EDM, Tech House, or Business Techno?

"Trolling" Inauthentic Club Music Through Social Media

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Abstract

This article explores how the term EDM, along with other newer labels for club music, is used among some audiences to distinguish between authenticity and inauthenticity within club culture. The focus is on discussions in social media, with the Facebook group The Worst Techno Memes Ever Group Page (TWTMEGP) as a prime example. For many, both audiences and artists, upholding the legacy from the early days of house and techno is an important mark of authenticity. Applying genre labels that emerged later in the history of club music, like EDM, are interpreted by some as disregarding the early legacy of club and dance music. The contemporary commercial music often associated with EDM, has the potential to frame it as a loaded term. However, it remains difficult for many to define how far audiences and artists can diverge from the original underground roots of house and techno while still being considered authentic. In an analysis of online discussions that frequently ridicule EDM and other newer musical labels, I will exemplify the fluid meanings genre labels can have within club cultural communities, as well as uncover some of the complexity around upholding established ideals of authenticity in club music.

Keywords: club music, EDM, authenticity, meme culture, techno, gatekeeping

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Gaute Barlindhuag has been involved in producing electronic music since the early 90s. Initially, this was as a recording artist with a variety of collaborators, but more lately the work has focused on composing music for film and theatre. Parallel to this, Barlindhaug has pursued a career as an academic, gaining a PhD in electronic music and aesthetics in 2019. He is currently working as an Associate Professor at the University of Tromsø, lecturing in Media and Documentation Science. Since the early 2000s, he has also been involved in organizing the Insomnia Festival for electronic music in Tromsø and several international festival collaborations.

As a former musician now working in academia, the use of EDM as an academic umbrella term for all electronic club music, covering genres like techno, house and trance, was a surprise to me. In my experience, being a middle-aged Northern European man who has worked with electronic music since the early 1990s, EDM—an initialism for electronic dance music—is a term loaded with cultural and political significance concerning the roots and social ideals of club music. In this article, I seek to explain this by demonstrating how part of the audience interprets differences in the labeling of club music as a demarcation between authenticity and inauthenticity within the music. I, of course, understand a need within academia to use broad terms to cover cultural practices that are in fact related, but not all musical audiences interpret the label as neutrally as academics. The challenge is that, as a term, EDM only started to gain traction within the music industry around 2000 (Glacer 2014). For decades, artists, audiences and writers had navigated the scene using specific genre labels like techno and house, as well as broader terms like "rave music" or "club music" (Reynolds 1998; Brewster and Broughton 2000). Though the term "electronic dance music" first appeared in the United States as a label for artists such as Moby, Future Sound of London and Danny Tenaglia, the popularization of EDM as an initialism corresponds with a significant shift in club culture, both in terms of its commercialization and cultural outreach (Jóri 2021: 27). In this text, I will therefore continue to apply the older term "club music" as an umbrella term for the full variety of genres of dance music.

Within academia, the concept of authenticity has been a recurring topic examining the different ways audiences ascribe ideals like "real" or "original" to the music when evaluating it. In club culture, similar ideas of authenticity can, in my opinion, partly be traced through audience criticism of the term EDM. The emergence of EDM at a specific time in the history of club culture means that its use as an all-encompassing term for club music can impact how the roots and legacy of club culture are framed, touching upon what constitutes "realness" and "originality".

To demonstrate how the labeling of music can be understood as a mark of authenticity in club music, I will analyze some examples of memes and discussions from the satirical Facebook group The Worst Techno Memes Ever Group Page or TWTMEGP (2025). In this group, not only EDM but also genres like tech house and, lately, melodic techno, have been mocked as inauthentic, while techno and house are understood to encompass authenticity. Artist statements have been reposted and often ridiculed, memes have been made, and even artists themselves have joined the discussion about what counts as authentic within what has now become the global club music industry. Through this, I will also demonstrate how unstable the idea of authenticity can be and how difficult it is to define the demarcation between the authentic and inauthentic.

I will start this article with an introduction to TWTMEGP, my methods and an overview of the academic studies of meme culture, as well as arguing why this approach might be fruitful for understanding what authenticity can be. Then I will go into a preliminary discussion about authenticity in club music, before I analyze examples from TWTMEGP.

Studying Social Media and TWTMEGP

TWTMEGP (The Worst Techno Memes Ever Group Page) is a Facebook page created in 2016 and as of early 2025 it had 187,000 members, in addition to accounts on Instagram and X. The purpose of the group is to share humorous memes and other satirical content about techno and club music culture. The "About" section sets the tone of the group, establishing an ironic view on both its content as well as the club music scene:

> TWTMEGP Techno Meme Community
>
> People complain about dance music so much on this page it makes me wonder if any of you actually like the music and if not what are you doing here?
>
> The rules are..
>
> No hating
>
> No racist connotations
>
> No misogyny
>
> Only TECHNO relevant memes! (TWTMEGP 2025)

The group operates in a private setting, visible to all, but allows only members to post and see other posts. Everything is moderated by an active moderating team, with the central figure being UK-based DJ Mitch Davis. As with all other phenomena on social media, TWTMEGP does not exist in isolation. Much of what is shared in the group—either memes, news articles, or artists' social media content—originates from other parts of the media landscape but is recontextualized for satirical purposes. In this way, the group takes part in what can be labeled as small viral events, happenings and opinions shared online and gradually becoming part of a larger cross-platform online discussion (Hemsley and Mason 2013: 139)

