“Raving as a survival”

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SYNOPSIS:

This essay aims to frame my experience as a trans neurodivergent person within the rave scene. Raving for me is not an individual practice – and my favourite way to rave is with my closest friends. For that reason, I chose to interview the people who make me feel safe when we rave, those "who need it"– as McKenzie Wark would say –, like me. I intend to draw from the socio-political background that raves emerge, beginning with the "free parties" – or illegal raves – where I got to discover a different way of being. The main sources for my analysis are: Hakim Bey's "*T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*" which brings the context to understand from where raves emerge, McKenzie Wark's "*Raving*" as an inspiration to understand and explain my own experiences and Eudald Espluga's "*No seas tú mismo*" ("Don't be yourself") to help situate these experiences within the broader political context where they take place. I will expose the binary structures through which we frame our identities and communities, while drawing on anti-punitive approaches to uncover the complex realities that such frameworks often obscure.

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INTRODUCTION:

This essay will explore the space occupied by queer individuals within the Techno scene. The idea for this work appeared after analysing the comments from a post on Instagram from Sónar music festival featuring the DJ HorsegiirL (@sonarfestival, 2024). Comments such as:

> "I miss the days when boards of Canada, AFX, mills, autechre and similar luminaries could grace our stage with eclectic avant-garde electronics. Personally I think would be best to have separate events for those that want pure entertainment and those that want to experience the best there is in electronic music and AV arts. No offense but this is a bit sad to see." (@arthurrobertofficial, 2024)
>
> "with all respect dear @sonarfestival makers, since you go on you're always an awesome playground to discover new and exciting talent, new micro styles... simply artistical freshness... I really don't understand this kind of bookings at all, this has nothing to do with art ... it rather leaves you with a feeling of „self embarrassment" .... let me understand?" (@timo.maas, 2024)
>
> "lack of parenting love now an attention seeker" (@itstheomg, 2024)
>
> "This scene is an absolute joke now.... It's done" (@peaceyvibes, 2024)
>
> "Imagine being an adult and acting like this." (@lovelifeandprofit, 2024)

This made me reflect on the social and political paradigm in which these comments emerged. There is a clear sense of nostalgia and genre elitism – a call to separate "real art" (old-school techno) from "entertainment." Queer-coded initiatives in techno are often dismissed as unserious or inauthentic. These reactions are laced with misogyny, queerphobia, and the policing of expression; where normative behaviours are rewarded, and difference is ridiculed. Underneath it all, there's a kind of fatigue – a refusal to engage with the scene as it evolves beyond the frameworks, they're comfortable with.

My narrative follows the idea that my discourse cannot be detached from my experiences within raving, which I lived alongside my friends. These experiences are collective. For that reason, this essay is built using a series of interviews – in the form of "talk". Drawing from my personal experiences as a neurodivergent trans individual, as well as those of my friends Dom, Sara, and Pablo – and from Antonia, curator of Sónar+D – my narrative will primarily engage with McKenzie Wark's "*Raving"*, alongside insights from Eudald Espluga's "*No seas tú mismo"*. These texts will provide a foundational framework to discuss the inherently political nature of transgender subjectivities, which are formed

through self-narratives (Drabinski, 2014). To achieve representation, we need to narrate our identities and experiences in our own terms.

> “And never again will the records of our lives be written by the media that spectacularise us, the legal systems that criminalise and the psychiatrists who pathologise us.” (Museum of Transology, n.d)

Whether transgender subjectivities expose "the constructed nature of binary gender by upsetting gender norms" or if, conversely, they reinforce the gender binary by aligning with its established categories (male or female), remains an open debate that is crucial for understanding the complexities of gender (Drabinski, 2014). My aim, however, is to contribute to these discussions by offering alternative frameworks of expression and articulating new forms of queer existence within the Techno community. By doing so, my narrative seeks to inform a broader social and academic understanding of gender and identity, particularly within spaces traditionally dominated by cis-hetero-normativity.

I am going to explore the intersections of queerness and non-binary thinking, anti-punitivism, drug use, resistance, and identity performance throughout this essay, drawing from critical theory and personal reflection to examine how these elements manifest within the techno scene. By weaving together concepts such as temporary autonomous zones, tiredness, gatekeeping, and care, I aim to illustrate the transformative potential I have experienced in techno raves – not only as a site of self-discovery and expression, but as a momentary break from normative structures and systemic violence.

1st CHAPTER: “We are not truly queer; rather, we are criminals.”

I came to discover that everything can be a political act. As a queer person, my own existence is political. Samantha casually states in one of the *Bimboficadas* live streams, LGBTQ+ individuals are considered illegal in 64 countries, guiding her to the conclusion, “We are not truly queer; rather, we are criminals” (Bimboficadas, 2025). This leads me to question if I am indeed a criminal. Am I a criminal for being queer? Am I a criminal for dancing in a field (in an “illegal” rave)? Hakim Bay argues that we have been flooded by cop propaganda – he refers to the 80s shows, some of which are still present in TV and streaming platforms nowadays (Bey, 2023). For instance, the Nordic noir genre is mainly focused on police drama. Or streaming platforms such as Netflix carry shows like Law&Order, Mr. Monk, Breaking Bad – which perpetuate Bey's idea that these shows portray a world inhabited solely by criminals, victims, and police people. Strangely enough – he comments –, the first two fail to be portrayed as fully human (Bey, 2023). This isn’t only true for police shows that are explicitly police propaganda – especially those from USA –, but in reality, this is fundamentally rooted in our system. Laura Macaya mentions in an interview that the punitive approach to criminal justice not only exists at a penal level, but how the “punishment culture” permeates us as individuals, which in turn shapes our affective and political communities, even the relationships we build with ourselves (Macaya & Velduque, 2025).

