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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

For Us By Us: Electronic Dance Music's
Queer of Color Undercommons

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Ethnomusicology

by

Blair Maya Imani Black

2023

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2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

For Us By Us: Electronic Dance Music's
Queer of Color Undercommons

by

Blair Maya Imani Black

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Cheryl L. Keyes, Chair

Electronic dance music (EDM) is a seven billion dollar global industry and its elements are core to mainstream popular music. However, the recognition and earnings elide the queer communities of color from which the genre originates. Therefore, this dissertation builds from Munoz's (2005) *minoritarian knowledge* production, to reveal how this queer of color EDM aesthetic allow them to not only reclaim agency through everyday politics, but also create lives of pleasure that decenter oppression through resistance narratives. And in doing so, it reveals how Black DJs from the early days of EDM and younger generations of queer DJs of color make sense of how this genre transitioned from brown and Black queer subgenre in American urban centers to a "supergenre" popular within the significantly whiter and heteronormative audiences throughout the world. Moreover, it addresses how the participation of queer DJs of color is

relegated only to source material for creation narratives surrounding EDM genres, at the expense of contemporary queer and of color scenes. This dissertation project builds on their frustration to highlight how underground networks of queer people of color are significant *loci* for the circulation of talent, cultural norms, music aesthetics, and economic opportunities. This dissertation also traces the formation of inter-musical and inter-textual aural cultures through the use of various popular Afro- Diasporic musical and cultural aesthetics in EDM production. Therefore, this work is guided by these key questions: (1) what is the relationship over time between the musical and cultural aesthetic of queer of color communities to mainstream dance music industries?; (2) how do the music and production styles within these networks act as expressive extensions of the queer of color identity/experience; and (3) how do networks of underground queer collectives of color engage in “world-making” (Buckland 2002) to create spaces and cultural norms through underground industries and tightly knit networks within and between urban centers?

The dissertation of Blair Maya Imani Black is approved.

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2023

Dedication

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my friends and family for their continuous support, love, and understanding throughout this process. From my family members near and far – hosting me and even reaching out to their contacts to help me get interviews, to my friends for lending an ear and letting me crash on their couches during the cash-strapped days of fieldwork, I want to acknowledge how integral you all were in supporting my dissertation project. To my mother, LaDonna, and sister, Nikki, although you couldn't understand the process and its lengthy commitment, your unwavering encouragement, and help made this project and dissertation happen. Last but certainly, not least, I want to thank my loving husband, Ulises. We've both been through the throngs of graduate school, family drama, losses, and personal milestones. The ways you've lifted me in the six years we've known each other give me comfort in the life we are building with one another. You have given me the strength to continue even in the most challenging times. May life continue to be a series of discoveries and dialogues.

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Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to everyone who has contributed to the completion of this project.

First and foremost, I would also like to thank my colleagues from UCLA's Black Feminist Initiative for their valuable insights, suggestions, and encouragement. Additionally, I want to thank Dr. Aisha Finch's Black Women's Interiority, Dr. Uri McMillan's Minoritarian Aesthetics, and Dr. Sarah Haley's New Work in Black Feminist Cultural Studies seminars for their extensive knowledge and profound insights that have helped me immensely in understanding my project's nuances.

I also want to acknowledge the Center for Oral History Research's Teresa Barnett and the Ethnomusicology Archive's Maureen Russell for showing me the necessity of storytelling in archives for scholars and future generations of community members to engage with their histories and their representations. I also want to thank the Metaphor Club for tolerating my endless sighs and epic face journeys through the dissertation writing process. And to my dissertation committee Professor Timothy D. Taylor, Professor Anna Morcom, Professor Mitchell Morris, and my advisor, Professor Cheryl L. Keyes, for giving me their time, unwavering support, and guidance. Professor Keyes's encouraging words and constructive feedback helped me refine my ideas and expand my theoretical toolbox.

I would also like to thank all my interlocutors who participated in the study, without whom this research would not have been possible. Thank you to Chicago's Natalie Murillo (LaSpacer), L.A.'s Kumi James (Bae Bae) and Lez Croix's Irene Urías (Your Muther), N.Y.C.'s Carrie Sun

(Kaili), and the folks at BBZ and Batty Mama in London for being open and candid with their stories and perspectives. To the parties, collectives, record labels, and online radio stations uplifting our communities, let this be a reminder that you all make a difference, and your work is essential to the well-being of your city's creative communities.

Thank you to the organizations that helped support this research, namely the Jorge Estrada Research Travel Fund, Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship, The Herb Alpert School of Music Scholarship, the American Institute of Culture's Research Grant, and the UCOP Dissertation Year Fellowship.

Some text in this project was cannibalized from past publications, namely "The Queer of Color Sound Economy" (2020), published through Columbia University's Current Musicology, and "Dark Banjee Aesthetic: Hearing the Queer of Color Archive Within Club Music" (2022) published in E-Flux Journal. I'd like to thank the editorial team at both publications, Laina Dawson, madison moore, and Mckenzie Warkk for their insightful revisions.

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INTRODUCTION: WHERE ARE THE QUEER OF COLOR UNDERCOMMONS?

Negress: A Hood Rave

January 18, 2020

11:50p @ Barbershop in Vermont Square

I'm sitting in the Lyft so excited that this rave I'm attending is close to the neighborhood where I grew up. The ETA literally says 10 minutes what a treat to have something like this be so close. It's actually close to my cousin's great-grandmother's house. I wonder if M is (I'm gonna anonymize his name, although I'm sure he would be over the moon to be mentioned in my actual dissertation. I'll come back to this) available, but I forgot to ask. I have no idea what to expect this area doesn't have any warehouses, or at least any I could think of at the top of my head, its mostly residential Black and brown-owned houses and apartments around here. I've driven up and down this street so many times throughout my life to head towards the 110 to either go visit my dad in East L.A. or to go IKEA in Carson.

Oh wow we got here so fast. I know better than to verify the location before I exit the vehicle. This is definitely the place. It would be rather unassuming, the barbershop looks like any other storefront business the neighborhood. The windows are sufficiently blacked out, sidewalk is void of a line wrapping around the building. Other than the streetlight illuminating the block closest to the main thoroughfare it's pitch black and quiet outside. Although I have no idea where the entrance is I step outside confidently, but hypervigilant and just in case. However, I remind myself that there is a police station a little over two blocks from where I am. On second thought this doesn't actually make me feel safer. (That makes sense as why there aren't people outside. Its simply not safe for Black and brown folks.) But the thought that this neighborhood is mostly multi-generational working-class families of color reminds me that most folks are most likely in for the night, if not already asleep.

It doesn't take long for me to find the entrance, its located in the alley way and its brightly lit. After I'm greeted by the doorperson and pay the entry fee I enter the repurposed (or abandoned) barbershop. Some of the chairs are huddled in the corner out of the way next to the drinks station. Its relatively crowded in the small space, but there's still room to move around and get to the dancefloor. The sound system sounds great inside the place, but then again its really only one

room with a black curtain dividing the space where the bathroom and greenroom are located. I don't immediately notice anyone I know so I place my jacket/purse at the table in the corner where other folks have placed their belongings before going to dance. I'm not too familiar with who's on the deck, YaDirtyDaughter, but their music is trance some other harder styles (e.g. hard house).

Once again I've dressed too conservatively because I'm hot! Thank god for the water bottles. I love it that when the DJ is doing something the crowd likes they immediately take their phones out. I know this isn't to record the actual set but more to big up them on social media. Everyone is really digging the vibe here. I'm having a goodtime and I can tell other folks are too. Most of the folks in here are Black. I remember the post saying that this was a space to affirm Black femmes & thems.

I love a set that crosses geographic borders! This British Berlin-based DJ, Kikelomo, is doing really well engaging the audience with her music (they're playing a Jersey Club edit of Snoop Dogg's "Sensual Seduction"). I never heard of this person before, but they're definitely my next favorite DJ. Everyone is literally hollering at how good this set is. Love the mixture of Afrobeats and techno, it really puts things (back) into perspective. Folks are twerking this is truly fantastic.

BaeBae loves playing R&B Gabba edits. Always feel like I need to bodyroll when she plays her sets. Everything is so sensual. Oop she said she made a mistake, but everyone is cheering her on (also I doubt anyone could tell). Everyone is transfixed by the music she's playing, it's so calming and heady. This whole night everyone is mixing live I can't imagine this is to be an easy task at whatever DJ level you are. Speaking of which I need to follow-up and see how that teaching session went last month.

The party is over and BaeBae is telling folks to be mindful when they step outside the venue since there's literally a house next door. As I'm headed home in the Uber (Lyft was more expensive right now), the driver asked me where I'm coming from. He's Black and lives in the surrounding neighborhood too. He's surprised that something like this is happening around here and thinks it's pretty cool that it's being run by other Black folks living there. I know I'll never look at this place the same when I pass it.

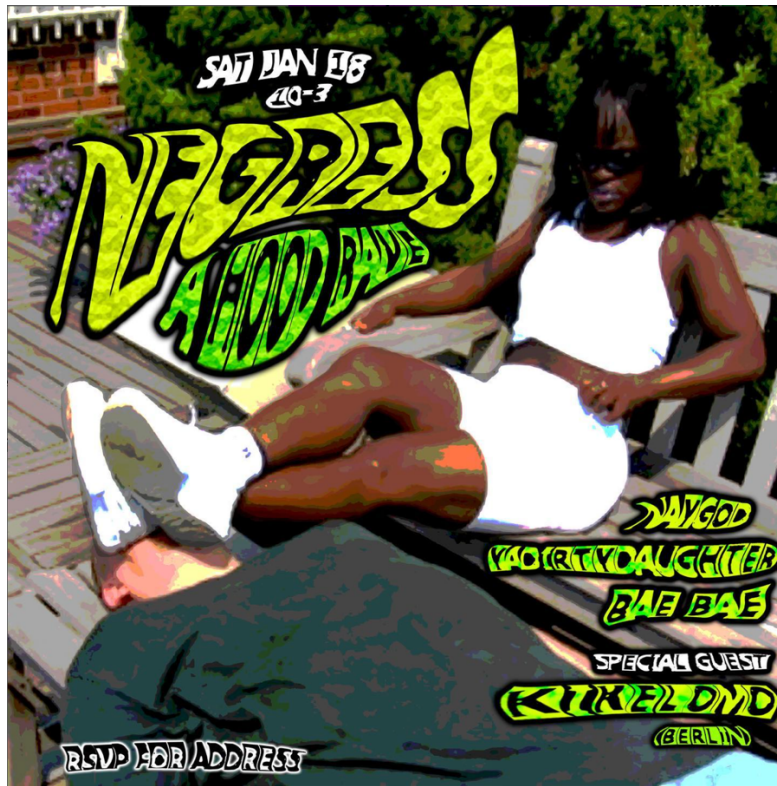


Figure 2. E-flyer for Negress: A Hood Rave Party | Courtesy of Hood Rave, Instagram

Hidden in Plain Site

As I sit here contemplating how far and few between the instances of parties that center Black queer femme DJs, let alone on audacious enough to advertise themselves with a nod to the internet BDSM practices of the humiliation of white male submissives by Black femme and women dominants. Is this flyer a tongue-in-cheek for its centering Black and Black queer femmes, or is part of what is overloaded on the surface meaning aspirational in its redress of white supremacy? Diverging from typical Internet BDSM imagery, both figures are clothed and in public spaces. Indeed, while Ariane Cruz (2016), a scholar of Black feminist sexual theory, acknowledges the problematic aspects of race and raceplay in BDSM pornography, she also explores the potential for agency, resistance, and counter-narratives within these representations. Specifically, she emphasizes how Black women actively engaging in the production and

consumption of BDSM pornography utilize the medium as a means of reclaiming sexual agency and challenging dominant narratives by participating in creating their representations. Moreover, these performers disrupt established racial scripts and challenge traditional power dynamics, providing alternative narratives of pleasure, desire, and empowerment. On the other hand, I think about how this aspiration may extend to domination or control over the space, specifically, about Black and brown folks' relationship to their public spaces.

Kumi James, DJ, event producer and Ph.D. student was adamant about creating spaces for Black and Black queer communities in Los Angeles. Having seen it all during her nearly fifteen year career, Kumi has DJ'ed at places all over Los Angeles, New York, and London. They also produced different programming centering Black queer and femmes across the gender spectrum. In a former iteration of her scholastic career she has created short films, sound and art installations throughout Los Angeles. Currently she and fellow L.A. Based DJ Kita spend their time running their party Hood Rave. And on the topic of documenting and telling the stories of queer nightlife for her own scholarly work,

“It's also hard to like, get access to things like footage or like any documentation. And of course, like what is documented can be violent. And it makes me think about, maybe like the trickiness of wanting to tell the story of nightlife, [...] I'm trying to figure out if it's something I will include in my dissertation. I wrote an article about it, but it's like you want it's like these things are illegal and like they're supposed to be protective of your community so it's hard to be like, ‘All right, university, this is what we're doing!’ because I don't know what would the fallout be or the negative thing because like with more visibility like some of these like vibrant [underground queer spaces] have ended because in the mainstream they're now aware [of these spaces] and they scandalize what this things are.” (Black 2023)

This is especially poignant given the necessity of the above event appearing inconspicuous because of its location three blocks from a police station in a quiet South Los Angeles neighborhood. Indeed, there is an inherent catch-22 for event producers who want to create more events visible to their communities. On the one hand, carving out spaces within the city's

landscape fosters a sense of refuge for members pushed out by the exorbitant prices and racial/ethnic discriminatory practices of white and non-Black spaces. On other other hand, throwing events in Black communities can come at the price of homophobia and increased policing of the events.

The above passage is from my collection of fieldnotes from about six months into my fieldwork in Los Angeles. Having attended events small and large, aboveground and underground, this particular event was my favorite to attend at the time. This was especially doubled given that many of my contacts and the events I attended forefronted queer femmes and women of color. Although I am heterosexual and (mostly) gender-conforming, it felt comforting to see and be amongst people who look like me, enjoying the music I typically listen to alone. As I was at this event, I had so many ideas bubbling to the surface about what themes and patterns I saw in L.A.'s underground queer dance music scene: erosions of Black public space, interethnic working-class solidarity (and tensions), relationships with the "industry," public/local radio, community-led DJ training, equipment loan programs, etc. the possibilities seemed endless. And thus, I also assumed that my opportunities to attend the rather hefty programming choices available around the city.

After all, this was happening all around the city, not just in your typical warehouses, bars, and clubs but also in people's apartments, barbershops, ski resorts, reservations, parks, museums, and community centers. These folks are wholly embedded within the city landscape, whether or not these spaces are friendly or hostile to their given identities. Attending and being a part of these events so carefully and thoughtfully planned by individuals looking to create and sound out their undercommons from the furthest reaches of their locales seemed pertinent. In Stefano

Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), they challenge conventional modes of knowledge production and offer an alternative framework for understanding the politics of blackness and resistance. The authors argue for the importance of "fugitive planning"¹ and "black study"² as critical practices to disrupt dominant systems of power and knowledge. Thus, the *undercommons* – the hidden spaces and networks of resistance that exist beneath the surface of mainstream society – emerge as a central site of collective action and mutual support, where marginalized communities come together to resist and create alternative ways of being.

Indeed, what I have seen is that queer and queer of event producers of color make due with the opportunities they are given to carve out fugitive spaces in public places. For instance, NÜ AFRICA, a party collective founded by three Black native Angelenas, pushed to showcase DJs from L.A.'s underground at the Juneteenth Heritage Festival. Hosted by Leimert Park Rising at Leimert Park Village in Los Angeles's majority Black populated Crenshaw District, this festival came right off the heels of the loosening COVID-19 restrictions. As one of the first gatherings allowed my local ordinances the attendance nearly doubled in size since the previous Juneteenth festival two years prior. As one of the DJs hired by the NÜ AFRICA, Kumi sought to embody the message of Black liberation so closely tied to Juneteenth. From soukous to house music, she played music from across the African Diaspora. Similarly diverse, the crowd included

¹Harney & Moten 2013. which involves organizing and strategizing outside of traditional channels of power. Fugitive planning is characterized by its refusal to conform to dominant structures and its commitment to collective labor and liberation.

²Ibid 31. A mode of inquiry that disrupts traditional knowledge production. They argue that Black study challenges the boundaries and hierarchies of academic disciplines, seeking to decolonize knowledge and interrogate dominant narratives. Black study is not confined to the university; it is a practice that takes place in everyday life and engages with the experiences and knowledges of Black communities.

Black folks of different generations, genders, and ethnicities. Further aligning herself with the ethics of Black Liberation, she paused her set to give stage to two young Tigrayan women who were bring awareness about the then, ongoing war between the people of Tigray and the Ethiopian and Eritrean federal governments.



Figure 3. Attendees at the 2021 Leimert Park Rising Juneteenth Heritage Festival | Courtesy of Author

Just before my second fieldwork season, my advisor asked why I decided to pivot my research from focusing on Black people’s working in house music scenes to queer Black and queer of color scenes. I gave her a reasonably sterile response that this community was wholly unrepresented in electronic dance music scenes, representation, and historiography. However, upon further thought, Black queer communities and a quared way of thinking have been ubiquitously in my life since before I could remember. From intimate hotboxing sessions in the car that crescendoed with my cousins’ stories of their coming out, the heterophonic chorus of laughter during the backyard summer nights kikis with my uncle and his friends, watching the

slow-burning love story between my sister-friends that would put the Office to shame, witnessing the ways my sister unabashedly trample over the gender norms preventing her from her goals, or the sophistication in which my mother intertwined her empathy and nearly thirty years of knowledge in early childhood education to protect and uplift the queer children who walked into her classroom. This project is a love letter to my immediate community, who have taught me that sharing in the quotidian is the most powerful thing. It helps you celebrate, work through conflict, and build communities contributing to your city's cultural and musical landscapes.

Key Arguments

Electronic dance music (EDM) – known for its programmed drum machines, cyclical 4/4 rhythmic patterns with accompanied off-beats – is a seven billion dollar global industry, and its elements are core to mainstream popular music. However, beginning iterations of EDM – such as house music, techno, and garage – emerged from underground queer Black, Afro-Latinx, and Latinx social spaces in American urban centers such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles in the late 1970s. Today, EDM has become core to popular music production and contributes nearly seven billion dollars to the global music industry economy. The bulk of these earnings derives from venues such as music festivals and club events headlined by renowned DJs of international acclaim. Despite its popularity and economic gains, Black and brown queer communities are representationally and economically marginalized within popular EDM circuits. Additionally, when queer people of color are referenced, they are “emplaced” (Rivera-Rideau 2013, 619), which fixes their representation within EDM's history while maintaining their marginalization within present contexts. As a result, queer DJs from

communities of color created their underground industries spanning major American cities and into international queer networks.

Considering the above, the key arguments of my dissertation examine how collectives established by and for queer people of color create networks and operate within underground EDM industries. Moreover, I seek to assess how different styles of Afro-Diasporic musicianship structure the music aesthetics of the EDM subgenres heard within these queer-of-color nightlife spaces. Furthermore, this project also examines the tenuous relationship between these underground networks and mainstream circuits as an intervention to cultural production for queer people of color, whose culture is often appropriated by their white counterparts and in heteronormative communities.

Gaps in Existing Scholarship

First, scholarly writings on EDM cultures that emerged from junior scholars in the late 1980s and early 1990s focus on the gay and queer African American contributions to the formation of EDM cultures (Yu 1988) and the innovations made within ground-breaking genres (Berry 1992). From the 1990s forward, published works about dance music cultures were headed by British scholars in anthropology and cultural studies focusing on contemporary youth and club cultures (Thornton 1996), Redhead 1997; eds. Redhead, Synne & O'Connor 1998).

Scholarship on EDM and its cultures within music studies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century ranges from cultural critiques to recuperations of its fragmented histories. For example, ethnomusicologist Rietveld (1998) examines the aesthetic genealogies and interrogates how industries that disseminate popular EDM influence its historical narratives, while cultural critic Reynold (1999) and cultural historians Brewster & Broughton's (1999) semi-oral historical accounts, focus on the phenomena of rave culture and trace the emerging

importance of DJing, respectively. Butler (2006) also fleshes out the (electronic dance) music theory. Lastly, ethnographic inquiry into underground queer African Americans and Latinx communities was limited to New York City (Fikentscher 2000 and Buckland 2002).

Within the last twenty years, cultural critics, historians, and scholars from various disciplines continued to trace EDM's earliest genres (eds. Burnim & Maultsby 2006; Garcia 2014; Sicko 2010; ed. Kirn 2011; Lawrence 2016) and interrogate attendees' experiences during the "big house" EDM events (ed. St. John 2017).

In contrast, the work I conduct not only focuses on the music created by queer communities of color but also highlights the multi-sited networks between cities. With this in mind, my work examines how these networks create and circulate EDM genres within, what I term, a *queer of color sound economy*. The proposed ethnographic analysis intends to connect previous research while focusing on the perspectives of queer people of color and how they translate their experiences sonically. In doing so, research on the music aesthetics emerging from queer people of color in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York will focus on the culture of music making - prescribed meanings of music production, sound aesthetics, audience participation and performance, sociality, and the construction of space (Bourdieu 1993). Given this, I prioritize analyzing a sound economy highlighting the fluctuating and messy negotiations of expression, representation, "inclusivity," and authenticity within queer of color communities. This is especially important given the rise of racialized heterosexism and homophobia.

Research Questions & Arguments

I argue that these queer-of-color collectives participate in this sound economy as a strategy not only to share and explore different articulations of racialized queerness but also to shift the contested discourses about queer-of-color communities in present EDM culture and

industry. Thus, the below points will act as my guiding key objectives: (1) how networks of underground queer collectives of color engage in “world-making” (Buckland 2002), the process by which queer DJs and audiences of color create spaces and cultural norms through underground industries and tight-knit networks within and between urban centers; (2) how the music and production styles within these networks are expressive extensions of the queer of color identity/experience; and (3) illustrate how the musical and cultural aesthetic of queer of color communities are treated as a creative resource for the mainstream dance music industries.

Chapter Outline

The introduction serve as an in-depth literature review and discussion of data collection methods and their justification. Additionally, this chapter will focus on the theoretical concepts that guide this project and the issues that will be addressed. Specifically, I aim to contextualize these musical idioms and musicianship within a radical Black queer performance tradition. Thus, this chapter will review relevant literature highlighting the importance of queer of color performance as a hermeneutic and worldview (e.g. Cohen 1997, Muñoz 1999, Johnson 2001, Ferguson 2004). Moreover, this chapter will discuss theories leading to radical world-building within counter-public spheres. Specifically, theorists such as Moten (2003), Neal (1999), and Brooks (2006) will prove invaluable in illustrating how the musical aesthetics of these artists are interlinked with the historical materiality of the Black queer experience.

On the other hand, scholars such as Royster and Stalling present how Post-Soul era artists adopt “appropriation, pastiche, sampling, and irony” to satirize and even critique heteronormative conceptions of blackness (2013, 8) while subsequently emphasizing the intimate connection between black music and world-making (2015), respectively. Moreover, ontological anthropology showcases how networks of these collectives create an alternative but connected

realities (Sahlins 2013, Bessire and Bond 2014). Lastly, semiotic anthropology and ethnomusicology scholarship provide theoretical tools to analyze the signs and sounds of symbolic meaning (Singer 1980, Turino 1999).

The first chapter analyzes EDM's historiography and how its formation led to the exclusion of Black, brown, and queer communities. Moreover, I present how the music industries and long-held heteronormative respectability politics facilitated cultural amnesia in scholarly inquiry and popular culture. I then turn to the work of memory work scholars in anthropology, history, and Black feminist camps. Lastly, this chapter also presents examples of community and social media-based archives that have adopted the documentation of various underrepresented communities.

Chapter two traces the emergence of the various EDM traditions within different scenes and across gender and ethnic communities. Although this historical survey primarily focuses on Los Angeles, sections include musical developments from other emerging EDM centers, such as Chicago, New York, Detroit, and New Jersey, to illustrate the connectedness of the queer-of-color sound economy. I will examine the macro histories of the "underground" and mainstream dance music industries to highlight where these networks converge and diverge. As such, this chapter sets the stage for the perceived necessity of these underground scenes for Black queer artists and enthusiasts.

Chapter three introduces the queer of color EDM field, which includes music collectives, community gatekeepers (activists, creatives, etc.), and underground industrialists (label owners, club managers, etc.) of the underground scenes. In this chapter, the oral history interviews will serve as detailed microhistories of each city's underground scene and the development of the subgenres that arose from them. Thus, scholarly works (Fikentscher 2000 and Salkind 2018) and first-hand documentation (New York Times, Los Angeles Times, etc.) will situate the

development of these individual music scenes into a more extensive queer-of-color network that spans the United States. As such, Bourdieu's concept of cultural fields (1993,1996) will further highlight (1) the extent and construction of this "field" and (2) how meaning is imbued and circulated by crucial players, musicians, label owners, audiences, etc. In doing so, this interrogation of this "field" will illustrate how those mentioned above negotiate their music and culture on their terms.

Chapter four presents an example of DJs utilizing mixsets³ for storytelling utilizing the shared aesthetic network across America's urban centers that extends to Afrodiasporic cultures worldwide. I term this exchange of esoteric low and high cultural the *queer of color sound economy* – a shared "shared system of socio-cultural [sound] aesthetics" (Black 2020) – that allows DJs and listeners to interpolate and be interpolated as a means of membership identification. Thus, this chapter also analyzes literature discussing the Afrodiasporic exchanges and flows of cultural aesthetics. To demonstrate how DJs utilize this sound economy in storytelling I analyze how a this practice manifests and its prescribed meanings for music production –informed by the dialogic relationship between audience participation and DJs. This chapter also discusses how sampling as a music-making process allows DJs to strategically utilize various African American, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, and Latinx popular music and culture to express their racialized queerness. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to understand if and how this music-making process reveals how Black queer DJs see their work and influence in the rapidly neoliberalizing and digitalized landscape.

Lastly, the conclusion explores the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 on various aspects of society, including the music industry and underground dance music scenes.

³Here and throughout I will use mixset to indicate a DJ mixset.

It discusses how the social movements prompted discussions about police reform and led to revelations of misconduct and discrimination within the music industry. Calls for transparency, community-run initiatives, and fund redistribution emerged as a response to these issues. This chapter reflects on the current state of the queer and of color underground scene. It also raises questions about cultural rights and appropriation, particularly within the context of electronic dance music (EDM). It argues for the need for critical consumption of EDM and advocates for supporting Black and Black queer DJs and artists. Moreover, the chapter highlights the ongoing struggles of the queer and of color underground community in the face of commodification and appropriation. Lastly, it calls for recognition, support, and economic empowerment for marginalized communities within the electronic dance music industry.

Literature Review

In the 1980s, before scholarship on disco and dance music coalesced into electronic dance music (EDM), the first scholarly writings were scattered amongst popular music, cultural, and performance studies. During this time, Gilbert A. Williams (1986) wrote about the significance of radio DJs in Black music culture. On the other hand, music studies began their inquiry into disco's similarities to and inheritances from previously popular Black music (Ramal 1981). Moreover, Hugh Mooney's (1980) considerations of disco analyzed its roots in music culture; the genre's Black, Latin, queer, and feminine forward influence; and provided speculation about its evolution going into the 1980s. However, its strength lies in discussing how disco – through the community building of Black, brown, and queer DJs – popularized club culture in (white & heterosexual) mainstream and middle America.

At the close of the 1980s and following the rising popularity of electronic dance music influenced British pop (e.g., new wave, synth pop), popular music and subculture scholars

adopted Deleuze and Guattari's (1972) bricolage as a framework to inquire about its rhizomorphic musical and visual elements. Subcultural scholars such as Frith (1984, 1996, ed. 2004) – through the Birmingham school's cultural studies – researching popular music tended to focus on how British teens used music to construct or reflect identity. These surveys and discussions provided demographic overviews that favored race and heteronormative genders, marking much of the music scholarship generated during this time. Hebdige's (1987) *Cut 'n' Mix* is a relational analysis of Jamaican and Caribbean cultural history and music aesthetics. His analysis of dubbing/versioning, studio art, and turntablism places Jamaican music-making into EDM lineages, albeit implicitly. In doing so, Hebdige highlights the dialogue between Jamaica, Britain, and the United States.

On the other hand, performance scholars such as Tony Mitchell's (1989) analysis of the postmodern discourse on popular music and visual media illustrates how after white American and British rock's severance as popular music par excellence and the subsequent rise of musical forms associated with marginalized groups (by either disenfranchised youth cultures, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.) in the 1980s set the stage for recycling, multiplicity, reinterpretation, pastiche, and even absurdism. Indeed, most poignant to the study of marginalized ethnic and sexual communities EDM is his critique of scholars who believe that this era of postmodern creative expression “undoes the problematics of surfaces, flatness, and appearances” (Ibid, 286). And to an extent, this concern holds some truth but is not applied to the ubiquitous and uneven appropriations of Black (queer) cultures by white (and even non-Black) creatives⁴. However, as Mitchell and queer of color theorists nearly forty years later have proven, flatness (Muñoz 1999),

⁴Frank Owens 1988 qtd in Mitchell 1989, 289, “When Brits hear house music, they don't hear the sound of a gay subculture, they hear the Ascension Effect -the beautiful flatness, its stratospheric quality. When Brits hear rap, they don't hear the sound of a black subculture, they hear the Collapsing Effect-that sense of sonic rupture and seizure that hip-hop embodies, the uneven surfaces and jagged textures.”

surface (Musser 2018), and appearances become the primary means for marginalized communities to critique and dissent.

