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FUTURE ARCHIVE DIARY — Historie und Hysterie

Cultural Private Partnerships And Commodification In The Context Of Club Cultures

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Keywords

capitalist realism; club culture; commodification; cultural private partnerships; transformation

Abstract

The premise of this working paper is an examination of prevalent industrial online media platforms which are indicated by *club cultural* actors as being without any (socio-economic) alternative in *club cultures*, and the impact of *cultural private partnerships* on *club culture* structures in general: With the advancement of digitization and the demise of special interest print media, emerging platform capitalist online media and social media became the most relevant channels and socio-economic structures to generate visibility and attention for actors in the *club cultures* — a contemporary *club cultural* affordance. While emancipatory positions increasingly express their critical views and bring attention to structural problems within the *club cultures*, a blind spot remains in spite of the widespread use of social media and it's inherent problematic logic of representative inequality. The reluctance of such platforms to effectively address issues of, e.g. right-wing populism and hate speech, bullying, as well as refraining from manipulative design practices and capitalizing upon private user data, remarkably contradicts the historically grounded and prevailing self-perception of values and norms in club cultures.

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From the second half of the 1990s onwards, the inner colonization of c*lub cultures* accelerated along the rise of long-term *cultural private partnerships* which not only shaped the production and reception of *club culture* historiography, but also form careers and enhance the visibility of *club cultural* actors. The impact of commissioned contributions to value chains of *club cultures* is questionable, and their economic circumstances seem to at least promote undifferentiated opinions — on an industrial level and scale. New *club cultural* generations socialise with the naturalised expectation of cultural content always being free of charge, of cultural work and efforts as ubiquitous commodities. This comes at a price as it transforms the credibility of *club cultures'* key values and norms, furthermore eroding its independent structures and socio-economic conditions. Not only did the pandemic years prove that the economic system of *club culture*, in particular that of electronic club music, is in a structural crisis. From grassroots to key players: actors jumping off this bandwagon are rare, as dependency, opportunism and impotence seem to proliferate a narrative of a system without alternatives.

This working paper offers to reflect upon the use of problematic platforms by and the impact of *cultural private partnerships* on *club culture* structures. In this context, *capitalist realism* is being used as a concept to describe a status quo and the process of commodification, to discern processes bearing down on the socio-economic structures of house and techno music as a particular example. Finally, this paper suggests to unlearn the mediated images of a parasitic, exploitative industry and instead get inspired by the emancipatory project, that the *club cultures* of house and techno music in particular had once been, as a driving force for sustainable socio-economic transformation processes in *club cultures*.

Echoes from the Underground

Club cultures[1], not just those of electronic music, promote the idea of being sub-/countercultural formations and institutions of aesthetic, social and economic dimensions.[2] They provide spaces for heterotopias by means of alternative identities, lifestyles and new forms of collectivity. In the past thirty years, urban night life economies have grown to be an ecosystem of political and economic importance[3], building on distribution and marketing structures beyond specific club cultures. Many structural problems are inherent in

1 Disambiguation: "'club culture' is the colloquial expression given to youth cultures for whom dance clubs and their eighties' offshoot, raves, are the symbolic axis and working social hub." Thornton, Sarah. C*lub Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital.* Polity, 1995, p.3. Despite Thornton's reference to the 1980s and Youths, her definition equally applies to *club cultures* since the 1920s, especially post-WWII. Employing the plural form acknowledges the diversity of *club culture*, their far-fetching differences and settings.

2 Damm, Steffen, and Lukas Drevenstedt. *Clubkultur: Dimensionen eines urbanen Phänomens.* Campus Verlag, 2020, pp.85

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subcultures and *club cultures* as they reflect a contradictory Western, Eurocentric society, or have grown to be problematic in relation to their economic size. Needless to say, that does not mean these problems are to be accepted nor that the music remains unaffected. Music is *always* of social origin, it is never the product of single so-called "geniuses" and their supporters. Music *is* political and is *not* merely entertainment, even if it is entertaining, because its true meaning and cultural resonance transcends all these moments.[4] However, having said that, there is a misalignment between what is being presented as *club cultures* (especially when it comes to house and techno music), and how the corporate structures operate, which negotiate the mediation of a *club cultural* past, present and future.