LGBTQI+ people have been historically heavily policed through anti-gay laws and other laws (ICVA, 2020). Nowadays, 12 countries still apply the death penalty while in 14 countries still criminalise the gender expression/identity of trans people (Human Dignity Trust, 2025). Samantha’s interpretations about the criminalization of the various identity layers experienced by gender dissidents’ individuals led me to reflect on the clear hyper-surveillance directed at us. It’s not uncommon to hear absurd claims in the media, such as: “The economic deficit that Spain is experiencing is due to the money given to homosexual people in subsidies,” a statement made by Spanish senator Luz Elena Sanín from the Popular Party (La Vanguardia, 2014). Even absurdities such floods or hurricanes being acts of God to punish Gay communities or child abuse being linked to same-sex marriages (BBC News, 2015). They all sound like conspiracy theories to me, but I was surprised to discover recently that it got my grandma brainwashed. She is now obsessively talking against gay people in conversations that relate zero to the topic whatsoever. This is an anecdotal example, but without needing to look much further, Spanish parties like Vox take every opportunity – employing pretentious euphemisms and eloquent narratives – to describe public displays of affection as disgusting. They also seem to be obsessed with sex, since narratives tend to be extrapolated towards it to invalidate people’s identity: “grotesque sexual scenes in plain sight of families with children” (La Marea, 2019). When I read this, I picture something far more explicit or exaggerated than two people holding hands or sharing a brief kiss – which is likely to be

the actual events they are describing. This disgust is not just a psychological phenomenon that is present in an individual, but rather is the result of a “socio-political norm that is learned, reinforced and embedded in cultures and institutions”. These responses both reflect and reinforce predominant cultural norms, revealing "what a particular culture (de)values" rather than indicating any "inherent repugnance". The importance of this analysis lies in shifting the focus from individual experiences to a broader, structural-level understanding of how disgust is systematically mobilised in politics – by whom, and at whose expense (Casey, 2016). This is something that has impacted me and shaped me as a queer person, influencing both my self-perception and the way those around perceive me.

Although I have discussed how LGBTQI+ individuals have been objectified as “criminals,” there is also tension surrounding the label of “victim.” Personally, I sometimes perceive myself as a victim of this broader political framework. “The system has failed me, society has failed me,” I occasionally think. Yet this realization often leaves me with a sense of numbness or resignation – a feeling of being trapped in circumstances beyond my control. Laura Macaya points out that the problem with labelling individuals solely as “victims” is that it can unintentionally strip them of agency by removing their sense of responsibility for their own lives while corroding their capacity for self-management. This “passive victim” narrative defines individuals who are receiving violence as passive recipients of harm with no power or ability to act. Such dynamics are reinforcing a broader system of disempowerment. Tamar Pitch, as Macaya explains, is an Italian criminologist who exposes the paradox that the penal system legitimises its interventions – and even its own existence – through the way it frames and understands problems and the individuals involved in them. Thereby maintaining and reinforcing its authority (Macaya & Velduque, 2025).

This constructs subjects who have to either be punished or protected, relegating the complexity of the problems a secondary matter. This way, both the “criminal” and the “victim” become roles that are instrumentalised by and depend on the system. When problems are not analysed outside this binary, the complexities of violence, conflict, and the structures they are stemming from are obscured (Macaya & Velduque, 2025). Karen Barad explains this in depth by exposing that these binaries are not merely socially constructed – they are not pre-existing categories (e.g. victim/perpetrator, man/woman, nature/culture). Instead, they are “materially enacted through agential cuts”: material divisions produced through real practices in the world. These divisions are physical, institutional, embodied. She explains that these “cuts” are part of dynamic processes of intra-action, where entities don’t first exist and then relate, rather they emerge through their relationships. In Barad’s framework identity is not something fix or stable; it is something continually becoming (Barad, 2011), (Barad, 2003). This perspective resonates with how I’ve come to think about subject matter – I have often found more answers by reframing issues that arise in my daily life through non-binary thinking than

by sticking to binary logic. Throughout this essay, I am going to explore the fluidity of relational processes, rather than treating identity or experience as fixed states of being. Although hard to practice, it's clear that this punitive approach sprouts not only within ourselves, but also in how we relate to others. Even the most intimate and personal aspects of our lives are infused by the internalised frameworks of the system. As Carol Hanisch(2009) would say: "the personal is political.

If a person's fundamental rights can be politically contested to the extent that their very own existence is threatened, then their existence itself becomes inherently political (Bimboficadas, 2024). Carol Hanisch analyses this idea that "the personal is political" through the discussions – often labelled as "therapy" or "personal" groups – she experienced when frequenting feminist circles. She rejected the notion that women need therapy, instead she puts the emphasis that societal conditions – not personal "failures" – are the root of the problem. Hanisch (2009) saw these discussions as a form of political action. Ruth Rosen summarises, "By this, she [Hanisch] meant to convey the – then shocking – idea that there were political dimensions to private life, that power relations shape life in marriage, in the bedroom, (...) and at work"(Lee, 2007). Even at the time, this wasn't a ground-breaking revelation – it was part of a thread that had already been traced. Figures like Sojourner Truth in the 1850s, Ida B. Wells in the early 1900s, and Rosa Parks in the 1960s had already spotlighted the entanglement between racial injustice and the lived – often violent –, realities of physical and sexual abuse It becomes clear, then, that personal experiences are inseparable from our privileges and oppressions within the system – and are therefore inherently political. In Hanisch's paper, there's an emphasis on how these meetings are conducted, and on what she – along with other participants – gains from them. This form of "political therapy" becomes a pathway toward collective action for collective solutions. Since oppression is systemic and rooted in individual struggles, under current societal conditions, no lifestyle choice can truly offer liberation (Hanisch, 2009), (Rajah et al., 2022).

Hanisch's analysis, though rooted in her own and other women's experiences, acknowledges that gender bias is just one of many axes of domination that sustain societal inequities (Morgan, 1996). K.P. Morgan, in Figure 1, visually represents how individuals are positioned differently within ideological and material structures of power, with the centre point symbolizing the individual as the intersection of personal, communal, and institutional interrelations. Domination is represented on the horizontal axis and is "deliberately ambivalent" – acknowledging that individuals may simultaneously hold positions of both privilege and oppression depending on the axis in question. Privilege refers to the systemic power to dominate – operating both ideologically and materially, as well as institutionally and personally. Oppression, then, is not (...) as the opposite of privilege in a binary sense, but rather the structured, lived experience of being dominated - that gets shaped by one's position within the various intersecting axes of power. (Morgan, 1996).