From the 1990s, anthropology, and cultural studies scholars spearheaded published works about dance music cultures. However, their concerns were directed toward adjusting social theory to the ethnographic study of subcultures (Thornton 1996) and developing new theoretical frameworks to analyze contemporary youth and club cultures (Redhead 1997; eds. Redhead, Synne & O'Connor 1998). However, their work focused on white British boys with little attention to queer or Black British communities. That is until Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993) shed light on the cultural nexus between Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean, and the African Continent with his discussion about musicians acting as "organic intellectuals" (76) who most "successfully" (200) demonstrates the antiphony within the African Diaspora. Despite this, Black music studies during this time elide mentioning queer musicians and queerness as a hermeneutic. This is partly due to Black music studies mirroring the heteronormative and male-centric perspectives of the 1960s Civil Rights era and Black nationalist and Arts movements.

Thus, scholarship or mentions of queer Black musicianship, similar to Black feminist thought, did not appear until almost twenty years later. With the onset of third-wave feminism, scholarship on the intersections of Black music production and LGBTQ studies began its first iterations. Through the works of Daphne Harrison (1988), Hazel Carby (1998), and Angela Davis (1998), analysis of early twentieth-century blueswomen would mark the first discussions of the homo- and bi-sexuality of Black musicians. Indeed, as one of the initial forays of Black feminist thought, Harrison's ethnomusicological analysis examined lyrics explicitly and implicitly mentioning blueswomen's homosexual encounters. Furthermore, Carby and Davis

sought to uncover the material realities of working-class Black women to present how they used the blues to empower themselves.

During the 1990s, scholars contributing to burgeoning performance studies would introduce new hermeneutics foundational to queer theory and the subsequent queer of color critique. Emerging from the same era of third-wave feminism, gender theorist Judith Butler (1990) critiqued the universalization of the category “woman” and instead advocated for a more holistic view to encompass how class, ethnicity, and sexuality influence the constructions of gender within different cultures. On the other hand, Eve Sedgwick (1990) interrogates the limiting binaries of human sexuality and the discursive power of language to describe sexual identities. However, the next wave of queer-of-color theorists, such as Cathy Cohen and Jose Esteban Muñoz, expanded queer theory to fit the lived realities of people of color. Indeed, Muñoz answers Cohen’s (1997) call for an intersectional approach to destabilizing heteronormativity and other forms of oppression. Thus, Muñoz’s concept of disidentifications (1999) became vital in understanding the survival strategies of racialized queers. Specifically, disidentification expands Butler’s culturally nuanced idea of gender performance to highlight the practices minoritarians⁵ develop to “negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere” (4). In doing so, Muñoz proposes that these groups engage in world-making, which creates counter-public spheres (7) by and of queer people with similar experiences.

Despite these gains, music scholarship & critique dedicated to the study of EDM and its cultures had a minimal discussion of queer and non-white communities, let alone queer, feminist, or Afrodiaporic theoretical analysis. Instead, music studies during this time range from cultural critiques to recuperations of fragmented histories. For example, although ethnomusicologist

⁵Muñoz (1999), p. 4 “Subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship”

Rietveld (1998) details EDMC's aesthetic genealogies from Black and queer communities, *This Is Our House*'s strength lies in its interrogations of white European EDM scenes and, more specifically, how Europe's mainstream music industries – by and for white audiences – disseminated EDM genres and publications that contributed to the whitewashing of the historical narrative. Other ethnographies focused on the newly emerging “rave culture” of Europeans, and although there is some discussion on the rave scenes created in the U.S. and even Southern California, yet L.A.'s queer and EDM scenes of color are rarely mentioned (Reynolds 1999). And in only focusing on the beginning iterations of EDM in these communities, queer people of color's emplacement (Rivera-Rideau 2013, 619) fixes their representation within EDM's historical past and maintains their marginalization within present contexts. On the other hand, cultural historians Brewster & Broughton's (1999) semi-oral historical accounts included (some) scenes and genres by Black Americans and queer Britons. Lastly, as a purely musicological project, Butler's *Unlocking the Groove* (2006) fleshes out the music theory underpinning EDM's production.

Around the same time in gender studies, Muñoz's iteration of performance phenomenology generated an analytic to theorize the experiences of queer people of color. Indeed, by foregrounding historical materiality queer theorists of color could critique the unmarked white within the nascent queer studies and theory. For example, theorist and performance artist E. Patrick Johnson introduced the term “quare” to not only acknowledge how queer people of color are racialized but also to point to how queer people of color “come to racial and sexual knowledge” (2001, 3). Johnson explores this in his autobiographical performance “Strange Fruit” (2003/2016), using black cultural imagery from the Civil Rights, Soul, and Post-Soul eras he was raised in to point to his experiences disidentifying with the heteronormative

symbols of Black culture, (Black) nationalism, and the Black Power movements. And in doing so, Johnson cleverly recontextualizes the “Strange” in the Billie Holiday song to mean “odd,” “queer” or “quare” (Brody 2016, 216). Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black* (2004) sought to re-centers the importance of a queer of color critique to highlight how liberal capitalist ideologies produce neat categories of gender, race, and class (2). In turn, Ferguson illustrates how the creation of these rigidly defined categories create “deviance” since it disallows the messy social formations that occur within social practice (Ibid, 4).

As a result of these new theories, scholarship *solely* focusing on queer and queer music communities of color continued to grow in the early 2000s. Ethnographic inquiry into underground queer African Americans and Latinx communities, although much of these works center New York City (Fikentscher 2000 and Buckland 2002). On the other hand, more sympathetic and serious theoretical considerations of disco and its (electronic) afterlives also emerge within music scholarship. Namely, Tim Lawrence’s ethnohistorical approach in *Love Saves the Day* (2006) addresses disco’s lacuna in American dance music history and traces the spatial and geographic genealogies of 1970s dance club cultures. Within musicology, Gilbert & Pearson’s *Discographies* (1999) anthology examines dance music cultures through the lens of cultural studies and critical theory in hopes of developing a theoretical lens most appropriate for its analysis. Indeed, Gilbert and & Pearson’s analysis of transatlantic dance music cultures engages and critiques subjecthood, phallogentricity, and the Eurocentric epistemologies of post-enlightenment subjecthood in music studies. They, therefore, deviate from a strictly historical narrative of the development of dance music cultures, instead favoring its theoretical genealogy to insert new ontologies for its study.

Additionally, this project addresses historical narratives, popular and instrumental dance music status within Western music, technoculture, pleasure, gender, sexuality, and phenomenology within dance music. Judith Ann Peraino (2006) continues to utilize queer theory within her analysis of musicians, performances, and musical idioms. It is, however, essential to note that queer of color performance theory and critique is missing throughout most of her oeuvre. Nevertheless, Peraino remained dedicated to using queer theory to analyze disruptions to white heteronormativity within music studies. As a result, Peraino's *Listening to the Sirens* (2006) expands Foucault's four-prong concept of "technology" to examine how music – as a queer analytic in and of itself – can destabilize the "ideological superstructure of 'compulsory heterosexuality'" (5).

In Afrodiasporic studies, scholars were similarly emboldened by the queer of color critique to analyze Black creatives such as actors, artists, and musicians. Specifically, theorists embraced how Black people and the Black body are queered within the nexus of White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1995, 29) and the radicality of counter-public spheres. For example, poet and theorist Fred Moten (2003) melds Mark Anthony Neal's (1999) and Muñoz's concepts of counter-publics and world-making, respectively, to emphasize its importance to the aesthetics of Black radicalism. Throughout *In the Break* (2003), Moten centers Black music within his analysis because "[B]lack radicalism is (like) [B]lack music" (24) in that the Black voice is grounded in the historical materiality of the Black experience. More importantly, he posits that Black music and the Black radical tradition are "omnipresently queer" (2003, 69) because they continuously adapt to the communities' conditions and needs. This adaptability is similarly constructed in Daphne A. Brooks's *Bodies in Dissent* (2006). Her work examines how performers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century employ acts of

“eccentricity” (read queer) to rupture the racial and gender typologies of their time. Specifically, Brooks coins the term “afro-alienations” to point to how marginalized communities “convert alterity into cultural expressiveness and specific strategies of cultural performance” (2006, 4) to survive.

Indeed, the critical lens of eccentricity provided another entry point for music scholars to adapt a queer of color analysis to examine musicians whose gender performances and sexualities were ambiguous. Francesca Royster’s, *Sounding Like a No-No* (2013) addresses a lacuna for a queer of color analysis of the Post-Soul Era in popular Black music. Her intervention was necessary as most scholarship on the music of the Post-Soul Era either focused on cis-gendered heteronormative men (Neal 2002, 2013) or were too preoccupied with the loss of a centralized Black political and cultural identity after the climax of the Civil Rights era (George 2003). Royster argues that the performers she presents adopt “appropriation, pastiche, sampling, and irony” to satirize and critique heteronormative conceptions of blackness (2013, 8). Indeed, through examining “eccentric” performers who break away from gender and sexual norms, Royster argues that the Black radical traditions of world-making and self-fashioning continuously re-invents itself (Ibid). Continuing analysis of a Black and decidedly queer self-fashioning, L.H. Stalling’s *Funk the Erotic* (2015) presents the intimate connection between Black music and world-making. This work presents funk as not just a genre but also a form of phenomenological knowledge production that centers on philosophies of life and death (3), erotics⁶ (4), and the body (6).

⁶Lorde’s (1978), “The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire.”

Adopting similar inquiries into alienations and electronic eccentricities, scholars employed Afrofuturism as a lens to examine how Black musicians utilized technology and electronic music to conceptualize the category of human. This multi-media movement concerns itself with the reinterpretation of technological progress that is often intellectually denied to Black people. The term was created by cultural critic Mark Dery (1994) and expanded upon by sociologist Alondra Nelson (2002) in conjunction with other black scholars. The main theoretical framework employed by scholars across black artist mediums sought to understand how Black narratives recognize their “Otherness” within white techno-futuristic paradigms. This contrasts Western futuristic paradigms wherein race and the body would no longer hold credence in the future, either utopian or dystopian, because technology would usher in a raceless and genderless humanity. However, scholars of Black feminist traditions of humanist and post-humanist camps (Wynters 2003, McKittrick 2006) highlight how white supremacy undergirds the (post) Enlightenment concepts of human and post-human. Indeed, music scholars such as Kodwo Eshun’s *More Brilliant Than the Sun* (1998) illustrates how scholars can study contemporary Black music and its electronic afterlives post Soul and identarian politics of “the street.”

With this new toolbag of Afrofuturist, queer, quare, feminist, and black feminist epistemologies, scholars began various projects focusing on queer or “eccentric” Black musicians. During this time, many theorists returned to Black popular music to analyze the “quare” optics of infamous artists, such as Missy Elliot (Lane 2011), Meshell Ndegeocello (Goldin-Perschbacher 2013, Richardson 2014), and Nicki Minaj (Smith 2014, Shange 2014, McMillan 2014). Others sought to recuperate the stories and queer aesthetics of foundational Black musicians such as Little Richard (Stephoe 2018, Stephens 2019), Sister Rosetta Tharpe (Wald 2007), and Big Mama Thornton (Mahon 2011), to name a few. On the other hand,

Afrofuturism continues to be a generative project to highlight how Black musicians utilize technology to construct identity (Kreiss 2008; Van Veen 2013; English & Kim 2013), challenge the limits of human (James 2008), and reflect the social & material realities (Jiménez 2011).

Since the 2010s, cultural critics, historians, and scholars from various disciplines have continued to trace the formations of EDM's earliest genres and interrogate attendees' experiences during events. For example, historical recuperations of subgenres' racial and sexual origins (eds. Maulsby & Burnim 2016; Garcia 2014; Sicko 2010; ed. Kirn 2011; Lawrence 2016) and interrogations of EDM's recent transcendence from subcultural spaces to global festival circuits (ed. St. John 2017) are common topics. However, only two ethnographies (Hunter 2010; Salkind 2018) account for recent research on the music and experiences of queer people of color within nightlife, while other ethnographic monographs are almost two decades old (Rietveld 1998, Fikentscher 2000). Other trends within EDM scholarship also highlight the experience of queer EDM communities (Rosendahl 2013) or the influence of African American musicianship within EDM genres (Albeiz 2005, Zeiner-Henriksen 2010, Loza 2001), all of which either separate or altogether elide queer communities of color.

The newest of this cohort have unabashedly centered the counter-cultural possibilities of Black, Black queer, and queer communities of color nightlife worlds. DeForrest Brown Jr.'s book, *Assembling a Black Counter Culture* (2022), is a groundbreaking work that explores the intersections of race, technology, and music in the context of Black cultural production. He not only discusses the origins of techno and house music in Detroit and Chicago and how these genres were shaped by the experiences of Black communities in these cities but also examines the role of physical spaces (e.g., clubs and warehouses) in have been used to create new forms of community and resistance. Moreover, Kemi Adeyemi, Kareem Khubchandani, and Ramon H.

Rivera-Servera's edited volume *Queer Nightlife* (2021) explore the vibrant and complex world of queer nightlife. Through diverse perspectives, the book delves into the significance, cultural politics, and transformative power of queer nightlife spaces to emphasize the crucial role of nightlife in fostering solidarity and enabling marginalized communities to reclaim their identities and spaces. Additionally, it explores how queer nightlife has served as a platform for artistic expression, showcasing performances, drag shows, music, and other creative forms. The authors examine how nightlife spaces have challenged normative boundaries and fostered cultural innovation, pushing the boundaries of gender, sexuality, and self-presentation.

Theoretical Methodology

The questions constructed and my more extensive project are influenced by how racial and sexual minorities create knowledge of themselves and their worlds. This minoritarian epistemology is equal parts a response to positionality within a white supremacist heteropatriarchy and the generative radicality of minoritarian world-building. Works such as Collins (1990, 2009), Moten (2003), and Brooks (2006) guide the theme and application of my questions as I seek to understand the imperative ways minoritarians carve out and create knowledge within matrices of oppression without centering the violence living within regimes of racial and gender/sexual heteronormative terror. Whereas Collins (2009) highlights the fallacies of apoliticality, ahistoricity, and all-around "objective" epistemologies that pathologize non-whites, Muñoz (1999) foregrounds the importance of minoritarian performance to turn overdetermined identities on its head. And in doing so, reclaiming agency and critiquing regimes of oppression while nodding to the existence of embodied knowledge inaccessible to dominant groups.

Moreover, Moten (2003) highlights how scholars can extrapolate embodied minoritarian epistemologies in performances of Black music. Specifically, he discusses a passage from Frederick Douglass's autobiography about an incident where his Aunt Hester was whipped by their slave owner. In Moten's analysis, Aunt Hester's scream emphasizes the reckoning when the commodity, or rather commodified bodies, speaks and can authoritatively articulate and critique the world around them (Ibid, 5-6). Such considerations are applicable when questioning why DJs can juxtapose a soundbite of a small snarling dog while The Moonwalker's "10,000 Screaming Faggots" plays in the background. Does the placement of these soundbites harbor the same "break" (Ibid, 5 & 6) that allows black queer DJs and dance music enthusiasts to relish in the generative space between the historical realities of the slur, the paralleling of small dogs to effeminacy, the reclamation of this sign, and the subsequent esoteric knowledge it creates? And last but certainly not least, Brooke's (2006) presentation and analysis of how minoritarians, and specifically Black Americans, transform acts of self-alienation, or ontological dislocations" into "resistance performances [...] to become agents in their own liberation" (Ibid, 3). Such acts of "afro-alienation" allow us to consider the ways DJs compile sound with music as they blur the lines between them to create new symbols and semiotic connections.

Thus, my project adds to the growing literature that expands on the generative possibilities of fungibility as a process and constant state of liberation. Although the idea first took root in Afropessimism⁷, fungibility is best understood in the context of Afrodiasporic

⁷Douglass, Terrefe, Wilderson 2018, "The claim that humanity is made legible through the irreconcilable distinction between humans and blackness is one of the first principles of Afro-Pessimism, and it is supported by the argument that blackness is a paradigmatic position, rather than an ensemble of cultural, social, and sexual orientations. For Afro-pessimists, the black is positioned, a priori, as slave. The definition of slave is taken from Orlando Patterson who theorizes slavery as a relational dynamic between "social death" (the slave) and "social life" (the human). Afro-pessimism is as indebted to black feminist theory as it is to Patterson's definition of slavery. The black feminist interventions of Afro-pessimism privilege position (or paradigm) over performance. To this end, Afro-pessimist feminism is a critique of the theoretical orientation of nonblack feminist theory. Afro-pessimism theorizes blackness as an effect of structural violence, as opposed to thinking of blackness as a performance and embodiment of cultural

studies as a framework to “capture the violent expansiveness of the Black body in the New World” wherein blackness is interchangeable and always commodifiable (Zellars, 2018). However, a more recent application of this conceptual framework, as made famous by C. Riley Snorton in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017), an interrogation of how blackness and transgender identity are mutually constitutive in that the experiences and struggles of Black individuals have significantly shaped the development and understanding of transgender identities during American slavery. Specifically, his chapter “Trans Capable: Fungibility, Fugitivity, and the Matter of Being” proposes how fungibility, at the intersection of fugitivity, can be used as a site of possibility “for living a life on terms more of its own making” (Zellars 2018). For Snorton, fugitivity represents the survival strategies of resistance and escape embodied by enslaved Black people in the face of societal limitations and constraints (2017, 57).

Indeed, Jared Sexton’s (2016) piece acknowledges the validity of Afro-pessimism’s articulation of Black people’s existence outside frameworks of humanity. However, he also underscores the limitations of Afropessimism in recognizing Black communities’ agency and creative resistance. In contrast, Black optimism is an extension of Afropessimism because it dually acknowledges the realities of racism and oppression while foregrounding the

and/or anthropological attributes. Most scholars would argue that what is essential about blackness is (a) the diversity of cultural expressions it elaborates or (b) the specificity of the socio-political terrains blacks occupy around the world. Humanists and sociologists might argue that what it means to be black in the United States, where the one-drop rule is in effect, is completely different than what it means to be black in most of Latin America, where a range of hues are named and experience uneven development as a consequence of that naming. Afro-pessimists would not deny the facticity of such claims but would relegate the distinction between a North American and Latin American orientation toward blackness as being important but inessential to a paradigmatic analysis. What is essential is neither the interpersonal nor institutional orientation toward blackness, but the fact that blackness is the essence of that which orients. Put differently, the coherence of reality (be it institutional or interpersonal coherence) is secured by anxiety over both the idea and the presence of blacks. The black, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon (Fanon 1967, cited under Afro-Pessimism and Psychoanalysis), is a stimulus to anxiety, and it is the anxiety of antagonism (Sexton 2016) represented and embodied by blackness that creates the condition of possibility for both the rigid one-drop rule and the catholic plethora of shades that are named in countries like Cuba and Brazil. Afro-pessimism implores us to think blackness at a level of abstraction that scholars heretofore have thought the worker (Marxism), the woman (nonblack feminism), and the native (postcolonial studies) and to think the human as a fetishized form rather than as a universal given.”

transformative power of Black culture, imagination, and social movements in challenging and subverting oppressive systems (Sexton 2016, 69). With this in mind, I adopt this framework to illustrate how music and its semiotic knowledge for DJs, musicians, and audiences point to how Black, brown, and queer communities reconfigure culturally meaningful sound economies through (EDM) production. In other words, understanding how remixing sound bytes of Memphis singer and reality tv show actress warning a solicitor off of her property works alongside the Philly club music rhythmic motif. Indeed, I wish to point to the longstanding routes of music production within the Afrodiasporic cultural matrix highlighting the antiphonic and dialogic relationship within and between communities (Gilroy 1993, 79).

What is at stake is understanding that minoritarian agents create lives of pleasure in the everyday for themselves and their communities. Thus, the growing literature on the politics of pleasure and the erotic as a theoretical paradigm allows me to analyze how these communities interact and experience space, one another, and music. Pleasure and the erotic, as retooled by Black feminists, addresses the ways Black women and femmes' "complex, messy, sticky, and even joyous negotiants of agency" are "intertwined with [the] pain from the compromised space [that] [B]lack women's sexuality occupies within society" (Morgan 2015, 36). In her ethnography, *Scandalize My Name: Black Feminist Practice and the Making of Black Social Life* (2016), Terrion Williamson highlights the quotidian ways Black women embody Black feminist practices through different methods of community creation and sustenance that challenge the notion that Black women are solely defined by their experiences of oppression. Specifically, she engages with the ways Black folks self conceptualize to "consider [B]lack social life from the vantage point at which it is lived, rather than at which it is merely viewed or policed or looked in on occasionally" (2016, 15-16). Similar to Snorton, Williamson describes how Black women

manifest “loopholes of retreat” (Roach 2019, 76) – or strategies of creating spaces of solace, refuge, and affirmation – through the creation and consumption of black cultural products such as music, literature, art, and film, which provide representations and narratives that affirm their identities and experiences. They can also be seen in forming intimate networks and relationships that provide emotional support, understanding, and solidarity. Thus, my particular engagement in Black feminist thought is based on how DJs (with specific attention to Black queer femme DJs) maintain Black social life.

During my early stages of fieldwork, when I was establishing fieldsites and relationships therein, an interlocutor expressed their gratitude for my interest and documentation of their music scene. Looking back, this gesture of appreciation marked my invested interest in archiving dance music scenes. To accomplish this, I have adopted oral histories to round out my dissertation project further. Moreover, incorporating oral histories provides further background and rationale to aesthetic musical choices and means of community building. Secondly, these oral histories document the lived experiences of groups “hidden from history” (Perks 1998, ix). As such, these oral histories seek to empower queer of color nightlife communities “through the process of not only remembering, [but also and most importantly] reinterpreting the past, with an emphasis on the value of the process as much as historical product” (Ibid) or rather the historical information created therein. Moreover, oral histories from minoritarian subjects are likened to traditions of folk narratives that are imbued with semiotic socio-cultural idioms and community-held sentiments (which are present in interviews with interlocutors). However, critical race, media, and information scholars remind us to avoid the representational traps and material dangers of documenting vulnerable communities – race (Lindsey 2017), citizenship (Young &

Gilmore 2014), gender/sexuality (moore 2021, Sundén 2023), etc. – during a time of increased digital hyper-surveillance (Blas 2014, Birchall 2021, de Vries 2019).

Of course, for oral histories to be generative, interlocutors must feel a sense of comfortability which, in my case, was established through perceived shared positionalities. That is, my positionality as a Black woman helped me relate or at least empathize with the women, femmes, and thems I interviewed. On the other hand, my sexual orientation, gender identity, and socioeconomic status as a graduate student may have contributed to hesitations and, in some cases, refusal by my interlocutors and community members. Thus, this “outsider/within” (Hill Collins 1986) position created challenges in collecting oral histories but also presented reflexive opportunities to consider this project’s *raison d’être* and the limitations of conducting research in queer communities as a cis-gendered heterosexual woman.

With this in mind, I constructed my questions based on my experiences as an oral historian for a project archiving the life histories of Black LGBTQ elders. Moreover, the questions constructed for this project center less on the historical product and more on how interlocutors experienced pivotal events leading them to electronic dance music scenes in Los Angeles. In doing so, I attempted to align this project with a corpus of embodied knowledge, the haptic and sensational, to present my interlocutors as fully articulated subjects moving through time. As a result, some accounts span anywhere from three to six sessions. In some cases, interlocutors are older and have more experiences to share.

In contrast, others may be shorter because of the interlocutor's age and because recalling sensory aspects can be intimate and sometimes traumatic. However, my experiences as lead interviewer for the oral history project helped me recognize when and where to give interviewees space to explore what speaks to them. Thus, some topics and questions were more generative

than others. These topics include: focus on family/early childhood, (music) educational experiences, early adulthood, coming out, finding community, entries into queer nightlife, learning to DJ, and experiences working in nightlife industries. With this in mind, I highlight generative and more unique sections of these interviews throughout the dissertation. At the same time, I place more similarly articulated sections in conversation with one another in the ethnographically heavy chapter three.

The oral histories represented in this work are best understood as being a part of a living archive. That is an *ongoing* set of practices and environments connecting the organization, curation, and memory transmission with present-bound creative, performative, and participatory processes (Sabiercu 2020). As such, my collection of oral histories should be viewed as a partial account of the scene in question or the life history of those interviewed. Many factors, such as the age, scene experience, and social position of those interviewed, varies and, thus, color the multifaceted history of an equally diverse scene. Indeed, my interest lies in how the interviewed individuals participate in these scenes, how they create music, and how electronic dance music allows them to connect. Therefore, this project is not a *complete* life history of those interviewed or even a historical account of the queer scenes of color, but rather a detailed account of the subjective experiences of moving through critical events which led interlocutors to electronic dance music and the queer communities of color in Los Angeles. Indeed, even such access to the experiences of finding community is markedly intimate, and in some cases, interviewees rescinded such portions of interviewees, which I have respected. Nonetheless, what I have included in the ethnographic and oral history chapter presents enough personal background to contextualize how and why electronic dance music is used to build community in nightlife music spaces.

To piece these stories into a holistic picture of a scene and community, I look to the work of oral and memory historians Alessandro Portelli (2006), Tina Campt (2009), E. Patrick Johnson (2008), Michele Trouillot (2015), and Sadiya Hartman. Precisely, Hartman (2019) and Portelli (1998) orient me to the importance of *critical fabulation* to fill in the gaps of minoritarian experiences left out by the official histories and narratives. Therefore, *critical fabulation* in this project's context combines my interviewees' oral accounts with the historical record to reveal speakers' relationship to their personal history and noted events (Ibid, 67). On the other hand, Johnson's (2008; 2018) oral history projects of Black same-gender-loving men and women in the American South also influence the analysis of these interviews. My analysis of these interviews is less concerned with correcting the historical record because, in doing so, these accounts are placed with the burden of redressing systemic erasures of minoritarians solely on the individual accounts presented here.

Moreover, such an attempt would also limit the generative interpretations by other scholars, community members, and even interviewees themselves. Instead, I align my interest with Johnson, who views oral histories as “validation[s] of the narrator’s subjectivity,” which illustrates how “the matrix of materiality, memory, subjectivity, performance, and imagination and experience culminates in oral history performance” (Madison qtd in Ibid). And in doing so, these memory accounts represent quotidian forms of theorizing as explained in common queer of color critiques and Black feminists alike. However, it would be naïve not to acknowledge how this oral history project redresses narratives surrounding sexual and racialized minorities within electronic dance music. Therefore, my examination also adopts Johnson’s emphasis on performance ethnography to focus on the “meanings and symbols embedded in the act of storytelling” (2008, 8). Adapting this methodology gives me room to reflexively theorize about

my participation in witnessing and validating these stories. With this in mind, I edited the textual translations of these oral history accounts to minimize everyday speech fillers such as “like” and “you know” to aid in the reading flow. Thus, these translations are best understood as archival copies rather than source original/archival masters.

Given the long documented history of institutional pathologization and criminalization of racialized communities, the documentation of sexual minorities within Black and brown communities calls for a mindful approach. For minority subjects outside of identity-based institutions, archives hold limited representations of these communities due to the archive’s alignment with surveillance agencies (i.e., government, law enforcement, news) that overdetermine the criminality, sexual deviance, and alternative family formations of racial and sexual minorities. As a result, the willingness to be part of an institutional, even “official,” record seems inconceivable and, at worst, outright dangerous. Indeed, as many scholars have highlighted, the perfunctory assimilation of “other” in institutional archives to the archive can be more harmful than intended. This is partly due to cultural practices outside the purvey of White Christian-derived laws and morals.

With this in mind, invisibility and overdetermined categories are turned on its head by overloading racist, homophobic, classist, and sexist misconceptions to hide true intentions or sense of self. Thus, an “opacity” of the surface becomes a way to protect oneself and the community from overdetermination by acting as a veil from the canopic reach of various surveillance agencies. In short, opacity is a minoritarian practice because “it allows for the possibility of existing with difference without mandating transparency” (Musser 2018, 13). Similarly, gossip, “T,” or *chisme* serve as a valuable resource for historical knowledge, idiomatic transmission, and *intracommunal* relations. This is especially important considering the

transmission of folk histories that scholars such as Zora Neale Hurston (1935) and Alex Haley (1998) have illustrated through their oral history projects. Moreover, I consider Deborah Vargas's concept of "*archisme*," a portmanteau of archive and *chisme*, which "acknowledges the hearsay murmurs, and silent gestures" that point to a minoritarian mode of knowledge production (2012, 56). As such, I see this as a necessary tool in documenting minoritarian communities whose "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990, xiii) are networks of information transmission that exist just below the surface of mainstream and official records.

Data Collection

This dissertation combines nearly six years within Black, brown, and queer electronic dance music scenes in London, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. I have attended various house parties, club events, festivals, seminars, and meetings during this time. In house parties and club events, I primarily played the active participant role as my primary goal in these spaces was to embody the experience of being with others and the music in the same space. On the other hand, general observations of the space were typically conducted periodically at the height (i.e., densely crowded), beginning, and end of events. As such, notes collected in situ tended to document first impressions or exciting occurrences, but more detailed fieldnotes were compiled the following day. After attending several queer and gender non-conforming prioritizing events, this method of fieldnote documentation was most appropriate, especially when I could be perceived as an outsider upon closer examination by queer and especially queer communities of color.

