

# *Club Culture in the Time of Coronavirus:*

The Online Transformation of an Embodied Experience

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis was conducted during the unsettling period of the coronavirus crisis, aiming to find out how the electronic music scene, as an industry that was completely shut down by the preventive measures against the COVID-19 spread, found ways to survive and renegotiate its nature by moving to the online environment. Based on previous research that approached club culture as an embodied experience that creates feelings of effervescence, spiritual transformation and different levels and types of solidarity, this qualitative inquiry sought out to identify the new experience and relationships created in the club culture context, during lockdowns and through social media platforms and online events. In order to achieve this, unobtrusive online methods were employed for the data collection, that was formed by thousands of comments posted online by users that watched live-streamings through recognized and established platforms representing and promoting electronic music. These comments were interpreted using thematic analysis and as a result four different themes were identified concerning the experiences and relationships that emerge through the online transformation of club culture.

Regarding the experience aspect, this research shows that people are still able to enjoy and sometimes re-create powerful moments even though their bodies are not in the center of the experience as they used to be. Also, it is evident through the data collection that this online activity is beneficial for the state of their mental health and has healing effects and generates hope and positivity. From the relationships' perspective, the findings point to a deconstruction of the DJ's dominant role and to a less hierarchical interaction with the audience. Solidarity continues to be fostered inside the electronic music scene even via social media and online comments, but it is a new type of anonymous and global solidarity that is not inclusive and based on physical presence. All in all, some basic elements of club culture like the feelings of effervescence, the ecstatic experience, the sense of belonging to a community and the relief from everyday burdens continue to exist in a similar but not identical way, while other elements like the DJ – audience relationship seem to change. The online version of club culture is still a new born and evolving phenomenon that is intertwined with its past version of being present and dancing in the nightclub and as time passes we will see if it could dominate, continue to exist in parallel or disappear when the old, established club culture rituals re-emerge.

Keywords: club culture, electronic music, livestreaming, coronavirus, online research

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Abstract and Keywords

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, an era characterized by rapid developments and major crises, electronic music seems to have found the perfect environment to grow as an alternative movement that influences both our society and economy. Festivals, parties and most of all nightclubs, from big, commercial venues to underground, illegal, temporary constructions, have always been the spaces where electronic music culture was celebrated by devotees, from old school ravers to young people that just want to dance and have fun. Lately electronic music and especially some genres like techno and house, have entered the mainstream culture spectrum, attracting a wider audience to these spaces and offering greater recognition to electronic music producers and DJs. However, the upward trend of electronic music and the expansion and broadening of this culture was disrupted by the coronavirus crisis. Suddenly, nightclubs were closed, festivals were cancelled and anyone that wanted to go out, meet other people and dance, had nowhere to go, afraid and advised to not even leave the house. In this thesis, I am going to examine how the electronic music industry answered to the complete shutdown of its spaces and rituals by going online and using social media platforms to offer a temporary solution with live-streamings and virtual events. In addition, I will try to understand how people experienced and perceived this alternative version of club culture in the online environment and see if these different rituals managed to function as a relief and support system for the club culture community in this unsettling period.

The aim and scope of this thesis emerged from our current reality and the uncertainty generated by the coronavirus crisis in almost every field of our lives. When the Dutch government announced a series of strict measures on March 12, 2020, in order to restrain the coronavirus outbreak, cancelling all the events and major gatherings, asking everyone to work from home and suspending physical education in all the universities, I was working on forming an ethnographic research plan about electronic music culture and its connection with solidarity and collective effervescence. However, quarantine and social distancing measures turned my plans from ambitious to irrelevant and my methods from feasible to forbidden. All the nightclubs, the record stores and the radio stations were shut down and all the big events and electronic music festivals were cancelled, so all the points of interest for my project disappeared. The coronavirus crisis was and still is such a significant moment for the whole world that has consequences in every aspect of our realities and influences every element of our societies. As a

result, the academic community, from medicine to sociology and any other field, could not remain indifferent in any way and turned its focus immediately to the coronavirus phenomenon in order to limit and hopefully eliminate the pandemic and additionally understand and locate its impact on our society. Driven by the worldwide focus and concern about this new, terrifying reality, I decided to adjust my research about electronic music culture and study how this industry, activity and community answered, adopted or transformed due to the coronavirus. I dedicated the following months of March and April to observing developments in the field of electronic music that quickly moved from the nightclub to the online environment, through numerous live streamings on social media platforms.

Before the coronavirus crisis, most of the literature concerning electronic music culture was focused on one of its most important rituals, the dance party (Brewster & Broughton, 2014; Malbon, 1999; Rietveld, 2000). More specifically, a lot of impactful and innovative research has been conducted concerning rave culture (Gauthier F., 2004), psychedelic or trance festivals (St. John, 2017; Vitos, 2004) and the evolution of the first electronic music genres of the US, like that of Chicago House and Detroit techno (Moreno, 2014; Pope, 2011; Rietveld, 2011). Moreover, researchers turned their attention to the case of Berlin, because its club culture is mainly intertwined with the legacy of Detroit techno, the fall of the wall and a huge urban transformation (Beate, 2014; Gook, 2016). Most of the times, club culture as an experience, is connected with religion by researchers that analysed this phenomenon and argued that it could create some kind of spiritual healing (Hutson, 2000), a communal soul (Rietveld, 2003) and a sense of liberation (St. John, 2017). Other more contemporary rituals concerning the digital expansion, distribution and community building of the electronic music scene online has been significantly understudied as club culture has been presented almost exclusively as a somatic experience, meaning an experience inextricably tied and created through bodies and senses (Rietveld, 2003; Rill, 2010). However, this secondary aspect of the electronic music club culture and industry that existed online without gathering a lot of interest from researchers and club culture devotees, became the one and only alternative that could survive in the era of coronavirus as it was virtual, meaning completely safe and feasible. Therefore, I decided that it is relevant and urgent to cover this new gap in electronic music culture's literature that was created because of this huge digital transformation.

This study will examine the coronavirus transformation of club culture. More specifically, this research will answer questions about the experience and nature of the new online alternative of club culture and the way it has been accepted and perceived by the participants or influenced the relationships fostered among them. My goal is to identify possible new elements of the club culture experience and try to examine if older theories and approaches concerning solidarity and community building can still be valid and useful for the online version of club culture in the time of the coronavirus crisis. It is important to clarify that the findings of this research will be strongly connected with the coronavirus condition and not only with the digital nature of the phenomenon under study. It is impossible to ignore the huge impact that the state of quarantine, the social distance and the coronavirus fear had in our lives. During this time of confinement, any research concerning club culture was and still is challenging, as we have not identified all the traits and characteristics of this new online alternative yet. My goal is to explore this new version of club culture, parallel to the old one, and begin the process of understanding, deciphering and analysing this new phenomenon.

This research aims to fill the gap in the literature related to the online aspect and activity of electronic music culture and the way people experience and perceive it, especially under the extreme conditions emerging from the coronavirus crisis. This work will contribute new knowledge to the field of electronic music studies, with a holistic approach and in-depth analysis of this movement's online presence and societal meaning. Moreover, this research will also partake in discussions related to other academic fields, wider than that of the electronic music culture, such as current studies that aim to measure and understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in our societies. As a society, we have already realized that we are experiencing a period that will bring radical changes and will leave its mark on every aspect of our lives. That is why this thesis will take a step forward and try to analyse the new normality of coronavirus and discuss what our society might be from now on. Furthermore, I believe that this study could be beneficial in the field of digital research in two ways. Firstly, it will produce new knowledge related to the online experience, the online behaviours and the relationships created among people through online interaction on social media platforms and will address issues of power, hierarchy and hostility that emerge in digital environments. Additionally, it will provide a methodology of unobtrusive online research that is progressive and not common in the field of social studies and might prove to be very useful in times of crisis, like the coronavirus pandemic

that we are going through now. The field of online studies and virtual qualitative inquires is still evolving and expanding the last decades and research like this that experiments and focuses on online methodologies could help test and prove their potential and expand our knowledge on this type of research, that seems fruitful but still encounter doubt sometimes.

In the next chapter, the inquiry on online club culture will begin by setting the historical background, in order to understand when and how this culture was born and evolved. Then, I will explore some of the main approaches and concepts connected with club culture by researchers that tried to explain its rituals, experience and communities. Afterwards, in the methodology chapter I will justify and explain all my decisions and steps taken to conduct this thesis in a valid, meaningful and ethical way. I will explain why I chose to conduct a qualitative research, how I collected all the data in an unobtrusive, online way and how I followed a thematic analysis process to determine crucial patterns inside the data and conclude on this thesis' findings. Therefore, on the third main chapter of my work I am going to present the main findings, concerning the new club culture experiences and relationships, new elements and issues that were identified, always in relation with the club culture as we knew it before the coronavirus crisis. Lastly, I am going to conclude this thesis with a series of new questions and impactful topics that could function as starting points for future research.



## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Up until now, essential and progressive work has been conducted concerning club culture as a collective experience and a social phenomenon. However, after the outburst of the coronavirus pandemic, the fundamental characteristics of club culture were eliminated, suspended or transferred to the online environment. Club culture's contemporary condition and connection with the digital world, even before the coronavirus crisis, are significantly understudied. In this section, I will focus on the social aspect and the meaning of club culture for the people that are engaged in it and then try to discover how this industry adjusted to the conditions of the current global crisis of coronavirus. I will start by looking at literature concerning the historical scenes of Chicago, Detroit, UK and Berlin, to find out why and how electronic music was created. Secondly, I will explore the aspects of the club experience and its connection with religion and the social theories of Maffesoli's "neo-tribes" (Goulding et al., 2002; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008; Riley et al., 2010), Turner's "communitas" (Goulding & Shankar, 2011; Hutson, 2000; Rill, 2010; St. John, 2006), Durkheim's "collective effervescence" (Gauthier, 2007; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008) and Foucault's "heterotopia" (St. John, 2001). Afterwards, I will mention some of the most recent academic works concerning coronavirus and its social impact and the shift from physical to digital communication. Combining the valuable information and foundation gathered by various fields, I will be able to move to the analysis of my data collection that is based on the online presence of club culture expressed through social media, in a time of crisis.

### 2.1 Club Culture History

It is essential to begin this research by going back to the history and the birth of electronic music, in order to locate the social conditions that led to the creation of this music and the people that shaped and promoted this culture. Afterwards, we would be able to compare the past and the present and see if the coronavirus crisis has the characteristics of a period where electronic music can change, flourish or evolve.

One of the first and most influential electronic music genres that shaped club culture and its rituals was the house music movement that originated in Chicago (Rietveld, 1998). The Chicago House scene was an answer to the "death" of disco, a culture that by the end of the 1980 decade had become too mainstream and alienated, leaving an empty space for a new anti-

commercial movement to emerge. DJs that played music in underground gay clubs with mainly black and Latino audience started re-editing disco songs and created a new, upbeat sound that quickly spread and became popular in the city of Chicago (Rietveld, 2000). This new genre was influenced by soul, jazz, funk and salsa music, while the lyrics of most house tracks came from the gospel tradition, praising a higher power and preaching love, hope and community.

Additionally, because of the proximity of the house scene with queer identities and sexual freedom, sensual lyrics about desire and liberations were also frequent (Rietveld, 1998).

According to Rietveld (2011), house music was shaped by its “spaces and dancefloor dynamics” (p.8). The places that hosted the house parties were mainly deserted industrial buildings that were turned into clubs. These spaces functioned in a semi-legal way, making the participants feel like they were invisible, away from their realities for a while. The most well-known club that is inseparable from the birth of Chicago House is The Warehouse, a club that managed to exist legally and avoid constant raids by the police by not serving alcohol. It was a dark space full of smoke and psychedelic light effects where people could dance all night to the music that the DJ mixed. The Warehouse and other nightclubs of the era, functioned as sanctuaries for marginalised people from ethnic minorities and of various sexual orientations, that wanted to get out of their realities for a while.

Techno on the other hand, originated in the post-industrial Detroit. It was influenced by the Euro-pop electronic sound of Kraftwerk, a German group from the 70s and was a lot darker than house, with machine noises and intense rhythm (Rietveld, n.d.). Detroit was supposed to achieve the American dream, mainly based on its car industry that offered a lot of jobs and wages to the people. However, at the end of the 20th century, after a series of protests against racial segregation and the general collapse of the American dream by the dominance of the global, technological, knowledge-based future over the industrial economy, the city was left in ruins. The post-industrial shift combined with the racial divide created a dystopian scenery that gave birth to the experimental, heavy, robotic sound of Detroit techno (Beate, 2014; Moreno, 2014). This sound, influenced by science fiction and Afrofuturism expressed the state of African Americans that were ready to surpass their past and were fully committed to their technologic future (Rietveld & Kolioulis, 2019). Pope (2011), in his analysis of the Detroit techno culture, argues that it was a very special movement because the techno producers represented the people that embraced their failing, dystopian reality. Whereas capitalism relies on producing and sharing

messages of joy and hope, in Detroit, the case where capitalism failed, the ultimate hopelessness of living the worst-case scenario, gave a great sense of liberation and unlimited expression to the creative people. In this context, Detroit techno artists viewed the post-industrial reality and the domination of technology over humanity as a state in which they were survivors who had to make peace with their future. They responded with their music, creating a sound environment matching to their reality and transforming it to an embodied experience in the city of Detroit and the abandoned buildings that once symbolized the power of modernity (Pope, 2011).