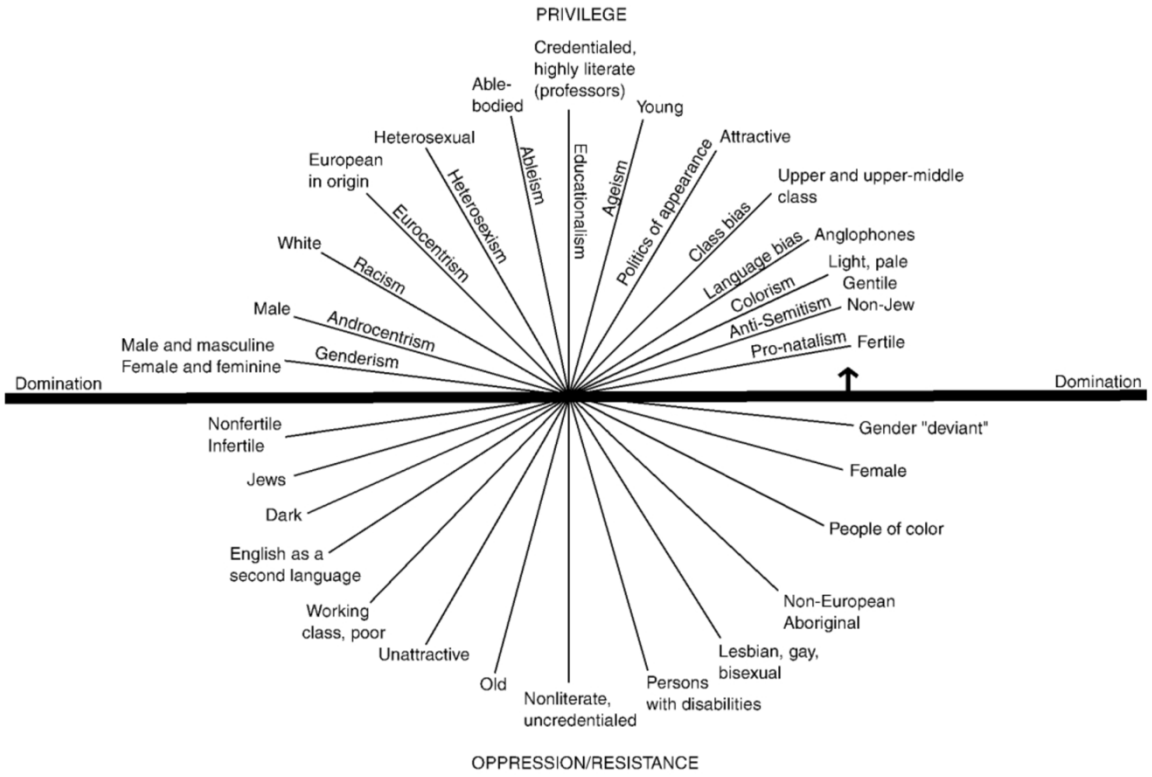

Figure 1. Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression (Morgan, 1996).

In line with Morgan's insights on intersecting axes of domination, the struggles faced by queer people are not merely theoretical. They extend into material reality: access to rights, the redistribution of resources, and social recognition. These challenges are embodied in our lives and in our bodies. The reality is that this is not a struggle between forces of equal power; systemic manifestations of privilege consistently target those without the institutional support or structural power to defend themselves. *"My freedom does not end where the other's begins. Your freedom does not end where mine begins. (...) My freedom begins, where everyone else's begins*." (Mora, 2021) We have been led to believe that freedom is a limited space that ends where another's begins. But this idea only serves to pit oppressions against one another – turning them into a competition. Freedom can only be real when it begins for all of us at once – when collective liberation is made possible. "*And we already know – or should know by now – that freedom isn't truly freedom until we are all free, because we are a community and depend on one another, because we are a social and political collective, because we are a network – and that is the only possible revolution*." (Mora, 2021) This is key to understand the need for community of queer people. Without collective care, there cannot be collective freedom.

Going back to Hanisch's paper, her focus lies in scrutinising the meetings she attended: how they were conducted, and what participants - including herself - gained from them. This form of "political therapy" becomes a means of generating collective action for a collective solution. As explored in the previous paragraphs, oppression is systemic and

embedded in all individual struggles. Creating spaces where personal experiences can be shared – where individuals recognise themselves in one another's stories – is essential for collectivising those experiences. It's through these connections and shared spaces that political action can emerge. While this may seem like a broad concept (and will be unpacked further throughout the essay), it's important to emphasise that queer people being seen, existing visibly in society, showing love and affection publicly, building community, and supporting one another in exploring identity and desire – is political action. Just before I started going to raves, I started engaging more politically and spending time with a group of friends who were trying to approach life through an anti-capitalist lens. We weren't squatting houses, but we were all sharing a space – one of my friend's flats – where everyone contributed in some way toward communal needs and were free to treat it as our own home. We sourced some of our food through "bin foraging," and not long after, I was introduced to raves. I lived in that world for a while, learning through doing, through conversations, through simply being there - connected to the "present". At the time, I saw it as a political act – and now I also understand it as a form of "political therapy," in the sense that Hanisch describes in her paper (Hanisch, 2009).

Although my perspective on raves – and the act of raving – has evolved over the years, for me, it remains a necessity, as it is for McKenzie Wark (2023). It is a constant in my life: the music evolves, the behaviour of people in raves shifts, and I change, yet the space that raves create – both physical and non-physical – remains a constant. As she says:

> "A rave is temporary. A passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time. Some things about it as a practice happen in the time of the situation and maybe belong there rather than in writing. So, I left them there. And while a rave is temporary, raving is outside of time (Wark, 2023)."

Raving, as I came to know it in Spain, was about creating community – and, in some way, practicing political resistance. I felt like I had found a space where something collective was taking shape – that I got to experience what it feels like to find a community, build it, shape it. It felt like we were engaging in a kind of political action, even if it was vague and undefined. There was resistance in organising parties outside commercial environments: "free parties" held in remote natural areas or in squatted spaces and warehouses. There was political action in creating a space for expression, conversation, creativity, and to "disconnect from reality". But looking back, I also recognise the utopian nature of that thinking. Nothing truly seems to exist outside of capitalism – a tension I'll explore more fully in Chapter 3. And yet, within that contradiction, something else was happening: a way of reclaiming agency, bodily sovereignity, and time, which I'll explore in depth in the next chapter.

Raves do create spaces where people can resist capitalism, but this resistance is not limited to free parties. Commercial spaces such as clubs, can sometimes foster and promote resistance to discrimination and violence against LGBTQI+ individuals, while offering a stronger sense of belonging and acceptance (Duncan, 2023). Some clubs that hold historical importance of techno music have not only proclaimed themselves "LGBTQI+ friendly," but have also actively engaged in political action regarding those matters – both nationally and online. Bassiani, for example, has been politically active in resisting fascism (Bassiani, 2023) and has consistently used its platform to stand in solidarity with queer communities (Bassiani, 2019, 2020, 2022). Most recently, it issued a public statement against the newly proposed anti-LGBTQ+ law in Georgia, while also being at the forefront of the ongoing fight for queer resistance in the country (Bassiani, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c), (DJ Mag, 2024).