Moreover, dancing and keeping to myself, unless approached, along with my position as a perceived young Black woman, provided a sense of ubiquity while occupying these spaces. In fact, when attending an event with my queer family members, my cousin and I were mistaken as

a couple in passing. Despite being heterosexual, there were many occasions when I was granted informal interviews to gain information on big players, events, and general sentiments about the state of queer-of-color nightlife on the strength of being both Black and a woman/femme. On the other hand, there were occasions when this was not enough. At events where ticketing prices are tiered on the level of self-identification, I always pay full price as a practice of (tasteful) and subtle transparency and as a means of not taking up space (a critique often heard in regards to heterosexual women in queer spaces), and supporting programming by and for queer and queer people of color. On another occasion, I attended another event with my cousin and their group of friends, where I was asked how I identified and was instructed to pay full price. Though in my experience, asking attendees how they identify at the door is not a typical practice and leads me to wonder if, at this particular event, I was clocked⁸ as a reminder for whom the space is meant. Although, opinions on the importance of self-identification tend to vary within the community and point to tensions about opinions on gender presentation across (gender and generation). For example, when I discussed this occurrence with another cousin (cis-gender gay), he pointed out that the supposed ethos of these events is that the person comes first and their gender and sexual identity come second. Moreover, although he feels that nonqueer people should not take up space in these discussions, he nevertheless thinks that the intersections in which Black women, regardless of sexual orientation, exist should be treated more nuanced when discussing their presence within the queer spaces. Also, the adherence to tiered ticketing would depend on

⁸ Merriam Webster, The use of *clock* to mean “notice” or “realize” seems to conflate the function of clocks with that of devices of detection[...] *The New Partridge Dictionary of American Slang* attributes a date of 1929 to a sense meaning “to catch sight of or notice something or someone,” with later senses applying to gambling (watching opponents closely for tells in poker) ...] A particular use of *clock* pertaining to the trans community also carries that connotation of detection, referring to the action of recognizing another person as transgender.

whether the event catered to specific ethnic groups (e.g., Black queer or non-Black queer communities).

In any case, attending with interlocutors to smaller events aided in ingratiating me into the space as an observer and occasional participant. In the case of DIY club events, festivals, and seminars, my presence as a cisgender heterosexual was less noticeable (or rather unimportant), and documenting (via photos and videos) was considerably less offensive, especially if its purpose was to be used for social media. This is primarily because in “underground” DIY events, it is a common practice for attendees to record the space by “tagging,” a method of generating and organizing metadata uploaded on social media platforms, which helps generate engagement, gain visibility, and promote events for collectives and promoters using social media (Garcia 2019). Therefore, adhering to this social contract, when appropriate, further developed the rapport between myself and my interlocutors.

In line with standard methods of ethnomusicological methodology, semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to explain the reason behind their answers. In doing so, interviewees give insight into their worldviews and motivations. Additionally, it is easier for participants to speak to their positionalities and how it influences decision-making for themselves, their art, and the spaces they wish to curate for others. The questions center around interviewee experiences within their DJing, race, gender, sexual orientation, and dance music communities. Moreover, interrogation along these modalities will illustrate how participants view themselves within the various identity groups they belong to and participate in. Lastly, these questions also reveal their motivation and considerations during their music-making processes.

To list all the ways COVID-19 has reshaped the design and implementation of my ethnographic project could be a project in and of itself. In the Winter of 2020, I was awarded a travel grant that would allow me to spend a third of my fieldwork year in New York City the following fall. However, when traveling and the world was shut down due to the Stay in Place orders, I, like many other graduate student researchers (Cyr 2020), was forced to reconfigure my project and its execution. I planned a multi-site ethnography in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. However, I was forced to temper my project and expectations to Los Angeles's queer of color communities and historiography. As a result, the participation portion of the participant observation was dwarfed by the observation during my fieldwork year in 2020-2021.

Much of the community-making I witnessed this year occurred online through social media websites and various video streaming platforms. Luckily, sociology, queer, feminist, and media studies scholars have illustrated how marginalized communities have utilized social media to coalesce online communities, create queer utopias in cyberspace, and even explore new modes of temporality. Indeed, Cavalcante (2019) explores how queer communities create “vortexes,” or spaces for alternative forms of community and belonging because of their fluid and open character. And as a result, these utopias have a high potential for transformation and resistance to dominant social forms because they constantly evolve to facilitate experimentation, playfulness, and exploration. Regarding multimedia, Cho (2015) discusses how users' engagement with sound, using audio files, music videos, and other forms of sonic content to create new modes of queer cultural production and to imagine new forms of queer experience.

In the case of people of color, and more specifically millennial-aged Afrodiasporic communities on Twitter, also known as Black Twitter, is a testament to the collective power of social media and their crucial role in shaping contemporary political and cultural discourse since

the onset of the #BlackLivesMatter movements. Marc Lamont Hill (2018) argues that Black Twitter has become a vital space for Black people to engage with issues of race, power, and social justice and that it has played a crucial role in creating new forms of social and political activism, allowing people to share information, organize protests, holding those in power accountable and pushing for social change. In his discussion about the Black counter-publics on Twitter, he points to how Black communities shape public discourse around issues like police violence, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the representation of Black people in the media. Additionally, Rasool's (2019) examination of new forms of Pan-Africanism created by millennial-aged users on Black Twitter challenges traditional notions of Blackness and Africanness. That is, utilizing site functionalities such as hashtags to aggregate and share information and creating new memes and cultural practices that reflect the experiences and perspectives of Black millennials. Moreover, Black Twitter users adopt and share Afrodiasporic linguistic expressions – vernacular language and code-switching – that draw on African and Western cultural traditions to challenge dominant notions of "proper" English.

Indeed, even with the limitless possibilities presented in online spaces, unique challenges are still faced by people of color and queer communities. For example, information and Black feminist scholar Safiya Noble's extensive work on search engines highlight how systemic racism and other forms of discrimination are built into cyberspace. In her work, *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018), Noble argues that search algorithms built into services like Google are not neutral but rather are deeply influenced by social, cultural, and economic biases, which are, in part, because these search engine algorithms are often based on incomplete or biased data sets, which can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misinformation. And more troubling, she presents

how these search engines have a powerful influence on our perceptions of reality in that most users often assume that the information presented online is objective and unbiased.

Despite all this, many event programmers responded to the Pandemic in the same ways as the rest by adopting virtual programming via live streaming on platforms such as Zoom, Facebook Live, Instagram Live, and Twitch. During the early stages of the Pandemic, many DJs, community leaders, programs, and collectives utilized various online platforms to host events. On the other hand, the sensorial observation of being together in the space was dampened. Thus, participating in virtual spaces often took the form of conversing in group chats and having yourself equally visible when appropriate. However, it is also important to note that these “underground” queer and queer of color networks, previous to the Pandemic, were already and all at once local, trans-local, and virtual by way of various social media and music dissemination websites (Bennet & Peterson 2004). Therefore, cyber-fieldwork (Lysloff 2003, Madrid 2008) was a generative method to learn and discover networks, knowledge production, and esoteric norms within these communities. To further embed myself, I participated in social media discussions about electronic dance music and subscribed to local event listservs. Additionally, I immersed myself in the social media networks of DJs, event producers, fans, and community activists. Moreover, attention was also dedicated to music dissemination platforms where musicians, producers, and DJs circulate their music accessibly and with a reduced risk of copyright infringement.



Figure 4. Screen capture of Nation X party held virtually | Courtesy of Nation X

Chapter 1

Historiography of the Undercommons: (Re)Locating Black Queerness in the (Electronic) Dance Music Archive

“There is a significant intellectual divide between the study of black music and the study of American popular music. Not unlike racial segregation, black cultural practices and popular culture are treated as if they are mutually exclusive categories of analysis. For many cultural critics, once a black cultural practice takes a prominent place inside the commodity system, it is no longer considered a black practice it is instead a ‘popular’ practice whose black cultural priorities and distinctively [B]lack approaches are either taken for granted as a ‘point of origin,’ an isolated ‘technique,’ or rendered invisible [... T]he category ‘dance’ music has been a particularly slippery space in which [B]lack music has been linked to technological effects rather than [B]lack cultural priorities [... T]he four major contemporary black dance forms disco, hip hop, Hi-NRG, and house [music] as the bases for his argument regarding the way in which technology is made funky and the community-based nature of these forms without one reference to black cultural priorities, black musical traditions, or black people. He makes no mention of black practitioners and the possibility that these dance artists are using sampling technology to articulate black approaches to sound, rhythm, timbre, motion, and community [...] His erasure of the overwhelmingly black approaches to music embodied in disco, hip hop, and house [music] is at best a pernicious case of the anxiety of influence and at worst contributes to a body of cultural studies that has not yet confronted black popular presence other than as a stylistic effect ready for white popular consumption.” (Rose 1994, 83-85)

Cultural amnesia is the collective forgetting of events, communities, and customs. New attitudes, opinions, and customs frequently fill the lapse in a collective memory that normalizes the erasure of specific facts from older generations. As a result, certain historical narratives are created and reproduced in this process. This chapter touches on the discussion of misremembering Black and Black queer communities in music scholarship and archives. I first discuss archival belonging for minoritarian communities by examining the archival documentation and collection of Black queer communities. I then discuss the temporality of music archives by directing attention to how identity-based music archives combat demographic shifts within music traditions. This section also seeks to fabulate how archives can redress the erasure of Black and other racialized sexual minorities by presenting possible solutions to adjust

current archiving models and practices. Lastly, I offer two archives that document queer and nonwhite dance communities.

As a musical expression born from the Black queer dancefloors in various American urban centers, EDM music has shared most of its aesthetics and historical trajectories with other Black musical idioms. Since garage and house music started on the curtails of disco, much of its rhythmic and instrumental ornamentation is mediated electronically through drum and sample kits. Even today, many genres of EDM are in constant dialogue with contemporary African diasporic music cultures, from practices (e.g., sampling, the use of turntables, and electronic instrumentation), to more “traditional” Black popular genres (e.g., R&B, Carioca Funk, Dancehall, and Rap). Although EDM is a pastiche of popular music genres inside and outside the established Black musical canon, Black musicianship is a principal element.

Nevertheless, EDM’s status as a form of popular Black music is not well known to listeners of younger generations. Indeed, EDM is overrepresented by white European males who play electro-house, or “big room” house music, at music festivals and clubs. As the story goes, house music – arguably the first popular EDM genre – extended its reach globally by a group of regionally famous house music artists who toured Europe during the 1980s, the era marked as the Second Summer of Love. Ten years later, white Britons became the face of house music through acid house during the rave culture of the 1990s. By the turn of the twentieth century, house music returned to the American mainstream, with white Europeans at the principal center of the industry.

Indeed, three historical events in the 1990s would ultimately change the politics and overall perception of EDM’s function in mainstream audiences. Starting in the mid to late 1980s, the acid house movement – created by the Chicago-based African American group Phuture –

entered Europe and influenced new generations of British, Dutch, German, and Belgian DJs who created new EDM genres. These DJs were affected by the African American DJs playing techno in Detroit and the dub and soundsystem cultures of British Jamaicans (Jones 1995).

Consequently, trance, house music, and techno became fixtures within predominantly white heterosexual club scenes, and the music subsequently departed from its queer and African American sensibilities (Rietveld 1998, 46). Moreover, the discursive shifts in European dance music scenes muted the liberatory politics central to the Black queer underground scenes in the US. This was especially the case in the Dutch house music scene, where they envisioned dance music scenes as escapist youth culture that "has no messages and gives no comfort" (Ibid 146). Ethnomusicologist and dance music enthusiast Hildegonda Rietveld speculates that because the Dutch were not economically and socially disenfranchised, like the racialized queer communities, they did not view EDM as a haven (Ibid 143).

Upon seeing its popularity in Europe, record executives repackaged the dance music created by European DJs under the umbrella genre "rave music." They then resold it to the unknowledgeable American youths. Moreover, EDM's apolitical narrative is vital given the prevalence of Dutch EDM from the 1990s well into the 2010s. Additionally, the proliferation of British dance music magazines, such as *i-D*, *The Face*, and *Mixmag* on both sides of the pond, further disseminated this perception of EDM (Ibid 59). Lastly, the AIDS epidemic effectively diminished EDM's founding generations of queer DJs of color whose presence could have pushed against EDM's lack of politics. Those lucky enough to survive joined EDM's straight and

whiter scenes or pop-fueled circuit parties⁹ that notoriously center white "masc" identifying¹⁰ men (Reynaldo 2016). As a result, the more radical countercultural principles were decentralized in EDM.

With EDM firmly associated as party music with a large following of white cis-gendered men, marginalized groups such as, women, people of color, and queer people of color began critiquing the material realities in contemporary mainstream scenes. In the last five years, journalists outside of EDM industries report the "canyons" between male and female DJs (Haven 2016), racist door policies (Cliff 2015), and institutions distancing themselves from sexual minorities to avoid "confusing EDM event goers" (Brown 2016). These incidents are symptomatic of the overwhelmingly straight white men in executive positions of music institutions, such as club management, record labels, journals, and festival committees. In turn, white DJs are disproportionately hired and praised compared to their queer and non-white counterparts (@itsFAUZIA 2020).

Even critiques of the representational politics within EDM trigger "music purists" to react negatively. For example, DJ Mag posted a video (DJ Mag 2020) of racially diverse demonstrators dancing to house music in solidarity with the nationwide Black Lives Matter protests against the extrajudicial killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police. However, some fans focused their anger on a sign that read, "House Music is Black Music." In the comments, people expressed that "music doesn't have a race" and called for the DJ Mag page to stop "political sh****t." Despite others stepping in to explain how the sign serves as a reminder of

⁹ Commercial parties that often centered white masculine gay men

¹⁰ A term used to describe gender-conforming gay men.

house music's history, those who were angered defaulted to the universalist rhetoric to justify their responses. And in doing so, it perpetuates the apolitical ethos that decenters social differentiation within EDM.

On the other hand, the Black American youth often fail to recognize house music, garage, techno, or any other EDM genre as a part of the “traditional” Black musical canon. The gentrification of these genres, along with the general representation of EDM, has and continues to alienate Black youth. The explosion of gangsta rap in the mid-1980s, coupled with the power of industry marketing, dominated the attention of Black youth. However, this erasure also manifests within the Black community, most visibly in the music shows honoring Black artists, such as the BET and Black Music Honors. Even the casual mention of current Black artists in EDM, let alone the importance of foundational artists such as Frankie Knuckles, Jesse Saunders, and Vince Lawrence, draw mild interest among Black twenty-somethings.

The construction of historical narratives hinders the “mainstream” and the (heterosexual) Black community’s awareness of EDM’s queer of color origins. EDM’s historical narrative curates specific stories, perspectives, and collectively accepted events. As narratives often reflect society’s cultural, economic, and political orientations, the most accessible historical narratives of house music emplace black and other queer people of color (QPOC) in the past tense. Specifically, these groups are viewed as relics fundamental to the start of house music and EDM, but not in their current state. As dance music scholar Luis-Manuel posits, a curious fan may find the origins of dance music but is “not likely to be aware of what that same crowd [of QPOC] is doing now, in another part of the city” (Garcia 2014). The historical narratives surrounding EDM presently have consequences for Black, Black queers, and other QPOC who never stopped participating in these music cultures.

Petra Rivera-Rideau's concept of emplacement highlights how both mainstream music industries and marginalized communities make sense of their place in the cultural and historical landscape. In her interrogation of race, place, and identity in Puerto Rico, Rivera-Rideau examines how the country's racial democracy narrative that emphasizes the island's mixed-race population to the detriment of Afro-Puerto Ricans because it obscures the persistent racial inequalities that exist in different regions of the island. At the same time, emplacement is not necessarily a static or fixed concept. In turn, Afro-Puerto Ricans living in racially coded places have created a sense of belonging and identity, such as Loiza, the "heart of Puerto Rico's Black culture." Therefore, emplacement allows individuals and communities to find ways to assert their presence and negotiate their place within society in historically hostile or unwelcoming spaces.

Historical anthropologist Ann Stoler (2002, 2010) expands the discourse on history as sites of cultural production by analyzing the role of archiving. She examines how record keeping, as a practice, is inherently biased, especially when curated by certain members of society who will privilege specific social categories and perspectives. Most poignantly, she argues that archiving should be treated as an ethnographic study rather than the truth because documentation is influenced by popular opinion and culture. In conjunction with Garcia's quote above, the construction and acceptance of house music's historical narrative perpetuate the erasure of Black and Black queers currently within it.

The homophobia within the Black community, coupled with early EDM's queer association, marginalizes the contributions of Black artists to EDM more generally. In the case of house music, its conceptions within the Black community differ between generations. This was confirmed during an interview with an older musician who recounted his inspiration for producing house music:

“I have a DJ friend, Kristi Lomax, and she plays what they call soulful house [...] That was like the first house music where I was like: ‘This shit ain’t techno,’ you know. It don’t gotta be like gay people, you know that whole thing. It took the stigma away for me, you know. Especially like all Black men, like hear house music and think, ‘Oh that the gay music’ and they just automatically turn off and don’t listen”

Knowledge of house music among older and younger generations of African Americans house music is often viewed in opposition to Black heteronormativity. Interestingly, techno was also an EDM genre created by Black youths in Detroit. However, compared to house music, techno is stylistically more abstract and experimental, as its creators wanted “to alienate themselves from sonic identity and to feel at home in alienation” (Eshun 2003, 296). Coupled with the heavy influence of sci-fi, technoculture, and European electropop, which center on the white middle-class male subject, techno was not widely accepted in the Black community outside its locality. Although house music, techno, garage, and hip hop were all contemporaries with one another – and share many of the same tenements of Afrofuturism – Hip Hop became the *lingua franca*, or rather *musica franca*, of Black youth and popular culture as it reaffirmed the Black heteronormative male perspective.

Upon a further look, the erasure of Black queers within the Black community can be viewed as an *infrapolitic* or a means to protect themselves from the scrutinies of white heteronormative society. These *infrapolitics*, first articulated by James C Scott (1990), are the subtle and hidden ways the subordinate classes resist domination. These strategies occur below the radar of public discourse and are often hidden from view but are crucial to maintaining power by subordinates. As such, the ways subordinate classes use humor, gossip, sabotage, and other covert forms are the strategies the subaltern utilize to resist and undermine the power of those in authority. However, Kelley states that *infrapolitics* is a double-edged sword for oppressed communities in that they also reveal the dynamics of oppression within oppressed communities and shed light on the social, cultural, and political orientations of the community in question.

These collective orientations manifest into respectability politics – a common coping mechanism for anti-Black racism – which cause tensions about representing the community collectively. Consequently, when that collective representation is constructed using similar dynamics as the dominant group, oppressed communities will often replicate the same repressive structures (Cohen 1999). As Ferguson summarizes, the emerging Black middle class utilized respectability politics to position themselves as “the normative antithesis to deviant African American subjects” (Ferguson 2004, 145). Therefore “deviants,” such as the poor, sickly, and queer, within the Black community are not deemed representable.

Regardless of media or cultural expression, Black queerness is hidden in the historical narrative and unseen in collective representation. Indeed, Matt Richardson’s (2103) analysis of Black lesbian literature highlights how cultural memory is often limited to dominant narratives that privilege heteronormative, patriarchal, and white supremacist perspectives. Further, he illustrates how Black lesbian literature challenged cultural narratives in Black and dominant communities through the concept of *irresolutio* – a means of exploring and exploiting the limits of cultural memory. For Richardson, Black lesbian literature, such as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), utilizes irresolution by embracing ambiguity and fluidity to resist fixed categories of race, gender, and sexuality. As illustrated in the interview above, this artist’s candid response represents the two strikes against dance music with its association with queerness and whiteness, which are constructed as dialectically opposed to Black music. We can see examples of irresolution with suspected queer artists such as R&B singer Luther Vandross whose own silences around his sexuality and personal life created a mystery around him that helped fuel rumors and speculation among his fans (King 2000; Cohen 2017). Indeed, if queerness exists in the *irresolutio* of Black heteronormativity, then these

misrecognitions of Black queers could also be understood as a survival technique. On the other hand, these silences still marginalize Black queer communities and therefore comes as no surprise that EDM and the contributions of queer artists are inaudible signifiers in Black historical narratives.

On the macro level, the historical narratives perpetuating the silencing of Black queer signifiers resulted in cultural amnesia within the Black community and mainstream EDM industry. To conceptualize how extensive the damage among budding artists is, I interviewed a young Black EDM artist. Unfortunately, his knowledge of Black artists within EDM was limited to Flying Lotus and Kaytranada, DJs from the last ten years. Thus, this lapse in collective memory between generations in both Black and mainstream music communities presents a two-pronged issue for current Black queer EDM artists who face racialized homophobia. Since Black queers never stopped participating in house music once it “went mainstream,” why are straight white men still dominating the conversation? According to Bertman, just as the passage of time clouds memory, it also “psychologically and culturally distances our sensibilities from their intrinsic significance” (2000, 50). Indeed, it’s much easier to get away with shifting the demographic representation when the EDM industry introduces house music, detached from its original context, to a less knowledgeable audience.

It’s no coincidence that house music underwent gentrification while shifting from its original context to the mainstream. Other examples of Black music being coopted by white audiences in mainstream society most notably rock and roll. As the story often goes, white artists like Elvis and The Rolling Stones profited off selling blue-eyed soul versions of Black music. Ironically, decades later, white artists that dominate the Rock genre, who perpetuate its

gentrification by participating in it, feel indifferent towards the history and the consequences of its legacy on Black rock artists. As Jefferson aptly states:

“Future generations [...] will be taught that while rock may have had its beginnings among blacks, it had its true flowering among whites. The best black artists will thus be studied as remarkable primitives who unconsciously foreshadowed future developments.” (Jefferson 1973)

Indeed, what is at stake here, is the antiquating of blackness, the shrinking of its importance, and the disappearance of Black musicians in the mainstream. Indeed, this ambivalence to this entire process is made possible, in part, by treating history as a fixed product as opposed to an active reproduction of historically oppressive structures (Stoler 2002). The mechanisms of the music industry, through the political economy, perpetuates oppressive racist and homophobic structures. If the white-dominated music industry allows white artists to imitate Black artists and sell to white audiences, then profit margins can skyrocket. During my time in Chicago, this was a sentiment held by many Black DJs and artists.

It is also important to reiterate that cultural amnesia is predicated on the complicity of younger generations. Within EDM, the utopian rhetoric boasts inclusivity of all races and genders born from its original queer Black community. The rhetoric did not become meaningless as time passed, and the EDM moved towards a primarily white straight and male audience. Instead, the message was coopted and transformed into a tool to discourage any meaningful discussion on how the overrepresentation of the straight white male marginalizes Black queers and every other subjectivity within the EDM industry. I suggest that forgetting or, perhaps more apropos, ignoring eases the guilt of upholding racism and homophobia. Indeed, as Bertman explains, “[f]eeding on guilt or dwelling on hurt can only keep us from discovering the joys” of life (2000, 21). However, confronting the truth is detrimental to the oppressed and oppressor and facilitates a loss in diversity that characterizes EDM.

Furthermore, as EDM increased in commercialization, audiences from across different races other than the associated white male fan. In her article about Asian Americans in EDM festivals, Park analyzed how the increase in audience diversity coupled with EDM's egalitarian ethos reinforces whiteness within music festivals. Additionally, Park argues that the contemporary EDM industry reflects the binary process of white identity formation, "middle-class whiteness defined [*against*] lower-class blackness" (Park 2017, 72). In addition, I will also argue that EDM inherits its myth of humanism and liberal universalism (Hartman 1997, 116) from technoculture, which situates whiteness at the forefront of technology and progress to the detriment of blackness as backward (Nelson 2002, 1). Consequently, the liberal myth of idealized equality is fraught with racialized hierarchies, a legacy of European post-Enlightenment philosophy (Rollefson 2008, 89).

As cultural amnesia firmly grips most of the younger generation within the EDM community, symptoms have also spread to its senior artists. For my master's project, I wanted to understand how early Black house music DJs viewed the level of inclusivity within the current scene. During the "official" interviews, many presented that everyone – young and old, Black and white – participated and enjoyed house music because it crossed boundaries. However, conversations incurred during fieldwork revealed that although they had devoted Black fans, their younger fans were primarily white and male. In this instance, the transformed utopian rhetoric affects how Black DJs recognize the present, connect it with the past, and articulate a response.

In the older generation of house music artists, their narratives of recollection and events are the most poignant. When discussing the current state of house music, these musicians often focused on the racial gentrification of artists and fans but did not mention the lack of queer

artists. Their narratives' mentions of queer spaces were absent even within the collected oral histories. How could this be if they were contemporaries to gay artists who often played in queer spaces? A closer look into the history of house music reveals that although it started in Black and brown queer spaces, straight Black men became interested and attended these LGBT clubs. For example, Jesse Saunders is a straight Black man, credited as the first artist to print a house music vinyl (Brewster & Broughton 1999, 327). At the time, Saunders was already a well-known DJ in Chicago and, to gain fame further and the affections of young women, produced a house music track capitulating him to stardom. Additionally, I would argue that Saunders is the turning point for house music's straightening.

What of the original Black queer artists, audiences, and fans within house music?

Unfortunately, many of them were ravaged by the HIV/AIDS epidemic or have died to poor living conditions associated with communities living on the margins of society. As dance performance scholar Buckland summarizes how HIV/AIDS disrupted the gay club scene:

“[I]n the 1970s, gay clubs and parties were a form of initiation into a gay life and that older gay mentors showed younger gay men not only how to own their sexualities, but also how to party: to be ‘glamorous’ and ‘expressive.’ There were now fewer gay mentors, and he regretted the passing of that time of mentorship [which] AIDS removed almost an entire generation of gay men from a gay social lifeworld.” (2002, 163)

Although house music is not a new genre, its status as an “underground” culture in a marginalized community means that many original artists and audiences from these are most vulnerable to structural violence, and the first-hand accounts are scant. Additionally, the disproportional infection of AIDS among the Black queers further diminished their “social lifeworld.” Indeed, the “disappearing evidence” by way of members from the original community means that fragments of the story are missing (Bertman 2000, 46).

Indeed, pivotal disappearances such as the place and spaces for queer and Black communities. In examining Black public spaces in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Gary Perry (2016) argues that these spaces were disproportionately affected by systemic neglect and erasure by highlighting how rebuilding efforts and gentrification favored wealthy, predominantly white residents while marginalizing and displacing the Black community. Perry also illustrates how the erosion of Black spaces leads to the loss of community networks, cultural traditions, and economic opportunities for the city's Black residents. On the other hand, Bitterman & Hess's edited volume examines how the disappearance of queer neighborhoods may lead to increased stress caused by sexual stigma and prejudice (2021, 26).

This leads to *the dilemma* which haunts all historians. How, then, can the story be pieced back together? In attempting to critique history, which is written by the victor, new ways of archiving must be implemented. In archiving, Stoler (2002) suggests treating records from a bottom-up approach. To put it differently, she argues that record keeping, as practice, is inherently biased when done by certain members of society (Ibid, 2). Along this vein Pearson critiques the way scholars have seemingly forgotten the power dynamics at play in the production of history and the impossibility of subjects working against institutions (Pearson 1999, 5). Certainly, this impossibility of Black queers still participating in EDM despite the assault of AIDS and generations of whitewashing. Just as Trouillot's historical ethnography of the Haitian Revolution revealed how European and Euro-American primary sources (newspaper articles, colonial documents, etc.) from the nineteenth century were written with bewilderment of the enslaved Haitians successfully organization and executing a coup d'état (Trouillot 1995, 84), scholars researching minorities in EDM must be careful as to how they analyze these communities.

Additionally, interiority, as an analytic and continual process to (re)establish humanity for Black queer and other queer communities of color, is critical when discourses around their identity are only constructed vis-à-vis the structures of their oppression. Thinking through the concept of interiority sheds light on the other, or rather *the rest of*, experiences that constitute the lives of minoritarians. Indeed, focusing on the *rest of* minoritarian's experience not only gives depth to their personal lives, but also serves as a site of possibility to reinstate narratives of agency within previously silenced subjects. The importance of this possibility must be reiterated because public conceptions of Black, brown, and queer subjects – from surface-level consumption of reality television to public policy – are built upon centuries of philosophical and epistemological violence. The archive serves as a prime example of how the silences of minoritarians are built into the historiographic conceptualization of their subjecthood.

Examining the scholarship of Black feminists working on archival records of enslaved Africans and African Americans will further explain the effectiveness of recovering minoritarian interiority in hostile archives. Indeed, reading against the archive to reclaim Black women's humanity is the goal of Black feminist scholars. From Afropessimism to the temporal construction within critical fabulation, invested scholars bring different issues to the forefront. Specifically, their concerns are focused on the ethics of these projects in speculating on behalf of the silent subjects within the archive. In thinking of how Black women are presented in slavery archives, records are almost always not written for them, let alone by them. As the saying goes, "history is written by the victor," and so is historiography. Therefore, what must be considered is how archiving and historiography – even with the advent of Black feminist methods – are still recapitulating violence on the historical subject because the institutional epistemology of the

archive is built on and by structures of oppression. With this in mind, scholars subsequently contemplate if and how to center the archival subject outside the archive.

Specifically, Hartman introduces critical fabulation, a subjunctive analytic, a concept that combines archival, historical, critical theory, and speculative narrations to fill the silence. First introduced in “Venus in Two Acts” (2008), Hartman introduces critical fabulation as a means to give silenced archival subjects, who had no control over their representation, a voice and perspective. In fact, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2016) is a testament to how scholars can utilize speculative narration to restore humanity to the silenced through a relationality that is both interpersonal and intertemporal, therefore, subverting the idea of silence, as a colonial methodology, into a generative project. However, Hartman’s primary contention with applying critical fabulation to the archive and the archival subject lies in the inherently political nature of recuperation projects. If the only condition of critical fabulation is the personal speculation of what archival subjects may have thought about their experience, then what must be considered is *who* is taking up these projects and *to what end*. Hartman points to the flipside of these recuperation projects, which is the failure to create a “romance of resistance”¹¹, given the authority placed on Western historiography and its subsequent archival practice.