Moving to Europe, the house and techno sounds found new audiences and evolved mostly in Ibiza, the UK and Berlin. In the late 80s, British DJs that enjoyed long parties with house music in Ibiza, decided to organize their own parties, bringing the Ibiza feeling back home. They created an alternative genre called acid house that was based in the Chicago tradition but had a more aggressive attitude and borrowed the 60s rock n' roll psychedelic aesthetic (Hill, 2003; Rietveld, 2000). In the summer of 1988 almost 20.000 people attended acid house parties every week, consuming drugs like ecstasy and dancing all night to the sound of electronic music. The British media presented this phenomenon as an imminent threat for the country and caused a wave of "moral panic" (Hill, 2003, p. 219). This panic was generated mainly because the acid house parties were a threat to the vision of the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Thatcherism was based on social discipline, order, conservative rules, governmental authority and conformity. Although Acid House parties were apolitical events, they nevertheless represented everything that the Thatcher government strived to mute and eliminate from the British society. A special police force was established in order to control these, mainly unlicensed, parties and in 1990 the Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act was passed to stop the "immoral phenomenon" of acid house. These parties took place in marginal spaces, warehouses, barns, underpasses and abandoned buildings that had no identity and no significance for the state or the media up until then. The great effort of acid house devotees to find and transform these places to party venues made it harder for the police units to locate and raid them. To escape from the constant war with the authorities, acid parties were also held in rural locations in order to be safer and undisturbed and that caused a second wave of panic and upheaval to the state. The English countryside was always the golden paradigm of conservatism, tradition and peaceful order that symbolized everything that was good and valuable for the Thatcher era. The acid parties threatened these

protected spaces and their purity and as a result the government fought them with unprecedented measures and actions until they started to disappear (Hill, 2003).

Lastly, Berlin is considered to be the city that took upon Detroit's legacy and evolved the sound of techno in Europe and onto the 21st century. Gook (2016), described Berlin after the reunification as a city in a state of social turmoil, transformation and complete instability due to the lack of industrial production, especially in the eastern part. However, he writes that in this time where industry and economy struggled, subcultures and music flourished. The club scene in Berlin spread in areas where property ownership was still unclear to the state and the authorities. After the fall of the wall, the no-man's-land created in the zone where the former separate parts merged, functioned as a "playground" of limitless spaces that hosted various parties. Techno became a phenomenon that took over the city from the gay bars to the squats and then the first temporary, illegal, nightclubs. The total freedom that was provided by this ambiguous situation, the numerous buildings that belonged to no one and no one paid attention to them, let the clubbing scene of Berlin evolve, liberated by structures and rules. The parties were focused onto a new future of freedom and hope and simultaneously fostered a collective sense of unity that has no limits and borders (Gook, 2016). It seems that the city of Berlin and the Berlin sound had a parallel evolution to that of Detroit. According to Beate (2014), in the case of Detroit, abandonment and the lack of social life, opened the door to creativity and provided new spaces for people to occupy and reproduce meaning and the same thing happened to Berlin after the fall of the wall, when it failed to be one of the economic centres of the contemporary western world but turned out to be a cultural platform and a creative city that is strongly associated with the global music industry.

Through this journey to the past of electronic music culture, we can locate three elements that came up in each case and these were: social crisis, empty spaces and need for community building. In Chicago we have people from marginalized groups due to their skin colour or sexual orientation that want to forget their everyday burdens and meet in semi-illegal clubs to dance and come together (Rietveld, 1998, 2011). In Detroit, a city facing a huge economic and social crisis that has turned it into a ghost town, people who lived through the demise, mainly African Americans, propose a new way of approaching their realities through machine sounds and a futuristic aesthetic (Moreno, 2014; Rietveld & Kolioulis, 2019). Then in the UK, young people that need to escape their realities too, organise illegal parties in abandoned buildings and in the

countryside, defying the law and Thatcherism's values (Hill, 2003). Lastly Berlin, welcomes electronic music in the years of the reunification, when the city faced a major transformation and was left with numerous empty buildings that became the places where techno music was celebrated (Beate, 2014; Gook, 2016). So, even if each city has its own evolution, history and bond with the electronic music scene, we can argue that in all four cases we can find similar social conditions and realities under crisis.

## **2.2 Club Culture Experience**

Keeping in mind the common characteristics that came up through exploring history and before moving to analysing the coronavirus reality, it is important to delve into previous work by researchers that already studied club culture and tried to grasp its social impact and significance. A lot of them tried to break down and decipher the experience of club culture in order to understand its importance and influence on people's lives, in our contemporary societies that are dominated by the evolution of technology and the information-led economy. Concerning the post-industrial club culture, Rietveld (2003) argues that dualisms as spirit versus matter, or Descartes' body versus mind cannot exist in our digitized society and especially on the dancefloor where the embodied action gives birth to a spiritual experience and such dualisms are completely deconstructed. Through their bodies, the dancers manage to reach a moment of peak-experience, where they feel the disappearance of the self, that becomes one entity with its surroundings and the others, creating what she calls a "communal soul" (p.148). In that way, visiting a nightclub and dancing to music takes up the characteristics of a ritual, where people gather, seeking this moment of liberation from themselves and merging with the crowd. This is a complex process that occurs when the participants let go of their consciousness, surrender to the repetitive rhythm and through a multisensory physical experience move to an alternate spiritual state, where time and space cease to exist like before.

The participants of such an event have the liberty and the chance to rebuild themselves and shape a new identity. Each participant is a different individual with his own style and attitude, but they form a collective that dances together, synchronized to the rhythm of music that flows through their bodies, in a dark place with lighting effects, following the "vibe" (Rill, 2010, p. 141). Rill (2010) defines "vibe" as a form of positive energy, communicated through people, that creates a shared, common feeling, expressed through their bodies. This vibe gives birth to the

collective experience and brings people together in the parties. Rill also believes that the clubbing experience is always a somatic one that later affects the consciousness and the perception of the participants. He bases his argument on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and recent developments in the field of cognitive neuroscience. Chatzisavva (2009), in her study of Merleau-Ponty's theory, explains that for the French thinker, subject, body and world influence each other and are constantly transforming and shape one another. People make sense of this world through their embodied spirit that exists in constant interaction with bodies and environment. So, perception is determined by the situation and the location of our bodies (Chatzisavva, 2009). Based on this kinetic and physical approach of perception that Merleau-Ponty proposed, Rill (2010) presents the experience of a rave party as an embodied, lived experience where mind, body and the world become one and shape the worldview and the ways people perceive their environment and lifestyles from then on.

Alongside the researchers who try to understand and describe the club culture experience through the synergy of body and mind, there are others who chose to connect this phenomenon directly with the concept of religion (Gauthier, 2007; Hutson, 2000; St. John, 2003). One of the scholars that associated club culture, and more specifically the rave parties with religion is Francois Gauthier. Gauthier (2007) mentioned that a lot of researchers talk about spirituality in the rave scene but do not go further enough to directly associate rave with religiosity. For him raves are a form of "fragmented, non-institutional religiosity" (p. 252), that can be found in the experience of the rave as a festive ritual and on the ways this experience influences and shapes people's worldviews and lives afterwards. Raves are not profitable events and need a lot of effort and work to be organized, and that is why they rely mainly in the participation and commitment of their audience. This commitment to the rave is manifested in various scales; starting with a group of friends that attend the parties together, moving to the local scene and finally to being part of a global rave culture. It seems like rave culture answers to ravers the same existential question that religion does for other people; it provides meaning.

Gauthier (2017) strengthened his argument by observing that club culture is a highly ritualistic process, which is a characteristic historically linked with religiosity. He analysed the ritualistic process in three steps: "separation, marginalization and aggregation" (p.405). First the separation from the present and the norm, comes with searching information about the location and the time of the rave, contacting friends, getting ready, finding the party, buying drugs, steps

that take you away from your everyday routine and gradually easing you in a different world. Marginalization occurs when you listen to the music, dance in synch with others and become one with the crowd. Even consuming drugs is part of this step because it has its own sub-ritual when a group of people insert the same substance to their bodies, at the same time and in the same amount to create a shared experience. Then, after a lot of dancing and exhaustion comes the level of aggregation, the comedown. Some people prefer to attend after-parties or relax in a house or the countryside or even visit a restaurant or a café to drink and eat. You cannot leave the rave and go to sleep because it is a very intense experience and you need an extra ritual too calm and move from the ecstatic state back to your everyday self.

The religious nature of club culture is also manifested as a form of techno-shamanism and salvation (Hutson, 2000; St. John, 2017). According to Brewster (2014), the DJ is perceived as a “sacred intermediary” (p. 12) that has the power to “affect people’s states of mind” (p.12) and the responsibility to create an atmosphere that will allow and guide people to a shared, powerful, life changing experience. St. John (2017) argues that the DJ takes up the role of the shaman and with his techniques and use of technology tries to create an atmosphere that reaches a liminal and transpersonal state. He describes electronic music gatherings as events where participants can escape themselves, and through dance and being there with their body and all their senses manage to leave behind all the burdens of modern life and communicate with their surroundings and their own bodies. As a result, participants keep going back to these events to relieve this “transcendence of self in the context of others” (p. 285). Electronic music culture is attached to feelings of liberation, safety and release. Even though club culture is now part of mainstream culture, open to a wider audience, still people participating in the post-rave movement testify that they experience feelings of transformation and liberation from their routines, from the burdens and demands of the modern way of living and from themselves too. During a rave people have the chance to play and experience an alternate reality without constraints and judgements, forgetting all that cause the anxiety. That is why club culture is connected to the notion of salvation that is a significant part of most religious theories (St. John, 2003).

Similarly, Hutson (2000) connects techno-shamanism with the alternation of consciousness and the suspension of the everyday world through endlessly dancing all night to the rhythm of the DJ, under flashing lights and smoke machines. These conditions, enhanced or not by the consuming of drugs, can produce according to the participants, an ecstatic moment that

surpasses your own body and your everyday self. This experience can have a healing effect to the participants that describe feeling happiness, confidence, peace and calm after a rave, what Hutson calls the “spiritual healing” (p.37). He explains that this healing process has also a social aspect and is based on going to the rave with other people, not only on dancing or consuming drugs. Raves are closely connected with both primitivism and futurism when it comes to aesthetics and concepts. Both these approaches deny the present and dream of an altered state, a utopia, a new possibility or a past heaven. This atmosphere of letting go of the present and allowing yourself to exist in a different way, melting inside the community, in unity with the world for a night of dancing is an important factor that cultivates the healing result. You can leave this place feeling like your consciousness and the way you perceive the world has shifted or by just feeling satisfied and carrying less burden.

### **2.3 Club Culture Communities**

Even if scholars describe club culture as a religion or as an embodied experience, they seem to come back to some specific concepts that can describe the relationships and communities created inside this scene. One of the most common concepts, that is repeatedly mentioned when trying to explain the club culture, is Moffesoli’s “neo-tribe” (Goulding et al., 2002; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008; Riley et al., 2010). Although, club culture was labelled as an apolitical movement because it never had an organized stance towards political or social issues and was mostly related to escapism, entertainment and temporary individual satisfaction, Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010) connected club culture with everyday politics, based on the neo-tribal theory. According to this theory, political participation can be achieved when people move through temporary and seth communities and adopt common habits, opinions and “aesthetic ethic” (p. 348). In these communities they manage to suspend or question the norm, the rules or the institutionalized reality. Although they are not protesting or consciously attack the system, by being aloof and ignoring the stereotypical lifestyle they create social spaces that have grave political importance by creating solidarity and transforming conformity to temporary liberation. Based on this analysis of Moffesoli’s “neo – tribes”, Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010) concluded, through interviews and observation, that club culture can be interpreted as a neo-tribe. The neo-tribal characteristics that they discovered in the clubbing experience were sociality as the main motivation for people to participate, the emergence of feelings of being part of a community,



solidarity, hedonism as an expression of positive feelings and most of all sovereignty. The participants described clubbing as an alternate reality, a “temporary autonomous zone” (p.356) that allowed them to be whoever they wanted to and reject the “nine to five world” (p.356).

Kavanaugh and Anderson (2008), also connected club culture with neo-tribes as a reversion of the everyday life rules and the modern society values that creates solidarity through pleasure and emotional, shared experiences. They found out that solidarity is created both through social and behavioural processes. The social aspect has to do with interaction between the participants, special relationships created among them and active participation in the events. They share a feeling of belonging to the same, meaningful community and some of them also stated that they communicate with other participants outside the rave for other social events or they keep in touch online. On the other hand, solidarity through behaviours can be created because these people share the same activities when in a club. They dance synchronized to the same music, they stay awake all night together, they consume drugs and adopt the rave-lifestyle all together. However, these scholars made an important comment about the current situation of club culture, where the love, peace and unity ideals of the original raves do not really exist, and the scene has been commercialized and become mainstream. As an answer to the mainstream club scene, a lot of new underground sub-genres and specialized scenes emerged and led to the formation of smaller groups of dedicated participants. In these groups the researchers locate greater levels of solidarity and community sense than in popular nightclubs. However, although this fragmentation has led to the creation of a new kind of exclusive solidarity, it also caused disappointment and alienation to certain participants that missed the unity and positivity of older raves. In the mainstream nightclubs today, people come to dance for different reasons, sometimes only out of curiosity or just to consume alcohol. In the underground scene, people remain dedicated, but they have also developed competitive attitudes against other sub-genres and communities and refuse to accept one another. So, solidarity maybe fostered inside small circles, but it is an exclusive solidarity that is not shared across groups (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008).

A lot of times together with neo tribes, when approaching the collective nature of clubbing, researchers reference Victor Turner’s spontaneous *communitas* (Goulding & Shankar, 2011; Hutson, 2000; Rill, 2010; St. John, 2003; St John, 2008). Olaveson (2001) explained that *communitas* are created amongst equal humans, connected with strong bonds and liberated by any kind of judgment or social role or status. *Communitas* are temporary, dynamic and exist

outside of the mainstream social structure and its rules. The spontaneous *communitas*, that are often related to club culture, are the *communitas* that emerge in events that question the mainstream culture and are “spontaneous and self-generated” (p.105) as opposed to the calculated and fixed conditions of social structure. They are created when people consciously share something common, important and meaningful and question the norm and subvert social order. According to St. John (2008), “spontaneous *communitas*” take place when “individuals interrelate relatively unobstructed by sociocultural division of role, status, reputation, class, caste, sex, age and other structural niches” (p.7). In Goulding and Shankar’s research (2011) participants described indeed the club experience as entering a place where your status, background and class disappear in order to give place to feelings of togetherness, bonding, sharing and acceptance. Equality and temporary character are the main aspects of the clubbing experience that ties it with the notion of *communitas*. As “social anti-structures” (p.1447) spontaneous *communitas* offer the chance to people who are part of them to let go of their everyday social roles and enjoy being part of a collective.

