"Being a DJ is My Form of Resistance":
The Dance Floor As a Safer Space for Queer-Feminist Communities in Vienna

FEATURE ARTICLE

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Abstract

Vienna based queer-feminist networks, DJ collectives and event formats such as female:pressure, Dishes, Unsafe+Sounds and Hyperreality provide a platform for exploration of a radical, uncompromising queer-feminist approach in institutionalized spaces. The dance floor becomes a safer space for nonconformism, as well as a platform for time-limited utopias and subcultures in an institutional framework. As subcultural spaces, these collectives create events that form intensive, multi-layered and progressive line-ups and advocate for greater visibility and representation of marginalized groups on the dance floor.

This paper explores the potentials and limitations of queer-feminist DJs and DJ-collectives, music producers and club organizers that make use of social spaces such as the dance floor to create safer spaces for queer dance music communities. I suggest that queer-feminist DJing and its contexts are shaped by ideas of fourth-wave feminism, queer-feminist networks as well as by the use of social media to provide spaces for cultural production and political activism.

Keywords: safer space, dance music communities, networks, fourth-wave feminism, queer-feminism

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Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture 16(1): 31–50
ISSN 1947-5403 ©2024 Dancecult http://dj.dancecult.net
http://dx.doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2024.16.01.03

dancecult
JOURNAL OF ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE

Primer

Vienna based queer-feminist networks, DJ collectives and events such as female:pressure, Dishes, Unsafe+Sounds and Hyperreality offer a stage for emancipatory experimental electronic music on the dance floor. Although the city is home to a diverse, creative and sophisticated electronic dance scene, there are few venues that allow an exploration of a radical queer-feminist approach. The identity-creating function of the aforementioned events offers different modes of subjectivation to be externalized on the dance floor, respective communities to stand up against values of social norms and political discourses to be conveyed. The feeling of belonging is central, especially for marginalized people. Electronic dance music tends to mirror and map the geographical and social-political topologies of its era (Fraser 2012: 507). The club is a political space that, at its best, proactively opposes hetero-normative social orders such as racism, sexism and homophobia and advocates awareness, tolerance, respect and acceptance.[1]

As members of non-commercial networks and collectives, the aforementioned DJs and event organizers are embedded in the broader field of electronic dance scenes. Hitzler, Bucher and Niederbacher define scenes as "thematically focused cultural social networks of people"—with an "issue"—that are oriented to the activities of the "scenesters" (2005: 20). Regarding electronic music scenes, the various networks consist of associations between "individual DJs, musicians, event organizers, producers, promotors, agents and crews and other 'organisational elites'" (Hitzler, Bucher and Niederbacher 2005: 27). In general, the majority is dominated by (young) men that obtain a gatekeeping function in electronic music scenes based on their accumulation of social, cultural and symbolic capital.[2]

The aim of this study is to examine how queer-feminist discourses are adopted and used by the creators and members of female:pressure, Dishes, Unsafe+Sounds and Hyperreality whose diversity includes queer-feminist cultural producers from different genders, sexual identities, generations and classes. Their education regarding (queer) feminism belongs to different feminist waves as well as different approaches to queer activism and institutionalized queer theory. Genz and Brabon state that while feminism itself understands a critical engagement with pop culture as a component of political struggle, queer networks use the Internet for the organization of music events, the production of websites, podcasts, e-zines and blogs (2009: 254-60). Shiva et al. (2019) as well as Diamond et al. (2013) describe Internet activism as a key feature of fourth wave feminism. Emphasising intersectionality, interlocking systems of power and their contribution to the social stratification of marginalized groups—such as trans and BIPOC individuals—Munro adds that fourth-wave feminists advocate for greater visibility and representation of marginalized groups in society, politics, media and business by arguing that society would be more fair-minded, unbiased and non-discriminatory if practices and politics incorporated the perspectives of all people (2013: 25).

I understand queer-feminist communities' rituals on the dance floor as the intersection of personhood, oppression, transgression and performance by referring to Alexander M. Cannon's (2020) idea of capturing time in atmospheric dance spaces and the DJs' work.

"These emergent communities repeat sounds and actions to generate or solidify histories and memories attached to orientation" (Cannon 2020: 124). Dance and exhaustion become thereby a kind of physical condensation of transience. In the intertwining of music and dance, the experience of "bass pressure" on space and body and the movements of the bodies seem to be a performative discharge of rhythms and impulses, biographies and collective memories (Garcia 2020: 6). Techno-moves thereby represent a specific movement repertoire that is primarily mimetic. As Reynolds describes it, "dance-moves spread through the crowd like superfast viruses" (2008: xxii).