> "Raves serve a lot of needs, interests, desires. For distraction, entertainment, exercise, dating, cruising, and so on. Those might be met by other practices just as well. I'm interested in a specific set of needs and a particular range of people for whom the rave itself is the need" (Wark, 2023)

For me, raving is the political intersection where I got to discover who I am, what I need. As Wark says, it became a need in itself – itis where survival, connection, and becoming converge. It is where I discovered that resistance begins in the self – because the personal, always, is political.

CHAPTER 2: “As an autistic, I went to an outdoor festival and took E. It was mind blowing”

Hanisch(2009) explores the idea of “liberation” in the political sense of the word, but what does liberation really mean? Are we talking about freedom from the structures of patriarchy? From capitalism? From the hyper-punishment culture that seeps even into the most intimate parts of our lives? Is liberation a personal feeling or a collective condition? And will we even know if we ever get to be “free”? “Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom? Are we reduced either to nostalgia for the past or nostalgia for the future? Must we wait until the entire world is freed of political control before even one of us can claim to know freedom?” (Bey, 2023). Barad(2011) implies that a profound shift in perspective is needed – one that transforms the very frameworks through which we perceive, analyse, and interact with reality. We are active participants in shaping what exists and what is possible. Any radical change will come from transforming those frameworks, rather than simply altering the perceived things within them. But when is this going to happen? If Hanisch(2009) insists that no amount of “self-improvement” can lead to true freedom, is there a way to temporarily escape these systemic structures that strip us of agency? This is where I want to return to raving – and to Hakim Bey. Because maybe, instead of waiting for the system, the framework or “reality” to change, we can ask: Can we create this freedom ourselves? Maybe we can steal moments of autonomy or resistance as small acts of temporary insurrection.

The idea of freedom that Bey defines is not something permanent; instead, it is something that must be seized, created – an embodied moment of autonomy. He describes the “uprisings” as felt experiences where another way of being briefly becomes possible.

> “Of course, the Temporary Autonomous Zone appears not just as an historical moment, but also a psychospiritual state or even existential condition. Humans seem to need the "peak experience" of autonomy shared by cohesive groups – "free freedom" as Rimbaud says – not only in imagination, but in real space / time, in order to give value and meaning to the social. (...) History says the Revolution attains "permanence," or at least duration, while the uprising is "temporary." In this sense an uprising is like a "peak experience" as opposed to the standard of "ordinary" consciousness and experience. Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day – otherwise they would not be "nonordinary." But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life. The shaman returns – you can't stay up on the roof forever – but things have changed, shifts and integrations have occurred – a difference is made.” (Bey, 2023)

The concept of “temporary autonomous zones” (or TAZ) is easily connected to the “free party” scene I discussed in Chapter 1. I personally only experienced the illegal raves in Catalunya, most of them in what’s commonly referred to as the “Barcelona area.” TAZs are a kind of uprising – not a blueprint for the future, but an eruption of autonomy in the now. In one quote, Bey (2023) briefly mentions a “psychospiritual” state and the figure of “the shaman” while discussing the concept of uprising. This immediately created a connection in my mind with psychedelic experiences. Like many people who frequent raves, I associated raving with MDMA. Although technically a psychedelic, “mandy” isn’t a substance I personally associate with traditional psychedelic experiences – even though it’s thought to dissolve subjectivity by breaking down individual inhibitions and subduing the dominance of the ego (Hutson, 1999). At least, not psychedelic in the same sense as LSD, 2Cx, or magic mushrooms. As life got busier, it started to feel less mentally sustainable to take drugs regularly, and as I began leaving my teenage years behind, I started exploring raving sober – but also using drugs I didn’t necessarily associate with raving. Although acid – house, techno – has that name for a reason (LSD was the drug of choice for that genre, which already evidences how common this association is) (Wark, 2023), I only started taking LSD for dancing a few years ago. It offers a way of experiencing music and the setting that’s entirely different from using uppers like cocaine, amphetamines, or MDA. It creates another set and setting from the one I was most accustomed to – different from the one shaped by camping in the forest with your best friend, witnessing the immensity of the universe and the secret cycles of nature unfolding before your eyes.

Taking LSD or 2CB while dancing shifted the entire experience: it wasn’t just about euphoria or energy, but about dissolving into sound, lights, and others (Wark, 2023). It became clear that altered states could emerge not only from the pharmacological side of the drug, but from the rhythm and repetition of the music itself. This is what I like about techno music, it’s hypnotic, it’s meditative, it represents the ever-evolving cycles of life. There seems to be a correlation between raving, techno, and spiritual experiences. For instance, Scott R. Hutson (1999) frames it as a modern spiritual healing practice – although his narrative takes some strange turns, such as the DJ being described as a “shaman who, aided by key symbols, guides the ravers on an ecstatic journey to paradise,” which feels like a big cliché coming from a white cis man from Florida. In his account, the rave becomes a kind of collective ritual that allows participants to slip outside of normative time and – in a way similar to Bey's TAZ – glimpse what else life could be.

Hutson(1999) takes this analysis further by introducing the idea of the rave experience as not only intense and real, but *hyperreal*. He defines this hyperreality as an “overload of sensory experiences”: a higher number of BPM (beats per minute), the shifting colours of lights, strobes flashing in your eyes – which, to me, are the most annoying part of clubs –

lasers, the humidity, the warmth, the smell of sweat, and the "wall of sound (Khutoretsky, 2018)," which I experienced most intensely at illegal raves. DVS1 – aka Zak Khutoretsky – is a strong defender of this kind of experience. For him, the music must be the star of the show, and he believes it is a key element of raves: a wall of speakers built from a high-end sound system – one so powerful it physically moves the air. The idea is that the bass travels through the space and hits the body with every beat, creating a physical experience alongside the sonic one. He calls it "body music" – sound that pushes you, makes you vibrate, and, in his words, is "pushing your insides" (Khutoretsky, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, the use of MDMA – widely spread throughout the scene – overstimulates our sense of touch (Hutson, 1999) and bodily sensations in general, pairing this with extreme euphoria and heightened empathy towards others (RollSafe.org, 2019). Dancing pushes the body – and the mind – to exhaustion. There's a state you can reach after a whole night of dancing and being awake, where your mind begins to shut down (or is it your body?), and you enter a dream-like state – still awake, but not fully conscious. That's mostly happened to me when I'm about to go to sleep after a long night but trying to stay awake a bit longer: not ready to let the night fully end, but tired enough to already be in bed. The overstimulation from what's just happened feels like a blanket – wrapping you in a psychedelic dream. The only thing left to do is let the body do what feels most natural: sleep. Pushing the body to its limits, making it find energy through the music, the people around you, the drugs, the entire experience, "gratifies a relentless and intense desire for pleasure (...) creating an appetite for impossible states of hyperstimulation."(Hutson, 1999)

