

Temporary Sacred Spaces

Collective Effervescence and Social Connection at Techno Festivals

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Abstract

In a time where loneliness is increasing, music festivals are becoming more important as places for temporary social connection. This research focuses on how visitors of techno festivals experience collective effervescence — a concept introduced by Durkheim to describe shared emotional energy and unity during ritual gatherings. In contrast to many other genres, techno was originally created as a culturally neutral. This makes techno festivals an interesting context to explore how visitors define and demarcate the festival community in the absence of cultural markers.

Based on ten semi-structured interviews with visitors of an indoor techno festival (Verknipt Ziggo Dome), a qualitative case study was conducted to examine in what way collective effervescence is created and experienced. Through thematic analysis, it becomes clear that techno festivals function as sacred spaces, where everyday norms disappear and visitors temporarily escape everyday life. This distinction between the sacred and the profane provides the foundation for collective effervescence to emerge. The combined practice of two rituals at techno festivals are essential for generating collective effervescence: dancing and drug use. Dancing creates a mutual focus of attention and a physical surrender to the music, while drug use (mostly in the form of MDMA) enhances emotional alignment and produces collective feelings of euphoria, openness, and connectedness. Both rituals result in a high degree of social solidarity among festival visitors and a temporary sense of community. The social inclusion and exclusion of audience members that occurs at festivals, is largely based on participation in these central interaction rituals — especially dancing and drug use — which serve as the foundation for this sense of belonging. Even though the community feeling is temporary and mostly remains within the boundaries of the festival itself, the sense of connectedness among visitors is perceived as deep and meaningful. These findings highlight the social potential of music festivals in an increasingly lonely society and offer valuable insights for festival organizers and cultural policymakers.

KEYWORDS: Collective Effervescence, Interaction Ritual Theory, Music Festivals, Social Solidarity, Dance Culture, Drug Use

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1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared loneliness a global concern with serious health issues (Johnson, 2023). Especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, which severely limited social interactions, levels of loneliness have significantly increased. In the Netherlands, more than 1 in 10 people aged 15 and older reported feeling severely lonely in 2023—a rise compared to the period before the pandemic (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2024). In a world where loneliness has emerged as a growing concern, festivals can offer rare and valuable moments of social connection. Packer and Ballantyne (2011) state that festivals encourage social connection and can contribute to both social and psychological well-being. Festivals can be seen as ritualistic contexts where, according to Durkheim (1995), collective effervescence can emerge. This concept refers to heightened feelings of unity and joy that emerge when people come together. While Durkheim points at the importance of collective effervescence, Collins (2004) identifies the elements that must be present for this feeling to emerge. When physical co-presence, mutual focus of attention, and shared emotion are present, individuals can reach a state of collective effervescence. Although the concept of collective effervescence is primarily applied to religious ceremonies in sociological literature, it can also be used in secular contexts, such as music festivals (Vandenberg, Berghman & Schaap, 2021). In times of rising loneliness this becomes especially relevant, as it shows how festivals can counteract social disconnection through shared emotional experiences.

However, despite the prominent position of collective effervescence in sociological literature, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence to support this concept (Buehler, 2012). Much of the existing research is theoretical, without direct observations or fieldwork. This lack of empirical data hinders a full understanding of how and why collective effervescence, as experienced at festivals, arises and functions. Additionally, Kearney (2018) points out that existing literature has primarily focused on the effects of collective effervescence, rather than its causes.

Researchers have studied festivals in a number of ways, mostly taking a macro-perspective by focussing on subjects like policy, economic benefits for cities and organizational design (Abrassian, 2023; Van der Hoeven et al., 2022). However, less is known about how festivals are experienced from a social or psychological level (Mulder & Hitters, 2021; Swartjes & Berkers, 2022). By focussing on collective effervescence, this research approaches festivals from a bottom-up perspective and contributes to this gap in the academic literature.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the pandemic period, new research should now focus on face-to-face interactions following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and should be expanded to a wide variety of music genres (Vandenberg, 2023; Vandenberg et al., 2021a). Especially because previous research shows that audience behavior and interaction with music, as well as the experience of collective effervescence, differ across music genres (Swartjes & Vandenberg, 2022; Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023). In some genres, like traditional folk music, festival attendees tend to appreciate a certain homogeneity within the audience, drawing social and symbolic boundaries against other groups based on national identity and shared language (Vandenberg, Berghman &

Van Eijck, 2021). It suggests that individuals may set preconditions for the circumstances under which collective effervescence can occur, potentially leading to the exclusion of 'outsiders.' While exclusion is commonly viewed as something negative, it can also contribute to a sense of safety and solidarity within communities. These findings lead to a broader question of under what conditions collective effervescence can emerge and in what way audiences negotiate inclusion and exclusion. The techno genre presents a particularly interesting case, as it lacks explicit social or cultural markers, such as national lyrics or historical traditions that tie the genre to a specific nationality, cultural group or ethnicity (Tsitsos, 2018; Walters, 2006; Williams, 2001). This raises the question of how techno festivalgoers define their sense of community and whether, in the absence of cultural markers, other social and symbolic boundaries play a role in the formation of collective effervescence. This research provides insights in alternative ways that social connections and communities can emerge in environments that appear culturally neutral at first glance. This article asks: Do techno festivalgoers experience collective effervescence? If so, how do they describe the experiences and the factors that contribute to it?

Using semi-structured interviews with festivalgoers, I explore how attendees experience collective effervescence and what factors play a role in creating this shared energy. I use a case study approach to ensure all respondents experienced the same environment of the techno-festival. I analyze the collected data using thematic analysis, so I can identify key recurring themes that contribute to collective effervescence. Based on primary data, collected in the form of interviews with people from the techno festival Verknijpt Ziggo Dome, the analysis shows that techno festivalgoers primarily experience collective effervescence through two essential ritual practices: dancing and taking drugs like MDMA. These rituals create a shared emotional state, foster a temporary community and help the visitors escape daily life. These findings are useful for scholars in sociology of culture, as well as other academic fields that are connected to the study of festivals, such as leisure, tourism and creative industries. Besides giving insights for academics, this research also offers valuable knowledge for festival organizers or policy makers in the arts and culture sector. I begin by reviewing the traditional theories of collective effervescence. I will also discuss recent research on collective effervescence in the context of festivals and look into the history of the techno scene.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Collective Effervescence

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995), Durkheim explains the ideas of the sacred and the profane as fundamental parts of human life. The profane refers to everyday life, where for example routines and personal concerns dominate. On the other hand, the sacred refers to the extraordinary, the collective and the ritualistic. Durkheim argues that the sacred serves as a source of meaning and connection for individuals. Rituals play a crucial role in this, as it temporarily takes people out of their daily ordinary life and connects them to something bigger.

The sense of sacredness is an essential part of Durkheim's concept of *collective effervescence*. Collective effervescence refers to the intense emotional energy and feelings of unity that arise when people perform ritualistic actions together. Durkheim (1995, p. 217) describes the act of congregating as an "exceptionally powerful stimulant," where physical proximity and shared actions, such as gestures and sounds, create feelings of unity within groups. This ritualistic context makes participants transcend their individual identities and experience a connection to a collective identity.

Gabriel et al. (2020) highlight the importance of the sacred dimension, by showing that 'spiritual transcendence' is one of the ways through which collective effervescence can be operationalized. This points to a feeling that lifts individuals from their immediate experiences, allowing them to see life as meaningful and feel a strong connection with others (Piedmont, 1999). Festivals also have the ability to break the monotony of ordinary life. They create special social experiences that align with Durkheim's definition of the sacred, namely a shared, extraordinary reality that is shaped by collective emotions and actions.

Packer and Ballantyne (2011) show that festivals provide a separation experience; a context wherein festivalgoers can disconnect from their everyday lives and open themselves up to new connections, personal insights and experiences. Falassi (1987) referred to this feeling as 'time out of time'; time that is experienced as separate from everyday routines. Thus, it seems like the physical *space* of a festival allows attendees to step outside of their daily life, and makes them experience a different sense of *time* which transcends their everyday norms and habits. This raises important questions about the role of spatial design and other aspects of the physical environment in generating feelings of collective effervescence at festivals.

Collins (2004) builds on Durkheim's theories by attempting to operationalize collective effervescence through his Interaction Ritual Theory (IRT). This theory provides a micro-sociological framework for understanding how shared emotions and focused interactions can create feelings of collective effervescence. Collins (2014) defines collective effervescence as "any intensification of a shared mood that occurs when certain micro-processes of social interaction take place in everyday life" (p. 299). Unlike Durkheim's focus on religious rituals, IRT emphasizes everyday face-to-face interactions and highlights how these experiences contribute to collective identification and shared

meanings (Krishnan et al., 2020). Collins connects the micro- and macro-levels by demonstrating how individual interactions accumulate into collective emotions and social structures.

According to Collins (2004), three key elements are required to produce an Interaction Ritual (IR). First, individuals must be physically present in the same space, enabling interaction between participants. This *physical co-presence* allows individuals to perceive micro-signals such as body language, facial expressions, and vocal intonations (Collins, 2014). Through this shared physical proximity, participants align their emotional and social states.

Second, there must be a *mutual focus of attention* among participants, with the awareness that others are concentrating on the same object or activity. This focus is essential to an IR, as it connects participants in a shared reality. By collectively focusing on the same object, theme, or activity, participants create a sense of unity and synchronization. This shared focus serves as a core of intersubjectivity, enabling individuals to feel connected as they engage in the same 'world.' Goffman (1967, p. 113) describes this process as a "unio mystico," a social ritual in which the interaction takes on its own reality and dynamics, supported by the mutual engagement of all participants. To maintain consistency and meaning, participants must actively sustain the shared definition of the situation (Goffman, 1967). At festivals, people may avoid disruptive behaviors, such as loudly talking or not being focused on the music, as this could break the shared experience. Instead, festivalgoers often focus on the mutual object of attention, such as dancing or singing along, enhancing the collective experience.

