Cross-dressing to Backbeats: An Exploration of the Practices, Wo/men Producers, and History of Electroclash

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ABSTRACT

Cross-dressing to Backbeats: An Exploration of the Practices, Wo/men Producers, and History of Electroclash

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This research-creation dissertation focuses on the emergence of electroclash as a dominant form of electronic dance music in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Electroclash combines the extended pulsing sections of techno, house and other dance musics with the trashier energy of rock and new wave. The genre signals an attempt to reinvigorate dance music with a sense of sexuality, personality and irony. Electroclash also emphasizes, rather than hides, the European, trashy elements of electronic dance music. This project addresses the following questions: what is distinct about the genre and its related practices, both in and out of the studio? Why do rock and electro come together at this point and in this way? Why is electroclash affectively powerful for musicians, audiences and listeners? And, what does the genre portend in terms of our understandings of the politics of electronic music?

The coming together of rock and electro is examined vis-à-vis the ongoing changing sociality of music production/distribution and the changing role of the producer. Numerous women, whether as solo producers or in the context of collaborative groups, significantly contributed to shaping the aesthetics and production practices of electroclash, an anomaly in the history of popular music and electronic music where the role of the producer has typically been associated with men. These changes are discussed in relation to the way key electroclash producers often used a hybrid approach to production involving the integration of new(er) technologies, such as laptops containing various audio production software with older, inexpensive keyboards, microphones, samplers and drum machines to achieve the ironic backbeat laden hybrid electro-rock sound.

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CALL…

In the fall of 2009 I attended an electronic dance music party night held in Montreal, Québec, at *la Société des Arts Technologiques* (SAT), featuring electroclash pioneers Alter Ego and two Montreal DJs, Jordan Dare and Duvall, who also work within the frames of electro and techno. Alter Ego is a German electronic dance music production/performance duo comprised of Roman Flügel and Jörn Elling Wuttke. Touted by *Montreal Mirror's* (former) dance music critic Jack Oatmon in a story running the day of the show as "among the most talented, longstanding and influential techno producers in the world" (2009), they present themselves as "Alter Ego Live" while touring. After more than ten years of producing remixes, singles and albums, Flügel and Wuttke released "Rocker" in 2004, one of the most popular *instrumental* tracks of electroclash, even reaching #32 on the United Kingdom (U.K.) Singles Chart (Roberts, 2006, p. 21). In the same year, they won three major awards in *Groove Magazine's* Readers' Poll, including "Best Live Act," "Best Album" (*Transphormer*) and "Best Track," for the aforementioned "Rocker" (2009).

Georgina Born reminds us, drawing on genre theory, "each art or musical work constructs connections to both prior and future or prospective works" (2005, p. 23), and, in many ways, "Rocker" was electroclash's defining swan song, incorporating certain foundational elements of the genre while signaling new sounds to come. It marks a subtle, yet significant, stylistic shift from the early electroclash songs produced by Miss Kittin and the Hacker, Peaches, Tiga, and the many groups (e.g., Le Tigre, Chicks on

Speed) and DJs that initially shaped the genre. With "Rocker," the heavy backbeat and synthesizer timbres of electroclash remain along with the classic rock-song structure of verse followed by chorus; however, the track is noticeably more rigid, techno heavy and slightly faster—in other words, it was produced with a higher beats per minute, or BPM.[1] "Rocker" also lacks the handclap adornments that coloured many initial electroclash tracks and is marked by the absence of vocals, which have been replaced by screeching hi-frequency synthesizer lines that play out in the song's chorus. The stylizations of "Rocker" are indicative of a larger trend whereby the mid-2000s electroclash had been shortened to *electro*, as the clash, or *trash*, had been expelled. Electroclash's celebrated sexuality and trashiness got pushed to the margins and replaced by a pronounced techno austerity, returning to where it came from.

Alter Ego's performance in Montreal, coming a full five years after the release of "Rocker," led me to consider electroclash and how it emerged as a dominant form of electronic dance music in the early 2000s. Electroclash is comprised of a "consortium of subgenres" (2008, p. 45), to borrow a term from Charles Kronengold, that combine the extended pulsing sections of techno, house and other dance musics with the reckless energy of rock and new wave. The genre signals an attempt to reinvigorate dance music with a sense of sexuality, personality and irony. Electroclash also emphasizes, rather than

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[1] Mark J. Butler (2006) attempts to broadly deal with electronic dance music while reserving its "detailed analysis" for techno (p. 25). Butler observes that electronic dance music typically works within a range 120-180 BPM (2006, p. 8). However, it should be noted that many electronic dance music genres operate outside of this range. For instance, many disco cuts are slower than 120 BPM and genres like drum 'n' bass, jungle, gabber, drill 'n' bass, and breakcore all incorporate BPM's exceeding 180. Electroclash tracks tend to sit at the lower end of this spectrum, from 120-135.

hides, the European, trashy elements of electronic dance music. In this sense, the term "electro*trash*" might work just as well as electroclash to represent the genre. I would like to use the specificity of this cultural moment to address the emergence of electroclash, by asking: what is distinct about the genre and its related practices, both in and out of the studio? Why do rock and electro come together at this point and in this way? Why is electroclash affectively powerful for musicians, audiences and listeners? And, what does the genre portend in terms of our understandings of the politics of electronic music? Using Stuart Hall's oft-cited conception of articulation, none of these connections are inherently linked; rather, they exist "historically in a particular formation," fashioned by social and cultural practice (1986, p. 54–55).

The proceeding pages of the first chapter address these questions by discussing the broader international emergence of electroclash and some of the genre's key producers and label owners, along with detailing the status of the electroclash producer and some of my own connections to the genre as an avid listener and participant in Montreal's electroclash scene. This introductory chapter argues that the coming together of rock and electronic dance music can be explained vis-à-vis the ongoing changing sociality of music production/distribution and the changing role of the producer. Instead of the monopolistic practices one sees in other media industries, or even in certain strands of popular music production earlier in the 20th century where a single firm controlled every aspect of production, including distribution and sales, with electroclash, many of the hierarchical and specialized duties of multitrack studio recording collapse around

multi-tasking digitally oriented studio[2] producers who can potentially control production, distribution, performance duties and the circulation of their aesthetics. It is worth emphasizing that these production practices are not exclusive to electroclash, let alone the professional music industry, as many noncommercial and amateur artists work in similar ways. Numerous women,[3] whether as solo producers, or in the context of collaborative groups, have contributed significantly to shaping the aesthetics and production practices of electroclash, an anomaly in the history of popular music and electronic music, where the role of the producer has typically been associated with men. These changes are discussed in relation to the way electroclash producers Peaches, Le Tigre, Chicks on Speed, and Miss Kittin and the Hacker often used a hybrid approach to production that involves the integration of new(er) technologies, such as laptops containing various audio production softwares with older, inexpensive keyboards, microphones, samplers and drum machines to achieve the ironic backbeat-laden hybrid electro-rock sound.

In chapter II, I outline the methodological program pursued for this research-creation project and my personal positioning as a researcher, soundmaker and participant in Montreal's electroclash scene between 2001 and 2006. The foundational methods used in the dissertation include retrospective participant analysis, sensuous ethnography,

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[2] I use the term digitally oriented studio instead of digital studio, which is somewhat of a misleading term given the degree to which audio and studio culture remains highly analog. See for instance Sterne (2006b), who writes "even in the *most* digital situations (…) most of the actual musical event still happens as sound in the nondigital parts of the social world" (p. 106, emphasis original).

[3] In a similar vein to Tara Rodgers (2010), I employ "the notoriously unstable terms *women* and *men* to frame" this dissertation as "these social categories significantly affect the organization of electronic music histories and the distribution of resources in related material realms" (p. 4).

metaphorical cross-dressing, research-creation, networked collaboration, friendship as method, semi-structured interviews, conversation, and scene analysis. I employ these methods in relation to the four core research questions and in order to articulate what is distinctive about Montreal's electroclash scene in the early 2000s and to address how some of the studio production practices of electroclash have developed since this period vis-à-vis my own current electronic musicmaking practice.

The four core research questions are then crossed and mixed interchangeably in chapter III in relation to Montreal's local electroclash scene by focusing on Tiga and DJ Mini (two of Montreal's key players), and the latter's seven year, weekly electro/clash[4] party night, *Overdose*, housed at Parking Night Club, in the heart of the city's Gay Village. Between 2001 and 2006 I attended numerous party nights at clubs, lofts and apartments in Montreal that typically revolved around electroclash and the broader parameters of electro-oriented dance musics. Research into various local music scenes has a long and highly developed history within popular music studies and cultural studies, dating back to at least the late 1980s and early 1990s with the work of Will Straw (1991), Barry Shank (1994), and later, Holly Kruse (2003), among others. The concept was initially employed as a way to move beyond the limitations of the term (musical) community, which, implied a degree of uniformity somewhat at odds with the variety of musical practices and expressions emerging within urban centres at the time (Straw, 1991, p. 368). An early foundational definition of scene comes from Straw, who writes:

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[4] I employ the term electro/clash here to denote that while *Overdose* initially started as an electroclash party night, it slowly transformed into more of an electro-oriented night and thereby incorporated dance musics within this broader generic marking.

"[A] musical scene (…) is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization" (1991, p. 373). Straw posits in a later publication, that "[S]cenes may be distinguished according to their location (…) the genre of cultural production which gives them coherence (a musical style, for example, as in references to the electroclash scene) or the loosely defined social activity around which they take shape" (2004, p. 412).

The concept of the scene has been particularly useful when mobilized vis-à-vis the ways in which music and a plurality of music related practices emerge, interact and circulate within particular cities and spaces, and globally, and it is for these reasons that scene is employed throughout this text in relation to electroclash. Scene is used in chapter III, entitled "Tiga, DJ Mini and Montreal's Vulgar Dance Music," to denote various electroclash-related practices throughout Montreal, in addition to smaller, more defined "clusters of social and cultural activity" within the city (Straw, 2004, p. 412). The chapter is primarily concerned with the ways in which local street-level activities and institutions (e.g., bars, nightclubs, record stores) produce(d) and sustain(ed) the coming together of rock and electro in Montreal in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In Chapter IV, I relate the core research questions to my own electronic music practice as I "Cross-dress to backbeats" and produce a series of musical tracks exploring the production practices of some of electroclash's key producers, including Le Tigre and Peaches, in addition to engaging in a networked collaboration with musician, researcher and friend Samuel Thulin. The chapter also addresses how the studio production practices

that are detailed in this dissertation have changed since the mid-2000s. The musical works are constructed using a sonic frame of unruly sounds and ambiguous voices within an affective mixing approach, in an attempt to represent and mobilize sounds that have been traditionally considered too vulgar and feminine for electronic (dance) music. The discreet musical tracks are then put together in the form of an extended dance mix, which connects the works to the DJ practices of Tiga, DJ Mini and Larry Tee (discussed below), who is known for coining the term electroclash. I then return to the question of gender politics vis-à-vis electronic dance music in the *Coda*, questions that seem all the more pressing in light of *DJ Mag's* 2011 release of its annual top 100 DJs poll, a list that contains no women DJs. In fact, Claudia Cazacu, who was voted in at #93 in 2010, is the only woman appearing on the list since 2007 (DJ Mag, 2011). Interestingly, electroclash artist Peaches responded to the publication's 2011 list via her facebook page: "DJ MAG! Your Top 100 DJ boy club list can eat a dick! Where the ladies at???" (Peaches, 2011).

ELECTRO/CLASH

Given that electroclash is still understudied, particularly in relation to its history, producers and production practices, I begin by addressing certain conceptual distinctions between electronic dance music, electro and some of its variations, before moving on to the broader international emergence of electroclash. The term "electronic dance music" is employed in this dissertation project as an "umbrella term," to borrow from Kembrew McLeod, that denotes "a heterogeneous group of music made with computers and electronic instruments—often for the purpose of dancing" (2001, p. 60). McLeod uses a "slash"—as in, electronic and/or dance music—to acknowledge that not all musics under this umbrella are "necessarily designed for dancing" (2001, p. 60). While I will refrain from using this "and/or" marking throughout this project, I am using the term electronic dance music in a similar way. It is also worth mentioning that electronic dance musics are not just consumed on the dance floor and listeners engage with these musics in many and varied contexts. Interestingly, McLeod's analysis focuses on electronic dance music between 1998 and 1999 and precedes the naming of electroclash. However, the list of more than three hundred genre names compiled by McLeod includes various permutations of electro, including "electro," "electro-acoustic," "electro-breaks," and "electro-dub" (2001, p. 60).

Electro currently operates as one of the primary defining categories of electronic dance music, and includes the genres of house, techno and trance, among others. Electro primarily functions as a prefix in tandem with various musical descriptors, practices, and/or vibes (as in, electro*clash*), and at times the genre is shortened to "electro." Electro

initially represented a down-tempo (that is, slower) and funkier manifestation of *electro*nic funk/rap music that emerged in the early 1980s throughout certain urban centres in the Western world, most notably New York City, where radio stations such as Kiss FM and WBLS mixed the genre into its electronic dance rotation (Rietveld, 2012). Electro from this period, interchangeably referred to as electro-funk—as in, electronic funk music—and electro-boogie, is associated with the mechanical sounds of Roland's TR-808[5] drum machine, as well as synthesizers and funky, repetitive bass lines, a holdover of disco and 1970s funk. Electro also draws heavily from early hip hop, often incorporating similar vocal stylizations; additionally, vocal tracks of the electro genre frequently feature the use of vocoders[6] and/or various other effects. Susana Loza describes the process as "the 'Planet Rock'/*electro effect*" (emphasis original), referencing Afrika Bambaata and the Soul Sonic Force's seminal "Planet Rock" (1982), where, "[N]ormal vocals are force-fed through a vocoder and cartoonishly mangled into a 1950s-style robotized version of the original" (2001, p. 350). Bambaata's "Planet Rock," which incorporates elements of Kraftwerk's "Trans Europe Express" (1977) and is heavily influenced by the work of Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO), G.L.O.B.E. & Wiz

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[5] The TR—"transistor rhythm"—808 was produced by the Roland Corporation between 1980 and 1983, and was succeed by the TR-909 from 1983-84. Roughly 12 000 of the former were assembled and 10 000 of the latter (Butler, 2006, p. 64). Many of these devices are still in circulation today and, because of their strong associations with numerous forms of electronic music and artists including hip hop, techno, electro and house, they have become increasingly more expensive as they are highly valued vintage musical instruments.

[6] Kay Dickinson writes that initial interest in the vocoder from the pop music world "came from (mainly male) musicians with heavy investments in types of futurism," and mentions its (slightly) later associations with electro artists (2004, p. 164).

Kid's song "Play that Beat Mr. DJ" (1983), and Cybotron's "Clear" (1983) are foundational cuts of this early strand of electro.

As electroclash's popularity spread throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, so too did electro as one of the most prominent generic categories of electronic dance music, nearly matching house and techno's popularity. In fact, electroclash's decline in popularity[7] since 2004 has been marked by the continued growth of electro as one of the defining genre structures of electronic dance music. In the December 2009 issue of *Mixmag*, for instance, with a tagline that declares "the world's biggest dance music and clubbing magazine," electro is one of ten umbrella subgenres of electronic dance music the magazine uses for reviews, including house, dubstep, techno, trance, drum 'n' bass, hard dance, urban, experimental and breaks (p. 92–101). Electro house, a melding of house and electro, electro-pop, and funkier, more disco inspired electro are perhaps currently the most prominent forms of this electronic dance music subgenre.

Even though electro of the 1980s is very commonly referred to as either electro, electro-funk or electro-boogie, there is generally a tremendous amount of disagreement amongst electronic dance music producers, consumers, listeners and scholars when it comes to fixing certain musical styles within genre boundaries. Mark J. Butler (2006) refers to the work of Cybotron as "proto-techno," as one of its members, Juan Atkins, is considered to be one of the first techno producers. Atkins, along with Derrick May and

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[7] Interestingly there are some who believe that electroclash is already on its way to resurfacing for a revival of sorts. As Thomas Sontag (Label Manager and A&R Turbo Recordings) remarked to me in a personal interview, "electroclash, it is getting a revival. There's a record that we're putting out which is a Marcool side project which is straight up electroclash" (personal communication, September 23, 2011).

Kevin Saunderson are known as the Belleville Three, alluding to Detroit, Michigan's southwestern suburb (2006, p. 42-5). Butler is careful to note, however, that genre "tensions call into question the unity that characterizes most historical narratives of" electronic dance music (2006, p. 45–6). The apparent lack of genre cohesion and naming within electronic dance music also extends into broader historical narratives and conceptions of electronic music. As soundwalk artist and researcher Andra McCartney posits, one of the many challenges of defining electronic music is that the term "electronic music" is often used interchangeably with electroacoustic music, even by noted scholars and in important library collections. Further, related terms like *musique concrète,* computer music and tape music are also frequently employed in overlapping ways (2000c, p. 4). Moreover, McCartney acknowledges that numerous texts do not even attempt to define the term, choosing instead to present a "historical account that defines by description and inclusion or exclusion" (2000c, p. 4). In other words, electronic music in its many forms and contexts can be a rather fluid concept that is used to describe anything from computer music to production techniques that use recorded sounds and microphones.[8]

Although electroclash remains one of the key innovations of electronic dance music of the last decade or so, it has not restructured dance music in the same way as

[8] For instance, Joel Chadabe (1997) writes: "[E]lectronic music includes all music made with electronics, whether specifically with computer, synthesizer, or any other special equipment" (x).

previous developments. Unlike the emergence of house music in the early-1980s,[9] electroclash does not represent a total reorientation of electronic dance music culture. Will Straw writes that house music's greater "importance comes from its recentring of the historical movement of dance-music culture as a whole" (1991, p. 383). Straw continues:

> As was the case prior to the rise of house, dance-music within the Western world has continued to be marked by opposed tendencies towards unity/coherence and diversity/differentiation, but the logics through which these processes unfold have become much more integrated. On the one hand, house music has drawn most dance-musical forms into various sorts of accommodation to it (…) At the same time, however, the durability and expansiveness of appeal of house music are such that these variations have come to be positioned laterally within a division of tastes running across dance-music culture. (1991, p. 383)

So, in thinking about electroclash as one of these lateral divisions, the genre has reoriented electronic dance music in many important ways, particularly in relation to production practices, aesthetics and the prominent role of women producers and performers. It is for these reasons that the focus of this research project largely revolves around these intersections.

The emergence of electroclash stems from changes to electronic dance music culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s, changes that can be initially traced to the circulation of emotions and vibes emanating from parties and club nights around this time. "Vibes" is a term that is generally employed to represent the overall feel of electronic dance music party nights and events. In speaking of Kingston, Jamaica's

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[9] It is worth mentioning that historical narratives of house music date the emergence of the genre to 1977 and as late as 1984. Frankie Knuckles, the DJ who is considered to be at the forefront of the genre's birth story began his residency at the Warehouse club in Chicago in 1977 (Currid, 1995, p. 171).

dancehall scene, Julian Henriques writes that the term vibes is "commonly used to describe the mood, atmosphere or ambience of a session, with the adjective 'vibesy'" (2010, p. 63). While I would disagree with Henriques' notion that "[S]uch affective qualities are considered irreducible, requiring no further explanation, as with feelings themselves," mainly because not all party night attendees feel the same way, and as Sara Ahmed (2004) points out, "even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don't necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling" (p. 10), Henriques notes that these vibes, which I would suggest are bound up with emotions, can circulate and propagate as repeating frequencies far beyond the confines of a dance floor or dancehall (2010, p. 70–5). Going further, it might be tempting to think of vibes as having a certain degree of agency, sociality and intentionality as they circulate and come into contact with more and more bodies. I am drawing here from Ahmed, who argues, "[E]motions are intentional in the sense that they are 'about' something: they involve a direction or orientation towards an object. The 'aboutness' of emotions means they involve a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world" (2004, p. 7).

Electroclash emerged in the early 2000s in various electronic dance music centres, such as New York, Berlin, Chicago, Detroit and Montreal, as an emotive response of many DJs, producers, club promoters, listeners and dancers who observed or perhaps more accurately, *felt*, that certain styles of electronic dance music (e.g., minimal techno) were too serious and austere. The "back-to-basics" sound of electroclash, which, in part, was a reaction against the perceived excesses of the electronic dance music of the late 1990s, was embraced by the fashion-conscious worlds of New York and London, along

with 1980s synth-pop, from Gary Numan and Soft Cell to The Human League (H. Rietveld, personal communication, June 11, 2012). In a personal interview with Mikey Muscles, party host, dancer and one of the principle electroclash promoters/performers in Montreal, he suggests that by the early 2000s club nights and events were "just not enough fun; they took themselves too seriously" (personal communication, December 11, 2009).[10] While mentioning electroclash's connection with the past, label manager and A&R for Turbo Recordings, Thomas Sontag, elaborates on some of Muscles' sentiments:

> [Electroclash] (…) was a revisiting of the past. It was pastiche to begin with (…) I think it came out of the rise of dance music culture, the continued rise of dance music culture and a movement away from a lot of the kind of facelessness and lack of personality of post-rave big club DJing and stuff like that and a lot of the dull repetition of clubs (…) and in Montreal and globally, quite a lot of pretty boring, pretty standard house music and darker techno (…) Electroclash picked up a lot of really simple elements that never really lost their appeal to people. (personal communication, September 23, 2011)[11]

The assortment of sounds and music associated with this movement away from the experienced boredom of techno party nights and the facelessness of post-rave big club DJing, as Sontag calls it, initially developed without a conceptual home, as the term *electroclash* only came into use a full two years after many producers and groups were attempting to articulate music along these lines.

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[10] Mike Tessier (aka Mickey Muscles) was the head promoter for Neon Productions (Montreal), working on-and-off between 2001–2009. Neon Productions was started in 1998 and since its inception has booked many of the top international electro artists, along with promoting and creating their own party nights.

[11] Sontag (aka Thomas Von Party) is a Montreal based DJ and the younger brother of Tiga Sontag, one of the key contributors of electroclash. He became Label Manager and A&R for Tiga's Turbo Recordings in 2005 when the label was relaunched. Turbo Recordings represents some of the world's most popular electro and techno artists, including Ivan Smagghe and Boys Noize.

Larry Tee is a longtime club promoter, music producer and DJ based in New York City and claims a certain paternity in coining the term electroclash, even having the term trademarked in 2001. As Brent Luvaas writes, Tee used electroclash "to describe a diverse set of young performers doing 'different but related' things with electronic music" (2006, p. 171). In 2001 and 2002, Tee founded and ran the Electroclash Festival featuring Felix Da Housecat, Peaches, 2 Many DJs/Soulwax, along with many other artists. Tee recounted the story during an interview conducted in 2009:

> Well, after I got clean in '97 it took a couple years for me to get my brains back and a passion for music. In 2000 someone took me to see Fischerspooner at the Gavin Brown gallery. It was around this time I was also investigating the electro section of dance music 12 inches and discovered Adult, Chicks on Speed, Peaches, and Gigolo Records. I decided to throw a festival to bring attention to these artists because I was honestly bored with the state of dance music at the time...intelligent dance music, glitch hop??/agggh! So I spent $80,000 on a festival to end all festivals and lost it all!!! (Grooveeffect, 2011)

What is perhaps most interesting about Tee's Electroclash Festival and early definitions of the genre, is that his definition included everything from the dance-y/glam-ish rock sounds of the Scissor Sisters to the sleazed-up house tendencies of Felix da Housecat. And, while the return to some idea of the distinct track/song was one of electroclash's defining features, so too was the prominent way so many women and gender-bending performers significantly contributed to the genre's production and distribution practices. The aforementioned Alter Ego along with Peaches—whose 2000 release *The Teaches of Peaches* is perhaps the most widely known full-length album of electroclash music—Le Tigre, Ellen Allien, Chicks on Speed, Tiga, Miss Kitten and the Hacker, and many others were at the forefront of the emergence of the genre.

At the centre of electroclash's new celebrated sexuality and gender play within electronic dance music is the Berlin-based Canadian artist Peaches (née Merril Nisker), who has released four full-length albums since 2000: *The Teaches of Peaches* (2000), *Fatherfucker* (2003), *Impeach My Bush* (2006) and *I Feel Cream* (2009). Marnina Gonick describes Peaches as "a gender provocateur" (2009, p. 139), who, through her music, performances, and parody, deploys a "disruptive pedagogy" that "destabilizes fixed notions of sexuality, rendering the body and sex as comical" (2009, p. 140-2). Going further, Stéphane Girard writes:

> [The] Electroclash movement, contrary to the faceless, sex-less and pre-Oedipal approaches to techno in the 1990s, was never afraid of domineering, strongly gendered performers who toyed with the signifiers of gender representation and various popular music-bound generic conventions in overtly explicit ways. Examples include Peaches, who has been photographed wearing underwear and revealing a stuff black penis and out-of-control pubic hair. (2011, p. 119)

Key tracks from Peaches' electroclash-oriented material include "Fuck the Pain Away," from *The Teaches of Peaches*, and "Shake yer Dix," from the album *Fatherfucker*. Beyond the aforementioned elements of sexuality and trashiness, the former is driven by synthesizer bass lines and plays with the backbeat conventions that provide the rhythmic moorings of electroclash. Nancy Bottner, who characterizes Peaches as a "Sonic Cyborg" by drawing attention to her imagery and lyrics, describes the artist's music as "recorded very roughly, noisy, focused on voice and beat," and "merging (post)punk attitude with 80s electronic music" (2005, p. 99). Perhaps the most pronounced aesthetic feature of "Fuck the Pain Away," along with many other early electroclash songs, is the heavy reliance on synthesized, participatory handclaps and the incorporation of vocals, almost

following, or parodying, the classic folk and (cock) rock-song structure of a verse followed by a chorus.

Between 2000 and 2002, Peaches' aforementioned "Fuck the Pain Away, " from *The Teaches of Peaches*, Miss Kittin and The Hacker's "Frank Sinatra," from *First Album* (2001), and Tiga's "Sunglasses at Night," released in 2001 by International Deejay Gigolo Records, became three of electroclash's prototypical tracks. The vocals of the three tracks are also marked by an explicit and detached irony exhibited in both the tone of the vocal deliveries and content of the lyrics. This type of ironic vocal posturing is perhaps what connects electroclash most stridently with new wave and other forms of popular music, which, as Kronengold tells us, often "parodize in the lyrics" while being "dead serious in the music" (2008, p. 58). For instance, in "Frank Sinatra," Miss Kittin sings of caviar and limousines in a monotone voice:

> Every night with my star friends/We eat caviar and drink champagne/Sniffing in the VIP area/We talk about Frank Sinatra/You know Frank Sinatra?/He's dead/To be famous is so nice/Suck my dick/Kiss my ass/In limousines we have sex/Every night with my famous friends/Nice. (2001)

The vocal distancing of "Sunglasses at Night" and "Frank Sinatra," in addition to other electroclash tracks, is further enhanced by distortive digital effects, very often employing a vocoder, thereby bringing electroclash in contact with the robotic, cyborg futurism of early electro's "Planet Rock."

Irony also serves as a method for electroclash artists to explicitly play with gender norms and sexual practices through their lyrics. As David Foster Wallace (1997) writes, "[F]or irony—exploiting gaps between what's said and what's meant, between how

things try to appear and how they really are—is the time-honored way artists seek to illuminate and explode hypocrisy"; adding, "gifted ironists work best in sound bites" (p. 65, 67). In the first verse of "Fuck the Pain Away," Peaches opens with: "Sucking on my titties like you wanted me/Calling me, all the time like Blondie/Check out my chrissy behind/It's fine all of the time/Like sex on the beaches /What else is in the teaches of peaches? Huh? What?" During an interview with Caroline Sullivan from *The Guardian* in support of her second studio album *Fatherfucker* (2003), where Sullivan refers to her as "an equal-opportunities vulgarian," Peaches remarked about the album's title: "Motherfucker's so over. You call everybody a motherfucker–you call your mother a motherfucker. It's a pretty extreme and intense word. Instead of shying away from that, I thought I'd bring the fact that we're using the word motherfucker in a really mainstream way to the fore" (2006). Interestingly, Peaches is asked about her sexuality in the same interview, specifically, "whether she is gay or straight," to which she responds: "I hate that question! John Waters used to say, 'I wish people wouldn't come out, I wish they would come in!'" (2006).

Other electroclash artists like Chicks on Speed and Le Tigre use irony and gender parody to deliver overtly feminist messages and/or align their music with feminist commitments whether they refer to themselves as feminists or not. As Judith Butler (1990) writes, "gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation" (p. 188). Chicks on Speed's most well known track from their electroclash-oriented material is playfully

entitled "We Don't Play Guitars," the first single from their album *99 Cents* (2003), released on their own record label, Chicks on Speed Records. The track features the lyrics: "We always thought that we were not a rock 'n' roll band, but it sure feels like rock n' roll over here tonight/We don't play guitars/We don't play guitars/We don't play guitars/We're standing on stage with our microphones, but we don't play guitars". Peaches makes an appearance halfway into the song and shouts out, "[W]ell you may not play guitar but I play guitar/And I love it", before performing a highly distorted shredding guitar solo, which the artist mimes or 'air guitar'-s in the track's video while simultaneously floating above and facing the members of Chicks on Speed, strategically holding an electric Gibson Flying V guitar between her legs.

The latter, Le Tigre, a feminist electronic music and performance art group (Rodgers, 2010, p. 245), released *Feminist Sweepstakes* in 2001 on the San Francisco-based lesbian-feminist independent record label and video art distributor, Mr. Lady, which folded in 2004. As Tara Rodgers writes, Le Tigre's "lyrics engage feminist and queer histories and politics" (2010, p. 245). In "Hot Topic," the lead-off single from their self-titled debut album, *Le Tigre* (1999), which Rodgers notes "proclaims a litany of artists, activists and writers who have inspired them" (2010, p. 245), the group—whose members include Kathleen Hanna (formerly of riot grrrl group Bikini Kill), Johanna Fateman, and JD Samson—calls out to numerous (women) artists, letting them know they are still listening: "Carol Rama and Eleanor Antin/Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneeman / You're getting old, that's what they'll say, but/Don't give a damn I'm listening anyway." Women often find themselves pulled in two directions at the same time when working in

highly masculinized technological fields, such as electronic music production: they are torn between downplaying aspects associated with femininity and pursuing a stereotypically masculine stance of control, or denying a connection with masculinity and taking a stereotypically feminine stance (McCartney, 2000b, p. 317–8). One way to overcome this conflict, as McCartney writes, is to forgo swaying one way or another and pursue a strategy of irony, which "acknowledges contradictions without attempting to resolve them" (2000b, p. 318).

Such political associations challenge numerous popular press reports and scholarly articles which take an apolitical approach when discussing the genre by primarily emphasizing electroclash's embracing of celebrity culture, glamour and high-fashion.[12] For instance, think of the highly ironic, cocaine-fueled tale of Miss Kittin and the Hacker's "Frank Sinatra" where Kittin sings, "Every night with my star friends/In Limousines we have sex." Although Luvaas argues that electroclash "seems to blur the very boundary between celebration and critique" (2006, p. 168–169), he writes that ultimately "the point" of electroclash "is a glamour-obsessed, nostalgic exhibition put on by people more concerned with style than substance" (2006, p. 173). In a similar vein, music journalist Martin Turenne reported in *Exclaim!*, ("Canada's music authority") during electroclash's heyday (2002), that electronic dance music "has been overtaken by style mavens with little concern for the intricacies of their new found pet sound" (2002). While on the one hand, I would agree with Luvaas' characterization of electroclash and some of the genre's artists as being underpinned by a certain nostalgia and glamour, he

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[12] For a detailed analysis of the effects of popular representations of riot grrrl, refer to Mary Celeste Kearney's (1997), "Riot grrrl—feminism—lesbian culture."

presents electroclash within a narrow frame that does not account for the genre's heterogeneity of practices, sounds, styles and politics. It is important to note that in order to draw such conclusions, in other words, that electroclash is glamour-obsessed and apolitical, one has to silence, or at the very least, ignore and downplay the electroclash contributions of artists such as Chick's on Speed, Le Tigre and Peaches, whose work seeks to challenge patriarchal identity politics.

In addition to the ironic stances taken by many of its producers and performers, electroclash signals a rhythmic shift within electronic dance music through the incorporation and circulation of the backbeat. In this way, the genre fits within a continuum of practices that are directly connected to the rise of house music in Chicago in the early 1980s (Straw 1991) and disco in the early 1970s (Lawrence 2003), both of which share the "four-on the-floor" with variations (e.g., tempo, timbre, etc.) as their structuring groove. Again, electroclash is marked by a certain hybridity, combining the extended pulsing sections of techno, house and other dance musics with the song structural elements and reckless energy of various rock musics. As Oatmon (2009) puts it, electroclash "mimics rock composition and sound quality without using any actual rock instruments," although numerous bands such as Le Tigre, Chicks on Speed and LCD Soundsystem contributed to the early stages of electroclash using traditional rock instruments, such as electric guitars and drum sets. As Luvaas notes, "indie electro-pop bands like Ladytron, Soviet, and the Faint were equally if not more responsible for popularizing" the genre (2006, p. 171). Many electroclash DJs and producers typically import a standard rock backbeat with much more aggressive and synthesized drum

sounds and textures/timbres, within the established conventions of electronic dance music tempi or BPM (beats per minute). For instance, Tiga and Zyntherius' "Sunglasses at Night," which sold over 200 000 copies in Europe (primarily in Germany and the UK), clocks in at 130 BPM (Girard, 2011, p. 110, 116). Until the mid-2000s, it was not uncommon to hear hard rock, post-punk and new wave hits mixed into live electroclash DJ sets—the Cult's "She Sells Sanctuary" (1985), Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart" (1980), and New Orders' "Blue Monday" (1983) were often featured at clubs and parties around this time.

The integration of the backbeat follows a trajectory of changes in electronic dance music revolving around slight rhythmic adjustments usually very specifically ascribed to a few individuals or particular samples. As Tim Lawrence (2003) posits in *Love Saves the Day*, the emergence of disco, perhaps the first electronic dance music, along with dub (Veal, 2007), can be traced to the developments of Philadelphia-based drummer Earl Young in the early 1970s, who in an attempt to make soul music more danceable started playing the bass drum on all four beats of the measure on cuts like "Zing went the Strings of My Heart" (1972), the first single by his band the Trammps (p. 120). This beat would be coined "four-on-the-floor," the foundation of disco and later in a slightly sped up and more aggressive manifestation, house music. As Kronengold writes, "[F]our-on-the-floor remains discos most recognizable convention," even though it is not present in every disco cut (2008, p. 52). According to Lawrence, Young's playing on "Love is the Message" (1973), along with Bobby Martin's string arrangement, "defined the artistic and emotional potential of the *textured* disco aesthetic in which various layers of

instrumental sounds could shift gradually or dramatically between different moods" (2003, p. 122).

As disco was embarking on its four-on-the-floor trajectory, reggae and dub producers, engineers and session musicians in Jamaica were pushing the limits and possibilities of the studio anchored by the "one-drop" drum pattern, developed by drummers withholding the bass drum from the first beat and third beat of the measure. As Veal (2007) writes:

> [T]he "one drop" became standardized into a minimalist pattern in which the bass drum emphasized beats 2 and 4, the snare (playing mainly on the rim) alternately doubled the bass drum or improvised syncopations, while the hi-hat kept straight or swung eighth-note time. (p. 32)

The one-drop was initially used in rock steady around the mid-1960s and then slowed down and tightened up for the purposes of reggae, and later, dub. Like the four-on-the-floor, it is a cross-generational pattern that plays out in numerous musical contexts, with tempo and timbre as its most altered variables. Although numerous session musicians contributed to the dub and roots reggae recordings of the 1970s coming out of Kingston, two drum and bass duos stand out for shaping the rhythmic trajectory of Jamaican music during this period—Carlton and Aston "Family Man" Barret, internationally known for their work with Bob Marley, and Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, best known for their work with Peter Tosh and Black Uhuru (Veal, 2007, p. 58).[13]

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[13] For a sampling of the one-drop, please listen to Bob Marley's "Concrete Jungle," the opening track from *Catch a Fire* (1973). The aforementioned Barret brothers are the drum and bass duo on this cut.

A more recent example of this rhythm phenomenon in electronic dance music, and one which echoes the developments of reggae and dub, is found in drum 'n' bass in the mid-1990s, with the 'Amen Break' serving as the core element of this genre and its variations. The Amen Break, usually shortened to just 'Amen,' is a sample from a short solo drum break played by Gregory C. Coleman on the Winston's "Amen, Brother" (1969), the B-side to the single, "Color Him Father." The Amen break was initially used in early hip hop recordings, in part because a slowed down version of it was featured on *Ultimate Breaks and Beats* (1986), a compilation album of sampled drum grooves put together by Breakbeat Lenny (né Lenny Roberts) for its viral potential. As Steve Goodman (2008) writes: "[W]hat the riddim album captures is the startling efficiency of breeding whole sonic microcultures out of one core loop" (p. 161). In the context of drum 'n' bass, the Amen is sampled, manipulated, or 'cut up', and sped up, regularly at tempi exceeding 170 BPM.[14]

Like the four-on the-floor and the Amen, the backbeat has its own originary tale in popular music with its roots in gospel music, early rock and roll and the recordings of Little Richard and Chuck Berry. John Mowitt (2002) writes in *Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking*, how the backbeat emerged out of efforts by the "extraordinarily influential and woefully underrated session drummer Earl Palmer" to "answer to the accompaniment demands placed on him by a particular way of performing what were basically blues tunes" (p. 26). As Palmer remarks, "the only reason I started playing what they come to call the rock-and-roll beat came from trying to match Richard's right hand.

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[14] To listen to the Amen break, please go to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amen_break.

Ding-ding-ding-ding! Most everything I had done before was a shuffle or slow triplets" (Mowitt, 2002, p. 26). After Palmer's early rhythm experiments with the groove, the backbeat would develop into the standardized rhythmic pattern of numerous popular musics, including rock music. As Mowitt emphasizes, "[V]irtually every popular song that actually has a drum part now employs some variation of the backbeat" (2002, p. 26).