Since about the 2000s, Western European pop culture journalism has produced a canon of *club culture* historizing contributions, tracing its development in the form of testimonial documentations or eyewitness interviews. While relying heavily on anecdotal evidence, these efforts aim to tell and reflect upon the origins of club music genres and the careers of *club culture* protagonists; addressed by and bound to these media are particularly those who are too young to have had witnessed the early and boom years. This professional gaze in the cultural rearview mirror caters to a *club cultural* audience, while concealing the industrial background of its clients. By flanking current genre and style syntheses, these contributions are the journalistic counterpart to crate-digging in cultural artefacts and idiosyncrasies[5], all along setting reference points of the contemporary *cool.* However, neither as an aisthesis of a historically authentic ideal, nor as a projection of a *club culturally* denoted alternative lifestyle and attitude.

The commodification of *club cultural* representation and performance

Even before the pandemic, actors and institutions of *club cultures* have faced economic pressure: The majority accepts precarious working conditions, confirming a systematic mode of self-exploitation sustained by idealism, in the hope of overcoming these circumstances by commercial success. In particular, an imperative to align artistic actions and *club culturally* encoded attitudes with the scene-typical role models, expectations and attention economies of social media, has emerged for performing actors, rendering themselves both as commodified and commodifying actors. Expression and action not only respond affirmatively to the quantity and quality of peers and the ubiquitous competition: the design and orientation of their social media content production are a speculative reaction in hope to master the continuously shifting opaque algorithms and dark patterns, which determine the ranking of posts as well as the visibility and recommendation of user profiles, according to the user experience and affective control designed by those platforms. In any case, this "Behavioral Value Reinvestment Cycle"[6] first and foremost caters for the interests of advertising businesses.

It is becoming increasingly clear that this economically determined behavioural conditioning

3 Working groups and interest groups have gained significant influence on local and federal policymakers, e.g., *Clubcommission* in Berlin and *N8BM* in Vienna, leveraging their agenda with reference to their cultural and economic role.

4 Lawrence English, https://twitter.com/room40speaks/status/1356351043219558400

5 The sum of all the peculiarities of club culture prototypes, e.g. of house and techno music.

6 "In this cycle, only behavioral data needed for service improvements are rendered. These are reinvested in the user experience." Cf. Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power.* PublicAffairs, 2019, p. 52

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of *club cultural* actors proliferates one-dimensional modes of expression and communication. Based on conversations with performing and organizing actors in my fieldwork, a preliminary conclusion is: *Club cultural* actors are concerned about neglecting or abstaining from social media, as they consider this being economically and socially disadvantageous, because they could not, for example, maintain contact with peers and audience and advertise for themselves otherwise. The code to this conclusion is: there is no alternative. The observed effect of this conclusion is: the anaesthetization of freedom of choice, whether to *play that game* while decidedly pursuing a career as an exponent of *club culture.*

Having no alternative is a concept of *capitalist realism* as defined by British cultural theorist Mark Fisher: "[…] acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action."[7] In his 2009/2013 pamphlet "capitalist realism: Is There No Alternative?", he elaborates on the concept using examples from contemporary pop culture in music and film, describing it as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it."[8] Fisher argues that this concept became established when the doctrine "There Is No Alternative", popularised by Margaret Thatcher, became a self-fulfilling prophecy[9] from 1980 onwards. In disagreement to the Thatcher government and in the aftermath of the UK miners' strike, UK *club cultures* subsequently challenged this doctrine by actively working on alternatives to what the Tories offered them.[10] Needless to say, this doctrine has been adopted by other liberal conservatives and notoriously employed in the rhetoric of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and her centre-right political party coalition since 2009 *(alternativlos, Alternativlosigkeit).*

