,

answering the research question: how can underground electronic music contribute towards developing queer identities in the Netherlands?

The sub-questions of the research question are based on the different literature selected to obtain a deeper understanding of the given subject. Thus, the sub-questions of this research will try to answer the research question by proving, disproving or updating different theoretical concepts when applied to the specific context of the present study. They can be organized in three different categories:

- How can the social aspect of underground electronic music contribute towards developing queer identities in the Netherlands?
- How can the identifying and performative aspect of the clubbing experience contribute towards developing queer identities in the Netherlands?
- How can the economic aspect of the electronic music scene contribute towards developing queer identities in the Netherlands?

However, it is important not to specify the sub-questions too much, and leave flexibility for new aspects that could arise during the interviews.

1.3. Scientific and societal importance

The societal importance of this paper is mainly that it could create awareness about the significance of this music genre -and subsequently of the cultural spaces where this music genre is played- for the personal development of a section of society: the queer community, and therefore, for society in general.

It could be significant as well, for all parts involved in the electronic music scene, especially for those who have the authority to make decisions that affect queer individuals: club owners, promoters, policy makers, etc. As mentioned by Arjo Klamer (2017), the “culture matters” conversations appeal to politicians and business leaders to pay attention to culture in the anthropological sense and to the arts in particular.

Regarding the scientific relevance, this research is significant because it tries to cover the under-researched space of previous research on the field. While there is vast literature about the clubbing experience in general, and the queer nightlife regarding inclusivity, or the normalization of Gay and Lesbian spaces, such as the recent study “Regulating the Reguliers: How the Normalization of Gays and Lesbians in Dutch Society Impacts LGBTQ Nightlife” by Laura Jacobs (2017), I have not found a study that

join together both areas putting the focus on how the personal identities of queer people are developed by underground electronic music.

1.4. Approach

All in all, to answer the research question, it is needed to know the experiences of queer people into the underground electronic music scene. Therefore, aiming to obtain in depth answers, this study is a qualitative research. I conducted ten face to face semi-structured interviews to queer people involved in the electronic music scene in one of the following ways: DJ, promotor, or regular audience, basically the main stakeholders that take part in the experience of an electronic music party.

This paper is divided into five sections. After the introduction, the second chapter provides the theoretical framework in which the study is based, connecting concepts to the specific context of an underground electronic music event. In the third chapter the methodology in used is presented, together with the subjects of study. The fourth chapter not only analyses the results obtained in the interviews, but it also presents a brief case study. Some conclusions are drawn in the fifth and final section, updating some theories and concepts, with recommendations for future research on the topic. At the end of the document, there is an appendix that includes: the interview guide, the list of coding groups, and the ten interview transcripts.

2. Theoretical framework

In academia there are all kinds of theories to support a research. Among all of them, this section provides the elements I considered appropriate to obtain a deeper understanding of the given topic. The chosen concepts are the lens through which the responses of the interviewees were evaluated.

2.1. The context

Being humans the subject of research, it seems significant to frame the study temporarily, as people's behaviours change over time. The study focuses on how electronic music contributes to develop queer identities in present times. Therefore, the subjects of the research operate within contemporary societies in which the postmodern condition applies.

The postmodern condition defined by Jean-François Lyotard (1984), originally published in 1979, establishes an incredulity toward meta narratives, in his own words: "the narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on" (Lyotard, 1984, p.24). The postmodern condition occurs when the main narrative ceases to be hegemonic. With the twilight of the metanarrative, we get the explosion of micronarratives. One of these metanarratives is the one that narrates social demarcations, thus, postmodernity allows the appearance of new social narratives, new social perspectives, new ways of living, etc. Such is the case of the queer narrative. Thanks to the postmodern condition, being queer is becoming more acceptable.

It was during the same decade when Disco music was born in New York. The ethnomusicologist Luis-Manuel Garcia (2014) claims in an article titled "An Alternate history of sexuality in club culture" for the renowned online media in electronic music *Resident Advisor* that, at the beginning of the 1970s, queer people of colour and many straight-but-not-narrow allies came together to create small pockets of space in the city's harsh urban landscape, "spaces where they could be safe, be themselves, be someone else for a while, and be with others in ways not permitted in the "normal" everyday world" (Garcia, L. M., 2014).

Music was an essential part of these gatherings, and a similar story happened in other places of the world: in Chicago with house music, in Detroit with techno, in the

UK with acid house raves, or in Paris with the lesbian clubbing. Hence, it can be assumed that most of the music scenes that founded today's dance music genres -house, disco, electro, techno, etc- were closely connected with marginalized groups, including lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans-people, racial and ethnic minorities.

However, once electronic dance music turned into a massive global phenomenon, it became primarily straight, white, male and middle-class environments, quickly forgetting about the more queer and colourful scenes that were still dancing and making music (Garcia, 2014). Moreover, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of electronic dance music festivals, shifting the clubbing landscape in the city from night to daytime, and taking dance music out of clubs and into parks and other big public spaces (Montano, 2011). These changes have made harder for marginalized people to stay inside the frame of attention, as for them it is easier to remain central to a music scene when it is small, local and personal (Garcia, 2014).

In her analysis of LGBTQ spaces in Amsterdam, Laura Jacobs (2017) concludes that mainstream gay bars become 'straighter', catering to a more heterosexual audience and mimicking mainstream heterosexual culture, forcing LGBTQ individuals to either assimilate or take part in the alternative queer nightlife scene.

Nevertheless, these alternative queer nightlife scenes continue to thrive today. A current example of this are the transsexual female DJs Eris Drew and Octo Octa, who are successfully touring festivals and clubs worldwide, spreading their philosophy. Eris Drew and Octo Octa's sets are a celebration of their love for each other, dance music and the queer community. Both independently and together, they are leading the charge with love, as Rachel Almeida (2019) asserts in a recent interview that the couple did for *Crack Magazine*. In this interview, Eris Drew mentions: "music allowed me to unlock that emotional side of myself, especially with coming out. Before that there were societal pressures to be more reserved."

On his behalf, Andrew Durbin, the writer of the book *MacArthur Park*¹, states in an interview he did for Pitchfork (Lozano, 2018):

"The great thing about nightlife, particularly queer nightlife, is that it really creates a space for trans people, gay people, people of color, especially when it's off the grid like the Spectrum² was." (Durbin, 2018)

¹ A novel that reflects the New York queer club scene.

² An under-the-radar queer safe space in NY, which pushed the boundaries of music and art.

Another concept associated with the postmodernity of late capitalism, is the simulacra by Jean Baudrillard (1983). He claims that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols, and that human experience is a simulacrum of reality, particularly regarding media and culture. He states that, in the current times, the simulacrum precedes the original, and the distinction between reality and representation vanishes. Considering that a dance party is a cultural product, it may be interesting to see if this concept applies to the culture of clubbing, and to what extent it applies. Do queer individuals perceive an underground dance party as a simulacrum out of their real lives? And how this perception affects their identities?

Baudrillard (1983) uses the example of an illness to exemplify simulation claiming that:

“To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary". Since the simulator produces "true" symptoms, is he or she ill or not?” (Baudrillard, 1983, p.168).

If we apply this concept to a queer attendee of a dance party, they may simulate behaviours that they cannot perform in their real lives out of the setting of the dance floor. But as opposed to the negative effect that Baudrillard expected, threatening the difference between what is “true” and what is “false”, this simulation could have a positive effect on the real lives of these subjects, as they can think that the imaginary created on the dance floor is real, and therefore become real, incorporating these performances into their daily lives.

2.2. The social aspect

Electronic music is mostly experienced collectively. Usually in the setting of a nightclub, a rave or a festival. In these contexts, a disc jockey plays a selection of records in front of a dance floor where an audience gather and dance. They may attend these events by themselves or with a group of people, but the experience will ultimately be social as they will join up other people on the venue.

Thus, considering the social side of the experience, it is remarkable to revisit some sociological theories to find out how queer people socialise, and if this social aspect contributes to develop their current identities.

The first concept is the basis of the following ones, and it is the social capital of Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of acquaintance and recognition” (Richardson, 1986, p.21). In other words, he means that the membership in a group provides each of its members with collectively-owned capital, adding that “these relationships may exist only in the practical state, material or symbolic exchanges that help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name, and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them” (Richardson, 1986, p.21). As queer people may attend to underground music events with other people, or may interact with other people once they are inside, they may create a network which can provide them with social capital.

Having introduced that concept, it seems relevant to research what kind of network is providing them with social capital. The first possibility is subcultures, a term which has been broadly defined as social groups organized around shared practices and interests. Herzog, Mitchell & Soccio (1999) state that subculture usually designates transient groups studied apart from their families and private settings, with an emphasis on informal and organic affiliations formed either in the unregulated public space, or against the disciplinary structure of institutionalization. Subcultures are generally perceived to deviate from the normative standards of the dominant culture according to age, sexuality, racial, and gendered terms.

However, according to Andy Bennet (1999), new generations are not tied to issues of social class, as subculture maintains. Instead, they are examples of the late modern lifestyles in which notions of identity are constructed rather than given, and are fluid rather than fixed. Such fluidity, he maintains, is a characteristic of the forms of collective association which are built around musical and stylistic preference, something that could fit with queer attendees of underground electronic music events.

Therefore, we come to the second possibility: neo-tribes. According to Maffesoli (1996) the tribe is “without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar, it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form” (1996, as cited in Bennet,

1999, p.605). Maffesoli's neo-tribes are defined as micro-groupings that develop as a result of the constant comings and goings between social situations that occur in society and which are premised upon a superseding or submerging of identities (Maffesoli, 1996). For this author, neo-tribes recognise the sense of emotional community, the ephemerality, the importance of atmosphere, and the key notion of emergent identifications that characterise the belongings of clubbing in contrast to more rigid notions of lifestyle. All in all, neo-tribes prioritise the here and now, the affectual and the tactile.

Moreover, Christina Goulding & Avi Shankar (2011) elaborate on the connection between clubbing and neo-tribes. The characteristics of clubbing defined by Peter M. Burns (1999) are: first, clubbing involves the individual or group leaving behind the normal rules of everyday society. Second, this is for a limited duration, at some point the individual must return to normality and re-engage with societal norms. Third, the experience may involve a sudden and unique set of social relations that can include role reversal, the mixing of classes and the instant formation of friendships, even if they are transitory. Fourth, the experience tends to be one of intensity involving pleasure or sensuousness (1999, as cited in Goulding & Shankar, 2011, p.1436).