Dance-moves are an essential part of ritualized ecstasy in techno spaces and their narratives; they design social bodies and renegotiate body politics. As Ueno defines it,

> Techno-dance consists of a series of gestures and behaviors that are, in each moment, experienced, experimental, repetitive, mimetic and performative. This 'unlearned' dance, which is transmitted, propagated and imitated in an unnoticed way, through 'entraining' rhythms and beats from one body to another, is dependent on the mimesis without a model. (Ueno 2003: 106)

By defining techno as repetition and citation, Ueno concludes that it shapes the embodied quality of the presence through the recollection and revival of stories, while remaining an expression from within. According to Ueno, it can be placed in the proximity of Butler's concept of performativity, "in which the original itself is always already a copy open to an infinite reiteration of gestures" (Butler 1990: 107). Between an individual singular and collective plural of movements, techno-dance as a bodily action does not refer to something given, something substantial that is to be expressed through it. According to Zebracki, the dancing body intrinsically exposes a do-it-yourself ethos, "yet, there are limitations to the body's 'own' agency, as it is connected to previous experience, current encounter and future rumination" (2016: 113). The theatrical dimension of techno-dance covers the individual performance and challenges a re-experiencing of certain codes which have been internalized. Fittingly, therefore, Ueno finds resistance potential in techno-spaces at the micro-level of interacting bodies, in the (re)learning of social repertoires of movement and the reality-constructing redesign in an interactive space (2003: 106).

This paper discusses how Vienna based queer-feminist networks, DJ collectives and events shape the dance floor, create safer spaces for non-conformism, integrate subcultures in institutional frameworks by providing time-limited utopias and advocate for greater visibility and representation of marginalized groups on the dance floor. I will examine the motivation of the founders and members of female:pressure, Dishes, Unsafe+Sounds and Hyperreality to create their own networks in electronic music scenes, and I will outline their embeddedness in the broader field of EDM scenes. Different queer-feminist approaches within and outside these networks and events become visible with analysis of their social media activities and their interaction with media formats. Furthermore, I investigate how the aforementioned actors convey their virtual labor, curatorship and activism. I also investigate their self-understandings as activists and artists and their self-representations online and on the dance floor. I am interested in forms of (virtual) activism and gatekeeping framed

by the contexts of feminist and anti-commercial agency, that are embedded in the (sub) cultural feminist scenes and networks. These are developed to protest forms of exclusion by formulating strategies to counteract the exclusion of female, trans and non-binary idividuals. By exploring how these DJs and collectives discuss issues of inclusion in their music, activism and virtual networks, I suggest that queer-feminist DJing and its contexts are shaped by ideas of fourth-wave feminism and provide spaces for cultural production and political activism. My analysis shows how these cultural workers and activists adopt a "politics of ambiguity" in their works, performances and self-representations, and how they refer to queer theory to distinguish themselves from earlier feminist waves, especially second-wave feminism (Genz and Brabon 2009: 158).

Methodological Approach

The core of my research data emerged from "virtual ethnography" and content analysis of social media postings from members of female:pressure, Dishes, Unsafe Sounds and Hyperreality.[3] This is complemented by an analysis of their websites, interviews in various Austrian magazines and newspapers and face to-face interviews. The interviews were in-depth, lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted between January and September 2023 in Vienna. The interviewees were female, white, middle class and between 30 and 45 years old. They were selected due to substantial engagement with the aforementioned networks and events by administering the social media accounts, organizing events or producing radio shows or podcasts. Central issues were discussed during the observation period: issues of inclusion, the development of virtual activism, the creation of safer spaces, the contradictions inscribed in the networks and strategies for women's and queers' advancement.

I use the term "safer space" to signal that every safe space is located within given power structures and therefore suffers from racist, sexist and heteronormative influences. A safer space has the ability to reduce power, but it is never free of toxic influences. I hereby draw on Deller's definition of safer space practice as "understanding and prioritizing the needs of the most at-risk—not as a way of sealing them off from the realities of life, but as a way of resourcing, equipping and supporting people to meet those realities" (2019: 223).

My analysis will present only a small part of the queer-feminist DJs', DJ collectives', music producers' and club organizers' work that is split into various local as well as virtual activities. All quotations from the face-to-face interviews I conducted are marked as such. Quotations without this indication come from other activities of the networks and events. I have translated the face-to-face interviews, other interviews and social media postings from German.

female:pressure

The network female:pressure was founded in 1998 by the Vienna-based techno DJ and music producer Susanne Kirchmayr also known as Electric Indigo, as a technically systematized answer to common comments that there are too few female identifying people in the EDM

scene (female:pressure 2024a). As an international online database that addresses female DJs, musicians, producers, composers and visual artists, the network advocates for the professional advancement of women who are active in the field of electronic music and digital art. female:pressure intends to make the existence and works of female artists visible while simultaneously serving as a publicly accessible source of information. According to the network, in July 2024, over 3,000 members from 85 countries were active (female:pressure 2024a). On Facebook the network is described as a "transnational network of women, AFAB, transgender, transfeminine, transmasculine, intersex + gender" (female:pressure 2024a). By establishing female:pressure, Kirchmayr highlighted the need for queer-feminist networks in the electronic music scene as well as the use of a database as a platform for representation and communication between peers

