FQS FORUM: QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH SOZIALFORSCHUNG

Volume 10, No. 3, Art. 17
September 2009

The Lord of the Loops. Observations at the Club Culture DJ-Desk

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Key words: DJ; club culture; stage performance; dance music; scene; ethnography; life world analysis

Abstract: The article provides a structural description of the work situation of club culture DJs. This description should convey an impression of the DJ's work seen from the perspective of the DJ himself. This intention is consistent with the concern of ethnography of imparting an idea to actors how *other* actors (or groups of actors, as the case may be) perceive the world (that is, the sections of the world relevant for them). As this description of the stage conditions under which the DJ works is *one* element in the larger mosaic of a long standing research into the club culture, it is part of an ethnographic exploration of life in youth scenes generally. Ethnography of scenes aims to achieve a perspective as though seen *through* the "eyes" of the actors in lieu of the pseudo-objective "overview" of the conventional social sciences that sweeps *over* the actors' heads. In doing this it can be shown that the DJ in the club culture has to act in a specific manner that differs from the performance of a disc jockey on the one hand or a hip hop DJ on the other; although the participants of club culture events idealize the DJ as an actor who is completely free in his decisions, he has to act as an artist who realizes his concept of party music and who furthermore has to act as an artisan who orients his action to the wishes of his clients. Only with this mixture of artistic behavior and service orientation the club culture DJ is competent to make a "good" party.

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1. Preliminary Methodological Remarks

This contribution[1] intends to provide a structural description of the usual conditions "on stage" under which a club culture DJ[2] works, which he/she has to handle by acting situationally, and under which he/she in turn has to be handled —both as a typical role player and also as a principally idiosyncratic person who, depending on the situation, generates more or less problems. In doing so, we do not claim to analyze a particular, individual work situation in detail and in terms of the (theoretical) central question of "man-machine-interaction" as Workplace Studies do (for an overview see SUCHMAN, 1987; EBERLE, 1997 as well as KNOBLAUCH & HEATH, 1999). We also do not claim to construct a course of action that could be labeled as "DJ at work" or even a personal type "club culture DJ" that could be used as a gauge or a measuring instrument for respective empirical data in the tradition of the construction of ideal types of WEBER (1963) and SCHÜTZ (1943). [1]

This description of the work situation of club culture DJs is in fact *one* "tessera" in the larger mosaic of our long-standing research into the "Techno-Szene" (HITZLER & PFADENHAUER, 1998a, 2001, 2002, 2004). This research is part of our ethnographic exploration of life in youth cultures generally (HITZLER, BUCHER & NIEDERBACHER, 2001).[3] Our understanding of ethnography in general, which we call "life-world analytic ethnography," and our understanding of ethnography of youth cultures or scenes in particular (PFADENHAUER, 2005) aims at getting away from the pseudo-objective "overview" employed by conventional social sciences that sweeps *over* the actors' heads. What we would like to achieve instead is—metaphorically expressed—a perspective as seen *through* the "eyes" of the actors (HONER, 1993a). Why is this so? [2]

As sociological researchers of life-worlds, we are interested in the perspective with which the people who are the object of research perceive the parts of the social world relevant for them. We refer to such perspectively-relevant parts as "small life-worlds" (HITZLER & HONER, already 1984). With the following (deep) description I try to convey an impression of how the DJ's work presents itself as seen from the perspective of the DJ himself/herself—which is consistent with the concern of ethnography of imparting an idea to actors how *other* actors (or

1 For a German short version of this description without any methodological remarks see HITZLER and PFADENHAUER (2008). Although the research into the "Techno-Szene" is done by Ronald HITZLER and me, I am the author of this article. When presenting our general insights, I use the term "we."

2 The term "club culture" is used as a synonym for the German term "Techno-Szene" which can in general terms be described as a youth culture focused on electronic music and night life and events with electronic music, also known as techno or dance music. As I would like to argue in this article, there are significant differences between a club culture DJ, a disc jockey who works in a discotheque and a hip hop DJ, whose work is in each case characterized by related but not similar phenomena.