Neo-tribes flow between different identities under different circumstances (Bennett, 1999). They represent temporary escape from the pressures and stresses of the everyday working week, and feel an intense community spirit, togetherness, and solidarity (Goulding, Shankar, & Elliott, 2002). As argued by Goulding & Shankar (2011), solidarity is expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form, and nowhere is this more evident than in dance club or venue which allows the individual to flout convention, play with the rules and escape the quotidian through acts of transformation of body and mind. Therefore, Goulding & Shankar (2011) have founded enough similarities between the clubbing experience and the neo-tribes' behaviour to conceptualised clubbing as a tribal, or more specifically a neo-tribal experience.

To conclude this section, the suggestion made by Andy Bennet (1999) is that "neo-tribalism provides a much more adequate framework as it allows for the shifting nature of youth's musical and stylistic preferences and the essential fluidity of youth cultural groups" (p.615). Therefore, it would relevant to apply both concepts to the queer audiences in underground electronic music events, analyse how these communities relate with each other in this context, and consequently see if their actions are more in line with subcultures, or as Bennet (1999) and Goulding & Shankar (2011) fully justified, they follow neo-tribal behaviours.

2.3. About identities and performativity

2.3.1. Identities

This research is focused on the effects that underground dance music can have on the identity of queer individuals. On a dance floor, as mentioned by Glennie and Thrift (1996), “the consuming crowd becomes a potentially important context for the construction, transformation and expression of people’s self-projects” (1996, as cited in Malbon, 1999, p.27). Thus, in what ways can these events contribute to the development of queer self-projects?

Accordingly, it will be significant to revisit some theories of identity. In the first place, defining identity. I will refer to the definition by Stuart Hall (1996), which in contrast to the naturalists who define identity as the recognition of some common origin shared characteristics with another person or group, he uses a discursive approach to see identification as a construction, a process never complete. Stuart Hall (1996) accepts that identities are never unified, and in post-modern times, “identities are increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (p.4), a concept that is in line with Lyotard’s micro-narratives of the postmodern condition mentioned above. If there are multiple narratives, there may be multiple identities.

For Stuart Hall (1996), “identity is a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination, not a subsumption. There is always “too much” or “too little”- an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, never a totality” (p.3). Identity is grounded in fantasy and idealization. Thus, an identity is always already an ideal, it is what we would like to be instead of what we are, an ideal composed of identifications that are not necessarily harmonious.

2.3.2. Music identities

A key part of human identities is music, the reason why of this research. The socio-musicologist Simon Frith (1996) explains in the chapter “Music Identities” of the book *Questions of Cultural Identity* by Stuart Hall (1996), that music is a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective:

“Due to its qualities of abstractness, music is, by nature, an individualizing form. We absorb looseness of reference that makes them immediately accessible. At the same time, and equally significantly, music is obviously collective. We hear things

because their sounds obey a more or less familiar cultural logic, and for most music listeners this logic is out of our control.” (p.121)

Therefore, music, whatever genre it is, offers the immediate experience of collective identity. Simon Frith (1996) argues that: “music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers to the body, time and sociability” (p.124). These experiences enable us to work with our imaginary fantasy and bodily practice.

More specifically, Goulding and Shankar (2011) state that the distinctive feature of electronic dance music is that is “focused on rhythmic continuity, repetition and visceral bass frequencies, played at volumes that bypass cognition and physically shake bodies. Such music communicates directly with the body, and lets its life and experiences flow into an ecstasy of perception.” (p.1448)

Clubbing in particular, as stated by Graburn (1989), whether experienced abroad as part of a vacation, or at home as part of a weekend break, is predicated on ritual, ceremony, play and cultural aesthetics (1989, as cited in Goulding and Shankar, 2011, p.1436).

Therefore, are queer individuals perceiving the body more than the mind when they dance to electronic music? How does this affect to their self-projects? Do they live a night out as a ritual? To find out an answer to these questions, it may be of interest to look at how queer people experience the electronic music genre, both individually and collectively.

2.3.3. Performativity

Besides listening to the music, people dance and move around the dance floor when they attend an electronic music event, what can be considerate a performance.

Performativity is a concept that was first described by the philosopher John L. Austin (1962) when he referred to a specific capacity: the capacity of speech and communication to act or to consummate an action, and particularly in the work of feminists and queer theorists, performativity has played an important role in discussions of social change (1962, as cited in Oliver, 2003).

Therefore, I will refer to two main theories related to performativity. On the one hand, a theory developed by Ervin Goffman (1959): front stage and backstage theory. What Goffman (1959) calls front stage behaviour is what we do when we know that

others are watching or aware of us, it is how we behave and interact when we have an audience. Front stage behaviour reflects internalised societal norms and expectations for our behaviour that are shaped in part by the setting, the particular role we play within it, and our physical appearance.

On the contrary, backstage behaviour is what we do when nobody is looking at us, or when we think no one is looking. How we behave back stage is freed from the expectations and norms that shape our behaviour when we are front stage. Being at home instead of in public, at school or at work, is the clearest demarcation of the difference between front and back stage in social life.

Whatever setting be in which a party takes places -a nightclub, a festival, a rave...- an electronic music event is almost always in a public space. In these spaces, there is an audience, and not only for the DJ, but also for the dancers themselves. Then, according to Goffman, the dance floor would be a front stage region. However, as mentioned earlier, Burns (1999) states that clubbing involves the individual or group leaving behind the normal rules of everyday society, and at some point, the individual returns to normality and re-engages with societal norms. Hence, when the party occurs in a clubbing setting, is the dance floor operating as a front stage or as a backstage region for queer individuals?

As argued by Goulding and Shankar (2011), in clubbing we observe a duality where bodies are transformed from the everyday to the sensational through dress, dance and stimulants. This transformation only lasts as long as the ritual process, and participants return to the familiar realm of the profane (p.1449). Moreover, Shields (1992) describes a 'postmodern persona' which moves between a succession of 'site-specific' gatherings and whose multiple identifications form a *dramatic personae* - a self which can no longer be simplistically theorized as unified (1992, as cited by Bennet, 1999, p. 605). Summarising, these thoughts suggest that a dance floor acts as a backstage region and, if that is the case, it will contribute to explore queer people identities, helping to develop them.

Goffman (1959) states that one way in which society expects certain behaviours of us is according to our physical appearance. This physical appearance is highly determined by the sex we were assigned at birth. For that reason, the second theory included in this section is one of the main gender theories of all time: Judith Butler's gender performativity.

Influenced by Austin, philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler (1990) asserts that gender is socially constructed through acts and nonverbal communication that are performative, in that they serve to define and maintain identities. Her view of performativity reverses the idea that a person's identity is the source of their secondary actions. Instead, she views actions, and behaviors, as a source that contributes to the formation of one's identity, which is continuously being redefined through speech acts and symbolic communication.

Thus, Judith Butler (1990) states that gender is performed and not inherent: nobody is a gender from the start. Quite the opposite, for Butler (1990), gender is culturally formed, it constitutes the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance. Gender roles are not inherent, masculinity and femininity are constructed by society. From Butler's statements about gender identity it follows that gender identity is unstable.

There are several criticisms against Butler's concept of performativity. The first is that the theory is individual in nature and does not take other factors into consideration: such as the space within which the performance occurs, or how others involved might see or interpret what they witness (Lloyd, 1999). For Butler, gender is just a performative and regulatory practice. Yet, Goffman concentrates on developing understandings of the timings and spacings of bodies within social encounters. As argued by Malbon (1999), combining these two approaches to performativity we can improve our understandings of how the consuming experience of the crowd can be simultaneously expressive (Goffmanian) and constructive (Butlerian) of self.

In that sense, if a dance floor is a backstage region, queer people will not necessarily perform according to what others expect of their physical appearance, and thus, according to what other people expect of their gender assigned at birth. That opens a space of performativity which is interesting to explore. I will research if when queer people are on a dance floor, they present a gender to the world according to societal expectations or, on the contrary, they explore their gender identity as something fluid and unstable, contributing to develop their gender identities.

2.3.4. Body culture

The attention of cultural and social studies to the body started around the 1970s, and it is relevant for the understanding of society and cultural diversity.

Firstly, Eichberg (2009) explains that Pierre Bourdieu (1967) referred to a bottom up strategy with the concept of habitus. Habitus is learned through the body, through a process of practical familiarization, which does not pass through consciousness. The unconscious incorporation of the habitus, through socialization, supposes the practical appropriation of the schemes that serve to produce the practices adapted to the situation and the fact of incorporating the interest to participate in diverse social fields (Lizardo, 2009), for instance, music.

Conversely, Michel Foucault (1975) studies approach the body from a top down strategy by analysing the history of military discipline as a mechanism of control. The modern body moves in an “archipelago of prisons” and is subjected to what Foucault (1975) called the biopolitics of power (1975, as cited in Eichberg, 2009). Regarding the context of the study, if a dance floor acts as a backstage region, is it doing so outside of the “archipelago of prisons”?

For postmodernists, again, there is pluralism, and the body became a matter of choice and construction, referring to the body as a resource. Body culture was a world of normalization, and at the same time a supermarket where the human being chooses according to his individual inclinations (Eichberg, 2009).

Therefore, since the body is an essential part of the performance on a dance floor, it would be of interest to see how these concepts apply to the performance of queer individuals attending underground electronic music events.

2.4. The economics of the scene

These gatherings to listen and dance to underground dance music are not happening as isolated cases. On the contrary, they happen in numerous cities around the globe, and the addition of all of them create a whole scene, which at the same time can have an influence on people’s experiences.

On the one hand, Elizabeth Currid (2007) states that social contexts are not only where arts and culture is evaluated but also where taste and genre are derived. DiMaggio (1987) argues that people consume and imbue arts and culture with significance in social contexts; they establish social relationships as a product of shared interests in arts and

culture (1987, as cited in Currid, 2007). Members trust each other's opinions and evaluations, creating subcultures geared towards particular niches within arts and culture that attract like-minded producers and supportive gatekeepers and tastemakers, such is the case of punk, pop art, folk music, etc.

Regarding club culture in particular, Sarah Thornton (1995) suggests that such patterns of music consumption are actually bound up with the conventions of particular club audiences whose tastes in music fit within a frame of what she terms "subcultural capital" via which dance music clubbers distinguish themselves from "mainstream" clubs and their clientele (p.612).