Redressing the Archive

How can music archives better serve minoritarian communities? This endeavor is important because choosing where to donate collected ethnographic material – interviews, photos, recordings, and ephemera – is not given much consideration by scholars. In other words, collected research material is given to an archive with defining features, such as the topic, area of

¹¹Lila Abu Lughod 1990, 41-42 “there is perhaps a tendency to romance resistance, to read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated. By reading resistance in this way, we collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the workings of power.”

specialty, or community. However, in the case of communities existing across multiple axes of identity and areas of study – such as queer African Diasporic communities within electronic dance music, whose roots emerge and are informed by African American music, LGBTQ history, and modern dance cultures – the choice is imbued with political implications. This conversation is especially poignant as COVID-19 has financially crippled fragile creative ecologies that could have once documented themselves using "traditional" archival platforms and processes. By analyzing the representations of queer musicians of color in institutional, community, and digital archives, I hope to open a conversation about making music archiving more rhizomatic for minoritarian communities.

Community archives these depositories both address and redress narratives surrounding the pathologizing and dehumanization of ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities in historical archives. These archives are typically run by and for community members to ensure a more authentic and balanced representation. As such, community archives can prioritize the documentation of the lived experiences of their members. This means they can prioritize the creation of records in languages and formats that are accessible to members of the community, including oral histories and multimedia materials. They can also prioritize collecting and preserving documents that might not be seen as "valuable" or "historically significant" by larger institutions, such as family photographs, diaries, and other personal records. Community archives can also serve as a site for community building and activism by bringing people together to document their histories. These archives can help to strengthen social bonds and create a sense of shared identity and purpose. However, the last three decades has absorbed identity-based archives into larger academic and government institutions. Indeed, archives such as the Schomburg Center for the Research in Black Culture and the ONE Archives were once

community archives acquired by larger public goods institutions such as the New York Public Library and the University of Southern California, respectively. For many community archives, having such prestigious backing brings resources.

Thus, there is ample opportunity for queer people of color to be represented in both archival institutions. In reality, the ONE Archive, despite having over six hundred collections, has somewhere around forty collections of Black queer communities. On the other hand, the Schomburg has a dedicated archive for Black queer communities, the In the Life archive (acquired in 2004), with at least two hundred collections, it holds the record of the largest in the United States. In fact, many collections cover Black queer communities in California. Indeed, one can assume that these communities feel an equal influence of their ethnic and sexual/gender identity on their lived experiences. However, in this case, we see a stronger connection to the ethnic community rather than the sexual or gender community.

Due to the critiques from historians, critical race, gender, and queer theorists, information studies have come a long way in combatting claims of neutrality and objectivity, especially within historical archives. Moreover, community and identity-based archives have magnified how "official" records misrepresent marginalized groups. Thus, remediation is achieved by inserting present claims of the past to highlight the different perspective(s) of the same era or event. Archives such as the Center for the Research of Black Music and the Modern Dance Music Research & Archiving Foundation play pivotal roles in preserving these legacies for their use in the present (Salkind 2018). Such recuperations will always be significant given hegemonic discourses such as white capitalist heteronormativity's ability to maintain itself. Indeed, my primary concern is how people of color, queer communities, and women become stuck in this

cycle of innovation, cooptation, and redress. With this in mind, how do we liberate identity-based archives from the burdens of (1) producing legitimacy and (2) redress?

Indeed, in the digital age, social media platforms such as Instagram have emerged as powerful tools for creating and disseminating visual content. One of the primary benefits of using social media for archival purposes is that it provides an accessible platform for those who may not have the resources or connections to traditional archival institutions. Social media allows people to document their lives and experiences and share them with a broader audience. This is especially important for communities that have been historically excluded from mainstream historical narratives. Using social media to archive their experiences, marginalized communities can ensure their stories are not erased or forgotten. Social media also offers a level of flexibility and immediacy that traditional archives may not be able to match, such as the sharing of multimedia content, such as videos and images, that can convey the nuances of a particular moment or experience.

Moreover, using social media for archival purposes can facilitate community building and collective memory as it has the potential to bring together people who may be geographically dispersed but who share everyday experiences or identities through share their stories that build a shared understanding of their history and culture. Sukhai Rawlins's (2021) article explores how Black artists, creatives, and scholars use Instagram to archive and represent Black interiority. She notes how Instagram has become a virtual space for Black artists and creatives to share their work and connect with audiences and allows for creating intimate and personal representations of Blackness that are often absent from mainstream media.

Additionally, Neumayer & Struthers (2018) note that by leveraging these platforms to document

and share their struggles, marginalized communities can create a powerful record of their experiences and demand accountability from those in power.

Understanding, and perhaps breaking, these cycles feels especially timely as civil rights movements spurred by the coupling of Black Lives Matter and the U.S.'s slow (i.e., inept) responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic have emboldened marginalized communities to disengage with the status quo. One such call is the #showmustbepaused, a music industry call to action started by Black music executives Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang after the extrajudicial killings of George Floyd by Minnesota Police. Thomas and Agyemang's mission statement reads the following:

“The music industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry. An industry that has profited predominantly from Black art. Our mission is to hold accountable the industry at large, including major corporations and their partners, who benefit from Black people's efforts, struggles, and successes. These entities must protect and empower the Black communities that have made them disproportionately wealthy in ways that are measurable and transparent” (Coscarelli 2020)

This enthusiasm has even trickled into the queer of color EDM ecosystems I follow on various social media platforms. However, it is essential to note that these grievances of exclusion and discriminatory practices within mainstream EDM industries have long been a contention within communities of queer DJs of color. With this in mind, music archives should collect digital materials on social movements from social media platforms. This is especially important for documenting queer creatives of color who maintain their communities and networks on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Bandcamp, and SoundCloud. Moreover, through these networks, DJs share flyers, mutual aid resources, music, and their opinions on the state of the macro music industries they belong.

On the other hand, there are practical and ethical implications when archiving social media content. Practical challenges such as archiving the dynamic nature of the ever-changing

and constantly evolving web and software applications mean that websites and phone applications archived today may not be the same as yesterday's (Brügger 2011). Therefore, archiving social media must be seen as a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Another challenge of archiving social media content is the issue of privacy because users often share personal information and sensitive data. However, Hockx-Yu (2014) suggests this can be mitigated by developing clear guidelines for collecting and using social media content, including obtaining consent from social media users before their content is archived and ensuring that sensitive information is redacted or anonymized.

Moreover, the right to internet privacy and personal data are germane to most, but especially marginalized communities who are disproportionately surveilled and censored, affect the archival potential of Instagram as a platform. For example, Middlebrook (2020) illustrates how Instagram's practices of shadowbanning and account suspension mediated by content moderation policies that identify and remove content that violates its community guidelines are biased against accounts belonging to queer, people of color, and sex worker communities. The combination of automated and human-assisted mechanisms that identify and remove "adult content" that violates Instagram's community guidelines is configured too broadly. Specifically, it fails to distinguish between explicit sexual content and sex-positive, body-positive expressions of identity and empowerment. Similarly, Instagram's policies against "hate speech" and "harassment" often fail to protect marginalized groups from targeted harassment and online abuse. Moreover, the lack of transparency and accountability around shadowbanning makes it difficult for affected communities to challenge or appeal Instagram's decisions.

As state subsidizations of public memory institutions continue to shrink and exacerbate the cost of maintaining archives, place added barriers to establishing community archives. Music

scholars and archivists must continue to work together to adopt new modes of archiving alongside creative networks that continually exist in financial precarity. This means that perhaps with much chagrin by formally trained archivists, widely accessible platforms such as Instagram may be the most readily accessible archive for those without institutional backing. With this in mind, I will finish this chapter by introducing archivists who have adopted Black feminist and womanist approaches to documenting queer and people of color in music networks across their cities.

The first is Map Pointz, an Instagram archive chronicling Southern California's Chicano rave and underground party scenes in the 1990s. Guadalupe Rosales, the founder, and curator, explains that her archival practice is “[g]uided by self-representation to create counter-narratives... of communities often under or misrepresented in official archives and public memory. With a participatory approach to her practice, she aims to celebrate the voices of others through their archives and memories.” (United Artists 2020). Further, Rosales has explained that her decision to use Instagram as her archival space is based on its accessibility and social aspects. Specifically, she believes the comments “are a huge part of the project because that’s where people learn and argue” (Pitcher 2018).

The Instagram account Blackarchives.co, which curates and shares historical photographs of Black people and communities – argues how this account serves as a counterpoint to dominant narratives about Black history, which often focus on trauma and oppression. Instead, @Blackarchives.co offers a nuanced and multifaceted view of Black history, emphasizing joy, community, and resistance. Additionally, artist Mickalene Thomas creates collages depicting Black women in intimate and domestic spaces. Thomas's work disrupts dominant cultural

narratives about Black women as hypersexualized objects and instead centers on Black women's experiences and desires (Rawlins 2021).

Honey Pot Performances, a self-proclaimed Afrodiasporic feminist collective based in Chicago that operates as the Chicago Black Social Culture Map, is a collaborative project with the Modern Dance Music Research and Archiving Foundation, local cultural historians, and cultural producers. Lastly, Sandra Oviedo, otherwise known by their archive Colectivo Multipolar, is a Chicago-based photographer and queer nightlife documentarian. As an avid dancer, Colectivo Multipolar frequently describes their work as documentation of their life because of their deep entanglements within the queer of color nightlife networks. Indeed, their entanglements run deep as Colectivo Multipolar is the sole documentarian for events thrown by the queer of color DJ collective TRQPITECA. As a photographer by trade, their archival practice is similarly entrenched with communities as their photo archive serves as both portfolio and talent showcase for their subjects. Specifically, Colectivo Multipolar works to spotlight the artists pictured by embedding hyperlinks to their professional portfolios, thus continuing the chain of resource sharing.

Chapter 2

Finding Glitter in the Rubble¹²: History of Fieldsite & Music Tradition

The story of queer of color nightlife in Los Angeles starts in the late 19th century at the parks and bars of downtown that hosted transient communities inherent in a newly admitted California. Firmly enmeshed within the Spanish Wild West, it was common to see Mexican gentry, Black and indigenous vaqueros, and American settlers filling saloons, gambling dens, stagecoaches, or roaming the streets. After all, initial Spanish forays into the Californian territory were accompanied by – and even led by Black people (enslaved and from the continent) – in the 1500s (Beasley 1919, 22). Moreover, nearly half of Los Angeles’s founders were of African descent, though the Black population largely miscegenated by the mid-1900s (Lapp 1977, 118). Fresh from the end of Mexican rule, Tongva, Kizh, Mexicans, and Afro-Mexicans witnessed a “rebranding” of their public social spaces to reflect the influx of white settlers manifesting their destinies. However, rebranding casualties such as renaming La Plaza Abaja to Pershing Square and Calle de Los Negros to Nigger Alley (Ibid) failed to deter the queer sociality that comes with mixing vaqueros, businessmen, and prostitutes. Saloons and cantinas were rife with cowboys whose same-sex intimacies, such as touching, bathing, and even kissing, pushed the times’ conventions of heteronormativity (Packard 2005, 56).

¹²The title is a nod to Eddy Francisco Alvarez’s (2016) article “Fining Sequins in the Rubble”



Figure 5. From left to right: Henry "Brother" Williams, Alena Lomax, Florence Cadrez, and Aristide Chapman, Los Angeles, 1940s. | Courtesy of the Walter L. Gordon Jr./William C. Beverly, Jr, Collection, UCLA Special Collection

The initial migration of (enslaved) African Americans to the West occurred during the gold rush (Williams 2022), their emancipation in 1865, their subsequent military conscription in the Frontier a year after (Williams 2020, 256), and the completion of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1887 led to an increased presence in California (Stanford 2010, 7). Figures such as Bidy These settlers' descendants, such as Henry "Brother" Williams, established the Brother's Rendezvous Nightclub, an after-hours jazz club on Central Avenue, the heart of the 1920s Black Los Angeles. Very little is known about the silk robe-wearing Williams and his communist-leaning lover, Astride Chapman. However, Brother's was known as a "secret temple of exotica" where all walks of life lounged and mingled while listening to Charles Brown, Art Tatum, Mabel Scott,

and Gladys Bentley, among others. Like most things by and of non-white and/or sexual minorities, these spaces operated as fungible counter publics hidden metaphorically and literally from the eyes and sensibilities of mainstream society. These dimly lit spaces teem with expansive possibilities and freedom otherwise denied in the white heteronormative publics.

Just east of downtown Los Angeles the Mexican-American and an immigrant community ravaged by the Great Depression and its subsequent unlawful policies spawned some of the first iterations of Chicana culture. Discriminatory policies such as illegal expulsions of Mexican Americans and discriminatory hiring policies led youth to gravitate toward the pachuco lifestyle, celebrating a uniquely Mexican-American counterculture. Seeing gratuitous representations of “Mexican juvenile delinquency,” Mexican American youths saw the pachuco counterculture as a medium to restore dignity and self-empowerment in the growing Anti-Mexican society of early & mid-1900s Los Angeles. Although made popular by men, las pachucas were not very far behind in challenging modes of gender, beauty, and sexuality of their traditional Mexican upbringing and the larger white society.

Their reputations as callejeras disrupted conceptions of homosociality, its place in male-coded publics, and lesbianism. Indeed, Ramírez explains that pachucas symbolized the generational shifts in Mexican-American identity, one that not only ascended to the newest fashion trends but one that was born of the increasing physical and social mobility of young women across the nation (2009, 50). These women were known to party to the popular music of their time and even roughhouse alongside their male counterparts. However, these gendered discretions were not unpunished, as parents strongly discouraged their daughters from this counterculture. Even laws prohibited women from wearing no less than three articles of women’s

clothing (Ibid, 70). Under these circumstances, imagining another queerer counterculture hidden in plain view of this dissenting youth is not hard.

In the 1970s, Asian Americans enjoyed an upward trend of economic stability and homeownership that was denied to previous generations. Specifically, after the landmark ruling of the 1948 *Shelley vs. Kraemer* case¹³ (334 U.S. 1), affluent middle-class families of color, such as Black Americans who began populating the Crenshaw, Watts, & Compton neighborhoods, and Chinese and Japanese Americans began moving into all-white neighborhoods around Los Angeles and Southern California. Silver Lake, in particular, served as architect Eugene Choy and Gilbert Leong's site to build Mid-Century modern homes for Asian Americans moving to this former racial covenant (Survey Los Angeles 2018, 48). In the following decades, and with the onset of queer leisure spaces after WWII, people of color faced racism despite their comradery in sexual orientation. This was no different for Asian Americans in the '60s and '70s, whose community was often scattered amongst ethnic bars, bathhouses, house parties, and cruising spots. Yet, neighborhoods such as Silver Lake would become one of the bastions for gay people of color who faced racism in white spaces on the Westside. Other spaces, such as Mugi's north of Little Armenia, New Faces on the East Hollywood and Silver Lake border, and Ken's River Club just west of Los Feliz, were similarly populated with queer Asian Americans and Latinx communities.

As for lesbians, Los Angeles hosted a variety of bars, lounges, and nightclubs well before World War II. Specifically, Faderman & Timmons explains that these clubs primarily reflected the glitz and glamour of their well-off Hollywood clientele to the detriment of the working-class and lesbians of color (88, 2009). However, with the onset of lesbians moving to Los Angeles for

¹³Real property deeds which prohibited the sale of property to non-Caucasians unconstitutionally violate the equal protection provision of the Fourteenth Amendment.

defense and military jobs during the 1940s, more working-class bars were established throughout the Southland. As such, more spaces were catering to specific ethnic groups in the coming decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Bars like the Redhead in Boyle Heights and the Plush Pony in El Sereno, which served the local Chicana communities, while The Star Room on the edge of Watts, and Arnie's and Dee's Merry-Go-Round in South L.A. were frequented by Black lesbians (Ibid, 92).

However, the disco era would allow queer communities of color to take charge of their culture and social spaces truly. Like other up-and-coming gayborhoods throughout the United States, West Hollywood became a bastion for Gay Liberation for those escaping their homophobic hometowns. However, this was to the detriment of Black, Brown, Asian, and women who experienced the brunt of discriminatory door policies such as multiple pieces of identification, dress codes, or population quotas that would flat-out deny them entry. As such, most gays and lesbians of color continued to frequent their local queer and mixed-gendered watering holes despite facing discrimination. In the two-pronged effort of creating a recession-proof business and inclusive leisure space, Jewel Thais-Williams bought a Mid-City haunt, Diana's Club, in 1973. Two years later acquired and renamed the entire building Jewel's Catch One. As the country's oldest and only Black lesbian-owned disco – a true “catch one, catch all space” – Catch One became a staple in Los Angeles's queer of color matrix and hosted the likes of disco queens such as Sylvester, Evelyn “Champagne” King, and Thelma Houston. Just four miles north, Eugene “Gene” La Pietra opened the doors to Circus Disco in 1974, responding to his African American friends being denied entry to the then-popular club Studio One in West Hollywood. Although La Pietra heavily promoted his club to Latin Angelenxs, Circus Disco became another mainstay to queer communities of color in the Southland area.



Figure 6. Los Angeles dance bar Jewel's Catch One. | Publicity image

In true Los Angeles fashion, many queer of color clubs and bars were established in underutilized commercial spaces such as strip malls, store-fronts, and warehouses to meet the diverse youth's disco craze. As a result, a largely underground underage disco scene developed within the city that was accessible via public transportation. Clubs such as Outer Limits, Other Side, Paradise Ballroom, Sugar Shack, and After Dark served as the matrix for Los Angeles's queer youths. And unlike the bars and nightclubs of West Hollywood, these spaces were both ethnically mixed and gender diverse. In fact, these youth clubs rivaled places like New York City's Studio 54, as it wasn't uncommon to see young Angelenos – who had not and, most likely, could not “come out” – experimenting with the sexual identities and gender performances. Club historian James Rojas compares the fluidity of these storefront disco clubs to the homonormative West Hollywood, recalling that,

“unlike the predominately male West Hollywood clubs, where buff men wore tight-fitting jeans and t-shirts, here diverse youth used fashion to explore their fantasies and bodies. Glitter babies or Hollywood Swingers, youth with their big hair, scarfs, baggies pants,

shoulder pads, and glitter make-up created an avant-garde fashion palette that ranged from Joan Crawford to David Bowie. Everyone stood high and mighty in their six-inch Fred Slatter platform shoes or perform shoes or platform tennis shoes.” (Ibid, 2016)

Indeed, clubs such as Gino’s II developed a reputation for their punk ethos, as its first iteration was a haunt for local punk bands¹⁴. This punk attitude was typical in underground discos because many had relaxed door policies, making it accessible to underage clientele. Moreover, having a mixed crowd allowed for setting the stage “come as you are” philosophy most often associated with club kid culture (Aguilar, 2004).

The accessibility of underground discos allowed Angeleno youths, gay and straight, to fully entrench themselves in the culture and the burgeoning DJ scene. Specific DJs during the mid to late 70s are Billy Long of Catch One, Michael Angelo of Gino’s II, Boris Granich, and “Swedish” Chris Modig of Marilyn’s Backstreet Disco. Billy Long, Catch One’s first and oldest resident DJ is considered to be instrumental in the club’s reputation for playing the most cutting-edge music (Dancing Pictures LLC, 2016). As the story goes, Long developed a taste for the burgeoning sounds of house music after seeing Chicago’s Ron Hardy¹⁵ play a set at Catch One (Arnold 2015, Electro Phunk 2020). Michael Angelo – proprietor and DJ of Gino’s II – has a mixed reputation for his DJing skills (Meraz, 2011, 58; Aguilar, 2004). However, his strength was his ability to play hidden gems and “rare imports” to the dancefloor (Ibid). Marilyn’s Backstreet Disco in Pasadena was a primarily underage dance club that briefly opened in the late 1970s. At the helm were European transplants Boris Granich and “Swedish” Chris Modig, who worked as interns at local radio stations such as KIISFM and KROQ. As such, they played not only the standard disco idioms (e.g., soul, R&B) but also contemporary genres of the time (e.g.,

¹⁴The original Gino’s burned down in 1977

¹⁵Ron Hardy lived in Los Angeles from 1977-1982 before returning to Chicago for a residency at the Music Box

Hi-NRG, new wave) (Mills, 2018; BackToDisco.com, 2003). These dance and underground music styles available to Los Angeles's youth would eventually lead to a new generation of DJs influencing the city's club soundscape.

Although a new generation was enamored by the technical and musical prowess of underground DJs, the turn of the decade would bring some dramatic changes to the cultural landscape. The shift from the 1970s liberal hedonism to the 1980s' conservative androcentricity was arguably ushered in as early as 1979 with the Disco Demolition Night. Hosted at Chicago's Comiskey Park, the night culminated in local radio personality Steve Dahl's "Disco Sucks" campaign, which he claims is aimed at the music industry's over-commercial and dissemination of disco (Dahl 1996). Scholars have pointed out that the anti-disco movement also responded to white America's growing exhaustion of various ethnic, gender, and sexual liberation movements (Frank 2007). This sentiment was further cemented by the Reagan administration's populist conservative movement (McGirr 2015).

In Los Angeles, the queer communities began seeing the effects of the AIDS/HIV epidemic. The first cases of AIDS amongst gay men in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City were reported in 1981, and no less than two years later, the number of known AIDS/HIV-related deaths jumped to the thousands, nearly all among gay men. It is not an exaggeration to say that queer communities, especially queer communities of color, were devastated by the AIDS/HIV epidemic. This was visible in various queer of color leisure spaces, especially in nightlife networks. Williams-Thais of *Catch One* recalls the time, "those pictures [referring to the club's hallway], when I would look down the aisle first, it was about 1/3rd of the folks missing, then about a 1/2, and then, eventually, 3/4ths" (Dancing Pictures 2016). By the mid-1980s, queer Black and brown communities were thoroughly organizing, exacerbated by the

government's nonresponse for nearly three years. Even local nightlife establishments pooled resources as these groups received little empathy, let alone aid in addressing the epidemic. For example, Gene La Pietra of Circus Disco alongside Thais-Williams, were part of the AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA), though the effectiveness of these white men-led projects and task forces for communities of color is of mixed opinion (OUTWORDS 2017a; OUTWORDS 2017b). As a result, several foundations, committees, subcommittees, and societies were established to address the AIDS/HIV epidemic in non-white queer populations in the mid-1980s and 1990s. The abuse of party drugs (e.g. heroin) also devastated queer of color nightlife and their subsequent representation in EDM. Indeed, some scholars argue that these events, in tandem, led institutions, individuals, and DJs to distance themselves and electronic dance music from its queer and queer of color associations (Salkind 2018).



Figure 7. APLA Procession | Courtesy of AIDS Project L.A.

However, just as queer underground appeared to be out for the count, the music helped to sustain and, in some cases, bring awareness. During the 1980s, queer communities rallied in

local club music institutions nationwide. For example, New York City's legendary Paradise Garage hosted one of the first HIV fundraisers (Francey 2016). Larry Levan, the progenitor of Garage, introduces dubbing the Jamaican studio art of effect manipulation (Veal 2007). Just a couple of states over in Chicago, Levan's protégé Frankie Knuckles begins his first residency at the Warehouse, where he begins synthesizing the stylistic characteristics of house music. Shortly after Knuckles's residency, Ron Hardy begins the second career residency at The Music Box. He expands upon the stylistic boundaries of house music by using more experimental non-music sounds (Thomas 2020). In the Bellville suburb, Kevin Saunderson and Derrick May, avid fans of Knuckles, formed a triage with euro synth enthusiast Juan Atkins to form the Bellville Three. These three would reconceptualize and reconfigure Kraftwerk and Yellow Magic Orchestra's krautrock and the funk of Parliament and Funkadelic to create Detroit techno.

In the mainstream, the music industry began slightly shifting its resources to adjust to the new era of "forgotten men" by establishing Music Television (MTV). Created in 1981, MTV became the mainstream music industry's product dissemination and promotion of music videos. Musically, the platform's primary goal was to showcase rock-based genres. However, disco and its subsequent industries released tracks and related genres well into the 80s. As a result, there was a dearth of American bands to fill the void disco left. Instead, the music industry sourced talent with British synth-pop acts, ushering in the "Second British Invasion." Ironically, disco music and gender-fluid club culture heavily influenced many bands and artists. This is because the anti-disco sentiment and movement failed to reach Europe allowing a more gradual phasing out and evolution of music after disco.

As such, these "post-disco" genres are typified by drum machines, synthesizers, and sequencers as made famous by Giorgio Moroder & Donna Summer's German-Italo-disco,

Evelyn “Champagne” King by way of boogie, Ryuichi Sakamoto and Afrika Bambaataa’s electro-funk, the funk of Cameo & Zapp, and Dead or Alive through New Wave. However, the popularity and emergence of these genres in Los Angeles during the 1980s overlap, as Tim Lawrence (2016) discussed. Specifically, the genres in heavy rotation were disco, Hi-NRG, new wave, rock-a-billy, ska, funk, electro, freestyle, and pop (Meraz 2008). Moreover, L.A.’s Black-owned records, such as SOLAR records, owned by L.A. native and music industry titan, Dick Griffey, helped curate the 1980s electronic soundscape of Black music in Los Angeles through acts such as Midnight Star, The Deele, and Klymaxx. And due to their success, subsequent Los Angeles-based labels - Tabu Records, Total Experience Records, etc. - similarly incorporated bass synthesizer lines, analog and digital keyboard chords, and steady drum machine beats into their music production (Brown 2010, 279).

However, it is essential to note that the 18 age and over clubs where these genres were played began disappearing (Rojas 2016), and in its place were the backyard and mobile DJ parties in East and South L.A. Despite holdouts in Hollywood and Mid-City (i.e. Circus Disco and Catch One, respectively), most spaces for Angeleno’s youth went the way of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) party networks (Meraz 2011; Viator 2019). This shift was also facilitated by the number of DJ and music-related businesses in and around downtown Los Angeles (Meraz 2008). Although there were some sexual and gendered demographic shifts, young Black and brown Angelenos were at the helm of these newly emerging backyard and mobile sound systems. Indeed, many business-savvy Black and Latinx youth created youth spaces by renting out schools, backyards, gyms, hotel ballrooms, skating rinks, and conference centers throughout the Southland (Viator 2019, 91). As a result, it was common for Black and Brown Angelenos to learn their DJ skills from one another and come into contact with various music genres (Meraz

2011, 63-64). Moreover, many of these DJs and promoters grew out of the ethnically diverse queer underground discos.



Figure 8. Vaginal Davis and her Afro Sisters, 1986 | Photos by and courtesy of Albert Sanchez

On the other hand, queer Angelenos similarly put out by the closing of these diverse underage clubs also went the way of DIY through Downtown and East L.A.'s punk scene. Although taking root in the 1970s and appearing in other scene-diverse spaces, punk subcultures had developed an anti-normative and nonconformist reputation. And for young queers of color, punk becomes a subcultural movement where queerness cleaves from homonormativity's association with the assimilation practices by white gender-conforming middle-class gays and lesbians (Nyong'o 2003, 113). This directly contrasts the working-class Black, Latinx, Chicana, and gender non-conforming youths, who felt the effects of Reaganomic policies destabilizing their communities (Johnson 2013, 129). As a result, punk in the 1980s became another means to process alternative sexualities and express the malcontents of structural inequalities and rapidly deindustrializing Los Angeles (Ibid, 132). Although these scenes form on the outskirts of punk's

white androcentricity, the strong anti-normative ethos allowed young Angelenos to “camoflag[e] in the sexual ambiguity and amorality” in the racially diverse East L.A. punk scene (Faderman and Timmons 2006, 250). Indeed, the various gender plays made permissible became generative for queer women, intersex, and femmes, such as Vaginal Davis of Cholita and Alice Bag (Alicia Armendariz) of The Bags.

Moreover, the experimental use of squelching synthesizers and electronic bass by local bands such as Nervous Gender and the Screammers helped to establish electro-punk. As one can imagine, L.A.’s 1980s punk genre was influenced by a bricolage of music and art scenes, as similarly detailed by Lawrence’s (2016) account of New York City’s underground. This was most visibly seen in the weekly Plastic Passion warehouse party, where punks, performance artists, and club kids would come dressed in the assigned monthly theme while listening to new wave, synthpop, and punk. Through brief, Plastic Passion spawned similar underground warehouse parties such as Dirt Box and Scream, which helped to form the basis of Los Angeles’ queercore scene (Raymond 2007). However, this underground queer by way of punk by way of art scene parties would again shift as the empty and abandoned buildings would give way to real estate developers.

As a result, some of these artsy punks of color would relocate to another part of the city and continue to expand the musical landscape of queer Los Angeles. Specifically, Club FUCK! – established by Miguel Beristain, James Stone, and Cliff Diller (ONE Archives 2016) – became home to fetish enthusiasts and performers alongside clubgoers at Basgo’s Disco¹⁶ in Silver Lake. For the time it was active, Club FUCK! was created for those in the queer punk camp, meaning that many of its attendants’ interests and politics were opposed to the more conservative gays of

¹⁶Former site of the historic Black Cat Tavern where the first pride demonstration occurred in 1967

West Hollywood (Gurba 2016). This is especially poignant as the 1980s saw a rise of a gay middle and upper class, adopting heteronormative respectability politics in contrast to previous generations with the onset of the AIDS/HIV epidemic. As a result, many queers with alternative life styles and sexual practices felt marginalized by the shift to traditional sexual practices and even the idea of being fully adopted into other capitalist structures. Because of this antagonism, gender-nonconforming folks outside of respectable categories were treated as scapegoats.



Figure 9. Dancers at Club FUCK!, 1991 | Courtesy of Rush Riddle

Consequently, Club FUCK! became the newest queer counterculture event where fetish play, punk bands, burlesque dancers, and artists would perform every Thursday (Cruze 2020). The resident DJs also pushed the sonic boundaries by introducing L.A.’s queer community to industrial music.¹⁷ In the case of Club FUCK!’s resident DJs Robert Woods and John Mark, their

¹⁷Industrial music was first started in Chicago by Wax Trax Record owners and couple Danny Flesher and Jim Nash in Chicago to showcase the local nonconformist and outcasts whose music fused more “traditionally” queer genres (techno, house, disco, synthpop, and punk) with industrial (Corr 2020).

contributions to Los Angeles's aural landscape were the fusion of industrial music with proto-trance and the practice of crossfading track to emphasize dissonance between tracks (Cunningham qtd. in Henkes 2013, 287). Moreover, Woods and Mark's DJing would also consist of high tempos, machine gun percussions, minor keys, digital instrumentation, sparse vocals, and looped sound bites (Corr 2020). Indeed, the experimental and genre-breaking practices within industrial music paralleled the feeling clubbers had about breaking preconceived notions of gender and respectability.