3 Life-world analytic ethnography is a concept developed by Anne HONER and Ronald HITZLER, elaborated further by Michaela PFADENHAUER (2005). Ethnography of youth cultures is a main research topic of Ronald HITZLER at the University of Dortmund. A popular output of this research is the Internet portal http://www.jugendszenen.com/ with currently 25 portraits of youth cultures. One of the next portraits to be put online will be "indie" written by Paul EISEWICHT and Tilo GRENZ, whom I have to thank for their support to this article.

groups of actors, as the case may be) perceive the world, that is the parts of the world relevant for them (HITZLER, 1999). [3]

For the reconstruction of small social life-worlds we use a number of procedures from the arsenal of methods of empirical social research: reaching from document analysis over interviews and surveys (employed with the greatest caution) to systematic observations (as fundamental source see HONER, 1993b). Accordingly, our approach is rooted in an established empirical research tradition and combines the logic of ethnography with a life-world-oriented perspective. This refers to the following basic assumptions: In line with the logic of ethnography, it is the researchers' firm conviction that an explicitly subjective perspective that includes the situational practices and (implicit) local knowledge of the specific life-worlds reality can only be gained by means of an in-field co-present role of a participant over a longer duration (LÜDERS, 1995). This explicit methodological perspective is a far cry from the specifically designed non-standardized techniques of reconstructing actional strategies and knowledge *only* through interviews, group discussions, or document analysis. Moreover, it combines the ethnographic logic of participating observation with the above-mentioned methods in order to attain the aimed-for empirical density of description (GEERTZ, 1973). The open-minded field-research perspective calls for a methodological flexibility when using and even modifying the research principles. This specific approach arises from the theoretical assumption that there cannot be any context-independent methodological strategies, pointing at the implication of the widely known question of Erving GOFFMAN (1974) "What the hell is going on here?" Therefore, in a typically circularly-arranged research process, the researcher personally strives to grasp situational meanings as well as cultural routines (so to speak the "know how" & "know why") and to gain relevant tacit (and strategic) knowledge. In the process, further steps of investigation are stimulated as more questions come up. The following structural description of the stage conditions under which a culture club DJ works and which he/she has to handle in communication and interaction with different counterparts is essentially based on the output of an "over-the-shoulder" technique, resulting from a long-term observant participation (BERGMANN, 1985).[4] The scientific view "over the shoulder" of the actor in question—at least in the social context I am discussing here—has several preconditions: Most importantly and necessarily, it presupposes that the researcher is not only profoundly familiar with the field but that he/she has also become, if perhaps not quite an unquestionable "fixture," then at least an actor who is taken for granted and is tolerated in the field without much ado (PFADENHAUER, 2003). For the first steps in the field (e.g., in the case of exceptionally restricted groups) it is useful to know a "gatekeeper." Such persons can rely on their already-established insider position, which enables them to familiarize the observer with the field. At the end of this field socialization process, the ethnographer is accepted as a "friend" (HITZLER & PFADENHAUER, 2004) and he/she is no longer regarded as an outsider

4 For ten years now (with a peak in the years 1998-2001) we have been active participant observers in the "Techno-Party-Szene." In contrast to other researchers (see the articles in HITZLER & PFADENHAUER, 2001) we focus our ethnographic work on the main events which are called "raves" (for details see the next section) because one can study the specific aspects of club culture in a condensed form there.

(stranger)—if not in the eyes of all field members, at least in the eyes of the people who are relevant for the research (in the present case of the DJs who are being accompanied, their bookers and the event managers who are engaging them). Access to the field, that is, establishing and maintaining this kind of socially-approved field role, is the most fundamental prerequisite for attaining the methodologically-preferred insider perspective. As SMITH (2001) has pointed out and I can only confirm, not only access but also a lot of time, which is needed to establish the friend role, are the main constraints of the ethnographer's work.[5] By investing this great amount of time and patience, however, the ethnographer is able to become an accepted member of the culture in question, even if he/she *prima facie* does not fit very well into the group because of age, gender, or social status. [4]

In order to be given the chance of actually analyzing the conditions under which a DJ works on stage, in terms of setting and course of action structures, the researcher must for many hours succeed in maintaining a position from which he/she can sufficiently observe the situation without being sent off. He/she has to achieve that position in the face of decision-making actors who have to deal with often profoundly stressful, interactively over-complex, crowded, technically accident-sensitive, mostly badly-lit and -aired settings that are extremely adverse in many other respects, too. Furthermore he/she must—by means of a drawn-out and complicated process of winning the confidences of these actors—in principle be authorized as a person who is allowed to ask questions--even "stupid" questions and possibly even questions about matters one does not "really" inquire into and questions directed at people one does not "usually" incommode. As a so-to-speak third ethnographic cornerstone, in addition to strategic flexibility and long-term participation, he/she has to produce field protocols and memos and collect documents on-site (and of course later off-site). This means he/she has to acquire "artifacts" of various kinds and must be allowed to produce text, sound, and picture documents in situ without—as is easily the case—causing distrust and being barred from doing so or even being "expropriated" by decision-making actors who, for whatever reason, have not been sufficiently informed; this may, however, at least partially be compensated if the researcher can enlist the assistance of competent field actors who—in a similar drawn-out and complicated process of winning confidences—have become his/her friends. [6] [5]