7 Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zero Books, 2010, p.16

8 Ibid. p.2

9 Ibid.

10 "The 1984-85 miners' strike, which brought the coalfields of South and West Yorkshire to a standstill (as well as those in South Wales and Nottinghamshire), intensified ill feeling between Yorkshire's working class and the Conservative government. […] The loss of the miners' strike hit Yorkshire hard. In Leeds, a city that had long boasted an entrepreneurial spirit and affluent suburbs packed with naturally Conservative voters, the City Council quickly took steps to address the loss of its manufacturing base. […] It was a different story down the M1 in Sheffield. There, the Labour-dominated City Council […] continued to oppose government policy at every juncture. […] Sheffield had traditionally charged high rates to city taxpayers, using the money to subsidize low public transport fares and ensure good quality services for all. Pertinently, this included investing in arts and culture, with the council funding the opening of two recording studios and rehearsal spaces, Red Tape in the city centre, and the Darnall Music Factory. In addition, the council also paid to convert a former bus garage into a live venue and club space known as the Leadmill. Gez Varley, later one of the founder members of LFO, once phoned Leeds City Council to ask why his home city had nothing similar to Red Tape. 'They said they didn't because it wasn't a growth industry,' he says. 'This was 1988. The music industry was the third biggest industry in the country at that point and (they didn't invest in it.' Spending ratepayers' money on recording studios and music venues was the kind of socialist utopianism that was wholly at odds with the 'small state, low tax' ideology of Thatcher's government. As with previous conflicts between the Iron Lady and "The People's Republic Of South Yorkshire", the left's favourite hate figure came out on top. […] Curiously, the curse of long-term unemployment may have inadvertently provided the perfect conditions for a real musical revolution to take place - not just in Yorkshire, but also elsewhere within Britain." Anniss, Matt. *Join the Future: Bleep Techno and the Birth of British Bass Music*. Velocity Press, 2019, pp.15 – 16.

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Following Fisher, I use the term *commodification* in reference to the process of turning cultural actions into a commodity *and* the "the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture"[11], not just in cultural production but also in the regulation of work and education.[12] This *commodification* renders codes such as *alternative, independent, underground*[13] and *sell-out* devoid of (their former) meaning and importance outside the mainstream *clubcultural* zones. Concluding this, there is something to be said for the irony in the fact that *club cultures* — at least historically — were *the alternative* of choice to an economically driven and optimised lifestyle, though in the age of *capitalist realism, club cultural* actors are more often than not choosing the opposite when they opt for an economic livelihood in *club cultures.*

Decontextualization and recontextualization

Club cultures grew in the niches of societies, defying their sociocultural marginalization and rejection in an ongoing activist act of emancipation by creating their own structures, media, and spaces. Self-organization, decentralization, and openness have made *club cultures* diverse, grandiose, and sometimes arguably revolutionary. In addition to the circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating precarity for those working in *club cultural* production and *night life economies, club cultural* histories and their paradigms are being exploited by commercial platforms with global reach, that have acquired a synonymous quality with these cultures. There is an ongoing problem of historical misrepresentation, local patriotism and nationalism, brought up by narratives in the canonization and definition of house and especially techno music, generally concerning those who laid the foundations for and contributed to *club cultures,* and those who represent, exploit, and profit from this. The resulting political economy appears to counter the original ideas and concepts, while explicitly and visibly exploiting them. On the whole, *club cultural* distinction and ostensible authenticity continue to be produced through placatory codes such as *underground, (being) real* and *sell-out* or *fake,* in contradiction to the clearly commercial nature of the platforms that local and global communities use.

As *club cultural* genres and scenes, as well as their actual and self-described pioneers were coming of age, a historiography particularly addressing younger generations has emerged. In the form of short video features (“The role of South African dance music during apartheid,” “How punk shaped electronic music”), talking head documentaries (“We Call It Techno!”[14]), or formulaic articles by music journalists like “How Frankfurt's '80s Tape Scene Laid the Foundation for the City's Techno Renaissance”[15] (wherein X meets Y at Z and then …),

11 Ibid. p.9

12 Ibid. p.16

13 The term *sell-out* is a subcultural code referring to a massive lack of authenticity due to commerciality. It produces a distinction within these reference systems, and marks cultural production and image in colloquial discourse as intentionally strictly commercial in nature, hence with little cultural credibility and acceptance. Cf. Thornton (1995), pp.123

14 „WE CALL IT TECHNO! A documentary about Germany’s early Techno scene and culture” is a talking-head documentary presented by *Telekom Electronic Beats* (https://youtu.be/TWPFrWojYQ4), produced by *Sense Music & Media* in 2008. *Sense Music & Media* is *Telekom Electronic Beats’* long-standing production partner, an agency run by DJ and producer Holger „Hoschi“ Wick.

15 Telekom Electronic Beats. “How Frankfurt’s ’80s Tape Scene Laid The Foundation For The City’s Techno Renaissance | Telekom Electronic Beats,” March 15, 2022. https://www.electronicbeats.net/frankfurt-diy-history/

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famous and lesser-known personalities mingle in the form of testimonials to become protagonists of a coherently staged *club cultural* canon. The quantity of continuously published articles suggests a certain demand for such stories, yet their framing and historicisation of *club cultures* rely almost exclusively on anecdotal evidence[16]. More often than not, such articles perpetuate a distorted and decontextualised account of his-stories (sic!), installing a subjective, biased *club cultural* historiography: devoid of its numerous political, socio-economic, contemporary historical contexts.