For other queers of color outside of the punk scene, Southern California's budding rave scenes became their underground leisure spaces. Specifically, "ditch parties" (DPs) thrown by Chicano high school students in East Los Angeles were some of the first sites where the next generations were introduced to house music, techno, and freestyle. Directly growing out of the mobile DJs and party crews of the 1980s, ditch parties were held in students' homes during school hours while their parents were at work (Happenings 2020). A southern California native, Irene Urías, DJ Your Muther, who grew up in the Coachella Valley where she was first introduced to EDM and raving in her late teenage years where she attended many of these ditch parties in high school with her friends and fellow neighboring peers. During her last year of highschool she recalled becoming heavily involved with different rave and dance music scenes after moving to Palm Springs. This time also happened to coincide with the map point era where it was a common practice for rave seekers to call a number from a clandestinely acquired party flyer that gave instructions to meet at an undisclosed location in order to find another clue, typically another phone number, that would yield yet another location or set of instructions before revealing the location of the party.

I think in my area [it] was really common to do the party crew thing and that was like, you know, alive and well. Like the map point era, you know, calling and finding out where parties were. I also went to like a lot of like Tea Parties, which were more like daytime ditching parties, but those were always like more geared toward gay kids. It was kind of like, you ditch school, you go to whoever's house is having the party, whoever's parents aren't home. And like it'll be a full on rager. And it would go off, you know, because nobody's parents are home and somebody's older sibling got alcohol. So we're going to party in this house until school gets out. Where you would be partying at like eight o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon and I'd go home and clean the house up before your parents get home. Like that was like a big thing that we had. [It was] easier access than a rave, you know? But the Tea Party thing got me into the party crew thing, [and] that got me into the map point thing, [and] that got me into eventually just finding raves. And when I found those, I just felt like there was the actual diversity that I was looking for at the time. (Urías 2021a)

Indeed, these ditch parties thrown by Latinx youth further cement L.A.'s interest in EDM. These parties were enticing partly because of their illegality and the sociality central to this pre-internet and cellphone era. Irene describes this time as one where it was important to have an address to stay in the know of the next party, especially since these parties were at risk of shutting down. However, many young ravers took it in stride, and these trips became another opportunity to create and maintain community,

Yeah, and it became more common to drive. It was like a super common and you would road trip with your friends. You would pack for the weekend and you would see other neighbors driving on the same highways to go to the same remote locations. And it was really, really cool and something magical about it [...] But looking back at it, yeah, it was pretty magical. [Especially,] for me feeling so disconnected from the environment that I grew up in and feeling like such an outsider in my own family. Having those memories on the weekends was so fulfilling because it was like you'd stop at the local like AM/PM to gas up and it would literally be filled with ravers. Every car getting supplies, every car in the shop, like it would just be ravers, literally like taking over spots. It was just like we're all going somewhere together, we're all going to the same destination. We're all going to have different experiences, but going in the same place and going to spend the next like 48 hours together on this like road trip, thousands of people, thousands of kids. (Urías 2021b)

Indeed, as the LAPD and other police departments became more savvy, these party promoters moved their events further east to places such as First Nation reservations and even as far as the Mojave desert.

And I think when things got really remote and things had to go out of L.A. because promoters couldn't secure permits or venues that would let them go all night for a "all night dance party," you know? [...] At that point, this was like late 90s, like '97, '96, you know, to '99 where you're just having like, the wild, raging raves in some of the most obscure places and venues you could imagine. The roller skating rink was definitely an iconic one, but like. There was a couple of parties that happened out in San Bernardino at a place called Santa's Village – it's still out there – that were just these huge, massive outdoor raids. I went to a lot of Indian reservations. [...] The ravers and the raves weren't just I.E. [the Inland Empire] they were like stretching all the way back to Palm Springs, they were stretching to the Mojave Desert, stretching out toward Nevada, stretching out toward Palmdale. There was a lot of parties in the Angeles Crest Mountains out there. Just there is a series of parties that happened in the San Bernardino mountains that were at what used to be Snow Valley – it's the two ski resorts, there's one going up toward Big Bear and then there's another one at the lower part of the mountain [...] you get all these ravers would have to walk up this like dirt ski slope and then get to the top. But it would be a stage with just like thousands of people at the top of the mountain. (Ibid)

Central to Simon Reynold's *Energy Flash* (2012), the British rave ex-pats were among the promoters who popularized raves in Southern California's remote areas to skirt L.A.'s increasingly reinforced 2am curfew. These British and American promoters would throw raves at places like Catalina Island and horse stables in Orange County (Ibid, 326). As the initial madness of the 1990s rave explosion died down and seeing the subsequent profits, raves wiggled their way back into commercial venues with the help of youth non-for-profits.

In fact, the non for profit REACH LA which focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention and education amongst L.A.'s Black and brown youth started from such a party. In 1992, Diane Bromberg, Eve Luckring, Tessa de Roy, and Laura Owens of L.A.'s Women's Action Coalition (WAC) subcommittee established REACH LA in hopes of addressing the rising rates of HIV among young women. As one of their inaugural events, REACH LA threw the party Club Prophylactive (Pro-Feel-Active) at Paramount Studios on East Sunset. The primary goal of these events was to bring awareness of safe sex practices across gender and sexual orientations among underage youths and young adults. Despite lacking the typical illicitness of their illegal counterparts, this event was still hyper-surveilled by local safety and law enforcement. However,

Bromberg and former program director, Gina Lamb, recall that these occurrences gave authenticity to the parties, which aided in their tenure (Adams 2016). This deep house would become one of the few spaces for teens to have rave-like experiences while learning safe sex practices.



Figure 10. Flyer for Club Prophylactive, 1998 | Courtesy of REACH LA

Indeed, the popularity of these raves, above and underground alike, became the newest media fixation of local newscasters broadcasted around the country. These “undercover” exposés tended to sensationalize the most egregious activities of participants, such as drug use, underage drinking, and the illegality of the event itself. Irene recalls this time as the end of this particular era of Southern California’s illegal raves,

“[The rave community] was a tight-knit community, and then, you know, all of a sudden it's just like on the news, ‘These [events] are drug orgies that happen at night’ and ‘Where are your kids?’ You know, I ended up on the news a couple of times. [...] And because the whole exposure is so salacious, it's literally that narrative where, ‘Your kids go when you're sleeping. Where are your children at?’ And it's kind of hilarious, but that was the narrative in the propaganda happening in the media. It was, ‘These events are drug orgies for teenagers.’ And when you put that on a massive platform like that? It's going to make any knucklehead be like, ‘Sweet, I can roll up and get high here,’ and that's a lot of what started happening. A lot of kids that weren't into the music. A lot of kids that weren't into the culture. A lot of kids that were just there to sell drugs, make money, [and] do drugs have a space to do them in.” (Urías 2021b)

Narratives of L.A.'s rave scene focused on substance (ab)use (Romero 1991) and its intersection with the (moral) well-being of youths. Irene shared one such expose series on desert raves by Fox 11 News, where she briefly appeared in the background. Interestingly, the tone of the first exposé is relatively neutral in its casual report of drug use and even likens the rave to the 1960s psychedelic youth movement. Indeed, at one point the exposé showcases clubbers holding hands in a circle as they reflect on their collective gratitude for being together the morning after the party ends. However, this nostalgic and even patronizing tone of news coverage did not last. As Mayor Tom Bradley's joint task force began cracking down on illegal raves across the Southland, news coverage hyper-fixated on the illicit nature of these events. It highlighted party goer's obsessive determination to attend these events. Moreover, a fatal nitrous accident involving two teens further contributed to the narrative shift of rave news coverage (Romero 1992; Dodson 1991). For example, ABC 7 news correspondent Linda Mour begins her rave expose with “It's Saturday night, and do you know where your kids are?” (Hill 2018).

Indeed, as Irene pointed out, locally broadcasted exposés revealed that reporters often over-sensationalized these events. For example, “wild” “out of control” were common descriptors. However, the most egregious was Michigan Fox's 47 calling Southern California's raves “deadly teenage orgies of sex and booze” (Boiler Room 2017). Nevertheless, it is also

essential to pay attention to the position-taking by Irene towards the undesirables she viewed who started coming to these events because of the coverage. Thornton (1996) discusses at length the importance of authenticity to rave and club cultures. Still, her specific interrogation on mass broadcast media, or betrayals (198) as she so aptly conveys, helps us understand the precarity by which certain groups can appropriate these events. She explains that mass broadcast media holds the “unique position to violate the esotericism and semi-privacies” of these spaces, and their “undiscriminating exposures” disallow ravers and participants from controlling how they are being represented (Ibid, 197). Mass print media’s bias against raves and EDM bled into the legal above-ground events as headlines were dominated by the illicit drugs found at these events (Hochman 1992; Romero 1992, 1994; Herron Zamora 1992; Mackey 1992; Leeds & Levikow 1997). Despite all this, promoters, DJs, and the ravers that followed them managed to go to legitimate clubs. Factors such as fatigue over the operational costs, underage youths becoming young adults, issues with crowd control, and attendance stagnation also contributed to the change in venue.



Figure 11. Screenshot and closed caption from Hard Copy's exposé of desert Rave, 1996 | Courtesy of Michigan Fox 47 News

During this time, promoters and club managers continued adjusting their music programming and DJ talent to capture their chosen demographic of the escaping crowds of the dying illegal desert and warehouse scenes across Southern California. Just two hours east of L.A., Jeffrey Sankar established the Palm Spring White parties. This HIV/AIDS fundraiser-cum-circuit party helped turn the quiet desert town into a vacation center for the nation's gay and lesbian community. Additionally, 18 and over Florentine Gardens and Arena nightclubs were frequented by Latinx young adults where local DJ legends such as Doc Martin, Irene Gutierrez, and Henry De La Peña spun throughout the 1990s (Meraz 2011; Alvarez Jr. 2018).

On the westside, DJs Tony Largo & Marques Wyatt similarly saw an opening for Los Angeles's aboveground dance music scene at the turn of the millennium. Born and raised in Santa Monica, Wyatt cut his teeth playing alongside his brother in the 1980s mobile DJ scene (Dev 2020). However, his love of house music stemmed from a visit to NYC's clubs, such as Danceteria and The World, where he vowed to bring the sound to L.A. (Although he was beaten by the queer community by at least a decade by DJs such as Ron Hardy and Billy Long of Jewel's Catch One, and various DJs at Arena, and Circus Disco). On the other hand, Tony Largo, a veteran of West Coast nightlife, started his career after attending Miami's annual Winter Music Conference in 1986. Since then, he started playing at venues such as The Florentine Gardens and even opened his house music club, the Seven Seas, in Hollywood three years later (Meraz 2011, 71). Wyatt and Largo eventually met at the latter's floating club Candelabra where Wyatt frequently spun. Through this relationship – and their shared love and vision for house music in Los Angeles – Wyatt and Largo established the after-hours called Does Your Mama Know (DYMK) at the Coconut Teaszer on the Sunset Strip in the early 2000s (Wesley 2015). This night has become one of L.A.'s most acclaimed “underground” parties (McNeil 2000).

Though Los Angeles was no stranger to queer nightlife or EDM in the 2000s, club spaces catering to queer people of color were in decline. While the gay-friendly clubs in West Hollywood were in full swing, many establishments have a documented history of discriminatory door policies that dissuade entry to Black, Latinx, and gender-nonconforming communities. The situation was worsened by the influx of apartment developments and rising rent prices, which resulted in the closing queer of color EDM institutions such as Arena and Circus Disco (Negrete 2016; Zonkel 2016) in the late 2000s. During the turn of the 2010s, the resurgence of “big room” house, or electro house that reached a fever pitch was nurtured and subsequently dominated by the British and American promoters of the 1990s who had effectively gone corporate through powerhouse institutions like Insomniac. Like the generation before, many of these aboveground events were thrown in Southern California locales like the Coliseum or Exposition Park. However, unlike the previous generation of raves, these events were not as markedly diverse. Moreover, after the fatal overdose of ecstasy by 15-year-old Sasha Rodriguez at the Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC) in 2010, the local government placed a moratorium on publicly held raves, and most were relocated out of the state (Billboard Staff 2013). As a result of the ensuing moral panic, only mainstream clubs, such as the Exchange, Avalon, and Vanguard dominated the EDM scene, and those were also markedly whitewashed, heterosexual, and male-oriented.

However, a group of DJs and creatives would emerge to diversify Los Angeles's dance music scene. Club nights such as Mustache Monday, established in 2007, was led by Ignacio "Nacho" Nava and Josh Peace for their band of queer of color misfits. Hailed as "LA's only straight-friendly queer dance party" (La Cita 2013), Mustache Monday was a menagerie of performance artists, drag queens, club kids, musicians, and fashion designers that filled the void

left by "great punk and art institutions" that disappeared in the 1990s (B. 2017; Arellano 2019). DJs Josh Peace and Total Freedom (Ashland Mines) emerged from this group of creatives to give Mustache Monday their distinctive sound that would later sweep across mainstream EDM (von Messling 2012). Irene explained that she started her DJ and Lez Croix career through Nava's support and guidance,

“And I would talk to him a lot about the way that I was planning parties and stuff, and he would be like, ‘You know, you don't got to say all that [...] You don't have to put all the labels in boxes and tell everybody that this is queer and whatever you'd like. Just fucking book queer artists.’ [...] Like, ‘I can see a room full of Black and brown queers going often. Book that kind of sound. Book those artists that's going to reflect your audience.’ And that was something that he taught me so early on that made so much sense with how and why I like to book things the way that I do [...] And it's a lot easier and [organic] to do that. That way it takes a lot of the thought [and] the stress out of the promotion part of it because it's just kind of like the music speaks for itself. This music has a fan base, a dedicated fan base that doesn't get the same opportunities to be on all the same stages. So, when you look at it like that, devoted fans will show up. Like absolutely devoted fans that are so geeked to see that artist that they're more than happy to. And that's definitely something that I'm grateful that he taught me that.” (Urías 2021b)

As a result of Nava's success in promoting the ethnically diverse sounds from queer dance music scenes, a new vanguard of queer activists, promoters, collectives, and DJs of color coalesced around the party. Nearly every week, the party would feature the then emerging talent of choreographers (e.g. Ryan Heffington), visual artists (e.g. rafa esparza, Franc Fernandez, Austin Young, Sebastien Hernandez), and performing artists (e.g. Sancha, Miss Barbie Q) of whom have stated that their careers took off, in part, because Nava gave them a platform for their work. Moreover, Mustache was also important to Los Angeles's queer political landscape. In 2008 when Oxnard middle-school student Latisha King was shot and killed by a fellow student based on being gender nonconforming, Nava and fellow co-creators attended the public funeral. While there, Nava and Mustache co-creator, Dino Dinco, were struck that Latisha was misgendered throughout the entire service. As a result, of her gender erasure, Nava and his team decided to

hold a memorial in honor of Latisha, where the proceeds went to the family (KCET 2021). Indeed, these acts by Nava and his team also inspired his contemporaries to create their parties and communities around the city.

Collaborators DJ Total Freedom, Wu Tsang, and Nguzunguzu established their party, Wildness, in 2008 at the Silver Platter in Koreatown. Attracted by the trans-inclusive Latinx immigrant community, Wu Tsang, Nguzunguzu, and DJ Total Freedom similarly featured “boundary-pushing” performance artists and DJs (Linthicum 2012). Then, UCLA MFA student Wu Tsang filmed a documentary (2012) that chronicled the history of the Silver Platter and Wildness to illustrate the limits of creating “safe spaces” to shed light on tensions within queer communities often glazed over by mainstream communities (Linthicum 2012). Since the start of Wildness at the Silver Platter, pressure built between the longstanding gay and trans-Latinx patrons and the new coming “flocks of artists, queer punks, and dance music junkies” (Ibid). Sonically, DJ Total Freedom’s music matched the juxtaposing crowd in that he sought to “be as disorienting as possible, like playing music from wherever and mashing it all together, trying to obscure power points and make it so you don't know who's leading and what's happening” (Davies 2013). Indeed, his stance is reminiscent to anthropologist Lila Abu Lughod’s statement, “where there is resistance, there is power,” which points to the material ways power expresses itself and sheds light on the seemingly mundane way people circumvent these manifestations (1990, 42).

The collaboration between Wildness and Mustache Mondays led to the formation of the Fade to Mind label by, the then New York City-based, rapper-cum-DJ, Kingdom. During the first years of its creation, Fade to Mind firmly established itself as a leading force in underground EDM, focusing on experimental club music, grime, and ballroom dance music genres. As a

result, Fade to Mind would come to influence the eerily dissonant electronic club music that made its way into mainstream music through the likes of pop musician Tinashe (Brown 2015). For example, former label darling Kelela's popularity illustrates the translatability of a queer of color sound for pop music (Ibid). This label is currently home to a roster of queer, queer of color, and women of color, all of whom are underrepresented in mainstream music and EDM industries. Indeed, through Nava's efforts, groups like Ravers-cum-activists groups, Rave Reparations, established by Mandy Williams and Alima Lee, seek to build relationships between local black queer-identifying DJs and EDM promoters. They partner with underground EDM scenes to subsidize ticket costs for marginalized bodies (Wheeler 2020). Moreover, collectives and parties such as Negress Mag, Hood Rave, YOU, Lez Croix, and Mapamota center queer femmes¹⁸, nonbinary, gender nonconfirming people in Black, Afro-Latinx, and Latinx communities.

"It's where you come to dance out your politics": (Re)Centering Community and Politics in Queer of Color EDM scenes

Therefore, "underground" industries represent a functional necessity for queer DJs of color while simultaneously serving as one of EDM's last bastions of politically ascribed countercultures. Indeed, this underground consists of DJ collectives, parties, independent record labels, promoters, clubs, and social activist groups, all formed within underground dance music scenes with similar calls to recenter alternative sexualities and ethnic minorities in EDM cultures. As a result, many of these scenes tend to collaborate by co-hosting events, sharing talent, and even operating as tour legs within an underground concert world. This section

¹⁸A floating signifier used to describe feminine identified and/or presenting individuals. See (Levitt, Gerrish and Hiestand 2003) for more an overview of its modern conception.

introduces some players that reignited underground queer and queer of color EDM scenes in North America and the UK during the late 2000s. These collectives, DJs, and creatives have influenced models of current nightlife spaces but have also changed the trajectories of music-making in EDM and popular music.

Rave Reparations, a term that has emerged in recent years within the EDM community, describes a movement that seeks to address the harms and injustices experienced by marginalized communities within the rave scene. As suggested in the name, the term draws inspiration from the concept of reparations, which refers to efforts to address the historical and ongoing harm caused by systemic oppression. A social experiment formed by Mandy Harris Williams and Alima Lee in Los Angeles, Rave Reparations “aims to help build relationships between local black DJs, specifically queer/femme/BIPOC and house/techno promoters who are largely not of these communities” (NTS 2019, Wheeler 2020). To do so, Lee and Williams established their show on the online radio NTS. While Rave Reparations acknowledges that rave scenes have and can be a space of freedom, expression, and community for many people, it has also been a space where harm and discrimination have occurred. This includes racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of prejudice, discrimination, and in some cases, violence.

The show seeks to address these issues through three key initiatives. The first aspect of the movement is education and awareness-raising. This includes promoting a greater understanding of the history of the rave scene and how it has excluded and marginalized Black, brown, queer and femme communities. A second tenet of Rave Reparations is community-building and support. This includes creating safe and inclusive spaces within the rave scene where marginalized communities can come together, celebrate their identities and cultures, and

build support networks. This is achieved by highlighting the contributions of Black and queer artists to electronic music and rave culture through interviews with musicians, producers, and DJs.

Additionally, Rave Reparations showcases the music of these artists, demonstrating their talent and skill and providing a platform for their work to be heard. Lastly, Rave Reparations also involve tangible forms of action and reparative justice, such as ticket subsidization, fundraising, and direct support for organizations and initiatives that are working to address the harm caused by systemic oppression. It may also involve initiatives to create more excellent representation and inclusion within the rave scene, such as promoting diversity in lineups, hiring practices, and organizational structures.

NTS Radio is a London-based online radio station founded by a former club DJ, Femi Adeyemi, in 2011. The station has quickly become a significant player in the independent music industries. It has gained a reputation for its eclectic programming and commitment to promoting new and diverse voices in the music industry. Inspired by American college radio stations such as WFMU, Adeyemi built NTS's model around having no commercial interest in keeping “total freedom” over eclectic programming (Gangel 2013). Indeed, NTS Radio's success can be attributed to its unique approach to broadcasting, which prioritizes community engagement, artistic experimentation, and a commitment to showcasing the most innovative and exciting music worldwide.

The station's programming is driven by a collective of over 300 DJs and artists based in cities worldwide. These DJs and artists are given complete creative control over their shows and are encouraged to experiment and push the boundaries of what is possible with radio broadcasting. This approach has created a vibrant and diverse community of listeners and

supporters passionate about discovering new music and engaging with emerging artists. As such, NTS Radio's commitment to showcasing new and diverse voices in the music industry has also been a major factor in its success. The station has become known for supporting emerging artists and underrepresented communities and regularly features music from a wide range of genres and regions, including hip-hop, electronic, jazz, and world music. This focus on diversity and inclusivity has helped to create a supportive and empowering environment for artists and listeners alike and has helped to raise the profile of many up-and-coming musicians and DJs.

One of NTS Radio's shows, *Bodywork*, is an example of promoting up-and-coming local DJs. *Bodywork* was established and is hosted by DJ Kaili (Carrie Sun), an NYC-based DJ, producer, and visual artist known for the unique blend of electronic and world music and their commitment to promoting new and underrepresented artists. Starting their music career via college radio at USC, Kaili is no stranger to creating mixes for audiences. Since its inception in 2019, *Bodywork* has become a popular destination for Afrodiasporic and experimental club music fans. As mentioned in the name, a key feature of *Bodywork* is its focus on the connection between the body and music. According to Debra Gimlin (2002), *bodywork* refers to the physical practices, techniques, and technologies individuals use to reshape, modify, and enhance their bodies and the cultural and social systems that promote and regulate these practices. In contrast, Kaili views *bodywork*, their sets, and dance music in general as an “exploration of modalities” to cleanse the “internalized bullshit that comes in our white cis-het late-capitalist spheres in the ways that we carry our bodies, nerves, and muscles” (Kaili 2020).

MANIFESTO

“BODYWORK” IS ABOUT APPLYING PRESSURE WHERE
IT’S NEEDED IN ORDER TO RELEASE

“BODYWORK” IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE MODALITIES
OF THERAPY AND RELEASE VIA DANCE MUSIC

“BODYWORK” IS AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF DETOX, AN
HOUR-LONG CLEANSING RITUAL IN A POST-COLONIAL
BODY STILL NAVIGATING TIME AND LOCALITY THRU
BEATS-PER-MINUTE AND HYPER-CLUSTERED
SUBGENRE

“BODYWORK” IS ABOUT RELIEVING THE DIGESTED /
METABOLIZED / INTERNALIZED BULLSHIT THAT COMES
IN OUR WHITE WESTERN CIS-HET LATE-CAPITALIST
SPHERES AS MANIFESTED IN WAYS THAT WE CARRY
OUR BODIES / NERVES / MUSCLES / SWEAT / TEARS /
MUCUS / BLOOD

“BODYWORK” IS ABOUT APPLYING PRESSURE WHERE
IT’S NEEDED IN ORDER TO RELEASE

Figure 12. *Bodywork Manifesto* | Courtesy of Kaili_xcx, Instagram

Minty Boi is an independent booking, touring, and promoting agency that has significantly impacted the queer nightlife scene in Los Angeles and NYC. First established as an art collective by Yiwei Meng and friends in 2016, Minty Boi's success can be attributed to their DIY event planning approach, combining Meng's passion for music, fashion, community-building, and giving smaller and underground artists a platform. A long-time contributor to Dublab, 2018 Meng started Minty Boi's Eternity, a weekly show showcasing a range of music, from house and techno to R&B and hip-hop, all with a unifying theme (Dublab 2019). For example, one episode might feature a mix of classic house tracks, contemporary R&B jams, and underground techno bangers, all woven together, emphasizing underlying themes such as love and connection.

Discwoman is a collective and booking agency founded in 2014 by Frankie Decaiza Hutchinson, Emma Burgess-Olson (DJ Umfang), and Christine McCharen-Tran to address the rampant white supremacy and sexism within the electronic dance music industry. Although

based in NYC, its roster includes talent from across the United States. Since its inception, Discwoman has been instrumental in promoting and amplifying the voices of women and non-binary artists. Moreover, Discwoman organizes workshops, panel discussions, and mentorship programs, creating spaces for artists to connect, learn, and support one another (Saxelby 2017). Discwoman has been involved in and fundraised for community programs and grassroots organizations such as ACLU, Sadie Nash Leadership Project, and the mutual aid organization Equality For Flatbush (Hahn 2021).

Dweller, started in 2019 by Frankie Decaiza Hutchinson, is a festival that celebrates and promotes Black electronic artists. From exploring Afrofuturism to the fusion of traditional African rhythms with electronic sounds, Dweller Festival is becoming a breeding ground for sonic exploration and a catalyst for the evolution of Black electronic music. It's programming also includes talks and panel discussions to amplify the platform and voices of Black artists. Additionally, Dweller Festival plays a crucial role in community building and empowerment through nurturing emerging talent, fostering collaborations, networking, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing, and empowering artists and aspiring musicians to navigate the industry and find their voice (Sherburne 2022). Outside the festival, Dweller also has an accompanying journal blog that serves as a valuable resource for both enthusiasts and newcomers to electronic music, offering a curated selection of music, interviews, and insights that promote a more inclusive and accurate representation of the genre's history and diverse artists (Herrera 2022).

This chapter has attempted to explore how queer people of color build communities in underground EDM scenes. This chapter introduces the intricate webs of meaning created by equally diverse queer communities. I have argued that these marginalized communities' liberatory politics render them illegible to mainstream EDM industries. In his dissertation about

disco's queer politics, Brock Webb (2013) argues that the emphasis on underground/mainstream binaries obscures the more meaningful relationships and embodied experiences felt by those within the scene. Indeed, the terms "underground" and "mainstream" are loaded because of the overlap between the two scenes, whether philosophical or in practice (Ibid, 5). However, significant evidence suggests that these networks' liberatory identity politics and aesthetics philosophically oppose the white capitalist patriarchy that structures the music industry. This is especially important given the well-documented history of the exploitative relationships endemic to the music industry. Therefore, analyzing whether these queer of color networks are blueprints for creating a more symbiotic music industry is vital.

Chapter 3

Examining the Underground Queer of Color Electronic Dance Music Field

This chapter seeks to illustrate the contributions of Los Angeles's local field of queer of color underground dance scene to mainstream EDM industries and fields. Although queer of color EDM industry houses hierarchical positions within itself, it also exists as a site of cultural production within the mainstream music industry. In this macroscopic view, the queer of color EDM industry is in the more significant mainstream music industry. Within this schematic, queer creatives of color tend to have high cultural capital but low economic capital. Indeed, very few queer people of color own the means of production and have the same notoriety or opportunities as their white cis-gendered counterparts. However, queer of color EDM industry, as a field of cultural production, is not an "economic world reversed" in that this field is "restricted" where DJs, artists, and producers are solely making music for music's sake.

As a matter of fact, economic capital is still essential. While having money is not as prestigious as the mainstream social space, queer people of color still wish to pursue financial stability by professionalizing their crafts. Consequently, queer of color EDM industry has long-established networks to create community opportunities. Indeed, despite existing on the margins of the music industry and society, this stretches across cities, countries, and continents in an imagined community that shares a basis of identification with their racialized queer identity and interest in EDMCs. Additionally, recent trends of mainstream acts tapping into talent from these underground queer of color creative networks to coopt (or appropriate).

Thus, this chapter hopes to illustrate how these underground queer of color EDM industries have counter-examples to Bourdieu's characterization of a "restricted" field. These networks of and by queer of color EDM nightlife serve as a creative resource that is

appropriated, culturally and musically, in the process of repackaging to fit normative mainstream consumers, sometimes with or without compensation. Therefore, part of this examination seeks to illustrate how key players, musicians, label owners, audiences, etc., negotiate their music and culture on their terms. Furthermore, goods, services, culture, and knowledge are circulated through nightlife networks created by collectives and record labels hoping to spotlight and uplift their communities. Specifically, queer of color theorists and historians view this phenomenon as a “brown commons” that reflects and refracts the diverse experiences of queer people of color for queer people of color (Tolentino et al. 2018, 475). Hence, the queer of color EDM industry is heteronomous as the cultural production intersects into other fields such as class, race, and nation. My analysis will draw from (virtual) fieldwork conducted in Los Angeles from 2019 to 2022, with some observations from scenes in Chicago, New York, and London.

Queer Habitus

Within the underground queer of color EDM industry, players' ages range from their early twenties to late forties. Equally diverse are the racial, ethnic, and gender of people who participate as DJs, promoters, label owners, and creators of collectives. As a result, many identify as a person of color and queer. Yet, it is essential to note that there are white, heterosexual, and cis-gendered players that are within this field. Typically, the folks on more heteronormative axes of identity tend to have higher economic capital in this field. For example, record labels and club owners are generally white. As a result, players within the field exist on varying socioeconomic scales.