Vested with the trust we acquired during many years of presence in the "Techno-Party-Szene," we accompanied a handful of DJs during many nights (and also days). Although these artists differ in many aspects (such as age, gender, preferred music style) they have one thing in common: they all work in a nowadays "old-fashioned manner," as they work (or worked at the time of observation) with vinyl and not with laptops, CDs or DJ Software (e.g., *Traktor3*

5 The "over-the-shoulder" technique to which I are recurring here can thus *not* be realized within the framework of the "quick" investigation design of "focused ethnography" as propagated and supported by Hubert KNOBLAUCH (2005).

6 Once in this position, the task of creating a balance between "going native" on the one hand and maintaining the essential distance and, more importantly, an unprejudiced open-mindedness to be able to give a comprehensive and detailed qualitative description on the other hand lies fully in the (ideally skilled) hand of the scientific observer.

and the newest version *Traktor Pro*).[7] We (participatorily) observed their work in various locations—ranging from big events (such as the "Mayday," "Rave on Snow," and the "Love Parade") to a number of medium-scale to small club events—especially, but not only, in German-speaking countries.[8] We complemented these observations (which, of course, often were discussions, too) with some background talks (ranging from quasi-normal conversations over focused interviews to guided interviews) with DJs, as well as with stage managers and artist-organizers. Our gained field experience and knowledge of characteristic know-how guided these talks and interviews and generated more and more focused questions and furthermore enabled us to achieve the authentic impression of belonging to the same culture which can, on the whole, be described as a global micro structure (KNORR CETINA & BRÜGGER, 2002). So, with all due caution, this description requires a median range of generalization. [6]

Before describing the chronological course of a club culture DJ set and the core of the club culture DJ's work (Section 4), I would like to deliver insight into the quality of experience of techno or, more generally, of electronic music (Section 2) and to convey an impression of the DJ's work place (Section 3). Last but not least, I shall take a short look at the DJ in interaction (Section 5). Finally, Section 6 is devoted to some general conclusions that could be drawn from our observations at the DJ-desk. [7]

2. Quality of Experience of Club Culture Music

Youth cultures in general and youth scenes are a form of loose network in which an undetermined number of people from all over the world are connected. As it is a global phenomenon, it is very difficult to estimate the magnitude of a specific youth culture. Symptomatic for the club culture is an event that is called a "rave" (HITZLER, 2000; PFADENHAUER, 2000). Because of its significant differences from other youth cultures events (i.e., such as rock or gothic open-air festivals) some researchers have described club culture as rave culture (GOETZ, 1998; REYNOLDS, 1998; ST. JOHN, 2004). Rave implies a party that (at least in theory) has "always already" started and "never" ends. In fact, it is "merely" an opportunity to dance that lasts so long that—potentially—every participant can get into and drop out of the event again at any point of time without missing anything essential. That is to say that such a party often lasts for twelve hours or more (sometimes even for several days). [8]

An essential (pre-) condition for the socially-defined time span of many hours typically sparks off strong physical sensations and extraordinary, non-quotidian physical-psychic well-being. These hours typically are experienced as a continuum of "resting places" and "flying stretches" interwoven in manifold ways

7 This sort of DJ-Software substitutes the work with turntables and mixer. The only thing needed are digital tracks which could be mixed on the Computer with an surface imitating the mixer design.

8 As it is a kind of "fuzzy field" (NADAI & MAEDER, 2005), a "multi-sited ethnography" is needed (MARCUS, 1995). But of course there are many autobiographical reasons for accompanying this DJ and not another, for doing fieldwork in this town and not in another (KNOWLES, 2000). We accompanied DJs on events in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Mexico and Thailand.

in the raver's consciousness (SCHÜTZ, 1966, recurring to JAMES, 1896). While dancing and chilling in a "re-moved" time-space composed of light and music the raver by no means loses sight of his/her location; quite on the contrary, it becomes a feast for his/her ears and eyes. [9]