The backbeat pattern is generally deployed in the context of a standard drum kit by using the bass drum (or "kick" drum) to mark the first and third beats of a measure and using the snare drum to hit beats two and four. In other words, the snare answers back to the call of the bass drum, which Mowitt ascribes to "the African tradition of 'call-and-response' drumming patterns" (2002, p. 26). The hi-hat, or ride symbol, simultaneously provides the glue, the momentum and the straight eighth-note feeling of the groove by playing either *straight* quarter or eighth notes as opposed to the shuffle or slow triplets feel mentioned above by Palmer (Mowitt, 2002, p. 26). In the context of electroclash, the backbeat is very regularly incorporated in a much more mechanized fashion; most recordings employ drum machines and sequencing technology to program the beats, resulting in *perfect* and unwavering metronymic time, usually between 120-35 BPM. This groove is played out in the aforementioned "Frank Sinatra," although with a common variation—the hi-hats emphasize the offbeat of each measure, importing one of disco's standard hi-hat patterns and giving the track a much lighter feel.

It might be tempting to think that the backbeat signified the rhythmic response to the aforementioned initial circulation of vibes and emotions from electronic dance music parties and club nights in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The beat's inherent push-pull

feel between 120-35 BPM, combined with the folk/rock song structure and the participatory handclaps which mark so many early electroclash tracks have helped engender a mixed musical audience, as the backbeat invited (indie) rock, new wave and pop music consumers to EDM dance floors. Although Luvaas does not mention the backbeat, the author describes Los Angeles' electroclash scene as "a rather heterogeneous lot" with clubs like the Echo primarily composed of a mix of "white, middle-class, largely straight, suburban 'cool kids' (…) Latino, mainly gay, working-class youth (…) well-dressed, primarily gay West Hollywood professionals (…) and scruffy East Hollywood, mixed sexuality hipsters" (2006, p. 171). In this way, electroclash operates within electronic dance music's cyclical encounter with various genres of rock music, dating back to at least disco, followed by the aforementioned early 1980s electro of Afrika Bambaata (Rietveld 2012) and currently associated with the American producer Skrillex (né Sonny John Moore), who released his debut EP, *My Name is Skrillex*, in 2010. The British/Sri Lankan artist M.I.A. (née Mathangi Arulpragasam), whose music is similarly focused on voice and beat, also continues to make connections with the sounds of electroclash.[15] Interestingly, M.I.A. began producing music after being introduced to Roland's MC-505 by Peaches while the latter was touring with the British group Elastica in 2001 (Harrington, 2005).

The electroclash backbeat in its many variations produced a markedly different energy and resulting construction of spaces in comparison to the *potential* experience of

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[15] M.I.A. has released three full-length albums since her initial experiments with Roland's MC-505: *Arular* (2005), *Kala* (2007) and *Maya* (2010). For a sampling of M.I.A.'s sound, refer to "Galang", from her debut album, *Arular*.

more aggressive four-on-the-floor variations of house music and hard techno where the repeating bass drum pattern can be deployed as a throbbing and unrelenting (masculine) force on the dance floor, especially as the beat becomes faster and is pushed to the forefront of a mix. Stephen Amico confirms this suggestion through his analysis of the way stereotypical constructions of masculinity operate at New York City's Aurora dance club "for one temporally, socially and geographically situated group of homosexual men" (2001, p. 359). Amico argues that music structures gender in this context, in part, through the particular way the repetitive and high-volume four-on-the-floor kick drums propagate on the dance floor. In writing of 68 Beats's track "Music to my Ears," which played regularly at the club during his fieldwork (from mid-1998 to early 1999), Amico posits:

> The beat is representative of masculinity in its potency; that the beat is positioned as paramount, that is unremitting, and "dominant" in a visceral form unmediated by thought—pure power as opposed to a lyric representation of such. This masculinized representation is more than aural signification, however. By impelling the participants to physical action—dancing which can go on for hours—the beat also engenders a performance of the construction of masculinity through a physical response. (2001, p. 352)

Again, it is important to emphasize that Amico (like Luvaas) is talking about one specific cultural setting or scene for these types of heavy repetitive bass beats and does not extend his findings into the entire field of electronic dance music production or even into other dance floors. While on the one hand, this line of thinking might invoke a certain musical determinism to explain the various genderings of the dance floor through emphasizing music's intrinsic properties, such as rhythm and meter, in a cause and effect relation. On the other hand, I would suggest that Amico attempts to balance "the 'co-productive' or

two-way interrelations between music and social life," as Born writes, by avoiding the poles of "radical constructivism" and of "an equally unilateral musical determinism" (2005, p. 13, 14). Born nuances this perspective by borrowing the concept of affordance from Tia De Nora's *Music in Everyday Life* (2000), who imports the term from perceptual psychology, and writes: "[A]ffordance points, then, to the properties or potential of objects as they are proffered to and may be engaged with or used by subjects" (2005, p. 13-14). Amico's approach resists the seductive pull of historical narratives of electronic dance music that contend electronic dance music inherently subverts Western patriarchal ideologies by merely propelling bodies into motion in the form of dance, which is typically linked with femininity (see Gilbert & Pearson, 1999) and through electronic dance music's link connection to marginalized communities (see Straw, 1993). I would argue that electronic dance music has the potentiality to both challenge and reaffirm such ideologies; however, whether it challenges or reaffirms is always contingent upon social and cultural practice.

THE STATUS OF THE ELECTROCLASH PRODUCER

The various backbeats of electroclash emerged out of a production context of change, both in terms of the sociality of studio production and the role of the producer. As previously mentioned in the text, the electro-rock sound of elctroclash was often achieved through a hybrid approach to production, involving the integration of "newer" sound reproduction technologies with older, inexpensive keyboards, microphones, samplers and drum machines. This is a highly novel approach to electronic dance music production, which is regularly marked by a rather unproblematized "macho" embrace of the latest studio technologies.[16] It is also worth restating that numerous women significantly contributed to shaping the aesthetics, production and distribution practices of electroclash, an anomaly in the history of popular music and electronic music where the role of the producer has typically been associated with men. As Emma Mayhew posits vis-à-vis popular music, "the producer's role has remained a male domain," and at the "top end of the recording industry women are significant by their absence as record producers" (2004, p. 149). Similarly, Bottner writes, in accordance with other areas of popular music production, "electro is dominated by male producers/users and the absence of women is explained through recourse to the all too familiar dichotomies: competence and interest in soft/hardware technology or computer science are mainly ascribed to men, whereas women are understood as engaging with her body" (2005, p. 102).

While I agree with Bottner's sentiment that electronic music production is dominated by men within the broader boundaries and context of electro, electroclash,

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[16] See for instance, Gilbert and Pearson's *Discographies* and in particular the chapters "Metal Machine Musics" and "The Politics of Popular Culture."

which brings together rock and various electronic dance musics, is significantly defined and inhabited by women music producers, performers, label owners, scene actors and scene curators, those who establish party nights and book artists among other duties. In the words of Larry Tee: "electroclash is often misunderstood. It was a powerful political statement because there was a huge women's voice (…) and the politics of Chicks on Speed and Peaches were quite important!" (*Groove Effect*, 2009). In addition to Peaches, Chicks on Speed and Le Tigre, whose work is discussed above, other artists like Ellen Allien (née Ellen Fraatz) factor heavily in shaping electroclash on many different levels by taking on numerous roles, both entrepreneurial and artistic. In fact, drawing on the careers of the just named artists along with recent scholarship on DIY DJs in Vienna (Reitsamer 2011), it can be persuasively argued that a certain entrepreneurial experience seems to be an essential skill for artists working within the realm of current commercially produced electronic dance music.

Although Ellen Allien is more widely known as a techno-oriented artist, she is mentioned in this study as the music on her label, Bpitch, was often featured in heavier, electroclash DJ sets, particularly towards the mid-2000s as the label became more popular. Additionally, throughout the 2000s Allien performed alongside numerous electro and electroclash artists, even performing in Montreal at DJ Mini's *Overdose* night in 2006. Allien resides in Berlin, where "female DJs and label owners are highly visible" (Naylor, 2008) and in 1999, founded the music label BPitch Control, currently one of the most prominent electronic music labels in the world, after her first label, Braincandy, failed. As she comments: "I stopped doing Braincandy because I had many

problems with the distribution, and I was younger—and I didn't know how to talk to men, in the men world!!" (Manuel, 2011). Allien describes how the Bpitch label was started, in part, as a reaction to a lack of (musical) diversity amongst Berlin labels in the late 1990s, in addition to mentioning her ambivalent relationship with the label's business matters:

> As a young woman, it was difficult to start my own company. It took me years to learn not to fear the future (…) At the time, there were no Berlin-based labels that really liked. The club scene was great, but the labels didn't start to flourish until later. When I founded Bpitch, I wanted to create my own island, to find my voice as a DJ and musician. It's really important to me to do things my way. But since starting my company, I've discovered that I have to do so many things I don't like, all of the business details necessary to run a label. I love it, but sometimes I hate it. (Index Magazine)

In the same interview, Allien notes that while growing up with a single-parent mother and sister in an apartment complex in West Berlin, she was "very self-reliant," adding that her mom: "gave me a real sense of freedom. She was very relaxed, she never told me what I could or couldn't do. I think maybe that's why I'm a strong-minded woman who's not scared of making decisions, or saying what I think" (Index Magazine).

As a label owner, Allien is responsible for signing other artists, releasing their material and thus, operates as one of the chief curatorial managers of electroclash and electronic dance music at large, although she has yet to crack DJ Mag's top 100 DJs readers poll! In this way, she acts as a mediator of tastes and aesthetics by actively shaping the changing dynamics of the various musical genres she comes into contact with. Her involvement at Bpitch remains very hands on or do-it-yourself, and contends she is "trying to be careful to sign people who will make really good music over the long

run, not just one good record" (Index Magazine). Ultimately she makes all artist signing decisions in collaboration with Bpitch artist Sascha Funke, noting that they listen to all demos sent to the label, even if just for a brief moment or two. As she emphasizes:

> Every one. I go through them at night with Sascha, who is one of the artists signed to Bpitch. He'll put a CD on, and if we like it, we'll write to the artist and ask for more tracks. If we don't like it, we throw it away. It's a pretty quick process, after a few bass drumbeats, I know if it's any good. (Christopherson, 2004)

In addition to her work as label boss, Ellen Allien is one of the most prolific producers of electro and techno (she also works as a fashion designer). In 2001 alone, and while performing regularly as a DJ, Allien released one album (*Stadkind*), numerous remixes and singles (notably, "dataromance remixe"), and at least two mix compilations (*Flieg Mit Ellen Allien* and *Berlin 2001 Compilation: Sweet*), most of which are archived and for sale on BPitch Control's website (www.bpitchcontrol.de). She continues to work in all of these capacities and, most recently, as a producer released *Dust* (2010), her seventh full-length record, in addition to the numerous mix compilations she has produced over the years.

In the history of popular music, the term producer is suggestive of numerous connotations: from the artistic free agent with a mix of technical recording skills and aesthetic wherewithal, to the "money" person who stamps their name on recordings due to their capital investment and ownership of studio gear, to the above mentioned multi-tasking artists, to name just three. John Ryan and Michael Hughes posit, in the popular music industry the prominence and influence of producers has increased since the 1950s, when record companies began outsourcing their production operations to studios outside

the traditional structure of the recording industry, with a similar trend occurring in the film industry around the same time (2006, p. 245-6). However, unlike the film industry where production outsourcing was brought on forcibly through the Paramount Decree of 1948, major record companies made the move towards outsourcing production in an effort to stay competitive with the burgeoning independent labels of the 1950s, many of which were focused on marginalized audiences. In this context of displaced production, or "decentralized and open production systems," Ryan and Hughes note that a new role emerged within the industry: "the independent producer." They write:

> Freed from the bureaucracy of the major company, armed with the powerful new recording tool of multitrack recording (…) the independent producer was now ready to assume a status often equal to, and sometimes exceeding, that of the recording artist in the production of popular music. (2006, p. 245–6)

Sam Philips, who established Sun Records, George Martin, best known for his work with the Beatles, Chet Atkins, who pioneered this role in the realm of commercial country music, and Alfred Lion of the jazz label Blue Note are generally considered key figures of this production model. Their primary roles were to develop a signature *sound*, develop recording artists and perhaps most importantly, deliver commercially successful records (Ryan & Hughes, 2006, p. 246). And, as the four names make very clear, the independent producer emerged as the domain of men, echoing Mayhew's sentiments.[17]

As noted above, Phillips, Martin, Atkins and Lion, along with numerous other

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[17] Virgil Moorefield (2005) develops a similarly gendered narrative vis-à-vis the increasingly prominent role of the producer in popular music over the last fifty years. Moorefield begins with Phil Spector, "who was to inscribe the term 'producer' firmly and indelibly into the vocabulary of pop record-making"(2005, p. 9), and moves on to discuss the work of various producers, including Brian Wilson, George Martin, Brian Eno, Bill Laswell, Quincy Jones and Trent Reznor, among others.

record producers, engineers and musicians, worked within a context of analog multitrack recording. This type of recording usually relies on a division of labour that is both highly specialized and hierarchical, wherein recording artists work with song writers, producers and engineers who handle the technical side of recording (e.g., setting up microphones and handling the recording equipment). Recent accounts of multitrack studio recording include Meintjes (2003), which examines various studio settings in post-apartheid South Africa, and Veal (2007), who writes about the development of the studio system in Kingston, Jamaica, moving from Ska and the incorporation of ensemble studio playing, through Rock Steady and Reggae to Dub, which primarily relies on remix studios.

According to Veal (2007), "the story of dub music in particular is a collaborative story between (…) producers and the studio engineers they worked with" and a "crop of musicians, especially the electric bassists and drum set players who were in the forefront" of the sound (p. 33). To be clear, the recording context of dub is highly dependent on the group interaction of studio musicians for its productions/musical material, in addition to a collection of DJs and sound systems for its dissemination and consumption (Veal, 2007, p. 42); it is predicated on a high level of *hierarchical* collaboration, usually revolving around lone "genius" producers such as King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry. In this way, dub producers fit within the dominant history of the (Western) global music industry wherein most commercial recordings are produced within the context of a collaborative and highly specialized editing chain (Ryan & Hughes, 2006, p. 243). According to Meintjes, decision-making along this chain is very hierarchical, with paid session musicians who often have the least amount of technical recording skills and experience

resting at the bottom of the stratified division of labour, and with producers generally at the top. Furthermore, Meintjes argues that female vocalists who enter the studio "are tangled in a triple disadvantage: their gendered status maps onto their spatial status," as they usually record vocal tracks from cut off and isolated recording booths, "and onto studio labor differences, where they are artists, not producers" (2003, p. 102). What is important here is the way Veal's and Meintjes' elaborations are suggestive of diverging social relations, ones that do not work well with the production processes pursued by electroclash producers like Peaches and Le Tigre, who produce their work outside of this specialized editing chain. Additionally, the dub studios and the multitrack recording spaces outlined above are primarily inhabited and dominated by men. Like many of the rap studios that Tricia Rose (1994) documents in *Black Noise*, "where technological discourse merges with a culture of male bonding" (p. 58), music studios controlled by men often work to prevent access and problematize female participation, particularly as engineers and producers. As Meintjes puts it, "[T]he studio is remote and exclusive. It is closed to outsiders" (2003, p. 87). In this highly gendered situation, men very often act as gatekeepers and decide who can record, the type of material to be recorded and the specific roles that participants are to play. This partially explains why women have primarily only been able to access studio spaces within the popular music industry as singers, performers and, even more rarely, as instrumentalists since the 1940s (Mayhew, 2004, p. 150).

With the increased power, speed and availability of home computers, workstations and digital sound reproduction gear and ever dropping prices for this equipment, women

like Peaches have been able to bypass the standard institutional structures of access within the commercial recording industry by setting up their own studios or places to record. Jonathan Sterne suggested that, in 2006, a decent digital home studio could be put together for around $2000USD, including cables and microphones, and a workstation, either a computer or a "standalone all-in-one 'digital audio workstation'" (2006, p. 258). This type of studio would cost even less today, particularly with the growing second hand market for electronics where discarded devices can be purchased far below their initial market value. To create an electroclash studio, or any electronic dance music studio for that matter, one only needs a laptop/computer, a few other outboard recording devices and a room—although one could technically record outdoors. This recording environment is markedly different from the enclosed and vacuum sealed spaceship-like studio spaces (Meintjes, 2003, p. 88), large mixing consoles, tape machines, and effects units that shaped the extended and fragmented aesthetics of dub and other forms of popular music.

The dropping prices of digital recording technologies not only increased access for women, it provides the context for an initial expansion of aesthetics and practices within electroclash, particularly the lo-fi and distorted beats of the previously mentioned Peaches' track, "Fuck the Pain Away." Again, to quote Bottner, Peaches' music is recorded "very roughly, noisy, focused on voice and beat" (2005, p. 99). These grittier timbres and beats challenge established conventions of electronic music production, which, as noted above, is regularly marked by the pursuit of the latest studio technologies and slick/clean sounding productions (see Rodgers 2003). It might be useful to think of

the studio practices and music of Peaches as *semiotic expansionism*, to borrow from Straw's adaptation of Peter Wollen's (1982) semiotic reductionism in *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (personal communication, April 7, 2010). Peaches was able to write and record most of *The Teaches of Peaches* using a Roland MC-505 (Bottner, 2005, p. 102), a small portable device also known as a groove-box that functions as a programmable sixty-four note polyphonic synthesizer and drum machine with twenty-six interchangeable drum kits to use in various combinations. With the MC-505, a producer is able to work with a set of previously recorded sonic materials—in other words, sounds that they did not record themselves such as drum timbres, handclaps or bass sounds—in combination with vocals or any other instruments that can be accessed. In this way, many electroclash studios operate as remix studios where sounds are rearticulated around certain established aesthetic conventions. These conventions are then solidified and circulated by various modes of distribution, whether at club nights, parties or through peer-to-peer file sharing and streaming.

Rather than thinking of these artists as using the latest in hi-tech studio equipment, it is important to emphasize that electroclash artists like Peaches and Le Tigre produced much of their electroclash material making do with whatever instruments they had access to. The aforementioned MC-505 used to make *The Teaches of Peaches* was first released in 1998 and was produced by Roland until 2002 as the successor to its MC-303. Although the MC-505 has an accessible user interface for programming rhythm patterns using a step sequencer, it lacks a sampler, is prone to "lock" or "freeze" during real-time operations, and its LCD screen, which displays the device's settings, is very small and

tends to lose pixels over time. These supposed design flaws, including the ease with which one can program beats, prevented it from being widely accepted amongst electronic dance music producers. Since the MC-505 was not taken up in the same way as Roland's TR-808 drum machine, which is intimately linked with hip hop production and house music, or its TB-303, known as the "acid machine" for its associations with late 1980s techno and acid house, the MC-505 quickly dropped in value.[18] While the device initially came with a price tag exceeding $1200USD, it is now readily available on sites like Ebay and Craigslist at prices below $300, depending on the condition. Interestingly, as a consequence of such a high degree of innovation, turnover, and competition, with devices and formats constantly being *improved* upon, electronic sound recording equipment can lose monetary value rather quickly, thereby making these devices available to those who could not afford them at the time of their release.

Perhaps it is useful to imagine theses producers putting together sounds and making tracks using left over and discarded sound reproduction technologies (see Sterne 2003). As Kathleen Hanna of Le Tigre mentions in conversation with Rodgers: "[W]e're really into whatever we can get our hands on at the time, utilizing it to create the sounds we want to make," noting that the group eventually learned ProTools, "so we don't have to rely on an engineer to help us sequence stuff or reorganize stuff at the last minute" (2010, p. 246). Additionally, the portability of their studio instruments allows the group to work in numerous different spaces, in various combinations—in other words, individually or as

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[18] For a discussion of hip hop and Roland's TR-808, see Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994), chapter 3, "Soul Sonic Forces" in particular. On the TB-303 and acid house, see Gilbert and Pearson's "Metal Machine Musics" from *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture, and the Politics of Sound* (1999).

a group—and at their own pace, as traditional multitrack studio recording is usually structured by expensive hourly rates. As Hanna puts it:

> Electronic music is so great in terms of being able to pass stuff off to each other (…) the amazing part about collaboration, especially electronic collaboration, is that we're a group, but we each really get to thrive individually (…) There's something about being in your house or the studio by yourself, learning these things on your own time, coming to your own conclusions, and being able to feel like no one's watching you and you can make crazy mistakes and erase it, and we'll never know, and get to as far as you can get. And also the process of being able to share that, even though it's not done, with somebody else. (Rodgers, 2010, p. 253)

Le Tigre's Johanna Fateman adds: "I feel like my best 'art brain' sometimes is happening at 3:00 AM when I'm alone, eating candy in the middle of the night and working on music (…) There's this part of it that's really live, and us all together having fun, and this part of it that's totally a crazy person alone" (Rodgers, 2010, p. 253).

These sorts of performative and collaborative production practices also subvert many of the ideological underpinnings of electronic music and "challenge the myth of the genderless composer" (2006, p. 45), as McCartney writes, the *immediate* roots of which can be traced back to Western Europe in the early Cold War period. To rehearse a well-told story, *musique concrète* and *elektronische Musik* were developed as antagonistic concepts by composers associated with the first two electronic music studios. Pierre Schaeffer and the *Groupe de Recherches Musicales* (GRM) worked in Paris at the Studio D'Essai at Radiodiffusion-Télévision Français (RTF), while Herbert Eimert and Karlheinz Stockhausen, among others, worked in Cologne at Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) from 1956 onwards (McCartney, 2006, p. 20–21). The lasting impact of these two studios on electronic dance music is perhaps more ideological (or philosophical) and

technological than musical as the music and sounds produced by these early electronic music experimenters bares little resemblance to electronic dance music. In fact, in typical high modernist fashion, many of these composers rejected using any identifiable or repeated rhythms in their works. Schaeffer and Andre Moles developed one of the first formal aesthetic handbooks for electronic music. As Thom Holmes (2008) posits, they elaborated on some of the principle tenets of electronic music, many of which can be mapped onto various electronic dance musics: namely, "the permanency of recorded work; the ability to reproduce music without the participation of performers" or interpreters; and "the ability to manipulate space and time components of the material" (p. 52-53).

At the same time that the independent popular music producer was established as a male domain, a similar construction of the producer was established in electronic music in the early1950s through intense ideological battling between RTF and WDR. Relations between those associated with the two studios were extremely tense in the 1950s, as composers and engineers dogmatically embraced seemingly oppositional approaches to composition, aesthetics and sonic working materials. According to the Dutch composer Konrad Boehmer, whose work is rooted in the German tradition at WDR: "[Y]ou could say that in the '50s, you had two types of Cold War (…) One between the Soviet Union and the United States and one between the Cologne Studio and the French Studio. They disgusted each other"; adding, "[T]he aesthetic starting points of Schaffer were completely different from Eimert's views" (Holmes, 2008, p. 56). The composers at RTF were committed to using identifiable sonic materials to produce its *musique concrète* and

they were initially wary of electronically produced sounds. As Douglas Kahn (1999) points out, however, in the very same year that Schaeffer produced his first *concrète* piece, *Étude aux chemins de fer* (1948), he rejected the work for its use of identifiable sound sources and in particular, the train station sounds (p. 110). Kahn writes that from this point on, Schaeffer "employed a variety of manipulation techniques that would more assuredly diminish or entirely eradicate any associative properties a sound might have." Schaeffer felt that this break from the identifiable sound world was a necessary condition for musicmaking (Kahn, 1999, p. 110).

In Cologne, the composers at the WDR studio wanted to break from the known sound world along with traditional understandings of harmony by using simple sine tones produced by oscillators and employing the serialist approach to composition to create *elektronische Musik*, a term credited to Eimert, Werner Meyer-Eppler and Robert Beyer. Broadly speaking, serialism is a twelve-tone atonal form of music where composers use twelve note tone rows for composition with each tone afforded the same value, rather than employing more traditional major/minor key signatures which have a defined tonal focus. Serialism is first associated with the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) and his followers, Alban Berg (1885–1935) and Anton Webern (1883–1945). In the 1950s, serialist composition techniques were taken to stereotypically masculine extremes as composers like Pierre Boulez, Milton Babbit and Stockhausen, among others, attempted to control all aspects of composition (Chadabe, p. 37). According to Born (1995), this became known as "total," "integrated," or "generalized" serialism, extending it "to the rationalist and determinist control not only of pitch but of all other parameters

of composition: rhythm or duration, dynamics, and timbre" (p. 50–51). Although these philosophical and ideological distinctions somewhat receded within a few years as both studios began experimenting with electronic and acoustic sources—Stockhausen is even credited with producing the first piece that combined natural recorded sounds with purely electronic synthesized sounds: *Gesang der Junglinge* (1956–57) (Born, 1995, p. 76)—the electroacoustic and electronic music communities, and particularly those associated with WDR, continued to conceptualize *musique concrète* and acoustic working materials (in other words, Schaeffer et al.) as inferior and feminine (McCartney, 2006, p. 21).[19]

These repeated moments of intense ideological battling over working materials and production practices significantly shaped the conceptual underpinnings of electronic music since the 1950s, traces of which can be found in electroclash and other genres of electronic dance music. In many ways, the serialist electronic music composers of the 1950s answered the masculinist hopes of early proponents of electronic music like Edgard Varèse, who is considered by many, including Joan Peyser, to be the "pioneer" of electronic music (1971, xv). Varèse once proclaimed: "I dream of instruments obedient to my thought and which, with their contribution to a whole new world of unsuspected sounds, will lend themselves to the exigencies of my inner rhythm" (Peyser, 1971, p. 141). In the early postwar history of electronic music, there was a sense that both identifiable sounds and synthesized sounds might be incorporated in the production processes and practices of electronic music without such a gendered hierarchy of sounds.

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[19] For instance, McCartney argues that musicologists such as Robin Maconie portrayed Schaeffer's work "as capricious and technically ill-informed, characteristics also used to create denigrating stereotypes of femininity" (2006, p.22).

The approach developed at WDR that favoured or privileged synthetic and abstracted sounds totally controlled by the *exigencies* of their *inner rhythms* won out and this continues to structure electronic music, particularly those forms of electronic music that share a more Eurocentric lineage. Postwar developments at the WDR and RTF studios also established electronic music as a studio, or perhaps more accurately, a laboratory based project with little to no regard for performance or interpreters. Although electroclash imports some of the rhythm principles and energy of rock and combines them with electronic dance music, thereby placing it at odds with postwar electronic music aesthetics and composers like Stockhausen, the genre still maintains a certain minimal aesthetic, often producing a rather cold and austere soundscape. Additionally, electroclash is deeply connected to Germany as one of its production centres and homes, with numerous producers living and working in Berlin and the genre is almost entirely produced in remix studios using internally synthesized sounds. In this way, electroclash operates as a medium with the potential to (re)inscribe the heritage and concepts of *elektronische Musik* in a popular and commercial form, particularly as some of its producers begin to embrace a high degree of control of the genre through their artistic and entrepreneurial pursuits. At the same time, many electroclash artists such as Peaches, Le Tigre and Chicks on Speed challenge this heritage through their highly performative and collaborative approaches to music production, including the employment gendered pseudonyms that seek to challenge patriarchal identity politics, and through the mobilization of a highly sexualized, vulgar and ironic aesthetic.

RESPONSE

It is important to add that the multi-tasking electronic dance music production context detailed above can potentially produce its own problems of access and control, somewhat reminiscent of the solitary studio composers of postwar Europe controlling all parameters of production. As Sterne writes: "the rise of the home studio has also in some ways buttressed the ideology of the lone musical genius. After all, a single person can now theoretically control the creation of an entire oeuvre of music at every step from conceptualization to small-scale replication" (2006, p. 262). Maybe this solitary production context is not suited to media producers who do not want to perform all of these various duties, from artist and studio engineer, to entrepreneur and music distributor? Are there other options? Perhaps there is something useful to the specialized editing chain of standard multitrack recording, in that, tasks are often well defined and not one single person is called upon to do *everything*.[20] Furthermore, if individuals and small groups are able to maintain control over and participate in so many aspects of production and distribution, will fewer voices emerge? Perhaps this explains the aforementioned aesthetic shifts in the four years between Peaches' "Fuck the Pain Away" (2000) and Alter Ego's "Rocker" (2004), where electroclash transformed from a vocally driven and heterogeneous genre, to a largely instrumental genre, with the clash expelled and replaced by a more techno-oriented sensibility. Although Peaches remains a prominent and active producer and performer, many other electroclash artists were unable

[20] This also connects current music studios to the broader multitasking demands of contemporary media practices.

to maintain their careers as electronic dance music producers and performers during this transformative moment. In this period, electroclash crystallized as a producer's medium with the shift happening in the history of the genre around changes in production practices. As electroclash moves to more techno-oriented *electro* in the mid-2000s, the genre steadily becomes dominated by a small group of high-end producers, performers and labels.

In the late 1990s, many electroclash producers began working within a more digitally oriented network of production and distribution that earlier formations of the producer did not have access to, or at the very least, could not control. For instance, DJ Hell (né Helmut Josef Geier) founded International Deejay Gigolo Records, which is known as Gigolo, in 1996, later becoming electroclash's most well-known and established label. Through the strategic release of many records and mix compilations, including one of the most prominent and popular mixes of electroclash in 2000, *International Deejay Gigolos 5*, featuring Tiga and Zyntherius' "Sunglasses at Night," and by signing numerous artists, DJ Hell and Gigolos were largely able to control and define the sonic frames of electroclash. As (Thomas) Sontag suggested to me during a recent personal interview at Turbo Recording's headquarters in Montreal:

> For me, when I think electroclash, I think Gigolo, first and foremost. Because to a DJ, to a music fan, to someone who's up on everything, there was no label that *owned* that genre the way that Gigolo did. And if you look at their artists, for a little while they had it all. You know, they had Kitten and the Hacker, they had Tiga, they had Vitalic, they had Boys Noize even. (personal communication, September 23, 2011, italics added for emphasis)

Montreal's DJ Mini makes a similar connection between electroclash and Gigolo,

although she is careful to mention that the label flooded the electronic dance music market in order to reach their status:

> I think Gigolo has this big place because they were the ones who put out numerous amounts of records, one after another. Every week there would be a new record, for something like two years. For over two years they really blasted the market with new music and it sort of overshadowed a lot of the smaller labels who were doing more artistic things, working on installation art and things like that. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

When a musical genre becomes so intimately linked with one label and/or a small group of artists, the aesthetic and expressive boundaries can become so rigid as to silence the contributions of artists who do not fit within these boundaries or those artists not represented on the label. With electroclash, this seems to have the effect of writing the trashier and more vulgar elements of electroclash out of its history as most discussions of the genre seem to fall in line with the above statements of Sontag, which over emphasize the music produced at Gigolo from 2000 to 2002, while neglecting artists like Peaches, Chicks on Speed and Le Tigre. This connects electroclash to broader historical narratives of electronic music which tend to silence or erase the contributions of women producers and performers.

In addition to establishing their own labels, electroclash producers such as DJ Hell and the above-mentioned Ellen Allien perform(ed) their music live as DJs. There are also more performance venues available to Ellen Allien and DJ Hell, and other solo producers and DJs, in comparison with the groups of electroclash who require much more equipment, performance space and personnel to tour. In contrast, DJs and producers only need laptops filled with MP3s and software to perform in a live context, thereby turning

their studio practices inside out. This marks a major shift from house and other earlier forms of electronic dance music where producers primarily relied on DJs for this process of dissemination (see Thornton 1996). Thus, perhaps one of the consequences of this highly decentralized production system is the displacement of other artists, such as bands and instrumental musicians, who are not able fully take advantage of the digitalization of distribution networks and those who do not want to perform all of the functions of digital media production. Many of the rock-oriented bands that initially contributed to electroclash lost much of their stature and presence within the commercial music industry as they struggled to compete with solo multi-tasking producers who did not work within the traditional and slower album cycles of rock. In other words, these electroclash bands could not release enough music and only in limited ways. From this perspective, electroclash is a survival story of sorts, wherein the production and distribution possibilities offered by portable digital reproduction technologies create a different set of institutional parameters that seem more suited to those artists who take on a multitude of roles, including producing, distributing and performing.

To further this last point, one only needs to compare the music releases of Ellen Allien (producer/label owner/DJ) with those of the more band-oriented productions of electroclash duo/performance troupe Fischerspooner from 2000 to 2004. Fischerspooner is comprised of Casey Fischer and Warren Fischer, along with numerous musicians and performers who accompany them during live performances, and are one of the groups who Larry Tee cites for inspiring the term electroclash. Interestingly, Fischerspooner is one of the only artists during this period, whether group or solo artists, that received a

substantial record contract, apparently signing to the label *Ministry of Sound* for two million dollars USD (Reynolds). As stated above, in 2001 Allien released one album, numerous remixes and singles and at least two mix compilations, which are archived and for sale on BPitch Control's website (www.bpitchcontrol.de/artist/1/29), and performed around the world as a DJ. In contrast, Fischerspooner released their first album in 2001 under the title *#1*, with the follow up, *Odyssey*, not coming out until 2005, although they released three singles from the former ("Emerge," "The 15th," and "L.A. Song"). In this way, Ellen Allien the record executive, music producer, and DJ/performer, was better positioned to maximize what Born refers to as the "relayed creativity" of digital music, while also maximizing her position within electronic dance music culture. As Born writes: "digitized music (…) is continually, immanently open to re-creation. Distributed across space, time and persons, music can become an object of recurrent decomposition, composition and re-composition by a series of creative agents" (2005, p. 26). Although Born extends creative agency to many different producers within this collaborative network, including audiences and "non-human agents" (2005, p. 25), it must also be stressed that some producers can access and control this system more readily than others.

The transformations to electronic dance music production discussed in this chapter must also be understood within the broader context of the popular music industry in the 1990s. The artist/entrepreneur electroclash producer crystallized as peer-to-peer file sharing practices proliferated and more traditional, high-end record labels and studios closed their doors, a trend that persists with Cello Studios (Los Angeles, CA) and the Hit Factory (New York City) folding in 2005 (Sterne, 2006, p. 258). Yet even though many of

the displaced and hybrid production practices detailed in this chapter might seem natural now, in the late 1990s and early 2000s there was an expansion of aesthetics and heterogeneity of production practices opened up by the possibilities of digital music culture and the many women who participated as producers and performers. With the increased affordability and availability of (discarded) sound reproduction technologies, artists such as Peaches, Chicks on Speed and Le Tigre were able to move away from costly multitrack recording and into their own spaces, on their own rhythms. Through the early 2000s, a distinct articulation formed around electroclash, with multitasking producers and DJs attempting to appropriate the chain of creative music production using the backbeat as a shared rhythmic convention.

II

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Moving through popular music studies, sound studies and cultural theory, and drawing on my own experiences as an electronic sound producer and participant in Montreal's electroclash scene in the 2000s, this dissertation project is concerned with the emergence of electroclash as a dominant form of electronic dance music with an added focus on gender, aesthetics and the various ways that electroclash is connected to earlier and more current studio production practices and ideological developments within electronic (dance) music culture. The project examines electroclash within the context of a transformative moment in the late 1990s and early 2000s wherein certain elements combined and restructured the course of electronic dance music. This transformation significantly contributed to the establishment of current and naturalized electronic dance music production practices where electronic music producers can strategically position themselves to fully take advantage of the increased digitalization of production and distribution networks as artists, entrepreneurs and performers. In this institutional production setting, many of the specialized and hierarchical collaborative duties of multitrack studio recording, such as mixing and engineering, collapse around lone producers or small groups who might also act in an entrepreneurial capacity by releasing their own music and, in a performative capacity, by performing their music live as DJs (e.g., Ellen Allien) and/or performance artists (e.g., Peaches).

This chapter addresses the various methods employed for the project, in addition to

detailing my personal positioning as a researcher, soundmaker and participant in Montreal's electroclash scene during a very specific moment, from 2001–2006. At various instances throughout the research process, I use retrospective participant analysis, sensuous ethnography, metaphorical cross-dressing, research-creation, networked collaboration, friendship as method, semi-structured interviews, conversation, and scene analysis. These methods are mobilized in order to address the following questions: how can I articulate what is distinctive about Montreal's electroclash scene and the practices of two of the scene's key players, Tiga and DJ Mini, between 2001 and 2006? How have these production practices developed since the mid-2000s and, in relation to my own current electronic musicmaking practice? I open by situating the project vis-à-vis sound studies and popular music studies before moving on to a discussion of the methodological program taken for the project and how I situate myself within the dissertation.

Cross-dressing to Backbeats is situated between popular music studies' longstanding interest in questions of music, meaning, identity and the types of situations music engenders and sound studies' broader, interdisciplinary approach in examining "the material production and consumption of music, sound, noise, and silence, and how these have changed throughout history and within societies," as Pinch and Bijsterveld write (2004, p. 636). Jonathan Sterne (2012) has written more recently that sound studies "is a name for the interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival. By analyzing both sonic practices and the discourses and institutions that describe them, it redescribes what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world" (p. 2). The study of genre has

been taken up extensively by scholars in the interrelated fields of sound studies, popular music studies and ethnomusicology, with important works covering everything from dub and reggae music (Veal, 2007), American dance music and disco (Lawrence, 2003), Italian disco and Quebec (Straw 2008b), disc cultures (Thornton, 1995), rap music (Rose, 1994), along with heavy metal and gender (Walser, 1993; Straw, 2008a). Gender is also a fundamental concern of scholars working in the areas of popular music studies and/or sound studies with notable topics including high fidelity and gender (Keightley, 1996), gender and popular music (Ed. Whitely, 2000), house music and masculinity (Amico, 2001), women and electronic music (Rodgers, 2010), and electroacoustic music and gender (McCartney, 1995, 2002, 2006; and Truax, 2003). However, as stated earlier, there is a dearth of information about electroclash, especially that which relates to history, development, gender, sexuality, production and audience practices.