The third element of an IR is *shared emotion*, which emerges when participants share a mutual focus of attention and align themselves emotionally. Durkheim (1995, p. 247) observed in his studies of Aborigines that every emotion expressed during rituals is echoed and amplified by others. Collective movements and actions, such as gestures, dancing, or chants, serve as signals that create intersubjectivity—participants recognize that others are doing and feeling the same thing. This shared emotion not only strengthens the bond between participants but also intensifies emotional expression, creating a positive feedback loop where shared emotions lead to more synchronized actions and vice versa. At festivals, this loop is visible when participants begin to dance or sing more intensely in response to the crowd's synchronicity. Lakens (2010) emphasizes that physical movement synchrony can evoke emotional synchrony, which is a key predictor of positive group experiences and closely linked to collective effervescence (Gabriel et al., 2020). Importantly, Collins (2014) notes that the shared emotion can be either positive or negative, such as shared grief at a funeral or shared anger during a protest. Interaction rituals act as emotion transformers, converting shared emotions into a transcendent feeling of solidarity.

When the three elements of an IR are present, both the shared focus and emotions intensify, producing collective effervescence: "[t]he rhythmic entrainment of all participants into a mood that feels stronger than any of them individually" (Collins, 2014, p. 299). A successful IR produces three key outcomes. First, it generates *solidarity*, a sense of group identity and belonging among participants (Collins, 2004, 2014). Paez et al. (2015) confirm that collective gatherings can strengthen collective identity, foster identity fusion, and promote social integration. Second, rituals produce *membership symbols*: emotionally significant symbols that serve as reminders of the

shared identity. These symbols can include physical objects, specific gestures, actions, words, or people. Finally, an IR generates *emotional energy* (EE), a lasting feeling of enthusiasm, motivation, and self-confidence gained from the ritual. Durkheim (1995) describes how participants, like the symbols, are charged up with emotional energy akin to a form of emotional electricity. Empirical studies support this, as Gabriel et al. (2017) note that increased collective effervescence leads to enhanced positive emotions, a sense of life's meaning, and overall well-being. Over time, EE dissipates, motivating individuals to seek similar experiences again. In this way, EE serves as both a driver and an outcome of interaction rituals.

EE is a crucial motivator in social interactions and explains why people return to events like music festivals where they previously experienced intense collective emotions. Successful rituals that generate shared emotions attract attendees and strengthen their engagement, while failed rituals lower EE, leading individuals to avoid such events. This underscores the importance for festivals to create rituals that evoke strong EE, as it fosters attendee loyalty and encourages repeated participation.

2.2 Collective Effervescence in the Context of Events

Since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been a growing awareness and concern about dissolving communities and increasing loneliness in society (Putnam, 2000). During the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue became even more visible and the concept of collective effervescence gained new relevance. Even though this concept is already more than a hundred years old and was originally applied to religious contexts, it is nowadays mostly used to understand social experiences in secular settings, such as festivals. Research that was conducted during the pandemic mostly focused on online events and showed that it is difficult to evoke feelings of collective effervescence and social connection in physical isolation (Vandenberg et al., 2021a; Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023). In a time of increasing loneliness, it becomes important to explore how festivals are still able to generate feelings of collective effervescence, as this can lead to a sense of meaning and social connection among isolated individuals (Paez et al., 2015; Gabriel et al., 2017).

As just mentioned, Vandenberg et al. (2021a) examined the extent to which livestreams of techno concerts could evoke feelings of collective effervescence despite the physical isolation of participants during the pandemic. While shared rituals were still present, they were primarily based on collective memories of previous techno events rather than creating new feelings of solidarity. The research shows that physical presence is a crucial factor for the emergence of collective effervescence and thereby confirms Collins' (2014) theory. The lack of direct interaction and rhythmic synchronization hindered the building of shared emotional energy, making the livestreams more of a symbolic reminder than a full substitute for physical events. However, research shows that there are differences between music genres in the experience of collective effervescence (Swartjes & Vandenberg, 2022; Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023). The way audiences behave and interact with the music or within the social setting is being influenced by the genre of the music that

is being played. For example, classical music lovers place less value on social interaction and focus mainly on the musical quality, while pop music fans consider the collective experience and social interaction essential (Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023). During the pandemic, livestreams of classical concerts were perceived as successful by the audience, whereas livestreams of pop concerts were marked by a sense of missing physical presence.

Physical co-presence is considered essential for the creation of collective effervescence during music events, but the way this is manifested also plays a crucial role. At Dutch *Levenslied* concerts, which align with traditional folk music, attendees place great value on homogeneity within the audience (Vandenberg et al., 2021b). This is reflected in the explicit and implicit exclusion of non-Dutch groups and the opposition to both high and low social classes. Additionally, visitors reject other music genres, such as techno and rap, partly due to the perceived immoral behaviors of their audiences. Clothing style also plays a role: simplicity and modesty are emphasized, while extravagant or fashionable attire is considered inappropriate. In this way, social and symbolic boundaries are drawn that strengthen the sense of group identity and solidarity within the community.

Earlier research hints at the necessity of physical co-presence in creating collective effervescence at festivals (Vandenberg et al., 2021a; Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023), but it's still unclear what specific conditions play a role in this. In the context of techno festivals, it is interesting to explore how essential the presence of 'others' is and who these 'others' actually are. Unlike traditional folk music, where national identity and language play an important role in defining the community (Vandenberg et al., 2021b), techno lacks an explicit connection to national or cultural groups or movements (Tsitsos, 2018). This leads to the question whether there is more openness and inclusivity at techno festivals or if there are other social and symbolic boundaries that people follow. Within the techno scene, there might be different types of markers and rituals that are used to define the community and distinguish it from other music genres, and consequently creating a different kind of homogeneity.

2.3 Festivalization

In the past twenty years, the number of festivals has drastically increased, a development that is also described as festivalization (Mulder, Hitters & Rutten, 2021). According to Mulder, Hitters & Rutten (2021), festivalization should be understood as a multi-layered concept, where value is created on different levels. For consumers, the festivalscape offers unique experiences; for artists, it provides more visibility; and for cities and local economies, it creates attractiveness.

Much of the existing academic literature approaches festivals from a top-down view, where festivals are for example studied from an organizational or policy perspective. For example, Swartjes and Berkers (2022) examined how festival organizers design festival spaces to stimulate social interaction. Since organizers are often aware of the social boundaries between festivalgoers (such as age, ethnicity, and social class), separate spaces based on genre are often created within the festival for different types of audiences. To still encourage the blending of different

festivalgoers, techniques such as spatial design, programming, and visual decoration are used to make visitors move around the site and encounter others in a spontaneous way. On the other hand, when festivals have a poor spatial design, this can lead to too much physical barriers, like excessive noise or spaces that are too dark, which can decrease social interaction and make people more motivated to stay in their familiar social circles (Abrassian, 2023). Also using a top-down view with festivals, Van der Hoeven et al. (2022) state that from a policy perspective, it is often difficult for festivals to meet the expectations of local governments, especially when they receive subsidies. While festivals are often focused on creating cultural value, local governments usually expect them to also produce economic, spatial, or social value. Cities and festivals are therefore strongly dependent on each other, but their interests are not always aligned.

Thus, even though there is a lot of research on festivals from a macro-perspective, the experiences of festival visitors on a psychological or social level are still underexposed (Mulder & Hitters, 2021; Swartjes & Berkers, 2022). Instead of approaching festivals from an organizational or policy-economic angle, the concept of collective effervescence can offer insights into the social and individual experiences of festivalgoers. In this way, it is possible to understand what festivals actually mean to the people who attend them, and how they are psychologically affected by organizational strategies or choices.

2.4 History of Techno

As previously mentioned, the experience and emergence of feelings of collective effervescence can strongly vary across music genres (Swartjes & Vandenberg, 2022; Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023). Therefore, to understand how collective effervescence can emerge at techno festivals, it is important to first examine the historical background of the genre. In this subchapter, I will discuss how the techno genre is an interesting case for studying collective effervescence based on two elements: its transcendent and escapist characteristics, and the absence of fixed identities in the techno community.

2.4.1 Techno as a Form of Escape and Transcendence

Techno originated in Detroit, where Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunderson, known as 'The Belleville Three', are seen as the founding fathers (Tsitsos, 2018). They grew up in the Detroit suburb of Belleville and were influenced by the socio-economic context of the city in the 1970s and 1980s. Detroit was once a prosperous global industrial hub, but it declined due to the economic crisis and the collapse of the automobile industry (Albiez, 2005). As a result, (mainly white) residents moved to the suburbs, leaving the city center empty and creating a post-industrial atmosphere.

The Belleville Three did not necessarily aim to criticize this situation but instead used their music to symbolically focus on the future (Williams, 2001). They sought a way to escape the declining state of Detroit by positioning themselves in a positive, futuristic way. According to Tsitsos (2018), the first techno producers did not resist the economic downturn but instead wanted to create "order in a disordered world" (p. 274). Techno emerged from a feeling of detachment, where people no longer felt connected to their surroundings. This led to a music style in which human elements, such as vocals or live instruments, were removed.