Olaveson’s main argument though, when explaining Victor Turner’s *communitas*, was that the notion of *communitas* is similar and connected with another, pre-existing concept that of Durkheim’s collective effervescence that is also often used to describe the clubbing experience (Gauthier, 2007; Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008). Olaveson argues that the most crucial element of collective effervescence is the fact that it is shared through a community, it is indeed collective. The common energy and the sentiments shared by the participants create closeness and stronger relationships. However, this effervescent feeling is only temporary, created in the moment and that is why people try to recreate it with more rituals. Also, he insists that collective effervescence should not be simplified into mere mob mentality or a common gathering of some people celebrating. It needs unity, focus, emotional dedication and intensity to transfer someone from himself to a new collective state. Another interesting fact that he points out is the “inherently creative nature” of effervescence that flourished especially in times of transformation and social turmoil. When whole societies face a common enemy or crisis they tend to gather more, seek companionship and be a lot more active. As a result, collective effervescence occurs making people leave their routines behind and live in a revolutionary and unfamiliar way in order to handle a difficult situation as part of a community. This description of the crisis state that generates solidarity and feelings of collective effervescence is very close to what we know about

the first marginalized clubs in Chicago and Detroit that flourished in periods of post-industrial decline and functioned as shelters for people that struggled in their everyday lives (Beate, 2014; Rietveld, 1998).

Despite the recurrent use of these terms, there are some scholars that came up with an alternative approach, questioning the use of Turner's *communitas* in the context of alternative cultures as the club culture (Gauthier, 2007; St. John, 2001). St. John (2001), a researcher that connected club culture with spontaneous *communitas* in a lot of his works (2003; 2008; 2017), was the one that questioned this concept and proposed a new one. He argued, based on the work of various scholars that studied pilgrimage, that the concept of *communitas* is completely apolitical and egalitarian, almost utopian, and does not take into consideration power relationships, distinctions, diversity, contradictions, social aims and political battles. So, without completely erasing the value of *communitas* he turned into Foucault's heterotopia to try and explain club culture in a more complete and efficient way. According to Foucault (1986), heterotopias are spaces that exist and form together with and inside society. They are sacred or forbidden spaces of illusion, mirrors of society that have explicit function and boundaries. Inside them traditional time and norms are suspended, and deviant or hedonistic behaviour can take place. St. John (2001) focuses on three characteristics that make heterotopia a suitable concept to describe club culture. Firstly, they are "spaces of otherness" (p.51), meaning that they are places where people who are different, rejected by the society or resistant to the system, people who are marginalised can belong to them. Secondly, they are "heterogenous" (p.51) spaces where anything can happen without some certain and expected result, they welcome diversity. Lastly, they are "contested spaces" (p.52) and a lot of times conflict may emerge inside them between the participants causing rupture. These characteristics express the differences between the people that form the club culture scene that may live and co-operate in union and solidarity, but they continue to be a diverse audience that claims its space in the society and inside the structure of the scene.

To sum up, there are indeed various ways to approach the club culture phenomenon, but they all have some shared qualities. Matters of solidarity, community, spirituality and ritualistic behaviours exist in almost every one of these theories used to explain club culture. However, all these significant findings are rooted to specific places, embodied, multisensory experiences and massive gatherings. The club culture rituals exist in the physical world and demand full focus

from both the body and the mind to create the alleged peek experience. As a result, various questions arise today that all these rituals are forbidden: can the nightclub be turned to a social media platform? Can the embodied self be replaced by our online profiles? Can we stream together now that we cannot dance together? To answer these questions, we must first clarify the coronavirus impact on our lives up until now and see how it changed our perspective and limited our choices.

## **2.4 The pandemic**

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on 11 March 2020 that the world is facing a COVID-19 pandemic, from a coronavirus that appeared first in Wuhan, China, in the end of 2019 and quickly spread to almost every country in the world (WHO, 2020). The first major outbreak in Europe took place in Italy at the end of February, resulting to a series of lockdowns, austere social distancing, policing and quarantine measures in the whole country. On March 17, France announced a nationwide lockdown and on March 23 Britain followed too (Taylor, 2020). In the Netherlands, an “intelligent lockdown” begun in March 15, leading to the immediate ban of mass gatherings, closure of schools, cafes, restaurants, sports and sex clubs while a distance of 1,5 meters was imposed among people at all times. On March 23, as the cases grew more and more every day, more measures were announced including extension of the previous decisions, restrictions on number of people inside shops and the ban of groups of more than three people (*Coronavirus*, 2020). The lockdown measures begun to ease on June 1<sup>st</sup> when cafes, bars and restaurants re-opened, under strict conditions, alongside with cinemas and museums too. Gradually schools re-opened again and from July 1<sup>st</sup> gyms, saunas, casinos and arcades have the right to open too (*Coronavirus in the Netherlands*, 2020).

With massive gathering banned in a lot of countries to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the club industry was one of the fields that took a major hit, as from early March all the electronic music festivals of the summer started to get cancelled one after another. By mid-March all the well-known clubs in Europe announced their closure until further notice (Resident Advisor, 2020). This situation led to extreme frustration from thousands of people working for the electronic music industry that were suddenly unemployed, so a lot of campaigns to support the scene were organised immediately (Resident Advisor, 2020). A lot of initiatives that aimed to keep club culture alive and collect money through donations emerged, trying to propose the

alternative of live streaming DJ sets through social media. There were cases where DJs played music through their personal pages on Facebook or more organized efforts like Boiler Room's "Streaming from Isolation", where famous DJs played music almost every day through the Boiler Room channels (Boiler Room, 2020). In any case, club culture was one of the fields that quickly adopted to the new circumstances and showed initiative to bring people together to survive this crisis collectively.

This unprecedented, global crisis immediately sparked huge interest in the academic circles that tried to approach the situation, explain and provide answers from various fields. Of course, important studies are conducted in the field of medicine but also researchers are trying to grasp the social impact of this crisis and speculate about the future of our communities especially after the normalization of social distancing. Romania (2020) approaches the concept of social distance as opposed to physical distance. He observed that most health organizations asked from the citizens of countries infected by the coronavirus to practice social distancing, meaning keeping a minimum of 1,5 – 2 meters distance from any other individual outside your household and avoid crowded places and groups. On March 20, 2020, the World Health Organization shifted from the term social distancing to the term physical distancing, to avoid leading people to isolation and lack of contact. However, Google statistics show that the term social distance was the one that prevailed in the media and our conversations about the issue. Romania then turned to Erving Goffman to clarify that social distance is not a new concept but has always being part of the social studies. When individuals interact, they must keep a certain level of social distance that is dictated by rules of social decency, shaped by the era, the country, the status, the relationship and familiarity between them. When someone violates the rules of social distance and does not respect the privacy or the boundaries of the other, he is considered at least impolite. By practising social distancing people perform their status and form dynamics. Now, during a huge crisis, the rules of social distance are revised, and we must follow the new normal. Moving closely to somebody is a high-risk behaviour and walking without your face mask is massively frowned upon. What causes concern according to the researcher is what is going to happen to these rules after the COVID-19 crisis. He anticipates a period of "interactional anomie" (p.59) where people will not be sure about which behaviour is proper as the rules will not be clear enough after an era where human contact is so profoundly demonised.

Concerning the consequences of social distancing and how can humanity renegotiate living together but far from one another, Long (2020) makes a valid point stating that the digital alternative proposed by most governments is not always accessible to everyone, so even greater social inequalities emerge. Also, he acknowledges that social distancing might be harder for people who live alone and cannot benefit from the presence and support of another human. However, he also adds that severe problems may arise in families that are obligated to co-exist without any break and parents might feel pressure and difficulty combining work from home with caring for their children when schools are closed. By analysing the way governments present the self-distancing measures to the citizens he locates a tendency to individualize the responsibility and ask for people to make sacrifices for the greater good. By turning social distancing to a “civic duty” (p. 5), asociality is considered a virtue, while social interaction is something that should be limited as much as possible, it is conceived as a non-essential part of our lives and a risk that we should not take.

All these measures and the feeling of responsibility have some impact on people’s mental state and various researches from the field of psychology emerged, providing information about the issue. Asmundson and Taylor (2020) wrote about the phenomenon of “coronaphobia” (p.1), the fear caused by the possibility of infection by the virus, that is enhanced by the general uncertainty and the unclear information shared about the issue as long as personal traits like previous anxiety symptoms or increased vulnerability to illnesses. A group of academics conducted research in Hong Kong during a quarantine phase to see if people are experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. They found out that 19% of the participants suffered from depression and 14% of them from anxiety, compared to 10,7% and 4,1% respectively in similar researches before the COVID-19 crisis. They relate the high percentages of mental health issues during this period with confusion from the unlimited and contradictory information and instructions, fear of being infected or fear of a family member becoming ill, frustration by the lack of commodities like surgical masks and also special personality characteristics like neuroticism (Choi et al., 2020). Another research was conducted in China during a 14 days quarantine period to monitor anxiety levels and sleep quality in relation with social capital, a notion that includes ‘social trust, belonging, and participation’ (Xiao et al., 2020, p. 2). The findings showed that in general the stress levels were augmented while sleep quality was deteriorating. Individuals who lived under quarantine state expressed feelings of loneliness, fear

of the consequences of the infection, insecurity because they were not hospitalised or tested and pressure due to their confinement that limited their physical activities. It appears that the more these feelings increased and caused anxiety the more their sleep was troubled. However, people with higher social capital that had the chance to communicate with others managed to handle anxiety better and had fewer negative reactions. Lastly, they stressed the importance of online social groups, that played a significant role in maintaining people's mental health in a stable state when in quarantine, through providing support and reducing feelings of loneliness (Xiao et al., 2020).

So, in a period where any physical contact is forbidden, It is reasonable to claim that the most evident and immediate transformation that occurred as an answer to the COVID-19 spread, was turning physical interaction to digital. Online interactions have been crucial to our everyday lives already, parallel to our offline presence but now the online aspect has almost completely prevailed. In the quarantine phase, space and time as we knew it was suspended and our ways of experiencing intimacy and maintaining our relationships changed too. Everyone – willing or not – embraced this digitalisation of our everyday life and new rituals were formed to function as alternatives to what is now prohibited. Family group texts, Zoom meetings, tele-conferences have become the norm and we have already become familiar with this was of life, wondering if we will ever come back (Romania, 2020).

From the information perspective and according to Bratu's research (2020), during the COVID-19 outbreak the media have been the cause of widespread panic since they constantly transmit speculative, discouraging, catastrophic scenarios about the pandemic without restraint. Stark (2020) sees the COVID-19 crisis and its coverage by the media as a process of multi-layered testing. Starting from newspapers and headlines he observed the term "testing" was mentioned frequently, either as a diagnostic test for the disease or as an alternative form of testing that has to do with how institutions, governments, scientists are responding to the crisis. The coronavirus crisis functions as a challenge, as a very important test for humanity and its structures that hope to pass it without grand losses. We have entered a state where we closely track the coronavirus spread through infographics and diagrams daily, asking ourselves all the time "where are we on the curve?" (p.73), hoping that the graphics will show improvement. We are living a reality where we are isolated in our houses and graphic demonstration is our new attachment to our environment; it is the way we experience the world now. In order to answer the

questions of how society will move on after the crisis, and how physical activities and experiences that are deeply connected with the body and the space, like clubbing, can survive such a crisis, it is meaningful to understand what tools do we have to transfer our lives online and understand how digital life works.

## **2.5 Social Media Everywhere**

For the last decades, with our mobile phones and our multiple profiles, we have all been somewhat accustomed to using the internet and especially social media to communicate. According to Maleki (2017), cyberspace is an alternative world but it is not separate from the physical one, as we have access on the Internet everywhere at any time and we can communicate without interruptions and constraints, under any circumstances. By being online and available all the time through our phones it impossible to separate the online space from the offline one as our choices, communications and actions are always somewhere in between the two. Today, with the social-distancing reality upon us, our online presence has become even more important than our offline one (Romania, 2020) and that is why it is crucial that we understand how social media work in order to decipher our new way of living.

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) define social media as the media that “employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (p.241). The researchers located seven basic elements of the way social media function and explained that each platform prioritize some of them in order to cover certain users’ needs and demands. These concepts are: identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Each platform uses some of these concepts to function and dismisses the others. For example, Facebook as a networking platform is based mainly on relationships, followed by identity, presence, reputation and conversation, while sharing and groups are of less importance. Youtube on the other hand does not use relationship, identity and presence on its structure but focuses on sharing videos that leads to matters of conversation, reputation and groups.

The question that emerges though is why social media became so popular, even before the time of quarantine that transformed them to necessary tools of communication. The researchers, Whiting and Williams (2013), conducted an exploratory study based on interviews to discover the reasons why people use social media. They found out that most people use social media for



social interaction, to exchange messages with friends online rather than face to face, especially when they cannot meet them frequently. They mentioned that they can make new friends too via social media and acknowledge these applications as a new form of social life. Apart from socialisation, the participants stated that they turn to social media for information seeking, for entertainment or just to spend some time when they are bored. A lot of people argued that relaxation and stress relief is another reason that attracts them to social media and admitted that they tend to express their opinions on social media or use them to find topics to share with other people too. All in all, social media are a crucial part of our everyday life that plays a significant role in our social life and communication. It is an undisputable fact that the use of social media was widespread even before the coronavirus crisis and it is going to evolve even more now that it is a necessity for our communication and not a choice. That is why a research concerning the coronavirus crisis period cannot in any way ignore the role and importance of social media.