Within this field, players' habitus can generally be understood through the umbrella term queer. Its first definition, and most frequently deployed, describes the variety of non-normative sexual and gender minorities. Queer's second definition emerged within the last twenty years to

encompass a socio-political analytic used to critique various normative structures within mainstream culture and describe one's socioeconomic position about the unmarked heterosexual white cis-gendered male. If, according to Bourdieu, habitus is "the ability to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles" (170). Moreover, it is important to note that because his schema can encompass alternative habituses, Bourdieu's concern was with how habitus is constructed without the lens of racial and sexualized identity. As such one can argue for the presence of a queer habitus. Neiling's concept of (2020) *queer habitus* helps us to understand that this particular habitus is formed around a counter-culture that subverts mainstream culture as a point of resistance and identity formation which

"in itself turns habitus on its head. Habitus is formed to gain cultural capital and therefore upholds social systems of oppression. However, if queer habitus is formed around the inherent desire to deconstruct these social systems of oppression, then habitus in itself becomes a form of protest rather than conformity." (4)

Since the latter is more politically charged, not everyone in the field ascribes to it. It is most common for people to only identify with queerness as a descriptor of gender, sexual orientation, and self-expression. It is also imperative to remember that as a positionality, queerness is a floating signifier that rapidly changes from person to person. However, due to racialized homophobia and classism occurring within their daily lives, queer people of color within this field typically align themselves with both modes of queerness. Thus, queer people of color separate themselves from the establishment – that is, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks 1984/2000, 118) – as detrimental to their physical, financial, and mental well-being. As such, I view queerness as critical capital circulated in this field – whether describing gender, sexuality, or politics.

Developing the Volume of “Quare”/Queer Capitals

If we are to interrogate if my interlocutors inherited any “classically Bourdieusian” cultural capital that would allow them to move up socio-economic classes of (white) American society, such as knowledge of the arts, business acumen, manners of genteel American society, etc., then they did not. Instead, I’d like to present the *quared* ways my interlocutors acquired their social and quare/queer cultural capital that would ultimately serve them outside their households. That is, paying attention to how their racialized and sexual identities lead them to acquire quare forms of cultural and social capital. This is most poignant given that my interlocutors’ parents’ commitment to assimilation into white American culture as immigrants and minorities caused a significant disjunction in inheriting social and cultural capital. This is partly due to the intersections of race and ethnicity and the communities where they live. My interlocutors were either from non-white immigrants or of color working-class families who lived in historically racially, culturally, or ethnically similar communities. Thus, their parent’s commitment to assimilating into what they perceived as “American” culture would have worked in a majority white neighborhood worked against my interlocutors because their neighborhoods were anything but. As a result, their acculturation process happened almost exclusively in their peer groups.

Indeed, my interlocutors who lived in communities that were either ethnically or racially similar make their stories of their parents’ aspirations of them assimilating into (white) American culture that much more alienating. For both my interlocutors Irene and Kumi, their parents refused to teach them Spanish and their respective Latinx cultures. For example, Irene, who comes from a Mexican-American working-class farming family, distinctly remembers her mother discouraging her from joining a Mexican arts and culture club in high school and even befriending her

neighboring peers. However, like her neighborhood peers, she could continue befriending her peers because she was a latchkey kid.

For Kumi, whose parents are an interracial Latinx couple, her experiences assimilating within her non-Black Latinx neighborhood and majority-Black schools were markedly tricky. On the one hand, she was alienated because she could not speak Spanish at the time and was markedly darker skinned. And, despite having a Black Panamanian father, she had no conception of any regionalized forms of Blackness, i.e., Afrolatinidad. Instead, she learned the Black cultural and social capital through her Black American teachers and peers at school.

“No, they didn't really talk about race. I think that's one thing that was difficult for me growing up. My dad's Black, and my mom, mestiza Salvadoran, is not Black. That was one thing growing up that was difficult for me to navigate. [And] because I had to come to understand my blackness by myself because my dad, though he identifies as Black, is Black and from somewhere else that I think they identify more with their nationality like, “Oh, I'm Panamanian.” Not in a racist way, because I know Jamaicans might do that or sort of thing, people might do that as a way to distance [themselves from Black Americans].” (James 2021)

Additionally, Kumi has difficulty recalling times when her parents would pass down aspects of their Panamanian and Salvadorian culture to her and her siblings.

Kumi and Irene's social and cultural acculturation into American society leads them to acquire *quare* capitals. According to the logic of liberal capitalist ideologies of citizenship, Kumi and Irene's “inheritance” of the social and cultural capital in public spaces, as opposed to the home, queerly sets them apart from their peers who felt the culture in their home did not mirror what they perceive of their peers. Furthermore, I argue that this disconnectedness allowed them to develop queer/radical conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, and politics. Indeed, scholars such as Ferguson (2004) and Halberstam (2011) have extensively deliberated on how queer represents deviance from or failure to adopt heteronormative liberal capitalist ideologies that produce neat categories of race, class, gender, and citizenship.

In the case of Carrie, a first-generation Chinese-American, the cultural and social capital of meritocracy and patriarchal gender roles align with the heteronormative conceptions of American citizenship. Economically, Carrie explains that their family was working-class with the middle-class aspirations associated with meritocracy. Specifically, Carrie was encouraged by her parents to play classical instruments and sports in hopes of being a more well-rounded student. However, Carrie explains that they felt dissonance with the gendered aspects of the cultural norms growing up, leading them to acquire their queer capital early in life,

“Well, I felt very, very trapped by gender when I was growing up because they abided [by Confucianism]. [I]t was always like they put a lot of emphasis on the boy. So because I have an older brother, there's filial piety, and it was always just because he's a boy. He gets to do this, so he'd get more food, or he'd get the better food, or he gets to eat like, you know, the last piece of this or whatever. And I was just like, ‘Well, this is dumb. I don't understand where this is coming from,’ you know? So I came to interrogate gender really early on this even from like, ‘Carrie, you can't wear this. Carrie, you can't wear blue. That's the boy's color. You have to wear red, or you have to wear pink.’ And I'm just like, ‘What?’ So gender was something that was very much I grew up finding it, rather than embracing it, I always felt trapped by it.” (Sun 2021)

Here we again see the disruption between passively inheriting more heteronormative forms of capital in the home. Indeed, this is also true of how each of my interlocutors came to view gender and sexuality. As such, I want to point out that although my interlocutors may not have learned or inherited a quare capitals – whether describing gender/sexuality, politics, or queer culture (which I will discuss later) – these disjunctions they experience in the home (dis-)places them outside of neatly produced neat categories, of gender, race, and class engender them to adopt “quare” capitals.

Forms of Capital Circulating in the Field

Within the queer of color EDM industry, racialized queerness is one of the necessary caveats to entering and operating within these underground industry networks. This is partly due to racialized queerness typically being the easiest way to index the distance and autonomy from a

white cis-heteronormative mainstream. However, social, quare/queer cultural, musical expertise, and political capital are the other forms of capital circulating within the field. In this field, social capital is broadly defined as being “well connected” through your relationships are key to players within the field. This means anywhere from the reach of your audience (e.g., followers on social media) to having relationships with other popular DJs, promoters, and club owners. Moreover, it is a significant factor in debuting/playing at shows, “successfully” throwing events, and circulating music/edited remixes. As such, a player’s social capital can also determine the success of acquiring resources.

Social capital is typically built through an online presence. As such, social media is used for advertising gigs, creating/maintaining relationships, aligning oneself with key players, and showing listeners their popularity and musical virtuosity. There is a common practice on Instagram where DJs, especially those traveling for gigs, post video clips or photos of their event/DJ set with one another on the application’s “Story” function. That is not to say that folks do not have meaningful connections with one another because, often, these DJs run within the same circles and collaborate. However, I cannot help but think of the symbolic capital DJs can build by showcasing critical players within this field. Moreover, because these circles are typically small and, in some cases, outright exclusive, having many followers and showcasing relationships with key players helps to broaden DJs’, producers’, and event planners' networks and overall popularity. Lastly, it is typical for DJs and event producers to “repost” the media created by their fans and attendees on their social media platforms to advertise the popularity of their events.

Quare/Queer cultural capital refers to knowledge of queer of color and queer culture and history. This type of culture represents both traditional conceptions of high (e.g., queer artists,

musicians, scholars) and low culture (popular music/culture). However, there is a tertiary space in between where queer/quare cultural knowledge of emerging trends and queer/queer-aligned tastemakers is equally important within this schema. Like other queer club scenes, the dress is a crucial way to express their habitus and cultural capital. Clubs and nightlife, in general, within the queer of color EDM industry are spaces for people to express their non-normative gender identities safely. The volume of queer habitus is also constituted through visual cues such as body language and self-adornment. Indeed, how people adorn themselves is not only a way to position-take but also a pivotal way to index a queer habitus and gender identity.

Historically, there is a distinct visual culture of dress codes that gay men and lesbian women have utilized to distinguish themselves from their heterosexual counterparts covertly. For example, “flagging” through the hankie code –placing a colored handkerchief in the left pocket from the 1970s – points to one’s membership in the queer community and signals participation in a sexual subculture. Other means of adornment include but are not limited to, the type of jewelry and its placement, the hyper-femininity or masculinity of clothing styles, strict observance of a stylized aesthetic, and a general non-adherence to heteronormative self-fashioning can all point to quare/queer capital. It is also important to note that all members do not universally use these visual strategies. This is especially poignant given the cooptation of many aspects of quare visual/fashion aesthetics outside of queer communities (Vänskä 2014). This is especially poignant given the recent surge in queer of color fashion designers, which has reinvigorated interest in name brands (albeit queer¹⁹ or queer-friendly brands). As a result, queer people of color will use dress to indicate their status as fashionable, well-connected, and even “cool.”

¹⁹Recent brands started by queer black designers: No Sesso, an L.A. based fashion brand, founded by transwoman Pierre Davis; Telfar, a NYC based fashion brand, started by Telfar Clemens; and Hood By Air, a NYC based streetwear fashion brand, started by Shayne Oliver.

In the case of clubbers, cultural capital is marked by knowledge of dance styles and DJs. Additionally, knowledge and skillful execution of Afrodiasporic dance styles are central within club and dance spaces. DJs often cross various EDM and club music genres, which tend to have associated vernacular social dances. For example, ballroom house remixes almost always trigger clubbers to vogue femme²⁰, while bounce²¹ remixes will lead dancers to twerk, and juke tend to cause Chicago natives to perform their best footwork steps. Lastly, knowing headlining DJs' musical oeuvre is another source of cultural capital circulating within queer of color EDM networks.

Musical expertise is also a form of capital, as it affects how many bookings you can get, which helps players develop their social and economic capital. Additionally, musical expertise also includes experimenting with music to push the envelope in a way that is still familiar to audiences (the "changing same"). It is important to note that technique is culturally mediated, such as the style of remix (e.g., the "Ha Crash"²² from ballroom house music; offbeat bass stabs²³ popular in the hard house genre). However, one of the most critical DJ skill is beat mixing (Brewster & Broughton 2000, 135)²⁴. The DJ's ability to beat mix is often a marker for a skillfully executed set.

Furthermore, a DJ's taste in music is also an important indicator of cultural capital. Indeed, mixes containing a bricolage of genres are opportunities for DJs to illustrate their

²⁰A style of the modern vogue dance originating in the New York black and Latinx communities during the 1980s.

²¹New Orleans style hip hop

²²Ballroom house music known for the widespread use of the "Ha" or "Ha Crash" sample from Masters at Work's song "The Ha Dance." <https://rateyourmusic.com/genre/Ballroom/>

²³Offbeat bass stabs, Ishkur (2005). "Hard House". Retrieved April 28, 2020.

²⁴The practice of "overlap[ing] the ending of one record with the beginning of a second so that their drum-beats are synchronized

cultural knowledge. Indeed, DJ and writer, Spooky the Subliminal Kid views the DJ's role as "custodians of aural history" who create "linkages between memory, time, and place" to "make it accessible to listeners" (Miller 2004, 473). On the other hand, having songs by other prominent queer of color DJs within mixsets signals insider knowledge of what is current and "cool."

Within semi-underground networks, queer of color DJs, starting in the 2010s onward, began experimenting with the club music genres associated with African American nightlife by juxtaposing Miami Bass, ballroom house music, and Jersey Club remix styles with techno, house music, and Afrodiasporic popular music genres from around the world. Music journalists call this genre deconstructed club music, though some contest its name. The origin of deconstructed club music is associated with then, L.A. based DJ Total Freedom (aka Big Gay Idiot) at the New York City party GHE20G0TH1K²⁵ created by native Manhattanite, DJ Venus X. As a then budding DJ and lifelong goth enthusiast, DJ Venus X wanted to destabilize the racialization of punk and goth by (re)establishing connections between these genres with the lived material realities of people of color by centering "darker" forms of popular Afrodiasporic music,

"Me and my friends were listening to a lot of juke music, Three 6 Mafia and Memphis rap, which is a very dark subgenre of hip-hop. I was like, 'This is so goth!' Or, at least, I thought it was just as goth as the type of music being played at the parties I was religiously going to, which only played Joy Division, The Cure and Alien Sex Fiend – bands that are considered to be pioneers of what we've come to know as gothic music. I also went to a lot of raves, but they really lacked diversity. We definitely wanted to fuck up the assumption of what goth was but also keep it pretty dark." (Amarca 2017)

As a result, the party developed notoriety for its clashing genres and subcultures that catered to queer audiences of color, GHE20G0TH1K became a platform for many queer DJs of color around the United States (Ibid).

²⁵Pronounced "ghetto gothic"

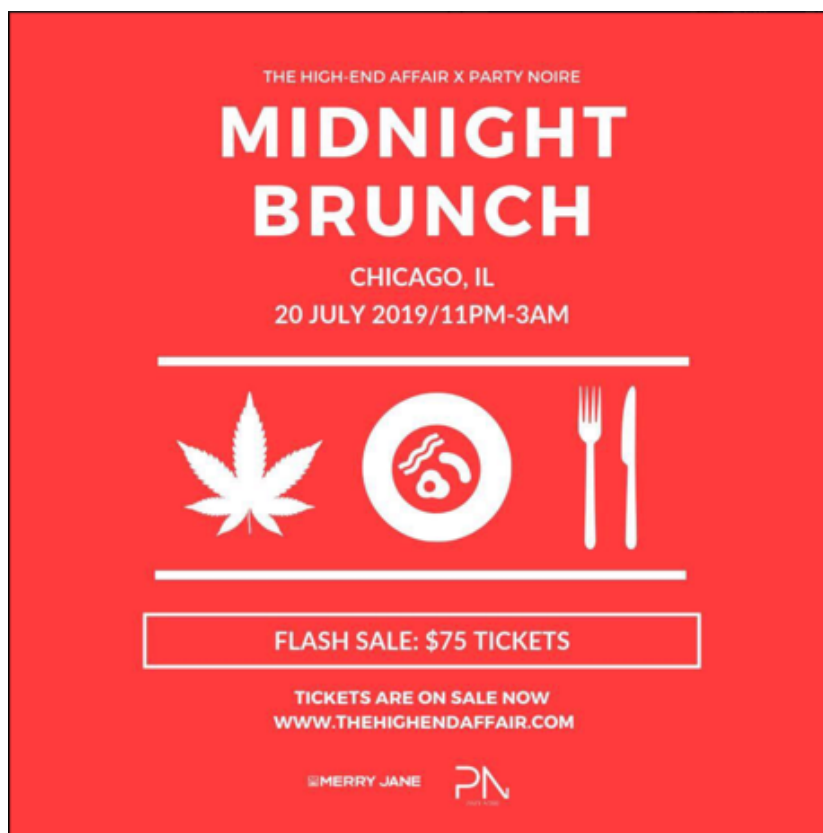


Figure 13. Screenshot of Flyer with co-host and Chicago-based collective, Party Noire | Courtesy of Party Noire, Facebook

Although economic capital is not as prestigious as other forms of capital in this cash-poor field, it is still worth discussing the prominence of economic capital since this underground queer of color EDM industry exists within the larger capitalist society. As noted at the beginning of the section, these networks tout themselves as more democratically social than their mainstream counterparts. Additionally, the high expenses of DJ equipment, the liability of throwing events, and the cost of hiring talent are principal considerations for DJs, collectives, and event producers. Many DJs, event producers, and collectives I interviewed harped on the importance of funding for their events. As a result, it is common for the most popular DJs in collectives to work at mainstream industry events under the banner of their collective or DJ persona (see Figure 12). In doing so, the money earned is redirected to paying for events thrown by their collective. Any

surplus cash earned through queer of color events is often re-gifted to the community through various health and housing fundraisers. As a result, many collectives will use their notoriety or symbolic capital within their field to earn money and economic capital in the mainstream music industry.

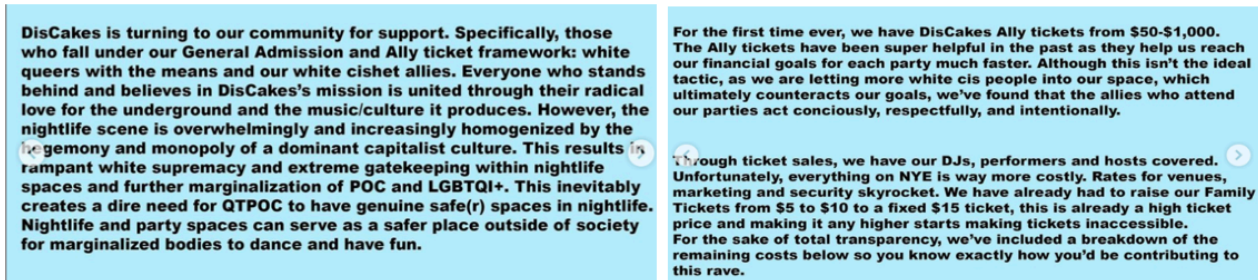


Figure 14. Screenshot of NYC-based collective DisCakes's "day of reminders" | Courtesy of DisCakes, Instagram

Political capital in the field typically refers to a player's liberatory politics. As mentioned in the previous section, queerness, and quareness are primarily dictated by politics, such as the extent of one's anti-capitalist, anti-establishment, or anti-racist leanings. Thus, explicit mentions of these liberatory politics – expressed artistically or through social media – are sources of symbolic capital within more radical circles of queer of color EDM networks. However, political capital is typically expressed through ticketing schemas²⁶ and event structure and policy. DJs, organizers, and collectives aim to structure events and the entire field to benefit people with marginal identities. Thus, players generally emphasize transparency, accommodation, and community. For example, collective co-creator of Chicago's Party Noire, DJ Rae Chardonnay,

²⁶Entry fees for allies (coded as white and cis-heterosexual) are higher than those who are queer and/or a person of color. This is done for two reasons, 1) to promote social and economic equity between queer people of color and their white cis-heteronormative counterparts, organizers implement sliding scale entry fees to discourage undesirables (i.e. privilege deniers, homophobes, racists, transphobes, etc.). 2) Most queer of color events and networks cannot operate (with any meaningful longevity) without the economic and social support of allies, therefore most events are open to all.

explains how this habitus manifests during events in hopes of redressing discrimination and creating more equitable and “safer” spaces (also see Figure 13),

“[T]he language that we use, we're no holds barred about what are space is about anywhere to anybody. We've been in spaces, [where co-founder] Nik and I being the only two black girls spinning in there like, ‘Yes, our party is about Black queer joy. And If you have some money that you'd like to give us, bring it on!’ [...] The communication around it, for sure, is a large part being able to regurgitate that emotion and that communication to the people in charge of the venue that you're using. But then also, not being afraid to remind people of that while we're in space together. So there are often times almost every party throughout the night periodically I'm getting on the mic just reminding people like, ‘This is what we will stand for. This is what we will not tolerate. If you have problems, you can come to myself or Nik.’” (Chardonnay 2019)

As a result, of this commitment of people with marginalized identities, many view themselves as a part of an “underground” network and industry because of shared experiences of discrimination in mainstream spaces.

Economic World Reversed?: The Relationship Between “Underground” & Mainstream Industries

Throughout my research, I have found that the boundaries defining mainstream and “underground” are permeable. DJs, collectives, and record labels often claim their status as “underground” despite tapping into mainstream networks and rising to fame in mainstream circles. In some cases, DJs and music producers can levee their social capital within “underground” networks to work with acts in mainstream industries. In discussing disco’s queer politics, Brock Webb illustrates that binaries of underground/mainstream blur the middle stratum of the subcultural practice of punk bricolage (2013, 16). This helps us envision the tertiary space that would render this entire field as an economic world vs. an economic world reversed or even underground vs. mainstream. Although players in this field are socio-economically positioned on

the margins of society and the music industry, the cultural capital they create can tie them, albeit limitedly, to mainstream networks.

Indeed, there are examples of folks from “underground” scenes rising to mainstream circles. Creatives from two of the most pivotal queer of color spaces in the 2010s, Mustache Monday, Wildness & GHE20G0TH1K, collaborated with mainstream acts and brands. In 2021 PBS SoCal’s Artbound docuseries published an episode about Mustache Mondays that showcased many musicians, producers, artists, and performance artists who got their start at the tenured party. DJs Kingdom & Total Freedom, frequent spinners at Mustache Mondays, have since gone to work on projects with fashion brands, such as Opening Ceremony, Hood By Air, & Mugler, as music directors. Daniel Pineda & Asma Maroof, who together form the duo Nguzunguzu, were also tapped to work with mainstream artists (Brown 2015). Lastly, DJ Honey Dijon is the most recent and famous within house music’s “underground” scene. With a nearly thirty-year career, Honey Dijon first cut her teeth playing in her Chicago hometown before implanting in New York City’s underground dance music landscape. She has become a “house” hold name and a staple in EDM festivals and clubs worldwide. In 2021, Beyoncé commissioned DJ Honey Dijon to produce music for the *Renaissance* (2022) album, where she helped produce “Cozy” and “Alien Superstar” (Luse 2022).

On the other hand, the cooptation of music and subcultural aesthetics created in queer and specifically Black queer cultures by mainstream industries is more common. DJ MikeQ, a New Jersey-based ballroom house scene, Qween Beat label owner, and Beyoncé collaborator, has long been a vocal critic of ballroom music’s misrepresentations²⁷. Within his 15-year career as a DJ for ballroom competitions and composer of the *Kiki* (2016) documentary, MikeQ has created.

²⁷“adding a Ha Crash (not snare or clash like some call it) does not make it ballroom. Its the way that beat it.... the girls gotta be able to vogue to it.”

Specifically, in 2016 he called out Apple for using a song with the *Ha Crash* by Surkin, a French DJ with no ties to ballroom culture, to promote the release of the iPhone 7. In Surkin's response to accusations about appropriation, he explains that he understands why folks in the ballroom scene prickled at his use of the Ha Crash but ultimately felt that because he was not trying to be part of the scene and that his music was not ballroom music and dismissed these criticisms as "totally stupid"²⁸ (Steyels 2013). DJ Rizzla, MikeQ's Fade to Mind label mate, spoke of the tenuous relationship between underground music cultures and mainstream industries,

"I feel like holding yourself accountable for originality is essential nowadays, because it's so easy to be influenced by everything around you [...] People don't ask themselves 'why?' enough. 'Why did I make this? why should it be in the public domain?' [...] Products get out of creators control so quickly [...] That's what people were afraid of with vogue music, but the people who created it are getting credit for creating it [...] After that point, it's free culture. It's only a problem if creators are cut out of their own story [...] Who am I as a friend of the sound to feel protective of it? That's a lot of old DJ culture that needs to be confronted." (Kelly 2013)

Indeed, Rizzla speaks to how art and culture belong to the public, and subsequent (re)interpretations of the product go through music evolution and genre development. After all, the famous Ha Crash is a reinterpretation of Masters At Work sampling the *Trading Places* (1983) movie scene. There is an argument to be made that artists, such as Surkin, are influenced by music emerging from these subcultures.

However, it is equally important to highlight an ongoing trend of mainstream industries holding up white artists who make derivatives of music created by queer and people of color. Here it is also especially poignant to highlight how this field, although niche, does not fall into

²⁸"I kind of understand that. But like, house music was started by gay people, so you can't make house if you're not gay? I don't think it really matters. I'm not trying to get into the ballroom scene. And it's not really ballroom music. It's just the same way as how the early ballroom tracks were influenced by Masters At Work. I don't think they were gay. That's actually where the "Ha" sample comes from. I was always interested in different genres. I think it's totally stupid. It's just music in the end. I'd think a lot of those guys would be happy to know that people in France are influenced by them."

Bourdieu's articulation of a restrictive field. According to this exchange queer sound culture is profitable and is commodifiable, but not for queer people of color themselves. Indeed, although Surkin explicitly distances himself from the ballroom culture and music, he still profits from mentioning ballroom culture from his song "Paris Is Burning," a reference to the Jenny Livingston documentary about New York's ballroom scene, on the Marble Players' *Marble Summer - EP* (2011). Moreover, the speed and ease in which mainstream music industries coopt cultural products from queer and scenes of color is concerning. Although MikeQ and the late ballroom DJ Vjuan Allure managed to position themselves as the quintessential ballroom DJs and gatekeepers, this mainstream recognition came after their nearly 15-year career in underground spaces. Ultimately, the debate about appropriation undergirding this discussion points to when and how to hold artists and mainstream industry support systems accountable.

Another example of the moving signifier of the "underground" and the tenuous relationship between the underground and mainstream industries can be found through Venus X's and her GHE20G0TH1K party. During the late 2000s and early 2010s, when club and music scenes were primarily divided among genre and demography, Venus X created GHE20G0TH1K to address how her identity, music, and aesthetic interests intersect (Bengal 2017). As a result, this party was wildly successful and influential in fostering a creating space for a new generation of queer music-making and creative communities of color in the 2010s (Resident Advisor 2015). However, she has expressed multiple times throughout her career that mainstream acts have coopted her party's aesthetics. For example, in 2014, Venus X placed GHE20G0TH1K on temporary hiatus because she felt pop star Rihanna was taking credit for the ghetto goth aesthetic made popular by the party.

“If they will not accurately tell our story and let the brand grow into a worldwide alternative space for the weirdos of this generation, particularly minority youth, I (can) no longer pour all my money and time into this movement” (Tsjeng 2014)

Indeed, a new generation of New York queer black creatives emerged from this party to change the fashion and club music landscape, which also catapulted her into international acclaim.

Despite this, she does not envision herself as part of the mainstream, which may be partly due to how mainstream industries carelessly coopt without recognizing or asking for meaningful participation by the scenes creating the cultural product.

Hierarchization, Positions, and Players in the Field

Within the queer of color EDM industry, three significant positions occupy this field: those who own the means of production, intermediaries, and talent. Entities that own the means of production within queer of color EDM industry are the clubs and record labels. These entities typically have more economic capital than cultural or symbolic capital. Additionally, record labels that operate within the microcosm of this field also have access to the mainstream industry, as many are subsidiaries of more prominent record labels. However, this can be contested if record labels and clubs become longstanding cultural institutions within queer of color circles, for example, Jewel’s Catch One²⁹ in Los Angeles (see Figure 14). Next, the intermediaries consist of identity-based collectives and promoters. This group have more cultural and symbolic but less economic capital than clubs and record labels. Lastly, the talent includes DJs with symbolic and cultural capital and the least economic capital in the schema. It should be noted that positions within intermediaries and talent are flexible, as many DJs create collectives

²⁹Jewel's Catch One (c. 1973-2015), owned by Jewel Thais-Williams, is widely believed to be the first large-scale discotheque in the United States to serve and operate within the Black LGBTQ community.

or are promoters. These two positions are permeable because it allows DJs to operationalize their symbolic and cultural capital into economic capital.



Figure 15 Jewel's Catch One in Los Angeles | Courtesy of Adrian Scott Fine, L.A. Conservancy Website

Within the microcosm of the queer of color EDM nightlife, record labels and clubs can be viewed as having dominant positions within the field. However, it should be noted that although this field directly opposes more mainstream music industries, it does not strictly adhere to Bourdieu's concept of the economic world reversed. Although the record labels and clubs in this field are identified as queer or queer-friendly, they are still capitalist entities that control the means of production – such as the performance space or recording equipment – and shape the field of queer of color EDM nightlife. As such, their main goal is to turn a profit, if only to meet their bottom lines. In fact, my interlocutors explained that it has become more common for venue

owners to openly exploit event producers and even turn them away despite events being profitable,

“I recently I've been approached by venues that I've had great relationships with now where they want. Normally I feel like with above ground stuff, correct me if I'm wrong, a lot of the deals I get worked are like you promote or keep the door ticket sales. We keep the bar and we will negotiate a bar cut, if you're lucky [...]But I've had venues tell me I'm getting a bar cut and then after they're like, ‘Oh, sorry, we're not giving you that. We just don't want to. What are you going to do about it? Like don't do an event here again.’ I recently have come across more when I'm searching for above ground venues, is that venues want a percentage of your ticket sales or of your door cost” (Black 2023)

Moreover, these clubs can still perpetuate harm towards communities the profit from as discussed by Kumi,

“It's interesting, like the club itself as an apparatus. It's interesting because Catch One historically was a Black lesbian owned club but now it's corporately owned. I mean it's like privately owned by someone who owns a bunch of clubs: the own El Cid, they own Los Globos [...] they own the Virgil [...] but it's like a monopoly and it's kind of maddening because like you want to create something that feels different but like the territory is foreclosed. But we threw a party at El Cid, which is one of their venues. We threw a party there and like, the security gaurds. I mean there's a lot of misgendering. We don't say things like we pat down men and not women. So there's like this thing that it doesn't apply, it's not fitting for our community. So it's like it just feels violent. There's just so many things you have to navigate, also because we're Black. Like our caterer tried to go in early to set up and they wouldn't let him in. And when we did tell them that that was our caterer, they're like, ‘Well tell him they can't play loud music while he's setting up.’ And it's like he's literally trying to set up the food.” (Ibid)

Indeed, although clubs and venues may claim to be queer-friendly does little to negate age old practices of discriminatory behavior and bias as discussed in a previous chapter.