On the other hand, social contexts are also where trends emerge. Elizabeth Currid (2007) argues that street level and underground subcultures establish social contexts where their communities meet, and it only takes the bridge of one gatekeeper into the mainstream cultural market to transform these symbolic communities into consumer products. Mainstream arts and culture producers often view these subcultures as pioneers and tastemakers for a larger public and thus seek out the places where they emerge (nightclubs, music venues, bars, gallery openings and so forth) for inspiration for consumer goods. (p.392)

If more and more people start following those trends, subcultures may be translated into commodified goods. In turn, as argued by Bourdieu (1993), this can result in subcultures trading its symbolic production for large-scale or economic production, a transformation that may allow these events to gain economic legitimacy but at the expense of losing its initial symbolic value with original, niche consumers (1993, as cited in Currid, 2007).

Therefore, there are naturally drawbacks to this system, and tensions arise when the commodification of goods alienates the core and original fan group that finds market legitimization to be a "selling out". Cowen (1998) explains that the decrease of production, communication and distribution costs may act as catalysts for greater (and more democratic) distribution of arts and culture. But also, for better or worse, they result in a more efficient transformation from "subculture" to "sell out" (1998, as cited in Currid, 2007). The fact that the arts and culture scene can be reported so quickly on social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, can act swiftly to terminate the exclusive cachet found in a particular place, while simultaneously drawing in a geography-less mass market at a rapid pace.

Summarising, it would be relevant to analyse if this scene is becoming more crowded and popular, and for that reason, losing its authenticity for its pioneer consumers, queer individuals in this case, as well as how this technological transformation applies to the underground electronic music scene.

To conclude the theoretical framework, the actual research will apply the different concepts and theories explained all over this section related to the three main areas of exploration: the social aspect of experiencing electronic music, the identifying and performative aspects of the clubbing experience, and the economic aspects of the scene, with the purpose to find out how queer people experience underground electronic music, and therefore, how the events where this music is played contribute to their personal identities.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

As mentioned by Alan Bryman (2016), qualitative research stresses on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants (p.375). Furthermore, the epistemology underlying qualitative research has been expressed by Lofland and Lofland as the one involving two central tenets: (1) face to face interaction is the fullest condition of participating in the mind of another human being, and (2) you must participate in the mind of another human being (in sociological terms, “take the role of the other”) to acquire social knowledge (1995, as cited by Bryman, 2016, p.393).

Therefore, as this investigation seeks to discover how queer individuals interpret their experiences into the underground electronic music scene, it seems that the most appropriate way to answer the research question is a qualitative study conducted through face to face interviews. With the aim to achieve rich and detailed answers, the semi-structured interview is the chosen procedure, as this type of interview tends to be flexible, responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview, and perhaps adjusting the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues emerging in the course of interviews (Bryman, 2016).

In addition, the research might have outcomes that cannot be predicted beforehand guiding fixed questions, so the openness of in-depth conversation could give insights, which will otherwise be excluded.

3.2. List of respondents

Having clear the criteria to achieve the research goal will be relevant to the inclusions or exclusion of units of analysis. Therefore, to select the list of respondents to the interview, I clearly aimed to a certain group of people that accomplished two criteria: (1) being actively involved in the underground electronic music scene as: regular audience, DJ, or promotor, and (2) identify themselves as queer, being queer whoever does not identify themselves into the gendered societal norms.

Thus, sampling with the research goals in mind, purposive sampling was used, selecting participants that accomplish both criteria to be sure that they are relevant to the research instead of sampling participants on a random basis, as recommended by Bryman (2015, p.408).

Within this purposive sampling, two methods were combined: criterion sampling and snowball sampling. I started with criterion sampling, contacting possible respondents that accomplish both criteria. When a considerable number of respondents confirmed their participation, the interviews started. Because networks of individuals are the focus of attention of the study, the sample was completed making use of snowball sampling, asking the first round of respondents for further possible candidates. In this way, a total sample of ten respondents was established.

The final sample resulted in being a diverse fragment of individuals. Their ages go from 20 to 36 years old, being 4 female individuals and 6 male individuals, with different roles into the electronic music scene, as well as nationalities, counting with half Dutch, and the other half foreigners living in the Netherlands. Regarding sexual orientations, they are also varied, from homosexuals and bisexuals to heteroflexible³ individuals, being the latter people who tend to be more attracted by the opposite sex, but they are open to other possibilities. All this information can be seen in detail into the next table:

Name	Role	Age	Nationality	Gender	Sexual Orientation	City
Tereza	Audience	20	Dutch	Female	Lesbian	Rotterdam
Ulufer	Audience	27	Turkish	Female	Bisexual	Rotterdam
Jason	Audience	28	North American	Male	Gay	Amsterdam
Armand	DJ/ Promotor/ Audience	28	Dutch	Male	Gay	Rotterdam
Katayoun	DJ/ Promotor/ Audience	34	Dutch (Iranian background)	Female	Bisexual	Amsterdam
Vanessa	DJ/Audience	36	Portuguese	Female	Heteroflexible	Amsterdam
Navid	DJ/ Promotor/ Audience	33	Dutch (Iranian background)	Male	Heteroflexible	Amsterdam
Peter	Audience	28	Australian/British	Male	Gay	Amsterdam

³ According to the chosen definition of queer, in its amplest sense, it is logic to integrate heterosexual people who don't identify themselves into the gendered societal rules.

Peter V.L.	Audience	27	Dutch	Male	Gay	The Hague
Davide	Audience	26	Italian	Male	Gay	Rotterdam

3.3. Operationalisation

In order to answer the research question, an interview guide was designed, consisting of 45 questions (view Appendix 1: Interview guide). These questions were destined to explore the three main areas in which the research question was divided: the social aspect of going to underground electronic music events, the identifying and performative aspect of the clubbing experience, and the economic aspects of the scene in general, to find out what aspects of the underground electronic music scene are contributing to develop queer people identities.

The questions inside each category were based on the specific theories and concepts that are explained in the theoretical framework. To translate each concept into questions, a non-technical language was used in order to facilitate the respondents its understanding.

The order of the questions in the interview guide is not according to how the three main areas to explore were included in the theoretical framework, but to a more natural order, aiming to create a free-flowing conversation. For that purpose, the first part of the interview counts with some introductory questions, firstly, some demographic data about the interviewee, and then, some questions about their lives, such as their profession and their relationship with electronic music, what helped to warm up the conversation.

The intermediate section of the interview includes questions about the experience of the respondent in underground electronic music events, according to the first category -the social context- and to the second category -the identifying and performative aspects of clubbing-. Thus, it includes questions about how is the group of people with whom the respondents attend these events, as well as how they experience the elements involved in the event: the music, the dancing and the performance itself.

The last part of the interview includes some final questions about the third area to explore, the economics of the scene, and about a theoretical concept included in the introduction of the theoretical framework: Simulacra by Baudrillard (1983). Some generic questions were included with the intention to give room to mention something that may

have not been told during the conversation, or to pursue topics of particular interest to the respondents, as suggested by Bryman (2016).

All the questions have not been asked exactly in the way outlined on the schedule, but by and large, all of them were asked and a similar wording was used from interviewee to interviewee.

3.4. Data collection

The ten interviews hold were conducted in two phases, interviewing the first seven respondents between the 4th May and the 15th May, and the last three respondents between the 29th May and the 3rd of June. In total, I completed 10 hours and 38 minutes of interviews (638 minutes), being the average time per interview: 64 minutes.

All the interviewees were greatly open when telling their experiences, and I believe this was due to the design of the interview. Since it was started with generic questions such as sexual orientation, gender and what pronoun do they use for themselves, clarifying these aspects in the first place created an atmosphere of confidence that allowed the respondents to feel comfortable when the conversation became more personal and intimate.

The interviews were held in English because it was the common language between the interviewees and myself, being native English speakers two of the respondents, and very fluent English speakers the rest. I gave to all the respondents the flexibility to be interviewed wherever they felt more comfortable, at their own place or at a nice and quiet café, resulting in that eight of the respondents chose to be interviewed in a café and two at their own apartment. In any case, the interviews were harmonious conversations and quiet enough to be recorded and transcribed, and the respondents agreed with using their original name in the study.

Regarding the location, five interviews took place in Amsterdam, four in Rotterdam, and one in The Hague.

3.5. Data analysis

While I was completing the data collection, I transcribed (view Appendix 3: Interview transcripts) and edited the first conducted interviews, as having the interview fresh in mind would make the transcription easier. Subsequently, the interviews were analysed using the digital software program ATLAS.ti. This software is used to process all

the information with coding, the process of giving labels to pieces of text as a systematic way to understand the collected data.

Therefore, all answers of each interview were reviewed and codes were assigned to the relevant answers for the study using the open coding method, including more than one code per answer when needed. In total, 190 different codes were created and assigned.

Then, relationships among the open codes were identified, grouping the codes in 15 different categories transcribed (view Appendix 2: Coding categories). These categories are based on the theories included in the theoretical framework.

Thanks to having started coding before finishing the data collection, information that could seem more relevant to complement the achieved findings could be reinforced.

3.6. Reliability and validity

It is important to clarify the factors that influenced the findings of this research, for instance, the geographical context. This study took place in the Netherlands, which has a specific set of socio-cultural characteristics, making that some aspects of the experiences in the underground electronic music scene were influenced by the fact that the respondents live in the Netherlands and not in any other country.

In terms of validity of the research, it can be stated that is strong because the respondents narrated their personal stories and experiences, as well as mentioned some concerns about the underground electronic music scene. This is close to their hearts, so it would have been well observable during the interviews if they were not telling the truth.

Moreover, qualitative research is valid to the extent that it is rigorous and consistent, trustworthy, credible, and transferable, even if in not identical ways. For that purpose, I provided a detailed description of how the research was conducted and the interpretations were done.

4. Results

The answers of the ten interviews conducted during the data collection process have been carefully analysed, and the main findings of the research will be explained below.