## **2.6 Research Question**

We have already made some steps into understanding the club culture experience based on the works of other scholars that dedicated their time into exploring, analysing and theorizing this contemporary phenomenon. However, during this period that we live in, all this previous knowledge has been put “on hold”, as almost all the basic elements that formed the club culture experience as we knew it are suspended. The coronavirus crisis led to the closing of all the big nightclubs and the postponement of music festivals and forced the whole electronic music culture to immediately move and adopt to the online world. The research question and the sub-questions of this thesis emerged after systematic thinking on club culture before and after the coronavirus and comparison of club culture offline as opposed to the online alternative. Based on the previous literature we can argue that some of the basic elements of the pre-coronavirus club culture are: an environment of social and/or economic turmoil, the underground, exclusive character that is concentrated in a specific place, a nightclub or a city and the very important role of the body, of our conscious, somatic participation in creating and forming a powerful experience. Although we are living in an era of an enormous crisis too, we are experiencing a different, global, open to everyone, unlimited version of club culture. The electronic music rituals have moved to the Internet and are not tied to any physical space anymore. As a result, the role of our bodies as the

centre and the generator of this experience is limited and altered, while our online identities are entering the equation.

After dwelling on these contradictions, a general, simple and obvious question arose: Did the club culture change? When it comes to experiences, feelings, rituals and communities, did they continue to exist, did the change and how? More specifically, I am going to investigate how online club culture is experienced after the “limitation” of the body and if new experiences and emotional states were generated, due to the digital turn in relation with the quarantine measures. Also, I would like to explore how the sense of community and the bonds created through members of this culture changed now that they cannot meet in real life but only online, from their personal spaces and listen to the DJ playing music from his/her own house too. Can all the previous theories of *communitas*, collective effervescence, neo-tribes or heterotopias that were closely connected with the notion of place and the element of people coming together, continue to be valid in a state where numerous, unknown individuals participate in the same public event by the comforts of their own home? In order to answer these questions or at least begin a conversation around them, I will conduct a qualitative research based exclusively on unobtrusive online data collection methods, in order to comply with the COVID-19 protection measures and at the same time immerse myself completely to the digital nature of my “field” of interest.

### 3. METHODS

After getting familiar with previous research on the topic of club culture, and before presenting and analysing this thesis' results, we should explain and justify all the methodological choices that made this project feasible and valid. In this section I am going to clarify all the methods I employed to conduct this research, starting from the selection of the qualitative theoretical framework. Then, I am going to describe and analyse the unobtrusive, online tools that I used and all the limitations that I had to face or impose in order to have a solid and meaningful data collection. Moving on to the analysis section, I will state how I followed the thematic analysis method to make sense of my data set and conclude in some results that provide answers to my research question, and at the same time raise concerns for further research. Lastly, I will provide information about the ethical aspect of my research and of course the issue of reflexivity.

#### 3.1 Theoretical framework

This master thesis is aiming to answer specific research questions that have to do with how people perceive and respond to a new cultural product, that of the live streaming of electronic music DJ sets, in a specific moment in time, while living under unprecedented conditions, social distancing and quarantine. The goal is to explore what people chose to share in a temporary, digital environment with their comments and based on this information, understand their experiences and relationships. I am not searching for a scientific, coded, general truth about virtual clubbing, so a positivist approach would not be appropriate in this case. On the contrary I am trying to locate and understand experiences and perceptions inside a new-born, versatile and global community that is still forming. This research, related with behaviors, feelings, interpretations, actions and meaning making, asks for in-depth exploration and interpretation of the viewer's descriptions, thoughts and sentiments concerning their experience. Consequently, a qualitative approach is the most suitable method to follow, because it is based on the perception that our world is a "fluid, ephemeral and ever-changing thing" (Cooper & White, 2012, p. 6) and aims to find meaning and understand phenomena, more so even than describe and generalize them (Cooper & White, 2012).

More specifically, this qualitative research will be based on unobtrusive online data collection and influenced by the post-modern paradigm that emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Lyotard (1984), our societies entered the post-modern phase due to the huge

transformation caused by the massive use of communication technologies, the prevalence of the knowledge-based economy and the scientific developments that undermined the undisputed truths of modernity. The post-modern society accepts and celebrates its diversity, it is constantly in a process of evaluating and questioning everything and acknowledges that it is based on power relations. Regarding to the academic practice, the post-modern paradigm dictates the acknowledgment of power relationships that exist in the research itself, meaning that no absolute truth can exist but “all research is a partial and sociohistorically located construction” (Given, 2008, p. 19). I believe that power relations are evident through this whole project and cannot be ignored or not taken into account and that is why I chose the post-modern paradigm as the theoretical backbone of this thesis. In a way this whole project will question, grasp and renegotiate the whole nature of a phenomenon, that has been completely transformed, revisiting everything we knew until now, putting previous knowledge to the test, as our realities change. When conducting a research based solely on the online environment, which is a foundational element of the post-modern society, the researcher and the reader too must acknowledge and keep in mind the fact that not everyone has access to the Internet or that people who do, sometimes only watch and never participate, or may not be truthful and have fake identities and are in general free to present themselves in any way and express themselves limitlessly. This means that locating bias is not easy to be achieved and in some cases even impossible (Hine, 2011). Also, in such a broad and boundaryless environment as the digital world, the researcher cannot in any way avoid taking an active role, so the level of reflexivity is higher, and he/she has to recognise and perform it. Lastly, due to the anonymity and liberation that the online platforms provide to their users, power relations, inequalities and hierarchies are highlighted and play a significant role in this research. For all these reasons I chose the post-modern paradigm as a theoretical background for my work because it allows me to conduct research in the digital environment, employing new methods, further from the established interpretive ethnographic tools and to reach some conclusions based on relationships, dynamics and interactions expressed online and not just aim for an accurate presentation of the participants’ perspective.

### **3.2 Data Collection & Ethics**

The collection of the data for this qualitative research, had been conducted exclusively online and in an unobtrusive way. Online research based on the collection of “found” data, that

are already transcribed, is easier and quicker to conduct and online forums can function as focus groups where people express their opinions more freely due to the anonymity and lack of physical presence of the researcher (Hine, 2011). The choice of anonymity gives a massive amount of freedom to people to express themselves without fear or boundaries, which is one of the biggest advantages of online research (Kinsley, 2013). Online unobtrusive research is fast and efficient, but it also allows participants from all over the world and different backgrounds and nationalities to be part of it. It offers access to teams of common interests, resulting to empowerment of groups that cannot participate in offline research and can now participate from home (Hewson, 2017).

Before moving to the practical details, it is important to clarify that online research is a legitimate and relevant way to conduct research at the academic level. According to Postill (2016), when you participate in or observe an event remotely, in real time through live streaming, or later through recordings and archived data, you experience all the emotional effects and the sense of immediacy even if you are miles away from a place. He argues that ethnographers who use social media encounters have similar embodied experiences as those who prefer to “be there” in the field. Besides, sometimes it is impossible to be present in the field even if you want or planned to. A lot of researchers had to conduct research through online platforms and media because of natural disasters, political turmoil, military regimes or protests that created a hostile environment, unsuitable for fieldwork. So, it is evident that when you cannot be there, you can still conduct research by “being there” (p. 62). Likewise, when a global crisis demands that you stay home and cancels the whole electronic music industry, you can still conduct research by focusing on the evolution of electronic music culture that is happening on the internet.

According to Murthy (2008), ethnography, even if it is a digital or virtual one, continues to be an ethnography, meaning that the researcher is once again a “storyteller” (p. 838), trying to understand meaning-making through the everyday life of a community and share it with the world. He argues that we cannot ignore that everyday life has become mediated and influenced by the technological evolutions of our time. We cannot ignore that a big part of our communication and interactions take place online, adding new conditions and platforms next to face-to-face communication. The boundaries between virtual and physical are now dynamic and blurry, as social media tend to merge and intertwine our offline and online realities. At the end of it all, people use the internet every day to communicate, express themselves, work, date, gain

knowledge, stream films and music and “if people do it, then that is enough to make it a legitimate focus for ethnography” (Hine, 2016, p. 22).

Online tools offer researchers the chance to use different and innovative methods and maybe even unobtrusive ones, focused on social media. Gray (2016) managed to follow protests in Russia through social media, conducting a type of remote ethnography. She stated that her being there in the field was difficult because of the violent and dangerous environment whereas being then, through live streaming and posts of the participants on various social media platforms allowed her to have a complete overview of the situation from the safety of her house. According to her the online experiences were as forceful and embodied as the physical ones, making online research as important as the offline one. Respectively, Kudaibergenova (2019) used the social media platform of Instagram, hashtags, comments, shared content and stories to see how bodies are presented online in Kazakhstan and Russia. These contemporary and fruitful methods are also used to study issues that are closely connected with music and subcultures, like the electronic music one. Murthy (2010), collected data from discussions, blogs and posts on Facebook, Twitter and Myspace pages in order to study the Taqwacore Muslim punk scene. Brett (2015), on the other hand stayed only in the unobtrusive methods spectrum for his research, by looking into YouTube videos, forums and blogs to find how the fans of the electronic duo Autechre manage to talk, analyze and decipher the techniques and the technology used to produce a track.

Therefore, as a researcher based on this previous evolution and innovation in the field on online social research, I had to make a series of methodological choices in order to structure this specific master thesis, in a suitable and valid way that would provide answers to the research questions. Firstly, a “field” had to be specified; which events would be part of the data collection, why and how. Kinsley (2013) clarified that although in the classic notion of ethnography we can chose a specific community, a village, a space and know exactly what our point of interest is, in the “cyberspace” the scale of our project cannot be easily defined. Global and local, online and offline cannot be separated. The internet is characterized by “fixity and fluidity, and connection and exclusion” (p. 543) creating a hybrid space where numerous people, from different places and time zones, have a role on its formation through various tools and means of communication. After browsing through this cyberspace that hosted a lot of live streamings, it was clear that limitations had to be set to make the thesis focused and feasible. In order to focus my research and at the same time provide more legitimacy and “thickness” to the data collection, I decided to

observe some events conducted by a widely recognized and prominent organization that represents and influences the contemporary electronic music community globally.

My source of data is the Boiler Room. The Boiler Room is a cultural platform that has been live streaming parties and events for ten years now, “connecting club culture to the wider world, on screen and irl [in real life] through parties, film and video” (Boiler Room, n.d.). This platform is already very successful and prestigious; their videos on YouTube – that are archived and can be watched any time after the live streaming – have millions of views, meaning that a lot of people are already engaging with this platform, so a lot of data will be available for my research. Recently, due to the coronavirus crisis they started a new live-streaming series called “Streaming from Isolation” where famous DJs play music sets for 1 or 2 hours from their own homes. While the video is live on YouTube and Facebook, hundreds of people comment and engage in conversations that I am going to observe. After the streaming the video is archived, and you can watch it again and comment, so a new set of data is created in an asynchronous way.

When the online research has to do with social media, like Facebook, YouTube it is important to consider the special characteristics of these platforms and understand how and why they function. Social media do not just reflect what is going on in our real lives, but they do in fact play a significant role in influencing our lifestyles, interpretations and behaviors. They can function either as what Mackenzie called “engines” or “cameras”, meaning that they can cause and shape social changes or monitor and archive social conditions (Mackenzie, 2006, as cited in Innes et al., 2017, p.3). So, it is important to deeply understand how social media, and each separate platform function before starting to conduct any further research. Facebook does it all while YouTube is more concerned with sharing content (Innes et al., 2017).

Boiler Room is live-streaming DJ sets at the same time both on YouTube and on Facebook, so information was collected from both platforms. The Boiler Room “Streaming from Isolation” initiative began on 19/03/2020 as an immediate answer to the quarantine situation. From then and through the whole month of April, 76 videos were streamed by the platform. I decided to use only videos streamed until then because I had to move on the next step of the thesis. If this was not a master thesis but a bigger research project, I would ideally follow the whole initiative until the end, but this is not possible due to time constraints. I used software called Facepager that can download all the comments written underneath a specific post in any social media platform in order to form my data collection. Comments are produced under two

different circumstances: either in real time, while the video is streamed live for the first time and people engage in a live conversation (synchronous) or afterwards, when the video is archived and uploaded and people have the chance to comment whenever they want (asynchronous).

Regarding the Facebook platform, through Facepager I can have access to both synchronous and asynchronous material because everything is saved and archived online. Also, Facebook is the platform that has thousands of comments underneath these livestreams compared to hundreds in the YouTube platform. Unfortunately, the YouTube platform gives you the chance to revisit only asynchronous comments. The live chat of the streaming disappears when the streaming stops. That is why I decided to use Facebook for both synchronous and asynchronous data and YouTube only to add asynchronous comments in order to make my collection wider by including more voices from another platform.

Concerning the quantity of data, more choices had to be made about which and how many comments will be included in the data collection. Miller (2015) used YouTube comments to conduct a research about reactions to the Sandy Hook and Aurora shootings and the hurricane Sandy. He chose four videos: three of them were news reports and one was a song performance from a Sandy Hook memorial on a famous talent show. He justified his choices by arguing that the three news reports were the most viewed videos concerning the issues, making it certain that he reached the wider and most diverse sample as possible. Likewise, Madden, Ruthven and McMenemy (2013) in their online research, chose their videos through the “Most Discussed” section of the YouTube platform in order to obtain videos with a lot of comments. Similarly to Miller, they argue that highly commented videos are more likely to have richer information and various opinions on issues. In order to avoid any questions about bias they tested their classification results to videos with fewer comments and found out that their results were valid in that case too. They collected all the comment for the videos in the same day.