Writing from the perspective of a heterosexual white male in relation to constructions of gender in sound and music has not been explored nearly enough. With the acknowledgement of my gender and sexuality, I hope to situate my work with the just mentioned writers, in addition to many others, who suggest that sound and music should be considered within its social context. In traditionally minded approaches, sound and music are too often perceived and dealt with on such a level of abstraction and formalism that issues of gender and sexual orientation are detached from most discussions. Of course, this has been changing for some time. Yet, while gendered and queer perspectives on sound and music have been continuously emerging since at least the 1990s, including landmark publications like *Music and Gender* (2000), “Homoeroticism and

electroacoustic music" (Truax, 2003), and *Pink Noises* (2010), there remains a notable absence of gendered perspectives from the male, heterosexual community, particularly in technologically oriented fields like electronic music and electroacoustic music.

However, since it is incredibly difficult to define exactly what this heterosexual, white male perspective is, given that it is such a broad mixing of identities, it might be more useful for me to discuss the particularities of my ongoing (gendered) experiences throughout the course of this research project and the way my bodily presence, genderings and identities have affected various situations.[21] Early on in the project's development, I encountered some difficulties getting access to many of the key women electroclash producers/artists, including Peaches, who I was unable to make contact with; Ellen Allien, who declined an invitation to participate in this study via email; Le Tigre and Chicks on Speed, who did not respond to my emails. Since I had never met Peaches, Ellen Allien, nor the members of Le Tigre and Chicks on Speed, I contacted intermediaries—also women—such as Tara Rodgers and Bernadette Houde of the Montreal electronic dance music band Lezzies on X in the hopes of being introduced to any of these artists, many who consider themselves to be feminist artists (loosely

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[21] It is worth emphasizing that I rarely seem to identify with descriptions of the white male category, which often feel static and not in line with my own more fluid, process-based ideas concerning gender. For instance, artist Rob Milthorp, who also writes from a white middle-class, heterosexual viewpoint, works "with the assumption that men have difficulty speaking openly or honestly about their feelings and desires, and that we consequently have difficulty in our relations with others (…) my experience is that masculinity is preoccupied with doing, with affecting and controlling" (1996, p. 133). More recently, Shana Goldin-Pershbacher notes that, "white, straight, middle-class masculinity is performed most successfully when one is in control, not out of control, is strong, rather than vulnerable, and takes possession, rather than showing need" (2007, p. 215).

defined), and may be hesitant to contribute to a "male-oriented" project centred on gender and electronic music. These intermediary attempts also failed in gaining access to these artists. Additionally, the project's heavy reliance on semi-structured interviews and conversations might have created further impediments for participation as this is a methodological process wherein a researcher ultimately edits and filters respondents' voices, even though I make it clear to anyone I contact that I work in a collaborative way and would be open to discussions concerning editing choices. The above named artists might also have been reluctant to participate in an academic or scholarly project, as academia has long been associated with severing the mind from bodily experience(s).

It is worth mentioning that the men interviewed for this project—Thomas Sontag (T. Sontag) and John Hatz—committed to participating after sending them one email apiece, although I had met them previously through attending party nights in Montreal throughout the 2000s. DJ Mini's (née Evelyn Drouin) participation was confirmed early one morning at a party in 2010 where I introduced myself as an electronic music producer and PhD student concerned with issues of gender, sound and electronic music. I outlined the direction of the project and informed her that I had been attending electronic dance music parties in Montreal for many years, in addition to attending her *Overdose* parties at Parking Night Club on many occasions. Mini's initial hesitation to participate in the project's semi-structured interviews and recurring conversations was alleviated through our connection to mutual acquaintances (DJs, party hosts, etc.), including Hatz and T. Sontag, some follow up emails where I was able to demonstrate that I was "serious" about the project (personal communication, November 4, 2011), as she

remarked in an email correspondence, and through my sustained commitment to electronic dance music in Montreal. In these various party contexts and club nights, I was able to establish a certain level of social capital through *repeated* participation over the course of five or six years. While attending an average of one electroclash and/or electro-oriented party night per month during this period (2001–2006), I created many informal, conversational moments where my scholarly associations were generally at the margins of my shifting and multi-dimensional identities, and I was able to use some of the foundational elements of friendship as method (which is discussed further below). Also during this time, I was working on my Master's degree in Media Studies, which seems to create noticeably less social distinctions than those associated with pursuing a PhD.

Through these experiences I have come to embrace a performative and situational understanding of gender as I have felt my own identity shift depending on the social situations that I enter or cannot enter. When I speak of the various crossings of electroclash, whether aesthetic, production practices, styles or dressing, it is based on a conception of gender drawn from Judith Butler's seminal works in this area and, in particular, *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004). As Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*: "the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established." She adds, "gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1990, p. 191). At any given moment, my identity crossings

might be structured, outwardly and inwardly by various combinations of electronic music producer, performer, man, researcher, heterosexual, musician, queer, dancer, teacher… I can only imagine how forced and detached the above email correspondences to Peaches et al. must have seemed coming from a "man/researcher/outsider" in comparison to the regular interactions I had in Montreal as I danced and partied while occasionally wearing eyeliner and costumes, thereby crossing the traditional boundaries of heteronormative gender play. At these parties and club nights I was always a work in progress rather than a static construction.

Employing a performative conception of gender also seems well suited to a study of electronic dance music as producers and DJs' "real" identities are very commonly mediated or masked through the creation of performative pseudonyms. For instance, the production and performance identity of the raunchy, dildo brandishing cyborg, Peaches—who sometimes performs with a built-in pussy light—comes from "somewhere inside," and I would add, outside, the "sweet" forty-five year old former music and drama teacher from Toronto, Merill Nisker (Sullivan). In the case of electroclash, as evinced by Peaches and Tiga, who is discussed further in chapter III, these pseudonyms are often created with a very explicit and fluid gender play at the forefront that blurs normative binary distinctions between sex/gender, male/female and masculine/feminine. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to use the term *wo/men* producers to broadly represent many of the DJs, performers and electronic dance music producers of electroclash discussed in the this dissertation—from Larry Tee, and Ellen Allien, to Peaches and Tiga—as "a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to

end" (Butler, 1990, p. 45), where "[T]here is no either/or. Rather, there are shades of difference," as Anne Fausto-Sterling writes (2000, p. 3). Yet, while electroclash is heavily structured by a mobility of crossings, feelings and affects, I additionally employ the term *women* producers within this wo/men framing to draw attention to one of the most distinctive features of electroclash, both in and outside of the studio, that the genre is inhabited and defined by numerous producers and performers who explicitly identify as women, broadly speaking, an anomaly in the history of recorded music and sound.

It is because of this historical anomaly that I have decided to include artists such as Le Tigre even though the members of the group have an ambivalent relationship with electroclash, electronic music and rock music. As they discuss with Tara Rodgers (TR):

> TR: *People often describe your music with terms like "post-Riot Grrrl" or "electroclash," and I wonder how you feel about this—how you see your music as fitting in or not fitting in with other kinds of rock or electronic music.*
>
> Fateman: Well, I think we'd like to fit in! [Laughs]
>
> JD Samson: With the "real" electronic music (…)
>
> Fateman: Obviously we don't sound like electronica, or dance music, or most electronic genres. But it's kind of frustrating that we're still kind of in this rock genre, even through we don't have a lot of peers using the technology that we're using, in that world (…)
>
> Hanna: Sometimes it is frustrating in terms of not getting press in electronic music magazines. I've felt like we're not taken seriously in that world or something. I don't know what kind of test you have to pass, or how you get your records into certain record stores. But I do feel like we should be reviewed in electronic music magazines (…) You know, people can be really genre-closed. (2010, p. 246–248)

I have also included Le Tigre in this study and other artists who may share this ambivalent relationship with electronic music as most histories of electronic music

generally focus on male composers, their works, and inventors (see Rodgers 2010). I would like this dissertation to intervene into these histories by representing the production practices and works of these women and gender-bending electronic music artists and performers.

Although I have been actively committed to writing about music and gender since 2005, when I began a graduate diploma in communication studies at Concordia University, while participating in Montreal's various electronic music scenes between 2001 and 2006, I was not officially conducting research nor was I writing about my experiences in any scholarly platforms. I was primarily moving through these scenes as an avid listener and producer of electronic dance music and for the purposes of dancing and partying. In fact, I was most likely going to these party nights as a way to escape or to get away from, my life as an academic researcher. Thus, I use the term *retrospective participant analysis* to denote the ways in which I have retrospectively accessed and discussed these experiences after my participation in these party scenes decreased from 2006 onwards. It was not until the fall of 2009, after going to see the aforementioned electroclash/techno duo Alter Ego that I began to seriously consider this project as a potential dissertation project. Following Alter Ego's performance at SAT, I started making sense of my participation in these scenes vis-à-vis my ongoing library and online research on electronic music, gender, sound studies and popular music studies.

One of the most productive ways of thinking through these experiences retrospectively has been relating them to Laurence de Garis' (1999) notion of a sensuous ethnography. De Garis developed this ethnographic research practice while performing as

a professional wrestler in the 1980s and 1990s as a way to move beyond traditional ethnographic subject-object relations and as a way to incorporate non-visual sensory data and experiences into the ethnographic field. As de Garis emphasizes, "epistemologically, the ethnographer is confined to visual data to the exclusion of sound, touch, taste, and smell. Ontologically, the ethnographer seeks to uncover and capture so-called hidden truths" (1999, p. 65). The author suggests that researchers should attempt to step "into the ring," whether literally or metaphorically, as an approach for addressing "questions of what sporting practices feel, smell, sound, and taste like" (1999, p. 71). My participation in Montreal's various electronic music scenes from 2001 to 2006 involved sustained explorations of getting into the ring or more specifically, various EDM dance floors. These sensuous experiments included dancing, listening, consuming alcohol, occasionally taking drugs and very briefly working as a party promoter for Neon Productions in 2004.

It is important to point out that my getting into the ring stopped short of literally cross-dressing at parties and club nights during this timeframe. As de Garis argues, literally getting into the ring "may serve to obfuscate cultural beliefs and practices or indicate an ignorance of etiquette or cultural codes" (1999, p. 71). My decision to not explore cross-dressing as a performative gesture largely came down to fearing for my own safety and the safety of my friends. Although it is relatively easy to access dance floors and party nights in Montreal that are open to a range of highly performative genderings, including cross-dressing and drag, the threat of homophobic violence never feels too far away from these spaces and sometimes this type of violence happens within

them. While walking to clubs in the city's Gay Village with friends who cross-dress, we faced harassment on numerous occasions, almost exclusively by men in passing cars or by men walking near us. This harassment generally came in the form of being called "faggots" and usually we remained silent during these altercations. However, I must admit that on occasion we reacted verbally to the provocations, thereby heightening the threat of physical violence. Through these ongoing instances of homophobia, I began to question what might be gained by literally cross-dressing once or twice at a party or club night. What could I possibly learn through the experience of direct physical homophobic violence? Furthermore, I felt even more conflicted given that by cross-dressing I might potentially be engaging in what Suzanne Moore (1988) calls "gender tourism, whereby male theorists are able to take package trips into the world of femininity" (p. 167). For, unlike some of my friends who cross-dress regularly, I would always be able to safely return to being a white, heterosexual male.

Cross-dressing in the context of this project involves an electronic music production metaphor pursued in chapter IV, where I attempt to playfully mix and balance a range of unruly sounds and ambiguous voices within an affective mixing frame. I employ this method as a way to mobilize and represent sounds that have traditionally been considered vulgar, too expressive and feminine for electronic (dance) music, through the creation of a series of musical works and an extended dance mix. This compositional approach should be understood as a queering process "that unsettles practices and codes of normativity and dominant hegemony," as Victoria Moon Joyce writes (1997, p. 35). Moon Joyce continues, "'queer' is the adjective that describes that

which is abject in society, transgressive and disordering of norms and normative practices. Queering is the process that actualizes that orientation" (1997, p. 35). I cross-dress to backbeats by working with a more current iteration of an electroclash-oriented studio in order to address what is distinct about this particular production setting, how these production practices have developed since the early 2000s, and how these practices relate to my own electronic musicmaking processes.

As is described in the first chapter, the sound of electroclash, which is deeply centred on the voice and backbeat, is often produced using a scattered mix of older and newer devices including drum machines, synthesizers, microphones and computers with various computer editing software. For instance, Peaches' *The Teaches of Peaches* (2000) was primarily recorded with Roland's MC-505, an all-in-one programmable drum machine and synthesizer that was released in 1998, as its foundational production instrument. The "groovebox" can be heard on the single "Fuck the Pain Away," with Peaches delivering heavily sexed-out vocals lines such as "Sucking on my titties like you wanted me." Using this particular mixed configuration as a guide, I put together a grouping of devices in my home studio for the specific purposes of this project. These devices are a drum machine/synthesizer (Native Instruments Maschine), which also doubles as a digital audio workstation (DAW), an audio recording interface (Apogee Duet 2), a synthesizer (Dave Smith Instruments Mopho X4), a laptop computer (MacBook Pro) with the editing software Ableton Live 8 installed, and a pair of studio monitors (Adam A5).

Part of this research-creation exploration of an electroclash studio involves

experimenting with various methods of collaboration as a form of knowledge production and as a method of music production. The most prominent way that collaboration is employed in the project is through *a networked collaboration*, which involves tracing out and working with the networked pathways of my studio. Once the studio was setup in my apartment, I was able to turn to various websites and online tutorials for addressing any lingering follow up questions in relation to establishing a workflow or chain between the instruments and myself. Although I was only working with a few components—a computer, two distinct DAW softwares, a synthesizer and a drum machine—there are numerous ways of linking these devices together or not all. I was interested in having the two DAW software, Ableton Live and Maschine, working in unison, with Ableton Live operating as the primary recording and editing interface for the project and with Maschine's signal routing into Live, a software relationship that is not very well articulated in either of the software's user manuals (although the possibility to work in this way is addressed). Routing is a term used in audio production to denote the practice of setting up and assigning the destinations of various signals, in other words, directing input and output signal paths. I found two video tutorials that outline the steps for connecting the software via routing: one entitled "How to Sequence NI Maschine in Ableton Live," and the other, "How to Route Maschine Drums in Ableton Live." I draw attention to this networked sociality because even in the most seemingly solitary of production settings such as working alone in a room and making music with a computer, where there appears to be the greatest potential for isolation and compositional control, there are numerous ways in which one's processes and ideas are connected to and shaped

by a social world "outside" of the studio or the particular musicmaking space, wherever that may be. As Nick Prior (2008) writes, "the popularity and portability of the laptop opens up a series of possibilities for music that sends it beyond the spatial anchorages such as the recording studio or domestic space" (p. 916).

The networked collaboration also entails producing a series of musical pieces with Samuel Thulin where we build on Le Tigre's practice of electronic musicmaking, which is discussed in chapter I, and pass sound files back and forth to each other. Again, as Kathleen Hanna suggests to Tara Rodgers, "electronic music is so great in terms of being able to pass stuff off to each other (…) the amazing part about collaboration, especially electronic collaboration, is that we're a group, but we each really get to thrive individually" (2010, p. 253). Thulin is a musician, researcher and media artist living in Montreal. His work is concerned with concepts of mobility and place especially as related to sound and technology. He is a member of the Mobile Media Lab and PhD candidate in the Communication Studies department at Concordia University. I first met Thulin in the fall of 2007 while pursuing a Master's degree in Media Studies, also at Concordia. In addition to my interest in working with Samuel because of our friendship, I contacted him because of his extensive abilities and interests as a soundmaker, musician and researcher. Thulin has experience engaging with a range of sonic materials, including field recordings of urban soundscapes and acoustic instruments such as guitar, and he is comfortable producing works in many genres of music and sound, from electronic to folk, rock and soundscape. I was also interested in the potential questions, concerns and issues that might emerge from the conversations about the production process that would

follow the studio production work.

In the summer of 2012, I solicited potential collaborators for this project through a series of email correspondences. Using "friendship as method" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 734), I contacted music producers that I already had a personal relationship with and, could rely on for a quick and honest dialogue, and producers who work within the academy and implicitly understand the contextual constraints of working on a scholarly research project. I initially sent out emails to Samuel Thulin, Owen Chapman, Tara Rodgers and Charity Marsh. Of the four, only Thulin and Rodgers agreed to participate in the project, with the former agreeing to contribute musical works and, with the latter, agreeing to participate in an email interview.[22] It should be emphasized that once a researcher decides to work with collaborators and/or research subjects, a project becomes tethered to an expanded social world where one's decisions and findings become significantly shaped by the energy and potential labour of the participants. A network of social interactions between people are at the centre of any collaborative project, even a project like this one where there is a single researcher/artist who is responsible for the textual component that results from the various collaborations.

My ongoing interactions with the collaborators and their level of participation have partially guided the direction of every chapter of this dissertation. While writing the first chapter, Peaches and Ellen Allien declined to participate and, as a result, I had to rely on secondary sources for interview material which always left lingering follow up questions percolating through my mind, questions that still feel unanswered. While writing the third

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[22] Please refer to the Appendices for the email interview I conducted with Tara Rodgers.

chapter on Montreal and electroclash, I attempted to schedule a second interview with DJ Mini where we were going to discuss some of her key electroclash mixes and DJ sets; however, after several emails, her manager did not secure a date for the interview and I had to move on. Tiga was also unavailable to participate in the project's semi-structured interviews.

After Thulin agreed to participate, I sent him the project's sound files—which are discussed in more detail in Chapter IV—in early August (2012), and then I waited until the end of October before contacting him with a follow up email, asking if perhaps he needed more samples to draw from and whether he had any questions or concerns about the process. By this point in time, Thulin had already made two compositions: one that was produced very quickly and early on in the production process, although he still does not consider the piece finished, and one entitled "Fall Ondes Follow," which he spent a considerable amount of time producing, in part, because he was "having trouble getting a mix" that he was "happy" with (personal communication, October 24, 2012). Thulin initially just submitted "Fall Ondes Follow," in other words, the composition that he spent more time working on and considered finished, concerned that the first piece might not be a significant enough contribution to the project. After sending "Fall Ondes Follow," we had a conversation about the production process in November of 2012. In keeping with the collaborative spirit of the project, large excerpts of this conversation are kept in the body of chapter IV's text. Furthermore, conversation is one of the "primary procedures" of friendship as method and I put forth our conversation as a direct representation of this methodological approach. As Tillmann-Healy writes, "our primary

procedures are those we use to build and sustain friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability" (2003, p. 734).

The decision to keep the voices of the participants prominently featured throughout this project is also informed by the collaborative approach to creating knowledge via semi-structured interviews by some of the contributors of *Music and Gender* (2000): in particular, Beverley Diamond, Pirkko Moisala and soundwalk artist and researcher Andra McCartney, and their ideas around respecting the voices of research participants. The three scholars regard the roles of researchers and collaborators as simultaneously sharing a production space while creating knowledge together, as they somewhat challenge traditional distinctions between researcher and research subjects. However, it is important to note that they do not collapse these distinctions entirely and I understand that ultimately the voices of Thulin, DJ Mini and T. Sontag are filtered through my own editorial decision-making processes, questions and writing. What Diamond, Moisala and McCartney all emphasize in their contributions to *Music and Gender* is the importance of understanding identity differences and how gender and power dynamics shape exchanges between researchers and research participants. And, if one were to completely ignore the distinctions between researcher and subject(s), this might erase certain inherent power relationships within research and soundmaking practices.

McCartney, in particular, overcomes this researcher/participant barrier by actively engaging with research participants in the co-creation of meaning and knowledge through listening exercises and public soundwalks. McCartney will sometimes play various musical compositions to different interpretive communities, many of whom work outside

of the academy, and will then ask these listeners to respond in writing to what they hear through prose, poetry and/or illustrations. In her own words, and quoting here at length, McCartney describes her research practice and how it is connected to composer Hildegard Westerkamp's approach to soundscape composition:

> My respect for the voices of research subjects is similar to the respect shown by Westerkamp for the voices of the places that she records. In her work, these voices remain in balance with her transformation of them, and retain an important place in her works through the use of unchanged field recordings as significant components of the pieces. My own research work includes long quotes from research participants, and discussions of issues raised by them, in ways that are intended to reflect my respect for their diversity and for differences from my own views. I attempt to maintain a balance between the voices of my consultants, and my transformations of those voices through my interpretations of what they are saying and how they relate to each other. (2000a, p. 10)

Thus, drawing on the ethics of respecting the voices of research subjects and the procedures of friendship as method, excerpts of my interactions with DJ Mini, Thulin and T. Sontag are included throughout this dissertation.

A prominent empirical foundation for chapter III's scene analysis is drawn from a series of semi-structured interviews I conducted with Drouin and T. Sontag, A&R/label manager for the Montreal electronic music label Turbo Recordings, DJ and Tiga's younger brother. I met with T. Sontag and Drouin in the fall and winter of 2011, in addition to some follow up conversations and email correspondences throughout 2012. During the interviews, we discussed their personal histories with music as producers, DJs and entrepreneurs, how they understand Montreal's particular contribution to electroclash, both within the circuits of the city and in relation to the broader international

emergence of the genre, the international cycles of electronic dance music[23] and their current practices, among many other threads.[24] Additionally, as mentioned earlier, I attended nearly one party night per month between 2001–2006, some of which were at *Overdose*, where I was able to develop numerous ongoing relationships and conversations with party attendees, DJs, promoters and various other scene actors.

Another interdisciplinary aspect of the project largely has to do with the methodological decision to incorporate elements of my artistic practice as an electronic music producer and musician into the field of my research. I have been actively working with sound in various contexts in-and-around Montreal for the last fifteen years as a music director for dance works, songwriter and instrumentalist in the indie-rock scene, as a soundtrack composer and independent studio producer under the moniker Miraclebaby, and as an instructor in Concordia's Department of Communication Studies. Since 2006, I have been able to incorporate these sound production tools into my research projects as a research-creation scholar. Kim Sawchuk and Owen Chapman have recently written about the potential of research-creation as a multi-varied *approach*, where "the theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of a research project are pursued in tandem, and quite often, scholarly form and decorum are broached and breeched in the name of experimentation" (2012, p. 6). The authors go on to state that "topics are selected and

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[23] As Straw writes, drawing on studies of literary globalization, "[S]ince the mid-1970s, dance music records have been cast into the world in patterns that we may identify as cycles. These cycles unfold within rapidly generated processes of imitation, extension, and influence. They produce quickly visible constellations of musical events as styles or novel effects are picked up and reworked in a multiplicity of places" (2008b, p. 121).

[24] Excerpts of the semi-structured interviews with Drouin and T. Sontag are included in the Appendices.

investigated that could not be addressed without engaging in some form of creative practice, such as the production of a video, performance, film, sound work, blog or multimedia text" (2012, p. 6).

Broadly speaking, my research-creation process, which is further developed and discussed in chapter IV, involves investigating various questions through (sound) creation. This is a liminal space of academic knowledge production where there is no either/or dualism, again drawing from Fausto-Sterling, between theory and practice. My approach to selecting a research topic and the decision to employ research-creation methods somewhat diverges from the ideas put forth above by Chapman and Sawchuk. For my purposes, research-creation is simply one methodological possibility out of many and it is rarely (if ever) the starting point for any particular research project. In order for this approach to be fully accepted within the academy, research-creation has to be on the same footing as any other methodological approach, whether archival, discourse analysis, ethnography, etc., rather than a specialized category. I like to imagine that the topics I am investigating can be looked at from many different perspectives and using many different methodological tools. For instance, could a researcher not investigate music production without being a music producer and producing a series of musical works?

Assuming that research-creation is a process and exploratory-based practice, then part of this exploration must involve figuring out whether or not one is going to use creative and/or artistic methods during a project. And, the decision to engage with research-creation as a method almost never comes down to research-creation being the only choice for advancing a research project or question. Furthermore, at one point in a

research project does one become aware that a creative element is the only possibility? Does this ever really happen? As Chapman and Sawchuk mention later in the same publication and somewhat at odds with the rigidity of the above quotation, “the role of intuition and ‘feeling’ presents itself as one of the strongest reasons why those who pursue research-creation are committed to the methods they promote” (2012, p. 12). The research-creation component for this project (chapter IV) was established after spending nearly two years reading in the fields of sound studies and popular music studies and after developing a series of core research questions. To be very clear, this project emerged out of a set of questions related to electronic music and gender rather than a desire to work with any particular methods or approaches.

III

TIGA, DJ MINI AND MONTREAL'S VULGAR DANCE MUSIC

The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the careers of two key actors who shaped Montreal's electroclash scene from the early 2000s onwards: music producer/DJ Mini, née Evelyne Drouin, and producer/DJ/label owner Tiga Sontag, who employs Tiga as a production and DJ moniker. Evelyne Drouin spearheaded *Overdose*, a weekly electroclash party night at Parking Nightclub in Montreal's Gay Village (*Village gai*), which is situated in the city's south-eastern centre along St. Catherine Street east, between St. Hubert and Papineau Streets to the west and east, respectively. While running *Overdose* every Thursday night for just over seven years (2002–2009), Drouin acted as a local Montreal DJ, entrepreneur, music producer, cultural broker, promoter, designer and mentor, which as previously discussed, are all roles that form the necessary (survival) skill set for building and maintaining a successful "professional"[25] DJ career, whether locally or internationally. Tiga, on the other hand, spent most of the peak moments of electroclash in the early-to-mid 2000s developing an *international* career (i.e., primarily outside of Montreal) as a DJ and producer. He achieved this success largely through building on his existing status as a well-known rave DJ in Montreal and Canada during the mid-1990s, establishing and then relaunching a record label in 2005 (Turbo Recordings), and by releasing music as a producer on his own label and on the aforementioned Gigolo, thereby elevating his cultural status (or capital) within electronic

[25] I employ the term professional to denote an individual who draws their primary source of income from their DJ or production practices.

music culture. Producers typically rest above DJs vis-à-vis electronic dance music social hierarchies—although this should not be taken as an absolute rule (see for instance Straw 1993).

As mentioned in the previous section on method, a significant empirical basis for this chapter draws from a series of semi-structured interviews I conducted with Drouin and Thomas Sontag (T. Sontag) in 2011. In addition, I attended at least one party night per month between 2001–2006, *Overdose* being the event I frequented the most, where I was able to develop numerous ongoing relationships and conversations with party attendees, DJs, promoters and other scene actors. The qualitative data collected through this participation in Montreal's electronic music scene(s) in the 2000s is discussed in relation to the primary research questions put forth in the opening chapter, in addition to scholarly literature on music scenes (Grenier, 1993; Straw, 1991, 2004), electronic music (Rodgers, 2010; Straw 1993, 2008b), Montreal (Allor, 1997; Remiggi, 1998; Stahl, 2001; Stolarick & Florida, 2006; Straw, 1992, 2005, 2009), and DJ and club culture (Farrugia, 2004; Fickentscher, 2000; Katz 2007; Reitsamer, 2011; Straw, 1993; Thornton, 1995). In particular, this chapter addresses the distinctness of Montreal's electroclash scene and its related practices outside of the studio.

The secondary aim of this chapter is to complicate certain dominant understandings of electronic dance music through detailing some of the ways in which Montreal operates as a centre of electronic dance music production and consumption, beginning with disco in the 1970s and continuing through the 1980s and 1990s with the development of various local independent music scenes and the emergence of the Gay Village from the

early 1980s onwards (Remiggi, 1998). Dominant histories of electronic dance music have typically been woven by a "moral geography," says Straw, which tend to selectively emphasize the more rigid and mechanical Northern European styles of dance music while rooting out and downplaying its more extravagant and vulgar permutations and expressive possibilities (2008b, p. 114–115). It is worth mentioning at this point that some of the more vulgar aspects of electronic dance music include the presence of lush orchestral adornments (most commonly connected to late 1970s disco and Eurodisco), the incorporation of female vocal tracks and the mixing of various rock music stylizations. Though the inclusion of female vocal tracks and rock music stylizations are heavily tied to the aesthetics of electroclash, all of the aforementioned vulgar elements of electronic music are tightly connected with Montreal's dance music history. As Straw writes, ever since disco's real or imagined "collapse into vulgarity" and pluralism in the late 1970s, "broad currents within Western dance music have been shaped by the impulse to install rationality and militancy as protective walls against" the possibility of this type of demise; adding, "[T]his has most noticeably been the case within that dance music culture which flirts regularly with rock music" (1993, p. 171).

Before mapping the contributions of Tiga and Drouin vis-à-vis electroclash, I introduce some important historical developments in Montreal and Quebec that helped set the context for the coming together of rock and electro in Montreal at the turn of the millennium. I begin by briefly presenting some broader, current statistics on the Montreal region that may suggest why Montreal continues to develop as a centre for cultural production, art, and music, while providing more contextual information for readers who

are unfamiliar with the city's cultural makeup. Montreal is one of the twenty-five most populous metropolitan areas in USA and Canada and it is third in terms of population density, after Boston and New York (Stolarick & Florida, 2006, p. 1802). As Stolarick and Florida (2006) write, of the twenty-five most populous cities, Montreal has the second-highest percentage of people working in the "super-creative core," which the authors define as those working in the following disciplines: "computers, mathematics, architecture, engineering, life sciences, physical sciences, social sciences, education, training, library, arts, design entertainment, and media" (p. 1802). Stolarick and Florida argue that the combination of "density and creative-class employment" create the ideal cultural and economic context for which "innovations generated by the interactions between individuals are more likely to occur" (2006, p. 1799). One of the key claims that the authors draw from their research on the driving mechanisms of urban economic development is that creative production flourishes and increases in places, like Montreal, where there are high numbers of artists and creative workers regularly meeting and engaging with each other (2006, p. 1801). As they put it: "[T]he idea here is that all creative people—artists, writers, scientists and engineers, etc.—work best in an environment that promotes and rewards creativity" (2006, p. 1801–1802).

Even though Stolarick and Florida's study makes important connections between economic growth and creative workers, their work largely focuses on developments within Montreal from the 2000s onwards—when Montreal's (primarily Anglophone) indie music scene began taking shape and receiving international attention thanks to artists such as Godspeed You! Black Emperor and Arcade Fire, and with the

establishment of the annual Pop Montreal music festival, which began in 2002—it should be noted that many of the important local conditions that enabled the emergence of electroclash materialized much earlier. Dating back to the city's prominent disco scene of the 1970s, Montreal has long been known for an intermixing of nightlife culture and (electronic) dance music. Entrepreneurs (label owners, DJs, nightclub owners, etc.) capitalized on Montreal's infrastructure of discotheques leftover from the 1960s and developed the city's heritage and reputation as an epicentre of nighttime entertainment, activity and "sin" throughout most of the twentieth century (Stahl, 2001). In the 1970s, the city emerged as one of the most robust markets for the consumption of disco, whether at nightclubs or through the sales of records and the production of disco, as many local record companies began producing and distributing their music throughout Europe and the Americas in the closing years of the 1970s (Straw, 2005, p. 190). As Straw writes:

> the popularity of disco in Montreal was seen to perpetuate that city's long history as a city of nightlife and musical entertainment, to prolong the sense of youthful modernity which had presided over Expo '67, and to reinforce the city's stereotypical image as the "Paris of Canada," a capital of leisure and semi-illicit entertainment. All these comparisons presumed a natural affinity between disco music and Montreal. (2005, p. 189)

In 1979, at the moment of disco's commercial peak right before the music's international collapse, *Billboard* magazine deemed Montreal "the second most important disco market on the continent, outside New York" (as cited in Straw, 2008b, p. 118). According to "subcultural lore" from the time, disco music circulated in Montreal throughout various zones of cultural activity with relative ease as it resisted being categorized exclusively as either French or English, thereby "producing mixes of population different from those to

be found in the audiences for other musical genres," posits Straw (2005, p. 191).

The rather rapid decline of disco's popularity coincided with the global music industry's first major crisis in thirty years, after a period of unprecedented growth and rationalization between 1973 and 1978 (Grenier, 1993, p. 210). As a consequence of the steep decrease in international record sales, transnational media firms and major record labels began releasing less and less content while concentrating on already established (American) artists, both in terms of marketing and production, in addition to moving away from the Canadian market. French-language vocal music was particularly hard hit, accounting for only 2 percent of the albums produced in Canada in 1984, the worst year of the crisis (Grenier, 1993, p. 210-211). Yet, in the fallout from the global crisis, Quebec managed to recover by establishing its own independent Francophone music industry to fill the production void left by major record companies that were no longer interested in releasing music from Quebec, whether French or English language (or Allophone). Local independent labels were strategic in mobilizing corporate strategies normally associated with transnational firms, such as vertical integration. "The locally-owned indies," as Line Grenier calls them:

> were especially important insofar as their emergence and rapid growth provoked a shift in the distribution of power between local and transnational firms in Quebec, the consequence of which has been the economic reinforcement of the local industry as a whole. But indie labels did not succeed in gaining control of the market simply because most of their operations are centred on French-language genres, that is, markets transnational conglomerates no longer found sufficiently lucrative or attractive. They also achieved such a success because, despite their relatively small size, their almost chronic under financing and the lack of appropriate industrial and commercial infrastructures, they played the cards of diversification and vertical integration well. (1993, p. 212)

In the aftermath of the international crisis, Quebec continued producing large quantities of dance music records, particularly of the "Eurodisco/Italo-disco" variety, even if many producers and distributors attempted to disguise the origins of their assemblage, fearing that the records might be perceived as coming from the wrong place (Straw, 2008b, p. 118-119).[26] Between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, Quebec operated as one of the biggest international centres of production for dance music recordings, and in particular, 12-inch vinyl dance singles. Notable local players included the Parapluie group of labels, producer and distributor Vincent De Giorgio, and disco performers, such as Karen Silver, Patsy Gallant and Suzy Q (Straw, 2008b, p. 118–119).

As Quebec's largely Francophone music industry started producing signs of rejuvenation roughly six years after the crisis (Grenier, 1993, p. 212), Montreal's Anglophone musicmakers remained disproportionately underrepresented within Quebec until the 1990s.[27] However, since this chapter seems to be setting up a total Anglophone/

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[26] Straw writes that Quebec disco labels and performers "cultivated a deliberate vagueness about their identities," which continued the tradition of Canadian and Quebec "cultural commodities to hide (or, at the very least, downplay) their origins, to look as if they came from more credible centers of cultural authority" (2008b, p.118-119).

[27] It should be noted that Quebec's Allophone and Aboriginal communities continue to remain marginalized and underrepresented in relation to the province's Anglophone and Francophone popular music. Although not exclusively focused on Quebec, Beverley Diamond has produced numerous landmark publications on Aboriginal music communities, including *Native American Music in Eastern North America* (2008), *Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern America* (1994), and the co-edited collection *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada. Echoes and Exchanges* (2012). Charity Marsh (2012) has also written extensively about Indigenous music cultures, particularly in relation to Canadian Indigenous hip hop cultures. Although Diamond, Marsh and others remain committed to this area of research, more work on music and culture needs to address Aboriginal communities and Allophone music scenes in Quebec.

Francophone division within Montreal and Quebec's musical culture at large, Grenier—drawing directly from the work of Straw—points out that although largely Francophone oriented, Quebec emerged out of the international crisis as a "pluralistic musical space" (1991) in the 1980s, "within which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of changes and cross-fertilisation" (1993, p. 222). In addition, there were many Anglophone musicians/artists performing and recording in Quebec in the 1980s and 1990s; however, they were not signed to the Francophone-controlled labels that Grenier discusses. And, while the music and artists represented by these Franco-indie labels were almost exclusively Francophone, some Anglophone musicians were key players in shaping the sounds that emerged from these labels Quebec labels in the 1980s and 1990s. The guitarist Rick Haworth, for instance, played on and/or produced many of the popular or hit albums released by the label Audiogram, including the works of Paul Piché, Michel Rivard and Daniel Bélanger. Going further, Grenier speculates that some of the people who had previously worked in the Montreal offices of the Anglo-controlled transnationals and major labels that closed during the crisis of the 1980s ended up working for the new local independent Francophone labels (personal communication, September 14, 2012).

On a personal note, when I first moved to Montreal from Kingston, Ontario, in the fall of 1995 to pursue undergraduate studies at McGill University, two months before the second Quebec referendum (October 30), my impression of the city was that it lacked the necessary infrastructure and smaller performance venues to accommodate the high

number of musicians moving to the city annually. Between 1995 and 1999, though there was a very limited selection of legal venues (e.g., nightclubs and bars) in downtown Montreal that catered to musical groups, many of these establishments maintained various pay-to-play policies that inhibited the sustainability and growth of local live music.[28] Pay-to-play arrangements typically involve musicians paying a service fee to a venue in exchange for the chance to perform. Performing musicians in such arrangements also tend to be responsible for all promotional material (e.g., making posters and flyers), hiring a door person to collect cover or admission charges, in addition to guaranteeing the venue a sizable attendance turnout. Furthermore, the venue and the musicians usually agree upon a monetary penalty if the minimum number of attendees is not reached. This might explain why a lot of live musical activity in downtown Montreal in the 1990s seemed to take place in "semi-legal" lofts, warehouses and apartments.

By the time I graduated from McGill in 2000, more legal venues that did not require musicians to pay the chance to play began opening up in areas such as Mile End and on or near the upper "Main," where, at the time, commercial and residential rental prices were noticeably cheaper than those of the lower Main.[29] Perhaps the best-known example of this is the restaurant/music venue *Casa del Popolo*, which was opened by

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[28] It is worth mentioning that pay-to-play policies are not exclusive to Montreal and are very common in many cities throughout North America.

[29] The Main refers to Montreal's boulevard Saint-Laurent, which has historically operated as a line dividing Montreal's Anglophone population to the west and Francophone population to the east. Martin Allor (1997) writes that over the course of the twentieth century, "the Main has been a kind of liminal zone where the cultural geography of linguistic, ethnic and class differences has intersected with the successive developments of leisure-cultural practices and cultural industry equipment" (p. 44).