4.1. The social aspect

Starting with the social capital defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), 7 out of 10 respondents are members of a group related to the underground dance music scene. Among them, 5 respondents are members of groups in an official manner: Jason is member of Burning Man the Netherlands, the subsidiary association of the renowned North American music festival, Vanessa is member of the cultural platform Subbacultcha, in Amsterdam, Peter V.L. and Armand are members of Rotterdam's gay party House of Boys, as graphic designer and co-founder of the event respectively, and Katayoun is the co-founder of Gher Space, a music platform from Amsterdam dedicated to woman. These five respondents have a more practical and institutional membership, whereas the other two respondents are members of a group of an event they regularly attend, but on a more symbolic manner and unofficial way, Peter helped to decorate a music event organised by some friends in Sugar Factory (Amsterdam), and Navid is part of the community of Odessa (Amsterdam), because he attends the event regularly and he plays music there sometimes. Therefore, it seems that these seven respondents are being benefited from the collectively-owned capital of these groups, as explained by Bourdieu (1986).

Most of the respondents attend events both either with friends or alone. The reasons they expressed for going alone to the events are varied. In the first place, because they may meet people they know in the party, knowing people in the scene was stated by 4 of the interviewees, thus again, due to the social capital they possess. Also, when they are abroad, as well as when they really want to see a specific DJ and their friends are not going, as mentioned by Vanessa (36): "If I really want to go and no one is coming, I will go on my own, and I will meet people there that I know, for sure."

All the individuals I interviewed stated that they have friends with whom they share their interest in electronic music, accomplishing the basic condition of being part of a subculture, which is that they are groups organised around shared practices and interests. Moreover, 4 out of 10 respondents named several times that they escape from

normativity in the context of a party in different ways: from heteronormativity, by questioning society rules and by exploring ways of wearing differently to the norm, according to what Herzog, Mitchell & Soccio (1999) state, that subcultures are perceived to deviate from the normative standards of the dominant culture. Vanessa, for instance, describing her friends, she said that they are more interesting in terms of exploring oneself in a deeper way, having an alternative lifestyle, and questioning both society and society rules.

The respondents named the word “mainstream” 6 times in an explicit way, and 2 times in implicit ways during the conversations, but always with negative connotations. For example, when talking about why they like electronic music, Katayoun (34) said: “I don’t like EDM, so if you put me in a party with like Tiesto⁴ music, I would freak out”. Therefore, it seems that they are mostly distinguishing themselves from mainstream clubs and their clientele, as Sarah Thornton (1995) suggests, behaving as part of a subculture.

Half of the sample expressed to hang out with a small group of friends, a feature that can be related with one of the characteristics of the neo-tribes, moving in micro-grouping as a result of the constant comings and goings that occur in society nowadays, for instance, being a foreigner living in the Netherlands, which is the case of half of the respondents. Davide, an Italian guy who arrived to the Netherlands 3 years ago, expressed:

“Actually, there are really few friends, one is Elisa, and she is just a friend of mine, and we just happened to have the same interest for clubbing. Then I have a couple of friends that I met by clubbing, so in clubs or in after parties. I got to know them, and now we go to events together.” (Davide, 26)

All the respondents recognise the sense of community, even though 7 of them expressed that it can vary substantially from one party to another. Peter expressed that, for him, the sense of community needs to warm up:

“Somehow, and the end of a really nice party there is just the people that have been there the whole party, like nobody is new, you start to get to know the people there... All of a sudden, the shame of expression is gone, everyone is doing whatever they want. So, then you can be anything you want, and you really want

⁴ DJ Tiesto plays mainstream music.

to be there with the people that went through the whole thing, and enjoying all the things that you want to do, so yeah, it is really like a free space.” (Peter, 28)

The totality of the sample recognises the importance of atmosphere, to the point of expressing that they leave the party if they do not find a good atmosphere. In the words of Ulufer:

“It is important! It motivates me, it affects me, if I don’t like the atmosphere, I just leave the party. It is very important, it is as important as the music, I think.” (Ulufer, 27).

In regards to togetherness and solidarity, two essential characteristics of neo-tribes, are experienced by all the interviewees in one way or another on the dance floor. Ulufer described these feelings in the following way:

“I experience the individuality in the solidarity. I am one, but we are all very unique and that becomes a feeling of togetherness, it’s not like lambs, but it is more like having the right of being different, but all in the same place.” (Ulufer, 27)

Concerning the advance with which they plan going to underground electronic music events, 6 respondents answered that they plan in advance big events such as concerts and festivals, and also 6 interviewees have expressed that for the weekly plans they tend to improvise. Therefore, the results show that they improvise weekend plans such as parties and regular weekend nights, seeming that they mostly live in the here and now.

The theory of neo-tribes states that these groups are together to escape from the pressures and stresses of the working week. When the interviewees were asked if they attend to underground dance events to escape from the pressures of work, it was found out that 4 out of the total sample of respondents recognised doing so, but when they elaborated their answers, they argued that from what they really escape is from the pressures of life in general, instead of working itself: “(...) but sometimes I think a lot about what is the meaning of life, so you can just take a break from these things” (Tereza, 20). On the contrary, others don’t consider attending these events an escape:

“It would never really be an escape for me, because in a way it is so important that it is not an escape, it is more getting some helpful moments, getting rid of stress, and then continue with life.” (Peter V.L., 27)

A further condition of the neo-tribes is that they consist of a mix of different social classes. Although they weren't asked this specifically, it was spontaneously mentioned by one respondent. When Peter V.L. was explaining that he has learned to be less judgemental on a dance floor, he said:

“(…) in the club you are partying with someone of the highest class, who is studying for the most difficult study you could think of, and you have a whole conversation that evening, and then you talk with someone who is a pizza baker, for example, you have talked with very different people but you didn't make differences, you know?” (Peter V.L., 27)

Consequently, the respondents possess social capital in the scene, are part of a subculture, and seem to behave in most of the ways that characterise neo-tribes: recognising the sense of emotional community, the importance of atmosphere, togetherness and solidarity among others, confirming the connection established by Christina Goulding and Avi Shankar (2011) between clubbing and neo-tribes. Therefore, clubbing queer experiences are neo-tribal experiences.

4.2. About identities and performativity

4.2.1. Identities

It is clear that the respondents shared characteristics with other persons -in this case an interest for electronic music-, which is the basic condition for the naturalistic definition of identity. However, 7 out of 10 respondents have conveyed that their identity is not complete yet, affirming up to 5 times that identity is a process. Referring to attending events, Ulufer (27) mentioned: “oh yeah! but is a learning process. I am becoming myself and myself, more and more that I attend.”

Therefore, the respondents seem to apply to Stuart's Hall (1996) definition of identity, an author who uses a discursive approach to see identification as a construction.

For Stuart Hall (1996), identity is always an ideal. When the interviewees were asked how their ideal identity is, all of them have explained their ideal, elaborating their

responses about how they imagine it, and most of them associating it with something either flexible or free from descriptions. For instance, Jason explained:

“I think it is really having a space or fluidity to express myself, like I also like looking like this (wearing casual), and so I don’t feel like that is how I need to express myself all the time, but that I want to have the space to move in lots of different worlds, and maybe that is even like cross-dressing⁵ in women’s clothes, that is actually super chic, you know? And so, just be able to step into any of them, and that be ok!” (Jason, 28)

Thus, their ideal identity would be a flexible and fluid one, which goes in line with what Hall (1996) states, that an ideal is composed of identifications that are not necessarily harmonious.

4.2.2. Music identities

All of the respondents have stated to identify themselves with the electronic music genre, confirming that music is part of their identity, as Simon Frith (1996) suggests. According to this author, one of the effects that music makes on people is through its abstractness and looseness, characteristics that may have caused that all the respondents lose themselves into the music in one way or another, as well as they lose track of the time when they experience an underground music event. However, Frith (1996) states that music gives both an individual and a collective experience. Jason, when answering to how he experiences the music collectively, he was accurate with Frith’s (1996) idea, expressing:

“There is a sort of energy that holds everyone together and I think the irony of a lot of parties is like you end up having a very individual experience, but as a collective, like if you think about how dancing has changed, people don’t really dance together anymore...now dance is facing a DJ, and so you are all having this individual experience, but together. And so there is, yeah, the music is the things that bonds...” (Jason, 28)

The interviewees experience the collective aspect of music mostly through dancing, as stated by 6 out of the 10 respondents. For instance, Vanessa experiences the music collectively like:

⁵ Dressing like opposite sex.

“Energy. Yeah, you feel it going through everyone around you, and dancing together is like exchanging that energy, and recognising that the others around you are also feeling the same kind of energy, and the same kind of thought.”
(Vanessa, 36)

Following dancing, the respondents experience the music collectively by sharing the music with other people in the crowd, as stated by 5 of them. Regarding this, Katayoun (36) explained that, for her, the collective feeling comes from recognising the work that the DJ is doing, in her words: “being like “Wow! That was a cool track!”, this already makes it a collective experience.”

Notably, when the interviewees were asked if they live a party as a shared experience, the 10 respondents confirmed so.

The fact that electronic music communicates directly with the body, as argued by Goulding and Shankar (2011) when they mentioned that, thanks to being focused on rhythmic continuity and played at high volumes, this music genre physically shakes bodies, can be reflected in 7 respondents having expressed to feel the body more than the mind when they dance to this music genre. For instance, Katayoun (34) mentioned that, to a certain degree, she is less preoccupied with her thoughts, and she is more exploring the possibilities of her body.

As mentioned earlier, Shields (1992) explains that, on a dance floor, appears a *dramatic personae*, a self which can no longer be simplistically theorized as unified, something that can be seen in the answer of Jason:

“At Burning Man people get a nickname, and mine is Triks, and so Triks is sort of this like gender fuck person, thing... (laughs) and so actually exploring this persona has been really fun of like who is Tricks and what does she look like and how does she act...” (Jason, 28)

It is interesting to remark the ecstasy of perception that music gives for Simon Frith (1996), because even though the respondents mentioned the use of drugs in several occasions, they have also mentioned the natural feeling of ecstasy without having taken substances. Peter expressed referring to being on a dance floor:

“I think it is much more an accessing point, a moment of ecstasy, not the drug, but the feeling, nothing good or bad, something really strong and intense, as a

feeling. It is hard to say, you know, it is this point of pleasure, but not ignorable, very strong.” (Peter, 28)

Music has been stated an element that contributes to their identities for 8 out of 10 interviewees. Although some respondents recognised that there is something there, due to the abstractness of the question, they found difficult to explain what actual effect music does on them. When Davide was asked if electronic music contributes to his identity, he answered:

“Yeah, because as I told you when I started clubbing, I found my place, a place where I can express myself, where I can be myself, and that helped me to discover myself, so it is a baggage that I hold also out of clubbing. Yeah, I don’t know if I am able to identify which parts of my identity are developed thanks to clubbing.” (Davide, 26)

But others could put into words their feelings about this:

“A lot, I think it really changed myself a lot and it really helped me developing, like how I behave, how I treat people. A lot of things, meeting new people, learning how to respect people, because on the dance floor you also learn how to respect people’s space... You never just randomly touch people, you really learn to how to behave, you know, and if you can also do that outside of the club, it is a good thing to learn it there and to continue outside.” (Peter V.L., 27)

In brief, the identities of the queer individuals interviewed are identities in process, not complete, according to the definition by Stuart Hall (1996), and underground electronic music is a part of this identifying process, as this music genre seems to offer the subjects of study the immediate experience of both the individual and the collective identity.