> Why are there still not many women in the electronic music scene? We have heard this question countless times. While we think that the perceived lack of gender diversity is caused by a complex combination of societal factors, experience shows that marginalized gender groups are hardly less active. In fact, their activities are less recognised and additionally often forgotten in historiography. Raising visibility [and audibility] of players in the electronic music scenes is therefore one of our main goals.
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> The female:pressure project is continuously growing and advancing. Initially planned as a mere insight into the status quo, it now also serves an archival purpose with links to works of artists who are no longer active or who are sadly deceased. Over the years, we broadened the simple focus on women in favour of an explicit inclusion of transgender and non-binary members. We practice an intersectional and anti-racist approach to our work and try to listen to and learn from each other on the female:pressure mailing list. (female:pressure 2024a)

Reitsamer found out that in addition to the digital database, female:pressure radio programs are broadcast on the free radio stations Radio FSK in Hamburg and Radio Orange in Vienna, and events and club nights are organized in different European cities (2013: 399). The mailing list is "the heart of the community, through which projects are continuously planned, publications and events announced, and sensitive political topics discussed" (Nemec 2019). Surveys that quantify the gender distribution of artists performing at electronic music festivals were published in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020 and 2022 (female:pressure 2024b). The 2022 survey revealed a rise of female acts from 9.2% in 2012 to 26.9% in 2020-2021; additionally, the data on non-binary artists showed an increase from 0.4% to 1.3% from 2017 to 2021. Furthermore, the report included a section on issues of diversity such as racism and ageism, as well as specific suggestions for festival organizers, artists, journalists, policy advocacy groups and festival attendees (female:pressure 2024b). Joint actions such as the Perspectives Festival have emerged from the network (Aha 2015). According to Reichle (2013), these events draw attention to the still prevalent

underrepresentation of female musicians in EDM culture. Projects such as the VISIBILITY tumblr (2015-2019)—a curated image-based collection of female, non-binary and trans individuals in performing arts and music production in their working environment—or the female:pressure podcast series established in 2018—wherein members periodically present their music—enhance the network's output. female:pressure encourages Viennese female DJs, producers, organizers and musicians to deal with their own role as well as clichés that are repeatedly forced upon them as artists. Even though it "remains a youth-oriented cultural network . . . it is not restricted to young women" (Reitsamer 2013: 399). The network acknowledges political feminism and the power of female collectivity beyond the gender binary, age, class, ethnicity and race. Feminist formations such as female:pressure act as a platform of self-empowerment against the suppression of queer individuals and women in EDM scenes, create safer spaces for female identifying DJs and musicians, support female cultural producers and promote their professional development.

While media coverage infrequently reports on the network's activities, Kirchmayr's activism has been a catch for her career,

> I know that in the past I was not booked at some festivals because I was associated with female:pressure. That has changed to some extent, but overall, my role in that regard is certainly not career-enhancing. . . . In the industry, it's sometimes more of a stigma to have feminism attached to you. (Vihaus 2017)

Kirchmayr's statement can be regarded as an example of the exclusion of female DJs from scene networks, coupled with the prejudice that women are not taking active roles in music scenes as music producers, as observed by McRobbie (1994).[4] According to Kirchmayr, the motivation for female, non-binary and trans DJs to launch their own forms of networking separates techno's origins and its utopian nature from male-dominated scenes and networks by providing safer spaces for female identifying DJs and their audienes. She explains,

> There wasn't this incredible hierarchy at techno parties. Techno as a musical language, and indeed as an international language that everyone can use and that can connect across geographical, cultural and social boundaries, that was another utopia of early electronic club culture. Due to the fact that in the club the social boundaries can be crossed more easily at the techno party because this kind of dancing and the music, which lasts for hours and is relatively unbroken, simply ensure that time and space as a dimension can be largely ignored. These are ideal conditions for precisely such social phenomena to happen. (Niedermayr 2012: 42)

Moreover, Kirchmayr mentions another reason for the invisibility of female identifying and queer DJs on the dance floor.

> It might be caused by a mixture of ageism and the higher dependence on some sort of novelty factor. This is just an assumption and unfortunately, I don't have scientific data for verification. But it doesn't sound implausible to me that there can be parallels to careers of actresses whose chances to succeed decrease with age as is commonly known. (Femmecult 2014)

Vienna's commercial club scene in particular is dominanted by white male DJs aged 30-50 acting as gatekeepers for young male music producers who intend to enter the scene. As a member of female:pressure observes, this space continuously reproduces hetero-normative social orders.