Besides the duration of the event, the volume of the acoustic emanations, which can by all means reach decibel levels of up to 120, seems to be essential to achieve this. Frequencies under 800 Hertz are so intensive at this sound energy level that they are not only taken in with the sense of hearing but actually with the sense of touch, too (especially through the diaphragm). Ideally one does not dance *to* but rather *in* the club culture music, which seems to flood and to stream through the body and to make one forget the world around oneself. To bring about this effect, an acoustic irradiation seemingly "from all sides" (thus the creation of a sound *space* in which and through which one can move equally well allover) seems indispensable. [10]

The music dazes and fills one with adrenaline at the same time. This effect is materially supported or boosted by often gigantic light shows which can, at best, be specified technically with terms such as video animation, laser optics, artificial fog, and irradiation by stroboscopes. These terms are, however, entirely insufficient when it comes to describing the *quality of experience* which is evoked by often very rapidly changing light-dark effects, by kaleidoscopic impressions, by standing, melting, repetitive images, by beautiful images, by atrocious images, by images that superimpose themselves on each other and use each other up in a completely unexpected succession. Furthermore, the quality of experience is called forth by a combination especially of diffusion—realized in an exemplary manner in the all-enveloping wafts of mist—and of precision with which the colorful razor-sharp laser beams jerk and cut through the diffuse. In this quasi-cosmic "tempest," a virtual space is generated—a non-quotidian space in space, in any everyday space—which is created and disappears again as the corresponding technical equipment is switched on and off. [11]

What one experiences during club culture dance events has often been described in the relevant literature (REDHEAD, 1993; THORNTON, 1995; COLLIN, 1997; HITZLER & PFADENHAUER, 1998b; WERNER, 2001). In this article I delve into *one*—however, a *central*, indeed essential—work situation within the scope of club culture dance events. Irrespective of all other organizational, logistical and technical efforts (for details see PFADENHAUER, 2000), the center stage, as it is generally known, belongs to one actor who is functionally non-replaceable and, so to speak, the "conditio sine qua non" of all that is happening, who is "not everything" but without whom everything (else) is nothing. He is the master of the mixing desk, the champion of the turntable, the lord of the loops: the DJ. The central position that the DJ occupies in the club culture scene has in fact prompted some observers to label and to characterize the overall culture as "DJ-culture" (POSCHARDT, 1995; HASLAM, 1998; also see HEBDIGE, 1996/97). [12]

3. The DJ's Working Place

The DJ's area of activity is located on the so-called "DJ stage," a platform that is usually at least slightly elevated in relation to the dance floor and is placed at its edge. This arrangement allows the DJ to have a relatively good view of the dancers, who likewise can see the DJ relatively well. The DJ stage is dominated by the so-called "DJ-desk" that normally consists of a stand of table height (or a little more) with a flat desktop. The central space of the desk is usually taken up by the mixer, which has numerous rotary knobs and faders by means of which the sound characteristics and the sound level of two tracks can be equalized, that is, the sound can be filtered (for the diverse mixing and filtering techniques, see Section 5.4). On both the right and left sides of the mixer there is normally at least one record player with a pitch controller (or "pitcher") to accelerate or decelerate (by +8/-8 percent) the record's speed (of 33 or 45 rpm). [13]

The standard equipment of the workplace (mixer and two record players) is furthermore complemented by one or two loudspeakers (monitor boxes) oriented to the DJ. While the DJ can pre-listen to *one* record via his headphones connected to the mixer, the music of the other record that can also be heard on the dance floor comes out of the monitor boxes—preferably installed close to the DJ's head—without delay. This "double acoustic irradiation" is indispensable for a beat-synchronous tuning of the records' tracks. That is why the DJ seldom, only for short periods of time, wears headphones on *both* ears. [14]

The DJ's wishes regarding the technical equipment (including the brands of the mixer, e.g., *Pioneer M 600*, and of the record players, e.g., *Technics 1210MK2*), as well as the way they are arranged on the DJ-desk, are listed in a "technical rider," which the party organizer receives from the DJ, that is, from his/her booker upon booking the DJ. The compliance with these instructions is usually assured by contract, in addition to other benefits (the DJ's transportation to the venue, board, and lodging). This allows the DJ to cancel the engagement without the loss of earnings in case of non-observance of his/her wishes. [15]

Leaving aside relatively new, quasi-sacral star-staging[9], it strikes one that the DJ is practically never alone on the stage but is typically surrounded by a large number of people (to a greater or lesser extent). Some of these persons at the DJ-desk are *functional* for the course of action (stage manager, sound engineer, light engineer, persons rendering repairing services, logistic personnel); others are *non-functional* for the course of action ("friends,"[10] "friends of friends," other DJs, people who nobody knows but who are not really in the way, people who simply are anxious to be on the stage once in their lifetimes, etc.). Finally, some are *dysfunctional* as far as the course of action is concerned (physically

9 The staging carried out around the Dutch DJ Tiesto envisages that he stands completely alone on an elevated, circular stage and is cheered by the raver masses around him in a sold out hall with 25,000 visitors (Gelredome in Arnheim).