4.2.3. The performance

In regards to the performance, the dance floor definitely seems a backstage region, as 9 out of 10 interviewees confirmed to dance as if nobody is watching them, vanishing the distinction stated by Ervin Goffman (1959) between public spaces as front stage regions and private spaces as back stage regions. For instance, Tereza (20) said: “you also

forget that there are people around you, and if the music is really nice then it is like almost the only thing you sense...”

When the interviewees were asked about how they experience dancing on the dance floor of an underground electronic music event, they expressed that the main benefits that they gain from dancing to this music genre are, firstly, that dancing allows them to express themselves, this was mentioned up to 13 times during the 10 interviews, revealing feelings like:

“If I have space, I feel super free! For me, movement is probably the number one way in which I express myself.” (Jason, 28)

“Especially on ecstatic dance⁶, when the music is really good, fuck yeah, I am going crazy!” (Navid, 33)

One of the ways in which the respondents find this self-expression is through fashion, as Goulding and Shankar (2011) state when they argue that clubbing allows a duality from the everyday to the sensational through dress. As Jason conveyed on his interview:

“Especially at parties, I wear a lot of really sort of trashy cross-dressing stuff, where the whole point is just terrible! (laughs) And so, I feel like that is sort of the space where “I don’t really give a fuck, this is just what I am going to wear!”” (Jason, 28)

Regarding if they can be themselves on the dance floor, 6 out of 10 interviewees confirmed that they do so, but as long as they are in what they consider a good party. Answering to the question, Peter V.L. expressed:

“Yeah, yeah. I think at good parties I always can, but I think it is also a matter of what party is, like the atmosphere... so it depends on a lot of things.” (Peter V.L., 27)

Besides allowing self-expression, the respondents argued that dancing frees them, because they can move freer than in daily life situations, something that was mentioned 11 times throughout all the interviews conducted, and recognized by 9 out of 10

⁶ Ecstatic Dance sessions are the creation of a space in which you can express yourself through dance and music, giving freedom of action and movement to the body without verbal communication.

respondents. Davide (27) mentioned that, on the dance floor, he can be himself much more than in daily life, as he is quite ashamed of his body.

Less commented among the respondents, but still relevant to mention, is that dancing allows to 3 of the respondents to push their boundaries. In the words of Ulufer, dancing is:

“To work with yourself, to do every time what you cannot do, what you are afraid to do, if you are afraid to hold your hands up, I try to do that, so I try to push the limits with the body...” (Ulufer, 27)

Ulufer may be referring to what she cannot do into the Foucaultian “archipelago of prisons”, being the dance floor of an underground dance event outside of these spaces.

The respondents also remarked the pleasure they get from dancing sober, 9 times mentioned during the 10 interviews. Some interviewees confirmed that they achieve the ecstatic feeling being sober, especially in a quite new way of partying called ecstatic dance. This event has only two rules, drugs -including alcohol- are forbidden, and when the party starts people cannot talk until the silence is broken at the end of the event. A DJ plays music during approximately two hours, and the whole purpose of the event is thus focusing on dancing. Two of the interviewees mentioned Odessa, a ship in Amsterdam that hosts a weekly ecstatic dance event, and Jason, who had attended the event the day before the interview, expressed:

“I have been, I think, a very expressive dancer my whole life, but I really feel like I have actually learned how to dance at Odessa... because there is something about being sober that if you want to have that same feeling of freedom and liberation, you have to do it yourself! And you are not relying on chemicals to take you there, and so I feel like going to ecstatic dance has really showed me how to dance in a way that I just freeing myself and liberating myself to express myself however I want it, without needing a substance.” (Jason, 28)

4.2.4. The gender performance

In relation to their gender performativity, all of the respondents have conveyed that their gender identity is evolving, so it can be assumed that they don't have a stable gender identity, which goes in line with the theory of Judith Butler (1990) that claims that gender identity is unstable. Ulufer (27), for instance, defined gender identity as an

incomplete thing, something that is open, something evolving, transforming, and sometimes pausing.

As mentioned before, when they are dancing to electronic music, 8 out of 10 respondents feel their body more than their mind, something that can also relate to the idea that gender is formed by the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated bodily acts over time that produce the appearance of substance. Referring to this duality, Jason mentioned:

“Now I am much more into really expressing myself through movement, as opposed to just being lost in my headspace. So, it is kind of nice, I feel like I blossomed a little bit... and being able to change what feels good for me.”

(Jason, 28)

Half of the respondents are not aware of the gender they perform on a dance floor, whereas the other half do. Peter is aware of the gender he performs, and he adds:

“I perform super feminine, I mean, this is the way I see it, I like to go and express this femininity much more. I think it is because I am not supposed to perform this way in daily life. If I have the chance to perform this way in the party, it is just perfect!” (Peter, 28)

Having 4 respondents, of those who are aware, expressed that they perform masculine or feminine depending on what music is sounding. Tereza (20), for example, expressed that she does not perform necessarily feminine, because when she really dances hard on electronic music, she thinks she performs less feminine, arguing that it depends on the type of music. Other respondents call their gender performance neither feminine nor masculine, but genderqueer, such is the case of Jason (28): “I would call it queer, like it is somewhere that is neither one...yeah!”

While all the interviewees identify mostly with the gender they have been assigned at birth, they perform either flowing between the gender cultural roles, as Judith Butler (1990) names, or they don't define how they perform because they don't identify themselves into the binary⁷. It seems that all of them are more fluid, and that electronic

⁷ The classification of gender into two distinct, opposite, and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine, whether by social system or cultural belief.

music plays a part, as they have expressed to explore this fluidity on the dance floors they attend and feel comfortable to do so.

4.3. The scene

4.3.1. The economics of the scene

In regards to the underground electronic music scene as a whole, or in other words, the aggregation of the different underground dance music events, the attendance of the events where the interviewees go is not completely clear, having 4 of them expressed that the crowd is unstable, depending on many factors, or even just randomly:

“I have been going out for many years, and I have worked in nightlife, and sometimes it is because there is a weekend with lot of stuff happening at the same time, or people are just tired because they went out last weekend, and there is not more explanation for it.” (Vanessa, 36)

The respondents mentioned up to 8 times over the interviews that they perceive that the events they attend are becoming more crowded. Regarding the event that Katayoun (34) herself organises, she mentioned that it started out really small and then the more active they are in the scene, the bigger plus value of their initiative, and the more people are willing to have a look to what they are doing.

Even some respondents recognise that certain underground events are becoming too crowded, to the point of selling out (Currid, 2007):

“(…) Gardens of Babylon, it started off as a lot of Burning Man people, and it was very community focused and, yeah, really just everyone knew each other and it was very family oriented, and now it has become so mainstream, that I feel like it really lost its authenticity.” (Jason, 28)

Therefore, in some cases, what initially was a subculture becomes a commodified good, trading its symbolic production for large-scale or economic production, as Bourdieu (1993) argues. Referring to how an event has changed, Jason continues:

“It is not the same! (...)for example, they use a Facebook group for the party where they add members, and they always make an announcement like: “we are super excited to have Carmela joining the group...” and at the beginning, you know, it was like “oh there is three new people: hey three new people!” and now there is a

hundred new people in the list, and it is like, this is ridiculous! you know? No one knows who these people are. What is the point of even doing this anymore? It no longer feels like a community of people who know one another...” (Jason, 28)

7 out of 10 respondents stated that finding events of interest is an easy task, and this is due to two main reasons. The first reason being their network, they discover events through the people they know, or these people invite them to the events, as mentioned by Armand and Jason:

“In the beginning you have to look a bit more for it, but now you mostly get invited for all the stuff that is going on.” (Armand, 28)

“I actually think that if you know people who are in the scene, you know, it is relatively easy to get invited to things, and then you just follow different groups or events. So, I would say like, you have to probably know someone first, but then you can get connected pretty easy.” (Jason, 28)

The second reason is finding them through Facebook events, something that was spontaneously mentioned up to 6 times during the conversations. Ulufer (27) expressed that she discovers events mostly through Facebook, especially now that she has moved to a new city, referring to Rotterdam.

However, there is a controversial relation among the respondents with the increasing use of digital media for the underground events, occasioned by the decrease of production, communication and distribution costs in arts and culture stated by Cowen (1998). As mentioned above, on the one hand, it seems a very helpful tool as almost all of them find the underground electronic music events they attend through Facebook, as Armand explained:

“It is much easier to reach out a community, people that you rely on, even though they are in other parts of the world.” (Armand, 28)

While on the other hand, it can be a negative tool, as Jason expressed:

“These platforms are changing heavily the way people engage, decreasing the real sense of community.” (Jason, 28)

4.3.2. The function of clubbing

As a result of having obtained a considerable amount of information about what the attendance to underground electronic music events means for the respondents, I consider appropriate to include a specific section for these findings.

First of all, 8 out of 10 respondents find freedom on the dance floor of an underground electronic music event. This was mentioned up to 15 times during the interviews. Among other answers, Jason (28) mentioned referring to his first clubbing experience:

“Ehm, I mean it just felt super liberating, and this was the space where I can just be really free and kind of be whoever I wanted, so I think that felt exciting, you know, and like this whole world of possibilities that have been done to me.”
(Jason, 28)

Secondly, 4 respondents expressed to find belonging on a dance floor. For instance, Davide (26) said referring to when he started clubbing: “I found my place, a place where I can express myself, where I can be myself, and that helped me to discover myself.”