> Incidentally, that's also the only reason why I'm not stopping. Because I don't want to say I'm too old for it. I think to myself, I'm certainly not going to do people that favour. Because I'm one hundred per cent sure that in Vienna in particular, in this very tight-knit scene, a lot of people would want me to finally quit. I'm not doing that. Being a DJ is my form of resistance.[5]

Even though studies show that age is not an important trait in youth oriented music scenes and networks, the analysed interviews argue that the intersection of age and gender affects the careers of female identifying DJs in Vienna.[6]

The network's social media activities show that it is primarily used as a promotion tool for its members. The postings consist mainly of announcements for gigs, events, calls for participants, snippets of members' works or advertising for podcast episodes. Generally, the network's followers don't comment on the posts at all or simply react with emojis. Even though most of the posts are in English, and I observed little communication, in most cases the mentioned artists appreciate the feature. Nevertheless, several collaborations arose from calls for participation in events; touring DJs were invited to perform at clubs. Practices such as inviting touring DJs or establishing collaborations via social media are the central forms of virtual networking. The dance floor as a safer space is not only promoted by social media, but it has the ability to turn online platforms into a safer space for the dance floor. DJs and artists from the wider (virtual) network become part of real, professional co-operation and contribute to the visibilty of marginalized groups on the dance floor. Internet activism is the key feature of fourth wave feminism, and I assume that in the case of female:pressure, social media posts in particular work as a catalyst for female identifying and non-binary communities in electronic music scenes. Reitsamer describes them as "central forms of translocal networking" as well as instances of political as well as gender activism (2012: 406).

Dishes

Dishes is an event and project of "RRRIOT—Verein zur Förderung und Vermittlung feministischen Kulturschaffens" (*Association for the Promotion and Mediation of Feminist Cultural Work*). It is curated and implemented by Chris Attila Izsák, Marlene Kager and Therese Kaiser with the support of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture Civil Service and Sport, as well as the City of Vienna and "SKE—cultural sponsorship for composers". The event offers a special stage for emancipatory experimental electronic music by focusing on national and international artists that take a progressive approach to electronic music. Although Vienna is home to a diverse and experimental scene, there are few commercial venues that allow an exploration of the same. Dishes provides a platform for these approaches in high culture spaces. Contributions from different contexts of

contemporary electronic music come together to form a multi-layered and progressive "menu" (Izsák, Kager and Kaiser 2022b). Co-organizer Marlene Kager states, "we liked the idea of viewing a line-up as a menu. The theme continues through social media, the logo as a plate, the merch as tea towels and the line-up release as alphabet soup" (Karlbauer 2022). Co-organizer Chris Attila Izsák adds, "in keeping with the title, there will of course be a dinner with the artists. After the years of zero networking, it's even more important to strengthen collective processes" (Karlbauer 2022). Promotion informs that "with the first DISH a progressive line-up with positions from different European scenes is served. Concerts and DJ sets by a total of seven artists are on the menu" (Izsák, Kager and Kaiser 2022a). By combining the idea of food with experimental music; visual art; queer-feminist, non-binary and female artists and an institutionalized space such as the Wiener Volkstheater, the event opens up previously foreclosed places to progressive sounds, art and politics. The "Wiener Volkstheater", roughly translated as people's theatre, was founded in 1889 by request of the citizens of Vienna in order to offer a popular equivalent to the elitist Hofburgtheater. The latter was initiated by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, who wanted a theater next to her palace in 1741 (Yates 2008: 81). Although the Volkstheater itself has become a place of high culture, Dishes takes up the originally intended low-threshold accessibility and enables the subcultural audience to reclaim space in a high culture institution.

The first edition of Dishes took place in April 2022 at the "Rote Bar" (*Red Bar*) in the "Wiener Volkstheater" (Izsák, Kager and Kaiser 2022a). The organizers focused on concerts and live performances, formats that are more associated with bar settings. According to Izsák, "it was clear to us quite early on that we wanted to place more emphasis on concerts. It seems to me that the bar offers different possibilities, which benefit from the changeable and yet decadent character of the space" (Karlbauer 2022). The lineup consisted of female identifying and trans artists from various genres and disciplines. The third edition of Dishes, in turn, offered mainly concerts, featuring artists who are usually found in subcultural spaces. Additionally, a film program curated by Otherness Archive, a visual archive documenting queer films and its pioneers, was screened.

In general, the event's social media accounts promote the event series and the featured artists. The posts consist mainly of announcements for the shows, promotion of the artists and pictures of the featured DJs and food. Generally, Dishes' followers do not comment on the posts at all or simply react with emojis or exclamations such as "love", "awesome" or "hot". Subsidies allow the organizers to provide a special setting for the invited artists and the audience.

> At DISHES, we have the opportunity to give a certain space. We can let people rehearse for two or three weeks and everyone, even the sound and light engineers, get paid. We're able to try things out and kind of give people space to try things out as well. We even have dressing rooms there, people can dress up, do elaborate makeup; we can facilitate a different, more comprehensive experience. Both for the artists themselves and for all the people that are in the audience. And that's the beauty of it. Our securities are not huge guys yelling at people. They're nice people. Yes, and they just try to make everyone feel comfortable.[7]

The organizers emphasize the queer-feminist idea of the event's line-up compared to other events. As Izsák remarks, "most festivals still display the same line-ups they had before the pandemic: male dominated" (Karlbauer 2022). Organizing a sustainable event, creating networks between artists and audiences and a safer space for female, non-binary and trans audiences are all challenges to the androcentric structures of the music business, especially festival organization.