This type of plausibly presented popular historiography renders an incomplete impression, as it arises from more general and journalistically opportune themes in accordance with journalistic conventions. Complex relationships and influences over longer periods of time can only be reproduced in abbreviated form and with omissions, regardless of claims to provide a considerable portrayal of origins, facts or biographies (i.e. The Definitive/Comprehensive Story Of […], The Sound Of […]). False conclusions and biases, especially due to statements by prominent and respected people, who are or have been in cooperative or mutually beneficial relationships with each other or can be attributed to such groups, confirm and repeat existing urban myths, questionable or reconstructed memories (e.g. techno music allegedly having been invented in Frankfurt am Main[17], or the many iconic accounts of *The Belleville Three*[18]), disseminate in the guise of serious journalism — as *stories and contexts as they happened*[19], however, exempt of deep and critical research aware of the typical biases and the pitfalls of *ex post facto* reconstructions.

The circumstance of de- and recontextualization is particularly true for media and *club culture* entities that are primarily or exclusively financed by advertising or backed by parent companies. Historiographic features are lined up with advertorials, artist features and product announcements, whose background deals with PR and artist agencies remain invisible to the consumers. The assumption is that this media avoids exploring the complex interdependencies

16 Hence resulting in anecdotal fallacies: A historicisation built on individual reports of experiences and hearsay stories consequently has only very weak, argumentative validity. Cf. Glaser, Christian. "*Anekdotischer Fehlschluss.*" In Springer Gabler, 2019) pp.148. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-25835-1_40

17 A narrative employed by DJ and producer Andreas Tomalla (aka Talla 2XLC) and associates, as reiterated in his autobiography, press statements and interviews given to support their *Museum of Modern Electronic Music* project in Frankfurt am Main, henceforth adopted by the municipality of Frankfurt am Main. Cf. Tomalla, Andreas. *Talla 2XLC: Am Anfang war der TechnoClub*, Henrich Druck + Medien GmbH, 2019, p.35 and https://femalepressure.wordpress.com/2022/04/06/an-open-letter-about-momen/, https://ra.co/news/77083, https://mixmag.net/read/femalepressure-momem-museum-frankfurt-open-letter-criticism-news/

18 A synonym of the Detroit triumvirate Juan Atkins (The Initiator), Derrick May (The Innovator) and Kevin Saunderson (The Elevator), complemented with personal synonyms describing their suggested and widely accepted role in history. E.g. cf. Sicko, Dan. Techno Rebels: *The Renegades of Electronic Funk.* 2 ed., Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010, p.53

19 Two examples of features provided by *Resident Advisor:* https://youtu.be/10dKeg73nMo and https://youtu.be/EqR7F5yCDfw. A plethora of similar videos have also been produced by *Red Bull Music*, *Telekom Electronic Beats* et al., to be found on *YouTube*.

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or even uncomfortable topics,[20] although those just as well are constitutive, if not elementary, for the *club cultures* of house and techno in particular.[21]

As a result, *club culture* history is being stripped of its poly-dimensional approaches and numerous contexts, and recontextualised in the reference spaces of interpersonal relationships. This ubiquitous take on *club cultures* has produced various accounts of history since the early 2000s, but at the present time, as witnesses of the early days increasingly become scarce, and younger generations' *club cultural* personae and interests are being informed, constructed and negotiated by *cultural private partnerships*, the result is a facticity manifesting which sorely lacks balance in the form of polyphony and multilayeredness. Primarily left out of this historiography are especially those, who could not afford a healthy lifestyle or proper health care, who had little to no status and support in society, moreover BIPoC, Latinx, women, queer people and communities who contributed significantly to *club cultures* but were at best "just forgotten" in the reconstructive memories of successful or privileged former peers.[22] In

20 "I think the queer histories we find served to us by industries are very much farcical. Queer histories have traditionally been constructed of secrets, missing passages, random utterances, vagueness… yet we are served histories rooted in the language of Pride[TM]. Meanwhile, the tragedies continue, so I can only assume what we have been witnessing in mainstream media is not so much about queer histories, but is more about a change within Neo-Liberal history telling. It's a change that has many people confused as to what queer histories might otherwise be, if not about Pride[TM]. And it's a change that adds confusion to my own projects as they interact with mainstream electronic audio distribution channels, etc." Luis-Manuel Garcia. "Terre Thaemlitz on Queer Nightlife: The Unabridged Interview." LMGM, the Blog, February 6, 2014. https://lmgmblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/04/terrethaemlitzinterview/.