10 Regarding the category "friend" in the club culture party scene, cp. HITZLER and PFADENHAUER (2004).

uncontrolled persons, aggressive persons—in brief, in the words of one interviewed DJ,"botherers and askers"). [16]

Behind or next to the DJ-desk, there is occasionally an elevated shelf, which serves as a storage space for record cases. Often the record cases also stand on the floor next to or behind the DJ. Furthermore, cables run around the DJ-desk; other technical equipment, spots, record cases of preceding and succeeding DJs, drinks (possibly in a cooler or in cartons or crates) are all deposited around the desk. In addition, clothing and coats, the DJ's own and those of all kinds of friends, lie around. Moreover, in the course of the party, litter accumulates noticeably: bottles, cans, cups, flyers, cigarette butts, cigarette packets and ash, spilled liquids, etc. Beyond its respective state of mess, the DJ's working place in the party situation is structurally characterized by a constantly (very) high volume, by middling to bad lighting, by baddish ventilation, by confined space, and by installation- and equipment-related instabilities. Depending on the heights of the desktop and the storage shelf provided for the record case, the DJ not infrequently has to work in a stooped position, which can prove extremely strenuous over the duration of the set and can result in chronic back problems. [17]

4. The DJ at Work

With the structural description of what the DJ *does* at such a workplace, I more or less follow the chronological course of action of a DJ-set that can be divided into the following parts: Preparations (4.1), Takeover (4.2), Putting on of records (4.3) and Handover (4.4). In the following portrayal I accompany, for the sake of clarity, one club culture DJ through one typical working night. [18]

4.1 Preparations

In a chronological view, the course of action of a DJ-set begins with the DJ's preparations in the run-up to his engagement. More or less betimes, the DJ requests information from the party organizers or other informed persons (their managers or their bookers or also the respective stage managers) about the character of the event (big event or club), the location of the event and its musical "reputation," the line-up (i.e., the other DJs booked for the event), the "relative" point in time of their performance (in relation to the beginning and the end of the party), the expected guests, etc. In view of the party situation anticipated on the basis of this information, he compiles—"in broad outline"—a selection of music in his record case, which seems principally suitable to him. (For the DJ to be able to identify every record at a glance and in a matter of seconds during his set, it has to be in a new jacket that is distinctive for the DJ.) [19]

The record case, thus sorted out, must then be transported by the DJ himself or by "helping hands" to the venue and—possibly via "temporary storage" in the production area—to the stage, thus as close to the DJ-desk as possible. As a rule of thumb, the DJ specifies the time span of one hour before the beginning of his set as the time at which he should have arrived at the venue in order to be able to take in the atmosphere of the event and to attune to it in regard to the

"arrangement," or the design of his set; however, this by no means implies that he wishes to or has to continue the perceived mood in the same style of music. Quite to the contrary, it can precisely be the DJ's aspiration to remodel the event's atmosphere by means of his individual style. [20]

While another DJ is still busy playing music, *the* DJ we, so to speak, are accompanying now, proceeds to the vicinity of the desk and the turntable. During the remaining time before his set, he mainly talks to "friends," who have accompanied him to the stage or have already been waiting for him there. However, he also confers with the DJ who is still playing records, with the stage-manager who—at least if he is not familiar with the locality—conducted him to the stage, and with the technicians, especially with "local" experts and perhaps also with the sound engineers. [21]

The DJ gets ready for his set by placing the record case(s) he brought along behind the desk so that they are within his reach. Then he opens the case(s) and swiftly "leafs through" the records, taking out some records and placing them ready. Sometimes he re-sorts one or the other record and also puts his headphones out. (Every DJ brings along own headphones; and if these do not function properly, this normally leads to greater or lesser panic reactions.) [22]

4.2 The takeover

The takeover of the set is usually ushered in by dint of the DJ who is handing over signaling to or telling the DJ who is taking over that he is playing his last record and, in most cases, at the same time pulling the plug of his headphones out of the socket in the desk. The DJ who takes over then plugs in *his* headphones, puts a record of his choice on the free, that is, empty record player and listens into this first record while the last record of the DJ handing over is still heard on the dance floor. It is not unusual for the DJ who is taking over to exchange the first record he chose for another and then to wait until it is his turn, communicating and interacting with the other DJ or the other people on the stage to a greater or lesser extent or watching the dancers in the meantime. [23]