Based on these examples and my research around online methodology, I collected all the videos streamed from Boiler Room on YouTube and on Facebook in the period from March 19 to April 30 and ended up with a list of 76 videos, 41 on Facebook and 35 on YouTube. These 76 videos had 51,576 comments, a number that is way higher than the one that I could handle in the limits of a master thesis. In order to make this number manageable I decided to follow the way that previous researchers did and chose the most highly commented videos of all (Madden et al., 2013; Miller, 2015). So, I narrowed it down to 9 DJ sets or 18 videos streamed both on YouTube



and Facebook. Each of them has more than 1.000 comments on Facebook, more than 100 comments on YouTube and more than 100.000 views both on Facebook and YouTube . These limitations occurred based on the range of comments and views in each platform. These 18 videos have 25,832 comments. That is why I downloaded all these comments in the same date and start my analysis from the first video in a chronological order from the nine, because it would have been uploaded for a longer period and as a result it might have richer reactions from the audience. I stopped after analysing three separate DJ sets in both platforms, meaning the comments underneath six separate videos. I decided to add to the data set, except from the live-streamings, two Facebook posts for each one that announced and promote it on the Boiler Room page. The final data collection includes 6.110 comments that nurtured and constituted the foundation of the analysis.

Before moving to the analysis level though, it is crucial to recognize that the special nature of these platforms raises some special ethical questions concerning the researcher's access and the possible exploitation of these sources. When it comes to social networking media, like Facebook, where people create networks of friends and share moments of their lives, opinions, comments, images, they can be very valuable for a researcher but also demand a lot of attention in their use as data sources. The major ethical problem is the fluid concept of private versus public. Sometimes, even when people are posting their opinions in public forums, which are public by definition, they can also claim to be "tricked" by the researcher because they did not know that their comments are going to be used for research purposes. This is a very fragile issue for online research and the ethnographer must be very careful in order to make sure that his/her considerations of public and private are complying with the considerations of the participants (Kinsley, 2013).

Just like in ethnography conducted in a physical space, online ethnographers have to take into account ethical questions regarding their gaze, discrimination, selectivity (Murthy, 2008). It is not always ethical to use all the data available online, especially for a qualitative study that focuses on a specific group of people. We must always remember that not everyone uses the internet but a specific amount of the world's population. Even from people that have access, a lot of them are passive users that do not engage actively in expressing their opinions and sharing information. Therefore, it is quite hard to locate biases and know the background of the people involved (Hine, 2011). The researcher has less control when it comes to settings and participants

and online communication is generally considered to be unreliable, superficial and easily misinterpreted due to lack of extralinguistic cues (Hewson, 2017). Moreover, the role of the researcher in these cases is even more reflexive and open than in common ethnography and qualitative research because power relations and the tools of communication are changed. Hine (2017) argues that the online ethnographer is always a participant as observer because he/she is obligated to use the same technologies as the participants in order to observe or communicate with them. So, when the researcher reflects on the use of these technologies and his/her own personal experience as an active user that moves through this online field, the research that takes place is always interconnected with the notion of autoethnography. A lot of times autoethnography is considered self-centered and meaningless as it focuses on personal feelings and has nothing to do with findings that can concern a whole community but in this case it is a way to see how someone uses these technologies and moves from an online space to another, how this experience is shaped, how his/her everyday life is influenced.

When it comes to reassuring the ethical legitimacy of this thesis, we must admit that there was no way to inform millions of people for this research, but it is possible to ensure that no one's personality or privacy will be harmed. All of the live streams that were part of the data collection, were conducted in "public" platforms, not even on closed groups that you have to ask for membership to enter, so anyone could watch them and follow the chat and comment below. In order to avoid any ethical concerns and obstacles only such public platforms were used. All the videos and the comments that were collected are public and can be viewed by users even if they do not have an account on YouTube or Facebook. Also, no usernames or personal profiles were collected or used for this research and the only common quality that we know of the people commenting is that they chose to be part of this online experience. Lastly, in order to absolutely protect the anonymity of the commentators, all the references of DJ names in all the comments cited in this thesis are going to be replaced by the phrase "[DJ's name]" and the specific videos that constituted the basis of the data collection will not be disclosed.

### **3.3 Analysis & Reflexivity**

The coding and processing of the 6.110 comments, downloaded from the live streaming videos, was based on thematic analysis. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data" (p.79) and I chose it

because it provides the researcher with the freedom to familiarize, compare and create links inside the data until he or she can conclude in a meaningful and solid set of results, the themes. In their approach of thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke also mention that there are several important decisions that each researcher must make. The first step is choosing between an inductive process, free of previous theories and assumptions or a theoretical thematic analysis. My approach is closer to the theoretical thematic analysis because I am examining a newly emerging practice and I am trying to understand its relationship with previous experiences that researchers had already identified in the past. Therefore, in my effort to decipher and explore the live-streaming world, I always have in mind previous findings that have to do with the somatic club experience as we knew it before COVID-19. However, while going through the data set, as a researcher I remained open to new findings that are not connected with any experience or theory established in the past, so inductive elements were also present in my process, but on a secondary level. The second choice is related to the semantic approach, that produces more explicit and descriptive reports, versus the latent approach, that tries to reach beyond the surface and locate ideas, thoughts and meanings. I followed a more latent approach as I tried to escape from superficially listing a set of codes but moved on to actively interpret my data set in order to understand sentiments, beliefs, experiences expressed with short and quick comments.

Moving to the practical aspect of thematic analysis, I followed once again the steps provided by Braun & Clarke (2006). I started by going through the data set multiple times to familiarize with it and then I moved to the phase of initial coding of “interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set” (p.87). Through my initial coding, I gathered valuable information and I started thinking of possible themes even before going through the whole set, as a lot of codes kept appearing again and again. Afterwards, I moved to the theme searching phase, that demanded a lot of thinking and patience because I had to make a lot of different connections and groupings until I reached a theme scheme that expressed the data set and provides valid and valuable information. In my first effort, I tried to base the themes on results concerning the coronavirus and expression of positive or negative feelings, but because this scheme was quite superficial and descriptive I continued looking to identify solid themes by searching again through my initial codes. Finally, I came to the realization that I should form two wide categories - new experiences and new relationships - and then work on sub-themes that will provide answers to my research questions. It is important to mention that the themes were formed

in relation to the research question and were not based on quantity but on quality. If an element is mentioned a lot of times it does not mean it has to be recognized as a theme, if it is irrelevant (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Especially in my data collection that consists of unfiltered comments that people write anonymously on public forums, some comments did not really provide and relevant information, even if they were numerous. For example, over 400 comments were from people that wanted to know the names of the tracks played on the DJ set, but it was pointless to create a theme based on this information.

The last issue that should be discussed before presenting and analysing the findings, is the issue of reflexivity. As much as we researchers strive to be careful and objective, we know that precision is an illusion because the whole project is born through the researcher's point of view and perception (Fine, 1993). That is why I am willing to be reflexive and honest about my position, as a 27-year-old, Greek, working-class, cisgender female, student undertaking a Master's degree on Arts, Culture and Society that often enjoys being part of club culture. All these qualities will possibly affect the way I read, perceive, compare, contrast and interpreted the data that I collected. It is important to keep in mind that from choosing a theme until publishing a paper, every researcher makes a series of choices that shape and guide his/her work and he/she can never be completely absent or objective no matter his/her aspirations. When we collect, code and interpret data, we always have an active role in order to identify themes and patterns. Braun & Clarke (2006) explain that the themes are not there for a researcher to discover them, but they are created through a process of familiarization and interpretation that is clearly influenced by the researcher him/herself. In this project, I had to make a lot of crucial decisions that led to this structure and content and left other questions, views, approaches and information outside of it. Reflexivity is the notion that allows researchers to "admit" and highlight their choices and active role in the process, in order to act as a "guard against hypodermic realism" (May & Perry, 2011, p. 2), meaning the superficial perception that one scholar can learn, represent and explain "the real world".

## 4. RESULTS

By using thematic analysis, I was able to conclude in identifying four different themes that can be separated into two wider thematic umbrellas, that of experience and that of relationships. The fact that I was working with thousands of online comments from social media platforms, was fruitful and challenging at the same time. The language used is usually specialized and difficult to understand, the writing style is completely informal and sometimes completely absent and there are no thick descriptions, long answers or specific discussions on a topic. However, after careful consideration and a lot of back and forth between the data collection and the literature that constituted the foundation of this research, I managed to conclude in some findings that will somewhat answer the research question but will also create new ones and start a conversation around the new nature of club culture and the online environment in general. Starting from the new clubbing experience, I will talk about a new, hybrid phenomenon that I call “couch raving”, concerning the way people still manage to enjoy themselves while staying at home, by participating in these online events and reliving moments of effervescence. Then, I will explain how these events can have beneficial effect on peoples’ mental health and function as a remedy and a healing mechanism during a time of strict measures and pressure. Finally, I will move to the relationship aspect and I will point out differences and new dynamics created both between the audience and the DJ and among the participants too. I will try to conclude the results presentation by going back to the theoretical framework of this thesis and testing if the theories used about club culture in the past can still be valid in the case of the online present.

### 4.1. New clubbing experiences

The first two findings of this research have to do with the experience of club culture and how it was transformed after its mass conversion, from the nightclub to the internet. First, we will see how the electronic music audience has found ways and means to be active even during the lockdown and then we will discuss a new aspect of clubbing related to dealing with the effects of the coronavirus crisis on our mental health.

#### 4.1.1 Couch Raving

The most evident finding that came up, even from the initial coding of the data collection, is that in spite of the stressful and unsettling reality that people experience they still maintain a

positive attitude when it comes to electronic music culture, followed by expressions of positive feelings and states of enjoyment, excitement, gratitude and satisfaction. The vast majority of people commenting under the live-streamings assumed a positive attitude towards the initiative and this new alternative club culture and the minor negative expressions had to do mainly with dislikes concerning music genres, track selections or the DJ's style. Although, this new online clubbing experience has a lot of differences compare to the pro-coronavirus era, as we have mentioned before, the reaction and perception of the audience towards it seems to be very similar to their attitude towards traditional clubbing. It was quiet a paradox to observe hundreds of party related comments from people that were isolated in their apartments and houses, raising questions about if these comments were expressions of feelings created through the live streaming process or pre-acquired perceptions of club culture, cultivated through past experiences, that re-surfaced now in a similar but simultaneously completely different condition. Nevertheless, it is undisputable that people approached this change with positivity and openness and expressed their need to continue partying and enjoying electronic music, in a new way that a user called "couch raving" (commentator 1).

This new "couch raving" experience has lot of common characteristics with the old clubbing experience, but they are formed and/or manifested in a different way. The first angle that we need to examine is that of the role of the body. All the previous researchers talked about the creation of a spiritual awakening through the embodied action (Rietveld, 2003) and the dissolution of identity that leads to alternation of perception once again through collective somatic liberation and expression (Rill, 2010), but in this case the participant's bodies function in a different way and are not the central point of the experience. On the contrary, bodies are now extremely limited in a confined space and above all isolated from other bodies because of the coronavirus spread that turned physical contact to a forbidden practice. However, even though limited, bodies are not muted. Through the live-streaming process, people are still using their senses – starting with vision and hearing - to be part of the online experience and according to their comments a lot of times they still succumb to the urge to express their excitement through their bodies and through dancing, even though they are alone. For example, a user wrote "around 16:00 something kicked into high gear I'm straight up dancing" (commentator 2), arguing that "something", a force he/she cannot specify, made him/her dance. Others attribute their desire to dance to the DJ's skills ("Damn gurl, you make me want to shimmy!" (commentator 3), "I'm

normally a techno girl. But this made me move <3” (commentator 4)) and encourage others to dance (“Dance like 163,000 people are watching” (commentator 5), “Oohhh...get up & groove!!🔥” (commentator 6)).

Apart from dancing, people engage in other activities that activate their body too, in a way that is not often associated with this culture. A lot of people describe listening to these DJ sets while cooking, preparing dinner with their children, working, studying and gaming, combining electronic music not only with dancing and partying but also with domestic activities. Sometimes though, the standardized perception of club culture connected with having fun and disconnecting from your daily obligations (Riley et al., 2010) prevails and you cannot really focus on your everyday duties. For instance, a user wrote his own experience of that phenomenon: “I put this mix on as background noise while I was studying...Now I’m sipping on my beer and pulling on my joint out in the garden, in the sun. Ffs [DJ’s name].” (commentator 7), describing how he ignored his/her studying and preferred to consume alcohol and cannabis and enjoy the DJ set. Incidentally, people are talking about consuming alcohol and drugs frequently under these live-streamings, and in a humorous way “pretend” like they are attending a real-life party. Snippets like “going to store now guys. grab a beer anyone?” (commentator 8), “Did the pills just kick in?” (commentator 9) or “Person with a liquid is here. We can start.” (commentator 10) are references to the ritual of buying and consuming substances in the parties and people are using them in an online conversation to remember old times and probably mock the situation under which they are living now. In a way, the new online alternative of the clubbing experience is welcomed by its audience, but they seem to try and re-connect with the old, familiar version. They still want to dance and consume drugs, even though they are alone in their houses, creating what we will call from now on, in this thesis, the phenomenon of “couch raving”.