The technological sound of techno music reflected the context of Detroit in the 1980s. The automobile industry had become mechanized, and human labor was increasingly replaced by robots. Just as people were no longer needed in Detroit's post-industrial society, human influence also disappeared from techno music. Tsitsos (2018) describes this complex relationship between techno and the post-industrial world as follows: "[t]echno celebrates mechanization while simultaneously seeming to recognize the depressing desolation that it brings" (p. 275). In a way, techno tried to create a vision of the future in a modern world where people had become uncertain about their own role.

This escapist function of techno became also prevalent in Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Techno was seen as a symbol of freedom, allowing the city to break away from its past and focus on the future (Rietveld & Kolioulis, 2019; Peter, 2014). In Berlin, techno was used to celebrate the reunification of the city, while also maintaining an anti-establishment sentiment. Just as techno in Detroit offered a vision for the future in a post-industrial society, the Berlin techno scene provided an escape from the city's heavy historical burden and a perspective on what lay ahead.

This historical context provides an interesting background for understanding how collective effervescence emerges at techno festivals. The escapist and transcendent elements that lie at the origin of the genre correspond to Durkheim's (1995) description of the sacred. The Belleville Three created a genre that was not about protest or identity politics but rather about a futuristic vision. Due to the alienation they experienced in Detroit, they wanted to escape everyday reality through their music and develop a perspective on the future that went beyond existing societal structures. This form of escapism matches Durkheim's (1995) definition of the sacred, where individuals step outside their everyday lives and collectively find meaning in something extraordinary, something higher. Even though, in its original context, the 'sacred' in techno mainly represented the future of Detroit, it is possible that this idea of escaping still resonates in contemporary contexts. In the end, the core idea behind the creation of early techno in Detroit and the definition of collective effervescence share a strong connection: both offer an escape from the constraints of everyday life and create a sense of belonging to something higher and collective. Whether the transcendental and abstract nature of techno indeed help to create feelings of collective effervescence among festivalgoers in a contemporary context remains an open question — one that this thesis seeks to explore.

2.4.2 The Absence of Fixed Identities in the Techno Community

Although The Belleville Three and other pioneers of the genre came from the African American community, this is often overlooked (Tsitsos, 2018). One reason for this is likely the non-human character of the music, which made race and identity less explicitly expressed than in genres like rap. Additionally, Detroit had become a predominantly black city due to white flight, meaning there was less need for DJs and producers to emphasize their ethnicity (Walters, 2006). Another key factor is that techno emerged from a suburban, middle-class environment. The Belleville Three did not grow up in Detroit's declining inner city but in the suburbs (Albiez, 2005). Their relatively comfortable socio-economic position meant that they did not see the city's deterioration as a direct threat to their own living situation. Unlike early rap artists, who used music as a protest against the decline of their neighborhoods and cities, the first techno producers took Detroit's decay as inspiration for their futuristic sound (Williams, 2001). Instead of resisting their changing environment, they used music to imagine a different future.

The fact that techno was not originally a protest genre or linked to a specific community does not mean that it was never used in this way. The label and music collective Underground Resistance (UR), led by Mike Banks, emerged in the 1990s and used techno as a form of political expression. UR resisted the commercialization of techno and used music to advocate for marginalized black communities, often incorporating references to America's history of slavery (Rietveld & Kolioulis, 2019). UR's musical style was rooted in Afrofuturism, a cultural and artistic movement that presents a vision of the future for African Americans. Instead of looking back at the past with nostalgia, Afrofuturism imagines a future where new technologies create a better life for the black community (Rietveld & Kolioulis, 2019). Science fiction themes, such as aliens and cyborgs, are common in UR's techno, symbolizing new identities and possibilities in a post-human future. The goal was not to return to a traditional form of black identity but rather to create a new one (Albiez, 2005). However, even though techno can in this case be linked to an ethnic community, the focus still lies more on creating a new identity in the future. Thus, this identity is not anchored in established cultural references and does not necessarily produce a clear cultural marker.

In addition to its escapist qualities, techno offers an interesting case for collective effervescence because, unlike other genres like rap or folk music, it was not originally connected to specific national, cultural or ethnic identities. The Belleville Three focused on creating a future-oriented vision that went beyond existing social structures. As previously mentioned, festivalgoers within certain genres use ethnic or national markers to define their community (Tsitsos, 2018; Vandenberg et al., 2021b). Excluding certain groups through these symbolic boundaries can contribute to the emergence of collective effervescence among festival attendees. In contrast, the absence of explicit cultural markers within the techno genre raises the question how festivalgoers define the techno community and use mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion. It is possible that the absence of fixed identities and the emphasis on transcending existing societal norms could foster a

sense of connection between festivalgoers, thus creating an optimal setting for collective effervescence.

However, at the same time techno music might not be accessible to anyone. The abstract, repetitive sound and the absence of lyrics may feel alienating to people who are not familiar with the genre. This presents a tension between openness and exclusivity: while the techno scene seems to be inclusive and allows for a broad identification, the inaccessible character of the music can still lead to a different kind of demarcation of the community. Access to the techno community could therefore not be limited by ethnicity or nationality, but by taste or familiarity with the music. Nevertheless, empirical research into the experiences of festivalgoers is needed to research this and form conclusions.

3. Method

In this study on collective effervescence at techno festivals, I have chosen a qualitative research method. Qualitative research focuses on describing and understanding experiences, behaviors, and social interactions of individuals or groups of people (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). This approach aligns well with my research, as collective effervescence is a subjective and social phenomenon that can best be understood by analyzing the experiences of festivalgoers themselves. As discussed in the introduction, most of the academic literature is focused on theorizing collective effervescence, while less is known about how people actually experience it (Buehler, 2012). Therefore qualitative research is needed to better understand this phenomenon. By directly asking festivalgoers about their experiences regarding collective effervescence, this study goes further than just theory and therefore contributes to the existing literature.

In this study, I use semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the experience of collective effervescence among festivalgoers. With this method the researcher can ask targeted questions, while still keeping the option to change the order of the questions or follow up on specific topics (Fossey et al., 2002). This flexibility allows the respondent to share unexpected themes and personal experiences, while the interviewer maintains control over the conversation and addresses the pre-established themes. The interview guide was designed with open-ended questions, giving respondents the space to share their positive, negative or even neutral experiences with the festival. This ensures that respondents do not feel forced to only share their positive memories that might have contributed to feelings of collective effervescence, which leads to a more nuanced picture of their festival experience. Additionally, the interview guide was not strictly based on specific theoretical concepts of collective effervescence in order to avoid steering the conversations too much toward theory. Instead, the questions focused on the respondents' personal experiences, making the interview feel more like an open conversation about their perceptions or a general discussion about techno and their festival experience. Examples of questions are 'How would you describe the atmosphere and energy at the festival?' or 'How do you compare the experience of music at a festival to listening to music at home?' The full interview guide with all the questions can be found in Appendix A.

The respondents for this study were recruited at the indoor techno festival *Verknipt*, which took place on February 28th at the Ziggo Dome. The specific subgenre that was featured was hard techno and approximately 12,000 visitors were expected. Participants were recruited at the festival itself, where they were briefly informed about the purpose of the study and asked if they were willing to participate in an interview in the days following the event. Contact details were collected in the form of Instagram profiles or phone numbers. The interviews took place in the week after the festival to make sure that the experiences of the participants were recent and detailed. Although only 10 interviews were conducted, approximately 30 people were approached to ensure a sufficient number of respondents were available. The respondents were selected through convenience sampling, a method where participants are chosen based on their accessibility and

willingness to participate (Emerson, 2015). To try to maximize the variability in the sample group, I approached people at various locations within the festival location, such as the dance floor, the bar, and rest areas. This approach increased the likelihood of speaking with both participants who experience strong collective effervescence and those who feel this less or not at all. However, it is important to note that this sample method can lead to a self-selection bias. Respondents who were willing to participate in an interview may have been more enthusiastic about the festival and therefore more open to sharing their experiences. As a result, critical perspectives from festivalgoers who felt less involved during the event may have been overlooked.

I strived for a balanced distribution between men and women and tried to select respondents from different age categories to create a sample group that is as representative as possible. Unfortunately, due to limited responds of potential participants in the week after the festival, only 3 women were able to conduct an interview with, making the distribution between men and women in the sample group slightly unbalanced. While the exact reason for this is unclear, it is possible that my position as a male researcher might have influenced who felt comfortable coming out for an interview. Furthermore, the age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 38, which aligns well with the general age of the audience.

Before the interviews took place, participants were asked to fill in an informed consent form, which explains that their participation is entirely voluntary and that they can withdraw their consent at any time. Also their anonymity was clearly stated by both the interviewer and the informed consent form, as sensitive topics like drug use could come up during the interviews. To protect the identity of the respondents, all the names that are used in this thesis are pseudonyms. All the interviews were conducted through online meetings on Microsoft Teams. As all the respondents were Dutch, the interviews were also able to be conducted in Dutch. The general time of the interviews was around 45 minutes each.

The interviews were firstly transcribed through the transcription mode of Microsoft Teams. As the transcripts showed a lot of errors, they were also manually corrected by listening to the audio that was recorded during the interviews. Afterwards, the interviews were analyzed by using the software program *Atlas.ti*. The first step in the data analysis is open coding of the interviews, where the data is broken down into smaller parts and then categorized into themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). This is the basis for a thematic analysis, which can be described as a qualitative research method used to identify patterns and themes within a dataset, such as interviews or texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using this kind of method in this research, the recurring elements could be identified that play a role in generating collective effervescence at techno festivals. The data was coded in an inductive way, as I wanted to analyse the experiences of festivalgoers without limiting myself to pre-established theoretical frameworks. This coding technique makes it possible to gain new insights that can only be derived from the actual practice of a phenomenon. In this way, the interviews could be approached in an open manner and the themes could be formed directly from the data (Thomas, 2003). The open coding resulted in a total of around 80 different codes. During the analysis, some of these codes were removed or merged; for example, the codes 'festival as escape' and 'festival versus normal life' were combined. After that, the remaining codes were

coded axially, meaning that the individual codes were categorized based on how they related to each other (Williams & Moser, 2019). Based on this coding, four overarching themes were identified: techno festivals as sacred spaces, dancing as ritual, drug use as ritual, and social connection. At first, I also had a fifth theme called 'critical perspective', in which respondents expressed more negative feelings about things like the logistical setup, filming on the dance floor, or the changing audience at festivals. But since these critical views were all linked to the other subjects, I decided to integrate them with these themes and not treat them as a separate category. In Appendix B a coding table can be found with the overarching themes and related codes.