Dishes explores how the relationship between a subculture—as specifically a reaction to a main hegemonic culture—and an institutionalized space that is part of that hegemonic culture can form a synergy and open up new spaces of transmedia collaboration. Theatres and other institutions allow electronic subcultures to develop new forms of expression in non-commercial environments and provide safer spaces for queer-feminist electronic music scenes through their institutionalized systems. Izsák confirms that the organizers are "interested in the question of what possibilities institutional spaces and free scenes can open up for each other. The course is usually that first there are subcultural aspirations and, in most cases, these become institutionalized or capitalized over time" (Karlbauer 2022).

However, collaborations with institutionalized spaces have limitations. "The structures of a huge institutional colossus that wants to crush the event . . . where you can't turn on a fog machine, for example, because they have the wrong smoke detectors".[8] Because the Volkstheater's two rooms are limited to 200 guests and the event series receives subsidies, the organizers decided to relocate Dishes "so that we can really let a lot of people in".[9] The fourth event took place in October 2023 in the nightclub Flex that hosts regularly DJ-sets and performing artists. Citing a capitalist logic, Dishes organizers argue that due to the size and the low basic costs of the nightclub, more profit can be generated, which in turn affects the fees of all those involved.[10]

With subcultural events taking place in well-established institutions, appropriations by established institutions of the subculture occur. Concerning the event Dishes, a high-culture institution reproduces subcultural values and promotes cultural workers such as musicians, DJs, choreographers, costumes designers, light designers and sound engineers emerging out of subcultures. Co-founder Therese Kaiser states that "it's only fair that we somehow open up these spaces, especially in times with few non-commercial spaces, especially for music".[11] The financial support of subculture events in institutionalized spaces comes with the responsibility of audience development for these institutions. These strategic future-oriented processes of opening up, in which cultural institutions consciously turn to their partners, build and deepen long-term and sustainable relationships with existing and potential visitors in order to remain relevant to them.

Hyperreality

The argument that line-ups with a high proportion of women and non-binary acts would not attract people and thus reduce economic success is disproved with the Hyperreality series. Initiated by Marlene Engel in 2017, the aim was to create a concept, that includes at least 50

per cent female identifying individuals. The program reflects the diverse manifestations of contemporary club culture, features newcomers and pioneers alike and aims to promote the exchange between local and global club culture. The press release points out that the festival "offer[s] an exciting cross-section of global club culture. . . . Hyperreality is again relying on the tried and tested male quota of 30%" (Schachinger 2019). From 2017-2018 the event was part of the Wiener Festwochen, a highly subsidized cultural festival in Vienna that takes place every year in May and June. Since its very first edition, Hyperreality has made it its mission to celebrate the local club scene; instead of playing warm-up sets for international headliners, performances and DJ sets from local artists are prominently woven into the overall line-up.

Engel's goal was to include female identifying artists as regular DJs as well as headliners to provide a platform for the visibility of various genders, which is almost a prerequisite for an event with public subsidies:

> The line-ups I put together fall more or less under Contemporary Club Culture, a field with an extremely large number of interesting, exciting artists, among whom the marginalized, those on the fringes of society, often make particularly unusual or exciting music. (Karlbauer 2018)

Engel concludes that networking plays an important role in the current electronic music scene:

> On the one hand, it is important for Hyperreality to reflect exactly that, to consciously include groups that are potentially underprivileged in the music world, through networks that are rather male (and white), the press or simply due to a lack of money. On the other hand, the programming has arisen simply from the demand to show the best and most interesting things that are happening in the field at the moment. Programmatically, therefore, we have not always had to actively seek to create a balance. The proportion of women has resulted from their content. (Karlbauer 2018)

However, as curator of the club concept of the "Wiener Festwochen", Engel could draw on a comparatively larger budget than private club organizers. Concurrently, Engel privately organized the "Bliss" event series. According to Femdex, an initiative that strove to highlight female identifying DJs and producers between 2016-2020, Bliss was the only one among 29 events evaluated to achieve a 50 per cent share of women (Vihaus 2017). Engel remarks,

> with Hyperreality, unlike Bliss, I work with subsidies and have grant money at my disposal. Of course, with private events, it's also about recouping the money—but with Bliss, I didn't even know how high the percentage of gender was until Femdex analyzed the lineup—it's much more reflective of the scene I'm in. (Vihaus 2017)

Even though a queer-feminist scene is forming in Vienna's male-dominated club scene, those who book acts and organize events are responsible for the representation of female identifying, non-binary and BIPOC acts in clubs. As Engel states,

in the first moment you see the line-up, of course, but it's also about the structures, from the booker to the management to the security. I always wonder how it would feel for me if I worked in a club and there were only women around me. (Vihaus 2017)

Engel adds that she relies on 50 per cent women in the security team.