Montreal musicians Mauro Pezzente and Kiva Stimac in 2000, an establishment that maintains solid bookings of traditional musical ensembles and DJs and a range of other cultural activities, including book launches and poetry readings. Venues like Casa, in addition to many other legal and semi-legal performance spaces, such as lofts and warehouses, started accommodating the city's ever-expanding population of musicians and performers; some of whom, like me, "moved here to study" in the 1990s "and stayed to make music," as Geoff Stahl puts it (2001, p. 104). Like Stahl, Richard Florida attributes part of this robust sociomusical economy to the relocation by North American musicians to Montreal in the 2000s looking to capitalize on the city's relatively low rental rates—both in terms of living spaces and the availability of rehearsal spaces—and the city's venerable reputation as a centre of cultural production and activity (2011, p. 2). According to Florida's more recent work charting the ongoing geographic changes of the popular music industry, Montreal currently has the third highest "concentration of music business establishments" behind Nashville and Los Angeles, which includes distributors, record companies, recording studios and publishers (2011, p.1). Of course, the presence and continued development of the interrelated and pluralistic, yet highly distinct, Anglophone and Francophone music scenes is one of the main reasons why the city has such a high concentration of infrastructure for music related practices.

At the turn of the millennium, Montreal's new legal venues and nightclubs also started housing many of the city's electronic dance music party nights, including electroclash events, partly as a consequence of the increasing regulations directed towards raves in the late 1990s. These regulations helped create a temporal shift in

consumption (i.e., party hours), from the afterhours of rave scenes and afterhours clubs, to the hours of the night regulated by alcohol licensing laws. Charity Marsh argues that "the entire raving phenomenon became an object of concern to be researched and studied by municipal authorities, the police force, health care workers, various media, and public intellectuals" in the late 1990s and early 2000s (2006, p. 416). In Toronto, the increase in rave surveillance and research led to such measures as Bill 73, which "attempted to dissolve rave culture," as Marsh writes, by calling for "a licensing for all venues, building safety code regulations, fire codes, unrestricted access to water, the need for toilets and fresh air, food services, security, paid duty officers, ambulance services, drug and health education, communication with city authorities, a definition of rave, and the periodic review of recommendations" (2006, p. 424). In her Foucauldian analysis of Toronto's rave culture, Marsh is careful to point out, however, that ravers were willing participants in the regulation process and became "ensnared by their own self-disciplining techniques" (2006, p. 428). Similar regulatory strategies were pursued in Montreal, largely through modifications to existing alcohol licensing laws and the enforcement of municipal fire codes by the Montreal Police Service and local firefighters (Maari, 2009). However, the enactment of municipal regulatory measures and the opening of new legal venues alone cannot account for this temporal shift in party hours away from afterhours.[30] There were emotional reasons as well.

[30] In Montreal, for instance, afterhours refers to the hours of the night after bars and clubs close, from 3 AM onwards.

TIGA

By the end of the 1990s, Tiga had grown tired and burnt-out from DJing at raves and afterhours clubs throughout the decade. As T. Sontag suggests, Tiga started to DJ between 11 PM and 3 AM at a new venue (*Pub Quartier Latin*) located one-block west of the lower Main near *CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal*, as a way out of afterhours:

> It was this shift again out of afterhours, because Tiga had been doing Sona, and I think the key moment for Tiga was doing that *Mixed Emotions* CD (…) That was part of the shift to a different venue and it made more sense also because there was a bit of fatigue with the afterhours scene. There was a bit of a fatigue, and his friends weren't going to the afterhours anymore. It's also just exhausting doing afterhours week-after-week and *Pub Quartier Latin* was something a bit more fun and it was something Tiga did with his little brother and his friend. The night was a bit more loose, and at the end of the night, maybe he would play a David Bowie song, because he loves to do that. It was a return to something more musical, closer to our kind of roots. (personal communication, September 23, 2011)

With the initial move to Quartier Latin where the parties were called *Cobra*, followed by establishing a weekly party called *Neon* at Jai Bar—a now defunct club that was located on the Main—just before the turn of the millennium, a different soundscape was required to accommodate the patrons coming to the new party night(s). The more epic techno and house musics that Tiga had been spinning at raves and afterhours clubs were no longer suitable to the new setting and earlier hours, as attendees were not just coming to *Cobra* and *Neon* to be enveloped by the music or to dance until ten or eleven in the morning.

These *new* sounds were pulled together by Tiga in the late 1990s and released in 2000 as the above-mentioned *Mixed Emotions: Montreal Mix Sessions Volume 5*. The double CD is perhaps best understood as representing a transitional moment in electronic dance music, with "Disc 1" (*Montreal Mix Sessions Volume 5*) devoted to passing sounds

and with “Disc 2” (*Bonus Electro Funk CD*) comprised of the new proto-electroclash sounds to come. As T. Sontag suggests, the mix is caught between shifting cycles of dance music, from the techno and house Tiga played at raves and afterhours clubs to more electro-oriented dance musics:

> It was a double CD and one CD was the music that Tiga was playing at Sona basically, such as big room techno, big room house, and the other CD was (…) exciting because at the time it wasn’t a defined genre and he pulled together a lot of records that were different and a lot of them pretty rare and just interesting and did some of the work of carving out a sound, and creating a bit of a blue print of something, which he called electro-funk. Because it wasn’t just ‘80s synth music, it just had more funk to it, you know. It was a bit more musical and he couldn’t really play that stuff at Sona. (personal communication, September 23, 2011)

As a DJ, Tiga acts simultaneously as a connoisseur of taste(s) and as a cultural broker. The *Mixed Emotions* release mixes together rarities from Tiga’s own crate-digging practice while attempting to solidify sounds for the emerging late-night dance floor. It is worth mentioning that Larry Tee, who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, claims a certain paternity and ownership of the term electroclash, employed a similar strategy when developing his aesthetic boundaries of the genre. In addition to the aforementioned Electroclash Festivals that he produced and organized in 2001 and 2002, Tee released his own double mix CD in 2003, culling together many of the disparate styles represented at the festivals and the electroclash party night that he hosted at club Luxx, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Tee’s mix, appropriately and strategically entitled *The Electroclash Mix*, was released by the label Moonshine Music and features cuts by Felix da Housecat, Ladytron, W.I.T., and Water Lilly & P0L, among other artists.

Tiga, a heterosexual male, also provides an interesting entry point into the particular gender play, cross-dressing and celebrated sexuality that is at the centre of electroclash. As mentioned at the opening of this chapter, Tiga spent the peak moments of electroclash in the first half of the 2000s nurturing an international career as a DJ, producer and label owner. He was heavily involved as a pioneering force in Montreal and within the larger electronic dance music scene in Canada and Europe since at least the mid-1990s. The DJ/producer is generally credited with organizing the first rave in Canada (1993's *Solstice,* which was held in Montreal), in addition to establishing Montreal's first afterhours club (the aforementioned Sona), and DNA Records, the first electronic dance music retail store in Montreal (Girard, 2011, p. 109). In 1998, he also started a record label (Turbo Recordings), which emerged as one of the more prominent electronic dance music labels in the world, largely due to Tiga's international success as a producer and DJ. After deciding to put more of his energies into Turbo following a period of relative inactivity, the label was relaunched in 2005 and currently represents a variety of electro, house and techno artists, including gesaffelstein, Ivan Smagghe and Azari & III. As T. Sontag remarks about the label:

> I think a lot of it lives and dies with Tiga's career (…) his ascent and him getting really popular and having a great career enabled Turbo to exist and to do well for years to come (…) Having a public figure who first of all can reach a large audience, that in itself gets exposure to the music. He's known and he knows a lot of artists, so there's an effective A&R network that he can take advantage of. You know, it's a natural fit for a big DJ to run a record label and it would be a lot harder for a label like us, which does DJ-focused music, to do what we do without having a big DJ that's at the helm. (personal communication, September 23, 2011)

Throughout the years when electroclash operated as a dominant form of electronic dance music (2001–2004), Tiga's gender performance was marked by a mix of sexual identities and gender-bending, both in the aesthetic choices he made as a music producer and the imagery and artwork that accompanied his releases. The cover artwork for *Mixed Emotions: Montreal Mix Sessions Volume 5* pictures a close up photo/illustration of Tiga wearing an androgynous wig and lipstick—referencing a mix of David Bowie's 1970s gender-bending period and Soft Cell's Marc Almond—with the text written in soft pink and purple. The back cover of the CD shows Tiga standing profile in a bathtub with his head cropped out of the photograph, sporting nothing other than a pair of black underwear and a pronounced erection. Most of the press coverage from this period featured a shirtless Tiga looking rather boyish in tight black. In a personal interview with T. Sontag, he mentions that Tiga's press images from the time were very directly attempting to appeal to gay men: "[I]n part, you have to appeal to gay culture with dance music (…) I don't think it's as calculated as that, though, in the sense that, I think it also just happens to be what Tiga's references were and the things he liked, such as Marc Almond and Bowie" (personal communication, September 23, 2011).

Much like the "subcultural lore" emerging from Montreal's disco scene in the 1970s (Straw, 2005, p.191), when electroclash started circulating throughout various nightclubs in Montreal in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the aforementioned Jai Bar and Parking, the genre was perceived as having a natural affinity with the city's pre-existing cultural fabric(s). In mentioning Parking Nightclub, which housed Drouin's *Overdose* nights, T. Sontag suggests:

> With most techno stuff and dance music stuff there is a clear European lineage and Montreal was an effective gateway for that (…) There's a good fit between the culture here and electroclash. There's just something you and I know and understand implicitly which is the vibe at a place like Parking (Nightclub), the French Canadian, kind of bi-friendly, that vibe which is super prevalent in Montreal, and has its roots way back in the disco scene here (…) It arrived here and fit in so perfectly, that in a lot of ways, I think it's never even left. That mix of 10 percent biker, 15 percent '80s, 15 percent disco and a lot of it is just sort of house, dance music (…) With just enough of a fashion to reel people in who don't even care so much about the music. (personal communication, September 23, 2011)

Drouin noticed a pronounced lingual and sexual mixing at her *Overdose* nights as well, which can sometimes be a rarity within Montreal's various music and cultural scenes (Stahl, 2001). As she puts it:

> *Overdose* eventually brought more people from all the other areas of Montreal and a lot more Francophones (…) Originally, strangely, there was a lot more Francophones in the electroclash movement; it was very French in the first place. For instance, a lot of French guys were going to Anglo nights. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

Not only was there a strong Anglo-Franco crossing at Drouin's *Overdose* nights, because they were hosted on the club's mixed night, there was a highly articulated crossing of genders and sexualities as well. On mixed nights, gay clubs typically allow heterosexual men and women to enter as long as the door person or bouncer decides that they meet the club's criteria for entrance, whether these involve dress codes or vibes. In contrast, on Friday and Saturday nights at Parking, it was much more difficult for those who identify as straight—or those who were "coded" as straight—to gain admittance to the club. On weekends, gaining entrance to the club was perhaps most difficult for heterosexual

women. These types of door policies or gatekeeping mechanisms have historically been put in place in order to maintain a homosocial environment and to protect various gay scenes from acts of homophobia, violence and surveillance. In Montreal, for instance, before moving east in the early 1980s, many of the city's west-end gay establishments along Stanley, Peel and the lower Main were targeted in the 1970s during "*une compagne de nettoyage préolympique*," as Remiggi writes (1998, p.276). Although the "cleaning" was not specifically directed at Montreal's gay bars, these establishments faced consistent harassment and surveillance by the State throughout much of the 1970s and into the early 1980s.

Like disco music in the 1970s, electroclash mixed and circulated in Montreal with a certain amount of ease in many social contexts and neighborhoods, in part, because it was not easily categorized as exclusively Francophone or Anglophone, and as neither straight nor gay. Although much of the lyrical content of the genre is in English, as previously discussed, electroclash vocal tracks are often sung with a developed sense of irony and disguised by various digital effects such as a vocoder, which arguably draws listeners and dancers to the materiality of the vocal utterances and phrasing rather than the linguistic content or subject matter of the lyrics. This connects electroclash to a long history of electronic dance music and, in particular, Eurodisco (and dub), which very regularly employs "highly codified, minimal units of English speech: 'orders, announcements (including self-announcements), greetings, lists, simple reports ('red alert!')' and so on" (Straw, 2008b, p. 129). These discreet units of English are also typically deployed in highly repetitive phrases. Tiga and Finnish producer Jori

"Zyntherius" Hulkkonen's "Sunglasses at Night," a cover version of Corey Hart's 1983 release with the same title, leads with an easy-to-follow ABAB song structure, or verse followed by chorus. Tiga and Zyntherius eliminated the original cut's eight bar pre-chorus employed to set up the release of the chorus, and, as a result, the whole track moves back-and-forth between two alternating lyrical refrains, which are sung by Tiga with slight variations: part A, "I wear my sunglasses at night/So I can/So I can/Watch you weave then breath your story lines"; and part B, "Don't masquerade with a guy in shades oh no." By cutting out Hart's pre-chorus, Tiga and Zyntherius' version maintains the same synthesizer progression throughout the track, as Hart's move to the pre-chorus is the only harmonic change in the original song. Stéphane Girard writes, "Tiga's artistic work as a singer and producer draws attention to itself by blurring the traditional distinctions between original composition, sample-based track and cover version" (2011, p. 109). Specifically discussing the co-produced cover of Hart's pop classic, perhaps still Tiga's most well-known track, Girard argues that it can lead us "to revisit the traditional, patriarchal and heteronormative notions of author and originality in popular music," not only because electronic dance music challenged these notions in the 1980s and 1990s, but also because of the imagery and videos that accompany the song (2011, p. 110).

At the turn of the twentieth-century, as electroclash party nights started moving to nightclubs and bars and away from afterhours, warehouses and lofts, consumption and performance practices began changing as well. While the genre incorporated many stylistic elements of rock, including its song structural elements and reckless energy, electroclash club nights, parties and performances imported many of the live practices

normally associated with staged rock and pop performances. As Simon Reynolds writes:

> [B]ored by the entire gamut of post-rave club music on offer—from filter house to trance to Sasha and Digweed-style progressive—a new generation of trendy club kids have rejected the ease-of-release offered by house music's warm pump'n'flow. Essentially, they've taken the E out of house, and rolled back time to the cold, neuro-Euro sounds that originally inspired the guys in Chicago and Detroit.
>
> This new (nu?) generation have abandoned the very ethos of Ecstasy culture: the principles of egalitarian unity and "only connect," the notion of shedding your ego in the hypnotic flow of the music and merging with the crowd, and the 'in the mix' aesthetic that treats tracks (as) anonymous components for the DJ's seamless montage. Instead, nu-wave electro-pop songs (known as Electroclash) compete to stand out, through domineering vocals, larger-than-life singers (as opposed to the depersonalised diva-as-raw material approach in most modern dance), witty lyrics, and extravagant amounts of obscenity and trash talk. (as cited in Girard, 2011, p. 115)

In the early moments of electroclash and until the mid-2000s, it was not uncommon for events to be housed at more rock-oriented venues or theatres with stages, with audiences starting to face the DJ, producer or performer, who was very often showcased facing the audience on a stage. According to Montreal electroclash promoter/performer Mickey Muscles, he first experienced stage diving and "moshing" (or slam dancing) at electroclash party nights in the early 2000s (personal communication, December 11, 2009). These parties were also typically marked by the increased consumption of alcohol and cocaine—rather than ecstasy, MDMA and speed, known for their associations with rave culture—a certain gender ambiguity and a corresponding change in dress to skinny ripped jeans, tight T-shirts and heavy makeup, an attire often worn by both men and women.

Previous to these developments, electronic dance music DJs and performers usually took more of an anonymous stance in a live setting, even if they were high profile DJs/

producers. In the mid-1990s, rave DJs were typically obscured by flashing lights, with party attendees dispersed in various places on the dance floor, facing and moving in every direction. Although DJs were very often the featured draw of raves and club nights in the 1990s, with their names prominently displayed on promotional materials, including flyers and posters, party attendees would generally not watch or even face DJs as they performed their sets. This is how Sarah Thornton (1995) contextualizes British dance music clubs in the 1990s and the role of the DJ:

> What authenticates contemporary dance cultures is the buzz or energy which results from the interaction of records, DJ and crowd. 'Liveness' is displaced from the stage to the dance floor, from worship of the performer to a veneration of 'atmosphere' or 'vibe.' The DJ and dancers share the spotlight as *de facto* performers; the crowd becomes a self-conscious cultural phenomenon. (p. 29)
> (…)
> Though DJs may be musicians, they are rarely performers in the pop sense of the word. In purpose-built clubs, mixing booths tend to be tucked away and DJs unseen. As cultural figures, DJs are known by name rather than face. (p. 65)

With the emergence of electroclash in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a movement away from the displaced liveness that Thornton discusses. The atmosphere or vibe remained the most important element of an event or party; however, DJs and performers took more of the spotlight as the cult of personality ethos of rock and pop music seemed to arrive alongside the grittier timbres of the backbeats. Electroclash DJs and performers started participating in "the trafficking in performer identity and poetic vision that have marked other musical forms (like rock or soul)," as Straw writes (2008b, p. 129). Around this time, electroclash DJs and performers regularly used microphones for interacting with audiences, perhaps drawing on the live performance practices of hip hop, while the requisite technical precision of seamless cross-fades and beat-matching

associated with house and techno DJs was often replaced by rougher mixing techniques. Electroclash sets seemed to play out in more of an identifiable track-to-track fashion, much like a rock or pop show, rather than the throbbing consistency associated with house music, techno and raves in the 1990s.

These emerging production and consumption practices were perhaps most strongly and regularly exhibited in Montreal at DJ Mini's *Overdose* nights. As stated above, the DJ/producer ran *Overdose* every Thursday for just over seven years at Parking Nightclub (which is no longer in operation). The club was situated on Amherst, just south of Sainte-Catherine Street in the heart of what many consider to be the largest Gay Village in North America (Straw, 2009, p. 4). After many of Montreal's gay establishments moved from the city's west-end downtown core in the early 1980s, the Village developed rather quickly in Montreal, following the openings of the bar *Au Deux R* in February of 1982 and *la taverne Normandie*, the bar KOX and the nightclub Max in 1983 (Remiggi, 1998, p. 269). By January of 1992, only ten years after the opening of *Au Deux R*, sixty-five out of the one hundred professionals and commercial establishments listed in *Fugues* (*le magazine des gais et lesbienne du Québec*) were concentrated in the neighbourhood, and in particular, along Sainte-Catharine (Remiggi, 1998, p. 272). Since the 1990s, the area has continued to develop a strong residential core, in addition to building on its commercial infrastructure of cafés, stores, restaurants, nightclubs and bars.

DJ MINI

Drouin's move from the periphery to the centre of Montreal's electronic dance music scene at Parking in the 2000s began when her family relocated from Rimouski, QC, to Montreal when she was sixteen. Although she did not have any formal music training or any plans to produce music, Drouin developed an interest in electronic music after attending raves throughout the city. In her own words:

> In the first place, I guess I wasn't really planning to make music in general until I discovered electronic music at raves and then I got really involved with it. And once we moved from Quebec to Montreal, and this is when I was sixteen, and I started having more interest in music in general, because I thought electronic music was the thing for me. It was the genre without specific messages, there's no lyrics talking about the same things we've been talking about for centuries, it was this new, fresh thing. I started getting interested in drum 'n' bass, and I have a feeling it's because of the frequencies, there's so much low-end, the bass is really present and melodic and percussive. There's a primal feeling to it and I got hooked on that and eventually started discovering everything from experimental, noise, hardcore, and just about everything, and I think electronic music opened me up to a lot of genres outside electronic music. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

Drouin's pedagogical path to becoming a DJ after her initial experiences at raves started while working at Bluedog, a club on the Main located just south of Rachel. The manager of the club at the time recognized Drouin's developed interest in DJing and electronic music, and allowed her to use the club's DJ/sound equipment during the day when the club was closed and during the early hours of the night when there were few patrons in attendance. The manager also mentored and trained Drouin as a DJ, in addition to buying the emerging artist some records and a record bag. As Drouin puts it:

> She thought I was kind of obsessed with electronic music because I was always playing it in the club. She was a bit of a DJ as well, not professionally, but she would play her own records and I would watch and obviously when all the other DJs came and played, I would watch and I would really focus and check out how they worked. And eventually your ears develop to what these people are doing without you really even knowing how it works, and so it gave me a chance to start a record collection and, you know, come in early in the night and play music in the club without having to buy equipment. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

Mini's development from a beginner DJ with no equipment of her own to a respected working DJ happened relatively quickly (three-to-four years), largely through her commitment to learning various musical techniques, by connecting with networks of other working DJs within the city and through receiving mentoring by more experienced DJs and producers. As Drouin continued to play a variety of nights at Bluedog, DJs who recognized her talent and commitment to the practice started inviting her to DJ at other bars and clubs. One very experienced professional DJ (Dan) offered her work in the record shop that he owned, in addition to teaching her more advanced DJ techniques. As Drouin suggests, Dan also introduced her to DJing in the Village:

> In the first place I was playing a lot of genres and then I met a guy called Dan, who was an old school DJ, who was playing in the Village a whole bunch, years ago. Dan was working at a store on St. Laurent and he rebought the space and eventually started a new record shop there and I worked there for two or three years, while also working at Bluedog, obviously. So I was doing two or three days here and there and replacing people on vacation. Basically, I spent my days there too (…) Dan eventually started talking to me about music and he loved the language that I used and eventually hired me for the store and started suggesting doing a night together. I was able to learn how to technically raise the bar a little bit and we did a night together for almost five years. I pretty much learned from watching him. He was technically really, really good. I worked with him for five years and had a night on Sundays call *Shredder* where I would play electroclash because nobody else was really playing that sound. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

Before being able to fully support themselves through DJ gigs and/or studio production work, DJs often work in record stores or in musical equipment shops in order to help pay for the heavy capital investment required to become a DJ, as the stores would most likely give their employees a rebate on all in-store purchases, including records and DJ equipment. When Drouin first started DJing roughly fifteen years ago, in order to be taken seriously by their peers, aspiring DJs had to develop extensive vinyl collections, both for practice purposes and for gigs/performances, in addition to acquiring two highly specialized vinyl players or turntables, a mixer, headphones and two speakers as necessities of the trade. In the 1990s, before the post-millennial move to primarily using (less expensive) CDs and MP3s in DJ sets, the industry standard for DJing usually included two Technics SL-1200s vinyl players, which could be obtained for approximately $700 CAD new, or $400 CAD used. New 12-inch vinyls cost approximately $15 CAD, and used vinyl records could range from $3 to $5 CAD. Based on recent conversations with professional DJs in Montreal, a relatively small vinyl collection for a working DJ in the 1990s might have contained about two thousand records; a bigger collection might consist of ten thousand records and beyond.

When Drouin first started to DJ at Parking Nightclub in the early 2000s, the abovementioned mixing that *Overdose* would eventually become known for was not yet present. In its original incarnation, *Overdose* was first established around DJ Frigid, the gender-bending DJ and music production persona of Joffrey Dumas, who specialized in glam rock and 1990s alternative music. According to Drouin, when she was initially

brought in to DJ once per month at Parking, the Thursday night was "originally very, very queer and very glam" (personal communication, December 30, 2011). *Overdose's* attendance and vibes were in decline, especially after DJ Frigid left Parking to start a glam-oriented night at Unity, thereby taking the more queer glam audience with him. I asked Drouin how she eventually started running *Overdose* and this is how she responded:

> I saw that the night was going down, and I thought to myself, this has got to be something else, rather than wait for the night to die and not doing anything about it. So why not, why don't I take over. I mean, I've worked in bars before, I've done nights, I've done promotion and I know how the system works and the sound is obviously picking up, so why not push it a little bit further. So I sat down with the owners and I made a business proposal. I basically explained what I would do and who I would hire (…) I would play two full nights a month and I would have one local guest DJ and one guest DJ from the international scene. I would do all of the bookings and hire all of the people for the promotion, going to other nights talking about *Overdose*. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

Like Tiga and Larry Tee, Drouin created a mix CD to both pull together and articulate some of the disparate styles that form electroclash—from rock to more techno inspired dance musics—in addition to using the mix as a strategic promotional tool, drawing attention to her new conception of the *Overdose* night and to her practice as a DJ. Drouin personally burned all copies of the mix CD before distributing them to retail stores, bars and to other DJs throughout downtown Montreal. As she puts it, the mix was a "turning point" for the new "mixed" *Overdose* night:

> Actually, this is also a turning point for when I started owning the night. I made a mix for people to discover what the whole music was going to be. Yeah, we made a mix CD, and it was all Gigolo, Ersatz, Mental Groove, pretty much everything that was electroclash at the moment. And we got that printed and distributed in all of the shops, all of the clothing stores in Montreal. But it was originally just for

> promo, in order to get people involved with first, my sound, and second, I mean, start following me and going to my nights. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

In this way, a mix CD operates as a branding tool for Drouin and other DJs where the real gains are perhaps better understood in relation to accumulating a certain level of (cultural) status or capital within a scene, rather than directly gaining economic profits through CD sales and distribution. Drouin's mix CD was primarily distributed free of charge and functioned as a way to establish a relationship with an audience through a mutually agreed upon set of aesthetic conventions and desires. Drouin realized that her *Overdose* night at Parking might be sustainable when the mix was launched and performed as a live DJ set:

> The night we did the launch of the CD (…) There was water dripping on us; people were going crazy. It was kind of also a strong point, the turning point, where we actually knew what the sound was, and where we actually got to know the crowd. On the mix CD there was Miss Kittin, Felix Da Housecat, some more underground things, I think it had Peaches and Gonzales in there as well. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

What is perhaps most interesting about the above remarks is the implicit understanding that the success or failure of a recorded mix is largely determined by the response from an audience and the degree to which a DJ is able to maintain an audience for future performances and gigs. Without a strong response from an audience, a mix CD very quickly becomes just another form of discarded ephemera collecting dust on shelves, apartment floors and computer hard drives. Additionally, it is important to point out that for Drouin, ADULT.'s track "Nausea," released by the Detroit label Ersatz Audio in 2000, best represents electroclash, which she describes as "bitchy, square, fully synthetic music

with a loud, obnoxious singer over it, singing with a lot of attitude. Screaming at you and everybody would freak out when you played the song." She adds, "it was so edgy too" (personal communication, December 30, 2011).

One of the consequences of bringing internationally known DJs to perform at *Overdose* once every month, including electroclash DJs such as Miss Kittin and Felix Da Housecat, is that it puts the night—and Montreal's electroclash scene in general—directly in contact with the shifting cycles of electronic dance music, which is marked by a "rapidity of cyclical change" (Straw, 1991, p. 382). Staying relevant and maintaining a connection vis-à-vis these quickly changing cycles and international dance music culture as a whole requires a local party night like *Overdose* to constantly shift its stylistic focus by incorporating related emerging sounds that are gaining popularity elsewhere. As mentioned in chapter 1, towards the mid-2000s, electroclash was shortened to electro, as the vulgar stylizations were replaced by a more pronounced techno-oriented and instrumental sensibility. This international techno-shift meant that Drouin and the other local DJs performing at *Overdose* had to incorporate more techno-sounding styles into their sets or risk appearing out of touch with the most current cycles of electronic dance music. As Drouin suggests:

> For me, eventually, when electroclash started fading away a little bit and people were kind of tired of hearing that Miss Kittin sound, obviously, to keep the night going I moved into a more techno, electro techno, straight up, four-on-the-floor sound (…) and eventually, taking the night from Joffrey, who had a very glam rock influence, and taking it to my signature sound which became a little bit more techno in the end. It was a really slow transition. Originally, the first three years were very rock and more queer, and eventually it moved into a more of a Berlin sound, a little bit more tech-house, a little bit more techno and towards the end it was pretty much techno. (personal communication, December 30, 2011)

However, moving in more of a techno direction in the mid-2000s also caused *Overdose* to slowly recede into the local electronic dance music scene as one of many techno nights littered throughout various neighbourhoods in the city. Not only did Drouin have to reestablish her "signature sound," as she refers to it, the DJ had to further develop additional skill sets, such as studio production, in order to continue making a living as a performing musical practitioner, given that *Overdose* slowly started making less and less money. As she says, "eventually I realized that if I want to survive, I have to make more music. And I decided to make an album" (personal communication, December 30, 2011). As the night began declining in popularity in the late 2000s, it became clear to Drouin that *Overdose* would again need to be totally relaunched and reconceptualized to remain operating at Parking. One of the drawbacks of hosting a party night in such a large club, which holds over five hundred people at any given moment, is that the venue needs to be close to capacity for the night to seem successful and profitable. Unfortunately, the moment that Drouin realized that *Overdose* needed this complete restaging was also the moment that she lost the desire to continue running the night. Being a locally oriented professional DJ keeps one tethered to the circuits of the city, and after seven years of DJing in Montreal and Quebec, Drouin wanted to spend more time traveling and working in the studio as a producer and spend less time booking other DJs for a club night.

As electroclash's descent became more and more apparent in the mid-2000s, Tiga also needed to reconsider and re-articulate his practice as a DJ and producer in order to sustain his music production and touring career. DJs, producers and labels that are too strongly associated with any given genre of electronic dance music can very quickly

appear obsolete or out of touch if they do not make pragmatic stylistic changes, both subtle and severe, that coincide with the changing cycles of electronic dance music. In fact, while Turbo Recordings remains a prominent electronic dance music label, it has somewhat been pigeonholed as an exclusively electro label, a consequence of Tiga's electroclash "poster-boy" status in the early 2000s and his focus on producing electro music. As T. Sontag suggests, it has been difficult for the label to distance itself from its electro associations:

> In some ways I think Turbo has been hurt by that kind of pigeonholing of people still thinking about us as an electro label. Again, that word electro meaning very little. At least there's almost zero consensus on what it really means. Now they use the word electro-house, which means even less, or even worse, they say "indie-dance-nu-disco." (personal communication, September 23, 2011)

For Tiga, shaking his connections with electroclash and electro meant changing his image as a DJ/producer by moving away from the seemingly queer-oriented look that marks much of his electroclash material and establishing a more masculine appearance in recent press images and promotional materials. Since the mid-2000s, the artist has also devoted more time to Turbo Recordings, which, as mentioned earlier, was relaunched in 2005. Interestingly, when Tiga was developing his career as an electroclash DJ and producer, the label was barely operational while Tiga devoted most of his time to touring and producing in the studio. As T. Sontag remarks:

> During the key moments of electroclash, Tiga was very much tied up in his own career and not very active with Turbo (…) Tiga did his artist album, *Sexor* and there's about two years where nothing happened for the label (…) From "Sunglasses at Night" to his artist album there was less action on the label front. He wasn't as involved doing A&R and not as focused on signing records and stuff. (personal communication, September 23, 2011)

Thus, for professional DJs working in local or international circuits of electronic dance music, the entrepreneurial aspects of sustaining a career, such as running a label or creating and sustaining a weekly party night, rarely mix well with the more creative aspects of the practice, such as performing and studio production. For Tiga, the move in the last six or seven years to working more with the label has resulted in less time for touring and releasing his own music; yet, at the same time, it keeps him more connected to Montreal and the more regular rhythms of living in one place for extended periods of time, rather than waking up in a different hotel room every night. In addition, running Turbo and supporting artists' records provides Tiga with a platform for maintaining relationships with networks of international DJs and producers.

For Drouin, maintaining the weekly *Overdose* night for over seven years and booking all of the DJs and performers, in addition to hiring a promotional team, amongst other duties, requires that "70 percent of your life becomes dedicated to that," as she puts it (personal communication, December 30, 2011). Luckily for Drouin, and unlike the experiences of many other women DJs working throughout the Western world (see Reitsamer 2011; Rodgers 2010), she was able to continually meet and interact with networks of other DJs, producers and mentors who were willing to share their knowledge of the craft and their musical equipment in times when she needed some form of support. At the beginning of her career in music, Drouin was helped by the aforementioned amateur DJ and manager of Bluedog. Likewise, the professional DJ (Dan) assisted her in developing more advanced DJ techniques, while introducing her to DJ possibilities in Montreal's Gay Village and hiring her in the record store that he owned. As she

incorporated more studio-based production as part of her practice in the early-to-mid-2000s, Drouin received "private sound design lessons" for three years from her manager's friend, Fred, leading up to the release of her first album, *Audio Hygiene* (2006). According to Drouin: "after three years, we finally had an album ready. The album was a trial-and-error process and there were a lot of different genres at the same time because I was experimenting" (personal communication, December 30, 2011). Drouin currently collaborates with a Montreal-based studio engineer who is responsible for managing Drouin's new studio and practice space, which was recently set up in anticipation of her second full-length release, *Espace Temps* (2012).

Aside from the role of the producer, the DJ is perhaps the most masculine professional role in electronic dance music. Just as the popular music and electronic music producer emerged in the mid-twentieth century as the domain of men, electronic music DJs are almost always assumed to be men—in other words, the DJ is gendered male. In scholarly studies of DJ culture, women DJs are most notable for their absence. In Katz's (2007) analysis of battle DJs, for instance, "the vast majority" are men, whether working locally or touring internationally; Fikentscher (2000) argues that women DJs number less than ten percent (p. 33); and Straw (1993) notes that while electronic dance music draws much of its political credibility through its connections to marginalized sexual (and ethnic) communities, "virtually all of the club DJs in the English-speaking world who exercise influence are male" (p. 173). Going further, Straw adds, "there are more women in heavy metal bands than there are female producers or mixers of dance records" (1993, p. 173). While *Cross-dressing to Backbeats* recognizes the importance of

detailing the lack of female participation and representation as DJs (and producers) within electronic dance music culture, it should be emphasized that these statistics can be misleading and somewhat arbitrary if the studies that contain them do not analyze the social and cultural factors that produce such numbers. There are numerous reasons why women do not regularly participate in electronic music scenes as producers and DJs. In an ongoing email conversation with Tara Rodgers, I recently asked her about gender representation within (current) electronic dance music production. She responded by mentioning one of the aims of her book, *Pink Noises* (2010):

> One of the main points I try to make in the *Pink Noises* introduction is that how such things get quantified—such as the numbers of women participating in a music culture, and the influence of their work—is highly arbitrary. There are all sorts of social and cultural factors that may mean that women are releasing fewer records than men—for example, that women are often in primary caregiving roles in their household or otherwise have less time for music-making than their male counterparts; that many women receive countless messages in their lifetimes that their creative work is not good enough or not finished enough to make public; that many social networks around electronic music festivals and record labels still default to extending more opportunities to men than women. (personal communication, August 11, 2012)

DJ Mini benefitted from a local network of people working in various music-related clusters of street-level activity, from bars and nightclubs to record stores and domestic studio spaces. By peering into these smaller local networks of musical activity, it seems that the number of women working with electronic sound changes significantly, especially in comparison to the number of women featured in electronic music magazines or represented on record labels or at major electronic music festivals. As Rodgers suggests, "if we look elsewhere, such as within local music scenes, or on listservs like Female:Pressure where women are sharing work with each other all the time, there are

more women doing more amazing things than you can imagine" (personal communication, August 11, 2011).

Lastly, this text also attempts to challenge some of the more dominant understandings of electronic dance music through mapping some of the ways that Montreal operates as a centre of electronic music production and consumption. North American (and Anglo) understandings of dance music tend to follow a selective evolutionary path, with an ongoing fascination with the United States' three urban centres of dance music and their relationship with certain parts of Western Europe, most notably London, Berlin and Paris: Chicago, known as the "birthplace" of house music, in reference to the music played at the club Warehouse in the city during the early 1980s; Detroit, known for its techno associations and the previously mentioned Belleville Three (Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson), whose techno dance music sounds launched in the UK on the 1988 Virgin Records compilation, *Techno: The Dance Sound of Detroit* (Thornton, 1995, p. 74); and New York, where (American) disco first emerged from David Mancuso's *Love Saves the Day* party in 1970, the ensuing parties at the Loft in the NoHo district of Manhattan (Lawrence, 2003), and nightclubs like the Sanctuary on West 43rd Street (Fickentscher, 2000, p.26). Because of this Anglo-American centricity, important dance music centres such as Italy, Spain and Quebec, which very likely produced as many disco records as Miami and New York, rarely receive attention in histories of disco and electronic dance music. Interestingly, as Straw writes, disco's "roots in southern France and Italy are just as long as those in the United States, even if the former are seen as less heroically subcultural" (2008b p. 125). This text argues that

part of this omission in the historical record is due to Montreal's continued fascination with the more vulgar aspects of electronic dance music, from the orchestral infused disco of the late 1970s and early 1980s to the hyper sexual rock stylizations of electroclash at the turn of the millennium and beyond.

IV

CROSS-DRESSING TO BACKBEATS

This project opens by addressing the broader, international emergence of electroclash through a discussion of many of the genre's key wo/men producers and their production and performance practices, in addition to detailing some of electroclash's principal aesthetic foundations including the use of the backbeat, irony, and the visual and aural displays of sexuality and personality. The third chapter then moves closer in, to a much more defined, local electroclash scene—Montreal, in the early 2000s, in-and-around the City's Gay Village and the work of DJ Mini and Tiga. The next move is an inward one, where I explore the distinct aspects of an electroclash studio in relation to my own electronic musicmaking practice. It is now my turn to cross-dress to backbeats in the studio vis-à-vis two of the core research questions: what is distinct about electroclash studio production and how have these production practices developed since the mid-2000s? This chapter takes a personal, situated and partial perspective, thereby building on certain feminist research methods, to explore the previously discussed studio practices of electroclash. As Ursula M. Franklin (1990) writes, "it is better to examine limited settings where one puts technology in context, because context is what matters most" (p. 6). Or, in slightly different terms, this text, series of musical compositions and dance mix create situated knowledge(s) of electroclash and electronic music production by avoiding what Donna Haraway (1988) calls the "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (p. 580).

It is worth emphasizing that the methodological program pursued in this chapter emerges from the set of research questions dealt with throughout the project. As Jonathan Sterne (2012) writes, "method matters, but it should arise from the questions asked and the knowledge fields engaged, not the other way around" (p. 6). Only the aspects of my production process that directly relate to the abovementioned questions are included in the textual analysis. Specifically, I work with musician, researcher and friend Samuel Thulin and "pass stuff off to each other," (2010, p. 253) as Kathleen Hanna of Le Tigre mentions to Tara Rodgers, to construct a series of musical tracks using the collaborative, networked pathways of our studios. I then turn to a discussion of using my electronic music studio to play with some of the aesthetic conventions and affective energy of the genre through the production of a series of musical compositions and samples that I arrange together as an extended dance music mix.[31] However, while I work with certain affective and aesthetic frames of the genre (e.g., the backbeat), it should be clear that it is not my intention to directly recreate electroclash music with the production of these pieces, sounds, and mix. Electroclash developed out of a specific production context in the late 1990s and early 2000s using instruments that were available at the time. Rather than mimicking the ironic, backbeat driven sound of electroclash using these instruments, I am more interested in exploring how these production practices have changed over time and in relation to current forms of studio-based collaboration and music production.[32]

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[31] Please refer to Appendix B for a complete list of the music and sounds created for this project.