It is important to note that the interpretation of qualitative data is always, to some extent, influenced by the perspectives, beliefs, or experiences of the researcher (Fink, 2000). Since I personally visit techno festivals quite regularly, there is a chance that my own experiences played a role—unconsciously—while conducting and interpreting the interviews. To minimize the bias and aim for academic distance, I tried to ask as many open questions as possible during the interviews, allowing space for personal interpretation without steering the answers too much in a specific direction. Still, there is a risk that I might have taken certain expressions for granted and therefore did not ask further about their underlying meanings.

At the same time, my own experience within the techno scene could also have helped in creating a more informal and familiar atmosphere. By subtly showing, during the recruiting process and the interviews, that I was familiar with techno festivals, there was a shared context that I believe contributed to a sense of trust. This might have helped respondents to feel more free to speak about sensitive topics like drug use or trance-like ways of dancing, without the fear of being judged or seen as 'weird' by an outsider.

My own experiences with techno festivals may also have influenced the way I interpreted the data. There is a chance that, during the coding process, my attention was mainly drawn to themes that felt familiar to me, and less to unexpected or contrasting patterns, which could have led to a form of confirmation bias. The inductive coding possibly helped to avoid this bias, since the themes could emerge directly from the data instead of me looking for topics that I already expected or was familiar with. Furthermore, when formulating the main and subthemes, I tried to continuously check them against the literal quotes of the respondents. In this way, I tried to prevent myself from making assumptions that did not necessarily come from the data itself.

4. Results

This chapter discusses the important empirical data from the interviews. The results provide insight into the experiences of festivalgoers at techno festivals and how they experience collective effervescence. Based on a thematic analysis of the interviews, four main themes emerged that together answer the research question. The first theme is about festivals as a sacred spaces, which allows festival visitors to leave behind their everyday life and therefore creates an ideal foundation for the emergence of collective effervescence. Next, two central ritual practices at techno festivals are discussed, which causes the feelings of collective effervescence to emerge among audience members. The first ritual is dancing, where visitors share a mutual focus of attention and physically surrender themselves to the music. The second ritual is taking drugs, through which festivalgoers are more social with each other and reach a shared emotional state. Finally, it is described how these rituals create a sense of connection between festival participants, and how the techno community is defined and demarcated. Each theme is discussed through different subthemes. To keep the results as close as possible to the experiences of the festivalgoers, respondents' experiences are supported by quotes. Additionally, theoretical concepts from mostly Durkheim and Collins will be mentioned to place the findings in a theoretical context.

4.1 Techno Festivals as 'Sacred' Spaces

4.1.1 From Daily Life to Festival 'Bubble'

The festival setting is described by respondents as intensely positive. Terms like 'loving' and 'happiness' often appear in the interviews. This collective, positive mood is named as one of the most characteristic elements of the experience at techno festivals. Respondents indicate that everyone is 'kind' and 'social' towards each other and that people come to the festival with the same positive energy. For example, Nigel says that at festivals "everyone is on the same level" and the festival crowd "blends into the same vibe." This shared positive emotional state not only makes respondents feel personally better, but also seems to create an energy from which openness and connectedness arise among the festival audience. This emotional alignment matches the concept of shared emotion, which Collins (2014) considers an important condition for a successful interaction ritual and feelings of collective effervescence.

For respondents, festivals offer a temporary escape from everyday reality. The festival experience is contrasted with daily life and described as a place where responsibilities, obligations, and mental worries temporarily disappear. Remarkably, Xander describes techno festivals, despite their crowded and intense character, as a place where he finds peace. Expressions like "having nothing on your mind," "thoughts on zero," and "living in the moment" appear repeatedly in the interviews. Timo describes his festival experiences as "just letting go of the world for a while." Festivals are therefore experienced as an outlet where festivalgoers can fully surrender to the

moment. Several respondents describe this experience as a kind of utopian reality that is closed off from the outside world and filled with freedom, energy, and positivity. Floris explicitly calls this a “pink bubble,” in which people are kinder, softer, and more sensitive than in the “real world.” The feeling of safety and non-judgment within this setting makes it possible to break free from social expectations and patterns. Mirthe says that this makes it hard for her to return to her daily routines:

I always feel kind of sad when it ends and I have to go back to the real world — with school, work, all that stuff. Just to sit in the train again, with train schedules and whatever else. So yeah, it's really a kind of a disappointment to have to stop, so to speak.

Festivals are thus not only seen as moments of entertainment, but also as a kind of alternative reality in which people can be another version of themselves. The respondents describe stepping into a different role, where they are more informal, more free, and more extroverted. The festival setting offers a temporary reality in which the social restraints or judgments of daily life fade away. Lucas expresses this in the following way:

You can be the best version of yourself for a moment, because nobody knows you. Just... I don't know, show the best of me. And then... yeah. That's how I escape normal life. For a while, you're someone else, in another universe, another world where everything is just great, where everything feels perfect and good and all that.

The contrast that respondents describe between the festival experience and daily life corresponds with the distinction Durkheim (1995) makes between the sacred and the profane, and points to feelings of collective effervescence. Collective effervescence allows festivalgoers to break free from ‘normal’ life and transcends them to a ‘higher’ utopian reality where they experience shared meaning and connectedness. The festival experience as a temporary escape reflects the original function of techno, which emerged from a desire to symbolically escape the declining reality of Detroit's context (Tsitsos, 2018). The founders of techno tried with their music to position themselves positively and futuristically, in order to break away from their disrupted environment. In a similar way, the respondents use techno festivals to break free from everyday life and position themselves in another reality where they are a more positive version of themselves and where they are no longer restricted by social norms or judgments. This experience of escapism connects to Falassi's (1987) concept of ‘time out of time’ and earlier empirical research by Packer and Ballantyne (2011), in which festivals are seen as a separation experience from everyday routines.

4.1.2 Preparation

For most respondents, the festival experience already starts before the event begins. They make preparations to be in the right physical and mental state to participate as well as possible.

Daan describes listening to music the day before that “fits the theme of the festival,” while other respondents focus more on their diet or getting enough sleep.

Clothing and appearance also play an important role leading up to the festival. Respondents say they dress more consciously and put more effort into their appearance compared to in their daily life. Often, they describe their outfits as more extravagant, and black clothing is mentioned as the most common at techno events. However, Timo, like some other respondents, says there are no strict rules about how to dress:

In my opinion, people at raves often try to put labels on everything — like ‘you have to do this,’ or ‘you have to dance like that,’ or ‘you have to dress a certain way.’ But the way I see it: you should just wear whatever you want, whatever makes you feel comfortable.

Still, several respondents share the feeling that ‘normal’ clothes, like jeans or a neat shirt, do not really fit at techno events. Lucas points out an unconscious social norm within the techno scene, where the collective pursuit of more extravagant outfits encourages him to also put effort in: “From experience, I know many people try to look good. That makes you want to match that and also look good yourself.” The outfits worn are therefore specifically meant for the festival space and are not worn to work or study. In this way, clothing and appearance help festivalgoers collectively separate themselves from everyday reality and enter a specific emotional state.

Respondents say that upon arrival at the festival, they first feel the need to acclimatize. For example, they mention exploring the grounds and walking around to sense the atmosphere before fully giving themselves to the dance floor. This act seems like a transitional ritual between everyday life and the festival experience and marks, as it were, the start of participating in the rituals that Collins (2014) and Durkheim (1995) describe as the foundation for the emergence of collective effervescence.

4.1.3 Spatial and Logistic Setup

Respondents describe that the spatial environment strongly influences whether the festival is experienced positively or negatively. Half of the respondents explicitly say that the specific location is a motivation to attend certain techno festivals. When locations were positively experienced before, it is expected that future experiences will also be positive. Daan believes that a good spatial setup can strengthen collective connectedness at a festival. Especially visual and auditory elements play an important role. Good sound systems, flamethrowers, light and laser shows, and screens with graphic visuals contribute to a positive experience and help respondents immerse in the moment. Lucas describes one of his best festival experiences taking place at a location set up like a “magical fairytale forest.” A well-arranged festival site can thus provide a visual context where everyday reality disappears. This refers again to the contrast between the everyday and the extraordinary, which Durkheim (1995) describes as the difference between the sacred and the

profane. This contrast strengthens the feeling of separation and symbolizes the transition to another world for festivalgoers.

Respondents also mention the importance of places where they can relax outside the dance floor. For some, this is even the deciding factor in rating a location positively. Locations with enough accessible chill zones are experienced as more attractive. These spots give festivalgoers the chance to recharge physically and mentally for dancing, but also serve as natural settings for socializing with others.

Additionally, various logistical and practical factors indirectly influence feelings of collective effervescence. Things like queues for toilets, drinking points, or cloakrooms are not direct sources of connectedness but can prevent festivalgoers from fully participating in interaction rituals on the dance floor. Some respondents also describe that running out of water or food can cause frustration or tiredness, making it harder to fully give themselves to the moment. Thus, a good logistical setup provides the necessary basis for feelings of collective effervescence to emerge.