Rave culture is not only a hyperreality created through hyperstimulation, but also a portal into the disappearance of space and time. Since they are held in "secretive" and "out-of-the-way" places – often while the rest of the world is asleep – ravers slip into an "existential void where the gaze of authority and the public do not penetrate. (...) Ravers create a seductive void and experience great joy in erasing their subjectivity" (Hutson, 1999). For me, it felt natural to embrace the new rhythms of existence that raving brought with it. Feeling "out-of-the-way" from the public eye creates a gap between the felt perception of reality and the outside world. Most of the raves I attended in Barcelona happened on the outskirts of the city, and in order to return home, I had to take the subway. There was always this moment – metaphorical, but also strangely physical – when you crossed back over and suddenly re-entered the pace of society. It made the whole experience feel like a dream you were just waking up from.

Thanks to the atemporal, deterritorialised feeling of the space (Fitzgerald, 1998), I found myself feeling more detached from the "norms" of reality – and this detachment helped me open up to new ways of interacting with people. All my life, I felt like I didn't understand how social interaction worked. I struggled to talk and connect with others, largely due to my neurodivergence and insecurities around my identity. Raves – and

MDMA in particular – created the perfect environment, and the perfect mindset, to unlock this "natural ability to socialise" that I had assumed I would never develop. I observed and learned social cues and began performing them in a way that actually felt natural (Nardou et al., 2019). Later, I was able to carry those learnings into my everyday life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is a shared experience among autistic people – and not just with MDMA, but with other substances as well. These experiences relate not only to social connection, but also to developing other forms of connection, such as to rhythm and music (u/masasin, 2021). For instance, one individual describes their experience with psilocybin mushrooms as follows:

> It's like my brain had swallowed all the information I needed to be a "normal" human being and hidden it at the back, and taking shrooms regularly formed pathways in my mind that allowed me to access these corners, and in doing so, shrug off the weight of autism (u/thrwoaway74i3, 2017).

Or this individual summarising their experience with MDMA on a music festival:

> As an autistic, I went to an outdoor festival and took E. It was mind blowing - I saw, in slow motion, how people interact, communicate with body language, all the social clues were so obvious. I was able to look into people's eyes for the first time! I will never forget that experience (@bouncecat, 2023).

There seems to be a common *"it finally clicked"* moment (u/Plane_Stick5124, 2023) – one I've experienced myself. The analysis points to neural or emotional mechanisms suddenly making sense, as if the pharmacological effect of the drug magically connected neural pathways that weren't previously accessible. It reminds me of how alchemy was once considered magic, when in fact it was chemistry and physics in disguise (Usselman and Rocke, 2025). This sense of mysticism aligns with the dream-like quality often evoked by raving, and the feeling of being both "out-of-the-way" and "out of time" – brought on by the disruption of sleep cycles and the abstraction of physical space, as discussed previously.

For João Florêncio (2023), the techno club is a space that holds "processes of collective self-invention." They draw from their experiences as a queer man, discovering through raving practices their own "becoming-queer." For me, it was both a process of "becoming-queer" and "understanding-neurodivergence." Florêncio (2023) locates the centre of this becoming in the drugs taken within the context of raving – not so much in terms of "healing" or "dealing with past traumas lingering in the present," but in the possibilities that emerge when we allow ourselves to push the edges of who we are, and what our bodies can become, toward a future that holds endless potential. Sound and substance modulate bodies into new forms of becoming. These experiences are not just escapes from "the normativity of everyday life" (Buckland, 2002, quoted in Florêncio,

2023, p. 870), but moments of what they describe as a "queer pharmatopia." This concept, borrowed from Oliver Davis, refers to "the autonomous social structures of care and meaning-making in an environment in which the consumption of illegal drugs is more the norm than the exception" (Davis, 2018, quoted in Florêncio, 2023, p. 870). It aligns closely with Bey's TAZ – both describe shared, temporary structures of autonomy that emerge in ephemeral social spaces, spaces that embody liberation and resist an "outside" normative structure (Bey, 2023).

> "The queerness of the pharmatopia consists in the fact that its drugs bring a heightened sensual experience of corporeality and enable meaningfully erotic encounters which overstep participants' usual sense of their own sexual identity or orientation. The pharmatopia illuminates – by materializing and embodying – Foucault's somewhat enigmatic queer alternative to 'sexuality'" (Davis, 2018, quoted in Florêncio, 2023, p. 870)

Florêncio (2023) also discusses the concept of "regaining our bodily sovereignty," introduced through the work of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (2019, quoted in Florêncio, 2023, p. 862), which advocates for an intersectional narcofeminist approach to substance use. Their aim is to move away from the belief that abstinence or control are the only paths to safety. Instead, they work to create the conditions in which people can "improve (their) mood, health and prosperity" by caring for one another "to live in safety and freedom" – doing so by sharing resources and opportunities. They understand drug-taking practices as complex, multidimensional, entangled, and deeply relational – far from the simplistic, punitive narratives of addiction, pathology, and criminality. Their ethics intentionally diverge from dominant discourses of prohibition and instead focus on the multitude of reasons people engage with substances (Eurasian Harm Reduction Association, 2019, quoted in Florêncio, 2023, p. 862). In Chang's (2020) words – although she refers specifically to women, her statement is equally applicable to all gender-dissident people:

> "Women take drugs for all kinds of simple and complicated reasons, including the pursuit of 'risky' pleasures, to satiate curiosity, regain control and self-confidence, lose innocence, to regulate emotional and psychological pain, for enhanced productivity and to resist and rebel against social norms and expectations." (Chang, 2020, quoted in Florêncio, 2023, p. 877)

This perspective aligns with Barad's (2011) discourse on entanglement – the idea that entities such as actions, bodies, choices, and behaviours emerge through relationships, not in isolation. It also resonates with the anti-punitive approach mentioned earlier, where we ask how to build trust, accountability, and support, rather than framing care through punishment and blame. Florêncio's narrative echoes my own experience with MDMA. They question the boundaries between spaces of play – such as the queer club

or the rave – and spaces of (political) work, like the everyday world. Rather than viewing these sites as "liminal, self-enclosed spaces detached from everyday life" – dream-like worlds outside the boundaries of reality – Florêncio (2023) suggests that raves and queer clubs are always shaped by, and entangled with, the broader socio-political context in which they emerge (Shiffman, 2024).