[32] Furthermore, creating a project steeped in mimicry might also be problematic while maintaining the dissertation guidelines of making an original contribution to knowledge.

The process of working with the affectivity of electroclash is intimately linked to considering "how to make gendered differences audible in music," as Susan McClary writes (1991, p. 139), given that so much electroclash music is produced with such a marked sexuality and explicit gender play. My intervention into the world of gendered music involves a playful crossing of unruly sounds and ambiguous voices within an affective approach to mixing. This chapter begins by describing the particular electroclash-oriented studio that I set up to work through these questions and some of the studio's distinct characteristics, in particular, the ways that this production setting is increasingly connected to a sociality outside of the studio.

THE STUDIO

As is detailed in chapter I, the voice and backbeat driven sound of electroclash is often produced using a mix of older and newer devices including drum machines, synthesizers, microphones and computers with various editing software. Peaches' *The Teaches of Peaches* (2000) was primarily constructed using Roland's MC-505 "groovebox"—released in 1998—which operates as a programmable drum machine, sequencer and synthesizer. For the purposes of this project, I put together a similar studio in my apartment comprised of more current iterations of these devices along with older inexpensive microphones and keyboards. Employing contemporary versions of these devices allows me to consider the distinctness of an electroclash studio and, at the same time, how these production practices have changed since the mid-2000s. The main instruments are a drum machine/synthesizer (Native Instruments Maschine), which also operates as a digital audio workstation (DAW), an audio interface (Apogee Duet 2), a synthesizer (Dave Smith Instruments Mopho X4), a laptop computer (MacBook Pro) with the editing software Ableton Live 8, a pair of studio monitors (Adam A5), and a microphone (Shure SM 58).

The blurring of the studio's inner and outer worlds is one of the most distinct characteristics of this particular home production setting and one of the most significant recent transformations in music studio culture. Ever since the establishment of the first professional music studios in the 1930s, studios have largely been constructed as isolated spaces with "an essentially divided architecture (and an attendant division of labour)," as Paul Théberge (2004) posits, where separate rooms are designed for the tasks of

performing, recording and manipulating sounds (p. 764). Théberge argues that by the end of the 1970s, with the proliferation and standardization of 24-track recording facilities throughout the Western world, the professional music studio developed into "a kind of 'non-place' (…) essentially identical in character: acoustically dead, less connected to local musicians and musical styles" (2004, p. 769). In a similar vein, Antoine Hennion (1989) contends that this intense isolation connects studio culture to laboratories. As Hennion writes:

> The studio is a padded room cut off from the outside world by a heavy, soundproofed door, a room that warns off outsiders with its red light while singers, producers, musicians, and technicians are locked inside. It is a world made to the measure of people so that they can test their own creations. (1989, p. 407)

In this multitrack setting (which is discussed further in chapter I), sounds also tend to be isolated from each other and recorded with various close miking techniques as single sources. Close miking allows for recorded sounds to be more easily manipulated without the interference or bleed from other sound sources.

With the growth of home studio recording in the 1960s and '70s (Sterne, 2006b, p. 103; Théberge, 2004, p. 769), the barriers between inside and outside the studio have become less pronounced. However, it should be noted that many of the home studios from this early era of multitrack recording were designed in similar ways to the more professional, isolated studios of the day, with (often crudely) soundproofed rooms dedicated to performing and recording. Interestingly, as Samuel Thulin (2009) points out, even when Tascam's well-known line of cassette-based "Portastudio"- s hit the market in 1979, "the aesthetics of an isolated, low-noise recording environment were carried over

onto the portastudio and instruction manuals stressed methods of achieving optimum signal-to-noise ratios and making sure that extraneous sounds were minimized" (para. 4). It was not until the 1980s with the development of smaller—both in terms of the number of recording tracks and scale—MIDI-based home studios and with the widespread growth of computer-based home recording in the 1990s that this inner/outer blurring really accelerated. With the increased processing power of home computers and the development of various audio editing software in the 1990s, music producers, for a reasonable price, were able to perform musical tasks that were once only possible in professionally owned and operated studios. Until around this time, professional studios held "a radical monopoly on the recording of music," as Sterne argues, borrowing a term from Ivan Illich (2006a, p. 258).

In part, this obscuring of inner and outer worlds comes from the fact that even when anchored in my apartment, my studio's component parts rest on a table in a windowed room that contains none of the soundproofing described above by Hennion. Electronic music studios also tend not to require the use of microphones for recording, as most electronic instruments are designed with direct connectors for computers and recording interfaces. For instance, the synthesizer and drum machine that I use can link to my computer through a USB cord and/or MIDI cables. As a result, I can produce music using much lower volume and monitoring levels, which allows for the possibility to record in many (quieter) spaces that are not specifically designed for music production. My studio is also a multi-purpose room and, perhaps most importantly, the device at the centre of this network of instruments and practices, a laptop, is a multi-purpose tool, not

designed exclusively for musical operations. Even while working on music, the files and folders on the desktop of my computer signal to other places, research projects, photos, videos and my music collection. Furthermore, my laptop is almost always connected to a wider network of online sound files, media archives and tutorials. As is mentioned earlier in the chapter on method, I was able to establish a routing chain for my studio's instruments and software through the assistance of online tutorials addressing various routing possibilities for Ableton Live and Native Instruments Maschine.

Before moving on to a discussion of my collaboration with soundmaker, musician and friend Thulin, where we work with the method of electronic collaboration outlined by the members of Le Tigre and "pass stuff off to each other," I would like to say a few words about the way electronic music devices communicate with each other, allowing for a more simplified and seamless workflow. The instruments outlined above all work together in a chain of production wherein they send and receive MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface). Electronic musical instrument manufacturers developed MIDI in the early 1980s as an industry standard for the control and synchronization of various electronic instruments, including synthesizers and drum machines. As Rodgers writes, "MIDI does not transmit audio signals but rather digital data 'event' messages, such as pitch and volume information, that provides instructions for a synthesizer or other instrument to use when generating sound" (2010, p. 288). Since the initial emergence of MIDI, the ability to transmit these MIDI messages has increased tremendously, in addition to the number and variety of devices that can potentially communicate within any given chain of production. With my particular studio, the editing software that I use

(Ableton Live 8) acts as the controlling centre or node for this network of devices by sending out MIDI messages to the other instruments in the chain, although it should be noted that each device is capable of performing this central controlling function. The primary sending device is generally referred to as the brain, and if we stretch this biological metaphor a little further, we can imagine my synthesizer and drum machine as appendages receiving messages from the software brain. Without a singular brain sending out MIDI messages to multiple appendages, these devices would not be able to work in such a synchronized and integrated way.

A NETWORKED COLLABORATION

> Electronic music is so great in terms of being able to pass stuff off to each other (…) the amazing part about collaboration, especially electronic collaboration, is that we're a group, but we each really get to thrive individually (…) There's something about being in your house or the studio by yourself, learning these things on your own time, coming to your own conclusions, and being able to feel like no one's watching you and you can make crazy mistakes and erase it, and we'll never know, and get to as far as you can get. And also the process of being able to share that, even though it's not done, with somebody else. (Rodgers, 2010, p. 253)

The remarks from Kathleen Hanna of Le Tigre address the production possibilities afforded by the inherent portability of electronic musical instruments while also presenting a method for exploring the collaborative potential of an electroclash/electronic music studio. One of the most distinct aspects of digitally oriented music production is that producers are currently able to work within the context of collaborative group ensembles and, at the same time, are equally able to develop their own solitary practice(s), on their own time and rhythms, outside of the structures of traditional multitrack studio recording. As I discuss throughout this work, producers can potentially control all aspects of production, distribution and performance duties as computer-based networked music production allows one to work with a fully operational studio for a relatively small price and requiring relatively little space. And, once any given track is finished, it can be uploaded and distributed through various Internet networks, archives and websites, the most common current platforms for this are perhaps *SoundCloud* and *YouTube*. As Sterne (2006a) emphasizes, "a single person can now theoretically control the creation of an entire oeuvre of music at every step from conceptualization to small-scale replication" (p. 262).

From a technological perspective, the potential to fluidly move between pursuing solitary work and collaborative work in this particular institutional setting can be attributed to the increasing ease of communication between the tools themselves and their high degree of portability. The studio that I work with for this project can almost entirely fit into a medium-sized over-the-shoulder bag as its foundational elements consist of a laptop computer, a small drum machine, a two octave synthesizer, and an audio interface that I primarily use to record vocal and synthesizer parts. The portability of this studio is further enhanced by the relatively small size of the sound files, which can be passed between producers and potential collaborators as MP3s[33] via email, for instance, or uploaded to a server and/or transmitted through file transfer websites such as *wetransfer.com* when the files become too large for email. "Band members no longer have to be physically co-present to collaborate," as Nick Prior (2008) writes, "software files and audio files can be easily sent through electronic or regular mail to be added to, modified or mixed, then returned for further iteration" (p. 920).

Drawing on the comments from the members of Le Tigre, I decided to seek out soundmakers in order to explore the collaborative and networked possibilities of electronic music production and the types of practices, issues and concerns that emerge from this form of collaboration. Using "friendship as method" (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 734), I contacted music producers that I have a personal relationship with and who work within the academy. After emailing four artist scholars, only Thulin committed to contributing musical works for the project, although as I mention earlier, Tara Rodgers

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[33] For a history of the MP3, see Sterne's recent *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (2012).

participated in an email interview.[34] Thulin and I have maintained a personal and professional relationship since the mid-2000s after meeting at Concordia University in the Master's in Media Studies program. Samuel is also a very experienced soundmaker and it is for these reasons that I wanted to work with him on this project.

After developing four discreet musical works for a period of one month, I emailed Thulin six samples that were significantly featured in these tracks in the hopes that he would begin working with them. Although I made it clear to Thulin that he would have "total complete artistic license to do whatever" with the samples, I requested that he attempt to complete the work(s) in a three month period given the intensity of the deadline pressure for completing this dissertation project (personal communication, August 8, 2012). The six samples include three rhythm clips and three more melodic sound files to choose from. The rhythm samples are comprised of a twenty-three second Amen break, containing three variations of the classic drum 'n' bass groove, and two versions of a drum loop—one heavily compressed and one with very little compression—that play with and alter the backbeat conventions of electroclash. The melodic sound files include a recording of an Ondes Martenot (Ondes) that I made in the summer of 2008, comprising one of the project's unruly sounds, and two versions of a Béla Bartok string arrangement that I downloaded from *archive.org*, a non-profit Internet archive offering free "universal access" to various forms of media including sound files (archive.org). To find the string arrangement, I "opened" the website and typed "Bartok strings" in the space provided for searches. After listening to several sound files, I downloaded a string

[34] Please refer to the Appendices for the email interview I conducted with Tara Rodgers.

sample that seemed suitable in terms of recording quality and was long enough for numerous creative paths and possibilities. I also sent Thulin an edited version of the string arrangement with a slight digital delay added in order to create more sonic space, in addition to giving Samuel a sense of the direction that I had taken with the sample.

I included the Bartok string arrangement in this project as a way to creatively revisit my own personal history with electronic dance music production vis-à-vis some of the aesthetic frames of electroclash. Keep in mind, as Thomas Sontag suggests in the opening chapter, for some of the key producers of electroclash the genre "was a revisiting of the past" (personal communication, September 23, 2011). For his brother Tiga, this entails exploring his childhood musical associations with David Bowie, Marc Almond and Corey Hart. When I first began making electronic music in the late 1990s, I was living in Montreal with friends who were also learning to make music with computers and various software, most notably the DAW Acid Pro. Part of the musicmaking process for computer-based electronic music involves building collections of sounds or sound banks, in order to have a developed set of sonic working materials. When I started building my first sound banks, a Bartok LP was the only form of high quality recorded music in our apartment containing orchestral strings. As a result, most of my early electronic music compositions with strings used samples derived from one of Bartok's string arrangements. The Amen break is included in this study for similar reasons, as the rhythmic foundations for much of my music from the late 1990s was provided by the breakbeats of drum 'n' bass.

By the end of October, Thulin had produced two musical works: one that he did

not consider finished and another entitled, "Fall Ondes Follow," that he felt comfortable submitting to the project. After sending "Fall Ondes Follow" via email, we met in November of 2012 to have a conversation about the production process, the way Samuel used the samples, his approach to rhythm and his interest in using field recordings, among other topics. In sustaining the collaborative thread of this chapter, large excerpts of the conversation are kept in the body of the text, intermixed with my own questions and reflections. Conversation is a foundational component of friendship as method and parts of my interaction with Thulin are put forth as a direct representation of this method, and the collaborative approach to knowledge creation outlined by Diamond, McCartney and Moisala in *Music and Gender* (2000). Again, as Tillmann-Healy writes, "our primary procedures are those we use to build and sustain friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability" (2003, p. 734). Hyperlinks to sound files and websites are employed whenever possible in order to provide further context to the discussion and our collaboration. Following the excerpts of the conversation, I continue with my analysis of some of the concerns that emerged during our collaboration and a discussion of a musical piece that I composed after Samuel passed some of his sound files back to me.

A CONVERSATION WITH SAMUEL THULIN[35]

Given that this dissertation is concerned with the sociality of music studio production as it moves away from the traditional institutional structures of the professional recording industry, I was interested in knowing how Thulin's home studio is set up and his method for working with the material that I sent him. As he informed me, the studio he uses is in the bedroom of his apartment and consists of a laptop computer (MacBook Pro), an RME audio interface, a pair of powered monitors, an inexpensive MIDI keyboard and various other musical instruments, including an electric guitar, many acoustic guitars, an electric bass guitar and several percussion soundmakers. For this project, he primarily worked during the afternoon, as this is the time of the day that Samuel feels most comfortable making sounds and music in his apartment. I began our conversation by explaining the premise of the research-creation component of the dissertation, which is to explore the sociality of electronic music production and various forms of collaboration in relation to home studio recording and the production practices of electroclash. From the limited literature on electroclash and studios, one of the most prominent forms of collaboration comes from the practice of starting a musical piece and then sending it off to other people to work on.

I first asked Samuel to walk me through his production process and whether he started listening to the sound files immediately after receiving them at the end of the summer (2012).

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[35] Please refer to the Appendices for a complete transcription of my conversation with Thulin.

Samuel Thulin (ST): No, I didn't listen to them right away. I don't think I listened to them until September when I got back from a trip. At first, I am actually a little ashamed to admit that I just listened to them through my laptop speakers, which is interesting because whenever I send someone my material, I am always hoping that they do not listen through their laptop. But that is what I did the first time I listened to the samples, because the computer was all I had at the time and I knew that I was going to be listening to them more (…) On the first listen through those speakers, I knew right away that there was tons of stuff that I could do with those samples, because they were long and there was a lot of material.

David Madden (DM): *Do you think it was too much material to work with?*

ST: No, it wasn't too much. It meant that I had to make choices. There were enough samples; I will put it that way. Which is why later on when you asked if I wanted more samples, I told you that I didn't need any more material to work with. I think the very first thought that occurred to me in terms of composition when I listened to them, and it was very fleeting, but because I am always thinking about my method, I wondered at first if there is something I could do with very basic editing, because all of the basic elements for a piece were there. For example, what if I make a piece with just these samples, pretty much using the drum tracks as they are, not doing any time or pitch shifting, just making a piece through cutting and arranging in time. But I quickly tossed that idea out.

I was initially expecting to send Thulin another set of sound files in October of 2012; however, at that point in time he had already produced two musical works. My plan for the collaboration was to keep the process rather open-ended in terms of the first series of samples. I wanted the first six samples to be open in a way where he could have taken

them in almost any musical direction. With the second set of sound files, my plan was to send things that were a little more direct, perhaps with a chord progression or a melody. Samples that I imagined Samuel more directly placing into a song. However, in our conversation, he detailed how potentially receiving an additional set of samples with more determined musical possibilities might cause problems.

> ST: Isn't it funny in a way that you would send this open-ended thing and I would take a particular path and then you would send me something more determinant. How would I use it at that point, once I had already made my decision about where I was going with the piece?
> Going a little further with the process (…) I listened to the samples maybe a maximum of five times before getting started, but basically what happened is that in the Ondes sample, there is this little part of it, that each time I listened, just sparked my imagination. And so that's where I began. The part is probably less than two seconds. It is in the opening of the piece: there are the drums and there's the Ondes sample. The Ondes is what started everything. I cut the part out using Adobe Audition. I just cut out that short piece of the sample and I put that into Ableton Live. And then in Ableton Live, I listened to that particular sample a lot. Then I just tried playing the sample on different keys of a MIDI keyboard where it would be shifted in pitch and time (…) If I played a really low note on the keyboard, the sample would take five seconds or something. I decided on three octaves, just holding them together, starting with the highest one, then going one lower and then one lower than that.

Our conversation then moved on to a discussion of some of the ways that samples have an inherent collaborative element to them. We both find that when working with music samples or field recordings, unimaginable musical parts emerge through the

listening and editing process. In part, this is what draws me to working with Ondes samples. Even when the person playing the Ondes on a recording might only be exploring the sonic possibilities of the instrument, I can still use the material for musical purposes because there is so much complexity to the sound of the Ondes—especially in relation to the way a lot of contemporary sound reproduction equipment is developed by eliminating noise, excess frequencies and harmonics. There is a harmonic complexity to the instrument that is kind of wild and uncontrollable. When working with samples of an Ondes, you can play out a single-note drone and there are all these beats and rhythms percolating within the sound. Furthermore, I can truly say that I have no idea where any particular musical piece is going to develop when I begin with these short samples, Ondes or otherwise, because they reveal musical possibilities only as you listen to them repeatedly. This makes the production process feel collaborative on some level, as if the samples have some sort of agency. In contrast, when I start a musical piece with a chord progression that I like, I usually have an idea that the chords are going to be a verse or a chorus, for example. As Thulin suggests, he works with field recordings for similar reasons.

> ST: That's exactly why I am drawn to working with field recordings. Not to conflate the Ondes samples with field recordings, but it's the same thing in terms of my process. If I take a little bit of sound from almost any part of a field recording and just listen to it over and over, it suggests things, but it's not a chord progression. This really feeds into where I went from there with "Fall Ondes Follow," because I held those three octaves and recorded them into Ableton Live. It seemed that by actually physically holding the octaves on the keyboard that the

sounds changed more over time—more than if I was to just hold a note for two seconds and then loop that. I held the octaves for seven minutes and then I put that in Reaper (DAW), because Reaper is the program that I actually like to work with and it's the program that I did all of the final mixing and editing with.
If I were braver, I would have just submitted the repeating octaves. However, I felt like it would have been a bit of a cop-out. And, the other thing I wondered was, will other people hear in this piece what I hear in it, because when you listen that much you start to hear things that aren't there. I don't know if there was this want to control the listener's interpretation of the piece that made me go further or if it was just more my own desire to work with that sound and build upon it.

I was also interested in knowing how Samuel used the project's other five samples —the Amen, two string samples and two additional rhythm samples. With my own musicmaking practice, because I use so much sequencing technology to program musical parts, one of the best ways to add a looser feel to a sequenced piece is by manually playing a few parts or by adding samples. For instance, in "Sharing Space," I perform the bass line on a synthesizer rather than sequence the part. Additionally, I can achieve this looser feel if I put a melody sample over a sequenced beat. Once the sample and beat are working together, unforeseen connections will emerge and this will keep my production process going forward. Perhaps this is also a form of collaboration? We first discuss Thulin's integration of the strings before elaborating on his approach to rhythm and attempting to work with the Amen break.

ST: Much later on in the course of working on the piece, that's exactly how the strings ended up in there. I wouldn't have come up with the progression on top of what I already had all by myself. I had already worked on the piece a bit and then I

was just listening to the piece with the strings playing overtop in the preview window of my computer. At first, the ones you treated, but they were a little bit more chaotic than what I wanted. And then I used the untreated ones a few times. There was a part in them, just a couple of notes, maybe four notes that worked almost anywhere in the piece, "Fall Ondes Follow."

I then asked Samuel how he approached the rhythm samples. It is worth mentioning that the Amen break can be difficult to use musically, as a producer almost has to totally represent the break in the forefront of a mix or not use it at all. The Amen used for this project is produced at a frequency where once it is at a certain volume level in a mix, it just takes a listener's attention. The sample is also hard to work with as a textural layer because it is hyper complex and rhythmically very busy. As Samuel mentions below, "in a way I noticed that it [the Amen] was either almost white noise in the background or just too overpowering." The other drumbeat employed for the project is more open, in that, there is a lot more space between each discreet drum hit. With so much space between each drum note, Samuel had the option of using the whole looping pattern or using particular sounds as one-hit samples.

ST: I actually worked with the Amen sample later in the process. In the end I took it out. At the end of the piece, I spent a whole afternoon working with the sample and thinking that it was killer, and the next day thinking that it was no good. Basically, I spliced up the Amen and put it in the Ableton Live sampler and then each key on my MIDI keyboard could play a different part in the break. Then I tried to play the keyboard manually and it was really hard and a bit sloppy. Maybe if it had been a bit tighter I would have kept it in the piece, who knows, but I tried it multiple times. In the end, I felt that the Amen didn't add much and it really

changed the whole atmosphere of the piece. Ultimately, it felt like it was in there just for the sake of using all of the samples that you sent me. I think what it came down to in the end, was that my treatment of the break was a bit too sensational in a sense. Because in a way, I noticed that it was either almost white noise in the background or just too overpowering.

DM: *What was your process with the rhythm elements?*

ST: I had the basic rhythm before using the Amen break. I used the other beat that you sent me. I think I made it half time in Ableton Live. I slowed it down and stretched it.

DM: *But then you incorporate a lot more drum hits or notes that makes the rhythm sound kind of double time?*

ST: Yeah, I slowed the sample down and re-pitched it, because when it was slowed down for the first time it was still at the same pitch. I didn't like how the kick drum sounded, in particular, with the Ondes. Actually, first I should say that I spent quite a while in Reaper just figuring out the BPM of the Ondes. It took a long time just to get the BPM of that little sample of the Ondes that I made, because it is looping and there's rhythm. And if I'm going to want to put anything over it, I am going to need to know what the BPM is. The Ondes sample is used almost throughout the whole piece.

DM: *Could you talk more about your approach to the rhythm elements?*

ST: Yeah, after I got the BPM, I got the Ondes part sort of looping. Then I recorded the guitar picking part, which I played using a metronome, and I actually couldn't keep up for seven minutes. The first go at that part was pretty sloppy.

That's when I decided that I wanted a bit of a stronger beat and that's when I started messing around with the beat that you sent me. I slowed it down, re-pitched it, and I put a delay on it and that's why it's a bit busier sounding (…) Also, there is one other rhythm element that I put in much later, where I just isolated a closed hi-hat and then got that going on a three against four sort of thing. It fades in a little ways through, which makes the beat a little less repetitive. I put in the handclaps as well.

DM: *Is that you clapping?*

ST: Yes. That is something I go back to a lot, genuine handclaps. Handclaps recorded in a room, especially if you compress them so that the room tone comes up, gives a whole different sense of space that I like.

When I first listened to "Fall Ondes Follow," I wondered if the added handclaps might be employed as a way for Samuel to mix in more acoustic sounding instruments, as most of the samples that I sent him sound electronically produced. However, as we discussed his integration of the one-hit clapping sounds, our interaction developed into more of a back and forth conversation where Samuel presented questions to me about my electronic music practice. Thulin wanted to know how I mix together acoustic and electronic instruments since he finds it challenging to work with acoustic instruments once a "sonic regime" has been established.

ST: Do you find that it is difficult to mix more acoustic elements into electronic music, because once you have those more rigid electronic loops and sounds, I can get the feeling that they create a sonic regime where even if you bring acoustic instruments in, you've got to treat them in a tightly controlled way. I'm not saying

that is something that I want to do, but I feel the tendency to maintain some sort of sonic quality that those electronic instruments tend to give. Do you know what I'm talking about? Mixing acoustic and electronic instruments can be pretty difficult because one brings out qualities in the other one that we don't necessarily think of as going together. For example, an acoustic guitar by itself might sound really great, but then when it's mixed with really tailored electronic sounds, it can sound out of place.

DM: *I find that the degree to which I can mix electronic and acoustic instruments depends on the moment that I introduce any particular instrument into a musical piece. This really matters for my process. Mixing more acoustic instruments with rigid electronic sounds, if it is going to work, I feel as though I have to make some sort of initial, or early in the process intervention. In other words, I have to bring them together quite early in the production process. To record an acoustic guitar part for a piece that already has a sense of an electronic sounding sonic regime would be challenging, unless I altered the acoustic guitar to sound more electronically processed.*

ST: But sometimes just a synthesizer is enough to make it that way.

DM: *Absolutely. So, if I am going to incorporate an acoustic guitar into a piece, it is probably going to come early in the production process and the guitar will be part of the regime.*

ST: Right.

DM*: With "Fall Ondes Follow," when the second guitar part comes in about twenty seconds into the piece, to me, it is mixed in an unexpected way. In terms of my own electronic music practice, I relate much more to the first twenty seconds of*

the piece in terms of how you mix it. During the opening, the rhythm aspects are prominently featured in the mix.

ST: The mix took a long time. It is pretty good but it could be better still, I think. In terms of the level of those guitars, what I discovered was that, either they were up front in the mix or they sounded like a mess. So they are kind of louder than I originally thought I was going to mix them (…) First of all, the resonator guitar is very difficult to record, for me, anyway. It's just a difficult instrument, unless it's the only thing present. If it's a solo resonator, just set up two microphones and you're gold. But to mix that with other instruments, it's got so much going on in the frequency spectrum that it's really hard for me to work with. Probably the biggest challenge was that guitar. In terms of performing the part, something about that part was at the edge of my ability. I had to record that part several times to get it the way I wanted. And I ended up using all of those performances together.

DM: *I sometimes wonder if you're totally aware of what you've created, because when you've been working by yourself on a composition for a longtime, you create changes in the piece that don't necessarily have to happen. For instance, if you had played me the intro to "Fall Ondes Follow," I would have said, there's the song. I think about this in relation to my own practice and the editing decisions that I make. Maybe that is one of the drawbacks of doing so much solo work and not having a collaborator present to listen at strategic moments during a production?*

ST: I think this idea goes a long way in explaining why we miss out on stuff, because for me anyway, I've sort of gone so far down a road that I'm not prepared to turn back. I had the guitar part, I had all of this other stuff going on, then I put the drumbeat in and then I'm like, I'm loving this intro, but the piece is going in another direction (…) The intro was not planned in any way and it didn't come

together in a way that an intro typically would. I often work somewhat linearly as well, where the intro is there and then I go to another part.

Following our conversation in November, I began considering some of the things that had been gained and lost through this collaboration with Samuel. Beyond the noted ease of communication between us, I immediately noticed that my own production process had been altered through working together and discussing our collaboration. As I began creating new tracks after listening to Samuel's compositions, certain parts of our conversation stayed with me and guided my process as I continued with our networked music practice. Even though Thulin might not maintain an authorial presence in the pieces that I produced with the files that he sent me, he most certainly collaborated on them by suggesting diverging production approaches and by maintaining an imagined social presence throughout the entirety of the process.

After our conversation, my approach to making sequenced electronic beats developed vis-à-vis Samuel's comments about the rhythms of "Fall Ondes Follow." When making electronic dance music, I typically begin by creating a sequenced rhythm that sustains my attention before moving on to construct various other accompanying parts. This is a markedly different approach to rhythm than the one that Thulin articulates above. For "Fall Ondes Follow," Samuel did not settle on a groove until very late in the production process by importing and slightly modifying the compressed beat that I created for the project. One of the challenges of dropping sequenced beats into a piece late in a musical production is that sequenced rhythms tend to be very tempo dependent. In other words, even though a sequenced beat works well within a composition at one

tempo (e.g., 110 BPM) does not mean that the beat will work very well at a different tempo (e.g., 122). Therefore, it is often beneficial to establish a suitable tempo for a groove early in any production process as minor tempo adjustments can produce drastic effects. This rhythm principle also holds for highly rhythmic and sequenced arpeggio parts and synthesizer lines. However, while producing the first piece after our conversation, I kept Thulin's approach to rhythm in mind as I progressed with the music.

Working on an early iteration of "Dripping Water," I found that I was able to move through the process without the usual pressure of finding the groove at the beginning of the production. The drum groove of the piece, which is primarily built through the interaction of two distinct beats created on my drum machine, came after I developed the layers of high and mid-range synthesizers that play out throughout the song. Perhaps without the conversation with Samuel, I would have remained bound by my own rhythm-first process and would not have developed the synthesizer parts. Through having such sustained access and insight into someone else's musical practice afforded alternate possibilities and ways of working through my own production problems.

As my trust of Samuel began to build through our friendship-oriented method, I also began to feel more comfortable consulting with him and discussing certain editing decisions and aesthetic potentialities. This is something that I am generally very reluctant to do, as my typical process for making soundworks is at times so solitary that I often feel insecure about sharing and discussing pieces that I consider to be unfinished. When I started producing a track with the Amen break in early January (2013), I contacted Thulin for feedback on the development of the piece and my integration of the drum break.

Thulin responded that although he was fond of all the variations that I made to the Amen —"the way the volume of the beat changes, and how you drop the kick in a few places (I think) and bring the hi-hats up," as he writes—he found that "the beat stopping completely/abruptly is maybe a bit too much" (personal communication, February 14, 2013). The continuous email correspondence created an intimate and safe, yet distant enough space for us to share our thoughts and feelings about each other's tracks. I wonder whether Thulin would have been comfortable making such pronounced editing suggestions if we had listened to the piece together in the same room. I then listened to the work-in-progress Amen piece while paying attention to the stuttered feel that Thulin articulates in the email response, decided to make minor adjustments based on his suggestions and then sent him a follow up email with the changes integrated. Samuel wrote back: "Yeah! Very nice! I like the echo/fadeout of the beat at the end" (personal communication, February 18, 203). This whole networked process only took three days and we never had a face-to-face meeting, only five emails in total between us.

At the same time, there seems to be numerous limitations to this method of working through email and passing sound files and tracks to each other. Although I sent Samuel a series of six sound files that I was familiar with and had spent a considerable amount of time using in my studio, when I first listened to "Fall Ondes Follow," I barely recognized the samples in the track and felt somewhat disconnected from many of his aesthetic decisions, particularly the mix. To be clear, there were numerous editing decisions that I did not identify with and could not relate to my own musical practice. As is mentioned above, I suggest to Thulin that only the first twenty seconds of "Fall Ondes Follow"

connect with my own ideas around mixing electronic music, where the rhythm elements are prominently featured on equal footing with the more melodic and harmonic elements. Furthermore, “Fall Ondes Follow” moves so far away from the aesthetic direction of the music that I produced for the project that I continue to question whether my own compositional voice is even represented in the piece. Even though we were able to easily pass samples and suggestions to each other and deliver timely feedback, it remains unclear whether I made a contribution to Thulin’s work beyond providing a range of source material to work with. Was he merely sampling and remixing my work? Although we had successfully created a shared space for ideas and knowledge creation, we hadn’t necessarily coproduced, or perhaps more accurately, coauthored any works at this point in the collaboration.

In looking for ways to have both of our voices more prominently represented in some of the music produced for the project, I asked Samuel to send me the seven minute looping Ondes piece that he considered unfinished. Since he already perceived “Fall Ondes Follow” to be a complete composition, I felt that there might be more space for contributions to the longer and more open Ondes octaves work that he made. Yet, while I received the sound file under the guise of an unfinished work, once I listened to the piece, I realized that it had all of the discreet components of a complete soundwork, including very thick layers of complex frequencies and hyper complex rhythms. This presented numerous challenges for working with the file, as I had to make several initial equalization adjustments to the looping Ondes just to feather my own musical expressions into the piece.

My approach for respecting and representing both of our voices in "Sharing Space" involves using Samuel's drawn out Ondes loop to open the first three minutes of the piece in an effort to establish a stronger collaborative musical space. Since the octaves are so dense in the middle range of the frequency spectrum, there was more room to place additional parts below and above Thulin's repeating Ondes. I also softened and dispersed his sounds through adding a slight digital reverb to the whole sound file, thereby creating even more space for my musical parts. Nearing the three minute mark of the track, I quickly fade-in a synthesizer part that rhythmically mimics the wild, percolating rhythms within the Ondes octaves and, at the same time, I bring in a rhythm foundation to create more movement within the piece. After the entry of the sequenced beat and synthesizer, the presence of the looping Ondes is maintained by constructing a chord progression with the octaves, which enter the song after the vocal progression ends. I do this by adjusting the pitch of the Ondes anywhere from five to seven semi-tones and generally alternate the chords every two bars or eight counts at 115 BPM. As I discuss further below, I integrate this chord progression and the other musical parts by using affective mixing, where I attempt to balance and represent all of the discreet musical parts and frequencies of any given musical work. This is my interpretive, conceptual mixing frame for working with the wildly affective textures of electroclash, while at the same time, intervening into electronic dance music's established politics of frequency.

AFFECTIVE MIXING

It might not seem all that unique or even interesting to employ a musical mixing frame that balances a fuller range of frequencies and voices; however, when used within the context of electronic dance music production there are important political implications to consider. I mobilize this affective mixing method as a way to intervene into the longstanding hierarchical politics of frequency within electronic dance music, a politics that unduly favours and prioritizes the low end at the expense of high-end frequencies and voices. As Will Straw (1993) argues, one of the aesthetic foundations of dance music is "that high-end sounds (vocals, strings and so on) represent the playful, outrageous moments within dance music, and that for the connoisseurist, credible exercises happen at the low end, in the bass and percussion" (p. 181). My approach to affective mixing is centered on using a range of unruly sounds and my own ambiguous singing voice with the low(er) end grooves of electronic dance music. Before discussing my use of these sounds and rhythms, I address some of the conceptual limitations of employing affect as a mode of musical analysis and some of the dangers of using a limited construction of the concept vis-à-vis electronic dance music. I argue that within the context of dance music, affect has the potential to reinforce this problematic frequency relationship, as the concept sometimes seems structured in a way that serves to legitimize the low end. Thus, we need to work with and produce affective models that somehow account for a wider range of frequencies, sounds and voices.

Affect is a relatively new concern within Humanities scholarship and has only emerged as a foundational concept in the last twenty years or so, largely through

remixing and translating the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, most notably *Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Perhaps the best known example of this (somewhat) recent work on affect that draws from Deleuze and Guattari is *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), by Brian Massumi, who also translated *Thousand Plateaus* into English. As Massumi writes, "*L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (1987, xvi). Within popular music studies, we can trace the beginnings of this affective turn to the late 1980s and early 1990s when certain scholars began looking for new modes of analysis that moved beyond relating music to meaning and the entrenched formalism of musicology. Musicologist Richard Middleton (1993), for instance, suggested that although popular music scholars rightly prioritized meaning in much of their work, "there is a suspicion that sometimes insufficient attention has been paid to the sounds themselves" (p. 177). Middleton continues: "we need to find ways of bringing the patterns created in the sounds themselves back into the foreground, without as a consequence retreating into an inappropriate formalism" (p. 177).

The concept of affect is generally used in music and sound scholarship in relation to the materiality of sounds in themselves and in relation to how sounds register on bodies as vibrations and frequencies. Notable examples of recent sound and music scholarship that mobilize the concept are Steve Goodman's *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (2008), and Bruce Johnson's *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence* (2008). Indirectly answering Middleton's call for new modes of

analysis roughly fifteen years later, in "The Sound of Music," Johnson opens by directly confronting many of the conceptual shortcomings associated with music as an object of inquiry vis-à-vis popular music studies and musicology. According to Johnson, music has traditionally been analyzed in terms of aesthetics, culture and meaning. In doing so, he posits, the sounds themselves—the materiality of the music—and their disruptive power have been neglected. Johnson writes:

> As a broad introductory simplification, it may be said that in traditional musicology, music is generally categorized as an "artform," the bearer of aesthetics. In popular music studies, the emphasis is on music as a "culture," the bearer of meanings. (2008, p. 13)

One of the goals of Johnson's book is to push our understandings of music into the realm of sound and sensory experience, as a collection of registering vibrations centred on the ear. The author is interested in the way music works in relation to the body on a somewhat pre-conscious or unconscious affective level—as a form of reception—and as a phenomenological experience. On this level, sound acts as a special sensory stimulant that is capable of producing certain emotional and physical effects not available to vision, "the other major sensory partner in our public social transactions" (Johnson, 2008, p. 14). Johnson contends that our first response to sound is purely physiological, "a primary reaction to a threatening stimulus," and involuntary. This first level response "creates a matrix within which a secondary and cognitively mediated response draws on cultural memory to articulate the precise nature of that threat" (Johnson, 2008, p. 18).

Goodman, on the other hand, wants to move beyond such a human centered, phenomenological model of affect to an ontology of vibrational force where "sound is

merely a thin slice, the vibrations audible to humans or animals" (2010, p. 81). Like Johnson, although going much further, Goodman explicitly takes on the shortcomings he perceives in nearly everything that has ever been written about sound and music. As he writes: "the phenomenological anthropocentrism of almost all musical and sonic analysis, obsessed with individualized, subjective feeling, denigrates the vibrational nexus at the alter of human audition" (2010, p. 82). Yet, while Goodman is careful to include nonhuman participants within these wide-ranging vibrational encounters, he limits the construction of this ontology of vibration to a special band of frequencies, those emerging from the low end. The author states that "bass figures as exemplary because of all frequency bands within a sonic encounter, it most explicitly exceeds mere audition and activates the sonic conjunction with amodal perception: bass is not just heard but is felt" (2010, p. 79). And so, is Goodman talking about the primacy of vibrational force or merely the primacy of bass? Does Goodman not denigrate the vibrational nexus at the alter of bass? How might this model of affect be employed as a mode of analysis outside of bass cultures, where frequencies oscillate in the upper ranges of the frequency spectrum? And, how would this conception of affect be mobilized in relation to electroclash, for instance, and the musical works produced for this project where so much of the affective energy comes from the bitchiness of the high-end?