4.1.4 Afterglow

Respondents describe that the festival experience partly lingers in the days after. They mention looking back at videos and photos they took themselves or see on social media. This mainly evokes feelings of happiness and gratitude for having participated in the festival. These melancholic feelings quickly turn into anticipation for the next festival. This anticipation in itself creates positive feelings among respondents. The positive feelings lingering after a festival correspond to the concept of emotional energy, which refers to lasting feelings of enthusiasm following a successful interaction ritual (Collins, 2014). This serves both as an outcome and a driver of collective effervescence, as it motivates visitors to seek out new festivals again. Xander describes that the anticipation of the next techno party gives him joy:

I do notice that I sometimes actually get more energy just from knowing I'm going to a rave again. Like this morning — yeah, I'm going to a rave tonight. And then you wake up differently, you know? Like, oh yeah, tonight we're going again. Yeah, fun, exciting. That really gives you energy.

4.1.5 Summary

Techno festivals are described by respondents as sacred spaces, where they escape from everyday life. Preparation plays a big role, as it allows respondents to break free from their everyday reality and step into another role through their appearance and mental state of mind. A good spatial and logistical environment is also described as an enabling condition for the emergence of collective effervescence, as it allows festivalgoers to fully immerse in the moment. After the event, respondents experience emotional energy, referring to positive feelings after a

successful interaction ritual. These feelings quickly turn into anticipation for upcoming techno festivals.

4.2 Dancing as Ritual

4.2.1 Musical Experience

For many respondents, the music — especially the artists on the line-up — is an important motivation to attend a techno festival. Previous experiences with well-known DJs create expectations for future festivals. When DJs have been positively experienced before, the same expectations arise for upcoming events. For some respondents, the line-up even weighs heavier than the social factors. Floris describes this as follows:

If there are actually artists that I feel like I *have* to see, then I'll definitely go. And sometimes, even if none of my friends is going, but the line-up is really good — yeah, I usually still go.

Although most respondents also listen to techno in their free time, the music in a festival setting is experienced as “more intense” and “more physical.” The music is not only heard, but also physically felt. The intense and bodily experience of the music is linked by several respondents to euphoria, excitement, and being lost in the moment, which point to feelings of collective effervescence. Daan describes the musical experience at techno festivals as follows:

Just the tempo. You really feel it — like, throughout your whole body, you feel the vibrations, the sound, that heavy tempo, you know? Yeah, it just makes you happy. You're... yeah, excited, pumped, and yeah...

In several interviews, the highlights of festivals are described as moments when a good track was played or when respondents recognize a specific song. At these moments, intense happiness is experienced, which is often remembered the next day. Therefore, music is not only the motivation to participate, but also enables festivalgoers to fully immerse themselves in the moment.

Several respondents also mention the importance of a “logical build-up” in the music and line-up. It is pleasant when the music, as the event progresses, becomes “harder” or more intense. Meaning that the music starts with less intense subgenres of techno and gradually builds up to harder and faster subgenres. This aligns with the ritual intensification that happens when a group of individuals, with a shared emotional state, begins to perform ritual actions more intensely (Durkheim, 1996; Collins, 2014). The increasingly intense music helps festivalgoers to physically surrender to the ritual actions of dancing, allowing feelings of collective effervescence to arise.

As the DJ, through his music, determines the atmosphere and experience on the dance floor, he can be seen as a kind of ritual guide within the interaction ritual, which corresponds to research by Goulding and Shankar (2011), where the DJ is symbolically defined as a ritual ‘shaman’. The DJ

forms, together with the music, a mutual focus of attention, which according to Collins (2014) is important for the emergence of a successful interaction ritual and feelings of collective effervescence.

4.2.2 Dancing as an Entry to Trance

Dancing is seen by respondents as the central and defining part of the festival day. Nigel, for example, calls the dance floor the place “where it really happens.” The extent to which the visitors have danced is connected to how successfully they later rate their festival experience. Dancing is therefore more than a physical activity and is also seen as a measure of how positive respondents experienced a festival. The act of dancing forms the core ritual in the context of techno festivals through which feelings of collective effervescence arise. Lena, for example, looks back less positively on a festival if she has danced little:

Sometimes I look back and I feel kind of disappointed that I didn't dance much (...). Like yesterday, the first part I was mostly sitting and stuff, but by the end I was standing and dancing a lot. So then I still think it was okay, you know, as long as I danced at least part of the time. (...) But I always find it more fun to look back on a day when I was just dancing and having a good time the whole day.

Respondents describe that during dancing they enter a kind of trance, with their focus on themselves and the music. They explain how they physically surrender and get lost in the moment. The rhythm of the music, the light shows, and visual effects enhance these feelings. Timo says he specifically looks for room to dance so he will not be taken out of his “space”:

I always look for a spot with enough room around me, because I hate being stuck in the middle where people are constantly walking past you. If there's no room to move, yeah, I really can't stand that. Like, even if someone keeps bumping into you — even if it's by accident — it kind of pulls you out of your space.

4.2.3 Dancing as a Collective Act

Although respondents describe the trancelike experience during dancing as an individual act, the interviews show that the rest of the audience has a big influence on their experience. When respondents see others dancing, it works contagious. This sight gives the respondents pleasure, which motivates and energizes them to dance themselves. Additionally, respondents indicate that their own energy while dancing seems to affect those around them, creating a mutual dynamic where festivalgoers motivate each other to engage more intensely in the interaction ritual of dancing. This contagious effect points to a positive feedback loop, where individuals begin to

perform collective rituals and actions (in this case dancing) more intensely when they see others doing so. Timo describes how seeing others dance even makes his own physical fatigue temporarily disappear:

It's the end of the festival, you've been dancing for hours, you're completely wrecked, and you're thinking: ugh, I've got no energy left. Then you see someone going all out and you're like: oh fuck it, I'll go wild too. The music is blasting, everyone is going all in, and suddenly you get energy — from the music, from seeing the artist go wild, from seeing other people go wild. And then you're like: ah fuck it, let's go one more time. It's just one more hour. I'm giving it everything I've got, just push through. I just really enjoy that, when you can join in the energy of others. And it's also great when you see others get energy from you — and they start going wild again as well.

Respondents often describe dancing with strangers on the dance floor. Although they do not know each other, dancing together creates a connection between festivalgoers. Some respondents describe dancing in sync as highlights of their festival experience. Daan literally calls these moments “goosebumps moments,” where he feels “harmony” and “connection” with the audience. Dancing together points to a high degree of physical movement synchrony and causes emotional alignment among festivalgoers (Lakens, 2010). Floris stresses the importance of dancing for the connection between festivalgoers by noting that parties with lots of dancing also have a noticeably open and social atmosphere outside the dance floor — for example, during breaks or in conversations. Dancing thus creates feelings of solidarity among festivalgoers; an outcome Collins (2014) describes as characteristic for a successful interaction ritual and feelings of collective effervescence.

Notably, although there is a lot of connection felt on the dance floor, the interactions are often superficial or even non-verbal. Because talking is difficult due to the loud music, interactions are limited to simple compliments about dancing or appearance. Often, the interactions are non-verbal, such as exchanging looks, smiles, and fist bumps. These simple interactions are not seen as less valuable. On the contrary, respondents describe high feelings of connection with other visitors during these moments. This fits with the importance of physical proximity in evoking collective effervescence, as the audience can emotionally tune to each other through micro-signals (Collins, 2014). The superficial interactions seem to match the trance-like atmosphere on the dance floor. Since verbal communication is not possible or not desired, interactions are based on bodily presence and shared movements. This ensures festivalgoers stay within their trancelike state and can even extend their trance to others, creating a collective emotional state.

Respondents often link a ‘good’ atmosphere at a festival to the audience actively dancing. The absence of others dancing thus understandably causes negative feelings among respondents. People who stand still on the dance floor are experienced as disturbing and undermine the collective energy among festivalgoers. Floris describes a moment when he felt influenced by such a situation:

Sure, you're in your own world when you're dancing, but when everyone around you is just standing still and you're the only one dancing, at some point you stop too — because you feel super awkward. I had moments like that where everyone was kind of looking at me and a few friends like: what the fuck are you doing? Because everyone else was just standing still and that makes me feel uncomfortable.

Another recurring source of irritation in the interviews is when people film too much on the dance floor. According to respondents, this mainly causes people not to participate in dancing or not to get lost in the moment, which worsens the atmosphere. While people do get energy when others dance, it also means festivalgoers are less motivated to dance when the rest does not. Standing still and excessive filming on the dance floor cause the interaction ritual of collective dancing not to be executed optimally. The shared bodily action disappears and there is a decrease in shared focus, as people are concentrated on their phones. This visibly reduces active participation in the interaction ritual and undermines the collective energy. So, the emergence of collective effervescence depends not only on a personal emotional state, but also on the visible involvement of other festivalgoers.

4.2.4 Summary

Music and dancing are seen as core of the festival experience and the main motivation for respondents to seek out techno events. Music creates a mutual focus of attention and shared emotion and is the main driver for performing interaction rituals among festivalgoers. On the dance floor, respondents describe entering a trance-like state, where the audience collectively surrenders to the music and dancing, which lets them fully immerse in the moment. Synchronous dancing and non-verbal interaction create emotional alignment and connection between visitors. Dancing is thus seen as the central ritual act that functions both as an individual outlet and a means of connection, thereby evoking collective effervescence among festivalgoers.