While trying to delve into and compartmentalize the “couch raving” phenomenon, we see that it comprises basic elements of the standard clubbing experience, which are somewhat altered, transformed or renegotiated. The first and more holistic element that is still existing in this online version of clubbing, is the widespread feeling of effervescence and satisfaction. Up until now club culture has been connected with feelings of collective euphoria (Malbon, 1999) and descriptions of states of liberation and release (St. John, 2017). Through the analysis of people’s reactions, we can understand that the euphoric feelings and a state of release, excitement and enjoyment still exist, but the collective aspect is transformed. The expressions of positive feelings

vary from clear declarations: “The best thing that happend to me today!!!🔥🔥🔥” (commentator 11), “That was unbelievably epic” (commentator 12), to impulsive, enthusiastic reactions like “Oh yes Oh yes” (commentator 13), “aaayyyeeyeee” (commentator 14), “the best omg wow omg waw this is amazing omg waw” (commentator 15), or “ohhhhhohooooooooooooo mamma”(commentator 16). The fact that most of these positive comments that express people’s state of happiness and satisfaction have the form of onomatopoeia, trying to write down a sound, a scream or expression denoting pleasure, hints once again that people use this new online alternative not yet independently from their previous offline experiences. In short, it seems that because they cannot scream in ecstasy in a club, they express their excitement using the same vocabulary – “Yay!” (commentator 17), “yaay” (commentator 18), “Yeee” (commentator 19), “whooooooooo” (commentator 20) - through a different outlet.

Looking back to the literature review, we know that two of the main elements that create this euphoric state are the peak experience, as a moment when the self disappears to become one entity with the surroundings, and through embodied action gives birth to a spiritual experience (Rietveld, 2003) and the vibe, as the positive energy communicated through people and expressed through their bodies (Rill, 2010). Both these notions appear in the online version of club culture but do not carry exactly all their old characteristics. Concerning the peak experience, we can argue that it still exists because people describe feelings off agony and building up tension until a specific moment where emotions and pleasure intensifies. Users expressed the evolving intensity with phrases like “waiting anxious for the last track!!” (commentator 21) or “😊😊 \*anticipation intensifies\*” (commentator 22) and in various instances talked about specific moments, when their experience culminated, that could be considered as moments of peak experience. To do this they use clickable timestamps, meaning that they write down the exact time of a specific moment and when you click on it you are immediately redirected to this moment. For example someone wrote “38:10 makes me feel whole ❤️” (commentator 23) sharing feelings of reassurance and security, while others preferred more enthusiastic approaches like “27:55 is pure madness” (commentator 24), “Rave start on 51:10” (commentator 25) referring to a moment, different and personal to each one of them, that marks the climax of their experience. What we observe here though, is that the new peak experience is unique for each individual that took part in the online event. Looking through the comments you can rarely see two different users that mention the same exact moment of the DJ set. On the contrary, the peak



experience produced in a nightclub, according to scholars like Rietveld (2003), is a collective process, as it demands a synchronized movement from the participants that will eventually lead through the merging of self and environment, to a spiritual elevation. During a time of isolation, it is practically impossible to achieve such a collective experience but as we can see the smaller and personal peak experiences do emerge and may or may not be able to replace the collective one. This is something that we still cannot identify because this phenomenon of the online alternative is still new and understudied and I believe that its influence on our perception, emotion and the gravitas of this experience will appear later. For now, it is important to take into consideration that personal peak experiences do emerge and the online alternative tends to create relevant but not identical emotional states and continue monitoring the phenomenon to see if a new collective peak experience could be achieved.

The second notion that we can locate in the “couch raving” experience, is the notion of the vibe. Rill (2010), made it clear that the vibe is always somatic and expressed through the bodies. I have pointed out earlier that the body is still part of the online experience, although isolated, but there are not enough indications to prove that the somatic action is so intense that can create the “vibe” and furthermore a collective version of it. However, people chose to mention the vibe again and again in their comments and refer to it not so much as a collective sense of euphoria but as a positive attitude created through listening to this music. There are a lot of cases where people explicitly mention the vibe: “:) good vibes” (commentator 26), “Feelin that vibe 🔊🔥🔊🔥🔊🔥” (commentator 27) or cases where people talk about some positive energy: “Love it! Sending positive vibes to everyone 😊” (commentator 28), “This set filled my soul with positive energy” (commentator 29). The meaning of the vibe in this case is that of positivity shared through users who are watching and listening to this DJ set. A lot of them are sending their positive energy to the whole group, while other receive it by listening to music and communicating with other people. Once again, the collective and somatic character of these notions move to the background, but this does not mean that the notions themselves cease to exist. They are just transformed and continue to emerge, but they are now intimate, personal experiences that are shared through online platforms. The collective aspect is formed by their quantity and not through the ritual of marginalization, that Gauthier (2017) defines as listening to the same music, dancing in synch with others and becoming one with the crowd.

#### 4.1.2 The Healing Effect

Aiming to define the new electronic music ritual of couch raving we can claim that it is, at the same time, similar and different from what we knew before the coronavirus crisis.

Nevertheless, this new online club experience has multiple aspects and couch raving is only one of them. There is one new, special segment of this experience that is closely intertwined with the new, special conditions that appeared as an answer to the pandemic. We must always keep in mind the magnitude, severity and enormous global influence of the coronavirus crisis that changed what we perceive as normality in our era and assume that no cultural product or social activity could remain indifferent towards such a huge, historical shift. As expected, the conversations of the various users that chose to participate in these online events, could not be limited in talking about club culture and ignore the coronavirus crisis. Not only did they not ignore the issue, but users have turned these live-streaming platforms to outlets through which they communicate their sentiments, fears, agonies, hopes and wishes related to the coronavirus. Talking, asking and sharing their thoughts about this urgent and stressful issue seems to function as momentary relief and catharsis, in various ways that we will explore further.

The first, most immediate and obvious message shared through these live-streamings, concerning the coronavirus, is the broadcasting of the “staying safe” message. This message, used by people, organizations, governments and the media constantly until today, urges everyone to take responsibility, follow the regulations and protect him/herself from the coronavirus spread. In fact, the World Health Organization presents the “stay safe” strategy as a solution against the deadly virus on their website and public instructions (WHO, 2020). Under the Boiler Room videos, the “stay safe” message is not transmitted by an official institution but people put great effort to spread it and most of all ask fellow citizens to obey and follow the official instructions, while at the same time entertain themselves by the safety of their own homes. “Good stuff! Stay safe people, but keep on dancing!” (commentator 30), “Thank you so much!! Everyone stay safe and healthy!!” (commentator 31), “legendary! Keeping it real, loving the tunes, thank you :D :D :D Stay safe, stay indoors.” (commentator 32), are just some of the quotes that urge co-citizens to follow the lockdown rules but not forget to have fun. There is an evident climate of positivity, hope and collective effort to fight a common enemy, by staying safe for our own and the common good.

Through a meticulous revisit of the quotes related to COVID-19, we can see that people want to stay safe indeed, but they also want to protect their mental health, by encouraging other people and themselves to not succumb to the loneliness of the quarantine and use initiatives like “Streaming from Isolation” to entertain themselves. As mentioned previously, studies conducted in China and Hong Cong have shown that the depression and anxiety levels have increased alarmingly (Choi et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020) and online entertainment and communication was one of the main tools that helped people regain a positive attitude and survive this stressful period (Xiao et al., 2020). This claim is confirmed by this research too, as a lot of users felt the need to describe a change in their mental state that shifted from negativity to joy and revitalization. Some indicative examples are: “Thank you very much for this set, this are the only time of the day that I feel some real emotions<3” (commentator 33), “Very refreshing in this shitty times..👉😂”, (commentator 34), “u completely changed my mood! So much energy!” (commentator 35), “He has come like a shining light in our darkest hour :O” (commentator 36). These online gatherings that offer people the chance to enjoy music and communicate, are elements that break the monotony and this lurking fear of a possible catastrophe, by proving that we can still have fun and enjoy ourselves. This positivity booster, allows people to even make fun of their situation, asking DJs to terminate the virus – “Go [DJ’s name]! Kill that virus 🚀❤️” (commentator 37) – and declaring that these DJ sets make coronavirus seem like a good thing – “This set is so beautiful I’m actually happy to be in isolation 😊” (commentator 38), “Corona Virus: Con: U can’t go outside Pro: [DJ’s name] Set <3” (commentator 39). On the other hand, there were of course people that did not approach this initiative as an uplifting chance but chose to express their discomfort and pessimism. Some talked about the difficulties of living in quarantine – “Lockdown in Paris is driving me crazy” (commentator 40) -, while others expressed their fear of the coronavirus consequences – “Happy Quarantine days guys 🏠 if you are reading this (its really end of the world guys) 😊” (commentator 41), F\*\*king sick. people are dieing around us all over the world” (commentator 42).

By dwelling on the psychological consequences of the pandemic and how they are expressed and dealt through such online initiatives, we can move on to identify a lot of emotional states, like hopefulness, seeking relief and security, expression of gratitude and of course desperation and fear. It is intriguing that numerous people chose to describe these live-streamings

as something they “needed”: “I needed this so badly” (commentator 43), “exactly what i needed today” (assessed 12 May 2020), “Just what I needed to lift the spirits 🍷” (commentator 44), “This is just what I needed now ..” (commentator 45) and the list goes on and on with more and more people expressing the same feeling. Needing something, means that it is a necessity, something that is lacking and you have to require it (Geddes & Grosset (Firm), 2008) and the fact that people chose to use this word, is not random because it happened in numerous cases. Living under the quarantine state, people were forced to adopt in a new reality, structured by endless boundaries and rules, so fast that it is reasonable to feel limited and deprived of their positivity and happiness. So, these online alternatives, although not identical to past experiences, come to function as temporary solutions that provide relief and security to people, by entertaining them and offering them the chance to feel and experience events that they miss. That is why a lot of them feel thankful towards Boiler Room and the DJs for helping them through the quarantine period. People show a lot of respect and gratitude to the Boiler Room organization with comments like “great music for those complicated times, thanks TBM” (commentator 46) or in a more personal way like “thank you for quarantine with me...” (commentator 47) or “this is the highlight of my week, thank you thank you thank you” (commentator 48). It is very common and profound through the whole data set that people who engaged in this online activity, benefited from feelings of joy, renewal and satisfaction of their needs, which is why feelings of gratitude were born towards the Boiler Room organization.

All in all, we can argue that this new online substitute of the clubbing experience played a significant role in maintaining and safeguarding people’s mental health and in helping them find positivity in their lives again, either through communicating and talking about their distress or by dancing and having fun again. This beneficial effect of club culture in the participants’ mental state is not something newly identified but it has already been examined in previous research. St. John (2017), argued that one of the basic qualities that make club culture special is that people who attend parties leave behind all the burden of modern life and reach a state of liberation. Additionally, Hutson (2000) in his inquiry concerning the rave experiences, talked about the process of the spiritual healing as an ecstatic moment that occurs after hours of dancing and generates happiness, confidence and calm to people that participate to these parties. This healing effect is evident in our case too, with numerous people describing their own healing experiences and changes in their mood that allowed them to be happy, calm and hopeful again. Moreover, a

lot of them, in an effort to explain this healing effect, argued figuratively that these live-streamings take on the role of the remedy against coronavirus. “This set cures any disease. 🙏😊” (commentator 49), “This set kills any coronavirus.” (commentator 50), “This set will surely drive the virus away! 🙏🙏🙏👍👍👍” (commentator 51), “The tracklist could be a vaccine for me.” (commentator 52) are only a few of the comments that impart healing abilities to the electronic music itself and express the change in people’s mindset that begin to feel hopeful and optimistic again towards the pandemic.

## **4.2 New clubbing relationships**

After delving onto the new experiences, it is essential to move on into identifying the new relationships that were developed after the online transformation of club culture. From the literature review, we understood that the concepts of solidarity and community are very important elements of this culture (Riley et al., 2010; St. John, 2001) and it makes sense to see how and if they continue to exist. The conclusions that this research allows us to reach have to do with both the relationship between the audience and the DJ but also with the bonds created among the users themselves.

### **4.2.1 The DJ is one of us**

The role of the DJ is one of the most significant in the community of club culture, because he/she is the one that creates the sound environment that guides people to their peak experience, spiritual awakening and liberation of their everyday lives. The DJ takes on the role of the priest (Brewster & Broughton, 2014) or shaman (St. John, 2017) that stands separate from the party crowd in order to preside and enhance their experience with his music selections. This relationship of the techno-shaman/priest and the “faithful” that dance to the rhythm is evident to anyone that walks into a club as the DJ stands alone, always in a personal space, a stage, sometimes in a higher level from the rest of the people that are free to roam through the rest of the nightclub but not inside the DJ booth. Now that nightclubs are a memory until further notice, and the online alternatives are the only available solution, this relationship is also altered, and the audience is aware of that too. “These new sets can get way more personal with the dj! leaving the rave feeling to a bit more 'music' oriented. love this!!” (commentator 53), a user wrote, establishing the turn from the traditional rave to the new relationships of the online rituals.

A key comment that allowed us to understand these changes better was: “Something about seeing producers in their homes is immensely comforting to me..” (commentator 54). One of the fundamental and most influential transformations that took place has to do with space. The nightclub has been replaced from the DJ’s and our own home, connected by the world wide web. The users can participate by watching, listening and commenting on an online platform but the DJs are more exposed because they are responsible for the sets but at the same time, we can see them playing music in their own houses. In a way, we are virtually allowed to enter their homes, and this changes the balance in the relationship between DJ and audience that existed before. The factor that gives birth to this change is the access that we gain into their personal space and their lifestyle, for as long as a DJ set lasts, and that is approximately two hours. Inside the limited space of the nightclub, that is enhanced with lighting and other visual elements in order to shape the ecstatic experience (Hutson, 2000), the participant is entering a state of flow, and he/she is completely focused on the challenging experience of a party (Malbon, 1999). In the live-streaming, people are watching from their homes and they are not influenced by their environment in such a way to be fully immersed in the experience. On the contrary, they seem to dedicate a lot of time searching and talking about the DJ’s homes. They make compliments about the interior design – “Cool place” (assessed 12 May 2020), “nice room!” (commentator 55), asking for advice or objects that they liked – “Wow!! Love that picture in the background!!! Where is it from?????” (commentator 56), “What book is that pink blob on the left from!” (commentator 57), pointing out problems in the room, using a play on words, also commenting on the cooking activities – “Sorry to say... I think you have a leek in your kitchen” (commentator 58) or compare DJ’s houses to see who has the best taste – “keen to se her home setup compared to John Digweed who did a home stream last Friday” (commentator 59). Either they chose to comment, ask, critique or make fan of the interior it appears to be a point of interest for the audience that has access and a lot of opinions about the DJ’s space.