Sound, of course, is tactile. This tactility derives from the fact that sound waves move at speeds that can be directly felt by the body. This includes not only sounds produced in the audible range of frequencies, between 20 Hz and 20 000 Hz, but also some frequencies in the infrasonic and ultrasonic ranges just below and above the

threshold of human hearing. Slower moving sound waves, or bass frequencies, have the potential to touch the body with greater vibrational force as they move at slower speeds than higher frequencies. So, if we construct a theory of affect that is prepersonal, unconscious, separate from emotions, meanings, and only concerned with militant vibrational power, are we merely constructing a low end theory? Is this affective turn simply replacing one kind of musicological formalism with another form of vibrational bass formalism? Will this understanding of affect serve to reinforce electronic dance music culture's longstanding practice of legitimizing bass and sub bass sounds? Keep in mind, there are numerous repeating moments within electronic music history where the creation of a hierarchy of sounds and frequencies has led to the silencing of other instruments and voices, usually those considered feminine or too expressive. For instance, in the first chapter I outline how intense ideological battles between the WDR and RTF studios in the 1950s over sonic working materials and compositional approaches led to the privileging of totally abstracted, unidentifiable sound sources at the expense of identifiable and feminized, acoustic materials.

As an oppositional production stance, I have intentionally incorporated certain unruly sounds throughout the musical tracks produced for this project. By unruly sounds, I mean wild, uncontrollable, highly expressive sounds that move through a broad spectrum of frequencies. These sounds are largely drawn from Ondes recordings that I have been collecting for the past five years in an effort to sonically restore the instrument through various creative interventions, as there are very few remaining Ondes in existence today. In 1928, the instrument's inventor, Maurice Martenot (1898–1980), a

former radiotelegraphic soldier in WWI, musician and pedagogue, presented the Ondes publically for the first time in Paris. I have written elsewhere (Madden 2013) how this early electronic musical instrument was deemed too expressive and girly by many important European composers, including Pierre Boulez and René Leibowitz, in the late 1940s after the premiere of the instrument's greatest works, *Trois Petities Liturgies* and *Turangalîla-Symphonie*, both by composer and pedagogue Olivier Messiaen. Even though the two compositions were considered to be great public successes, said composers reacted against Messiaen's lyrical and feminine use of the Ondes (Tchamkerten, 2007, p. 71).

It should be apparent from listening to the Ondes sample that Samuel and I work with throughout the project, in addition to listening to the seven-minute Octave piece, that the instrument has a vast dynamic and timbral range. It should also be clear to listeners that the Ondes recorded in the sample is slightly out of tune—or ambiguously tuned—and that the recording contains gritty, hissing noises throughout. In addition to Thulin's piece, "Fall Ondes Follow," and "Sharing Space," the unruly Ondes sounds are used in several other instances within the musical works produced for this project. With "Unruly Ondes," the sample is employed to construct a gritty and ethereal ambiance over a slow BPM version of a simple backbeat, with the bass drum hitting the one and the three of every measure and with participatory electroclash handclaps marking the two and the four.

Like the works of electroclash artists Peaches and Le Tigre, the recordings could also be described as low quality, which I maintain through keeping extraneous noises

present in the tracks. With "Breathe," additional noise is added to the sample through recording the sounds of a vinyl record directly into my audio interface and then looping these sounds in the extended dance mix. These noises and textures not only potentially provide greater textural depth to a sound work by referring to an instrument or to a sounding body; they can also create an access point for an imagined audience waiting to listen, as they signal to the particular context of production.[36] I have left these textural elements strongly featured in the musical pieces as a way to more directly represent myself within the creative works produced for the project.

Working within this frame of unruly sounds, I also included sounds that directly refer to my body, both through the use of "non-verbal vocalizing," (2003, p. 14) to borrow a term from Hannah Bosma, and through the incorporation of my own ambiguously gendered voice. The non-verbal vocalizing techniques are heavily explored in the sample "Breathe," where I record myself taking deep breaths using a microphone and then loop these breathing sounds throughout the mix. As McClary tells us, "a very strong tradition of Western musical thought has been devoted to defining music as the sound itself, to erasing the physicality involved in both the making and the reception of music" (1991, p. 136). I would argue that this silencing of the body vis-à-vis music and sound has developed to such an extent within Western musical traditions that using

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[36] For instance, in the context of soundscape composition, McCartney and Westerkamp leave these contextual elements recognizable in their works. As McCartney writes: "through the process of composition, a new place is created which is connected to the original location, transformed through Westerkamp's experience of it, and by her compositional strategies. This creates a work that says something about the place, while leaving room for listeners to inhabit it in many different ways" (2000a, p. 6).

sounds that directly refer to the body in a musical composition often provokes a certain anxiety amongst listeners. McCartney, for instance, notes that Westekamp's integration of breathing sounds and the sounds of a mechanical beating heart in "Breathing Room," were a source of tension for some respondents that she played the piece for (2000a, p. 326). In my own reception work (Madden 2008), I have noticed a similar pattern amongst some listeners, with sounds emerging from the mouth—salival drops, breathing, teeth chattering, etc.—often provoking tension in listeners' responses.

The second method for maintaining a bodily presence in these tracks involves exploring the creative possibilities of my own singing voice. Given that I am not a vocalist and have not sung for many years, my initial plan was to recruit vocalists to contribute to the project. However, since I was interested in representing higher range frequencies in these pieces, I had to rely on vocal effects processing to create layers of upper range textures to my tenor voice as I felt very uncomfortable asking women to make the higher frequency vocal contributions. Women's voices have a long and problematic history in electronic dance music, a history that I do not wish to reproduce in any way with my sound works. In the opening chapter, I discuss how for the better part of the popular music industry's history, women have primarily been invited by men into studios as vocalists and instrumental performers. A similar history holds for electronic dance music studios, although this inviting into the studio often takes the form of sampling and/or stealing vocal performances from previously recorded musical material. As Barbara Brady (1993) has persuasively argued, in the early 1990s numerous male producers used female voices in stereotypically emotional and sexual ways when the

underground sounds of house music were taken to the mainstream as commercial dance music (p. 157).[37] These voices were typically African American, sampled from older soul, R & B and disco records. During this period, Bradby argues that "disturbingly traditional representations of women have been recycled in both 'live' and sampled performance," and since most of these vocalists are black, "the projection of sexuality onto the female body also has a familiar racial dimension" (1993, p. 157, p. 168).

Similar stereotypical gender representations also extend into electroacoustic and computer music cultures, where musical partnerships between female vocalists and male composers are very prominent (Bosma, 2003, p. 12). As Bosma writes, "this stereotype relates woman to body, performance, tradition, non-verbal sound and singing, and man to electronic music technology, innovation, language and authority" (2003, p. 12). One way to overcome these stereotypes is by refusing to sway one way or another through creating an ambiguously gendered voice. This is my personal production tactic for connecting my musical works to the singing cyborgs mentioned in the first chapter, who use irony as a way to play with the established heteronormative conventions of masculinity and femininity. In practice, I do this by slightly distorting my vocal tracks and then making adjustments to the pitch while editing the pieces in Ableton Live. The musical segments with vocals should sound as though more than one person is singing, from many different registers and from many different identities. In "Sharing Space," for instance, the vocal

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[37] A well-known example of this form of sampling comes in Black Box's song "Ride on Time," which was released on the summer of 1989. The male producers (Daniele Davoli, Valero Semplici and Mirko Limoni) sample parts of American soul singer Loleatta Holloway's vocal performance from "Love Sensation" (1980), without permission. In the video for "Ride on Time," the group hired "a tall, sexy model" from Guadaloupe, Katherine Quinol, to lip synch Holloway's sampled vocal line (Bradby, 1993, p. 170).

tracks are compiled together using ten separate vocal layers and then feathered into a fractured whole.

Using the voice is perhaps the most direct and obvious way for making gender differences audible in music. Unlike my more subjective incorporation of unruly instrumental sounds and noisy textures, where listeners might not be able to discern any audible signs of gender, with the voice, the process of hearing and classifying gender is generally much easier and more immediate. In part, this comes from the fact that we spend so much of our lives listening to and making sense of human voices, and our ears are oriented towards mid-range frequencies where most voices operate. Furthermore, the way one employs lyrics can also very easily add a gendered dimension to any given song. In the context of electroclash, this gendered vocal dimension is generally achieved with highly sexualized vocal hooks that play with and parody heteronormative, patriarchal identity politics. My approach to articulating lyrics in these works is slightly different, however, as I maintain the project's ambiguous frame even when attempting to vocalize actual scripted words. In the track "Sharing Space," I try to disguise the lyrics through the use of digital effects processing and through singing in a slightly inarticulate way, wherein I rarely enunciate any words. The vocal parts are developed by creating melodies with single keyboard notes and then filling in these melody lines with words that best fit the rhythmic patterns. I also loop my voice and create chords, or synthesizer-like pads, in many instances in attempt to use my voice as a textural layer, rather than the featured component of any given track.

Although many listeners might not be able to detect any sonic signs of gendering in

the non-verbal and instrumental working materials used throughout these sound works, the unruly sounds are very explicitly created and mobilized as a way to connect the sounds of this project to various sounds and frequencies that have been at different moments considered too expressive and wild for the aesthetic boundaries of electronic music, dance or otherwise. By using sounds that refer to my body and by refusing to eliminate the extraneous hissing textures in the tracks, it is my hope that the pieces produced for this project draw attention to a politics of frequency that too often silences the (sampled) voices of women and those frequencies emerging from the high-end. I am also interested in using these pieces as a way to create dialogue and provoke questions between those who come in contact with them. Do any of the sounds in these songs provoke anxiety in your listening experience? Do they produce any pleasure as you listen to them? What do the songs and the discreet sounds within them mean to you? What kinds of memories, feelings and sensations do they initiate? Are the high-end frequencies capable of producing an affective response? Or, is it only possible to be moved by the lower end bass lines and pulsing rhythms?

THE MIX

Push play… After constructing the discreet musical works and samples, I then assembled them together in the form of an extended dance mix in order for the pieces to be listened to one after another in a continuous form of play. The term dance mix is employed in three overlapping ways: firstly, in a broad sense to denote the mixing together of the songs produced for this project through mobilizing various production techniques, including cross-fading, equalization, beat matching and effects processing; secondly, to signal to the specific place—the dance floor—where I imagine performing these works in the coming months; and thirdly, as a method for connecting the musical works of this project to the previously mentioned production practices of electroclash artists Larry Tee, Tiga, DJ Hell and DJ Mini, who all used extended mixes in the early 2000s to establish their particular aesthetic understandings of the genre and as promotional tools for their careers as professional DJs and music producers.

The primary production considerations for putting together the *Cross-dressing to Backbeats Mix* involves working through questions of selection and transition: namely, in what running order should the sound works be selected and arranged? And, how to use various transition techniques to move from one track to another? In relation to the former question, I decided to record and arrange the mix in Abelton Live using my intuition as a decision-making method, as this is the way many DJs select and mix their tracks together while performing in live situations. DJing is perhaps best understood as a form of improvised composing, where a variety of individual musical tracks and fragments are

sutured through matching tempos, textures, melodies and rhythms. Thus, while I was very familiar with the sonic palette that I would be employing for the mix (i.e., the musical works and samples produced for the project), I did not predetermine the running order of the tracks before recording them. Each musical section was simply selected "in-the-moment," based on my particular affective relationship to the pieces on the day of the recording (May 28, 2013).

Reflecting back on the process, I can hear that the mix opens with the more upbeat and dance-oriented material (e.g., "Sharing Space"), before reaching a rhythmic crescendo towards the middle section with the introduction of the Amen break, and then slowing down and closing with the slower BPM tracks, such as "Dripping Water." The first three minutes of "Sharing Space" is comprised of Thulin's repeating Ondes loop with added equalization adjustments and effects processing, which seems to create a sense of ambiguity and anticipation of the steady beat that suddenly emerges with the synthesizer bass line and "unruly synthesizer" part. If I were to record the mix again, the same piece would most likely remain as the opening intervention since the repeating Ondes octaves slowly draws one's listening attention to the music. However, the slower material introduced towards the end of the mix lacks the repetitive driving rhythms that are usually required to maintain sustained dancing on a dance floor. Therefore, when I eventually perform these pieces in a live setting, further rhythmic modifications will have to be made in order to accommodate the particular performance sites.

While creating the transitional moments in the mix, I kept my production decisions in line with some of the DJ performance practices of electroclash. As I posit in chapter

III, electroclash DJ sets in the late 1990s and early 2000s progressed in much more of a track-to-track fashion, unlike many other forms of dance music like house, disco and techno, where emphasis is placed on the incorporation of seamless mixing practices such as beat matching, cross-fading and equalization. Thus, I avoid using many of these techniques and, as a result, the beginning and ending of each discreet musical section should be easily discernable to listeners. One of the challenges of this type of track-to-track DJ style is that selecting and arranging the musical pieces becomes a hypersensitive process, as there is very little room to slowly ease into each song, thereby making transitions sound very abrupt. In contrast, when using equalization and cross-fading, which permit a DJ to slowly fade out the volume level of one song while fading in another, it is generally unclear when exactly each track begins and ends, resulting in smoother sounding transitions.

Finally, one of the goals of producing this mix and series of musical works is to open my electronic music studio to outer worlds in an effort to make the studio a more knowable place. Since music studios have traditionally been constructed with various forms of isolating principles in mind and are very often closed to outsiders, they generally maintain a mysterious and highly secretive aura (Meintjes 2003). With this textual exploration and sound works, I attempt to link this particular studio setting to outsiders in many different ways: through a networked collaboration with musician and friend Samuel Thulin where we share sound files and production ideas; through detailing and discussing our production processes; through posting all of the musical works and some of the samples to soundcloud.com; and through making all source material

downloadable for further collaborations and re-articulations. It is also my intention that this text draws attention to the changing sociality of current music production practices, where, more than ever, producers are turning to and exploring various networked pathways of production and collaboration. This includes using online tutorials and forums for addressing particular production questions, in addition to seeking out archives of sound banks and media files. At the same time, I hope that by using, documenting and acknowledging these collaborative pathways this project complicates certain established notions of what it means to work alone as a solitary media artist. Making music is always a social practice.

CODA

> DJ MAG! Your top 100 DJ boy club list can eat a dick! Where the ladies at???[38]
> –Peaches, October 27, 2011

In the opening chapter of this work, I call for a return to addressing questions of gender politics and electronic dance music, questions that appear even more pressing in lieu of the publication of *DJ Mag's* 2011 top 100 DJs list (which is decided by online voting). *DJ Mag* is published monthly by Thrust Publishing in the UK and is one of the most prominent commercial electronic dance music magazines in the Western world. In addition to its heavy print circulation in many different languages (e.g., Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Polish, Bulgarian, Chinese, Spanish, among others), the magazine maintains a highly developed Web presence through its site (Djmag.com), containing everything from interviews with DJs and label owners to lists of important clubs and DJs. Between 2007 and 2011, the previously mentioned Claudia Cazacu was the only woman to be voted to the magazine's top 100 DJs list, reaching #93 in 2010. The results did not diverge from the ongoing trend when the 2012 list was released, with the DJ and production duo from Australia, Nervo (Miriam and Olivia Nervo), representing the only women on the list. They were voted in at #46 by the magazine's online readership.

The electroclash artist and producer Peaches responded to the 2011 incarnation of the list, abrasively stating, "DJ MAG! Your top 100 DJ boy club list can eat a dick! Where the ladies at???" The comment was posted to her artist Facebook page the same

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[38] Please refer to the Appendices to view the screenshot of Peaches' Facebook page where this quote comes from.

day that the magazine released the results of the 2011 list. Immediately after posting, Peaches' artist page was inundated with affirmations of support, coming in the form of nearly 800 "likes" and comments such as, "Hallelujah! Preaches of Peaches you should be at the top!" and "Yeah! What about the ladies with the power of the needle!!!!," in addition to a variety of sexist and misogynist responses. One Facebook user posted: "Man Created the EDM Society in the late 80's and women were tagging along cuz it was something new.. Now females are all big mouth in our accomplishments in life.. Nd Peaches u suck anywys i nvr heard of you and dont hear of u."

Peaches was not the only person to publically denounce *DJ Mag's* overtly male-oriented project. The UK DJ Hanna Hanra wrote a blog entry for *The Guardian* entitled "Why are there no female DJs on DJ mag's top 100 list?," detailing how the list comes as no surprise given that she performs in places where men attempt to tell her how to "use the decks" (Hanra, 2011). Nearly one month after the list's circulation, Angus Finlayson produced a piece for *thequietus.com* that mentions the top 100 DJs vis-à-vis the increasingly misogynist impulses of electronic dance music culture since the decline of raves in the early 2000s. As Finlayson argues, the current exclusionary and misogynist politics of EDM culture make it more difficult "to find accessible urban spaces in which DJs and dancers can congregate to create this sense of togetherness" that was present during the rave days (2011). I was also not surprised by the results and the continued absence of women, as electronic music magazines often maintain a consistent discourse that discourages female participation as producers and DJs primarily through the mobilization of militaristic metaphors and misogynist imagery (McCartney, 1995;

Rodgers, 2010; Théberge, 1991, 1997). *DJ Mag* and many other publications, such as the previously discussed *Mixmag*, which promotes itself as the world's biggest dance music and clubbing magazine, regularly feature photographs of partying women in various forms of undress, while almost exclusively focusing on the careers of male DJs and music producers.

It is worth emphasizing that this marked absence of women also extends to the artist rosters of major electronic music labels and festivals. For instance, last night in Montreal (June 2, 2013), the fourteenth edition of Mutek—an annual five day electronic music and arts festival—closed with another line up almost entirely comprised of male producers, performers, workshop facilitators, speakers, visual artists and DJs. While my research details and documents the representation of women performing at major festivals and producing works for major electronic music labels, this final section responds to Peaches directly in the interests of mapping future research on music, gender and technology. As Tara Rodgers posits, the short answer to this question is that women are making contributions to electronic music everywhere and in so many different contexts, as label owners, producers, DJs, critics, instrumentalists, festival organizers, engineers, and philosophers. "With their myriad technological innovations and sounding practices," writes Rodgers and drawing on Autumn Stanley's history of technology, "women hold up two-thirds of the sky" (2010, p. 16).

Following Rodgers and many of the authors present in this dissertation, *Cross-dressing to Backbeats* listens for women and gender-bending artists in the places where they are making contributions, rather than seeking out and finding settings where they are

not. Locating the places where women are making wonderful and diverse musical contributions often entails moving to the peripheries of mainstream culture, where composition and engineering are structured as masculine practices, and turning towards "alternative contexts and productions," as Andra McCartney posits (2003, p. 89). Electroclash, in many ways, is one of these alternative contexts and productions. The genre represents an extended moment in the late 1990s and early 2000s where numerous women and gender-bending artists were contributing significantly to the production and distribution of an electronic dance music genre, an anomaly in the history of popular music and electronic music where producing roles typically belong to men. Some of the more internationally well-known electroclash artists include Peaches, Chicks on Speed, Le Tigre, Miss Kittin, Tiga, Fischerspooner, Larry Tee, ADULTE., Ellen Allien, and Scissor Sisters, among many others. Whether in the context of collaborative group ensembles or as solo DJs and producers, these artists worked with some of electronic dance music's most vulgar stylizations to produce their ironic and highly sexualized backbeat sounds. Or, in the words of Montreal's DJ Mini, these artists generally created "bitchy, square, fully synthetic music with a loud, obnoxious singer over it, singing with a lot of attitude" (personal communication, December 30, 2011).

The sounds and music discussed throughout this dissertation were also produced outside of the traditional institutional structures of professional music studios, where access to recording has historically been granted to men, by men. Much like the music and samples that I produced for the project in my apartment's studio, electroclash artists like Peaches, Le Tigre and Chicks on Speed worked with a mixing of older and newer

musical devices in spaces not specifically designed for the purposes of music production. These spaces were intimately tied to social worlds outside of the studio, as the artists who inhabited them often worked collaboratively, sharing ideas, musical tracks and equipment. Of note, once any given album or track was finished, these artists were able to release their own music through various circuits and networks of DIY (do it yourself) distribution and sales.

Many women also participated within local and international electroclash scenes in various entrepreneurial capacities, as curators, promoters and label owners. The most prominent internationally known example of this manifestation is the Berlin based DJ and producer Ellen Allien, who started BPitch Control in 1999. The label is currently one of the most important electronic music labels in the world, representing a variety of artists working in many different genres and contexts of electronic music. At the local level, DJ Mini helped to establish one of the longest running electronic dance music party nights in Montreal's dance music history, with *Overdose* operating for seven years at Parking Nightclub. While producing the night, Mini was responsible for booking talent, hiring bar staff, leading the promotions team, DJing, hosting and handling media relations, among other duties. Mini's musical history and work at *Overdose* is important not only because it complicates histories of electronic music that repeatedly represent the dance music cultures of New York, Detroit and Chicago; but also, because her story challenges some of electronic music's most firmly established identity politics. Once researchers turn their attention to local music scenes and broader instances of local cultural production, the contributions of women increase tremendously, as musicians, producers, community

organizers, activists, teachers, philosophers and curators. Mini worked within a local network of support comprised of mentors, friends, amateur musical practitioners, bar owners, managers, audio engineers, designers and so on. Yet, somehow in the move from local to national and international circuits of (mainstream) music culture, this support structure for women and gender-bending artists seems to dissolve.

Another alternative context for producing future research on women and electronic music production might involve studying the contributions of musical interpreters, who only seem to be marginally represented in electronic music histories. Historical narratives of electronic music unduly centre on solitary male composers, inventors and their works. Examining the various ways that electronic musical instruments are used in social and performative contexts would drastically alter the epistemological foundations of electronic music history and popular music studies. For instance, while the aforementioned Ondes Martenot continues to draw attention from musicians, scholars, media artists, and museums for its advanced user interface, sonic potential and connection to both acoustic and electronic music cultures (Chapman, 2009; Madden, 2013), scholarship on the instrument has not yet examined current or past interpreters. Since the 1950s, the instrument's sociality has been kept alive through the sustained efforts and ongoing commitment of its interpreters—known as *ondistes*—many of who are women and currently live in Québec.[39] However, their stories are rarely told and very little is known of their musical practices.

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[39] Some of the instrument's past and current ondistes include Suzanne Binet-Audet, Marie Bernard, Genvième Grenier, Jean Laurendeau, Estelle Lemire, Jeanne Loriod, Ginette Martenot and Mary Chun.

I would like to finish this dissertation by asserting some of its contributions to scholarly discourse and suggesting potentialities for taking the research forward and the music into new contexts. This project is primarily concerned with understanding how music operates "on the ground," so to speak, by moving through the circuits of local music scenes, studios and dance floors. On the one hand, *Cross-dressing the Backbeats* is a feminist historiography of an electronic dance music genre that has received very little scholarly and popular media attention. Electroclash is an ideal object for feminist research on electronic music culture because of the prominent women in the genre and due to the gender play among producers, performers and listeners. The genre not only complicates the discursive privilege of male producers in discussions of electronic music, at the same time, electroclash challenges the longstanding privilege of bass, through musical focus on hi-hats, snares, and voices. Furthermore, the project uses various creative approaches and feminist methods in order to contribute to a growing body of scholarship on the sociality of music studio culture, which, until very recently, has been sorely lacking in cultural studies, popular music scholarship and sound studies.

Finally, although the performance practices of electroclash are discussed throughout this text, my own artistic work was primarily conducted inside the studio. A series of samples and sound works were created using a conceptual sonic frame of unruly sounds, ambiguous voices and affective mixing. In the coming months, I will take these musical pieces into clubs, galleries and parties, in order to explore the live performance practices of electronic dance music. The first performance was in New York at the *BronxArtSpace* (June 29, 2013), where the works were showcased in a forty-five minute

audiovisual set, working with new collaborators. For the show in the Bronx, I primarily focused on making the necessary rhythm adjustments to the tracks so they could sustain continuous movement and vibes on the dance floor. As the live engagements continue to develop, I will also construct a performative pseudonym to use during the performances. Perhaps these various live settings will serve as the appropriate context for me to literally cross-dress to backbeats outside of the studio.

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Appendix A: Consent Form to Participate in "Cross-dressing to Backbeats"

Dr. Andra McCartney
David Madden

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN "Cross-Dressing to Backbeats: an exploration of the practices, wo/men producers and history of electroclash."

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a program of research being conducted by David Madden of The Department of Communication Studies of Concordia University.
Contact information: dmalokai@gmail.com
(514)-703-0027

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to address the emergence of electroclash by asking: what is distinct about this genre and its related practices, both in and out of the studio? Why do rock and electro come together at this point and in this way?

B. PROCEDURES

I understand that I have been asked to participate in semi-structured interviews either via email or in person. Participants will be asked a series of open-ended questions that should take anywhere from 1-3 hours or time.

I understand that the project will be published in academic journals, both online and in print. Identities/full names of participants will only be revealed in direct quotes.

Participants will have the opportunity to offer editing suggestions to the researcher before the final draft of the project is submitted (spring 2013). The researcher will email all documents produced during said timeframe.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are always potential risks to participants when information shared to a research project is published. For instance, research participants may receive criticism from peers and/or from those who encounter the published documents.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.

- I understand that my participation in this study is non-confidential.

- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator: Dr. Andra McCartney, The Department of Communication Studies.
Contact information: andra@alcor.concordia.ca
(514) 848-2424 ext. 2551

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 ethics@alcor.concordia.ca

Appendix B: List of the Sound Files and Tracks Created for the Project

All sound files can be accessed and downloaded at: www.soundcloud.com/dmadden76

1. Cross-dressing Mix (27m 57s)
This is the extended mix that I produced for the project using the unruly sounds, ambiguous voices and affective mixing. The mix is discussed in Chapter IV in "The Mix" section.

2. Unruly Ondes (7m 13s)
This is a finished composition that I produced for the project using the unruly sounds, ambiguous voices and affective mixing. The track is discussed throughout Chapter IV.

3. Sharing Space (9m 44s)
This is a finished composition that I produced for the project using the unruly sounds, ambiguous voices and affective mixing. The track is discussed throughout Chapter IV.

4. Unruly Synthesizer (5m 24s)
This is one of the project's unruly sounds. By unruly sounds, I mean wild, uncontrollable, highly expressive sounds that move through a broad spectrum of frequencies.

5. Ondes Chord Progression (59s)
This is a chord progression using segments of the seven-minute Ondes Martenot piece that Sam Thulin made. To construct the chords, I adjust the pitch of the Octave Ondes sample anywhere from five to seven semi-tones and generally alternate the chords every two bars, or eight counts at 114 BPM.

6. Vocal Pad (2m 56s)
This is an example of a vocal recording that I use as a textural synthesizer layer in the mix.

7. Breathe (21s)
This is one of the unruly sounds that I created for the project.

8. Amen 2 (3m 7s)
This is the second version of a piece that I produced using the Amen drum break. The edits that I made to the piece were suggested by Thulin via email after hearing the first iteration—"Amen 1."

9. Amen 1 (2m 49s)
This is the first iteration of a piece that I produced using the Amen drum break.

10. Early Iteration (2m 41s)
This is an early iteration of the piece, “Dripping Water.”

11. Ending (19s)
This is the ending to Thulin’s piece, “Fall Ondes Follow.”

12. Resonator Guitar (11s)
This is a sample of one of Thulin’s resonator guitar parts performed in “Fall Ondes Follow.” The sample is referred to as the “picking part” in the written text.

13. Fall Ondes Follow (opening) (18s)
This is the opening of Thulin’s piece, “Fall Ondes Follow.”

14. Ondes Octaves Loops (7m 8s)
This is the unfinished looping Ondes piece that Thulin submitted for our networked collaboration. I use a three-minute sample of this to open “Sharing Space.”

15. Fall Ondes Follow (4m 51s)
This is the piece that Thulin produced for our networked collaboration.

16. Bartok Strings (edited) (53s)
This is an edited version of the Bartok string sample that Thulin and I use for the networked collaboration.

17. Ondes Martenot (unruly) (30s)
This is the Ondes Martenot recording that Thulin and I use for our networked collaboration. The recording is one of the project’s unruly sounds.

18. Beat (no compression) (4s)
This is one of the drum loops that Thulin and I use for our networked collaboration.

19. Beat (compressed) (4s)
This is the compressed version of a drum loop that Thulin and I use for our networked collaboration.

20. Amen Break (23s)
This is the Amen sample that Thulin and I use for our networked collaboration.

Appendix C: Interview Excerpts

THOMAS SONTAG (DJ/Label Manager/A&R/ Turbo Recordings)

September 23, 2011. Montreal.

David Madden (DM): *Would you like to give some general comments on your understanding of electro and electroclash and how the genres rose to prominence?*

Thomas Sontag (TS): Sure. The first thing I would say is that you always have to be careful with how you define the terms, in other words you must understand exactly what you are talking about. Especially I think with discussions about music, you know, usually one term kind of means something different to one person than it does to someone else. And I mean, electro in a lot of ways is a misnomer, I think, for what people generally talk about.

Electroclash is a bit easier to situate, but even then … For me, electroclash is a very, very specific timeframe and I think a lot of what became the blueprint for electroclash was more proto electroclash. By the time that term was used and by the time that people like Larry Tee or whoever were doing compilations and stuff like that, I think electroclash was already getting too… obviously the heyday was happening and it was on its way out in a lot of ways. It already became a dirty word I think as soon as it was acknowledged as that.

To me, electroclash as a movement was a revisiting of the past. It was pastiche to begin with. I think it came out of the rise of dance music culture, the continued rise of dance music culture and a lot of the kind of facelessness and lack of personality of post-rave big club DJing and stuff like that and a lot of the dull repetition of clubs. And, in Montreal and globally, quite a lot of pretty boring, pretty standard house music and darker techno. Electroclash picked up a lot of really simple elements that never really lost their appeal to people. And in terms of the timeline, it just made sense, because it was something that was revisiting the youth, the real youth, of a lot of the people who were key players. So picking up on elements of ‘80s synth-pop and that kind of early ‘80s. You

can cite something like Kraftwerk, or any stuff that I think had been an influence on a lot of the people making techno and house records, but had a bit more, I guess, more concept, more melody, more of a pop aesthetic that had appropriated, or made use of, the technology … What was the question again? Sorry.

DM: *Who do you think the key players are?*

TS: Tiga was called godfather of electroclash. Actually I remember reading that somewhere. I think "Sunglasses at Night" was one of the first big hits of that genre. It was on all of those first compilations. He was one of the poster-boys and I think it was a genre that badly needed a poster-boy. But for me, when I think electroclash, I think Gigolos, first and foremost. Because to a DJ, to a music fan, to someone who's up on everything, there was no label that owned that genre the way that Gigolo did. And if you look at their artists, for a little while they had them all. You know, they had Kitten and the Hacker, they had Tiga, they had Vitalic, they had Boys Noize even. The beginnings of all of that sound were on Gigolos. They definitely had an amazing couple of years and a lot of really great records and a lot of guys who haven't made it out of that period so well, such as Latex, or David Carretta, or. I don't want to say didn't make it out of that period at all. There's Terence Fixmer who is still doing great techno records. Tons of great stuff came out on Gigolos. So I think the key players, really you have to hand it to DJ Hell for being the guy at the centre of it in my mind.

DM: *What do you think happened with Gigolos after electroclash?*

TS: I really don't know. I think as is usually the case with record labels that, or with anything really, it hits its peak and the downfall is sort of outwardly mysterious. A&R wise they just seemed to get less and less relevant. But occasionally they still sign a great record. So I don't know, I think of it first and foremost on the A&R front and they stopped being relevant, but for whatever reasons they didn't keep the big artists happy or

weren't able to do for them what they needed to do to keep them. Because everyone from Zombie Nation to Tiga, Boys Noize, Vitalic, everyone went on to other things, bigger things. I mean, to be fair, I think it's very hard for the label that launches the career of an artist to also be the label that takes them to the top and especially when they were doing so much. DJ Hell had his own career. I have no idea what the structure of their operation was, but it's probably just like it is for us, just a few people working really hard and they can't take on everything. And, I wouldn't want to speculate, because I don't really know.

DM: *Can you talk about this ambiguity about electro that you first pointed out?*

TS: Electro itself is a term that I think of Grand Master Flash kind of shit, like Africa Bambaataa.

DM: *Right, to that early '80s electro-boogie?*

TS: Yeah, I think of US black music and I think of music that essentially I've never seen work all that well on a dance floor and in that period of electroclash I think of certain people that picked up on that and did a lot with it. Someone like Anthony Rother or something like that did a lot of good electro records in that period. DMX crew always kind of looked back towards that kind of stuff.

But electro itself, I think, the funny thing is as a style of music, it's something that I can never see getting that big, or I don't think it ever was that big or attractive. It's not the easiest stuff to dance too. There's little break dance crews and stuff. But electroclash, the broader thing, that's why I think it's a bit of like a misnomer. With electroclash, the elements that really stuck out and made it, more than anything is probably the octave bass line, which has nothing to do with electro. It's kind of a motif of '80s synth-pop more than anything. To use "Sunglasses at Night" as the prototypical electroclash song, which I think in some ways it is, or Miss Kitten and the Hacker, there's the clear '80s cover version vibe and that kind of euro trash like sex vibe. And sleazy vocals, which

references everything from Soft Cell to I don't know, to Depeche Mode, all the big names out of the '80s.

DM: *But even a little more detached vocals.*

TS: At least with Tiga and again as the prototypical example and I think it is a decent one, as good as just about any, it is a little bit detached. There's a little bit more irony there. And I think that's funny, because it coincides with I think with a broader … here you go, here's a good quote, I think it coincides with a broader kind of cultural fascination with irony. There was an explosion of irony and I think that's why electroclash also became such a dirty word, because the in-joke as soon as it leaves the in crowd just becomes tired very fast. And especially when there is sort of a fashion equivalence and visual equivalence to that. It just gets exhausting to look at and hear.

When it becomes something that is imitated and there's another degree of separation. It's the same thing with the new (nu) rave, I guess it's when you're dealing with people who don't even have a good sense of what the references are, that start to reference the references and copy the copies and kind of don't even get the irony in the first place, then it kind of just becomes another shitty post modern soup.

DM: *I agree and I think it kind of connects it a little bit to, probably around the same time, mash-ups started becoming pretty popular and that is usually explained with a certain irony or ambivalence behind it.*

TS: Yeah, it's a good point. The mash-up, some big records at the time such as those "Girls on Top" ones, like the Whitney Houston, "I Want to Dance With Somebody." It's like Whitney Houston and Kraftwerk pressed onto a 7" and it was a big deal at the time. But it's one of those things that doesn't age all that well and even though I think it was a good call and it's a cool record, there's a degree of excitement when it's fresh that I think it just doesn't have longevity in the end. Not in the way that original ideas do.

DM: *Let's maybe talk about Montreal. How do you think Montreal fits into this kind of story?*

TS: Globally?

DM: *Yeah, I mean how does Montreal fit into electro and electroclash?*

TS: I mean, I think about these things very, very strictly. I think about who the key players were and I don't think there were that many out of Montreal. In my view, I think Canada and Montreal has tons of good house producers and techno guys, but talking about electroclash, I mean unless I'm forgetting someone, I mean for me there's only really Tiga and then there are the minor local players. As far as promoters and events go, I think Neon was super important for North America in being one of the first to really bring a lot of these artists here and to have a little scene that nurtured that invasion. I mean, I think Vitalic's first ever live show was in Montreal. I mean, at least in North America, or I might be wrong.

With most techno stuff and dance music stuff there is a clear European lineage and Montreal was an effective gateway for that. And I do think there's a role that was played by the city in just sort of getting North America on board with that stuff. But I don't know, I'm interested to see what you write, because I'm not so convinced there's such a huge link there. I mean, there's a natural link between the culture here. There's a good fit between the culture here and electroclash. There's just something that you and I know and understand implicitly, just the vibe at a place like Parking, the French Canadian kind of bi-friendly, that vibe which is super prevalent in Montreal and has its roots way back in the disco scene here and the gay scene in Montreal. Someone like DJ Mini, or Mary Hell, just kind of that electroclashness, it was such a good fit. It arrived here and fit in so perfectly, that in a lot of ways, I think it has never even left. That mix of ten percent biker, fifteen percent '80s, fifteen percent disco and a lot of it is just sort of house, dance

music. With just enough of a fashion to reel people in who don't even care so much about the music.

DM: *Right, so how do you think Turbo fits into this story? From my understanding, that really set up Turbo to be sustainable in a lot of ways.*

TS: I think a lot of it lives and dies with Tiga's career. Turbo got its start doing stuff that definitely wasn't electroclash at all and most of the big electro*ish* releases weren't really on Turbo. I mean, there are a couple of releases that happened during the rise of Tiga's career that were a big deal at the time. There was that Martini Brothers record that Tiga licensed to Turbo with the Black Strobe remix, which was a pretty big record and definitely a defining electro sound. But, I think it's funny, because during the key moments of electroclash, Tiga was very much tied up in his own career and not very active with Turbo. But his ascent and him getting really popular and having a great career and everything enabled Turbo to exist and to do well for years to come. My involvement has been in the last six years which is the post-electroclash period, really.

DM: *How did you take the ascent of Tiga and focus it with Turbo?*

TS: Well, I mean, I think it's quite straightforward, you know.

DM: *It would be impossible to make it without his success?*

TS: It's not impossible, but the branding of it would be difficult. People respond a lot more to a person than they do to a company. An artist with an artist's name with their own image. This idea maybe ties back to the electroclash thing, because in some ways I think Turbo has been hurt by that kind of pigeonholing of people still thinking about us as an electro label, again that word electro meaning very little, at least there's almost zero

consensus on what that really means. Now they use the word electro-house which means even less, or even worse they say indie-dance, nu-disco, which is entirely retarded.