4.3 Using Drugs as Ritual

4.3.1 Drug Use as an Emotion Enhancer

Remarkably, all respondents in this study report using drugs at techno festivals. MDMA (or ecstasy) appears as the most popular substance within the techno scene. According to the respondents, drug use creates the social, loving, and open atmosphere that is seen as typical for techno festivals. Using drugs is considered self-evident and embedded in the culture of the techno scene.

Although it is described that taking drugs gives energy to party, this is not seen as the main reason for using them. Rather, it is used as an emotion enhancer, deepening feelings of happiness,

euphoria, and connection. Respondents say they feel happier and more positive about the music, people, and the environment. Nigel describes that this causes people to be emotionally in tune with each other:

I think like 95 to 100 percent of the people there are using drugs. So yeah, everyone's kind of in the same boat, so to speak. Everyone's more or less experiencing the same things (...)
Everyone's kind of on the same wavelength.

Festival visitors are perceived by the respondents as “nicer” because of drug use. People are more empathetic, less easily irritated, and more inclined to help others and give compliments. A recurring example is that physical discomfort, like small collisions, does not lead to fights but is often immediately solved with an apology from both parties. According to the respondents, fights or aggression are almost non-existent at techno festivals. The drug use by festivalgoers creates a shared emotional state among the crowd and points to the concept of ‘shared emotion’ (Collins, 2014). Because individuals emotionally tune in to each other and immerse themselves in the same experience, a feeling of connection and collective excitement arises—which is characteristic of collective effervescence.

Besides becoming more empathetic when using drugs like MDMA, respondents emphasize that it also makes people more social. For example, the personal threshold to approach someone is lowered, and people are more receptive to social contact. Floris, for instance, says that talking “goes easier than normal.” Lucas and Sophie also describe that through drug use they are in a more positive mood and therefore more likely to spontaneously give compliments to others. Notably, several respondents say they are not naturally social, but behave extraverted on techno festivals because of the use of drugs. Lena expresses this as follows:

People just become, yeah, more social, and people are more together, you know? You get what I mean. I'm usually very much focused on myself and stuff. But at a rave, I'm actually only focused on others and I really want to talk to people.

The open, social, and caring atmosphere is often mentioned by respondents as typical for the techno scene. It is important to notice that these values strongly resemble the feelings festivalgoers experience when using drugs. Taking drugs is a recurring ritual at techno festivals, where feelings of love, empathy, and connection are enhanced. These effects of collective drug use create membership symbols, which Collins (2014) describes as emotionally significant actions or signs that serve as reminders of the shared group identity. Although membership symbols are often thought of as persons or physical objects, at techno festivals they take the form of a shared ethos, where values such as care, empathy, and social connection define the techno scene.

4.3.2 Drug Use vs. Alcohol Use

Respondents often contrast drug use with alcohol use, portraying alcohol negatively. While alcohol is being served and consumed to a small extent at techno festivals, the respondents state that most festivalgoers are primarily using drugs, and that they rarely see people who are visibly drunk. They associate alcohol with other settings (like club culture or other genres) and describe that, unlike drugs, alcohol leads to aggression, fights, and an unsafe atmosphere. Techno festivals are therefore generally experienced as safer than places where alcohol use dominates. Floris explicitly states a preference for people who use drugs like MDMA instead of alcohol:

Someone who comes up to me with rolling eyes, I'll approach them way more positively than someone who staggers over drunk. I feel much more at ease, much safer, I think. Because I know that person probably doesn't have any bad intentions.

By negatively contrasting alcohol users and other party settings, like nightlife culture, with the techno scene, there is a process of 'negative othering' (Stahl, 2017). Notably, in other genres alcohol consumption is used as a positive distinguishing factor precisely in opposition to the hardcore techno scene, allowing those audiences to position themselves as morally superior (Vandenberg, Berghman, & Van Eijck, 2021). This moral superiority of alcohol users is also reinforced by the legal status of alcohol, which they contrast with illegal substances and are therefore depicted as 'bad'. Thus, substance use across different music genres is not only functional, but is also used to mark and define one's own scene.

4.3.3 Criticism and Awareness Regarding Drug Use

Although respondents speak positively about drug use, some negative sides and dangers are also discussed. A recurring concern is that drug use at techno festivals has become increasingly normal and even seems to have become a requirement for some festivalgoers. Sophie describes feeling more social pressure at techno festivals, causing people to feel forced to use drugs or else be seen as "boring." There emerges an image that festivalgoers who do not use drugs somewhat fall outside.

The danger of drug use as a ritual, is that it could start to be seen as a condition to fully participate in the festival experience. Just as there is rejection of people who do not dance at techno festivals, a similar rejection is felt toward those who do not use drugs. This could come from the fact that individuals who do not use drugs, exclude themselves from the shared emotional state at techno festivals. This form of exclusion conflicts with the non-judgmental, inclusive atmosphere that respondents consider typical for the techno scene.

Some respondents also mention the risk of addiction, where festivalgoers use drugs to escape personal problems. It is said that when people can only enjoy techno festivals with drugs, this can lead to habitual use. Xander emphasizes the importance of mental health when using drugs:

I do think, you know, since drugs are involved, that you really have to be mentally strong enough. It shouldn't be the reason *why* you do it. Like, for me, the reason is that I enjoy it. For me, it's not because I need to clear my head (...) People who do it for *that* reason — just to stop thinking about something else — yeah, then you get into a negative spiral and that's how you get addicted.

4.3.4 Summary

Respondents mention that drug use is normalized and embedded in the techno scene. The use of drugs like MDMA causes intensified positive emotions such as love, empathy, and euphoria, leading to a shared emotional state among festivalgoers. Festival visitors also describe that drug use makes them more open and social towards others. Respondents contrast this positive effect with alcohol use, which is mostly associated with aggression and other party settings or music genres. Drug use in the context of techno festivals creates a shared ethos of care, empathy, and social connection. This shared ethos emerges from the ritual act of taking drugs and defines the identity of the techno scene. Because drug use is increasingly seen as a requirement at festivals, an unconscious exclusion of non-users can occur. Since non-users do not take part in this essential ritual at techno festivals, they are less able to immerse themselves in the shared experience and group connectedness.

4.4 Social Connectedness and Limits of Inclusion

4.4.1 Connectedness at Festivals

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the atmosphere at techno festivals is described as extremely open and social. The social character of festivals is named by respondents as an important motivation to attend festivals. It is not only about seeing friends or acquaintances, but also about the ease with which new contacts can be made. This social interaction with strangers is mentioned as a valuable part of the festival experience. It is described that at techno festivals it is very easy to make new friends, since the threshold to talk to others is very low. Several respondents say they sometimes go to techno events alone, as they expect to meet new people there. The conversations often seem to come out of nowhere, and it is mentioned that there is an immediate "click" with everyone. Joel says meetings with strangers feel like "you have known each other for years," and Lena says that at festivals a social side of herself comes out that she does not show in daily life.

Some respondents describe that at the festival they consciously separate from friends to walk around and meet new people, to talk with others. These social interactions mostly happen outside the dance floor, in places where people retreat to rest or come to smoke. Respondents describe

that in these areas it is as easy to approach others, but also to be approached. These so-called “chill zones” are considered an important part of the spatial environment of the festival, as they are the places where feelings of social connectedness between festival visitors become most visible. Even though these spaces are not where the interaction rituals themselves take place, they do reflect the positive effects of those rituals — particularly the emergence of social solidarity between the visitors.

Although the conversations remain superficial, respondents describe that this contributes to the feeling of togetherness among festivalgoers. Besides talking, caring for each other is also named as a form of connectedness. It is described that everyone looks out for each other and that people who feel less well are helped. Respondents feel connected not only to their friends or close ones, but almost to everyone at the festival. Daan describes the audience at techno festivals as “one big family.” The connectedness festivalgoers feel with the rest of the visitors points to social solidarity, which results from successful interaction rituals and feelings of collective effervescence (Collins, 2014). Nigel explains he highly values the moments when this connectedness becomes visible:

When I’m just walking around and I randomly come into contact with a group of girls, you know, and they say something like: ‘You look great!’ and I’m like: ‘Oh, you too,’ you know? Or when I ask, ‘Does anyone have chewing gum?’ and someone says: ‘Oh yeah!’ Or when I’m really hot and someone just starts fanning me out of nowhere — those are the moments I really enjoy. And those are the moments that really stick with me, like: ‘Wow, everyone is really looking out for each other.’

4.4.2 Image of the ‘Typical’ Techno Festivalgoer: Inclusion and Exclusion

The feelings of connectedness and collective effervescence remain linked to who does and does not ‘belong’ at a techno festival. Respondents say people within the techno scene adhere to a certain ethos. Judgments are avoided as much as possible: everyone may be themselves, everyone accepts each other, and people help each other. This open, non-judgmental attitude is seen as typical for the techno scene. Mirthe notes that people outside the techno scene often have a negative and stereotypical image of techno parties, mainly due to the associated drug use and dislike of the music style. She therefore experiences a feeling of acceptance within the techno scene, as she is in an environment with people who understand her better.

Although respondents often say that everyone is welcome at techno festivals, the desired group of festivalgoers is still defined in a certain way. The typical festivalgoer is mostly seen as social, open, loving, and cheerful. Joel and Lucas contrast this with the hip-hop scene, where according to them there is a lot of show-off behavior and aggression. Within the techno scene, there is a norm of friendliness and openness that determines the group feeling at festivals. Lucas describes that this atmosphere makes it hard for some people to fit in when they cannot match that energy:

I don't think there's necessarily a kind of exclusion of people, but it's just a very different culture you have to adapt to. Because everyone is kind of open and loving, everyone is happy with each other. And if you can't match that energy, then yeah... you won't be accepted. People will give you dirty looks — they just won't like you being there.