Regarding the ritualistic function of clubbing suggested by Graburn (1989) in Goulding and Shankar (2001), 7 out of 10 respondents consider their attendance to underground electronic music events as a ritual. For Jason:

“Trying to see it as a ritual, is like, this is going to be something that I know I am going to really enjoy and it is going to be special and I am going to wait for it, as opposed to just going to anything that is happening...” (Jason, 28)

They went further, comparing clubbing with other rituals, such as religious or ancient rituals. Davide reasoned why clubbing is a ritual comparing it to religion:

“It is a habit because I go every month, let’s say, and I celebrate something really undefined, in church or in a tribe you call it god, we as club goers don’t really define it, but we celebrate being alive, being ourselves, music, I don’t know, and there is a sense of going out of your body, getting lost in the crowd, that is also the social part of the ritual, right? (...) if you really go all the way and you lose yourself with the crowd, it is more a spiritual experience.” (Davide, 26)

Whereas Peter compared it to an ancient ritual:

“It is like a really old school idea, like people coming together to listen to music, and dance together... it is very old school, and it needs to find its place in society. You can’t go to camp fire anymore, in the woods, this was a ritual that is not relevant anymore, and the new idea of ritual it is going to a party, I realised. So, it is kind of a ritual everyone going there to dance, and express themselves... this idea of a group of people working together for a while, it is very ritualistic!”
(Peter, 28)

It is curious to include that they mentioned the concept transcendence in different contexts, Davide when explaining the function of clubbing:

“There are different moments in social life that can trigger a similar situation of being together in a flow, and experiencing this sense of belonging, a sense of transcendence, and we must be able to fit in these situations. Maybe some people are a bit afraid of the feeling of getting lose, but I think it is an important skill to learn in life. We need it in other moments of life” (Davide, 26)

And Tereza when she was explaining that her identity is not complete:

“I am a woman, I am 20, I study philosophy, I live partly in Rotterdam, but maybe I want to be a pilot, and it is not what I am; but it is possible. Simone de Beauvoir says you are unfree if you are only your facts, but also if you are only your transcendent, what you are not” (Tereza, 20)

Lastly, for Peter V.L. clubbing is:

“A platform to behave differently, like to try out different ways of living together, like all of a sudden you are in one space with all these people you don’t know, they are all very different, but you still get along, so I think this place to try out meeting new people, behaving in a better way...” (Peter V.L., 27)

To sum up, from the findings obtained, it can be concluded that the attendance to the events the respondents go may be increasing, and sometimes leads to certain events lose their symbolic production for economic production (Bourdieu, 1993), causing rejection by queer individuals. Moreover, the results suggest that clubbing has a significant ritualistic function, giving room to the spiritual and transcendental side of the individuals.

4.4. The simulacra

The theory of the simulacra by Jean Baudrillard (1983) was applied to the dance floor of an underground electronic music venue. Baudrillard (1983) argues that, in the current times, the representation precedes the original, vanishing the distinction between reality and representation. Thus, the interviewees were asked if they live an underground electronic music event as “in a bubble” out of their real lives. Whereas 3 out of 10 respondents expressed that they don’t live the party as in a bubble out of the real life. For instance, Navid (33) said:

“I really don’t experience it as something out of real life, I see it as part of real life also. Sometimes it does feel a little bit that way, but I never like the feeling of us versus them, or something like that.” (Navid, 33)

7 respondents stated they do experience the bubble, but to a certain extent, because they were also sceptical about defining it like this. When Vanessa (36) was asked if she lives the experience as in a bubble, she answered:

“No, I think it is still real life, yeah, it is a bit of a bubble, indeed, but again, I think it is good to try and transpose that into real life.” (Vanessa, 36)

Therefore, the Simulacra of Baudrillard (1983) is only applicable to the extent that there is a representation different to the ordinary reality, in this case, the party, because this space gives room to the imaginary, to different behaviours. However, the majority of the respondents are perfectly aware of the distinction between the representation and the reality, that is to say, the dance floor and their ordinary lives. Moreover, most of them perceive the representation as completely real, what makes possible that they take with them this experience to their ordinary lives, incorporating the behaviours that they perform inside the “bubble” to their everyday lives, either in terms of freedom of expression, as Navid (33) expressed referring to a friend:

“He says “dress everyday like as if you are in a festival, why should there be a difference?” And that is I think the message behind not being in a different bubble, but making the whole world like your bubble”. (Navid, 33)

Or in openness towards others, in being more open to talk with other people:

“You can go up to anyone and start a conversation, it is so easy, people are so open to just talking and: who are you, what is your story, what are you doing... and I think that is what I would like to see more in the world, just this genuine curiosity about other humans.” (Jason, 28)

As well as in incorporating fun into daily life:

“I get freer when I dance and then I transport it into my daily life. Into my identity, yeah. And this urge also of having fun, you know, and enjoying life, I think electronic music gives you that a lot, or awakens that in you a lot.”
(Vanessa, 36)

4.5. Practices of the scene

As the interviews conducted were semi-structured, throughout the conversations arose both positive and negative aspects that the interviewees encounter when they attend underground electronic music events. Hence, even though initially I haven't intended to analyse what are the best practices of the underground electronic music scene for the queer community, this section aims to gather all these elements to conclude what would be the best way for the scene to warrant a satisfactory experience according to these 10 respondents.

4.5.1. Good practices

Over the almost 11 hours of interviewing, the respondents mentioned several positive aspects of the underground scene. The ones that were repeated are summarised next.

Firstly, the communal aspect of the scene was highlighted up to 8 times. The respondents expressed thoughts like:

“The community thing that is going on, people are open to be approach, people really want to talk with each other, and learn something, and really feel like a family.” (Navid, 33)

“What I like the most is the communal aspect, especially like smaller raves where it just feels independent, that is very much the Burning Man ethos as well, like I went to a rave here where is a van and a couple of speakers, and so this super

“diy” approach of just “we are going to do this because this is fucking fun for us, and we don’t need someone to organise it”” (Jason, 28)

The interviewees conveyed that this communal aspect is more likely to be found in smaller parties and venues. Therefore, they mostly prefer small venues, in line with what Luis M. Garcia (2014) argues: “for queer people it is easier to remain central to a music scene when it is small, local and personal.” This viewpoint was mentioned up to 6 times during the 10 interviews. Talking about the sense of community, Katayoun (34) expressed:

“(…) but if you go to a smaller venue, and there is a little queer party, you can even create a sense of community with a wider audience, because it is a small venue, and at the end of the evening you feel that you have made so many connections to people that were present, and this is really great, I like that!” (Katayoun, 34)

These small spaces are significant, especially for minorities inside the queer community, as mentioned by Katayoun (34) referring to the space she has founded:

“I really imagine a platform for people to come and practice with the gear, who would otherwise not have maybe the right network, or know the right people (...) to create more visibility for say not so recognised subjectivities or experiences, for example being bicultural and queer, going out in different cultures (...) I think like this is important to infiltrate, and take up space, because at the end of the day, when we use our fullest potential, every person can create so much more for the community.” (Katayoun, 34)

Some interviewees expressed positively the values that club culture is currently promoting. As Armand (28) mentioned:

“(…) artists, they are a bit more aware, instead of thinking “ok, I am DJing, I am playing music”, artists also really look at what kind of parties they were asked for, and see if they match what they think or what they identify with...” (Armand, 28)

Finally, two respondents mentioned several times the term radical self-expression, which is one of the guidelines within the Burning Man⁸ community. Jason (28) expressed how important for him is this concept referring to a queer collective:

“Radical Faeries, it started in the US but it is in Europe as well, it is a community of alternative queer men, and they do different events and gatherings, and parties and things... They are known for a lot of like really flamboyant expression and a lot of drag and cross-dressing, and really breaking boundaries of what it means to be a gay man. So, I think their parties are some of the best that I have been to in San Francisco, because it is ultra-inclusive, really sex positive, and everyone is just like over the top, in like amazing outfits, and there is just this real sense of belonging there. This is a safe space.” (Jason, 28)

4.5.2. Bad practices

Undoubtedly, the aspect of the electronic music scene that the interviewees consider as the most negative of all is the abuse of drugs, mentioned up to 10 times during the interviews. These are two examples of their thoughts:

“I think just like I have such a complicated relationship with drugs, and so there is a point where we go from “this is really fun and liberating to this is actually really unlovely”, and that line is not really clear...” (Jason, 28)

“What I like the least is the abuse of drugs, when it gets abusive, because yeah sometimes it happens that you know someone who is just doing a lot of drugs.” (Vanessa, 36)

Related to this, Peter V.L. (27) mentioned that there are people in the scene who only enjoy the experience when they consume substances:

“What I like the least is that it is really related to drugs a lot. I don’t dislike drugs, but I dislike that there are people that cannot enjoy it without it. And it is very easy to find people who cannot enjoy it without it...” (Peter V.L., 27)

A further negative aspect about the scene that was highly mentioned is the shallowness or snobbishness that the respondents sometimes find in the underground

⁸ Among the 10 principles of the communal festival Burning Man are: gifting, communal effort, civil responsibility, radical inclusion and radical self-expression.

queer community when they go to parties. This aspect was mentioned 8 times throughout the interviews, and among other thoughts, Vanessa (36) mentioned:

“I feel that there is a lot of people who are the fashionable ones, and they just want to be in the front, and if you try and dance in the front too, they are going to actually hurt you, to make you go away...there is a lot of hierarchy, and politics.” (Vanessa, 36)

Moreover, they mentioned 7 times that the underground electronic music scene is not diverse enough. Katayoun (34) referred to Amsterdam when she expressed:

“I don’t really like clubbing here because I don’t like the public that the club attracts, it is usually a lot of white cis-male.” (Katayoun, 34)

Whereas referring to the scene in general, Ulufer (27) mentioned:

“I like the least that is not that diverse, is not that open to non-white or Middle-Eastern people, I would love to see more of these people.” (Ulufer, 27)

Finally, some respondents highlighted some bad behaviours that they encountered on the dance floor, such as not respecting other’s space. In the words of Katayoun (34):

“So when you are on a dance floor, it is obviously already very crowded, but some people have the tendency to really push other people out of the dance floor, and I take a lot of issue with that, so whenever that happens I do make sure that I address it... and yeah, this is a bad atmosphere, I understand that they are having fun but a dance floor is a communal space.” (Katayoun, 34)

4.5.3. Best practices

Consequently, having described the positive and negative aspects encountered by the respondents in their underground electronic music experiences, they can be summarised in that the significant elements for the interviewees are the sense of community, the small venues, and the possibility of self-expression. On the contrary, the main elements of the underground dance scene that should be avoided are: the abusive consumption of drugs and the snobbishness on the scene, as well as that the scene should be more diverse, and the audience should be more attentive on respecting others’ space.