This intriguing interest does not stop in examining DJs’ space but moves on to the DJs’ lifestyle choices that people can grasp by watching them for these short amounts of time. For example, in one of the three videos, a female DJ chose to broadcast her set from her kitchen and while she was mixing, her partner came up on the background and started cooking. This level of access to her personal life caused a huge series of comments like “What’s cooking? I expect some cuisine coming out of the kitchen soon? 🍷” (commentator 60), “what was for dinner I

need to know” (commentator 61) or “I love your hubby just chilling food doing his preparation” (commentator 62). In the second video of a female DJ, people were mainly focused on her smoking habits, calling her “our tobacco queen <3” (commentator 63) and complementing her for her rolling skills (“name a better dj that can roll tobacco & spin at the same time” (commentator 64)). Generally, people quickly lost focus from the music and took the liberty to comment on any aspect of the DJ’s behaviour and space and acted like watching reality TV. Previous research on reality TV shows have shown that people consider this type of programmes as part of their habitual entertainment and appreciate that they get to watch real people, acting and talking without scripts. Fewer of them decided to watch them hoping to have access to secret and intimate moments of other people’s lives (Nabi et al., 2003; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Knowing that people find it entertaining to observe other people’s actions and lifestyles through their TV screen, this enthusiastic interest towards DJ’s homes and behaviours is somewhat explained.

Moving on from the content to the attitude and intention behind the comments related to the DJs, we can distinguish two different trends. On the one hand, we have impersonal, distanced comments with intention mostly to critique the DJ’s technique and skills and on the other hand we have comments that express a false level of familiarity and tend to get a lot personal, sometimes even inappropriate or reach the level of gossiping about the DJ. In the first category, people are talking mainly with each other, asking questions about the equipment (“anyone know what mixer she is using ?” (commentator 65)) or expressing opinions about the quality of the set, like “best streaming from isolation for sure! outstanding as always. every single track is a real gem.” (commentator 66) or “There has some terrible "djing" videos posted but this is in top 3 worst 🙄” (commentator 67). Like any real-life event there were people who enjoyed and people who were bored or disliked it, but everyone had the chance to speak his/her mind due to the online nature and format of the event.

Regarding the second category, we can locate various comments in a scale between extremely passionate, positive comments and insulting, almost condemnable ones. On the positive edge one can come across enthusiastic, loving expressions of praise like “YOU ARE A QUEEEEEEN” (commentator 68) or “The Current and Undeniable Goddess Of House Music 😊👏” (commentator 69) and also rampant declarations like “no other dj I’d prefer for the end of the world” (commentator 70) or “I wish my mom was as cool as [DJ’s name]” (commentator 71).

These intense expressions of love and praise towards the DJ are behaviours that are not usually observed in an offline environment, amongst people that do not know each other. On the contrary, the online environment is completely different because the users based on their anonymity, feel the liberty and the security to express themselves without boundaries and without fear of any consequences (Kinsley, 2013). This condition of anonymity provides rich data for a research like that, but it is evident that a lot of people abuse their online liberties and cross the line by writing insulting, indiscreet, intolerable comments.

For starters, most of the people who decided to share their dislike, used swearing, harsh language, like “Garbage.” (commentator 72), “Awful” (commentator 73) or more elaborate sarcastic statements like “This is horrible lol she should practice social distancing from those turntables” (commentator 74) and “Watch her rolling a cigarette and drinking a beer and pretending she's making music” (commentator 75). In fact, the female DJ smoking in the second video of this thesis’ data collection, constituted one of the main issues of discussion and debate among the audience. The users who watched this broadcast thought that they should protect and scold the DJ for her habits – “stop smoking!” (commentator 76) – an ask her if she is consuming drugs – “Please tell me that's a spliff” (commentator 77), “jazz or normal ciggie ?” (commentator 78). The indiscreet, personal interventions continued in all the videos, concerning various traits of the DJs like: “is she italian?” (commentator 79), “whats her zodiac sign????” (commentator 80), “It’s she classed as self employed?” (commentator 81) and “your room is so dirty.” (commentator 82). These comments validate the claim that the hierarchical and distanced relationship between DJ and audience has been deconstructed. The audience has an unprecedented power to express their opinion in real time and without a lot of filters and consequences. On the one hand, this new relationship reduces the authority of one side and increases the influence of the other, creating a more equal, liberated, rejuvenated club culture. However, it creates a lot of new questions about the level of access and freedom that is provided to the way people express their opinions that can easily be derailed and cause the opposite effect, such as hate speech, insulting language and racist or sexist outbursts.

This issue of boundaries in the online world is very recent and clear answers have not been yet provided. Through this research though, we can make another valuable observation regarding the issue of insulting behaviours online. It is overwhelmingly clear that most of the insulting comments and those with the most offensive language are observed in the videos that



the DJ was female. People commented about the female DJs' bodies and appearance and made fun of them with comments like "Chubby [DJ's name]" (commentator 83), "She needs to eat veggies" (commentator 84) and "She has gained weight. But the music is cool." (commentator 85). Other chose to talk about them as sexual objects, although they were female professionals working at the moment, and used expressions like "Wish u was in bra and panties djing" (commentator 86), "she is one hot woman..." (commentator 87) and other more explicit ones. Moreover, there were cases where users chose to compare these two female DJs with other women from the electronic music scene and decide who is better: "Amélie Lens imitation 🤩" (commentator 88), "PLEASE STOP ACTING LIKE NINA KRAVIZ... IT'S AWFUL. YOU ARE A TRUE TALENTED ARTIST." (commentator 89). This kind of negative and unsolicited comments were absent from the male DJ's live streaming. So, based on these data we can identify that there are indeed indications of hostile, insulting, sexist, discriminating behaviour online and inside the context of club culture. We are not able to conclude in solid results because this was not the scope and main question of this research, but we can claim that this is an issue that should at least be taken into consideration for further research about club culture, gender bias and inequality.

#### **4.2.2 Online anonymous solidarity**

In the last section of this thesis' results, we will focus on a concept inextricably linked to club culture, the concept of community and solidarity. Looking back to the history of club culture we can see that it has functioned as a shelter for marginalized social groups, people that lived through social and economic disasters and people that searched for new beginnings and revolutionary ideas (Beate, 2014; Gook, 2016; Moreno, 2014; Rietveld, 1998). All these individuals who took refuge in the nightclubs, wanted to become members of a community. Thus, the social dimension, the bonds and the solidarity fostered between the members of this culture, form some of its most significant building blocks. Consequently, we wonder if this important feature of club culture can survive and be equally powerful in a new digital environment, with completely different rules and conditions. As argued above, the club culture community is now global, open and online so the experience and hierarchy within this boundaryless community has changed too, compared to the past. Now, we need to conclude by examining what effect these changes have had on the community building and the feelings of solidarity between participants.

Moving through the thousands of comments of the data set, we can identify a strong need and effort for socialization, that is possibly linked to the fact that people in most countries that were affected by the coronavirus, were living under austere measures of confinement inside their houses. The first and most obvious effort for socialization is the action of “mentioning” a friend or more in your comments. By typing @ plus the name of your friend on a comment under the video, he or she will be redirected to the video by clicking on the related notification. Up until now there was no specific reference to the quantity of types of comments because this is a qualitative research based on the analysis and interpretation of online comments and not a quantitative one that uses statistics to conclude in some results. However, in this case of mentioning friends it is interesting to take into consideration the quantity aspect because 38,8% of the comments inside the whole dataset included a mention of another user and this is such a high frequency that we cannot ignore it. It is a solid indicator of people’s need to share this experience with others, spread the word about the initiative and allow their online community to grow. Most of the times users mention their friends without leaving any further message but in some cases, they ask their friends to join the virtual party and do something together, even if they are not in the same space. Some examples of this kind of invitations are: “tuuune in from the living room maaaate” (commentator 90), “the house rave you requested” (commentator 91) or “we have plans tomorrow now” (commentator 92), followed by the name of one or more friends. The efforts for socialization though are not limited on inviting your friends to join you in the live-streaming and creating small groups of people that watch the event at the same time, but it has also an extrovert approach, when people decide to “talk” to all the other strangers that participate too. A lot of users try to start conversations by stating their location and greeting other users, like: “Hello from Perú” (commentator 93), “Hi from Slovakia ❤️” (commentator 94), “Hello from Greece” (commentator 95), “London Town listening” (commentator 96), “Hello from Baltimore, Maryland USA. Thanks for what you are doing.” (commentator 97) and many more examples that demonstrate the global reach of the initiative and the need that users have to communicate, talk and be active and present in this experience.

Nevertheless, the fact that people use this platform for communication and socialization, is not enough to prove that solidarity still exists. We can locate distinct expressions of solidarity though in the cases where users express concern, interest for the others, gratitude for the community and hope for the future. The sense of community is evident in comments like: “Thnx

[DJ's name] and Boliler room now i feel happy. Luxury traks and mix” (commentator 98), “Thxxx mate this is really cheering my day at work ♡ Thanks to all the djs that have been producing and mixing for us on the field ♡♡♡” (commentator 99) or “Thank you for the set and positive vibe [DJ's name]. We all need the music for our minds and soul especially now. Stay safe everybody. We are all one.” (commentator 100), and many more, where people speak like they belong to a collective that supports and helps them through this difficult time. A lot of them show their respect and gratitude to the organisation behind the initiative, the Boiler Room, with comments like “I knew BR would come through to stream sets around the world. Already been throwing family dance parties every night since we've been in lockdown with their help!” (commentator 101) and prove their solidarity in action by donating money through the Boiler Room initiative to other organizations that help people affected by the coronavirus or health organizations. Furthermore, there is an ubiquitous feeling of love and positivity flowing from the comments, in an explicit – “LOOOOOOOVEEEEE ONLY” (commentator 102), “❤️” (commentator 103) – or implicit way – “No virus or laws can stop us doing what we do 🗣️” (commentator 104) – that strengthens the sense of solidarity and community building trough this online experience. Of course, these expressions of solidarity are possibly connected with previous experiences and bonds and perceptions created about club culture before the coronavirus, but either way we can argue that they continue to exist and evolve in the online environment.

Now that we have established that solidarity is present inside this global, online, boundaryless new electronic music community, it is time to clarify, in a level that the depth and length of this thesis allows us, which theories could be valid for the online alternative. Arguing for a community of this size, that could possibly consist of anyone having access on the Internet in the whole world, without having in depth conversations with the participants but only access to spontaneous comments that they write online, can be challenging because the findings are not obvious and we cannot conclude in specific, focused results. However, in the issue of solidarity, by comparing previous theories with the information that these comments provide, we can make a primary claim about which theories might or might not be valid for our case.

Starting from the notion of spontaneous *communitas* that has been closely linked to club culture by academics like St. John (2006), we can locate several common elements with the online solidarity but there are some differences that question the validity of this theory online. According to Olaveson (2001), spontaneous *communitas* emerge when people, liberated from any

judgment, consciously share something meaningful and are led to a personal transformation through this collective process, that somehow subverts social order. In the case of online club culture, we cannot argue that people consciously share this experience because everyone is isolated in his/her own space and they just watch the same live-streaming at the same time, without choosing or perceiving the fact that this is a collective activity. Also, the subversion of the norm is not evident in the same nature as it was in the nightclubs or the rave parties, as we cannot identify any significant questioning of society or letting go of identities, status and everyday roles. On the other hand, we can claim that another type of subversion takes place, as online electronic music events are themselves a subversion of club culture's norm up until now and additionally we see that people who are forced to stay inside their houses and away from each other find ways to subvert this condition and socialize through these online events. Moving on, we cannot claim that the online club culture has the characteristics of a heterotopia.

Heterotopia, according to St. John (2001), is a notion rooted to a specific place, that has specific function and boundaries and in which forbidden activities take place. This was a characteristic of various nightclubs but cannot be applicable in the case of an online platform that is open to everyone and follows certain rules and policies dictated by the companies that manage them and the national and international law. This new version of club culture is not exclusive, underground and selective, as the old one used to be. On the contrary, it is open to anyone, regardless to his/her level of commitment, engagement or conscious participation, and it is public, meaning that it cannot have a deviant or mysterious, rejecting of society's rules character anymore and that is why it cannot be described neither as heterotopia or spontaneous communitas.

The concept that mostly coordinates with the characteristics identified in the data set, is that of the neo-tribe. We have already explained that neo-tribes are temporary communities, with no organised stance towards socio-political issues but they are indeed political because they foster the creation of solidarity through entertainment and temporary individual satisfaction (Riley et al., 2010). Kavanagh and Anderson (2008), stated that solidarity inside a neo-tribe is not based on a conscious decision, a protest or an effort to question modern societies but on pleasure and shared experiences. In the club culture case, they located two kinds of solidarity the social and behavioural. The first one is based on interaction and active participation, while the other one in the process of sharing the same activities. When it comes to online culture, we can locate social solidarity too, as analysed earlier in this section, when people try to connect with

friends or communicate with other unknown users, share their feelings, opinions and a common healing effect. Furthermore, we can also detect the emergence of behavioural solidarity, even though participants are not dancing in synch, stay awake all night or consume drugs together, they still share the same process. They have to open the outlet of their choice, open a web browser, type the website or click a link, find the live-streaming and watch it at the same time and following the same steps as everyone else in the world.