21 Besides Brown (2022), Salkind (2019), another example of academic interest in precarious settings of *club cultures* is Maloney's research on the socio-economic perspectives of Black communities caused by segregation: Maloney (2021) explains why many pioneers of Chicago House experienced their musical socialization in churches in the early/mid-1980s, what influences this had on their own cultural and musical logic, and how the church was one of the few unrestrictive options for educating young Black people culturally and artistically in their free time, who had less promising prospects of joining the labour market, and thus also keeping them off the streets, where they would likely find themselves tempted to engage in illegal activities. Cf. Maloney, Liam. *House music, Chicago and the uncomfortable heritage of racial segregation*. In Maloney, Liam, and John Schofield. *Music and Heritage: New Perspectives on Place-Making and Sonic Identity*. Routledge, 2021, pp.114

22 "[C]ulture-bearers don't necessarily revise the stories passed down to them, but they do often enlarge them and give them "imaginative representation to suit their psychological needs for continuity and control in a changing world." [… F]or generations inheriting widely circulated myths, the magnitude and relevance of origin stories can't be assumed. [Salkind] puts pressure on questions of not only what happened when over the course of nearly four decades, but also of how and why particular events became important." "[H]ouse music and culture, as under-appreciated forms and ways of being created as a result of tensions and alliances between gay people of color and white gay people, as well as straight and gay people of color, are reservoirs of affective information that can help artists, scholars, and fans alike better understand how to make and sustain loving cultures across innumerable axes of difference, despite the ways that they are repeatedly told that these efforts are futile. While I cannot deny ways that straight, white, cisgendered men have helped launch house into global circuits of commercial exchange—indeed, it is difficult to ignore the fact that they reap the greatest material rewards from house music's global popularity—this text deliberately shifts the focus from these high earners in an attempt to reorient listeners, fans, and scholars toward the music's queer of color roots. Understanding Chicago house music as first and foremost the product of queer of color excellence nurtured in the face of what might have been crippling alienation, rather than lamenting the inauthenticity of the most ubiquitous recordings and artists, can help flip the scripts of electronic dance music fandom so that audiences with resources and

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conversations and interviews[23], a tendency becomes evident among those who do not enjoy a sustained high profile or notoriety to this day: A lesser interest in inscribing one's persona in history opens up a space and time gone by to learn more about urban conditions and socio-economic circumstances, cultural practices and contemporary classifications, contrasting the prefabricated professional images, and the quantity and quality of appearances or features of their former close peers.

My argument is that this kind of nostalgia driven *de facto* historiography rarely expresses neither the original cultural practices nor sheds light on the many *club cultural* spaces, nor those which not only exploit but shape the cultural present. Apart from apparent ahistorical tendencies, the central methodological issue is to possibly only hear out of the story what one has called into it[24] or to repeat standardised versions of a continuously told story, resulting in decontextualization. Decontextualization reduces or omits the socio-economic and political contexts, which is particularly culturally detrimental because of the industrial effectiveness in visibility and reach, as "[t]hese videos have become unique historical documents for present and future generations, including journalists, audiences, and artists", and "[s]imilar material on these artists is not available in magazines or in public media."[25] A historiography relying on the "genius" of famous actors, who have a biographic awareness of the impact of their public statements, potentially omits the continuum of cultural, reciprocal and international influences in favour of self-contained success stories of groups of people or contingent urban attributions, hence resulting in recontextualization. It has become necessary to forge a counter narrative for a culture and community, to which once was nothing left but (to imagine) the future.[26]

Inner land grabbing and transformative processes through *cultural private partnerships*

With the turn of the millennium, established *club cultural* sponsoring partnerships are not only changing quantitatively, they are reaching a new qualitative and sophisticated dimension in the form of *cultural private partnerships* focusing on "electronic dance music culture and its nightclub and festival networks, primarily the parts of the culture with underground and cosmopolitan values"[27]: A business agenda expanding beyond the scope of selling a direct product with the capitalization of *club cultures* is investing beyond previous brand and product placements in a patronage and philanthropy, that promises to increase reach and improve image cultivation significantly. "The distinction", as sociologist and media scholar

institutional power might appreciate the ways that house remains critically important to the communities that created it." Salkind, Micah. Do You Remember House?: Chicago's Queer of Color Undergrounds. Oxford University Press, 2018, p.6 and 8