In addition, the respondents were asked what they would advise to newcomers who start going out in the queer underground electronic music scene. Among the most advisable comments are that newcomers should own their own space, and they should not be afraid to approach other people. In the words of Ulufer (27):

“I would say that people don’t need to give you space in order to you to have a space in the scene, you shouldn’t be afraid of people, like divas and stars, you are also a star and you can shine in the party. Don’t be afraid of doing your own moves and having the space that you own. Really own that space!” (Ulufer, 27)

4.6. Case study: Spielraum, Amsterdam

Arising from some of the respondents discussing about a specific event, a techno queer night that is currently going on in Amsterdam, I decided to include it and address it as a case study, with the purpose of illustrating the research with a real example of what is happening at this precise moment in the Dutch underground electronic music scene.

Spielraum, playground in German language, is a queer night that aims to create a safer dance floor for queer people. The Spielraum team defines the event as a space for the most colourful misfits to unapologetically express their uniqueness. A place where everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity or age, is invited to playfully celebrate their freedom.

The concept behind Spielraum was inspired by the thinkers Friedrich Schiller and Johan Huizinga, who believed that people show the best versions of themselves when at play (as cited by Hein, 1968). The Spielraum team is convinced of the idea that every person needs a place to play, to dance, and to be themselves. No matter age, origin or preferences, people need a place to move freely, to discover who they are, and they offer so by booking high quality techno artists and warranting an open and playful atmosphere.

They encourage their audience to leave their strict, serious self at home and go to play with them, and emphasise that Spielraum is a queer party, reminding those who are not part of the LGBTQIA+ community, that they are guests, and therefore, they should behave like guests.

The party usually takes place in Radion, a club in the area Nieuw West of Amsterdam. The security staff of the club is trained to remove individuals engaging in any form of: sexual harassment, acts of aggression, racism, misogyny, transphobia,

homophobia, religious bigotry, or hatred and discrimination of any kind. Therefore, the staff can be contacted in case of experience any unwanted attention, contact, harassment or behaviour that makes the attendee uncomfortable. They stand with all those who demand complete freedom from hatred and harassment in Amsterdam's clubs, parties and venues. Lastly, they ask the audience to be responsible and safe, look out for each other, and take care of each other.

4.6.1. Spielraum in the research

Three respondents mentioned Spielraum, for different reasons and with different opinions throughout the interviews. In the first place, Peter V.L. (27) conveyed:

“The only thing that I would consider underground at this moment (talking about the Netherlands) I think is Spielraum. I really enjoy their parties, because the atmosphere is so loose, and everything is ok, everything is welcome, there are no rules, at least not written rules, like everyone respects each other, the music is really good, it is just really intense, and I think that a lot of other parties or queer parties don't have this atmosphere and you also don't really feel as free to do whatever, to move however you want, to feel however you want.” (Peter V.L., 27)

When discussing about where they find sense of community, Peter V.L. (27) mentioned that he finds the sense of community at the Spielraum parties. Nevertheless, Davide (26) has a different perspective on the matter:

“(…) the last time I went, at the end of the night I was very... I felt very weird, and that is when I decided that my clubbing habit has to change a bit. So, I really like the party itself because of the music, because of the style, but that time I didn't feel the human friendliness of it, because I feel like the techno queer community of Amsterdam is very specific, it has a very specific style, a very specific fashion, a very specific language, so, if you don't really belong to that specific style, it is a bit hard to feel 100% comfortable. So, I felt very lonely during that party, it also depends I guess on the fact that, I went with my friend Elisa, and two friends of hers, and during the night, of course, we lost each other, I found myself alone in different parts of the night, and then, of course, you always meet some people you know, and you are “hey! how are you? I am going to take a beer, bye!”, you know,

so, sometimes it is really hard to interact with humans in this kind of parties, and that is what I missed the most.” (Davide, 26)

Still referring to Spielraum, Davide (26) added:

“They consider themselves as a safe place, a free place, but you can really see all the queer categories that exist, and how they are separated from each other (...) Sometimes you can even really see on the dance floor that there is the corner of that kind of people, the corner of that other kind of people, and there is not interaction.” (Davide, 26)

The hype of this event is very recognizable as all the three interviewees who mentioned the event stated that it is rapidly becoming more crowded:

“Spielraum, if I am not wrong, it grew in the last years, now it is getting really cool and popular and it is always super-fast sold out.” (Davide, 26)

“For sure, I mean, there is a couple of parties that are becoming more and more popular, like Spielraum is what it comes to mind, I think it is three years old (...)” (Jason, 28)

“(…) Spielraum, you can see that every edition becomes more and more crowded, like really crowded, because they are becoming really successful, so they sell a lot of tickets, so yeah.” (Peter V.L., 27)

According to the respondents, Spielraum reflects the good and bad practices mentioned earlier. On the one hand, the event offers a good atmosphere and a real sense of community, while on the other, it also reflects the snobbishness of a part of the queer community that the interviewees encountered as one of the most negative aspects of the scene. In the case of Spielraum, turning into a sort of hierarchical system of social categories.



Figure 1: DJ booth, Spielraum. Taken from Facebook.



Figure 2: Crowd, Spielraum. Taken from Facebook.



Figure 3: Cross-dressing, Spielraum. Taken from Facebook.

5. Conclusions

This thesis has addressed the relation between underground electronic music and queer people identities. Therefore, the main contribution of this study is to answer the research question: how can underground electronic music contribute towards developing queer identities in the Netherlands?

The three main research sub-questions have been useful to split the field of study and analyse different elements involved in the experience of an underground electronic music event by a queer individual, connecting these elements to theories. However, because the areas of study are considerably abstract, and many parts are interconnected, the conclusions will be drawn as one writing piece, without sections.

Firstly, it has been proved that the queer individuals interviewed operate within the underground electronic music subculture, more specifically, in what Maffesoli (1996) calls neo-tribes: contemporary lifestyles that are more fluid rather than fixed. This fluidity is reflected throughout the interviews, from the way they socialize -having different and small groups of friends- to their personal identities, both gender and general identities.

Besides the respondents possess social capital in the scene, a social component is almost always present in the experiences that they shared, and that is reflected in that most of them having said that they live a party as a shared experience. Hence, answering the first research sub-question, the social element of the underground electronic music provides the foundations to the experiences that will contribute to develop queer people identities.

Once queer individuals are on the dance floor of an underground electronic music event, they experience the music from an individual and a collective manner, and mostly through dancing. In turn, the main benefits they get from dancing to electronic music are that they can express themselves, and that dancing frees them. This music genre communicates directly with the body, consequently, they translate this freedom and self-expression through their bodies, exploring their movements, their expression, thus, their identities. In the words of Jason (28): "I blossom".

Because of what this music genre creates on a dance floor, and besides being a public space, the dance floor of an underground electronic music event acts as a backstage region, as opposed to what Ervin Goffman (1959) would have suggested. Therefore, the dance floor becomes a space that allows queer individuals to perform as if

nobody is watching them, behaving freed from the expectations and norms of society. Thus, either the theory of Ervin Goffman (1959) does not apply to the dance floor of an underground electronic music venue, or the theory can be updated for this specific context.

While all the interviewees identify mostly with the gender they have been assigned at birth, since on a dance floor they perform freed from the expectations and norms of society, they don't perform only the gender they identify with. They flow between the two gender roles: masculine and feminine, or they just flow without wanting to be into the cultural gender categorizations. Thus, likewise Judith Butler's (1990) theory, their gender assigned at birth is not always the source of their secondary actions.

Accordingly, answering the second research sub-question, the performative experience of the queer audience on the dance floor is an exploration of self-expression and gender expression that becomes part of their self-projects, setting out on a one-way journey of an identity, an identity in constant evolution, as argued by Stuart Hall (1996), who sees identity as a construction.

Next, the simulacra by Jean Baudrillard (1983) helps to explain what happens after this exploration inside the walls of the club, or whatever the place is in which the event takes place. Owing to that queer individuals are well aware of the distinction between the experience of a party and their ordinary lives, most of them perceive the representation -the party- as completely real, what makes possible making real the simulation or "imaginary", incorporating the behaviours that they perform inside the "bubble" of the event into their daily lives, either in terms of freedom of expression, openness towards others, or just incorporating fun:

"I get freer when I dance and then I transport it into my daily life. Into my identity, yeah. And this urge of also having fun, you know, and enjoying life, I think electronic music gives you that a lot, or awakens that in you a lot."

(Vanessa, 36)

Ultimately, if they do so, instead of being reproducing normative lifestyles, queer individuals are showing to the world other possible ways of moving, dancing, dressing, in short, living. They would be breaking with the reigning societal rules, creating a more playful and diverse world to live in.

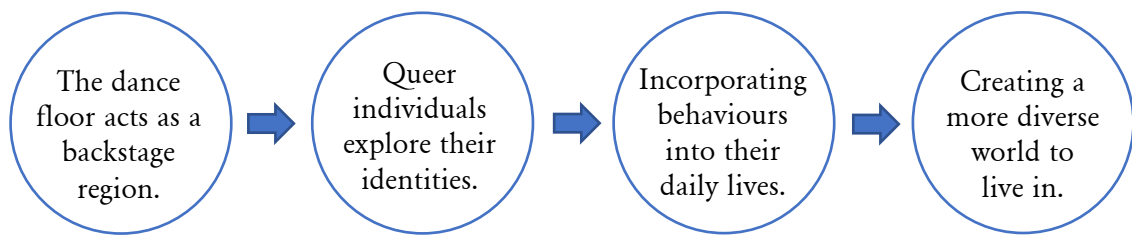


Figure 5: Diagram conclusions.

On a different level, regarding the economic aspects of the underground electronic music scene, the respondents perceive that some events are becoming too crowded, such as the example of study: Spielraum. However, it is difficult to arrive at any conclusions with regard to if the possible loss of authenticity, due to the events becoming more crowded and popular, is affecting their identities.