The two DJs usually agree upon the actual moment of the takeover nonverbally. Time and again we have observed the following, symptomatic handing over and taking over behavior:

a. The *indiscernible takeover* (for the dancers): The taking-over DJ accomplishes this by choosing the first record of his set and "mixing it into" the running record in such a way that its tempo and its sound characteristics are as congruent as possible with the last record of the handing-over DJ so that the dancers ideally do not immediately notice that another DJ is now "making the party happen." In this case the DJ who is taking over very gradually (i.e., over several records) leads the ravers into the "mood" *he* wishes to create with *his* set;

b. the *break* by the DJ who is handing over: The DJ usually accomplishes this by either choosing a last record with a distinctive end or by "shutting down" the record unexpectedly and abruptly;
c. the *crash* by the DJ taking over: The DJ usually accomplishes this by launching his set with a cacophonic introduction, thus with unharmonious, nonrhythmic sounds that completely disrupt the dancing, so that he can, as it were, completely "re-build" the "mood" of the party. Under certain circumstances, for example, if the party has already lasted for a long while, perhaps for a few days, and it is therefore difficult for the DJ to leave a mark, it may be the DJ's strategy to "string along" the audience with the intro he has chosen, that is, to delay the moment the bass drums set in for a while so that his start is more distinctive. This strategy is by no means popular with all the dancers. [24]

4.3 Putting on records

According to Dr. Motte, the "father of the Love Parade" and one of the most experienced DJs, working at a DJ-desk is fairly simple:

> "So, puttin' on records is very simple: you take two records, put 'em on the turntable, play the first one, mix in the second one, take the first one off and put a new one on. And so on and so on" (personal, a "tongue-in-cheek" piece of information). [25]

For the experienced DJ, the "rest" is for the most part what is usually subsumed under the label "tacit knowledge" (POLANYI, 1966) or, as we prefer, "incorporated knowledge of routine and recipes" (SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN, 1973, pp.105ff.). [26]

All the same, let me try to explain in a little more detail what the club culture DJ is doing when he puts on a record. First of all, his skill fundamentally manifests itself not only in his ability to choose the "right records"—with a view to an "overall concept for his set"—but also in his capability of reacting very flexibly to party situations and moods. This usually entails "leafing through" his whole selection—like through a card index in a library—time and again, pre-listening to a record, at least to one of its tracks, and possibly exchanging the record for another. Furthermore, the DJ's skill manifests itself in his ability to work *with* the records (i.e., to mix, to scratch, etc.), and, above all, to string tracks together "virtuoso" (i.e., in such a way that there are not only no gaps or even pauses between the different sound sequences but also that these fade into each other without irritating disruptions for the dancers, who are the listeners). To achieve this, it is normally necessary to match the tempo of the two consecutive tracks and likewise to match their sound characteristics by employing various filter techniques (hall effects, echo effects, filtering out, etc.). [27]

According to Ansgar JERRENTRUP (2001, p.190), club culture DJs have developed their own techniques for mixing in: first, "continuous crossfading," which is the imperceptible fading in and superimposing of two tracks; second,

"*gentle* fading," the imperceptible relay by means of gentle lining-out of the one and lining-in of the other record; and third, the "*jerky* start of crossfading," that is, "hard cuts" and plug-ins by means of quick pulling out of one record and pulling in of the other record. [28]

4.4 Handover

The duration of the set is usually agreed upon by the DJ and the organizer and exactly stipulated *before* the DJ's appearance; normally it lasts for one to two hours, in isolated cases for up to twelve hours. The approaching end of the DJ's set is usually not only signaled directly by the stage manager but also indirectly by the next DJ coming onto the stage and placing himself more or less demonstratively next to the turntables. Now the DJ who is handing over can choose between different exit-alternatives: He can end his set with a kind of crescendo, thus trying to let the party mood hit its peak exactly at the end of his appearance; he can, so to speak, gently bring the dancers "down" as from a kind of "flight;" he can spur on the dancers to celebrate him; he can present his successor at the turntables to the dancers (by means of gestures); or he can hand over his set as it were "imperceptibly." [29]