When Engel left Vienna in 2021, Lisa Holzinger, director of the not-for-profit organization "SISTERS+ for Queer-Feminist Art and Culture" started co-directing Hyperreality. Holzinger's takeover of the festival was the first edition with an overall budget, and it became more inclusive, safer space for its community with a dance floor code of conduct. As one co-organizer remarks:

It's more about community, so the Sisters events are a safer space, and that has certainly come more into Hyperreality, it's much more about the people who go there and a little less about the lineup and the whole show aspects of it . . . now it has to become a thing that is not attached to a person, but somehow stands for something that can somehow exist on its own.[12]

The focus was shifted away from the line-up to other aspects, such as the idea of providing a safer space that corresponds directly to the event series' code of conduct.

Hyperreality is dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, mental illness, neurotype, physical appearance, body, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, or religion. We do not tolerate harassment of participants in any form. Everyone participating in the Hyperreality community—including, but not limited to the Festival—is required to agree to the following Code of Conduct. This includes all attendees, performers, volunteers, and staff. (Hyperreality 2023)

The fact that the safety concept is written in English refers to the international character of the festival. Moreover, it allows the organizers to reach the broad non-German-speaking public and thus guarantee that more of the attendees are aware of it. At the same time that it is associated with a specific (intellectual) group of people, Hyperreality as an international and translocal network.

According to the organizers, harassment includes offensive comments regarding gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, mental illness, physical appearance, age, race or ethnicity. Moreover, the code of conduct mentions other examples such as unwelcome comments related to a person's lifestyle choices including food, health, parenting and employment, misgendering or use of dead names, gratuitous sexual behavior in spaces where they are not appropriate. Physical contact or simulated contact without consent or inappropriate social contact has to be avoided by prioritizing "marginalized people's safety over privileged people's comfort" (Hyperreality 2023). The event therefore not only showcases progressive music making, but also advocates for representation, awareness and collective decision-making. At this point, the code of conduct tries to be as inclusive as possible. Any form of discrimination is forbidden, including discrimination towards

parenting or mental health. Ensuring the respect of gender identity and clearly pointing out personal and physical border spaces allow the dance floor to be staged as a safer space for a female identifying and queer community. One co-organizer states that, "the audience is a different kind of audience. The spaces—how they're designed and so on—that works much better since Holzinger is in charge. Because of its much queerer audience than before".[13]

With public spaces, where feminist electronic dance culture is allowed to take place, being essential for building communities, Tronto's politics of care become crucial. Tronto examines the political implications of caring practices, that are valued at the personal level by defining care as universal (Laurin and Martin 2022: 1579). According to Tronto, good care is comprised of four elements: attention, responsibility, competence and capacity to respond; consequently care consists of: caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care receiving and caring with (Tronto 2013: 103). In the context of Hyperreality, three aspects of Tronto's concept are central. First, "caring about" requires attention and includes the physical aspects of organizing the event Hyperreality, including completing a funding application and curating a program. Second, "taking care of" requires responsibility and refers to the affective investment in and attachment to others, the provision of a code of conduct and an overall safer space. Third, "caring with" allows Hyperreality to act politically, to mobilize its audience, musicians and other associated citizens to bring about social change.

Hyperreality's social media accounts promote the festival, the featured artists and merchandising, and they post recaps of the parties. The event series uses social media primarily as promotion tool. Fittingly, therefore, the followers do not comment on the posts at all or simply react with emojis. When Dishes announced that Hyperreality's awareness team would be present during their event in October 2023, around 80 followers liked the post but no one posted a comment. Similar to female:pressure, the network's social media activities show that it is primarily used as a promotion tool. Hyperreality is a safer space based on a shared interest in the advancement of the careers of marginalized DJs, an intersectional solidarity for protesting exclusions from dance music scenes, harassment online and during the event and tokenism in the music business.

In 2023, the festival released its own compilation for the first time, which reflects its diversity.[14] With this initiative, Hyperreality underlines its commitment to the local music scene and sets an example for an inclusive and diverse club culture (Hyperreality Press Release 2023). One co-organizer, who was responsible for the production of the record, explains that,

> So a person who is attached to an established label anyway, would not get that from Hyperreality. It's also very clear that this won't be a white cis man. Who could benefit from a professional recording? Who could do the mastering, or the mixing? Who embodies Hyperreality's values?[15]

Furthermore, the organizers tried to combine approaches of fair pay and inclusive cultural work with regard to the idea of a festival recording.

Besides the focus on the representation of flinta (women, lesbians, intersexual, non-binary, trans and agender people), who form the majority of the festival team and bookings, Lisa Holzinger sees utopian potential in collective work. When she took over the festival's lead, she decided that "the time of 'one-person shows' was over. I think it's important that different positions and points of view are reflected in the programming" (Ben Saoud 2023). Regarding the fact that every subculture works with codes that are not accessible for a broader audience, "low-threshold" accessibility does not apply since the kind of music performed at Hyperreality is hardly ever encountered in everyday life. With a mixture of genre-crossing local and international artistic positions, the music programme covers a broad spectrum of contemporary and experimental electronic dance music. With €18 admission for one 18-hour event, the parties are affordable for the audience (Ben Saoud 2023). Hyperreality's goals include fair pay, giving local and international acts the same status and providing an awareness team to ensure that guests have contact persons they can turn to if they have experienced assaults.