The controversial relationship among the respondents with the increasing use of social media for the underground events, occasioned by the decrease of production, communication and distribution costs in arts and culture stated by Cowen (1998), is not sufficient to draw accurate conclusions, but it can be suggested that it may lead to a negative effect in the development of their identities if the increasing use of digital tools, decrease the sense of real community, as suggested by Jason (28) when he mentioned that Facebook groups are becoming too big, and the relationships through this platform too cold.

Obtained from the practices section, we can conclude that small venues should be encouraged and protected, as for queer individuals it is easier to remain central to a music scene when it is small, local and personal (Garcia, 2014). On the contrary, the aspects that should be addressed to improve their experiences in the underground dance music scene are: the abusive consumption of drugs, and the snobbishness inside the queer community, as it has been exemplified with the case of Spielraum.

Finally, the practice of clubbing has a relevant function in the lives of the respondents. Firstly, because they find freedom and belonging, something that already contributes to develop their identity, and secondly, because it has a ritualistic function, such as religion or other ancient traditions, being a place where they can practice their spiritual side, their transcendent. In short, as expressed by Peter V.L. (27):

“A platform to behave differently, like to try out different ways of living together, like all of a sudden you are in one space with all these people you don’t know, they are all very different, but you still get along, so I think this place to try out meeting new people, behaving in a better way...” (Peter V.L., 27)

Everything that has a beginning, has an ending, and it seems appropriate to conclude this study as it has started, highlighting the spiritual, symbolic, and social values that the cultural sector provides. The spaces where underground electronic music is played are one of these cultural places providing spiritual, symbolic and social values for queer individuals, as they contribute to develop their personal identities. Therefore, the sociocultural function of this music genre and the spaces where it is played is fundamental for the societies thriving for a more diverse and inclusive way of living.

5.1. Contribution of the study

This paper contributes to the field of study by addressing the experiences of queer individuals in the underground electronic music scene from a new perspective. A viewpoint that considers an introspective vision, looking inwards the personal identities of queer people, and connecting their experiences to different theories and concepts, that at first glance could seem unrelated, updating some of them.

Moreover, touching their identities results in a more emotional and soulful justification to why underground electronic music venues are fundamental for progressive and open-minded societies.

5.2. Limitations

Even though the sample of respondents is highly diverse in terms of age, gender, nationality, background, and sexual orientation, and even sometimes they are transgender⁹, for instance Navid, a male respondent who is attracted to women but who also practices cross-dressing, all the respondents interviewed identify themselves with the gender they were assigned at birth. This means that there is an under-researched area among the individuals who don’t identify themselves with the gender they were born,

⁹ Unlike transsexual, transgender is a term for people whose identity, expression, behaviour, or general sense of self does not conform to what is usually associated with the sex they were born in the place they were born. It is a multifaceted term.

that is to say, transsexual individuals. The study may have had a different nuance if the visions and experiences of transsexual individuals in the underground electronic music scene had been included.

Besides that, due to the abstractness of some parts of the study, difficulties have been found to translate a few concepts into questions, as the chosen qualitative methodology was interviews. That led to trust the interpretation of the subjects themselves, even though sometimes it could have been that reality is not exactly the same as how they define it.

5.3. Recommendations for future research

After acknowledging the limitations, one possible way to overcome them in future studies is including transsexual individuals, as well as complementing the study with some ethnographic research.

Furthermore, the section of best practices emerged during the research process provides a good starting point for discussion. Hence, for future research, best practices on the underground electronic music scene could be a research in itself, aiming to compose a consultancy report for the electronic music industry, putting the focus on how underground electronic music venues should work at their best to ensure their queer attendees a satisfactory and enriching experience.

5.4. Personal opinion

From a personal perspective, I am fondly glad that the study shows the social value of underground electronic music and the spaces where it is played, as I wholeheartedly believe in it.

However, it came as an unexpected finding to encounter examples of social categories inside the queer community, a community that promotes to be a place where everyone is welcome. Although by no means I want to stand by this behavior, this hierarchy may be on a lower degree than in the non-queer or non-underground scene, and I think that, to a certain extent, it is still understandable that happens, because at the end of the day, no matter our identity, we are all part of the same society, and thus there is the risk of making the same mistakes as outside the walls of the music venue.

All in all, the negative aspect is just a small part of the whole experience, and considering that the heteronormative¹⁰ world maintains too much control in everyday life, we should learn from the queer community on how to approach life: dissolving boundaries, being more relaxed and adventurous, and incorporating fun into daily matters.

¹⁰ The belief that heterosexuality, predicated on the gender binary, is the norm or default sexual orientation.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide:

Demographic data:

Name:

Age:

Nationality:

Gender:

Sexual orientation:

Initial questions:

1. First of all, I would like to ask you what pronoun do you use for yourself.
2. Are you working or studying? (If you work, what do you do for living?)
3. Please, tell me about when your interest in electronic music began.
4. How did you feel when you went to your first electronic music party?
5. How easy or difficult for you is to find underground music events?
6. Are the events you attend becoming more crowded? (Do you think are they losing authenticity because of that?)
7. Do you have friends with whom you share this interest?
8. Do you prefer any subgenre in particular inside the electronic music?

Intermediate questions:

9. Do you normally attend these events with a group of people or by yourself?
10. Are you a member of a collective related to the scene (music/queer...)? (Could you tell me more about it?)
11. Could you describe the network with whom you go partying?

Within this group of people,

12. Do you identify with each other?
13. How inspired by them do you feel?

14. How important is for you to follow trends?
15. Do you usually make plans with lot of advance or you tend to live more in the here and now? (neo-tribes)

Within the party,

16. How is the sense of community?
17. How important for you is the atmosphere?
18. Do you experience togetherness and solidarity?
19. Do you feel as escaping from the pressures and stresses of the everyday working week?
20. Can you be yourself?

When you are in a party...

21. Do you lose yourself in the music? How?
22. Do you lose track of the time?
23. Did it happen to you to measure the time in tracks?
24. How do you experience the music collectively?
25. Do you live a party as a shared experience?
26. How often do you feel the need to attend electronic music events?
27. Is that a ritual for you?

When you are dancing in a party,

28. How do you feel?
29. Do you dance as if nobody is watching?
30. Is this feeling alike to other situation in your life?
31. Do you feel the body more than the mind?
32. How freely do you move compared to daily life settings?
33. Are you aware of the gender you perform on a dance floor?
34. Do you think you usually perform feminine, masculine, or both depending on the moment?

35. Have you noticed an evolution of your gender identity?
36. How would you describe your ideal identity?
37. Does electronic music contribute to develop your identity?
38. Do you think there is a gap between what you are and what you want to be? (How complete is your identity?)
39. Are you happy with your current identity?

Ending questions:

40. Do you live the experience of a party as in a bubble out of the real life?
41. Would you like other aspects of your life to be like the experience of a party?
42. Why do you like electronic music?
43. Do you identify with this music genre?
44. What do you like most, least about the underground electronic music scene?
45. What advice would you give to someone who is new in the underground queer scene?

Appendix 2

Coding categories:

- Bad practice
- Dancing
- Economic production
- Gender performativity
- Good practice
- Identity
- Music identity
- Neo-tribes
- Simulacra
- Spielraum
- Subcultures
- The dance floor
- The music
- The scene

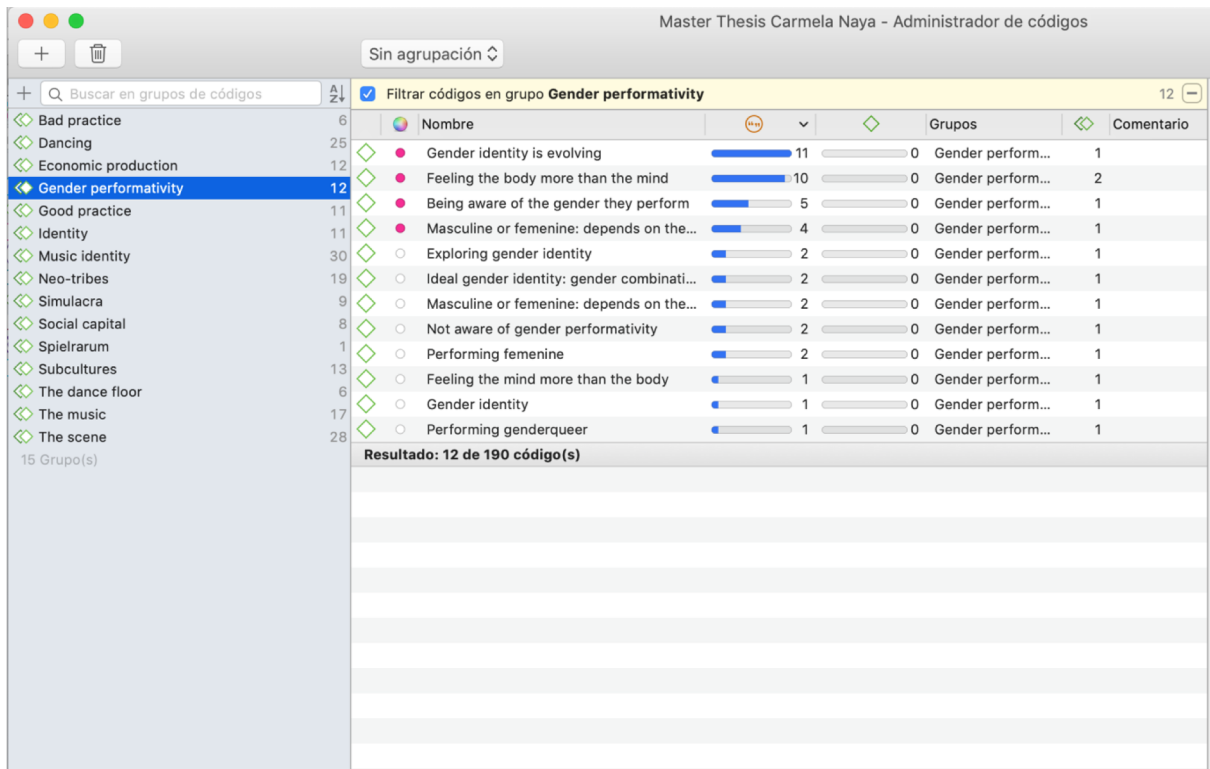


Figure 6: Screenshot of ATLAS.ti with coding categories.

Appendix 3

(Interview transcripts available upon request)