Moreover, more than others, some clubs and record labels mirror the same cultural and political claims of collectives, communities, and DJs. This is especially poignant for DJs (players) who create their labels. For instance, although queer-friendly, record labels and clubs are typically white-owned and embedded within society's capitalist structures. However, there are Black and co-Black-owned labels, but the typically sub-labels of “boutique” artists are meant

to market to specific demographics. Within the queer of color EDM industry, clubs, and music labels have the most economic capital and hold social capital through their lateral and vertical relationships. As such, they are predictably the most demographically different from the marginalized identities most common to this field's DJs, promoters, and collectives. On the other hand, some DJ collectives – some businesses – are structured as grassroots organizations and companies explicitly seeking to empower queer people of color who may have prestige and social capital but very little economic capital.

The next position within this field is the intermediaries, such as promoters, organizers, journalists, and collectives who act as middle wo/men between talent and venues. Players within this position, especially promoters and journalists, are motivated by the prestige of “discovering” talent and reifying the symbolic and cultural capital circulating within the field. On the other hand, promoters are also motivated to gain economic capital, which is achieved by booking popular artists within and from different cities. Collectives, similar to promoters, find talent and negotiate on their behalf with clubs to headline community artists and host events. However, collectives’ primary position is to support and bring visibility to talent.

Additionally, some collectives within queer of color EDM nightlife also serve as fundraising intermediaries that help queer people of color pay for community needs (see Figure 15). Hence, collectives will often seek out sponsors to help fund events. Indeed, through corporate patronage, collectives collaborate with big companies who seek to align their brand with the trendiness of social progressiveness often associated with queer people of color. For example, another London creator relayed the following:

“I also think that it really is the [shit] right now to be brown and queer and a woman. And I feel like white people feel they need to be on board, and I think that's a social thing as well, as it just makes sense for them businesswise to be onboard with us.”
(Campbell 2018)

Knowing that their access to resources is tenuous at best queer people of color operationalize their social positions to their benefit. This corporate patronage, as Taylor explains, allows artists to be funded without being under a big company's direct association and control (Taylor 2020, 18). Thus collectives within this field do not adhere to Bourdieu's economic world reversed as they seek to make a living from their work.



I am the founder of For The Gworts (@ForTheGworts), a collective that helps BLACK transgender people pay their rent and gender-affirming surgeries. We help Black trans people obtain these bare necessities through two methods: (1) by bringing the community together to fundraise through rent parties (2) using our burgeoning social media presence to crowdfund for Black transgender people that reach out to us with an immediate need. Over the last 6 months, we've helped raise over \$28,000 for Black transgender folks in need.

Figure 16 Assani York promoting her NYC based collective, For the Gworts | Courtesy of BET Design

Position-Taking In The Field

According to Bourdieu, social life is organized around different fields, which are specific social arenas with their own rules, hierarchies, and positions. He argues that These fields can include various domains such as politics, education, art, and economics. Within each field, individuals and groups compete for symbolic and material resources, and position taking becomes crucial in this process. He argues that individuals engage in position taking through their habitus, which is a set of dispositions, habits, and embodied knowledge acquired through socialization. The habitus shapes individuals' preferences, tastes, and behaviors, guiding their

choices and strategies in positioning themselves within a particular social field. Specifically, Bourdieu frames his discussion of position-taking along the lines of aesthetics. However, in the field of the queer of color underground position taking manifests slightly differently. Since collectives work towards promoting queer artists and communities of color, competition for resources, such as talent or prestige, rarely occurs publicly. In fact, it is fairly common for collectives to promote each other on social media pages³⁰, and attend each other's events and services. However, when these players are called out publicly, it occurs after folks in the community hear about several incidents against someone. Thus, position-taking amongst DJs, event producers, and collectives can be related to political capital. These players position-take by pointing out the misogyny, transmisogyny, or anti-blackness among each other.

In private conversations and interviews, position-taking also comes from how closely aligned their parties are to the claim of centering racialized sexual minorities. The most egregious allegation was levied against the party called Ostbahnhof and A Club Called Rhonda. This particular party is curated by the Black genderqueer collective Black Charmed who claims they center queer people of color in their party space. A policy they developed to insure their space stays queer is through a stringent screening process where they ask for proof of identity via a social media page (e.g. Instagram, Facebook) and email address to verify a potential attendee's identity and queerness. Once you are verified the party planners email you a location for their party where you are asked to show at the door. I once tried to gain entry but I presumably failed this screening process as I did not receive further instructions on where the party was located.

³⁰Campbell, Interview with Author, 2018. "Um we, we like, we all try to support each other as much as possible. Like I suppose there are certain collectives that we have more in common with. So we'll chat more, talk more, um but if Batty Mama were doing an event, or if Pxsy Palace or Magic Clit or em what else is there...uh Resis'dance, Gold Snap, um Cocoa Butter Club like if any of them are doing events then we'll make sure we try to share it on socials. I've DJ'd, I think, at like pretty much all of their events and we've tried to like swap DJs. And we have a calendar all together where everybody inputs when they're doing parties."

Nevertheless, from what I have learned from interlocutors and casual conversations is that this particular party often drew crowds similar to white cisgender gay circuit parties to the detriment of gender non-conforming and queer people of color.

Indeed, failing to live up to the claims of diversifying a party can be detrimental, but harmful to party's that tout themselves as inclusive and intersectional. For example, the popular party A Club Called Rhonda, started by USC graduates Gregory Alexander and Loric Granic, is one of L.A.'s longest and most visible aboveground queer parties. In fact, Rhonda and Mustache Mondays, L.A.'s most famous underground party and institution, are closely related. According to an interlocutor Alexander and Nava were friends since high school. As a result, Gregory got the idea to create A Club Called after attending a Mustache Mondays. However, the socio-economic positions of Rhonda's team would allow the party to expand into the prominence its now sees,

A: The kids that started, Rhonda were all USC students that were like involved in business marketing and one guy, his brother majored in lighting. When you look at the team that is that party, it's a lot of like educated, went to school, went to a university type gays. And that's not Nacho. That wasn't necessarily his upbringing, or his access to education. Nacho, and I would talk about stuff and, you know, he would get real with me and be like, 'I don't fucking get it. Like, why do they get fucking invited? How are they getting like parties at Coachella? Like, why am I not being asked for dah dah dah dah?' And I'm like, 'Nacho, all those kids are like grown ass kids, with fucking degrees in marketing and like in event coordinating and shit like that and...

BB: With networks and stuff like that?

A: Well, and also to the thing is, is that maybe Rhonda's started out trying to be diverse or having a diverse crowd, but over the years it became a party that that catered to white, cis gays and that is what Nacho is not about and never been about. So I think there are a lot of the opportunities that came that way, aside from those people on the team being like. Marketing majors and shit. They were also like. Making a playground for like white cis gays that wanted to throw money at the party and wanted to invest, you know? 'Oh, well, I work with this brand, Gregory. Let me give you the contact,' you know? Bringing the opportunities to Gregory because [he] is providing a playground for that demographic and Nacho was not and was very, very open about the 'I'm not here for the house music and disco white gays to come twirling through my party.'" (Anonymous 2021)

As said previously colleagues would not berate each other for demographic choices. Most conversation I have had with members operating in this field like to congratulate each other for navigating the difficulties of events production for queer and queer of color communities. However, there is a distinct economic benefit for centering the white gender conforming community.

Another common vertical position-taking from interlocutors occurs when clubs or labels fail to provide a safer space for their guests and talent. For instance, Trqpiteca's DJ and co-creator Natalie expressed how DJs use their position and cultural capital to make clubs more equitable to the queer of color communities that bring them business:

[O]ne of my friends, who is a transperson person, [got] kicked out of the club because they were in the "women's" bathroom. Like that put a sour taste to my mouth. I was like 'that's not cool!' [...] fast forward to like three years after that incident, now they're bathrooms are gender neutral. So it's like they're getting with the program. They know that the queer community is profitable now. They know that there is a community, [and that] there is a scene. [A]nd they gotta play with some of our rules for that to happen [...] Now you can like put something out there like, "Hey this-this venue just did this." Like "Don't go to it. Don't support it." They're more cautious than like if this happened if, if somebody got kicked out because the security, you know, is policing someone's gender they would be like "Oh whatever!" [...] but now it's like "Oh no wait Jimmy. Like this is actually affecting my business 'cuz it's being put out there on social media." (Murillo 2018)

Indeed, most outright lateral or vertical position-taking only occurs when addressing discriminatory behavior. Unfortunately, there are many instances of club owners' overt discrimination against marginalized communities along the axis of race (see Figure 16) and gender.



Figure 17 Conversation between drag queen, Honey Davenport, and Monster's former general manager | Courtesy of Honey Davenport, Facebook.

Talent, or DJs, exists as a fluid location within the field of EDM nightlife. As mentioned, being a DJ holds enormous symbolic capital within this field. This is because DJs are viewed as not only cultural curators but also cultural gatekeepers. Indeed, in Bourdieu's schematic, DJs are positioned with high levels of cultural capital and creative resources. Thus, DJs will often co-occupy other positions such as promoter, collective creator, attendee, and even record label owner. For example, Los Angeles-based DJ Kingdom owns the label Fade to Mind, and the previously mentioned DJ MikeQ owns a record label that almost exclusively signs queer DJs, musicians, and singers of color within the EDM industry. As such, DJs also hold the capacity to control the field, although to a different degree than those who control the means of production and intermediaries. With this in mind, there is competition for resources such as recognition (symbolic capital) and gigs (economic capital).

Furthermore, position-taking is expressed between DJs, intermediaries, and those who control the means of production. Position-taking between other DJs often manifests through value judgments of technical skill, song quality, and crowd control. As stated before, people in

all three positions typically shy away from value judgments because the main goal of this particular industry is to advance marginalized identities in the nightlife and EDM industries.

Discussion

Bourdieu's field of cultural production helps map the mechanics of the queer of color EDM industry. Similar to Bourdieu's formulation of the literary field, cultural and symbolic capital is often more abundant when economic capital is not. Within this field, DJs are, more often than not, cash poor. As discussed above, this is because of their position as creatives and socioeconomic status within mainstream society, further placing them at the margins. However, by acquiring significant amounts of cultural and symbolic capital, they can transform this capital into economic capital. Although the ability to earn economic capital is typically limited with the microcosm of these queer of color networks. Consequently, this field of cultural production cannot be accurately described according to Bourdieu's "economic world reversed." The players operating within this field of cultural production are, in fact seeking to professionalize their creative capacities.

Additionally, based on this observation, I break away from Bourdieu's schema. Although these artists do not see themselves making art for the masses, they wish to live off their crafts. Moreover, because this field and all its players function within society's capitalist structures, there is no option to opt out of the need for economic capital. Further, it is the very impetus of the queer of color EDM industry and its subsequent networks to help gainfully employ artists and DJs within this community because of the exclusionary practices within the mainstream music industry. DJs and collectives can and do utilize symbolic and cultural capital to share different resources. However, DJs, promoters, and collectives do seek economic capital and thus do not see its accumulation as compromising their cultural capital. As such, it is important to

note that not all players operating within the microcosm of this field face discrimination because of their socioeconomic positions. As discussed previously, clubs and record labels –typically owned by white cis-gendered men – are more politically, socially, and economically embedded within the larger structures of capitalism and society. More research will be needed to outline how these players navigate being in both queer of color EDM networks and mainstream music industries/society.

Chapter 4

Dark Banjee Aesthetic: Hearing the Queer of Color Sound Economy &

Archive within Club Music

“I like the philosophy of like teaching the children. I always having a bit of an homage to some classic tracks, personally. I don't I feel like it's also part to do with my age. That. A lot of times we with the kids, you know, if they're hearing a remix that sampling something from a classic track, they don't even know where they don't even know what the original song is or they're think they're receiving it. Like they're hearing it for the first time where when somebody who is a little bit older can recognize the sample or can recognize the cut. So, I'm that person” (Urias 2021c)

Within electronic dance music cultures (EDMCs), musicality and experimentation are indebted to black and Latinx DJs of color since its inception in the 1980s. Even today, queer DJs of color continue to push the envelope of experimental EDM by showcasing dance music from the "global south," centering remix styles that border between hip hop and EDM and sampling cultural references prevalent in queer communities of color. This chapter explores music's complex entanglements with identity and community for queer people of color in underground electronic dance music scenes. The first section frames my use of sound economy by discussing the literature that has influenced my application to queer and music communities of color. The second section examines the identity politics that underlie this sound economy by tracing how intertextuality allows DJs to display these minoritarian perspectives. The last section analyzes the **Cultural, Political, and Sound Economies, Oh My!**

At its basic root, an economy is a system of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within a society. It includes all the activities related to how resources are used to produce and exchange goods and services. In the case of cultural economies, these goods and services are related to culture, creativity, and the arts. Like other forms of economies, cultural economies tend to thrive on exploiting intellectual property and other forms of intangible assets.

Due to the expressive character of circulated goods is closely tied to issues of identity, representation, and cultural diversity. As such, it can be important in promoting social cohesion and inclusiveness. Cultural economies can also be viewed as a social and political force, reflecting and shaping values, attitudes, and beliefs.

However, my interest in economies is how queer and communities of color use sound as exchange systems throughout networks in the United States and beyond. Thus, I invoke Jeff Tilton's concept of "sound economy" to recognize how music and other sounds significantly impact the economy and can be viewed as valuable resources contributing to the well-being of queer of color communities (Tilton 2021, 28). According to Tilton, a sound economy is based on four fundamental principles. The first is that music and other sounds have economic value. This means that they can be bought and sold and contribute to creating jobs and income in a wide range of industries, including music production, live events, and sound engineering (Ibid 36).

The second principle of sound economy is that music and other sounds are necessary cultural resources. They are part of our collective heritage and play a key role in shaping our identities and sense of community (Ibid, 29). These resources should be protected and preserved for future generations. The third principle of sound economy is that music and other sounds are integral to social and environmental sustainability. Music and other sounds can promote social cohesion, raise awareness about political issues, and foster greater understanding and empathy between different groups of people (Ibid, 36). The fourth principle of sound economy is that music and other sounds can be used to promote innovation and creativity. They can inspire new ideas and ways of thinking and be used to create new products, services, and industries that contribute to economic growth and development. By focusing on these principles, sound economies can help us better understand how music and other sounds contribute to the economy

and society more broadly. It can also allow us to recognize the importance of protecting and preserving these valuable resources for future generations. For example, he references UNESCO's advocacy for economic justice of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for traditional and indigenous music cultures in Asia and the Americas (Ibid, 36). However, Titon notes that the ICH model used by UNESCO objectifies art as a cultural asset that can be owned whether it be by the state or individuals rather than communities. Current iterations of international copyright law under the World International Copyright Organization (WIPO) are intellectual property centric, which he quotes Weintraub who considers this type of "cultural asses-think" as "antithetical to the collective nature of traditional music" (qtd in Titon 2021, 41). Although this model may not be useful for cultures without commodity-centric cultural values, such as some indigenous cultures, it is useful for minority communities forced to operate in capitalist systems and societies.

On the other hand, Krista Thompson's iteration of economy in visual economy helps orient my conception of shared aesthetics exchanged between communities outside of commodity exchange. In Thompson's (2015) ethnography, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice*, she defines a visual economy as how images and representations are produced and consumed within a particular cultural context. Specifically, she examines the use of artificial light in African Diasporic cultural practices, such as carnival and masquerade, and how these practices challenge and resist the dominant visual narratives of Western modernity. Thompson argues that the visual economy of light in these cultural practices is not simply about aesthetics but also power and politics. Through the use of light, African Diasporic communities can create their visual economies that challenge dominant narratives of modernity and colonialism from which they have historically been excluded. By making their

visual economies, these communities can resist and subvert the dominant gaze and create new ways of seeing and being seen.

In fact, part of Thompson's iteration of visual economy borrows from Deborah Poole's (1997) concept. In her work *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World*, Poole explores the interplay between visual culture, race, and modernity through indigenous Andean images and their transformation within broader socio-political contexts. In her analysis of various visual artifacts – including religious icons, popular prints, photographs, and tourist souvenirs - she highlights the rich symbolic and cultural significance of these images within Andean societies and reveals how they have been transformed and commodified over time. Moreover, Poole presents how Andean visual culture presents an unequivocally indigenous Andean epistemology that challenges Eurocentric notions of both time and modernity. This is especially poignant given how these Andean perspectives persisted given colonial histories and the commodity circulation in Western global markets.

Towards a Queer of Color Sound Economy

Sampling music genres and using remix styles employed by queer communities of color is a generative space to examine how minoritarians articulate the intersections of music, identity, and community. Further, sampling, as a practice where producers take segments of "fixed musical text" (Fikentscher 1995, 95) to create newly articulated compositions, is deeply rooted in Afrodiasporic musicianship (Hebdige 1987; Hope 2001; D'Angelo 2015; de La Barre 2019). Consequently, the music heard within these scenes includes but is not limited to Angolan kuduro, Brazilian funk carioca, American R&B, Hindi pop, and Dominican dembow. What is most interesting is the editing styles DJs use to remix the genres, as mentioned above. Techniques

such as ballroom, Baltimore club, ghettech, and house music, allow DJs to recontextualize meanings of the source material.

Additionally, sampling as artistic expression reflects a sense of style and cultural knowledge (Rodgers 2004; Fiekntschler 2000, 50), wherein semiotic indices are essential in the genre's music-making (Turino 2008). For example, "Ha Crash," a staple in ballroom music, is sampled from a scene where Eddie Murphy and Dan Ackroyd are disguised as racist caricatures in the movie *Trading Places* (1983). As such, remixing is a disidentificatory process that allows DJs to create new meanings to suit their needs. The concept of musical intertextuality highlights how DJs construct new "relationships, implicit and explicit, between different 'texts,' including music, visual art, theatre, body movement, et cetera, in the process of creating, interpreting, performing and listening to music" (Folkestad 2013). Consequently, it is common to hear reality TV star Tiffany Pollard screaming "I don't give a fuck" over a ghettech track³¹ and congresswoman Maxine Waters's "reclaiming my time" over a Vogue beat³² placed next to each other in an hour-long DJ set.

On the other hand, blurring lines between music and sound allows artists and DJs to (re)center the politics that affect them. For example, deconstructed club innovator DJ Total Freedom once sampled an audio clip of charges being laid against the officers involved in the extrajudicial killing of Freddie Gray (Carolus 2017). Indeed, this practice of centering politics, overtly or implicitly, is a common aesthetic practice. This disruption of linear time invokes Kara Keeling's conception of black polytemporality that seeks to use the past in service of present

³¹ Tygapaw. "CRINGE MIX #43 – TYGAPAW" *Soundcloud*. (2020, May). <https://soundcloud.com/clubcringe/cringe43>. Retrieved June 16, 2020

³² MikeQ. "Commentator Buddah - Reclaiming My Time (Prod By. MikeQ)." *Soundcloud*. Retrieved June 16, 2020, from <https://soundcloud.com/qweenbeat/commentator-buddah-reclaiming-my-time-prod-by-mikeq>

interests and desires (Nyong'o 2018, 23). Moreover, this play with time affirms the futurity often denied for minoritarian subjects. This is especially the case, given the specters of structural violence, such as police brutality, racialized homophobia, and transphobia. This sentiment is also shared by artist Mister Wallace whose Cool Mom persona is an "otherworldly being from roughly three thousand human years into the future who is 'sent back here to right the wrongs of this time.'" (Later 2018). Therefore, music in this sound economy and club culture functions as an intervention and reminder for those living on the margins of society to celebrate their survival communally. In the example of the Freddie Gray sample, DJ Total Freedom critiques the social condition of Black life while simultaneously imagining a future outside of oppressive structures. Furthermore, DJs and artists tap into an (afro)futuristic practice of using the past to reclaim narrative control of their communities and experiences (Eshun 2003, 292).

As such, remixing and re-editing songs point to how perception is influenced by personal history. That is, people's background ultimately affects how source material will refract and give new meaning to the source material. For example, singer-songwriter Kelela explains that anyone "could have three completely different lives for the same vocal, and that's what we do. That's our culture. In the club you're gonna hear a halftime version, then you're gonna hear one with no drums, then you're gonna hear one that's 150 BPM" (Douze 2018). Within this aesthetic practice, DJs that music is in a constant state of refraction because sound occupies "multiple systems and plays several roles" (Altman 1999, 25). And this refraction is possible because artists and DJs' dispositions affect how they reinterpret and create music. As such, this sound economy is socially mediated and dialogic. In the same interview, Kelela expounds on the role of collaboration,

"There's a way that we empower each other through that conversation. Not only is the song better for it, but when your ideas are constantly being challenged and constantly

questioned, there's a way that you move through the world considering a lot of things. You can't navigate the way that a man would navigate studio sessions or even dictate the drums on a track. It was really important to me through this project that everyone was going to have to go through us. Not on some reverse-machismo shit, but really on a more profound level. There's insight and intuition and consideration." (Douze 2018)

Indeed, collaboration as a practice forefronts the importance of diversity in musicianship, positionalities, and politics. In highlighting these differences, this sound economy and more extensive dance music community work to prevent centralizing power and authority within the scene. In doing so, this scene philosophically forefronts an *incommiserate communism* (Muñoz 2013, 112) as expressed by queer theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz where "living-in-difference"³³ is more representative of the messy negotiations of race, class, gender, and sexuality in diverse communities. This is especially important given how corporate structures have coalesced to flatten any representations of racial, sexual, and other socio-economic differences by universalizing EDM's function and meaning.

Interrogating Afro-philo-sonic Fictions

Kodwo Eshun's *More Brilliant Than the Sun* illustrates how scholars can study contemporary Black music and its electronic afterlives after Soul without the identity politics of "the street." Such a call tantalizes scholars of alternative Black music who contend with genre redlining by music industries and the artists this marginalizes. Within electronic dance music cultures, PLUR or the disposal of identitarian vestiges appear, in theory, utopian because these liminal spaces allow folks to transcend burdensome constructions and divisions of humanity, of which early writings about techno, rave, and dance music are wrought with (Albiez 2005; Rose 1994, 83). However, scholars of Black feminist traditions of humanist and post-humanist camps

³³Joshua Chambers-Letson 2018, xx "A sphere of relation structured less by the flat social fictions of possession equality, and equivalence, than by a mode of sharing out, just redistribution and being together in racial and sexual particularity"

(Wynter 2003; Wynter & McKittrick 2015; McKittrick 2006; Weheliye 2014) highlight how white supremacy undergirds the (post) Enlightenment concepts of human and post-human, which allow misappropriations by mainstream music industries, festival/event planners, and enthusiasts to adopt race-blind attitudes, such as PLUR (Peace Love Unity Respect) that maintain the status quo of this nearly seven billion dollars global music industry economy (Gálvez 2019, Park 2017).

Another concern feeding into this chapter is how and if artists of color, particularly queer artists of color in EDM, developed a musical epistemology that references the sonic archives of Black queer life to prioritize coming together in difference within DJ mixsets. In other words, how can these afro-philo-sonic fictions (Nyong'o 2014) help us work through the tensions of our lived material realities to relate to one another and even achieve unity? This is especially poignant given how decades of marketing by the mainstream simultaneously decentralized racial/sexual minority liberatory politics of EDM culture while adopting almost all of the production styles. Moreover, these (re)discoveries are timely given the recent calls to democratize and even return the rave to the queer Black and brown communities from which it emerged (Conway 2020; Brown Jr. 2019).

To do so, I turn to mixset (also known as sets), or a “contiguous ‘suite’ of music” (Silby 2007) consisting of sequenced songs according to genre, mood, or theme through “beatmatching, blending, harmonic mixing, and a DJ-to-crowd feedback loop” (Brewster & Broughton 2014, 10-14 qtd in Jose Magaña 2018, 2). Philosophically, these DJ sets are also considered sonic journeys, fictions, or, as DJ scholar Paul Miller (Spooky The Subliminal Kid) explains, “mood sculptures [...] generated by the assembly process of DJing and sequencing etc. the social construction of memory” (2017, 472). I argue that through mixsets, queer of color DJs reconstruct quotidian life through the sonic archive by sampling and remixing. Here Lynnée Denise’s concept of *DJ scholarship* (Frank 2020) connects the DJ as song selector to DJ as an archivist. Recent literature

also illustrates how samples are not only essential to building “speculative visions” of idealized places (Salkind 2018), but also “dialogue and commentary” on issues concerning the communities within the African diaspora (Markle 2017, 208). Queer DJs of color utilize sets to signify their connection to contemporary sociocultural identities by sampling their community's sonic archive.

This is especially important considering that archivists Maloney & Schofield (2021) illustrate that if DJs’ collections, be it physical or digital, are an “overt link to dance music’s material, culture, and history.” The same can be applied to DJ mixsets (1). With this in mind, queer of color DJs utilize sets to interpolate members and contemporary sociocultural assembles through the citational practice of sampling the sonic archive of their community (Ibid, 3). With this in mind, queer of color DJs utilize sets to interpolate members and contemporary sociocultural assembles through the citational practice of sampling the sonic archive of their community (Ibid, 3). Thus, DJ scholarship allows scholars to excavate the layers, histories, ideas, people, and references contextualizing the music (Frank 2020, 15; Brooks 2021). What is at stake for the inclusion of mixset analysis is paying attention to the lower frequencies of Black and Black queer memory and, by extension, archival practice, which operates “independently [...] in popular culture and academic historiography” (Hanchard 2008, 54). Thus, looking to mixsets of queer of color dance music scenes as sources for sonic inquiry may help address the limitations of grand narratives and expand how we archive minoritarian communities (moore 2021).

The polytemporal nature of remixing and sampling central to mixsets points to the limits of documenting and even passing down Black queer cultural history in traditional institutional practices (Nyong’o 2018, 18; Maloney & Schofield 2021, 3). The compounding of time within mixsets allows DJs to “simultaneously preserve, interpret, and recontextualize” memory (Eshun 1998, 17). The problems with time and memory as conceptualized through linear notions of

progress is that it (1) erases (Rivera-Rideau 2013, 619) or fixes within time what little experiences and contributions of marginalized people in official narratives, (2) antiquates identitarian politics, and the (3) ignores the experiences of minoritarians living in under a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Refashioning mixsets as sonic fictions helps to see the afro-fabulations DJs create for audiences to hear and experience. Indeed, phonographic compressions tune into these practices and sounds to extract, for instance, how a scream can point to the breakdown between commodity and human (Moten 2003) and how a moan can signal a reclamation of sexual autonomy and pleasure made invisible by racialized sexual terror (Hine 1989).

The structure of mixsets similarly follows what we would find in the literary plot form. For DJ, teacher, and theorist Brent Silby (2007), the framework of a mixset typically follows a rubric similar to fictional storytelling in that it includes a (1) Act I: introduction, (2) Act II: development or midpoint where DJs find their groove or “main argument” through tracks fitting a chosen theme or mood. During this section, DJs typically introduce conflict characterized by “a slightly different (perhaps harder) sound,” creating the tension necessary to propel the set to the next sound (Ibid). This movement is accomplished through sampling aspects from the introductory section (ACT I) in the development section (Act II). Lastly, the resolution section (Act III) features the return to the music style found at the end of the introduction (Act I) and the beginning of the development section (Act II). Depending on the length of a mixset, DJs can repeat the conflict/relief within Act II to achieve the desired time length. This is important considering that DJs across minority communities, such as DJs Venuxs X and Total Freedom (Ashland Mines), utilize sets to force listeners into an “active participation” that prevents a “cool and distant acceptance of data” (Morrison 1984, 387).

As mentioned, sets are fleshed out through musically and culturally relevant samples. Scholarship from hip-hop studies parallels digital sampling to practices of homage (Hebdige 2003; Rose 1994) and reflections on historical & aesthetic values (Schloss 2004). Recent literature also illustrates how samples are not only essential to building “speculative visions” of idealized places (Salkind 2018) but also “dialogue and commentary” on issues concerning the communities within the African diaspora (Markle 2017, 208). Here, Hanchard’s (2008) concept of sample-based producers within Black music as Black archaeologists who are “accustomed to having their range of aesthetic tastes, political dispositions, and aspirations for the future ignored” (54). Thus, what is at stake for the inclusion of mixset analysis is paying attention to the lower frequencies of Black and Black queer memory and, by extension, archival practice, which operates “independently [...] in popular culture and academic historiography” (Ibid). This way, sampling within Black queer and queer of color electronic dance music traditions can be understood as ruminations and reaffirmations of cultural identity. Additionally, samples referencing Black queer life force listeners into an “active participation” that prevents a “cool and distant acceptance of data” (Morrison 1984, 387). Indeed, within some queer spaces of color, the object is not to escape reality. Instead, DJs like Soto and Mines use their mixes to confront pressing issues through sampling in current events (Hawgood, 2012; Ryce 2015).

On the other hand, the sonic archive is partly made tactile and dialogic through the CDJ. In fact, within rave and underground dance music spaces, the CDJ is central in music performance in that it has replaced the vinyl turntabling and laptop DJing that characterized much of the early 2000s. This is due, in part, to the ease with which DJs can carry their music collections on USB drives and CDs, which the CDJ has ports for. Additionally, the steady rise of “internet crate surfing” via music dissemination and P2P file-sharing services helped to boost the

CDJ's popularity. For club owners and event producers, the CDJ eliminated the need to reconfigure the booth between DJ mixsets, thusly becoming an industry standard since the introduction of Pioneer's CDJ 2000 in 2009 (Rothlein 2013). Moreover, the CDJs facsimile jog wheel has the same tactile manipulation as a turntable and with similar equalizing controls. The CDJ's quick cue button allows DJs to create and manipulate samples in situ of performance through stuttering, looping, and rhythmic repetition (Rietveld 2016, 4), as seen in this video³⁴. Furthermore, these functions allow DJs to make aesthetic choices, which DJ Lotic explains is essential for those interested in "pushing the idea of the DJ as a performer" (Wheeler 2015).