Unsafe+Sounds Festival

An event series that combines electronic dance music and the ambiguities that constitute the discourses around the techno scene, the Unsafe+Sounds Festival was established in 2014. Entering its ninth edition in 2023, the festival presents "musical positions of a contemporary culture that resists the prescriptions of the mainstream, and critically and reflectively depicts the reality that surrounds us, sometimes with radical results" (Music Export 2021). Experimental, emancipatory or subversive approaches in electronic music represent fragments of a global avant-garde by providing alternative perspectives and new musical territories. The artistic director Shilla Strelka and the discourse program director Bianca Ludewig show a common interest in the influence of music on bodily movement. The festival's program combines the corresponding socio-political questions and contextualizes them on the basis of a wide range of intersectional perspectives. With different spaces being taken up by club culture, the Unsafe+Sounds Festival takes place in various Viennese locations such as the alternative music club "Das Werk" (*The Factory*) and the "Wotruba Church", built between August 1974 and October 1976 on the basis of a model by sculptor Fritz Wotruba, which was inspired by the Chartres Cathedral. These locations challenge hegemonic and capitalist ideas of club music as a male dominated genre located in unsafe spaces. Experimental sounds and progressive trends in contemporary electronic music shape a club culture beyond the mainstream. The patriarchal church as a location for queer-feminist club music challenges the utopian idea of the genre. Historically charged locations are deliberately chosen in order to confront visitors with the space's past and demonstrate the possibilities of utopia. A place of centuries of abuse becomes a safer space, albeit for a limited period of time.

The eighth edition of Unsafe+Sounds, "Tainted Futures—Agency of Immediacy", was described as "pushing back against the viral feeling of insecurity and focuses on artistic

positions that confront our reality" (Strelka 2022). The performing artists engaged creatively with the changing environment by searching for appropriate sounds of the future and the human existence. The festival challenged the human fears of war, climate crises, natural disasters, epidemics and pandemics, energy crises, banking crises and right-wing pressure with the slogan "Farewell to utopia, now for real" (Strelka 2022). Strelka describes the festival's approach as,

> something for your body, your mind, and your soul. . . . The club is not a zone isolated from reality, like a space-time capsule whose focus is on a utopian space beyond our current reality. In my eyes, the club is the focal point of the present. It anticipates the future, but in it the present is also crystallized. . . . The times for utopia seem to be over. In the energies that the club releases, in the intensities, the feeling of a now manifests itself. (Benkeser 2022)

The dance floor allows its communities to act out feelings such as euphoria or ecstasy. Strelka observes dance floor aesthetics as, "feelings that seem to have no justification in our crisis-ridden time, our shattered society. . . . Strategies of overpowering play an increasingly important role in aesthetics" (Benkeser 2022). The idea of celebrating together on the queer-feminist dance floor as a safer space offers the possibility of escaping a patriarchal and misogynistic reality.

Sicko (2010) and Schwanhäußer (2010) describe the techno scene as in search of atmospheric spaces, while at the same time reflecting and eluding the general tendencies of an experience-oriented society. The dance floor becomes a space for negotiating precarization, self-empowerment, cultural capital, queer expression as well as queer strategies for social change. Spaces for electronic dance music effect and unfold a listening and dancing fascination; Simon Reynolds asks, "how do you write a history of a culture that is fundamentally amnesiac and non-verbal?" (2008: xxv). By trying to answer this question, the discourse program features musicians, researchers, performers, journalists and activists, and it promotes dialogue that enhances understanding among individuals with diverse viewpoints, focusing on its queer-feminist protagonists. Consequently, the Unsafe+Sounds Festival tries to create a safer space not only within the framework of the festival, but also in the implementation of the accompanying program.

With the festival's attempt of connecting sonic aesthetics and social trends, urgent socio-cultural and socio-political topics are addressed in screenings, panel discussions, performances and other discursive formats. Curated by Strelka and Ludewig, the accompanying program explored the "politics of the body in search of audio-social potentials" in four thematic blocks: "How does music change in the globalized (platform) capitalism of the present?"; "What is happening beyond the attention machine? Experimental music and noise from regions of the so-called 'global south'"; "Enjoyment, pleasure, intensity, intimacy & communality in the context of sound experiences and alternative sound cultures" and "Local history and status quo" (Strelka 2022). A range of diverse activists, musicians, organizers and researchers discussed these socio-political issues and contextualized them.

Strelka describes community, the body, politics or the political and aesthetics as the central themes she has been working on for years.

> While for me aesthetic aspects of sonic sensuality are very important, respectively the subjective and private potential in the immediacy of soundscapes, Bianca Ludewig puts a strong focus on the actions, on agency, the political potentials of our practices and how they might work beyond that into the public sphere. (Benkeser 2022)

Strelka and Ludewig show a common interest in the influence of music on bodily movement. Overall, the festival's concept refers to Ueno's idea of the resistance potential in techno-spaces as a re-experiencing of certain codes, the (re)learning of social repertoires of movement and the reality-constructing redesign in an interactive space (2003: 106).