I have followed the group for eight years, collecting memes and the comments they spark. This has resulted in a thorough digital ethnographic study that provides ecological valid information on the group (Varis 2015: 65). Posts and memes in the group makes jokes and sparks comments relating to many aspects associated with club culture, from extensive drug use and sexual escapades to different artists and venues. The memes I present in this text are the ones coded to thematize authenticity within club culture, in which EDM and other genre labels become part of the discussion. Based on my engagement with the group, I have chosen two sets of memes from this category that I will discuss in this text. First, there is a selection of memes that exemplifies the baseline assumptions about EDM and other newer genre labels as symbols for inauthenticity, as opposed to earlier genre labels like house and techno. Second, I have selected two examples of meme exchanges for a more in-depth analysis that exemplifies the difficulty of drawing the line between authenticity and inauthenticity in today's expanding club culture scene. According to my experience

with the group, I would claim that the majority of the members are young adults and older people who, like myself, have probably followed club music for decades. Analyses of Facebook users show that the largest age group spans 20–39 years (Ribeiro et al. 2020: 328). This age span makes the group a good subject for a study of how historical developments and changes play into the discussions about authenticity. Based on their profile names, the majority of the posts—especially when they are related to authenticity—are made by men, but women also participate in the group as members and moderators. According to Mitch Davis himself, in order to fight back against possible misogyny in the group, women have always been part of the moderating team (IUM 2020).

There have been debates in academia about retrieving data from social media for years: Should all data available be free to use, or must it be treated as private? A point made is whether the persons posting believe they are voicing their opinions in a private space or not (Fuchs 2018: 390; British Psychological Society 2021: 8–9). This has been especially problematic with research into smaller secret groups on Facebook, where sensitive and personal matters are being discussed (Johnson et al. 2018). However, TWTMEGP is a Facebook group with over 180,000 members, and is visible and accessible to anybody who logs into Facebook. In addition, the group and its leading moderator have been featured in different online magazines. Even so, the individuals active in the group probably did not anticipate that they would end up being discussed in an academic context. I have therefore chosen to follow Fuchs's guidelines when conducting research into social media and have anonymized the participants (Fuchs 2018: 390; Franzke et al. 2020: 7). However, in the context of Facebook, the possibility of reidentification has been an issue, though mostly within larger data sets (Zimmer 2020: 319). As a precaution, all searchable text has therefore been removed. TWTMEGP has a search function that can help users retrieve older posts in the group. However, this does not work on the text that is part of the pictures posted, nor does the search retrieve the comments made on posts. In cases where I have kept the names of people posting, these are musicians and artists who can be regarded as public figures. Naming these artists is crucial for analyzing the cultural importance of their opinions within TWTMEGP.

Meme culture has been the subject of academic research for years. As the name suggests, the word meme draws inspiration from Dawkins's biological concept of genes, establishing the internet meme as a cultural unit, a text or a picture, that changes and adapts itself to suit different situations (Díaz 2013: 84). The concept of the "image macro"—a picture that can spread through the internet by changing captions—constitutes a classic example of such a definition (Miltner 2018: 414–24). Now, however, there is a trend to abandon the genetic analogy, instead placing more emphasis on the people who create, manipulate and spread memes (Shifman 2013: 41). Memes are subsequently studied as one of several ways that we can express social, political and cultural statements in digital media, in part as an evolution of earlier forms of tactical media (Denisova 2019: 17). In addition to "content" and "form", Shifman described a third dimension when studying memes: "stance", which "… depict[s]

the ways in which addressers position themselves in relation to the text, its linguistic codes, the addressees, and other potential speakers" (Shifman 2013: 40). When re-creating a meme, the user can either imitate a position they find appealing or use a different discursive orientation.

Sharing some of the subcultural backgrounds as memes, the concept of trolling can also be useful in understanding memes as a form of communication. Originating in the antagonistic and abusive corners of the internet, we later started seeing trolling more as a way of catching the viewer's attention either by activating emotional engagement or by forwarding a claim so outrageous that a response has to be made (Phillips 2015: 181). Within equal power relations, this can function as an effective way of sparking a discussion, even one that is not driven by antagonism and hate.

The potential in meme culture to convey cultural meaning and establish social bounds has inspired others to look at memes in relation to music. Based on Shifman's definition of "stance", Gesoff has studied memes about jazz music, arguing that they function as community building, enforcing the boundaries as well as helping to transform outsiders to insiders (2023: 24). Memes about contemporary music have also been studied for making fun of its perceived elitism as well as pointing out real concerns about the music (Freitas 2022: 437). My research on TWTMEGP not only investigates how memes establish ideas within musical communities but also how the exchange and creation of memes debate these ideals. In addition to Shifmann's "stance", I have also chosen to build on Tulloch's approach to memes as value hypotheses, a way "to represent and reflect on different aspects of reality" (2021: 295). In his view, memes can be used as means to interrogate the underlying logic of different representations of reality. In part, this also corresponds to Baspehlivan's (2024) concept of the "memescape", a special relationship that brings together digital subjects, memes and collective affects. In this space, there emerges a possibility for the circulation and creation of political discourse and affects (Baspehlivan 2024: 38). "Here, the so-called stable constants of knowledge, truth, and meaning as produced by striated segmented places instead orient towards the playful instability of constantly moving signs, which are often ambiguous and ambivalent" (Baspehlivan 2024: 38). TWTMEGP strongly resembles Baspehlivan's description: users reposting artists' pictures and quotes, giving them meaning through comments and memes, and sparking a playful debate with other members who might, through meme creation, contest their viewpoints.

What is Authenticity?

In the academic context of music, authenticity is primarily understood as a quality we as audiences turn to when we evaluate the music, not a quality of the music itself but to an ideal shared among a group of audiences. It is often a quality of the ethical type: authentic music is perceived as honest, real, uncorrupted, even "loyal" toward the audience (Martinelli 2008: 122). Such ethical judgments are not, however, defined through one singular ideal but rather used as the basis for varied and often contradictory claims to authenticity (Moore

2002: 209). It is clear that the concept manifests itself in different ways within different artistic expressions (Rudbig 1996: 226).