10,000 Screaming Faggots HBA F/W 2014 Soundtrack

"10,000 Screaming Faggots" is a DJ set and soundtrack, spearheaded by the fashion label Hood By Air's creative director and co-founder Shayne Oliver featuring DJ Total Freedom in collaboration with Tim DeWitt for the Fall/Winter 2014 show. According to an interview with Oliver, the theme for this show is trans as the future forward prefix to point to the raw creative adaptability of streetwear fashion (Schuller 2014b). HBA director Leilah Weintraub explains that one of the show's goals was to elicit emotional responses to the fashion line's incubation of ideas rather than one particular theme (Schuller 2014a). And true to his description, much of the show's designs were androgynous as male and female models were adorned with halos of hair extensions, loose-fitting silhouettes, skirts on all genders, and heeled boots. Shayne's collection features many staples of streetwear fashion, such as graphic t-shirts, jackets, and sweatpants punctuated with metallic adornments, decorative zippers, and strappy platform boots often seen in underground cyberpunk/goth music scenes. The show is constructed minimalistically, almost mimicking the

³⁴ Vodafone. 2012. A demonstration of the CDJ instrumentation by Jazmin Soto: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjOr9DhiQsY&ab_channel=Vodafone

showboating walks down the carpeted hallways into a dark club with flashing white lights complimenting the rhythmic bass of the soundtrack.

Oliver's insistence on a multi-sensorial experience draws on his experience as a DJ at New York City's influential Ghe20 G0th1k party, which was established by longtime friend Venus X who sought to unite the Black, queer, and goth party scenes she frequented. Described as a party that "Court[s] Catharsis Through Chaos," music journalist describes this influential party as the following:

"Face tattoos, Buffalo platforms, chokers, bondage trousers, Marilyn Manson T-shirts, lime green braids, blinged-out gold name chains and head-to-toe Hood By Air. You walk inside to a scene reigned by chaos and mutability. Dark rap, Jersey club, ballroom, industrial, nu-metal, dancehall, grime, reggaeton, baile funk and Aaliyah all rammed into each other at frenetic cadence. Voguing, shuffling, dabbing, twerking. Welcome to Ghe20 G0th1k." (Amarca 2017)

In its formative years, Oliver was a resident DJ, which allowed both of their projects, HBA and Ghe20 G0th1k, to grow alongside one another (Halabian 2019). As a result of their shared "dark banjee aesthetic" (Shorey 2017), Oliver and Venus X collaborated on several projects. Ghe20 G0th1k became one of the country's creative center for queer people of color. Venus X often collaborated with various underground queer electronic dance music artists and DJs, such as L.A.-based label Fade to Mind, through co-founder DJ Kingdom (Ezra Rubin) and Total Freedom (Mouchemore & Kay 2022).

Although DJ Total Freedom met Oliver through Venus X's Ghe20 G0th1k network, he developed his career through L.A.-based parties. Formerly and briefly (mis)named as the worst DJ, Total Freedom found his groove two years before connecting with Venus X at Ignacio "Nacho" Nava's Mustache Monday and the Wildness party he co-founded with friends Wu Tsang, Asma Maroof, and Daniel Pineda (Carolus 2017; Stone 2013). Through their meeting, DJ Total Freedom cites that his method of music-making is heavily influenced by Venus X & Oliver's "disruptive"

and “uncomfortable” style of DJing (Stone 2013). Venus X’s style of DJing that emerged through Ghe20 G0th1k is considered deconstructed or “post-” club music, though some within the DJ community contest such a designation.³⁵ She explains in previous interviews that the deconstructed music coming out of Ghe20 G0th1k was influenced, in part, by the 2009 recession and the world’s then, obsession with the apocalypse and young adults’ subsequent feelings of anxiety and helplessness (Pearl 2017). Sonically, this genre is characterized by a “post-modern” blend that,

“breaks away from dance music tropes like four-on-the-floor beats, stable tempo, and constant mix with gleeful anarchy, proposing a sonic locus where ballroom breaks, field recordings, rap a capellas, and heavy metal are reconfigured into dancefloor fodder [...] It’s vision is high- and low-brow cultural signifiers in order to reclaim the club floor co-opted by mainstream electro-pop and EDM.” (Nikolayi 2019)

The style Venus X and Shayne helped pioneer has become a disruptive force in electronic dance music in that their style breaks away from popular conventions of Top 40 club remixes made popular in the 1980s and 1990s, which they accomplished through the dark tone of their edits but also placing gritty current events, “non-musical” sounds, and “low-brow” culture in conversation with manufactured fantasies of popular music. On the other hand, the variety of genres crisscrossed within this particular electronic dance music tradition points to an ethos where difference is incorporated into the mix to seemingly address how nightlife was splintered across music genre, race, ethnicity, and sexualities in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Her method of creating and music-making favors the juxtapositions of her queer, Afrodiasporic, and women/femme leanings.

“10,000 Screaming Faggots” borrows its name from the 90s dance track, “10,000 Screaming Faggots (In the Life Extended Mix),” by The Moonwalkers—a duo consisting of dance music singer/songwriter Ultra Naté, and dance music producer, Maurice Fulton. According to the

³⁵Though opinions about why the name is nonsensical, the main contentions are that (1) “deconstructed” is redundant to describe the general form and production style prevalent in club music and electronic dance music more generally, (2) but also that it is a term established by the music industry (music journalists). See McLeod 2001 for more discussions on EDM subgenres

liner notes of the original dance track, the song is inspired by a night out in Miami. It is a (controversial) dedication to the duo's, but more likely Ultra Naté's, gay fan base for their "endless support" (Discogs). There are two significant voices in the song. The first is the perspective of a figure who proclaims his disgust with the exuberant queer clientele and whose own orientation is indiscernible,

"They were laughing and dancing/ I mean screaming all over the place/ writhing their bodies in total abandon/ I mean it was disgusting!" (The Moonwalkers)

The other and most prominent perspective is a female narrator who recounts a dream about their relationship to the chorus of the adoring gay crowd,

"I had a dream last night/ I that I was adored beyond imagine/ carried on the shoulders of 10,000 screaming faggots/ [...] 10,000 screaming faggots in unison and chaos as they sang/ songs of love and sadness/ songs of honesty and pain/ [...] They were my friends/ for to them, I am real/ enjoying the beauty of womanhood/ for me allowing them to feel!" (The Moonwalkers)

Throughout the lyrics, the female speaker calls and responds with the adoring chorus who reify each other's gender and experiences of "love and sadness/ of honesty and pain." The song is considered, by many, an essential to the canon of "bitch tracks," or songs instrumental to the development of the queer Afro-Latinx ballroom dance music sound in the 1990s (Lhooq 2018).

In referencing this song Total Freedom & Oliver align themselves with the queer of color archival practice of using music to document their history, culture, and aesthetics (Collin 2018, 324). The soundtrack set mirrors the relationship between the down-low figure and the woman who is reified by the adoring gay crowd. Specifically, this mix fabulates how the down-low figure might have met the narrating woman, whom we will see is more than the man bargains.

Act I: “Let Me Take You Away From Here”

Given Oliver’s “trans” theme, the beginning section deals with disclosure, visibility, and utopia/dystopia. As if mirroring the awe-inspiring night that led to the Moonwalker’s dance track, the set begins with a simple but chilling interpolation to, or hailing of, the down-low figure “Do I know you from somewhere?” Does the narrating woman recognize the down-low figure from a night of “laughing, dancing, and screaming all over the places” of queer bodies “ripping in total abandon” (Moonwalkers)?

Total Freedom turns the down-low figure on its head by placing the onus back on this figure; for why would he be in the club with the community that disgusts him? The repeating question build the down-low figure’s anxiety about being misidentified as queer, an enticement, or tradition found within Black music and musical critique such as Gil Scott Heron’s “The Subject Was Faggots” and in the works of Amiri Baraka. Here, this ominous exchange between the “down-low” figure and the “out” woman who recognizes him points to the strategies of negotiating multiple forms of stigmatized sexual identifications (Snorton 2014, 6). The unease of this interrogation is furthered as the set fades into a sample of a snarling chihuahua over the background of dark industrial otherworldly sounds—as if triggering the journey to a repressed memory.

Though still ominous, the music becomes lighter as if the forgotten memory becomes more apparent, and the listener is placed back into a moment. Here, the looped *a capella* of Beyoncé’s “End of Time” fades in. The female narrator beckons to the figure, “come take my hand/ I won’t let you go/ I’ll be your friend/ I’ll love you so deeply/ [...] I will love you ‘til the end of time.” The reverbed *a capella* juxtaposed with the lyrics’ sweetness, and the background music’s expansiveness make the narrator seem like a siren calling the listener to a forbidden fantasy, just beyond reach. “Come take my hand” repeats as dissonant strings and space sounds

fade in and eventually crescendo over the vocal sample. The chorus continues, “take you away from here/ there’s nothing between us, but space and time/ [...]let me shine in your world/ [...] make me your girl.” The section “make me your girl” repeats as if signaling the completion of a spell entrancing the figure. Here the sampled lyrics forebode through signifying the “excess surface” (Musser 2018) of the singing Black femme³⁶ and diva to highlight how overloading the surface impression – a critical practice to disidentification – with indexes obscures the true meaning only accessible to members privy to alternative networks and systems of meaning (Nyong’o 2018, 15).

Act II: “No, I’m Not the Girl You Thought You Wanted”

The mix then changes moods to introduce the conflict through fading in a spoken word piece by DJ, visual artist, and writer Juliana Huxtable,

“When small boobs are championed by the defeat of the social impulse to make them bigger and more supple by the same sleazy dudes in the upper westside with pec implants whose parents secretly orchestrated the creation of distinct gender dysmorphia from the...”

The placement of this piece formally introduces the down-low figure to the alternative epistemes hinted at through the vocoded Beyoncé sample. As if calling for a new world order, Huxtable’s incendiary renouncing antiquated beauty standards and gender norms juxtaposed against the space sound effects and lyrics discloses the woman speaking as alien to the world of the down-low figure. The woman is “eccentric”³⁷ because she satirizes and critiques the heteronormative regimes they both live in. And in doing so positions herself as not an alien but someone who transcends these

³⁶ Keeling 2007, 143. Here I evoke Kara Keeling’s conception of how black femmes and specifically queer black femme, of which the Beyoncé’s sample as the Black diva cites, “portal to a reality that does not operate according to the dictates of the [hegemonic] visible and the epistemological, ethical, and political logics of visibility.”

³⁷ I use “eccentric” queerly to acknowledge how Black musicians and performers adopt “appropriation, pastiche, sampling, and irony” to satirize, critique, and reinvent heteronormative black radical traditions of world-making and self-fashioning (Royster 2013, 8; moore 2018).

regimes. “Space and time” simultaneously evokes the “tensed” and “tenseless”-ness of the Black performance aesthetic found between Beyoncé’s lyrics and Huxtable’s spoken word piece. As Huxtable’s piece trails off, her words are garbled as if suggesting that her words and perspectives are inhuman or illegible to the systems that seek to “code out” the lower frequencies of alternative epistemologies (James 2021, 22).

That the woman is more than appears is further highlighted through the horrorcore classic Lil Noid’s “Load My Clip.” While the chopped-and screwed version of this song is brief, it fits the generally dark apocalyptic (read beginning of a new era) theme and genre of the set³⁸. The lyrics further reveals that the speaking woman has a strong sense of self,

“talking shit, I’ll load my clip and shoot you in your fucking face/ bring that shit up to the door you wanna try me, Noid hoe/[...] bitch my nuts you best not ever test/ Blackout is my nigga so Lil Stabby got his fucking back/ Get yo’ hands up we’re the ones so damn near we gon have to scrap.”

This passage suggests that the narrating woman is not only willing and ready to defend herself but also has the support of her family. This is further punctuated by layering a chorus of barking chihuahuas, a longstanding effeminate signifier for gay men (Tate 2011, 106). Interestingly, the sample placement can be read as an affirmation of ethnic identity and self-defense. The AAVE within this sample as a means to iterate a strong sense of Black identity is reminiscent of the saying, “my gender is Black” (Ziyad 2017). This phrase attends to how the traumatic events of the transatlantic slave trade excluded African descendants from the binaries of public/domestic gender roles (Spiller 1987, 72). The violent imagery of the lyrics is reminiscent of the “by any means” self-determination helpful to women, femmes, and non-binary people of color living in defense of themselves, as outlined by the Black Panther Party and STAR (Leighton

³⁸ Julia 2019. “At the end of the 80s, young people were tired of the upbeat electro-funk tunes that had defined the decade so far. The music of their parents’ generation was out of sync with the reality in Memphis”

2019, 22). Such a call for self-defense is especially poignant given the simultaneous under- and over-enforcement of Black transgender and queer femme communities. As a conflict section, this song serves as a recognition of the phantom of violence (state or interpersonal) haunting transwomen and queer femmes.

The section continues into an industrial interlude featuring a chopped and screwed remix of Beyoncé's "No Angel." This edit is not only a nod to Houston's Black music scene and the artists therein, but it also serves to trouble notions of gender classification and humanity through Beyoncé's down-pitched and slowed voice, "Baby put your arms around me/ Tell me I'm the problem/ No I'm not the girl you thought you wanted." This song nods to the politics of gender disclosure, passing, and visibility within the transgender community.

The vocoded vocals and lyrics also touch upon how Black musicians and performers use technology to invent what it means to be human. This song nods to the politics of identity disclosure, passing, and visibility within the transgender community (Snorton 2009; Galupo et al. 2014; Fernandez & Birnholtz 2019). Moreover, the vocoded vocals and the lyrics also touch upon how Black musicians and performers use technology as the crux of fabulating what it means to be human (James 2008; Yates-Richards 2021, 36; Wynter 2003, 273; van Veen 2013). As the section continues, the narrator reveals herself to the figure, "underneath that pretty face I something complicated/ I come with a side of trouble/ but I know that's why you're staying/ Because you're no angel either baby." If the previous section and beginning of Act II set up the antagonistic relationship between the down-low figure and the female narrator, whose trans dispositions are gradually revealed throughout the set, then this section, with the exaggerated vocoded vocals and lyrics, is the climax or resolution. It signifies a leveling of the field needed for the down-low or closeted figure to open himself up to the world and worldview where the narrating woman exists.

Act III: Cunt

Now that the world has opened for the down-low figure, the mix's dénouement explores themes of liberation, belonging, and self-affirmation. This is accomplished by the quick fade-in and loop of Disco Lucy Lips, the narrating woman in the original Moonwalkers song, shrilly yelling "10,000 Screaming Faggots." At the same time, Total Freedom stacks the sample of snarling chihuahuas in the foreground. The narrating woman of the set interpolates her community and summons her family. This is especially poignant as the mix moves into the sound, aesthetic, and history of ballroom culture. As the Moonwalkers track fades in, Kevin Aviance's "Cunt" sample bounces from left to right stereo as it enters the sonic landscape. Including ballroom music accomplishes two things: (1) it acts as a sonic claim to space, a proclamation to move from the margins to the center, and (2) it also signals an expansion of gender aesthetics. In his analysis of gender in the ballroom scene, Bailey explains that "cunt," "pussy," "feminine," etc. serve as a criterion for gender performance in competitions and for passing "authentic femininity" in the real world (2011, 382). As the mix continues, trilling and commentating by Kevin Movado Prodigy fill all parts of the stereo until it crescendos with a double bass drum solo.

The solo fades into white noise, exaggerating the abruptness of the instrumentalized "Ha" crash sound characteristic of ballroom dance music. The set then goes into a commentary vs. commentator ballroom track, visually marked in the fashion show with a vogue femme performance. What I find poignant in including this vogue femme performance with actual dancers is that it visually positions the narrator as a part of a family (house) and the larger community. Whereas before queer aesthetics were implicit, the dancers' presence in the fashion show makes an explicit claim to Black queer culture and identity. Musically, this is poignant given that the "ha

crash” and the Jersey club music rhythmic motif in contemporary iterations of ballroom music are popular in “deconstructed/post-” club music.

Discussion

I’ve attempted to excavate the sonic archives within the mixsets using DJ scholarship and attending to the sonic compression within “10,000 Screaming Faggots (Hood By Air FW14)” to illustrate how EDM DJs are aurally representing the culture, issues, and experiences of Black queer communities. Mixsets can be viewed as archival objects that contain culturally specific histories, epistemologies, and ontologies important to underrepresented communities. Mixsets, in form and function, are a method of storytelling and world-building which Black queer DJs utilize to document and preserve their community. Interestingly, mixsets like the one analyzed to illustrate how Black queer DJs use sound, low-, and high-brow culture to create music specifically catered to the aesthetics and concerns of their community. Black queer DJs interrogate regimes of gender, sexuality, and even humanity through sampling.

Conclusion

Living in a Post-Covid World: Living Beyond Our Discontents

[Redacted]

Catch One

[Redacted], 2021 @ 10:24p

It's a nice late summer night, the kind you don't need a jacket unless it pulls the outfit together. It's been nearly a year, if not more, since my return to Catch One. I also haven't attended a [redacted] event since probably 2018 if not 2019. The last event I went to left a bad taste in my mouth. If I were to pinpoint it I remember there were a lot of those dreaded clout chasers. The one that only goes to the hippest venues in the safest areas (read: gentrified and/or white). Although Catch One is by no means a dangerous neighborhood, its situated on a main thoroughfare with small storefront businesses, plazas, and street vendors selling tacos and the kind of hot dogs I love to commemorate a night of dancing, drinking, and chatting with folks. I'm waiting here for M, although I could go in since I bought a ticket to the event. However, he "dances" for this event and is able to get me access to the greenroom where the talent and other dancers are separating themselves from the crowd. It's relatively early but there's still a modest line beginning to form around the block.

More time passes and M texts me that he and his current partner are in a Uber just around the corner. As whenever he steps into a new space M dazzles the people around him with his presence. I can't help but roll my eyes at his theatrics and he laughs and gives me him a hug and a kiss on the cheek. I greet his partner the same and M leads us to the building's rear where the talent enters. After checking in with the staff all three of us are given drink tickets which we immediately redeem at the bar situated in the two story open-spaced greenroom. Once we all finish we make our rounds checking out the five rooms situated between two floors. I stop in one to listen to DJ BEARCAT, a British Philly-based talent who I've written about in various papers during my coursework. The room she plays in a discotheque fantasy with black and white checkered floors, red neon lights with the party's iconic logo that is complimented by the red overhead lights and purple lazer. M and his partner leave me to my own devices as he tells me that according to their job duties they must be seen floating around the venue to make the event look cool and interact with the guests to hype them up. No matter BEARCAT is playing my

favorite remixed edit of hers, one that I've been dying to dance to on the dancefloor since lockdown was lifted.

Speaking of which most folks are not wearing a mask I assume the implementation of vaccines has something to do with this. As a matter of fact I talked to a nightlife worker who only had his first round of vaccinations and because of his skepticism, like many other Black Americans, was hesitant to have the full series until one of his bosses told him he couldn't return to work until he was fully vaccinated. This event almost felt like a pre-Covid party in the ways people are embracing one another. Indeed, it felt good to be out dancing again [...]

I've been dancing for nearly three hours and I need a break. I just finished dancing to DJ BaeBae's killer set. I'm so happy they played one of Calvo Music's song I love what he's done with B-More Club music. While I was dancing M introduced me to some of his friends and coworkers. All stylish of course, but judging by the fact that I've only seen some of them actually dancing this evening is leading me to believe that they're all influencers here to make this party look hip and cool. The three of us, and some of M's coworkers, made our way back to the greenroom for a little rest and recap. While M is seated on the couch parallel to us chatting with his coworker, M's Partner and I are on another chatting about his experience in L.A.'s queer nightlife. With all the stylish and hip looking people around us in the greenroom, our conversation naturally drifted to how he navigates being around the "cool kids." He states that he keeps a small smile while looking around as to not offend by looking and leave the space open to initiating conversation. We talk more until M has a drink spilled on him from the second floor and we move to the balcony to cool down.

I'm separated from M and his partner on the small balcony who are busy catching up with more of their friends and coworkers. As I'm typing more notes in hope of capturing my first impressions of the space my eyes catch a gentlemen next to me smoking a cigarette. We exchange pleasantries, and small talk before he curtly asks me who I am to which I answer that I'm a plus one and cousin to M. I ask for his name to which he answers and says "Well not to toot my own horn, but I like started this" in reference to the party. Dang. I had read up on this party and even watched a small documentary, but little good that did me I didn't recognize this dude at all! Luckily I didn't let that phase me as in the next heartbeat I congratulated him and asked about the state of queer nightlife since the lockdown ended. He told me everything seemed to work and that this was his third event since the restrictions lifted. As we continued our

conversation he mentioned that the boldness of talent had shifted. When I asked him to clarify (I made sure to have a blank expression on my face, seeing as how in these networks everyone knows everyone) he pointed to my L.A. interlocutors, a Black femme who holds a nearly ten year DJing career, asking for more demands unequal to his perceived level of their talent and notoriety. Before I could follow up he was called away and we both said our goodbyes before he disappeared into the building. Same shit, different day.

The Black Lives Matter 2020 movement rippled throughout the American and global landscape due in part to the lockdown lending the world's attention to the extrajudicial killing of George Floyd. It almost felt like the horrors of deregulation and neoliberalism would finally be addressed. Indeed, calls to address were not limited to police reform and even touched various aspects of the music industry. For underground dance music scenes, this was also true. Instagram posts, Tweets, and Facebook updates were filled with the dirty laundry of various players and operators in the field. From renewed accusations of sexual assault to leaked conversations of venue owners disparaging nonwhite and nongender conforming talent/audiences, the entire scene was awash with redress. This was met with calls for transparency in upper-level decision-making, the creation of community-run coalitions, and the redistribution of funds.

As I sit here trying to conclude this work and even give an overview of the queer of color underground, all I can think of is that the scene is fine. The scenes around the country have reached a stasis enabling them to maintain their presence within the city. Indeed, the party flyers circulating social media have returned, and events appear regularly. And in some cases, attendance has skyrocketed and has even been attended by celebrities. However, the relationship between the queer and of color underground and mainstream music industries, and even media industries more generally, remains tenuous at best. It is common for folks riding the post-2020 wave of socio-political redress, especially the seasoned artists, to interact with promoters and

aboveground clubs with tacit apprehension, given their experiences of seeing public interest shift to the next catastrophe. Nonetheless, the queer underground in Los Angeles has seen the rise of new parties and promoters focusing on various ethnic, gender-nonconforming, and immigrant music communities.

Cultural Rights Over Electronic Dance Music?

As explained in the previous chapters, EDM is, in fact, Black music. It was established in the Black queer spaces, developed by Black queer and later other ethnic minorities and straight white musicians. However, its climb in popularity led populations outside minority communities to enjoy and become successful contributors to the genre. Now that electronic dance music has transcended race and sexualities, should its original community celebrate the growth of its cultural products? Or is this another case of appropriating Black and Black queer culture? Indeed, EDM is not the first product of Black and Black queer culture that has suffered the ensnaring effects of commodification for white consumers, leading to white artists appropriating Black musical styles (Neal 199, 17). The most salient example, Rock and Roll, created by the queer Black woman Sister Rosetta Tharpe (Wald 2007), then popularized by “chitlin’ circuit” artists – e.g. Chuck Berry and Little Richard – and eventually miscegenated into Elvis and the Beatles (Mahon 2004, 150).

Even descriptions of those who like and listen to “Black music” illustrate the distancing from its originators. For example, when jazz transitioned to the mainstream, white listeners did not seem interested in Black music, instead, they were interested in “cosmopolitan music” (Toynbee & Wilks 2013, 38) since non-Black musicians appropriated it. This relabeling and exaggeration of the *cosmopolitanness* of Jazz essentially dilutes its Black origin. Thus, removing the racial aspects of the music and divorcing themselves from the culture in which jazz emerged.

The gradual whitening of Black culture through its absorption into popular culture leads to the mainstream memory loss of its Black origins.

What is at stake here is not the community's recognition as creators but the money that comes with it. Here we see the conflation of two different cultural approaches to intellectual and cultural rights, both African and European. In some sense, EDM shares aspects of African musical culture where it belongs to the community, not just the individual (Collins 2006, 159). House music was the cultural product of the queer people of color coming together to create a space where they felt accepted. So much so that during its heyday in the 1980s and 1990s, non-Black queer people of color used house music to index community membership (Brewster & Broughton 2000, 295). However, house music was initially a product of minorities within a minority. So then, should it only be created and enjoyed by select populations? And is it enough to acknowledge the contributions and move on?

Indeed, many have taken steps to ensure that the Black and brown contributions have not gone unnoticed. In Chicago, a street in the district where unlicensed raves and clubs were named after Frankie Knuckles for his contributions to the underground dance scenes. The Dance Music Hall of Fame was also established to recognize the pioneers of EDM, past and present. Is this still enough? According to some, how the mainstream records of events are not only biased but also how memorialization or memory-work is "(re)created in accordance with the needs of the present" (Howard & Graham 2016, 120) significantly divert the attention from current monetary and social exploitations of minority groups.

Therefore, even with all this recognition, it is still crucial that enthusiasts of electronic dance music culture, myself included, should be critical of who and how we consume the musical culture. As an ethnomusicologist, I try to be aware of the roots of house music and

advocate upcoming Black and Black queer DJs. And, luckily there is some criticism from fans of house music (Hinton 2016), however, it still is not enough (McCarthy 2015a). The lack of, or rather a willful ignorance on the part of the music industry, creates inequality, as seen in the representation of EDM. This is especially visible when popular publication outlets such as Your EDM – boasting nearly 4 million views on their website 41 – posted an article about the best and most influential EDM artists under 30 who are overwhelmingly straight white men (Sills 2015). Furthermore, despite creating a counter culture at the turn of the century, the British rave culture mainly comprised white working-class males who “did little to rearrange its social affairs” despite “the utopian ‘everybody welcome’ discourse” (Thornton 1996, 25).

The perpetual occurrence of the mainstream’s commodification of minority groups’ musical culture frustrates people who belong to the communities from which they originate. That is not to say that these communities do not see the value of having those outside the community enjoy the music or do not understand the advantages of cultural diffusion. As the African Diaspora critic Stuart Hall states:

“It is to insist that in black popular culture[...], ethnographically speaking, there are no pure forms at all. Always these forms are the product of partial synchronization, of engagement across cultural boundaries, of the confluence of more than one cultural tradition, of the negotiations of dominant and subordinate positions, of the subterranean strategies of recoding and transcoding, of critical signification, of signifying[...] Thus they must always be heard, not simply as the recovery of a lost dialogue bearing clues for the production of new musics (because there is never any going back to the old in a simple way), but a what they are – adaptations, molded to the mixed, contradictory, hybrid spaces of popular culture.” (Hall 1993, 109 & 110)

Undoubtedly, EDM pulls from many musical traditions: Black, white, Western, and non-Western cultures. Frith also explains that music production in the post-modern world and consumption cannot, and never will, be limited to the community which creates it (Frith 1996, 108). EDM would not be the worldwide phenomenon it is now without the patching of various musical

traditions and even the dialogic collaborative practice tradition of experimentation, remixing, cutting, and mixing. Instead, the frustration lies in the money, and mainstream recognition drifts away from its originators.

This appropriation is partly due to the commodification of marginalized cultures, especially Black and Black queer Americans. For the Black community, corporate America's continual claim to Black culture via public domain (Austin 1994, 165) has been rampant since the early to mid-twentieth century, not including how disparaging economic inequalities stemming from the Trans Atlantic slave trade. And this is coupled with the modern rhetoric of post-Civil Rights and "post-racial" narratives where the belief that Neal states: "often implied that the inclusion of African Americans and African American culture into the mainstream American life[...]but in reality rarely offered African-Americans significant autonomy and agency in their commercial products" (Neal 1999, 94). Thus, Black and Black queer musicians' lack of access to commercial avenues to genres outside of R&B, Pop, Gospel, and Rap is compounded by their counterparts in popular music, both in sexualities and race. Indeed, there are no clear answers as to whether and how Black, especially the Black queer and other queer communities of color, can gain creative and economic control over EDM. Some say that those of us outside the community can only reiterate its origin in hopes that it is not forgotten (Thomas 1995), and at the same token, champion the queer and DJs of color whose access to the mainstream is inhibited because of current conceptions of EDM as music for young straight white men.

How, then, can Euro-American copyright tradition help to protect the monetary rights of the queer community of color to the profits incurred by the electronic dance music industry? Indeed, there has to be a shift of attitudes toward the unequal access queer DJs of color have

compared to their white counterparts. Also new discussions regarding the importance of imperialistic, Western-centric (Weintraub & Bell 2009, 2), classist, and exclusionary notions of single and tangible vs community authorship of minority communities should come into question. Hopefully, such dialogue will allow the queer black and brown community to tap into the nearly seven billion dollars in profit from mainstream EDM industries in 2014 alone (McCarthy 2015b). For instance, folk music in China through the Chinese amended copyright law, grants “community profit-making” for folk artists and performers (Rees 2009, 54). Perhaps more inclusive record labels (e.g. Discwoman, Qween Beat, Fade To Mind) and music festivals centering queer and people of color (e.g. Dweller, ICUQTS) would be most appropriate. As Thomas states: “To be properly appreciated, house [music] must be experienced in a gay Black club. As is true of other African music, it is a mistake ‘to listen’ to house [music] because it is not set apart from its social and cultural context” (Thomas 1995, 445). Indeed, if corporate stakeholders want to continue draining these communities' cultural resources, then they must be open to reform, and we, as scholars, must continue to help hold them responsible.

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