DM: *What tends to happen in terms of naming genres, there tends to be something that solidifies for however long and then there's a period after where all these totally nonsensical names emerge. In between acid house and techno, there was about twenty to thirty variations on acid house that combined techno and eventually techno—this is kind of the second stream of techno—then eventually techno stuck.*

TS: I think as time goes on the terminology gets lost, because there's kind of more and more mutations, if you think about it as a tree or whatever. There's more and more little mutations and there's no justice as far as there being some names which pop up for something incredibly specific, you know for something that I don't even know or understand, like moombahton or whatever. For instance, you'll have a new genre that emerges with very, very set parameters and there'll be one name for it and it will be really easy to understand and then there's other stuff that borrows a lot and it's sort of still a distinct point on the map, but it's really difficult to name it, because if you're somewhere in between hard-house and what used to be progressive trance and acid and a banger, there's no catchy word. I mean, essentially all these things are ways to identify and remember shit and for me, they are really not very useful and I think the destruction of that vocabulary, or at least the lag or inability to create effective terminology that does the job properly, I think it hurts the business and I think it hurts people's understanding of music. If they don't have words to identify it, it's harder to sell it, it's harder to place it, and it's harder to put it into stores. Back to your question, for Turbo I always feel, because we lean towards diversity rather than sticking to genre, we get almost comically slotted into weird spaces.

DM: *Was that a mission after electroclash for Turbo to represent a diverse range of artists?*

TS: The label never focused on electroclash and at the time, I think in that immediate post-electroclash phase, there wasn't much of a distinct effort one way or the other, because as I said to you, Tiga was really focusing on his career. When we re-launched the label, oddly enough we re-launched it with a record totally, totally, one hundred percent in the electroclash spirit, which was that Etienne Daho "Sweet Light (Remix)," which is super electroclashy and that's when I started working on Turbo. I mean it certainly wasn't done to get away from that, but again, we don't really think in terms of genre, we don't really care. When music gets boring to you, you don't do it anymore and it's always kind of case-by-case for us.

DM: *So when was the re-launch of Turbo?*

TS: I have to double check, but I think it was 2005.

DM: *The label kind of stopped going for a while, didn't it?*

TS: Yeah, I mean Tiga did his artist album, *Sexor*, and there's about two years where nothing happened for the label. You know it started off with just mix CDs and stuff and then Tiga started doing 12" releases and then as his career, from "Sunglasses" to his artist album there was less action on the label front. He wasn't as involved doing A&R and not as focused on signing records and stuff.

DM: *So what do you think is going on in Montreal right now?*

TS: I absolutely love Montreal right now, more than ever. I think it really took it up a notch this year, this summer. It's partly like certain things have been sort of taking shape, all that bicycle vibe has really picked up and changed the city and I think the city has expanded in the right kind of ways, in the sense that, a lot of the young artsy people that

do parties, or that I guess make up my friends and whatever, they're taking over more and more territory and certain things are shifting. We've seen that in the last decade the Plateau and the area around St. Laurent gets kind of yuppified and St. Laurent turns into Crescent St. and things move north.

But the main thing in Montreal I've just found, that this summer finally I've been finding the kinds of parties that I really like. Just completely outside of the industry because personally I feel like, and no offence to any of the promoters who make real efforts to bring interesting talent into the city, but my feeling has always been what matters is the party and the music, not the biz or the show. I don't give a shit about the names. To be honest I've never even really valued live music so much as a thing, certainly not in the dance music scene. I love going to see Leonard Cohen or J.J. Cale or some dope real musicians for sure, but you know, going to see a DJ who is famous as a producer, to me, it's boring and it sets things up for a bad party, because they charge a shit load of money and then it gets over promoted and that show needs to get sold and it costs a lot and it's just a big boring business to me. It is great for keeping the operation going and it's great for all the artists that I work with so that they can make a living, because they certainly don't make a living selling their music anymore. But what's interesting to me is real parties, real parties that feel great, real parties where you look around and you see people just enjoying it and there's a sense of spontaneity and there's the freedom to play a lot of different music. For me as a DJ, I've had the experience of being able to play for a lot, a lot of people on tour at big parties opening for people, closing nights, playing big shows and it's okay, but to me there's a much bigger thrill in playing a five hour set for a hundred people at a great party, and really feeling it, then there is for playing some giant festival for thousands of people that just don't … I mean, yes you're reaching more people, but it doesn't really feel like anything too great.

And Montreal lately there's been some interesting developments of people just going for it, taking control of little spaces and doing cool loft parties and stuff and things like Silver Door and Torn Curtain and this little place that I've been doing stuff at on Jean Talon. I mean, I think I haven't seen things like that in years in Montreal. There have

been bits and pieces, but it seems like there is a lot of it now. It's going on a lot and it really suits the city. And I think the move away from raves and the shift to these commercial parties, a lot of which kind of electro in Montreal at least played a big role in kind of … let's say shift that whole thing into a norm sort of, because what before maybe was a night out at Sona or going to a rave or whatever, that became something like, 'okay, let's go see Vitalic at Neon' which ends at three, and I think drug wise the whole thing became more and more of a shift towards alcohol and I guess, not that I *do it*, but everyone doing blow. And just this feeling of people going to a party until three and then they all rat around and go to someone's apartment and then just smoke cigarettes and drink more and do a bit of blow and the party's over, though. That's the truth, the party ends at three and then it's just this crap in its place and for me that gets boring. It's not that I want to be out all night all the time, but I like to see things that don't have to play by the rules.

DM: *Yeah, the electroclash scene was much more bar dependent. For it to go on past three, someone would have to set up an after party.*

TS: To me, there's only a certain amount of times that you can go to the same place. It just feels less and less special and back to the conversation about Neon and what it really was. What it began as and I think this is sort of important to get out there, Neon started, the first time we did Neon, before it was Neon it was Cobra, I think we called the first couple of parties, which was just me and Tiga DJing, with Justin (Dallegret) that did a little flyer. We did a few parties, two parties or something at Quartier Latin, a tiny little bar and then we did Jai Bar, which was the first regular kind of, I can't remember if it was a monthly or a weekly. And we had Yori Hulkkonen play and a few people come visit and play.

And it was this shift again out of after hours, because Tiga had been doing Sona and I think the key moment for Tiga was doing that *Mixed Emotions* CD. It was a double CD and one CD was the stuff that he was playing at Sona basically, such as big room

techno, big room house, techno more, and the other CD was this one that was, I think a really great CD, one of his best mixes, one of my favorite mixes ever. It was really exciting because at the time it wasn't a defined genre and he pulled together a lot of records that were pretty different and a lot of them were pretty rare and just interesting. The mix kind of did some of the work of sort of carving out a sound, and creating a bit of a blue-print of something, which I think he called, electro-funk or something. Because it wasn't just '80s, it just had some funk to it, you know. It was a bit more musical and that kind of stuff, he couldn't really play at Sona. That was part of the shift to a different venue and it made more sense also because there was a bit of fatigue with the afterhours scene. There was a bit of a fatigue, his friends weren't going to the afterhours anymore. That had become more of a business, that had become … It's also just exhausting doing after hours week after week and this was something a bit more fun and this was something that he did with his little brother and his friend and it was a bit more loose. And, at the end of the night maybe Tiga would play a David Bowie song, because he loves to do that. It was a return to something more musical, closer to your kind of roots and everything like that.

DM: *Stuff that you grew up with almost.*

TS: Yeah and more like a house party kind of vibe. And then Neon, what it became at the SAT, it was a few parties that were all done as special parties and then I don't know if you've talked about this with John Hatz, I doubt he'd talk about this, but you know, I'm not interested in the revisionist versions of the story, I'm just telling you the truth. It was Tiga, I'm just telling you this, this is investigative journalism, I don't want to cause any controversy, but what happened, Tiga wanted to stop doing Neon, because he did a few parties and it started to feel whatever, and it was the fourth one or something, and it started to feel a bit less special. The first ones really were special. The Vitalic party I got up and did the puppet randomly just because we thought it would be cool. And that's another thing that I think is a bit of a Montreal specialty and something that was

developed through that period, with the whole government kind of arts and new media promotion, that in Montreal we did visuals. A lot of the parties had visuals, and the first Neon parties, I think one thing that I'm not too modest to say, is that I think part of what made some of those first parties special was the puppet. It was an interesting, new thing. It was a weird, totally weird curve ball, kind of unique thing at those parties. I mean, it was so different to now in that people weren't even looking up at the stage, they were looking at the screens, or they were just looking around and weren't thinking so much where the sound was even coming from.

But yeah, I mean Tiga didn't even want to keep doing the Neon parties, but John and Justin felt really good about it and wanted to keep doing parties so Tiga kind of got out of it, left the operation and said 'fine, you guys can keep doing stuff.' So what it became was just, to their credit they've done tons of great parties and everything, but it's just, it was business. And it was something that was initially done with passion, sure, but now I would say Neon are in my mind, okay there's a little bit of a genre distinction, but there essentially like Blues Skies Turn Black or something and they just buy up every show from every agent in anything close to what they do, partly to shut out the competition and maintain their place, win some lose some, some shows don't make money, some shows do, but it's not like there's real personal involvement with everyone on any real level.

DM: *It's interesting you mention the burnout from afterhours, because so many prominent producers from that period really had been around for a long time. For instance, both Larry Tee and DJ Hell had been around forever.*

TS: There was a lot of value on the past, so age meant experience. Look at the rise of one of the biggest bands to emerge out of that scene, if you can call it that broadly, something like LCD Soundsystem, and hearing "Losing my Edge," and one of their first big records and the whole thing being so clearly and obviously about referencing things and that's why it was able to catch fire. Because nowadays there's this simple kind of networking

language, right, if you tag enough different things with something, you know, 'post,' you're going to get a lot of traffic and you're going to get a lot of impressions. And back then even though you didn't even really have, this was pre Myspace, pre Facebook, pre a lot of things, but the mechanics of promotion and the way things sort of propagate were the same. And things got big, because you had a guy like Larry Tee, you had a guy like James Murphy, who some of these people, their references were post-punk, some of their references were punk, some of their references were just cheesy '80s pop tracks with a span of about ten or fifteen years maybe in age difference. You just had kind of a catchall revivalism, spirit of revivalism that worked. And there's a lot of power in that, because there's nostalgia and there's just the sort of the essence of all these movements which were real and full of good ideas and full of real ideas that are just all of a sudden presented to a new generation with a lot of energy.

I feel like now we should start talking about what's happening now, because electro is due for a revival, electroclash, it is getting a revival. There's a record that we're putting out which is a Marcool side project which is straight up electroclash and it's a brand new thing and we're getting remixes by Yori, another old name player and Ewan Pearson is going to do a mix. And it's interesting because a guy like Gesaffelstein, I don't know if you know him, but he's someone who you should know, because he's the key new guy, he's the first new artist to revisit all that shit in a new way that's exciting. He's kind of the protégé or the descendent of the Hacker, Caretta and Vitalic and all that French new romantic techno and he's awesome and he's getting really, really big. We've been putting out his records and everybody loves him across the board from Ed Banger to more serious techno people. He's getting big in the states. He was just on that Big Hard Summer Tour and he's also extremely good looking and fashionable, so he's just kind of this complete package of another electroclash poster-boy, which is something, which again, is just due for a revival, because right now if you look at what's going on there's this massive wave of dub-step, kind of like American dub-step dance music which I barely understand and there's a lot of dying techno stuff. There's nerdy techno stuff and Mutek and all this, but there's nothing new that's sort of captured the imagination of

people or anything. And I think a return to a bit of melody, a bit more romance and an aesthetic of sort of … It's just more appealing to people than a pretty dull alternative. It's easy to cite those references, it's difficult to talk about what's getting played. Dance music has become so commercial, there's so many massive things now, guys like David Guetta, A-Trak even, all these things, it is *the* pop music now. It's just huge. When you get to a point where P-diddy is doing a record with Guy Gerber, who's kind of a progressive-trancey house guy, or Switch producing huge records for massive pop stars and hip hop and Major Lazer, and all this crossover of dance music. But there's still something in all this commercial dance music, there's still a legit appeal and it's something that's been buried by just enough years now to come up again, which is overall the aesthetic of romance and naiveté in '80s music, it's due.

DM: *And nothing really stuck after.*

TS: Dub-step definitely has. Minimal techno is a funny one because it changes shape, but minimal techno did and minimal techno, if you include now what's become just sort of this more lifestyle deep house which is what it has mutated into. Like, minimal techno was a big thing and deep house now is a huge thing, but those aren't new ideas.

DM: *I've always thought of dub-step as unrelated to electro.*

TS: Yeah, I mean it is. It all goes back to the rave roots of one side a bit more of an acid house and techno root and then, the kind of drum 'n' bass side. And that drum 'n' bass side was dormant for a while and it took awhile for it to mutate into something that worked for people, but you forget in a way how massive it was. In the States and the U.K. it was bigger than the techno end for awhile and so it kind of makes sense that it would come back even bigger.

(…)

TS: In part, you have to appeal to gay culture with dance music … I don't think it's as calculated as that, though, in the sense that, I think it also just happens to be what Tiga's references were and the things he liked, Marc Almond, Bowie.

DJ MINI (Producer/DJ)

December 30, 2011. Montreal.

David Madden (DM): *Can we begin by discussing how you first got involved with music, very generally?*

DJ Mini (DJ): In the first place, I guess I wasn't really planning to make music in general until I discovered electronic music at raves and then I got really involved in it. And once we moved from Québec to Montréal, and this is when I was sixteen, and I started having more interest in music in general, because I thought electronic music was the thing for me. It was the genre without specific messages, there's no lyrics talking about the same things we've been talking about for centuries, it was like this new, fresh thing. I started getting interested in drum 'n' bass, and I have a feeling it's because of the frequencies, there's so much low-end, the bass is really present and melodic and percussive. There's a primal feeling to it and I got hooked on that and eventually started discovering everything from experimental, noise, hardcore, and just about everything and I think electronic music opened me up to a lot of genres outside electronic music.

First I was doing a lot of experimentation. I was working at a bar, bartending, and the owner got me a few records, she got me a record bag and let me practice when the place wasn't open and said, 'when you're ready you can start your own nights.'

DM: *What bar was that?*

DJ: Bluedog.

DM: *And the manager let you come in to use the decks anytime?*

DJ: She thought I was kind of obsessed with electronic music and always playing it in the club. She was a bit of a DJ as well, not professionally, but she would play her own

records and I would watch and obviously when all the other DJs came and played, I would watch and I would really focus and check out how they work. And eventually your ears develop to what these people are doing without you really even knowing how it works, and so it gave me a chance to start a record collection and, you know, come in early in the night and play music in the club without having to buy equipment.

DM: *You didn't have any of your own equipment at the time?*

DJ: No, it took a long time. But when you're practicing six or seven hours a day, you eventually get really good at it.

DM: *So you basically taught yourself between going to Bluedog and whatever you could put together at home?*

DJ: I didn't actually have anything to play records with at home. I would basically just spend my whole day there and practice and sometimes I even bartended while I was doing music at the same time.

DM: *And what was the first thing you got at home?*

DJ: Well, I started saving money when the bar picked up, and I was bartending so I wasn't spending money. I had a lot more money coming in and I would put it on deposit and I got two turntables and a mixer, a regular kind of mixer. I got it all at the same time for a pretty decent price and started buying equipment for the club, like CD players, the new fresh thing.

DM: *What year is this around? Late-1990s?*

DJ: Yeah about ten years ago. It feels like yesterday. Eventually the other DJs from the other nights when I would open could see that I was getting pretty good and started booking me outside of the nights I was doing. I eventually started playing for other people's nights and started playing at the Forum for a while and had some breakdance crew friends, breakdance girls, twelve people, and they hired me to be their official DJ. I started collecting Afika Bambaataa and Kraftwerk, hip hop influenced electro records. This was at Saphire, for two years they ran that night, it was like a breakdance oriented night. And then Solid State and I stared doing shows at more creative spaces, the Mai, Saidye Bronfman Centre, we did something for the fringe festival in Montreal and in Ottawa. So we started presenting what I would call an electro, live, choreographed show with music. I was doing the mix live on stage with turntables, so we had to be careful.

DM: *You were using all vinyl records then? Did you switch to CDs?*

DJ: Eventually I tried CDs and I really didn't like it. So I had a friend who worked at M-Audio, and I asked him to give me Torq and then I could maybe use Beatport as a platform to buy my music and play with Torq in the club, because at the time, I wasn't going to put $1000 into Traktor or Serato. I wanted to make sure that I liked it and it worked well. I bought a computer and I got Torq and I played with Torq for about a year and I had a lot of problems, but I liked the fact that I could walk around with my whole collection without all the weight of having all the records with me. So I was sort of doing half-half, I had some CDs and I had records with me. Nowadays I play mainly on my computer with an S4. It's a fully equipped console by Traktor. When you're traveling a lot, and corporate gigs, the simpler the setup the better.

DM: *And what are you playing now?*

DJ: I am doing a lot of different kinds of gigs. I am doing a lot of corporate stuff, but I don't really change my sound. I play a little bit smoother, all electro, techno oriented.

Sometimes I play more ambient influenced stuff and mix it up with electro. It's fun stuff. At Picnic Electronic I play more techno, with chopped up fucked up lyrics. Things that freak you out and I still have an ear for that heavy bass presence.

DM: *That still comes from drum 'n' bass?*

DJ: Yeah, I think that presence is still there.

DM: *And how did you end up at Parking nightclub?*

DJ: In the first place I was doing a lot of genres and then I met a guy called Dan, who was an old school DJ, who was playing in the village a whole bunch, years ago. Dan was working at a store on St. Laurent and he re-bought the space and eventually started a new record shop there and I worked there for two or three years, while also working at Bluedog obviously. So I was doing two or three days here and there and replacing people on vacation. Basically I spent my days there too. Every time there was a record coming in I would buy it. I needed to build my collection. This was the early days of electroclash, it was when the first new B Pitch Control records came out and a lot of new records had this crunchy, chewy electro sound.

Dan eventually started talking to me about music and he loved the language that I used and eventually hired me for the store and started suggesting doing a night together, so also I could learn how to technically raise the bar a little bit and we did a night together for almost five years. I pretty much learned from watching him, he was technically really, really good. I worked with him for five years and had a night on Sundays call Shredder where I would play electroclash because nobody else was really doing that sound. It was very small. We had like twenty people, fifty people on a big weekend. It was a really small night. It was a Sunday night. And eventually it got bigger and Blizzarts started picking up on Saturdays. And that was the moment where people were like, 'whoa, what is this sound?' Gigolo Records, whatever, fucked up lyrics by

Kittin, Audio Bullys and the night started going in that direction as well and obviously people talk, and the night was going good, the music was crazy different, glamorous and really fun.

Electroclash just popped like a mushroom, it was refreshing, when everybody else was doing organic sounding beach house and we have this raunchy New York sound. So it popped out and I got noticed. A friend of mine that was a client at Bluedog, when he learned—he was working at Parking, he was the designer for all the posters and stuff—when he heard that Joffrey was saying goodbye, he called me to ask me if I would be interested in doing a spot there every month and I was like 'sure.' I was going when Joffrey was there and it was one of the only other places where you would hear Felix da Housecat records. I started playing there once a month and they started using my face, I was really young and didn't really decide for bye-bye Frigid, there's a new face for the night. I mean, me being twenty, I didn't really realize what that meant. I didn't realize it was kind of political and we could have avoided that.

DM: *So there was an overlap with you and Joffrey?*

DJ: Two years, but he wasn't the only one there, there were three people at the start and then there were two, Joffrey and Louis Costa and another guy before that. It was a lot different, he was doing a lot of glam rock and '80s, and so he would really mix the genres, but the night was originally very, very queer, and very glam. Very glam rock.

DM: *And then two years in, you kind of took over?*

DJ: I started seeing that the night was slowing down a little bit, obviously because Frigid was done and all the people who liked glam rock were not coming. I would maybe play something by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs once a night, but my style was really different. I was playing mainly Gigolo records, you know, that raunchy German electro sound. Because I was doing only once a month I had to fill in the space, because the owners, everybody

was touchy and it got a little bit political, it was kind of hard, and I saw that the night was going down, and I was like, 'well this has got to be something else,' rather than wait for the night to die and not doing anything about it. So why not, why don't I take over? I mean, I've worked in bars before, I've done nights, I've done promotion and I know how the system works and the sound is obviously picking up, so why not push it a little bit further. So I sat down with them and I made a business proposal. I basically explained what I would do and who I would hire for the night. We started inviting people, calling the media, inviting people from the outside to come play, like Zombie Nation, Waterlily, and all the people who were the originals of the electroclash movement. And sort of asking around, who are the best live acts, who can we invite internationally that's doing cool stuff, but keep it local as well. I would play two full nights a month and I would have one guest DJ from local, and one guest DJ from the international. I would do all of the bookings and hire all the people for the promotion, going to other nights talking about the night.

DM: *So you handled all the…*

DJ: All the bookings, all the publicity and all the media.

DM: *And you went from being at Parking once per month, to taking over the weekly?*

DJ: Yes, pretty much.

DM: *And then you did that for four or five more years?*

DJ: Well, I was hired in the first place in 2002, September, and I gave my business proposal in December, so by January it was seven years to the month.

DM: *And it became less of a queer night, it probably became the most mixed night I've ever seen in Montreal.*

DJ: The first three years were very, very queer. You can only go so far with certain crowds and eventually you have to go outside of your world, so hiring also Picnic to do the newsletter that was more like wider public and eventually brought more people from all the other areas of Montreal and a lot more Francophones. Originally, strangely there was a lot of Francophones in the electroclash movement, it was very French in the first place. A lot of French guys going to anglo nights, in my circle at least.

DM: *There was a weird language mix that you often don't see in Montreal. And you brought everyone to play at that night at some point.*

DJ: A lot of people, yeah. Waterlily, Felix da Housecat came, Kittin cancelled, but we had Ellen Allien.

DM: *And how did it end?*

DJ: For me, eventually when the movement started fading away a little bit and people were kind of tired of hearing that Miss Kittin sound, obviously to keep the night going I moved into a more techno, electro techno, straight up, four-on-the-floor sound. And eventually, taking the night from Joffrey who had a very glam rock influence and taking it to my signature sound which became a little bit more techno in the end, it was a really slow transition. Originally, the first three years were very rock and more queer, and eventually it moved into a more Berlin sound, a little bit more tech-house, a little bit more techno and towards the end it was pretty much techno.

DM: *How would you say the Montreal electroclash scene played out? It was pretty much you, Neon, Tiga and Turbo. What was your relationship with them?*

DJ: Neon and I didn't really work together until two years ago, which is really strange because we were crossing paths all the time. We worked on a few events at Parking, but it wasn't a perfect fit, because they were really working towards the St. Laurent clubbing Anglophone crowd. Eventually everything towards the end started mixing, there were no clear distinctions, I guess. I mean, at that point Cherry Cola started something as well where he would do like banger-electro and a lot of the younger kids, instead of going to Overdose, they were going there.

Parking is closed now. It's so funny because the downfall, the end, you know when you start seeing the peak, after five years there was obviously the peak when everyone would come and it would get really nuts. This is when Tiga would come and play, Barbara and everybody wanted to come and play. Then the other nights at the club were not doing well at all, so this was kind of their only working night at this point and the club put a lot of pressure on me to make it even better. But I mean, how can we make it better.

DM: *And so you saw both ends of it. And eventually you decided to end the night?*

DJ: They stopped agreeing to my original business proposal, they cut all the funding for promotion and I told them you will not go more than two years with the night if you don't promote it. You're going to pretty much kill it. And to the month it was two years from when they cut the promo budget to when the night ended. Eventually I left, because I was like, there is nothing more I can do here without having any promotion. So I left two years after that. It was either I stay and redo everything over again, and when you're doing that seventy percent of your life becomes dedicated to that. You do it once, you don't do it every… I didn't want to start the process again. I wanted to travel more.

DM: *And you couldn't really play anywhere else when you were doing that?*

DJ: Not on Thursdays, but I was doing a lot of weekends at other nights, going out of town, local stuff. Going to Quebec a lot.

DM: *So how did you get into home studio producing?*

DJ: When I was actually living around the block [*ed's note: near Mt. Royal and St. Laurent*], I had a friend called Sean, a musician, who started telling me 'you should really start to do things for your career, you know you're DJing now but you really have to push it.' I was really interested but I knew shit about computers. I started from scratch; I never even had one. A guy built me a computer and I started working. He showed me a few things on Fruity Loops, so I started practicing and he told me, basically, try to make a tune a day. So everyday I would fool around and try to work. A few years later I had a manager who approached me, he was managing Lafleche at that time and I think he was managing Champion and he managed Maus for a bit too. He introduced me to somebody for production who would teach me, his name was Fred, and he started coming to my house. I had a big double room so we set up half the room, basically I had like one computer, very little equipment, a micro sound card. It was very small.

We started from there. He started showing me Reason, and he had me work on Digital Performer and eventually I was like, 'if I want to survive I have to make more music, I would like to do an album.' I went to get some funding from a government grant, a grant for self-employment, *Jeunes Volontairs*. So I worked with somebody, my girlfriend at the time, a graphic designer and we were building my image as an artist and with the funding they gave me I financed a studio space for two years, for one year, but I stayed after that and it allowed me to work with Fred and establish myself as a musician and had somebody work with promotional type stuff and getting me an image.

DM: *Fred gave you studio lesions?*

DJ: Yeah, a crash course. I stared doing circuit bending, stuff like that. So we would incorporate all of the things that I would work on and do on my side. I built myself a sound bank, we handled that together, doing all the patterns for the drums and stuff like that. We did maybe twenty-five or thirty songs or something, and we did some contracts on the side, for *Juste Pour Rire* television. Basically he helped me build my studio at home as well. I was buying synths and stuff and at the time, when there would be a new element, we would have to sit down and have to figure out how it works, how to incorporate it. We started needing MIDI cables, a MIDI card. He would teach me a lot of the theory as well, what to do and what not to do with the equipment, sound, and how to handle a recording with a microphone. He basically gave me private sound design lessons. And while we were doing that I was obviously working on tracks at the same time. It was a lot of trial and error, a lot of trial and error. But I got to learn so much.

DM: *And he was your manager?*

DJ: No, he was my manager's friend. And so after three years of collaboration we finally had an album ready. The album was a trial and error process and there were a lot of different genres at the same time, because I was experimenting. For example, the bass for this track is actually a down-tuned high-hat, things like that. And I spent time in the studio on my own after that, eventually I set up the studio at my house. I still have somebody who works with me in the studio, Amélie, she's been working with me for about a year-and-a-half.

DM: *A studio engineer, in a way?*

DJ: Kind of, yeah, although she's started doing more. I've officially hired her to be the engineer of the studio, so that I don't have to handle that part. I want to be able to go inside my studio and work right away without having to figure out what is working, and what's not working.

DM: *What is your studio set up now?*

DJ: We're moving right now. I have a technical director now and he's going to be working with me for the show and for my outside gigs. Amélie is obviously the engineer and they're going to move all the stuff, all the records and all the synths to the office.

DM: *But up until this time, it's been in your apartment?*

DJ: Yeah. I haven't really had a balance. It's been seventy-five percent work or eighty percent work and twenty percent living. Now I at least have a different room for it.

DM: *You're going to set up a room in the new office?*

DJ: The loft is 2000 square feet, so there are two spaces. There's one bedroom that's closed and so we're going to use the bedroom that's closed and the rest is one big space that's going to be a practice space for the dancers and there's a friend of mine setting up a homemade photo studio and the offices are next to the studio, with a kitchen and everything. Basically, it's a living space where everybody that works on projects with me

DM: *Are you going to live there too?*
DJ: No, I'm keeping my place. I'm finally going to have a place where my room is not for work. It's a nice thing when you're thirty to live away from your work space.

DM: *And you've been building a studio for the last ten years?*

DJ: Ten years, yeah.

DM: *What is your process now? What are you working on musically?*

DJ: I'm still working off of that sound bank that I've been building for years and a lot of the sounds are environment sounds. I'll sit in a park, or record in the metro. I used to use a portable recorder, but now I just use my iPhone, which works fine. I mean the sounds are going to be processed anyway. So I still use a lot of samples I made. I recorded everything in my kitchen and things like that. We pull out a microphone from the room in the front to the room in the back and record everything one-by-one. So I still work a lot from that sound bank.

DM: *Are you really concerned with having your own sounds?*

DJ: Yes. It came naturally in the first place. It was, you know, why not use the cool sounds that surround us. I didn't see why people were not doing it more. So it started like that and I didn't have money at first either. Building a studio is quite a lot of money, especially if you're working two days straight during the week with somebody in a private studio. So I started from that and as I said, I didn't have much money, so it was kind of a way to bypass not having a drum machine. To be able to make cool things without needing that machine to make it … DIY.

DM: *Often everybody knows the really good stuff so it's really expensive.*

DJ: I've never used the packaged stuff. It was really important to me to make everything from scratch, because I want everything that I do to be very personal and I want to be able to tweak each sound until I go, 'okay that's the right sound.'

DM: *Do you hear things around you and go, 'that would make a good hi-hat, or something,' or do you record things and process them to sound like something?*

DJ: I guess I mainly do the more manipulative technique, but I can hear something, like clapping from a metro door. But mainly I build a bank and then I fool around and I tweak it and make it into things that are not supposed to happen. The fattest bass I have on the entire album is a down-tuned hi-hat. I think it was something from the kitchen. Yeah, I mean, why not, you find things that you don't expect.

DM: *What software are you using now?*

DJ: Now I use Live, because it's much easier, on the road. It's very effective when you're doing structure work. I can synch MIDI so everything can work at the same time. I don't know if I'm going to keep working with that because now we're using 4.1 in the studio and I have to get ready for the Sphere.

DM: *You're going to do a four-speaker mix?*

DJ: Probably five.

DM: *If I can backtrack to some of the electroclash stuff, what were some of the artists you got interested in?*

DJ: Peaches, Chicks on Speed, Ellen Allien at the time was not necessarily going in that direction intentionally, but she was with her energy, the rawness of it.

DM: *I've written Ellen Allien into my story of electroclash, but in many ways she's more of techno artist. However, I group her in with electroclash because of B Pitch and she was representing a lot of artists at that time and she was making music that fit into electroclash quite well. What I'm finding in my research, is that when people tell the story of electroclash, they really want to focus on Gigolo and Gigolo gets so much attention that it really cuts a lot of important people out of the equation and a lot of them are*

actually women who are either working in more of a rock context, like Le Tigre or Chicks on Speed, or someone like Peaches who is not associated with that label. I also write Ellen Allien into this, not only because of B Pitch and her presence in techno, but with the more focus there is on Gigolo the more artists get pushed out.

DJ: Lasergun was one really good reference as well. Everything that Zombie Nation was doing too, was really rowdy, loud, bitchy attitude. Ersatz Audio, not to say that they don't identity with the electroclash movement, but they were really present during that time. In terms of electroclash, it's the definition, the song "Nausea" pretty much represented the movement. Bitchy, square, fully synthetic music with a loud, obnoxious singer over it, singing with a lot of attitude. Screaming at you and everybody would freak out when you played the song. It was so edgy too.

DM: *I'm trying to represent electroclash a little broader, because there is a tendency within popular music to shrink or reduce histories of genres.*

DJ: There were a lot of other labels. Like I said, Ersatz was one of them, Lasergun was one of them. We had the whole electroclash movement/record label, Touch of Class was one of them, I mean, it came a little bit later, but. Mental Groove was one of them. There were a lot of underground labels and a lot in Germany actually. Ascii.Disko was also a good example and his album now has sort of been picked up as an anthem to gothic culture, synth-pop culture. People love Ascii.Disko now in that scene and it's strange how it transferred from the electroclash scene into the goth scene. It crossed over with industrial at some point, with Nitzer Ebb and Kraftwerk. This is when we were picking people from each scene, the gothic scene, the industrial scene, the synth-pop scene, the rock scene, and everything was like a hybrid.

DM: *Do you have any recorded sets from back then?*

DJ: Yeah, I have them on tape.

DM: *On cassette tape?*

DJ: I think I have a cassette. I don't know if I still have it. Yeah, I would have some mix of old things. Oh actually, this is also a turning point when I started owning the night, I made a mix for people to discover what the whole music was going to be. I made about, I mean I burned it myself and everything … I got a print-out, like a mix between broken glass and me getting a hair cut and it was my signature at the time, before I got the glasses. Yeah, we made a mix CD, and it was all like Gigolo, Ersatz, Mental Groove, pretty much everything that was electrolash at the moment, with a strong electro-techno influence. And we got that printed and distributed in all of the shops, all of the clothing stores in Montreal. But it was originally just for promo, to get people involved with first my sound and second, I mean, start following me, and going to my nights. And this is when I was working at Blizzarts, and it sort of gave a really big oomph for the Saturdays, a few months later the night was packed. Rammed like crazy. They'd never seen it like that. The night we did the launch of the CD, we did a recording live night, and then we did the launch night like two weeks later or a month later, it was rammed. There was water dripping on us; people were going crazy. It was kind of also a strong point, the turning point, where we actually know what the sound is, where we actually come to see this crowd. On the mix CD there was Miss Kittin, Felix Da Housecat, some more underground things, I think it had Peaches and Gonzales on there. I can't remember what else.

DM: *As a DJ, your Overdose sets must have included electroclash, techno, and rock. I'm trying to represent the diversity of electroclash; however, every time I talk to someone about electroclash they use different reference points. For Thomas Sontag, his immediate reference is Gigolo. When I talk to you it is Peaches and Ersatz. It's kind of all over the place.*

DJ: Thomas is obviously biased, because I think he came into the movement when his brother Tiga was already present. Tiga was the first person who invited Vitalic. Vitalic was a big, big, big breaking record for the scene. It was obnoxiously good electro techno. It sounded like nothing we had heard before. It also broke Gigolo and got Gigolo interested … It's not only the record, it's like who owns this new school. And Larry Tee sort of did that with electroclash afterwards, where he would come in with four or five bands with a really good sound and performance art and bring them all together into a record label and touring with them and showing the world a little bit. Ersatz did the same with Adult.

I think Gigolo has this big place because they were the ones who put out numerous amounts of records, one after another. Every week there would be a new record, for two years. For two years they really blasted the market with new music and it sort of overshadowed a lot of the smaller labels who were doing more artistic things, working on installation art and things like this. Chicks on Speed, you do consider them electroclash, but they have a speech, they have a mind, they have a power and a mission behind them. Their process is a little bit different from just working on a drum machine and trying to make something cool happen. I mean they have a little bit of that, but they have a strong speech behind them.

DM: *Same with LeTigre too.*

DJ: Yeah for sure, exactly, with the visuals and stuff. It's something that people were not doing back then. I think Thomas is talking about Gigolo because Tiga got involved right away with Gigolo and they built a side business with Turbo, a lot of the reflection of Gigolo records but in Canada. That's why it would seem like his main reference, but there were a lot of other things that happened.

I mean everybody was doing dress up parties, really glamorous and trashy, in Germany, Russia, New York and Chicago, maybe smaller in Chicago, but still.

Everybody was going through the same very underground movement, queer oriented, tattoos, piercings, mohawk haircuts, wearing ties. It was a very strong movement when you think about it.

DM: *Yeah, I totally agree. For me, it's a matter of just trying to represent the diversity of it.*

DJ: Also, if you think about the revival and you think about Charlotte Gainsbourg as one of the main references for now, because she's doing exactly what those guys were doing ten years ago. She hooked up with Beck and made an album and there's actually one song that gives the perfect example. It just came out a month ago.

SAMUEL THULIN (Musician/Researcher/Friend)

Nov. 9, 2013. Montreal

David Madden (DM): *The whole premise of this aspect of the project is to explore various forms of collaboration in relation to domestic studio recording and electroclash. From the literature on electroclash and studios, one of the most prominent forms of collaboration comes from the practice of starting a musical piece and then sending it off to other people to work on.*

So, on the one hand, I decided to send you some samples that are going to be strongly featured in my material (in other words, I chose samples that are going to be identifiable in my music). On the other hand, I chose things that I considered to be more suggestive, rather than too rigid in terms of what you might do with them. I also wanted to send you a mix of rhythm samples and melody samples. And I wanted to send you samples that I felt you could either use explicitly or directly, or you could manipulate them too. One of the main points that I would like to emphasize, though, is that in order to create the idea that I am passing something to you that I've started and intend to use, at the very least, I know that the samples I sent you will be strongly featured in the material I am working on.

Samuel Thulin (ST): Okay, I did not know that part. It doesn't explain why you chose to work with Bartok strings in the first place, but it explains why I received those particular samples, because you're working with them.

DM: *Yes, I wanted them to be identifiable and I also wanted to pull from a few different pieces that I am working on. So why don't we walk through your process. I send you these samples via email at the end of the summer (2012) and what follows? Do you start listening to them?*

ST: No, I didn't listen to them right away, because I got them just before going on a vacation. So I didn't have a chance to listen to them right away. I don't think I listened to them until September when I got back from the trip. At first, I am actually a little ashamed to admit that I just listened to them through my laptop speakers, which is interesting because whenever I send someone my material, I am always hoping that they do not listen through their laptop. But that's what I did the first time I listened to the samples, because that's all I had at the time and I knew that I was going to be listening to them more. So I listened to each one just to get a sense of them and I knew that I was missing bass and stuff from the speakers. On the first listen through those speakers, I knew right away that there was tons of stuff that I could do with those samples, because they were long and there was a lot of material there.

DM: *Do you think it was too much?*

ST: No, it wasn't too much. It meant I had to make choices. There were enough samples; I will put it that way. Which is why later on when you asked if I wanted more samples, I told you that I didn't need any more material to work with. I think the very first thought that occurred to me in terms of composition when I listened to them, and it was very fleeting, but because I am always thinking about my method, I wondered at first, if there is something I could do with very basic editing because all of the basic elements for a piece were there. For example, I make a piece just with these samples, pretty much using the drum tracks as they are, not doing any time or pitch shifting, just through cutting and arranging in time, just making a piece with those four samples. But I quickly tossed that idea out.

DM: *It's interesting because I was almost expecting to send you another set of samples. Because like this interview, I wanted to keep the process somewhat open-ended as a methodology in terms of what I initially sent you. My plan for the second round of samples was to send you things that seemed a little more direct—for instance something*

with a chord progression, or a melody. Samples that I imagined you more directly just placing into a song. And the first round of samples I wanted to keep open in a way where you could have gone in any direction.