After the *handover,* thus after ending his set, the DJ begins to pack his record case(s) and collects his other paraphernalia. Possibly he communicates or interacts with his successor at the DJ-desk, insofar as the latter does not appear to be (overly) disturbed or irritated by this. Above all, though, he typically turns towards his "friends" "camping" around the DJ-desk and not infrequently expects (positive) comments about the quality of his appearance. Sooner or later he leaves the DJ-stage, usually attended by his "pozze."[11] [30]

5. The DJ in Interaction

As mentioned before, the DJ always pre-listens—through his headphones—to *the* record *that* is to follow the one playing at that moment. Depending on the "strain," his degree of concentration, he almost casually listens with one earpiece simply lying on his shoulder, or he partly puts on the headphones in such a way that *one* ear is covered by an earpiece; or—this happens rather seldom—he pulls the headphones over both ears. The position of the headphones is a sufficiently reliable indicator for people who know the DJ relatively well of whether or not he may be addressed or otherwise importuned. [31]

Generally, the interaction of the people on the stage with the DJ during the set is a difficult matter. "Making a good party" takes precedence over all other activities on the stage, and this usually demands a good deal of concentration. Therefore, upon the DJ's request, which he signals verbally or by means of gestures, dif-

11 The term "pozze" is used in the German techno scene to describe a circle of relatively close friends with whom one visits parties and often also spends the so-called "after-hours," in other words the hours after the rave in which one does not yet wish to be alone or to get together with other people ("strangers").

ferent people (partly friends, partly staff members) render various services (e.g., fetching and handing him drinks, lighting and handing him a cigarette, etc.). [32]

Not infrequently, the dancers also hand the DJ who is working at the DJ-desk drinks, and, when smoking was not yet forbidden (which is not always respected on the DJ-stage), cigarettes (occasionally also a joint). The dancers also express wishes to the DJ (directly or indirectly via "friends" standing at the desk). In particular, these regard autograph wishes or the request to be photographed with the DJ. [33]

The intensity and the quality of the "friendship" influence to what extent and in what form (ranging from trying to catch the DJ's eye over addressing the DJ to touching him) the "friends" lingering around the desk may communicate or interact with the DJ without his previous invitation to do so (and to what extent the DJ himself or his "friends " hinder them from "importuning" him). The stage manager, however, is entitled to communicate with the DJ seemingly at all times. This is normally also true for the technicians who have to take care of things relevant for the course of action. [34]

Depending on the DJ's character and his mood, he shows himself as more extroverted or introverted, more priestly or chummy, in interaction with the dancers. Oriented towards the whole "party crowd" or individual dancers, he may communicate more non-verbally (by, e.g., provoking "hands ups") or verbally (for instance, by backing down the volume and loudly cheering and spurring on or berating the audience). Only rarely a microphone is installed at the DJ-desk for this purpose. Normally, however,—depending on the phase in which the whole party is (in the prelude stage, at its height, at an advanced hour, or even in its "final" hour) and on what tone he wants to set (warming up, evoking "peak experiences," or cooling down)—the DJ tries to influence the mood on the dance floor through his choice of music and sound mixing. [35]

6. Conclusion

In this case, the central insight of Workplace Studies is corroborated, namely that interactive processes are by no means only accessories of work but that they *significantly* contribute towards the structuring of work sequences and that moreover this contribution increases rather than decreases in highly technological work (KNOBLAUCH, 1996). Interacting and communication not only with the staff members but also with the dancers and – often forgotten – with the friends hanging around nearby the DJ are by no means accessory parts or even disruptions but essential ingredients of the DJ’s work. [36]

With respect to reflections towards an *ethnography* of work, I regard the methodology "behind" the description presented here as an indication of the relevance which long-term observations, based on existential involvement in the respective field of research, have as an essential element not only of ethnological ethnography but *also* of *sociological* ethnography. Sociological ethnographers, too, are in principle confronted with the main problem that is brought up time and

again by ethnological ethnographs: with the problem of existentially coming to terms with the "other." [37]

With regard to a comprehensive "survey" of club culture in terms of social and cultural sciences, the description of the work situation of the DJ at a club culture dance event obviously merely represents something like a "cartographic" detailing. However, I am dealing with the detailing of an aspect that is central to the event as a whole, namely with what the DJ really *does* on the stage and under what conditions he/she does so—beyond all euphemizing, mystification, and mythologizing, as, for example, is done by HILKER (1996), who referred to DJs as "shamans," "priests" and "channellers of energy" because they control the "psychic voyages" of dancers through their selection and manipulation of music. [38]