23 Research and and qualitative analysis of interviews conducted for my diploma thesis and PhD dissertation.

24 Cf. Staas, Christian. *War damals halt so. Oder? Von der Mohrenstraße bis zum Bismarck-Zimmer: Anmerkungen zum schwelenden Streit über die Frage, nach welchen Maßstäben die Vergangenheit zu bewerten ist.* In DIE ZEIT (No. 16, 13.04.2023), p. 19

25 Holt, Fabian. *The Evolution of Corporate Sponsorship in Sensitive Cultural Spheres in the Early 21st Century: Lessons from a Culture-Producing Marketing Unit.* In Berger, Hanno, Frédéric Döhl, and Thomas Morsch. *Prekäre Genres: Zur Ästhetik Peripherer, Apokrypher Und Liminaler Gattungen*. transcript Verlag, 2015, pp. 255-288

26 In particular, this is being articulated by the comprehensive in-depth analysis, and contextual re-examination of the electronic dance music industry from a Black perspective: Brown Jr, DeForrest. *Assembling a Black Counter Culture.* Primary Information, 2020, pp.15

27 Holt (2015)

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Fabian Holt puts it, "between sponsorship and advertising is crucial here because the former happens *through the medium of core participants, activities, and experiences in the culture*, while the latter is mainly about the production of images for media communications."[28] Established global players in the field are *Deutsche Telekom* (which emerged from the privatization of Germany's former mail authority *Deutsche Bundespost*) with its *Telekom Electronic Beats* portal[29], commercial advertisement and feature websites such as *Resident Advisor*[30], or the DJ set and live music broadcasting platform *Boiler:Room*, among others. In 2018, *Gucci* launched a *club culture* historicizing format, called *Second Summer of Love*, in co-production with *FRIEZE* magazine[31], "celebrating '80s youth culture" and "explor[ing] the lasting impact of the Second Summer of Love, thirty years ago up to today"[32] through contributions from young as well as established visual artists[33]. The format was flanked by a stylistically appropriate, 1990s *Rave* informed *Pret-A-Porter* line and re-enacting imagery.

The beverage producer *Red Bull* had been at the forefront of these cultural private partnerships: from around 1998 to 2019, with a high personnel and financial outlay, the *Red Bull Music Academy* was omnipresent and dominant, initially providing *club cultural* scouting and promoting young talents in the form of workshops and talks with scene luminaries, over time flanked by an ever-growing archive of documentaries and other multimedia features on its own *Red Bull Music* online platform (plus YouTube etc.); which also promised careers and visibility to People of Colour as well as openly queer, decidedly feminist artists and Black activists. *Red Bull Music* and its *Academy* pioneered "a new sponsorship paradigm that has succeeded in gaining long-term sympathy"[34] in the *club cultural* domain, especially but not restricted to *Electronic Dance Music*. The asymmetry in economy and political agenda of the company founder Dietrich Mateschitz on the one hand, and the *club cultural* protagonists along with their target audience on the other, could hardly have been any greater, as Mateschitz, in addition to *Red Bull's* numerous institutionalised commitments in sports, music and especially *club cultures*, has continued to massively finance an extensive reactionary, identitarian, right-populist network of parties, initiatives, institutions and media companies. It was only in 2019, due to growing criticism addressed to *Red Bull Music*, that both *Red Bull* and creative agency *Yadastar*, which had been responsible for the concept and content of *Red Bull Music Academy* activities since the beginning, officially terminated their relationship.

28 Ibid.

29 Cf. Brown (2022), p.370, for *Deutsche Telekom's* intention "to be a cultural platform that would reframe the aging rave culture industry into a lifestyle circulating between arts, fashion, and emerging technologies."

30 "Resident Advisor sought to connect regional European clubs and scenes on a single platform, and overtime created a ticketing service and job board that together assert a kind of monopoly on the process […]." Ibid.

