Beyond 'live' and 'dead' in popular electronic music performances in Athens

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Resumen

Como arte interpretativo, la música requiere la presencia física y la comunicación entre todos sus participantes. Pero ¿qué significa la corporalidad física, en vivo y presencial para los participantes de la música electrónica popular, donde las tecnologías cambian rápidamente el contexto dentro del que se comprenden a sí mismos y al entorno? La investigación antropológica/ etnográfica de estos eventos musicales en Atenas, arroja luz sobre las relaciones que se establecen entre participantes, alterados por las tecnologías digitales (fundamentalmente por medio de sintetizadores y laptops), y el mundo material y sus propios cuerpos. Los seres humanos no se consideran como una otredad tecnológica, sino como un complejo devenir compuesto por ambos. Experimentando estas performances, músicos y público perciben esta presencia como el desarrollo de relaciones complejas y creativas entre humanos y máquinas, más allá de oposiciones entre naturaleza/cultura, uno mismo/otro, sujeto/objeto, orgánico/inorgánico,

Abstract

As a performing art, music demands the embodied presence and communication amongst all participants. But what embodiment, liveness and presence mean for participants in popular electronic music performances, where technologies rapidly change the context within which they understand themselves and their environment? The anthropological/ethnographic research of performed music events in Athens sheds light on participants' altered, due to digital technologies (mainly synthesizers and laptops) relationship to the material world and to their bodies. Humans are not considered to be technology's other, but rather complex becomings compound of both. Experiencing performances beyond oppositions between nature/culture, self/other, subject/object, organic/inorganic, musicians and members of the audiences perceive liveness to be the development of complex, creative relationships amongst all participants (humans and machines).

Palabras clave
música electrónica, performance, tecnología, encarnación, materialidad, música en vivo

Key words
popular electronic music, performance, technology, embodiment, liveness, materiality

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Introduction

As a performing art, music is a collective activity that takes place in a specific time and place and demands the embodied presence and communication amongst all participants. But what happens when the audience of a concert watches a digital avatar singing and dancing on stage? Is this considered to be a live music performance or not? Is the performer present or not? Are the human beings, whose voices and images are (re)produced through visual or audio media during a concert present or not? What about the musical instruments' presence? Is sound emanating from laptops and synthesizers, whether pre-recorded or created onstage, considered 'dead' (Frith 2004) or 'live'? What do materiality and embodiment mean, at least to our Western world, where humans create technology that in turn creates humans? For instance, we created the machines that made the Human Genome Project possible, but now, in a very real sense, these machines create us, continuously and rapidly modifying the context within which we understand ourselves and our environment. Approaching actual instances of situated, performed music events from the point of view of performance theory may help us understand our altered (through digital technology) relationship to the material world and to our bodies, by re-examining materiality, embodiment, liveness and presence beyond oppositions of true/false, reality/representation or body/language, that are inscribed within a system of conceptual hierarchies (McKenzie 2001: 40). Instead of seeking to essentialize the body as technology's Other, performance theory may help us redefine and resituate questions concerning the technologizing of the body and its boundaries (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 50).

The idea that technology should not be considered an adjunct to the human body or in opposition to it but as a determinant of its ontology is as old as the ancient myth of Prometheus. According to Stiegler, the idea that the tools humans use are something humans invent, presupposes that there is a human essence that remains distinct and separate from these tools. However, "the human... invents himself in the technical by inventing the tool—by becoming exteriorized techno-logically" (1998: 41). That is, the concept of 'human' is unthinkable without technology, but we act as if it isn't. In anthropology too, technology has been closely associated or even identified with the material culture and materiality of human existence, and has been

considered as a given, as "something extraneous to human life and a force to which communities and beliefs are obliged to adapt" (Pfaffenberger 1998: 236). However, holistic (Schiffer 2001) or interpretive symbolic (Pfaffenberger 1998) approaches stress the need to examine technology as a total social phenomenon that is simultaneously symbolic and material, as a set of social behaviors and a system of meanings (economic, legal, political), a sociotechnical system and not a decontextualized object. There is a need for the study of technology to merge with everything else, since in order to understand any aspect of human culture we need to investigate its 'materialized' behavior, that is, to recognize and analyze embedded technologies (Schiffer 2001: 3).

Defining a musician, either of classical or electronic music, necessarily includes various relationships (economic, cultural, existential, etc.) with the tools that enable him/her to create and perform music. Our relationship with technologies, however, continues to be defined by ambivalence and complexity that reveal anxieties connected to how we understand what it means to be human and how we define the limits of the cultural world (Shaw 2008: 5-6). A study of electronic music, thus of a music that is so closely related to technology as to be actually identified with it (Auner 2003), necessarily includes the study of changes in technologies, which are an inseparable part of its performances, as well as the changes they produce in the ways participants perceive themselves as both biological and technical beings. Instead of viewing technology as a means of salvation or destruction of humans and their world (Heidegger 1993), exploring the cultural meanings people attribute to it may contribute significantly to understanding the transformations in the ways people think and live, thus pushing the boundaries of human existence.

Although there is a tendency to approach the relationship between humans and technology by focusing on oppositions—technology as opposed to nature, technology as opposed to community, technology as opposed to art (Frith 2004)—popular music and performance studies literature on issues related to concepts of liveness and presenceness give emphasis to the ambiguity and fluidity, rather than to the fixed boundaries between mental categories that characterize performances.[1] Seen as processes rather than products, performances create the context for dominant cultural values to be considered not as given and certain, but under dynamic negotiation, subject to improvisation, experimentation, and reflection that may lead to new

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[1] Auner 2003; Auslander 1999, 2002; Blau 2007; Emmerson 2007

formulations.[2] Within this context, ethnographic accounts of popular electronic music events (in clubs, festivals, concerts) have focused on the ways in which liminality generates potential transformative experiences for all participants.[3] In Greece, popular electronic music performances have not been a field of systematic academic research. Thus, my aim in this paper is on the one hand to cover a gap in the study of a current cultural phenomenon from the point of view of anthropology, and, on the other to analyze these performances as reflexive processes that reveal technology as an integral part of the participants' cultural experience of the world, where humans are not considered to be technology's Other, but rather complex becomings compound of both.

The ethnographic material used in this paper was collected during fieldwork I conducted in the city of Athens, Greece, between December 2009 and May 2010. Fieldwork included participant observation in popular electronic music performances in various bars and clubs, as well as informal talks with members of the audience during intermissions and unstructured interviews with musicians/performers. Published material from internet sources and interviews in musical magazines was also utilized. In academic studies of (mostly Western) music, musicians and members of the audience rarely have a voice of their own. In this study, however, I present their perspective through an ethnographic investigation of their performing behavior and explore the meanings they attribute to the whole process and especially to their understanding of the concepts of live and presence, while trying to avoid imposing ready-made theories on their behaviors and accounts. In our postmodern, global world, the investigation of such issues unavoidably leads to the transgression of traditional ethnographic conventions (Ong and Collier 2005), towards an ethnographic investigation of individuals and small groups of individuals "linked for perhaps just a moment in time and place by shared beliefs, social status, behaviors, tastes, and experiences of the world (and perhaps not at all by ethnicity)" (Rice 2003: 152). Direct observation of people, interactions, discourses, and performances, as well as personal accounts do not necessarily grant me access to some essential 'truth' in my questions about electronic music and humans' relations to technology. Rather, I propose a specific reading of these accounts, which are themselves partial and provisional, wishing to increase self-awareness and challenge preconceived notions or 'ungrounded' assumptions (Cohen 1993) linked to these questions.

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[2] Carlson 1996; McKenzie 2001; Schechner 2006
[3] Fikentscher 2000; Gerard 2004; St. John 2006

1. Entering the field

Entering the field of popular electronic music scene in Athens for the purpose of ethnographic research was a particularly difficult, exotic, discomforting and enchanting experience. Forty-year-olds, such as my friends and I, do not usually follow or participate in popular electronic music cultures. The main difficulties I faced were related to the complexities that stem from studying groups within a familiar urban setting (I have grown up and lived in Athens for most of my life), and to the blurred landscape of electronic music itself (what *is* electronic music?). After a short period of wandering around crowded clubs very late at night (or very early in the morning), listening to totally incomprehensible kinds of music and talking to 'strange' people, I timidly began to recognize a few artists, sounds, and places that made more sense to me. Finally, my fieldwork focused on performances in specific clubs and music scenes (BIOS, K44, Stavros tou Notou) that are either related or commonly identified with the history and development of the more 'artistic' (έντεχνη) popular electronic music scene in Athens, and with specific artists, who use computers and samplers in their live performances. According to my interlocutors' (musicians/performers and audience members) definitions, electronic music has changed through time largely because of changes in hardware and software, and the music they play or listen to may be placed within various genres and subgenres of techno, house, electro, hip-hop, trip-hop, electro-punk, etc. Thus in this paper I use the term 'electronic music' as an umbrella term that refers not to decontextualized musical pieces or genres but to a heterogeneous group of musical styles made and performed with—mainly but not exclusively—electronic technology (synthesizer and laptop).

Within the context of popular music studies, the term that refers to various genres such as house, techno, electro, progressive, electroclash, trance, glitch, etc. is 'Electronic Dance Music' (EDM).[4] In Greece, the electronic music scene is more focused on what is called 'dance' and 'experimental' music. In many events, bands combine artistic (έντεχνα) with dance elements, and during the last decade in particular, what we have is mainstream mixed with R&B and house. According to my interlocutors, three or four years ago distinctions were made mainly between mainstream and underground clubs, especially in Athens and Thessaloniki. However, owners of larger mainstream venues started to invite underground groups that had become quite popular, and thus even musicians who did not perform mainstream genres had the opportunity to play in big clubs like Luv and Blend. But now this industry is gone. There is still a house and techno scene,

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[4] There is an extensive literature on the origins, history, and typology of electronic dance music. Indicatively I mention: Emmerson 2007; Katz 2004; McLeod 2001.

but it is one that is mostly aimed at an audience of music lovers. There are few big clubs for mainstream and a few smaller ones for more underground and experimental music. Theoretically there are three tendencies in the European electronic dance music scene, of which Greece is considered to be a part: a) the experimental electric, electroacoustic music, that is, experimentations by jazz musicians who have a classical education (like the music of Xenakis and Stockhousen), b) the strictly dance scene, which includes mainstream and underground, and c) what is found between the former two and is known as the indie (independent) music scene. Of course, nowadays all music is independent in the sense that there are no big companies with contracts, as there used to be. In smaller clubs, dance music coexists with experimental and what's more, as in many clubs in Berlin, distinctions between electronic music, indie or experimental and dance do not exist. For them it is one and the same. Since my interlocutors themselves use the term 'electronic music' instead of EDM, I prefer to also use this term in this paper.

One of the first musicians I met was Giannis. I saw him on stage at Stavros tou Notou, in one of the first live performances I attended. He is thirty years old and considered by many to be one of the most talented artists in the electronic music scene of Athens today. The next day I contacted him through Myspace and he responded immediately. A few days later we were talking in a café at the central square of Exarheia (a neighborhood in downtown Athens). He studied film direction and classical piano for five years and later became "entangled with the machines". When he was 14 years old he bought his first, cheap synthesizer and later a good one, "like most people who deal with electronic music do". He travels to Europe frequently, and has a cosmopolitan air that is very exotic for older generations of Greeks, but quite common for young people of middle and upper social strata. He performs live very often with his friend Giorgos. Giannis plays the laptop and Giorgos plays the drums and synthesizer, and sings. Their music styles include techno, house, and Greek new wave.

> Me: So, what is electronic music after all?
>
> Giannis: Nowadays everything is electronic music, that is, whether you play rock, or jazz, or techno, since the entire process is electronic, whether your sources are electronic or digital, everything ends up in digital mixing and your final material is digital, either a sound file or a CD.

Electronic music performances in Athens usually take place very late at night, in dark, crowded clubs. BIOS, for example, an "Athens centre for today's art and cross media" (http://www.bios.gr) is one of my favorite places and a place identified with the history of the electronic music scene in the city. It is located in Pireos Street, very near the 'Artcity' (Τεχνόπολη), an industrial complex that

in 1999 became a culture hub that transformed a poor, working-class, historical area of Athens. According to its habitués, BIOS is a place that is continually transforming, together with the city, and gives the urban youth a chance to connect with international cultural developments. As Giannis explained: "BIOS is a reference point for the experimental electronic music scene of Athens. It opened ten years ago as an electronic music stage. We are the children of BIOS and in this club we found a house for more strange and experimental things... and the place evolved with us."

Members of the audience are young people in their early twenties, although older goers (30-year-olds) are not rare, dressed like "fashionistas-alternative", who drink alcohol, smoke, and talk while waiting for the performers to get on the stage. They don't dance much, and most of the time they look rather "tied up, bewildered" (Thanassis, a student and member of the audience in his early twenties). Although most of the people I talked to consider it to be something they don't like, it is very common and is often attributed to the fact that performers like to mix dance and experimental music together, and as a consequence, the audience does not know what to expect and does not know if they must dance or just watch. However, when they become absorbed by the music "and the whole thing that is happening at that moment", they "shout, dance, move [their] hands, bow before the DJ", says Maria, a big fan of electronic music for almost ten years, one night at K44. Video projections presenting abstract patterns, photographs, various images from the natural or urban environment, as well as films, are often part of these performances. Performers, bands or solo, stand on stage (its size depends on the size of the bar or club) and play 'natural' instruments (usually guitars, drums, bass, voice) and electronic (synthesizer and laptop).

2. Time, space, and reciprocity

In musical performances (like in all performances) the concept of 'live' refers to the relationship between the musician and the audience in the here and now, that is, simultaneity and shared space. The concept of 'live' cannot thus be distinguished from the concept of 'presence', of the embodied (in the sense of the physical) presence of both performers and members of the audience in a specific time and space.[5] This living presence indicates physical contact (face-to-face interaction), reciprocity (what happens on stage affects what happens in the audience and vice

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[5] Auslander 1999, 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Blau 2007.

versa), and awareness of the here and now (Copeland 1990). As I will show next, in my interlocutors' rhetoric and practice, physical contact amongst all participants, reciprocity between pit and stage, and awareness of the performing time and space are experiences actually defined by their relationship with technology.

2.1. Real time is the time we share

Within the context of Western musical tradition, performance brings to mind the image of a stage and a pit. The distinction between these two groups of people most of the time refers to a distinction between a world of (passive) audience and a world of (active) performers. Ethnographic research, however, shows that participants in electronic music performances experience these two groups as different but not distinct, and the boundaries between notions of activity and passivity as ambiguous. As far as performers are concerned:

> Me: Is there a difference between a live *(sic)* and nonlive?
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> Giannis: Yes, of course. For example, the night you saw us in Stavros tou Notou we were playing a pop repertoire because we wanted a reaction from the people
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> Me: So, you are interested in the audience?
>
> Giannis: Definitely. I adjust my program to the place, people and mood. My aim is to make them dance, or sing if they know the songs. However, they will do so, only if they are convinced that I take them into account and I do not play only what I have in my mind.

Panagiotis, on the other hand, does not adjust his program to his audience but experiences a rather esoteric, even spiritual connection with them through music. Now in his late 40s, he was a member of a pioneering and very influential band in electronic music in Greece, which was formed in the beginning of the 1990s and split up a few years later. Its members followed solo careers. In his performances today he plays the synthesizer and sings, while a guitarist and a sound engineer, who is in control of the laptops, stands next to him on stage. Although quite famous in Greece, he was very friendly. He responded immediately to my request to talk with him. One cold winter afternoon we met near the Acropolis museum and sat in a café behind two cups of hot chocolate:

> Me: When you are on stage, do you communicate with the audience, or do you feel closed to yourself?
>
> Panagiotis: I rather communicate with my own music. I must be the perfect tightrope walker if I don't want to fall down. There must be a balance between the program I have prepared with a beginning, a middle, and an end, the story I want to narrate and the action, what is really happening at that specific time in that specific place. I stand between my music and the audience.

I become an instrument. People are not standing there in isolation, just reacting to what I do. Instead they take music into their soul and their vibration is united with my own and that of my music, and something new is created. The beat wins everything and creates one soul. 'Live' is this relation between humans and music that becomes a distinct beat.

Me: How would you describe a successful live *(sic)*?

Panagiotis: Perfection for me, may come through my absolute union with the divine. I am an artist, who is not vibrated by my ego, but by the union of the people with my art. It happens rarely, I do not know when it is going to happen, but sometimes I do it, I tune in and rise...

Me: It sounds like a spiritual experience

Panagiotis: Look, the performance *(sic)*, at the time you are watching it is certainly planned. Everybody knows that. But for it to be something perfect, it depends on all the gradations of every listener. The performance is a frame, like a theatrical performance, with a beginning, a middle and an end. The musician is prepared, but the listener is the one who will add the gradations, according to his personal moment. So, everything is a connection...

Members of the audience also feel this close connection with the performers and the music itself. Maria spoke about "the energy that flows between the two groups". This energy "unites all participants, and although [they] usually don't dance, if someone starts first, then others will follow. It is contagious". The lived experience of participants in electronic music performances thus shows that the audience's expected role changes from a passive process of decoding the performers' articulation, to become something much more active, entering into a praxis, a context within which meanings are not so much communicated as created. The audience is invited and expected to function as a co-creator of whatever meanings and experiences the event generates (Carlson 1996).

During performances Giannis moves constantly and seems absorbed by his laptop much like a standing pianist. This is not just my impression since he himself confesses that he plays his laptop like he would any other instrument; his guitar for example. He may not have strings but he has files and he plays various machines in "real time". He is also very much like a conductor, whose job is to conduct and coordinate different parts of an orchestra. This orchestra consists of drums, vocals, synthesizers, and a laptop with pre-recorded (studio) samples from 'natural' instruments and modern synthesizers:

Me: The instruments you play define an event (*sic*) as live (*sic*)?

Giannis: For me, live *(sic)* does not have to do with your instruments, but with how much you trig (*sic*), how much you intervene in your machines, your instruments on stage. Trigging (*sic*) means intervening in various sound files, in various virtual (*sic*) machines that you may have in your

computer (*sic*). That is, through shortcuts (*sic*) I give commands to my computer, I make some adjustments in real time (*sic*) and I change, I intervene in the sound.

'Real time' is a recurrent theme in my discussions with participants in electronic music performances. Vladislav Delay, a musician in the Synch Festival,[6] who was 'playing laptop', was considered by Katerina (member of the audience, early thirties, psychologist) as live because "… sounds were coming out at that moment and it was a creation of the moment. He was sampling (*sic*), but he was taking it further. Live (*sic*) is what someone makes right now, what someone has to give at that moment—whether it is distortions, vocals or keyboards (*sic*)."

Although the production of 'liveness' is often inflected by technological limits, it is also a subjective or discursive process. That is, laptop DJs frequently 'play live' by simply triggering (and not even mixing) mp3 files of songs they have composed previously and audiences appear satisfied and respond to this. Yet this would appear to be empirically less 'live', for instance, than a laptop performance that involved triggering sounds and looping and modulating them, in combination, say, with a saxophonist and a percussionist.[7] The technological sophistication of the electronic musician is not disregarded altogether but is considered to be an inseparable element of the whole musical experience in real time.

'Real time', thus, is not an abstract idea but the performing time of all participants experienced through music. This time is not the outwardly imposed time of the clock, but by the time of the musical facts and the inner flow of the music itself.[8] Musical time is rather an intersubjective experience that cannot be cut down and measured, it is an organic process in motion that cannot be divided in past, present, and future. It is the shared time of "growing old together" (Schutz 1964). Music that comes from a piece of wood as well as music that comes from

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[6] Synch in an international electronic music, moving image and new media festival, which takes place in Athens every summer.

[7] Thornton has reflected on the process through which "technologies are *naturalized* by enculturation. At first, new technologies seem foreign, artificial, inauthentic. Once absorbed into culture, they seem indigenous and organic" (1995: 29). In the context of her analysis, contemporary dance cultures are authenticated by the 'vibe', the 'atmosphere' which results from the interaction between DJ and crowd in space: "It is as orchestrators of this 'living' communal experience that DJs are most important to music culture" (*ibid.*: 65). In her book on British Indie music, Fonarow too, discusses the role of the DJ as a mixer who uses sonic fragments to produce a new musical creation. She defines the DJ set as "an elaborate interplay between the artists, the mix, and the energetic response of club attendees" (2006: 69).

[8] DeNora shows how the introduction of music changed the way she experienced a five-second interval in her work: "It redefined that temporal situation, translated it from 'long-time' into 'short-time'. The music did not simply fill in the time of waiting; it reconstructed the ongoing aim of [her] action such that the very thing [she] had been waiting so eagerly […] was redefined in the real-time situation, as something that was interrupting the pleasure of the music" (2000: 8).

a high tech laptop becomes live (or comes alive) when it is shared, when it is created and offered from someone to someone else.

Participants in electronic music performances are not only together in time but are conscious of being together, of constituting a community. This sense of togetherness, of sharing, affects and even defines music itself. Music does not have an *a priori* form or meaning. Growing old together means changing together. For musicians as well as for members of the audience this means that music is not fixed but created live, during shared time. That is why every performance is different. It is different because participants "create a vibration that gives [their] life at that moment a very special beat" (Panagiotis)*.*

2.2. Are you really here?

Reality and physical presence in space during electronic music performances are concepts closely related to technology, and that refer to musical instruments, sounds, and humans. As far as musical instruments are concerned, physical presence brings to mind what we usually call 'natural' instruments. But are electronic instruments and the sounds they 'contain' present? From the outset of my research I did not seek to understand musical instruments from their essence, but from the way people who actually use them put them into use and find their meanings (Pinch and Bijsterveld 2004). Thus, I avoided adopting a position over whether laptops and synthesizers are solely machines or musical instruments, trying, instead, to understand what people themselves make of them, the meanings they attribute to them. What I observed in most performances I attended was that the combination of what we traditionally call 'natural' and electronic instruments is a very common practice. Their close interconnectedness comes as no surprise to members of the audience like Katerina, who has "never thought about it. All that interests [her] is the music [she] hears. [She] does not care where it comes from. [She] does not mind if the musician plays a laptop, a guitar, or the drums" and is also perceived as completely normal by the musicians. 'Natural instruments' is a category that for Giannis includes guitar, piano, drums, but also "old time" synthesizers. The terms 'acoustic', 'analogue', and 'natural' instruments are used alternatively to denote any technology that is not current. Mikro, a popular electronic music band in Greece, consists in four members. Nikos does programming loops, synths, and vocals, Ria vocals and synths, Giannis guitars and Stelios synths, loops, and DJ's scratch. They argue that "anything that produces sound, either in a natural way or through computer and effects (*sic*) is part of music. We do not exclude either one. We believe that they

complement each other to give the big picture, and what matters the most is the result and its effect on the listener" (Mikro 2008).

The physical presence of instruments during the performance does not seem to be connected with their form or with their place in the ladder of technological evolution (from simple wood and strings to complex electronic devices). Sound may come from 'natural' instruments, laptops, voices or other sources, but what matters to participants is that everything together (humans and machines) forms a cohesive, musical whole.

The use of technology in these performances may also raise an issue of imitation and reproduction.[9] If musicians use pre-recorded (studio) material during performances, is this performance considered live or not? What may production and reproduction or authenticity and imitation mean in cases where musicians create loops by recording natural instruments or room sounds in real time and then introduce them in their performance? Performance is usually identified with (un) predictability and something that is not a carbon copy of itself (Blau 2002), even if parts of it may be considered to be mechanically reproduced. A network of complex interrelations between performers, members of the audience and the world at large make every performance different:

> Journalist: In your music that is full of electronic sounds, are there any possibilities for improvisation?
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> Mikro: You may hear repeating loops but we also have free plays of synths, use of filters and FX, vocal improvisations and different performances of the guitar. Usually in lives we deviate from the normal flow of the pieces and we do new longer performances
>
> Journalist: Do you prefer live or studio?
>
> Mikro: We love both forms. On the one hand, studio is the process of creation, of birth of ideas, of inspiration, of composition. On the other hand, lives transmit all this energy in a live audience and then you feel that you are not the only one who has such feelings, then you become a society and a voice. This is the joy of the artist. We live very intensively on the stage, for us it is a place of communication and expression (Mikro 2008).

Thus, participants in electronic music performances give emphasis not on whether a material is pre-recorded or not (that is, on the existence of some fixed, metaphysical, ontological category of music called 'pre-recorded'), but on the degree to which musicians communicate with their

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[9] According to Attali (1985), the goal of music in the era of 'Repeating', the era of recorded and broadcasted sound is not memory, but fidelity. Musical works are compared to other versions of themselves and musicians aim at faithfully re-producing the 'original' recording. Public performance becomes a simulacrum of the record since an audience familiar with the artist's recordings attends to hear a live replication.

audience and take them into account in creating music.

Unpredictability and improvisation, usually identified with creativity and originality, are concepts that to my interlocutors are not identical to live performances. Creativity and originality may be identified with what Frith calls "dead studio activity" (2004: 111), an activity that includes synthesizers, drum machines, tape recorders and anything that may be regarded as 'unnatural instruments', which is anything but 'dead':

> Me: What is the difference between a live (*sic*) and studio (*sic*)?
>
> Panagiotis: studio (*sic*) is a different process. You do not perform (*sic*) for someone else, you are alone with the technician and the musicians and you are joined with the frequency spectrum. You feel the music that vibrates, that you create...

Thus, what we have is an ambiguity between live (created in 'real time') and fixed (studio created), because what is live is the musical experience as a whole, the communication between participants during performances which are always mediated by instruments that, whether called natural or unnatural, are always present. The presence of digital technology does not negate but rather intensifies humans' (physical) presence, although today it might be something different than it was 50 years ago. Digital technologies transform our sense of the human, of reality and subjectivity. Mechanization, the extended use of technologies is considered by many to drain music from subjectivity, or to abstract the individual from the performance (Frederickson 1989). Performance, however, is neither something given nor is it static; it is an activity, a dynamic process in which humans and technology do not threaten to eliminate or replace each other, but cooperate; they both constitute each other, and participate in the creation of the meaning of music. In this process performers and musical instruments become dynamic systems (assemblages):

> Computers are machines that are alive. I cannot imagine myself without them. It is a very intimate relationship, a magical relationship through which I create art, make music and communicate... During performances, I have to concentrate so hard that my mind becomes a real computer (*sic*), an electronic mind... (Panagiotis)

Stavros, now in his early thirties, is a professional DJ, who plays his music in Greece and other European cities (Berlin, Barcelona). He is not very expressive on stage. He prefers to be concentrated on his work because he "wants to mix fast":

> Me: With your machines do you have the same sense that you have when you play your guitar? I mean bodily sense.
> Stavros: I play for almost ten years now. When I am behind my machines, when I touch them, I

feel them to be part of myself.

The embodied presence of humans as well as the presence of musical instruments during electronic music performances is also closely related to the concept of materiality. Are instruments and humans that are stored as data in a laptop, present? Apart from the fact that computer sound files are enduring physical (thus, material) forms (Auner 2003), sound (waves) may also collapse 'physical' distance and create an experience of co-presence (Wallach 2003:36) even for participants (humans and sounds) who are present as digital information. From this point of view, materiality should not be identified with visual presence (as is often the case within Western discourse, which gives priority to the eye in general), but should also include sonic presence,[10] that is, the material presence that sound possesses too.

3. Bodies and machines: towards a posthuman materialist-realist approach

One—if not the most significant—element of any performance is the embodied presence of both performers and audience. Butler's analysis of performative utterances (1990, 1993), however, has shed light on the ways symbolic systems construct and constitute the body in this manner whilst hypermediation (incorporation of multimedia technologies—audio, video systems, synthesizers and laptops—in live performances) has led to a break-up and rearrangement of what we traditionally call 'performative presence'. Nowadays, we have to rethink what embodiment means, when embodiment as human presence is so much mediated by technology that it is no longer possible to distinguish between them.

In my attempt to explore the relationship between body, technology and human presence during electronic music performances, I place the analysis of my ethnographic material within the frame of the theoretical perspectives of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) and Latour (2000), who mostly contributed to what is today called the posthumanist turn in social thought (Georgopoulou 2010). These theoretical perspectives allow me to a) rethink the dualism between the ontological and the epistemological levels in anthropology, that is, the relationship between theory and empirical data (knowing and being), or local and academic understandings of culture,[11] and to b) discuss what live means in the context of electronic music performances.

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[10] Wallach proposes "sonic materialism", as an alternative approach to conventional and highly mentalist conceptions of music as a language-like, free-floating symbol system. For him, "[m]usic recordings are cultural objects whose meaningful effects come about primarily through their ability to produce material sonic presences" (2003:37).

[11] Viveiros de Castro (2010) explores the relations between anthropology and Deleuzian philosophy, and argues that making no distinction between epistemology and ontology leads to an understanding of knowing not as a means of

Departing from the thought that the world is not what we, as anthropologists, think about, but what we think with (mainly due to participant observation) (Ingold 2008:83), practices of knowing and being cannot be clearly distinguished but are rather mutually implicated. Separating epistemology from ontology strengthens a metaphysics that "assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse" (Barad 2003: 829), whilst a posthuman anthropological perspective suggests that we obtain knowledge not by standing outside of the world but rather by being *of* the world. For both modern and postmodern approaches, the performing arts are considered to be 'life arts' on the basis of the animate nature of their medium; in other words, a live audience needs live actors (in contrast to non-live paint). My interlocutors' experiences, however, seem to promote a materialist-realist perspective, that is, an understanding of the world as a continuum between nature and culture that transcends dualisms between animate and non-animate, live and non-live, that is, between biological organisms/bodies and technology.

Both modern and postmodern, phenomenological/hermeneutic approaches to the human body[12] dematerialize the body and ignore the material aspect of both nature and culture—since they are both perceived to be culturally constructed. Being silent and docile, it is as if matter, either as the substratum of culture or the existential circumstance, does not exist at all. More specifically, as far as the modern essentialist division between human and nonhuman is concerned, the material dimension exists only to verify and strengthen the superiority of the human. In the postmodern program too, the deconstruction of dualisms in favor of the symbolic-linguistic dimension also confirmed the superiority of the human element and strengthened a new form of social/cultural and linguistic idealism. This significant development—the deconstruction of dualisms—was trapped in a discourse without external (to the human language universe) references, and with little appreciation for the empirical aspect of both everyday life and scientific knowledge. Scientific views became 'narrations' and scientific knowledge a sciomachy with extreme relativism. Thus, although the postmodern/poststructural turn brought to the surface a dynamic conception of 'reality' as a constant construction, it has led to the cancelation of science itself (Latour 2000: 110-112).

As a reaction against the hegemony of the constructivistic 'turn to language', which

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representing the (un)known, but as a means of interacting with it, of creating rather than as a means of reflecting or communicating.
[12] Csordas 1999, 2008; Rabinow 1996a, 1996b.

restricted the complexity of the world into a world of symbols, Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) proposed a neomaterialist approach (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010). Within this context, the idea that the natural-material world is not a silent, mechanical automaton, but is acknowledged as ontologically open and complex, capable of self-organization and thus of active participation in the construction of the world, constitutes the crucial point of differentiation from the postmodern view. As far as the relationship between human bodies and machines is concerned, Deleuze and Guattari think of the body as creating 'assemblages', as 'becoming'—rather than being—recognizing desire, the autopoietic nature of body, as a mode of existence in the world (1987: 4-11). As technology changes, our bodies change, and they in turn change technology. Human bodies are no longer the Other to the machines that increasingly determine our self-understandings. From this point of view, any attempt to sustain the illusion of an essential body (the material presence of something essential) that exists prior to its insertion into social categories is a losing battle (Shaw 2008: 95).

Latour (1991, 2000) too, influenced by Deleuze, argues against the absorption of the natural-technical world by the social/cultural and its reduction to a hermeneutic/language construction. According to his actor network theory (ANT), as long as we persist in viewing the world as separated into subjects and objects that are already opposed, we can never associate with one another. 'Nature', 'culture' and 'technology' are categories created by the modern man, that is, they are themselves historical. In our days, however, we should rather talk about "technonature", "technoculture" and "technobodies", questioning the traditional distinctions between 'self' and 'other', 'natural' and 'unnatural', information and materiality. Latour's approach is materialist through a redefinition of the notion of materialism: instead of an essentialist understanding of reality that consists of two levels, where the material processes constitute the basis of social life, he proposes a world that is built on the basis of mutual network interrelations between human and nonhuman constituents that do not have ontological status. The only real-material basis of the world is the interrelations amongst heterogeneous materials, human and nonhuman and their productive-creative character. What exists is a continuum between nature and culture, and the only essence of the world is hybrids, complexities, or in other words, the creative relationality of networks.