Drug use in these settings can be an aid to experiencing freedom, survival, and self-discovery. But in my experience, I've come to understand that in order to let go – even when using drugs – I need to feel safe. Letting go isn't something that just happens intentionally for me; it's something my body allows when it trusts the environment around it. I feel safe knowing there are other queer people around me, knowing that people will look out for me if I need it – that there are eyes watching, not to surveil or police, but to care. For me – and for many others who define it this way too – it's important that this sense of community is built through support and care for one another (Folguera, 2025), (Martínez Monterrubio, 2023). In my conversation with Sara Lopez (2025), she advocated for a different perspective: the idea of indifference. She explores the concept of "normalising weirdness" – the idea that people may behave or move differently than you, and that it's nice when that doesn't draw attention. When you can go unnoticed, even if you're acting or dressing in a non-normative way. She explains that she values this kind of *non-intrusive recognition* – being acknowledged without being approached – and how she applies that same practice to others. In a way, I think this is another dimension of care. Understanding that care can sometimes be performed through inaction made me question whether my constant need to ensure everyone around me is having an amazing time when raving might actually be rooted in an internalised, punitive-driven desire for control – one that, in turn, may be getting in the way of me experiencing my own freedom.

One of the ongoing challenges with illegal raves is that when violence occurs, accountability becomes difficult to navigate. Who responds? Who takes responsibility in a space without formal structure? Violence in communities with unclear or undefined norms often reproduces wider systems of power, where those who are already marginalised end up paying the consequences. This is precisely why it's essential to intentionally cultivate spaces where care is not assumed, but actively practiced – where the needs of oppressed people are prioritised, and where safety is a shared responsibility. Queer-only spaces have tried to do this, but even there, achieving truly intentional and accountable care is difficult (Dandal et al., 2024). When harm occurs, who ensures it doesn't happen again? And in trying to respond, how do we avoid replicating the punitive logics we claim to resist? In these moments, a kind of informal policing has the potential to emerge – one that contradicts the values of freedom and autonomy that rave spaces strive for. Maybe this idea of raving as a utopia is not about perfection or escape, but about a necessary refusal of the system we are trying to change. In the meantime, my

longing for a space where I can let go and feel “free”, feel safe, and feel cared for – by simply existing, dancing, talking, and being – continues.

CHAPTER 3: “Normalize not having energy. I’m very tired.”

Figure 2. Instagram meme reading: "Normalize not having energy / I'm very tired.

“I am very tired.” I find myself saying this constantly throughout the day. As Eudald Espluga (2021) reflects in his book, “we are tired of being ourselves”. I’ve discussed the different dimensions that shape queer identity and how communities of care can help us feel more aligned – more at ease – in performing and finding comfort within our identities. But what happens when we’re too tired, too caught in the routine? Is this endless search for identity performance worth the effort? Why does it feel like we don’t have time for the things that make us feel free? Is there space for real liberation in a culture where identity is constantly curated, branded, and evaluated? And how do we reclaim joy, connection, and presence in the midst of all this fatigue? Is raving still a radical act – or has it become just another spectacle of capitalism?

Since moving to the UK, I stopped going to illegal raves. It now feels like those years of raving are a dream from the past – sometimes, it feels like they never happened. I had to trade free parties for nightclubs, and although I can’t say they’re the same, there are club spaces that are more politically attuned to intersectional ideas than others. In Glasgow, for example, we used to have Bonjour – a co-op space striving to centre BIPOC and trans communities, offering a kind of safety that, in some ways, aligned more closely with queer needs than any free party I attended in Spain. EXIT is another club that seems to emerge from more “radical” ideas, functioning as a DIY space with political intention (Tablas, 2025). “The answers you seek will never be found at home,” writes Florêncio (2023) in their journal – and although that may be true, it’s sometimes hard to blindly trust an event and just go, especially when we’re already overwhelmed by the constant aggressions of everyday life. Even when you trust the friend inviting you (Wark, 2023), the act of showing up can still feel impossible. Sometimes, we simply don’t have the leeway to choose. We are required to show up – for work, for the people around us, and for ourselves. To me, it is clear that we are subjected to a constant – and persistent – form of systemic and economic violence that tires us.

In a podcast, Macaya (2025) discusses a concept drawn from an Argentinian theorist: the "sex-for-life negotiation." In the context of rape, even within an extremely limited framework, victims are still expected to choose and negotiate. As I expressed earlier, I feel like a victim of the system – not only as a queer person, but also as someone who is neurodivergent. Macaya (2025) also questions how identity is framed. Using the example of "being a lesbian", she critiques the way certain identities are interpreted as acts of nature, or sacred truths – removing any sense of responsibility or agency from how we perform or embody them. "I am a lesbian because I was born this way." (Macaya & Velduque, 2025). In a similar way, it seems like we perform our identities or remain trapped in our routines because we believe we have no choice. Is it possible that we're engaged in a similar negotiation with the system – a kind of performance-for-life? Where, in order to be seen as worthy of life, we are expected to sacrifice ourselves? We're expected to give up our sleep, time, joy, energy – our personal needs – in order to remain economically functional, emotionally available (to others and to ourselves), and socially legible (Espluga, 2021).

The framework of negotiation with the system seems to become smaller and smaller, especially due to the capitalism of platforms. Eudald Espluga (2021) explains that:

> "What happened is that, up until around 2010, it was still possible to maintain a separation between public and private life – but with the triumph of platform capitalism, that distinction has been completely blown apart. The difference has been erased. Now, there's the possibility of self-optimization almost at a biological level – of one's existence, one's body, and even one's metabolism. We can think of apps that let you regulate your sleep cycles, or smartwatches that track your steps and count the calories you burn when walking or running. It's this constant parameterization of our existence – enabled by technical tools – that allows the "self-as-enterprise" model to be put into practice." (Font & Espluga, 2022)

In an ideal world, going to a rave and experiencing the kinds of moments discussed above would be sustainable – even if only done sporadically. But the reality is that, sometimes, it simply isn't possible. As Florêncio(2023) notes, "the border between the queer club and the everyday world of politics is porous, with what happens in one side (...) being osmotically carried through to the other side and vice versa." How tired we are – physically, emotionally, economically – affects our ability to show up in rave spaces. We might choose drugs that help us stay alert – cocaine, amphetamines – or we might not be able to make it to the rave at all. McKenzie Wark (2023) mentions that the first thing she looks for at raves is people who "need it and can maintain their habits." But maintaining habits isn't only about substance use or bodily stamina. It can also be about having the time, the resources, and the material conditions to take time off, to afford the rave – to

afford the economic consequences of carving out space in our lives for raving. As Ewans (2025) points out, there is clear evidence of class at play:

> "In the UK, class is a big thing. Or at least it was a big thing. And it still is, but it's changed from what it used to be… I remember going to raves and there was a lot of people who are obviously from rich backgrounds, but they are raving because their parents obviously are supporting them… whereas, like, we might really value having been able to save up for like a pair of trainers…"

While some can afford to explore identity in these spaces – through fashion, raving, or drugs – others must constantly negotiate within tight economic and personal frameworks. Dom attributes the use of social media, especially Instagram, to a heightened sense of FOMO and the comparisons it generates – the internalised questions like: *"Why am I not cool enough?"* (Ewans, 2025) As Espluga (2021) critiques, we're not simply asked to be ourselves, but to perform a version of self that is polished, productive, and "cool." This is the neoliberal logic of the "self-as-enterprise." Even moments that originated as acts of resistance – like raving – are increasingly shaped by the pressures of visibility and value. These demands of auto-identity become another task, another form of labour, contributing to our exhaustion. We are constantly analysing and perfecting our performance of the self. "Be yourself" becomes an imperative, a command embedded in neoliberal strategies of subjectivation. Even "sincerity" becomes another strategy within the free market of identity.

This exhaustion seeps into every part of our lives, making it difficult to trace where it begins or how to escape it. Setbacks become vast feelings of frustration, helplessness, and failure. We fear missing out not just on events or posts – but on opportunities to remain visible, desirable, relevant. Not just online, but across all spheres of what we call "reality." There is no digital world vs. real world as Zigmund Bauman (quoted in Espluga, 2021, p. 15) says. FOMO isn't just the fear of missing a party – it's the fear of falling behind in the endless race to be seen. Being seen has become a measure of being alive. We scroll through Instagram, we show up – to raves, to work –, we improve our performance. Not necessarily because we want to, but because we fear that if we don't, we will cease to be. In this context, the search for identity is never purely about freedom; it is always shaped, negotiated, and constrained by the systems we inhabit (Espluga, 2021).

There's a phenomenon that many people attribute to social media and the obsession with what is "trending" or going "viral." A lot of trends on Instagram are linked to this idea of "self-optimisation" (Tiske, 2024) discussed above. With some of the most viral hashtags being "ootd" (outfit of the day), "fashion", and "travel" (Purba, 2021) it is not surprising that people who frequent the scene started noticing a similarity on fashion an behaviours among some of the rave (and club) attendees. Freddy K for example, mentions this in an interview, pointing out how people often look like they belong to the

same “tribe” – dressing the same, dancing the same. He attributes this to a lack of spontaneity and individuality in the scene. For him, social media plays a major role in this shift, especially in how it has stripped away the mystery of the night. Platforms like Boiler Room have already shown us what the club looks like – the vibe, the crowd, the layout of the space – even before we step inside (Lergenmüller & Armeni, 2022). This visibility has spread to other platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where users post their nights out like they’re filming the ultimate BBC documentary on club culture – panoramic crowd shots, slow-motion moments, dramatic bass drops (@b_lazze_, 2025), (@r.makarova_, 2025). This phenomenon extends even to illegal raves (@free.tekno.party, 2024, 2023).

Lopez (2025) mentioned that social media has become a gateway for people to access scenes they don’t necessarily belong to. She gave the example of how, if her mom wanted to, she could start learning the particularities of the scene just by watching Instagram videos or following techno-related accounts. Social media has also played a major role in shaping and spreading different dance styles (Khutoretsky, 2019). Sara commented on the rise of dance tutorials – asking: what’s the point of learning how to dance to techno through video tutorials? And yet, it’s not hard to find Instagram profiles entirely dedicated to that (@das.techno.team, n.d.), or memes joking about the way people dance in different countries (@yakhlef__official, 2021), or satirising the “vibe” and attitude people are expected to have when dancing to techno (@ravecultur, 2021).

> “I do understand that there are kind of some bubbles within techno… well, bubbles – some scenes within techno, like newstyle, hardstyle… like the people who go to Masia, who have a very specific way of dancing, or the hakken, that kind of thing. That’s a really specific dance and I can understand a tutorial for jumpstyle, you know? I can understand a tutorial for gabber, you know?
>
> But a tutorial for standard techno, let’s say – although even saying standard techno is a bit abstract, because what even is standard techno, right? – but a tutorial for the kind of music they play at, I don’t know, Sónar (even though they might also play gabber there)… but most of what gets played at Sónar… a tutorial for that kind of music is just like, “what?”.
>
> Just dance however you want, you know?” (Lopez, 2025)

I personally align completely with Sara Lopez’s views. Is this what Freddy K was referring to when he said we are lacking spontaneity (Armeni, 2022)? This opens up two different analyses. The first – in line with DVS1’s critique of the scene – is the loss of “etiquette” (Khutoretsky, 2019). McKenzie Wark (2023) unpacks this by drawing distinctions between the “raver” – those who *need* it – and the “coworker” – those who are just “looking for the story they’re going to tell their coworkers on Monday,” who don’t see raving as a form of release or necessity. Then there’s the “punisher” – the person who

shows no regard for the fact that you are also there. “They’re going to take their fucking phone out and take a picture of you, they’re going to move around the space as if you’re not there. Basically, the ones who are preventing people around them from having a good time” McKenzie explains that the relationship between the raver and these other “characters” is complex. She links the problem back to the pressure on promoters – who, in order to keep events viable, are often forced to prioritise ticket sales over curating a respectful or intentional crowd.