Most of all, the fact that connects neo-tribes with online club culture is the importance of the temporary satisfaction and pleasure of the individual, that could multiply amongst various individuals at the same time, and become a shared state, creating solidarity. This characteristic of neo-tribes allows them to exist in a digital environment, and amongst users that are alone and separated physically but together too, through their actions and active participation. Also, both in neo-tribes and online club culture there is a state of openness and escapism that later leads to a political impact, without it being a goal of the community. There is a thin line that differentiates all these concepts from one another and has to do mainly with the way solidarity is created through them. *Communitas*, heterotopias and also collective effervescence demand a greater state of conscious collective participation, while neo-tribes are more focused on individual entertainment and shared experiences. Olaveson (2001) makes it clear by interpreting Durkheim's writings, that collective effervescence cannot be achieved by any crowd without dedication, focus and conscious participation. However, he argues that collective effervescence emerges especially in times of crisis, like the pandemic that we are going through now, when people seek companionship and chose to live normality behind and search for a much-needed sense of belonging and solidarity. At many points in this analysis, the issue of the need for communication, understanding, healing and escape is constantly raised and is often accompanied by expressions of hope, relief and satisfaction. This process is very similar to the way that collective effervescence is created according to Olaveson, but we should renegotiate what collective means. All these past theories used for club culture have a level of connection with our new realities and could all offer a valuable scope if we adapt them to the online world. Starting from the neo-tribes that have more distinct similarities with the online rituals, we can move to talk about online *communitas* or digital heterotopias, where collectivity and conscious participation would have a similar but altered definition to be able to grasp and match to the online environment.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to identify the transformations caused in the electronic music culture due to the huge impact of the coronavirus crisis. The main question that needed to be answered was how club culture changed, regarding its experience, perception by the audience and solidarity, community building. After a meticulous and interpretative exploration through the thousands of comments that were included in the dataset, my findings show that the online club culture has important differences when it comes to the nature of the experience, the collective and somatic aspect of it and although it continues to foster solidarity and some sense of belonging to a community, the process that leads to these feelings is altered too.

More specifically, when it comes to the experience factor, there were two trends that stood out through people's testimonies in the form of comments on social media platforms. Firstly, I talked about the phenomenon of couch raving, where people dance, have fun, consume drugs or alcohol, alone in their houses and apartments and try to party even though they are living in the era of quarantine and social distancing. The great amount of positivity and acceptance of the online alternative from the public indicated that people are still devoted to club culture and can create or re-create feelings of effervescence, hope and liberation that were always linked with the club culture experience from various scholars (Malbon, 1999; Rietveld, 1998; St. John, 2017). These emotional states were connected with the club experience through a somatic process and researchers argued that it is achieved only through the conscious participation of the self and the body to dancing liberated from your identity and lifestyle (Rietveld, 2003; Rill, 2010; St. John, 2017). However, the results of this unobtrusive online qualitative inquiry showed that similar states of positivity, relief and happiness could be achieved in a state of isolation by using only online means of communication. This finding does not contradict previous arguments from scholars like Rietveld (2003) and Rill (2010) connected the club experience with a multisensory, collective participation, centred on our bodies and on being there, in the nightclub. On the contrary, it adds a new, differentiated, contemporary aspect of the club culture experience that happens online and can also have equivalent impact in people's perception and emotional state.

Apart from the couch raving, there was another finding related to the experience aspect of club culture that stood out and that was the healing effect. Hutson (2000), was the first one to talk about "spiritual healing" as a part of the club culture experience, stating that participants often leave from the nightclub feeling liberated, unburdened, renewed, hopeful, peaceful and confident.

Through this research, his argument was validated, as the healing quality of club culture was mentioned and highlighted by numerous users. The attitude that music is a cure was evident through the data set and people expressed their pleasure and gratitude towards the initiative with enthusiasm. It appears that these frequent DJ sets functioned as a reminder of past positive experiences and as a hope for a future where we can still be happy and active and not consumed by measures and fear. People perceived these events as something that they needed, as a remedy for their mind. Previous research has shown that the coronavirus quarantine affected people's mental health in a dangerous way, causing increase in cases of depression and anxiety (Choi et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). In such an unsettling environment, this initiative offered relief, support and changed the mood of the participants from negative to hopeful, even for a short amount of time.

Some interesting findings emerged in the relationship and community aspect of club culture too. Starting from the interaction between DJ and audience, we observe the most obvious and significant transformation of all. Although in the past DJ and audience were in the same room, they were always separated, distanced and had completely different roles. The DJ was the shaman (St. John, 2017), the priest (Brewster & Broughton, 2014), controlling everyone's experience and creating the atmosphere of the nightclub. No, the DJ is also the one selecting the songs, managing the set's culmination and evolution but although he/she is not in the same room with the audience, he/she is more exposed than ever. The live streaming process through social media, and the archival of the video for future viewings, gives the right, to all users of the platform, to virtually access the DJ's personal space and express their unfiltered opinions. Consequently, the DJ is a lot more vulnerable, open to any kind of criticism concerning his/her performance and even personal traits and lifestyle choices. The anonymity and the quick, simple, momentary action of writing a comment online led numerous people to extreme, passionate expressions of love and also insulting, intervening, unsolicited expressions and harsh language. It is a fact that the old hierarchical relationship and the image of the DJ as a divine entity is entering a phase of deconstruction.

As we have mentioned before, there were some dominant concepts that academics used to approach the notion of solidarity and community inside club culture and those were the neo-tribe (Kavanaugh & Anderson, 2008; Riley et al., 2010), the spontaneous communitas (St. John, 2003) alongside collective effervescence (Olaveson, 2001) and heterotopia (St. John, 2001). All these

theoretical approaches were based on the physical, the nightclub aspect of club culture and were not tested in the online environment. Through this research, neo-tribes were the notion that best fit to the digital version of club culture, as it is not tied to conscious non-conforming actions and conscious collective actions. On the contrary, it is a community that becomes political through escapism, individual satisfaction and entertainment (Riley et al., 2010) and that is why neo-tribes can be formed in the case of online club culture. Also, collective effervescence as a notion that flourished in times of crisis, when people seek solidarity and need to escape and find positivity and hope again, can be a suitable concept to describe the coronavirus club culture. The “collective” element of all these theories is renegotiated now, in a digital setting as it is no more related to being there in the same space but on being online in the same time and still it manages to exist.

Of course, while stating these findings, it is important to acknowledge all the limitations that were inevitable through the process of conducting this thesis and clarify that none of these results is an absolute truth or an undisputable argument. The data collection of this research was based solely on six videos, three DJ sets, in two different platforms, streamed from the same initiative, the Boiler Room’s “Streaming from Isolation”. It is possible that if I have chosen a local initiative from the city of Rotterdam, or more radical approaches like the United We Stream platform from Berlin that hosted more underground and/or queer artists and adopted a radical rhetoric, these results could also include different aspects or even contradictory conclusions. Additionally, the findings could be more in depth and significant, if I had the time to observe and analyse the whole initiative until the end of the coronavirus crisis or if I could contact various interviews with participants that could provide more detailed and personal testimonies about their experience and perception. Nevertheless, the length of the data collection and the methods chosen were the most suitable for a master thesis under a global crisis and social distancing measures.

Through this whole process of forming a research question, collecting data, analysing it and identifying possible answers, some first conclusions were reached, and some steps were made towards opening a conversation about the online club culture of the coronavirus crisis. However, this conversation has a lot of extensions that could generate new research questions, debates and reflections. Firstly, the issue of the online nature of a real life activity is not limited on the club culture case but could be examined in various activities that were suspended by the coronavirus crisis and had to find new alternatives, in order to continue to exist. Secondly,



regarding the club culture experience, it is meaningful to keep monitoring the evolution of this online alternative and see if it will be a temporary solution or a new reality and start asking questions about the future after the coronavirus. Concerning the club culture relationship, I believe that we need to focus on the dynamics created online and further research is needed on issues of sexism, racism and inequalities inside club culture. The paradox between the love, peace and freedom ideals of club culture and the hate speech incidents that emerge online in club culture events is a multi-layered issue that needs to be discussed and examined in depth. These issues, examined inside the club culture environment may provide information and new knowledge for this specific society but they do raise bigger questions about our realities in general. What will happen after the coronavirus? How do our ideals, relationships and behaviours change when the online reality prevails? These questions that concern the field of electronic music culture, that is right now going through a huge transformation, belong to a wider category of concerns and inquiries for the future of our societies and cultures.

Humanity has come to face another huge crisis, that of the pandemic of coronavirus and we, as individuals, found ourselves powerless and numb towards the fear of a deadly virus and all the unsettling changes that were rapidly imposed in our everyday lives. Through all this pressure, negativity and turmoil, music and more specifically in our case club culture, managed to transform and adapt immediately, in order to survive as an industry and at the same time provide support and entertainment. Nightclubs are closed but people are logged in to their social media platforms, in order to participate in online events and engage with their bodies, senses and spirits, in a new, different way and alone from the comfort of their own home. They still party, they still have fun, but they are also stressed, wondering about their future and missing their corona-free past. That is why they use the online electronic music streamings to find some relief, positivity and remembrance of club culture. They may not be able to foster the same kind of exclusive solidarity bonds as before, but they manage to support each other, form a community and together go through a global crisis. Even in times of crisis, people find ways to adapt and evolve in order to survive and sustain. What is left for us to see is if this online transformation is here to stay or if it is a temporary solution for the coronavirus era.

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## APPENDIX A

### Overview of Data

Table A1: Information about the DJ sets included in the data collection

	<b>DJ Set 1</b>	<b>DJ Set 2</b>	<b>DJ Set 3</b>
<b>genre</b>	techno	house	house
<b>DJ's gender</b>	female	female	male
<b>year</b>	2020	2020	2020
<b>comments total</b>	1,618	2,572	1,920
<b>source</b>	Boiler Room	Boiler Room	Boiler Room

Table A2: Data collection in numbers

<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Data</b>
comments that make no sense (spam)	2,06%
unknown language (not English/Greek)	12,3%
users mentioning @friends	38,8%
users asking for track id	7,2%
comments with other content	39,6%



## APPENDIX B

### **Thematic Analysis**

#### **Category 1: Experiences**

##### **Theme 1: Couch Raving**

People who participate in online electronic music events are still having fun, partying, engaging with their bodies and spirit to create powerful experiences, peak moments and positive vibes, in a similar but not identical way as in the real nightclubs.

##### **Code 1: Peak Experience**

Before coronavirus: disappearance of the self that becomes one with the surroundings /  
Online: personal intense moments that form a collective experience when combined.

##### **Code 2: Vibe**

Positive energy communicated through people. Before coronavirus: shared through  
bodies / Online: shared through social media

##### **Code 3: New Bodies**

Bodies are active and engaged in isolation but in a different way – dancing alone,  
working, cooking, eating, smoking etc.

##### **Code 4: Club Talk**

People are still talking like they are attending a real-life nightclub party – drugs,  
onomatopoeia (writing down sounds that show excitement, surprise, satisfaction etc.)

##### **Code 5: Effervescence**

Expressions of excitement, satisfaction, celebrating life, pleasure and in general  
descriptions of positive feelings

#### **Theme 2: The Healing Effect**

While people participate in this online electronic music events, apart from pleasure and positive energy they are also experiencing a kind of “spiritual healing”, as these events function as a support system that helps them protect their mental health.

##### **Code 1: #StaySafe**

People asking others to stay safe, protect themselves, wishing everyone to survive this

crisis, hope and advice for better protection

**Code 2: Mood Booster**

Descriptions of changes in participants' mood from negative to positive, ability to see a positive side in this bad situation, making jokes about coronavirus and laughing with their problems

**Code 3: Needing It**

People stating that they “need” club culture in their lives, so these events are a great relief for them

**Code 4: Gratitude**

People expressing gratitude and praising the initiative, the organization and/or the DJs

**Code 5: Distress**

People talking about personal states of stress, anxiety, fear, practical obstacles and problems caused by the lockdown and the coronavirus crisis

**Code 6: Healing**

People describing their experience as a healing specifically, or as a remedy, a cure, a vaccine etc.

**Category 2: Relationships**

**Theme 3: The DJ is one of us**

Before coronavirus, in the space of the nightclub, the DJs used to be separated by the audience and their role was that of the leader that shaped the experience. Now, in the online version, though the anonymity and liberty to express their opinions provided to the participants, these hierarchical relationships are altered, leading to a deconstruction and a formation of a new dynamic.

**Code 1(a) & 1(b): Personal Questions & Personal Traits**

People asking personal questions about the DJ's life, habits, employment and personality or expressing their opinions and/or critiques about these subjects that are not connected with the DJ's profession

**Code 2: Negative**

Really negative comments about the DJ's lifestyle or his/her technique – sometimes insulting language, hate speech, sexist comments

### **Code 3: Technique**

People talking about the DJ's skills and asking, commenting about software, equipment, mixing techniques, asking for songs, giving advice and instructions to the DJ etc

### **Code 4: Interiors**

Comments referring to the DJs' apartments, interior design, objects, aesthetics etc.

## **Theme 4: Anonymous Online Solidarity**

Solidarity and community were basic elements of club culture as we knew it before coronavirus and they continue to be fostered through the online version but through different processes and in a new global, inclusive, and simultaneously in a very personal way.

### **Code 1: @Friends**

People mentioning other users in the videos of these DJ sets and calling them to join the online party and participate together even if they are isolated

### **Code 2: Community**

Expressing love, interest and support to people that participate in the events and to the organization, even though they are complete strangers, talking about a club culture community, hoping for future meetings, asking for donations to support club culture, proposing similar initiatives in a DIY level etc.

### **Code 3: Greetings**

Effort to socialize with greeting, location sharing, asking people if they are happy, fine, safe and try to start a conversation

This section as the final one is also based on a lot of codes included in other themes too (Gratitude, Effervescence, #staysafe, Healing, Technique), that are also connected with the process of community building and the notion of solidarity.