Although techno festivals are described as places where everyone is welcome, there is still an exclusive dimension. People who are more introverted or closed off could fit less well in the techno scene.

Furthermore, respondents say that festivalgoers within the techno scene must share a passion for the techno music to connect with the audience. Mirthe describes that you “really have to love” techno to go there, contrasting it with Billie Eilish or Taylor Swift concerts where “half the world goes to because they know it.” The club or nightlife culture is often negatively contrasted with the techno scene in the interviews. In clubs, according to respondents, mainly people come to get drunk or flirt, and unlike at techno events, the music is not the main focus. It is also described that there is much less (positive) contact between strangers during going out. Timo sums up the difference between nightlife and techno festivals as follows:

At festivals, people really go for the music. So you already share a passion — the music. That's something you already have in common with someone: that they like it too. So you just click more easily. But with clubbing, I think a lot of people don't give a damn about the music, so you don't have that common ground, and you're more on your own, in your own bubble. Whereas with techno, there's something you share — something you can talk about, something you can relate to.

4.3.3 Temporary Connectedness

An important binding factor that emerges in the interviews is the shared goal of all festivalgoers: enjoying themselves, dancing, and the love for techno. As Xander says: “Everyone is there to have a good time.” The shared passion for music means that festivalgoers are emotionally attuned to each other before they even join the interaction ritual, forming the basis for collective effervescence. The shared focus on fun and music creates a temporary shared identity among festivalgoers, where differences fade to the background and connectedness arises. Joel emphasizes this by telling how people come together from different places in the Netherlands and that contrasts, like rivalries between football clubs, disappear at techno festivals:

People can tell from the way I talk... my roots are in Amsterdam, and I often end up chatting with people from Rotterdam. And that contrast with the whole Ajax–Feyenoord hooligan thing — I think it's so beautiful (...) We all agree, like: yeah, it's such nonsense. You're going to smash someone's head in just because they're from another city?

Notably, there are no pre-established cultural boundaries drawn to decide who belongs at techno festivals, something that often happens with other genres (Tsitsos, 2018; Vandenberg et al., 2021b). This fits the origin of techno as an abstract and future-oriented genre, detached from social or cultural movements (Williams, 2001; Walters, 2006).

Although the festival experiences are characterized by feelings of connectedness in the moment, their impact outside the festival is limited. More than half of respondents say they do not feel connected to a techno community. They indicate they do not attend techno events frequently enough to feel part of a community. It is also noted that the social connections formed at the festival do not carry over beyond the event. Daan, for example, describes the festival as a snapshot:

I don't really feel connected to a festival community. I don't follow those people on Instagram, and I don't feel like I need to follow them on social media when I'm at the festival either (...) For me, it's really just a moment in time where I completely lose myself and have the best time. And then it's done for me, until the next festival.

Some respondents do feel part of a techno community. They often visit weekly techno parties and recognize the same group of people returning to the same events. Still, even this contact rarely expands outside the techno event setting.

The festivalgoers' experiences show characteristics of what Riley, Griffin and Morey (2010) describe as a 'neo-tribe.' This concept refers to temporary group formations that are not consciously focused on social or political issues but mainly on connectedness through direct sensory experiences, like being together, dancing, and enjoying. This focus on hedonism also comes back in the interviews, where the respondents describe a shared goal of partying, enjoying, and the music. The neo-tribe offers an alternative way of doing 'politics' by creating a temporary autonomy through which its own ethos and values arise. In the interviews, this is visible as social norms such as empathy, care, and openness apply at techno festivals. Corresponding to the neo-tribe idea, respondents say this is a temporary feeling of connectedness with limited effects beyond the festival.

Thus, the way visitors at techno festivals use inclusion and exclusion is largely based on the extent to which someone participates in the rituals during the festival itself. This provides new insights into how collective effervescence can emerge in culturally 'neutral' settings (like techno events), since it suggests that social boundaries in this context are mostly drawn in the moment itself. These findings contrast with earlier research in other genres, where the community was defined and delineated by fixed, pre-established markers based on nationality, ethnicity, or political movements (Tsitsos, 2018; Vandenberg et al., 2021b).

4.3.4 Critical Perspective on the Commercialization of the Techno Scene

Although techno festivals are generally described as social and connecting experiences, some respondents say the techno scene has changed in recent years. They notice this especially at large-scale events, like Verknipt — the festival where respondents were recruited for this study. Some respondents say these festivals have become too massive. Festival organizations often have commercial interests and therefore try to organize ever bigger events. This causes venues to be overcrowded, less space to dance, and makes finding friends harder. Most respondents say the crowdedness negatively affects their experience and the general atmosphere at the festival. Additionally, as festivalgoers recognize fewer people from previous techno events at large-scale events, no community feeling arises. Interviews also show that large events attract a broader audience. Targeted online marketing campaigns of festival organizations now also attract people who normally would not go to techno events. Floris explains that at big techno festivals, a less specific group of visitors come:

Verknipt does their marketing in such a way that *everyone* goes — even people who normally don't listen to techno. People who are into completely different genres, but then they're like: 'Oh, let's go to Verknipt tonight, that sounds fun.'

Some respondents feel that attracting a broader audience causes a dilution of the original techno culture. For example, there is talk about “day-trippers” or people who mainly come for the hype or through social media. These people do not have the same passion for techno as the more “experienced ravers” do. Mirthe notes that she felt less comfortable at Verknipt because of the presence of people who do not often go to techno parties, as they are often judging her on what she is doing:

You could really tell the difference between people who go to raves more often and the ones who were like: well, I'll just try it once. And that really changes the vibe, I think (...) If you're surrounded by real ravers, you don't feel that as much. But if you're around people looking at you like: what are *you* doing? — then you start feeling more self-conscious, sort of.

Sophie also mentions a changing audience at big techno festivals that judges her dancing and the way she looks:

There are definitely more and more new people coming in. And I just notice it's a very different kind of crowd. Like, people look you up and down for what you're wearing or how you're dancing.

It is mentioned that this broader audience often is less familiar with the social norms at techno festivals, like being able to spontaneously talk to strangers, wandering alone, or dealing with each other without judgment. It is also said that this audience is more often busy filming for social media

instead of enjoying the music. At large-scale techno parties, people who are not familiar with the techno scene can have the same experiences, like dancing, using drugs and listening to the music, but lack an understanding of what these experiences represent. While they participate in the same rituals, they might not get in what way these rituals are connected and contribute to the underlying ethos of the techno scene.

Opposite to the criticism of large-scale events, there is an appreciation for smaller, more intimate techno parties. The respondents who attend these parties say there is more connectedness among visitors here. Because it is smaller, often the same people are recognized, which gives it more of a community feeling. Also, the audience really comes for the music here, and the original ethos of the techno scene seems to be better preserved. Floris explains that at these so-called “insider parties,” the rooms are less crowded, there is more space to dance, and there is more connectedness because the same people keep coming back. Also, the no-phone policy at smaller techno parties is talked about positively, as it makes people more present in the moment and focused on each other.

4.3.5 Summary

The social interaction respondents have, is described as the core of the festival experience. There is a high degree of openness among festivalgoers, both between friends and strangers. The openness and connectedness between visitors at the festival point to feelings of collective effervescence and successfully performed interaction rituals. The shared goal that festivalgoers have — like enjoying, dancing, and the passion for techno — creates an emotional alignment among the audience and forms the basis for collective effervescence. Respondents describe people in the techno scene as mostly open, social, and positive by nature. When festivalgoers do not bring this or do not share the same passion for techno, they will likely find less connection with the rest of the audience. The community feeling respondents describe mainly applies within the festival boundaries and, due to its temporary character, shows features of what Riley et al. (2010) describe as a ‘neo-tribe.’ The commercialization of festivals leads to increasingly bigger events, causing the original techno culture to seem diluted. Because of the broader audience, many visitors are unfamiliar with the ethos of the techno scene, which according to respondents leads to a decrease in mutual connectedness.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyze collective effervescence in the context of techno festivals, with attention to both the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. The central research question was: Do techno festivalgoers experience collective effervescence? If so, how do they describe the experiences and the factors that contribute to it? The results show that visitors of techno festivals take part in two essential rituals that generate collective effervescence: dancing and taking drugs (mostly in the form of MDMA).

Techno festivals are approached by visitors as sacred spaces where they can escape everyday reality and fully immerse themselves in the moment. This contrast with 'normal' life reflects Durkheim's (1995) distinction between the sacred and the profane and provides the ideal basis for the emergence of collective effervescence. Festivalgoers prepare mentally and choose more extravagant clothing to 'mark' this transition from everyday life to the extraordinary festival experience. The spatial and logistical design of a festival play an ancillary role, as they support the audience to completely surrender to the moment. Visual and auditory elements in the festival's setup help festivalgoers detach from everyday reality and immerse themselves in another experiential world. This setting, where festivalgoers let go of their everyday lives and step into 'sacred' territory, creates the ideal environment for visitors to perform interaction rituals which create collective effervescence. The festival experience as a temporary escape connects with the original function of techno, where the music was used to symbolically escape the post-industrial reality of Detroit and position oneself positively in a utopian reality (Tsitsos, 2018).

Firstly, the act of dancing is an essential ritual that creates collective effervescence among the visitors. The extent to which festivalgoers participate in dancing, determines how positively they evaluate the festival afterwards. On the dance floor, the audience physically surrenders to the music and enters a trance-like state in which feelings of connectedness, euphoria, and excitement are experienced. This experience fits with Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, which he describes as the intense emotional energy and feelings of unity that arise when people perform ritualistic actions together. The collective focus on both dancing and music creates a mutual focus of attention; a condition that Collins (2014) considers important for successful interaction rituals and the emergence of collective effervescence. Despite the minimal interaction that takes place on the dance floor, the audience is still connected to each other, as shown by the increased energy and feelings of togetherness that arise when people dance in sync.