> “That means a random assortment of coworkers and punishers, which will drive away the ravers who need it, (…). While djs might not want to hear it – the crowd is what makes the rave. For a crowd to get off (…) needs to be seeded with a goodly proportion of actual ravers who really know how to dance. Then there’s the club kids. They need nightlife, like ravers do. But they go to be seen and see each other rather than to lose themselves. Club kids and ravers both need nightlife, although their needs pull against each other.” (Wark, 2023)

The second – which feeds into the first analysis – is the growing “hate” toward the current “hard techno” trend among some of us. I find myself having strong feelings about it too, which makes me wonder: is this reaction rooted in a desire to “gatekeep” and protect techno’s “etiquette”? Has the feeling itself become a form of policing? Or is it, as Wark suggests, because our needs are pulling against each other. Sara (Lopez, 2025) believes this sense of dislike might stem from social media – from the kinds of posts that have shaped her associations with the genre. She wonders whether she might have actually enjoyed or even loved the music if she had encountered it in a different context. She traces the root of her discomfort back to the image projected online, especially – though not exclusively – by DJs who upload videos of themselves dancing (@nicomoreno_music, 2022), (@saralandrydj, 2025), (@shlomo_taapion, 2023); “especially those super-prepared dance videos. It all just feels *cringe*, and it might’ve made me hate DJs or scenes that I probably would’ve liked, if it hadn’t been for that”(Lopez, 2025). Paula Temple mentions in an interview that “she doesn’t think of herself as a body that needs to entertain, even though that’s the way techno has become.” She attributes this shift to “EDM influences, where it is about the showmanship.”(Temple, 2022). But for me the “branding” is not the real problem. It’s the cis-heteronormativity that dominates that genre. Yes, it’s male-dominated (Jóri et al., 2024), but more specifically, it’s cishet-dominated. I’ve attended many hard techno nights, and those have been the ones where I’ve felt most on guard. There’s often no explicit hostility – though sometimes there is – but there’s a constant, unspoken judgment. A gaze that follows you, a low-level tension that fills the space. I try to protect myself from unwanted situations, to distract myself and have fun, but I end up consumed by persistent, continuous thoughts about my safety throughout the event. The problem with this insight about safety, is that it is often

accompanied by increased feelings of paranoia, insecurity, cautiousness, and disillusionment (Dandal et al., 2024).

While DVS1 mourns the destruction of club culture – as he knows it – he frames the decline of the scene primarily in terms of format: the predominance of festivals, the positioning of DJs in the space, shortened set times, and the presence of cameras on the dancefloor. His proposed solutions lean toward restoring a kind of purist etiquette: longer sets, better sound systems, a return to the club as a space for deep listening, and a no-phone-camera policy. He identifies social media as a major factor in the deterioration of club culture, criticising the way phones disrupt privacy, community, and intimacy (Khutoretsky, 2019)– a critique that aligns with both Freddy K's and McKenzie Wark's perspectives discussed earlier. Social media shifts the experience from a shared collective presence to online appearances. This obsession for capturing moments for "validation and likes" compromises genuine experience and privacy. Lopez's (2025) discomfort with the increasing "performative" nature of techno – shaped heavily by social media – reflects a similar concern. Some are already tackling issues regarding club etiquette by proposing "tips" to build a better dancefloor: "make the most of the opportunity for disconnection", "respect personal space", "you don't have to face the DJ when dancing", "take care of eachother" (@club.raum, 2025). But this, to me only ensures a clean etiquette that doesn't promise awareness in regard to LGBTQ+ individual's safety. There is beauty in DVS1's protective, and I understand the desire to guard something you've made your whole life around. But his framing sometimes reads as a form of gatekeeping (HorsegiirL, 2024) – one that risks romanticising the past while ignoring who was often excluded from it.

Although I agree about this loss of etiquette, I also like this contrast that HorsegiirL (2024) creates between this views and hers. She embraces what seems to be an opposite ethos, thriving on the internet culture that DVS1 criticizes. Her audience largely stems from social media trends, viral aesthetics from internet culture, and a deliberate irreverence towards the seriousness from traditional techno. Rather than gatekeeping, HorsegiirL's proposal creates space through exaggeration, while playfully disregarding the norms established in the scene. So, where DVS1 sees loss through exposure and performativity (Khutoretsky, 2019), HorsegiirL finds opportunity, queerness, and community – even if it doesn't explicitly claim to be political. Her presence in the scene emerges from internet culture, hyperpop and queer aesthetics. She doesn't claim to be creating "safe spaces", yet her audience is overwhelmingly queer – such as the one from DJ G2G. There is no explicit manifesto, but there is a strive for fun and enjoyment – "let people have fun" (HorsegiirL, 2024). She reminds us that sometimes, queerness survives not through seriousness or structure, but through silliness, and the refusal to explain oneself – which aligns with Lopez's (2025) non-intrusive care approach, or as she says: "normalise weirdness". This contrast underscores that the future of techno spaces, particularly for

LGBTQ+, might lie not solely in preserving traditions or gatekeeping etiquette, but in embracing diverse, fluid, and perhaps even "messy" forms of engagement and visibility. Or as Antonia says: Everything must be a safe space.

> “When someone approaches us (...) saying, 'we have a proposal to create a safe space,' it feels like if you create a safe space, you're sending the message that the festival itself is not safe. The whole festival must be a safe space, everyone should feel comfortable; you can't create corners where people hide. Being together – diversity is about being together, respecting each other, and coexisting. Everything must be a safe space. (...) Starting from within the organization itself, which is also something important, there should be, from the very foundation, from those who curate and program, a certain diversity or inclusivity. Sometimes it's possible, sometimes it isn't. (...) I think if you include these people within the organization from the start, this will logically be reflected in the programming." (Folguera, 2025)

Things didn’t “use to be better” (Allien, 2023), things are now starting to be better. The conversation is open, and it is just a matter of keeping the ball rolling. The dichotomy presented by social media between DVS1's longing for a more controlled, intimate past (Khutoretsky, 2019) and HorsegiirL's (2023) embrace of a freer, internet-driven present highlights that techno culture is dynamic. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that privacy, and genuine collective experiences are also at stake in overly performative environments. Folguera’s (2025) comment reminds us that queerness and community don't always align with structured or curated safe spaces. Sometimes safety, inclusivity, and genuine community emerge organically through playfulness, irreverence, and the normalization of difference.

CONCLUSION:

The complexity of the subject leaves a lot of ground to explore. But ultimately, my conclusion is that we need to build space. We need to talk. We need to resist a system structured by binaries – one that erases the complexities of the problems that cut through us. Raving gave me – and still does – a space away from it. Where the freedom of being my queer self could live, even if briefly. It revealed that resistance doesn't always look like protest – sometimes it's care, sometimes it's techno, sometimes it's drugs, sometimes it's dancing in a dark warehouse filled with flashing lights. Sometimes we can't make it to the rave because we're too tired – and even when we can, we bring with us a self already exhausted from having to perform who we are at all times. Queer people are here to stir things up, to question the norms and the structures of a scene – and a society – that has been serving the norm for too long. I am tired of the same events, of the same crowds, of not feeling safe to be "me". We need to create more TAZ, we need to build strong communities of care. I want to experience more what it feels like to belong: to be surrounded by others who are also resisting, experimenting, dreaming and ultimately becoming. Not a better version of themselves – just being.

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