By investigating the Unsafe+Sounds Festival's social media accounts, it turns out that the comment function on Facebook and Instagram is limited. The postings do have likes, on average around 30, but there are virtually no comments. The digital space obviously has no added value for the festival organizers. On the one hand, this may indicate that the discourse takes place directly at the festival, which would certainly speak for the program. On the other hand, a safer space for the festival visitors is not only guaranteed on site, but also in the digital space. The possibility to comment remains limited and is moderated, which prevents hate comments but at the same time reduces the interest in a digital exchange. Even though it seems that the situation is similar to female:pressure's and Hyperreality's online activities and their followers' responses, I assume that in the case of Unsafe+Sounds the moderation is a deterrent. The reduced interest in digitial exchange limits the influence of social media on the dance floor and the discourse program. The activism takes place on-site with the invited artists that engage creatively with human fears, the changing environment and (gender) politics. The discourse program's focus on socio-political questions has the ability to induce processes of emancipation and transformation for the participating DJs, producers and audiences. Fittingly, therefore, Strelka notes, "everything that challenges our perception is severe and emancipatory. Emancipatory, transformative forces can also be found in experiments. It's about breaking free from dominant forms" (Benkeser 2022). Accordingly, electronic dance music combines the character of action and performance, and in its ritualization, it unfolds a potential effect that can be perceived as transformative for the festival's participants.

Conclusions

This article has explored the dance floor as a safer space for queer-feminist communities in Vienna who adopt a "politics of ambiguity" in their works, performances and self-representations through a case study of three events and the network female:pressure (Genz and Brabon 2009: 158). I have outlined the various ways the organizers as well as female:pressure members make use of the dance floor and the internet, especially social media, for cultural production, political activism and networking. Their work is based on a shared interest in music making and the advancement of their careers as musicians, DJs,

producers, organizers and promoters. It also shares a cross-generational, cross-gender and cross-subgenre solidarity for protests against exclusions of female, queer and non-binary acts from club nights and virtual harassment, as well as harassment on the dance floor. The study shows that gender identity remains an essential category for participating on the dance floor, contributing to cultural production and organizing events in electronic dance music scenes. Examining female:pressure, Dishes, Unsafe+Sounds and Hyperreality reveals challenges for marginalized sexual and gender identities; it also reveals the empowerment of women that is negotiated in the fourth feminist wave. The differences in women's experiences based on sexuality, class and ethnicity influenced fourth wave feminists' work, motivating them to build queer-feminist allies with activism and to use the internet as catalyst for their work.

Notes

1 At its worst, the club perpetuates the reproduction of hetero-normative social orders, as authors such as Rodgers (2010), Farrugia (2012) or Hutton (2016) have discussed.
2 The exclusion of female, non-binary and queer cultural producers from such networks, coupled with the sexist idea that women are not intensive record collectors nor active musicians, music producers and event organizers in music scenes can be regarded as central motivation for women to launch their own forms of networking, separating their cultural labor from the existing male-dominated networks in electronic music scenes (see McRobbie 1994, Cohen 1997, Straw 1997 and Vihaus 2017).
3 Virtual Ethnography is a research method that uses the Internet and other information technologies to collect and share cultural knowledge. These interactions take place in virtual environments such as chat rooms, web-based discussion forums and newsgroups (see Hine 2000).
4 McRobbie (1994) advocated an approach to youth culture emphasizing the role of cultural production and the aesthetic element in youth cultures to offer an active picture of the involvement of girls and young women and to demonstrate the creative interplay between music, music production, dance and forms of visual image-making.
5 Member of female:pressure, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 24 February 2023.
6 I hereby draw on findings of Bennett (2006), Leonard (2007) and Reitsamer (2013). In his 2006 study, Andy Bennett explores the continuing significance of punk rock for an older generation of fans. Marion Leonard (2007) examines how female rock performers negotiate age in their performance as rock musicians. Accordingly, Rosa Reitsamer (2013) anaylsed the do-it-yourself careers of Austrian DJs and found out that age is not an important trait in youth oriented electronic music scenes.
7 Therese Kaiser, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 2 February 2023.
8 Therese Kaiser, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 2 February 2023.
9 Therese Kaiser, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 2 February 2023.
10 Therese Kaiser, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 2 February 2023.
11 Therese Kaiser, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 2 February 2023.

12 Hyperreality organzier, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 10 August 2023.

13 Hyperreality organzier, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 10 August 2023.

14 *Hyperreality Compilation Vol. 1* was published independently in 2023, see
      <https://hyperreality1.bandcamp.com/album/hyperreality-compilation-vol-1>,
      (accessed 16 October 2024).

15 Hyperreality organzier, personal communication with the author (Vienna), 10 August 2023.

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