ST: Isn't it funny in a way because you would send this open-ended thing and I would take a particular path and then you would send me something more determinant. So how would I use it at that point, once I had already made my decision about where I was going with the piece?

DM: *Right, you would almost have to take something really direct and make it indirect.*

ST: Going a little further with the process, I didn't listen to them an insane amount before going forward with the piece. I probably listened maybe five times at the most before beginning what I consider to be the process.

DM: *In other words, you almost immediately started listening to them in the context of producing. Did you immediately put them into Ableton Live?*

ST: No, it was sort of a mix. I listened to them maybe a maximum of five times before getting started, but basically what happened is that in the *Ondes* sample that you sent me, there is just this little part of it that each time I listened, just sparked my imagination. And so that's where I began. And it's probably less than two seconds. It's in the opening of the piece: there are the drums and there's the Ondes sample. The Ondes is what started everything. I cut it out using *Adobe Audition*. I just cut out that short piece of the sample and I just put that into Live. And then in Live, I listened to that particular sample *a lot*. I wanted to do something in Live that I couldn't really do exactly the way I wanted to. This frustrates me about Live generally, you can't just loop a sample without warping it, right. For example, in that mode of working with clips. I think actually you can hit an action that will repeat it. Anyway, so I took it out of the clip and I put it in the sampler instead so

I could just hold down a key and have it repeat. Then I just tried playing it on different keys where it would be shifted in pitch and time.

DM: *So you had it on a keyboard that you could use to play that two-second sample?*

ST: But if I played it really low, the sample would take five seconds or something. And then I basically played around with that and I decided on three octaves, just holding them together, starting with the highest one, then going one lower and then one lower than that, just holding them.

DM: *So is that the opening pad?*

ST: Yes.

DM: *That is great. Maybe this is somewhat suggestive of the 'why the Bartok strings' question. I've found a particular quality of listening to hours and hours of samples, as you have too, of the Ondes Martenot, where even when the person playing the Ondes might only be playing around or exploring the instrument, I can find stuff in there that I can then turn into some of the most favorite music that I make. And what I find interesting is that I can truly say that I have no idea where the piece is going to go when I start with these short Ondes Martenot samples. And this makes the process feel like I am collaborating on some level, as if the sample has some sort of agency. As opposed to when I start with a chord progression that I like or know, I kind of have an idea that these four chords are going to be a verse or a chorus, for example.*

ST: That's exactly why I am drawn to working with field recordings. Not to conflate the Ondes with field recordings, but it's the same thing. If I take a little bit of sound from almost any part of a field recording and just listen to it over and over, it suggests things, but it's not a chord progression.

DM: *And then you make adjustments and then the sample changes and the process keeps going like this.*

ST: But this really feeds into where I went from there, because basically I held those three octaves and recorded it into Live. I actually didn't make a loop. I don't know if I was right or if I was just imagining, but it seemed that by actually physically holding the octaves, it changed more over time, than if I was to just hold it for two seconds and then loop that. So I did it for seven minutes and then I put that in *Reaper* (DAW), because that is the program that I actually like to work with and that's the program that I did all of the final mixing and editing with. I listened to that seven minutes in Reaper for a good hour that night and then an hour or so the next day and I was so into it, that I was like, 'this is the piece.'

DM: *I would have been into that.*

ST: If I was braver, I would have just submitted that. But I felt like it would be a bit of a cop-out. And the other thing I wondered was, will other people hear in this what I hear in this, because when you listen that much you start to hear things that aren't there, compared to if you just listen a little bit. And I also noticed even just on different speakers different things. And I don't know if there was this want to control the listener's interpretation of it that made me go further or if it was just more my own desire to work with that sound and build upon it.

DM: *So can you send me that?*

ST: Just the seven minutes? Yes, I can send you that.

DM: *I find that because I am using so much sequencing technology now, I find that one of the best ways to add a looser feel to a sequenced piece is by playing a few parts, even if they are parts that I could sequence or loop. For example, I will play a bass line. And that is the other thing that draws me to a lot of these Ondes Martenot samples, just like field recordings, and I look at them as field recordings, is that they automatically bring this looser element, particularly in relation to a more fixed or rigid rhythm. In a similar way that if you take a piece of music and play a set of moving images, things will line up in ways that you can't even imagine. Connections will be made. I find a similar thing happens with these Ondes Martenot recordings: if I put the sample over a beat, and I've done some selection in terms of the beat and the particular fragment of the Ondes sample, these connections will be made that you could not have even thought of. And this is also a form of collaboration.*

ST: Much later on in the course of working on the piece, that's exactly how the strings ended up in there. I had already worked on the piece a bit and then I was just listening to the piece with the strings playing overtop in the preview window. At first the ones you treated, but they are a little bit more chaotic than what I wanted, unless I was to edit them. And then I used the untreated ones a few times and there was a part in them, a couple of notes, maybe four notes that worked almost anywhere in the piece. So I just cut those out and then at first I was just triggering them at the pitch that they were, and then I realized that it worked if I did it at a couple of other pitches as well. That's how the strings ended up in there.

DM: *I also wanted to send you different versions of the same sample, meaning that with the strings, I gave you the initial sample that I downloaded from archive.org, and I gave you an edited version. I wanted you to have the longer sample, just in case you heard something else.*

ST: Again, the way the strings worked with the piece, is something that I wouldn't have composed. I wouldn't have come up with the progression on top of what I already had by myself.

DM: *I felt that if I hadn't sent you that initial string sample, that I would have been taking certain possibilities away from you. Interestingly, outside of the drum components, I didn't recognize a single thing in your piece.*

ST: You didn't recognize the strings even?

DM: *No. I sort of knew that they were the strings. However, the first time I listened to the piece, I thought you might have recorded someone playing the violin.*

ST: It's kind of amazing with those strings because they are pretty low quality, but when I plopped them in, I thought they sounded great in this mix. And for a while I actually put on a really great convolution reverb, but I took it off because I liked the really dry sound in the end.

DM: *Because the recording already has a bit of ambience.*

ST: But there was something about the tactility, I just liked it. It got a bit too ethereal with the reverb that I had on it before.

DM: *I thought it was a great decision and in fact, it made me question whether you were even using the strings that I sent you. And I think with sonic material like that, your initial impulse is to put a delay on it, or reverb on it. I mean that's basically what I did. In a way, when I was working with them, I didn't even consider using them dry like that. Also, I had no idea that that was the Ondes Martenot sample opening the piece.*

ST: Well it's such a short sample.

DM: *It's great because there is nothing about your piece that I could have imagined. It went in a direction where I don't even really recognize any of the material, outside of some of the drum sounds.*

ST: Outside of rhythm, the Ondes sample and the strings are the main things that I used.

DM: *There is that one repeating bass note.*

ST: That is an actual bass.

DM: *That's what I thought. So you took a two-second Ondes sample…*

ST: Actually it's probably less than a second now that I think of it.

DM: *That you turned into a chord?*

ST: Octaves. It's a chord still, but why I did that in a way, I was captivated by both the harmonic things that came out of that and also the rhythms that came out of that. Like I said, I didn't start with the drums or a beat. I started with that. And there was this rhythm that when I was listening to it over and over again, I got really into. And then hearing different rhythms and rhythms within that.

DM: *Well, please send me that to me. There's so much complexity to the sound of the Ondes. If you trace the way a lot of sound reproduction gear has been made around eliminating noise and in a similar way where a lot of digital sound reproduction has gone, it has gone in the direction of eliminating excess frequencies and harmonics. And I think that is what partially draws me to the instrument itself and also the Bartok strings,*

there is a harmonic complexity that is kind of wild, which in a lot of ways has been silenced. I heard an Ondes Martenot performance the other night, and they were droning and it's almost like you have to go to an avant-garde noise concert to hear frequencies like that, that haven't been eliminated or tamed… because they are wild. And you realize that you can just play out a drone and there are all these beats percolating.

ST: There are other instruments from that period that have that quality as well. I remember going to Owen (Chapman's) place and playing his little Hammond with a small keyboard, and buttons you can push for chords and it was the exact same thing. I mean, it was a similar experience of just holding a couple of notes and just listening and realizing that there is so much in here going on. And I'll tell you that after deciding that I was not going to just submit the seven minute section as is, even though I could, my original plan was to somehow use acoustic and electric instruments to orchestrate everything I hear going on, reproduce all of these little voices. And that's what I started to try to do the next day. And the very first things you hear in the piece, there's resonator guitar, but it's one in each ear, that was me staring that process. And there was even another bass part. That was some of the first stuff I did. I was trying to flush out those parts. Originally I was like, it would be great to have an orchestra at my disposal to do all of these different parts I'm hearing, but then I thought, or maybe just pick one instrument and work with that. And the resonator guitar can be a bit wild in terms of all the tones going on also, so I just kind of chose it and I was going to try to pick out everything with it. But after doing about three parts, three sort of bass parts that I was hearing, I was going to try to do a more mid-range part and I couldn't get my mind around what I was really hearing and then I just started doing the picking. I mean, a pretty core part of the piece is a resonator guitar, picking part. I started doing that and I liked how it sounded over the Ondes and then I was like, 'screw my original idea,' I'm just going to go with this.

DM: *I'm glad we're addressing the 'why' question. I realize that I use a lot of drum machines with factory preset sounds. I still use classic Roland TR 808 and 909 sounds and while I adjust them, they are generally still recognizable. And so to use the Ondes Martenot or to find a really strange string progression, like the Bartok strings that I found on archive.org, adds a dimension that I find works really well beside, around, or on top of sounds that are very identifiable. For instance, every time you use an 808, many people will listen to that and say, 'oh, that's an 808.' And so I think it works well to draw on these sounds that are a little more unknown, or that aren't in that canon of sounds. Because I think those Bartok strings are really strange in terms of harmony. For me, Bartok is someone that I do not know a ton about, but I would put him in this category where a lot of his music comes at a time where people are really trying to break from the last few hundred years of harmony, and importing more rhythms into classical music. But his music is not to the point of mid-century avant-garde music.*

ST: Maybe that's what I'm thinking when I say, 'I wouldn't have come up with that string part.' The two notes at the core of the part would have been easy to come up with, but the full sample is four notes which only get used on the one of the measure and the third and fourth notes of the sample are just a little wonky in this way, where I'm like, 'I wouldn't come up with that but man I like how that sounds.'

DM: *Yeah, that's what I find with Bartok. For instance, there will be three or four textures going at one time and maybe three of them move somewhere and the fourth goes somewhere else.*

ST: In this case, it even sounds like a different instrument on the third and forth notes, it starts to sound almost like a flute or something, in the mix anyway.

DM: *How did you approach the rhythm elements? The Amen break that I sent you was difficult, in that, you almost had to totally use it as is, or not use it at all. So I felt like that was perhaps the one sample that would have locked you into something. The other drumbeat was pretty open with a lot of space. You could have just taken a bass drum, or.*

ST: The very first thing I did, actually, was when I had the repeating Ondes part, I tried just plopping down the Amen break and I kind of liked that. It kind of worked in a way. There are these contrasting rhythms that are hyper complex, but I realized that it was too much. To listen to that for any period of time, I'm just going to go nuts.

DM: *And the Amen I sent you is really more of a break, in the sense that it works more as a fifteen second break, as in 'let's go to the drum break.'*

ST: It's funny that I never thought of using it that way.

DM: *But on some level, I was interested in whether you might turn the break into a song.*

ST: I actually worked with it later too. In the end I took it out. At the end of the piece, I spent a whole afternoon working on this and thinking that it was killer, and the next day thinking that it was no good. Basically I spliced it up and in the sampler and I had different regions so each key could play a different part in the break. And then I tried to play it live and it was really hard and a bit sloppy. And maybe if it had been a bit tighter I would have kept it, who knows, but I did it multiple times. I went through recording live, not just triggering hits but parts of the break, at the end, to go with it. But it was just too much; again, it was too much and a bit too sloppy. In the end I felt that it didn't add much and it really changed the whole atmosphere of the piece. And ultimately it felt like it was in there just for the sake of using all of the samples that you sent me. So I got rid of it. But it was fun to do that, in a way, because it was kind of exciting because I shifted the tempo and everything to a point where… the way Ableton does its whole trying to match

tempos, made it all weird, which is why I had to break it into regions, because if I played it, it would maybe be in sync for maybe the first second or something and then go out of sync. And so I had to just hit little bits of it in sync and then switch off. But it also meant that it could be turned into a whole new break on the fly.

DM: *That's the other reason I sent it to you. Although I haven't fully used it in a piece yet, I have just really enjoyed trying to work with it and having the sample in my software editor when I am working on something. I've just had some fun moments working with it and experimenting with all the different ways you can incorporate it. It's very complex, it's exciting and it's kind of wild. And I've tried to use it in many ways, as a break or with a fade in.*

ST: I think what it came down to in the end, was that my treatment of it I felt was a bit too sensational in a sense. Because it's a hyper sensationalized break in a way, it's kind of in your face, listen to how cool I am, in a way.

DM: *And it's also at a frequency where once it's at a certain level in the mix, that's where your ears go. It's hard to work with as a textural layer. At a certain volume it just takes your attention.*

ST: Yeah, because in a way I noticed that it was either almost white noise in the background or just too overpowering. I worked with it but I didn't keep it.

DM: *So, what was your process with the rhythm elements?*

ST: I had the basic rhythm before using the Amen break. I used the other beat you sent me. I think I made it half time in Ableton. I slowed it down, stretched it.

DM: *But then you incorporate a lot more hits that makes it sound kind of double time.*

ST: Yeah, I slowed it down, re-pitched it, because when it was slowed down for the first time it was still at the same pitch. I didn't like how the kick drum sounded, in particular, with the Ondes. Actually, first I should say in Reaper I spent quite a while just figuring out what the BPM of the Ondes was and lining it up. It took a long time, just of that little sample of the Ondes that I made, because it is looping and there's rhythm. And if I'm going to want to put anything over this I am going to need to know what the BPM is. And the Ondes sample is used almost throughout the whole piece.

DM: *At the end, the Ondes loop becomes really prominent again. You really become aware of how much it is a loop, in a good way. In the opening it doesn't really sound like a loop, it kind of sounds like a nice drawn out chord progression. At the end, it creates a nice change or contrast, because you become aware of the loop. Actually, when I heard the song, it went in this totally unexpected direction, and it's interesting that your initial impression was to play that Ondes loop out, because after the second or third listen to it, I wanted to hear more of the opening. Because I think there is enough there in the first twenty seconds for a whole piece.*

ST: Exactly.

DM: *So, back to the rhythm, could you talk about your approach?*

ST: Yeah, I got the BPM, I got it sort of looping. And the first thing was doing the guitar parts when I initially thought I was going to orchestrate everything, and then I recorded the guitar picking part, which I played using a metronome, and I actually couldn't keep up for seven minutes. The first go at that was pretty sloppy. And that's when I decided I wanted a bit stronger beat and that's when I started messing around with the beat that you sent me and I slowed it down, re-pitched it, this I was doing in Ableton, and I put a delay on it and that's why it's a bit busier. It's just a delay.

DM: *So you just put a delay on the rim shots?*

ST: No, on the whole beat. Although actually it might be filtered, so it might just be on the rim shots and the hi hats, not on the kick.

DM: *Interesting, because it doesn't sound like a delay. It sounds like you actually filled in all of the one hits.*

ST: I can't be sure because I know there's a delay on it, but I also messed around with beat repeat, because if beat repeat is on it that could be why it doesn't seem like that. But the other thing is, much later there is one other drum rhythm element that I put in much later, which was, I just isolated a closed hi hat, I think it was, and then got that going on a three against four sort of thing with the beat repeat, that fades in a little ways through, which makes the beat a little less repetitive, also. Aside from the handclaps. I put in the handclaps, also.

DM: *And what did you use for those?*

ST: Those are handclaps.

DM: *Is that you?*

ST: Yeah. That is something I go back to a lot, genuine hand claps. Whenever I feel like it needs a bit more of a beat, but also sort of, hand claps in a room and especially if you compress them, so that the room tone comes up, it gives a whole different sense of space that I liked.

ST: *I agree on two levels with that. I rarely find prerecorded handclaps that I like in drum machines. And it's an element that I want to incorporate quickly and I end up spending a lot of time just listening to all of these various handclaps. Secondly, I find with a lot of my electronic music I avoid using direct snare drum sounds, yet I often want a similar quality or character and I will go somewhere else for this. And handclaps are a good way to achieve this. So, you'll notice that the beat I sent you uses rim shots. I find that I do want those mid and upper range drum textures but I rarely use a snare drum. So, recording myself clapping takes care of the fact that I rarely find synthesized claps that I like and it somehow connects to a snare drum.*

ST: Yeah, I agree. The thing about the hand claps, and I'm not a percussionist, I mean I've got a really good sense of rhythm so I know that I'm off time but that doesn't mean that I can be perfect, I can just know when I screw up. And with the hand claps that are in there, a lot of them are not right on the beat, but in the end, it was either laziness or just kind of thinking people aren't going to be concentrating on the handclaps enough that this is going to matter.

DM: *And also that connects to the idea that I always like to play a couple of parts. Which can be difficult because finding the right part to play can be challenging.*

ST: But do you find that it is difficult to mix those elements into electronic music, because once you have those more rigid electronic loops and sounds, I can get the feeling they create almost a sonic regime that even if you bring acoustic instruments in, you've got to treat them like that, like tightly controlled. I'm not saying that is something that I want to do, but I feel that tendency to maintain some sort of sonic quality that those electronic instruments tend to give. Do you know what I'm talking about? Mixing acoustic and electronic instruments can be pretty difficult because one brings out qualities in the other one that we don't necessarily think of going together. For example, an acoustic guitar by itself might sound really great, but then when it's with these really

tailored electronic sounds, the acoustic guitar, the recording quality can sound not controlled in that way, and it will sound just out of place.

DM: *I find that it depends on the moment that I bring any particular instrument into the piece. This really matters. I find that mixing more acoustic instruments with rigid electronic sounds, if it's going to work, I feel like I have to make some sort of initial or early in the process intervention that works. In other words, I have to bring them both in quite early, together. For instance, it's not really acoustic, but I can line up a pretty random Ondes Martenot part with a pretty fixed beat, if I almost start with that. And there's some sort of initial feathering, or connection that is made right away. I find it really difficult to have a piece that already has a sense of a sonic regime, and then to record an acoustic guitar part for the piece would be challenging. I guess if the piece is already to the point of a regime…*

ST: But sometimes just a synth is enough to make it that way.

DM: *Absolutely. So if I am going to incorporate an acoustic guitar into a piece, it's probably going to come early in the production process and it will be part of the regime.*

ST: Right.

DM: *Which is why when I heard those Ondes Marenot octaves I thought it was enough. And you should try to do a piece with that.*

ST: But I think that's kind of the whole point, is that, either the piece is that, left alone, or it's what I did.

DM: *Well send me the other one. I want to hear it. I think it's great.*

ST: Because what I was going to do when I talked about orchestrating it, I was going to have it begin with that and then have the instruments come in and then have a transition from that into just the same thing, but my interpretation with instruments. Which in the middle section there is kind of a little of that, because that is when the Ondes is gone from the piece for a little while, there's a little section that is a vestige of that original idea.

DM: *When the second guitar part comes in, about twenty seconds into the piece, to me, they are mixed in an unexpected way. In terms of my own electronic music practice, I relate much more to the first twenty seconds of the piece in terms of how you mixed it. The rhythm aspects are really prominent in the mix. Yet, at the same time, some of the unexpected parts really keep my creativity going. To hear a set of materials that I have some familiarity with articulated on numerous levels in unexpected ways is really exciting.*

ST: The mix took me a long time. And it's pretty good but it could be better still, I think. I think that in terms of the level of those guitars, what I discovered was that, either they were up front or it sounded just like a mess. You didn't get what they were doing. So they are kind of louder than I originally thought I was going to mix them.

DM: *It would have sounded like mud if they had been any lower in the mix.*

ST: Yeah, that's what happened when I tried it.

DM: *And again I think one of the main things that I am trying to work against with this project is the idea of control. And if you acknowledge those things that you cannot necessarily plan for and keep yourself attuned to that, it really challenges this idea of being able to control all aspects of composition and here's a really great example, because here's a part that you figured out how to play. It's a part that you wrote and you*

put it into a piece, but you found that you could not mix it in the way that you had imagined.

ST: Yeah, first of all the resonator guitar is very difficult to record, for me, anyway. It's just a difficult instrument, unless it's the only thing. If it's a solo resonator, set up two microphones and you're gold. But to mix that, it's got so much going on in the spectrum that it's really hard for me to work with. Probably the biggest challenge was that guitar. Yeah, I mean, in terms of performing it, something about that part was at the edge of my ability. I had to record that several times to get it the way I wanted. And I ended up using all of those performances together.

DM: *And you comped them?*

ST: Yeah, well what do you mean by comp?

DM: *How you would compile a vocal track, for example.*

ST: I mean they are all playing together. Like I said the mixing of those was pretty hard, because early in my process I knew that I wanted that in there and it sort of shaped the piece in terms of mixing it, because I could get it sounding okay through my monitors and even other speakers, but through headphones, surprisingly, where everything usually sounds great, I didn't like it. But I liked them panned pretty hard right and in headphones it sounded really weird.

DM: *There is a lot of separation in the mix.*

ST: Yeah, especially in headphones. And that's actually the first piece I mixed with these monitor speakers and before that a lot of my mixing I did on headphones or just my stereo, a mix of my just headphones and stereo.

DM: *I use Adam A5s. I just find that I can hear things a lot clearer with these monitors and my audio interface, maybe because for years I was using pretty crappy desktop computer speakers.*

ST: I know there's a huge sound difference between the interface and the output of a Mac. Although there are some flaws in the mix, I don't think I could have mixed it as well without those speakers, because I had done a somewhat similar piece with some sounds from Owen maybe a year ago and it was a nightmare mixing. And I was doing it mostly in headphones and when I put it through speakers there was way too much bass. There were all kinds of problems.

DM: *With my new setup, a lot less of what you just described happens. And ultimately a monitor is a monitor as long as you're familiar with it. But there can be a pretty steep learning curve.*

ST: In my kitchen, first off the kitchen is a terrible room, and secondly, I've got these two little speakers sitting there and I find that if I can get it good in that kitchen on those shitty speakers then it's good to go.

DM: *On the other hand, monitoring can also become so hyper sensitive that it can be misleading and you can underplay everything.*

ST: And that can happen when you use headphones too. Listen to that reverb it's like I'm right there.

DM: *So did you keep the rhythm pretty similar? Did you just use the drum loop? Did you use the compressed one, or the non-compressed one? Did you notice a difference?*

ST: I used the compressed one. I didn't notice much difference. I didn't do a lot to it, amazingly it just kind of worked great even though I had already done a lot of work on the piece. Often times I know a lot of people want to start with the beat, but I put it in after. I matched the tempo after. I had already recorded the resonator guitar without the beat, so it didn't have the right groove and I had to re-record it with the beat in there, a couple of times. And then I was always having a single one of those takes going, but I felt that it was too much to the left in the headphones. And so I initially compensated for that by throwing in the ukulele part and panned that a little bit to the right, but quiet. And then that part ended up being pretty prominent during the break in the middle, but then later on I still wasn't happy with the resonator and mostly rhythmic variations that I thought weren't tight, so I added all of the resonators together, like three resonators all recorded stereo, and it was almost like, you know how you can have a pretty poor choir that sounds good because even if you are all out of pitch a little bit it evens out, it was almost like that effect but for the rhythm. None of them were dead on, but I found that when I put them together the overall effect made it seem more on to me and also opened up the space. And actually made the resonator sound more like I imagined it sounding when I played it.

DM: *Which is sort of similar to how a quick way to get a nice sound on an analog synth is through detuning one of the oscillators. Or how doubling vocal tracks sometimes works. It's not quite reverb…*

ST: When I think back to that process, though, because if I hadn't had that problem with the mix, had that resonator guitar part fit great in the mix right from the beginning, I never would have come up with the ukulele part, which I ended up really liking.

DM: *I find that one of the challenges of importing sequenced beats into a piece late in the process is that sequenced beats tend to be so tempo dependent that one beat works fantastically at one tempo and doesn't work at all at another tempo. Maybe that's why*

you had to add that delay? Just because you have a groove that works at 122 BPM doesn't mean that it is going to work at 110 BPM.

ST: For sure. Maybe it was the freedom of not knowing whether I was going to use that beat or not. And I probably wouldn't have used it except that I experimented with it and felt like it worked.

DM: *It totally works. And I could imagine the song without it too. The opening is really strong.*

ST: That's where the beat sounds the best for sure. I like the intro.

DM: *I wonder sometimes if you're aware of what you've done, because you've been working on it for so long that you create changes that don't necessarily have to be there. Maybe you lose the sense to just hear a piece for the first time. For instance, if you had just played me the intro I would have gone, 'there's the song.' And I think about that in relation to my own practice. Maybe that is one of the drawbacks of doing so much solo work and not having a collaborator there to listen.*

ST: I think this is a lot of the reason why we miss out on stuff, because for me anyway, I've sort of gone down a road and I'm not prepared to turn back. I had the guitar part, I had all of this stuff going on, then I put the drumbeat in and then I'm like, 'I'm loving this intro,' but the piece is going in this direction.

DM: *So, you discovered the intro towards the end of the process?*

ST: I didn't discover it at the end, but at least halfway through.

DM: *I usually have a sense of the rhythm pretty early.*

ST: Well that was the Ondes for me more or less. I was hearing a pretty heavy rhythm element in there that I wanted to follow and it just happened that the beat worked. The intro was not planned in anyway and it didn't come together in a way that an intro typically would. I often work somewhat linearly as well, where the intro is there and then I go to this part. But it's always a mix, because as soon as I put some other layer in there then I rethink everything and that's what happened a little bit.

DM: *That beat is basically four on the floor, but if you listen to it in the context of the song, it actually doesn't sound like four on the floor in the way that standard house music does. And I find that using rim shots on some off beats really help to take the beat away from four on the floor. So there are hi hats and rim shots on off beats and then at two points a kick drum mixed at a lower volume on the step before the down beat, which gives the groove a stuttered feel.*

ST: When I had the beat slowed down and in the context of the song, it really reminded me of an afrobeat feel. That's what I was picking up on. And there's an electric guitar part with a little bit of analog delay on it and I think that might be where that came from. I wanted to have this nice rhythmic, simple guitar part. It comes in the mid-section, it comes in with the handclaps, it's just two notes, but it's the rhythm that's more important.

DM: *I find that when I work with that beat it is really hard to adjust the tempo because of the bass drums hiccup.*

ST: I had the beat in Ableton and there are those two little buttons in the loop and one is divide by two and the other is times two, I think I divided it by two so it lasted twice as long. That's what I mean by slow it down.

DM: *The last thing I want to talk about is vocals. For the piece, what was your approach to singing or not singing?*

ST: It's partly a genre thing. I approached the piece more like I have approached other compositions where I used field recordings, whether those are recordings of a space or whether they are recordings of old instruments, like the Ondes. And I often restrict myself to only that material, and so there is no room for me to do vocals because that is not there in the recordings. But in this case I kind of blended it, because I didn't restrict myself. So why didn't I add vocals? Well I used my voice as an instrument in the track.

DM: *Tell me about that.*

ST: Again, it had to do with the first idea that I had of trying to orchestrate the various voices that I heard in the Ondes. So in the part where the Ondes cuts out is where the vocals are and they kind of subtly take over what the Ondes is doing in the song. They become the pad and it's just two harmonizing parts that I spent very little time on. They are really rough vocal takes and they are kind of going from Os to A sounds, more nasal sounding to try to get a bit more richness in the harmonizing. I'm not a throat singer, but a bit of that idea, multiple voices. I spent a while trying to decide how to treat the vocals and how to mix them.

DM: *Do you know why or when you decided to break from your usual convention of only using the field recordings?*

ST: I knew right away, as soon as you contacted me I was pretty sure that I would. I think because with those other projects it's partly been conceptually fundamental to the piece that I only use this material. With this, it wasn't coming with a research motive, so it was an opportunity for me to have fun. And because I had wanted to try mixing the two methods a little bit more than I had, playing instruments with the computer.

DM: *And that was kind of your thinking behind your studio setup?*

ST: Yeah, I want to be able to do as many different things as possible. That's why I got all of these outputs and such.

DM: *At what point did you decide it was going to be an instrumental piece? Is it because you conceived the piece as electronic?*

ST: Yes, in a way. I think part of the reason is that I really labour over writing lyrics and why go through that if I don't have to. I don't want to put the work into the lyrics, because it's really difficult for me. That's something that I'm still thinking through with musicmaking.

DM: *Right now lyric writing just seems so outside of my process. And ultimately I guess I have to force myself.*

ST: I have to force myself if I want lyrics. That's the part that is frustrating for me actually, is that, I will sit down with my guitar and write the music for a song and I'll just sing nonsense words and then I'll be excited to record it and I will be like, 'ah, now I have to write lyrics' and it holds me back.

DM: *Which is interesting because that is often how I hear vocal music. For music with singing, it often takes me years to figure out what the vocals are. But I have to connect with the sounds and the syntax, etc.*

ST: Same with me. The singer is still important to me, but what they are saying, not so much.

DM: *But at the same time, if I make the effort to discover the lyrics to a song, they better be really good.*

ST: That's why I have this huge pressure. I'm like, 'I have to make these lyrics and they've got to be more than just I work up one morning.'

DM: *I often sing along to songs using phonetic sounds.*

ST: It's the same for me too. And that's a conflict that I have because I will like my nonsense phonetically but it's not what I want to say.

DM: *And the next step is that I find myself writing lyrics that fit in with those phonetic sounds.*

ST: Yeah, I try to match the lyrics with the sounds.

DM: *Can you describe your studio: how you have it set up, where is it setup? And a method question: is there anything you discovered about your process through this collaboration? Is there a particular time of the day that you work? Is there a particular atmosphere you need in your apartment in order to work?*

ST: My studio is pretty much in my bedroom and in terms of technology, I don't keep my laptop in there, but I take it in there when I am going to work in there. It's a MacBook Pro. I do leave my sound interface in there. It's pretty much on my nightstand, or bedside table. What I really like about the RME interface is that it doesn't matter what programs I have open or what order that I do things in, I just plug it in and it works. There's no driver nonsense. And it didn't used to always be that way. So I love that and I know anytime I can go in there and plug in. I've got the monitors going out of my interface; they're on a higher desk beside the bedside table. Next to that I've got a keyboard, like a Radio Shack

keyboard that I mostly use as a MIDI controller. And then next to that I've got a regular stereo system and my instruments are in the corner. Electric guitar, bass guitar, several acoustics, the resonator guitar and then I've got a thumb harp, shakers, tambourine and recorders.

DM: *What do you usually record your instruments with?*

DM: For instruments, usually, I've got a matched pair of microphones, Octavia I think they are. They are Russian condenser microphones, small diaphragm. And vocals, usually, I have a Rode NT1-A condenser microphone. Sometimes I also use an SM 57 for instruments, like an amp. Actually I think I used the SM 57 for the ukulele, because I tried that as a really quick way of recording and I found that it sounded fine, so it was easier than getting out the condenser microphones.

DM: *When do you work?*

ST: On that piece I mostly worked in the afternoon.

DM: *Is that your usual work pattern?*

ST: My usual work pattern is afternoon or evening, because I need to feel like I've accomplished some other work, like reading or writing or something in the morning. Yeah, school work. And that almost frees me to then work on music.

DM: *Do you ever work at night?*

ST: 10:30 or 11:00 is maybe the latest that I would work. And I probably wouldn't be using my monitors too much then, I would be using my headphones. And that's a time that I could get really into it, but I'm more aware of the noise that I'm making.

DM: *You need to find a point in the day when all of those elements line up: when you have the right amount of energy and when you're not just thinking about the amount of noise that you are making. My feeling is that time of day does matter.*

ST: It does. It's funny to me knowing that I did so much in the afternoon, because I am not an afternoon person. I usually get sleepy then. But in part, because I like to make music, it actually brings me out of my sleepiness. So it's not just that I need energy, it gives me a bit of energy just to do it. And practicing guitar is the same. Lately I've been practicing at five in the afternoon, which is not when I have the best energy, but then I get into it and I get more energy, sometimes. Other times it's like, 'fuck this.'

TARA RODGERS (Musician/Composer/Feminist Technology Scholar)

August 11, 2012. Email.

David Madden [DM]: *As you may (or may not) know, my dissertation focuses on the emergence of electroclash in the late 1990s and the way so many women (e.g. Peaches, Chicks on Speed, Le Tigre, Miss Kittin, Ellen Allien, etc.) and gender-bending performers (e.g. Tiga) contributed to shaping the genre, both in terms of production practices and aesthetics. As far as I can tell, this is an anomaly in the history of popular/electronic music where the role of the producer is typically associated with men.*
The opening chapter discusses how the move away from traditional multi-track studio recording and the development of the second hand electronics market opened up new possibilities for music producers and domestic/home based music production. I am wondering how you might think through the coming together of rock and electro in the late '90s and the way so many women were able to contribute to and shape electroclash? Also, how might previous developments like riot grrrl and womyn's music factor in to an electroclash narrative?

Tara Rodgers [TR]: This is an interesting question. Mapping the history of a genre, and the multiple creative practices it inherits, can be a near-impossible task, although fun to think about. Some important questions to consider are when the term "electroclash" came into being, who was behind its naming, and to what extent women artists have claimed or associated themselves with that name. Some answers here are probably fairly clear, at least to the questions of who and when. But the answer to the question of whether women self-identify as belonging in this genre is less obvious to me. Perhaps your research can tease that out in more detail. For one example, in the interview we did for Pink Noises in the early-2000s, Le Tigre spoke with some skepticism about their relationship to the "electroclash" genre—noting that their work falls between categories of "feminist" and "electronic" music that are, in many people's minds and ears, irreconcilable. The undercurrent of our conversation had to do with how audiences (including and especially some music critics) tend to be "genre closed." In other words, the boundaries of genres,

even in underground and experimental forms of electronic music, are still heavily policed for particular aesthetics or styles. Even in a new and fairly open genre called "electroclash," Le Tigre implied that electronic music with feminist lyrics might not seen as "real" electronic music. I wonder, too, whether even at this stage women are widely understood to be "producers" of this genre—or if they are more commonly recognized and showcased in the media as vocalists and performers, despite that fact that many of them control all aspects of electronic music composition,
production, and performance in their work.

That said, your observation is important that there are indeed numerous women and "gender-bending performers" whose work can be placed within the electroclash genre. I think in part this can be understood as a convergence of the increasing affordability of producing electronic music in home studios, which really accelerated in the late '90s, with emerging feminist communication networks that followed grassroots social movements like Riot Grrrl and took off with the expansion of Internet cultures again in the late '90s. Online networks like Pinknoises.com and Female:Pressure by the early-2000s were connecting women in these fields and promoting their visibility as DJs and producers. I think more research is needed to flesh out the influence of Riot Grrrl on electronic musicians coming from the UK and Europe—I would pause before presuming that Riot Grrrl superseded other lines of influence overseas. Certainly other genres and art practices feed into the aesthetics electroclash as well, across these geographic areas—like punk, feminist performance art beginning in the 1970s, '80s synthpop (where even a mainstream artist like Prince was playing with gender in generative ways), and Kraftwerk's sound and performance style.

DM: *Will Straw writes in "The Booth, The Floor and the Wall," that "[M]uch of dance culture's political credibility has rested on its links to disenfranchised sexual communities (…) It remains the case, nevertheless, that there are more women in heavy metal bands than there are female producers or mixers of dance records, and that virtually all of the club DJs in the English-speaking world who exercise influence are male." I am*

wondering what this portends in terms of our understandings of the politics of electronic music? Additionally, what are your thoughts on gender representation within current electronic (dance) music production?

TR: I haven't read this piece by Will Straw, and I hesitate to respond to a quote that I'm reading out of context. But I'll respond to the issues it raises. One of the main points I try to make in the Pink Noises introduction is that how such things get quantified—such as the numbers of women participating in a music culture, and the influence of their work—is highly arbitrary. There are all sorts of social and cultural factors that may mean that women are releasing fewer records than men—for example, that women are often in primary caregiving roles in their household or otherwise have less time for music-making than their male counterparts; that many women receive countless messages in their lifetimes that their creative work is not good enough or not finished enough to make public; that many social networks around electronic music festivals and record labels still default to extending more opportunities to men than women. So, if we define the number of women producers according to a count of those represented on record labels or at major festivals, there may not be a lot. But if we look elsewhere, such as within local music scenes, or on listservs like Female:Pressure where women are sharing work with each other all the time, there are more women doing more amazing things than you can imagine. This also pertains to how we define "influence." If we define influence according to how much money a producer earns, or how many top-selling tracks the producer has on Beatport, etc., that is a limited definition. I've met or corresponded with many women—for example, like Riz Maslen in London or DJ Rekha, Val-Inc, and Jeannie Hopper in New York—who are enormously influential in their communities as educators and/or political activists, as well as producers and performers. To me, this is a kind of influence that really matters. Then, we need to start asking why musical genres are not named after their work

Appendix D: Peaches' Facebook Screenshot

October 27, 2011.

Appendix E: Approved Summary Protocol Forms

UNIVERSITÉ Concordia UNIVERSITY

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Dr Andra McCartney
Department:	Communications
Agency:	N/A
Title of Project:	Cross-Dressing to Backbeats: An Exploration of the Practices, fe/male Producers and History of Electroflash.
Certification Number:	UH2011-094

Valid From: September 28, 2011 to: September 27, 2012

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

01/29/2009

UNIVERSITÉ Concordia UNIVERSITY

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Dr. Andra Mccartney
Department:	Faculty of Arts and Science\ Communication Studies
Agency:	N/A
Title of Project:	Cross-Dressing to Backbeats: An Exploration of the Practices, Fe/Male Producers and History of Electroflash.

Certification Number: 10000487

Valid From: October 1, 2012 to: September 30, 2013

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee