ElectroDance as a "being-together"

New forms of mediatization in the communication of youth styles

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“Youth instinctively understands the present environment - the electric drama. It lives it mythically and in depth”

Marshall McLuhan

“Modern communications have drastically altered the terms of the experience and consciousness, the ordinary structures of interest and feeling, the normal sense of being alive, of having a social relation”

James Carey

"In hunting culture, kids play with bows and arrows. In an information society, they play with information"

Henry Jenkins

:: Preface ::

"[...] the world of teenagers has changed a great deal from the one I lived in, but the core of experience remains much the same. I wanted my teams to win, I listened to music, drank and flirted with soft drugs. Replace football with skateboarding and everything is the same. The intensity of feelings and personal discoveries are still there. The differences have more to do with technology..."

Nick Hornby[1] (2009)

The above excerpt is taken from an interview published in June 2009 by the Spanish newspaper *El País* with the well-known youth novelist Nick Hornby. Asked about what makes today's youth social experience different to that of past decades, Hornby pointed to technology as being key to making a difference. When Hornby refers to "technology", he means network digital communication technologies (hereinafter "new media"), or what we all know and vaguely refer to as "the Internet". Later on in the interview, for example, Hornby comments on

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[1] Hornby, N. (2009, June). Entrevista: Nick Hornby. *El País*. Retrieved from http://elpais.com/diario/2009/06/13/cultura/1244844001_850215.html

the way notions of privacy in the realm of parent-child relationships have been altered as a result of the arrival of new media. Indeed, Hornby's thoughts echo what a multitude of culture commentators, journalists, researchers and scholars alike have been saying in recent years about the impact of new media on our lives and the manifold domains in which we conduct our day-to-day activities.

In this dissertation I will explore certain shifts that have taken place with the arrival of new media. It will focus on young people, and a particular group within this broad social segment, that is, a group of individuals whose social experience and sense of identity is filtered by their involvement in youth cultural styles, subcultures and cultures. This research project will explore one cultural manifestation in particular, a dance style known as ElectroDance. As we shall see later on, when it appeared in 2007 the ElectroDance youth style depended a great deal upon the appropriation and usage of new media, at a time when communication technologies were undergoing significant changes both in terms of ubiquity, variety and built-in practical and symbolic affordances. As many of my informants would note throughout my research, the style owed its very existence to the latest forms of new media. It was this new media which led to the creation, development and dissemination of this style, becoming in very short span of time a worldwide style followed by hundreds of young people around the world.

When I first discovered this style in late 2008 I began to think that perhaps it was the new media and its particular characteristics that were "enabling" certain changes in the communication of the youth style that were not available in previous youth phenomena appearing in a communication environment dominated by well-known forms of broadcast media. I felt that these shifts merited further attention as part of a research project. At the centre of my research was an inquiry into the particular role of these media forms in the configuration of the youth style at a time when, as has been suggested, new media penetrated nearly every sphere of human activity. In other words, and what will be discussed in the sections that follow, is the way in and the extent to which technological change, embodied in a series of novel technical communication

interfaces, exerts an influence over the process of cultural production of new youth styles such as ElectroDance, which in this instance shall be observed from the theoretical standpoint of communication.

The theoretical stance of communication I adopt here is not, strictly speaking, new; it has been present, in some form or another, in earlier approaches to the phenomena of youth styles, cultures and subcultures in past decades, occupying a more or less central role in their study. Falling within the realm of communication, within the field of Cultural Studies, there are a few seminal works that are relevant: Stuart Hall's classic *Encoding/Decoding* (1972), sought to thoughtfully formulate notions of communication, problematizing more linear, culturally-emptied models such as Weaver's theory of communication. Within the sub-field of Youth Cultural Studies, communication also underlies Hebdige's attempt in *Subculture* (2004[1979]) to look at youth subcultures from the analytical perspective of semiotics, in which concealed subcultural meanings contained in a particular style are waiting to be deciphered for the observer, seeing them as a point of departure of a discussion about the social background of the individuals taking part. Another direction, but also significant is Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (2002[1972]) which is an inquiry into the relationship between youth cultures and mass-media representations of youth phenomena through the mediating notion of moral panic. Other relevant works could easily be added to this list, but all of them arguably share a common denominator: they all belong to an age in which the field and notion of communication was linked to certain set of disciplinary approaches (e.g. Hebdige's semiotics), understandings of communication supported by specific socio-technical systems (e.g. the "transmission" view of communication embodied by broadcast media) and certain social concerns regarding youth and media (i.e. media as an emerging social institution that channels the public conversation). If we take into account that all these works were written in a, so-to-speak, pre-internet time, it might be argued that their age and their attached assumptions are no longer "ours".

More recently, focusing on the sub-field of Youth Cultural Studies, Sarah Thornton's *Club Cultures* (1995) implicitly pointed to the shortcomings of a communication point of view in prior studies of youth phenomena. What is interesting about Thornton's approach is, first and foremost, that it attempts to expand upon the notion of media by identifying a comprehensive, all-encompassing typology of media which allows for the emergence of varied forms of technical and non-technical mediations that help to forge social relations within the cultural worlds of young people. Beyond this, the importance of Thornton's contribution rests on the appropriateness of adopting a theoretical and empirical standpoint based on communication when interpreting how identity in youth styles, cultures and subcultures, is constructed, symbolically demarcated and transmitted via different, complex technical and non-technical means, materials and associated social practices. Significantly, in her afterword, Thornton foresees future shifts brought about by new media in the communication of youth phenomena. In recent years, researchers such as Hodkinson have followed Thornton's lead with youth group-oriented ethnographic work. In his study of Goth subculture, this author (2002) draws on Thornton's insights, thereby including as part of his interests the dimensions of commerce and media, which, according to Hodkinson, had not been sufficiently explored in previous studies. For this author, and for Thornton earlier, youth phenomena cannot be adequately understood if we ignore aspects associated to commerce and media, as these aspects contribute in diverse ways to the constitution of such phenomena and should not be interpreted as being mere symptoms of resistance to a hegemonic/mainstream culture. In Thornton and Hodkinson's view, the role of media role is no longer seen as external to the configuration of Club and Goth subcultures, respectively, but rather intrinsic to them. Yet Hodkinson updates Thornton's work, giving an account of the role of new media in Goth subculture at the turn of the century, showing how network digital communication technologies expand the sphere of communication within subculture, exerting a function in the group's activities, relationships and style practices. However, Hodkinson is more concerned with issues of identity in

youth subcultures and does not delve into specific aspects of communication, particularly those that are media-related. For Hodkinson, the Goth style serves as a suitable example that could shed some light on the notion of subculture, his interest mainly lies in taking a stance in the long-lasting, often entangled "subculture vs. post-subculture" debate.[2] By theoretically dismissing a standpoint founded on communication, and striving to make a case for Goth as the latest full-fledged, 'substantial' youth subculture, Hodkinson fails to pay greater attention to the specific ways in which emerging new media shape the different dimensions of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the fact that his research ended in 2001 would mean any impact of the latest new media such as YouTube or Facebook on youth subcultural practices could not have informed his research.

In my own approach to ElectroDance, as in Hodkinson's case, issues regarding the style's identity will be discussed. Since identity continues to be a central aspect of youth cultures and styles, the sections that follow will cover this and other important issues behind the style. In particular, the primary objective motivating my research is to shed light onto the way a youth style like ElectroDance is created, developed and spread through diverse practices and how the specific practices which are assisted by new media acquire a central significance in the whole process of the formation of the style. Practices that employ new media become therefore fundamental to the style, but they are not alone. These practices channel and give a concrete expression to situated verbal, aural and kinetic forms of meaning-making and are intertwined with them, constituting the group's sphere of communication. Indeed, the first part of the title chosen for this dissertation reflects this idea, as it is "by" and "in" communication that young people taking part in ElectroDance develop a form and sense of being together. As the title also suggests, this form of "being-together"

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[2] See, for example, Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Hollands & Greener, 2006; Bennett, 1999, 2011; Griffin, 2010.

involves new forms of "mediatization" (Hjarvard, 2008) within the communication of a youth style like ElectroDance. This refers to the way novel media forms are embedded into the sphere of social practices of young dancers, and when compared to the media regime of only some decades ago, we cannot help but observe the difference in the ways youth cultures and styles have traditionally been shaped both collectively as well as experienced individually; these changes (still ongoing and ever-evolving) being worth exploring.

However, and in line with what has been discussed earlier, the ever-growing presence of novel forms of media acting as interfaces of social interaction and communication between individuals and involved in the establishment, development and maintenance over time of such relations today, not only in the case of ElectroDance but in society at large, requires the incorporation of new conceptual tools and concepts in our analytical endeavors. An expanded theoretical apparatus is now needed that is in keeping with the numerous and varied communicative options that are now available to us; options made possible by new media's enhanced interactive and symbolic affordances. In times of constant technological innovation, this last assumption is not without important consequences. Forms of "being together" are undergoing significant changes under the pressures of technological change, and as I shall attempt to show in my study of the ElectroDance style, the domain of youth cultures and styles, one in which individuals retain a sense of belonging to a group or a community formed around common interests, projects and values, offers a fertile ground for the exploration and documenting of many of these changes. Changes which could not be adequately accounted for if we employ a communication-based view anchored in notions of "message", "text" or "audience" as well as in conceptual understandings of interaction that rely upon formerly dominant broadcast socio-

technical systems such as radio or television.[3] Accordingly, the work presented in the sections that follow is thus intended to both strengthen and update the connection between the tradition of Youth Cultural Studies, Media studies and Communication Theories, while incorporating new ideas; one of which, as stated earlier, is not strictly new.[4]

This is why the first of the four parts that make up this dissertation starts off with a discussion about the very notion of communication. Thus, chapter one begins by laying down the theoretical foundation that inspired the empirical part of the study. This section begins with a discussion of the etymology of communication as a term and its polysemy, selecting and clarifying the meanings that will be used in the rest of the work. Next, the chapter will explore notions of communication that will be used in the study along with other central concepts such as "mediatization", "ideals of communication" and "interface", concepts which are crucial to the subsequent interpretative task. Chapter two assesses the appropriateness of characterizing today's youth – and the young people that participate in the ElectroDance style – as members of the "Net Generation" or being "born digital". This chapter will provide an overview of today's youth and the members of ElectroDance in particular, from a quantitative perspective, comparing both groups in terms of new media consumption. This preliminary step sets the ground for the bulk of empirical work in the chapters that follow. The

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[3] These terms can be said to fall within the "transmission" model of communication (following Carey's views on communication (1989)) as opposed to "ritual" ones. I delve into both views in Chapter one.

[4] Chapter one establishes the sources that make up the theoretical basis of the dissertation. To summarize, my own approach to Communication relies on, first and foremost, Carey's general notion of communication (1989) as a "ritual" - i.e. "culture" - as used in the tradition of Cultural Studies, supplemented by contributions to communication and Media Studies made by Meyrowitz (1985) and his Medium Theory, and more recently Hjarvard's Theory of Mediatization (2008), Scolari's notion of "interface" (2010) and Holmes' (2004) and Peter's (2001) "communication architectures/ideals".

first two theory-related chapters, along with a third chapter that includes a description of the methodological aspects of the research work, comprise the first part of the dissertation. Whereas Part One can be seen as an entry point into ElectroDance as a representative part of the youth generation as a whole, the rest of the dissertation is an ethnographic study divided into three parts.

In Part Two, I will look at ElectroDance and how it has evolved over time. I will explore the founding of the style and its main features, charting its development over time and space in three different chapters. Chapter Three introduces the object of my research through the use of a particular narrative strategy: ElectroDance as seen from the subjective perspective of one of its members, who narrates his own experiential pathway into the style. The goal in this case is to offer the dancer's view as "insider" from the beginning of his/her engagement with ElectroDance to the end; a description meant to reveal dimensions of the subjective experience as well as the relationship between the dance style and the young dancer's contact with media. This will be the object of a more detailed, analytical discussion in subsequent chapters.

Part Two then moves from this preliminary phenomenological stance, adopting an "outsider's" view of the style. Here, the history of the style is recounted as a narrative, viewed from a two-pronged perspective in Chapters Five and Six, with each chapter corresponding to a different phase of the style's evolution. Each of these two phases represent conceptually-opposed, underlying socio-technical architectures (i.e. what I described previously as "ideals") of communication over which specific forms of integration around the central concept of "scene" are developed.[5] Chapter Five describes the configuration of the scene - i.e. the specific arrangement of social relations that arise between the different human, material, technical and institutional components involving a certain symbolic circuit representing what I would characterize as a broadcast

[5] The concept of "scene", coined by Straw (1990, 2004), appears throughout this part of the dissertation.

model of communication.[6] Chapter Six examines the youth style in a different light, with its components arranged in a different manner, fitting what can be regarded as a network model of communication. At this point in the chapter, the analytical portion of this work becomes apparent when new media is examined, allowing for a clearer understanding of its communicative architecture. In addition, given that one of most notable effects of media is to refashion modes of interaction across time and space, I am also interested in observing the way in which social relations are established, developed and maintained "at-a-distance" at both the national and transnational levels and the way this is configured by new media. An account of the local/global dialectics in the context of this youth movement will be implicitly included here, showing the particular elements which condition the configuration of social relations. Finally, since communication is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon both chapters will offer additional considerations falling within the domain of political economy and meaning-making modalities (e.g. verbal, kinetic, aural, etc.), without which the logic and the history of the style would undoubtedly be difficult to grasp by the reader.

The analysis of the ElectroDance scene continues into Part Three, this time making use of another perspective that takes into account the object of study at the "micro" level. Here, I will look at communication in ElectroDance at the local level. The reason for devoting an entire chapter to the subject of local communication is quite straightforward: the various forms of media offer technically-extended interaction; but why do electro-dancers, who gather together in public meeting places on a continuous basis, continue using these forms of media? In Chapters Seven and Eight I attempt to answer this paradox, while offering an account of the fundamental aspects of the group dynamics in

[6] As I will explain in greater detail in Chapter One, it is certainly possible to speak in terms of a "broadcast model of communication", whether it is realized by technical (e.g. mass-media communication) or non-technical means (e.g. a person giving a speech to a small group).

local ElectroDance scenes, many of them supported by new media. In particular, Chapter Seven looks at how a new media interface like YouTube becomes an indispensable part of the communicative logic of the style in relation to in-group hierarchization, personal reputation and visibility as well as to the development of key group roles such as that of leader. Chapter Eight follows on from this by analyzing the central ritual of ElectroDance, that is, an event known as *El Muerte Electro*. Here I argue that this particular ritual is an eloquent example of the ongoing shift towards the mediatization of common culture, where social practices and everyday situations become refashioned around the use of new media in ways that are starkly different from what past practices.[7]

Part Four is devoted to the issue of identity in ElectroDance. Accordingly Chapter Nine presents a discussion of the various aspects of ElectroDance that make it a singular style within the wide symbolic realm of contemporary youth cultural forms. Due to the number of heterogeneous elements involved in the definition of cultural identity among youth, I consider ElectroDance identity from different angles. Firstly, identity emerges when certain *homological* meanings are attributed to the aesthetics of the style, subtly and indirectly connected to socially-connoted notions of gender or class. Secondly, it results from a process of commodification initially set into motion by specific cultural intermediaries (ranging from large cultural industries to small, niche-oriented entrepreneurs who forge temporary collaborative alliances with notable figures of the style); the style - and the youth who adopt it - is fashioned in specific ways. Thirdly, identity appears to be subject to the representations and images constructed by general media corporations (i.e. television and radio coverage). Chapter Ten moves on from the task of defining the symbolic contours delineated by different social actors to an account of the ways in which electro-dancers shape their identity

[7] Here I am referring to the fact that other previous youth styles based on dance like Hip-Hop have been practiced at times when new media did not exist.

amidst new media digital interfaces. Here, as in the discussion on YouTube in Chapter Eight, I examine the role of blogs in the crucial identity-building process of both electrodance teams and individuals. In light of the expressive potential contained in new media forms, I discuss the different implications derived from media-centred practices of self-presentation by specific individuals and their link to notions of celebrity-like identity, reflecting on how new media permits the creation of micro-celebrities whose field of recognition transcends the traditionally more immediate, locally-bounded realm. Finally, Chapter Eleven closes the dissertation with the main conclusions drawn from the research.

PART I

Communication, media technologies and youth cultures

:: 1 :: Stepping into the realm of communication

On the newness of new media

The introduction to this dissertation began with a quote from novelist Nick Hornby. As a long-standing writer interested in youth and their world, Hornby regards the social experience of young people as not having really undergone any conspicuous shift over the past decades. He only views a change in media technologies. In this same interview, Hornby comments on how current technological change has led to shifts in parent-child relationships. Whereas youth enjoy a heightened sense of freedom due to sustained connectivity with peers, friends and acquaintances through new media, they also view their parents' surveillance as an unexpected burden. Despite acknowledging the changes in their relationships brought on by technology, youth social experience for Hornby remains unaltered at its core; parents and children today experience similar intergenerational conflicts just like their forebears did in the past. The structure of this relationship, for this author, has remained unchanged.

Indeed, for not only young people but for every one of us new media have become, in a very short time, increasingly central to our everyday lives – something which could not have been foreseen a decade ago. From the very moment that we wake up until the moment we go to bed at the end of the day,

we are in constant contact with a myriad of communication technologies in the most varied social contexts and situations. Throughout the day, there is a high probability that most of us will be sending and receiving email messages, making calls from our mobile phones, browsing a digital newspaper, commenting on a given news item, hearing about an event organized by a friend through a social networking site like Facebook or maybe watching a YouTube video by a favourite pop band and sending a link to it to our significant other. And in all probability all of this is done while standing at a bus stop waiting for the bus; or at work, when we are really supposed to be doing something else; or at home, digitally overcoming the walls which separate us from the outside world – regardless of spatial location and conventional temporal frames that characterize these settings and everyday situations. As Holmes (2005:2) notes, behind all these habits and routines carried out with the help of communication technologies there is a certain degree of technical competence in the use of technological artefacts that we as users have internalized and developed largely unwittingly. The human-machine interface, and our connection to technological objects in general, play an important role in human contact, in some cases replacing it to a certain extent in peculiar ways. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the importance of human relationships has diminished within an increasingly mediatized, digital-dependent, experiential environment. After all, behind technical interfaces there still are people who form part of our lives in one way or another. As Hornby suggests, media technologies make a difference in our time because they allow us to "be together" in manifold fashions which were not, at least apparently, available in the past. As Holmes also reminds us, as members of informational societies, we not only *meet up* and use information and communication technologies; rather our modes of action are framed by these technologies in varied ways. We are left, however, with the question raised by Hornby as to whether social relationships and our way of life in contemporary societies are substantially altered in any significant way since the advent of new media forms. In other words, given that technologies are meant to exert an influence in human socio-cultural realms, we

should ask ourselves about the sheer newness of new communication technologies in this regard.

As stated earlier, the research I have conducted over for the last few years has looked into the newness of digital communication technologies, and in particular, the "being-together" that is created through the use of communication technologies by youth participating in the ElectroDance style. At this point, it is important to state that any analytical approach used to study the social from a media-sensitive perspective should circumvent various pitfalls intrinsic to the study of media. Before moving on, it will be useful at this point to briefly clarify what this means. Firstly, the recent communication technologies that we see as being "new" may not be so new after all. It would be difficult to argue with Crowley and Heyer who state that in many ways, media generally refashions human concerns, interaction patterns between people, within groups, nations and societies at different levels, while affecting how information is accessed and distributed. Yet these presumed shifts brought about by new media technology should not merely be accepted without further scrutiny. Otherwise, we would implicitly agree that the use of a certain type of media communication, leads to the configuration of a particular phenomenon that differs substantially from social formations of yesteryear. In order to avoid the temptation of automatically attributing this ability to media, it is worth considering the newness of what we perceive to be novel, in light of the development of media throughout history. In this sense, humans have always relied on some form of media to communicate. Ancient primitive cultures were sustained over thousands of years by simple face-to-face exchanges. But not too long after, speech could no longer adapt to the demands of a hostile environment. Increasingly complex forms of culture and social organization cannot be properly understood if they are dissociated from the means used for recording and transfer of meaningful information beyond the transience of oral encounters. Media in their varied manifestations provided humans with an "extrasomatic memory", a communication technology of sorts which supplemented the limitations of biology. Contemporary practices such as

blogging and the Neanderthals' use of tokens for counting, although significantly distanced in time and used for different social and cultural purposes, do not to seem so different at their core if we look at their basic function, that is, of fixing meaning outside one's brain in order to share it with others. After all, modern communication technologies are but the latest in a long chain of innovations including speech, signs, drama and all kinds of rituals.[8] But technological change does not necessarily parallel social or cultural change. In this sense, we should take heed of Silverstone's caveat (2005:27) suggesting that the interactive, network communication technologies embodied by internet media reproduce some of the communicational features present in prior media socio-technical systems; consequently, they may not be as novel as we might like to think. According to this media sociologist, there is no technologically-extended communicative situation capable of providing higher interactivity than a face-to-face encounter, which possesses not only a verbal but also a non-verbal dimension of symbolic exchange. In fact, globalization, a phenomenon which many attribute to the emergence of the Internet, is not the result of the World Wide Web but a long-standing shift that began some centuries ago and which saw dramatic expansion in the twentieth century thanks to the existence of broadcast-based socio-technical systems. Furthermore, instant, two-way, point-to-point disembodied communication came earlier with the arrival of telegraph. The goal should therefore be to empirically examine the extent to which distinct media forms make a difference in the transformation of the social and cultural context they become part of, and to do so without missing a historical perspective which allows us to relativize its presumed innovative character.

Secondly, a look from a media-centric perspective at the newness of new media and its impact on the social could easily lead us towards a sort of technological determinism. In 1974 cultural thinker Raymond Williams pointed to

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[8] See "Communication in History", 2011, Foreword, pp. 277.

the risk involved in attributing the advent of a new historical era to large technological developments. From this perspective, technological innovation is seen as a mainly unidirectional force capable of bringing about social change at a different scale. Williams then differentiated between what he understood as "technological determinism" from "technology-as-socially-configured". Whereas in the former progress and social change alike are seen as being connected to the conditions imposed by technological drives, in the latter perceived effects induced by technology are deemed as a consequence and not the origin of ongoing processes of social change that arise in other domains of society (i.e. where technology is viewed as a "symptom"). William's proposal for a history of technology in which technology is seen as a social construct is justified if we look at other prior interpretations of technologies such as, for example, the radio before it became the stable form of communication we know today. The radio appeared in the late nineteenth century as a point-to-point medium of communication, somewhat replicating the telegraph and the telephone technology that was to follow. Only after the First World War did it become the "broadcasting" device we know today, one, as Silverstone argues, "shaped for increasingly dispersing and suburbanized urban populations." [9] Recent authors from the field of Science, technology and society have suggested that social, political, economic and cultural factors associated to every society and every age seem to be behind technological development rather than the other way around.[10]

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[9] Ibid, p.25.

[10] Williams' view shares a common ground with that of authors such as Bijker and Pinch who, by taking on an constructivist approach, attempted to show the extent to which a given technology is not the consequence of some intrinsic properties that make it automatically accepted by certain social groups or by society at large, but rather appear as the result of the clash of different actors attempting to impose their own views of what such technology ultimately "is". Bijker's 1995 studies on the technologies of bicycle, bakelite and bulb constitutes a good example of this.

However, it is always true that the embeddedness of technology in social formations frequently leads to unforeseen effects, introducing a degree of indeterminacy in the human capacity to control its creations; much like McLuhan put it in his famous aphorism "we shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us." In the following pages, my approach to the role of new digital network media technologies in the cultural worlds of youth will take a similar stance in terms of how technological change is understood. Instead of adopting a media-centric view in which "new media" is the object of study, I will adopt just a media-sensitive one which puts the focus on "communication". Here, the concept of communication is understood as being a more general social process containing numerous elements in interaction (Trenzano, 2006: 241). It is here where the social practices that use media technologies are embedded. Nevertheless, the invocation and use of "communication" as a central concept under study is not clearly delimited by any means. Before moving on to a discussion of these preliminary ideas, I will devote some attention to delving into the polysemic nature of this notion as well as that of "mediatization", a term used by a number of media theorists. Both terms will serve as the *theoretical lens* through which I shall explore the ElectroDance youth style in the following chapters.

Understandings of communication

A good way to set out the theoretical basis and the associated conceptual terminology upon which my argumentation rests would be an inquiry into the meaning of communication. Looking back once again to my research question, i.e. the role of information and communication technologies in the communication that takes place within the youth world of ElectroDance, the words "information" and "communication" are used in two different instances; firstly, in reference to certain technologies related to information and communication, secondly, to talk about the embedding of such technologies into the wider phenomenon of

communication of a certain youth style. In other words, it would seem as though we have, on the one hand, technologies that are used for the exchange of certain information, and on the other hand, a more general term known as "communication". Are we talking about the same thing in both cases? What does "communication" mean? In what sense does it differ from the term "information"?

The sense of communication is by no means easy to understand. If one considers the views of various scholars and academics, we are faced with a lack of consensus on the very meaning of the term. Semantically broad, the everyday use of the term seems to add more confusion as it encompasses the manifold but not always convergent senses that depend on where and when it is used. Some cultural theorists such as Peters (1999: 11) locate the emergence of the very idea of "communication" at the center of contemporary concerns, with individuals defining themselves on the basis of their ability to relate to others in a meaningful way through symbols. In our times, communication appears to be linked to other domains such as politics, marketing or interpersonal relationships, just to name a few. They are all related in some way or degree to communication. Likewise, they all seem to be shaped by and defined through communication. In order to deal with these difficulties, Rodrigo (2009: 17) offers a view that differentiates "information" from "communication" which can serve as an appropriate starting point. For him, "information" points to messages and the content of messages, and "communication" refers to "the global process embedding such messages." According to this general distinction, communication would seem to relate to the realm of meaningful information so that without the exchange of information by individuals there is no communication at all (Castells, 2009: 87). These two senses are only recognizable when we look at the etymology of the term. According to Peters, the roots of "communication" point back to the Latin word *communicare* - sharing, making common, thereby involving an interaction or exchange between interactants (ibid: 7). It is possible to discern here the root of the word

"community", thus the existence of latter being conditioned to that of the former.[11] Another branch of meaning rooted in Latin can be also found in the term *communicatio*, meaning "to impart" and thereby having a non-dialogical sense, i.e. without response or mutual recognition. Both sources of meaning can be traced back to these senses.

Beyond these two senses of the term, Carey (2009: 12) draws a counterposed view on communication, which juxtaposes the idea of communication formed around the metaphor of "transmission" to another one based on the idea of "ritual". The former relates to the sense of "transfer", the conveying of messages, ideas or thoughts. It involves a one-way orientation, like the move of something from one place to the other as in the semantic fields of commerce and physical transport, when commodities or people are moved back and forth across space. The same sense of displacement is applied to the word "information" when it is attained by means of communication technologies. Indeed, for Carey, the "transmission" view of communication is one that dates back to the nineteenth century, an age when a conspicuous range of technological innovations in the fields of transport and interaction over space undergoes significant development. This is a view of communication that "derives from one of the most ancient human dreams: the desire to increase the speed and the effect of messages as they travel in space." Instead of seeing communication as "transmission" which relates to information and its movement by technical means – an idea which has dominated our thought and culture since modern times – Carey presents another sense of the term. Less technically and more socially committed, his notion of communication is connected to that of a "ritual", tying communication to the above-mentioned ancient sense of "community", "commonness" and "communion", all these terms sharing the same etymological origin. Communication embraces a broader meaning which goes beyond the

[11] See Dewey's comments to this regard in Carey, 2009, pp. 18.

effective exchange of information, incorporating all uses of information as part of a more general social process. Communication as "ritual" thus has less to do with the transmission of messages in space than the maintenance of society over time, thereby privileging the constitution of "an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container of human action (Ibid: 15)." However, even though Carey's dichotomy makes a clear distinction between both views on communication, one is still closely dependent upon the other. Carey's contention is that this relationship is one of subordination, that is, any account of the social from the perspective of communication should depart from and focus on the "ritual" view, while incorporating elements of "transmission".

Furthermore, Carey's notion of communication leads us to consider in turn the notion of culture as another commonly accepted sense of the former. Communication has been traditionally invoked by social scientists in relation to forms of symbolic interaction, an ability mainly possessed by humans. Greeks referred to this intellectual ability from the notion of the broad sense of *logos*, a term which in practice appears in speech, argument, discourse, reason, book and so forth. Here communication has to do with the notion of culture. As Geertz (2005: 2) once noted by paraphrasing Weber, "man is an animal embedded in a web of meaning of his/her own production." For humans to make sense of their world and their social lives a system of meanings is needed, one which has to be culturally produced, shared and negotiated by individuals. So human interaction at the group, interpersonal and societal levels must involve the existence of a stock of meaning around which social relations are forged, maintained and also dissolved. Cultural theorist Raymond Williams emphasized the close relationship between culture, meaning and communication when he stated that "our description of experience comes to compose a network of relationships, and all our communication systems, including the arts, are literally part of our social

organization."[12] This means that communication has a great deal to do with the social, with the ways in which individuals forge and make sense of such relations as well as how they come to understand the world surrounding them. Furthermore, Williams' assertion is of interest in that he acknowledges the different forms of meaning-making involved in what he calls "communication systems". Here, Williams points to forms of meaning-making which are not exhausted by the use of spoken or written words, but by any system of representation which, as DuGay (ibid: 13) argues, allows us to use signs or symbols to represent – i.e. or *re-present* - whatever exists in the world in the form of meaningful concepts, ideas, sounds or images. Williams, much in the same way as Carey, found a clear link between the notion of communication and that of community, with the meaning of the former relying on the latter.

One last sense of communication which is central to our discussion can also be found in the ideas put forth by Williams. In line with the earlier notion of diverse systems of communication, Williams used the word communication in its plural form. By using its plural form, Williams highlighted another level of the social related to communication, where "communications" were understood as those institutions and forms in which ideas, information, and attitudes are transmitted and received. Williams' conception here is an intriguing one. Firstly, by using "communications" Williams had in mind what is commonly known by both medium theorists and people in general as "media". If communications contain particular forms of communication, each of these communications are supposed to characterize the interactions between individuals in different fashions, and the way in which they do so are worthy of consideration. Secondly, if communications are understood as being institutions, a range of meaningfully typified behaviors are expected to emerge around media forms. As these two aspects are of clear

[12] Quoted by DuGay et alt., 1997, p.12.

relevance to our present discussion, I shall examine them in greater detail in the pages that follow.

All the above-mentioned senses of "communication" will be more or less explicitly present in my take on the ElectroDance youth style. Although our times are increasingly dominated by the social form of networked individualism (Wellman, 2003), this does not diminish the social significance of groups. While it is true that today, individuals tend to form a sense of self and connect to one another on the basis of shared interests and tastes, it is also true that the basic, not necessarily transient forms of association (i.e. groups) remain of importance to people and continue to be a concept that is indispensable in the understanding of the social. This has always been one of the more elemental functions of youth social formations and groupings, and it continues to be true in the case of ElectroDance. Around the ElectroDance style young people forge the sense of community and commonness described earlier, establishing relatively enduring social ties around the dance practice and the engagement to the particular dance style. Patterns of interaction embedded in electrodancer group rituals involve William's concept of communications, that is, forms of behavior which rely on particular forms of appropriation of technologically meaning-exchanging and meaning-making artifacts which are the object of our attention here. But for such patterns of interaction to be meaningful, the young people participating in the style must share the set of meanings on what the dance means as a dance style and as an arena for socialization. Unless one learns a series of stylized dance moves as well as attain some knowledge about where one should or should not dance, when and with whom, how to relate to others through the style or how to become respected and why, just to mention a few recognizable features of the dance as a practice, one will not be adequately immersed into the dance world. ElectroDance is thus communication because it is culture, and because it is culture young people use the dance style to make sense, in variable degrees of intensity and form, of their own world and their place in it.

My research on the ElectroDance youth style shall draw on this series of the elemental meanings associated to the notion of communication. However, in order to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of this semantic matter I need to explore another set of considerations in order to conceptually build a richer communicational perspective for the study of this social phenomenon.

Communication ideals across time and space

The prior subsection has served to explore the notion of communication by way of its various senses. Drawing on Peters once again, I shall introduce one last aspect into the term's meaning, which will require further attention. This aspect has to do with ideals of communication, which, for Peters, are two historically traceable patterns of meaningful information exchange among humans, where communication is seen as a patterned process over which lies a specific form of social integration. One ideal of communication is dialogue; the other is dissemination. Each has existed across historical periods, within contexts that were either socio-technical or technology-free. Furthermore, each has profound social implications for they allow us to approach the social from an uncommon theoretical viewpoint. In an attempt to shed light on the meaning of communication, Peters travels back in time, going as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman cultures, selecting two historical figures that embodied these ideals. According to Peters, "dialogue" is best exemplified in Socrates' *Phaedrus*, while "dissemination" is represented by the spread of the sacred Word by means of the Gospels. As shall be explored in greater detail in the following pages, Socrates' preferred mode of human interrelation involves contact between souls (or selves) in situations of embodied interaction, while communication through the Gospels suggests individuals acting as proxies of a message that is external to those who

are doing the interacting. Peters' insights serve as a point of departure in the interpretation of the communicational environment of our time.

My own interpretation foregrounds two different yet tightly interrelated issues underlying Peters' approach in relation to the social dimension of new media technologies. The first of the two deals with the way in which each communication ideal, dialogue and dissemination, represent diverging conceptions of social relationships in terms of authenticity and moral value. As we shall see in the following pages, this leads us to consider communication ideals from the point of view of the conditions enabling supposedly *pure* communication to occur. In terms of communication ideals, the emphasis is on the "quality" or meaningfulness of communication. This concern has a bearing on the present day in debates concerning the pros and cons associated to enhanced interpersonal connectivity brought about by new network communication technologies and disguised within the ordinary linguistic use of the terms "on-" and "off-line" and "at-a-distance" modes of action. The extent to which network media technologies offer the conditions for meaningful communication will be discussed in later sections throughout this dissertation in relation to the ElectroDance world. A second issue highlights both ideals of communication as forms of human association. These forms are not exactly new but have arisen throughout history in the form of varying socio-technological configurations and expressions wherein individuals relate to machines and to one another through machines in manifold, complex ways. The interest here lies in observing the way in which the ideals of communication take on a particular expression in the evolution of the ElectroDance phenomenon.

The quest for humanness in communication

As suggested above, Peters' understanding of Socrates' *Phaedrus* can help us revisit what has traditionally concerned social theorists and cultural thinkers alike. Peters draws on Socrates' reflections to identify conditions that are needed to make human communication *true* communication. According to Peters, this issue is best left to Socrates. True communication requires an appropriate situational context, namely, face-to-face contact. Dialogue is therefore the preferred mode for meaningful human exchange. Only words exchanged with eye contact can provide mutual acknowledgement and understanding, a full-fledged meeting of souls. Outside the situational frame of embodied contact, true reciprocity, sympathy, intimacy or fraternity cannot be achieved. Face-to-face dialogue is paramount to humans; therefore it should not surprise us when Peters asserts that "the deprivation of presence has always been the starting point of discussions on communication (ibid: 36)." In this sense, Holmes, drawing from Derrida, argues that the Western logocentric metaphysics of presence permeates all accounts of communication (ibid: 130). Logocentric metaphysics is premised on the existence of two mediums: first, natural language which functions as the conduit; second, any kind of technical means that is used to convey language, such as print, television or the digital network interfaces of today. That the ideal of dialogue reigns supreme in accounts of communication is best illustrated in the sociology of Berger and Luckmann. For these well-known sociologists, we make sense of the world based on our knowledge of it. There are two sides to this premise. First, that reality is something "out there", having an objective quality which precedes us and is beyond our volition; and second, the reality that only exists subjectively "inside us", within our brains, organized around the stock of knowledge we have accumulated as a result of acculturation in an human social medium. Although Berger and Luckmann foregrounded the role of natural language in the social construction of reality – a process which is collectively developed and individually interiorized - their approach to its communicational dimension did not place

enough stress on the importance of technically-mediated ways of communication. Yet these ways of communication cannot be ignored, for in contemporary societies they have become powerful institutions which have decisively contributed to the spread of symbolic languages beyond space and time. If natural language is seen as the sole carrier of meanings, media here seems to add nothing to the paramount function of meaning-making. In other words, it is considered a sort of meta-conduit interposed between the two poles of communication (i.e. the sender and the receiver), which is transparent to them. Even if we hold what Carey would regard as a transmission view of communication, in their analysis, the authors seem bound to traditional societies where the transfer of knowledge between individuals mostly relied upon oral exchange in face-to-face situations and less to modern societies where mass-communication is accomplished by technical means.

It is no wonder then that for Socrates, writing (as opposed to dialogue) is a debasement of communication. Writing fails to provide the qualities of meaningfully interpersonal communication. It lacks intimacy, reciprocity and is random in distribution. Writing is impersonal communication at a distance. When disseminated, it disembeds meaning-making from *Hic et Nunc*. While useful in extending meanings beyond embodied exchanges, for Socrates, in order to make social relations between individuals a truly human affair, it must possess the contextual appropriateness of face-to-face communication. As Peters concludes, "distortions of communication arise for Socrates from the disappearance of personal nexus" (ibid: 47). Two decades ago, internet analysts such as Poster (1995) and Rheingold (1994) believed that network communication technologies promised a revitalization of the presumed virtues of dialogue conducted by technological means. After some analysis, others like Turkle (1994) optimistically envisioned communication technologies as open-ended symbolic spaces for experimentation with identity, places where the self becomes disconnected from other domains of everyday experience. In an age marked by the domination of the broadcast, vertically-constituted forms of mass-communication embodied in television, newspaper and radio are seen to give way to another form

characterized by a more personal, horizontal, non-hierarchical form of disembodied contact. New media seems to provide adequate conditions for the rebuilding of the personal nexus that is absent from mass-communication. At different points throughout this dissertation I will to revisit this assumption in my exploration of the meaningfulness of social relations within the cultural context of the ElectroDance youth movement, social relations in which the "dialogue" ideal of communication is performed under the conditions of technically-extended interaction.

The salience of socio-technical mediums

According to Peters, writing is condemned by Socrates as a flawed way to engage individuals in communication, at least in any type of communication deemed to be worthwhile to humans. However, for Peters "dissemination" as a communication ideal should not be ignored – it too is a valuable tool in building a bond between individuals. Peters sees the Christian Gospels as an outstanding example of the effectiveness of dissemination as a communicational device; dissemination can make the Word and its message widely available to those receptive to the lessons contained in the Gospels. Initially interpersonally exchanged by word of mouth and later on massively disseminated through writing, the message of love was transmitted to worlds beyond its place of production, gathering individuals around a set of shared cultural meanings and values regardless of their temporal and spatial location. As in dialogism, here values of intimacy, fraternity and commonness are present too, giving specific content to communication acts, but the sense of togetherness between individuals is attained at a more abstract level by the mediation of the central figure of God.

Since ancient times these two communication ideals are associated to distinct modes of social integration. Dialogue prevails within forms of network association; here communication mostly occurs at the interpersonal level, with individuals acting or expressing themselves on more or less equal terms. It is

therefore the grouping of participants who share a domain of interest under these same conditions which represents the network model of communication. Dissemination, in contrast, involves one or more individuals acting as a center of meaning production and message conveying, with a number of addressees who look vertically towards the center to indirectly achieve a sense of semi-reciprocity resulting in an uneven social relation. These two patterns of communication, which involve forms of social connectedness among constituents, can exist at differing scales. Dissemination exists in contexts such as schools, churches or in political campaign events, where people gather around the figure of the speaker. Dissemination also appears at a larger scale in contemporary societies where the responsibility of regulating the public conversation falls on the technical ability of media corporations to distribute information widely. But networks are as old as mankind, existing wherever people formed groups around commercial, cultural or political interests.

Yet these two communication architectures, broadcast and network are but schemes which rarely appear to us in their pure forms. Instead of being clearly detached, they are parasitic to one another within diverse social contexts. This is why, following Holmes, referring to the broadcast or mass-media era or today's "network" society as the dominating communicative medium in society at a given moment in time might be to a certain extent misleading. If we accept this premise at face value, we might fail to see the connection between communication mediums and the technical systems they are related to (ibid: 86). As stated earlier, both communicational architectures date back to ancient times and it is only now when they have attained a more visibly technical and commodified form. Broadcast communication allows for some degree of reciprocity, which is the main characteristic of network communication where opportunities to act or express oneself are never totally equally distributed among agents, with some of them

becoming more important than others.[13] In Part Two, I will explore the role of digital media technologies as one element part of these communicative schemes. The ElectroDance movement will be considered following two different stages of its evolution, one in which broadcast communication emerges as the more visible communication realm, and a second where communication among young dancers takes place via a networked form of social connection. The main difference between one and the other relates to the way in which a particularly-patterned symbolic circuit is arranged as a result of the interaction between human and technical agents.

New media as interfaces

Within both broadcast and network socio-technical environments, new media technologies take on the role of interfaces, that is, as a sort of semiotic-technical layer placed "inter-faces", i.e. between individuals that are in contact. In being an important part of any study of media, the notion of interface should not be overlooked; indeed, it will be a part of my own analysis of local communication in ElectroDance. As media theorist Scolari (2012: 215) notes, the concept of interface has been employed in a broad range of discourses and contexts.

Originally appearing in J. T. Bottomley's 1882 work *Hydrostatics*, the term "interface" was set forth as a "separation surface" between two liquids. In the realm of communication, the meaning of interface as a "separation surface" can be retained if we think of images, sounds and other symbolic forms as carriers

[13] The unequally distributed abilities of agents within a communicative medium offer an alternative reading when regarded as power relations. In this sense, in Chapter Seven the local ElectroDance scene of Valencia is likened to a Bourdieusian field in which the possibility of attaining certain in-group positions is not only a matter of being more or less skilled at dancing but also being able to use media technologies effectively.

of meaning shared by individuals. Interfaces take up a kind of space *in between*, acting as a kind of meeting point. Verbal language could be seen as the most basic example of interface between humans. Diverse physical objects show similar qualities for retaining and expressing meaning in varied fashions, with media technologies being the clearest example of this. For Scolari, every media *has* an interface (human–technology interface) and at the same time, every media *is* an interface (technology–technology interface). He thus differentiates technology-technology interfaces from human-technology ones. While the former refers to the specific ways in which a series of smaller, separate technical material components are assembled together to form larger, more general functional devices or units, i.e. the parts that make up a car, the second type of interface refers to the particular arrangement of internal features or properties of a certain technology which allows humans to interact, i.e. all the different parts, from print to navigation devices, indexing systems, page numbers, font types and so on, of a traditional book. If we extend this notion to new media technologies, it could be said that the human-technology interface defines the ways in which individuals interact with technology but more importantly the distinctive ways and styles in which interaction occurs.

This point is of a great relevance when it comes to recent highly interactive network digital technologies that condition communication in different ways; more than merely overcoming the spatial-temporal barriers, these technologies often enhance or at times even constrain said barriers in particular ways. Or to use Meyrowitz's metaphor, every media form contains its own "grammar" and its particular ways of extending our cognitive, instrumental and sensory capacities according to McLuhan's classical insight. In this sense, watching a TV show, listening to the radio or updating one's profile on Facebook involves different issues in practical terms but also in terms of the kinds of communication and experience they offer. According to this assumption, we can expect a different communicative situation when speaking on the phone or writing on someone else's Facebook "wall" because the communicative qualities of each

media differ from each other, with the former allowing for symbolic cues via voice or oral communication that digital writing lacks. In other words, when we consider the notion of interface we put the focus on the medium, or "how" communication is pulled off rather than "what" constitutes the substance of what is conveyed. Even though interfaces can be studied separately, some of them, such as YouTube, will be discussed in detail in later sections, as they represent communicative situations which in practice rely on interrelated, often overlapping interaction processes needing more than one interface.

As shall be shown throughout this text, electro-dancers come into contact with the style via a number of different means, including videogames, TV shows, YouTube, … and physical settings as dance clubs; each having its own interface. When communication involves several interfaces, meaningful analysis becomes difficult when said interfaces are analyzed independently of each other; communication in this sense becomes meaningful only when viewed as a whole reality. This led media theorist Scolari to speak of the group of interlocking interfaces in terms of "media ecology". Drawing on media theorist Neil Postman, Scolari looks at media in ecological terms. The goal of media ecology, according to Scolari, is to try "to find out what roles media force us to play, how media structure what we are seeing or thinking, and why media make us feel and act as we do". For this study, the interfaces that are part of the ever-changing media ecology of the Valencian local ElectroDance scene have been detailed in the table below.

Table 1. The 'Media Ecology' of the local ElectroDance scene in Valencia

INTERFACE	PREVALENT SYMBOLIC FORM	TIME-MODE	PREVALENT INTERACTION PATTERN	PREFERRED USE
Mobile phones	sound / text	Both	dialogical	group and peer coordination
Instant Messaging	text	synchronous	dialogical	group and peer coordination
Forum	text	asynchronous	dialogical	group and peer coordination
Blog	text / image	asynchronous	Disseminative	self-presentation
YouTube	text / sound / video	asynchronous	Both	dance display and discussion
Facebook	text / sound / video / image	both	Both	multi-purpose

The extent to which media work as interfaces becomes more apparent after the arrival of new media associated to network communication. Seen from a transmission view of communication, new media provide high-interactivity, instant, multidirectional and multimodal communication in ways unparalleled in prior media forms. In other words, and paraphrasing Hjarvard (2008: 121), their affordances[14] as communicational objects are arguably not the same as those found in media forms such as television, telephone, radio or newspaper, although some of their features, in being "remediated", might be the same in some cases[15].

[14] By 'affordances' we mean here the set of features of any given object which make certain actions possible, exclude others and structure the interaction between the actor and object.
[15] One could "passively" view YouTube on the computer screen as they would their television in their living room. Nothing seems different apart from the technology for content delivery -

Acting as interfaces, as something which is "in-between" interacting agents, these media have, more than any other prior media form, the ability to facilitate, limit and structure communication, action and interaction in varied ways. The specific ways in which new media are appropriated in terms of individual self-expression and re-presentation, or in local, translocal and transnational group coordination, just to name a few uses, within a communicative medium in which broadcast and network patterns of communication become parasitic on one another to the point of becoming undifferentiated, shall be the object of attention in the following pages.

The corporate background of new (and prior) media practices

In exploring the meanings of communication, I have attempted to highlight the different concepts which will be of use in the analysis of the ElectroDance phenomenon. The analysis of ElectroDance from a communication standpoint will involve the task of interpreting the different meaning-making processes made possible by new media. As argued earlier, the creation and exchange of meaning in ElectroDance is subjected to different interaction modalities; of these, the ones which make use of interfaces are of interest in this study. As suggested earlier, communication in ElectroDance takes place when young people use technical devices, thereby forming social interactions that follow both "network" and

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the computer, on the one hand, the TV set, on the other. Yet what lies behind each activity in terms of the underlying communicative medium is entirely different. Whereas YouTube operates within an environment of network communication, traditional television does so through a broadcast medium.

"broadcast" models of social integration. All of these elements will be employed in my analysis of communication in ElectroDance.

However, today's communication architectures, and broadcast communication in particular, along with the media practices of young dancers have traditionally relied upon the existence of mass media corporations; nowadays, the corporations are newer and their business model is based on services supported by digital global networks. This shift has resulted in a change in the meanings created by media and communication, a change also brought about by the political and economic characteristics of these industries undergoing constant transformation. Although a detailed analysis of Media and Cultural Industries falls outside the scope of this study, their contribution to the new media practices conducted by electro-dancers shall be explored. At this point it is worth noting the different roles played by the various media corporations involved in the ElectroDance scene, roles which can be certainly extended to society at large. Whereas internet-based corporations are interested in offering services to users free of charge, thereby acting as mere mediators between networked individuals, mass-media corporations, which generally forge alliances and operate in their own interest as conglomerates, seem to retain more of an institutional role. A role which, for internet corporations, is less apparent. Media are corporate organizations in modern societies because no other social agent or actor is capable of mobilizing the economic, technological and organizational resources needed to build broadcast systems of mass-communication, creating a "center" of information, entertainment and opinion. Furthermore, media behave as institutions – in a more strictly sociological rather than in an everyday, popular sense - because they are involved in meaning-making at a large scale. Because media enterprises and cultural industries are closely associated with the production of cultural content in the form of film, news and documentaries, they are far from being *transparent* in their action. Instead, they take an active part in the social construction of reality, shaping events, forming opinion and discourse, and more generally providing meaningful models of behavior and feeling around

which individuals make sense of their everyday world. Or in other words, their role is that of *representation* instead of *presentation* of facts. As shall be illustrated later on, in the case of ElectroDance, the shift in the communicational environment where both the broadcast and network schemes of communication adopts a balanced, unprecedented socio-technological expression; media, especially at the outset, enables the style to become a form of broadcast communication, creating both a community of young dancers and fans and the symbolic basis and discourses upon which a youth movement can emerge and develop.

The increasing mediatization of contemporary social life

As was argued earlier, humans have historically been surrounded by some form of communication technology that enabled forms of togetherness. Broadly speaking, to state that media technologies are more present today than in the past may be somewhat misleading. If the twentieth century saw the rise of mass media communication and the appearance of large corporate institutions fulfilling a social function, i.e. distribution of public information and creation of professionalized opinion at a large scale, what we are witnessing today is the penetration of new media technologies at a more interpersonal level, providing sustained connectivity to individuals who are progressively replacing and complementing face-to-face forms of interaction by technologically-extended ones.

Yet the extent to which media technologies are more and more prevalent in the myriad of everyday social situations and contexts is not as much a matter of enhanced connectivity or widened symbolic bandwidth in extended interactions afforded by the latest technical interfaces as much as the inclusion of communication technologies in these social domains and the subsequent

transformation of said domains. It is not then a simple question of "media-saturation" nor is it a mere increase of interactions afforded by new media on the part of individuals. The difference in communication terms is not quantitative but qualitative, not transmission-related but ritual-related, as Carey argued. For Hjarvard, contemporary societies are more and more characterizable by increasing degrees of mediatization affecting the more varied social domains of practice. Hjarvard speaks of "mediatization" and not simply "mediation" as each term invokes a different meaning. Whereas "mediation" refers to the simple act of two individuals communicating by way of a technical medium without the definition of the social situation being modified in any meaningful way, by "mediatization" Hjarvard acknowledges a more substantive, long-standing, influential process characterising contemporary, mostly Western, industrial societies. Particularly, by mediatization, Hjarvard (ibid: 113) understands the more general process whereby society is to an increasing degree submitted to, or becomes dependent upon, the media and its logic[16], one that should be added to other drives of modernity like individualization or commodification of social life. It is interesting to pay attention for a moment to what Hjarvard understands by the "logic" of media. For this author, as suggested earlier, it is not simply that social and cultural institutions and practices are now showing an increasing dependence upon media technologies which are a technological layer affecting a previously existing group or interpersonal interaction patterns in a special way; rather, mediatization occurs when media becomes embedded in a particular social institution or domain of practice, refashioning them either totally or partially. In other words, the

[16] As Hjarvard argues, mediatization owes a lot to the ideas of the so-called medium theorists such as McLuhan, Ong or Meyrowitz in that it shares similar concerns as to media's particular formatting of communication and the impacts on the interpersonal relations resulting from it. Unlike medium theorists, "Mediatization theory" seeks to avoid the pitfall of technological determinism, holding a more empirically-sustained approach to the study of media than the macro-level, non-empirically-grounded views of medium theory.

presence of media does not represent a sort of "cosmetic effect" upon practices whose meanings remain unaltered.[17] Far from it; by modifying patterns of interaction linked to media affordances, the very function, meaning or prior social purpose of such domain of practice or institution is altered to a greater or lesser degree. In adopting a media form, social institutions, situations and processes, and the social relations embedded within and dependent upon them, which previously existed "outside of" media are now being shaped in different ways, transforming the foundations, meaning and purpose of such social institutions, situations and processes in different ways and at different scales.[18] In this sense, and following Turkle's recent contribution to this field (2011), we can look at the way in which the use of mobile technologies heightens interpersonal connectivity regardless of the spatial and temporal conditions, at the same time disrupting social relations with our "significant others", thereby leading us, to paraphrase Meyrowitz, to lose "a sense of place" and even "a sense of the other" too. If we explore the impact of new media on friendship from this perspective, we would need to determine, on the basis of observed media practices whether the very notion of friendship has undergone a significant shift. Here, analysis would entail a look at the effects of media-imposed conditions of interaction and whether these have caused individuals to have different understandings of intimacy, loyalty, reciprocity and

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[17] For example, it is unlikely that profound differences will arise when those who use the telephone from home or work purposes decide to use a digital service such as Skype instead of their traditional land line. A shift in the technological infrastructure does not say much about a shift in practices behind both technological conditions.

[18] A further account of this might lead us to discuss, for example, the ongoing changes in the institution of marriage in the presence of today's media. Although it would be an exaggeration if we claimed that media is behind certain shifts in the institution of marriage, we may be able to assert that the cultural ritual of marriage and the way in which its protagonists understand and conduct said rituals in contemporary Western societies - the way they document them, "starring" in them as though they were celebrities of these rituals-as-performances and so on – reflects and is fed by mass-media culture.

self-understanding which could give rise to a different meaning of what friendship is. As stated earlier, transformations associated to the mediatization of culture need not be seen as morally negative or deemed disruptive in and of themselves, nor should they be automatically seen as positive without further scrutiny. For now, it suffices to keep in mind, as medium theorist Postman (1998) once claimed, that every advantage brought by a new technology is not without unexpected, undesired effects.

Mediatization manifests itself in varying intensities and forms. Thus, we can speak of either “direct” (strong) or “indirect” (weak) mediatization. According to Hjarvard, direct mediatization can be identified on the one hand in cases where a non-mediated activity converts to a mediated form. An example of this is an online retail outlet, with fashion companies disembedding trade from traditional, local shops. On the other hand, indirect mediatization takes place when an activity is increasingly influenced by “mediagenic” symbols or mechanisms with regard to content, form or organization (ibid: 115). Hjarvard provides us with the example of the burgeoning merchandising industry surrounding popular hamburger chain restaurants. Whereas the former we would perhaps foresee a shift towards the ever-diminishing importance of “physical” shops as mediating settings for embodied encounters between sellers and buyers, and likely expressing a substantial shift in the institution of commerce in contemporary societies, in the latter the social practice of “eating out” is not significantly altered at its core, although the symbolic medium surrounding it has changed.

That said, this exploration of Mediatization theory concludes my own preliminary inquiry into the meaning of communication in the study of ElectroDance. Delving into the world of ElectroDance youth world from a communication perspective shall firstly entail a look at the meaning-making process within the dance culture, attempting to interpret how the dance and practices associated to the dance style conducted amid new media becomes subjectively meaningful to young dancers. Secondly, as the dance style is culturally produced within the sphere of specific group social relations, I shall

consider the role of new media technologies at two different stages of the evolution of the style on the basis of the aforementioned general communication structures. The configuration of social relations in terms of broadcast and network architectures will come into play when I look at the patterns of interaction between the young dancers and compare these patterns to particular schemes of association, socio-technical formations which challenge the spatial and temporal restrictions of the past. By paying attention to such communicational models, particular understandings of the organization of social groups such as that associated to ElectroDance can be attained. Finally, the ElectroDance phenomenon will be examined as a form of mediatization; a phenomenon that goes beyond the concept of communications posited by Williams with the simple addition of digital interfaces. ElectroDance, as a youth style, is not precisely new in this regard. Since middle of the twentieth century up to present day, and hand in hand with further developments of consumer society, youth cultures and styles have been configured as examples of the ongoing shift toward the progressive mediatization of society; being both a product and at the same time a manifestation of the ability of mass media to extend communication worldwide, bringing young people together around youth-oriented cultural forms regardless of their specific locations. However, the sense in which the notion of mediatization shall be brought into the discussion here is not one in which the relationship between youth, culture and media remains the same at the beginnings of the twenty-first century but one which will inquire into the way in which such a relationship might become altered by modifying the characteristics of one of the factors of the equation, that is, the type of communication technologies we use at present. In the case at hand, exploring the ElectroDance style as an empirical case of mediatization will entail an interpretation of the social relations formed around the dance style as a result of, for example, the negotiation of specific social meanings related to in-group reputation and out-group broader social acknowledgment, or acceptable interpersonal behavior and convenient public self-presentation which are subjected to a certain “media logic”; with the regulation

of all these aspects greatly depending on media forms and media-based interactions. Bearing in mind that forms of mediatization are intrinsic to most of the past and current youth styles and cultural phenomena, by employing the term "media logic" I mean an inquiry into the extent to which all of the above-mentioned aspects and some others are configured in such a way that allows for the study of ElectroDance rooted in the present, while comparing this to what existed in the pre-internet media environment of the past. Thus, my goal is to examine the significance of today's new media technologies in the everyday experience of a specific group of young people participating in a youth dance style in order to weave an empirically-grounded case in which some broader societal trends emerging from the complex relationships between culture, media and society can be reflected. Nevertheless, before moving on the discussion of empirical aspects surrounding the ElectroDance case, I shall look at young electro-dancers against the backdrop of the broader context of today's youth and the diverse scholarly studies in the field offered by different social and cultural analysts.

:: 2 :: New media and the contemporary youth generation

Bearing in mind the aforesaid notions of communication, and particularly the way in which media relates to communication, I shall now turn to the way in which media is important to the youth of the past and today's youth generation. For novelist Nick Hornby, who was quoted in the Preface, it is the technology of our times that makes a difference in the social and subjective experience of today's youth. However, when looking back, media technologies of yesteryear also seem to be of defining importance to the youth of the past. If the role of media in the past century was of vital importance to the creation of the cultural, social, political and economic spheres of Western and increasingly non-Western societies, it seems even more crucial for youth. Over the first half and the second half of the twentieth century in particular, young people have defined themselves as a socially differentiated sector resulting from a conflation of factors, one of which being media. Media cultural forms and associated socio-technical systems coupled with entertainment industries were to gain more and more presence within the world of youth that paralleled the rise of consumerism. As more and more young

people joined the labor market, they also began to enjoy higher levels of disposable income,[19] spending more on leisure and amusement-related activities.

The impact of media can be seen first and foremost in the way symbolic contents came to exert an influence over young people's consciousness, emotions, cognitive schemes, and their bodies through particular modes of behavior, expression and public presentation. Media shaped in specific ways the communication environment that was to surround teenagers, many of whom finding the meanings that would help them make sense of their everyday experience. These meanings stemmed from different sources and were represented by a myriad of symbols, in keeping with the emerging languages, images, sounds and cultural forms of movies and popular music, just to name two conspicuous examples. For Brooker (2010: 9), Hollywood-produced movies of the early twentieth century held a cogent influence over youth by "teaching its viewers – particularly the young viewers – more specific skills of the modernist city: how to walk, and how to feel". As a symbolic form, movies (and other cultural forms) provided teenagers with the themes, meanings and behavioral patterns which reflected and were in turn influenced by larger sets of social discourses. Much of this is also true for youth-oriented television and radio shows from the 1950s onwards, and the new musical styles such as Rock & Roll – a successful hybridization of cultural meanings rooted in both poorer Black and affluent White communities which became a cultural expression of ongoing, profound, long-lasting shifts in the strained relations between often distanced social groups. The salience of media is that it contributed decisively in varied ways to both enable and shape the cultural world of teenagers. On the other hand, in

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[19] As Osbergy (2004:19) notes, even at the early 40's, youth's spending power not only helped to shape notions of youth as an uniquely autonomous social group but "provided the basis for an additional expansion of the commercial youth industries and associated media", an expansion which firstly took place in countries such as U.K and U.S.A and later on in Western societies at large.

more collective terms, youth groupings, collectives and other forms of "being-together" formed around musical styles and genres can not be fully understood either unless the role of media is taken into consideration, in its varied forms and ways of expression, since it is media which spreads and circulates meaningful information beyond its original contexts of production. As anthropologist Feixa (2004: 17) notes, youth cultures, subcultures and styles are to a great extent both a product and an expression of the mass-media era.

Media exerted thus a twofold function in the twentieth century; on the one hand, as suggested above, media delivered specific symbolic content and messages embedded in the content and products of media and culture and entertainment industries. Because media was able to influence the social construction of the world by providing young people (as well as other sectors of the population) with messages and information imbued with normative values, social discourses, behavioral models, and imaginaries which helped them develop views on the world, they came to fulfill an *ideological* role. On the other hand, media constituted *institutions* in their own right. As such, media became professional organizations with their own logic – either for commercial or public purposes – which entered into contact with audiences by way of certain technologies. The broadcast technologies of television, radio, books or newspapers not only involved the use of certain technical mediums but, as discussed in the previous chapter, also involved a form of vertical integration in which members of a "mass" were indirectly interrelated to one another as well as to communication-related corporations by sharing a set of meanings linked to specific situations, for instance, those listening to a radio show, watching a TV programme, or reading a book. In this sense, the combination of individuals and communication technologies under certain culturally-patterned situations results in particular "communicational environments". The notion of "environment" here alludes to a given youth culture as a symbolic circuit in which different actors, including media technologies, young people, business agents and larger corporate institutions are brought together in the creation and exchange of meaning. Indeed, in the mass-

communication era, youth's forms of "being-together" have relied to a great extent upon the specific configuration of symbolic circuits formed around certain media delivery systems, particular cultural products circulated by cultural industries and *ad-hoc* communities built around such symbolic content. To speak in terms of "environment" here prevents us from taking on a simplistic, transmission-oriented view of the role of media as just another way for individuals to interact with one another for the purpose of information exchange via technological means. Thus, my aim is to move away from the classical view of media as corporation-associated producers of one-way, one-to-many kinds of informational flows to be received by rather passive individuals, who do nothing else than unproblematically absorb said content and messages.[20] In accordance to this view, the notion of media is no longer equated to mass-media, nor is the concept of communication confined to a simple exchange of information. By holding a "ritual" view on communication, the sphere of communication is expanded by taking into account "horizontal" interaction taking place in other interactive media forms.

In this regard it is worth highlighting the usefulness of Thornton's (1995: 114-161) categorization of types of media as mass, niche and micro in order to differentiate social agents and the media channels of communication they use. For this author, every youth culture or style is culturally produced by its members with the participation of all or some of these three types of media. In other words, each type of media fulfills a different function within the logic of the symbolic circuit of a youth culture or style. Whereas mass media, embodied by mass-communication corporations, fulfill the above-mentioned role of making and disseminating meanings at a large scale, disembedding them from locality, *niche-*

[20] Authors such as Willis (2000:24) and others have extensively refuted this assumption in showing how individuals actively and creatively respond to media content and products by subjectively appropriating and making sense of them in creative, varied ways in the context of everyday life.

and micro-media cover communicational needs of cultural practitioners and small entrepreneurs interacting at a more local level. The usefulness of Thornton's conceptual categories is that they recognize other forms of equally important media that create forms of being-together beyond the scope of mass-media. Furthermore, Thornton attributes certain distinguishable features to the media types, each of them fulfilling a purpose within the communicational logic of the youth cultural world. When seen from a "transmission" view, within a symbolic circuit part of a music-related youth subculture or style, cultural agents belonging to the domain of corporate cultural industries posses the broadcast-oriented technical means and enable the necessary channels to reach people through particular cultural forms. These include television and radio music shows, niche-market vendors who supply records and specialized magazines to style followers and subcultural practitioners who produce their own fanzines, design flyers, and who also disseminate information via mailing lists and via local radio stations. All of these media forms and socio-technical systems give rise to a complex web of overlapping informational flows, interactions and communicational patterns.

Nevertheless, although Thornton's simplified yet workable taxonomy provides a conceptual tool that allows for further analysis of communication within youth collectives, her study, which was written in the mid-1990s, predates the arrival of digital technologies and the wide-reaching technological changes we are witnessing today. From that time onwards, the phenomena of digitization and digital telecommunications have led media to a sort of technological convergence, a phenomenon that dissolves prior associations between particular media forms and clearly demarcated physical devices and systems by converting any kind of information into digital data. Along with digitization and digital telecommunications, and without abandoning a media-centric standpoint, the notion of "remediation"[21] is another one of crucial interest at this point.

[21] See Bolter and Grusin in "Communication in History", 2010, p.228.

Remediation refers to the ability of newly modern media technical systems to incorporate prior media forms, refashioning them in some way or another. For example, the Internet could be seen as remediating the telegraph, expanding affordances for multimodal communication in unforeseen and innumerable ways; or the World Wide Web could be seen as a refashioning of not only books, written correspondence or periodicals but also mass-media such as the radio, film and television, as seen in the cases of YouTube or the corporate multimedia websites of today. This is why it could be argued that the concepts of remediation and digitization lead us to question the current validity of Thornton's classification of media types, possibly rendering them somewhat obsolete. For some authors, like Castells, our time and position as communicators within today's global communication environment is no longer that of the mass-communication model associated to a supposedly superseded broadcast era; we have entered a time where our relation to the world and the forms of being-together that we establish with others is one characterized by mass-self-communication. By "mass-self-communication" (2009: 88) he is referring to a sort of communication wherein the individual is placed at the center of a complex pattern of interaction which integrates modes of broadcast and network association. In this sense, as shall be argued in depth in the following chapters, the electro-dancers' in-group use of a platform such as YouTube would doubtless fall within Thornton's micro-media category. However, in practice, reality proves otherwise as young dancers make use of YouTube in relation not only to their local groups but also to wider, translocal audiences located in different countries. These new audiences constitute masses which might be, at least quantitatively, at odds with our common intuitions concerning the term "micro". On the other hand, when large media conglomerates bring their broadcast schemes into the world of digital network communication, they no longer possess the exclusivity of Thornton's term "mass", a capacity that today is shared - at least in theoretical terms - by anyone having an account on websites such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. In other words, distinctions between "mass", "micro" and "niche" should be questioned

inasmuch as such categories have clearly been surpassed at least at a technical level as a result of the arrival of digitization and modern telecommunications. We should ask ourselves whether prior forms of youth being-together have or haven't been necessarily refashioned under the pressures of the novel technical affordances offered by new media. Yet, for Thornton, these media distinctions are also related to contrasted realms of discourse, unlikable thereby from more general social issues, especially when it comes to images of youth phenomena delivered by mass-media as opposed to that created by youth group insiders.

My own approach to ElectroDance follows the path started by Thornton in that I will also question the significance of new media technologies in the domain of youth culture communication, an approach in which empirical exploration will be conducted with an eye on the conditions of communication present in prior phenomena of youth cultures, subcultures and styles. As suggested earlier, I want to inquire into the novelty of new media in the creation of discursive circuits, self-presentation, group organization, new forms of youth being-together, and the expression of the communication ideals. Thus, the goal of this research is to question whether shifts in technical means have invariably led to changes (and what these are if observed) in the communication ideals, as well as their influence on the youth social experiences. Before moving on in this regard, I shall first take a brief look at some characterizations of today's youth generation by various commentators who have considered youth from the perspective of its relationship with new communication technologies. After this, and to begin laying the groundwork for the subsequent ethnographic study, I will continue with my empirical examination of the specific relationship between ElectroDance group members and media, with an aim to placing it within the wider context of media use by many of the so-called Spanish "Net-Generation".

“Born Digital” into a “Net Generation”?

When contemporary authors interested in youth as a socially differentiated group identify this group’s main defining features, new media and the place media occupy in young people's lives is always central to its characterization. The salience of new media in the study of youth stems not only from young people's willingness to be early-adopters of novel technological devices or gadgets that appear on the consumer market, or because the highest rates of new technology use is generally found among youth, but because today's youth are doubtless seen as the first generation to grow up in a media-saturated environment dominated by the phenomena of digitization and networked interactive communication technologies.

Just as the youth generation of the 1990s was described by popular social commentators such as Douglas Coupland as being marked “by the uncertainties and paradoxes of post-modern society,”[22] current popular voices largely tend to agree on one particular feature that defines today’s youth: their access to new media technologies. According to Tapscott (1998), just as the post-war baby-boomers were at the center of the 1960s Cultural Revolution, one underpinned by an emerging pop culture driven by mass-media developments, today’s young people are said to have been born and raised amid new media technologies. This is important not because it is a statement of the pervasiveness of these technologies but because it draws attention to the fact that these technologies, as stated earlier, have become the “medium” in which today’s youth exist, helping them forge a sense of self, establish social ties and interact at different levels with the outside world. Therefore, just as the generation of baby-boomers was immersed in a social world dominated by the technologies and the associated cultural forms of television and radio, the lives of today’s youth are immersed in new media

[22] Douglas named this generation “Generation X” (Feixa, 2006:13).

technologies. Yet this change is more a matter of degree rather than obsolescence of prior technological forms. For Tapscott, an individual born today will implicitly belong to the "Net Generation", youth that experiences media forms of yesteryear along with the newer ones supported by network digital technologies and systems. Back in 1999, a study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in USA suggested that young people's lives were highly influenced by their contact to media, with the average American child growing up in a home with three TVs, three tape players, three radios, two video recorders, two CD players, one computer and one video game console (Osbergy, 2004: 6). Despite being associated to the US context, this now decade-old study is the first general picture we have of today's youth in relation to media usage, one which can easily be extended worldwide, as we shall see later. Furthermore, unlike those born decades ago who have only recently experienced the new media technologies as adults, members of the so-called "Net Generation" have been born and raised in this environment, consequently earning the name of "digital natives". This is the term used, for example, by Palfrey and Gasser who have elaborated on Tapscott's ideas. In their 2008 work *Born Digital*, these authors offer a portrait of "digital natives", a generation that is clearly distinguishable from its older counterparts. As in Tapscott's work, today's youth is largely defined by its relationship with new media. They are a cross-national social group, formed specifically by "young elites" whose members are connected to each other "in terms of how they relate, to information, to new technologies, and to one another" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008: 13). Rather than sharing similar features in terms of their economic, cultural and social profiles, it is the kinds of practices conducted by this group that really make global youth a distinguishable phenomenon in its own right. According to these authors, "digital natives" have developed certain recognizable skills and features as result of their intensive, sustained contact to media technologies which are worth noting. Firstly, "digital natives" have excellent multitasking skills (ibid: 191). This ability to divide one's attention among different activities undertaken simultaneously, usually represented by the numerous multipurpose windows

scattered all over one single computer screen, e.g. chatting with several friends, listening to music, browsing the web, doing homework and so on. Secondly, digital natives may have a greater capacity for creativity. This should not lead us to view today's youth as substantially "more" creative than youth of the past, but what the authors want to highlight is new media's capacity to provide youth with different creative outlets. Thirdly, as mentioned before, digital natives show a remarkable tendency to relate to others in various ways, mediated by new media technologies. As Palfrey and Gasser argue, it is important to note here that youth's intensive use of new media does not prevent them from interacting in an embodied, more traditional fashion, but offers them a greater array of interaction processes via technological means. Far from what early studies have told us about youth and its relation to new technologies (Turkle, 1994), theirs is not necessarily "a life on the screen", a realm of activity detached from other everyday interests. Moreover, as more recent academic studies and press coverage alike have shown, the "online" versus "offline" conceptual dichotomy no longer seems to represent what youth currently do with new media. Rather than understanding their new media and communication practices in terms of on- and off-line, young people speak of their relationship with new media in terms of "being or not available/contactable."[23] Interestingly, this fact speaks of a "state-of-the-art" in which young people have come to deal with communication technologies without being aware, at least prima facie, of their relationship to them, one in which technology has lost its novelty and become a natural part of the self and everyday

[23] See, for instance, journalist M. Dworschak's 2010 report for German newspaper *Spiegel* misleadingly titled "Logging Off: the Internet Generation Prefers the Real World". In the article, this journalist describes some people's views on their relation to new media in these terms: " [...] they hardly even use the word 'Internet', talking about 'Google', 'YouTube' and 'Facebook' instead. And they certainly no longer understand it when older generations talk about 'going online'".
Dworschak, M. (2011, April). *Logging Off: The Internet Generation Prefers the Real World* Retreived from http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/logging-off-the-internet-generation-prefers-the-real-world-a-710139.html

life. Finally, as a consequence of youth's relationship with new media, these authors argue that notions of friendship and privacy, among others, could be transformed in ways we cannot foresee.

Nevertheless, although the accounts offered by these authors help shed some light on the current aspects behind the relationship between youth and new media, a view of the Net Generation and its digital natives requires further analysis. First of all, while it could be argued that even though youth can be regarded as a distinct social group with a characteristic pattern of use of new media, nowadays media practices are also used by all social groups and sectors to varying degrees, even by those older individuals known as "digital immigrants". In short, new media is not strictly a matter of youth anymore, regardless of its importance in certain definitions of youth. Secondly, internal diversity in terms of gender, race, social status and nationality within the so-called Net Generation makes each of these sectors a delimited group in its own right. Thirdly, it is worth remarking the extent to which the notion of digital natives is linked to that of "technical mastery". In this sense, Broker criticizes the ideological dimension at the core of the view of today's youngsters as being versatile, adaptable, highly interactive, and skilled at multitasking. For this author, it is no coincidence that the vocabulary related to new media is largely aligned with that of the economic system of our time, i.e. the late-modern information economy, and what it is expected from individuals in terms of workforce skills and requirements, i.e. multitasking, adaptability, flexibility, etc. Moreover, accounts of being born digital are prone to overemphasizing the virtues of this generation and the supposedly remarkable abilities to the point of foreseeing "a better future" simply because these new technologies will be at their fingertips.[24]

[24] A good example of this can be found in the following excerpt: "Digital Natives will move markets and transform industries, education, and global politics. The changes they bring about as they move into the workforce could have an immensely positive effect on the world

As Hebdige argues, this type of analysis runs the risk of feeding back into dichotomous views of "youth-as-fun" and "youth-as-trouble" which have traditionally characterized academic approaches to the relationship between youth and media in the past. From this perspective, Tapscott and Palfrey, are constructing a narrative which, following Osbergy (ibid: 225), paints a general picture of youth as "the spearhead of a new digital epoch that heralds an unprecedented expansion of knowledge and greater opportunities for community participation, self-expression and community". This rather optimistic view of youth, epitomized in the figure of the "cyberkid", is usually countered by mass-media accounts of cyberbullying, online predators, Internet addiction, and online pornography. In such cases, the relationship of youth and new media technologies is presented as a pernicious one, where technology in the hands of young people becomes an "out-of-control" instrument, with unpredictable consequences. A view like this one suggests a current shift towards privatized lifestyles at best, and at its worst it warns of future trouble, miseducation and misfortune brought to those who use them, as in the case of the video games linked to violent behavior. Without dismissing arguments on the positive and negative aspects associated to the use of media technologies by youth, we should ask ourselves whether these two polarized stances offer an adequate explanation of the relationship between one and the other at this time, or if a more accurate, more "moderate" approach is called for in this regard.

At any rate, most will agree on the central role played by new media in the lives of young people. Youth anthropologist Feixa shares this view, claiming that new communication technologies are indispensable to the understanding of what he labels as "Generation @" (Feixa, 2000). Closely associated to other factors, new media, according to Feixa should be taken into consideration along with other issues when attempting to provide an updated picture of youth. Firstly,

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we live in. By and large, the digital revolution has already made this world a better place" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008: 9).

youth are experiencing an erosion of traditional frontiers between gender and sex. Secondly, youth and youth-related cultures are symptomatic of what has been known over the last few decades as the globalization of culture, this social sector being among the first social groups to become "globalized" thanks to the spread of popular culture, which is an expression of this same phenomenon. For Feixa, today's youth are living in a world which is quite different from that of prior generations. They are experiencing the transition from an analogical culture, based on writing and a regular life cycle, to a digital culture, based on the image and a discontinuous life cycle. As a consequence, the impact of new media technologies on the lives of young people is mostly seen in terms of a shift in the way they experience space and time. Prior technologies and the cultural forms associated to such technologies (e.g. television), similarly altered notions of space and time, but digital technologies have doubtless expanded the repertoire of media "effects". More than any other social group, today's youth are experiencing Meyrowitz's "no sense of place" through the disembedding of social situations and relations from previously associated in-person and in-place contact. More importantly, they are also experiencing a conflation between the real time of traditional institutions such as school or work, which are dominated by well-defined, linear time frames, and the virtual time imposed by other contemporary realms such as mass-media or digital environments (e.g. videogames, and virtual reality worlds), which create experience formed by overlapping, simultaneous "timeless" sequences – and they do so as a matter of course and unproblematically. More generally, Feixa, inspired by sociologist Maffesoli, characterizes youth's social experience as "nomadism". Here, the notion of nomadism seeks to capture the sense of what youth experience in our time, one that is dominated by uncertainty, change and instability. As a consequence, the social experience of young people takes place in a world where the "rites of passage" that mark the stages of life become increasingly blurred; where the experience of youthfulness is dramatically marked by a lack of clear expectations or a well-defined life project; where young people are at risk of suffering new

forms of social exclusion associated to greater deterioration in working conditions; where the meaning of youthfulness involves, as Feixa argues, "a migration through diverse material and social ecosystems, experimenting distinct roles without shifting social status, moving back from adulthood to youthhood when one loses a job, travelling low-cost or via internet without renouncing to one's identity" (Brooker, 2010: 172).

In light of the above, we might ask: To what extent do the young people participating in the ElectroDance movement conform to the above portrait of today's youth? In my exploration of the ElectroDance youth style in the pages that follow, I will explore many of these aspects. Before doing so, however, and after this general characterization of today's youth generation, I shall take a preliminary look, in a rather quantitative fashion, at the relationship between ElectroDance members and new media in the context of the patterns of media consumption among Spanish youth in general.

ElectroDance in the context of new media use among Spanish youth

As stated earlier, the aim of this study is to offer an interpretation of the media practices as an integral part of young people's engagement with ElectroDance. As I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, my approach to the object of research is primarily qualitative and based on ethnographic work designed to shed some light on the meanings behind the various facets of the ElectroDance phenomenon. The findings and insights described in this dissertation will therefore result from the application of qualitative methods in order to explore and understand the experience of electro-dancers and their followers, both at the individual and group levels –aspects which would be more difficult to observe if other means were used. As the members of the ElectroDance movement grew in number, I also made an attempt to examine some general aspects linked to their

experience from a more quantitative perspective as well. This last subsection is therefore intended to give an account of the more general aspects having to do with the experience of young dancers and their relation to new media use. The interest here is not to delve into the group's singularities, which I believe can be best observed by way of ethnographic work, but rather to observe electrodancers' practices, preferences and attitudes from a more general perspective and how these are connected to broader patterns of media use among Spanish youth. As was argued earlier, because new media is undeniably enjoying greater presence in the social lives of youth in recent years, to such an extent that analysts and scholars alike have come to call them the Net Generation, I am also interested in examining the possible relationship between the intensive use of new media by young dancers and the patterns of media use by youth in general. In other words, the aim here is to discuss whether electrodancers' engagement with new media is predictable and consistent with the current habits of media usage among Spanish youth, or if their particular habits have emerged as a result of the logic that is particular to the Electrodance culture.

Just as I explored some of the conceptual issues concerning the characteristics attributed to the so-called Net Generation by different authors, I will also take a close look at the assumption that youth are the most representative social group in the use of communication technologies, readily adopting and using said technologies intensively. In this sense, a number of surveys conducted recent years in a number of countries reveal the same fact: that age is a perfect indicator in the use of new media. The 1999 study conducted in the USA mentioned earlier in this chapter showed an increasing use of new media by American youth. More recently, the Oxford Internet Institute published reports in 2005, 2007 and 2009 which revealed that 92% of children under the age of 18 are using new media, as opposed to only 20% of those aged 75 and above (Siapera, 2010: 71). In addition, the World Internet Project, which includes 32 countries and regions across the world, reported similar findings in 2010: people between 18 and 24 were found to use new technologies in all the countries surveyed except

Mexico. However, as Siapera suggests, this assumption is not without its own difficulties. The most important issue is the fact that even within a given age group there is enough variation among individuals associated to the social roles and their occupation. According to recent research[25], it seems more appropriate to refer to notions of "generation" or "life-stage" than age on its own, as these are better able to capture the prominence of youth as users of new media. According to this, it is only not that different age brackets (i.e. youth, middle-age, senior citizens) show differentiated patterns of new media use connected to varied social practices and situations, but such patterns of media consumption and use will differ from some cohorts to others. In this sense, what patterns of media consumption are seen among members of the ElectroDance movement when compared to the "Net Generation" as a whole within the context of Spanish society? Are they similar? As we will next see, young electrodancers' patterns of new media use do not differ in broad terms from those of Spanish youth, but they significantly do in relation to the types of new media and attached youngsters' practices. Let's look at all of this in greater detail, from a quantitive perspective.

My approach to this question will rely on data collected through two different surveys. The first is a 2008 survey conducted by Xperience Consulting with Findasense,[26] a private enterprise operating in the Spanish IT sector.[27] This

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[25] See Siapera, ibid, p.73 again in reference to the 2009 Pew Internet and Life Report.

[26] Xperience consulting and Findanese (2008). *Estudio sobre los jóvenes y las redes sociales en internet*. Retrieved from http://www.codigojoven.com/fileadmin/Descargas/Publicaciones/Estudio_sobre_los_Jovenes_Redes_Sociales_en_Internet.pdf

[27] This study from Xperience Consulting was not the only one conducted at that time. Additionally, I shall also refer to a study named "Informe Generación 2.0", conducted in 2010 by a team of psychologists from the Spanish University Camilo José Cela, who were also interested in exploring the relationship between Spanish youth and new media technologies, in particular social networking sites or "social media" such as Fotolog, Tuenti, Facebook and so on. In this case, the sample was significantly larger, including 6,798 youngsters from across Spain aged between 11 and 20 .

company surveyed 263 individuals aged between 14 and 22 who were in contact with new media an average of 5 hours a week. The second survey I conducted myself in the summer of 2008 as part of my MA research project and involved a smaller sample of 80 individuals aged between 13 and 24, all of which were connected in some way to the world of ElectroDance.[28] I shall refer to this survey in detail in the pages that follow. Although both studies draw on different populations and result in different samples, they were conducted the same year and covered the same age group. Furthermore, both surveys coincided to great extent in their objectives and subsequently in the question that was formulated - i.e. both sought to evaluate the way youth used new media. As electro-dancers could be said to constitute a subgroup within the broader Spanish youth sector, I will use data from each survey for comparative purposes, fully aware that those surveyed were not, strictly speaking, members of the same sample and study. Taking into consideration such limitations, my aim now is to outline correspondences or differences between them in order to answer the above-mentioned question, that is, whether the group of young dancers fit - and if they do, how and to what extent - the general picture of the pattern of use of new media among Spanish youth, or does their use of new media technologies respond to a specific pattern of use which only *coincidentally* matches that of the former group in intensity and purpose.

Data from both of these two surveys seem to converge in some general respects. In both cases, Spanish youth are featured as fervent consumers of new

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Sánchez, A.; Fernández, M. (2010). *Informe Generación 2.0: Hábitos de los adolescentes en el uso de redes sociales . Estudio Comparativo entre Comunidades Autonómas*. Retrieved from http://estaticos.elmundo.es/documentos/2010/07/06/Generacion20.pdf

28 For further discussion about the survey design, see Chapter 3. It suffices to say here that the set of questions included in the survey were meant to cover a wide range of issues regarding media usage and the characterization of the style. For the time being please note that I will only refer to those questions that help us make a comparison with the general patterns of new media consumption on the part of Spanish youth.

media. In the Xperience survey, 47.7% of youth report using new media on a daily basis, while 36.4% of them say they use it on a weekly basis.[29] In general terms, up to 83% of those surveyed stated that they had used some sort of new media in the three months prior to the survey. It is interesting here to distinguish between the types of practices typically associated with the most used new media supporting such practices. The following graph shows the most common reasons for using new media.

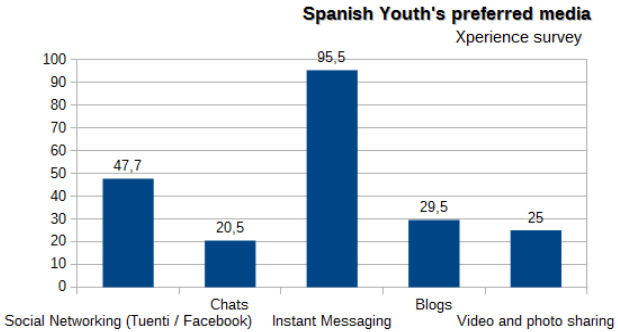
Figure 1: "Spanish youth's motives for new media use" (Xperience Consulting, 2008)

According to this study, the most common practices with new media are getting in touch with both close (81.8%) and distant (63.6%) friends. Activity related to user-generated content such as uploading, commenting, sharing and viewing photos -

[29] Along the same lines as the Xperience Consulting survey, in the "Informe Generación 2.0" survey, 34.5% of males report using different types of new technologies at different times throughout the day; for females, this percentage was higher, reaching 42.9%. In addition, 28% of males and 25.3% of females report using new media at least once a day.

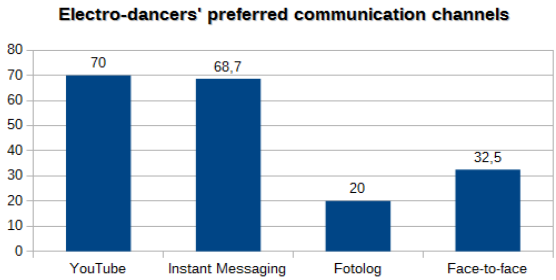
central to the practices of electro-dancer as we shall see - occupy nearly half of the time devoted to new media use for half of those surveyed (47.7%) as well as that labelled, somewhat ambiguously, as "communication", which comprises instant messaging, commentaries on diverse interfaces and so on (54.4%). When it comes to preferred interfaces "Instant Messaging" (95.5%) and "Social Network Sites" (42.7%) such as Tuenti or Facebook are mentioned as the most valued ones, followed in degree of importance by blogging (29.5%) and "video and photo sharing" sites (25.0%).

Figure 2: "Spanish youth's preferred media" (Xperience Consulting, 2008)



If we turn now to the case of youth involved in the ElectroDance style, those surveyed report similar rates of media consumption. For electro-dancers, communication technologies are indispensable when it comes to relating to peers. When asked about particular ways of communicating with their peers within the context of the dance, "Instant Messaging" (68.7%) and YouTube (70%) appear as the preferred choices, even more frequently used than regular, unmediated contact (32.5%).

Figure 3: “Electrodancer’s preferred communication channels” (2008)



Patterns of frequency of use as well as certain practices seem to match those of youth in general, such as commenting on someone else’s media content. The differences observed are related to the use of particular types of media and the situation-related use of such media. For electro-dancers, YouTube occupies a central role in their media practices over other types of media. As shall be shown in the ethnographic part of the study, YouTube’s centrality in ElectroDance is far from accidental. Indeed, in another question, 55% among those surveyed said they posted comments on YouTube videos almost every day, while 26.2% posted comments at least once a week. Furthermore, 43% reported producing and uploading a video at least once a month, while only 13.7% and 11.2% did so on a daily and weekly basis, respectively. Fewer (45%) reported the use of media interfaces such as blogs or Fotolog, be it on a monthly, weekly or daily basis.

The conclusion derived from this brief, mostly quantitative overview of media consumption leaves us with little doubt: as advanced earlier, individuals involved in the dance style do not differ from other users in terms of their engagement with new media. In all cases, new media technologies have clearly

attained an undeniable significance in the lives of youth. In this sense, members of ElectroDance aren't any different from the rest of Spanish youth, as they are an integral part of this population segment. Indeed, both surveys showed that that electro dancers and youth in general use Instant Messaging to communicate with their peers. Whereas both dancer and non-dancers seem to be equally involved with new media in general, there are significant differences if we look at the types of media interfaces they use and the sort of purposes media fulfil in the context of dance; in other words, style-related practices determine the specific orientation of and intensity in media appropriation, something which the survey is unable to show. When both surveys were conducted in 2008, electro-dancers did not seem to care much about "social media", at least in the context of the dance practice, whereas the Tuenti social networking site was one of the most popularly-used sites among young people in general. These surveys also showed that while YouTube seems to be central to the activity that surrounds ElectroDance, it does not play such a central role among general youth. It must be noted that a platform such as YouTube can be appropriated in ways that most young people could not envision – something that these findings seem to support. The same is true for other new media interfaces such as forums and blogs. What could be behind these divergences in practices and media choices? A quantitative approach proves to be limited in offering us clues onto the matter. Adopting a more qualitative, ethnographic approach can help us shed some light on the meaning of media practices within the socio-cultural realm of ElectroDance, showing their importance for the constitution, development and spread of the style. This is the main objective of the chapters that follow. Let us begin!

:: 3 :: Methodology

Some considerations on media and methodology

Many may regard the practice of ethnography as a research approach from the distant past, used for the purpose of studying far-away cultures located in exotic places. Nowadays ethnography continues to be central to anthropology, appearing in other fields such as the Social Sciences and Cultural Studies as the preferred or at least an important methodological choice for the study of particular domains of activity such as urban life, education, health and so forth. Ethnographic approaches have also proved successful in the area of Youth studies in the past, a field where this present study is situated. Willis' *Motor-bike subculture* (1978), Thornton's *Club Cultures* (1995) or more recently Hodkison's *Goth* (2001) are but a few salient examples of the benefits of taking on an ethnography-inspired approach for delving into the cultural life of youth social groups emerging in contemporary societies, better suited to observe the motivations, feelings, values and behaviours behind social practices. This thesis is premised by such considerations.

For ethnography to evolve alongside Western societies, it needed an adaptation that would allow it to be used in the study of today's media-saturated world. A number of contemporary authors have recently considered the impact of new media on the meaning and practice of ethnography. More powerful and exceedingly more interactive than media forms of the past, new media increase the possibilities of relating to each other in unprecedented ways, blurring the

conditions of time and space in which interpersonal and group interactions take place. Originally reliant upon well-bounded, stable ontological bases, the uncoupling of the spatial and temporal conditions of interaction is not without consequences in terms of research as well. Interestingly, Hine (2004) has reflected on these implications, roughly distinguishing between the study of the Internet "as a culture" and "as an artifact". By the former she refers to corpus of research carried out in the 1990s in numerous fields concerning the development of online communities and online identity linked to socialization phenomena in media environments. The latter related to the assumption that social processes taking place "on-line" can not be detached whatsoever, nor be excluded in their effects, from the "offline" contexts framing people's interaction. Here, we are not negating the capacity for media environments to give rise to their own culture, but rather putting the focus on identifying and understanding the broader cultural, political and economic contextual features that surround technology and the practices around it. In other words, whereas in the former the focus is placed on the online activity of those interacting, in the latter importance is given to the dialectics between what occurs in digital interfaces and what is channelled by other unmediated means, paying special attention to the ways individuals make sense of technology through certain practices, i.e. technology explained through specific forms of appropriation. Thus, whereas certain objects of research will be keen on studying particular contexts of mediated activity, others will seek to tie "life on the screen" to broader contexts framing such activity – i.e. those that can be seen from the perspective of "media ecology". My research will be based on this second approach.

An ethnography-inspired approach like this one aimed at connecting what is taking place "on the screens" to that occurring in the outer world does have one downfall: rather than interacting in just one single media environment - or through a single interface, as it shall be known in this study - one notices that the young people under study contact to each other by way of different interfaces and in different socially-defined situations, each characterized by its own interactive

qualities. In the social world of ElectroDance young people move constantly and seamlessly between digital and physical places, leaving behind traces of their activity that become indispensable research material for the external observer. However, this fact complicates the researcher's task since the field, traditionally conceived in terms of well-bounded, physical settings, gets blurred and more difficult to demarcate. Thus, the approach to ElectroDance must become "multi-site" and "multi-modal". It is "multi-site" in order to account for the numerous interfaces and places that allow for contact between young people. This term alludes to the different *sites* that are available for socialization. It is "multi-modal" because of the variety of styles - or modes - of interaction that exist. These modes of interaction are associated to both technologically-mediated and face-to-face communication which makes a difference in terms of meaning-making and exchanging. Furthermore, as interaction and social relations are scattered among different locations, the notion of field basically understood as a physical setting where individuals get together in person must be necessarily relativized and therefore rethought. In this sense, I soon realized that even the notion of "spatiality", traditionally regarded as the benchmark for fieldwork demarcation, might be somewhat misleading. Instead, following Hine (ibid: 78), the interest in physical location was to give way to the cultural processes involved in the practice regardless of the specific place where they occur. Thus, the way in which distinct spaces for interaction, media interfaces, practices and individuals become interrelated leads us to think about the field in terms of a network (Boyd, 2008: 53). In line with this assumption, and given that electro-dancers interact as much on the streets and sports pavilions as on YouTube, MSN, forums, webpages, blogs and Facebook, the greatest challenge I faced as a researcher involved making full sense of otherwise separate interaction processes taking place at each of these varied meeting points. This meant studying each process of interaction separately, and then looking at the way they all related to one another. In other words, by following electro-dancers wherever they go and whatever they do over an extended period of time, paying attention to continuing shifts between different

contexts and situations, the researcher can get a sense of the field, which arises from the movement across a series of interconnected elements each retaining their own idiosyncrasy. Based on these premises, my task as a researcher was to try to understand the logic of the network, that is, to try to capture how all these elements work together to shape ElectroDance as a meaningful phenomenon at both individual and group levels. To answer the main research question about the role of new media in the constitution and dissemination of ElectroDance would therefore have much to do with shedding some light on the way in which all these elements come together to attempt to make sense of them as a part of a more or less coherent phenomenon.

Further discussion on methodology is required at this point, in relation to the qualitative orientation of the bulk of the research methods used in practice. As stated above, my research is inspired by ethnography, thus deploying a variety of well-known qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups and participant observation usually associated to this research approach. Nevertheless, without moving away from the qualitative approach, in Chapter Four I will make use of a methodological variant of this method, which is known as the "life history".[30] At that point I will introduce the research topic to the reader, recounting the experience of a young dancer through the stages of his engagement with ElectroDance. As I take some procedural licenses in applying a life history, some clarification is needed on the use I will make of it in this study. In this case, the life history operates more as a rhetorical device than a full-fledged research-bounded outlook.[31] In other words, the personal story that unfolds throughout that

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[30] It is worth noting at this point what differentiates a "life history" from a "life story". For Bertaux (1980:3), whereas the latter focuses on a first-hand account of personal experience, the former allows for the inclusion of an array of varied, multiple, heterogeneous sources and data rather being confined to the subject's own discourse.

[31] Prominent sociologists like Wacquant have carried out ethnographic research with a clear phenomenological flavour in studying contemporary socio-cultural domains of practice. In his work *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, Wacquant explores the cultural world

chapter is not consistent with a previously-envisioned, phenomenology-oriented research plan based on the ongoing follow-up of a single dancer, with data obtained from just one source. Instead, the portrait of the *persona* I would like to offer is not pieced together from the data elicited from just one source but instead is a subjective construction of a fictitious dancer created by bringing together diverse experiential pieces of some *real* electro-dancers I had contacted and subsequently followed. By telling the story of a *semi-anonymous* electro-dancer I will try to identify the key features characterizing the ElectroDance experience while providing the reader with a general picture of the style; this more phenomenological account "from the inside" is supplemented by a more analytical perspective throughout the rest of the dissertation.[32]

Having said this, building a largely qualitative-based framework has not discouraged me from incorporating other sorts of non-qualitative methods in my research work. Thus, the research design was supplemented with a survey which gathered information from a group of electro-dancers and their followers that was larger than the group I originally followed with greater attention during most of

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of boxing by stepping into the shoes of a boxer, turning himself temporarily into a practitioner. Like Wacquant, becoming a dancer could have also been a possibility in my case, a starting point for a subsequent study of the same media practices as any other dancer. As suggestive as this research strategy may sound, a lack of time and an age difference with regard to the local subjects of the study made me rule out such a possibility. I feel that the experience of dance and dance-related media practices that was culled from my informants was more than adequate for my purposes. Chapter Four provides an account of all this.

[32] As it is not based on any particular "real" subject, this kind of strategy could be regarded as epistemologically problematic. Some might claim that since the account is not taken from a real person then no credit or "validity" can be given to what is told. Nevertheless, we do not think this is the case if we take into consideration that the content and organization of "life stories" are always the result of the researcher's choices and standpoint regardless of the degree of accuracy, fidelity or positivist correspondence to the facts of an alleged "true" personal story. And this is not meant to be an exception. Far from it, our goal is rather to show a coherent representation that is capable of showing - and interpreting - this youth style from "within", giving a voice to its protagonists directly (Bertaux, 2006:19).

the research period. Even though a small number of interviews would give me enough information on the key aspects of the ElectroDance style, I wanted to reinforce this initial data and preliminary analysis with data from a larger number of individuals in order to underpin my initial intuitions and observations. The aim of the survey, as I shall document next, was then to capture some general aspects in order to put together a picture of the style's scene along with its more defining features. In any case, the quantitative data plays a secondary and complementary role in terms of research design: despite the fact that the initial interviews provided me with clues which informed the design and topics of the survey, the application of both types of techniques was not really dependent upon one another. The survey was conducted in parallel to the development of qualitative techniques, and was loosely based on some ideas I had about the research object. It was only during the final stage of the research analysis that the data collected in these two different manners was used. The survey therefore acted as a technical device to supplement and to a certain extent contrast data obtained by qualitative means rather than explicitly seeking a triangulation of findings. Nevertheless, I believe that the application of this ethnographically-flavoured approach through the set of techniques associated to this field, supplemented by data obtained through the survey, has provided me with the flexibility in the means needed to deal with a multifaceted phenomena such as the ElectroDance youth style.

As stated earlier, it gradually became clear to me that an ethnographically-oriented approach offered a powerful instrument in the interpretation of culture and the life of social groups like ElectroDance. Furthermore, the cultural analysis that is normally applied at different points of the research, mostly associated to the end of this process, is connected in my case to specific theories of Communication and Sociology. As shall be argued at the beginning of the forthcoming chapters, the application of qualitative methods proved to be helpful in, for example, providing a method for the gathering of information later employed in the dissection of various phenomena: the internal

hierarchization of local groups following Bourdieu's Field Theory, the understanding of the “media logic” underlying the organization and development of the "Muerte Electro" ritual from the perspective of Hjavard's Mediatization Theory, and the comparison of communication models behind ElectroDance on the basis of Holmes’ conceptual notions of broadcast and network.

After this brief introduction to the methodological aspects concerning this thesis, I shall move on to document in greater detail the characteristics of the fieldwork, specific methods for data-collecting used as part of the research project.

Fieldwork and research chronology

As argued earlier, the identification of my object of study and subsequent delimitation of the field started in mid 2008 when I met a student at the secondary school where I worked at the time, who was involved in ElectroDance. At the same time, I began to see an advertisement for a Tecktonik music compilation on billboards and other spaces and became aware of shy attempts on the part of the cultural industries to bring the style to Spain. To write my MA dissertation, I spent some months trying to make sense of ElectroDance by speaking to local dancers, tracking them down through varied media interfaces and collecting other data here and there from mass-media corporations. I was able to glean some fundamental insights on the various idiosyncrasies of the style after a six-month research period conducted for the most part in Valencia (and Spain) for my MA dissertation. The writing of a paper titled *Why do electro-dancers dance on YouTube?* summarized the research work carried out between mid 2008 and 2009. The paper included some of the findings and ideas that will be developed in Chapters Seven and Eight, therefore the content of this chapter will build upon and offer a more refined analysis of the manifold issues dealt with at that time.

By the time I enrolled in the IN3 2010 PhD programme, the strengths and limits of the scope of this field in terms of a research opportunity became clearer to me. As suggested, making full sense of and tackling ElectroDance as a global cultural phenomenon would imply linking the development of the style at a local level to what was taking place somewhere else, particularly in Paris and increasingly all over the world. At the time I seriously thought about travelling to Paris in order to extend the fieldwork to this city since the style had originally appeared there and spread across France first. There were two reasons which stopped me from doing this. First, my total lack of competence in the French language was a big barrier to achieving the goals of the research work; second, the decline in the popularity of Tecktonik since 2009 would have made it difficult to tackle those aspects related to the inception and initial dissemination of the style that I was interested in as well as those having to do with the style's connection to cultural industries.[33] The research work covering the object of study beyond the more immediate boundaries of Valencia would then depend to a great extent upon what I could find in and through new media from places that were further afield, a solution which, in the final analysis, would end up having more positive than negative aspects. The way in which new media provides researchers access to social activity taking place anywhere becomes relevant not only because it opens up the field's boundaries and thereby the scope of research – and avoiding methodological nationalism in turn - but also because media, as shall be seen in the next section, becomes a research tool in itself.

I have been lucky enough to conduct my research in parallel to the worldwide spread of the style, and have been able to keep abreast of associated activity occurring in scenes from other countries, following the development of the Valencian scene. This proved to be valuable in my attempt to understand this

[33] Even though I decided against traveling to Paris, I still was able to contact Andrés Pérez, a journalist with the Spanish daily *Público* living in Paris, who kindly provided me with valuable information and insights on the phenomenon.

quickly-evolving phenomenon in which the local and global attains a conspicuous degree of interconnectedness. Thus, if the first period of my research in the context of the MA dissertation largely focused on the local scene, from 2010 to 2012 the fieldwork broadened and became more clearly multi-sited. I conducted interviews with young dancers from Mexico, Argentina, France, Ecuador and the United States, combining such interviews with observation of their activity as reported in blogs, Youtube and online forums. At the same time, as argued, I was keen on observing the evolution of the Valencian local scene, conducting additional interviews, analyzing data from different internet media and attending group events. By expanding the scope of the multi-located subjects of the study, my knowledge on ElectroDance youth culture clearly widened with regard to the research carried out for the MA dissertation. One of the greatest challenges of the research was to make sense of the interplay between multiple sites that were part of an ever-changing field, connecting the activity taking place simultaneously in different sites against the backdrop of mass-media coverage and the activity of the cultural industries. When I realized that I was not getting additional knowledge about the object of study, I decided in early 2012 to finish the fieldwork. Now that this general description of fieldwork and research timeline has been established, all that is left is an account of the methods for data-gathering used throughout the fieldwork.

Ethical issues in the research

Along with issues concerning the fieldwork and the timeline of the project, this study had to take into consideration the ethical concerns that are part of any social research of this kind. As any other research project, dealing with ElectroDance featured its own specific implications in ethical terms. In spite of the non-controversial, recreational nature of young dancers' activity, and the fact that

they do not constitute a “high-risk” group nor can the practices of its members otherwise be seen as subversive whatsoever, there were aspects that had to be taken into consideration, since as any other field of social research, it involved relating to people and situations which one observes and from which one collects different kinds of data. Ethics in this research work therefore involves a respect for the participant’s personal integrity, dignity and autonomy. Moreover, dealing with a field in which new media are the object of study and a site for observation alike (i.e. being both a “means” and an “end”) also involved fulfilling other ethical issues connected to scientific value and social responsibility of the project. Given their relevance in the course of the research, I shall examine each in greater detail in the two sections that follow.

Respect for the informants

Preserving respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons bears relation to the notion of privacy, which takes on particular significance in the context of digitally-mediated communication, as it is a context in which both the public and the private natures of certain social situations tend to become blurred for their very same participants. As the young dancers were not only observed when gathering on the streets and competing in pavilions but often in digital spaces too, the understanding of public-private was prone to vary in different degrees in keeping with specific moments, situations and activities at stake, sometimes in contradictory ways, thus raising doubts on the validity of found data. It has been stated that a given social situation can be deemed public when those observed “would expect to be observed by strangers”,[34] but the fact is that it is not always

[34] British Psychological Society, 2013, pp.6

easy in practice to determine the nature of a situation and the information one can gather from it in terms of the aforementioned distinction of public-private, that is, where young people did not care about whether they were being observed or not. In the case of the participants in this project, this dilemma was, for the most part, easy to handle since the behaviour of young dancers was largely oriented to public exposure. This was true even in those cases where personal feelings and intimate thoughts were overtly exposed to the scrutiny of the public. I tended to approach these situations case by case, following the lead of the subjects concerning the openness or restrictiveness they projected and the public identity they chose to use. I will use examples throughout the dissertation that I perceived to be deliberately shared by young people who deliberately wanted to make certain content public. Or put it in other words, it is dancers' will not only to be publicly recognized as ElectroDance practitioners by peers but deliberately in wider social circles too. In contrast, in those cases in which an act of communication did not have the intended effect (e.g. a private message initially sent to a specific peer which ended up being sent to unintended recipient due to the public nature of the medium, and ultimately being removed by the former due to social critique or mockery), I have omitted the personal identity of the youngster and the content of the communication.

In the same vein, I have tried to be careful with confidentiality and anonymity of participants in my research work, two notions which are inextricably interrelated in practice. These have been assured by the use of different research methods as well as the subsequent use of the special narrative approach in the writing of the dissertation. For instance, the confidentiality in the processing of data collected during my research survey. As I shall document later on in this dissertation, this survey sought to capture some general data on participants' personal involvement in ElectroDance from a quantitative standpoint. Personal details of those surveyed were required; however, participation was anonymous. In contrast, in most of the chapters that describe the qualitative empirical work, the criterion being followed has been semi-anonymity; quotes taken from

interviews with informants do not include their real name but the public identity of the dancer – i.e. dancers are most referred to by their nickname. Again, the choice here is in keeping with the public nature of young dancers' activity, although attention has been paid to further anonymize these few comments or interactions the publicity of which, because of its somewhat controversial or intimate nature, or any other reason, were regarded as being potentially compromising to the dancers' face. Even if it is impossible to foresee the consequences of making public this information provided by informants, and even if what is reproduced here can hardly be regarded as harmful in any way, particular attention was paid to minimize this danger.

A further exception to this procedural criterion is found in Chapter Four, where the story of ElectroDance is first told from the eyes of a fictitious dancer, who describes his journey into the dance world. As the depicted character does not correspond to any real dancer but is composed of numerous experiences taken from different people, I have given him and the rest of the characters in the narrative completely fictitious names.

Along with being respectful of electro-dancer's privacy, another issue that must be taken into consideration is their consent to use the data related to them. In relation to the gathering of the data, there were two aspects that were paid attention to. First of all, consent to use the data provided by participants was requested as a preliminary step in the use of specific data-gathering methods. This was applied to both personal and group interviews. Whether they were conducted in person or by means of any digital interface, participants were systematically informed about the purpose of the interview and subsequent use of the data provided. I was particularly careful to this regard with these few informants that had not yet reached the majority of age at the beginning of the fieldwork. I opted to keep the identity of those specific youngsters anynoymous. Likewise, the online survey included a preliminary screen with a full description of the research

purpose and terms of agreement of subsequent data use. Those who took part in the survey had to provide their consent before continuing with the survey[35]. However, there were other cases in which explicit consent was not asked or given. This occurred for the most part in relation to data that came from internet observation. I had access to data that was "out there" for the taking, available at just one click. The mere availability, permanence and traceability of people's online data, however, should not lead us to assume that such data can be automatically taken and used for purposes other than those of the context where they originally appeared. The criterion I followed here is the same as that described earlier, i.e. the perceived "publicness" of the data found on digital interfaces, and its perceived controversial and potentially harmful implications. That is, on the one hand, when I used data that I regarded being public in nature I did not ask for permission; on the other hand, when I came across data which was somewhat controversial or because of some reason I foresee that its subsequent dissemination could, in some remote, unexpected way pose a future problem to the individuals concerned, I have either masked their identities or referred to such information indirectly.

Scientific value

The validity of procedures, findings and conclusions of the research may be called into question given the conditions of mediated communication. In particular, contacting and communicating with informants outside situations of co-presence may result in lesser control on the part of the researcher over the terms and

[35] Given that the content of the interviews or more generally of the data gathered by different means was by no means seen as controversial or amenable to cause any future damage to participants, no authorization from the parents of those being under eighteen was required.

direction of the research. In my case, this was made plain, for instance, in the verification of participant identity. Whereas interviewees were easily identifiable when being interviewed through email or Instant Messaging (i.e. the same conversation raises issues that help associate the interviewee with provided content), it was more difficult to control participation in the online survey, which meant that I had no choice but to "trust" that those surveyed were valid participants. There was a similar issue that arose in relation to the environment surrounding mediated interaction. In the course of interviews carried out mainly through Instant Messaging, the lack of symbolic cues in text-based interaction meant that dialogue was not as fluid as I would have liked, with unjustified delays and breaks in between speaking turns. Whenever I detected that my informant was not entirely focused on the conversation (e.g. talking to someone else at the same time, being distracted for an unknown reason and so on) I would gently suggest postponing the exchange until another time. In contrast, email-based, asynchronous interaction proved to be more trustworthy in this sense. Finally, possible variations in the research procedures due to different hardware and software configurations which may have an impact on the research, particularly in relation to experiments in which accuracy is required, were not relevant in this case and will not affect the results in any sense.

Social responsibility

Keeping criteria of social responsibility is crucial issue to be aware of in the design and subsequent development of any research project. As a researcher, one must assess beforehand all those issues which may condition in one sense or another the way the research will be conducted. Or put in other words, the researcher's ethical commitment towards the varied circumstances surrounding the object of inquiry and the particular social position and characteristics of the people he/she will have to deal with is required. This involves, for instance, being clear about

one's attitudes toward the ethical side of the study object and the kind of actions to be taken under the premise to keep participants' personal integratity intact. This is of major importance in the case of collectives, groups and individuals who may suffer some kind of social discrimination or stigma, or could be at risk of social exclusion of any kind, just to name a few common ones. Although none of these sensitive circumstances surround the otherwise unproblematic, recreational, ludic nature of ElectroDance and its group practitioners, the ethical dimension of the research project was by no means absent. As stated above, I strictly behaved in keeping with criteria of social responsibility in maintaining the participant's privacy when needed and not using information which could be harmful to them in the future.

Additionally, as shall be pointed out next, I created a personal blog to help my fieldwork, which contained notes, ideas and information from varied sources as they appeared in the course of the research work. Participants in the research work will be informed and given access to the said blog and the information it contains if this dissertation becomes published in any form in the future. However, despite the information it contained was not sensitive in nature, I preferred throughout the fieldwork to keep the blog private as a way to guarantee the privacy of my research and that of those taking part in my study. As I understood the blog as a device for self-reflection and "out-of-sight" personal thinking, no comments or feedback in any form was provided by my informants, confining interaction with them to face-toface exchanges. Finally, despite the fact of being written in English language – which could pose reading problems to potential readers -, I plan on handing out this work once it is finished to those young dancers which I have had a closer relationship with throughout this time. As well as giving them access to the results of the work, this will give me the opportunity of receiving some feedback from them.

Methods and data-gathering

The techniques employed in this study, both qualitative and quantitative, did not always allow for easy recording, since many observations and personal exchanges were informally conducted with the members of the scene. It is important to note that, in accordance with the adopted ethnographically-inspired approach, qualitative techniques clearly dominated. What follows is an attempt to provide, when possible, a detailed description of the purpose, application and scope of the different techniques used during the fieldwork.

Personal and focus-group interviews

Twenty-nine interviews and one focus group were conducted throughout the whole research period. Two types of informants, dancers and members associated to cultural industries, were chosen for the interviews. The main criterion for the selection of candidates was their position within the intra-group/scene, this criterion overriding other issues such as social position, background or any other personal feature not directly related to their association with the group and style. The selected youngsters, aged between 16 and 25, of different backgrounds, were largely from Valencia but some were also chosen from far-off locations in order to follow the paths of the style as it traveled across social networks and relationships. I paid special attention to leaders (Taylor, S. & Bodgan, R., 1992) as a strategy guiding the selection of key informants, which provided me with valuable knowledge on the local expression of the style in each place. Secondly, I conducted a couple of interviews with members either associated to the cultural industries or having a specific business-related role. Finally, I also carried out a focus-group with the three members of Valencian BeatMode team, whose leader I had previously contacted at the beginning of my project, in order to add previously overlooked and unexpected details to my information.

Interviews varied in length and form in accordance with the chosen modality. In-person formal interviews were basically semi-structured, but quite open to allow for potentially valuable meandering, as determined by the conversation, these lasting between one and two hours. More informal exchanges, like conversations at *quedadas* (the Spanish word for get-togethers or meet-ups in public spaces), also proved to be a great source of information to supplement data obtained by other means. I also maintained casual conversations through new media with those informants with whom I had developed an ongoing acquaintance, transforming their interviews into continuing, open-ended and very rich exchanges. Conversations held through new media allowed me to easily search for informants and to introduce myself to them, conveniently laying the groundwork for a subsequent in-person meeting. Curiously enough, in instances where ongoing interviews with local informants began in a mediated fashion mostly through Instant Messaging, follow-up in-person interviews were often marked by a certain feeling of awkwardness between all actors involved.

If the use of new media played an important role in the interviews with local informants, it became absolutely essential when attempting to contact youth outside Valencia, whether they lived in other Spanish cities such as Madrid or Castellón or in other countries. In the latter cases, interviews were semi-structured and carried out through both Instant Messaging and, mostly email, the latter becoming more appropriate when interviewing dancers located in the USA or Argentina, due to differences in time zones. Some further points should be added regarding the email interview process that was used in this study. Questions were sent to the interviewees in groups of two in order to keep the dialogue as fluid and agile as possible while attempting to prevent interviewees from getting too bored or losing interest in the interview. Just as Bampton and Cowton (2002) remark, they replied with long, elaborate answers, presumably due to the fact that asynchronicity offered interviewees the chance to reflect on the questions. I believe that this counterbalanced and even outweighed the presumed downsides of this interview modality, namely the loss of spontaneity, richness and symbolic

cues in the communication between interviewer and interviewee. The possibility of finding activity from those interviewed across varied digital interfaces constituted an opportunity for complementary triangulation as data elicited through interviews could be compared to digital sources. The following table is meant to provide more detailed information about the work conducted in this regard:

Table 2. List of the conducted interviews between 2008 and 2011

Interviewee	# of interviews	Format	Modality of interaction	Origin or location	Date
Local DJ from Valencia (DJ Miret)	1	Individual	Face-to-face	Valencia	September 2008
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (Ache)	3	Individual	Instant Messaging / Face-to-face	Valencia	July 2009 / January 2011
Local scene leader of Valencia (Juanito)	2	Individual	Face-to-face Instant Messaging	Valencia	December 2008 / June 2010
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (CristianRTX)	1	Individual	Face-to-face	Valencia	July 2008
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (Jeison)	1	Individual	Face-to-face	Valencia	November 2008
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (Furió)	2	Individual	Instant Messaging / Face-to-face	Valencia	July 2009 / April 2010
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (Astro)	1	Individual	Face-to-face	Valencia	October 2009
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (HouseRitta)	1	Individual	Face-to-face	Valencia	November 2008
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (Serox)	1	Individual	Face-to-face	Valencia	September 2010
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (Tormo)	1	Individual	Instant Messaging	Valencia	April 2010
Relevant local dancer from Valencia (Edwin)	1	Individual	Instant Messaging	Valencia	November 2008
Relevant local crew	1	Focus	Face-to-face	Valencia	November

(BeaMode)		Group (3)			2011
Local dancers of Castellón (Stewiee, Arno)	2	Individual	Email	Castellón	May 2010
Independent dancer (Santi)	1	Individual	Instant Messaging	Madrid	August 2008
“Dance Elecktion” crew member (Kiwi)	2	Individual	Instant Messaging	Madrid	October 2008 / March 2009
“Dance Elecktion” crew member (Yoryo)	1	Individual	Instant Messaging	Madrid	July 2010
Owner of tecktonik virtual shop	1	Individual	Email	Zaragoza	November 2009
Local dancer from Castellón (MyDro)	1	Individual	Instant Messaging	Zaragoza	November 2009
Local dancer from Lleida (xDie).	1	Individual	Instant Messaging	Lleida	November 2009
Italian dancer (GA)	1	Individual	Email	Italy	November 2010
French Vertifight organizer (Youval)	1	Individual	Email	France	October 2010
French dancer (Treaxy)	1	Individual	Face-to-face	France	October 2011
Argentinian scene organizer; a dancer (A. Dotta)	1	Individual	Email	Argentina	May 2010
Journalist from Spanish daily *Público* (A.Pérez)	1	Individual	Email	France	January 2009
Mexican scene organizer (Leonardo)	1	Individual	Email	Mexico	March 2011
Mexican scene organizer (Gian)	1	Individual	Email	U.S.A	May 2011
Ecuadorian scene organizer; a dancer (Iván)	1	Individual	Email	Ecuador	March 2011
TOTAL	**33**	**29 individuals**			

In-person / mediated participant observation

Along with interviews, observation-based work has provided me with crucial information about ElectroDance, especially when it came to scences located abroad which were not easily accessible. In this category, I must differentiate between two types of observation. The first involved observing the subjects of my study at their regular meetings, whether they were in public settings like streets or semi-public ones like recreational centers. I attended these meetupss in order to contact young dancers, meet them personally and for the most part see them acting under conditions of no *media interference*.[36] Although I normally interacted with those who I had come to know over time and took advantage of my presence by asking them questions as needed, I made an effort to take on the role of an external observer, my role in this sense not being that of *participant*. In-person observation then consisted of taking notes of what I had seen, heard and felt, which I later posted on a private blog that served as a notebook of sorts.[37] When I became aware of changes in the group dynamics I made a number of visits to local electro-dancer events at different times, firstly to weekly meetings known as *quedadas*, secondly to informal local competitions, and finally to more formally organized Vertifight events. The following table summarises the work done in this regard:

[36] By "media interference" I do not mean that dancer will not use media in my presence, but my contact with them was not technologically mediated by any digital interface. This fact should not lead the reader to think that youngsters do not use media in my presence, which happened constantly.

[37] Blog as a data-storage and organizing tool fits the researcher's needs in ways that improve upon traditional, paper-based notebooks. Notes can be neatly stored and data is easily retrievable by date and category using the indispensable tagging feature.

Table 3. List of the events and places visited for in-site observation between 2009 and 2011

Type of event	Location	Date
Quedada	Parterre (Valencia)	January 2009
Quedada	Ruinas de Aragón (Valencia)	March 2009
Quedada	Centro Comercial "Nuevo Centro" (Valencia)	March 2009
ElectroBattle	Instituto Rascanya (Valencia)	November 2009
Electrobattle	Instituto Rascanya (Valencia)	March 2010
C.R.E (Vertifight)	Ribarroja	April 2011
C.R.E (Vertifight)	Ribarroja	October 2011

In-person observation was combined with internet observation. In particular, internet observation turned out to be a valuable source of data over time, becoming a modality of observation that condensed a significant part of the activity that was the object of interest. The value of this is twofold. From the very beginning young dancers channeled a great deal of their communication via digital interfaces, the content of their interactions getting fixed in the technology and fully accessible to the external observer. This circumstance provided me with privileged data which I could not have accessed otherwise, not even when personally attending their group meetings. The extent to which people alter their usual behaviour in circumstances when they feel they are being observed has been fully documented by social scientists. In the presence of the researcher, they are said not to behave "naturally" any more. Internet-based observation is to a great extent freed from this influence, allowing the observer to follow the reactions of individuals, their behavior and different modes of expression with no external interference. Yet this fact should not lead us to think that subjects behave *naturally* in digital interfaces since that would imply the existence of a "standard" behavior based on unmediated interaction. Not denying the validity of such assumption, what new media-based interaction involves is a sort of "naturalness"

on its own, one being the object of study in this thesis. Furthermore, the degree of relative anonymity that mediated interaction guarantees offered me an interesting opportunity for participant observation in ways that in-person observation did not. Thus, as my knowledge of dance grew over time, I intervened on numerous occasions in/through Youtube-conducted conversations as though I were another dancer, giving my personal opinion on videos, encouraging dancers to keep on improving or reviewing the quality of their video-editing.

Documentary sources

Another source of valuable data came from the analysis of different media resources that did not fall strictly within the category of dialogue-oriented interactions on YouTube or online forums which were the object of the previous section. By this I am referring to the task of data-gathering and associated analysis using periodicals, TV advertising, particular commercial websites as well as electro-dancer blogs, videos and personal webpages. Whereas the analysis based on the observation of mediated participation sought to make sense of interactions on the basis of what they say about the style and the interactions themselves, documentary analysis deals with information geared to put together a picture of the style by particular actors, whether they be young dancers, small entrepreneurs, cultural intermediaries or mass-media corporations and so on. In this sense, the sources, technologies and formats used are varied, including online and paper-based periodicals, TV advertising and reports, corporate websites, and blogs. My assumption here is that user-generated, mass-media and advertising content involve their own codes, formats and languages of (re)presentation which are worth considering separately from a semiotic-sensitive perspective, providing interrelated yet distinct views of the same phenomenon, and which all come together to give it form. The following table summarises the work done regarding both in-person and mediated interaction and documentary analysis:

Table 3. List of the digital interfaces used for observation of mediated activity from 2009 to 2011

Type of media	Period of observation	Observation
Youtube	From January 2009 to present	More than approximately 500 videos viewed along with their attached comments. · 48 dancer videos analyzed in depth.
Webpages / forums	From September 2009 to July 2010	Follow-up of dozens of conversation threads on the forum of Madrid-based "Tecktonik Spain" webpage.
Blogs	From January 2009 to June 2010 / From January 2011 to March 2011	Follow-up of activity of SkyRock blogs of 3 local Valencia crews. Follow-up of activity of national Mexican webpage "CulturaElectro.mx"
Mass-media (online newspapers, TV coverage, etc.)	From January 2009 to December 2010	Review of online coverage of local and national newspapers (i.e. *Las Provincias*, *El Mundo* and *20Minutos*) and National TV (A3, TV3, La2 and LaSexta) and foreign TV reports (BBC, Reuters)

Survey

Finally, during the time period between May and August of 2009, over 200 people were invited to voluntarily take part in a 16-question survey for the purpose of obtaining extra data to enable triangulation with qualitative data. As the survey depended on voluntary collaboration, I started off by recruiting prominent dancers through YouTube and via personal contacts previously made in the scene. This enabled me to find other interested parties, gradually expanding the list of survey respondents.[38] In the end, 80 individuals took part in the survey, which was

[38] I was able to verify the identity of most participants – those who had established a visual record of themselves through their videos.

conducted online through the IN3 survey-generating website. The only prerequisite for participating in the survey was to be a member of the ElectroDance Spanish-speaking community. The topics covered by the fourteen-question survey ranged from surveying patterns of use of new media technologies to personal attitudes towards the style, the aim being to generate survey data that would provide more systematic knowledge of a broader sample of Electrodancers.

No standard criterion of statistical correctness or reliability guided the design of the sample so that the usefulness of the survey should not be assessed in terms of representativeness of a larger group of individuals. As my approach was fundamentally qualitative-oriented, the only goal was to gather further information on specific issues by widening the small circle of local contacts first established in 2009 as part of my research work. Needless to say, the use of the survey proved useful in providing valuable supplementary data to that obtained by other means.

PART II

Building a worldwide youth dance in digital times

:: 4 :: A personal journey into the ElectroDance world

ElectroDance, as any other youth phenomenon, offers us diverse entry points to be grasped. In a scientific work like this, I am expected to give a comprehensive, accurate account of the most significant aspects which have made ElectroDance a worldwide youth phenomenon in the past years, examining in particular the influence of new media in the production of the style. As posed in the introduction, each part of this dissertation covers the different angles of the object under study. In part two, which comprises this chapter and chapters five and six, I look at ElectroDance from a sort of history-centred outlook, providing a general picture of the style out of its conditions of production and subsequent development. To tell a "history" of ElectroDance - which implicitly involves no more than telling a story about it - shall then mean to give an account of the style as resulting from the articulation of a myriad of interlinked yet diverse aspects that are social (i.e. a specific group of young people sharing interests and taste), spatial (i.e. a number of public and semi-public meeting places such as, at the onset, clubs, discotheques and streets, and later, pavilions and new media, where young dancers bring the practice of dance in), temporal (i.e. a period of development ranging roughly from 2007 to present), symbolic (i.e. diverse forms of meaning-making expressed in the aesthetics of fashion, preferred sound genres

and kinetic, body-related expression attached to the dance style), technological (i.e. usage of varied media artefacts), agential (i.e. a range of interrelated actors, from dancers to cultural intermediaries, taking part in the style-shaping). Furthermore, in taking on an analytical standpoint on communication, the attention will be geared to observe and interpret how the dynamic interplay of the above facets results in the production of a meaningful style to youth.

However, the point of departure for our itinerary across the world of ElectroDance will take on another perspective. Instead of getting started by thoroughly covering the above-listed dimensions being indispensable to understand the shaping of the style, this chapter steps into the characterization of the style and its subsequent evolution by unfolding a different tactics. In particular, what follows in the next pages is the history of the style as narrated by one of its members. Thus, it is the experience of one young dancer based on his particular *journey* as an "insider" across the ElectroDance what shall set the entry point into the ElectroDance world. The reason behind this choice is twofold.

Firstly, the view of insider shall allow to unfold a coherent, sequenced narrative on what the style "is", functioning as an appropriately descriptive supplement to what will be said throughout the next two chapters in a more analytical fashion. Secondly, it allows to shed light into a range of nuances which would be left outside by simply taking on an external, presumably more "objective", observation-based approach[39]. In looking into the dancer's experience from the dancer's own view, it is possible to make sense of forged-in-communication aspects of the style such as inner personal motivations underlying the style enrolment, particular appraisals of the style's meanings and connotations, specific dynamics of learning and sharing knowledge, accounts of

[39] For example, a subject-focused narrative can bring to the fore the various psychological and emotional facets involved in experience which affects not only the several ways in which the dance practice and the social relations with other dancers are lived, either concerning or not the use of new media.

the nature of social relationships from the prospect of one's relative position within team, group and scene[40], or attitudes and dispositions regarding subjects' engagement with media. Within this context, listening to young dancers' voice provides us with the additional benefit of looking at identity from one's subjectivity and its relationship with new media use. To this purpose, it might be useful to rely upon Walter Benjamin's notion of 'complex kind of training'.

As a "complex kind of training" Benjamin referred to the ongoing young people's cognitive and behavioural adaptation to new cultural dynamics and meanings linked to technological developments (Brooker, 2010: 9). By the time he lived in, the appearance of cultural forms such as cinema and photography opened up a space for cultural change having an impact in the domains of, for example, artistic practice and leisure time. On the basis of individuals' engagement with mass-media and their symbolic contents new social situations and practices were created - e.g. going to cinema, being portrayed. At a more subjective level, these media forms required from individuals to develop new sorts of cultural dispositions and attitudes, a kind training that could equally be said to exist today too in relation to the shifting technological conditions brought by new media. Now as then, the shaping of individuals' dispositions and attitudes associated to media use is bound to involve a high degree of emotional investment underway. A personal narrative opens up thus the opportunity to bring to the fore the emotional dimension of the dance practice and media use. This shall mean in our case to look at the ways in how emotions are shaped and expressed under the influence of new media technologies, taking part in what could be more broadly regarded, following Williams, as the "structure of feeling" of our time[41].

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[40] The term *scene*, originally coined by Straw (1992), is further discussed in the next chapter.

[41] With this expression Williams referred to "the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time" (quoted by Harding, p.5) in attempt to vindicate the category of experience as indispensable form of knowledge and communication. Moreover, according to

That said, the chapter is divided into five subsections roughly corresponding to the differentiable stages into the pathway across ElectroDance; from the very moment when a young dancer knows about the style existence and subsequently enters the dance scene to when they decide to leave. As previously argued in the chapter on methodology, the dancer who tells his own story, one to whom I refer to as Kino' is not any specifically-known electro-dancer, but a fictitious one whose portrait is drawn out of the experiential bits from two *real* ones whom I had the opportunity to follow throughout my research period.

Stepping into the dance

I first met Kino in summer of 2008. This first encounter was to be the first of a series of four throughout the course of my research, although I communicated with him in a more informal fashion along a number of different mediated ways over time. These can be seen as moments at which I found recommendable to meet him up in an unmediated fashion in order to make our communication more agile and likely richer, thereby not being subjected to the constrictions of text-based interaction. The three encounters coincide with key moments of what could arguably be viewed as his personal pathway into the Electrodance world.

By the time I met Kino in November 2008, Kino was a fairly skinny, blond-dyed hair, eighteen-year old boy, taking studies on Information Technologies in a Vocational Training School of Valencia. He had just got into Electrodance and was really excited about how things were going as to what would later on be the small local scene of Valencia. He will be talking retrospectively to me about his initial

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Williams each generation develops its own structure of feeling (ibid, 5). No doubt the ongoing embeddedness of new communication technologies into young people's realities must play a role, along with some other varied factors, in the shaping of this today's youth particular "structure of feeling".

engagement into the style six months before this first conversation, whose story is in turn tightly connected to that of the very beginnings of the local scene of Valencia.

> **Kino**: Well, I knew first about Electrodance… or better said, Tecktonik, by Alexis [one of his friends at the school]. It was more or less in May 2008 [...]. He'd heard of Electrodance through YouTube, where you can find videos of the Metropolis parties… you know… those being called "Tecktonik killer" where French dancers gather to compete against each other. He showed me who Spoke and Jey-Jey are, but if I have to tell you the truth he was not very skilled at the dance at the time and only was able to do some among the most basic steps by then … pretty much like everybody else.
> **Tony**: … so you two were the only ones knowing about Tecktonik existence in Valencia, right?
> **Kino**: Kind of… well, with the exception of Jean [another dancer], who was the first one uploading a video to YouTube and having a public personal account up there. Alexis showed me who he is, although had not talked to him yet. Because he was a French guy living in Valencia, we could soon check that he was following a bunch of people in France and Morocco, and some other people were following him too. Tecktonik was followed by a lot of people at that time not only in France, but in other countries too. Jean knew many people outside Spain. [...] We also contacted Girly [another dancer] some time after via an internet forum created by us. She lives in Castellón, and had appeared in the T.V show *Fama* only some weeks before. She happened to be the first girl dancing Tecktonik overhere. We came to get along with her really quickly.

What I shall refer to as ElectroDance throughout the dissertation was not originally known as such. The dance was called *Tecktonik*, a kind of arm-based, highly-speedy dance style executed over electronic music. It was initially created around 2006 and 2007 by a bunch of young people being regulars in specific popular Parisian venues such as discotheque Metropolis. Indeed, Tecktonik was the commercial name chosen in 2007 by certain small, club-related French entrepreneurs coming from the world of clubs in order to exploit economically a

phenomenon which would firstly grow inside the discotheques, but soon after beyond their walls too. Tecktonik was therefore both an emergent dance form as well as a branded youth style, and it is by way of dance-oriented parties sponsored by clubs' owners that those initially engaged in the dance practice will come to progressively shape the dance form. Just as in Paris, the attendance to clubs by young people like Kino in Valencia, and more generally clubbing as a leisure-oriented activity, seem to be the reasons behind him and some other's interest in this specific dance style, as he would tell me about in our last encounter two years after:

> **Kino**: First of all, the music, the sound. I think the fact that you could hear it at that time in discotheques has an influence. Electro was played all the time at some places when I started going out … I was sixteen and I was only allowed to attend afternoon sessions. [...] Apart from this, I liked a lot the type of dance movements when it was known as Tecktonik…, you know, basic but easy to do … not as hard to learn as Break-Dance… and you felt you could perform nicely in no time.
> **Tony**: You mean dancing like the French did?
> **Kino**: Yeah, you saw these French guys dancing on those home-made videos on YouTube and thought 'I can do it just like them!'. Besides, their look was appealing, they looked really nice, with that sort of sport-inspired fashion … the parties, the sound … everything.
> **Tony:** So ... you learnt about how those parties are like thanks to YouTube, did you?
> **Kino:** Yeah, that's right.
> **Tony**: Didn't you like something else? … I mean … another type of music or styles?
> **Kino**: Yeah, definitely. I also liked funky and hip-hop but never dared to dance them … And about music, I like rock, but not punk or heavy rock as I've just told you, … you know … things like *Estopa* or *El Canto del Loco*. My older sister and her friends used to play them at home and I ended up enjoying them myself too, although I'd never acknowledge it publicly [grinning]".

Kino's and other young dancers arrival to the style bears no doubt relation to the music they liked and the places they used to visit in their free time. Tecktonik can be seen as a product of these conditionings - i.e. a particular Clubber Culture. But apart from the prior I was also keen on finding out what specifically led him to start dancing.

> **Tony**: What initially took you to start dancing? … What did you like of it in particular?
> **Kino:** Well, I was impressed by the way those French guys moved, how they danced and move their arms and legs… it felt kind of weird at the beginning but I was hooked soon.
> **Tony**: And I guess it was nice to be able to dance it in discos…
> **Kino**: Yeah, sure, nobody used to dance like that in discos, you know, people don't know how to dance with Electro music and this gave you a way!
> **Tony**: Was it indirectly a good opportunity to show off maybe?
> **Kino**: Well, that's right, it's true that girls pay more attention to you when you dance Electro [smiling]

Tecktonik seemed to bring a roughly patterned, stylised way to move in discos, a way to express oneself through the body which this particular type of social setting lacked of so far, at least in a very well-defined, recognisable manner. Getting back to the first excerpt, it is worth highlighting the fact of the swift spread of the style beyond the boundaries of France, reaching out in a short span of time other far-off locations such as Morocco. As I came to know through the accounts of some of my informants, French young practitioners occasionally who travelled abroad in holidays were to disseminate the style which was largely danced in clubs, but more and more at streets and homes, showing it to acquaintances who had no relation to its context of emergence; it is via new media that young people like

Kino will largely learn about the dance existence[42]. In this particular case these two sources converge into Kino's arrival to the style. Kino's accounts on the early mediated interaction with unknown people across different locations in Spain provide a sense of the role of new media enabling multiple communications at a variable scope:

> **Kino**: "I remember how fun and useful was for us to run that forum at the beginning. It was Alexis' idea to open it just to cast about for some other dancers out there in Spain. It didn't take long for few people like us to show up. There were people from Spain most of all, particularly from Valencia, but from other places too like Madrid or Sevilla, and from outside Spain too…, there were people from South-American countries like Chile, México or Argentina, where Tecktonik began to be known little by little too [...]. It was so much fun to go there and see what other people would say… and the best of all was Alexis and me trying to pass ourselves as total experts at the matter ... people just believed us! [laughing at loud]".
>
> **Tony**: You say that apart from funny it was useful … what do you mean by that?
>
> **Kino**: Well, people that used to go to the forum were pretty much in the same situation like us, you know..., we all felt kind of isolated in our respective cities, dancing this new thing and searching for others with whom to share our new passion pretty unknown by anyone not being French…, it was a form of getting together somewhere.

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[42] As we shall see throughout this dissertation, it is thanked to new media that the dance style was to be spread like wild fire. Before too long, the style was to be practiced and followed by hundreds of young people beyond France, gaining a variable popularity depending upon the country at stake - e.g. it was not as much followed in Spain as in Russia, Italy or Mexico. In overall terms, ElectroDance will never acquire the salience of other youth styles like Hip-Hop beyond the small circles of influence, remaining a minoritary phenomenon anyway.

These first excerpts on Kino's first contact with Electrodance address some issues regarding the relationship between knowledge acquisition and patterns of socialization, along with references to the varied new media interfaces supporting the communication processes involved (whether they be co-presence- or digitally-based ones), that are worth remarking. First of all, according to Kino, a traditional institution like school, whose is meant to primarily provide a context for individuals to acquire formal knowledge, reveals likewise itself as a place where young people establish social relations that can be regarded as part of their learning too. It is by entering into contact with other peers there that individuals forge their networks of acquaintances and often friends, mostly on the basis of face-to-face interactions. This seemed to be Kino's case to get to know about ElectroDance. In the context of school, Kino initiates a friendship with Alexis, which becomes a point of entry for him into the youth style as well as to the subsequent social network to be formed around the dance[43]. The very existence of ElectroDance and the basic cultural meanings of the dance style was for him something thus elicited at the very onset through an interpersonal relationship based on in-person exchanges. Furthermore, as it can be inferred from his following words, this communicative fashion dominated another relevant context of knowledge transfer, that is, that of the interpersonal relationship of apprenticeship between a skilled dancer and a tutee beginner, the street serving as the place wherein these learning dynamics is developed.

> **Kino**: When I met LittleK [another local dancer] he hardly knew a couple of old-style movements. He was 3 years younger than me, but even so we become good friends. I introduced him into the new style [...]. He used to

[43] According to the survey conducted in the summer of 2009, having some acquaintance already practicing the dance was pointed as the primary way in getting into the Electrodance, chosen by 32% of the surveyed youngsters.

> come over at home to play videogames and we watched videos on YouTube so that before going out to meet other dancers, we tried to practise what seen on YouTube. We ended up going together everywhere ...

Knowledge acquisition based on forms of mutual embodied interaction is crucial to learn about the dance, but other forms of extended communication broadened Kino's first-contact list. Firstly, an interface like YouTube remarkably reveals itself as playing a central role in people's discovery of the style as well as providing a source for learning. Despite living in the same city, Kino and Alexis found Jean through the latter's YouTube videos, media itself allowing them to get in touch for the first time. Secondly, both came to hear about Girly through her appearance on T.V show, the former subsequently being able to contact her thanks to the forum managed by both of them[44]. What all these variants in getting to know about on another's existence suggests is a range of modes of interpersonal connection operating at a different level, in an overlapped manner, which result in young people's particular patterns of sociality. Whereas Kino's first social relationship occurs in the context of a face-to-face encounter, he hears about Girly by way of his engagement with a third party - that is, the media corporation agents running a T.V show –, which involves a secondary, vertically-constituted indirect mode of interpersonal connection. Finally, the case of Jean's is likewise based on a agency-extended way of connection enabled by YouTube media. Unlike Girly's case, interpersonal communication develops here "horizontally" in being embedded into an interactive network environment where technology makes a substantial difference to network-based forms of association of yesteryear. Kino's access to the style world relied thus upon the simultaneous, often overlapping deployment

[44] According to data on my survey (p.59), these two options, that is, various network media (27,5%) and to a lesser degree mass-media (11,5%) were signaled as the second and third sources for discovery the style.

of diverse modes of interpersonal association which refer in their turn to a number of varied communicative situations where no specific one could be said to act either as a frame of reference for the others nor to recast how each should be experienced by individuals, but all jointly contributing to the subjective overall experience[45]. This last observation get us back in turn to the another relevant aspect in Kino's earlier comment, that is, that of the role of media forum as a means to cope with the "isolation" of its participants by the time. Kino regards the participation on the forum as useful for the purpose of putting in contact geographically distanced people who held the same interests. Seen as an independent communicative phenomenon on its own, the activity on the forum around this subject recalls somewhat for the sense intimacy and reciprocity that early research on the so-called "virtual communities" usually regarded as intrinsic to Computer-Mediated Communication; a sense that is supposed to be more and more absent in today's everyday interpersonal communication.

> **Kino**: Everybody in the forum said pretty much the same, you know, … we are now and then just young people looking for something new, exciting …, a new sound, a new way to dance, to get dress and so on.
> **Tony**: Do you have any anecdote worth telling to that regard?
> **Kino**: Mmm… [thinking for a couple of seconds] something really funny happened one day. One guy happened to upload some comic-like images taken out from the artwork of the Tecktonik's DVD Vol.4. These pics were kind of hilarious because you could see some guys and girls eccentrically dressed up as people in the Tecktonik parties of Metropolis, … you know

[45] To notice the salience of new media we could imagine as an hypothesis new media being removed from the whole communicative context of ElectroDance: in order to circulate Electrodance meanings, we would be left, on the one hand, with the classical form of vertical meaning dissemination through television and, on the other hand, with locally face-to-face-based, horizontally-constituted, unmediated peer networks. What might be likely *lost* in dispending with new media would be the enhanced ability to extend individuals' interconnectedness at both local and a translocal levels, the style being spread and shared uniquely relying on the mass media participation.

> …, with those massive mohawk haircuts, gaudy, highly-tightened outfits, sporty shoes and the like [...] That was too much, man! People were commenting long on that and the funniest thing is that everybody said to like the look while confessing as not being willing to dress pretty much like that!
> **Tony**: Weren't you either?
> **Kino**: No, I wasn't. From the beginning, I was much more into the dance and of course the music, but I never saw myself looking like that… it felt like… I don't know...
> **Tony**: How come?
> **Kino**: Well…, to be honest that look seems kind of effeminate to me. As some other participants made it clear on the forum, many other people and acquaintances have felt in the same way about the movements and gestures of the dance... This is something I've had the chance to check out myself. When we dance on the street, there's people passing by who sometimes laugh and mock at us, although I never cared much about it, unlike some others [...] I'm used to caring for my hairstyle and I sometimes like to wear tight t-shirts when I most go to the discos … but dressing like that is to show off too much.

As noted here, the communication environment provided by the forum, close to what could be a community of practice, allowed Kino and other pioneers of the emerging translocal scene to negotiate and make sense of the meanings around the aesthetics of Electrodance, and even to take a stance on the matter more noticeably without the necessity to meet one another in an embodied mode nor having a more complete knowledge of one another. According to Kino, everybody was positioned rather against the look featured by the Tecktonik's brand creators at that time. Kino's own account significantly points to the sex- and gender-related connotations initially attached to the style. He regards the Tecktonik aesthetics as being "effeminate", a symbolical connotation that came to affect the fashionable look and the set of movements symbolically associated to the dance form. Both aspects shaping the style are experienced by Kino in a different way. Whereas following the style aesthetics could become to certain extent viewed as advisable - the distinctiveness of a certain personal image acting a

valuable cultural marker within diverse places such as the discotheque or the street -, the bodily dimension of the dance came to be *sensuously* appealing and the same time paradoxically felt as socially reprehensible – i.e. people exerting a form social control in public spaces by means of mocking and the like. In any case, this issue did not prevent him as well as many others from getting more and more engaged with the style. Besides, at times where local scenes were not formed yet, the negotiation of meanings had to happen by technical means.

Joining a team

By the time of our first encounter, an emerging yet small local scene was slowly taking form in Valencia. A number of approximately forty youngsters had joined to the pioneers, Kino being one of these. Following the internal organization of the more neatly-constituted Parisian scene -and in line with the tradition started long before by Hip-Hop subculture -, this early cluster of members was splitted into several teams in order to best articulate and dynamize the local scene. "United Electro", led by Kino, would be one of these crews. Personal experience within a team and more broadly concerning the scene's first steps focus our interest here.

> **Tony**: As far as I know, you have just created 'United Electro', didn't you?
> **Kino**: Yeah, that's right. Some people have joined us lately. People start liking and practising the dance and that's awesome [...] I arranged a casting a month ago in order to recruit new members. I intended to bring the best dancers on board and was happy with how everything went.
> **Tony**: How's everything now in the team?
> **Kino**: Oh, great! I'm really happy about how we're doing in so little time. There's a lot of good vibes among us. We're almost like brothers right now, you know… a bunch of very good dancers who were on their own are now together in this team, it feels like a dream come true, something being unbelievable only some months ago.
> **Tony**: Why is it important to be part of a team for you instead of dancing

> on your own?
> **Kino**: Well, I think it serves you a lot in different ways. You share a lot of things in a team, you learn a lot, hang out together, even go out at night … we're pretty much like a family.

Teams become the basic socialising unit wherein communication takes place within the Electrodance social world. At this point, the explicitness of Kino's words regarding the emotional investment in one's attachment to the group is one deserving to be highlighted. To speak in terms of "being brothers" or "being a family" indeed suggests a strong bond among their members. It tacitly speaks of a sense of belonging, mutual affection and shared intimacy as intrinsic to the dancer's personal experience. Moreover, the emotional dimension can not be unlinked from the crucial fact that it is within a team where one acquires an understanding of the style idiosyncrasy and some central values such as self-improvement, effort, discipline, competitiveness and respect among others, as Kino points to here:

> **Kino**: [...] In a team you basically learn what the dance is like. You can learn a great deal about the dance by means of YouTube, but it's not the same. Within your team, you learn each others' steps and movements, and they learn yours. When you dance you try to get better all the time because every dancer wants to do always his best. So the better one is, the better for his team and for the community.

Communication largely takes place for an electro-dancer within a team; it occurs, let's to say, 'intra-team'. But it does so equally among various teams, within an 'inter-team' dynamics that constitutes the dance scene. As just noted, if the team sphere is characterised by a sense of intimacy, goal-sharing and cohesiveness linking their members, a scene is otherwise by that of an agreed competence and rivalry among teams. However, this must not lead us to think on a distanced,

strained relationship between dancers. Far from this, the dance community, understood as a "group of groups", is indeed one in which friendship and camaraderie prevails above everything else. Communication in ElectroDance is then 'inter-team' too. 'Inter-team' communication develops, on the one hand, at what dancers know as 'quedadas', a sort of regular, street-located meeting point for electrodancers in which a set of diverse dance-related practices are carried out. Beyond clubs and discotheques, streets will become the preferred public space for dancers to get together over time, 'quedadas' being the name attributed to the social event. Along with streets, as we shall see along the next pages, 'inter-team' communication among young dancers also occurs amidst new media in varied fashions, interfaces acquiring the status of public meeting points.

> **Tony**: You've been getting together at 'quedadas' for the last months. What makes different to live the dance 'inside' your team from doing so through 'quedadas'?
> **Kino**: Mmm… it's the same in a way but also different at the same time, you know? In your team people are like your brothers and you treat them like that … that's something not happening in a *quedada*, although you end up knowing quite well over time all the people at there [...] We go to 'quedadas' for several reasons, but the most important is to challenge others dancers through dance-off. You go there basically to compete, you know, to show your progress, what you've learned since the last time you saw everybody.
> **Tony**: It's a matter of competition then ...
> **Kino**: Well, not entirely. They're an excellent hang out. I learn a lot of new steps from other dancers, comment on videos recently watched on YouTube or what's going on in other places and so on … And some other times you do nothing special at there but messing around…, you know, sometimes it's a perfect waste of time! [he laughs at loud".

In relation to the dancers' patterns of dance learning at either *quedadas* or in the context of more regularly independent teams' activity, whether they involve

embodied or technologically-extended interaction – e.g. like in YouTube -, a hierarchy is established by Kino:

> **Kino**: Mmm… I think you learn more when you're with someone. As I just told, that's one of the very points in going to *quedadas*: it's a good opportunity to learn from the others, and you can't get the same through videos.
> **Tony**: Well, but you can send a message through YouTube and ask, don't you think?
> **Kino**: Yeah, that's right, but to be honest that's something I've not done yet and I don't know if I would.
> **Tony**: Why?
> **Kino**: Mmm, I don't know..., maybe because I'm really not sure if that's gonna work after all. I think it's easier to have someone in front you and tell whatever you have to say to him. You can say: 'look, you have to do this and that, raise your left arm while you turn your neck left-right and blah blah blah, and he can answer you right away, you know?

Whereas the viewing of YouTube videos in this case can provide oneself with an approach to what the dance is like, which is seen by Kino as a legitimated yet limited way to knowledge from some unknown other's content, one's team and *quedadas* alike are meant to provide electro-dancers with the preferred frame for knowledge acquisition and exchange, one being largely based on face-to-face interaction. Therefore, YouTube is important but not to the extent of mediating those situations wherein unmediated in-person exchange is rather preferred[46]. Kino also told me about how much useful new media was whether coordinating

[46] This last comment is much line with other observations during my fieldwork. In the above-mentioned forum, I came across once a comment from a newbie who would establish the same distinction between ways of learning, privileging the co-presence situation over the mediated one. In reference to a meeting, he said: "Wow, it was great! I got there a bit late to and did nothing about video recording, but I realize that it's the best way to learn [...] The real truth is that seeing someone dancing "live" can't be compared to anything else"

'quedadas' or letting the scene members know about whatever being important to them ("information just flows ..., you publish something that you want everybody to know and you're sure they will get it overnight"). Its usefulness was equally proved within the team sphere, so that I wanted to know about his view on the role of new media on the pursuit and goals of his own team.

> **Tony**: I've seen on internet that 'United Electro' has its own blog and YouTube profile. What is the purpose behind them?
> **Kino**: Well, the blog gives us the chance of presenting ourselves to others and letting them know about all the things we usually do. It lets us say to everybody, you know, 'this is us and this is what we do'. With YouTube is pretty much the same, but using videos. You can show how you dance and make comments on someone else's videos, and they do the same to yours.
> **Tony**: Are you in charge of their maintenance of these tools?
> **Kino**: Oh, no …, it's everybody's duty to keep them up-to-date. To tell you the truth, I'm not the most of us into it … you should ask maybe the others [smiling].
> **Tony**: Why?
> **Kino**: Because my fellows are more skilled at some tasks with computers than I am. I try to do simple things by now such as adding entries on the blog when needed. But the more technical things as making and editing videos are done by Xerox [one of the members of his team], he's really good at it!.
> **Tony**: So … how do you improve your computers skills? … at the school?
> **Kino**: Oh, no, no… I try to learn as much as I can from Xerox. When we get home after school we sit many times and do this and that together. He shows me how to do things … say, the more technical ones. For the simplest ones, as I've just told you, I know what to do myself.
> **Tony**: Is it the same at other teams?
> **Kino**: Yes, we always try to help each other with everything … and dealing with most difficult tasks on computers is not an exception.

This last interview excerpt shows again the dynamics implied in youth's access and exchange of knowledge as linked to varied situations and interaction modes, while

serving us to bring into discussion Benjamin's notion of 'complex kind of training'. As argued in chapter two, today's youth at large become early-adopters of new communication technologies, which means to be one of the first social sector experimenting the potentialities, risks, practical affordances and varied effects implied in their everyday usage. Electrodance is not an exception in this either. From a phenomenological point of view, two relevant aspects related the case of young electrodancers can be differentiated when accounting for this 'complex kind of training'. On the one hand, there exists an instrumental side involved in individuals' engagement with new media to be highlighted. Implicitly in Kino's words, there is a need for electro-dancers to become skilled enough at media in order to meet the socializing dynamics of the group. Complex procedures with media forms, interfaces, digital tools and languages of representation must be understood and learned, thus consequently bodily and mentally internalized, in order to adequately relate to others as well as to build and project a coherent image of the self[47]. Kino's comments show how in the context of his team these personal abilities - a dimension indeed of subcultural capital - are asymmetrically distributed in keeping with technical demands. Whereas one of his colleagues deals with the tasks deemed as more difficult, he does so with some simpler ones. Some way or another, one has to be skilled enough to cope with new media in order to keep up with the group demands.

> **Tony**: How much time do you usually spend on your computer doing things related to the dance?
> **Kino**: Mmm … I don't know, some days more than others… It depends on what's going on, I guess. For example, when an event is closed or when

[47] In terms of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, we might speak of such skills and practical knowledge as well as attitude toward the communication technologies, which are both mental and physical, as a novel constituent of today's young people cultural capital as well as the modern *habitus*. For a more comprehensive definition of habitus, see Bourdieu, 2005 [1992], p.46

you have to make and upload a video, you spend more time talking to people … I think it's quite normal.
Tony: Do you feel that you have to do it, I mean ..., is it a must for you to be aware all the time of what other might say or do?
Kino: Well …, not all the time, but it's true that you want to be in touch and hang out with your fellows as often as possible.
Tony: And how do you manage to do so?
Kino: Well, it's easy. As soon as I get home, I go to my bedroom and turn the computer on. What I normally first do is to open MSN for whoever wanting to talk to me could do it. I also check Tuenti and YouTube's updates to check out what other dancers are up to, and get all the income messages answered if any. Those days after I've posted a video or a special announcement I keep track on it more carefully. Sometimes if I happened not to be at home I can do it too through my mobile phone, so…
Tony: I see… so when you're on the computer … do you do all those things simultaneously?
Kino: Yeah, kind of… sometimes I get to talk to a bunch of people at the same time. It's not a big deal at all.

Becoming 'multi-tasking' is one of the qualities to be internalized as part of the dancers' everyday communication, one more and more common to youth's dynamics of socialization. Noticeably, personal investment in dance is highly time-consuming. There is so much to watch, read, discuss and listen to from others that most of these activities must be done not as a single, independent task but often by shifting rapidly from one to the other. As many others young people today, an electro-dancer must become multitasking to cope with the dance demands, a cognitive quality could arguably said to characterize young people's way of being and taking part in their social worlds. As argued before, the more instrumental side of this fact is not now without emotional implications, as the next subsection attempts to show.

A training of a complex kind

During the next months after our first interview, I rather followed Kino at a distance. I combined attendance to *quedadas*, wherein I had the chance of exchanging impressions with him, with my task as a participant observer of electro-dancers' technologically-mediated activity. With regard to the latter, I basically kept track on his YouTube's videos as a part of the follow-up. Some of them were celebrated in particular by the dance community due to both their production quality and Kino's proved skills at dancing. I also read his comments on someone else's videos and checked regularly his Fotolog and Skyrock accounts, which were promptly up-to-date by him and other members of the group. All that proved his growing attachment to the style and ongoing relationships with different members of the dance community. Kino's fleeting appearances in some local mass media and performances on discotheques led me to ask him for a new interview which would take place in June 2009. My interest in this case was to sound him out about all these issues, which depicts the emotional side of the 'complex kind of training'.

> **Tony**: Congratulations! I've seen your last two videos and I liked them a lot …
> **Kino**: Thanks, we're really happy with them.
> **Tony**: Tell me ..., did it take you long to make?
> **Kino**: Well, kind of …, a couple of hours to get all the shots. We went to record with a clear idea in mind of what we wanted, because otherwise you end up wasting a lot of time there [...] Afterwards, the edition took us longer, around three hours during three days.
> **Tony**: So … you didn't practise those days …
> **Kino**: No, there's no time for everything. When you make a video you only concentrate on that during that week and you leave the dance alone. Making a video and uploading it to YouTube is always a special moment ...
> **Tony**: Why?

> **Kino**: Because you expect it to be seen by a lot of people. You want it to be as good as possible.
> **Tony**: What kind of sensations it provokes on you?
> **Kino**: Well …, it's a thrilling moment because you want to see how much expectation it comes to raise. I would say it's a mix of sensations…, you get thrilled, other times anxious, sometimes even fearful to fail, … you know? You don't know if it's gonna be well received, or if it's gonna be criticized or whatever … [...] Making a video requires a lot of effort, you know, you put much energy into it and it has to turn out fine.
> **Tony**: And what happens once the video is 'out there'?
> **Kino**: Wow... whatever! You always wait for people's best response but you never know what's going on … When everything turns out fine and you see good comments and the number of visits increasing, … that definitely makes your day, man!

The dance involves a great deal of emotional investment for a dancer. One has not only to meet one's own expectations, trying to do the best of oneself, but someone else's too. And that is something to be shown and proved to others. When dancing on the streets before the watchful gaze of other dancers, some emotions such as, for example, anxiety, thrill and fearfulness are expected to be activated. It is intrinsic to the experience of dancing when this activity is collectively pulled off as opposed to the isolation of one's rehearsal at home. However, what becomes interesting in the last excerpt is the fact of being able to mobilize a similar set of emotions amidst new media. Just as Kino proves himself on the streets when sharing the dancing experience with others, so does he when becoming espoused to them through a YouTube video. For Kino, waiting for someone else's reactions to his videos causes him equivalent levels of anxiety, thrill or fearfulness, both forms of exposure, technically mediated and unmediated, being equally significant to the dancer's experience. Moreover, unlike dancing on the streets, dancing on YouTube involves additional pleasures related to the practice of video-making, whether it be the enthusiasm that accompanies the video design, the excitement arose from uploading, making it

broadly visible for people's scrutiny, or, as just suggested, feelings of either happiness or disappointment, depending on people's response, whether this be approval or rejection, respectively, to what shown in the video[48]. Or put in other words, in media environment other than today's, where interfaces like YouTube were not available, ways of feeling or sensing regarding the dance practice would be subordinated to certain communicative situations, basically dependent upon human exchange at eye's contact. In Kino's case, YouTube is interposed (i.e. is "inter-faced") between him and other dancers like him, both channelizing and shaping interaction at once, thus providing an alternative form for being together. Interestingly, unlike interpersonal embodied exchanges where emotional response derives from one's position as just 'observed-by-others', interaction via YouTube places dancers doubly as both 'observer' and 'observed' of themselves, adding a more self-reflective dimension to emotional behaviour.

Time to compete

By the time of our third in-person encounter in March 2010 the local scene of Valencia was to somewhat undergo some changes. Theses changes could be regarded as more qualitative - in the sense of a reorientation of the group

[48] To these considerations, it is worth adding one more remark from the point of view of the typifications emerging from meaning-making media practices. The prior extract shows a common one among youth, that is, that of informing everybody about one's novelties or changes on everyday life. This action is typified into a linguistic form through the expression "to go updating" or simply "to update" which is commonly used by youth today as part of their everyday vocabulary. But this was not the only one. In the course of my fieldwork I equally observed the use of another term associated to various media use, but more particularly to MSN, which is "add me" (i.e. the being the case in which one requests someone else to be incorporated to his/her network of contacts).

purposes and activity patterns - than quantitative - the number of members taking part on the scene had stabilized over time, the group remaining much smaller that those of other countries such as Italy, Russia or Mexico. By then, the frenzy period that would be somewhat derogatorily regarded by electro-dancers later on as "trendy" or "fashionable" was over. For electro-dancers located in Valencia, trendiness has not as much to do with the origin of the style linked to the effects of Tecktonik's marketing campaign on local followers[49] as with the fact of them finding in the dance itself a novelty. Many of those who have enthusiastically entered the dance, seeing the style as the latest leisure-related fad to be embraced, ended up leaving the scene after a time. For those loyal ones who remained *on board* a new period began; one in which, according to Kino, those who "really love the dance" will focus on developing the dance form while, leaving progressively aside attempts to gain greater visibility by way of being interviewed in mass-media and performing in clubs – i.e. electro-dancers never wanted the dance to become a minoritary phenomenon.

Thus, Kino and other local dancers alike were mostly immersed and concentrated in improving their dance skills. As a local group, the aim now, just as happening in a number of other settings around the world, was fore and foremost to compete. Competition took place simultaneously at two levels: one at a local level, in Valencia and other Spanish cities, around the organization of the event known as ElectroBatle, and transnationally, revolving around the French hub of Vertifight international contest. This was a strenuous, demanding time for Kino as the dance form was undergoing its own stylistic evolution in keeping with the particular perceptions of its practice by the dancers. In a short span ranging roughly from 2006 to 2009, that is to say, from the time at which ElectroDance started to be danced in Parisian venues by a small host of clubbers to that of the interview, the dance was to evolve significantly. Kino speaks here about his - and

[49] In fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, the strategy of the brand's founders did not include Spain among its commercial targets.

others' - move away from a stylistic pattern being seen as surpassed at the time. The so-called "old style", a result of the initial reinterpretation of a set of bodily movements inspired by other former dance styles into a range of basic, arm-driven, easy-to-make gestures, was rejected in favour of a renovated, self-centred mode of expression, in which individual creativity became dancer's drive. Whereas the old-style came to be defined around a typified pattern of basic bodily movements that was clearly recognisable and assumed by dancers all over the world - i.e. Tecktonik as shaped by prominent dancers such as Jey-Jey or Spoke, among others; the "new style" was something more loosely defined, waiting to be shaped by dancers in the search of a new patterns of expression, as in Kino's case[50].

> **Tony**: How long does the dance practise take you up currently?
> **Kino**: Well, now I spend a couple of hours per day, pretty much as before.
> **Tony**: So… has then anything changed to that regard?
> **Kino**: Yeah, I think I try to be more regular now than I've been so far. Some days I didn't feel like practising and didn't just do it … Other days I had something else to do, as making a video, chatting with someone or something like that.
> **Tony**: Do you notice your self-improvement over time?
> **Kino**: Yeah, kind of…, but it is not easy after shifting to new style. Nobody wants right now to dance like before, you know, in the way we did some months ago…
> **Tony**: How's the new style as opposed to the 'old'?
> **Kino**: Well, I think now the most important thing is to get your own way, to make your own steps and movements from scratch… I mean, having a distinguishable style. To be creative is the very point…, to be yourself,

[50] Something funny recurrently appearing in my interviews points to dancers' difficulty in expressing amidst words what the dance is like. As mostly sensuously perceived, the translation of what one made through his body - i.e. the movements and gestures unfolded when dancing - into words made individuals felt often uncomfortable and hopeless at trying to define it, with them reproducing rather with the language of their bodies what they hardly could express verbally.

you know?
Tony: What do you mean by *being yourself*?
Kino: Yeah, I mean… the dance is getting more and more complex. Now repeating the same steps, movements and phases that everybody knows is not enough… I mean, nobody wants to see that any longer. To become anyone in this world means now to be creative in your own way [...] I think everything is more…, how I might call it [looking thoughtfully for the right word], is more 'professionalised'.
Tony: What do you mean by that?
Kino: I mean that if you want to be the best, you have to prepare further yourself and spend a lot of time in doing it. And I've just told you, it's very important now to create your own style, a way of dancing being recognisable by anyone. Apart from this, we're also improving in the way ElectroBattle is organized.
Tony: Do you think have your own style by now?
Kino: Mmm… I'm working on it, but it's not as easy as it seems. It takes a lot of effort. I get inspiration from the biggest dancers, you know, Goku, Ramses and so on … I look at their videos and try to imitate them as a first step to get my own thing… Some people say that they like how I dance and love my style, but I keep on having doubts on my level of performance..., I think I could do it much better...

As an external observer, I followed Kino's personal evolution by viewing countless of his videos on YouTube and occasionally attending to ElectroBattle events. Whereas the dance once had a distinguishable set of movements that formed the basic repertoire of a dancer, now creativity, variation and open-endedness would prove to be key, self-expression being placed at the center of this shift. The dance thus had become more and more complex in form which resulted in a reinforcement of individuality as an implicitly shared value. Or put simpler, Electrodance somewhat was turning itself into a 'dance of dances'. Though it would be unfair to deny that the style retained a basic core of patterns of movement - say, the arms roughly as drivers of the overall bodily gestuality - without which dancers would not be capable of acknowledging their respective forms of expression as pertaining to the same style, my perception is that the

sheer basis of originally coded, bodily-enacted meanings was increasingly giving way to what individuals were able to creatively develop by themselves. This move could be then regarded as each dancer's personal contribution to the style regardless of the degree of relatedness to the existing typified forms of the dance expression. By being expression self-focused, it looked as though each dancer was somewhat obliged to painstakingly find out his style in order to truly become *someone* in ElectroDance, thereby affirming his/her own identity within the group. Creativity and individuality, as part of one's identity, were welcomed; competition was thus the suitable place and time where these should be publicly exhibited.

Whereas some changes in the style were noticed at the level of the dance form, some others pointed more specifically to the organisational dimension of the group activity. In the following extract, in which Kino talks about organisational shifts in the scene, the aforementioned effects associated to the usage of YouTube become noticeable as well.

> **Tony**: Apart from this ..., I've been noticing how the 'quedadas' have changed lately … You all gather now just to compete, am I right?
> **Kino**: Yeah, now it's like that, despite competition has always been there when getting together, though. Dances-off in *quedadas* has always been part of the hang-out. We used to get together to share our passion for the dance but also to show your progress to the others, and that's what ElectroBattle is all about at the end of the day.
> **Tony**: So… why turning it into a formal contest then?
> **Kino**: Because it's a step beyond that everybody has taken somewhere else. We just didn't want to leave ourselves behind. Everybody's doing the same thing. They have their own local competitions but keeping at the same time an eye at the next world championship in France. Our goal now is to get ready to go to France this year.
> **Tony**: So you prefer it this way…
> **Kino**: Definitely… I like it because, you know, when you have a goal, you get more motivated... You know you dance because you love it, but at the same time you dance knowing that you are gonna have the chance to show it off to the rest in contest. That's a good feeling!
> **Tony**: Which things do you like the most and least about competing?

> **Kino**: What I like the most is, as I've just told, the competition time, when you have to beat being in front of you. There's a lot of tension, concentration, excitement … pure adrenaline, man. You've been practising so much the last weeks and it's time to show what you're capable of. It's really exciting!
> **Tony**: And with regard to what you like the least...
> **Kino**: Well, definitely, I don't like controversy coming out of jury's decisions. Some people say that it's part of the dance and I agree, but sometimes I get sick of it because you waste lots of time and energy in arguing with everybody which often goes nowhere. It sometimes gets endless…, you know… talk and more talk not only at dancing but also later on YouTube. Besides, that's one of the reasons why people stopped from uploading videos to YouTube.
> **Tony**: What do you mean by that?
> **Kino:** What I mean is that since we all moved to new-style, everybody started to copy one another, you know…, taking someone else's steps and moves. And the reason to me behind that was no doubt YouTube. You upload your video with your last new stuff and by the time of competition you find that someone else has taken your ideas. That caused a lot of trouble there, you know …, 'that's my step, you stole it and blah blah blah'.
> **Tony**: And how have you worked it out?
> **Kino**: Well, we didn't have to do anything special... People just stopped uploading videos and kept them for themselves. It became better to show your new stuff when competing, and that's all.
> **Tony**: So… you mean that YouTube isn't useful anymore as a way to exhibit oneself as in the past?
> **Kino**: Well, kind of…, that was what most ended up happening. Now we prefer to upload only the ElectroBattle's videos, although some other people keep uploading their stuff, ... they're the least.

Kino's account makes a good point on the shifted perception of YouTube usage over time by the scene members. At the onset, broadcasting oneself through home-made videos was regarded as highly advisable. To make one's progress publicly visible through video-making allowed for displaying one's skills for a bigger audience as well as getting peer's feedback. It was a convenient

supplement to what done in 'quedadas'. But this was acceptable insomuch as rivalry was not channelized through formal, more institutionalised competition. Once knowledge-sharing via this media was felt as disruptive to one's interest in giving an advantage to competitors, dancers seriously would choose to dispense with it in practice. Paradoxically, however, that very same mechanism has largely been part of knowledge transmission on Electrodance, that's to say, to learn from what others do through networked videos on YouTube. Interestingly, even within the context of ElectroDance a media like YouTube shows enough variability in regard to forms of appropriation and application, its usefulness depending upon specific circumstances regarding the evolution of the group cultural life.

Leaving the dance

I last got together with Kino in December 2010. Since our prior encounter months before, a host of problems had suddenly conflated with the dramatic result of him eventually leaving the dance. I found him somewhat sad, the expression of his face showing a concealed mix of frustration and helplessness due to his overall personal situation. In the course of our conversation, his mood only was to change when talking about the different issues concerning dance. I learnt that a surgery operation to his recently injured ankle had forced him to stop dancing - "I don't know if I'll be able to return to the dance later on, we'll see …". Unfortunately, what was expected to be temporary resulted in a definitive leaving some months later. But this was something that neither Kino nor could myself foresee at the time of the interview.

After months of bearing a strained, problematic relationship with their parents - specially with his father - Kino decided to leave home and trying to emancipate. He was twenty-year old by the time, having their studies unfinished. Such a decision took him in turn to dropout the school - he was not doing very well

- and try to get a job that would allow him to pay the rent of a 3-people-shared apartment. With no few difficulties an under-qualified, middle-class boy was likely to get a job given the unstable, precarious conditions of Spanish labour market within the broader context of the country economic crisis, so that, as he confessed, their parents would accept to provisionally meet his economic needs. Things had unfortunately got more and more complicated at the time.

Yet, Kino's discomfort could be traced back some months before, shortly after our previous conversation, and it was strictly related to dance-related issues. After a long period of ongoing stylistic progress he started to feel as somewhat stuck in the middle of an unfruitful impasse. Moreover, some of his more beloved personal relationship inside and outside his team seemed not to be at their best. Despite new youngsters had been incorporated into the scene, some old members had recently abandoned too. I perceived a feeling of frustration and hopelessness in Kino's words. His personal situation was clearly perceptible all along a carefully crafted video made along with a good friend, a dancer too, who helped him in the production tasks. Under the eloquent title of "No fear", the video featured a singular pathway across the different spaces of a murky, gloomy country house. It began with him entering the house and going up across several rooms and floors, eventually reaching out the top through a last door leading out. Once at there, the staging is reversed, and the somber sound and ambiance lighting which had dominated the situation up to now gives way to a gleaming and sparkling scenario, a moment at which electro music is triggered and Kino initiates his typical dance exhibition. Needless to say, the video was obviously thought of as an accomplished metaphor enacting his personal feelings and situation.

> **Tony**: I watched your video called 'No fear'. It surprised me greatly, and it seems that many people liked it too. It was really well-made … what did you try to convey?
> **Kino**: Well, I decided to make it because I started to have many doubts about me as a truly good dancer. Not happy with my style during those weeks. I didn't feel comfortable either when rehearsing … I felt clumsy

and couldn't find my way… you know … not feeling any real progress. I felt that I needed to take all that out of me some way.
Tony: … and why by means of a video?
Kino: I thought it would be nice to do it that way. I've been making videos right from the beginning. I had the chance then to make one expressing how I felt … that's all.
Tony: Did you feel more comfortable addressing to others this way … you know … expressing intimate things than speaking directly to them?
Kino: Mmm… I wouldn't put it that way. When you have good friends, you can say the same kind of things to them. But it's true that some people are good at saying things to others by means of videos … or they just prefer it that way because it's easier for them than doing so in person. For me both options are fine… I just have fun when video-making, that's why…
Tony: By reading the comments along with it, I felt a lot of support from different people… specially coming from your team fellows…
Kino: Yeah, that's right. To be honest, I didn't expect it to be so much welcomed … They're always there when needed. We were having some little problems at the time… just silly things, you know, … but after all you know you can count on them whenever you want to and they've proved it to me one more time.
Tony: But also critiques..., surprisingly coming in some cases from people of different countries that I guess you don't know…
Kino: Yeah, I know, that's normal ... you always get comments from people that you don't even know, but they follow you just as I do with other people that I've never seen outside YouTube. Believe me, I just don't give a shit about their critiques … you know … the video is not particularly addressed to them, so why to worry?

This last excerpt takes us back one more time to the emotional dimension associated to new media practices within the context of dance. Indeed, emotion-driven expression channelized by YouTube would become a common place for electro-dancers over time, a practice nearly becoming a genre in itself. According to my observations, dancers' video content could roughly be grouped into two basic themes: formal announcements of one's withdrawal and dedication-like messages addressed by a dancer to an intimate one. Another Kino's video titled

Goodbye ElectroDance, publicly released some days before our encounter, suited best the former of these two categories. Unlike others' far less complex videos, whose basic structure was based on an presumed last dancer's exhibition interspersed with a farewell text containing the message to be retained, Kino's one assumed a more consciously elaborated textual organization. All the meaningful people and moments as well as memorable places were arranged on a visually-appealing, orderly narration made up of photos, explanatory text and other video bits, delivering a sense of personal biography as a dancer. Despite other members of the scene already knew about his situation, the video arouse widely considerable expectation. Attached to the video's display area, numerous heartfelt comments expressed support, admiration and a sense of true companionship, even by those who largely were not particularly Kino's intimates.

> "I don't know you enough Kino ... but I know you always looked like a humble guy to me ... You've grown a lot both personally and as a dancer from the beginning ... for whatever you need, your family, UnitedElectro, will always be there and also the people from D*G51 .."

Some other comments featured a recognisable pattern found in other people's videos announcing dancers' withdrawal, in which the author of the particular video become an object of flattering:

> "What??? I can't believe my eyes ...you're leaving?? ... you must be crazy, man!!! ... you've are so good at dancing, awesome style and made so much for the community that i can't take your words seriously ... think twice, please ... United Electro you know you're big guys .. the best!"

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[51] "D*G" is an acronym of "Dance Generation".

But unlike some of these, Kino's video was not meant to be the typical strategy for just transiently drawing people's attention to himself, a type of video he rejected for regarding it as childish and I had myself the chance to observe in several cases:

> ***Kino**: "All you know I am serious. My time in Electrodance is over, and I'm not gonna say ... 'hey, I'm leaving' and the day after say ... 'hi everybody, I'm back', as nothing would happen. That's stupid and not fair. I'm not like that. I don't need people to butter me up as some others seem to need …".*

This last example and the prior alike show once again the emotional dimension of Kino's experience related to YouTube media practices. Both of them are able to show how emotions are activated throughout the ongoing dynamics of meaning negotiation of distinct central aspects of the dancer's group life, such as the mediated expression of personal feelings and the announcement of a member's withdrawal from dancing. Nevertheless, rather than being just "communicated" - which could misleadingly make us think of them as somewhat previously existing in the self and then waiting to be just 'felt' and 'conveyed' in a second moment by technological means -, emotions can be arguably said to be culturally shaped and unfolded in the course the media practice itself, as part of it, a complex process starting off with the video-making and being completed when publicly displayed and subsequently discussed. Or put it differently, it is within various communicative situations and dynamics that emotions adopt a particular expression by using as a "raw materials" the set of values, themes and general meanings contained in the youth style. Emotions thus are not just enabled 'by' communication, but they are rather so 'in' communication. And they do namely so amidst YouTube. The emotional side of new media usage, largely associated to YouTube-related practices, is an important facet to the more general experience

of young dancers' pathway across ElectroDance. And this fact becomes equally remarkable when seen in biographical terms.

This chapter was aimed to provide a rich yet necessarily incomplete portrait of a young dancer, one, needless to say, which does not exhaust electro-dancers' diverse personal journey into the dance world. In fact, it suffices to browse into Kino's YouTube channel to be able to envision an alternative personal pathway to the one drawn in the prior pages. In current digital interfaces such work is effortlessly done for you. In YouTube, just as in many other new media, content is stored by respecting the uploading time, allowing to be retrieved in a chronological fashion. Applied to Kino's case, this would mean to be able to clearly witness his personal evolution, in both stylistic and even physical terms, over the two year period of his involvement in ElectroDance; from those earlier, poorly-produced, home-made videos to the latest, more elaborated ones set forth above. Publicly available to everyone, a story about Kino is implicitly composed and delivered by technical means. A media interface like YouTube featuring the technical possibility of storing personal content and information unexpectedly becomes thus a privileged "guardian" of valuable bits of one's life, memory and, put it this way, of "who one is".

I came across these thoughts some days after our last encounter, when being in front of my computer screen going once again over the all-time Kino's YouTube video collection. I asked to myself whether Kino would like or not to see himself in the future as a former young electro-dancer in the varied situations, ranging from the *naif* to the more formal to the occasionally somewhat compromising, portrayed in those videos. I also asked to myself what Kino's opinions would be regarding the possibility of having such a massive amount of personal information at one's and others' disposal. And what most puzzles me, the unforeseen ways in which this fact could affect him in the future. Will he be proud of his past as an electro-dancer years later? Will he want others to know about this facet of his past? … Will he agree with what he said, acted and did as one's memory is stored out there and becomes accessible just at one click away?

:: 5 :: A new style is born: the broadcast-type scene of Paris

As posited in Chapter One, an essential quality of media is its ability to extend communication across time and space. It is by using different media that forms of "being-together" can be attained regardless of the *Hic et nunc*, allowing human interaction to be tailored to the most varying temporal and spatial circumstances. As my conceptual approach to the ElectroDance style is premised by this notion of media, in this chapter and the next our attention will move from the more general, phenomenological approach to the style seen in the previous chapter to the analysis of the way in which the formation and development of social relations behind the particular form of "being-together" of ElectroDance takes place under varying spatial and temporal circumstances, many of them influenced by media use. But if notions of space and time become central to the following characterization of ElectroDance, some additional concepts should be defined at this point in order to enlighten our discussion of this case. The first concept to be explained in this regard is that of *scene*.

My use of this notion rests on Straw's (1991) definition, which can be seen as an attempt to theoretically grasp the transient relations that arise between various populations and social groups that coalesce around particular coalitions of a musical style.[52] Inspired by Straw, the understanding of the ElectroDance youth movement as a scene in my case will entail in practice the identification of key human and technical agents, emblematic locations and situated social practices - some of them related to the usage of new media - as well as discussion on the way all of these elements become interrelated across time and space as part of the process of cultural production of the style. As social formations, scenes are constituted "in" communication, a process whereby its members, whether they be style adopters, cultural intermediaries, corporate agents and entrepreneurs, among others, come to interact by different technical and non-technical means over the basis of a shared interest, taste, knowledge and purpose. However, in my work, I will look at scenes in a slightly different way, as expressions of specific socio-technical communication architectures, following Holmes' (2004) view on communication. As suggested in Chapter One, Holmes identifies two prevalent communicative forms: broadcast and network. Nowadays both forms of social integration are not limited to traditional socio-cultural domains of practice dependent upon the co-presence of participants (e.g. the classroom, church service or political meetings). In modern times we also have a type of socio-technical system that does not need the physical, eye-to-eye presence of participants. The Internet is today's most conspicuous example of cultural

[52] More recently, authors like Bennet (2004) have approached the variety of configurations and expressions shown by scenes by suggesting a classification based on the categories of local, translocal and virtual in keeping with notions of scope, degree of technical dependence and characterization of social spaces around which social relations are constructed. However, as this typology seems to draw a somewhat essentialist line that neatly demarcates each type of phenomenon, it will not be used here to account for the hybrid case of ElectroDance which features characteristics that make it local, translocal and virtual at the same time.

technology for network communication, whereas the television or radio for broadcast communication. The advantage of studying the ElectroDance scene from the perspective of its association to particular ideals of communication relates to the analytical possibility of highlighting the prevalent interaction pattern followed by different instances of social relations in terms of the agents' greater or lesser capacity to produce and disseminate cultural meaning. Thus, whereas broadcast communication is characterized by a more asymmetrical relation between a reduced number of actors who become a center of message production as opposed to others who will mainly act as receivers, network communication allows for the making and exchanging of meaning to be distributed more equally among participants. In the case of the seminal ElectroDance scene broadcast communication initially underlies an uneven transmission of meanings across a number of interrelated events and practices involving dance practitioners, media corporate agents, social networking sites and communication interface technologies. The broadcast form, as we shall explore in the following pages, can be found at a different level, time and scope in this case. Early on in the history of ElectroDance this was seen when the first dancers, who boasted a privileged position, performed in social gathering places such as discos. The broadcast form also existed outside, by dint of the intense marketing and mass-media coverage a well as by the "viral" action of new media appropriation.[53]

Although in practical terms none of the two conceptual *mediums* exist in the absence of the other, each can otherwise be said to be more apparent and

[53] At first sight, it may be difficult to grasp the sense of "broadcast" put forward here, beyond the classic, technically-supported, one-way, few-to-many pattern of message delivery that links media corporations to their so-called audiences that are embedded in the social forms of television, radio or newspaper. And even less intuitive is the concept of broadcast communication as a form of interaction. However, as Holmes argues (ibid, p. 14), the members of an audience, who are indeed divided and united at the same time, share a sense of reciprocity if we imagine them as being linked by way of the meanings and messages they come to share, a link mediated by media corporations acting as a kind of center of production and exchange of meaning.

dominate a different stage of the evolution of Electrodance, a fact which is not without analytical implications. This is why the present chapter will cover the early stages of the ElectroDance movement in France, exploring the communication that took place during this period as an example of that of a broadcast medium. The next chapter will cover the later stages of the scene and how the patterns of interaction and the way they were organized were characteristic of a network medium. Furthermore, as the identification of communication mediums is located in time and space - or to be more precise, in varied spaces, at different times - along the ElectroDance journey, the analysis will provide (indirectly) the history of the style. The next table provides a summary of the basic traits associated to each contrasted communicative medium which will be object of attention throughout the dissertation:

Table 4. Basic features defining ElectroDance in time(s) and space(s)

Communicative architecture	Broadcast	Network
Primary drive	profit-making	community-building
Group aesthetics	defined	undefined
Preferred setting	discotheque / club	pavilion / street
Scope of communication	local	translocal / transnational

This chapter is divided into two subsections, as is the following chapter. A different theme and approach in the analysis of broadcast communication is assumed in each. I shall start off by considering the configuration of the style from the standpoint of the genesis of both the dance and dance-related social relations within the specific setting of clubs. ElectroDance was born in the discos of Paris, and it is the club setting which originally lent this style its characteristic features.

With this in mind, I will offer a characterization of ElectroDance, both in terms of dance form and medium for socialization that is influenced by the symbolic environmental features of clubber cultures (e.g. its electronic-music aesthetics, the style of clothing associated to the dance, the sensory arrangement of space based on a specific lighting and acoustic layout, etc.). The presence of broadcast communication in the social relationships that exist within the clubs will be discussed, and how this communication architecture can also be seen outside clubs too; its socio-technical expression enjoying a larger scope. The next subsection is then devoted to the analysis of large-scale broadcast communication. Fundamental constituents of broadcast systems are identified here, paying special attention to the role of commerce[54] in the shaping of the phenomenon, a facet further explored in Chapter Nine without which our understanding of the style and its development would be inevitably biased.

[54] Perennially controversial, the relationship between commerce and youth subcultures has been a sort of keystone in discussions of subcultural identity. Commerce, as has been argued widely, is in one way or another central to youth culture idiosyncrasies, with the cultural industries providing commodities and media products that young people use to build their social identities. Although my approach to communication does not focus on issues concerning the Political Economy of the matter – something that would certainly need a separate, more profound treatment - the analysis shall not exclude these considerations completely. As will be seen later on, in the early stages of the dance, the social relations between young people were found to be influenced by commercial drives and the interests of cultural industries. Thus, instead of offering a detailed analysis of the specific issues regarding the control, organization and ownership of cultural and media industries, attention will instead be focused on examining young dancers' reactions to commercial strategies mobilized by profit-making concerns.

Communication in local places

Youth cultures and subcultures flourished as a visible social phenomenon after the Second World War in the context of Western consumerist societies. Rapidly spreading across disparate geographical locations, youth cultures have become a conspicuous expression of globalizing processes. Collective imaginaries and narratives tend to situate youth cultures in a certain place and time, becoming both the symbolic landmark and the stock of knowledge that is used by adopters from diverse parts of the world to make sense of style. Just as Hip-Hop culture emerged in the 1970s out of the social and cultural conditions of the African American and Latino communities in New York City, or the *Mod* subculture, which arose in London's working-class neighbourhoods at the end of the 1950s, the beginnings of ElectroDance can also be tied to concrete spatial and temporal coordinates, the place being the city of Paris and the time period roughly spanning the first half of 2000s.

In particular, the beginnings of ElectroDance were deeply rooted in the Club Culture and its quintessential gathering place: the disco. There are various websites which recount the supposed origins of ElectroDance, with the official site of the Mexican ElectroDance community known as Cultura Electro providing possibly the most comprehensive one among them. However, all of these accounts agree that the dance that would be later known as Electro was the result of the activity that took place inside three specific Parisian venues located in the center of the city: Metropolis, Le Mix and Red Light. Coming to the clubs from different Parisian neighbourhoods and suburbs, club-goers took their inspiration from prior styles such as Voguing, Waacking, Jumpstyle and mainly Hip hop to create this seminal dance form. They adopted and refashioned the movements and steps from these other dance styles in keeping with the demands of the fast-paced rhythm and sounds of electronica, and its sub-genre Electro-house or simply Electro in particular, a style of music that was based on house music of the late 1980s. Practitioners did not keep their new dance to themselves, however. Style pioneers

shared their moves with others at the discos during long late-night sessions frequently taking place throughout this period. This facilitated the progressive shaping of the dance not only in terms of its growing repertoire of movements but also in the forging of a visual, distinctive and idiosyncratic group. Pioneering dancers such as Jey-Jey, Caliméro, Treaxy, Spoke or Jack Herror, just to name a few of the more well-known ones, will be remembered by subsequent generations of dancers for being the first ones to shape experience and develop the future style's idiosyncratic form. As a cultural practice, the electro dance style is connected to elements of sound (music) along with an increasingly stylised set of body movements that will serve to mediate social relations within the ambience of the heavily signified Parisian discos. In order to better understand the process of creation of the style I shall take a preliminary look into the significance of the disco as a place for communication; a place capable of providing the physical and symbolic conditions for the emergence of a stylised dance form such as electro dance.

Various authors interested in youth culture have attempted in recent years to account for the social and cultural significance of discos in different ways. One such example is Thornton's study titled *Club Cultures* (1995), or to a lesser extent McRobbie's earlier exploration of the matter in a 1984 article entitled "Dance and Social Fantasy" as well as Malbon's 1999 work *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy and Vitality*. All of them make several valuable contributions to this realm that help to understand how social relations and experience are culturally organized along the social lines of gender, age and class. Yet our interest at this point is specifically focused on their particular observations regarding the symbolic configuration of the setting as an environment devoted to socialization, capable of delivering a certain kind of situated, meaningful experience. Or in other words, the interest here is to look at how experience unfolds by way communication within a space like this.

When approaching discos or clubs in these terms, one preliminary remark must be made in relation to the very nature and meaning of this sort of social

setting. Discos are leisure-oriented, meeting places where primarily young people socialize by taking part in a number of practices revolving around dancing, sex, drugs and flirtation (Thornton, ibid: 15), among which the practice of dance stands out as a form of collective attachment. As a leisure-oriented setting, its function and meaning derives from the fact that its aims exist in opposition to the dominant values and goals of the workplace and the pursuit of work in general, as well as those of the academic world. Its antithetical cultural status can be analyzed at different levels. First of all, the time of day at which they operate; whereas *productive* social activity occurs during the day, clubbing happens mainly at night. Furthermore, whereas the former is associated to terms such as "routine", "performance", "worldliness" or "responsibility", the latter is associated to "escape", "entertainment" or "exceptionality". If we consider the appearance of social spaces for dancing from dance halls of the nineteenth century to today's clubs and discos, there have been profound transformations in how the space is configured. These spaces exist as a sort of multimedia environment whose goal it is to guarantee an appealing experience for youth along the lines suggested earlier. Keeping this last consideration in mind, the exploration of the dance and the social relations that form around it will provide a description of the disco based on the set of qualities, structural components and symbolic registers that make sense of this setting as a distinctive social and cultural place[55] where communication takes place.

To begin with, attention should be paid to club interiors, which, as Thornton argues, are decorated "to sharply divide inside from outside beyond door restrictions." (ibid: 57) Even though night clubs vary in size, facilities, number of dance floors and labyrinth-like, interstitial parts of corridors and stairways, it is the type of social groups which occupy them that determines how indoor space is

[55] In her theorization of dance as a form of non-verbal communication, Lynne (1979:19) highlights a number of physical features of the environment as having a direct influence on the way dance forms are shaped under particular spatial and temporal conditions.

taken up. In this sense, when it comes to venues oriented to other dance styles such as *Salsa*, Urquia (2004: 114) points to skills and dance competence as being another factor which segregates people into different spaces, a factor also present in the emerging medium of ElectroDance.

As the relationship between people and the spaces they inhabit will be dealt with in a later section, at this point my aim is to highlight the additional, non-physical, communication-related components that contribute to symbolically shaping the space of the disco. Here, the double role of computer-based technologies is one that merits further exploration. There are two ways in which new technologies shape spaces: through the use of light and sound. Strictly speaking, it cannot be said that they both have a *real*, physical impact on space, but they undoubtedly contribute to the way in which space is felt, and thereby experienced, by the people that inhabit them. Lighting would therefore exert an influence on the visual dimension of sensory subjective experience, just as sound would in acoustic terms. The conflation of both elements serves to transform the discotheque into an enveloping, dream-like, futuristic, otherworldly environment. The setting that results is in keeping with the aforementioned notions of leisure, escapism and entertainment but also the technology-influenced aesthetics of electronica music. In order to recreate a space with such qualities, technologically sophisticated systems of lighting become crucial in providing individuals with a landscape of visual sensations. This usually involves the projection of figurative flashy patterns and forms moving in manifold directions throughout the interior of the night club. The effects created by these lights speak to the symbolic power of electric light in the shaping of space. Interestingly, this interplay between light, space and visual perception also seems to play an important role in shaping electro-dance. This is the opinion of Treaxy, one of the French pioneers of the dance style, whom I had the opportunity to interview when he sat on the jury for a local contest in Ribarroja (Valencia) that took place in October 2011:

> Everything was kind of silly at the beginning... We used to dance wearing those fluorescent bracelets on our arms which helped us see each other in the darkness… It was sort of a fun thing to do because when you did these fast moves with your arms, you would get these nice swirling shapes in the air. As we also dressed in black, the only thing you could see was those circles around you, like the disco lights that were all over the place... Everybody used to stare at us when we did those moves.

Treaxy talks about his own experience as one of the pioneers of the scene. According to him, it is this interplay of light and dark that gave rise to the creative, playful movements that characterize the style, initially lending content to the dance form. The instrumental use of a clothing accessory (the fluorescent glow sticks mentioned above) led young dancers to perform the arm-based moves that would give Electrodance its distinctive style. Attracting the attention of other dancers, the arm movements and the trails of light they created sought to imitate on a small-scale the visual effects of the technical, large-scale lighting that so typifies the fantastical ambiance of discotheque interiors. In the beginnning, it was the dancers performing at Metropolis who supplied the rudimentary, minimal repertoire of arm movements. As described earlier, interaction with other dancers from Red Light and Le Mix helped shape the dance form by adding basic footwork to the arm movements originally developed by the dancers of Metropolis. As Treaxy noted, “There weren’t more than fifty of us dancing at that time.”

If the lighting used inside night clubs plays an important role in the shaping of the space, enhancing the visual dimension of club-goers’ experience, sound is even more crucial. In these dance-oriented social spaces, sound is provided by varied technological means at the points of delivery, production and reproduction, regardless of the specific complexity or degree of sophistication. Nevertheless, just as in countless other realms of communication, this process primarily involves computer- and media- based technologies and digitization. This can mainly be seen in classic electronica genres such as House and Techno, more

than in genres such as Salsa or Tango, which are equally affected by this trend, yet not crucially conditioned by it. As Thornton (ibid: 58) argues, Club and Disco subcultures are built upon the playing of recorded music as opposed to performing music live. Records constitute the main material resource in deejaying, but they serve more than mere instrumental purposes. By taking part in privileged underground circuits of record production and circulation, the cultural capital of deejaying is intimately tied to this cultural artifact and how it is exchanged as a form of capital. Without altering their own social role, the task of the DJ comes to rely more and more upon the technical affordances and flexibility of sound management in the course of their night club sessions, which become less and less dependent upon old formats and devices. At this point in our discussion, I wish to highlight the way in which sound contributes to the overall configuration of a discotheque as a culturally singular setting, providing individuals with a particular kind of experience. Symbolically speaking, today's Electro music[56] is a fast-tempoed musical style punctuated by a driving bass drum beat in 4/4 time. It often features multiple, interweaving melodic lines and motifs that fade in and out and which are marked by repetitive, "crunchy" or "dirty" industrial or sci-fi-inspired electronic sounds. Played at high volume, it delivers a hypnotic and contagious sensory stimulus capable of absorbing the listener.[57] The role of

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[56] The profusion of genres and subgenres in electronic music and the growing popularity of these sounds has traditionally required the use of labels normally given to types of music that are often quite distant from each other. *Techno* has been more commonly used as a generic term for electronic music. From the 2000s onwards, *Electro* is the preferred label, especially in French-speaking countries. Nevertheless and as I have noted above, among young dancers, *Electro* is the label given to a specific genre of music with a particular set of features.

[57] In the case of Club Cultures, letting oneself become absorbed by the music is not only a result of the features of the cultural form itself, but also a result of the consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Paradoxically, ElectroDance practitioners reject the use of stimulants of any kind; their identity as electro-dancers is largely forged in opposition to this particular practice.

lighting is important here, becoming, in the hands of the lighting designer, the perfect counterpoint to sound. The movement of the club's spotlights are matched to the patterns of the sound, and togther a seemingly inseperable entity is created that is essential to the shaping of discotheques as cultural places. From a phenomenological standpoint, visual and acoustic elements are arranged in such a way as to provide subjects with a wholly meaningful sensory experience. This particular arrangement is not neutral; the choice of visuals and sound is meant to create a symbolic experience in the listener. Here, the spatial and temporal conditions of our everyday lives outside the club are recast into an experience that is wholly created within the walls of the club, as part of its artificial envrionment.

Whereas sound and visuals make up the symbolic scaffolding of the club's interior, there is a third component that concerns the social aspects of communication, as opposed to the phenomenological aspects explored above. Insofar as dancing rests on individual expression through bodily movement, the production, expression and exchange of meaning in social interaction can also adopt a kinetic form. As argued in the first chapter, humans primarily communicate face-to-face. And even if this mean of communication relies greatly on the use of spoken words, the verbal form by no means exhausts other types of communicative registers that are available to humans. Our movements and gestures are a form of non-verbal communication, capable of conveying a wide range of meanings in a wide range of social contexts and situations. In the case of night clubs, this takes on greater significance. Along with a set of on-site, complementary practices such as drug and alcohol consumption or interpersonal interaction (which is fundamentally verbal), it is the collectively shared ceremony of dancing that takes place on the dance floor that mainly attracts individuals. While the meaning of this dance practice is mainly based on the visual and sonic sources discussed above, it is also a result of what the bodies in-motion are able to express to one another. The relationship between lighting and sound has been suggested above, with the former *visually* underpinning the particular acoustic qualities of Electro music. An analogous phenomenon occurs in relation to the

dance form. The music's vibrant, fast rhythms and synthesized, high-tech sounds are translated into the dance via a simple series of frantic, high-spirited, repertoire of arm-based gestures and moves. This can be seen in the countless videos posted on Youtube[58] and more extensively in the 2008 film *Génération Électro* where popular French dancers are captured in Metropolis, Le Mix and Redlight tirelessly moving their arms to the sounds of Electro music. In contrast to subsequent developments of the dance form, performance is seen here as being only partially connected to the music. Dancing to the music is nothing new, but when electro-dancers move their bodies, their movements do not match the rhythms of the music exactly; instead, they limit themseleves to adding physical gesticulations in response to acoustic stimuli without completely synchronizing said moves. Dance and music are combined, but are still far from the degree of interrelatedness that will be attained later on, once the dance leaves the night clubs and adopts a different orientation. The aforementioned symbolic elements are what turn discotheques into meaningful local places. Communication acts as an interface between individuals and groups, weaving a web of visual, aural and kinetic meanings through which individuals are able to make sense of their experience within the cultural domain of clubs. At this point, one chief question remains: what are the dynamics of interaction that characterize the social relations between dancers in this three-dimensional symbolic space?

Earlier in this chapter communication in ElectroDance was posited as fitting a broadcast communication model. Linked to the evolution of the dance scene, discotheques were regarded as the foundational element of this communicative form, i.e. the places that would shape the scene in its inception. So accustomed are we to the notion of broadcast being associated to the socio-technical apparatus of mass-media communication, that relating the broadcast

[58] For example, the French radio FDGJ Youtube channel contains an illustrative sampling of videos showcasing early Electro dancers as well as videos showing the ambiance and activity that typified this particular night club scene when it began.

model to a physical social setting such as a night club might, *prima facie,* seem at odds with our most basic intuitions. The easiest response would be to negate the existence of such communicative architecture in this sort of physical setting. However, it would be difficult to fully understand ElectroDance at this point without acknowledging the existence of these communicative dynamics within the walls of the night club. Indeed, according to Williams (2003 [1974]: 21), historically, the social basis of broadcast communication has been a part of common human interaction processes, constituting "a major, dominant area of social communication, by word of mouth, within every kind of social group." Furthermore, as Williams notes, broadcast communication is intrinsic to the nature of diverse institutions, which "involves or is predicated on social teaching or control: churches, school, assemblies or proclamation, or direction in places of work" (ibid: 21). If strictly seen from a transmission-based view of communication, participants adopt different positions and play specific roles in their mutual yet uneven inter-action. In settings dominated by forms of embodied interaction such as the ones suggested by Williams, message exchange is originated by some privileged individuals – the teacher in the classroom, the priest in the church and the boss in a work meeting. These individuals address others in a mostly unidirectional fashion, leaving room for the occasional interaction with those being addressed. Needless to say, it is with the arrival of socio-technical media systems such as radio, print or television that broadcast fully develops this interaction pattern.

Just as communication in face-to-face-oriented institutions such as the school or the church can be viewed, in some sense, as being of the broadcast-type, so can communication in discotheques. And this is not only true when it comes to patterns of meaning production and circulation, but more importantly with regard to the presence of the same dimension of control and teaching noted by Williams, with the sphere of social relations involving varied degrees of hierarchization. In discotheques, two types of actor can be identified as occupying privileged positions: on the one hand, there is the DJ, and on the other hand, the

dancer - and not just any "dancer" *per se*, or someone who *dances* freely on the dance floor, but the electrodancer in particular. Both are important due to the central role they play in the activity that takes place inside the discotheque, albeit in a slightly different manner. The function of the DJ is well known. It could be said that if dance is a "ceremony", the DJ is undoubtedly the "master" of such a ceremony. For Thornton, the DJ "has a decisive role in conducting the energies and rearranging the authenticities of the dance floor [...] The DJ is liable to the creation of a musical space, a space which is formed according to the expectations of the crowd and the specific kinds of DJ practices in place" (Thornton, ibid: 58). Thus, the DJ becomes a key figure in communicational terms. DJs manage which music customers listen to, thus retaining the control of the aural dimension of experience, as posed earlier. The DJ's role can then be easily likened to that of the teacher or priest. In the night club world, DJs play a crucial role in broadcasting the meanings embedded in music. In possessing the power to choose music - however limited by what the dancing crowd is willing to accept -, they become taste shapers who guide the audience as to what to listen to on the basis of both their own preferences and the establishment's music policy and orientation. The electrodancer's role parallels that of the DJ, embedded as it is in the internal broadcast dynamics of the discotheque and shaping it at the same time. The DJ takes center stage in terms of music and sound, so too does the dancer in terms of kinetic meaning-making ability. This is important because the way in which people normally dance in night clubs is not usually associated to any particular style. Valencian DJ Miret put it this way:

> **Tony**: … have you seen many people dancing Electro at your sessions?
> **DJ Miret:** not really ..., you know, here in Valencia people dance differently, not like in Electro.
> **Tony:** … maybe not in a stylized manner, you mean?
> **DJ Miret:** yeah [grinning] … everybody here does their own thing or whatever they like, a kind of free-style. If you like a song you dance to that song..., some people are more uninhibited than others. It also

> depends on the kind of dance floor. When dancing to harder sounds, people tend to move more aggressively, with rapid movements. When you're, say, on a House dance floor everything is different; the dancing becomes more sensual …

Clubbers get together around the shared ritual of dance, but the sense of being together through such social activity is limited to a shared space, the music experience and their leisure-oriented purpose, which does not necessarily encompass the performative dimension of dance, at least from a stylistic standpoint. Yet electro-dancers in night clubs were to introduce a novel element into the dance, formally encoding it. In this sense, the young dancers who were able to show a more defined, typified bodily expression on the dance floor will shortly become the benchmark for this ritual, attracting the attention of the rest. Consequently, electro-dancers, in the same way as DJs, contributed to the way both communication and social relations were configured on the dance floor. If the experience of clubbers in general was subordinated to the wishes and musical tastes of the DJ, dancers would exert a similar function in normatively suggesting a particular dance aesthetic. In other words, they would show others how to dance in a way that was appealing and impressive. When it comes to its impact on social relations, the following excerpt illustrates the importance of having a well-defined dance style:

> **Edy:** … there was this guy in Pacha [a Valencian club] who used to dance on his own. He was the only one in the whole disco that danced Electro. Right from the beginning, I liked the way he moved [...] I started watching videos not long afterwards but didn't dance at all. Actually, I started dancing two months ago…
> **Tony:** And did you get to speak to that guy?
> **Edy:** No, no… I tried to, but I never could. When people do something new here right away they get so full of themselves that you can't get close to them.

> **Tony:** Was he known in the movement?
> **Edy:** No, he was just someone who knew a couple of basic moves at a time when nobody even knew what the dance was… nothing more than that.

This interviewee, a former electro-dancer in Valencia who I interviewed in 2009, differed many other dancers because instead of getting interested in the dance through Youtube, learned about it in a club he regularly attended. His special way of dancing, though simple, would attract his and other people's attention ("after a while there was a circle of people around him"), becoming an object of admiration and inspiration for others. Moreover, because he was the only one dancing at that time, this youngster attained a certain reputation in the club over time. Thus, by having distinctive, highly-stylised dance skills, Edwin was able to acquire a reputation within the club's social sphere which in turn led to new opportunities for capitalizing said skills, both economically (e.g. by being hired for indoor, dance-related shows, as we shall see shortly) and socially (by facilitating opportunities to meet girls).

Finally, far from being an isolated case, this example shows a dynamic which could be seen in the early stages of the style both in Valencian and Parisian venues alike, i.e. where social relations were framed to an important extent within the broadcast communication model. As we have seen here, broadcast communication exists at this stage of the scene's evolution as being confined to the physical boundaries of discotheques, and driven by a few committed, pioneering dancers engaged in shaping the dance style. As I posited at the beginning of this chapter, behind broadcast communication lies a pattern of interaction among dance members, which implicitly speaks to the existence of levels of influence and power that are able to shape the style. In the next subsection, the characterization of the scene within a broadcast communication model is completed by giving an account of both the incorporation of new actors

and the presence of other, complementary elements would influence the development of this youth style.

ElectroDance as a branded style

In the previous subsection I approached the gestation of the ElectroDance scene by characterizing the communicative environment of discotheques and the kind of social relations established therein. As suggested, small-scale social relations in a social setting such as a discotheque can be thought of as a type of broadcast communicative form. However, even though social relations can be thought of in this way, as a small-scale example of this broadcast form, this communicative medium will only reach full expression once the dance leaves the confines of the discotheque. It would mainly be during 2008 and 2009 that the style would gain broader social visibility, becoming a phenomenon of massive proportions whose popularity would reach French youth. The style's rising popularity in dance clubs would lead small, independent entrepreneurs to look for alliances in the sectors of mass media and cultural industries to take those incipient profit-making opportunities and commercially exploit them at a large scale. Here, the term “broadcast” captures the notion of the process of massive diffusion of the style, but at the same time it makes the study of this phenomenon more complex from a communicative point of view. This means that in order to view the communication in and of Electrodance as following a broadcast model, we cannot limit ourselves to merely accounting for how this new style became a significant social phenomenon first in France, and then around the world, resulting from the decisive action of mass-media and cultural intermediaries. It is also important to observe how the communicative form is both sustained and its development fostered, allowing it to embrace new followers whose engagement with the dance will not necessarily rely upon attending discotheques, or requiring embodied social relationships with pioneers. If the scene is conceptualized at this stage as a

broadcast medium then it becomes necessary to explore the particular arrangement and significance of a number of heterogeneous, interrelated actors, social events and artifacts and their interactions and how these have produced the communication sphere of ElectroDance. Because all of them are linked in some way to the action of Cultural Industries, in this section I will attempt to shed some light on the commercial strategies, interests and workings of said industries. For the sake of clarity, my approach to communication here will distinguish between the three types of components which hold special relevance in the configuration of this broadcast form of communication. These are sponsored events, branded commodities and star dancers, each playing a different, key role in the creation and circulation of meanings, linking members of the scene.

Sponsored dance events

One of the key drivers behind the increasingly notorious acceptance and popularity of the emerging style in Parisian discotheques were events held to showcase the new dance. By 2001, *Metropolis* owners Cyrill Blanc and André Barouzdin sought to expand upon their DJ sessions with an aim, in their own words, "to creating not just a party, but a show with a strong visual identity that included DJs and MCs, based around a type of music that was resolutely unpopular in Paris, Gabba."[59] To give these events their own distinctive stamp they created the *Tecktonik* brand, and organized branded events such as Tecktonik Killer Nights. The reason behind establishing a registered trademark was clear-cut: the creators of the brand wanted to prevent anyone else from sponsoring parties under the "Tecktonik" brand. The Tecktonik Killer events offered the dance as entertainment for regular customers. Blanc and André Barouzdin wanted to turn the dance into a spectacle,

[59] John Laurenson, 2009. "Tecktonik tremors jolt France". BBC-News [retrieved online, 10/04/2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7923658.stm>]

with dancers becoming the focus of attention for the rest of the clubbers. Inspired by the practices of other contemporary fight-oriented, indoor sports such as wrestling or boxing, as well as other youth cultures like Hip-Hop, the event creators envisioned a dance performance in the form of a combat wherein practitioners would compete with each other to show off their skills. Countless videos posted on the DailyMotion website, and then on Youtube, show how clubbers temporarily become the audience of a spectacle organized around a boxing ring-like stage in which dancers "fought" using their dance moves, against the backdrop of a singular show of light and sound.

Image 1. Tecktonik Killer parties

Tecktonik events carried their own significance in the nightly social world of Metropolis, but also in terms of the evolution of the dance proper. Firstly, they contributed to the shaping of the dance style by putting the dance at the center of the Metropolis night club scene. Practicing a stylised form of dance was not just another way to connect to music and to those surrounding you; it also symbolically defined who you were and your social status within the scene, indirectly leading to opportunities to earn money for highly-committed dancers such as Treaxy, as we

shall see next. Secondly, it helped to popularize the dance over time. As Blanc himself notes: "With more and more kids from inner city Paris and the rich suburbs joining in, as well as the growing media focus on the movement, by 2005 TCK Killer parties at Metropolis were bringing 4,000 people together every Saturday night."[60] Thirdly, it introduced a new understanding of what spectacles in clubs might mean. As posited earlier, the multimedia environments of clubs such as Metropolis are visually and acoustically arranged to create a full-on spectacle. But to a certain extent, these dance events also allow for the recasting of the role of dance in clubs, in terms of their spatial arrangement. Here, the spectacle has entirely different connotations, adopting values, meanings and norms borrowed from other leisure-oriented sports spectacles such as wrestling or boxing. In the following excerpt Juanito, a leading figure in the local Valencian scene, remembers his own beginnings in ElectroDance as being somewhat linked to the dance events as well as the clubs hosting them, explaining why clubs would eventually stop holding these events.

> **Tony**: How did you get interested in the dance?
> **Juanito:** In the summer of 2007 I was in Morocco where my mother owns a small hostel. I saw the dance there for the first time because many young people were dancing it in Tanger. That same summer I travelled to France, where I had heard it originated. I visited Metropolis and Red Light which were organizing and sponsoring the dance through the Tecktonik Killer parties [...]. Later on I heard that Red Light ended up forbidding the dance because clubbers weren't buying drinks whenever they went to the shows. That kind of customer was not profitable to them so clubbers dancing Tecktonik weren't welcomed anymore.

[60] Tecktonik official webpage (2010, May). Retrieved from http://www.officialtecktonik.com/

By 2007, Metropolis no longer organized these sponsored dance events. The founders of Tecktonik had already found a suitable marketing strategy to ensure remarkable profit margins not only from the events held within the walls of dance clubs and *Metropolis* in particular – but more importantly beyond them.

Branded commodities

As we have just seen, the dance style which would ultimately be known worldwide as *ElectroDance* was initially named Tecktonik by Blanc and Barouzdin. It did not take too long for the creators of the above-mentioned sessions at *Metropolis* to see the money-making potential of what at the time was nothing more than an ill-defined dance style practised by a reduced number of clubbers. As noted earlier, their business move was to convert *Tecktonik* into a registered trademark, a marketing strategy that responded to, as Barouzdin later confessed, the purpose of "preventing other nightclubs (from) advertising Tecktonik nights."[61] But this early, improvised move in self-defense against business rivals would soon turn into a full-fledged marketing strategy. A complete marketing plan would later be developed around the new brand, consisting of a number of profit-driven actions, one of which being the organization of Tecktonik Killer events. Because the style lacked a well-defined aesthetic, Blanc and Barouzdin attempted to provide the dance form with a visual identity in order to make dancers more recognisable as a group, as we shall see later on in Chapter Nine. Suffice it to say that by the years 2006 and 2007 a whole arsenal of commodities branded as Tecktonik had been marketed, products such as energy drinks, t-shirts, magazines, bracelets and

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[61] Pichevin, M. (2008). "Furious electro-dance style sweeps France". *Reuters* Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/03/29/music-tecktonik-dc-idUSN2943062220080329?sp=true&view=sphere

watches, just to name a few. These were sold to young people as part of the Tecktonik experience.

Not long after, Tecktonik commodities would target French youth outside of the club realm. What was initially geared towards a local French market mostly located in the city of Paris, would eventually seek broader commercial opportunities around the dance. The management of the brand as such would turn out to be crucial in this regard. This is not too surprising, given the centrality of brands in the workings and commercial strategies of cultural industries in recent decades. As Lash and Urry put it (2007: 6), global cultural industries rely mostly on the symbolic power of brands. They represent a corporation's main asset inasmuch as they function as a symbolic connection between products and consumers through the meanings and values attached to commodities. More than ever, the success and failure of corporations depend upon the effectiveness in conveying, through a product, the meanings that help to forge the identity of the individuals who buy said product. Not content with their small but profitable business, Blanc and Barouzdin were sufficiently aware of the intrinsic potential that lay in their apparently modest brand to reach out a wider public. The goal then was to develop a marketing strategy based on multi-sector cross-promotion over various media platforms (2007: 22) in the hopes of maximizing the brand's popularity among young people. This strategy consisted of forging suitable alliances with other small, medium and large corporations within the cultural industry sector. Numerous campaigns were launched between 2006 and 2009 in order to greatly increase the presence of the Tecktonik brand in the general youth markets. Clothing, as mentioned before, was one of them, with Blanc and Barouzdin opening a small shop on *Rue Des Archives* which sold dance-related items. On a larger scale, in 2008 the Fishbone & New Yorker firm released a winter clothing collection vaguely inspired by the aesthetic of the young French dancers. This alliance-building strategy was embraced by other business sectors as well, namely the music industry. A series of six CD compilations entitled "Tecktonik" were released by EMI between 2006 to 2008, which included tracks made popular in

Parisian club dance sessions.[62] Similarly, media and communications corporations also participated in the Tecktonik trend, with French telecom Mobile 5 featuring star dancers in their advertising campaigns, and gigantic media corporations such as French TF1 sponsoring the copyrighted dance events in Metropolis and more generally acting as distributor of other Tecktonik brand products. Even videogame companies such as Nintendo exploited the new dance style by releasing a dance-related game for their DS handheld console in 2008.

This brief sampling of commercial actions clearly shows how the Tecktonik brand would come to be a symbolic hub at the center of a network of small, medium and large business actors. Through the action of brand attachment, these *ad-hoc* alliances would soon build a dance-based community of consumers. Circulating through countless commercial and media channels, Tecktonic products were offered in a variety of symbolic forms and artifacts, and served as entry points into the style for new devotees. The marketing strategy activated by the brand founders is, in the words of Lars and Urry (ibid: 25), one of "transposition", that is, a strategy involving an intensively coordinated and associative series of events, merchandise promotion and publicity, organized partially by the laws of trademark.

The above considerations makes of Tecktonik a special case as to past accounts on the role of the youth market and more generally the processes of commodification that are involved in the formation of youth cultural phenomena. This is the case of Hebdidge (2005 [1978]), who three decades ago saw the market as merely exploiting and co-opting styles created "at street level" by "authentic" subcultures. Nevertheless more recent approaches to the relationship between youth subcultures, consumption and commercial markets have acknowledged, as in

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[62] In particular, EMI France reported *Tecktonik/Vol. 4* as being the best-selling album in the series. The album, which featured local acts such as Hardrox and Dim Chris alongside international DJ/mixers including U.S.-based *Robbie Rivera* and Italy's *Paolo Bolognesi*, shipped more than 230,000 copies on the date of its release in December 2008.

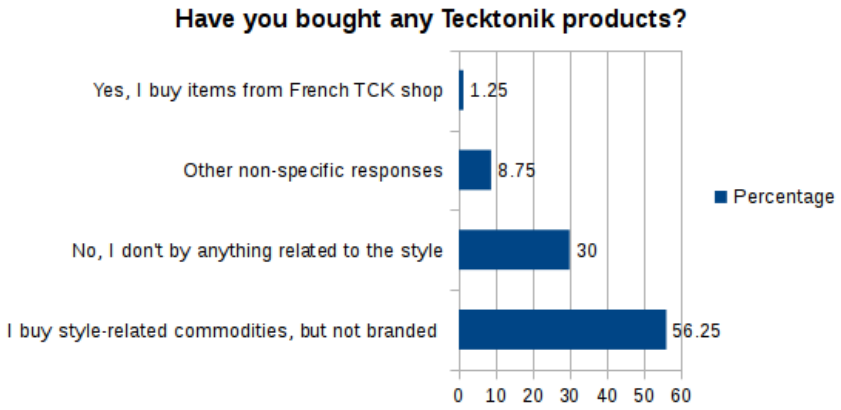
the case of Thornton, the varied levels of commercial co-responsibility in the process of youth culture production. The Tecktonik case wholly inverts this assumption, as cultural marketers here have played a decisive role in the shaping of what otherwise would have been nothing more than a group of clubbers practising their preferred dance form quite anonymously. In his study of the Goth subculture, Hodkinson identified particular appropriations of commodities as being intrinsic to the identity-building practices of its members; if we take this view, and accept consumption as being part of an individual's experience of a youth style to some degree or another, then we might come to the conclusion that in the case of Tecktonic, scene members occupied a subordinated position in defining a largely prepackaged style conceived by youth fashion designers in their offices. In this regard, the following extract reproduces part of an October 2008 conversation between members of the local scene in Madrid, taken from the TecktonikSP online forum. In it, they discuss the release of a Nintendo video game. Their opinions seem to counter the above argument in unexpected ways:

> **WikiVLC**: Guys, I've just heard something that freaked me out. Nintendo is coming out with a game about Tecktonik for the TS!!! I'm gonna try to download it but I don't know if I'll be able to because it won't be released until November.
> **MyDro:** I've got the one for DS and it's fun, haha. Nothing special but at least it is about Tecktonik. I've been messing around with it for a while, trying out some dance routines and battle scenarios, but I didn't buy it..., I just downloaded it and made it work via an emulator I have on my computer. No money spent on it at all!
> **WikiVLC:** I found the webpage you mean, Wiki, and here are the links to download them!! ;-)

According to this extract, far from showing a simply passive response to Tecktonik products, dancers seem to be rather ambivalent about them. On the one hand, marketing succeeds in getting followers of the dance to react positively to the

video-game release and arousing their interest in bringing it into their experience of the style. On the other hand, however, they do not seem to want to purchase it. This attitude should not be interpreted as a form of opposition to the brand or more generally to the full-fledged commodification of the style; it has more to do with Electro-dance followers being able to find and distribute pirated copies of digitalized content amidst new media. In the survey I conducted between June and September 2009, I attempted to sound out dancers as to their sense of attachment to and opinions on the brand through several questions. Figure 1 shows consumption habits vis-à-vis the style and more specifically the brand:

Figure 4. ElectroDance's followers patterns of the brand's products



As in the case of the Tecktonic video game, many dancers showed an interest in style-related promotional items, but in a way that becomes unlinked to the brand. A reason for this is that the marketing plan for Blanc and Barouzdin's business was not initially meant to fully exploit the revenue opportunities outside France. Unlike other countries like Japan, where their products saw some success,

Tecktonik products will never target the Spanish youth market. Still, some of my informants expressed a strong desire to establish a relationship with the brand at the time the survey was conducted. This was especially true for Valencian BeatMode's team leader Furió, who, in September 2008 said:

> "I'm talking to the owners of Tecktonik in order to bring the brand here. We'd love to be representatives of the brand in Spain. We're willing to organize official parties and sell their products, but I can't tell you anymore about it yet".

Without leaving Spain, another rather fleeting, unsuccessful attempt to exploit the brand's e-commerce opportunities came from an entrepreneur via the online shop "Tienda Tecktonik", based in Zaragoza. Similarly, dancers organizing their own local scenes in other parts of the world showed an early interest in becoming mediators of the brand in their cities. Uruguayan dancer D4, whom I spoke to in 2009, put it to me this way:

> **Tony**: I've seen on your web page that you're an official Tecktonik website. How did you start working with them? What are the terms and conditions of your relationship with them? …, For instance, do you pay royalties to be able to organize events, sell products or carry out similar activities?
> **UruguayTCK**: Contacting them was not easy whatsoever. It was made possible thanks to the contact list available on Tecktonik's official webpage. I talked to them, expressing my intentions as to the diffusion of Tecktonik all over Uruguay. They agreed, allowing us to use the brand name for non-profit purposes, and that's why our web page shows the 'Tecktonik' logo.

Yet dancers taking part in the operations of the Tecktonik brand will mostly be located in France, some of them acquiring a high degree of visibility and popularity.

Star dancers

Finally, the third element into the discussion on the broadcast-form of communicative architecture of the early ElectroDance scene is that of the movement's star dancers. The role of pioneering dancers in the club context was outlined earlier. Indeed, the reduced number of clubbers who were interested in the dance played a significant role in shaping the style early on. Their participation in branded events at *Metropolis* would decisively contribute to giving the dance form its particular style, indirectly leading to the recruitment of some of the more outstanding dancers by the *Tecktonik* brand. Young dancers such as the aforementioned Treaxy, Naim, Angy or Lili Azian were taken on and danced together under the name of Eklesiast, one of the most well-known teams in France at the time. Unlike many other dancers who were equally visible in underground circles, those linked to the brand would enter wider mainstream circuits, with their personal image being used as the public image of the brand. Apart from dance-sponsored events, these young dancers also participated in telecom ad campaigns, appeared in videogames and dance-related movies, and even toured the most important clubs in France and Europe. In the excerpt below, French culture writer Gregory Colard,[63] who followed the *Tecktonik* phenomenon closely, offers a personal account of the young French dancers involved in the business-side of the dance and the brand:

> "[…] After talking to the creators of the Tecktonik – both French – Alexander Barouzdin and Cyril Blanc, and meeting the 17 dancers of their team, Eklésiast, I realized that these young people aged between 17 and 20 years, have suddenly found a life plan, a salary, and lots of work here and there, on television, on stage and the like, in France and worldwide. These are young people rescued

[63] Smiri, K. (2008, July). "Interview with Gregory Colard, French writer". *Le Matin.ma*. Retrieved from http://www.lematin.ma/Actualite/Journal/Article.asp?idr=115&id=95954

> from a certain social uncertainty. Likewise, disco offered a life change, attitude, look; it proposed new freedoms and has promoted social success, whether in fashion, music or other fields".

Colard's account involves a rather celebratory, positive view of those youngsters enjoying a professional career linked to the dance. The dance certainly opened up a number of work opportunities for those recruited by the *Tecktonik* business project across a variety of style-related activities connected to a variety of cultural industries. For this group of youngsters, the dance is a way for them to enhance their social and economic status as well as forge a personal identity. For Colard, the simple fact of giving a few young people some job opportunities somewhat justifies the existence of dance style by itself. More questionable is the extent to which "new freedoms" or "social success" have arisen as a result of the dance, although Colard does elaborate further on these two notions. In terms of the relationship between commerce and the production of the style, it could be said that the ElectroDance phenomenon, at first glance, reproduces the model posited by Hebdige. According to his view, "authentic" youth subcultures are co-opted – and denaturalized in the process - by the commercial interests of the cultural industry. A number of selected youngsters are then featured as having the status of celebrities, thus becoming a visible *center* around which the social relations in the scene can revolve for a certain time. What was, in the beginning, a recreational club-based dance practice eventually becomes an object of broader attention. However, and as discussed earlier, the aspect that characterizes ElectroDance the most is precisely Thornton's argument regarding the varying presence of cultural industries in youth subcultural phenomena at their inception. Contrary to Hebdige's insights and unlike the development of other youth cultures, the case of Electrodance shows the central role played by cultural intermediaries in the constitution and definition of a phenomenon that barely existed as such before their involvement.

To summarize the discussion offered in this subsection, it is worth adding a last consideration on the way in which the above-described elements — sponsored events, branded commodities and star dancers — can be brought together to help us understand the notion of broadcast medium. As suggested earlier, by broadcast I mean a form of communication which in practice involves, conceptually, a vertically-constituted form of association among a series of actors who become interrelated on the basis of a few-to-many pattern of making- and exchanging meaning. Here, the notion of verticality suggests a sort of hierarchization of the social relations taking part in the dynamics of the style cultural production. Hierarchization stems from the unevenly distributed capacities of the participants in the symbolic circuit of the scene in terms of making- and exchanging meaning, with those who control the symbolic and commercial potentials of the brand exerting a more tangible influence on the shaping of the style over others who come to act as consumers of it, regardless of their ability to reinterpret the meanings embedded in the brand products in ways other than those conceived by the cultural industries industries - which of course also involves an important degree of networked communication among those who identify with the dance. Thus, according to this model of vertical integration, at one end of this communication structure we have a core group of commercial agents of the brand and star dancers who communicate brand meanings through sponsored events and commodities, and at the other end there is an ever-increasing legion of targeted followers who must *look to* this imagined center to reach a sense of "being-together". This form of *indirect* association, or what Thompson (ibid: 118) termed "quasi-interaction", is characteristic of broadcast communication, although this concept is by no means intuitive. The followers of Tecktonik likely attained a sense of being part of the same movement when Parisian clubs served as social meeting places where young people could interact with each other, establishing and developing social relations based on embodied exchanges. Nevertheless, once the founders of Tecktonik took the style out of the clubs in order to commercially exploit it, the relationship and potential sense of

attachment of older participants to *external*, unknown newcomers, i.e. young people who, in theory, had nothing to do with the club world, had to be constructed at a more abstract level. It is significant that broadcast communication at this point is only attainable by technical means according to the notion of "community of audience". As seen before, brand products[64] and star dancers here act as symbolic markers of the style meanings shared by practitioners within a context of social relations mostly defined by anonymity. Branded commodities will then provide the invisible yet indispensable bond between some dance practitioners and others, one which does not, strictly speaking, require reciprocality or mutual acknowledgement to become meaningful. In contrast to the broadcast model of communication discussed here and how it can be used to describe the first stage of the development of ElectroDance, the next chapter will offer an account of the second stage of the style's development, which follows a different communicative architecture, that is, that of network communication. It is here that this youth movement experiences significant shifts in its internal configuration and subsequent development.

[64] At this point is worth noting how under this approach the dancer and the fan of the style in general are no longer thought as a "clubber". Disembedded from the cultural context of clubs, it is the category of consumer in its strictest sense that best defines the individual's relationship to the style. In other words, engagement with the dance style now involves not only the practice of the dance itself but, more crucially, access to and a close relationship with an array of commodities that allow young people to attain something close to what Miles (2000) regards as a "lifestyle".

:: 6 :: From France to the world: digital networks of cultural dissemination

As we have just seen, broadcast communication took centre stage early on in ElectroDance, with a particular communicative model imposing itself at two different times. This occurred, first of all, within the walls of Parisian clubs and discotheques, by means of a set of social relations among clubbers, dancers and DJs. Afterwards, outside the clubs and on a larger scale, this took place through the linking of the for-profit interests of specific small-scale entrepreneurs and diverse media and entertainment corporations to the desires of a legion of newcomers eager to find a novel dance style. However, from that time on, some key changes took place in the scene's underlying communicative structure, changes which can be perceived as operating at three different levels: firstly, with the massive penetration of new media, which provided unprecedented dynamics in communication through enhanced interpersonal interaction, initially locally confined to the French context; secondly, the flexibilization of spatial and temporal relations resulting from the shifted technological environment; and finally, a different understanding of the style in terms of a more localized, profit-making orientation. The interplay of these three levels facilitated the transition from the previously prevalent communicational architecture of broadcast

communication to that of network communication. Thus, a network-like medium came to dominate the organization of communication in ElectroDance at a later stage. If these three aspects were the underlying drives for change within the scene, the transition from one communicational model to the next is best understood as a movement involving, successively, the following three interrelated processes.

To being with, communication within the ElectroDance movement adopted a network structure as the original local French scene underwent a process of delocalization. This process involved a series an overlapping moves occurring in parallel over time. Between 2006 and 2007, according to prominent French dancer Treaxy and style-related historical records found on the Mexican website "CulturaElectro.mx", the dance left the club realm and began to be followed by a broader range of young people who had no connection with the original pioneering group. Some became clubbers as well, constituting part of the mass of dancers attending Tecktonik Killer parties; others took the dance into another city locations, firstly its streets and not long after its sports halls. Of great significance was to be the incorporation of new media into dancers' practices at this time. Graphically, while members of the scene were, on the one hand, "vertically" integrated by virtue of the messages, images and products circulated by mass-media and culture corporations, on the other hand, the new devices would come to provide them with the capacity for "horizontal", grassroots communication, with both modes of association appearing seamlessly intertwined in practice. Media interfaces with different features - such as YouTube or Skyrock at first, and Facebook some time later, just to name a few key examples, along with other communication devices, such as mobile phones with built-in photo and video cameras - became part of the technical arsenal with which the dance-related social practices were supported. They would function as powerful means of expression and dialogue, often used in situations of embodied interaction in clubs, streets or sports halls, thereby providing dancers with new ways of experiencing the dance and interacting which no longer depended upon the spatial

and temporal constraints of its practice in situ. The “delocalization” of the scene was then a result of the ability of this technology to extricate social relations from the “physical place”. Because of the unrestricted public availability of this dance-related content on various forms of media, communications originally operating at a local basis in France would be the unexpected object of attention for an ever-increasing number of youngsters across the world, who were soon to start imitating their French heroes, thereby incorporating the practice of the dance into their everyday lives. This also speaks of a shift in the mode of operation of cultural dissemination, now linked to the communicational affordances offered by new media usage. Indeed, among the causes put forward by respondents surveyed during my research, new media interfaces appeared as the second most common means of finding out about the style, coming after only interpersonal contact, but taking precedence over other older mass-media forms which traditionally assumed this role.

Secondly, the scene also went through a process of decentralization, going hand-in-hand with that of delocalization. With the emergence of countless local scenes in locations across the world, ElectroDance ceased to be an exclusively French phenomenon. A remarkable number of nationally-rooted scenes of varying size would grow extensively across the world between 2008 to 2010, with the style achieving a stunning impact in terms of the number of followers in countries such as Mexico or Russia. In the early stages, such communication did not involve more than home-made videos posted on YouTube by prominent underground French dancers being viewed by those searching for inspiration and eager to learn all over the world. However, it would not be long before communication patterns similar to those found in the French context were reproduced in every local scene across the world by young people. The dancers engaged with the same sort of media and developed the same media practices, ranging from the production and sharing of videos capturing street-based, informal, one-to-one battles or home rehearsals, to the exploitation of the interactive affordances of new media so as to organize their collective action as a

group. It is thus the high degree of connectedness attained by different young people scattered across the world which seems to be the most salient effect of using new media. Nevertheless, the fact of simply sharing information "in real time" would not necessarily have led to the formation of a shared consciousness of the dance's practitioners beyond the immediate context of their respective local scenes. While a community of practitioners had previously formed around the Tecktonik brand, those young people interested in the style in its "post-brand" age could easily have found themselves without the necessary meanings around which to forge a sense of shared identity and membership. Indeed, without the existence of an element to link and bring together the various local scenes worldwide, Electrodance would have only existed in a handful of isolated and scattered places, which would have been technologically connected and with their members being aware of other people's activity, but poorly integrated in terms of being a globally networked community. The force for the articulation of the only partially related local scenes was to come from France once again, in the shape of the former Hip-Hop dancers Steady, Youval and Hagson, who were interested in the phenomenon from its earliest times. They would come up with the well-known Vertifight event in an attempt to "rescue" the style from its club roots, moving it away from the declining influence of the brand. As Steady put it to me: "we built Vertifight when Tecktonik and all the brands were beginning to stop making money from Electro". By 2007, under the name of Vertifight, Steady, Youval and Hagson had started scheduling competition-oriented meetings for old and new dancers. The goal was then to transform the ritual of dance fighting, originally embodied as a show in clubs at the aforementioned Tecktonik Killer parties, and apply the standards of sports competition. More generally, they aimed to provide new cultural bases on which to build the style and make it an "authentic" culture, one which the style was claimed to lack at different levels, whether aesthetically - the dance being poorly defined as a dance form - or socially - the scene not truly existing as a cohesive community.

> "Youval, Hagson and me, with our pedagogic discussions with all dancers just before each competition, forged the direction of this dance. We created some monsters, such as Majestik, Naim or Milliard. In the first vertifight competitions, none of the dancers danced to the beat of the music, and they did not know anything about creating a show, etc. Our actions were based on a different point of view, we transformed a fashion movement into a culture […] Vertifight was the beginning of the real ElectroDance culture".

In 2007, the organization of events was initially restricted to France, and they helped other unknown dancers to become visible, with new media exposure providing them with reputations matching those who had earlier been associated with the Tecktonik brand. Aware of the rapid growth that the style was undergoing elsewhere, the Vertifight founders sought to globally extend the organizational framework to scattered local scenes in far-off destinations. Two actions were undertaken in order to build a global community made up of local scenes whose members would be translocally united by Vertifight membership. Firstly, Vertifight made members meet a series of requirements before being able to 'enter' the community. Among them, the most basic was to be in possession of a partnership licence for the right to organize local Vertifight events similar to those in France. In Steady's own words:

> "As for the Vertifight staff members, first of all, they have to love the Electro culture, know a little bit about the history of Vertifight and be fair with all dancers [...] The licence is free, but it's a real responsibility [...] My staff members have to arrange some Vertifights in their own countries, develop Electro and send me 5 dancers to the main competition. And that's all. For the rest, the unique rules of the community are love and respect."

Secondly, what started out as local competitions in France geared to French dancers, was opened up from 2010 with the organization of an international competition with dancers from all nations coming to take part in it. According to Beatmode's team member Spikes, international competitions - and not exclusively mediated contact - helped forge a sense of transnational community:

> **Tony**: Do you have any sort of relationship with others abroad?
> **Spike**: Yeah, sure, now more than before ...
> **Tony**: Really? … why?
> **Spike**: Yeah, everybody was on their own at the beginning ... I think everything changed due to the World Championship as it let us meet each other.

Outside the clubs and discotheques and the spheres of mass-media and commerce, the spread of ElectroDance entered a new phase, one of a global networked community involving translocal and transnational communication enabled by new media. The notion of the network as a pattern of social interconnection is by no means a new one. As Castells (2011:46) has remarked, social networks have formed the backbone of societal forms since ancient times, being present in diverse civilizations over the history of mankind. However, what we find today in late-modern societies is clearly a more technological and commodified expression of them (Holmes, 2004:83). Just as broadcast communication was important within the clubs and discotheques, a small communication network also started life among those who gathered together on a regular basis in the early dance sessions which shaped the style. However, it was the highly-interactive networked communication technologies which provided the technical means and conditions for the creation of an expanded network of young dancers based on their affinities, interests and values regardless of spatial and temporal constraints,

something which was not possible – or at least, to be more precise, would have been much more difficult – only some years before. The case of ElectroDance broke new ground, with hundreds of dance practitioners scattered around the world yet still able to monitor what was going on in relation to the dance, anywhere, at any time. Yet, as already suggested, the enhanced connectivity offered by new media did not inevitably lead to people developing a sense of togetherness. In fact, as I noted in the previous chapter, the extent to which the dance practitioners obtained a sense of togetherness was substantially based upon the effectiveness of the circulation of the meanings of the Tecktonik brand, under the vertical framework of technologically-supported broadcast communication. However, both "broadcast" and "network" social media never exist "on their own". On the contrary, as Holmes remarks, they are parasitic to one another. We never encounter either broadcast or network media in a pure form. To a great extent, broadcast communication involves variable levels of network communication, and the converse is equally true. While at the outset, the young dancers' attachment to each other was mainly enabled by corporate media commodities and what I referred to as "Tecktonik's star dancers", new media interfaces such as YouTube or SkyRock blogs would come to play a similar role, as we will see later, providing ways for supplementary horizontal communication to take place. It was through the usage of these media that dancers in France and all over the world, many of them from small local dance groups, would encounter these other outstanding French dancers, who would be a source of both knowledge and inspiration. New media supplied the technical conditions for different locations to be able to come together much easier than before. Electrodancers were thus connected both to their local group and at the same time to those other groups involved in the style somewhere else, bypassing spatial and temporal constraints on sharing knowledge and experience. Vertifight's role was therefore that of an institutional nexus for far-off locations, thereby favouring the constitution of ElectroDance as an operational, dynamic, globally networked unit.

According to Castells (ibid.:45), a network can be defined as a communicational structure formed by nodes. Within a network structure, not all the nodes are equally important. Depending upon their contributions to the establishment of the network's values and purposes, some nodes become more significant than others, functioning as a sort of hub. The local French node then became the hub of ElectroDance at this stage. As noted above, Vertifight not only provided new dancers with a base one could identify with and the opportunity for dancers to come together on a larger, translocal basis, but, more importantly, it supplied the very symbolic resources around which the culture of this dance could be rebuilt nearly from scratch. It is therefore worth highlighting on the extent to which the ability to dictate values, ideas and methods of collective organization - i.e. what Castells calls "the communication protocol of the network" - relied heavily on the possibility of fluid, constant communication across time and space. Leonardo, an organizer of the Mexican scene, put it this way:

> **Tony**: Do you think that the spread of ElectroDance all over the world would have been possible without the existence of new technologies?
> **Leonardo**: That's a very good question. I have no doubt that ElectroDance spread worldwide is largely due to the internet, particularly to YouTube. Dancers started off dancing in Mexico by watching each other's videos. [...] It's possible that the dance would have ended up arriving in other places anyway, but probably later. And I find it highly unlikely that something like Vertifight or the national contest would exist without these tools.

Finally, along with delocalization and decentralization, there was a third process: Electrodance's shift from a broadcast-based into a network-based scene could be termed as a "displacement". By displacement, I mean the process through which a social actor with a central role in meaning-making within a certain symbolic circuit

ceases to play such a function. In order for the symbolic circuit to hold together, the function exerted by the actor leaving must be taken on by another, either by bringing another actor in, taking over the other's position, or by a whole rearrangement of the set of actors forming part of the symbolic circuit. This is the case of the underlying symbolic circuit of ElectroDance where, after a period of significant participation in the development of the style, corporate agents gradually lost influence within it due to young people's decreasing interest in the consumer side of the phenomenon, leading to them eventually abandoning the scene. Given the centrality of the Tecktonik brand in the configuration of the scene, this led in turn to its restructuring in the way described, i.e. it shifted from a broadcast-based to a network-based form of communication. The consequences of this, in terms of the disruption of this commercial orientation, will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

If these three trends - decentralization, delocalization and displacement - can give us some insight into the evolution of ElectroDance, what follows in the rest of the chapter is a further discussion of ElectroDance as a network communication medium, following the same two-subsection discursive structure of the previous chapter. In connection to the above-mentioned question of decentralized relations in flexible time and space, I shall begin by tackling the circumstances and effects surrounding communication when using new media. Just as I considered in the previous chapter the social world of ElectroDance as involving a social formation whose members relate to each other in recognizable places, I will discuss the appropriateness of regarding digital interfaces as places too, a question in need of further clarification. A consideration of the anthropologist Marc Augé's notion of the contemporary "non-place" will initially be used as a backdrop against which the relationship in ElectroDance between (the types of) place, communication and sociality will be assessed. As the relationship between communication and place takes place at a local level, but at the same time at both translocal and transnational levels too, this chapter will focus on the latter ones, postponing the treatment of local communication. The chapter seeks

therefore to pay attention to how electro-dancers make sense of the style and also establish and sustain over time their social relations, while keeping up with the variable and demanding conditions of an ontological communication framework where no face-to-face contact is possible. The way in which the electro-dancers' communications beyond locality are subjected to certain biases, effects and affordances resulting from being submitted to new media will then be the next object of study. Furthermore, just as the following account of communication while using digital interfaces has its counterpart in the analysis of communication inside clubs contained in the previous chapter, the second part of this chapter takes up the same politico-economic perspective by looking at the economic practices of certain young dancers and business agents working outside the influence and commercial operations of the Tecktonik brand.

Communication in interfaces

As Augé has argued (1993:122), any valuable analysis of social relations between individuals should take into account the symbolic configuration of space in forms of sociality. Yet the conditions in postmodernity are such that, according to him, they increasingly push individuals to inhabit spaces lacking a marked identity. A space which cannot be defined as identity-based, relational or historical should not be deemed a "place" (ibid.:83). This assumption leads this author to regard common places such as supermarkets or airports as postmodern "non-places". It is undeniable that such spaces house an important part of people's everyday activity. Yet Augé questions their true meaningfulness. On the basis of the nature of the relations that individuals engage in in such spaces, Augé compares what he calls "non-places" to common places. The difference is clear-cut. Whereas the former points to individuals fleetingly occupying a "space of transit" wherein relationships with others occur at an abstract, largely impersonal level, the latter

invokes the notion of place as resulting from specific forms of making sense of space, for the most part involving social relations dominated by meaningful interpersonal bonds.

In the previous chapter, clubs were regarded as the places in which ElectroDance emerged. For clubs to be meaningful places attendees must make sense of them on the basis of certain symbolical traits of the medium as well as there being differentiated roles guiding social interaction. The ElectroDance style, as has been suggested, was to a certain degree the result of the environmental conditions of these clubs. However, once the dance moved out of the clubs and started being performed, firstly on the streets and sometimes later in sports halls, the symbolical connection with the original medium was lost. It was then when new understandings of the style with regard to these shifted spaces needed to be formed in order to render these spaces into meaningful places, that is, dance-oriented places. As well as sports halls, streets and homes, new media now appeared here as a sort of new meeting place, that is, a space for communication that needed to be made sense of by the young dancers, perhaps in some novel, forcibly-meaningful way. Needless to say, physical settings and media settings present different ontological features, with the former showing a materiality at odds with the abstractness of the latter. In this sense, clubs are “closer” to streets or sports halls than media spaces are. Our bodily relations with physical spaces are of a distinct nature than those with the surfaces of digital interfaces. Yet both types of space share the property of hosting forms of sociality within certain symbolic frames; they are the destinations for dancers’ social relations and communications. The ways in which these special sorts of place are occupied and made sense of through specific practices raise various issues concerning the sociality embedded in the dance world. Just as social relations develop inside clubs on the basis of a shared understanding of their symbolic features as social settings, digital interfaces likewise constitute a medium for group and interpersonal interaction that can be cognitively and sensuously grasped by users. Approaches to the study of the forms of sociality present “in” digital interfaces

have tended to be polarized[65], with, on the one hand, those which regard digital spaces as reduced-cue environments which are ill-suited to emotional, expressive or complex communications, and which lead to longer decision times, anti-social behaviours such as flaming, and decreased social involvement; on the other hand, there are studies which regard this sort of communication as a force for integration, bringing disparate types of people together and consolidating existing connections. Yet these contrasting, general approaches with which new media-based communication is dichotomically framed as either positive or negative might easily mislead us into not paying enough attention to the socio-cultural particularities and specific circumstances surrounding particular phenomena. In our specific case, social relations in ElectroDance, whether local or translocal, are in principle built around the values and meanings of the dance culture, with these elements constituting the cultural foundations over which a sense of belonging of members is formed. As we will see shortly, beyond the cultural domain of dance, certain "out-of-the-screen" characteristics - socio-cultural features specific to the screen-mediated experience - come to colour the social relations maintained by means of at-a-distance communication. To put it another way, as interaction by technical means is no longer anchored to the spatial boundaries of locality and the specificities of local social relations - such as is the case when individuals relate to one another on the basis of a shared neighbourhood, workplace or leisure-related settings - digital interfaces must be able to offer a set of symbolic cues for those interacting in order for them to experience “a sense of place” from what they perceive on and feel through the screen.

Social relations maintained completely at a distance gave rise to a varied set of experiences for the young dancers I had the chance to talk to. The nature and quality of the links forged between the young dancers in terms of the reciprocity and mutuality involved seemed to range, almost in a continuum, from

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[65] Haythornthwaite, 2000, p.1

those who said they had been able to develop rewarding relationships with some distant peers to others for whom the contacts made did not result in long-term, rewarding relationships. Many of my informants could be included in the first group. An example is the case of Ecuadorian dancer, Iván, whom I asked about the existence of solid, durable personal ties between widely separated dancers which formed out of shared membership in the dance community:

> **Tony**: Do you get to develop true relationships with people from other places or countries? What is your personal experience in this regard?
> **Iván**: Well, ..., it depends a lot on groups and personal availability to get together. For example, I used to hang out with a North American friend, and with another French one too. However, my girlfriend, who is involved in Electro too, made good friends in Mexico [...] Relationships may be no more than watching and commenting on someone else's YouTube videos, but other times you can make true good friends out there.

Iván differentiates two sorts of relationship, both being valuable in their own way in his eyes. One suggests a strong tie between peers, involving a high degree of reciprocity and interactivity based on regular exchanges of a synchronous, dialogue-like form; the other has much in common with Thompson's[66] "quasi-interaction" present in social interaction via media forms such as print, television or radio; these communicational modes are largely one-way, mostly indirect, asynchronous contact. In the case of the dancers xDie and MyDro, what is of interest is not so much the quality of the bond or the degree of the closeness attained as the way in which new media permits relationships which would otherwise not exist at all.

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[66] 1998, p.213

> **Tony:** ... I've seen in one of your videos that you know the dancer MyDro ... what kind of relationship do you have?
> **xDie:** It was via MSN. It's like a long-distance relationship between brothers. He's one of my closest friends in Electro, probably my best friend. I know other dancers in Girona [his home town], but I have no relationship with them.
> **Tony**: And how did it happen? ... I mean ... how is it possible to build such a strong bond without seeing each other in person at all?
> **xDie**: Our personal situation made it easy.
> **Tony**: Because, let's say, you live the dance in isolation, right?
> **xDie**: Yeah, that's the point!

As argued earlier, one of the most fundamental features of media communication is the ability of media to extend social relationships across time and space. This enables xDie and MyDro to come into contact regardless of their personal situations of isolation. Living in Girona and Zaragoza, respectively, and lacking a local group of practitioners in their own cities, opportunities for engagement in the dance depended upon what long-distance relationships with others might offer them. MyDro and xDie met on YouTube and started watching one another's videos, exchanging comments on their respective styles. Their ongoing "quasi-interaction" soon led them to enter into more sustained contact, with the relationship being extended beyond the dance. Far from face-to-face contact being indispensable in order to acquire a sense of reciprocity and closeness, this example makes a case for the opposite situation, with interpersonal relationships maintained via new media-based communication being more satisfactory and fulfilling than those based on regular face-to-face exchanges. Nevertheless, theirs is a case which no doubt involves a limited sense of translocality, in which the interpersonal relationship operates over a broadly shared cultural basis. Yet for xDie, just as

with many other interviewees, relationships with dancers located in a culturally-diverse, far-off locations could be valued in similar terms:

> **Tony**: Are you in contact to dancers from other countries?
> **XDie**: Yes, I've talked to Jaii'C several times and a couple of times with Skips. Both are French.
> **Tony**: ... and what kind of conversation did you have with them?, ... I mean, does the Internet make it more difficult to communicate?
> **XDie**: You basically talk about the dance, and about other dancers […] I asked them to take a look at my videos and give me an opinion about my style.
> **Tony**: And what happened? Was it useful to you?
> **XDie**: Yeah, a lot, as both are champions of France.

But not all cases followed this pattern. Other dancers recounted unsuccessful attempts to establish translocal contacts. In the following example, the reason behind this failure has to do with a lack of responsiveness by one of the interactants, presumably due to questions of cultural capital and hierarchical position within the global scene side rather than any sort of difficulty associated with communication by technical means.

> **Tony**: Did you get to establish any sort of relationship with dancers abroad?
> **D2**: Well, we tried to get in contact a couple of times with people at D*G France, but first they gave us no answer, and when they eventually did so, they seemed to us to be quite full of themselves.
> **Tony**: Really?
> **D2**: Yeah, ... we wanted to meet nice people, not to have to put up with

> snobs. I have to admit though, they're awesome dancers, and they deserve all the credit they get.

There were other cases in which the relationship between the communicators was created on a different basis. Rather than being interpersonal, the link established took on the form of an alliance between a group of dancers in different places who became interrelated by membership of the same "translocal" team.

> **Tony**: Let me move on to ask you something else. Do you have any contact with people in other far-off places?
> **AcheTCK**: Yeah, of course, I used to have more in the past rather than today. For example, when I tried to extend 'UnionElectro' [his team] my goal was to give other dancers an identity, ... I wanted them to feel supported by us, trying to bring the dance to other places. I got into contact with people in the USA, Venezuela, Colombia, Italy and Germany.
> **Tony**: Who was it easier for you to communicate with?
> **AcheTCK:** With South American people, obviously, because they speak Spanish. In fact, they got into the dance after watching our videos!

Nevertheless, as has been pointed out earlier, the fact of being able to overcome spatial and temporal constraints is not, on its own, a sufficient condition for the establishment of new, meaningful social relationships. The cultural dimension of the object of study has specific biases in the way disembodied communication can take place. Below D4 dancer suggests an ingenious, technology-based way of overcoming certain obstacles when communicating in a disembodied register.

> **Tony**: Are you in contact to people from other places?

> **D4**: Yeah, but not very often [...] The people I get along with best are Italians. I met them at the World Championship and we became good friends.
>
> **Tony**: And how do you speak to them? ... Do you know Italian?
>
> **D4**: No, absolutely not. The thing is that two of them are Argentinians living in Italy right now. They introduced me to the rest. I talk to them using the [electronic] translator [smiling]

Yet Tormo's case must be seen as an exception for most other technologically-mediated situations in which cultural- and language-related barriers - i.e. features rooted "out-of-the-screens" - are not so easily overcome. By contrast, it seems therefore that the cultural affinities based on language or nationality retained a great importance as to establish meaningful social relations within ElectroDance. This fact is to certain degree expectable if we take into consideration that the result of having available a shared space for interaction like that produced technologically by means of YouTube should not automatically lead to a sense of satisfactory communication, that is, mutual reciprocity, closeness or understanding. In this sense, social situations of communication at-a-distance share with those carried out face-to-face as individuals need to make sense of what it is going on. Dancers' discussions revolving around the Vertifight World Championship videos become an eloquent example of this. Namely, these videos become a sort of international meeting point for those interested in the development of the high-level battles within ElectroDance world. A stream of comments can be found in the comments section below the video, with a variety of dancers giving their opinions on what can be seen. However, this set of supposedly interlinked comments ends up being very often no more than a long chain of unrelated, multilingual interventions in which no dialogue among the participants truly occurs. The following is a small sample retrieved from the

YouTube video called “VERTIFIGHT MASTER 2011 | 1/8 Finals” which captures a comment thread in which a number of presumably unrelated dancers appear.

> Una de las razones por las que naim perdio .. fue su actitud de engreido.. Por eso cuenta mucho la actitud... ;)! BryanHaints hace 2 meses 8
>
> I can’t believe that shit ! - FreaxKittens hace 5 días
>
> arriba miniahce y solo tck - Electrohardvallarta hace 6 días
>
> @BryanHaints Pero siempre ha sido así Naim - AcidsKittBixler hace 2 semanas
>
> испанец очень крут! - PoddubnyiBogdan hace 4 semanas
>
> NAIM 4EVER;-):-) - KubaOliva hace 4 semanas
>
> @TheBACONFUSION THANKS ;) 97kyrtaptychy hace 1 mes
>
> @TheMoradiitoo 1st Acetronik - make me feel good. 2nd Deadmau5 - WTF You can't afford this. 3rd
> Invaders (djedtronic remix) - TheBACONFUSION hace 1 mes
>
> @97kyrtaptychy Deadmau5 . WTF you can't afford this (original mix) - TheBACONFUSION hace 1 mes
> song please!! 2:20 - 97kyrtaptychy hace 1 mes
>
> Minchia e' un po' ingrassato Naim o.O - ELECTROLUCIO97 hace 1 mes
>
> putiiiiiiin on est en 2012 et cette danse de merde existe toujours !!!!! C vraiment la fin du monde - Tedy974 hace 1 mes

This last example invites a contrast between the patterns of interaction taking place in places such as sports halls with those found on the YouTube interface, both spaces being associated with registers of embodied and disembodied communication respectively. Both the physical and technological spaces act as meeting points for dancers, settings in which the dancers’ dynamics of socialization can come into action. However, such patterns of interaction are not

perhaps so different in practice when one considers the kinds of communicational forms at work. One could imagine dancers in sports halls meeting face to face but undertaking little oral interaction due to language or cultural barriers. In a similar way, dancers are brought together in the viewing of a dance battle with apparently little substantial reciprocity being involved in a series of multilingual, disconnected, written interventions. In both cases, the dancers share a communal space but "real" interaction does not seem to be going on, or, at least, there is little effective communication in a verbal form. However, as was mentioned earlier in the discussion on communication in clubs, the dancers' mode of meaning-making largely adopts a kinesic, rather than a verbal form. Dancers communicate through and in dance, with the body becoming the main source of sensuous meanings. Verbal communication is not then compulsory in order to attain effective communication in practice. By chiefly relying upon what one "sees" rather than upon what one hears in linguistic input, the cultural bias deriving from one's national background can be more easily overcome.

> **Tony**: What can you tell me about your experience in Vertifight France? … Because I think you were there last year, weren't you?
> **Spike**: Well, alright … you go there and find all these people dancing what you dance …
> **Furió**: … it feels like home there because everybody dances the same as you … believe me when I tell you that whenever music was played on the bus or at underground stations, everybody would start dancing all of a sudden!
> **Spike**: … and at dawn, we all went to a park to keep on dancing together … awesome …
> **Tony**: … with people you know, I guess …
> **Spike**: Yes, of course, with people from other places.
> **Furió**: As we all stayed at the same hostel, we could go together anywhere … there were Italians, Mexicans … good vibes among everybody.

> **Spike**: We went there along with the Romanians, in fact.
> **Furió**: … we mostly got along with them …
> **Tony**: And how are you supposed to communicate with a Romanian?"
> **Furió**: … well, you try to do it in English, with the few words you know … with insults, haha

However, rather than follow the path of the analyses of sociality on the Internet which are primarily focused on the study of technologically-extended interaction itself, the above should not lead us to view both the embodied and disembodied communicational modes of operation as being typically two disconnected spheres in practice. The sense of 'being together' examined here which is achieved at the translocal level is one which results from the way in which the distinct registers and modes of communication are intertwined. If we agree with Holmes[67] in that "in any given communicative situation there is always a co-presence of levels of mediatized integration involved - i.e. face-to-face, agency-extended, and so on - but one of these levels can come to recast how all the other levels are experienced", it becomes clear that so-called "online" communication can by no means be properly understood on its own, without taking into consideration all those intersecting communicative practices which are performed by other means. The way in which one of these levels comes to act as an ontological frame of reference for other registers can be illustrated by the following example, from an interview with North American dancer "Gian":

> **Tony**: You say that you met recently people in Paris whom you have talked to only via the Internet ... What kind of personal sensations did you take from the encounter with all these 'half-known' people and more

[67] Ibid, p.178

> generally the contest itself?
>
> **Gian**: Getting to meet everyone in Paris was the most satisfying experience I've ever had yet. 'Cause some of these people overseas I've known longer than the dancers here in the USA. Remember I started this in 2007 and it did not get big here till 2010. So I've made contacts with people all over the world since 2007 and to finally meet them almost 4 years later was unreal.

Significantly, Gian ended his comments by referring to the last face-to-face meeting as "unreal". The face-to-face encounter was experienced by him in those terms because the disembodied mode of association acted as the ontological level which framed the embodied encounter. In other words, for the dancer Gian, meeting up face-to-face feels somewhat ackward because the translocal social relations among dancers had been built via contact on digital interfaces, involving a different way of 'being-together'. Yet defining the situation as "unreal" speaks of the undeniable salience of "eye contact" in times of increasingly pervasive technically-extended forms of communication. The following excerpt gives a sense of the importance, linked to our very nature as human beings, of the face-to-face experience as the most basic form of interrelation with others:

> **Tony**: ... and doesn't it feel strange when the time comes to eventually meet up with someone who you'd only known via the Internet before?
>
> **MyDro**: Yeah, the truth is that, on the one hand, you go there without knowing what to expect, but, on the other hand, you know he is someone who likes the same things as you … But, you're right, at the beginning it feels strange because to know someone in person is not the same as knowing them via the Internet.

Finally, a further example can serve us to illustrate the complexity of situations in which individuals, following Meyrowitz (1984), seem to lose a "sense of place" as result of a "clash" of ontological levels of association induced by the overlapping modes of interaction. Retrieved from a conversation on Facebook, the following excerpt refers to a dialogue between two Spanish dancers with an "external" Mexican being aggregated in, with the effect of the latter unexpectedly meddling in a conversation which was felt to be none of his business.

> **ACF**: "Listen D6, you haven't got a clue, I'm D5, a Spanish dancer, they took away our Vertifight licence, and the two most important event organizers have had an argument. One is Iván and the other Furió. This affects all the SPANISH dancers, not you. I'm trying to do my best for them to reach an agreement, so listen carefully to me in order to know what's going on here and stop threatening and saying bullshit. You're miles away from here and I don't think you can hit anyone …"
> **ANS:** "It doesn't really matter who the organizer is because we all belong to the same community, and this war does no good for any of us. Nobody has the right to censor anybody else."
> **IM:** "C.R.E is wide open to whatever … And D5, you're wrong if you think I'm being arrogant, we haven't said anything in public which could cause any kind of trouble … The organization can be dealt with privately, without making it too public …"

Frex and Solo are old members of the Spanish scene. As both of them live in the metropolitan area of Valencia, they meet up on a regular basis in public places. In addition, communication between them is often mediated by the Facebook interface. From Frex's words, we can deduce that this is a continuation of a previous conversation, probably in a previous face-to-face situation, beginning again later in a disembodied fashion via Facebook. The topic of discussion touches

on the life of the Valencian local scene, so that the very meaning of the conversation can consequently only be fully grasped by Valencian local dancers. Unlike Gian's case, to whom the experience of face-to-face encounters with far-away, only "half-known" dancers was "unreal", Frex and Solo's regular unmediated encounters must feel perfectly "normal" to them. To put it another way, while Gian makes sense of his face-to-face experience from the subjective perspective of disembodied communication, for Frex and Solo communication via the range of available communication technologies is framed in terms of the face-to-face, local experience. The difference between each case then lies in the particular level of integration that acts as an ontological frame of reference in each case[68]. And it is this logic that makes the intervention of 'Andy' in the conversation problematic. Taking advantage of the communicational affordances of new media to overcome spatial boundaries, Andy tries to take part in the discussion of a local Spanish matter from his translocal position as a member of the distant Mexican scene, with the result of 'Frex' reproaching him for his attitude. The clash comes then from 'Andy' trying to position himself as another member of the local Spanish scene while not really being part of it. Even though he thinks he is right to take part in the conversation by taking the view that everything surrounding ElectroDance is of equal concern to everybody, no matter where one is from, he fails to realize that he does not share the same frame of reference as Frex and Solo, which is not only geographical but also, as suggested, ontological - i.e. the face-to-face experience taking place on a local basis. Due to

[68] This formulation is in part an attempt to question the all-pervasive dichotomy of "online/offline". It is not that we simply relate to and interact with each other by moving between different spheres of interaction and experience, but rather that the modes of association that such dimensions involve cannot be understood as being detached from each other, or even being supplementary, one to the other. From a phenomenological viewpoint, we as individuals are constantly involved in different communicative situations, which have different cultural contexts and are defined by coexisting forms of association, with one of the levels acting as the primary experiential framework for the way in which the other levels are experienced.

this capacity of new media technologies to alter the contextual nature of social situations, the symbolic boundaries framing Frex and Solo's conversation suddenly *overflows*, rendering what was meant to be a private issue into a public one, thereby allowing 'Andy' to access the restricted information.

Without abandoning the sphere of translocal communication in ElectroDance, I will now move on to pay some attention to the practical and symbolic limits of technically-extended communication, one of the most fundamental concerns for research fields such as "Computer Mediated Communication" (hereafter "CMC"). Influenced by the "transmission" view of communication, CMC is also interested in seeing how individuals come to make sense of their exchanges within a reduced symbolic cue environment, in contrast with that of the more "enriched" one of face-to-face interaction, and how they come up with ways to meet their communicational needs. As we have just seen, the dancers in some cases come up with creative solutions based on what the technology itself offers[69]. However, what this standpoint usually fails to see is the way in which media can offer new communicative affordances which become meaningful by themselves without any link to face-to-face situations. One further example can illustrate this point, while being eloquent to the complexity involved in translocal communications.

In November 2010, the Canadian YouTube user known as "Electro lurker" posted a news-like video[70] as part of a regular series providing commentary on the latest worldwide events in ElectroDance. At one point, he refers sadly to the announcement that the leaders of "Dance Generation Germany" had decided to stop dancing, a decision made public by these dancers on a video on their YouTube channel, the motivation for Electro lurker's comment. In this video, these dancers

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[69] This was clearly exemplified earlier by means of the use of an electronic translator to overcome language-related difficulties.

[70] Electro Lurker (2012). *The Electro Lurker ep. 31*. Retrieved from http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=xH5f_UBuQ9w

presented the reasons behind their decision. Right after publication, the video started to accumulate many comments, and would continue to do so some weeks later. Interestingly, one of these comments came from far away, namely from some east-coast based, North American dancers who also expressed their sorrow at this decision. Their sadness would lead them to produce a tribute-like video in honour of the German dancers, posted on their own channel. Despite being rudimentarily edited, the video[71] named *Dance Generation Germany Good Byes* can be seen as a dedication, featuring an assemblage of images combining music, dance and text. Of particular significance for its symbolic power was a painting-like composition set up on the floor displaying two scarves, separated by the handwritten words "D*G Germany", which appeared both at the beginning and in the middle of the video. The items were carefully arranged, with the chosen colours of the scarves being the same as those of the US flag and they appeared either side of the words "D*G Germany", symbolically suggesting a sense of "togetherness". Needless to say, the initiative was well-received and the German dancers left a comment thanking them below the video:

> "Thanks a lot, this video is so awesome. We are happy to see this. Thanks a lot for your compliments. A new door opens. I am sure ;D"

Another dancer approved the gesture adding:

> "That Was Real Nice Of You. Guys, This Is What The Meaning Of Dance Generation Should Be, Sticking Together And Standing up For Each Other We're Gonna Make A Goodbye Video As Well Keep Up And Good Luck<3!"

[71] ThoseEastCoastKids (2012). *Dance Generation Germany Good Byes*. Retrieved from http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=EK3a7CP8VO0

The interest in this exchange of symbolic flows between peers in different locations is twofold. Firstly, there is the question of the enhanced symbolical affordances enabled by an interactive, networked medium like YouTube. The conflation of different symbolic elements in the video allowed North American dancers to express a sense of solidarity and reciprocity in a very particular fashion, one congruent with the meanings of the dance. Interestingly, no words are spoken in the video, and communication rests exclusively upon the power of the image. For these North American dancers, the image suited the purpose of their message in a most effective way. It enabled the representation of what is central to the dance, what binds dancers together: the performance of the dance and bodies in motion. Furthermore, membership did not exclude other dimension of the dancers' identity, such as nationality here. Nationality was thus brought to the fore as an aspect for contextualizing interaction. On the other hand, what the video might suggest is the way in which the "cultural layer" of dance comes to hide other underlying cultural differences which undoubtedly also contribute to the multi-dimensional reality of the individuals' social identities. The image thus comes to metaphorically convey what could have been communicated in another fashion, by other means, but in this case it enabled the message to be conveyed in a very creative, emotional, and even, poetic fashion.

Secondly, besides the symbolical and practical affordances, this example also highlights the sense of "immediacy" involved in cross-interaction among manifold participants. On the one hand, the interactive capacities of YouTube as a digital interface allow dancers to take part in communicational dynamics which had never been possible under previous technological conditions. It is not only that such new media-based communication introduces variable degrees of 'space-time distanciation'[72], but it does so in a way that, much in the same way as many other forms of media forms, it is able to redefine the spatial and temporal coordinates

[72] Thompson, 1998, p.53

of experience in its own peculiar terms. In this case, we find three dancers from scattered locations such as Canada, U.S.A and Germany coming into contact by means of a common technical interface. Of great importance is the capacity of the YouTube interface for the 'fixation'[73] of symbolic contents. By being "fixed" in the media itself, interaction processes do not need to exclusively revolve around synchronous communication; the young dancers interact largely with each other asynchronously, that is, through a series of messages stored on the medium itself which can be retrieved and responded to at will. Thus, the ability to socially interact with others at a chosen time, combining patterns of both synchronous and asynchronous communications, flexibilizes the possibility of maintaining interpersonal contact on a regular basis. The more frequent these exchanges are at both group and individual levels, the narrower the time frame becomes and the greater the sensation of "time-compression", an aspect highlighted by some authors such as Harvey[74] as being intrinsic to the phenomenon of globalization. For this reason, Castells's understanding of communication with regard to notions of space and time deserve further comment. Just as he does, we can argue that translocal social relations are constituted on the basis of a "space of flows" linking networked places - here, all of those local scenes which are scattered all over the world. However, when looked at in detail, there is a recognizable sequence to the interventions of the various parties involved in communication and which is not only meaningful to them but is also detectable by an external observer. Thus, rather than being "timeless" (2010: 305), what we observe in practice is a mesh of countless, overlapping timelines, each showing its own logic, forming a matrix of cross-contextualized yet identifiable interactions by individuals. Seen from a more phenomenological perspective, time for a dancer is but the accumulation of a number of simultaneous, overlapping yet consistent streams of meaning that

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[73] Thompson, ibid, p.57

[74] Quoted by Moores (2005:43)

connect one person to others at different moments. In this sense, the above-mentioned sensation of ever-heightened "time-compression" as well as that of "despatialized simultaneity" (Thompson, ibid:53) hovers over the content of the following excerpt:

> **Tony**: ... There's something which is quite clear to me … I mean … you seem to be up to date with whatever is happening around Electro, anywhere, any time ... Do you have that feeling?
> **Tazz**: Yeah, definitely, … for example, the organization of a contest wherever, when someone uploads a video, … everything. Look, do you know Antonio Rodella? He belongs to the Vertifight staff in Italy. He's constantly updating information, offering new stuff, and many others do that too.
> **Spike**: … Yes, it's like all of us publishing what's going on at every place … everybody at once.
> **Tony**: This didn't use to be like that, did it?
> **Furió**: No, it's happening more today … everybody was on his own before.
> **Tazz**: … and when it comes to being up to date, the truth is that subscriptions are the reason behind it.
> **Spike**: … I think that being able to subscribe to someone else's account is by far the best thing to happen to ElectroDance.
> **Tazz**: … yeah, you look up at "Vertifight master" and you get a list of videos in no time … you easily get all the videos by being subscribed. All that information organized for you!
> **Tony**: Who are you especially following?
> **Spike**: Hmm, I don't know, there are some many people ..., channels from France, Vertifight, … you even have channels only for displaying videos of the championships ... you can easily end up following up to 100 channels at the same time.

As argued earlier in this chapter, the horizontal nature of the network's organization does not diminish the relative importance of its parts, so that it is likely that there are components which fulfil particular functions, acquiring a special significance within the structure. As we have seen, Vertifight functions as the primary "centre" within ElectroDance, one capable of bringing the young dancers together regardless of their specific origins. Furthermore, as can be seen in the previous excerpt, some individuals within the global scene exert other important roles which indirectly result in providing transnational coordination for its members. This is the case of figures such as Italian media producer Antony Rodella and members of the "Madiotec" group who, instead of engaging themselves in the dance as dance practitioners, play the institutional role of mass-media by constituting the information "centres" for the community, meeting the need for constantly up-to-date information on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Image 1. Italian producer Antony Rodella's personal Vlog

Further to this discussion of the relationship between temporality and mediated communication, the next post, found on the forum of the "D*G USA" website, shows the dancer Hazard assessing both the benefits and the shortcomings of joining Vertifight. It is remarkable the way in which the individuals' agency has been expanded to such an extent that they are now able to participate in activity taking place in other far-off groups rather than simply being informed about particular situations occurring there. The sense of immediacy achieved through using new media comes to the fore in this example.

> *"I say screw Vertifight and lets go with Major league Electro. If we go with Vertifight it will only be a waste of 1000 dollars, and for what? A logo? Because that's what we'll be paying for. We could just keep MLE and spread it around the world like E-Motion. I don't know if you guys saw the comment on one of the D*G vids (forgot which video) but electro dancers in Malaysia want to start an E-Motion point. We can easily tell them that they could spread MLE over there causing it to rapidly grow. Spain doesn't have a contract with Vertifight, we can easily offer them MLE. -Hazard".*

Yet the immediacy surrounding current communications and the way this translocality is shaped is not without its own downsides. Steady puts it in this way:

> **Tony:** Is there in your opinion any negative aspects about communication over the Internet?
> **Steady**: I think the negative aspect is that the Electro culture has grown up too fast. This is just my opinion. With this support, this dance cannot stop just for one minute to understand its own movement. We are in a consumer society ... more and always more.. and this dance is on the same track. The community can applaud a dancer for his performance

and hate him at the same time just because he lost against someone else.

This interesting insight from Steady seems to point to the fact that instant communication has enabled the formation of a hyper-connected global community of dancers, but at the same time an excess of *interconnectedness* among dancers can bring undesired effects as well. In other words, the more opportunities there are for individuals to come into contact, the quicker social relationships develop, for good or bad. Steady's words speak of a youth culture experiencing accelerated growth, with dancers showing a degree of anxiety in the way they relate to each other and not being self-conscious enough to properly perceive their impulsive, rather incongruous behaviour. Taking a broad view, the accelerated development of ElectroDance driven by this non-stop, unrelenting communication could be said to be something of a parallel of the way in which acceleration characterizes social life in contemporary times - times in which we all sense everything is moving "too fast" around us, in which we have no time to think about the nature of the change involved. Dancers can praise someone today and condemn them the day after, just as all what seemed as permanent and durable yesterday becomes transient and uncertain today.

When the brand faded away: the commercial dis-intermediation of the scene?

In the previous pages, I have portrayed ElectroDance as a worldwide network scene. In particular, I have looked at the sense of integration of the scene members in their translocal social relations, these social relations being subject to the varied affordances and constraints surrounding technologically-extended communication. This stage in the development of the scene is in stark contrast to

the previous stage, which was dominated by what can be seen as a broadcast model of communication. In the previous chapter, I pointed to the logic of the Tecktonik brand as epitomizing broadcast communication within a global information and consumer economy like today's. The brand - materialized into a number of commodities and disseminated by means of a variety of media delivery points, along with a number of star dancers acting as "symbolic markers" of some kind - became the central node within the symbolic circuit of the style, with practitioners being incorporated into the youth movement on the basis of a vertically-constituted mode of integration. At a small-scale and at local social sites such as the neighbourhoods and clubs of Paris, dancers would gather in largely embodied communicational situations. At the translocal, larger scale in France, they did so on the basis of their shared attachment to the brand and its products and media-circulated messages. Nevertheless, as was noted earlier, despite the fact that some efforts were made in countries such as Belgium, Spain or Japan, the Tecktonik founders did not seem to have a clear, specific commercial strategy for the targeting of translocal youth markets beyond France, with their interest being principally focused on the exploitation of the commercial possibilities of the brand within the national boundaries. With the decline and eventual disappearance of the brand from the sphere of the dance, the role of cultural intermediaries within the scene was removed, with dancers then needing to find new ways to maintain their way of 'being-together'. As was mentioned previously, IT corporations such as Google or SkyRock were unexpectedly to become the new mediators within the dance world, providing dancers with the technical support for their media practices.

Seen now from a politico-economic point of view, it might seem likely that with the demise of the Tecktonik brand all intensive, profit-oriented activity related to the style would have ceased to exist at that time. As the reader may recall, the commercial activity surrounding the Tecktonik brand took place at different levels. Firstly, at an earlier time, on a smaller scale, and based around the so-called Tecktonik Killer parties in clubs, there was the niche-oriented,

brand-related merchandising and the Parisian fashion shop owned by the brand founders. Later, once the style obtained the broader attention of the mass-media and began to operate at a larger scale, the brand covered an emerging array of commodities resulting from the set of alliances of the brand founders with several sectors of the cultural industries, such as broadcast media channels or video game firms. None of these forms of profit-making forms were to be found outside France once the style spread worldwide. However, some other small-scale, for-profit activities did appear, with the money not leaving the world of Electro. The most basic form of commercial activity was related to Vertifight: a Paris-located, event-oriented organization which, as we have seen, would enable the scene to be translocally articulated. Steady referred to it in this way:

> *"The licence is free, but it's a real responsibility. They can make some money with Vertifight [here he refers to nationally-based organizers as he was the link to them], and I hope they do. Because nothing is free in this world and without money it's difficult to continue a movement. It's impossible. For example, the Vertifight World Championship costs a lot of money, and we need this money to make it the biggest meeting in ElectroDance."*

The payment of a licence was a compulsory requisite for local scenes to become an official part of Vertifight, allowing them not only to acquire the right to take part in international contests but to use this name in their own local events too[75]. Although this was generally accepted by members of the worldwide local groups as a precondition to becoming part of the movement, not everybody fully agreed with it. This was also the case of the chief organizer of Valencian local scene, Juanito, who was initially reluctant to adopt the Vertifight name:

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[75] "Free" therefore should be interpreted as "free of use" for one's own purposes but not as "free of cost".

> **Tony**: Why don't you use the name of Vertifight here?
> **Juanito**: Well, I had a different approach from the beginning … I thought that, to begin with, it was a trademarked name, and people had to pay €120 a month to use it. And second, I wanted us to be different from the rest in some way.
> **Tony**: Do you know if they make any money through licence franchising and other things in France? … Does it allow them to make a living?
> **Juanito**: Yes, of course. Keep in mind that Youval organizes events all the time, not only for ElectroDance but for Hip-Hop too. In fact, Youval started organizing the "1000x100" event for other dance styles, before moving on to create Vertifight only for Electro.

Here Juanito mentions the Vertifight staff member Youval earning a financial return from his work as an organizer in the scene, suggesting that it is possible to earn a living in this way. Rather than having the profile of a dancer, the role of Youval is similar, in a non-institutionalized form, to that of music producers or venue owners in the music business; he is someone who began as a dancer[76] and ended up exerting a management-oriented function within youth culture after a time. However, as a local organizer, he was an exception in ElectroDance, with other exerting the same role as him strictly moved by non-profit motivations. Just like Youval, some other individuals attempted to capitalize on their knowledge and privileged position within their local scenes. Profit-making linked to the dance adopted three forms. Firstly, some experienced dancers offered to teach beginners, taking the dance into dance schools. In France, particularly in Paris, a number of dance schools - e.g. *Savoir Danser* - started to offer personalized

[76] This was particularly the case of both Youval and Steady.

classes. The dancer Iván, an Ecuadorian studying for an economics degree at university, even saw teaching the style as an opportunity for entrepreneurship, leading him to open his own business.

> **Tony**: How did you come up with the idea of giving Electro lessons?
> **Iván**: I saw a lot of people wanting to learn the dance, … It was a good opportunity to exploit a new niche market. By 2009 Electro reached Ecuador, and I started to think about if a project like this could be viable… , and I thought, 'alright, I think I can try it!'. I opened the academy in January 2010 …

In other cases, dancers just temporarily rented space at an existing school for their purposes. The ability to use new media such as blogs for advertising purposes became an invaluable tool for marketing purposes, as can be seen in image 2.

Image 2. Advert on a Spanish dancers' blog

Secondly, some dancers also attempted to make some money out of the dance through performances. As noted earlier, this was a common practice for those who were involved in the organization of Tecktonik in earlier times. They toured with events and exhibitions in clubs, theatres and on television not only in Paris but all over the country, reaching other European destinations in some cases. In Spain, pioneering teams such as Beat Bangerz in Barcelona or Beat Mode in Valencia sought to imitate their French counterparts in the Tecktonik era, arranging their own performances in popular discotheques such as Pacha (Girona) or Namala (Castellón). This opportunity arose for Beatmode as a result of an alliance forged with a group of DJs who were interested in combining dance and music as part of a unique show in discotheques. Interestingly, this relationship was fostered by YouTube, with the DJs coming across BeatMode by watching some of their videos. Together, they formed a collective named as Eqalize.

> **Tony**: How was 'Eqalize' formed?
>
> **Furió**: These DJs saw us dancing on YouTube. They wanted to create a show for clubs at a moment when 'Tecktonik' was a fad. Then, they got in contact with me to meet up, with the aim of offering to work together with us [...] 'Eqalize Group' is a trademark right now, so every time there's a party, they'll call us. If we had any requests for Djs, I would call them too.
>
> **Tony**: So … you function cooperatively …
>
> **Furió**: Well, … we can dance as 'BeatMode' or as 'Eqalize Group', depending on the situation…

Finally, some dancers found another source of revenue linked to their dance activities. While the above-mentioned of activities of teaching and performing are by no means new and could be said to be traditional ways of making money for dance professionals, new media practices represented a novel and unexpected way of capitalizing on such skills and knowledge in the form, for instance, of paid advertisements or proposals to introduce markeatable products. Such revenue opportunities must be understood against the backdrop of the attempts by internet corporations to come up with new initiatives for making profit out of digital technologies. These initiatives have varied over the past decade, with big and small corporations offering diverse communication services by means of technologically advanced network infrastructures. From providing information on the 'World Wide Web' by means of search engines such as Google or Yahoo! to more recent proposals involving technology-based social networks such as Facebook or MySpace, IT giants have addressed a range of communicational and informational needs over recent years. Regardless of their specific purposes, all these companies' offerings share one basic feature from a business model standpoint: the services are cost-free to users. In the case which occupies us here, this has led to dancers opening personal accounts on Google and uploading freely chosen content to YouTube in order to share this with others. Similarly, they could create a blog on SkyRock in order to display their personal stories and photos there without having to pay anything for this. As access to these services is freely available to everyone, and opportunities for profit are not strictly linked to payment for the usage of them, internet companies have sought to achieve a return on their investment by other means. These ways of extracting profit differ in practice from case to case. Two of my informants reported specific sorts of commercial transactions mediated by new media. One example is the case of the Valencian dancer Furió with regard to SkyRock. Furió, like many other dancers, used to have his own personal blog on SkyRock which, as I shall document later in this thesis, allowed him to tell the story of his own experience as a dancer, with somewhat unexpected consequences.

> **Tony**: Did you have the feeling of being really followed by others?
> **Furió**: Well, it's hard to tell, … there was a time when hits started to grow quickly, … a guy even paid for one those "Google-sponsored links" that you can see on YouTube and other websites, ... we came to appear in many places, haha.
> **Tony**: But … who was that guy?
> **Furió**: He was from Paris …, someone following our blog, … he liked us in some way.
> **Tony**: … I see …
> **Furió**: He said he worked for SkyRock. He told me that he was in contact with Tecktonik and wanted to bring the brand to Spain. He called me several times, trying to get us to sell Tecktonik stuff and planning a tour across different cities here… but, at the end of the day, nothing happened…

The relationship between Furió and some kind of "half-known" cultural agent is an instance of a traditional aspect of the business side of the arts and culture in general: contact between artists and professional agents. Until the arrival of new media, distribution channels were less numerous and largely spatially confined to encounters in local settings. Just as in many other realms of society, new media seem to open up opportunities for previously unacquainted people to find each other on the basis of shared interests. Here, we seem to have a case of a professional agent located in France coming to hear about Furió's team from the evidence left by him on digital interfaces in the form of personal stories, photos and videos posted on his blog. The agent contacted him after monitoring his activity for a time. In economic terms, their link results in the possibility of Furió's team being advertised on various websites by using Google's advertising system AdSense, and receiving a certain amount of money from this. Furió's case is

illustrative of the new marketing practices surrounding ElectroDance made possible with new media, but it is by no means exceptional. A variant of this can also be found with regard to the dancers' usage of YouTube. Just as the number of hits on a SkyRock blog can work as a partial indicator of one's popularity, the number of viewings of a video comes to play a similar function, with profit-making implications. In the following interview excerpt, Spanish dancer Ache refers to his own experience in this regard:

> **Tony**: It seems like internet companies like Google have an interest in people having a lot of followers…
> **Ache**: Yeah, I have no doubt about that. Personally, I can tell you that I have partners … I mean … people who offered to place ads in my videos on a pay-per-view basis.
> **Tony**: Really?
> **Ache**: Yes, they don't give you much … maybe €0.03 per video seen.
> **Tony**: Were they from YouTube?
> **Ache**: Yeah, I got a message from 'YouTube partners', but I wasn't much interested in it because you can only make a profit if you reach a very high number of viewings.

Having acquired Youtube in late 2006, Google has strived to come up with new ways of making services like YouTube profitable, as have other IT companies working under the parameters of the new digital economy. In the case of YouTube, difficulties derive from the singularity of its business model. Seen in terms of content sources, distribution and technical infrastructure, YouTube's business model is at odds with other existing models. A classification of these models allows us to speak of "traditional media", "closed communities" and "hyper-syndication of content". In the traditional media business model, brand content is created by professionals, with distribution depending upon an environment with

conditioned access and specific devices. In the case of closed communities, distribution of user-generated content is placed behind a wall or conditional access occurs via specific devices. Finally, in the model of hyper-syndication of content, access to professional content is enabled through open channels, without devices or specific access providers conditioning such access. In contrast, YouTube presents itself as an "aggregation platform" (Artero, 2010: 119), a model featuring user-generated content and open distribution being offered as a cost-free service. Free access to content has led Google to look for formulas to compensate the huge economic effort involved in running a service under these conditions. The following description by Artero (ibid: 112) provides context for Ache's above comment.

> *"[...] The firm launched in mid-2007 added several important innovations, one of which can be found in YouTube Invideo Ads, a commercial advertising stripe located in the lower part of the video. [...] Advertisers are billed for each impression and the resulting revenue is shared with the video creator."*

Furthermore, this strategy is extended in this way:

> *"Google also has included YouTube videos in its AdSense system. The owners of the websites that use AdSense are able to select videos from certain providers and the ads are shown in relation to the sites or the context of the video. The revenue is shared between the owner of the site, the video creator and Google."*

Mentioned by Ache, Solo illustrates the case of a dancer taking full advantage of YouTube's business approach. From the very beginning, he has been one of the dancers who most actively exploited both the expressive and social networking affordances of new media. Solo's skills not only concern those involved in dancing but also technological areas such as video-production, which has led to him

gathering a high number of followers over time. Creativity and craftsmanship have been the key to attracting the attention of others to himself. As will be described in more detail in Chapter Ten, Solo's case is one of a dancer who has been able to master the distinct aspects of communication at multiple levels - he is currently one of the Vertifight organizers in Spain - and who has managed to take the right decisions in order to gain financial benefit for himself as well. In Bourdieusian terms, he is a dancer who has been able to find ways to convert subcultural capital into economic capital. In the following excerpt, he talks about AdSense, the same marketing mechanism referred to by Ache:

> "One day I logged into YouTube because I wanted to change the title of a video and I found a message saying: 'You can generate income out of your videos, read more …' [...] Jordi [an older friend who helps him with everything related to the dance] entered his personal details since you have to be over 18 to get any money. Every time someone clicks on the ads placed in your videos, they pay some money into your AdSense account. Once you've validated your AdSense account, and you make, for example, €70, they transfer that money to your bank account."

And here he further clarifies his intentions in relation to the possibilities of financial reward gained via YouTube:

> "My goal is to become a 'YouTube Partner'. Being a 'YouTube Partner' means that you make some money every time someone plays one of your videos. I'm sure you have realized that some videos come with an ad at the beginning that can't be skipped [...] I meet all the necessary requirements to become a partner, but as I often use copyrighted songs in my videos, I can't use this service."

It is worth comparing Solo's profit-making approach to those mentioned earlier, by looking at the particular arrangement of the different types of actors, practices

and places involved in each case. In the case of performing and teaching the dance, the possibilities for making money are subject to social relations, involving embodied performance of the dance in specific settings - a club, theatre or school - and different individuals - DJs and the owner of the club or dance school. In the case we have just seen, the contextual conditions which provide an opportunity for revenue to be made from the dance are turned upside-down. Firstly, here the dance is 'disembedded' from the usual dance-related settings, becoming "re-presented" on the YouTube interface. Furthermore, the relationship among those taking part in the commercial agreement - i.e. 'Solo', YouTube marketing staff and external advertisers - are fully impersonal and abstract, as disembodied communication is involved. Moreover, the commercial activity around the dance is not dance-rooted. In other words, the fact that YouTube marketing staff and external advertisers come into contact with the dancers is not so much due to a specific interest of the former in the dance style or youth movement as it is to YouTube's marketing policy, one in which what really counts is the potential of users to attract a group of followers to their content, which can be indirectly "sold" to external investors.

Finally, this last consideration becomes more significant when seen in the light of what was argued earlier with regard to the emergence of the Tecktonik brand. It was argued that the ElectroDance scene was constituted as a "community of audience" shaped by broadcast communication. This form of communication led followers of the dance to organize themselves around a "centre" which would provide them with the meanings of the style. This centre was said to be embodied by brand-sponsored, selected star-dancers, their image being widely distributed by means of a myriad of commodities and media channels acting as entry points for other young people into the style. The business model conceived by the Tecktonik brand founders did not differ much from traditional approaches in the cultural industries in the so-called era of mass-communication, with the exception of the currently heightened importance attained by brands as the crucial symbolic asset of today's corporations. Under this model, broadcast

communication generates some centres - i.e. star-dancers working for the brand - around which fields of recognition are erected - i.e. here, members of the scene who look to such centres in order to identify themselves with them.

In the network configuration of ElectroDance, broadcast communication is not eliminated, nor are the revenue opportunities offered to dancers. In this sense, if we focus on comparing the case of the French dancer Treaxy with that of Solo we find fields of recognition and revenue opportunities being generated in each case. However, what differentiates them is the underlying socio-technical systems enveloping the relationships between the social actors. In the former case, there was the Tecktonik brand in alliance with diverse media and cultural institutions such as the TF1 television channel or Nintendo; in the latter case, we see young internet companies such as Google. In the former case, the image of the dancer is addressed to an undifferentiated mass - i.e. an “audience” formed both by the most committed dancers and youth in general - initially boosted by the presence of new media, but crucially managed by agents of Tecktonik; in the latter case, the dancer’s image circulates among his peers within a “community of practice”, self-managing without the mediation of a third party. Just as the opportunism of a select group of dancers in France, who were in the right place at the right time, allowed some young people to benefit from the dance when the style was at its peak of popularity, the conditions fostered by the new networked technological media have enabled other talented and highly technologically-skilled dancers like Solo to do the same.

PART III

The mediatized life of local scenes

:: 7 :: Understanding ElectroDance as local communication

In the so-called global societies like today's, local social phenomena, no matter what their size, take on a global dimension. This arises because we as individuals, in some way or another, and to a greater or lesser degree, make sense of our daily experience using what we know about other far-away realities which might not be directly related or connected to our own lives. And the opposite is equally true; whatever is taking place somewhere else, at a larger scale, is fed by what is going on in the more immediate realms of local social life. Today, the local depends upon the global, and the global depends on the local. As seen in the previous chapter, ElectroDance is no exception to this premise. Our analysis led us into a discussion of one of these poles through an examination of the way in which translocal and transnational social relations in ElectroDance are shaped amidst new media. We saw how ElectroDance is crucially shaped by youth who dance without the benefit of face-to-face contact whatsoever but who otherwise experience the phenomenon, interact and even coordinate activities with other distant peers under the parameters of immediateness, accomplishment and meaningfulness in local practices. Here, we will focus on the other side of the coin, and look at the nature of the social relations within ElectroDance that take

place locally, paying special attention to the particular ways in which the dynamics of interaction among participants are fashioned by new media in keeping with the cultural logic of the style. Exploring the significance of new media and how it enables communication at a local level responds to a desire to answer, at least implicitly, a straightforward yet counterintuitive question: why do young dancers use media intensively when they are constantly meeting up and seeing each other in diverse public meeting places? Or to put it in more technical terms, if the very purpose of dance is to provide a means of kinetic communication among individuals, why do they use media for communicating what is presumably best conveyed face-to-face?… What do these media offer which is not provided by other means? In the pages that follow, I will explore why new media have acquired an unexpected yet significant role in local communication in the realm of ElectroDance. As we shall see, their importance is not limited to merely supplementing or reinforcing communication in social situations dominated by face-to-face exchanges; they also function in a way that is intrinsically connected to the very logic of the youth culture in question. Not only do digital communication technologies represent an additional resource which helps young dancers exchange information, enabling and facilitating frequent contact; they are also an indispensable part of the local, everyday group dynamics both pragmatically and symbolically.

If we consider for a moment the notion of dance as a cultural practice, we find that both its meaning as well as the way dance as a practice has articulated social relationships between individuals have varied significantly throughout history. From our present perspective, there seems to be a great distance between particular, firmly-rooted manifestations of dance in small tribal societies, where the practice of dance is associated to the domain of religion – through rituals ranging from the worship of deities and ancestors to modes of impersonation or embodiment of supernatural forces - and politics - enacting extant power relations between individuals by some means of aesthetic bodily expression - as opposed to the more modern, secular forms of street-born styles

such as ElectroDance, where the practice serves the purpose of leisure and amusement. Basically, dance provides young people with a source of recreation and pleasure as well as a sense of identity often objectified via a specific form of attire, behaviour and attitude which, as in the case of Hip-Hop, may also have a political dimension. This activity is generally considered by most to be a hobby that one does in his/her free time and young people may only participate in the scene temporarily, only to leave later on for reasons ranging from boredom or apathy on the one hand and academic, family or work pressures on the other. Only those who have made dance the main focus of their lives, who have acquired a higher degree of involvement and sense of belonging continue to dance, indirectly keeping the style alive over time. It is these participants who create a local scene, that is, dancers who have made a long-lasting commitment to the style. For some of these dancers, their involvement helps them forge enduring friendships, even though social relationships develop within the cultural boundaries of the dance practice.

From a group-centred perspective, dance represents a form of socialization for those involved in the group and its dynamics. As such, it provides practitioners with a set of basic norms and roles that help to create, develop and sustain social relationships between members of the group. Culturally speaking, such aspects of socialization are based on the values and meanings associated to achievement, self-improvement, hard work, comradeship, reciprocity, tolerance and mutual respect, just to name a few of the more significant ones. Yet how is ElectroDance as a collective youth movement internally organized around these aspects? In order to answer this question, I will make use of the theoretical concepts of field and capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1992:45). Bourdieu considers field to be a system of objective relations between positions that players occupy according to their present and potential situation. Said positions correspond to a certain degree of power that Bourdieu conceives as non-economic forms of capital. A field, then, can be thought of as a space of conflict and competition, with its own regulating values and principles, where participants

fight for a monopoly over that type of capital which is considered of value in that space. The notions of field as well as types of capital have been applied to the domain of subcultures and youth styles. This is true for Thornton (1995:98), who refers to both in her approach to social relationships within club cultures. She adapts Bourdieu's notion of capital to the context of subcultures which leads her to speak of subcultural capital as one which, once incorporated or objectified, confers status to its holder in the eyes of those who look upon him/her. An example of this can be seen when, for example, someone is thought to be "in" either through their use of argot or by dressing in a certain way. According to Thornton, the capital of each subculture is constructed in a different manner as a function of what is designated to be the value of the object and is distributed unequally among its members. As a consequence, they each occupy different positions with respect to others, with a distinct status granted to each. Following Thornton, Hodkinson also refers to relations between members of the Goth subculture in terms of variable amounts of subcultural capital held by each member. Parodoxically, the concept is employed without making reference to the field to which it is always paired; capital cannot exist or function unless it is associated to a field (Bourdieu, ibid:155), and this is why their use of the term is, to a certain extent, vague.

Unlike these cases, the internal composition of the ElectroDance group is formed through the competition between its members in search of greater and always unequally distributed levels of recognition; this permits a characterization of the group as a full-fledged Bourdieusian field. My take on the field is based on the distinction between the two main roles assumed by the dancers who are positioned against one another in keeping with their respective accrued capital. The first of the two is that of the leader, a kind of role which, depending on the size of the scene and country in question, is taken on by only one or often various individuals displaying distinct styles of relationship to and communication with the rest of the group. Here, a leader is that associated to the most basic form of internal hierarchization within the group. The second role is that of a regular

dancer. Dancers are hierarchized too but their position is governed by different aspects. Unlike leaders, whose position with regard to the rest must be legitimized by their ability to successfully manage the different aspects of the group scene, the authority of regular dancers is derived from their particular level of competence, achievement and skill at dancing.

In this section, I will explore how these two roles as well as the norms which govern modes of behaviour and action are constituted, challenged and modified "in" and "through" communication.[77] This occurs "in" communication because it is by way of specific communicative acts involving the making and exchanging of meanings regarding the culture of dance – often involving mutual understanding but also disagreement – that young dancers negotiate their particular status and the different types of expectations associated to each position within the field. Furthermore, it occurs "through" communication because such communicative acts take place in situations dominated by the varying conditions imposed on interaction by the mediums themselves.[78] It is in this sense that the leader and the dancer alike must possess communicative abilities that will satisfactorily meet others' expectations both personally and in terms of their particular role. The deployment of such communicative abilities in the various situations of personal interaction through digital interfaces points to a twofold dimension of communication technologies when considered in terms of one's type of capital. For both the leader and the dancer, communication

[77] The issues of social status, system of recognition and in-group hierarchization is the focus of our interest at the moment, but they are not the only ones that explain the particular idiosyncrasies and the resulting levels of cohesiveness that electro-dancers attain as a youth group. Identity-related questions are also important, and will be dealt with in Chapter Nine.
78 Authors such as Forth (2007:9) or Haythornthwaite (2001:1) among others, have provided evidence of the capacity of users to choose the particular type of media that best meets the communicative needs of their social relationships and not the other way around, that is, the idea that social relationships are forced to adapt to inadequate means of communication which could weaken their social ties. In this sense, we shall soon see the ways in which certain forums provide dancers with the means to facilitate assembly, how YouTube helps them publicly display and discuss their skills or the role of blogs in building their identity as a dancer.

technologies are regarded as, firstly, an indispensable yet economically affordable material resource, whether in the form of a computer or a mobile phone, without which communication with one another becomes unfeasible; second, whereas communication technologies can be seen from an economic point of view, that is, a minimum level of economic capital is needed in order for their users to have access to these media artefacts, they are more decisively related to cultural capital held by their users, which is determined by the technical knowledge they need in order to efficiently use media artefacts and successfully communicate through their interfaces.

Still from a communication-oriented standpoint, in the following three subsections I will dissect the local ElectroDance field, each section corresponding to the two above-mentioned areas of inquiry into ElectroDance's in-group social positions. Firstly, I shall look at the particular ways in which the design and properties of interfaces mediate the communication processes that take place between members of the group, whether they enhance or constrain them, and how they do so. First, I will discuss how interfaces can be considered social spaces with specific communicative features and then I will analyze the group dynamics of socialization that is built upon them. Secondly, I shall continue to explore how the uneven levels of symbolic capital held by different dancers are linked to and negotiated by means of the use of new media on the basis of specific forms of appropriation of artefacts. The discussion will then focus on the varied communicative strategies put in practice by leaders to manage the group life, sometimes gaining the favour of the group members and other times coping with various forms of disapproval that arise – which also require the use of communication technologies. If as Lynne (1987:86) argues, "in dance power is exercised through interactions - the exchange of messages between individuals, such as between dancers, dancers and spectators, and either of the latter with other individuals in society," it is worth taking a look at what occurs when group communication largely depends upon technologically-extended interactions. Finally, the sociological analysis of ElectroDance as a form of local communication

that began here will be continued in the next chapter by offering an ethnographic-flavoured account of one of ElectroDance's main rituals, known as the *Muerte Electro* event. The examination of the group's rituality through this event, one which can be viewed as a striking instance of "mediatization" of (youth) culture(s) in today's society, will allow us at that point to construct a complete picture of the complexity of a communicational arena comprising the elements of dance, these understood as both an institution and a symbolic form, digital interfaces and interrelated registers of social interaction.

Why on YouTube? Interaction through digital network inter-faces

Our first step in the study of the nature of social relationships existing locally involves the exploration of how electro-dancers appropriate their preferred media interface, YouTube, taking advantage of its socio-technological features. As explained earlier, this initial discussion is necessary in order to provide a clear account of the most meaningful practices deployed by electro-dancers, in accordance with their particular role within the group. Said practices are oriented to satisfying the specific needs of their socio-cultural world and the way they are deployed is based on the features offered by the media itself. As part of the process of appropriation and attribution of meaning to the media, at this point it is useful to examine how personal interaction by means of the YouTube interface becomes subjectively intelligible, and how through certain practices the medium is symbolically branded by the youth style in question – making it recognisable to its members and thereby enabling communication. By this I mean that as electro-dancers interact in and through YouTube, it becomes necessary to provide an account of how this occurs under the particular conditions imposed by the interface and how they enable and constrain dancer behaviour, as well as a discussion on the modes of shared meanings.

YouTube needs little in the way of an introduction. This interactive space designed for the individual posting of short videos can be framed within the wave of "Social Networking Sites" or so-called "Social Media" that have appeared in recent years, as part of what is popularly proclaimed as Web 2.0. When we use these terms we are referring to the latest generation of internet-based interfaces that are more intuitive and which allow for the creation and exchange of symbolic content by users. They also offer socio-technological environments that facilitate interpersonal connections between users, each holding an egocentric position. Boyd (2007) identifies three generic features that are characteristic of any "Social Networking Site" and which are part of the interface existing between communicators: the personal profile, comments and friends sections. This is just a general characterization that can evolve to greater or lesser extent over time in accordance with the interface in question,[79] but it is fairly typical in general terms. On YouTube, the personal profile is known as a "channel", in a metaphoric reference to television, and it is probably the most important element appropriated by young dancers. Serving as a space for either an individual or group (the latter when several dancers get together to form a crew), the channel displays an array of culturally significant markers that situate the visitor within the world of meaning that is the ElectroDance universe. This is mainly created through their use of a custom background/wallpaper design usually including the crew emblem. The frame on the left lists the team members and contact information (email addresses and website links). Here, too, the visitor will find information on the team's musical tastes and other data regarding dance styles. This same channel is where we also find the videos posted by the team (which also visually frame the content and purpose of the channel) as well as friends, subscribers and subscriptions (which, when seen all together provide the visitor with a snapshot of the traceable links that exist in the network of relations within the scene but

[79] This description of YouTube offered here is largely based on the design of the interface in the years in which the bulk of my fieldwork was carried out, that is, between 2009 and 2011.

which do not show the strength of these connections in practice). In many cases, this personal or group information includes a series of links to other digital interfaces which gives us a sense of the resulting media *ecology*; each interface fulfilling different yet complementary communicative purposes. The channel itself contains other elements that represent the subcultural identity of its members and where one can perceive an influence originating from conventions based on internet culture (Baym, 1998: 61). Electro-dancers in particular usually hide their true identity, using an artistic name instead which in many cases includes the letters TCK (an abbreviation of *Tecktonik*), e.g. "Joseetck", "Zebraxxtck", "AleexiitoTecK", etc. When posting a comment, they usually sign it with their nickname and the name of their team, adopting the format of an email address (e.g. "Att: SoloTCK @ Electro-Tek"). Finally, a channel will also include a comments section in the lower area of the page. This comments section does not usually show much in the way of activity and tends to contain messages that are varied in nature and directed to the team or one of its members.

If in its channel design YouTube clearly displays characteristics that are common to other SNS, it is its interface devoted to viewing videos which confers a singular identity to the medium and which demands a more detailed and itemized analysis. This analysis will involve an examination of its tagging function, the manner in which content is displayed, objective markers and comment types. If, given its capacity for the diffusion of audiovisual content, YouTube appears to be a medium not unlike that of television - both are decontextualized activities where the viewer participates by just sitting in front of the screen - it is the way this content is embedded within a network of elements related to the notion of interactivity that provides this medium with a notable level of structural complexity. Video (or, “text”, if we take a semiotic point of view) is the central axis which articulates and confers meaning to the remaining elements found on YouTube. As mentioned above, in the ElectroDance context, the only reason to post a video is to show (in public) oneself dancing. This activity can be classified

into the following textual varieties framed within the concept of "self-production":

i) videos showing dancers training (as a pretence for showing off their progress and meant to be seen by members of the scene),
ii) videos of dance-offs (a public ritual in the form of a competitive showdown between two dancers and which shall be discussed later on),
iii) videos of performances (at clubs, high schools, music festivals, etc.),
iv) music videos (a type which encompasses types i), ii) and iii) and which features more sophisticated production techniques that attempts to creatively reproduce the aesthetics, conventions and narratives of music videos as an audiovisual genre).

Each video typically features an introduction or message to the right in which the creator provides additional information for their potential "audience", the idea being to contextualize what's being shown. In some cases, a brief comment by the author of the video is included which also provides explicative information on the audiovisual content:

> *"All right I uploaded this video showing the first Tecktonik meeting in Xàtiva, as you can see there were lots of people, and for the show Lepe and I (Ache) performed a friendly dance-off to entertain people and encourage them to take part in the dance"*

In other videos, the creator specifically requests visitors to rate some specific aspect of the video or the video as a whole, with the expectation that they will receive a response in the comments section:

> *"Training 18.1.09: ultimate old electro or new? the question is ... after training all this week, I'm still into the old style, but am more skilled …*

> *or I've moved to new electro, vertifight, or whatever you want to call it XD … ok, thanks for your comments!"*

In addition, the information area offers a video tagging option. Here the author selects keywords that are related to the video's content; these are useful in searching for and locating videos within YouTube's general repository (Lange, 2007). Tagging is a resource that is exploited by electro-dancers to varying degrees in keeping with their objectives with regard to their desired visibility; when video authors make use of this feature, their videos become more accessible to viewers. Visibility can therefore be limited to a set of videos that might bear tags ranging from the author's nickname, their team, city, type of dance or go as far as including an endless list of terms more or less directly associated to the ElectroDance world, which may or may not be limited to the content of the video in question (one might find, for example, names of DJs, famous electro-dancers from other countries, other dancers or the names of other teams, etc.). Tagging is by no means an optional extra feature when publishing a video, but a crucial aspect that requires careful consideration; the wider the scope covered by the set of tags, the greater the chances that they will be found by other YouTube users around the world, and preferably by another peer. Along with the tagging function, the video is accompanied by what I view as being "objective markers" (of symbolic capital), which, as we shall see in the following subsection, carry a special meaning in the logic of ElectroDance subculture. These are the number of cumulative visits received by the video in question at a given time and the overall rating that said video has received (represented by a five-star scale) by its visitors over time. Associated to these are other secondary indicators such as *favourites* (the number of users that have selected this video to add to their personal list of favourites) and "comments" (the number of observations/remarks made regarding the video) which give a general idea of the degree of interest and attention a particular video has garnered.

Finally, we have one of YouTube's most popular sections - the comments section – which is just as popular in the ElectroDance universe. Along with the audiovisual content, the dialogical component that is particular to environments of asynchronous textual interaction such as forums or discussion groups remind us, perhaps metaphorically, of an unmediated interactive context that is characteristic of the act of "watching TV with others"; that is, that common practice of exchanging opinions on that which is being watched with other spectators. If we look at the text-based interaction section mentioned above, we can see that the comments that accompany the videos adopt a variety of forms and content. One of the varieties has to do with the viewers' technical assessment of the dancing they have seen in the video:

> **SeMyYyDaNcEr**: good moves with the hands jeison and amazing segues maybe one day I'll see you dance 100% in person, I've never seen you haha, here's a 5* hug);

Likewise, we can also find comments that seek support:

> **Hammerfest10**: gosh what program do you use to make your videos?? i've got movie maker but it tells me it doesn't recognise the file format :S and i can't upload it... i've got a tecktonik dance group here in ribarroja ... hope you can help.... GOODBYE
> **Arangool:** guuuuys maybe you can help me and give me the name of that amazing traaaack (= grax

Or even comments that allude to the negotiation of meaning regarding style themes, among others. This last component, along with the rest mentioned above, are what I consider to be the key components that build group unity:

> **AcheTCK**: "i'm sorry but i think you've been misinformed and you're absolutely wrong. TCK is not a dance, but much more than that, it's a cultural movement just like Hip Hop... there's a lot more to it, more than what most discotheque-type dances have...go out and learn a little more about it... but i understand that you're not gonna know all that at all."

These examples show that YouTube is a communication medium that has a profile that is very different from that of television. Although it's clear that both YouTube and television are mediums that display moving images and have viewers, what makes one different from the other is the relationship between viewers the authors of the videos. In television, viewers anonymously relate to each other by means of the chosen content; in YouTube, they do so in a more straightforward way, the video simply acting as a sort of pretext for viewers to enter into a series of endless text-based conversations about all the issues that concern dancers as part of their group life. In the two comments reproduced below, viewers refer to the symbolic affordances of YouTube as an *inter-face*, that is, as that sort of *symbolic layer* placed between two interactans while communicating. These comments offer a sense of interface as being an intelligible symbolic space which is closely connected to the sense of self, an idea which will be further explored later on in the dissertation. Suffice it to say at this point that the personal profile section of the interface is experienced as part of oneself, being publicly open to those who one interacts with.

> **axelfrx33:** not too bad your video, take a look at mine, it's just a home-made one to introduce myself, see you Nov 2nd (Electrobattle)
> **josemiosemyRTX:** man it's really good, I love the way you, … style, steps, … awesome 5 stars, go and see mine, make a comment and rate it, a big hug ;) SeMyYy@r.t.x

All of these elements constitute the YouTube interface, that is, the socio-technological framework to which electro-dancers' interactions are subjected. Next we'll take a further step back from the medium – without fully abandoning it – in order to understand the underlying logic that governs its use. That is, to determine what moves these young people to do what they do, through YouTube, in the context of their group culture and the effects it has in terms of the sort of social relations they develop with its help.

In search of recognition: "5-star and marked as 'favourite'!"

> **Tony:** ... and what should one do in order to become known and respected in Electro?
> **KIW:** you have to be good at dancing, videotape yourself and upload your video onto YouTube. In YouTube everybody comes to know everyone else's videos, and if they think you're good enough, you'll be respected.

As 17th-century philosopher George Berkeley stated, "To be is to be perceived." Interpreting this dictum in a socio-cultural instead of its original ontological-epistemological sense, the use of YouTube in the realm of electrodancers can be viewed in a similar manner, that is, as "To be is to be seen." To this effect, electro-dancers deploy, through Youtube, a whole manner of mediated practices the aim of which being to relate to their peers. The ultimate objective underlying this relationship, however, is a personal interest in gaining presence on and through the interface as part of a strategy that pursues greater prestige and recognition. This motivation is in keeping with the logic of the subculture and creatively articulates the practice(s) in the symbolic, interactive and pragmatic

framework provided by YouTube. As advanced earlier, dancers' dynamics of recognition linked to the use of Youtube, where what is at stake is one's reputation as a dancer, can be best conceived from the Bourdieusian notion of field. In the field of ElectroDance, the principal and most basic element of subcultural capital is represented by the level of skill that a member of the scene demonstrates through dancing. The more skilled a dancer becomes, the greater their reputation and consequently their relevance within the scene. But dancing well is not enough. Having a higher status and receiving due recognition means becoming visible, a visibility which can be elicited through group encounters on the streets or sports pavilions where dancers compete and more crucially through the extension of such appearances in space and time by means of digital media, a fact which requires strategic deployment of certain practices in Youtube in order to acquire a high degree of visibility through it.

> **niitahElektroStyle**: who's more popular juanitoxXx or elgab? hamala hamala, tecktonik belongs to france ;)
> **hamalahamala10:** no doubt elgab is more popular... elgab has millions of comments in his videos and a Fotolog... and no doubt Argentinian electro is the best ciao ;P
> **niitahElektroStyle**: but juanitoxXx is more good-looking and famous, tecktonik is France's … i mean … French people dance better!

Therefore, participating in a scene not only requires a certain mastery of YouTube. It is also adviseable for individuals to possess excellent skills in other areas related to self-production and a relatively good understanding of audiovisual language; a set of self-taught skills involving knowledge not learned at school or another educational institution, as previously suggested in Chapter Three.

> **MyDro**: … yeah, absolutely, I videotape myself, edit the videos and

> upload them to YouTube unless someone does it for me … but I mostly do it myself
>
> **Toni:** Do you consider yourself as being self-taught?
>
> **MyDro:** Yeah, kind of.

These skills can be viewed as a subset of subcultural capital, involved in knowledge and skills associated to the handling of symbolic content, which transcends mere dance. In this sense, while it is true that many videos are quite rudimentary, i.e. shot with cell phones and posted, unedited, on YouTube, the more sophisticated and better-produced videos featuring protagonists with equally excellent dancing skills (recall that this is the principal criteria) are the ones which become more celebrated and generate the most interest within the scene, attracting a higher number of views on YouTube.

Owing much of their aesthetics to the music video, these visual bites implicitly pursue, through technical artifices involving visual effects and editing (see Figure 1), the development of narratives based on popular culture. This latter device may be based on a film such as *Matrix* for example, or involve the re-enactment of dance activities in the context of the dancer's daily routine, i.e. from the moment our young protagonist wakes up in the morning until he meets up with friends later in the day. These narrative constructs make the videos more appealing to observers, and draw attention to the video itself and its main character who is, of course, its featured dancer.

Image 3. Playful video-making

The viewing of well-crafted videos reveals itself as an activity providing levels of aesthetic pleasure for dancers. As shall be further elaborated later on in my discussion regarding leadership, dancers consciously seek to bring such aesthetic effects to the eyes of the viewer in an attempt to enhance one's performance. Dancing becomes just as important as the way in which the dance is featured. However, this fact does not prevent dancers from being sufficiently self-aware to differentiate between the existing boundaries separating visual artifice from real dancing skills that are shown when performing, as dancer Stewiee notes here:

> "… I like uploading videos every two or three days. I work hard at video editing to produce a greater impact on viewers […] No doubt the most important thing is how skilled you are, but it's also true that if you removed video editing from a good video, you'd realize that editing does quite a lot in terms of making a dancer seem much better than he/she really is"

Another dancer, known as Ache, makes a similar point:

> "… videos are like that, they can get people mixed up; having more and better editing in your videos doesn't make you a better dancer"

The appeal of the mediated version of dance came to be so pervasive in the eyes of audiences that some dancers began telling viewers how their videos were nothing in comparison to watching dancers perform live in non-mediated situations:

> **emilio288:** gosh! you're so good, man, I love your style so much xd, keep on going! btw for those of you who have not seen him dancing live it's much better than in videos, see you man.
> **dancEeleCKtion:** but guys... are you blind or what the hell, don't you realize that in the first few videos he speeds up the action?? and no one says anything! ... it's a total fake, and I say this not only because of the arm movements – there are dancers who move faster than him with no video editing, … omg look at that guy's neck!... from second 25 to 30 it's totally fake and everybody here is keeping their mouth closed.
> **MarxTck:** look, this video doesn't show his level of dancing at all, shut your mouth please … when you see him dancing on the street, you'll realize how what you're saying is all bullshit.
> **antonioTCK**: look, 1. you can start by introducing yourself...2. i can't understand what you really mean because in the video I'm just dancing with a faster song, that's all...3. if it annoys you, I don't care at all!"
> astro - mighty crew

The sense of playfulness and a certain degree of self-deception involved in the production and sharing of videos do not diminish their impact in terms of dancers' subcultural capital. As suggested earlier, the quality of the video overall is crucial to the aim of improving the dancer's personal image within the scene; its excellence is usually acknowledged by way of the following phrase: "5 stars and marked as 'favourite'!" which can be repeatedly found in the comments section of the most celebrated videos.

> **elbruno92**: awesome video ;) and the video editing is so good! 5* and marked as a favourite! :)
> **Joremss**: the story is very good and the video itself is amazing, you're very good as a dancer too, you deserve a 10, regards.
> **juanitoxxxxxxx:** all right all right ferfiro as I told you a good video like this makes a difference, your performance is very good and everybody could tell you've been working hard in front of your pc ...
> **espirituelectro**: you've got a lot of talent as a dancer and as a video producer you're simply the best, I didn't know you also knew how to dance xd!

In this sense, the markers of symbolic capital are expressed in each video's assessment and the number of views it receives. This is exemplified in honourable mention granted by YouTube to the most popular users through the title of "guru" (see image 4) displayed on the user's personal profile (channel), which offers an objective indicator of the hierarchy of a particular electrodancer within the scene and their relative position in the field (of course not all electrodancers achieve this rank):

liam69tck: “ache!!!!! I’ve just seen the video after coming back from my vacation!! we’ve made it!!!! it must be the most viewed video in spain right now!!"

Image 4. Symbolic markers on the YouTube interface

The effect generated by these practices on YouTube suggests a conversion of a certain amount of cultural capital – e.g. skill and technical knowledge that go beyond the dancing itself - into symbolic capital – e.g. status attained and objectified in said indicators. Presence on YouTube and the use of this interface as a support for both interpersonal and group interaction in the context of the ElectroDance scene enables, as suggested here, an understanding of the scene as an articulated “field” based on an economy whose currency is attention. Participating in YouTube, therefore, involves a competitive game of observing and

being observed; and the more you are observed with respect to your cohorts, the better. The idea here is to “be seen” to “be somebody” in the group, thereby generating, as Holmes (2005:22) suggested, a “field of recognition” around oneself. Seen from the point of view of communication channeled through extended interaction, the structure of the subcultural field is, therefore, the result of the unequal distribution of “quotas of attention” over time among individual positions holding a particular level of symbolic capital. If we look at the most celebrated and better-positioned members of the scene, one intuitively detects a certain correspondence between their dancing skills and the technical skill and creativity in their use of digital media along with their knowledge of the fundamentals of audiovisual language. In other words, those dancers that are much more active socially and more involved in the scene often become the most capable in terms of handling media and being able to communicate across a number of varied interfaces in general.

Nevertheless, participation in YouTube is far from being open or unconditioned. Although it may seem that any young person can join the world of dance and establish ties with those that make up the scene regardless of the dancing skills they may display at any given time, we find that their complete integration is biased by the presence and use of YouTube. Making oneself visible and belonging to the group requires interaction not only within an embodied register (i.e, face-to-face on the streets, in pavilions or at school), but it crucially must also be mediated through YouTube, which is singularly selective. In this sense, electrodancer Geo12312312 makes use of another dancer's comments area to make the following recommendation, insinuating certain sanctioning mechanisms associated to the above consideration:

> **Geo12312312**: "listen man you don’t dance too badly but keep in mind that others might see us and think Spanish dancers are all like that... i don’t think that people who are not skilled enough should upload videos .. i made this mistake and I’m still paying for it.. now i’m a better dancer

> but i don't want to upload anything until i become really good, and i think everybody should do the same so we'd all have less videos but better ones"

Along the same lines we find another comment from another dancer which indirectly gives us a sense of the relationship between the appropriateness of being publicly seen and one's personal progress in the dance.

> **alejandreta6**: "No one would have imagined you would come so far! I remember the first video you made at your friend's place XD I uploaded it right then and you told me to remove it, it's funny because you dance so well now …
> one kiss for you
> ZOE!"

Finally, outside the YouTube arena, in a forum devoted to the ElectroDance world, an electrodancer nicknamed "Let", new to the scene, expresses herself in the following way:

> *"[...] uploading videos is kind of hard for me XD*
> *they're telling me to make a video and that's enough for me XD*
> *I'm not ready yet XD*
> *but let's wait a little longer*
> *take care!*
> *kiss"*

Authors such as Jenkins (2006) have recently noted that the new media which follow the dynamics of network communication are evolving in such a way as to foster amateur creation and production of content, in full synergy with media and cultural industries, resulting in a “culture of participation”. Nevertheless, according to what I have observed in the case of ElectroDance, this assertion, even when formulated on a more general level, would be somewhat hard to sustain: in the unrestrained access to and use of YouTube, it is the subcultural logic of skilfulness which selectively determines the full individual participation within the medium, and therefore in the scene. That is, it is not only that technological mediation of the subcultural experience requires deployment of certain mediated practices aimed at raising personal status, but their integration within the medium itself requires that YouTube be used under specific conditions: not exhibiting yourself in public in just any fashion. So, it is both the competition’s stylistic idiosyncrasies and their skill at using YouTube that govern the dancing scene; the latter operating restrictively. In terms of participation, presence and use of the medium is significant when determining one’s belonging to YouTube. In this sense, dancers post videos with a certain regularity and frequently comment upon others as a fundamental media practice, as a prolonged absence could be interpreted as a personal abandonment or stagnation in one's progress in the dance - an example of this could be seen with dancer JuanitoxXx, who, after an absence, posted a video entitled *Hardstyle 3* which included the following message at minute 3'11": “Two months away, training and rehearsing like a dog, no sign of life... and left for dead ....”

As we have seen throughout this subsection, communication between dancers in and through YouTube is subject to criteria of competence and competition and the values of reputation and recognition. In contrast, the matter of leadership points in another direction. Communication between leaders and their group is strategically oriented to the tasks of organization, conflict mediation and intra-group coordination, each of which equally requiring an effective use of

YouTube. What lies behind these functions are the different ways of exerting influence to preserve and extend over time one's status within the group.

"Follow me, I'm your leader!": forms of media-driven, intra-group 'micro-power'

The figure of leader is intrinsic to the configuration and activity of social groups, a concept which is often connected to the idea of hierarchy among their members. In modern times, we find leaders across disparate areas of social and cultural life, including representatives of political parties, and executive managers in companies. They can even be found at the smaller scale, for instance in the classroom where some children exert a noticeable influence over their peers. If we take a broader view, we see that leadership has existed in some form or another in ancient, Non-Western cultures around the world and throughout history, with the leader retaining a central social role in the coordination and development of collective life. Both today and in the past, being a leader involves a deployment of diverse communicative practices in order to efficiently exert an influence over those who depend upon you; the success of such practices will determine a leader's legitimacy, and consequently their power over the group. More prevalent in Non-Western, traditional cultures, dance could be seen as being part of these practices. Broadly speaking, the power of the body as expressed in dance very often served to communicate socio-political status and roles. As Lynne (1987:135) points out, given that dance is an extraordinary activity and that charismatic authority in such cultures was based on personal powers perceived to be extraordinary, that is, thought to be fed by supernatural forces, the symbolic

manifestation of authority through dance was intended to increase the potency of a charismatic leader.[80]

In the context of ElectroDance, the concept of leadership differs somewhat. Instead of being a medium of symbolic interaction whereby leaders assert their authority, either performing for others or others doing so on their behalf, leadership in this particular youth culture is oriented instead to the organization of the collective aspects of group life. Leaders in local scenes are responsible for a number of tasks: first, they organize the street encounters known as *quedada*s (in Spanish) or *aprem* (in French) where dancers meet to share ideas, dance steps and experiences; second, leaders develop local or translocal "Vertifight" tournaments wherein dancers gather to compete with each other; third, they provide dancers with up-to-date information about their local scene and the dance as style - norms, values, advice and so on – to foster group cohesion and a sense of belonging among members; fourth, they keep in contact with leaders in other locations in order to coordinate joint actions; and finally they offer support, guidance and motivate dancers as well as mediate in conflicts resulting from the competitiveness and rivalry that are intrinsic to the scene. In all of these cases, leadership requires personal skills to ensure efficient communication within the group, including proper management of communication technologies. This means that their authority within the group relies upon their personal competence in adequately fulfilling the above-mentioned group-related tasks. It is worth outlining this last point - throughout the previous and present chapters we have seen the extent to which interaction amidst digital media becomes an indispensable resource in the development of group communication at both the local and global levels.

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80 Lynne comprehensively accounts for several culturally and historically situated examples ranging from Ivory Coast's Nafana men, to the various tribes of Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya or Tanzania and to more contemporary cases such as the court of Louis XVIII in the 16th century, where dance rites were associated to the communication of support for leaders.

Just like dancers, leaders too must be skilled enough in the use of new media in order to maintain regular contact with the group, this knowledge being part of their subcultural capital. More than anyone else, leaders need to feel comfortable using and communicating with the varied interfaces that are part of the above-mentioned media ecology of ElectroDance, being aware of each medium's symbolic affordances and limitations.

> **Tony**: As far as I can see, you have a blog called 'CulturaElectro' as well as a Facebook account which you use as communication tools. What is the role of each? I mean, what and what not are they useful for? What are the affordances and limitations in each case?
> **Leonardo (Mexican leader)**: Ok, the blog of "CulturaElectro" has become the backbone of the movement, offering you full information of everything going on in the world of electro. We currently have more than 12 collaborators around the country who are able to trace any relevant event that is happening … It's also a forum for discussion where any problem can be addressed. It has a video section, contact section, suggestion section and so on. In that sense, it's got everything you might need. Our Facebook is rather a supplement to the blog. When someone wants to publish anything, he has to first send to Facebook so we can pick it up and bring it into the blog too. We use YouTube to talk about different topics, work out emerging controversies, and give advice and so forth. The best of these tools is that you can make them work together so when something is published on Facebook, it goes to Twitter too, … so everything gets interlinked [...] When it comes to the constraints, I wouldn't know what to say because we have all we need so far, you just need to know how to use these tools.

As noted before, a different interface *induces* different styles and modes of communication so that the continuous, ever-changing forms of new media that have emerged in recent years have pushed leaders to constant adaptation. Vertifight's founder and organizer Steady puts it this way: "Before Facebook, the Vertifight website was the basis for our communication… but Facebook changed all the configurations. […] Things change and we have to change also if we want to stay at the top." When leaders themselves do not possess these technical skills, they elicit the support of others:

> **Tony**: How is your relationship with Juan?, … do you get along with each other?
> **D1**: Good, good, … but only because he has an interest in us getting along. I used to belong to two different teams, Electro-Tek and the staff of ElectroBattle. I quit Electro-Tek but I'm still in ElectroBattle. Because I'm the webmaster of ElectroBattle Juan knows to avoid arguments as I do the computer work for him.

Moreover, the geographical scope of local scenes becomes another factor to take into account in the management of group activities by leaders. The larger the domain of a certain scene, the greater the effort required for leaders to establish a good standing vis-à-vis their group, in organizational terms. Communication technologies extend interaction within localities but there exists a substantial difference between the small yet lively local Spanish scene, largely concentrated in the city of Valencia, where dancers gatherface-to-face, to that of Mexico, where technologically-extended communication become an invaluable resource for the scene, which is made up of members scattered across the country's many regions.

> **Tony**: I can see Mexico as having lots of regions and localities, with young

> people interested in the dance. How do you organize all the group activities under such conditions?
>
> **Leonardo**: Well, when Electro began here, neither Mox [another scene organizer], nor I were concerned with the organization of contests. It was other people who were in charge of Vertifight. They managed all this as though they were parties, and didn't care too much about dancers. They only did this for the money. [...] But everything started to grow very fast, and when we got on board we realized that we were going to need a powerful web page for centralizing everything going on in this world, helped by the solid foundations of the dance style. 'CulturaElectro.mx' was to do well in no time. We contacted other people to act as local representatives. We gave them clear instructions on how to organize contests successfully. The dancers from Tijuana have always been the best ones from the beginning, so it was even easier for us to become the leaders of this movement in Mexico [...] We manage all the States from here. No event is arranged without us, and not because we want to control everything, but because we want to ensure that our country becomes a world power in the dance style.

This comment shows how Mexican dancers Leonardo and Mortox attained their local leader status as a result of a conscious, well-planned combination of technical and social know-how. In other words, their leadership is related to and is a consequence of, on the one hand, the ever-increasing accumulation of social capital - they belong to Tijuana, the Mexican State with the largest number of dance practitioners - and cultural capital - showing an accomplished management of the web page as a vertical hub of information, working as an effective interface for connecting members of the scene members. The Mexican case, perhaps the most conspicuous in terms of the demands, scope and effort required in the coordination of the group life, provides us with a snapshot of what is viewed as

being common to varied forms of leadership in local scenes, that is, the efficient management of social relations through varied channeling of communication. In the section that follows – the last one of this chapter - I shall delve further into the communicative dimension of media practices associated to the role of the leader. If the previous sections offered us a preliminary account of the importance of new media for scene leaders, in the next section I shall explore the existence of certain underlying "mechanisms" which allow leaders to exert an effective influence within the group; mechanisms that speak to the "micro-power" relations between leaders and their groups forged through differently-fashioned, technologically-extended interaction processes. These mechanisms relate to the sphere of discourse and its management, and to aid analysis can be best covered by breaking them down into three areas: social control, message scope and aestheticization.

Social control

In his 1970 essay "The Order of Discourse", Foucault discusses the notion of discourse and its production as governed by certain norms and mechanisms that control, largely negatively by exclusion, limitation and prohibition, what can be said under certain contextualized conditions. Indeed, what Foucault describes in relation to the realm of the epistemology and the generation and diffusion of ideas, can be applied to the most varied spheres of social life. It is well-known that language largely demarcates the boundaries of the sayable, and the ability or means to define what comes to be the object of representation could be said to be related to higher levels of power; Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic power" also points to this view in which language is not a mere vehicle for communication, but a vehicle related to action and power. In a smaller, restricted context such as that of ElectroDance, notions of social control as well as regulation also appear as being associated to different positions and roles within the group.

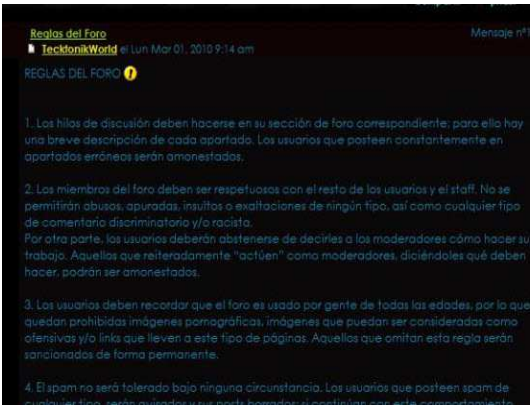
Discourse is first and foremost controlled by leaders who have privileges in the access and management of interfaces. As suggested earlier, if interfaces can be conceptualized as symbolic spaces interposed between communicators, different sorts of access and agency over technological mediums, whether adapting, shaping or customizing them in keeping with the purposes and needs of particular agents, will lead to differentiated positions when communicating, favouring some positions over others. Until the advent in 2007 of network-oriented, sophisticated interfaces like Facebook, the social life of local scenes was for the most part articulated by way of web pages where all relevant information for the group was posted and made available to the public, as in the case of the Madrid and Valencia local scenes at their beginnings, and it is still the case of the French Vertifight and Mexican local scene. Leaders define the structure and content as well as the interactive possibilities of webpages; in doing so they implicitly demarcate the boundaries of the representable within the symbolic universe of dance. Often embedded in web pages, forums epitomize the leader's preferential position in that they frame and regulate discourse. A glance at the categories featured in them, the areas of interest and the topics of ongoing conversation can be easily identified. As administrators of the communicative space, leaders retain the privilege of setting the agenda, adding, modifying or removing themes and moderating the flow of conversation, whereas the role of the dancer is rather that of a mere contributor. As the following comment shows, an accurate understanding of the workings of a medium for shaping communication allows leaders to better develop their role, even in difficult cases where they have to mediate in situations of conflict:

> **Tony**: In your web page I found a section having to do with something also existing in Spain, which you call "controversies". What is the exact meaning of this in Mexico?
>
> **Leonardo**: Well, that's a space where we let members of the community post their questions, complaints and so on. All these issues are channeled

> into one place so that dancers can discuss them whenever needed. We only intervene when we feel things are getting out of hand [...] Controversies are mostly related to jury decisions … the way we deal with this is to just act as mediators, trying to get people to work out their problems on their own [...] This is all made possible through our fantastic website and Facebook page. We keep in touch with city representatives on a near-daily basis. We listen to them and give them advice.

As well as setting the scene's agenda through the categorization of topics and themes, leaders incorporate another mechanism in forums to regulate discourse by explicitly defining the set of norms and procedures governing the participation of dancers. These appear in two forms; firstly, as a list of permanent rules which participants are meant to follow (see image 5); secondly, as suggestions made by leaders. This is the case of Furió, a dancer who took part in the original forum in Valencia, whose statements were aimed at fostering understanding and respect among cohorts:

> *"… it's all right, but listen, please, try to write in a clearer way, if possible in Spanish, haha"*
>
> *"Well guys, I've seen some inappropriate comments, we don't need jokers here, at least I don't want them"*



Reglas del Foro
TecktonikWorld el Lun Mar 01, 2010 9:14 am

REGLAS DEL FORO

1. Los hilos de discusión deben hacerse en su sección de foro correspondiente; para ello hay una breve descripción de cada apartado. Los usuarios que posteen constantemente en apartados erróneos serán amonestados.

2. Los miembros del foro deben ser respetuosos con el resto de los usuarios y el staff. No se permitirán abusos, apuradas, insultos o exaltaciones de ningún tipo, así como cualquier tipo de comentario discriminatorio y/o racista.
Por otra parte, los usuarios deberán abstenerse de decirles a los moderadores cómo hacer su trabajo. Aquellos que reiteradamente "actúen" como moderadores, diciéndoles qué deben hacer, podrán ser amonestados.

3. Los usuarios deben recordar que el foro es usado por gente de todas las edades, por lo que quedan prohibidas imágenes pornográficas, imágenes que puedan ser consideradas como ofensivas y/o links que lleven a este tipo de páginas. Aquellos que omitan esta regla serán sancionados de forma permanente.

4. El spam no será tolerado bajo ninguna circunstancia. Los usuarios que posteen spam de

Image 5: Forum rules

Unlike YouTube, where dancers own their own channel whereby each user can *inter-face* one another, web pages and forums act as meeting points for the group for the exchange of information and collective conversation, with these two aspects converging into one single *locus*. However, as noted earlier, communication by leaders and dancers take place within a media ecology. In this media ecology, leaders deploy strategies of control and regulation that must be also applied in accordance with the technical affordances of the given medium. This is seen, for example, in the Valencia scene and its leader Juanito. Juanito's use of the comment-deleting feature of YouTube for videos posted in the "ElectroBattle" channel he managed is worth looking at in regard to the ongoing discussion on control and regulation of discourse. The following comments made by dancers Stexx and Albeeta for Juanito were part of an argument in which dancers publicly expressed their disappointment after discovering that some of their comments had been deleted - a circumstance which they felt was a form of

social control. The removal of certain comments as a way to sanction is a technically affordable mechanism within the sphere of interaction of the YouTube interface.

> "listen this is gonna be my first and last 'muerte elektro', I noticed that my comments are unwanted and have been erased, ... juan, you let me down"
> stexx 2 years ago
> "come on, Juan, keep on erasing our comments! The truth hurts, doesn't it? you don't seem to change at all and I won't keep my mouth closed
> Beta!@CEDC"
> albeeta 2 years ago

In those cases where for whatever reason the tension between parties becomes too great and there is a strong disagreement between members, a harder sanctioning measure is put in practice, involving the blocking of a YouTube user account. This prevents the user from taking part in the collective conversation about an ongoing topic.

> "No, i won't erase your comment, listen, norms are clear-cut, any insult is erased and blocked :) right? :) if you keep on acting up, I'll block your comments forever ;)"
> JuanitoxXx Electro-tek team. . .
> Electrobattle in reply to Anthy3390 1 year ago

When the conflict reaches an impasse, the consequence is the exclusion of the accuser from the group activity, which involves ceasing all forms of

communication with the rest of the members on this channel – or at least with the leader.

> "… guys this is your last sentence on this issue, you're going to get censored (just like your friend with the little babies of his neighbourhood) in the electro community, both xdddd"
> JuanitoxXx . . ."
> ElectrobattleSpain 1 year ago

Along with the specific practices examined in this section involving social control and regulation of discourse, the message scope is another significant communicational feature underlying the relationship between leaders on the one hand and the use of web pages and forum interfaces on the other.

Message scope

Although communication within the ElectroDance scene takes place through a highly interactive, networked communication structure, we have seen how leadership still depends upon the centralization of media resources in order to be effective. In other words, the role of leaders in this realm depends on the existence of interfaces that can act as both a hub for information and a place for members to gather together and perform certain social practices. This fact largely runs against the commonly-held view that network communication technologies mostly enable patterns of two-way, many-to-many interactions in keeping with an ideal of dialogue-like communication. New media in their varied forms and expressions have given rise to a new communicational framework that is at odds with the past era of mass communication defined by broadcast technologies.

However, as YouTube's motto *"Broadcast Yourself"* suggests, the potential for broadcasting might be present in a network communication structure as well. For dancers and leaders alike, making use of the broadcasting capacities embedded in technology becomes crucial to their objectives. Both are pursuing the attention of others within their field of interest. Whereas the former seek to increase their reputation, the latter want to reinforce their authority. But this is even more important for leaders, because in order to exert their role, they have to ensure that their message reaches its recipients, this fact influencing the choice of some interfaces over others. The dancer known as Ache put it this way:

> *"[..] before we basically used to stay in contact with each other by making comments on Youtube. Fotolog was used to organize and announce all kinds of events. But that was kind of a hassle because you had to pass on every link with the information to each recipient … if you didn't do it personally, copying and pasting every contact, nobody would notice it at all …"*

The nature of dissemination, the broader scope of the message and its effects within the communication sphere of ElectroDance can be best accounted for by considering an empirical example based on the use of YouTube by Juanito, a leader of the Valencia local scene. Just like other leaders in ElectroDance, Juanito has his own YouTube channel to allow him to publish information regarding the life of the group. From time to time he publishes videos which are largely devoted to dance-offs. In addition to these, he includes others with news and personal opinions, sometimes autobiographical in nature, deemed to be of interest to the group. Juanito is known in local circles for the strained social relations that often arise with other dancers in the group; many dancers in Valencia view his leadership style as being controversial. Occasionally, Juanito is quite adept in his use of YouTube to air (broadcast) internal conflicts, offering a positive image of himself before others when he is part of such conflicts.

Image 6: A speech by a leader, broadcast through YouTube

An example of this observation are two videos entitled "ElectroBattle nº4 brefing [*sic*]", which were posted as part of a controversy between Juanito and an opposing faction led by another local dancer, Furió. The controversy arose as a result of Furió's group's intention to adopt the French Vertifight name as the official designation for local competitions instead of that of ElectroBattle, the name previously established by Juanito as part of a strategy to maintain local autonomy from the dictates of the French scene. In contrast, Furió and his group were interested in following other national scenes which had joined Vertifight. In his video, Juanito addresses a number of different issues (a structure often seen in different videos), but this time his speech is mostly devoted to the problem

regarding the matter at hand. Here, Juanito is trying to make his point of view known to everybody; his best ally being YouTube and its capacity to disseminate messages. To be effective, Juanito seeks to augment his leader status by carefully and deliberately managing his public image, with the staging becoming crucial to such a purpose. In the picture above (image 6) Juanito is surrounded by a number of members of the scene, giving the viewer the impression that he has the support of the group. Looking at the camera but sometimes turning to the people around him in search of their approval, Juanito contemptuously addresses his moral adversaries, who even become the object of his taunts. The combination of this broadcast mode and the fixability of content within the medium guarantees the permanent availability of the message for anyone interested in watching it at another time by virtue of this medium's asynchronous communication. Moreover, Juanito's stylistic choices in his composition of the message's visual dimension help to reinforce his position as leader. In addition to these stylistic moves, Juanito has also inserted some phrases over the images (added during post-production) which serve as a complement to his discourse, allowing him to touch on aspects that were left out when it was videotaped "live". In many cases videos like these will receive an answer from their intended recipients in the text-based comment section below, often only serving to further inflame the original argument. In other cases, a response will be offered in the form of a video too. But this was not the case here. Neither Furió nor his colleagues will be replying to Juanito's opinions to avoid escalating the problem. Conversely, one of them, Astro, condemned that sort of practice.

> **Tony**: Do you think people behave differently when using internet as opposed to when they see each other in person?
> **Astro**: Yeah, I think so, some people show off in front of the camera when you're not there … but they happen not to be that cocky when it comes down to it … that makes you think you can't really trust some dancers at all.

For Astro, publicly airing personal affairs through a technological medium is a sign of cowardice. Extended interaction emboldens users who would otherwise not express themselves in embodied situations. Experience tells him that some dancers, even those who are well-known, behave differently when interacting by means of communication technologies than when they do so in situations of co-presence. Behaviours change when the conditions of communication change. And for each communicative situation there is an underlying set of cultural expectations that guide the social behaviour of the person doing the communicating. This argument, one which also points to the shifting yet always contextualized character of notions about what is public and what is private, is in keeping with other comments I came across in the course of my research:

> **HendriXelectrodance**: stop insulting, you're acting like kids …, I didn't know that was a popular motto … anyway, if BeatMode is using it right now, there is nothing else to say, I apologize. Personal problems are best worked out on the street and not here.
> **josemiosemyRTX**: juanitooooo and acheeeee ha ha ha .. omg dude i think you should have said that to them instead of making it public XD

These examples show that dancers are constantly trying to work out the most appropriate method of communication for particular social situations. Interestingly, those seen as personally relevant generally seem to be reserved for an in-person communicative register. What we're seeing is an attempt to differentiate what should be handled in private from what can be made the object of public knowledge. Astro's irritation stems from the ambiguity present in different registers of communication. In contrast, Juanito seems to break with the expectations associated to disembodied communication via YouTube by altering what is expected in each social situation, making public what should be kept as

private. In so doing, the astute Juanito exploits to his advantage the communicative potentialities of certain social situations in which technologically-extended interaction coupled with the power of broadcast afforded by the medium help to reinforce his status as leader. Astro's claim and the silence of Furio's group in their refusal to reply to the video motivate this interpretation.

Aestheticization

The third dimension regarding the use of communication technologies and the role of the leader brings us to the relevance of the aesthetization of messages, a characteristic closely linked to those of social control and scope of message. By aesthetization of the messages I am referring to certain ways in which the form of the message is stylistically altered, making it more compelling to its recipients. For Castells (2009:126), sources of power throughout history are based on the notions of "violence and discourse, coercion and persuasion, political dominance and cultural framing." In the smaller context of ElectroDance, we have seen how the mechanisms of control of discourse and strategic dissemination are present as well. Aestheticization completes our analysis by invoking the notion of persuasion, which is needed to make messages more effective in terms of subjective influence. Leaders in ElectroDance are persuasive because they regularly exploit and shape the visual features of messages, preferentially channeling them through YouTube more than any other interface. Leaders need to periodically broadcast information but they have to do so in a catchy, entertaining way. YouTube then becomes the perfect instrument for such a purpose. In the following excerpt Juanito's comments alude to this idea, one which connects closely to the above-mentioned notion of behavioural appropriateness in distinct communicative situations.

Tony: "Why do you capture and make public not only dance-offs but also

> controversies? …, wouldn't it be better to discuss such issues privately, face to face?"
>
> **Juanito**: "That's something I talked about to Youval some time ago. The fact is that we want our YouTube channel to have content that is varied, like a documentary, where you can learn everything about ElectroDance, the arguments, the good times and the bad, the changes, our fights, … everything. The goal is to entertain all of those people who are interested in the dance, and I think this approach helps. Youval says that personal shit "feeds" Electro, and all the negative parts become useful too … look at those TV shows like "Sálvame" [a popular tabloid talk show in Spain] … personal shit rules … It's true that negative things are not good, but at the end of the day I think it is positive for the community. The most important thing is entertaining people, and to not watch the same thing over and over".

As I shall further discuss in the chapters that follow, the dimension of aesthetization of experience through new media is central to the experience of dancers. Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to show how much dancers rely on the symbolic affordance of YouTube's interface as a medium for interaction. Not only is it important for dancers to present their messages with care, leaders must do so too. As Juanito points out, information on YouTube must be displayed in a way that is capable of attracting and sustaining the group's attention over time. The ElectroBattle YouTube channel contains a good deal of material, much of it possessing a documentary-like format. All videos feature an intro with the channel's logo and the content of the video adopts a different format as needed – a news report, a TV interview, or the sports-broadcast format traditionally seen in mass-media. This variety helps to turn the scene leader into a showman of sorts. As Juanito himself claims, if content must provide

entertainment, then the role of the leader can also be thought of as that of a media entertainer. Furthermore, he significantly takes his argument to the point of equating the ElectroBattle channel to that of gossip TV shows in that both take advantage of the *sensationalistic* dimension of social life for their own benefit. Not foreign to a certain degree of self-conscious and detached irony, he interestingly justifies the ongoing controversies as being useful in keeping the scene alive, with communication through YouTube providing the best means to aesthetically shape the content of social life. The ends, it could be asserted here, justify the means. For Juanito, the success of the ElectroBattle channel is best explained insofar as it shares common aspects with the language and formats of traditional mass-media shows, a fact which should not come as a surprise if we consider the profile of the dancers, that is, individuals aged between fifteen and twenty-five whose education and everyday life can not be understood without acknowledging the pervasive influence of mass-media imaginaries, cultural forms and languages. Under this premise, it is not so much that dancers - and maybe young people in general - would not accept other less persuasive ways of dealing with their reality; it is just that the logic of new media is what is "natural" for them. The extent of "mediatization" of the ElectroDance world is a crucial aspect of today's common culture, a topic which I shall turn to next by analytically exploring the central ritual of ElectroDance, which is known as the "Muerte Electro" event.

:: 8 :: The ritual is the message: notes on "Muerte Electro" event

If there exists a group practice which is key to electro-dancers, one whose nature and development can serve to cast a different light on some of the issues previously covered, as well as enabling an inquiry into others, this is the *Muerte Electro* event. In ElectroDance, the *Muerte Electro* event involves a three-stage ritual in which two dancers compete against each other in a previously-arranged dance-off in order to publicly demonstrate their superiority in this dance style. As we have seen, dancers constantly and strategically seek to enhance their relative position within the dance field by heightening their skill level, thus acquiring ever-higher levels of symbolic capital[81]. The importance of *Muerte Electro* from the point of view of a dancer is related to the fact that it constitutes the preferred situation in which one's reputation within the group is publicly negotiated, to the extent that it can be asserted that all dancers' efforts are ultimately aimed at

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[81] Even more specific forms of YouTube appropriation by dancers concerning practices which, prima facie, could be expected to fall outside the dynamics of symbolic capital acquisition, such as the capture of a solo training session in a dancer's home, end up being embedded into these dynamics, as they acquire a public character through the technological medium.

preparing themselves for this kind of event. From an analytical point of view, what differentiates *Muerte Electro* from any other dance-related practices is its complexity as a highly technologically-mediated group activity. Indeed, I showed in the previous chapter how electro-dancers bring the dance onto the YouTube interface in order to enjoy, discuss and experience it. *Muerte Electro* is no exception in the intensive use of YouTube, with this being inseparable from the constitution and development of the ritual from the outset to the end. As we shall shortly see, if new media technologies are at the core of the dynamics of negotiation of symbolic capital in ElectroDance across diverse YouTube-related practices, *Muerte Electro* best exemplifies how such dynamics occur within the framework of a formalized, more patterned group activity, where both the potentialities and limitations of new media for managing the spatial and temporal conditions of interaction are exploited by electro-dancers to the fullest extent. However, if what differentiates *Muerte Electro* from other dance-related practices is largely its status of ritual, it is worth inquiring into this very notion before moving on to analyse the particular role of new media in the shaping of the ritual itself.

In this sense, at several points in the previous chapter I drew on the work of the anthropologist Lynne, who has reflected in the past on dance as a key, culturally-patterned, meaningful practice with which social groups in non-Western, pre-modern societies organize their communal life. Lynne conceives of dance as a form of communication - i.e. “an expressive form of thinking, sensing, feeling and moving” (1987:5) - through which shared political and social meanings can creatively be activated. Seen as a ritual form, in the context of ancient cultures dance generally means “an extraordinary event involving stylized, repetitive behaviour”, and from a communicational standpoint, "a set of operations aimed to ensure a certain type of communication" (ibid.:129). Repeated, often patterned, and more or less formalized actions are generally seen in anthropology as the traits which define rituals, with the existence of transcendent values linked to religious practice also being one of their key

features (Bourdieu, 1977). However, the sense of transcendence and "strong" moral orientation implied in this conceptualization can be said to be at odds with more modern, secularized, leisure-oriented activities like *Muerte Electro*. In this sense, Collins offers us another approach that might be more appropriate to our interests. This author points out four conditions for an interaction ritual to be possible (2004a:49). Firstly, a ritual requires that "two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence". Secondly, participants in a ritual "have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded". Thirdly, participants "focus their attention upon a common object or activity", which leads them to "share a common mood or emotional experience". According to Collins, these ingredients feed back upon each other, especially the fact of participants being aware of sharing a common focus of attention and a common mood. Finally, Collins regards successfully-resolved rituals as producing certain outcomes, such as a shared feeling of membership and emotional energy, as well as producing feelings of morality and specific symbols identifying the group.

The next pages are thus devoted to shedding some light onto the configuration of *Muerte Electro* as a rather complex communicational phenomenon – one which largely meets these ritual-related criteria, making it a social activity that contrasts with other seemingly less formalized, repetitive-over-time practices in the social world of ElectroDance. What follows is then a characterization of *Muerte Electro* as a fully-fledged, urban contemporary ritual around which a particular sense of "being-together", expressed in members' feeling of membership, emotional engagement or shared cultural values, becomes crystallized. As I have said, the following ethnography-flavoured dissection of the ritual is intended to show how a supposedly straightforward activity where two young dancers publicly challenge each other to a subsequent dance contest is transformed, by being submitted to new media, into an enriched, more complex communicational event in which some communicational forms - i.e. mostly kinetic and verbal – and certain interaction situations - i.e. some that are place-bounded

and others that are reliant on interfaces - are complexly enmeshed within an highly-flexibilized temporal frame. From a broader perspective, as I shall attempt to argue in the following pages, I do think that something like the *Muerte Electro* event is highly representative of the way in which more and more realms of social and cultural life are increasingly being fashioned under what could be seen as a "media logic", a phenomenon which further fosters the mediatization of contemporary common culture.

In order to grasp the complex character of the ritual from a communication perspective, I will now seek to account for the way in which the very event is culturally configured 'in' communication. The sequence of stages making up the ritual - the challenge and response, the dance-off, and then the deliberation and voting process - will function as the starting point for the analysis. Within this basic framework I will proceed to account for a number of aspects involving communication. Firstly, the dance form and the communication technologies as, respectively, the medium - i.e. bodies in motion performing stylized movements - and meta-medium - i.e. the receptacle for various symbolic forms - for interaction, will be examined by looking at both the presence they have and the role they play in the whole ritual; the dance form/medium retains kinetically-based meanings, codified in the nonverbal form of body movement, and the communication technology/meta-medium acts as an interface interposed between individuals which is capable of containing different symbolic formats - e.g., verbal and nonverbal, textual, visual or auditory and so on. Secondly, media are inseparable from any interaction with them, and so the multiple, intertwined registers of interaction intervening in the whole communication will be brought into the picture too. This brings us back to the above-mentioned complexity of the ritual, as communication throughout the *Muerte Electro* event involves, as we will soon see, a sequential yet flexible time frame, a combination of differently-characterizable settings of interaction and a varying set of participants taking part in the event, at different times, in different fashions, and with different degrees of presence and participation. Finally, communication in *Muerte Electro* is

subjected to a noticeable degree of aesthetization through the formally-stylized treatment of messages, which contribute to the shaping of the event and each dancer's experience. This is of great of importance as it gives a sense of the very nature of how an everyday practice takes on a specific form when it is linked to the use of new media, an aspect closely related to the above-mentioned notion of mediatization. In sum, once again, it is the crucial participation of communication technologies in the very constitution and development of the ritual which makes the *Muerte Electro* event an interesting analytical object for the study of communication. This is so much so that it could be argued that, without new media, a collectively shared activity like this would be another sort of cultural practice; that is, as a ritualized activity, it would be "another different thing".

Stage 1: The challenge

As stated earlier, the "Muerte Electro" event provides a situation in which the dance brings two dancers face to face in order for them to display their respective skill levels, functioning implicitly as a sort of public evaluation of their mastery before the other group members. In every country where the dance style can be found, the "Muerte Electro" event takes on a different name, as the Valencian leader Juanito remarks in this excerpt:

> *"We began with the simplest, what here was called 'Muerte Electro' and in France they know as '100x1000%' [...] There had to be a basic basis for competition, taking the simplest part of Vertifight to make the culture grow ... I came up with this kind of challenge-and-response video"*

What in Spain was to be named *Muerte Electro* became known in places such as France or Mexico as, respectively, *100x1000%* or *E-motion* respectively, with this

predating those subsequent, more consciously-planned, and well-known modalities of dance-off corresponding to the label of Vertifight. Unlike the latter, *Muerte Electro* involves a more elaborate prior ritual for the upcoming dance-off. At this prior stage a dancer formally challenges another, with the latter accepting or rejecting the offer. Neither the challenge nor the response takes place in a face-to-face encounter but by means of a YouTube-based interaction involving interpersonal video-exchanges. A brief reference to this can be found on Juanito's *ElectrobattleSpain* YouTube channel:

> *"Electro Death Match: the announcement of an Electro combat between two electro-dancers. This combat will be filmed and posted on YouTube and on the dancers' respective pages, to await the opinions of spectators, no jury. Everybody will state their opinion and is free to declare any combatant the winner. BUT anyone who makes offensive and derogatory remarks will have their comments removed and their accounts blocked…*
>
> *P.S.: To request an Muerte Electro match, contact anyone of us through this page."*

Channelling the interaction through YouTube instead of doing so by means of face-to-face contact opens up, in spatial and temporal terms, a distinctive form of shaping the sequence of challenge and response as well as having an impact on participation and aesthetics. In earlier times, the procedure might have involved two youngsters meeting up in the street, surrounded by the other group members, witnesses to the whole situation unfolding at that particular moment. We might then imagine them undertaking a lively negotiation of the terms of the upcoming encounter too, but once the parties go away the event is over. Only the attendees would know about the specific circumstances of the deal; as a consequence, those absent would subsequently have to rely on the former in order to be informed about the events. By contrast, with the interaction unfolding on YouTube, the

situation undergoes important shifts as a result of the altered communicative conditions brought about by the interface. First of all, there is a decoupling of space and time in the challenge/response process, as the two separate videos capture the two sides of the exchange (see Figure 7a and 7b). This entails that whatever is said will be recorded, made subsequently accessible and can be commented on, not only by the video-makers, but by a broader range of disparate people who were not present when these messages were made.

Image 7a. Challenge and response via YouTube

Image 7b. Challenge and response via YouTube

The effect of this change has therefore an immediate consequence in terms of participation. By interacting through and on YouTube a larger amount of people can become engaged in the event, which is thereby no longer constrained to the specific conditions of the in-person encounter. In this sense, YouTube's interface emerges as an extremely powerful medium in combining different yet additional communicational features and patterns. At one level, we find the existence of interpersonal, multi-sensory communication provided by the exchange of videos. However, the broadcast capacity of the interface renders the interpersonal communication into group communication, turning the private into the public. Moreover, the persistence of the content across time allows asynchronous communication to take place, extending the conversation across time, which has a direct impact on individuals' ability to participate in the event in ways that were not possible with face-to-face communication. From this perspective, it would seem that communicating on YouTube via the exchange of video messages serves to heat up the battle more efficiently, as the rivals and the group members become entangled in a continuous dialogue that seems to have no end. However, instant and recurrent interaction in a disembodied register does not necessarily

bring benefits in terms of communication, particularly with regard to fostering a better understanding among interactants. Perhaps precisely the opposite can be observed in the case of *Muerte Electro no.7*, in which the more contact there was between challenger and challenged, and in turn between these two and other third parties, the greater the possibilities there were for misunderstanding and confusion over time.

As pointed out to me in the course of several conversations, *Muerte Electro n.7* is remembered by members of the local scene of Valencia as one of the most intense and competitive ever held. One reason behind its success was the prominence of the rivals, Stexx and Ache, two of the most popular dancers inside and also outside Valencia at the time. The competitive edge possessed by this particular dance-off was not only due to the dancers' achievement in it but also due to all the expectation that arose as a result of the prior communication on YouTube. Stexx, a friendly, easy-going, talented dancer was not particularly enthusiastic about taking part in a *Muerte Electro* at the outset in the terms Juanito and other dancers had proposed it, that is, as an extremely demanding contest in which his reputation within this social circle of young people could either rise up to the heights or sink down into depths in a flash. His teammates, who took part in the "challenge" video message, convinced him to fight against Ache, the contest being seen by them as a good opportunity for Stexx to significantly enhance his reputation within the local group. However, Stexx, for whom the dance was just a way to have fun in his free time, was already well-known enough at that moment in the world of Electro because of his personal videos, so he did not perceive the importance of the event in the same way as others did. Eventually he agreed to take part in the event, a decision he would later regret.

Days after the posting of both Stexx's challenge to Ache and Ache's response, a stream of interventions flooded the comment sections of both videos. Everybody was eager to give an opinion about the videos' content. Some of these comments - which largely came from youngsters in Valencia but there were also

many others from individuals located elsewhere - sought to encourage the rivals, gave personal opinions about their skills and respective styles, or just expressed impressions about the content. Stexx seemed to be quite enthusiastic at the beginning and willing to get involved in the conversations, replying to everybody's comments. But what began as a friendly chat would soon turn soon into an unpleasant experience for him. Far from a respectful, ordered exchange of ideas, the dialogue took an undesired path. A series of unjustified accusations, reproaches and unwarranted gossip took over the collective conversation, with Stexx unexpectedly taking part in it. At one point, his interventions give a sense of him feeling overwhelmed and at a loss, brought about by so much (mis-)communication. From my perspective as an external observer, it seems that this incessant and instantaneous text-based interaction on YouTube resulted perhaps in the opposite effect as to what might be thought to be the aim: instead of providing a meaningful and fruitful dialectical exchange, the medium led to a chaotic and increasingly untidy stream of disconnected interventions which could only bring misunderstanding and confusion to the participants.

> *"listen this is my first and last 'muerte elektro', I give up, comments are erased at will, some people say who's the best when there's no contest at all [...] I'll take part in this one and I'll leave 'elektrobattle', juan you let me down so much"*
> *emilio288 2 years ago*

As this last excerpt shows, Stexx agreed to take part in the dance-off, but afterwards he would leave the group and the dance permanently.

Stage 2: The dance-off

If a challenge is accepted, the dance-off is held as part of a forthcoming regular group *quedada*, a name based on the French term *aprem*. Every *quedada* constitutes an opportunity for local dancers to gather together in a bigger group rather than just with their own teams. One or more dance-offs are arranged as the highlight of the session, with dancers taking advantage of the occasion to exchange progress, ideas and news on the dance with others. A battle can itself justify a meeting if the combatants are important enough, as in the case of Stexx vs. Ache. Although the dance-off has not changed significantly in form over time from the times of early *Muerte Electro* to subsequent, more formal events connected with the *Vertifight* competition, the setting wherein the event takes place has done so. While the former was primarily held on the streets, the latter takes place at sports halls hired specially by local leaders for the occasion. The reason behind the shift is straightforward: sports halls provide dancers with an optimal controlled environment for dancing which meets the requirements in terms of sound capabilities and insulation, with the possibility of profit for the organizers from ticket sales in the case of big events.

Different types of agents participate in Muerte Electro events. First, there are the two combatants who fight against each other and their respective teams, who provide the combatants with support during the battle. Then, there is the local leader, acting as a sort of referee, whose function is to assign the turns and keep time. Interestingly, in contrast to what happens in *Vertifight*, the winner of the dance-off in a *Muerte Electro* event is not determined by an *ad-hoc* jury at the moment of the dance-off but later by voting on YouTube, as we will see later on. Next, there is the rest of the group made up of other dancers and guests attending the event. And finally, there is another, non-human, *guest*: the video camera held by a dancer tol record the whole event, the video being subsequently edited and eventually made publicly available on YouTube. The cameraman takes up a privileged position among the observers in order to properly capture the

action. During the *Muerte Electro* event, he places himself to one side but close to the dancers, following their movement; in a *Vertifight* event, by contrast, the camera is statically located perpendicular to the dancers, similar to a sports broadcast, statically capturing the action. At first sight, the dancers seem to ignore the presence of the camera: they pay no attention to it and simply act as though it were not there. But this does not mean that they are not aware of its presence at all. In fact, on one of my visits to a Valencian Vertifight event I had the opportunity to verify this for myself[82].

According to my own experience, there is always a considerable span of time from the moment dancers meet in the street for a *quedada* to that of the dance-off beginning. In the meantime, the dancers hang out together, often dancing in small groups in order to show off their personal progress; other times they just gather around the figure of the leader when there is something of common interest to be collectively shared. When the dance-off is about to begin they all take up different positions, normally of their own choice, but sometimes according to the leader's instructions. Considered in spatial terms, dancers and observers are placed within an ideal circle, each occupying a half of it. The team members position themselves behind their dancer, in order to offer necessary

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[82] Fieldwork note: During the course of one particular battle, a technical issue with the sound equipment made the music suddenly halt. Unlike street dance-offs in which music amplification mostly relies on the limited capabilities of a portable stereo, the music in the sports halls is amplified by the facilities' own powerful speakers, hanging on the wall. Music, played at a high volume, comes to create an immersive atmosphere which envelopes both dancers and attendees so intensely that the movement of the bodies matching the rhythm of the electro sound seems perfectly natural and harmonious even to the eyes of the non-dancer observer. The unexpected cessation of the music left everybody paralyzed for a minute. Neither the competitors nor the audience knew how to react to that shattering of expectations caused by the emptiness created by the absence of sound. Suddenly it felt like the session was over at that very moment. But in less than a minute the music came back on inexplicably, something which was the cause for wild celebration everybody started jumping back and forth in overly theatrical way, joyfully embracing each other - all of which was captured by the attentive eye of the camera. What had remained unnoticed up to that point - the presence of the camera - rapidly turned into something visible and alive: the focus of everybody's attention.

support. When for whatever reason a dancer does not have enough supporters, some others will spontaneously take on that role. When the dance-off is seen as lacking interest, the rest of the dancers move away from the circle, practising movements on their own or simply chatting to each other. As a process which unfolds over time, the dance-off is divided into rounds of a couple of minutes - not measured with any great accuracy - which normally gives dancers the chance to finish off their number without being interrupted. The battle consists of two rounds with an optional extra one for each contender when the battle is closely fought, so that the winner can be better determined. Curiously, the dancers love this sort of situation, which allows them to abruptly break away from the course of the event and enter into further verbal discussion - what they call “controversies”. The duration of such discussions can vary, depending largely upon the importance of the specific dance-off or the combatants involved, with the dancers talking in a lively fashion to one another or in groups until a satisfying joint resolution is reached.

Given that communication in dance draws fundamentally on body movement, it is unsurprising that the signs with which the watching dancers intervene throughout the course of the dance-off and convey certain meanings are equally non-verbal and gesture-based. Two basic gestures stand out because of their repetitiveness and significance in practice. On the one hand, dancers tend to express their satisfaction with a well-executed move by raising one hand and pointing the index finger downwards repetitively for some seconds. This gesture is a mark of accomplishment and the more this is performed by members of the audience during the battle the more valued a certain performance is. Those in the audience display another gesture whereby they identify those specific moves carried out by a dancer which they perceive as having been performed previously by the other contender. Both gestures do not influence the course of the process in any way, operating rather upon the impressions that observers form of the dancers' overall performance. Non-verbal, gesture-related communication also appears at another special moment once the dance-off is over: in order to

proclaim the winner of the dance-off, the referee, at the centre of the circle between the two dancers, raises the winner's arm to signal his victory. This is more usual when it comes to *Vertifight*-related dance-offs than with the *Muerte Electro* event, for which the process of deliberation concerning the result possesses different communicational dynamics. The difference is directly linked to the kind of interaction in each case: the dynamics of ongoing competition of the former requires that the result be decided there and then in order for the competition to proceed, within a context of embodied co-presence; in the latter, deliberation is usually postponed, as we shall see next, to a later date and is mediated by YouTube.

Figure 8. Dance-off

Stage 3: The voting

The next stage of the "Muerte Electro" event does not take place on the street but in a very different sort of place: on YouTube. One might expect the process of deliberation and subsequent voting of the winner to occur when the dancers are in face-to-face contact, after the dance-off is over. However, as can be seen on the *ElectroBattle* channel, it is on YouTube where dancers choose to enact this last part of the ritual. In my interviews, I was keen on finding out the reason behind this choice and the response of my interviewees pointed regularly to the same motivation: taking the voting to YouTube allowed those dancers absent from the original dance-off to take part in choosing the winner. The dancer Jeison put it this way:

> **Tony**: ... and when it comes to voting, … why do you do it via the Internet instead of doing it at the time of the dance-off?
> **Jeison**: We vote via the Internet so people can see it because, for example, nobody knew me in my first 'Muerte Electro' … When people vote they say 'he won, the other one won' … it's basically for people to be able to view it.

However, opening up participation to a wider audience has not been without problems. These relate to difficulties involved in managing a conversation with massive participation under the constrained communicative capabilities of YouTube. The YouTube interface enables a text-based conversation to take place concerning certain video content, but it lacks sophisticated mechanisms for regulating dialogue. Thus, the dynamics of voting is based in practice on dancers making an assessment of the battle and returning a personal verdict in accordance with the content shown in the video. In certain cases, one observes a participant

keeping a tally of the given votes and updating the results periodically. This was the case of the dance-off I referred to above:

> *"btw juan*
> *who's winning!!?!!?!?!?!*
> *magteck1 2 years ago"*
>
> *"For the time being the voting results are as follows:*
> *STEXX: 143 votes*
> *ACHE: 65 votes*
> *Provisional winner: STEXX*
> *Vlc5802 2 years ago"*

However, this does not form part of the general trend in many cases and the winner is not always proclaimed, nor even a tally of the votes made. In my view, this could be for two main reasons. The first of these is the design of YouTube's interface. It does have "I like" and "I dislike" buttons, aimed at offering users the possibility of expressing their opinions, but the aim is not particularly to survey opinions in a quantitative manner so that interventions can be accurately tracked and verified. The second reason is that this process is not really meant to be an objective one. In other words, by relying on YouTube for this part of the ritual, dancers do not seek to know with great accuracy who is really the winner of the battle but rather they just want a rough and ready idea of the balance of forces among dancers in the group at a certain time. In Bourdieusian terms, the *true* result of the dance-off is not as critical in practice as being able to obtain an idea of the modification to the contenders' levels of symbolic capital as a result of the battle and of the impact of this on the group members' relative positions within the field of the local dance scene. In fact, the dancers' ongoing conversation is mainly devoted to discussing who is better than who in the light of the video content. At its best, the substance of the dialogue deals with providing

appropriate arguments to support opinions. Commenting on the Stexx vs. Ache dance-off, two participants made the following remarks:

> *"I'm sick of people saying Ache is the winner just because he's Ache and that's all … no! … they should explain why … Ache is very good but Stexx is better because ...*
> *stexx: set of arm movements are more stylish + combination of popping and breaking + better fancier moves*
> *ache: better at moving across the circle and nimbler although his movements are harsher & not so good in my opinion … "*
> *crikits5 2 years ago*

> *"ache has such an awesome style, fluid steps and dynamism.*
> *however, stexx is sheer strength, he gets more anchored to the ground than ache, but because of that his arm work is more appealing*
> *i think we all win if this electrobattle can settle the argument so we can keep enjoying these two good dancers whom I'm very fond of"*
> *sito212 2 years ago*

It is worth noting the way in which YouTube, understood as a meeting point for dancers and followers, opens up a communicative arena for the negotiation of those aspects which are central to the everyday life of the group, enabling new conversations or extending those previously started in another medium. For an external observer, it is easy to get to know a great deal about the dance style, its characteristics and most highly-regarded aspects of the dance just by reading people's opinions stored on this medium. The interface is an excellent means for dancers to get engaged in and learn about dance, as the visual content of the videos is perfectly supplemented by the text-based discussion that comes with it in the comment section. Nevertheless, while the positive side of YouTube-based interaction lies in its manifest capability to open up participation regardless of the constraints of space and time, with the technology even enabling forms of voting to take place, there is also a negative side in terms of the emergence of situations

involving forms of what could be called technologically-mediated "symbolic violence". In a different *Muerte Electro* even, the dancer Jeison competes against Rober, the former accusing local leader Juanito of manipulating the content of the dance-off at the editing stage. According to Jeison, JuanitoxXx sought to deliberately influence the outcome of the combat by altering the integrity with which the dance was represented in its audiovisual format.

> **Jeison**: He wanted Rober to win … If you pay proper attention, when I'm dancing nothing can be heard as opposed to when the other guy does so …
> **Tony**: ... But ... what was going on then?, Juan wanted to direct people's comments so as to favour Rober ...?
> **Jeison**: Yeah, look, I told him there's no sound in the video and thought 'it's totally fixed' … After a time, people watching the video felt the same thing so they voted for me massively. Then, Juanito warned me that if didn't apologize he'd remove the video and ban me.
> **Tony**: So … did he do it?
> **Jeison**: Yeah, definitely, … I dared him to do it and eventually he did.
> **Tony**: So … you didn't like your video being removed, did you?
> **Jeison**: No, no, I don't give a shit ... people know me well enough ... I did it just for Rober as he was less known than me.

By using the capability afforded by the YouTube interface to exercise censorship, Juanito could filter out any dissenting opinions, in reaction to Jeison's show of discontent. The control of the interface gave him the control over representation, thereby skewing the facts to a certain extent for his own interests. The mediation of the event through YouTube then gave him the power to act upon the discourse around the event, thereby going some way beyond the supposedly impartial leader's task of event coordination; this is something that could not have occurred (and in fact did not) under the conditions of in-person interactions.

Muerte Electro as mediatization of common culture

The *Muerte Electro* youth ritual constitutes an eloquent case of the phenomenon of mediatization occurring in the most varied social and cultural domains of today's contemporary societies. As stated in Chapter One, and following Hjarvard (2008:111), by "mediatization" I mean the transformative, ever-pervasive process whereby society, to a variable yet increasing degree, is made subject to, or becomes dependent upon, the media and its logic. Media logic, which derives from the capability of communication technologies to facilitate the circulation of information via technology-based interpersonal interaction, concerns the way in which social and cultural institutions are shaped under the pressure from the media and technology. In other words, some cultural practices or social institutions reveal themselves to be cases of mediatization insofar as the sort of activity they involve, and the sort of interactions with which individuals relate to each other, rely to a variable degree on the presence and use of media technologies.

Needless to say, the notion of mediatization is not new, nor one exclusively linked to the network communication technologies which have emerged in recent years: in fact, this phenomenon can be traced back to ancient civilizations, such as Ancient Egypt, with its use of papyrus technology[83]. It is, however, a trend which has grown in intensity since the emergence of mass-media technologies and institutions over the twentieth century. Mediatization occurs at different scales and manifests itself in different terms across a range of heterogeneous areas of social and cultural human activity. For example, the level of mediatization in the world of politics has visibly grown over recent decades: the discussion of public issues, the dissemination of political messages and, more

[83] For further details, see Harold Innis, "Media in Ancient Empires", pp.12, in *Communication in History*, 2011

generally, the social relationships between public bodies and citizens have adapted to the cultural codes, languages, procedures and institutional imperatives of forms of mass media such as radio and, more crucially, television, which has led authors like Sartori (1997) to speak of politics in terms of "video-politics". The logic and dynamics of politics has without doubt taken on a “media logic”. Yet the phenomenon of mediatization is reflected not only at the macro-scale of society but also in more modest media-related social practices and activities carried out by individuals in the context of day-to-day life. A good example of this is the way in which weddings are culturally fashioned today in western societies and the role media plays in this. A great part of the ritual of weddings is submitted to media, with the groom and the bride firstly devoting some time for photos to be taken in a beautiful setting before moving on later to the reception which will be filmed as a keepsake and set to a romantic movie-style soundtrack. For media theorists such as Hjarvard, the conceptualization of the wedding is a paradigm of indirect (weak) mediatization. Mediatization is therefore present in weddings because the cultural ritual is to a certain extent fashioned according to a media logic: the presence and use of media serve to shape the way in which behaviour and interactions between participants take place in this traditional socio-cultural ritual.

Much in the same way as with weddings, we have seen throughout this chapter the extent to which dancers also draw on interactive network communication technologies as part of the *Muerte Electro* event. This account has revealed how two parts of the whole ritual take place via a disembodied medium of interaction, with only the dance-off itself requiring participants to meet face-to-face. This certainly speaks of the extent to which the *Muerte Electro* event fits very well with the notion of mediatization. Unlike the indirect mediatization of weddings, the *Muerte Electro* event presents itself rather as a case of a direct form of mediatization. Forms of direct mediatization appear in those cases in which a formerly non-mediated activity adopts a mediated form (Hjarvard, ibid.:114). As remarked in the previous chapter, dance performed "at street level" is a cultural activity which has traditionally been common to a range of human

cultures throughout the history of mankind, including modern urban youth subcultures such as Hip-Hop. Now, with media technologies becoming embedded in a wide variety of interpersonal communicative situations, social rituals, practices and activities, such as that of *Muerte Electro,* these are taking on a new dimension and can therefore be seen in another light.

The way that mediatization operates in the *Muerte Electro* event can be best accounted for by taking into consideration the two main factors driving its underlying specific media logic. The first of these concerns the way in which the ritual is implicitly presented as a form of spectacle. The sense of spectacularity of the ritual is linked to the role that video plays at practical, instrumental and symbolic levels in the dancers' overall communication. Unlike other forms of embodied and technology-based communication, video enables content to be formally and stylistically processed and the sequence of events to be presented in ways that make the experience of communicating more aesthetically appealing to the dancers. This notion of spectacularity has a notable influence on the first challenge-and-response stage in which dancers first confront each other verbally via YouTube. The dancers' fundamental aim is interpersonal communication with each other, but this occurs under the assumption that this performance will also be viewed by others rather than just the specific addressee. Thus, the rest of the group and other viewers external to the group become indirect addressees too, being able to intervene in the course of events by interacting with the competitors and other group members by commenting on the video. Two styles of communication merge here, giving rise to a paradoxically peculiar hybridized form of communication. On the one hand the sense of directness, privacy and intimacy of interpersonal communication is at the core of the challenge-and-response interaction process between the rivals. On the other hand, the open, public character of group communication leads the dancers to express their personal opinions on the most varied issues concerning group life, in accordance with the group's social norms. These two forms of social relationship and communication converge into a unique pattern in which the public and the private blend together,

bringing together different, often counterposed, expectations that might be expected to belong to different types of social relationship. Within this hybridized communicative situation in which a number of psychological and behavioural expectations anchored in different modes of social relations appear together, the actors have to negotiate and make sense of their exchange. The way in which this takes place - i.e. how the dancers relate to each other via YouTube - could be said to possess certain representational conventions which are also present in television genres such as those of certain confrontational sports. The challenge-and-response process resembles to a large extent the spectacularity seen in the aesthetic modes and codes used in mass-media communication, here being brought down to the level of everyday, group and interpersonal communication by means of new media. This is perhaps something that dancers would not acknowledge when asked about it; however, I do think that young people's constant exposure to mass-media is such that the latter undeniably constitute a valuable source of codes and meanings concerning modes of consumption, cultural lifestyles, behavioural patterns and a broad understanding of the world which we live in. Given this, today's youth consequently find it natural to reproduce these cultural patterns when communicating with one another, as part of their embodied, internalized schemes of appreciation, evaluation and perception of the world, which are continuously being modified through learning.

Another characteristic of the mediatization of *Muerte Electro* which goes hand in hand with the communicative role of the video, and which also contributes to the spectacularity of the event, is the dynamics of the interaction between the dancers across space and time. As has been described in detail above, the *Muerte Electro* event unfolds by means of a series of differentiated stages, involving various settings and distinct time frames. The existence of these stages might suggest a certain degree of linearity in the way in which the event takes place, with most dancers relating to one another in an orderly manner from the start to the finish of each stage. Yet this assumption simplifies the way in which the ritual unfolds in practice. Obviously, the three differentiated stages underpin the ritual

and form part of its logic. However, the flexible timeframe underlying the dynamics of participation in the whole event is what endows the ritual with a singular complexity, even more than the constant alternation between places, digital interfaces and forms of interaction which dancers are required to deal with as part of engagement with the ritual. This complexity is partly a consequence of the use of the medium of YouTube, which is capable of "freezing" social situations by means of video, making them fully available over time. By enabling asynchronous communication, interaction processes around each stage continue once stage-related situations are supposedly over. In other words, interaction continues throughout the challenge-response, dance-off and voting stages and beyond, fuelling ongoing conversation for an indeterminate, variable span of time.

The pattern of dancer participation at each moment tends to follow a particular pattern in practice. The days following the posting of a stage-specific video the volume of comments and activity peaks as largely local dancers, but also some non-local ones, flock to YouTube. As the video loses its novelty, participation decreases over time. It is difficult to measure this time period with great accuracy as it basically depends on the importance, interest and content of the specific video and the time at which it was made. Yet it is not unusual to find activity on these pages weeks, often months and sometimes years after the videos were posted. A quick look at the Ache vs Stexx example can give us a grasp of what this might mean in quantitative terms. The figure below is a cumulative frequency diagram, generated from a built-in Youtube feature, showing the viewing statistics for the video "Muerte Electro nº 7 Ache vs SteXx parte 1". The number of viewings skyrocket in the first weeks after the video was uploaded in January 2010 and keeps increasing steadily over 2010, becoming stabilized from 2011 onwards. It is worth highlighting the stunning number of accumulated viewings of the video by 2014, amounting to more than 80,000, indirectly speaking of the potential of a local event like this to become a global one.

Figure 5: Audience statistics on *"Muerte Electro nº 7 Ache vs SteXx parte 1"* video

In this case, other dancers, scene followers or just randomly incorporated YouTubers are brought into the conversation. In such cases, many of these are usually external-to-the-group dancers who rarely have any kind of tie with the participants other than their shared interest in the dance style, but they foster further interaction based on the video content over time. It is also possible to find patterns of interaction which challenge the linear logic of the event. It is easy to find commenters taking part in conversations who do not strictly respect the order of events marked by the ritual sequence. Dancers find themselves moving backward and forward in time, thereby entering and leaving overlapping threads of ongoing dialogue and communication corresponding to a variety of timeframes within the main sequence of events. The following picture attempts to visually summarize the complexity associated with participation in the *Muerte Electro* event in terms of individuals' participation as well as their location in space and time.

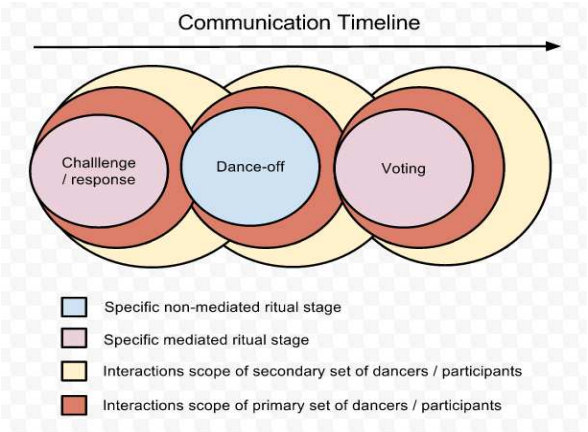

Figure 10: Scope of interactions by dancers/ participants in “Muerte Electro”

Seen from an ontological perspective, the *Muerte Electro* event could be conceptualized as an open-ended, unfinished phenomenon, with a recognizable beginning but with a not so obvious end. As suggested, some distinguishable parts of the ritual, such as the dance-off or the challenge-and-response involve specific, grounded situations with well-defined, acknowledged participants, but, beyond that basic structure, it is no easy task to determine the who, when and how of participation. The interweaving of different communicative situations, characterized by distinct modes of interaction and variable spatial and, especially, temporal conditions, adds a degree of complexity which some other similarly-patterned rituals carried out by means of face-to-face communication styles lack. Moreover, each communicative choice is linked to each particular situation within the ritual and is not exchangeable without altering the sense of the whole, and thereby the very essence of the ritual. Therefore, every communicative choice exerts a significant influence on the execution of the ritual, shaping the social relations among the dancers within the scene, in terms of reputation, competence

and intra-group power. In a hypothetical comparison between the ritual being based on new media as opposed to the ritual being kept separate from such media, we would probably have the same dance but it would be shaped and experienced by dancers in different terms. This is precisely the point at which digital networked communication technology makes a difference at a small scale in a media society like today's, by progressively refashioning previously non-mediated social and cultural practices into mediatized ones.

PART IV

ElectroDance and identity

:: 9 :: Understanding ElectroDance from style

In this last part of the thesis, the focus is on the discussion of identity in ElectroDance. To some extent, this topic has been addressed earlier, at least implicitly. In fact, when looking at the transition from broadcast to a network communication form, a broad picture of ElectroDance has been painted based on an interpretation of its defining elements as a distinctive social youth formation; the practices of the young dancers, and the logic and the various factors influencing such practices were analyzed, as was the way young dancers organize themselves collectively, both locally and translocally. All of this has a great deal to do with ElectroDance's identity, that is, with "what is and what is not ElectroDance", and how we can analytically understand and approach it. However, what does it actually mean to speak in terms of identity within the context of social youth phenomena? Some preliminary considerations regarding the tradition of Youth Cultural Studies are necessary in this regard before moving on. Before we analyse how the limits and content of what is and is not Electrodance, and more importantly, how it is defined, undertaken and transformed through communication, it is important to examine how the identity of particular youth styles have been characterised within the context of social youth phenomena.

The very idea of there being a distinct youth culture is a relatively new phenomenon, which did not appear in sociological approaches until the post-war years. After Parsons's initial functionalist focus on middle class and its distinctive

college youth culture (1954), the study of youth styles began with the use of the notion of subculture, borrowed from the study of youth delinquency, with regard to the spectacular new British youth styles of the post-war period: e.g. the Teddy Boys, Mods, Skinheads, Punks and so on. This new approach to what were to become known as "spectacular youth subcultures" emerged from Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. One of its first students, Dick Hebdige, published the influential Subculture. The Meaning of Style (1974), where he analyzed the highly stylized expression of certain youth manifestations emerging out of the historical context of post-WWII Britain, seeing them as a result of the social background of the subculture members, largely linked to their experience of class. It is through subcultural engagement that youth unconsciously finds an outlet to their social position as a subaltern class, with stylistic elements symbolically expressing what was seen by Hebdige as a political statement and a show of resistance. Importantly, Hebdige noted that the purpose of style in subculture was to express difference, and the communication of distinctive group identity would then be the point behind the style of the spectacular subcultures of that time (1974: 102).

Hebdige's view gave rise to a debate around the significance of subculture that is still relevant today. The rather essentialist image of youth subcultures as social formations, membership of which was indelibly linked to social position or the experience of class, gender relations or ethnic origin and whose specific meanings could be straightforwardly "read-off" by a cultural analyst, has lately been brought into question by, for example, other so-called "post-subculturalist" views on the societal changes of the turn of the 21st century. Factors such as an increased structural differentiation linked to education and labour, the growing importance of leisure time as a space for the proliferation of diverse lifestyles and social distinctions rooted in consumer and thematic practice - e.g. sports, tourism and so on - and the pressure of new media as novel channels for the dissemination of all of the above (Buchmann, 2002: 1660-1664) have made youth cultural practices and their structural connections more and more difficult

to grasp today from a sociological standpoint. Questioning the validity of past views on subculture for the study of the social manifestations of today's youth, authors such as Muggleton (2003) have claimed that there is a need to move away from essentialist to more anti-essentialist views on subculture and style, with "monolithic" youth formations giving way to other more fluid and hybrid ones - a move motivated by the inability of traditional approaches "to reflect the political, cultural and economic realities of the 21st century" (ibid.: 5). We find a good example of this thesis in Hodkinson's view of Goths as a youth subculture which retains a degree of stability and distinctiveness over time and can be argued to be an example of a fully-fledged music-related youth subculture. However, it can otherwise be seen as being empty of any politically subversive meaning and or social implication in terms of class, age, race or sex, thereby becoming a province of meaning and experience reserved for the subculture's "practitioners", and thereby not keeping any group-related or more general social connection. Moving away from this rather dichotomic stance, other sociologists such as Martinez, drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Willis, have explored other novel analytical paths regarding young people's social practices in relation to cultural forms such as music, regarding them as a subproduct of the more general social construction of personal taste: a process by which young people produce and reproduce, both collectively and individually, with the help of cultural commodities, specific social geographies, or "a particular institutionalised way of experiencing both social distances and inequalities" (2007: 4).

Therefore, the following pages are devoted to the analysis of, as Hebdige would say, "the meaning of style" in ElectroDance. My use of the notion "style", however, does not imply an essentialist or simplistic approach to it. As in chapter 4, where I used the concept of "scene" instead of that of "subculture" to capture the complexity involved in the set of relationships the young dancers had with each other, commercial agents, youth groups and their social settings, here I will use the notion of "style" instead of "subculture" to capture, in my communication-based approach, the more open-ended and contested nature not

only of youth cultures, but also Electrodance in particular. My use of the term "style", instead of "subculture", can also be seen as a way of signalling the lack of subversive purpose, or deviant or "anti-mainstream" attitudes, while otherwise recognizing the vocation of the group for distinctiveness and symbolic boundary-marking through diverse elements shaping style, as argued by Hebdige. The combination, in my approach, of both the importance of fluidity, change and the disputed character of a particular style, on the one side, and the importance of defining the symbolic features and typified meanings of the style, while also distinguishing a distinctive and recognisable experience, on the other, parallels Hodkinson's approach to what he names varying degrees of "subcultural substance" (2002). My use of the term "style", however, will also follow Martinez in recognizing that current music and dance-related youth cultures such as ElectroDance do not necessarily emerge as a realm of cultural practice with no links to broad social structures: these links may be weak, diffuse or concealed, under the pressures of the increasing individualization, hyper-consumerism and high personal mobility which characterize late-modern societies. For this reason, as we shall see later, my discussion of identity does not avoid inquiring into, for example, the implications of gender and sexuality or young dancers' social position "outside" the ElectroDance social domain. In sum, my use of the term "style", far from reifying ElectroDance as a coherent, static and ahistorical reality, will rather form part of my attempt, throughout this thesis, to give an account of ElectroDance as a multi-faceted, dynamic, open-ended process that takes place "in" communication. That the process occurs "in communication" invokes the image of young dancers getting involved, sometimes literally - i.e. at particular moments, in certain places - and also, at a more abstract, symbolic level, interacting with business and mass-media corporate intermediaries and other youth social groups as part of a shared process of definition, through certain signifying practices, of the style and its meanings. Moreover, that the process is both open-ended and multi-faceted means that group style, far from becoming closed and unalterable, evolves over time and can be looked at from an

interpretative framework that takes into consideration the current pressures and forces of commoditization, people's search for authenticity and recognition, and the embedding of socialization into a media-saturated environment.

Keeping these premises in mind, the next pages are devoted to discussing the key features defining the identity of the ElectroDance style. For the sake of clarity, I identify a number of analytical foci that will enable these fundamental factors behind style to be addressed in separate sections. I will begin by discussing what we all perceive about style: that it is a certain way to dress, behave and sound, or, in other words, that a series of symbolic elements make up a style and they traditionally confer group practitioners with a certain distinctive, identifying image. Secondly, with regard to the group image, and drawing on both Willis's notion of “homology” and Martinez’s “music and social geographies”, I aim to locate the significance of the style in relation to broader social meanings, as well as in terms of sociability with other youth groups in the public arena. Particularly, I will refer to how, in early ElectroDance, the dance form and its associated bodily expression - i.e. Tecktonik - showed a sensibility that would be homologically connected, once the dance left the realm of clubs, to notions of femininity. Of special interest here will be, for example, to observe how the naturalized, gender-related homological meanings attached to the dance form which function in the social sphere of ElectroDance group are able to influence social relations outside the group, modulating the sense of distance or proximity felt and sensed by “outsiders” with regard to “insiders”, in keeping with the particular, relative positions occupied in the broader context of music-related youth space and more general social hierarchies. Afterwards, I will discuss the role of commoditization and the more current phenomenon of branding in the dialectical configuration of a style’s identity at early and later stages. In this case I will show how discourses of authenticity and value built around commoditization serve to underpin the style’s character, but they do so in such an ambiguous, elusive way that this problematizes its understanding by means of dichotomic, prior notions of, for example, mainstream versus alternative. I suggest here how a style like

ElectroDance, which tries to forge a sense of authenticity by means of a denial of a past characterized by marketization and profit-seeking attitudes, lacks, however, any resistance-related attitude or political meaning that questions in any way the embedding of the style's practices into more general capitalist economic relations. Within the same framework of for-profit motivations, one can place the prevailing role of mass-media, as certain views of ElectroDance are projected into the public realm amidst particular messages with signifying potential. In this regard I will inquire into whether the ever-changing sphere of communication induced by the arrival of new media technologies favours an effective shift in the relationship between corporate media intermediaries and young people in the case of ElectroDance. The analysis of the young dancers' responses to and negotiations with mass-media representations revisits old debates assessing the power of media that must be currently assessed against the backdrop of a shifted technological environment. Now, chances for communication seem a priori to be more equally distributed among media users than ever before, but, as we shall see in this specific case, the result does not seem at heart to differ much from what we have witnessed in the past.

The articulation of all these analytical elements "in" communication configure the style's identity as being embedded in what Willis would call the "integral circuit" of culture: in our case, the circuit of culture formed around the cultural form of dance. However, nothing has been said so far about the specific role of new media when it comes to identity, so this will be object of attention in the next chapter. Before then, I will also look at the role played by new media in the identity-building practices of electrodancers. As we shall see, electrodancers rehearse surrounded by new media, both individually and as a group, and they provide opportunities for novel forms of self-presentation, semi-private self-reflection and public expression which were not available in the period dominated by mass-media broadcast technologies. The electrodancers make full use of the bandwidth and high-interactivity potentials of these new interfaces for content shaping, social networking and message dissemination.

Style as cultural image

In the previous pages, I have commented on the notion of "style" in relation to group identity as one being differentiated from, for example, that of "subculture". To make the use of this notion clearer hereafter, I shall draw on the view of the youth culture anthropologist Feixa, who intrinsically links it to the more general term of "youth culture". Whereas for Feixa "style" refers to "the symbolic manifestations of youth cultures, expressed through an organic appropriation of preferred symbolic elements regarded by young people as representative of their identity as a group" (2004: 22), "youth culture" has the more general sense of the way in which "social experiences of youth are manifested through the construction of cultural identities localized in their spare time or the interstitial space of institutional life[84]". Furthermore, for Feixa, any youth culture can be approached by looking at the "cultural image" attached to it, as well as its social conditions, these latter being seen as "the rights and obligations defining youth identities on the basis of a specific social structure" which surround its construction on the basis of, as noted earlier, a wider array of social factors, including ethnicity, sex, gender, generation or class. This basic analytical differentiation sets out the basis for the following analysis and so I will begin by looking at the "cultural image" of ElectroDance. Given the evolution of the style during its otherwise short existence, I will do so by respecting the division delineated in chapters five and six. There, on the basis of the underlying model of communication in question, I differentiated between the earliest times of the ElectroDance scene, mostly concerning its early development in France which was characterized by an intensive commodification of the style within the parameters of what was called "broadcast" communication, and a later stage,

[84] ibid., 20. Translated into English from Spanish

dominated by the spread of the style worldwide under a model of "network" communication, in which the commodification component is no longer present.

In early ElectroDance, when the style was more popularly known as "Tecktonik" and covering a long period approximately between 2002 and 2009, the style's "cultural image" can be said to have acquired a set of more visual, well-rounded stylistic features. Nevertheless, the style's image would not take on a unified expression at that time, with dancers varying their looks in relation to peculiar sounds. Thus, some dancers would go for the spectacular, using an aggressive look to accompany the hardest sounds of the Electro genre - skinny jeans and fluorescent T-shirts, with maybe a flashy accessory like day-glo gloves - and asymmetric haircuts - short at the front and sides, long at the back with a gelled-up Mohican on top (see image 9).

Image 9: ElectroDance[85] "hard look"

This was to be the preferred look for dancers when attending clubs for "Tecktonik Killer" sessions, but it was also retained when elsewhere, and so it was not unusual to find young people with this look during the daytime in the Parisian

[85] Retrieved from Tecktonik's entry on Wikipedia <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tecktonik>

streets. As with any other youth style, this first variant of ElectroDance was a syncretic blend fed by a myriad of references borrowed from other previous styles and youth cultural manifestations, with the resulting image being a retro-fusion of 90s cyberpunk, Japanese-inspired "manga" and various other club-related styles; with neon colours, leg warmers, futuristic hairstyles and lots of tight-fitting t-shirts featuring the eagle-inspired logo of "Tecktonik". As will be discussed later, the role of the "Tecktonik" brand designers would be crucial in terms of shaping a distinctive image out of such a heterogeneous list of ingredients. Whereas French teams like "Eklesiast" would be a good exponent of this look, other teams like "SMDB" would opt for a milder, less visually sophisticated image, tending to dress in a more casual, less sharply stylised way. Here, the spectacular haircuts, day-glo gloves and tight-fitting T-shirts gave way to a look not far from that of more usual everyday contexts (see image 10).

Image 10: "mild-look" electro-dancers

Just as the "hard" look of ElectroDance became attached to its own particular sounds, the "mild" one became associated with some lower-paced, pop-related inflections found in certain songs which were labelled by many as "Milky Way".

USA-located dancer Gian stated that "Electro ain't Electro without that heavy, infectious 'dirty bass' and those sound effect details", and this would be largely held by other electro-dancers as the most defining and recurrent sound trait. In the long term, away from the influence of the brand, this second variant of the style was to impose itself among ElectroDance's followers. This moves us forward to the second period roughly ranging from 2009 to the present, in which the youth movement moves out of the clubs and away from the spotlight of the mass-media, spreading worldwide with the help of fast media-based information exchanges. During this period, ElectroDance acquired the profile of a street-based, arty style dance much like Breaking in Hip-Hop, a youth culture which ElectroDance has been greatly influenced by in terms of appropriation of shared public spaces (streets and sports halls), group behavioural patterns, the style's fashion and underlying cultural group values. Electro-dancers have therefore attempted to move away from the commodified version of the style by rejecting any kind of tie to the brand, most notable in the electro-dancers' generalized lack of enthusiasm for the brand-related, harder look:

> **STE**: "I didn't much take to Tecktonik fashion, I rather prefer Electro's, … Tecktonik's was kind of weird looking, … weird clothes, weird hairstyle, … I don't know, … everything so showy [...] Electro is much better because it is closer to Hip Hop".

The Mexican scene leader 'Leonardo' had the following to say about it:

> *"At the beginning the way you looked was quite important … but that was just at the beginning … until dancers became more keen on improving their dance skills than on how they looked … they only wanted to be comfortable because the thing that became most important to them was to be able to move in the right way".*

Rather than being concerned by their external appearance, electro-dancers came to invest their efforts in developing the knowledge necessary to make the dance form evolve stylistically, an aspect on which the style ultimately bases its substance on. In this sense, as the above electro-dancers and the French Vertifight founder Steady have claimed, it is at this time when ElectroDance can be said to be constituted "as a fully-fledged culture", based on "the human and sporting values of peace, commitment and respect", ones which 'Dance Generation' or 'Tecktonik' "definitely lacked". Viewed in terms of what Hodkinson (2001:28-33) defines as "subcultural substance" - i.e. a range of criteria allowing us to characterize the variable degree of singularity of youth cultural phenomena - electro-dancers view themselves as being distinct from other youth styles, showing a relative yet sustained degree of commitment and autonomy from wider social and economic relations. This view is based on a subjective sense of like-mindedness as well as a shared passion for dancing, and, collectively, on particular forms of local and translocal group organization, as set forth in previous chapters. All of this contributed to providing a sense of group identity to the group members.

The social meaning(s) of the style

From a sociological perspective, one of the most defining aspects of the identity of the style, which was present from the outset, is the promoters and pioneers' will to project an image of the style as being all-inclusive and open-ended, receptive to all kinds of audiences regardless of their social background. This was claimed by the founders of the Tecktonik brand themselves, Alexandre Baroudzin and Cyril Blanc, on Tecktonik's official website, where they regarded the early massive popularity of the style as a result of it having "no political mission, ethnic or

sexual affiliation[86]". Attempts to characterise the style as non-controversial were assisted by the fact that it was not associated with any kind of drug use, an aspect which could be seen not only in later times when the style took on a sport-like orientation but, strikingly, also earlier, when it emerged from the ambience of club culture. All this seemed to shape the style in the more neutral terms. Is this evidence supporting the view that the ElectroDance style was empty of any broader social significance? To accept such a suggestion is tantamount to taking the view that electro-dancers act in a sort of social vacuum and engage in the style unproblematically, with no kind of social tie or connection. Yet, evidence from past research on club cultures suggest we should be cautious, at least at first, when drawing rapid, unexamined conclusions. Among others, Thornton (1995) has demonstrated the complexities associated with the social and cultural worlds of clubs, and the kind of discourses and authenticities behind cultural hierarchies which rework in different ways the social background of its members along the lines of age, sexuality, gender or class.

In our case, I have chosen to approach this question using Willis's notion of 'homology'. Inquiring into relationships between music and the social, Willis used the notion of homology to find relationships between the choice of certain cultural items by specific social groups and the ways of using such cultural items, through particular meaning-making practices, in order to forge a sense of group identity (2000: 24). According to Willis, there exists an homological relationship when a group of people recognize, in the structure of a concrete material object, the potential for allocating specific meanings which are intimately related to their particular sensibility, and thereby simultaneously expressing and producing a sense of identity. Far from being random or arbitrary, Willis was interested, for example, in showing the way in which a variety of objects were, on the basis of their material features, dialectically and meaningfully appropriated by members

[86] Tecktonik official website (2011). Retrieved from http://www.tck01.fr/

of biker and hippie cultures through meaning-making practices in very limited, context-bounded ways. Getting back to the present object of study, it would be the kinetic dimension of communication of dance, associated with the language of bodily movements rather than the aesthetic visual elements of its look, which would be the origin of the most crucial homology in ElectroDance: the dance form as homologically connected to socially-connoted gender and sexuality-related meanings. The homology rests on the perceptions outsiders have, which are based on the dancers' look to some extent but also, and more especially, on the arm-based repertoire of rapid, spectacularly-executed, seemingly messy, artistic bodily movements performed by electro-dancers. Unlike the electro-dancers themselves, for whom the dance form and the colorful, lively tones of their clothing did not invoke any special socially-connoted meaning, outsiders seemed to perceive that kind of kinetic mode of expression, in combination with the colourful, lively tones of their clothes, as "affected" or "effeminate". This is significant in the light of the origins of ElectroDance. Various secondary sources give evidence of the nascent dance being influenced by distinct subcultures falling within umbrella of what we have referred to as club cultures, among them, crucially, the gay club subculture. Not only do certain web pages of the scene[87] echo this particular affiliation to the gay sector but mass-media reports[88] featured "Tecktonik" founder's Cyril Blanc as being closely linked to the gay subculture, and so the style and particularly the dance form supposedly incorporated certain basic movements and, more generally, a kind of, shall we say, gay sensuousness in the way the dance was interpreted and performed. The most remarkable fact about the homology linking the dance form to these supposedly connoted meanings was to occur outside the walls of clubs, once the style reached audiences other than

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[87] Further details can be found in the post in the webpage of "Culture Electro" called "Inicios del ElectroDance". Retrieved on 03/08/2012 from: http://culturaelectro.wordpress.com/historia-electro-dance-2/

[88] Laurenson, J. (March, 2009). "Tecktonik tremors jolt France". BBC News Europe. Retrieved on 10/04/2010 from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7923658.stm>

those who regularly attended dance sessions in Parisian clubs - in other words, when the dance, in being exposed to an unfamiliar audience, became "denaturalized". This enables the negative implications that this association brought to electro-dancers to be put into perspective, as they reported being the victims of forms of mockery and scorn by others.

> *"Well, yeah ... they laughed at me on the street at the beginning ... I was criticized just for dancing Electro ... they said I was a fag and that sort of thing [...] This is pretty common for those who don't know the dance, they see it ... you know ... as a girlish thing".*

That circumstance was not felt by newcomers to be overly problematic - even though they might somewhat acknowledge a certain degree of affectation in the original dance form - as it seemed to be in the eyes of outsiders. The above comment shows how, from an insider's position, the verbal attacks in the form of mockery and insults - which can be seen as an obvious form of "verbal violence" - were seen as understandable to a certain extent[89]. In some cases such forms of social rejection and disapproval came from anonymous people, something which disembodied communication facilitated. As an example, the following "YouTuber" openly expresses contempt of this kind in the context of a conversation concerning a television report of ElectroDance on the "La Sexta" TV channel.

> *(9 months ago) Display Hide fredispain*
> *<http://www.youtube.com/user/fredispain>*
> *+1*
> *Reply | Spam*

[89] With this observation I do not mean that neither shared electro-dancers this perception of style as being "effeminate" nor were they are fond with this kind of association. In fact, up to 75% among those surveyed claimed not to consider the style as such at all.

> *tecktonik is the most gay dance i've ever seen in my life, you learn some movements and repeat them over and over regardless of the music .. that's not dancing but just being a fag*

In other cases, those making such comments[90] were not anonymous. Disapproval came from individuals with otherwise well-defined, distinct tastes regarding other youth styles and cultural collectives. Interpersonal, face-to-face interaction taking place on the street was commonly the context in which these unpleasant encounters took place, as the next example related by a dancer from Girona shows:

> **XDie**: Well, I don't know, I think guys don't have a good opinion of the dance 'cause they think it's a girls' thing
> **Toni**: Really? ..., do you mean then some people see it as effeminate?
> **XDie**: Yes, I've even been called gay for dancing Electro!
> **Toni**: People close to you?
> **XDie**: Kind of ... from the city I live in
> **Toni**: Are they people with other tastes or preferences? … I mean …, people who like other kind of music styles and so on?
> **XDie**: Yeah, mostly rappers and 'quillos' [Catalan expression similar to "chavs"]

[90] In the light of the next examples, we might be tempted to perceive a link between the previously suggested origin of Tecktonik in the gay scene in Parisian clubs and the social connotations of sexuality and gender sensuously perceived by "outsiders" far from the original context of production. However, we should be wary of attributing any kind of "essence" to the cultural form since, as Willis suggests, homological relations and meanings are refashioned through practice, in different locations, over time, on the basis of the practical "objective possibilities" of the cultural form for different people, thereby forming a sort of "integral circuit" over time.

Communicative situations linked to embodied contact in which forms of "verbal violence" might occur would also take place in certain semi-public spaces like clubs. As pointed out earlier, club cultures show enough internal diversity to create their own social hierarchies within potentially fragmented audiences. Different clubs are oriented to different sorts of people, with the musical taste being one of the main factors in social segregation. Verbal attacks on electro-dancers, arising from the above-mentioned characteristics of the dance form being perceived by different youth collectives as "affected" or "effeminate", even occurred in some clubs and discotheques in Valencia with very specific audiences and identities involved.

> **Ache**: I wouldn't dance Electro where there are 'xungos' [Valencian expression for "dodgy" people], so not in, say, Barraca, or Masía [popular clubs located within the metropolitan area of Valencia]. In Barraca you must dance like everybody else if you don't want to get into big trouble. You can only dance the typical thing there …
> **Toni**: What's the Barraca/Masía style like?
> **Ache**: It's a dance style which is quite a lot simpler than Electro, danced with faster music, even faster than hardcore … Everybody knows how to dance Barraca.

In communicational terms, it is worth noting how diverse dance styles involve different kinetic meanings which, in turn, presumably connect homologically with distinct youth collectives. As previously noted, body movement is revealed as a very accomplished non-verbal vehicle for creating and conveying meaning, being capable of containing and expressing a sense of sensuality connoting effeminacy. According to the Valencian dancer Ache, the dance was not intended to be performed in certain clubs whose audience was made up of xungos who disapproved of and ultimately censured forms of dance other than theirs - which,

according to Ache, was a harsh dance style unlike the more sophisticated, refined form of ElectroDance - within a social setting that was also felt to be their own. Without using words, within a space in which bodies in motion become the main instrument of communication, xungos subjectively inferred meanings which were at odds with their sense of masculinity and toughness, and therefore were not acceptable to them. In an extreme case like this, under precise circumstances, verbal aggressivity might give way to physical violence on the basis of xungos' homophobic and sexist drives.

Two further aspects of a general nature are worth considering with regard to the above. Firstly, due to its gender associations, the dance could not be publicly performed in many places without the risk of being socially sanctioned. In addition to the street, homes and some time later sports halls, a club was the preferred location to dance in, as stated by 72% of the surveyed dancers. However, as the dance became more and more sophisticated, requiring a more specific sound to fit the dance patterns, the dancers started to complain that Electro sounds did not form part of the clubs' musical repertoire. Other electronic sub-genres had taken over the clubs, which is why the dance had to be performed in other public and private spaces. Secondly, it is revealing to consider such reactions of contempt by members of other youth cultures in the light of the view which sees music and music-based youth styles as having the capacity to mediate social interaction between those with distinct preferences and tastes. For Martinez, the way in which this articulation occurs is not arbitrary: youth styles such as ElectroDance or Hip-Hop are relationally organized in the symbolic space of music, which is connected in several ways to the broader social space of youth in what he calls "music and social geographies". Both music and the social relations between young people are organized in terms of distances and proximities: music geographies relate styles, genres and sounds, and social geographies relate distances and proximities between individuals and social features. The importance of music geographies is that sharing the same geographies means "to be able to communicate with others, to share common

ground in which meaningful interaction becomes possible" (Martinez, 2007:73). Furthermore, far from such relations being confined to the level of cultural relations, for Martinez, both music and social geographies are homologically related, in the sense that distances in taste in music are used to make sense of social distances. In the light of the prior analysis and the latest theoretical notions, the following aims to to sketch out, rather succinctly, the contours of the ElectroDance identity, by putting the style and its members in relation to the above-mentioned rapero and quillo categories based on their respective homologies, a full analysis of which would surely need more space than that available here.

On the one hand, some basic features have shaped the imaginary of Hip-Hop as a style characterized by street-rooted, artistic practices in music (rap, with its politically-connoted, resistance-oriented message), painting (graffiti) and dance (breaking), which took shape around 1970 in North American black and latino neighbourhoods, spreading worldwide in subsequent decades. On the other hand, the xungo style - also known, depending upon the geographical region in question, as quillo, cani, pokero and so forth - can be roughly associated with a wide youth spectrum - white, mainly working-class, and defined by its patriotic, sexist, transgression-oriented and low-cost consumption attitudes, analogous to the concept of "chav" or "kev" in the UK - and a music style - a harsh electronic sub-genre formerly known as makina - which emerged from the nightlife culture associated with clubs and discotheques of the metropolitan area of Valencia during the 1990s. Far from being defined by some sort of unmistakable cultural essence, the identity of the ElectroDance style, as with any other youth culture manifestation related to music, cannot be fully understood unless its symbolic and social qualities are placed into a set of hierarchical relations of distance and proximity to other youth styles, based on the level of compatibility of their respective symbolic qualities, their social values and attitudes, and the cultural practices involved. From this conceptual position, it is possible to view ElectroDance as "closer" to Hip-Hop in the way both styles share a similar view of

dance as a street-based yet elaborate, artistic form of subjective expression, requiring doses of effort and creativity - the complexity and richness of the vocabulary used by dancers when discussing a performance clearly speaks of an bodily yet also mental activity - and also more "distant" from - or in direct opposition to - the more basic, non-intellectual profile of the xungo dance style. Conversely, the milder, 'effeminate', fashionable, middle-class look of electro-dancers might be censured by both xungos and raperos ("rappers") to varying degrees - more markedly by the former - on the basis of their perceived lack of affinity to masculine values. Much in the same fashion, these relations of social distance and proximity can be interpreted in spatial terms too. As already noted, although I have referred to the links between ElectroDance and clubs from its earliest days, not all clubs were a good fit with the electro-dancers' interests, with regard to both music and the club's audiences. Xungos were not well-disposed to allow electro-dancers to make the dance floor their own, just as some breakers (rather than raperos here) presumably saw their symbolic hegemony over the street as being challenged (or to be more precise, "the significance of street as their source of authenticity"). Valencian dancer Jeison put it this way:

> *"A friend of mine told me that the problem had to do with the uniqueness of Breaking as a street dance so when Electro appeared they were kind of annoyed … but I think it's a kind of friendly annoyance"*

Another point of contrast between these styles can be found in the degree of ethnic and racial inclusiveness shown by each in practice. As argued before, ElectroDance was intentionally presented, at least according to the "Tecktonik" founders, as a style "with no ethnic affiliation". My own observations corroborate this assertion. Both in France and in Spain, and particularly in Valencia where most of my fieldwork was conducted, the group followed displayed racial diversity. Some of the members came from South American countries such as Ecuador,

Venezuela or Colombia, from which the bulk of immigration into Spain has originated in recent years. Significantly, South American, mostly working-class young people were naturally integrated with their white Spanish counterparts, the style bridging groups of young people whose social relations often tend to be more problematic than harmonious. But in some cases, depending upon the ethnic group in question, this trend was not uniform, as made clear by the Valencian dancer Cristian in the following interview excerpt:

> *"[...] the way you look says a lot about you. If you like wearing, ..., say, a Calvin Klein t-shirt, you're going to think 'that dude must have money', ... you know? So someone looking like that is more likely to dance 'Tecktonik' than a gypsy guy, ... You know for sure that he doesn't dance 'Tecktonik' ... If you see two guys, one gypsy and another who's pijo, which one do you think is gonna like the dance? ... For me it'll definitely be the pijo one ... Because gypsy people like their own gypsy stuff, you know?"*

Regardless of the exact meaning attached to the categorization of pijo - somewhat similar to 'posh' but the value of typifications like this vary according to the specific social position of the speaker - Cristian clearly establishes social distinctions when considering whether those he places in categories such as pijo or gitano ('gypsy') are suited to the style. In establishing this differentiation on the basis of the seemingly structural factors of income and ethnicity, he implicitly demarcates the symbolic boundaries of the style by drawing on subjective knowledge of the social space. The style thus offers a point of identification for some young people but not others depending on their particular social backgrounds, as they socially define themselves as being associated with some style or other. From a wider perspective, the results of the survey are largely consistent with previous observations (see figures 1, 2 and 3). We are thus able to

quantify the way in which electro-dancers position themselves in relation to, on the one hand, other youth styles and cultures, and on the other hand, other musical genres on the basis of their tastes and preferences.

Table 5. General traits on ElectroDance identity

	Not at all	Rather not	I'm not sure	I agree	I entirely agree
A posh style	32,5%	15,0%	21,25%	18,75%	12,5%
An effeminate style	75,0%	16,25%	7,5%	1,25%	0%
An all-publics style	0%	7,5%	11,25%	23,75%	57,5%
A very authentic style	1,25%	1,25%	5,0%	35,0%	57,5%
A lifestyle	1,25%	2,5%	17,5%	23,75%	55,0%
More than a dance style	0%	3,75%	8,75%	11,25%	76,25%

Table 6. Electro music versus other genres

	Not at all	Rather not	I'm not sure	I agree	I entirely agree
Electro	0%	0%	1,25%	7,5%	91,25%
House	1,25%	2,5%	6,25%	41,25%	48,75%
Hard-Style	3'84%	10,25%	15,38%	43,50%	26,92%
Masia-Pitidos (VLC) / Port-Aeri (BCN)	33,75%	20,0%	22,5%	10,75%	5,0%
Hip-Hop / Rap	5,0%	8,75%	28,75%	30,0%	27,5%

Flamenco / Gypsy sounds	45,56%	17,72%	15,10%	13,92%	7,59%
"40 Principales" sound	15,0%	10,0%	30,0%	36,25%	8,75%

Table 7. Electro music versus other youth subcultures and styles

	Not at all	Rather not	I'm not sure	I agree	I entirely agree
Pijos [Posh]	6,25%	5,0%	30,0%	28,75%	30,0%
Pokeros [Chavs]	30,0%	25,0%	40,0%	3,75%	1,25%
Emos	28,75%	18,75%	31,25%	13,75%	7,5%
Skins	55,0%	22,5%	17,5%	5,0%	0%
Punks	30,0%	23,75%	35%	7,5%	3,75%
Canis [Andalusian Chavs]	45,0%	25,0%	28,75%	0%	1,25%
Goths	37,5%	27,5%	27,5%	6,25%	1,25%

As suggested earlier, electro-dancers show higher affinities, for example, for those musical genres related to electronic music, while showinga certain affinity for Hip-Hop too. In terms of style, distances are strongly marked by electro-dancers with regard to well-known youth groups such as skinheads, goths and canis (i.e. xungos), these styles being widely disliked by them, while showing a greater

affinity for (and proximity to) pijos. These affinities and dislikes should not prevent us from acknowledging the fact that, as many authors have remarked in recent years in relation to other youth styles and cultures[91], electro-dancers might simultaneously hold a primary allegiance to the style while also holding a shifting preference for other styles, and also that the style's symbolic qualities allow us to establish well-founded, indisputable correlations in terms of ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. However, it would be equally misleading not to acknowledge the fact that the ElectroDance style can be differentiated from others and that its symbolic contours and broader social connotations are best grasped when seen in the light of the wider social space of multi-faceted positions and oppositions of youth cultures. In this sense, as an observer of a 'glocal' phenomenon like this, it is remarkable to see the way in which ElectroDance's embedding across disparate geographies, conditioned by varied social, cultural and economic realities, has not entailed significant alterations in terms of identity-related features and homological relations; in fact, the above-mentioned aspects seem to largely adopt a similar expression in the social space of the youth of other countries. This is particularly noticeable in the cases of France and Mexico where ElectroDance and other youth styles are endowed with similar homological traits, likely denoting broader structural connections. Andrés Pérez, a journalist at the Spanish newspaper Público, a diligent observer of Parisian life whom I was in contact and able to ask about ElectroDance, put it this way to me:

> *"[...] the fact that ElectroDance is achieving a crushing victory in middle-class suburbs can be seen simply by going to Metropolis. The frontier is clear-cut: in lower-class suburbs people live their lives a great deal on the street. You will never hear a car there with Tecktonik music on. It's regarded as a mild sound which could, however, challenge the dominance of both 'rap' and 'rai'".*

[91] See for instance Bennett (1999) or Muggleton (1997).

Comments by 'Leonardo', a leading figure in ElectroDance in Mexico, seem to refer to similar social patterns:

> *"[...] the population segment who got into ElectroDance were mostly affluent teenagers ... It's true that lower-class young people are more into Hip-Hop ... I don't think that belonging to some part of society predetermines the youth movement one engages with, but I do think that young people interested in Hip-Hop belong to a lower class than those interested in Electro".*

Following Martinez, I do believe that the degree of regularity found in these manifestations across disparate locations is far from being coincidental or unmotivated. Indeed, the informants' perceptions here, for which there is quantitative evidence, clearly demonstrates the way in which ElectroDance has been appropriated in similar ways by specific sectors of young people and not others, becoming similarly positioned in terms of music-related issues, as well as broader social youth hierarchies, in different transnational young people's social spaces. Regularities found across diverse and distant locations no doubt point to trends which are often conceptually captured under the term of 'globalization': i.e. certain patterns of cultural, economic and social homogenization are becoming mutatis mutandi increasingly recognizable worldwide. To explain why these regularities behind ElectroDance's patterns of appropriation occur is rather more difficult. Undoubtedly, as we have seen throughout the thesis, new media have been crucial to the dissemination of the style worldwide, but the mere dissemination of symbolic content does not give us an insight into the configuration of these patterns in different socio-cultural realities. This complex

and interesting issue would no doubt require further investigation that exceeds the scope of this chapter, thereby remaining an open question for future research.

Branded versus post-brand authenticities

In late 2008 I came across the following comment regarding the style's branding under one dancer's Youtube video.

> *"We are aware that tecktonik is trademarked. It is a sad and frustrating bridge to cross.. It has become a youth culture along with all the styles involved. It is the 1st time in history that a culture has been trademarked. Can you imagine if someone had trademarked "Rock & Roll" or anything that became a youth culture?. As far as what we do on our page, we find that 98% of the dance vids have "tecktonik, tck in their title & tags. Kids around the world hear about tecktonik & get into dance (a good thing). How does one enter the politics? what's right or wrong into this?"*

The commodification of this youth style has been the object of attention earlier in this dissertation. However, it is a topic to which I shall turn to once again here as it is relevant to the style's identity. This comment, made in this case by a North American dancer, was just one among many others pointing to the commodification process undergone by the style. Similar sentiments were also expressed here and there all across blogs and forums, demonstrating that this issue was a source of controversy and uneasiness amongst dancers. All of them critically discussed the "Tecktonik" brand and its disruptive significance at a time when the dance underwent a transition from a commodified form to a period of subsequent existence outside the merchandising circuit for goods and services. In chapters five and six I looked at the circumstances surrounding this process, but

here the focus is on the discourses of authenticity built around the issue of commodification of the style by different actors, at different times, taking part in the shaping of the style's identity. As I shall argue presently, such discourses revolve implicitly around the classic dichotomy of mainstream/alternative but they do so in a somewhat ambiguous manner which makes the case worth exploring.

Two kinds of discourses are behind the construction of ElectroDance's identity. Firstly, the style's image results from the agency of worldly small-scale entrepreneurs identifying profit-making opportunities out of a carefully planned exploitation of what initially was no more than a group of youngsters performing a poorly-defined dance style at late-evening club sessions. As explained throughout chapter five, the organization of the dance-oriented parties called "Tecktonik" ran in parallel to the release of a range of products targeted at ever-growing audiences of young people, along with the opening of an official shop where all these commodities could be found and purchased. Wider revenue-generating opportunities would not take long to emerge for the "Tecktonik" founders. In July 2007, "Tecktonik" was becoming more and more popular. A derivative product development deal was signed with TF1 Licensing, a subsidiary of France's biggest TV channel, which would bring the commercialization of the brand to a new level. Guillaume Lascoux[92], the sales representative in charge of Tecktonik at TF1, put it somewhat ironically in these terms:

> *"We won't go in the sector of sex or weapons or drugs or alcohol … Tecktonik has some very positive values which are holding parties, respect for oneself, dance, fashion… energy… it's important for us to work on that, especially when your target market is kids from six to 20 years old."*

[92] Ibid. Laurenson, J. (March, 2009).

Lascoux's view was logically aligned to Baroudzin and Blanc's. In order to become successfully marketed, the style had to be built around "positive values". Only in that way could it reach wider sectors of young people other than those strictly linked to the club world. For the "Tecktonik" founders, the commercial strategy to follow in order to achieve their objectives required the creation of a distinctive image, much as other youth styles had. Crucially, however, that image would have to be tightly controlled in some way to make it profitable: the solution was to make the name a registered trademark. By being turned into a brand, a cross-promotion and a complete multi-channeled business strategy could be adequately deployed. The case of Tecktonik was not the typical case of the co-option of a style formed at street-level by particular agents and subsequently widely exploited by cultural industries (Hebdige, 2002:132); rather, the very style could be viewed here as a savvy product of such industries from the very outset. In other words, without this major profit drive the dance would probably have stayed within the walls of clubs and possibly might have disappeared after a time. What validated the style and gave it a sense of authenticity was therefore the ability of the "Tecktonik" founders to link it to a series of meanings that were broadly acceptable for a wide spectrum of young people. As noted earlier, only by making it "mainstream" - a fashionable consumer product stripped of any controversial, socially connoted meaning - could it become an object of interest that could be targeted at a mostly middle-class youth market. For it to be as "neutral" as possible was basically the goal to be pursued. And for a certain time period, they were successful in this, with the style becoming a fully-fledged fad and attracting the attention of larger sections of young people as a result of aggressive brand-related advertising campaigns and wide-scale mass-media coverage[93].

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[93] Ibid: Laurenson, J. (March, 2009).

By 2008 a different kind of discourse had emerged. At that time, the style had begun to lose ground after its initial commercially-driven push, and those more truly committed to the dance started to look down on the "Tecktonik" label. The old identification with the brand came to be seen with disdain. Saving the dance from falling into oblivion, a new style was forged around it, one based on a new discourse capable of legitimating the dance by means of different ideas and values. This discourse would then have to mobilize a form of authenticity sustained by a set of values opposed to those of "Tecktonik". In other words, ElectroDance's identity would have to be reconstructed by moving against its past. French Vertifight founder Steady's words reveal the discursive elements behind such a move.

> *"We built Vertifight when Tecktonik and all the brands were beginning to stop making money with Electro [...] our actions started to establish another point of view, we transformed a fashion into a culture. Vertifight is based on human values and sports values, not on a fashion like Dance Generation or Tecktonik were."*

The identity-building process of ElectroDance's style therefore comprised a double move. Firstly, a move away from the past by abandoning the name associated with the brand. Thus dancers would no longer refer to the dance as "Tecktonik" but as "ElectroDance", or just "Electro". By means of a simple mechanism of using different words, changing both signifier and signified, an unwanted reality could be erased and a new one symbolically created. Secondly, any sort of association of the style with commercial interests had to be suppressed. The style, unlike what had happened in the past, would have to remain hereafter separate from the broader commercial circuits of the youth market, in a break with its previous history. As a consequence, dancers would show commitment to the style based on their disinterested passion for dancing and in the search for self-expression, in

sharp contrast with past times in which many practitioners were openly motivated by other drives such as popularity, fashion or, in some particular cases, profit. It is worth noting that underlying this assumption we find a form of authenticity rooted in the old codes of youth cultures' romanticism and the value of art as the highest form of self-expression and individuality - and the more detached from financial interest the more authentic the intentions and work of the artist should be perceived as being. This dichotomy is best expressed in Steady's own words, in which he opposes the term "fad" - something transient, spurious and worthless, and thus inauthentic - to "culture", something viewed as socially and individually meaningful and valuable, and thus more authentic. Other young people, such as the Ecuadorian dancer Iván, made this "transience/permanence" opposition a key aspect in differentiating between more and less authentic youth styles.

> **Iván**: Fads come and go, but real dance styles representing sports and art definitely stay. It's like the 'Emo' fashion: it was trendy until 'Flogger' came and displaced it. Nobody is 'Emo' any more.

This form of perceived authenticity runs parallel to the typical distinction in many youth subcultures between 'being' and 'acting' like a punk, metalhead or skinhead. The move away from an unwanted past of massive yet fleeting popularity meant that the more seriously committed and emerging dancers would have to establish the symbolic boundaries of the style on different foundations. In the next excerpt, the dancer Ache tells of the stylistic features which made Electro a less immediately accessible style musically, but which were specifically aimed at those already possessing acquired schemes of appreciation and aural perception.

> **Tony**: ... and how was something like 'Tecktonik' sold to the public?
> **Ache**: Electro was there from the beginning, it's just people saw

> ‘Tecktonik’ as a kind of ‘Electro’, an ‘Electro’ a little faster that ended up being called as ‘Tecktonik’. What we dance nowadays is ‘Electro’ because no one calls it ‘Tecktonik’ any longer. Also, it’s not commercial music, it’s fast, with heavy drums, … it’s not so easy to get into, so people who don’t know the dance don’t like the music either, as you can imagine.

Electro-dancers’ reluctance to accept any form of style co-optation by third parties should not lead us to view their stance as either a form of resistance to the dominant consumer values underlying the style commodification during the “Tecktonik” period, or even a more general critique of consumerism in current society. In fact, it is also true that Vertifight became a registered trademark as well, although a non-profit one. A similar lack of a more general critique can be inferred from the dancer Solo’s words:

> **SoloTCK**: We don’t want anybody to sell [from the Spanish “vender”, meaning “to make popular”] Electro, not as a type of dance, nor as a clothing brand or the like”
> **Tony**: “So … you’re not happy with ‘Tecktonik’ … are you?”
> **SoloTCK**: “Absolutely not! … Can you picture breakdance as a clothing brand? Or flamenco?”

According to Solo, the style cannot be conceived of as a clothing brand because that bears no relation to dancing whatsoever. Dance as a genre equates to culture and a dance genre cannot be commodified at all. In his eyes, it just makes no sense. However, he does not seem to deny the possibility of making a profit from dance, although in my interview he did not make clear what the legitimate ways to do so might be. In fact, Valencian electro-dancers proved to be eager, as I will

discuss in the next chapter, to appear on TV shows and to be interviewed, showing a great desire to be popular by entering mainstream, broader information channels. In any case, it is worth noting, at a linguistic level, the use of the verb “to sell” here as it conceals a rather paradoxical stance with regard to the commercialization of the dance. On the one hand, for Solo and most electro-dancers, whose consumption patterns are not particularly different from those of other young people, dance is not meant to be a matter of big business but of shared identity, passion and community; on the other hand, by using the verb “to sell” instead of, for example, “to show” or "to make known", the dance is still conceptualized in economic terms. In other words, while the commercialization is supposedly denied, the reality is that the dance style is looked at through the lens of the conceptual framework of economic relations. Does this fact render the electro-dancers' claim of being opposed to commercial interests less credible? My own interpretation is that, in late-modern capitalist societies like today’s, the logic of the market and economic relations increasingly permeates all spheres of social and personal life - the degree and form of this being variable - so that our views of the world unconsciously internalize the language and meanings of economics and marketing, forming part of our basic schemes of appreciation and thinking. As demonstrated by the seminal subcultures of the mid-20th century, this produces a particular stance against commodification in some specific cultural practices or institutions, such as that of our object of inquiry, oddly compatible with the fact of other “external” spheres of young people’s socialization being marked by an all-pervasive capitalist logic. Having said this, we should not lose sight of what seems to justify the electro-dancers’ claim in this case: the style’s identity is underpinned by a desire for authenticity, based on an anti-commercialization stance within the restricted realm of dance meanings.

Corporate representations on a shifted media environment

Finally, our discussion of identity leads us to consider the role of the media as a social institution in the shaping of ElectroDance as a youth style. According to many cultural theorists, media corporations exert an undeniable influence on the shaping of youth phenomena to the point of arguing, as Feixa (2004: 17) and others do, that youth styles cultures are to a great extent a reflection and result of an age of mass-communication and the emergence and full development of mass-media corporations in public life. For these authors, without the ability to produce and circulate symbolic content at a large scale, youth cultures would probably not have existed as we have known them from the mid-twentieth century to the present, nor even would youth as a social category. Focusing on the social influence and participation of the media in the public realm, Hjavard (2008: 113) argues that the media have a double social dimension. In a nutshell, the media currently consist of, on the one hand, for-profit corporate organizations oriented to the production and distribution of messages via technology for the sake of a specific commercial end; on the other hand, they are institutions themselves which other social institutions rely on in order to enter public life and carry out their particular role in society. In our case, the media has the institutional role of providing young people with symbolic materials which are useful in their social lives. However, it should not be overlooked that media institutions are not simply neutral carriers of information but exert a crucial role in shaping meaning and disseminating it on a large scale. In this sense, it is important to reaffirm what Carey (1989: 62) argued some time ago: the media does not reflect a pre-existing reality but crucially rather gives a form to it by means of their varied, influential representations.

When it comes to youth styles and cultural phenomena, the role of media corporations is thus not just to transparently reflect such “external-to-media” phenomena but to construct images of them which are riddled with social meanings: ones which, as recent history shows us in manifold ways, connect to

wider social discourses and concerns (Osbergy, 2004:60). This fact is then especially important when dealing with youth culture phenomena. Cultural theorists like Hebdige regard media institutions as primarily performing a function of mere co-optation of youth phenomena taking place “at street-level” for their own profit. This can best be exemplified by Hip-Hop culture. Fogarty (2006: 18), in reference to some prior studies on the matter, argues that breakdancing changed in "form and meaning" after the media hype of the early 1980s. Media co-optation of what was meant to be a street-style dance resulted in a style purposely featured for global consumption - not only by disadvantaged black and latino youngsters but also white-affluent youth audiences, being stripped in the process of its contextualized sociocultural features rooted in specific living conditions and realities. However, other authors such as Thornton have problematized this unidirectional reading by viewing media institutions as taking part in the production of such social and cultural phenomena in a variety of ways from the very outset. Regardless of the degree of participation or precise moment of emergence within the cycles of the rise and decline of youth cultures and styles, what becomes evident is the influence of the media to shape such phenomena, now and before, in various ways. That said, what role did the media play as social institutions in Paris and France, and in the various locations such as Valencia, with regard to the formation of the ElectroDance style’s identity?

An approach to this question should undeniably consider the impact of internet-based enterprises, given the currently shifting scenario of global communication. In this sense, Internet corporations such as Google, Facebook or Twitter are not merely information-generating organizations in the way traditional press and TV networks are, such as French ‘TF1’ or ‘Le Monde’ and Spanish ‘Antena 3’ and ‘El País’, but, from a certain standpoint, they arguably fulfill a similar role today in terms of massive grassroots production and distribution of information, with the connection between the two becoming increasingly obvious over time. In both cases old and new media corporations do indeed share the same technological infrastructure - that of digital online systems - and offer the same

communicational and technical affordances for message production and distribution based on multimodal, two-way, many-to-many, communication. Nowadays this reality is pushing mass media organizations to reformulate the traditional way of addressing audiences inherited from the so-called mass-communication broadcast age in order to incorporate the people's voice in information production, now made possible by means of the networked, interactive opportunities offered by the new communication technologies. Has this technological convergence and communicational trend had any sort of influence on the way in which media corporations projected a specific, dancer-approved image of the ElectroDance identity onto wider sectors of society? Or, in fact, have the discourses and representation of the media corporations and electro-dancers' taken divergent pathways as was commonly the case in previous decades?

I will attempt to shed some light on this issue by drawing on two kind of materials found in my research: on the one hand, the data stemming from media coverage on the topic in both foreign (France) and local (Spanish) online newspapers and TV reports; on the other, the electro-dancers' reactions to corporate messages and representations expressed during interviews. Before moving on, an additional remark regarding the blurred semantics of the notion of "the media" when seen as social agents must be made. When talking about with "the media", I refer not to a unitary source generating a range of coherent, homogeneous messages in response to social issues but rather as a relatively plural aggregate of voices behind which there exist a number of distinct, corporate, for-profit organizations with different interests and points of view, often competing against each other in order to increase their potential audiences. In practice, depending upon the specific matter in question, we as receivers of media content might come to perceive the media as either aligned to the same opinion - and being a single, unitary "thing" - or occupying discursively-opposed positions in accordance with divergent interests - and manifesting a plurality of stances. The former perception seemed to dominate negative view of the media's role possessed by the French 'Vertifight' founder Steady, with regard to Electrodance:

> *"Before Vertifight a lot of dancers in France were victims of attacks from a lot of people because the whole media depicted the dancers as if they were gay, … the media started to bring the clichés into this community… fluorescent colors, skinny trousers, very strange haircuts… these clichés were not a major part of this community but it was enough for them to turn this dance into a ridiculous dance, a gay dance or a "Parkinson's dance". In the beginning, many dancers were assaulted in the street… it was so hard for them".*

Here Steady takes us back to the connoted meanings associated with the style which were the object of discussion earlier. For Steady, the media attention on the dance movement in France did not do any good with regard to projecting an accurate image of the style. On the contrary, some of the most aesthetically eye-catching attributes - e.g. clothes, bodily movement and so on - were used to publicly feature the style and its followers in rather a stereotyped, conspicuously prejudiced way. Steady blames the media for fostering the stigmatization of those following the style by associating them with certain social prejudices linked to sexuality ("being homosexual") or physical disadvantages ("being disabled") which in some cases led to serious trouble for some individuals. Spanish newspaper coverage of the movement did not report cases of personal assaults or physical or verbal violence. Yet forms of mockery could be also found in some cases. One example is a 2008 ADN newspaper report[94] whose sarcastic headline was "The dance style which could poke your eye out". Whereas the body text is limited to a description of some of the best-known aspects of the dance movement, a picture displaying electro-dancers performing some movements on an underground train

[94] Staff journalist. (2008) *El estilo que no podrás apartar de tus ojos. ADN*. Retrieved from http://www.adn.es/cultura/20080310/NWS-2743-baile-moda-tecktonik.html

was placed to the right of the web page with a caption saying in a similarly sarcastic tone "He hasn't had any bad news. He is just dancing Tecktonik" (see image 11).

No le han dado una mala noticia. Tan sólo baila tecktonik.

Image 11. Coverage from Spanish newspaper ADN

In an entirely different fashion, Spanish coverage of the movement also echoed other French concerns about ElectroDance iconography, particularly with regard to the Tecktonik logo and the dancers' looks as symptoms of a supposedly concealed connection with Nazism. Andrés Pérez, the journalist working for the Spanish newspaper 'Público', provided me with an insight into this issue:

> *"I don't really believe in the thesis that 'Tecktonik' is evidence of alleged white neo-racism - although an organization were going to sue the 'Tecktonik' founders because they saw fascist elements in the brand's official logo."*

Even though this example might suggest that the symbolic elements within the style are prone to typical forms of media-enhanced moral panics, the fact is that ElectroDance was far from creating any real sort of public unease. One could maybe affirm just the opposite, as the style was given quite considerable attention in France at that time and. significantly, far greater than was the case in Spain. It could also arguably be said that the phenomenon was not approached in a sensationalistic fashion in the Spanish media. What dominated, at least from my perspective, was a rather neutral treatment of the question, showing scarce interest in the alleged "feminization" or "Nazism" embedded in the style. In fact, media coverage, occurring mostly in the press rather than on TV networks, highlighted what were seen as the positive values associated with the style such as the young dancers' spontaneity, liveliness and hedonism. In this sense, coverage from Diario de Mallorca or LaOpiniónLaCoruña.es[95], both drawing on a report from the news agency Agencia EFE, referred to the electro-dancers' rejection of drugs in these terms: "Tecktonik, unlike other dance and music styles, reinvents young people's parties without alcohol or drugs". Here, what is meant to be an apparently neutral statement about young people's partying practices could be interpreted in a different way. In particular, this sentence makes a distinction between some dance and music styles which are associated with drug or alcohol use and ElectroDance, with a rejection of such substances being seen as a key part of its make-up. The overall formulation of the sentence, in which the separation of the notion of partying from that of drugs and alcohol consumption is remarked upon, could lead us to interpret such a statement as being more favourable to those youth cultural manifestations which accomplished levels of social acceptance or normativity. Thus, as was seen earlier, the desire of the brand's

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[95] EFE (2009, 3 March) â€œÂ¿Formas parte de la moda Tecktonik?â€ . LaOpiniÃ³nLaCoruÃ±a.es. [Retrieved from: http://www.laopinioncoruna.es/secciones/noticia.jsp?pRef=2008031000_8_172884__Sociedad-Formas-parte-moda-Tecktonik]

founders and the dancers to shake off any kind of connotation with general social discourses may have found support in the media's sympathetic treatment, both sides jointly forging an image of the style as a non-deviant, "normal" one. I mostly found such mutual correspondence rather than difference: the electro-dancers portrayed themselves as healthy yet hedonistic, indulgent, 'normal' young people living a pleasant life with no great worries, with media representations reinforcing this socially unproblematic youth identity. As Martinez (ibid.: 417) notes, "normalcy tends to be linked to mild, non-transgressive styles" and this seems to be the case. In this sense, despite the fact that the electro-dancers' look might be regarded by some as rather flamboyant[96], the lack of a link between ElectroDance and any socially-connoted, controversial meaning, coupled with the fact that the social background of its followers was mainly white, middle-class yet also ethnically inclusive, conferred on the style a comfortable position in terms of broad social acceptance. The media and young people therefore worked together dialectically to produce a homogeneous public image of ElectroDance as a youth style whose group values and behavioural patterns were in line with - and therefore reinforcing - broadly accepted social values linked to the sociological notion of "normalcy".

Nevertheless, the image of the style projected by the media was not totally accepted by electro-dancers in all cases, which contradicts our account somewhat. Steady's account earlier showed how the media's response to the style had negative effects in some cases for those involved in the dance style. As pointed out before, accepting the existence of a prevalent stance shared by a range of diverse media actors should not lead us to think of them as giving the same, unitary response to the phenomenon. None of this tells us about in what

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[96] Coverage on the "LaSexta" website on 3rd March, 2009 included critically regarded electro-dancers who were proud of their visual appearance, not embarrassed about it - "Combina música electrónica, ganas de divertirse y escaso sentido del ridículo". [Retrieved from: <http://www.lasextanoticias.com/noticias/ver/los_profesores_toman_las_calles/39911>]

cases, how, and in what circumstances media producers and dance followers came - or did not come - into contact via specific digital interfaces in the negotiation of meanings regarding the style. The question is then: to what extent did the ever-changing sphere of communication induced by the arrival of new media technologies favour an effective shift in the relationship between corporate media agents and young people in the case of ElectroDance? Having carried out most of my research fieldwork in Spain, and particularly in Valencia, the response to this question will chiefly focus on observations regarding the Spanish media.

In order to properly examine the degree and the significance of the exchanges between the Spanish media and electro-dancers, a differentiation between both analogue and digital newspapers and TV networks must be made. As already suggested, several Spanish national digital newspapers, such as Publico.es, reported on the style, undertaking their own research on it. Others local newspapers, such as Diario de Mallorca or LaOpiniónLaCoruña.es, limited themselves to superficial reproductions of information provided by the news agency Agencia EFE. Local newspapers in Valencia, such as Las Provincias, or the national daily El Mundo in its Valencian regional section, showed greater interest, to the point of including comments from interviews with outstanding local electro-dancers (see below image 12). It is worth noting the recent efforts of media corporations to enhance interaction with particular readers and audiences on their web platforms. Interfaces have been recently reshaped in order to include users' written comments and opinions with the news content, enriching the overall result. When it comes to ElectroDance, little activity occurred on their websites. One exception was the case of Público, where the report on "Tecktonik" attracted quite a lot of attention from readers. A number of comments were made on the article, most of them coming from regular readers of the newspaper whose reactions varied from curiosity to simple indifference. Only some of these interventions, the later ones, seemed to come from real electro-dancers, reacting to another commenter while attempting to provide other readers with further information about the style, giving external links pointing to other websites.

Significantly, the dialogue was maintained with other readers but not with the article's author nor an editor on behalf of the newspaper as organization. Furthermore, none of the electro-dancers whom I followed intensively throughout my research participated, nor did they on other Spanish digital newspaper websites, in which the comment sections were mostly deserted. With the TV coverage of the movement, the situation was quite similar. During the summer and autumn of 2008, Antena 3, La Sexta, RTVE and the local network in Valencia, Canal 9, simultaneously covered the so-called "Tecktonik" phenomenon, with the first only referring to the state of the art in France and the other three focusing on Spanish electro-dancers. The reports in these three cases paralleled in narrative terms those of the digital newspapers, with the young dancers being featured in performance and being asked personal questions. Apart from this set of interviewees, wider participation was not facilitated due to the technical inability of the interfaces of both Canal 9 and La Sexta to embed video content at the time.

EN LA ONDA

AMADEO SALVADÓ

La sábana anti-

El ritmo Tecktonik 'made in Valencia'

Estos chavales de instituto se reúnen en cualquier sitio para bailar esta nueva tendencia

Image 12. *El Mundo* report on Valencian electro-dancers

But to what extent did the dialogue between media companies and youth which occurred in this case extend beyond these specific situations? Of special interest for this question is the case of La Sexta, as it exemplifies currently technologically-mediated interactional patterns between media corporations, electro-dancers and “outsiders” across digital interfaces which could surely now be extended to other youth collectives and groupings. Journalists from La Sexta contacted electro-dancers from Madrid through their YouTube channel in order to propose to them the making of a TV report on the dance style, in which dancers from Valencia would also appear. After being broadcast via traditional TV platforms on the daily news, the report was digitally captured and then uploaded some days after to a dancer's YouTube channel. It did not take long for the video to garner considerable attention amongst the dance community, giving rise to a number of different reactions. The electro-dancers who had taken part in the report were rather unhappy with the image projected by La Sexta. They regarded the report as frivolous and biased, and had to defend themselves against intense criticism from other dancers but more especially from outsiders who tended to be amused at their comments in the report. For the present discussion, it is interesting to note here how all this occurred on YouTube, away from the La Sexta website.

As seen throughout the dissertation, electro-dancers "meet up" on YouTube, with this platform becoming their preferred digital interface through which they channel a great deal of their interaction. Although the report was mentioned on the La Sexta website, the dancers’ interaction took place on YouTube, thus modifying what could have been a more straightforward relationship between the media content producers and the receivers of such content. Previously, dancers of other styles such as Hip-Hop used to rely largely on the circulation of dance-related content in pop magazines and movies, but now there exists another kind of highly-interactive, networked interface through the use of new media, one which interestingly also embeds these older forms of

media. Viewed from a politico-economic perspective, what is then to a certain extent modified is the "circuit of culture" surrounding youth dance styles like ElectroDance by means of the entrance of gigantic telecom corporations like Google onto the scene (see the next figure). In this reordered scenario of global communications, the symbolic content of the dance as shown by traditional broadcast networks enters the domain of YouTube, then being reworked and enmeshed with dancer-generated content in varied patterns and fashions. Equally, broadcast networks go to and observe YouTube's grassroots productions in search of new and eye-catching content, establishing a two-way exchange between the traditional content producers and proactive audiences with the mediation of YouTube and other new digital technologies.

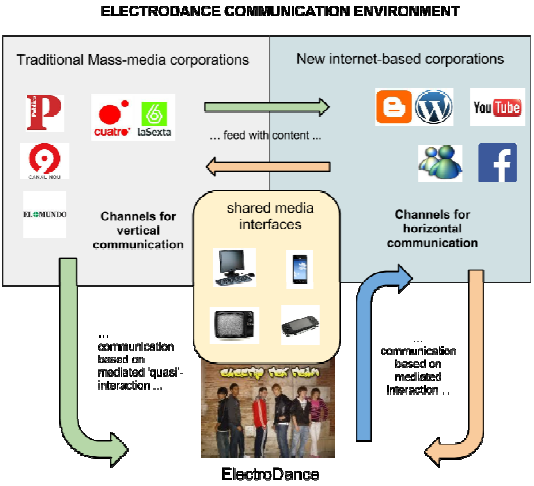

Image 13. Communication flows in ElectroDance

Furthermore, an inference can be made from this situation with regard to the style's identity within the ElectroDance circuit of culture. While it is undeniable that the media corporations attempted to report on the phenomenon by taking the protagonists' views into consideration as well as opening channels for subsequent exchange, there is an otherwise rather conventional interrelation pattern, with the media corporations ultimately exploiting the fashionable characteristics of the phenomenon at a very particular time and the young people becoming "victims" of misleading, largely unidirectionally-constructed representations. Interestingly, even though the parties now possessed similar communicative capabilities by sharing a common technological infrastructure for communication supported by differently-oriented media corporations - with Google's YouTube for example disruptively entering the market and changing the terms of content production, circulation and consumption, and others like LaSexta, as part of MediaPro media conglomerate, striving to adapting their traditional, top-down business model to the new situation - this common ground did not result in a closer, reframed dialogue between them, or at least not one which was satisfactory to electro-dancers. At a time supposedly defined by a growing "convergence culture" (Jenkins, 2004), where socio-technical patterns of cultural production emerge from closer collaboration between previously remote media-based culture industries and supposedly "passive" individuals operating at a grassroots level, the truth is that a youth style like ElectroDance was able to remain largely unaltered. The acceptance of a suitable media representation by young dancers would not necessarily depend upon the number of channels of communication linking the parties to one another as much as on the will to establish a long-standing relationship, even a for-profit one, with youth culture phenomena, dominated by mutual agreement. This is at least what might be concluded from Steady's subsequent experience with MTV, while also implicitly demonstrating the almost inherent, enduring ambivalence of media representations of young people - now seen as positive while they were earlier regarded as unfair.

> *"MTV contacted me because this channel was producing short documentaries on underground communities. The MTV staff were surprised about our energy and about this dance. So they decided to make a documentary.. for free.. When MTV was here, I saw that the staff were very professional, good people. It's was very fun [...] The best way is to have media support … The same which destroyed Tecktonik. But Vertifight hasn't got the same manner of communication as Tecktonik"*.

To conclude, it is worth making a conceptual remark on the basis of Steady's insight. He speaks of ElectroDance receiving adequate "media support": from my point of view, ElectroDance's reliance upon new media is indeed evidence of such unnoticed support. Yet, in his view, YouTube is not part of the media, or at least not in the sense of big media corporations like MTV. Only MTV has the interest, budget and technical resurces to cover something like ElectroDance. Unlike YouTube, which seems to be reserved rather for the humbler, small-scale amateur adventures by dancers, MTV possesses the appropriate human, organizational and technical means for content production and delivery as to be regarded as part of "the media". Only MTV is seen here as being capable of providing the levels of visibility guaranteed by broadcast communication and desired by electro-dancers. However, despite recognizing the unevenness of this relationship in terms of the availability and capacity for mobilizing economic resources and setting up technical infrastructures, it is equally true that young people can use certain technical resources that surpass in terms of message scope, peer connectivity and symbolic bandwidth any other media technology from the past, enabling them to build a digital communicative space that can aspire in this sense, as we have seen throughout this thesis, to compete with media corporate infrastructures, and to a great extent to be emancipated from them. In any case, aside from this final consideration, there is a remaining question which will be addressed in the next chapter: in a context in which the media as institutions seem to retain a high

degree of power and influence with regard to the creation and wide circulation of more or less appropriated representations of youth phenomena, in what sense do the new media interfaces make any difference in terms of identity building and self-presentation from what we have witnessed in the past?

:: 10 :: Mediatization on dancers' self-presentation

There have been several actors and ingredients at work in the configuration of the identity of ElectroDance's style. As seen in the previous chapter, media corporations and cultural industries are among these actors. As for-profit organizations operating in the communication and leisure sector, they have been and continue to be characterized by the practice of creating fads and crazes which can be turned into revenue opportunities, a dialectical process where cool-hunters look at young people's cultural practices for inspiration while the latter incorporate the meanings present in the former's commodities and cultural contents into their social lives, often reinterpreting them in unexpected ways. In this, media corporations and cultural industries make a more or less deliberate contribution to the shaping of youth culture phenomena by delivering representations and circulating discourses about them that, as in the case of ElectroDance, become both accepted and disputed at different moments of their development as styles. What surrounds the workings of such modern corporations is determined to a large extent by what the media has been and continues to be, a meaning inherited from the age of broadcast mass-communication. However, throughout this dissertation I have attempted to show how digital media technologies have become highly-versatile, interactive, powerful socio-technical means for young people's cultural production in novel ways.

This chapter is aimed at completing the analysis of the tension between the cultural forms and patterns inherited from an age of broadcast mass-communication and those emerging from grassroots-related practices found in a case such as ElectroDance. While continuing the discussion of the style's and dancers' identity, the attention moves here to the study of the particular forms in which electro-dancers publicly present themselves using new media, i.e., how they build a public image of themselves with the help of new media. As previously, this interest in examining the young dancers' practices regarding group- and self-presentation does not simply stem from the fact that they have encountered in new media's affordances - e.g. enhanced interactivity, symbolic bandwidth and social networking-related potentials - an unequalled means for the expression of their interests, feelings and passion for the dance that were not available for past generations. The point is not simply to highlight the potentials for expression present in the set of digital tools available to today's young people and contrast them with, for example, the printed fanzines of members of subcultures from the past. Rather, the interest here is to take the analysis a step further by identifying some key aspects of the young dancers' practices that show the modes of group- and self-presentation emerging from a communicational landscape in constant transformation: here, change results from a multi-faceted, largely dialectical process in which the interplay between previously-existing broadcast and more recently-emerged network patterns of mediated interaction, together with grassroots and celebrity cultures' own behavioural modes, leads to a new form of expression, to some degree showing some elements of continuity with the past while also allowing for cultural innovation and disruption. In other words, the aim behind the exploration of young people's new media practices in this case is to show the logic of mediatization at work when it comes to the dimension of dance-related identity-building in ElectroDance.

The next pages are then devoted to looking at the forms in which new media are appropriated by young dancers for group- and self-presentation purposes. I will start by looking at these specific ways of technological

appropriation in response to the affordances and restrictions of particular interfaces. The description of blogging practices will serve to show how the symbolic contours, the style's image and the sense of the dancers' self become shaped in the process. Notions of imagined audiences, narrative-building as well as the blurring of public and private dimensions of self-presentation are some of the important issues which young dancers have to implicitly cope with when blogging, and they will be discussed here. The consideration of the extent to which electro-dancers' blogging underlies a search for social recognition will lead me to the view that the more elaborate self-presentation practices are influenced by and reflect the values, imaginaries and models rooted in consumer culture and particularly celebrity culture. This empirical account ends in the last subsection with a final thought on the implications of the relationship between forms of global celebrity culture and that of the grassroots in the light of the ElectroDance examples. As I will argue, technological convergence has provided the basis for the emergence of some degree of "cultural confluence": the former has supplied local practitioners and groups with a channel to potentially transcend the narrower agential boundaries present in face-to-face encounters, thereby incorporating the logic of broadcast mass-communication outside the global communication circuits forged around large media corporations. Yet there also seems to be a kind of "cultural convergence" as a result of a cross-fertilization process. Thus, on the one hand, global, well-known celebrities try to get closer to audiences by drawing on the potential for interpersonal communication of new media, while, in parallel, young people make use of new media in the context of their socialization circles - e.g. that of the dance, in this case, and its impact on those of school, neighbourhood and so on - in order to rehearse forms of self-presentation that show the influence of celebrities' behavioural attitudes and values - they act as if they are celebrities. The result of this process is uneven: whereas the notions surrounding mainstream, corporate celebrities do not seem to have undergone noticeable shifts, specialized and grassroot practitioners have managed to widen, thanks to new media, their repertoire of forms of celebrity-related self-expression and

action beyond local boundaries, which is not without consequences in terms of identity-building.

Blog as a technology of dancer's self

Since their emergence in 2005, weblogs have become one of the most popular digital interfaces of all the forms of new media. Maintained by different sorts of people, used in various everyday circumstances and oriented to a range of purposes, blogs arguably perform a vital function in countless cases directly related to people's lives, enabling them to bring aspects of their everyday activities into the electronic domain, whether these are professional, personal or leisure-related. People currently use blogs to tell their life stories to themselves and to others. Nevertheless, from the perspective of acknowledging the importance of new media in people's lives, blogs are not so different from older media forms: blogs are also riddled with a range of symbolic content connected to the context of people's everyday realities. Indeed, if one follows social theorist J.B.Thompson's (1998), media, and particularly older mass-media forms like the press, television or radio, are seen by him as having an outstanding influence on individuals' projects of self construction. To a probably greater extent than in previous historical periods, in late modernity, individuals reflexively form their sense of the self by incorporating and making use of a wide range of symbolic resources at their disposal, with mass-media becoming a primary source of a variety of meanings. If, as has been said, mass-media have fulfilled and continue to fulfil the role of providing people with the symbolic resources so as to make sense of their lives, do new media now fulfil the same function today? Or, to put the question differently, what do digital interfaces like blogs, blogging as a practice and other new media forms explored earlier in this thesis, like YouTube, add in terms of identity-building, beyond providing a range of new conduits for the distribution and delivery of mostly one-way, already-modelled media messages?

As was seen in the previous chapter, the style's identity relies heavily on what is publicly shared by the young dancers on digital interfaces. But the influence of these media is not limited to shaping the style; young people's use of the media helps define them "as individuals" too on the basis of meanings associated with the dance's style.

The following excerpt, from September 2011, which belongs to an announcement published by Valencian 'Tornado' dancer on his Facebook wall, gives us a sense of the significance of new media to these young dancers' subjectivity - or at least, to the extent to which the dance practice becomes meaningful to young people in constructing, say, a sense of self:

> *"This is the worst day since I got into Electro 3 years ago. A supposed friend of mine who dances too, has erased all my vids without letting me know, closing the MSN accounts of 'ElectroWarriors' and 'ElectroDanceXativa'. Those accounts stored lots of vids of past tournaments in Xàtiva, Valencia and Almussafes. I've opened new accounts replacing the lost ones. I hope you'll subscribe so we can start off again. Thanks a lot to those of you who have".*

In this case, losing one's material on Youtube's interface comes to equate with the loss of the sense of who one is as a dancer. But it is worth noting here the extent to which this loss has an impact not only at a personal level - once one's media blueprint is removed, it is the subjective sense of the personal biographical pathway through the style which really becomes lost on the way - but at a collective one too - the others cannot have an overall sense of who one is because there is no longer a record of one's performing skills to see. Therefore, new media usage by young people relates to their everyday reality in ways which do not fall within the polarised views of either 'youth-as-problem' or 'youth-as-fun' that we

discussed in the second chapter, but it points no doubt to more practical aspects related to personal identity and everyday experience.

Getting back to blogs, Siapera (2012:177) makes the case for blogging and blog variants - microblogging and social network blogging - as a new media form which fits Foucault's definition of 'technologies of the self'. Foucault's use of the term 'technology' did not necessarily refer to material artifacts but rather a set of practices, institutions and discourses producing certain socio-historically situated forms of subjectivity. Foucault, for example, saw a technological dimension in the practices of interpersonal confession found in Christianity, deeming it as producing a particular form of subjectivity. As Siapera also pointed out, others such as Habermas have likewise identified other historically located subjectivities connected to certain media practices, such as that of the eighteenth century's reading of the "moral novel", a genre which Habermas attributes to the promotion of an inner sort of self resulting from our lives as imagined and subsequently narrated by others - i.e. an "audience-oriented subjectivity". Pushed to the extreme, media theorists such as McLuhan have come to view subjects as a product of an unnoticed socio-technological environment surrounding them in an age of electronic mass-communication. For Siapera, just as the old practice of exchanging letters involved a characteristic kind of relationship dominated by the notions of privacy and intimacy and particular communicational features such as being text-based, asynchronous and interpersonal, the technical characteristics of blogs - e.g. archives, categories, links and so on - the ability to shift between modes of address (addressing readers, friends, oneself and the like) and the discretion enjoyed by bloggers with their blogs (they can write about whatever they choose, they can post photos and so on) points to a specific kind of subjectivity differing from the one cultivated by letters, confessions, novels and the mass-media. Moreover, Siapera regards this kind of subjectivity as 'authorial' in that, if on the one hand blogging practices involve a clear individual dimension, with subjects gaining autonomy in their abilities of "judging, evaluating, thinking and acting through self-instituted and self-assessed modes" (ibid.: 178), then on

the other, blogging is subject to public scrutiny and the interaction of others with one's symbolic work. To put it another way, blogging establishes its own communicational terms which are capable of producing a specific form of subjectivity. Next, I will consider to what extent electrodancers' use of blogs support these assumptions, and to what extent the media form allows for the emergence of particular ways of self-presentation and both group and individual expression.

Before delving into this matter, it is pertinent to note the relationship of blogs with the other media forms making up the media ecology of ElectroDance: among the myriad of digital interfaces in which these young dancers leave traces of their group and individual identities, the media form of the blog takes up a prominent position. French dancers were the first ones to blog: by 2006 they had begun to open personal blog accounts on the SkyRock website. This is a social networking site that offers free space for users to create their own blogs, add personal profiles, and exchange messages with other members[97]. "SkyRock.com" had begun as a private radio station in 1981. Founded by CEO Pierre Bellanger and Le Monde, it was basically a rock music radio station, deemed to be the second most listened to radio station with 3.9 million listeners, most of them being between fifteen and twenty-five years old. SkyRock.com began life as a blogging site known as "SkyBlog.com". By May 2007, after abandoning the name "SkyBlog.com", "SkyRock.com" was launched as a large-scale social networking site. Not long after Spanish electrodancers would mimic their French counterparts, and also started blogging after opening their own accounts on SkyRock. Blogs were created by both individuals and teams. Between 2008 and 2010, the most prominent Valencian teams such as "ElectroTek", "BeatMode", "RTX" or "Union Electro" created and maintained their own blogs. In smaller locations like the city of Castellón, where there was not a significant number of followers, one blog was

[97] SkyRock. (n.d.) In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skyrock

enough to gather together and represent all local dancers under the "community" label: Comunidad ElectroDance de Castellón. Another startling example of blog use as a large-scale digital interface among electrodancers can be found on the blog on the Mexican scene named CulturaElectro.mx. While in all these cases blogs were the "visible face" of teams or bigger groupings, CulturaElectro.mx functions as a fully-fledged informational hub for the entire Mexican community, providing diverse organizational information, support and even entertainment to its members. In any case, all the blogs fulfill an informational purpose, but what specifically makes them identity-related digital interfaces is the orientation of their content. An identity-related use appears here at two levels. Firstly, all the blogs contain key symbolic elements identifying the style and the group culture, showing what ElectroDance is like through particular information displayed in photos, comments or embedded YouTube videos. Secondly, the blogs can acquire a particular significance to individuals in terms of self-presentation and self-construction - although not all the cases I studied in the course of my research clearly displayed this characteristic. Indeed, it was uncommon to find blogs which limited themselves to housing a haphazard accumulation of videos, photos and favourite songs. In these few cases, the use of of the blog appeared to be something of an afterthought by those teams or individuals who were trying to keep up with their counterparts who were truly interested in using blogs as an instrument for self-presentation and self-expression, being willing to invest lots of energy and enthusiasm in them. The "BeatMode" and "Union Electro" Valencian teams were among those who showed a more coherent distribution of information across the interface over time. Their entries were mostly filled with explanatory texts and thus a more consistent, chronological narrative of the dancers' biographical pathway, their journey through the style, emerged out of a neater aggregation of the variety of items. In this sense, three patterns can be identified in the dancers' self-presentation blogging practices.

Firstly, the dancers initially presented themselves by filling in a pre-formatted entry containing fields with personal information. Here, dancers were

expected to report their personal preferences and tastes not only with regard to the dance style but also more general ones, ones such as preferred clothing brands, movie, music genres or clubber events, in an attempt to define each person's individuality and uniqueness within the sphere of the group identity. In these cases, self-presentation through these specific blogging practices offer young people the chance to express what they perceive defines them. It is interesting to note the way in which such presentation is subject to the constraints posed by the fields of such a survey-like questionnaire. Young people share information and recognize themselves by means of this set of personal attributes, with the blogs serving to develop this form of self-reflection. They help shape not only who a dancer is supposed "to be" as a dance practitioner, but, beyond this, who one really is as a unique, differentiated individual, in being identified in terms of style attributes which in turn seem to be inseparable from more general consumption choices. Thus, this reaffirms the salience of personal taste and cultural preferences in defining, at least when it comes to self-perception, the contemporary notion of selfhood in young people - but also in other social collectives and groups - over the past decades when compared with other structural and equally defining dimensions of social identity such as class, gender or race, which are not seen subjectively as being so important. These blogs permitted such self-reflective practice.

A second pattern found in the use of blogs regarding individual identity-building points back to the above-mentioned sense of a biographical pathway emerging from the organization of information on the interface. Blogs are a kind of interface which is much different from, for example, YouTube, and this difference resides in the affordances inherent to the technical design of each kind of medium. If we just looked at a dancer's video collection on YouTube, we would probably be hard pressed to find any sense of a coherent, neat trajectory and the evolution of the dancer within the dance style. YouTube's organization of content does not directly provide a sense of temporal linearity in spite of the fact that videos are obviously uploaded one after another over time. In contrast, blog posts

are automatically ordered chronologically, which allows the observer to easily grasp the author's activity with regard to the dance on a day-to-day basis. Not only are videos embedded into dancers' blogs but photos, songs and text are commonly present too. Despite the presence of this variety of symbolic forms, a personal narrative emerges when the entries are largely text-based. Writing about oneself seems to be an attempt to make sense of what one does in relation to the style. In this sense, to experience the dance is to feel it when doing it but also to talk - and write - about it. Blogs are then most meaningful in those cases where dancers reflect on themselves through the stories they tell about the dance and their experiences with it. These include assessments of a variety of topics, such as the description of a hard day of training, personal thoughts concerning the last battle performed on the street, different kinds of announcements aimed at others, opinions about controversies on YouTube or on the street concerning any aspect of group life, and so forth. In sum, they build their sense of the self as dancers by writing about their experiences of the dance world. Ache dancer put it in these terms.

> **Ache**: … and you had SkyRock. Later it became kind of old-fashioned … It was pretty much like a sort of MySpace, … the French used it quite a lot and we did too.
> **Tony**: Yes, I see you still use it.
> **Ache**: Yeah … I'll keep on doing so as long as it keeps getting hits, which would mean there are people interested in myself … It's useful to give news, to publish vids, to make announcements, … For example, I've been using it to tell people about my injured knee, and some people have asked me about it. It's a good way to keep people up to date.

Here, Ache points to the third pattern in the use of blogs in ElectroDance, which derives from their public character. As we have noted, blogs are a useful artifact to electrodancers in enabling them to give a personal account of one's experience regarding the dance. Yet in contrast with a traditional paper-based diary, which also allows people to put their feelings and thoughts into written words, blogs are not meant to be private but are instead overtly public in essence. In other words, while a personal diary is kept for oneself, blogs are written in order to share, at least theoretically, the content with others. Bloggers interact, first, with the technical medium, and by means of the interface with themselves, but the relationship does not end there, as it is purposely extended to others who can access its contents, enabling interpersonal communication. In practice, recent research into the relationship between youth and blogging (Hodkinson, 2006; Huffaker, 2006; Bermudez, 2008; Chittenden, 2010) has shown a rich variability in its use, ranging from people who confine the use of blogs to the private sphere to those who envisage and use this interface as a way to enter into contact with others, regardless of the actual amount of feedback obtained in practice. The electro-dancers' use takes this latter form, and it is interesting to see how they approach the existence of those on the other side of the interface. In this sense and on the basis of my observation of the use of blogs by Valencian dancers, two kind of imaginaries related to blogging might arguably be said to exist.

In the first variant, the blog authors regard their followers as equals. In this case, blogs are seen as conveying both up-to-date personal information of one's experience as a dancer as well as being a means of providing useful information to the group. Ache's comments above could be seen as a good example of this attitude. If one looks at the content of "Union Electro", one finds Ache writing on a wide range of topics: calls to meet up, opinions on recent issues, controversies related to group life, and confessions about his own dance progression. The second imaginary at work envisages the blogs' visitors as an audience. This variant can be seen on the accounts of members from teams such as the Valencian "BeatMode" or Barcelonian "BeatBangerz" and it involves the

dancers setting themselves at a distance from their followers, with the blogs then turning into a device geared to publicly project a kind of self, asymmetrically related to others, and thereby giving rise to a social relation based on celebrity-style broadcast communication. Under this perspective, dancers value their involvement in the style as something conferring on them a degree of distinction, which can be noticed by the way in which they address their real, or imagined, audience. The attempt to create a sense of complicity with the audience is made by employing different discursive resources. In the case of BeatMode, teasing statements like "This time we're gonna tell you something we've never told before …" or "BeatMode will be travelling to Paris … we'll soon inform and show you some pics … don't miss it!!" are used, implicitly depicting the blog authors as self-consciously standing at the centre of someone else's attention, in an attempt to generate admiration around them regardless of the actual existence of such attention in practice. In other cases bloggers talk about themselves in the third person when narrating everyday life situations, as if they were external observers (see image 14).

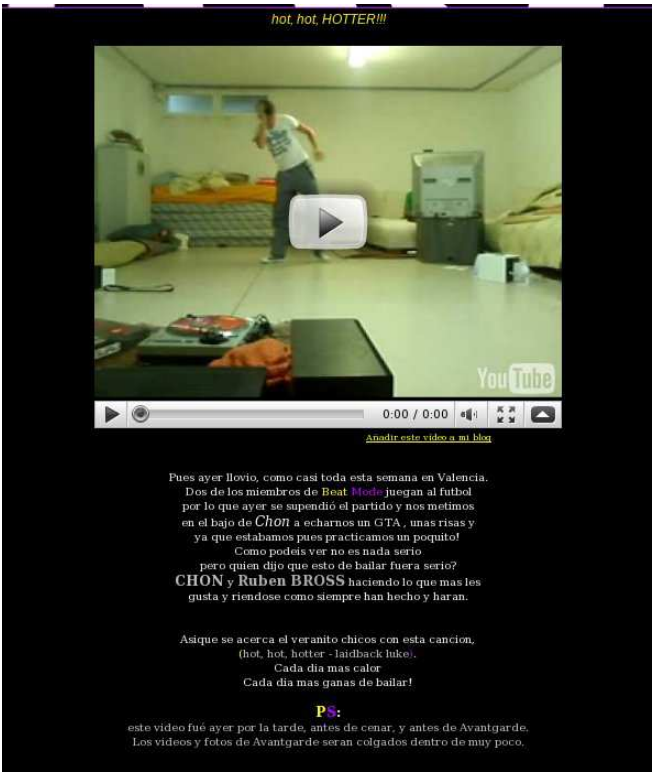

Image 14. BeatMode's blogging style

The most noteworthy aspect of this practice is its importance to the dancers regardless of the existence or otherwise of a significant audience. For most blogs, a low number of comments would bring into question the existence of a fully-fledged audience and, consequently, the ultimate value of the effort invested in maintenance of the blog. Yet under my interpretation electro-dancers hold blogs for another reason: the use of the blog corresponds to these young people's

dreams of becoming a star. Even though blogging is thought to be for the most part public, in the end it proves otherwise. Yet it is the exercise of the imagination which gives value to blogging in the electro-dancers' eyes, with the blogs being the technical resource with which to realize this inner fantasy. Thus, these young people's daydreaming is no longer subjectively confined to their imagination or bedroom in the form of posters of pop idols hanging on the wall, but it can now be publicly projected onto the shared digital space of these interfaces. Unexpectedly, these dreams can in practice be played out in ways that were not possible in the past. Consequently, the technologically-enabled performance of fantasies brings a shift in the notion of what is public and private, or personal and collectively shared. In many cases not strictly concerning blogging but rather the overall use of new media, it is common to find electro-dancers taking pictures and videos of themselves at home, posing in the same way pop-and-movie stars do, in a range of semi-intimate scenes related to the dance but also implicitly connected to their more mundane everyday life[98]. As a result, what is supposed to relate to the public image of dancers is at the same time part of their private selves, their identity being forged in the blurred boundary of this dichotomy.

We have sketched out the more typical use of blogs by electro-dancers in relation to group- and self-presentation purposes and now the discussion will move on to the empirical examination of specific cases. Here, more elaborate forms of personal self-presentation look for inspiration in the behaviours and values rooted in celebrity and consumer cultures, a tactical choice in the quest for wider social

[98] Interestingly, we can observe in this a dialectical dynamic between increasingly-popular "reality TV" and the realm of grassroots practices. TV networks do not simply focus on celebrities' lives in the content of their shows nowadays, but have recently tended to make ordinary people's lives the object of spectacle too. The BeatMode members' attitudes and behaviours seem to result from the hybridization of these two dimensions, with common people becoming celebrities with the help of new media.

recognition, which is linked to the notion of mediatization used throughout this thesis.

The mediatized move from dancer to "star"

As we have seen, a number of electro-dancers have come to understand their involvement in dance as a vehicle to shape a certain kind of self, one in which the dancer thinks of him/herself as a sort of 'star', as someone who has attained significant popularity and social recognition, and behaves accordingly. Blogging has been regarded as a suitable instrument to pursue this aim. Yet blogging-related practices cannot be looked at in isolation. Before the arrival of Facebook - an interface aimed at integrating all the communicative socio-technical features which were previously scattered across distinct media forms - dancers' blogs drew on content coming from other sites such as YouTube, personal websites or instant messaging. Personal content was thus found across a number of intertwined digital interfaces so that the dancers' identity emerges out of what they leave behind on all of them. This does not prevent us from seeing blogging-related practices on their own but it must not be forgotten that they only make full sense when seen as part of the media ecology within which the electro-dancers' communications developed. Dancers who understand the degree of interrelatedness between the diverse media interfaces as part of their overall communication with others are better at presenting themselves and relating not only to members of the dance scene but also to 'outsiders' too. In some cases, like that of the Valencian dancer 'Solo' who will shortly be the object of further discussion, this goes hand-in-hand with a self-understanding largely influenced by celebrity culture, recognizing digital interfaces as the most appropriate means with which to realize this specific kind of personal identity.

Indeed, cultural theorists such as Marshall have come to recognize a conspicuous relationship between new media forms and celebrity culture. He

thinks of the link between the two as being embedded in the broader developments in celebrity culture over the past decades, which is in turn linked to significant structural changes in the entertainment industries. Marshall regards celebrity culture as having exerted a great influence on global culture. The importance of celebrity culture resides in its capacity to teach generations about "how to engage and use consumer culture to make oneself" (2010:38). To put it a different way, celebrity culture is of particular importance because it can function as "a pedagogical tool and specifically a pedagogical aid in the discourse of the self". In short, celebrities function as cultural benchmarks for people, providing them with culturally-patterned ways of being, acting and expressing themselves in the public realm. Importantly, Marshall underlines the extent to which celebrity culture was originally built upon what he refers to as a representational communication style linked to the operation and logic of mass media institutions, in what we have referred to as broadcast communication. The celebrity was a cultural model of persona filtered, controlled and shaped by the creativity, ideas and for-profit logic of cultural media industries, to which the audience was exposed in specific formats, fashions and social situations - e.g. celebrities were presented in interview structures, TV and radio shows as well as in films and celebrity gossip settings. Against this representational form of communicating with others, Marshall opposes what he views as a presentational-type of media embodied in people's current uses of new media. According to him, new media intersect celebrity culture in two ways. Firstly, new media allow for the dissemination of information from and to other media; secondly, new media are, as outlined earlier, integral to the organic production of the self too. For Marshall, what we are witnessing nowadays is the transformation of celebrity culture within a technologically-shifted media environment, a change which could be arguably said to be two-way. On the other hand, formerly well-established celebrities have to manage and adapt their self-presentation strategies born in the broadcast era to new presentational modes of addressing and relating to their fans in accordance with the novel forms of communication employed at a grassroots level. On the

other hand, ordinary individuals, under the influence of celebrities and empowered by new media, reproduce and incorporate celebrity behaviours, attitudes and values into the production of their (public) selves. As an extension of the analysis of identity linked to new media use which began in Part Three, in what follows I will discuss the second dimension of the transformation of celebrity culture through empirical examples found in ElectroDance. For the most part, I will focus on the case of the Valencian dancer Solo, as he best represents how new media can be appropriated for shaping a celebrity-like self within the context of this dance youth style.

Solo was one of the second generation of dancers coming to the style. At the early age of fifteen, he committed himself to the dance by joining a Valencian dance team called "Elektro-Tek", but it did not take long for him to make his own way, forming and leading his own team in Ribarroja, a small municipality nearby Valencia. Solo stood out right from the outset and he did so not only because of his ever-improving skills at dancing, nor due to his proved mastery of and creativity with media technologies, but because he learnt how to strategically manage, shape and present his public self by means of all these digital interfaces. In Bourdieusian terms, in contrast to other prominent dancers for whom the manner in which their public image was presented did not count for so much, Solo knew how to capitalize on his own subcultural capital by means of his mastery of media technologies, forging a singular persona as a worldwide, well-known dancer, thereby gaining noticeable levels of social recognition. Therefore, Solo's success in forging a celebrity-like identity was based on a balanced combination of, in Marshall's terms, elements of both representational and presentational celebrity cultures supported by a thorough knowledge of digital media technologies. The following pages will discuss these three elements separately.

This first element behind effective self-presentation to be considered is the mastery of media and its language. I began to follow Solo's dance-related activity during 2009 when he created his own personal website and opened a YouTube channel. Solo differentiated himself from others dancers from the outset

and he was to find in media technologies the perfect resource for such a purpose. Unlike other dancers whose use of YouTube would not go further than displaying homemade, rather amateur personal videos of themselves dancing at home or on the streets, Solo was keen on producing increasingly highly-crafted videos which were to gain him a greater and greater audience over time. As was seen in Chapter Seven, Solo understood the value of a well-made video and the power of images to attract people's attention in a world where in order to be a well-known dancer one he had to acquire a reputation both at the local and translocal levels, something which he was able to do; new media offered the chance to build his public image far beyond his immediate social environment. At a juncture in which dancers had to globally compete with hundreds of other dancers, attention became a scarce resource and and a strategy for gaining it a must. Solo started to produce videos showcasing a variety of locations, multi-shot standpoints and increasingly complicated narratives refashioning futuristic narratives or urban-grounded situations, which always formed the preferred backdrops for dance performances. In addition, it is worth noting the extent to which Solo - and others dancers too - not only learned by himself how to master media technologies but also how to develop such narratives, which showed an intuitive yet also thorough knowledge of languages, media formats and genres, probably resulting from years of exposure to popular culture products - a knowledge which could be seen as being part of contemporary youth's "media knowledge". Solo's videos grew in popularity in many different locations, especially in Mexico where his followers could be counted in the thousands. Along with increasing his activity in quantity and quality on YouTube, Solo extended his presence across as many interfaces as possible so that he could reach out to people in different ways. As has been mentioned, he currently owns his own personal website, "www.solotck.com", which functions as a point of reference for his presence on other media interfaces such as email, MSN, Tuenti, Facebook or Twitter, although the bulk of the media-related activity is channelled via Facebook and YouTube. Furthermore, although Solo's sphere of communication was principally based on the use of new media, he

did not miss out on exploiting the power of broadcast TV channels for the dissemination of information when possible, as he pursued a wider public presence outside the digitally networked channels. An example of this is his appearance in January 2012 on Canal 9's TV morning show "Connexió", as he was interviewed with regard to the celebration of a local dance contest. In sum, a first step to be potentially widely known is to reach people in whichever manner possible through all of today's available channels, with this kind of self-expression being a possibility facilitated by new media.

The second element of Solo's new media-built identity points to the representational dimension of self-presentation, which finds expression through the appropriation of new media. The point here is that despite the fact that Solo found ways to present himself publicly without the intervention of any cultural intermediary, he did so by incorporating behavioural and expressive patterns inherited from the representational mode of address possessed by traditional mass-communication, in a celebrity-like style. Two elements can be regarded as belonging to such a mode of address. Firstly, Solo forged a stylised, unmistakable visual image of himself that could be recognized from one interface to another and used consistently over time - an image with which he could differentiate himself from other dancers. Such a unique, personal visual image was shaped on the basis of two stylistic choices. Firstly, Solo designed a personal logo which would be attached to all his videos, personal webpages, and his Facebook and Twitter profiles, and it was even displayed on his self-made T-shirts. Secondly, all the content featured the same color patterns, typographic and background composition, with these design choices revealing significant knowledge of image editing software and computer-based tools. Finally, his look was equally important. Solo's appearance did not differ a great deal from the way other dancers looked, as suggested elsewhere, as he tended to feel comfortable wearing sports-type clothes. Yet, within this sphere of stylistic consumer choice, Solo added other ingredients echoing clubbers' or Tecktonik-inspired looks from the past, such as clothes with shiny black-coloured patterns and a modern, toned-

down mohawk. Therefore, when presenting himself in as many communication spaces as possible, it was crucial to do so in such a way that allowed others to see Solo as a different dancer[99]. The content delivered was important too. Unlike most other dancers whose video production was limited to featuring dance performances, Solo devised and offered to his audience, free-of-cost, dance lessons and tutorials for beginners, with similar videos now frequently offered on YouTube. However, beyond projecting a stable, lost-lasting distinctiveness as a dancer, it was to be the employment of certain practices which would show Solo's self as imbued with behavioural patterns and meanings inspired by celebrity identity. Multiple elements detectable across his personal YouTube channel, Twitter account and personal website came to feature Solo as a self-conscious celebrity-like figure supported by a broad legion of followers around the world admiring his style and himself. Two of these videos can serve as examples of this. In the first one, posted in May 2010 and entitled "Recopilación de lo nunca visto de :Solo:[100]", Solo addresses the camera to express gratitude to all his followers after having reached an overall total of one million viewings of Youtube videos. The video was meant to be a sort of gift for all viewers, consisting of an assemblage of discarded footage never included in previous videos. Talking on the video, Solo makes reference to his website where followers can purchase his personally-designed t-shirt.

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[99] In this sense, it is worth noting how even though a dancer basically attains an identity by belonging to the group, within the group one must retain a sense of individuality. The sense of individuality comes through developing a personal, distinctive style, as Solo's case clearly shows. The consideration of intra-group individuality echoes Simmel's analysis at the turn of the 20th century regarding the notion of fashion and the way in which social groups tend to define themselves through a double movement: on the one hand, groups must stand out "outwardly" from others, signifying the "difference" - i.e. a symbolically perceived distinction that makes a difference in social terms - suggested by Hebdige, and on the other hand, "inwardly", with its members reinforcing their own individuality and position within the group realm (1999: 43).

[100] This could be translated as "Never before seen compilation of Solo".

Image 15. Solo's for-profit practices

In another video (see image 16), Solo displays a more clearly celebrity-inspired attitude in personally heralding a campaign to raise funds for the victims of a recent nuclear disaster in Japan. Solo posted a video with the name "Ayudando a Japón[101]", whose narrative is eye-catchingly organized. The video starts off with a sequence of juxtaposed images blending together news footage from mass-media coverage, with Solo's thoughtful, downcast figure serving as a background for the composition. A footnote at the bottom of the screen displays a series of bank account numbers for viewers to altruistically donate money for the cause, a gesture which resembles certain TV shows and celebrity attitudes toward audiences when acting as mediators between individuals and victims of different kinds of collective tragedies.

[101] This could be translated as "Helping Japan".

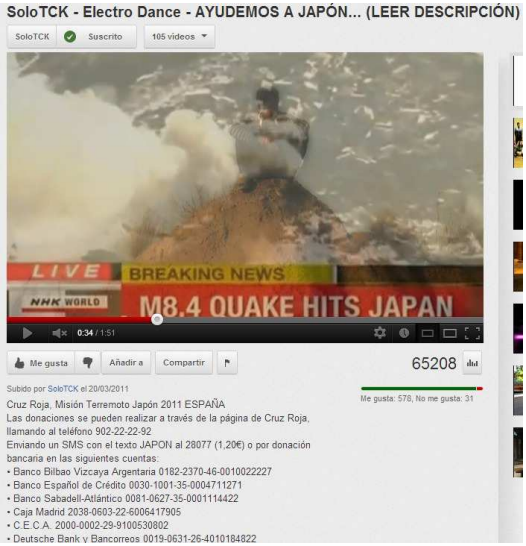

Image 16. Solo's projected celebrity-like behaviour

In the concrete case of celebrities, these often calculated attitudes are aimed at enhancing their credit in their followers' eyes, implicitly drawing an association between the figure of the celebrity and certain personal values such as solidarity, empathy and benevolence. Many viewers applauded Solo's initiative, recognizing the youngster's gesture towards those unknown people who were suffering on the other side of the world. Interestingly, such comments on YouTube came in many cases not from acquaintances or friends but from his broad base of followers located in diverse, far-off places all over the world.

> *"Well, Solo let me tell you you're one of the guys I most admire, even more now that you had this admirable idea to help people going through*

such a big drama in Japan. You're an excellent dancer, the best one in Spain for me"

GREETINGS FROM PERU - TRUJILLO
ATT : FAMILY ADICT DANCE :D
GOD BLESS YOU AND THE SPANISH DANCE COMMUNITY XD
Hideki Trujillo 1 year ago"

"You're a very good dancer I hope my bro to be as famous as you on the network .. you're so good and nice vid"
MsSnaik 1 year ago"

"It's nice to know there are people like you who worry about other people, we all should follow your example helping people in Japan"
CONGRATULATIONS !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!-!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
DanceGenerationMexico
DanceGenerationM 1 year ago"

These excerpts give a sense of Solo's status as a grassroots celebrity. They illustrate an aspect which will be discussed further near the end of this chapter: Solo is depicted as a new celebrity but one whose popularity exists the realm of "the network". Furthermore, the comment by the YouTube user "Hideki" is coherent with the above-mentioned effect that celebrities' solidarity-related gestures have on followers' perception of them. Regardless of the credibility of such actions, the effects on the audience are clear in terms of the increase in the celebrity's prestige. Finally, a further consequence of Solo's gesture connected to what Marshall views as the most outstanding function of celebrities' personality - i.e. becoming a benchmark of the self capable of inspiring someone else in their personal life - can be found in the comment from the Youtube account of the collective "DanceGenerationNMexico": Solo becomes an example for others.

Just as celebrities seek to build their public reputation by being associated with certain social values, their image is often linked to consumer choices through the participation of promotional campaigns of diverse cultural

goods and services. In most cases the link between the celebrity and the advertised product is not coincidental, and marketers tend to highlight this link on the basis of certain meanings and associations which seek to connect certain specific symbolic features of the product with those of the celebrity's persona. In a video called "Solo Dancer with Audi R8" Solo seeks to establish this kind of effect of identification between his public image as a popular dancer and a luxurious consumer product such as a sports car (see image 17).

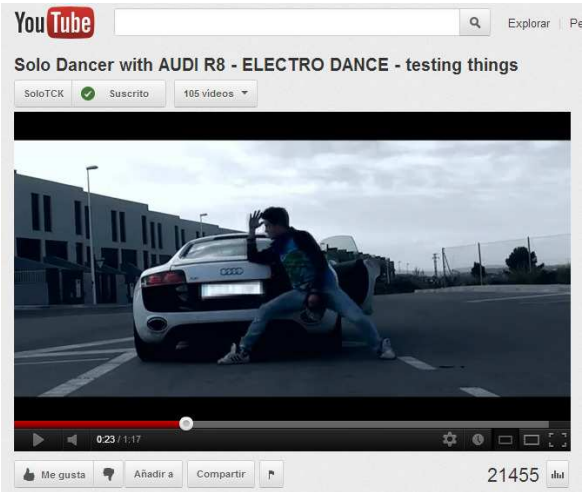

Image 17. Consumer culture

Obviously, Solo did not own that car nor had he been called on and paid by Audi to take part in such a promotional video, but he no doubt fantasized playfully with that remote possibility. In my own interpretation, Solo's initiative aimed to draw an association between his skill as a dancer and the excellence of the car, but Solo also gave his own account in which he opted to justify the video idea in terms of

provoking pleasure for viewers: "[...] I took the opportunity of driving my father's friend car for a while, and I made this video for you to enjoy my dance style along with this wonder at the same time".

If Solo's self-presentation tactics includes elements grounded in the representational, "classic" celebrity culture, it equally contains some others which can be arguably associated with a more recent, new media-afforded presentational style. This presentational style involves an emerging way of understanding the relationship between celebrities and audiences based on a supposedly more direct, one-to-one, sustained interaction rather than the presence of third parties mediating this relationship. Needless to say, these elements unmistakably appear under the conditions of highly interactive, networked, potentially massive, two-way communication enabled by new media. In Solo's case, this would mean to be as responsive as possible to as many followers as possible, a kind of reciprocity not existing in the representational style, leading to media theorists such as Thompson to view this type of uncoupled interaction between celebrities and audiences in terms of "quasi-interaction".

> **Tony**: How does one get the number of followers that you have?
> **Solo**: I think people love my vids and dance style [...] For most dancers personal image is not really important, unlike me. I try to do some things that many others do not. First of all, your dance style must be original and distinctive - that's the most important thing if you want people to follow you. Secondly, your videos have to be well made so people get engaged with them over time [...] Another important thing is the relationship with people. I always try to answer everybody's messages, not to let people down, and be considerate … Sometimes, I have to cope with 30 messages an evening and I try to answer them all, one by one … At other times, I'm able to maintain different conversations on MSN at the same time.

Solo fits with the noticeable change in celebrity behaviour with regard to followers, one which has been also adopted by previously existing, very well-known celebrities working for cultural industries and entertainment businesses. What is important to bear in mind here is that the relationship between celebrities and audiences used to be based on a distant, mediated relationship, involving a low degree of reciprocity, but now celebrities are expected to be more responsive to audiences, with new media providing heightened levels of regular interpersonal communication. Unlike more prominent celebrities, for whom the use of digital interfaces such as Twitter and Facebook is mostly oriented to asynchronous communication even if they provide updates on a regular basis, Solo invested a great deal of time interacting with his followers in real time, proving himself to be highly skilful at multitasking.

Images 18 and 19. Solo's linking to audience

Moreover, the attempt to keep in as close contact as possible with his followers led Solo to sketch out creative initiatives to get other dancers to engage with him and his passion for the dance. Once again, taking advantage of the interaction potential of new media, Solo released a video in January 2012 inviting other dancers to join him to make a collective video which would be made out of small chunks of each participant's videos. The initiative was well-received by his network of followers, with up to sixty-seven dancers from different parts of the world coming to eventually appear in the collaborative experiment. Such international collaboration was not unusual in any case. As seen in Chapter Six, what characterizes ElectroDance is precisely the way in which young people have found in network media technologies the technical means to suit their communication needs in order to transnationally coordinate collective practice regardless of spatial and temporal constraints. The dynamics of cooperation in technologically-extended forms of collaborative content generation as exemplified by Solo is then not an exception but rather a central constituent of electro-dancers' shared behavioural patterns: such behaviour has been claimed by recent media theorists such as Scolari (2010: 211) as currently defining people's broader patterns of production and consumption with the advent of new media. Just as Solo was able to encourage other dancers to become involved in the production of a collective video, other media producers equally tend to join forces in a variety of ways. Dancer and video producer Serox put it this way: "... look, I have my own business with some DJs. They compose songs for my vids in exchange for advertising them through the video itself by adding their name to the credits."

Solo's self-presentation was therefore the result of blending different presentational styles: one being indebted to older unidirectional, externally-mediated modes of address used by music, movies and TV celebrities, and another one characterized by a more dialectical, direct style of communication between follower and person followed. Yet a last question remains to be considered with regard to Solo's case. We could ask ourselves about the implications of grassroots celebrity in terms of everyday life. Just as well-known celebrities have to struggle

with the inconvenience of being publicly scrutinized, due to mass-media overexposure, there exists a negative side here as well.

> **Tony**: Does your popularity have any downside?
> **Solo**: Yes, well, just as I'm telling you … some people envy me, and this leads to unpleasant situations ... some people have even tried to steal my MSN user details from me, or to create fake profiles on Facebook and Twitter, pretending to be me. I don't really know what they really get by doing that, but I can assure you it's quite annoying …

Here Solo reports an interesting case of people trying to pass themselves off as him. As his popularity increased as a result of his public activity on the range of interfaces through which he communicates to people, it was to be expected that individuals wanting to cause him trouble for whatever reason end up playing the same game, using the same means that Solo does. Despite the discomfort that this caused to Solo, its scope was limited to the sphere of relationships that he held with others he was largely physically distant from, which were subject to technologically-extended interaction. However, this last example should not lead us to regard the relationship between the ElectroDance identity, new media and celebrity culture as having perceptible effects on the young dancers' identities only in respect of relationships maintained with other people in conditions of technologically-extended communication. Although for prominent dancers like Solo the dance-related identity was a dimension of self which was best managed and capitalized on by using new media, this sphere of social relationships and interpersonal and group interaction came to have an influence, in terms of the enhancement in social recognition, in another apparently separate array of everyday social situations and settings. This is consistent with what has been argued previously throughout the thesis, as I have envisaged extended interaction as being enmeshed with other differently-fashioned levels of interaction, a

distinction which becomes less significant when adopting a phenomenological point of view. The use of new media to achieve the celebrity-like status possessed by Solo and other dancers, with a personal audience created via regular contact with a mass of peers, followers of unknown styles and anonymous individuals, could be seen as bearing scarce relation to what happens in other social settings in which young people's lives play out: in schools, malls, pubs, clubs, streets or homes. Yet reality demonstrates otherwise. In such cases, popularity, did have other more pleasant effects on some other facets of Solo and other dancers' social lives.

> **Tony**: How has your involvement with the dance affected your life and the interpersonal relations with family, friends and so forth?
> **Solo**: Well, I don't think it has had a great effect in any sense. The relationship with my parents is pretty good. They don't poke their nose into it - they just know what I'm into and respect it. It's also true that my fame is higher now in my hometown, everybody seems to know me now. After all, my friends remain the same as well as those who I didn't like before … all that didn't change.

Others dancers such as Valencian-Colombian dancer Jeison accounted for similar effects of transference of popularity from "life-on-the-screens" to other settings of socialization as result of greater public dance-related exposure brought about by new media.

> **Jey**: Yeah, absolutely, … before that Muerte Electro against Ache, people used to look at me and said 'damn, you dance just like whatever', but that was all, they didn't know my name or anything. After that dance-off, I went on holidays to Colombia and when I came back, I started going to 'Guru' [Valencia club]. It was surprising that some people recognized me

and said 'you're Jeisonxxx …'.

Tony: It seems a fair guess that they'd seen you on YouTube …

Jey: Yeah, that's the point!

Most young people long to be popular within their circles of socialization. Becoming popular allows individuals to stand out in those settings in which social life takes place, whether they are schools, streets or leisure-oriented public spaces like clubs. As has often been reported in youth cultural studies, involvement in youth styles provides young people with a valuable resource to distinguish themselves from other individuals within all these social spaces, with those adopting youth styles becoming in some case the object of attention from outsiders, arousing emotional reactions of either approval or disapproval, on the basis of their distinctiveness. Jeison's involvement in dance plays in his favour in terms of social acceptance in such highly public settings. By appearing in videos on YouTube, some people came to know things about Jeison that would have not done otherwise. In the absence of this interface, young people would have depended upon face-to-face, interpersonal communication in order to obtain and exchange information about him. The medium enhanced Jeison's visibility, giving those unknown to him information about him by being able to re-live past events at which they were not present. In my own interpretation, Jeison's YouTube-derived popularity fed back into his reputation in the clubs and this, in turn, fed back into his popularity on Youtube by virtue of a simple dialectical transfer between the two communicational situations. On the one hand, Jeison received greater social recognition in the popular clubs he frequented, as those who saw his videos came to learn about his popularity in other contexts. This is only possible after the emergence of YouTube, as this source of information was simply not available before. On the other hand, it is likely that those who knew Jeison in a face-to-face context but who were previously unaware of his presence on Youtube, would search for and watch his videos, further increasing his popularity.

As we have seen, electro-dancers' popularity works primarily within the logic of the dance grouping and less outside of it, although these last examples show how visibility acquired by way of media exposure has consequences not only in terms of self-construction and identity-building linked to the style, such as in Solo's case, but also in ways that affects socialization in other settings which have little to do with the dance. In the light of what has been discussed over the previous pages, I will now finish the discussion on ElectroDance identity initiated in the previous chapter with a final contemplation of the relationship between media, style and young people's identity.

Towards a "convergence culture"? Last thoughts on communication, identity and new media

Previously in this thesis, I have looked at identity in Electrodance as an important dimension within the style's own circuit of culture. I have dealt with components of the style's identity within this circuit as being connected to the persistent role of culture industries and media corporations, as they shape the meanings of the style through certain discourses and making-meaning practices. As has been repeatedly seen, although current technological developments set up the communicational environment and conditions for the process to take place in a more dialectical way, young people in fact occupy a rather subordinate position in such constructions. The communicational interface(s) available to media corporations and young people based on new media technologies have not led to a better, enduring dialogue between the parties.

In contrast, as we have seen throughout this chapter, this type of technology can make a difference in terms of the identity-related practices which young people can employ. In this sense, I have examined the use of blogs as the preferred communication channel for electro-dancers to publicly present

themselves not only to dance-related social circles but more widely to anyone making use of this media technology. Interestingly, self-presentation practices using new media did not appear in a cultural vacuum but were connected to the world of celebrities. As argued earlier, certain electro-dancers tended to build their sense of self as dancers on the basis of the behavioural patterns and meanings of globally-extended celebrity culture. Just as with celebrities of the older kind - a social and cultural phenomenon rooted in the broadcast era - who extended their fan base globally, some electrodancers came to do so using new media, acquiring visibility and recognition which went far beyond their local environment. In this sense, the following comment by Youtuber "MsSnaik" on one of Solo's videos can serve to introduce a final reflection on the subject discussed throughout this chapter:

> *"You're a very good dancer I hope my bro to be as famous as you on the network you're so good and nice vid"*
> *MsSnaik 1 year ago"*

As shown here and in previous examples, this youtuber overtly displays a degree of admiration for Solo, showing approval for his dance style and proven skill at video production. Furthermore, he (or she) refers to Solo's popularity in terms of it being gained "on the network". This nuance is not without interest for our ongoing discussion. As is well-known, to become massively socially popular at times before the emergence of the new highly-interactive, network communication technologies depended greatly on whether or not the person in question was part of the world cultural and entertainment industries. Only institutions of this kind possessed the both technical means and the economic and operational resources to provide certain individuals - i.e. the so-called celebrities - with the recognition possible in mass-communication. Needless to say, popularity has always existed, but before the advent of broadcast media it did not usually transcend the social

life of small-scale groups and local social situations characterized by face-to-face communication. Although patterns of broadcast communication have existed and continue to exist even in the most limited local settings of human interaction, a "mass" can only be brought together by technical means. In other words, in order to be truly "well-known" one must therefore be able to reach people beyond the boundaries of locality and face-to-face interaction. The broadcast media provided such a model for mass-communication, a form of exchanging meaningful information among those in contact with each other but involving a singular technologically-enabled form of association. However, as observed in the case of the more prominent dancers like Solo, new media are also currently able to provide the technical conditions to deliver the field of recognition possible with broadcast communication. With thousands of followers and viewings of his videos, Solo provides a perfect example of a vertically-constituted field of recognition around a public persona which is not very different from those formed by means of the culture and entertainment industries. Furthermore, as we have seen, Solo and other dancers incorporated behavioural and symbolic elements inspired by the representational style of twentieth-century celebrities when portraying themselves on new media. Likewise, we can see today's celebrities in the worlds of movies, TV, sports or literature using new media in an attempt to achieve heightened levels of interpersonal communication and a seemingly more personal relationship with audiences. Having said that, have new communication and information technologies blurred the meaning of what being a celebrity is? Is the identity of a celebrity available to whoever wants to adopt it today? Can anyone be a celebrity? Does this mean that Solo's popularity "on the network" can be equated in practice to, for example, that of any of the stars of the silver screen or pop music?

Seen from the perspective of the behavioural, identity-related and communicational patterns involved, this would seem to be the case. New media have brought a new push to the mediatization trend which increasingly pervades the varied realms of contemporary cultural and social life, here affecting the

shaping of personal modes of expression within youth styles in a way reminiscent of the older kind of celebrity culture. However, when seen more carefully, there still remain some noteworthy differences resulting from the contrasting logics of each type of celebrity, and the kind of impact they can have in practice, which arguably makes necessary a relativization of the degree of impact of the currently shifted technological infrastructure. On the one hand, despite the fact that Solo enjoys a field of recognition enabled by mass broadcast, this vertically-driven form of relationship, in which he becomes the centre of attention, still operates within the prevailing structure of network communication in which the network is made up of the members of Electrodance scene. Undoubtedly, without new media he would have not acquired the degree of social recognition he has enjoyed so far, but it would perhaps be excessive to equate Solo's social significance to that, for example, of any worldwide popular rock stars. After all, there is still a great difference in terms of the economic and organizational resources mobilized in each case. The cultural circuit of ElectroDance which he takes part in is partially enclosed in on itself, keeping itself apart from the larger communicational channels of media corporations which retain the capacity - and power - to provide the highest levels of visibility. Even within the new environment of global communication, this fact diminishes the scope of Solo's influence. Solo is no doubt a celebrity, a youngster behaving as such, whose identity could not have developed in the way it has done without the conditions of the current technological environment. But he remains a grassroots celebrity after all. On the other hand, we find the opposite trend in the way celebrities more linked to culture and media industries deal with technological change. As mentioned earlier, well-known global celebrities coming from different fields of entertainment seem to strive to establish a more direct, interpersonal relationship with audiences in the era of digital technologies. However, their mode of address and overall operation remains subjected to the traditional social logic of broadcast communication, one in which pop stars and movie stars are but the most visible side of large, highly-organized business. Rather than working under a network

communication framework, as in the case of Solo and other popular electro-dancers, in which a broadcast dynamic still exists, for global celebrities the process may be taking place the other way around. They no doubt add a degree of a more interpersonal "flavour" to their relationship with followers, but they do so in any case without losing their grip on their position as individuals who are the focus of someone else's attention. As Marshall has shown, there are countless cases of global celebrities adopting new media as a strategic component used to strengthen their presence in the public realm, rather than being a determined attempt to increase contact with followers. Therefore, despite the fact there is some confluence between traditional and grassroots celebrities, mostly in the coexistence of interlayered, patterned broadcast and network communication flows that were not possible in the past, the reality points to the underlying permanence of the forms of social association which previously prevailed.

Apart from the prevailing form of association behind such degrees of "celebrity-ness", elements of confluence can be perceived at a symbolic level too. As seen previously, the way in which Solo and other dancers publicly present themselves by way of new media draws heavily on the behavioural and symbolic elements of the representational style developed by celebrities in the twentieth century. The modes of behaviour and self-presentation linked to the older celebrity style are now subjectively internalized by young people as part of their "cultural repertoire", which involves a significant amount of symbolism with associated meanings, integrating these as part of their sense of the public self. Unlike the past, where the employment of such meanings at a grassroots level was tied to more restricted, locally-rooted communicational situations, new media bring possibilities for expression at a broader level, one which has a significance in terms both quantitative - i.e. it is possible to address oneself to a worldwide audience if desired - and qualitative - i.e. symbolism through media technologies offers a variety of possibilities for self-construction and self-presentation. Beyond these relational and communicational elements, what could ultimately be said to underlie the technically-supported forms of association and the hybridization of

celebrity-related representational and presentational modes of address are the associated logics of the cultural circuits in question. As seen throughout this dissertation, these logics have been present, sometimes overlapping and at others working in parallel, at different stages throughout the cultural production of ElectroDance style. During the broadcast stage of its evolution, it was possible to view a limited number of dancers, mostly linked to the "Tecktonik" brand, as epitomizing the classic profile of an older celebrity style. Thus, they gave interviews on TV and radio shows, were featured in video-games, provided their image for advertising campaigns for a variety of products, and took part in tours around France and other countries promoting the style. This select band of young people even came to temporarily earn a living through their engagement with the dance. They enjoyed a level of visibility corresponding to true celebrities which derived from the link of the brand with the operations of large media corporations: they introduced and spread the style across broader communicational circuits rather than just those of the underground. In the network stage of the style's development, the celebrity phenomenon, far from fading away, has taken on another novel expression, with particular electro-dancers equally behaving as celebrities and enjoying conspicuous levels of attention thanks to new media. Out of the spotlight, becoming a celebrity involves a personal investment in building a celebrity-like self. In contrast to broadcast electro-dancers, network electro-dancers have to rely upon their own resources to build their identity, no doubt finding greater difficulties in converting their symbolic capital into an economic one. Behind this inability stands a different cultural circuit dominated by another logic, one in which dancers and followers are interrelated by a less apparent intermediation - that of internet-based corporations like Google or Facebook - and in which the dance keeps away, for better or worse, from vested, commercial interests.

Conclusions

Today's youth are surrounded by new technologies. Over the course of a normal day in their lives, they constantly use them to communicate with their peers, friends and social groups, finding in them an indispensable resource to make their different forms of being together possible. Researchers with an interest in youth and its social worlds have made great efforts in recent years to explore the particular ways in which young people incorporate new media technologies into their everyday lives (Boyd, 2008; Chittenden, 2010; Lange, 2007; Lehdonvirta et alt., 2011, Buckingham, 2008; Ito, 2010), and to assess the impact of new media-based practices on a number of issues and social contexts, ranging from identity-building to socialization in certain institutions, such as the family or school, to name just two. My research project shares similar interests; unlike other studies, I have focused on groups formed around music-related youth cultures and styles, regarding them as spheres of socialization which are still important and which coexist today in tension with an undeniable drive towards individualization.

Questions and framework

Located within the field of youth cultural studies, the research I have presented here could be seen as one among a series of all-encompassing ethnographic studies dealing with music-related youth culture phenomena in which an analysis of media is made and their role in processes of cultural production discussed. Just as in these previous cases, and in contrast with other general research which has approached the issue of youth without considering what cultural backgrounds their subjects might share, the ElectroDance phenomenon has offered me an excellent chance to employ an ethnography-flavoured analytical approach aimed at gaining a better understanding of the nitty-gritty of the cultural and social characteristics of the dance practitioners' group life and and the links of this life with the use of new media. Previous studies in which media have been taken into consideration include Thornton's *Club Cultures*, in which the main interest was to examine the system of distinctions operating in clubbers' conceptions of their social world, and more recently Hodkinson's *Goth*, in which he presents this cultural style as an exemplar on which an extended discussion on subcultures is based. However, my approach has placed a discussion of media at the very centre of the inquiry, making my research at once both an ethnographic depiction of a contemporary youth style in times of technological change and, in contrast, also a study of new media viewed through the lens of the specific practices of a translocal group of dance practitioners. More particularly, I felt that the appropriation by a culturally-distinctive group of young people of certain digital communication technologies with highly-interactive qualities which were not available a few years before was an appealing research object. Moreover, I had the certainty that the relationship between certain novel media technologies and their impact on social relations viewed in terms of "communication" would enable me to tackle the concept of communication itself at a more theoretical level too. Thus, it is my hope that the contribution of this study has not just consisted of updating the state of the art,

by providing a case study subject to the influence of the latest media technologies, but, in doing so, I believe that I have cast the field in a different light by means of a very interesting empirical case. In this sense, for instance, Holmes' recent "theory of communication" (2005), resting for the most part upon the discussion of broadcast and network communication as models of social integration rather than mere technological systems, has been adopted and reinterpreted here. It has been employed to examine the history of the ElectroDance scene and its internal dynamics as a social realm where different agents, places, artifacts and meanings coalesce and give rise to an interactional pattern which is suited to these two models of social integration. Furthermore, Hjarvard's "theory of mediatization" (2008), to a large extent the heir to Thompson's media theory (1998), helped me to view ElectroDance's rituals as evidence of today's drive toward the mediatization of common culture, highlighting the increasing importance of mediatization as a key concept of modernity. Finally, the concept of the interface as used byScolari (2010) has been at the centre of my analysis of the intrinsic properties of media artifacts and young people's uses of them, enabling the old "medium theory" to be brought up to date.

Nevertheless, from the very beginning I suspected that working upon a theoretical notion of communication would not be without problems. As a result of the diversity of meanings attached to the term over time, one soon realizes the different understandings and interpretations it possesses for a range of disciplines and fields of knowledge. Rather than facilitating understanding, this complicates matters unnecessarily to a certain extent. Just as was the case in Meyrowitz's book *No sense of place* (1985), in the broadcast media era, I believed that the strength of my project could also stem from the integration of views and concepts scattered across Media Studies, Semiotics, Anthropology and Sociology. Thus, for example, a semiotic view of youngsters' grassroots video productions as kinds of "texts" is not incompatible with a medium-centred analysis of the socio-technical

features of interfaces, nor is it incoherent to see “texts” and “interfaces” as elements which are integral to the practices of these young dancers within a sphere of social relations which is best understood from Bourdieu’s sociological notion of “field”; and then, of course, there are the politico-economic economy facets of the practices in question. An interdisciplinary approach capable of finding links between these disparate perspectives was therefore needed, in order to be able to address the different dimensions of ElectroDance in a comprehensive manner.

More particularly, in the research presented here, which has looked at the roles which new media technologies play in communication within the social worlds of today’s youth, I have attempted to inquire into the assumption - commonly held by the general public but also within the academy in many cases - that popular culture is being transformed under the pressures of technological change. This dissertation was introduced with a quote taken from an interview with the well-known writer on youth, Nick Hornby, which is worth considering again here. Asked about the impact and effects of new communication technologies on people’s lives, Hornby remarked that, looking at the present in comparison with what we witnessed only a few decades before, his personal experience as a young individual, and more generally that of his generation, was not very different in essence to that of today’s youth. For Hornby, what currently makes all the difference is the new media technologies. But what does this author mean by that? If, as he suggests, for example, the mediation of new media in the communication of family members has left the institutional basis of the family of yesteryear untouched, has it yet contributed to modify the behavioural patterns with which its members relate to each other - e.g. are parent-to-child relations of authority currently being altered by new media use, with teenagers trying out

communication technologies in order to avoid their parents' control[102]. Much in the same line, the social arena of youth cultural styles seemed a priori to me to be another fertile terrain in which to explore and interpret the changes said to have been "brought about" by adoption of new technology.

We are repeatedly reminded about the great impact that internet-based technologies are having on our everyday world, and how our lives are being transformed by the use of new media, while for the most part not being fully aware of this. According to such a view, we are in the middle of a technological revolution which since the mid-90s has impacted upon every facet of our everyday lives at manifold levels. Focused on specific manifestations within the social worlds of today's youth, the primary objective in my research has been to shed light on the way in which a youth style like ElectroDance is created, developed and spread by means of diverse practices, with those which are new media-based acquiring a central significance in the whole process of the cultural production of the style. In my approach to this object of study, I have been concerned with the question of whether, and in what sense, technical innovation in the means of communication always leads to the modification of the communication structures involved in young people's social experience and practices - i.e. what I have called their particular form of "being-together" - with reference to a particular youth culture, that of ElectroDance. Put like this, one might expect, quite deterministically, that communication technologies would bring out some sort of transformation in the dynamics of cultural production of youth styles. As I have remarked at different times throughout the dissertation, today's media, as with any technology, feature specific technical designs and appear with certain built-in affordances. A few important examples are that new media are said to be highly interactive, fully accessible on demand, and enduring, as content gets "fixed" on

[102] See Turkle (2009) for a broader discussion on this and other related aspects.

the digital medium. However, it is well known by cultural sociologists and anthropologists that we make sense of media technologies culturally, that is, out of particular forms of appropriation which make them meaningful to us. According to this premise, the interest in studying youth cultural manifestations like ElectroDance from a communicational perspective is first and foremost to look at how communication technologies enable novel patterns of information exchange across time and space. Yet it is not only this. As Carey (1989) pointed out some time ago with his view of communication as a form of “transmission” and “ritual”, communication possesses a fundamental relationship with rituality - i.e. with shared culture - and it is through communication that we people come to weave social ties and specific forms of attachment in which particular patterns of information exchange are embedded. This “ritual” view of communication has been present throughout the dissertation, as a means of understanding how new technical capacities come to be made sense of by the dance practitioners, and this involved considering how the various social facets of the group and individual experience were shaped in ways that differed from those of times past. At this point, I wish to draw some conclusions on the basis of the empirical evidence that has been presented and in the light of the concepts and categories discussed earlier. I will now consider the question of at what levels, in what senses and in which manners - e.g. enabling, constraining, modifying and so on - new media now contributes to the transformation of the way in which a youth style like ElectroDance is built and experienced.

New media and youth cultures

First of all, a cursory quantitative approach to patterns of new media use by members of the ElectroDance style initially revealed that the young people involved in the style do not differ much from Spanish youth in general in terms of which digital interface they use, but in the purposes they have when using them. It is in this sense, I argue, that we can understand in what sense new media makes a difference in the historical evolution of youth cultures. I argued in Chapter Two that the young dancers have in general terms similar patterns of new media usage as other young people. Significantly, while patterns of use in both cases seemed similar, differences between them emerged with regard to the type of new media used, which, I have suggested, bore relation to the cultural demands of the ElectroDance world. It thus seems that the cultural context of the dance practice involved particular ways of appropriation of new media which were unlike those of other young people. All of them used digital interfaces such as YouTube, Fotolog at an earlier stage, and then Facebook later on, but the purpose behind such uses had little to do with one another. If, in general terms, the use of new media as a communication tool was not particularly different from the rest of today's youth generation, the interest of the research was rather focused on inquiring into the specific meaning of new media within the cultural domain of ElectroDance. In order to respond to this question appropriately, I will now summarize the most important aspects associated with the use of new media within the cultural context of the ElectroDance youth style, attempting to show the reasons why new media forms make such a great a difference to the way in which youth cultures are created, develop and spread in times of technological change[103]. To do so, taking a

[103] The reader may be surprised by my speaking in such general terms in what is a specific case study. However, I am confident that some of the findings and trends described in the following pages may be applicable to or found in other youth phenomena.

similar approach to that seen throughout the dissertation, but without following the order of the narrative seen earlier, I will seek to identify a series of analytical areas, expressed as particular conceptual categories, from which some conclusions can be drawn and some lessons can maybe be learnt, and to give an account of the sense in which new media is able to make such a difference in the development of youth cultures within the ever-changing media environment of contemporary society.

The first of these areas of inquiry concerns the notion of interaction. As extensively argued in the first part of the dissertation, the most defining feature of any media form is its ability to extend interaction in time and space by technical means, disembedding social relations from traditionally embodied situations, and so here, I will consider the significance of new media affordances and limitations in the context of the evolution of the style, that is, with regard to the formation, development and spread of this youth movement. ElectroDance is no different from many older youth cultures with regard to alternating between phases of underground activity and of massive acceptance and higher social visibility. From a communication viewpoint, I examined this conceptually and found that two underlying models, those of broadcast and network communication, have been active at different times during the evolution of the style. I will return to this approach here, in an attempt to characterise, at a time of increasing media presence, the positions, functions and shifting interdependencies among the different actors involved in the symbolic circuit formed around the youth phenomenon.

Secondly, the reorganization of interaction in time and space that new media entails not only affects social relations established “at a distance” but also, quite unexpectedly, social relations taking place at a local level. The extent to which certain style-related practices that could be deployed without the help of new media are in fact carried out with digital artifacts speaks of an ever-

increasing drift towards mediatization within popular (youth) culture, whose implications are worth considering again.

Thirdly, a drift toward a higher degree of the mediatization of culture in contemporary society is not only reflected in certain cultural and subcultural rituals, but is also manifested at other levels such as that of identity. Beyond "interactivity", other built-in qualities of new media such as their "fixity" or "immediacy" play a crucial role when it comes to individuals' self-presentation and, more generally, in identity-building practices related to the dance style. These properties are not exclusive to new media as we can find them in older media forms. All of them possess affordances and practical limitations, as was the case with the older forms, but together they are able to open up a range of possibilities that young dancers explore creatively in this dimension of the style experience. As part of these conclusions, I will review the implications of new media usage in the context of the dance practice, in which internal motivations and meanings are intermingled with other elements borrowed from the traditional celebrity and mass-media culture which is characteristic of contemporary society.

The discussion will finally move on to consider the role of intermediaries in the production of the style. Here, ElectroDance is viewed against the backdrop of today's recomposed landscape of global communication, with new actors such as internet corporations penetrating the ever-evolving yet old structures of the media and culture industries. I will conclude this last chapter with an afterword about the contribution of my research to the fields of Cultural, Media and Communication Studies.

Interaction - or how action in space and time is reorganized today around new media

So, if the most fundamental purpose of media is to extend interaction by technical means, we can ask ourselves at this point what the effects of new media are in terms of enabling communication processes in ElectroDance. The first part of the dissertation attempted to assess this question in the light of the translocal and transnational developments of the style, while giving an account of the style's evolution over time. Intuitively, new media might be expected to have played a key role in extending interaction beyond local boundaries, yet we have also seen the extent to which, somewhat unexpectedly, new media became crucial at a local level too. However, I will focus here on the meaning and implications of new media extending interaction globally.

Youth cultures, subcultures and styles related to popular music have been said to show a similar pattern of dissemination: they originate in particular social and cultural contexts - typically those of English-speaking countries such as post-war Great Britain and USA - and they later travel further afield and take root far away from the original locus of emergence. Similarly, ElectroDance was born in France in around 2006 and, after a few years as a seemingly fleeting fad within French boundaries, it rapidly spread worldwide. These two stages of the style's dissemination - firstly, locally in France, and subsequently, all over the world - were described in Chapters Four and Five. In order to better illustrate the way in which new media make a difference in youth cultures today in contrast with what occurred in the past, we can draw a brief comparison between patterns of global dissemination found in another "pre-internet" dance culture, Hip-Hop, with that

of "internet-age[104]" ElectroDance. In her study of the state of Hip-Hop scene during the nineties, Fogarty (2006) argued that Hip-Hop as a style was experiencing great difficulties to survive after a decade of widespread visibility due to its mass-media presence. Her account focuses particularly on the causes whereby the style was unexpectedly present in different geographical locations after the decisive contribution of mass-media. In her research, Fogarty comes across the existence of a translocal network of communication linking breaking dancers to each other all over the world. Communication between distant b-boys and local scenes took the form of some of them touring from one place to another in order to take part in events and competitions as judges or competitors. These "touring" dancers were in most cases organizers or prominent figures in particular local scenes, implicitly acting as mediators between localities. Interestingly, besides in-person verbal exchanges functioning as the main framework of communication, Fogarty highlights the role of home-made videos as part of the "communicative baggage" that particular dancers carry with them everywhere: videos which are to be shown and handed on to other dancers at their destinations. Just as in ElectroDance, videos are also used here to capture different dance-related activities, largely capturing memorable dance-offs and dance lessons. According to Fogarty, videos thus became a valuable resource for dancers in remote locations operating within in a communicational environment still dominated by embodied interactions. Interpreted from a purely "transmission-based" communicative perspective, the communicational framework in Hip-Hop in the 1990s resembles a great deal, yet on a more modest scale, the practical

[104] Needless to say, to speak of Hip-Hop today as a "pre-internet" youth culture is somewhat inaccurate as Hip-Hop followers have now adopted new media as part of their group experience. Nevertheless, Hip-Hop has been around for some decades, with its worldwide spread being based on media systems which were internet-based. For this reason, the comparison is made here merely for explanatory purposes.

circumstances before the advent of the telegraph[105]. For the symbolic materials of Hip-Hop to reach different locations, the message (the video) had to be personally carried by the messenger (the touring dancer), just as, before the age of telegraphy, the message had to be delivered personally or by a messenger. In this sense, internet-based media would fulfil prima facie similar communication purposes, disembedding interaction from embodied situations just as the telegraph did in the past. Yet whereas telegraph-based systems boosted to a certain degree the networking possibilities among places and individuals, new media and internet technologies in general have taken this trend to a different level. Digital media interfaces bring us levels of connectivity, interactivity and symbolic bandwidth which far exceed the technical affordances of telegraphy, before one even considers questions of generalized access and widespread diffusion.

Nevertheless, let us take this analogy a little further by making a contrast between the kinds of network built in the case of these two youth phenomena. On the one hand, in both ElectroDance and Hip-Hop, contacts between distant places have resulted in dancers touring different areas and in competitions calling for international participants. On the other hand, the role of video-production and exchange in ElectroDance has taken on a more central significance - presumably due to the ease with which both tasks can be carried out - than in Hip-Hop, where the use of videos did no more than supplement embodied exchanges. As has been said, in the context of "pre-internet" Hip-Hop, the circulation of videos was conditioned to the movement of specific individuals back and forth, who implicitly acted as gatekeepers to the scarce resources available to a small number of people within a limited range of situations. Undoubtedly, this was enough to weave a basic content distribution network, but one highly mediated by certain privileged individuals connecting the different scenes, with very little contact

[105] For a more comprehensive account of the emergence and development of the telegraph, see Carey, 1989, pp. 155-178.

between scene members in different places beyond this circle of a few selected intermediaries. However, by being embedded into a fully-horizontal, highly-interactive socio-technical system, video takes on a more central role within the communication sphere of ElectroDance. Far from being a supplementary source of information, video-making and sharing, among other media practices, become central to the everyday activities of dancers, to the point that, when asked about their importance for the style, dancers asserted on more than a few occasions to me that they could not envision their engagement with the dance or the development of the style itself without them. Once the barriers for production were removed - every electro-dancer could now easily produce their own content - instant distribution was effortlessly obtained, as the new media technologies made everyone's content widely and permanently accessible. This has created new unconstrained ways for interacting, as time and space have diminished in importance and the patterns of communication at both local and translocal levels have become reconfigured in sense, scope and scale. In other words, as the communicational environment is now characterized by instant, multimodal, many-to-many communication, social relations within the sphere of the style have come to be fashioned in peculiar ways, and consequently a different dialectic between the local and global dimensions of the phenomenon has developed.

The most noticeable consequence in this sense concerns aspects of translocal coordination among local groups. Coordination attained at a global level emerges, naturally, from the free agency of practitioners whose number of communications tend to increase within a communicational infrastructure in which interaction becomes costless in terms of temporal and spatial constraints. By means of a real-time, multimedia-based, up-to-date supply of information, electro-dancers are connected to the world of the dance, making them all aware of both what is happening in their city and neighbourhoods and what is occurring in other places across the world. The main realm of communication for the dancers remains for the most part that of their local group, but the dance is also

experienced simultaneously as something taking place regardless of place and time. As a dancer, one can be influenced by and have an influence on those one meets face to face, but also by what is said by other individuals one meets under conditions of mediated interaction, enmeshing what occurs in different modes of interaction. If many-to-many interaction between hundreds of dancers brings a degree of emergent coordinated action - i.e. it is "coordinated" inasmuch as one's agency is influenced by and has an influence on others, within a global arena - more consciously group articulated action emerges among scattered local scenes. As was mentioned above, local Hip-Hop scenes were interconnected to a certain extent, operating within a network medium, but it was a social network in which the heightened participation of practitioners across locations was forcibly and relatively limited. In the case of ElectroDance, the interconnectedness between people and places is reflected by, for example, the formation of cross-national teams - e.g. the case of UnionElectro - or more generally the organization of global events like Vertifight, geared to bringing electro-dancers from all over the world into the arena of one single competition. The ability to act regardless of temporal and spatial constraints sets up a communicational framework in which local scenes show specific patterns of development, while still being subjected to what is happening elsewhere. The local relies upon the global and vice versa, to a point where the boundaries between what could be regarded as the global and the local becomes more and more blurred within today's communicational regime. Measured in terms of the dynamics of competition between local groups, and the gaining or losing of symbolic capital by dancers, dancers are becoming embedded in a Bourdieusian field in which rivalry among peers does not only occur within their local group but becomes extended to dancers in other places against whom they compete for a greater share of media attention. The dynamism shown by the international scene, with its various semi-autonomous units operating on their own while simultaneously interacting with each other, led me to think about ElectroDance, figuratively, as a kind of dynamic global system. At times, as an

observer, I sensed something of what Thompson[106] called despatialized simultaneity, an effect attributed by him to television and deriving from its ability to bring together facts from diverse realities as though they were "one" and project this into the viewer's mind; but this is brought about in a similar way by new media for these young dancers.

If interaction via new media problematizes the distinction between the local and global, the management and perception of time poses similar challenges for the practitioner and observer alike. In the next subsection I will look back at the Muerte Electro event as one which makes the relationship between time and interaction a complex issue, even at a local level. Here, I would like to consider in more general terms what Harvey calls "time-compression[107]", an effect normally associated with the phenomenon of an increase in communications and that of globalization as such. The leader of the French Vertifight scene, Steady, who also has connections with the French Hip-Hop scene, remarked in an interview about how envious acquaintances from that youth culture were about the speed at which ElectroDance was developing. While it took a few years for the style to take shape inside (and outside) the Parisian clubs - over a period roughly ranging from 2003 and 2007 - its later stunning geographical expansion was accomplished more quickly - from 2007 to 2010, approximately. While the dissemination of the style in such a short span of time speaks of its great acceptance worldwide, the time-compression effect was not without downsides. One might expect communication to improve from the increased interaction - as more information exchanges were taking place in less time - but this does not seem to be the case: an excess of interconnectedness can lead to a communication breakdown. Indeed, Steady felt that it was at the point of bringing about ultimately undesirable effects - as he argued "this dance cannot stop just one minute to understand its movement". As

[106] Thompson, 1998, pp.53
[107] Quoted by Moores, 2005, pp.51

media theorist Neil Postman[108] once argued: "for every advantage a new technology offers, there is always a corresponding disadvantage". New media are no exception.

Finally, the technical affordances built into new media which enable interaction to be extended do not by themselves explain the "success" of global communication in ElectroDance and so attention has been paid to the specific cultural biases guiding the mediated interaction. In this sense, interaction "at a distance" has been found to be not always attainable. Indeed, in Chapter Five I showed how the cultural traits of nation and language were not so easily overcome[109] in mediated interaction, conditioning to a certain extent the amount and quality of communications. Within a context like dance where the potential for interaction can be unrestrained, dancers tended to weave stronger, more enduring ties with those they feel are culturally "closer" to them, on the basis of a shared language or geographical origin, influencing the possibility of long-lasting social relationships and which could involve embodied interaction. Interestingly, we saw how language-related differences among dancers were negotiated and in some cases overcome by technical means in creative ways: for example, by using online translation tools. In other cases, leaving cultural barriers aside, they also reported that other dancers ended up disconnecting at the other extreme with noticeable ease, rendering social relations as transient as has been traditionally suggested in relation to interaction via media technologies. Nevertheless, in my own interpretation, the successful character of interactions between electro-dancers is due not so much to the potential inherent to new media technologies themselves, or the aforementioned secondary factors of shared nationality or

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[108] 1998

[109] The dimensions of class, ethnicity or race were not seemingly determining dynamics of interaction; issues which seemed had a more noticeable influence at a local than a translocal or transnational level.

language, as with the prevailing modality of interaction at stake: kinetic interaction. Dance is a form of communication based on the body in motion and so meanings are conveyed by bodily movement and taken in by the viewer with no need for words. Needless to say, there could not be any degree of organization within local scenes and among members of different local scenes without verbal communication, but what YouTube provides first and foremost is visual access to other peers, a sort of "quasi-interaction" for which spoken or written interaction is not absolutely necessary. On the one hand, a dancer may interact with others like them, whether this is in person or at a distance by means of any kind of new media, or perhaps a combination of the two; on the other, they might find a sense of attachment through "quasi-interaction", by following someone else's videos and comments on forums and blogs. This latter sort of unidirectional relationship seldom takes on a bidirectional form with regard to comments on videos or blogs, resembling to a large extent the relationship between the audience and television actors in broadcast communication.

Mediatization (at work) - or how youth's everyday social rituals rely increasingly on new media

The analysis does not end with the changes in the types and forms of interactions. Media use is not so much as a supplement or an enhancer of face-to-face interactions, but something which is integral to the practice of ElectroDance. If the usefulness of new media is predictable with regard to enabling dance practitioners to interact through the removal of space and time constraints, it is much less so with regard to its role in local terms. It seems rather counter-intuitive that people should choose to draw on media when embodied encounters are feasible and interaction takes on a kinetic form, as dance involves bodies in motion. It can be undertaken individually, but dance has been found to be a part of key group rituals in manifold cultures from ancient times. When performed with

others, it obviously needs practitioners to meet face-to-face. In the third part of the dissertation I have given an account of the logic embedded in the use of new media in the local experience of the dance practice. I focused on YouTube as the electro-dancers' preferred digital interface because the relationship of young people with this media form and the sort of practices they undertake in regard to it have great significance for group-internal dynamics and therefore also for my research. As I argued in Part Three, the social world of ElectroDance is one in which the dynamics of cooperation, mutual understanding, commitment to the group and reciprocity coexist with a highly competitive spirit. The young dancers dance for their own amusement and pleasure while possessing a set of shared values, such as hard work, comradeship, respect and passion for the dance, but they also dance in order to increase their self-esteem and attract others' attention. This last aspect makes ElectroDance a competitive terrain, a sort of Bourdieusian 'glocal' field where every dancer strives to acquire a higher position within the structure of objective relations existing, first of all, within their local group, and then subsequently and additionally, as part of an expanded, broader global scene. In-person situations fulfil at the outset the basic communicational needs involved in mutual learning, sharing progress and integration into the group dynamics, with competition-oriented activity becoming gradually incorporated into this context. However, none of these practices are beyond the reach of the different media forms, particularly those of handheld and mobile video cameras with which young dancers capture dance activity and post it onto YouTube. However, I showed how the role of YouTube was not only that of providing a record of what occurred, but also that it caused electro-dancers to produce more and more videos with this specific platform in mind. In this sense, the camera was in some cases a silent witness to situations which were not primarily intended to be shared with those not present at the time, while in other cases different types of videos were produced with those not present in mind - i.e. as a message to be exchanged in conditions of disembodied interaction. Dancers have to be as skillful

as possible at the dance and are required to show sufficient new media skills, to the point that an intuitive correlation between the two mentioned personal qualities was suggested. In other words, the group-internal status of dancers does not only depend upon how good or bad at dancing they are, but also upon the effectiveness of their messages - i.e. the ones being showcased in the videos - with which they want to attract the attention of the others. This is why many electro-dancers take so much care with the way the videos are made, being as creative as possible in their design and production. We saw that YouTube-related interaction is not a mere extension of conversation carried out by other means, but substantial in its own terms, providing an outlet for the practical and communicational demands of the group. Just as electro-dancers resort to media to experience the dance, other group roles, especially those of the leadership, also adapt to the novel socio-technical communication medium. We saw empirical evidence in Chapter Six of how local scene leaders in ElectroDance made effective use of media for their own purposes. The aspects of social control (setting the terms of, regulating and sanctioning conversations), aesthetization (the effect of embellishing the message to render it more effective) and the scope of the message (the ability to take advantage of the mass-communication potential embedded in digital interfaces) were shown to be facets that the leaders in different local scenes had to manage effectively in order to be "leaders".

An important conclusion to be drawn here is that of the inextricability of the relationship between the dance practice and media use. As was pointed out at the beginning of this section, it is not the case that the media are used to supplement activities which do not need their support: in fact the media are an integral, rather than optional, part of the practice of ElectroDance. As ElectroDance and the form of 'being-together' it embodies is constituted not only 'by' communication, but also 'in' communication, I observed how the young dancers chose the best form of it and drew on the most suitable resources with which to build their sphere of socialization. At this point, I must invoke once again

the conceptual notion of the interface as one of great importance throughout my inquiry. According to my own interpretation, the young dancers resort to new media not a result of transferring the technical skills and knowledge gained from other media practices related to other non-dance facets of their lives, but because new media suited the communicational needs of the dancers' social world, allowing them to do in terms of agency what would not have been possible otherwise. In other words, as the medium theorist McLuhan might say, the media like any other technology represents for the electro-dancers an extension of their human capabilities.

Therefore, it can arguably be said that there exists a media logic in ElectroDance-related practices. Underlying this logic is, first of all, the fundamental need, as mentioned before, to extend the patterns of interaction through space and time, overcoming the constraints present in these two ontological coordinates. Secondly, there is a sense of spectacularization which otherwise exists in the practice of dance in face to face contact, but passed through a media filter, the attractiveness of the message is heightened notably. In other words, electro-dancers did not use YouTube only because it allowed them to disembed the dance-related situations - e.g. dance-off, formal contests, regular meetings and so on - from embodied situations, bringing those absent in and enabling them to keep them up-to-date - e.g. the forums and blogs created basically for this purpose - but because it opened up a space for the recreation of the dance at aesthetic and symbolic levels on the basis of the more suggestive terms and formats of the modern language of media and communication - i.e. YouTube videos in the style of pop videos. Nevertheless, the meaning of new media in local communications, and in particular of YouTube as electro-dancers' preferred interface, was not always as predictable as might be expected. Much in line with the anthropological principle that sees technology as being made sense of by culture, YouTube was not understood by electro-dancers in all cases as simply a means for showcasing themselves, with it being used for other purposes in

different circumstances. Particularly in Valencia, once the global dynamics encouraged every local scene to adopt a competition-orientation, electro-dancers felt too much exposure might be against their interests. In a competitive context, some dancers ceased to showcase themselves in videos in an attempt to prevent other dancers from copying their steps and movements, which could result in their losing their advantage over future competitors. Once the group dynamics shifted, so accordingly did the criterion behind the publication of videos, and YouTube was the medium for a posteriori discussions of dance-offs and official contests.

However, if something served us as an illuminating example of the impact of new media on today's cultural practices, that is the Muerte Electro event I set forth and discussed in Chapter Seven. This group ritual best exemplifies the theoretical notion of mediatization introduced in the early pages of this study. The effect of mediatization can be seen in its structural influence on human interactions at the microsocial level, so that returning for a moment to the analysis of "Muerte Electro" may shed light on the media logic of a process which is currently gaining more and more ground in late-modern society. The interest of Muerte Electro as a group ritual derives from its high degree of dependence on new media, and particularly on YouTube, in its conception and development. As was related in Chapter Seven, Muerte Electro was an older modality predating the better organized events of formal face-to-face competition. In it, two dancers compete against each other in order to publicly show off their personal skills, with the dance-off resulting in the winner increasing his or her in-group status and the loser seeing his or hers diminished. Muerte Electro consisted of three stages which gave form the ritual. Only the moment of the dance-off required the dancers to meet face to face, with the challenge and subsequent voting process making use of new media. In other words, the electro-dancers interposed a technological layer - i.e. what I have called the interface - for those moments of the ritual in which mediated interaction was able to make a difference in any sense. While competing bodies need nothing else other than being able to dance face to face, electro-

dancers placed YouTube's inter-face into the other stages of the process. Although an attempt was made to carry out a contest via YouTube, competitive dancing is an activity requiring the competing bodies to be in close proximity, in face to face contact. However, for the prior and following stages - i.e. the challenge and the voting, respectively - the dance-off took advantage of the new media affordances. In the case of the challenge, these affordances might lead to a bigger audience via asynchronous communication with a high symbolic bandwidth - i.e. image in motion, sound and text are blended into the interface - whereas for the voting stage these technical affordances would enable broader participation. However, as was pointed out earlier, new media also brought undesired effects such as that of introducing too much noise into the conversation: in the example which I used to illustrate the ritual, this resulted in one of the contenders leaving the dance after too much irritation, misunderstandings and disagreement, which to a certain extent arose from the nature of the mediated communication.

What the analysis of Muerte Electro also highlighted was the conceptual and practical problems in continuing to use dichotomies such as online/offline, a notion which has been omnipresent - and in some cases continues to be - in popular and academic understandings of the phenomena surrounding the new communication technologies. There is no doubt that we can find distinct modalities of interaction, with that of face-to-face interaction remaining a central part of our everyday lives. However, I believe that the notion of this dichotomy is rooted in a time when new media was still seen as a novelty, with it in many cases being seen to be a domain of practice which was detached from other intertwined modalities of interaction. There are a not inconsiderable number of cases in recent years within the field of Youth Studies where the arguments revolve around this dichotomy. In the worst cases, scenes are spoken of as being "on- and off-line" (Kruse, 2010) or "virtual" (Bennet, 2004; Basile, 2008; Hollands, 2006), but, even in the best cases, attempts are made only to draw a more or less clear link between the spheres of practice (Hodkinson, 2002). It would seem as though "the

Internet" has not gone unnoticed enough yet in order to become naturalized, and that it still draws attention to itself as a "thing" that can to a great extent be studied in isolation from from the broader socio-technical systems in which it is otherwise embedded alongside other technological and human components. A case like Muerte Electro questions the appropriateness of using such an approach, where the focus is on "the Internet" in itself. The complexity in communicative terms of a group practice like this entails that the area of interest lies not so much with the medium as with the logic of the interaction styles being used, with the spotlight falling on the practical requirements of each situation within the whole process, as these motivate the shift from one style of interaction to another. The Muerte Electro event, alongside other ElectroDance-related practices, exemplifies current trends toward mediatization of popular culture, as it is a youth cultural practice whose logic relies upon the media - i.e. it has a "media logic". The above-mentioned complexity of the ritual can best be grasped by paying attention to the temporal dimension of the whole process. In Chapter Eight, I included a diagram with which I attempted to capture and illustrate the communication timeline of the event (pp. 269). An effect associated with mediatization can be immediately seen in that picture: once can see how the event begins before and finishes after the dance-off. The three-step, seemingly linear sequence comprising the ritual is complicated by the mediation of new media in two of the three phases. The disembedding of the social relations involved results in an extremely intricate time-frame, in which each phase does not have a perfectly definable beginning and end, and the associated interaction patterns become mixed together to the point of the logic of the whole sequence becoming blurred. Needless to say, the level of mediatization of the ritual is not such that it becomes entirely unintelligible. As YouTube is an interface with a "fixity" capacity built-in, the event is available at all times to those who wish to take part in it. Ultimately, the media renders the event into something with no end in which the balance

between the aforementioned pros and cons is of a particular kind, one subjected to the logic of mediatization.

Identity - or how young dancers build a sense of the self amidst new media

The relationship between youth identities and media is one which has been explored in the field of Youth Cultural Studies over recent decades. In the 70s a semiotic view prevailed of this relationship, deriving from the notion of "text". Hebdidge's approach to subculture constitutes a good example of this, seeing in subculture a source of specific identities, with youth making styles into a stance communicating their resistance and opposition, as subaltern classes contesting the dominant culture. Here, the style becomes a "text" whose subversive meanings could be "read off" by an observer, and media are equated with the "mass-media", as the supplier of hegemonic meanings. From the late 70s onward, an "ethnographic turn" could be found in the work of Willis andothers (Osgerby, 2004:136). Here, the emphasis is not placed on the observer's ability to merely decode the subversive meanings supposedly embedded in the style, but rather on bringing to the fore, from a more general perspective, the way youth takes on an active position when dealing with a varied range of products coming from the media and cultural industries, and seeing consumption practices as important identity-building opportunities which take place within the context of young people's everyday life. What seems more or less implicitly to underlie these approaches is an underlying scheme of broadcast communication, where youth identities could emerge from the interaction with media texts and products, the latter serving as a sort of raw cultural material for the former to appropriate in a variety of often unexpected ways.

In a manner similar to Carey's understanding of communication as a "ritual", my approach to ElectroDance identity has been influenced by the "culturalist" stance of Willis and others to a large extent, but this is somewhat

nuanced inasmuch as the relationship between the ElectroDance youth movement and new media revolves around the peculiar coordinates of today's technological changes. In other words, an era of mass-communication characterized by corporate broadcast systems has now given way to an environment in which mass-communication takes place by means of network structures[110] with broadcast capacities. Within such a scenario, the empowerment of agents by new media affordances are but the expression of a reconfigured set of interdependencies linking some actors to others on the basis of specific cultural circuits. This could not be inferred from my account in Chapter Four, where the intensive presence of media and cultural industries around *Tecktonik* might well make us think of the age of broadcast communication, with the young French dancers and dance followers (audiences) becoming active consumers of commodities and media contents (texts), and thereby building their identities on the style-related cultural meanings provided by such content. Furthermore, in Chapter Nine, I examined how media corporations once again fulfilled the role of delineating the symbolic contours and meanings of the style, making youth identity a construct which is embedded in broader systems of cultural and social distinctions. After the *Tecktonik* era, ElectroDance took shape and developed in its later form as a product of network communication, after the rejection of *Tecktonik's* associations with commoditization, fashion and the mainstream. This being the case, what then has been the role of new media in terms of formation of the ElectroDance identity, given that the media are no longer "texts" - or at least not in the traditional semiotic sense - which the cultural practitioners work with? If the notions of "text" and "audience" fail to capture what young dancers do today with new media, then, in a media environment in which mass-communication emerges

[110] There could arguably said that until the arrival of internet broadcast communication was attained in technical terms in ways that network communication was not. Today, models of communication are parasitic to one in broad terms.

through patterns of broadcast and network communication, sustained by traditional mass-media corporations but also by corporate internet platforms, what would be the best approach for the analysis of the relationship between style, media and identity?

My own position on this issue has pointed to the notions of "interface" and "media ecology" being the key, as kinds of both material and medium at once for the patterns of broadcast and network communication. By using the notion of "the interface", I have attempted to emphasize the intrinsic affordances and constraints of different media forms when used in communication processes and their ecological function, that is, one which is interdependent with what is done and channelled through other artifacts. Whereas the term "interface" might connote advanced devices like today's digital communication technologies, older media forms and artifacts can obviously also be deemed as something placed "in-between" those interacting. In this sense, print-based "micro" media such as fanzines, flyers and newsletters are said to have contributed in a different manner, for example, to the constitution and development of youth phenomena such as the Goth (Hodkinson, 2002), Club (Thornton, 1995) and Punk (Douglas, 2011:612) subcultures at "pre-internet" times. While serving the communicational purpose of coordinating collective action and disseminating information related to the group norms, values and a range of cultural meanings, they were able to shape the dimension of expression linked to the style: that is, they helped their members construct a distinctive image. As interfaces themselves, each older medium contained distinct communicational features and contributed to the communication of the style in particular ways. They were able to "fix" and disseminate symbolic contents within a limited scope. However, as I have argued throughout this text, new media possess their own range of communicational attributes in terms of the style of interaction, content availability, dissemination scalability, symbolic bandwidth and the degree of customization of the medium - features which far surpass the capacities of the older forms of media. If media

never were simply textual content which cultural practitioners work upon, but a powerful resource for making and exchanging meaning, in what sense do new media now make a difference in terms of identity-formation in the context of ElectroDance?

I have highlighted three of the ways in which new media has become important for identity. First of all, new media provides dance practitioners with the means to try out enhanced, sometimes truly sophisticated forms of self-expression and self-presentation at both the group and individual levels - something that was not attainable in similar terms in the past. From the group-centered perspective, electro-dancers express identity with new media in the manner in which the digital interfaces are configured, rendering the style recognisable within the aesthetic layout of these interfaces. While not taking on a distinctive image in terms of clothing and look, the digital interfaces are by contrast usually laid out as a cultural syncretism of forms and motifs drawn from Hip-Hop, Techno and to a lesser extent Punk styles. Beyond the basic aesthetic treatment of the interfaces, some specific practices regarding self-construction must be highlighted. Despite their shared ecological nature, a distinction between Youtube and blogging can be drawn in the way in which individuals use them: YouTube is understood as a space for self-presentation while blogs are in contrast regarded as devices for self-reflection. Self-presentation through YouTube relates to the dance logic which has already been referred to earlier. Whether by means of posting rehearsals at home in the isolation of the bedroom or accompanied by other peers on the streets when performing, electro-dancers repeatedly submit themselves to public scrutiny in the search for feedback and opinions from their peers. As we have seen, shows of approval, acknowledgment and praise, on the one hand, or dislike, mockery and rejection, on the other, have an impact in terms of the electro-dancers' levels of symbolic capital and their status within the dance world. The identity of any individual as a dancer is articulated here as a dialectic of seeing and being seen. From the individual's perspective, the videos act as a

record of personal progression over time, and the activity of video-making is an outlet for the electro-dancers' expressiveness and creativity: it functions in this regard as a form of self-communication. Interestingly, we have seen how, in some cases, forms of self-communication worked for certain young dancers as an alternative channel for conveying their emotions. Here, to master the audiovisual grammar, techniques, genres and representational codes of the video clip made video production a highly creative activity meant to provide the viewers - i.e. other peers - with an aesthetically pleasant experience which was different from that attainable from in-person communicational situations. Certainly, such self-produced videos reveal themselves ultimately as pre-texts interposed between the producer and viewer, in order to trigger dialogue so that the dancer's self can be negotiated socially out of the input received from his or her peers.

Apart from the YouTube-related practices, it was blogging where identity building was perceived more noticeably. Whereas use of YouTube was found to be largely related to self-presentation practices, blogs were more open to self-reflection, featuring a more unidirectional, monological style. In the young dancers' hands, the blogs were turned into devices for storytelling. Using blogs as a kind of personal diary, the young dancers combined the written word with pictures to form a narrative of personal experiences related to participation in group-related events and relationships with other peers of their local scene. At other times, the narrative would take on a more visual form, as in the case of pictures in which the dancers pose in a way similar to models in advertisements, largely as a device for self-evaluation - a necessary practice in teenagers' self-growth. Moreover, in some cases, the blogs record a considerable amount of daydreaming. While some electro-dancers used their blogs as a means for dispassionately providing the latest information about their teams or their own regular activities, others saw blogging as an opportunity to try out celebrity-like identities. For those who acquired a certain amount of popularity, whether measured in terms of an increased level of social capital in the sphere of mediated

communications or expressed in terms of improved symbolic capital within previously-existing personal social circles, the blogs allowed the young dancers to portray a type of self formed around the cultural values, behaviours and attitudes of widely admired public figures with massive followings. Narratives of their personal progress and local adventures were full of emotion, intimate thoughts and feelings, all of them reflecting aspirations, dreams, and expressions of disappointment and joy, which are addressed to the putative audience, whether this was "real" or just assumed in practice. Whether or not fame and popularity always were among these young people's private fantasies and aspirations, the engagement with the dance offered them a space in which to stand out, and blogging gave them the means to perform on a wider public stage.

The second way in which new media makes a difference to identity relates to the fact that interfaces provide an overall medium in which the self can be seen as a sustained project to be constructed over time. Youtube, blogs and other new media, such as Facebook, organize content across time in the form of a timeline. By recording activity on a daily basis, personal content brought onto the medium is accumulated chronologically, and when this is looked at retrospectively, it can deliver a subjective sense of a biography, a kind of personal pathway through the dance world which has taken the form of a meaningful sequence over time. If, as Turkle (2007:6) suggests, "we live our lives in the middle of things", we can see new media as not merely the objects we instrumentally relate to for communicational purposes, but also as the repositories of emotions, memories and actions. Inasmuch as the sense of self and personal identity is connected to one's memories, new media seem to perform the same role as even the most ancient forms of media: to serve as an "extra-somatic" record of memory. This is important for our present discussion in the sense that a great dependence on new media technologies for self-acknowledgment can bring undesired consequences. In Chapter Ten, where I examined the relationship between new media and the dancers' identity, we considered the case of a dancer

who lost his materials - i.e. his presence on diverse interfaces - and experienced it as a sort of loss of who he was as a dancer - i.e. his sense of self as a dancer. There is no better way for a dancer to show who he or she is than through these traces they have left behind, traces which can be retrieved by anyone at will, at any time; however, this means that once one's records are lost, so is the sense of the self.

Finally, the third way in which new media is important for identity is in terms of the effects overexposure on public digital interfaces can have. Here also, the reliance on new media to build a sense of self can bring about both positive and negative consequences. To become popular in the new media era requires the young dancers to acquire a level of visibility which until the arrival of digital technologies was confined to local, narrower spaces of in-person socialization such as schools, neighbourhoods and clubs. A number of dancers claimed to have gained increased social capital within pre-established circles of social relations as a result of media exposure. For others, visibility obtained from media interfaces had social effects at a translocal and transnational level, with these mediated communications not having an obvious impact on their local social relations. Yet some did report having suffered unexpected effects, such as the theft of personal accounts on YouTube and Facebook or impersonation attempts. In other cases, where dancers who for whatever reason - e.g. after an intimate confession reached an unexpected audience - became the target of their peers' mockery or critique, it was necessary to remove controversial media content.

In sum, all the above considerations tell us a great deal about the roles that new media play in the configuration of identity in ElectroDance, going beyond the mere shaping of each interface out of a set of aesthetic attributes from the group style. As well as functioning at a group level, new media have become powerful tools in the hands of individuals, allowing them to carry out symbolic work concerning the self in ways that were impossible with media forms of yesteryear. As I have argued, new media is crucial to the young dancers in offering

a window for self-presentation and self-reflection, with the self being exposed to public view. This opportunity provides great potential for creativity to be deployed in a variety of complex, often sophisticated and always playful ways for daydreaming to take place and celebrity-like attitudes to be expressed, but it is not without risks and unexpected downsides as it is embedded in a complex communicative scenario. This scenario is one in which diverse modes of interaction coexist and in which an unitary, coherent, sustained image of the self must be projected and managed. For a dancer to be successful in this, the logic of each interface must be known so that the media ecology can to a certain extent be tamed over time - this is only attainable by trial and error. Thus, the complexity of building an identity as a dancer "by way of" and "in" new media comes, firstly, from the management of the varying expectations that underlie different but interrelated communicational situations, in which there are shifting and often contradictory notions of what is meant to be public or private. These notions are not known beforehand and only experimentation can determine what they are - e.g. a dancer who performs in a bedroom makes publicly available details of what otherwise would be kept private in the home. Secondly, the complexity also derives from the fact that, by operating in a communicational medium in which expectations and understandings about how to behave or what to say, and when and how to say it, are never totally clear beforehand, and are in fact found out "on the go", the self becomes ever more subject to a negotiation with others that takes place at two levels. The first of these is explicitly with regard to the meanings of the dance and group activity - e.g. the above-mentioned dancer giving indications on performance and getting feedback from other dancers - and the second is implicit and concerns the underlying conditions of communication under which the dynamics of meaning making and exchanging occurs - e.g. one dancer rebukes another, who is the author of the video, for publicising a technique taken from him. This process of cultural production involves process of personal training which is evidently of a complex kind.

Intermediations - or how the balance between ideals of communication shifts around new media

So far, I have discussed the most important aspects of identity, interaction and mediatization involved in the cultural production of the ElectroDance style, taking them to be key areas for the inquiry into the different sort of effects found with the use of new media. By taking a micro-sociological view for the analysis of the young dancers' practices with new media, it has been possible to determine the way in which new media modify the dialectics between the local and global, enrich and multiply the possibilities of expression, and cause the typical group rituals to take on a different shape. Yet, as I have argued, the very technical infrastructure underlying the electro-dancers' practices deserve some attention too, by taking a somewhat broader perspective. In this sense, it is necessary to highlight the role in recent years of service-oriented, network-based digital communication companies, such as Google or Facebook: without them, phenomena like ElectroDance would probably not exist in the form that they do. The emergence of these corporations must be considered against the backdrop of what different authors see as a conspicuous transformation of the conditions of production of today's global communications. According to Castells (2009:90), such transformations have occurred at both technological and institutional levels. On the one hand, two main processes are at the core of these technological shifts, one known as technological convergence (Holmes, ibid:64), and the other being digitization (Hesmondhalgh, 2007:11; Marshall, 2004:17). On the other hand, this technological innovation has run in parallel with a series of multi-level adjustments affecting the institutional and organizational structure of communication: these are reflected in the establishment of cultural and mass-media enterprises as global networks and conglomerates which provide all kinds of communication services, with the ownership of telecom firms, electronic systems vendors, internet service providers and media corporations becoming consolidated

into fewer, bigger groups. The magnitude, scale and depth of these transformations are such that some authors have viewed them as being part of a transition from an age of mass-communication characterized by a socio-technical broadcast model to a new one dominated by the omnipresence of network communications[111]. This is empirically confirmed in our case: in Chapter Six, we saw the extent to which ElectroDance developed away from the traditional intermediation exerted by the mass-media and cultural industries in the production of youth cultural phenomena, with the style growing on "the street level" on a different, non-directed symbolic basis, and being disseminated worldwide by means of a network communication structure. This fact is of conceptual interest too since, as I will argue below, the discussion of youth phenomena within the field of Youth Cultural Studies has traditionally rested upon dialectical notions of production/consumption in which intermediaries from the mass media and cultural enterprises have been central to the production of meaning, even if there has also been some recognition of the creative ways in which consumers have dealt with the symbolism conveyed to them. From this standpoint, the case of ElectroDance could be seen as the confirmation of the arrival of a new age, in which disintermediation is a reality and grassroots cultures can compete, at least in principle, from a less disadvantaged position with the mass-communication capacities of mass-media and cultural industries. To what extent can all these transformations be perceived in the case of ElectroDance?

My own approach to this question took ElectroDance to be embedded in a communicative environment which is not the beginning of a new era for communication, but rather one which contains elements of both continuity and innovation, while taking the above-mentioned ongoing technological and institutional transformations into proper account. Given Holmes' theoretical view

[111] For a further discussion on the subject, see Holmes, ibid, pp. 52

of the interdependence of the notions of “broadcast” and “network”, I took this a step further conceptually by taking these notions to represent not only the technical systems of communication but also the socio-technical forms of "being-together", where humans and machines relate to one another in specific ways. I then sought to place the current media-related developments into a historical perspective of the forms of communication. As I argued in Chapter One, despite the fact that these forms are not exactly new, they do, however, operate in different ways today. Thus, I interpreted the history of the youth style as having distinct stages in which social relations among the different actors taking part in the cultural production of the style revealed a different balance between the two ideals of communication. A vertically-constituted model of communication appeared in the early stages of the configuration of the style, when the interests of media and cultural corporations and those of small entrepreneurs converged, resulting in the production of a typical “meaning-making centre”: a fully-fledged fad drawing in a mass of young dancers and enthusiasts. Once the corporate intermediaries left the scene, new members from all over the world together with older members from the Tecktonik era took advantage of the interactive potential of new media technologies to rearticulate social relations on the basis of a global network structure, thereby constituting a space for horizontal mass communication. The advantage of the approach I chose derived not only from its capacity to depict the more or less asymmetrical nature of social relations at each point - resulting in some actors and agencies retaining more or less influence - but also from being able to frame the role of new media in a communicative context in which the two communication architectures are shown to be in constant tension, by taking on diverse socio-technical forms. Although advertising, commoditization and massive media coverage broadcasted the style widely, the way in which the first phase of local dissemination took place is inconceivable without the existence of network communication technologies gathering young cultural practitioners together outside the physical boundaries of Parisian clubs.

On the other hand, despite the fact that electro-dancers interrelate horizontally, both locally and worldwide, in the new media era, some prominent actors - i.e. individual dancers or scene leaders - end up attracting more attention than others, creating specific vertical fields of recognition, even within this domain of network communications. By being embedded in broader socio-technical forms, the role of new media is in this sense relativized while still helping to establish the balance between the communication architectures.

Some final considerations can be drawn from this view with regard to the ecological dimension of communication in ElectroDance. Firstly, one aspect of ElectroDance that caught my attention at the beginning was not only the presumed influence of new media upon the configuration of the phenomenon, but more specifically the pace at which this process was taking place. It felt to me as though, prima facie, the expanded field of communications and the accelerated pace of events in the youth style were linked. Indeed, in the course of the research, the French scene leader Steady confirmed this intuition, as he reported how acquaintances of his from Hip-Hop were astonished at the different ways in which the two dance styles had developed over time, with the former needing various decades to become known and performed worldwide, in contrast with the rapid dissemination of ElectroDance all over the world. Nevertheless, as Thornton[112] suggested some years ago, each youth culture has its own socio-cultural logic and consequently show contrasting patterns of development, which may therefore not be exclusively related to the availability of specific media forms or technologies. In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that it took ElectroDance longer than Punk subculture, for example, to travel across USA and Britain in the late 1970s, bringing together audiences from across huge distances - with the members of them surely quite unaware of this - by way of the broadcast

[112] Ibid, 1995.

technologies of records, magazines and television. It is not therefore the overcoming of spatial and temporal barriers what makes ElectroDance interesting but, as I have said, the particular ways in which communication took shape under the conditions of today's digital technologies - i.e. by relying upon a model of association technologically sustained by means of digital network communication.

Some cultural analysts, such as Jenkins, have argued that it is not only technology that is currently undergoing a process of convergence but that we are witnessing a general cultural convergence too. According to Jenkins, the significant gap between the media and cultural industries, on the one hand, and consumers of media content, on the other hand, has narrowed in recent times, as they have been brought closer together in the shape of the multiple spaces of digital communication made available by new media. This convergence of producers' and consumers' interests, in profit-making and leisure respectively, have led to adjusted expectations, strategies and goals in each case as a result of the increased interplay between the two sides. Indeed, the field of Cultural Studies has traditionally been interested in showing how, even in earlier decades, consumers are not so detached from the workings of cultural industries, allowing for levels of agency in what might otherwise be seen as passive audiences. ElectroDance is no exception in this regard, proving rich in different patterns of relations throughout its development, depending upon the time, place and the specific circumstances of the individuals involved. At the earlier stage, that of Tecktonik in France, the youth movement seemed to reproduce the well-known cycle suggested by different authors in which an underground culture is co-opted by certain cultural industries, due to potential revenue opportunities, and it later becomes a fad in their hands before ultimately returning to its underground origins. The relationship of youth with the cultural corporations under this rather traditional unidirectional scheme sees the former converted into mere receivers of the latter's actions: they are the consumers of style-related commodities. Only a certain number of privileged French dancers would enjoy real benefits in terms of

economic and symbolic capital from this relationship, by being publicly converted into celebrity dancers of some kind. A contrasting pattern emerged when the cultural intermediaries left the scene and internet companies took their place. Throughout this text I have attempted to show how young dancers in Spain, and particularly in Valencia, have become fully-fledged producers of multimedia content themselves, exploiting the affordances embedded in new media to broadcast to big audiences. Yet this has not prevented them from embracing the attention of media corporations in order to increase their visibility beyond these digital spaces: they have given interviews to local newspapers (e.g. in the case of Valencian dancers) and to MTV (in the case of Vertifight in Paris), and they have occasionally appeared on talent shows on TV. This could arguably be seen as a tacit recognition of the remaining importance of traditional platforms and channels for reaching out beyond small social circles and of insatisfaction with network media, when it comes to its ability to reach truly large audiences.

However, in Chapter Ten I discussed the case of the Valencian dancer Solo as one which challenges this pattern. I presented Solo as a case of a grassroots celebrity working under a set of parameters different from those more traditional ones which produced the stars of Tecktonik. Solo has taken the symbolic work with new media a step further than his peers in order to turn himself into a celebrity. The interest of the case of Solo was not only that it concerned someone building up a celebrity-like identity away from the institutional channels of the entertainment industries, but also in terms of the kind of celebrity identity he has created, in which the modes of self-presentation of widely-known public figures serve as an inspiration and are successfully reproduced. In other words, the link with the cultural industries here is not so much technological or institutional as simply symbolic. In behaving and performing like a celebrity, Solo is not so different from Tecktonik's sponsored dancers, such as those of the "Eklesiast" French team: both share a similar representational style and patterns of public exposure, having thousands of fans and having a large

amount of followers. Yet it is the context, the specific cultural circuits in which the celebrity's agency is embedded, which makes a difference in each case. On the one hand, Tecktonik's young star dancers operated under the pre-established infrastructure, resources and business logic of the cultural industries, becoming a sort of intermediary between Tecktonik's profit-making interests and the tastes and preferences of youth for a novel dance style subsumed into a fad; on the other hand, Solo built his own audience by relying upon self-production, occasional collaborative work and ongoing social networking by means of horizontal communication, making his own "system of production[113]". These two models differ too in terms of the contrasting ways in which cultural capital is converted into economic capital in each case: Tecktonik's young dancers were paid by the brand-related cultural intermediaries they worked for, but Solo's revenues derive from the novel marketing logic of YouTube's payment system for videos viewed, making Solo's approach a phenomenon of our time, made possible by the existence of new media and massive network-embedded broadcast communication. In times of global network communications, hierarchies are not dissolved but rather, as this modest evidence illustrates, they are reorganized and are expressed in different ways.

Implications and future research

Needless to say, a case study like the one presented here does not come close to exhausting what can be said about the relationship of youth cultures, subcultures and styles with new media in the context of contemporary society. I hope that the case of ElectroDance can provide some useful insights into what a specific group of young people do with new media at the present time, and which could be

[113] See Osbergy, ibid, pp. 139, in regard to the ideas of the cultural theorist Fiske.

generalizable to other distinct youth phenomena to a greater or lesser extent. It is, however, true that the rapid advance of technology opens up countless opportunities to explore the embedding of new media into a wide range of social worlds of today's youth. Young people are known to often be early-adopters of novel technologies, which usually means that they explore the benefits of their use and also suffer the unexpected - and sometimes unwanted - effects they may have. This makes the activities of youth a reflection of more general concerns in society, and at times these are the forerunners of subsequently widespread phenomena. Areas of ongoing development include identity-forming and personalization through the use of particular media, collective media forms of production and specific modes of consumption, media ecologies, new modes of interface and mobile connectivity, and new forms of bodily, sensory and emotional experience channelled via media and embedded in environments; they all offer appealing research opportunities. These areas of innovation deserve attention in themselves but, in my opinion, they are best explored by being framed in terms of the social characteristics of media users - age, sex, race and class - which condition and often determine the nature of the uses and practices. Furthermore, the politico-economic dimension of media industries and institutions and the power they derive from individuals' media practices offer another interesting area, which could be considered on its own, or, preferably, together with the processes of consumption.

I believe, therefore, that the worlds of today's youth in general, and particularly youth styles and culture, are an optimal target for any attempt to assess the current configuration and expression of the ever-changing relations between technology, culture and society. As the research presented here has shown, this is the case because they allow the observer to examine the range of media-related issues embedded in domains of practice characterized by very particular cultural and social features: in such domains, the use of technology is likely to take on very particular meanings and be employed in particular ways

which are well worth paying attention to. It has been possible to consider the issue of identity, the dialectics of the local and global and the organization of social relations at the local, translocal and transnational levels in the case of ElectroDance, but I am sure that older youth cultures and subcultures, whether music-related or not, are also undergoing adjustments at these and other levels to a greater or lesser degree (and this will also be the case for such cultures in the future). This cannot be uncoupled from changes in the material and social conditions of cultural practitioners. This is why, lastly, future studies on new media should not consider new media only nor make such media into a research topic - i.e. I do not advocate a media-centric approach to social phenomena. I believe that more powerful and fruitful research might emerge from explorations of sociological issues in which media accounts of the aforementioned more novel kind are acknowledged and brought into the discussion as an intrinsic part of the phenomenon itself and necessary for the latter to be fully grasped - i.e. a media-sensitive approach is required.

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