31 See "Second Summer of Love | Frieze," n.d. https://www.frieze.com/tags/second-summer-love

32 Frieze. "Second Summer of Love: Prelude 1," n.d. https://www.frieze.com/video/second-summer-love-prelude-1

33 E.g. Turner Prize laureate Jeremy Deller's oral history account and presentation of historical footage to a school class, in a feature directed by himself: "We join an A Level class as they discover these stories for the first time, viewing these familiar narratives from the perspective of a generation for whom it's already ancient history." Frieze. "Jeremy Deller: 'Everybody in the Place, An Incomplete History of Britain 1984-1992,'" n.d. https://www.frieze.com/article/jeremy-deller-everybody-place-incomplete-history-britain-1984-1992

34 Holt (2015)

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This effectively rendered a large part of their worldwide staff, freelance music journalists and business insiders, obsolete within a short period of time. However, *Red Bull's* ambivalence did not end with the termination of their *Academy*, as it continued to "wrestle[…] with racism"[35] of its leadership in 2020. Red Bull Sound Supply, as a paid streaming portal, Red Bull Records, as an independent label for long-term artist development, and Red Bull Radio with a linear 24/7 programme of features and music, continued to operate at the time of writing.

It seems that the formerly opposing forces of industry and subculture have swapped positions in contemporary *club culture*, with industry adopting tactics of subversion and incorporation: "The corporation is typically presented as a benefactor and a partner that helps the culture reach goals that would not otherwise have been possible."[36] Holt continues: "The trick of cultural sponsorship is thus that the corporation expresses itself through culture." This transformative process is evident in the fact that *club culture* actors must increasingly acquire entrepreneurial knowledge and qualities in order to survive economically or fulfil stereotypical roles, while a shareholder industry uses *cultural private partnerships* to not only control culture through budgets but also to appear as charismatic cultural entities, perhaps even as culture itself, motivated by a corporate agenda to ultimately transform their "cultural power into commerce."[37] While this ubiquitous brand presence may serve bilateral economic interests, as far as cultural credibility and independence are concerned, these "complex innovation[s] in conventional genres of corporate sponsorship and marketing communications" and "specific practices of marketing" essentially are "central technolog[ies] of power."[38] That is to say, advertising first and foremost has always been the actual content production of any *cultural private partnership* and media industry platform.

According to Fisher, the atmosphere of *capitalist realism* "determines not only the production of culture [...], but also the regulation of work and education". Agencies broker deals to determine who can access the international dance floor through a paid streaming event, or gain visibility through media partnerships. Many actors who rely on *club cultural* work as their only means of economic existence — typically a mixture of artistic engagements, organizational and journalistic activities — find their livelihood in the field of *cultural private partnerships*. Hence, *club cultural* actors are often found in according positions of *cultural private partnerships*, sometimes staffing key positions in corporations. Despite permanent employment models in the industries, the inequality between the industry and the cultural creators in their *project-based polis*[39] not only remains unchanged, but is consolidated by its intermediaries through agencies and their annual budgets, which award their contracts to a "floating employment pool of […] freelance workers without benefits or job security"[40]. When asked about it again, the actors respond lapidarily or resignedly that a *club culture*-based economic existence can practically not be maintained in any other way. Ironically,

35 Cf. Wigdor, Douglas. "Red Bull Fires Top Executives As It Wrestles With Racism." *Forbes*, July 28, 2020. https://www.forbes.com/sites/douglaswigdor/2020/07/28/red-bull-fires-top-executives-as-it-wrestles-with-racism/

36 Giuliana Garzone cited by Fabian Holt, ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Cf. Boltanski, Luc, and Ève Chiapello. *Der Neue Geist Des Kapitalismus*. Halem, 2018, pp.152, pp.176

40 Simon Reynolds as cited by Fisher (2010), p.14

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many activists and curatorial staff have had access to higher education and "some knowledge of cultural history and theory" and have critical perspectives on neoliberalism and capitalism, but surprisingly "fail to see [neither] the power relations and implications"[41] of their affiliation with *cultural private partnerships*, nor the "economic order that claims [cultural] experience as free material for hidden commercial practices" of a "rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in [subcultural] history"[42].

There is reason to believe that the lack of critical distance on one hand, and the prevailing opportunism to *cultural private partnerships*, altogether with their affirmative and defeatist coquetry with the inseparability of life and work, the ups and downs of the *gig economy*, temporary employment relationships and unemployment, is the formation of *capitalist realism* in the *club culture polis* and its commodified *New Normal* of (popular) culture: A desirable condition and state of mind mediated through the capitalist platforms of social media, as well as their *intermediaries*[43] and the journalistic outlets of *cultural private partnerships*. Because subjecting any idea of club cultural livelihood to supposed economic necessities restricts artistic freedom both in thinking and in acting, not to question this *club cultural* affordance has become a naturalised and institutionalised comfortable state of mind, if not *de rigueur* or mandatory for the generally acknowledged mode of *club cultural* existence — a *polis* which would otherwise collapse overnight. The socio-economic subjection of *club cultural* actors to the *polis* of *cultural private partnerships* cements their power and resilience towards structural criticism. Consequently, the penetration of what is presented as *club culture* through these industrial channels is total: In their aesthetic practice, it can no longer be differentiated from meaningless, obsolete codes such as *underground* or *sell-out* — in the mode of "immersive emotional experiences" designed to create "controlled custom-built brand space[s] that create[…] a certain separation from broader interests in the culture."[44]