A broad definition of authenticity can be a pre-established set of ethical ideals the audience uses to evaluate the music they encounter, applied not only to the music itself but also to its broader context of production and consumption. It is, as Gunders (2012) describes it, not inherent in the music but is something ascribed to it, changing depending on who is making the judgment and when the judgment is being made. Moore distinguishes between three different kinds of authenticity: "that artists speak the truth of their own situation; that they speak the truth of the situation of (absent) others; and that they speak the truth of their own culture, thereby representing (present) others" (2002: 209). He further defines these as first-person, third-person and second-person authenticity.

Most of what has been written about authenticity in popular music has discussed it from the perspective of a rock music audience. Within this realm the concept has been extensively constructed around the artist's instrumental or vocal performances, with a hostility toward newer technology. Musicians relying on technology in their performances were deemed fake by some audiences, establishing a distinction between "real" rock musicians and "fakery" of pop (Frith 1986: 267). Such ideals have consequently linked authenticity within popular music to a lack of mediation, something that Moore connects to first-person authenticity in rock music, the artist conveying their message directly to their audience (Moore 2002: 212). One explanation for this can be found in a continuation of earlier folk music audiences' hostility toward technology, where authenticity would even condemn technology such as electric guitars (Marshall 2006: 22). The hostility to technology has also been directed toward commercial and impersonal aspects of the music industry. Gunders underscores this by claiming that authenticity is seen as "an antidote toward the industry in which it operates" (2012: 148). This resistance toward commercialization can in many cases correspond to a focus on the honesty of the artist and their expression, further establishing the authentic as the alternative, avant-garde, more marginalized music in contrast to the mainstream (Martinelli 2008: 124).

Authenticity in Contemporary Club Music and the Term EDM

Atton (2019) has summed up several discussions on authenticity in rock music and points out how crucial the performer's integrity is to the audience's belief in the performer. As he defines it, the work appears authentic "to the degree it accords with the personality of the performer, the views and experience of the audience, the transmission of an 'inherited' performance (which is itself considered authentic) or the communal experience of performer and audience alike" (Atton 2019: 206). This definition opens an important space for discussing authenticity, where not only the use of technology is important but various artistic and ethical considerations are also expected to be fulfilled.

From the perspective of electronic music, expecting that an "authentic" artist is not aided by new technology is not necessarily very productive, though audiences might evaluate artists' mastery of technology, especially as this relates to DJing (Rietveld 2016: 11–13).

What especially puts club music at odds with established ideals of rock authenticity is that the instruments fetishized in its production—like the Roland TB 303 and Roland TR 808—are of the sort that are not performed in a traditional sense but instead programmed (Théberge 1997: 168; Barlindhaug 2019: 92).

As in other musical genres, authenticity in club music also varies among its audience. For instance, Gunders claims it is largely built on the rock mythos, pointing out that audiences of club music also object to musicians faking their musical skill (2012: 152–53). He concludes by pointing to an online discussion that appeared between artist Moby and his fans over the fact that Moby was obviously using playback during concerts (2012: 153). The point I would make is that for other audiences Moby has a rather ambiguous standing: being a massive commercial success, many perceive him as an inauthentic artist who does not actually represent the club music he might claim to embody. These claims to authenticity are not, however, linked—as Gunders argues—to Moby's use of technology to cover up any lack of skill as a musical performer.

Constitutions of authentic musicianship within the electronic club music scene can, in my opinion, diverge drastically from the established rock ethos. Due to the fact that electronic club music emerged in the African American club music scene of the 1980s, the use of technology has been viewed as a means of self-expression rather than complying with the strictures of the music industry (Frith 1986: 276; Rose 1994: 71; Goodman 2012: 173–75; Rietveld 1998: 22). As mentioned, many of the instruments favored by artists in the scene broke with established instrumentalist ideals, since they are programmed rather than performed. The music was seldom experienced live in a traditional sense, but through the medium of a DJ. Instead, it has been argued that it is the audience's dance-floor experience that constitutes the live experience, not the artist's instrumental performance (Thornton 1996: 29; Ferreira 2008: 20).

Returning to Gunders's example, the controversy over Moby can be traced as far back as 1995. Pioneering Detroit techno innovators Drexciya criticized Moby (and also Richie Hawtin) in *Melody Maker* by saying that what they did could not be called "techno" (Mothersole 1995). On the twentieth anniversary of Moby's *Play*, in 2019, *Fact Magazine* posted Ryan Diduck's article "All *Play* and No Work: How Moby's Bestselling Album Damaged Electronic Music", which claimed that through the problematic sampling of African American cultural heritage, the 1999 album had turned techno into "a cheap and trivial pastime for white men" (2019). *Play* contains several vocal samples from Lomax's ethnographical recordings of African American singers, raising questions about representation of musical heritage (Hesmondhalgh 2006: 57). These objections to Moby and his music uncover aspects that for many audiences can be more important markers of authenticity than whether the artist is using playback or not. Central for both Drexciya and Diduck, is the respect for musical tradition and the cultural roots of club culture. Diduck (2019) underscores how Moby capitalizes on musical history in which he, as a white person, played no part, and Drexciya felt that Moby was not acknowledging the role black musicians from Detroit had in inventing the genre of "techno".

It is apparent that Drexciya and Diduck both evaluate Moby according to certain predefined ideals about what techno is, and both claim that Moby is failing to meet some key benchmarks. This mostly concerns ethical considerations about respect toward musical traditions and norms of innovation and creativity. A racial aspect is also apparent through his "exploitation" of African American music, failing to pay homage to the innovators of techno and earlier black music pioneers. These arguments partly follow similar lines Atton describes for establishing authenticity: conformity to some established norms about music and the artist's behavior (2019: 206). The difference is that, compared to rock music, as audiences of club music they often place less emphasis on the artists' actual musical performance and more on the larger context of production and consummation of music. As mentioned, club music is rooted in the emergence of new technology and needs other strategies to establish such historical ties. Drexciya and Diduck clearly move away from what Moore defines as first-person authenticity—the artist being true to their own situation. Labeling something as techno, as Drexciya and Diduck do, is an act that places a focus on a specific cultural tradition rooted in African American music, establishing authentic club music in response to that context. We here move into what Moore describes as second- and third-person authenticity, speaking the truth to their own group, or another group which is not present (Moore 2001: 2009).

While most examples Moore uses to illustrate his understanding of authenticity are gathered from rock music, Thornton's accounts of club music are used to exemplify second-person authenticity (Moore 2001: 219). She describes how departing from liveness and moving toward the recording as the primary means of musical expression provoked a need to establish a new form of authenticity through cultural events and environments (Thornton 1996: 51). The authenticity of club culture becomes connected to a community of venues and clubgoers rather than the singular artist. Drexciya and Diduck's critique of Moby shows how this becomes difficult to uphold in part due to the increasing popularity and commercialization of the music. From being an underground phenomenon in the late 1980s (Sicko 2010; Brewster and Broughton 2006; Rietveld 1998), club music such as house and techno saw growing international popularity at the end of the decade. To uphold authenticity, a link to the place and time of pioneering ancestors (as Drexciya also focused on) had to be established in the music, while also taking into account the facelessness of technology and global dislocation (Thornton 1996: 76). At this point, the authenticity of club culture moves toward what Moore defines as third-person authenticity. Just like the blues rock of the 1960s had to establish a connection to the harsh racist environment of the Mississippi delta (Moore 2001: 215), club culture had to retain its connection to its past as an underground culture. Gilbert and Pearson also point out that departing from the underground and becoming a part of the mainstream would strip the culture of its subversive character (1999: 158). For some, it became a "sellout" through which, for instance, its opposition to capitalist forces was lost.

Today, club music has become even bigger still, in terms of money and its popular appeal, while new media platforms are simultaneously reshaping the culture. Through promotion and distribution via social media, the symbolic framing of music has become more important (Bartmanski and Woodward 2020: 148). Music that once represented a niche by being hard to find must now depend on external references to retain its underground status. In 2024 Mouraviev wrote an article examining how social media worked to uphold the subcultural legacy of dubstep in the wake of its popularization though EDM, establishing a dichotomy between "real" dubstep and the more commercial brostep (2024: 15–16). Much the same situation is the starting point for Hidalgo's (2023) research into how artists in the club scene today navigate ideals of authenticity in the context of social media. What Hidalgo identifies as an ideal strived toward by many artists is framing themselves in relation to club culture's PLUR ethos: Peace, Love, Unity and Respect (2023: 20–21). This has been defined as an important aspect for several organizers of contemporary club and rave music (Park 2015: 16), but has perhaps today, detached from its intended meaning and turned into a rather hollow catchphrase. Hidalgo, however, emphasizes that it stems from the values of the original club culture (2023: 20), in part echoing the historic context of the African Americans and the gay club scene that was important during the early years of house and techno (Garcia-Mispireta 2018: 36). This period fostered an inclusiveness both to race and sexuality, an ethos that to a certain degree can be seen as a legacy of the earlier days of disco (Lawrence 2006). However, this ideal of inclusiveness within club culture often comes with a degree of exclusivity. Garcia-Mispireta (2023), after conducting extensive fieldwork in clubs in Paris, Berlin and Chicago, concludes that the harmony found on the dance floor in several clubs is due to the fact that people have already passed through a process of selection. According to him, it represents an "embedded diversity" that creates a safe and harmonious space where individuals who might pose a threat to the established subculture represented in the club are kept out (Garcia-Mispireta 2023: 212). This could also be seen as a legacy from earlier disco culture, where the dance floor represented a place where people otherwise marginalized in society could feel a sense of release and could even address injustices (Garcia-Mispireta 2023: 8).

An important aspect of the discussion about early club culture's legacy, is how it connects to the term EDM. Hidalgo and others make the claim that the contemporary commercial EDM scene largely lacks these historic ideals of inclusion and respect (Anderson 2009: 24; Park 2015: 31; Conner and Katz 2020: 461; Hidalgo 2023: 20–21). A description of this divide is found in Simon Reynolds's piece in *The Guardian* from 2012. He argues that rave culture, as it existed in Europe, had struggled to gain a foothold in the United States. In his words, it had to be rebranded into EDM in order to make it big there. In part this was done to distance itself from the drug use associated with European rave culture, but while the drug use persisted, Reynolds argues that the growing EDM scene mowed away from the inclusive ethos found in the earlier club/rave scene (Reynolds 2012). Much of the same sentiment is repeated in a more humorous way by Clive Martin, a British writer for *Vice* magazine, who claims that while the United States was attempting to catch up

with something that has been popular in Europe for decades, it misunderstood some key concepts. He returns to Gunders´s account of club music artists bringing more live instruments into their performance, but turns this development into a comic punchline. He argues the Americans are totally missing the point when they are trying to make "live" dance music: "Live drums are completely unacceptable" (Martin 2013).

An example on how this view on EDM is continued in social media today can be seen in a post from Mixmag some years ago. Posting "to all haters", *Mixmag*'s editorial called for a stop to homophobic, sexist and transphobic comments on its Facebook page, pointing to the origin of both house and techno within marginalized communities (fig. 1).[1] A comment appeared (by what appears to be an American white male) opening with the phrase "EDM was always an inclusive place […] However", then going on to criticize *Mixmag* for trying to press a political agenda. The most "liked" response to this comment was made by a famous British DJ, simply stating "…….EDM?". For an "informed audience" this would underscore the notion that using the term EDM means you lack any knowledge or appreciation of the authentic club music and that you are at odds with the original ethos of the club scene. This distinction is also made in the later editions of Brewster and Broughton's *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* (2000); in the chapter "Sell-Out?" it is suggested that EDM was a rebranding exercise pursued in order to detach club music from its black and gay roots (2006: 540).

TO ALL THE HATERS

Before leaving homophobic, transphobic, sexist, racist or any kind of bigoted comment on our videos or editorial, please educate yourself on the history of dance music and the marginalised people who began this scene in the first place.

We have a zero tolerance approach to harassment of any kind and have full support for the many diverse identities and communities involved in dance music across the world – so if you chat shit we will delete and report your comments and block you from our pages.

Show some respect, do your homework and be ready to participate in this scene with an open mind and heart.
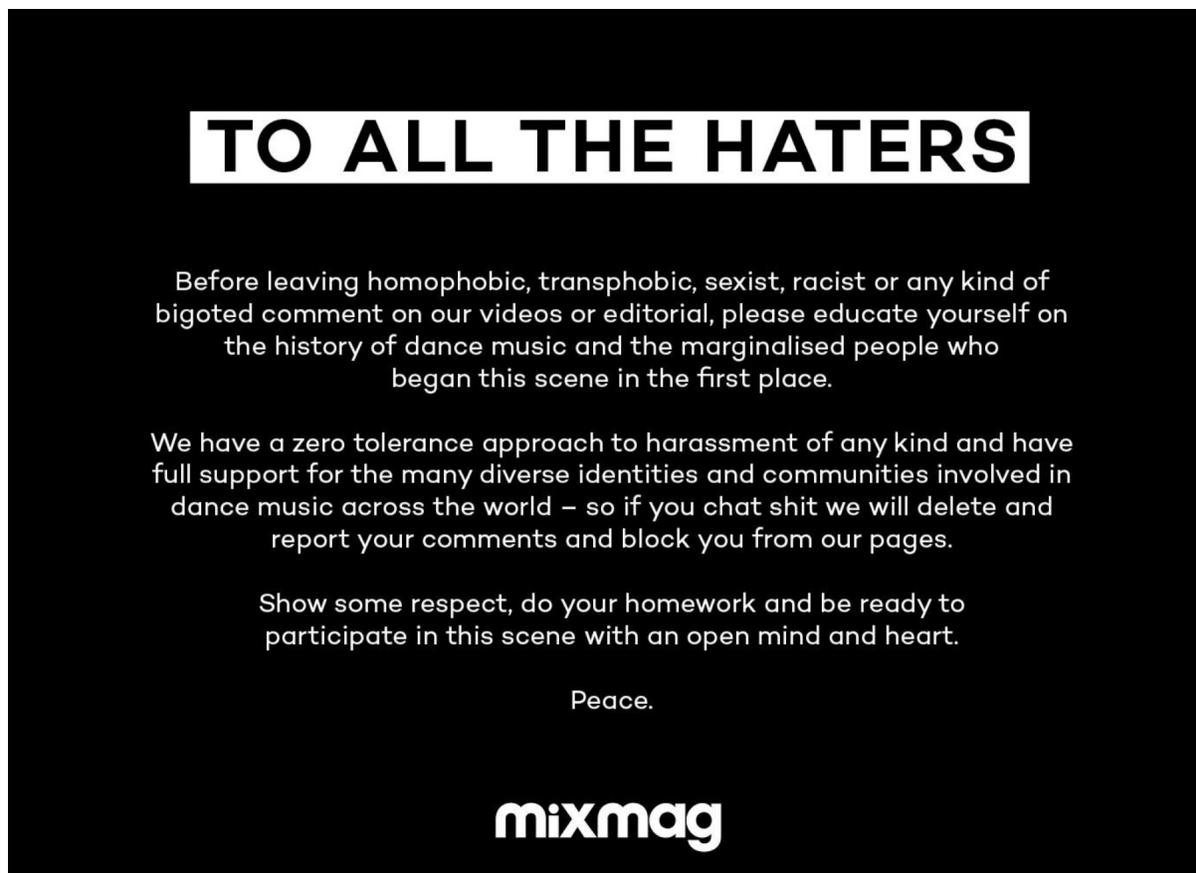
Peace.

mixmag

Figure 1. "To all the haters" Mixmag

At this point, discussions about authenticity intersect with current discussions about genres as a commercial apparatus of labeling and marketing (Alacovska and O'Brien 2021: 642). The term EDM can be used to attract a specific segment of consumers. The way the popularization of EDM coincides with the growing popularity and commercialization of club music leads many to use EDM as a description of a new commercial club music. Academics are of course aware of how this can be in conflict with their use of "electronic dance music" as an umbrella term (Jóri 2001: 27; Garcia-Mispireta 2018: 57). My analysis of memes in TWTMEGP will bring more insight into how newer genre labels like EDM, as opposed to earlier genre labels, are used to define inauthenticity, but also reveal insights into how such ideals can be established as well as negotiated.

TWTMEPG: Drawing a Line Between the Authentic and Inauthentic

Today's club music continues to morph into new genres, and the scene continues to expand, causing the line between the authentic and inauthentic to be in constant flux. What makes TWTMEGP interesting is that through memes, humor and sometimes more sober discussions, members establish their "stance" (in Shifman's terms), discussing and negotiating the borders between authentic and inauthentic, as well as giving genre labels different symbolic status. In this process, the idea of the memescape comes into play (Baspehlivan 2024: 38), where statements made about authenticity are questioned through the playful exchange of symbols.

Having followed the group for years, I will define the baseline assumption about EDM as signifying the opposite of authenticity in club music, representing an ethical departure from its original underground status, its social inclusivity and its non-commercialism. A post that exemplifies this, is reposted from an interview with DJ DVS1, reading: "Hard techno is the EDM of this generation" (Xceed 2023). Three days later, the post had over 300 comments, mostly stating that he was right, that hard techno was garbage (referring to the group's prevailing understanding of EDM). There were, however, two people that tried to point out that EDM was not a genre, but a term used to label all dance music. They were rather quickly reminded that it might have been the intention at one point, but that it now was used to describe bad commercial dance music. One person explained it as:

> [...] you know what he means. Overpaid playback/sync DJ's playing commercial electronic dance music with big buildups and drops, often with cheesy elements and vocals. 128 BPM, pryda snare right before the drop, festival bangers with electro and trance instrumentation. VIP tables for crappy rich people, Slutty champagne waiters with sparklers, CO2 cannons, confetti, strobe lights and cakes in your face. Not to forget the people on the dancefloor not dancing but filming everything on their mobile phones to let people on social media know that you are having a 'good time'. This is what I think of when someone mentions EDM (comment on TWTMEGP 2024).

What makes this statement interesting is that, besides few actual musical explanations, it mainly focuses on ethical aspects, associating EDM with a superficial, commercialized and impersonal social movement, underpinning the opinion that EDM is a commercial rebranding of club music (Reynolds 2012). In addition, it exemplifies how the posts in TWTMEGP follow Tulloch's analysis of memes as a way to represent different aspects of reality (2021: 295). The reposting of the interview opens a space where alternative interpretations in the comments section come into play, establishing the term EDM as a negative label, perhaps in opposition to what it was originally intended to encompass.

Together with artists like Timmy Trumpet, Skrillex, as well as Steve Aoki with his cake throwing (steveaoki 2021), David Guetta has been central in shaping EDM as a negative term (fig. 2). In addition to his massive commercial success, Guetta has become a soft target due to his disregard for the cultural roots of club music, exemplifying how important the legacy of early club culture is for TWTMEGP members. In an interview with ABC in October 2018, he claimed to have brought house music to the United States, which instantly sparked a long stream of ridicule in social media and TWTMEGP (Matthew 2018; Gardner 2018), as common knowledge places the birth of house music in Chicago.

FIGURE 2 "DAVID GUETTA" TWTMEGP 2023

Moving beyond the term EDM, in TWTMEGP labels such as tech house and lately melodic techno have also been used as a marker of inauthenticity and commercialization. The memes on melodic techno often refer to how the genre excessively borrows musical elements associated with 1990s trance while claiming to be new and innovative (fig. 3). In addition to making fun of actual musical subgenres, the fictitious genre of "business techno" has been invented to criticize the commercialization of club music (fig. 4). This has been used to label artists that have diverged from the expected non-commerciality associated with the roots of techno. It is hard to pinpoint exactly how the term was coined, but it was clear that Richie Hawtin (also criticized by Drexciya in the 1990s for commercially exploiting techno) has been associated with the genre. This fictive genre has also been used outside TWTMEGP as a label for an unethical drive to commercialize techno. One example is the German artist Apparat, who in response to the emergence of "plague raves" (a term coined at club events operating on the fringe of legality during the COVID-19 pandemic), said: "Business techno is getting out of hand, it should officially be a subgenre of EDM" (Apparat 2020). Another artist that uses this term is the British DJ and producer Dave Clarke. In an interview, he criticizes the EDM movement for being a commercial and artistic circus, but continues "…business techno took from EDM and basically put business first, which is completely opposite to what techno was" (Green 2024).

Figure 3 "Melodic techno" TWTMEGP 2023

Figure 4 "Fake Business Techno" TWTMEGP 2024

For the members of TWTMEGP, EDM, tech house and business techno embody the inauthentic, while older genre labels like house and techno symbolize the authentic; however, it can be challenging to define exact borders for the inauthentic. From time to time, ideas of authenticity collide with artists' desire to reach new audiences. How far from the underground ideal can an artist depart before it becomes a problem for the audience? To exemplify these challenges, I will dig into two earlier discussions that have taken place in the group—examples that show how complex it is to draw a demarcation line between the authentic and inauthentic.

The first example is related to the Saudi Arabian festival Sandstorm and its extensive lineup of DJs. The notion that these DJs were selling out to a corrupt and murderous regime was almost unanimous (fig. 5). Dance culture's legacy within the gay community seemed misplaced in a country known for cracking down on LGBT rights. Among artists that the group members defined as EDM, their participation was of course anticipated and confirmed what many saw as an expected lack of morals. Responding to Steve Aoki's performance at the festival, one member ironically commented: "NOT STEVE AOKI" (fig. 6). In contrast to this, what upset many was that there were some "decent names" in the lineup, artists that for many TWTMEGP embodied authenticity. Among them was Jeff Mills, hailed as one of the pioneers of techno in Detroit during the early 1990s (Reynolds 1998: 205). On social media, Mills defended his choice by arguing that this was an opportunity to reach out to an audience that had not had the chance to experience this type of music. He himself reflected on the importance of spreading music to new regions of the world, pointing to his experience of hearing European electronic music in Detroit (Juno Daily 2021).

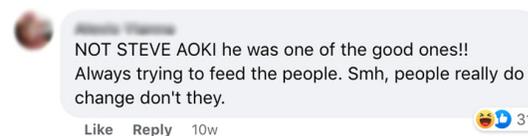Figure 5 "Sandstorm" TWTMEGP 2021   Figure 6 "Not Steve Aoki" TWTMEGP 2021

Mills's participation in Sandstorm received widespread condemnation from members of TWTMEGP, even sparking new memes ridiculing Mills's justification for performing there (fig. 7). This exemplifies how arguments for spreading music to new groups of audiences can in some cases conflict with the audience's perceptions of what constitutes ethical behavior from an artist.

My second example touches upon the same dilemma but illustrates my point that the borders between the authentic and inauthentic are in flux. It all started when a Twitter post from artist Seth Troxler related to an ongoing discussion about duo CamelPhat was shared on TWTMEGP. Troxler was of the opinion that their music was not house, but EDM disguised as house. However, the screenshot shared of Troxler's tweet, also included a reply from a club promoter complaining that Troxler had asked £30,000 for a gig, calling it "…as #underground as a 12 story building" (fig. 8). This caused amusement, since Troxler is an artist who on several occasions has advocated for the original spirit of club music (Hidalgo 2022: 28), and for some his proposed DJ fee contradicted his self-proclaimed authenticity.

Figure 7 "Are we the baddies?" TWTMEGP 2021.   Figure 8 "Seth Troller" TWTMEGP 2019.

While Jeff Mills's attendance at Sandstorm was unanimously condemned by the group members, the memes following Troxler's tweet turned into a longer meme exchange where the actual act of gatekeeping the authentic become debated. What was first made fun of was how Troxler took the role of drawing the line between the authentic and the inauthentic. We find this in a meme depicting a confused baby Yoda with the caption "Me front row trying to decipher if this is 'EDM disguised as house music'", with someone commenting "Is that Seth Troxler at a Camelphat concert?" (fig. 9). These memes about Troxler become part of a specific trend I have seen among memes in TWTMEGP that makes fun of the actual ideals of authenticity, especially considerations about the underground. This points to what Martinelli describes as authenticity as a guarantee for the alternative/avant-garde (2008: 124). The question raised with some memes is whether there is any musical difference, and if there is, are there any reasons why the underground should be any better? A good example is a version of a well-used image macro, reading: "Techno people be like" and a happy face besides "A hair dryer with a kick drum" (fig. 10).

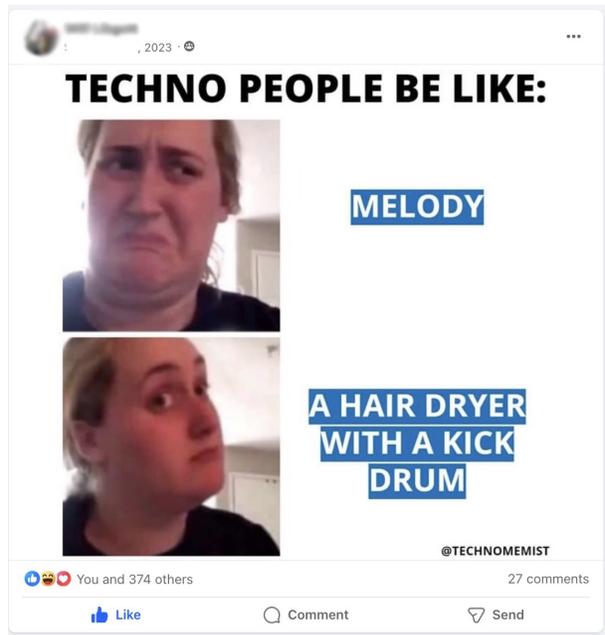Figure 9 "Me front row" TWTMEGP 2019

Figure 10 "Techno people" TWTMEGP 2023

Figure 11 "Goes to Berghain twice" TWTMEGP 2019

However, the interesting part in the meme exchange concerning Troxler appeared when he himself entered TWTMEGP, turning it into a direct exchange of opinions between Troxler and the audience. The meme that brought Troxler to post in the group was a variant of a meme that has existed for a long time within the group (fig. 11), a picture of a strangely dressed person with the caption "Goes to Berghain once" (or "twice"). Berghain is a club in Berlin known for its strong ties to the gay community as well as its underground ideals, but at the same time, it is renowned for its exclusivity, being a club notoriously difficult to gain entrance to (Garcia-Mispireta 2023: 189). In TWTMEGP, Berghain has gained the status as more or less the antidote to EDM, the guardian of authenticity within the club scene. At the same time, its strict door policy has been the subject of many memes, partly questioning the authenticity of their exclusivity. The meme that Troxler responded to was a picture of himself in tight red shorts, red shirt and roses in his hair, with the caption "Goes to Berghain twice". Troxler himself is well known for humorous press photos, even doing promotional pictures in the nude (Nadin 2013), so the meme has a degree of homage as well as humor. When someone commented that he actually had DJed at the club, twice, Troxler posted a meme himself, under the heading "I'm a bit of a memer myself" showing a scene from *The Simpsons*: Homer sitting in the control room of the nuclear power plant with people standing behind him seeking safety in the doorway. The captions over both Homer and the bystanders are "Never been to berghain" and over the control panel it reads "making meme's about people who go to berghain once" (fig. 12).

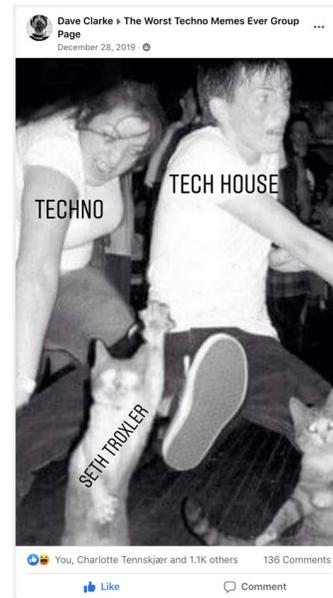Figure 12 "Never been to Berghain" TWTMEGP 2019

Figure 13 "Troxler" TWTMEGP 2019

This meme exchange between Troxler and TWTMEGP members turned into a debate about who has the authority to define authenticity, and in a humorous way commenting on the gatekeeping that is going on in the group. Considering Berghain's status within the club scene, Troxler could point to the fact that he, in comparison to other people, actually had been there. He might demand a lot of money for his performances, but displays the right symbols concerning the legacy of club music and has performed at the club that for many is the benchmark of authenticity. As Atton argues, the central argument of authenticity in music is about how it accords with the personality of the artist and the views and expectations of the audience (2019: 206). But the result can be both artistically and culturally conservative. People on the inside function as gatekeepers who uphold their own ideals of authenticity.

What later came to unfold in this meme exchange centers specifically on how authenticity might not be compatible with trying to expand the music to new audiences. Here we perceive a friction that emerges due to the "embedded diversity" that Garcia-Mispireta describes within parts of club culture (Garcia-Mispireta 2023: 212). However, these attempts to preserve the existing subculture can sometimes hinder the vitality of the genre. Through fieldwork within the Philadelphia rave scene, Anderson uncovered that the inability to recruit new people led to a decline in the scene (2009: 317). Part of this decline came as a consequence of the rave scene becoming too alternative for its own good (2009: 322). This point became apparent when a new artist, Dave Clarke, entered the meme exchange. He posted a meme with a well-used picture from social media: two persons dancing furiously together with two cats (fig. 13). The persons are captioned as techno and tech house, while the cat dancing in the front is Troxler. Clarke's exact intention with this meme is not entirely clear, but it positions Troxler between house and techno that he might find enjoyable. Troxler, however,

responded by posting a promotional picture of Clarke performing at Tomorrowland with the caption "Nothing says underground anarchists hard techno DJ like your own stage at Tomorrowland"—the case being that the Tomorrowland festival is mostly associated with commercial EDM (fig. 14). Clarke responded quickly with a picture of Troxler, this time in a pink dress and black braids, with the caption "Nothing says gentrification of house more than playing Spice Girls at a gig in Ibiza" (fig. 15).
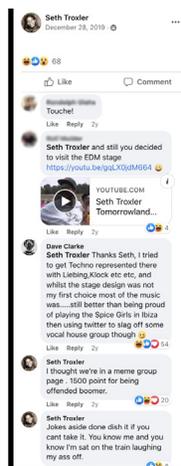

Figure 14 "Clarke Tomorrowland" TWTMEGP 2019   Figure 15 "Gentrification of house" TWTMEGP 2019

On the surface, the memes exchanged between Troxler and Clarke can be seen as a humorous competition about who is most authentic. Looking into the comments, however, a more serious discussion emerges concerning the role of authenticity markers, abolishing bigger festivals to stick true to the traditions of underground club culture. Clarke argues that it should be about bringing music you believe in, out to a new and larger audience, explaining: "…I tried to get techno presented there with Liebing, Klock etc, etc, and while the stage design was not my first choice, the music was…". This exemplifies the contradictions that the struggle for authenticity can involve, debating authenticity as a guarantee for the avant-garde and marginalized music (Martinelli 2008: 124). EDM, and the culture connected to it, do not necessarily eliminate the possibility of presenting good music and sway the ethics of audiences. This also connects us to the first meme I discussed, posted more than four years later: DJ DVS1 claiming that "Hard techno is the new EDM". In the interview, DVS1 was speculating that for younger audiences, hard techno might influence them to seek out deeper, more underground music. Striving for exclusivity and positioning yourself as cultural gatekeepers, does not always help build a community for club music. Although it can be fun to ridicule the commercial ethics of EDM, the meme exchange between Troxler and Clarke also uncovers a deeper discussion: how can one uphold the legacy from the origins of club music while still gaining a larger audience.

Conclusion

Through this article I have shown how some people use the term EDM and other newer genre labels to brand certain club music as inauthentic. The authentic, on the other hand, is defined through a link to the roots of club culture in the marginalized, underground communities of the late 1980s. My analyses of memes and discussions in TWTMEGP show, however, how difficult it can be to define the line between the authentic and inauthentic. This is partly linked to what Garcia-Mispireta calls the scene's "embedded diversity"—the desire to keep the established subculture safe (2023: 212). On the other hand, safeguarding something too jealously can also result in cultural decline (Anderson 2009: 317).

While Mills's performance at Sandstorm was condemned by the members of TWTMEGP, my analysis of the exchange of memes between artist Troxler and Clarke reveals that it can be considered appropriate to reach new audiences through what might be seen as inauthentic venues. Some comments from TWTMEGP members even poke fun at the gatekeeping that exists within parts of the communities. It is apparent that champagne waiters and CO2 cannons are taking it too far, yet Troxler's attempt to label CamelPhat as EDM was interpreted by many members of TWTMEGP as a condescending move. As shown, much of the discussions on authenticity within club music corresponds with Moore's definition of third-person authenticity, connecting it to the historic time and place of club music's origins. This stands in contrast to the instrumentalist skills that are important in other musical genres. What my examples reveal is that this might make club music's authenticity particularly unstable and is perhaps the reason why the label EDM has come to encapsulate inauthenticity. In my experience, club music's ideals of innovation and expansion do not always mix well with a focus on conserving a historic moment in time. One cannot demand that club music should be the same as in late 1980s for it to retain its authenticity. The invention of the term business techno, however, exemplifies that there are clear ethical considerations that for many ought to be followed. Money should not come before music, as Clarke puts it, and embracing sexual and ethnic minorities is also important. The global outreach that club music has today does not necessarily stand in opposition to the original cultural ideals of inclusion and respect, but for some—perhaps mostly the older generation—the popularization of EDM as a label for club music represents change to what they feel club music should be. In TWTMEGP, this exact feeling is expressed and discussed through memes and comments, never giving any direct answers but exemplifying that these are questions in constant flux.

Notes

1 I have chosen to omit the date of this post for ethical reasons to avoid identifying the persons commenting on the post.

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