A club culture DJ is *not* a disk jockey, that is, he/she does not simply happen to play records (and maybe make more or less witty comments). The rave differs from the traditional disco precisely in that individual "hits" are *not* played one after the other but rather the music to which the ravers can dance is actually *created* by the DJ himself/herself within in the party situation—however, not with traditional instruments but by means of record players, mixing desk, and possibly other electronic equipment. At the turntable (or, less frequently, by so-called live-acts), the DJ basically inserts sequences of familiar material (loops), at best as recognizable building blocks, into a situational sound composition. This happens, as it were, in acts of spontaneous new creation by means of blending, recombination, and modification of the tracks on the vinyl record. In this creative process, the DJ virtually merges the essentially electronically "composed," computer-sampled tracks, stacks them on top of each other, telescopes them, and in doing so, takes care to create transitions that are interesting, technically challenging, intriguing and/or that provide evidence of virtuoso dexterity. The art of balancing the different bass frequencies of the individual tracks, thus avoiding disruptions in the rhythm of the beat is, in fact, the most familiar but certainly not one of the most difficult of these "routines." The "spinning"[12] of the available sound material—by means of multiple techniques—into complex "sound carpets," that frequently last for several hours, *ideally* generates the impression of *one* continuous composition, *one* track to which, if not the whole party, then at least the party, dances: namely the party that *this* DJ "is making alive" by *creating his/her* sound *in* the situation for exactly *this* situation. [39]

If the club culture DJ does his job *the way* he should according to the criteria of the scene, it differs significantly from the "l'art-pour-l'art"-virtuosities—also very impressive for those people who are not familiar with hip hop events—that especially hip hop-DJs demonstrate in their contests, which, as is generally known, are already organized in divisions and in "leagues" (KLEIN & FRIEDRICH, 2003). For, irrespective of all additional "internal" ranking-criteria (whose description would be a task rather of discourse analysis than of ethnography of

12 "Spinning is the art of mixing songs together by using different pitches, speeds, and an equalizer to create a seamless flow of steady music. It is the DJ's responsibility to take the crowd on a journey, to read their mood, and transport them to a different time and place through his or her choice and sequence of records" (GLOVER, 2003, p.314).

work) and as it were "braving" all the adversities of his/her workplace situation, the competent club culture DJ orients himself/herself especially towards the party, that is, towards the partygoers who dance themselves into a "raving community." To be more precise, the competent DJ orients himself/herself to their diffuse, incalculable collective demand for precisely *that* music which "now" (paradoxically) all at once takes in, expresses, transforms *and* evokes their mood: "Technical know-how as well as a certain behavior when dealing with the audience are expected of the DJ. (...) Something has to click between the dancers and the DJ" (WERNER, 2001, p.36; my translation). [40]

Physical processes of music production and the gestural and descriptive aspects (gestures and body movements) play an eminently important role for the success of the DJ's appearance. Despite the preponderant operation of switches and controls, the handling of records, turntables, mixer and effect machines—often comparable to the movements made when playing on the keyboard—"has developed into a new form of making music characterized by differentiated physical skills and in each case genre-specific significant gestures" (SCHMIDT, 2002, p.92; my translation). The "experience world club culture" (HITZLER, 2001) is generated communicatively and interactively in the interplay of practical DJ skills (pitching, scratching etc.) here and physical (re-) actions of all the persons involved in the performance there. According to Robert SCHMIDT (2002, p.107; my translation), the DJ-activity can be interpreted as a practice of "calling forth emotions"—"which happens via the 'technical' handling of records and equipment by the DJ, his gestures and his facial expression and via the body movements of the dancers." [41]

In the first instance, the competent club culture DJ in fact plays records (barring, for a moment, what he then does with them). Viewed in this perspective, he/she is an artisan (primarily working at night). However, he/she plays these records in *such* a way that they form a secure basis, a solid ground for the experience for which ravers commonly gather: for individual dancing within a "horde "in a re-moved time-space essentially generated by the music, by music they recognize as "theirs." Exactly this ability, not only to mix music but, as DJ Westbam emphasizes, never to forget the party, to mix "music with people" turns the culture club DJ into an artist, too, into the "Lord of the Loops."[13] Or saying it in Sarah THORNTON's words (1995, p.65): "What authenticates club culture is (...) the interaction of DJ and crowd in space." [42]

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Citation

Pfadenhauer, Michaela (2009). The Lord of the Loops. Observations at the Club Culture DJ-Desk [42 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *10*(3), Art. 17, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0903172.