Message to the Communities

Club cultures propagate genuine aesthetics and modes of perception (clubbing experience, sound, collective feeling, release, mental and physical states), they were founded on practices of subversion and assertion of new identities, countercultural attitudes and ethos. An important aspect is that the *club cultural capital,* the characteristics and aesthetic experiences, continues to attract interest in, or commitment to, music and modes of living in distinction or

41 Holt (2015)

42 Cf. Zuboff (2019), p. 9. While this is adapted from Zuboff's definition of surveillance capitalism, the description as a whole applies to cultural private partnerships; not only with regard to the benefits of the content production for any of those capitalist platforms.

43 Entities in the *clubcultural* business that do not create immediate cultural value. The economy of *intermediaries* is the management of *club culture* production: Booking agencies, PR agencies, artist management, distribution, etc.

44 Ibid. A recent example of *club culture* serving as a branded immersive space is the *Museum of Modern Electronic Music project* in Frankfurt am Main: While establishing a brand-like *simulacrum* of *club culture*, an multi agency-conceived project positioned as a pseudo cultural institution exploits sub-/cultural capital, backed by a team of media professionals. Cf. Rogers, Thomas. "With MOMEN, Frankfurt Officials Give Techno the Stamp of Approval." *The New York Times*, April 6, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/06/arts/music/momem-frankfurt-museum-of-modern-electronic-music.html and Brown, T. M. "The Battle Over Techno's Origins." *The New Yorker*, April 14, 2023. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-battle-over-technos-origins

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opposition to mass culture and traditional ways of life. Building on their cultural persistence and commercial success, *club cultures* have expanded significantly and become integrated in mainstream society as a whole: They have become naturalised by means of established professional jobs, and standardised in role models proliferated by the *platform capitalism* of social media. The critique of prevailing social and political conditions, hence their countercultural rejection, is indeed constitutive for *club cultures,* for it is rooted in their beginnings. Yet in *capitalist realism*, the modus operandi to *club cultural* actors and institutions sooner or later demands for opportune collaboration with their antagonists, creating *real* and *cultural capital* in a mode of expected self-exploitation — a strange and uncomforting ambivalence. Is there really no alternative?

Can *club cultures* today reclaim the independence they once advocated for as an anti-establishment cultural movement? Can they still assert a much-invoked *underground* and subcultural authenticity for themselves, when *club cultures are* widely consumed as a self-optimised commodity on *Instagram, Twitch, YouTube, Facebook* and other *platform capitalist* media, drifting towards governed one-dimensional consumer culture? Will *club cultures* assert authority over their industrialised historiography and reconsider their mediated images of a phantasmal *underground?* Which perspectives do *club cultural* actors and activists want to take, which media and cultural strategies could help in the digitalization of clubs and *club cultures,* to explore newly created and reappropriate already existing digital spaces and channels in the future? Are they going to be economically and culturally sustainable, equally paid? If clubs are to be heterotopias *and* safe spaces, what about their digital realms? Will cooperative and constructive networking succeed for the well-being of local, regional *club cultures*, building bridges to the communities which provided for the cultural foundations, but have not gained adequate recognition for it or profited as much as those presented in *platform capitalist* media? Will *club cultural* actors at local and regional levels support each other multilaterally and resonant with feasible ideas — to create community-driven, self-owned, diverse, and fair *club cultural* platforms for both sides of the bars, counters, booths?

Especially for *club cultures* of electronic music, the future may not be a continuation of the past, but a promise and an experiment based on dissident reflections. This experiment does not demand a comprehensive abolition of the existing problematic structures but, actors, decision- and taste-makers need to consciously opt for a transformation, not parametric optimisation. If the majority of *club cultural* actors would start to cooperate within their communities, instead of competing with each other in a mode of aggression and cooperating in *cultural private partnerships,* they could leverage their transformational potential in *being the majority* for a change: By means of ideas and concepts which account for the status quo and target at a socio-political *clubcultural* engineering, implemented and sustained in solidarity by both those who create and those who party.

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