Back to Athens: some concluding remarks

Research, analysis of the ethnographic material and writing of a text are never three

clearly distinct processes. When I conducted fieldwork I did not have any ready-made theory that I tried to impose on my interlocutors' experiences. On the contrary: having no previous relation to the world of electronic music, my aim from the beginning was to understand other people's experiences and the ways they make sense of them. I approached fieldwork as an attempt to partially share and become part of these intersubjective experiences, bringing to light the dialogic nature of the whole process in the account of the difficulties I experienced in determining precisely where the 'field' is, as well as in the analysis of participants' rhetoric and practice. I saw performances not as 'objects' or 'things', or as representations of an identity, but as dynamic processes, during which participants, rather than merely enacting cultural scripts, were actively constituting their musical worlds. The Deleuzian/Latourian theoretical perspectives described above are not posed as a closed interpretive scheme that was already in play. My ambition was not to apply a cooked theoretical model on some raw ethnographic material but to approach both research and theory as processes, relations and happenings. Selected concepts, styles or intensities (to use Deleuze's favorite term) do not stand alone but emerge with an emotional, physical and environmental background. Reading theory and my notes from the field was not a purely intellectual exercise. It was a complex process that undermined "[my] sense of self and [my] capacity to act as a pure subject—that is, one that is fully conscious of its intentions and driven by them alone" (Williams 2003:45).

Fieldwork, participation in electronic music performances and discussions with musicians/performers and audience members gave me the opportunity to come in close contact with the rhetoric and practice of people engaged in such activities. In my effort to understand what liveness means for them, I take their behavior and the extracts from our discussions not as discursive constructs, which reflect my interlocutors' ideologies of 'liveness', but as direct 'windows on their world'. These accounts and that to which they refer thus become a means of interacting with them, of creating rather than reflecting. They are part of the network created, they do not just point to it. Live performance is not the (technologically) *un*-mediated performance of music but the experience of unity between the different (but not distinct) groups of participants (performers and members of the audience) through music in real time, that is, the time they share, the inner time that is constituted through the intersubjective time of performance, during which they and the music are changing and becoming. Liveness means communicating, balancing, sharing, offering and accepting a successful union through a common vibration. Reality and the physical presence of sound, humans, and machines (instruments) are

defined within the context of music as lived experience, with the term 'live' referring to the movement, the constant flow. Live performance is life; it is movement, endless creation and constant change. Giannis, Stavros, Katerina, and Panagiotis do not understand live performances through dipoles of culture-nature, biology-technology, human-machine, but through their relations and the forms performances assume through these relations. This leads to a non-anthropomorphic capture of liveness, where there is no actual difference between humans and non-humans; participants create assemblages, dynamic systems consisting of human bodies, laptops, and synthesizers; they become technobodies living in a continuum between nature and culture (technonature, technoculture). The lived experience of music is co-created by human bodies and machines: particular musical technology leads to specific creative processes that are inextricably bound to Giannis' and Panagiotis' musical creativity—they constitute assemblages, networks, where one is unthinkable without the other.

As part of networks, technology is an active participant in electronic music performances and not a means of reproduction. The production-reproduction dualism—imposed by the widely accepted view that technology does not produce but rather reproduce music—refers to a presentation-representation dualism, that is, "to the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing" (Barad 2003:804). Laptops and synthesizers, however, are not things, but open-ended practices that are perpetually open to rearrangements and reworkings. This is part of the creativity and difficulty of creating music: getting the instruments to work in a particular way for a particular purpose, which is always open to the possibility of being changed during the performance as different insights are gained. Furthermore, any particular instrument is always in the process of interacting with other instruments and this process results in the production of a new instrument, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Liveness, an unmediated situation that can put us in the presence of other breathing human beings, is traditionally considered to be the uniqueness of performance. Electronic technology used in musical performances thus puts the issue of performers', sounds', or instruments' materiality on a new basis and thus live performances are no longer considered to be specifically human activities. The subjectivity, vitality, flesh and blood that live performances traditionally imply, within the cultural context of electronic music performances refer to complex entities with no clear boundaries between organic and inorganic bodies. Like human bodies,

instruments are also considered to be alive and to contribute to the creation of a cohesive musical whole: a performance. Biological presence and corporeality do not come from natural entities anymore. Materiality is not perceived by my interlocutors to be an inherent fixed property of abstract, independently existing objects, but the materialization of the performance itself as the development of complex relationships amongst all of them. The embodied, organic presence of participants is never un-mediated, and the performance is not a raw experience of some external reality. Human bodies and machines are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties but complex becomings compound of both.

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