Additionally, drug use is an essential ritual act within the context of techno festivals. Especially the use of MDMA makes festivalgoers feel more positive about others, the music, and the environment. It acts as an emotional amplifier, where the audience collectively experiences feelings of euphoria, connectedness, and openness. This shared emotional state aligns with Collins' (2014) concept of shared emotion, which is a crucial condition for the emergence of collective effervescence. The use of drugs is often positively contrasted with alcohol consumption, which is associated with aggression and other genres and party settings, and functions as a way to

define and demarcate the techno scene. Drug use not only creates a shared experience but also produces a certain ethos within the techno scene, where values such as empathy, care, and openness are central. These values function as an immaterial form of membership symbols (Collins, 2014) and help define the group identity at techno festivals. However, the downside is that collective drug use seems to become a norm, where the use is seen as a requirement for the festival experience. Non-users do not take part in the essential ritual of drug use and do not enter the collective emotional state of the festivalgoers. As a result, non-users may find it harder to fully engage in the group experience and may experience an unintended form of exclusion, which contradicts the non-judgmental and inclusive character of the techno scene.

The result of successfully performed interaction rituals is that a sense of togetherness or solidarity arises among the audience at techno festivals — something Collins (2014) identifies as a core outcome of collective effervescence. This togetherness is especially visible outside the dance floor at smoking or resting areas, since there is a high level of social interaction between festivalgoers who do not know each other. The shared goal of partying, enjoying, and the love for techno leads to a temporary connection between the visitors. At the festival, a temporary community is created — which can be described as a neo-tribe (Riley et al., 2010) — where connectedness in the moment is experienced through hedonistic practices like dancing, enjoying, and being together. No pre-established cultural boundaries based on ethnicity, nationality or politics are drawn to mark off the audience at techno festivals, which contrasts with the exclusion sometimes found in other genres where a certain homogeneity of the audience is preferred (Vandenberg et al., 2021b). This aligns with the origin of techno as an abstract and future-oriented genre that was initially not connected to specific cultural or social movements (Williams, 2001; Walters, 2006). The community at techno festivals is mostly created and defined through participation in rituals — in this context: dancing and taking drugs — and temporary norms and values that apply within the context of the festival. This differs from other genres, such as hip-hop or traditional folk music, where the community is based on cultural, national, or even ethnic markers (Tsitsos, 2018; Vandenberg et al., 2021b).

Even though the effects of collective effervescence have little continuation beyond the festival, a positive mood lingers after the event, which can be linked to emotional energy (Collins, 2014). This is not only connected to memories of the festival but also motivates festivalgoers to seek out new festivals.

A limitation of this research is that it is not possible to determine to what extent the feelings of collective effervescence can be attributed solely to the use of substances like MDMA. It seems likely that drug use forms a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence of collective effervescence in this context. That means that while drug use plays an important role, dancing with a like-minded crowd at a techno festival is also needed. However, this study cannot determine to what degree each of these elements contributes to evoking collective effervescence. Even though it is likely that someone taking MDMA in a home setting would not have the same experience, the qualitative nature of this research and the absence of a control group make it impossible to draw any definitive conclusions about this.

Another limitation of this research is that all respondents were recruited at one specific indoor techno festival, namely Verknijpt Ziggo Dome. As a result, the findings may be influenced by the specific characteristics of this event and might not be generalizable to other techno festivals, such as smaller and more intimate events, or larger outdoor festivals with multiple stages. Even though some references were made to other festivals during the interviews, the focus was mainly on Verknijpt Ziggo Dome. Especially the spatial and logistical factors, such as the interior design or the crowdedness on the dancefloor, are highly context-specific. In addition, previous studies have shown that there are differences in the experience of collective effervescence across different music genres (Swartjes & Vandenberg, 2022; Vandenberg & Berghman, 2023), which means that some of the themes in this research — such as the use of drugs and dancing in a trance-like state — may not be applicable to festivals from other genres.

Also, it is important to address that the results of this research are based on the memories of the respondents. Collective effervescence is mostly about the emotional experience that individuals have in the moment, which can be more difficult to describe afterwards. Even though the interviews were conducted as soon as possible after the festival, it is unavoidable that respondents interpret their experiences slightly different in retrospect. Adler and Pansky (2020) describe the danger of the positive memory bias, in which people tend to remember the past more positively than it actually was. Positive moments are remembered more clearly, while negative ones are often forgotten. It is possible that respondents unconsciously exaggerated their feelings of euphoria, connection and excitement in the interviews, while negative moments received less attention. In future research, the addition of other methods such as direct field observation could help to increase the validity and reliability of the findings.

An interesting direction for future research could be to further explore the role of substance use in the context of the techno scene. This research shows that using drugs appears to be an essential ritual to evoke collective effervescence among festivalgoers. It could be interesting to investigate to what extent collective effervescence can emerge at techno festivals among people who do not use drugs. This could give insight into whether dancing and the musical experience on their own are enough to reach a shared emotional state among visitors.

Additionally, this research shows that drug use (especially MDMA) is not only important in evoking collective effervescence, but also plays a role in defining and marking the boundaries of the techno scene. Techno festivalgoers, for example, distinguish their drug use from alcohol users or from festivalvisitors of other music genres. Follow-up research could explore how substance use (and the preference for specific substances) is used to construct specific music communities, and to what extent this form of inclusion and exclusion differs between genres.

Another relevant direction for future research could be the role of digitalization in the after-experience of festivals. This research shows that a certain level of emotional energy remains after the event, but that the feelings of connection are limited. Future studies could explore how digital tools might play a role in extending the positive emotional state of festivalgoers. An example is Tomorrowland, which shares content (such as DJ sets and interviews) throughout the year via its own app, website and social media channels to increase visitor engagement and stimulate

interaction. Future research could examine whether digital tools can help extend the sense of community beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the festival itself.

In a time where loneliness is becoming an increasing societal issue, this research underlines the important role of festivals as spaces for individual well-being and broader social cohesion. Although the sense of belonging is temporary, the encounters are experienced as highly meaningful and can therefore offer a way out of social isolation. This study offers new empirical insights into the mechanisms through which collective effervescence can arise, especially within culturally 'neutral' contexts such as the techno scene. By showing how social connectedness can emerge in settings without explicit cultural markers, this research contributes to the literature on collective effervescence and to a broader sociological debate about social cohesion and the creation of community feelings.

The findings are not only relevant for researchers in cultural sociology, but also for scholars in related academic fields that study festivals, such as leisure studies, tourism, and the creative industries. Additionally, this research provides practical tools for festival organizers and policymakers in the cultural sector. It shows how festivals can create meaningful experiences by stimulating feelings of collective effervescence, and how the physical and logistical design of the festival environment can influence this process in a positive or negative way.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide

Introduction

- Thank the respondent for their participation.
- Explain the interview process (anonymity)
- Could you briefly introduce yourself? How often do you attend festivals like Verknipt?

Preparation for the festival & general questions

- How did you experience the festival? What were your expectations beforehand, and how did the experience compare?
- What were your main reasons for attending this festival?
- How did you prepare for the festival? Did you have any specific routine or mindset before going? How did you feel beforehand?

Festival experience & musical engagement

- Can you walk me through your festival day step by step?
 - Where did you spend most of your time at the venue?
 - What were you doing most of the time? (Standing, sitting, dancing, talking)
 - How was your interaction with the DJs and the crowd?
- How would you describe the atmosphere and energy at the festival? Did it change throughout the day or vary in different areas?
- What was the most impressive moment of the festival for you? Why?
- Was there a moment when you felt less engaged or less connected to the crowd? What happened at that moment?
- How would you compare hard techno festivals to other festivals or party settings?
- How did you experience the music and the way it was presented at the festival?
- What do you think are the key elements of a good festival?
- How do you compare the experience of music at a festival to listening to music at home? What does a festival setting add to the experience?

Social interactions & audience

- How did you experience interactions with other festivalgoers? Did you feel connected to others, or more on your own?
- Did you interact with strangers? What kind of interactions did you have with them?
- How would you describe the people at this festival? Did you feel comfortable within this crowd?

- Do you feel like you are part of a broader techno community, or do you see festivals as more of a one-time experience without strong connections to others?
- Do you think festivals impact how you feel, both during and after the event? Could you explain that?

Reflection

- Can you compare Verknipt to other festivals you have attended? In what ways are they similar or different?
- Would you attend Verknipt or similar festivals again in the future? Why or why not?

Appendix B - Coding Table

Theme	Code Name
Festival as sacred space	Acclimatize, Different role on festivals, Atmosphere, Spatial environment, Happiness and euphoria, Festival as bubble, Festival versus normal life, Location as motivation, Feelings after festival, Taking pictures and videos, Logistical design, Spatial design, Anticipation for Next festival, Preparation, Physical appearance
Dancing & Music	Alone to rave, Dancing in general, Dancing with others, Dancing negative, Crowdedness, Filming on dance floor, Trancefeeling, Interaction on dance floor, Line-up/artists, Music/artists as motivation, Music experience, Dancing as release, Comparison to techno listening at home
Using Drugs	Alcohol, Techno vs other settings, Happiness and euphoria, Negative about drugs, Drugs emotions, Drugs energy, Drugs social, Shared Goal, Judgment free/acceptation
Social dimension	Alone to rave, Community, Experienced vs Inexperienced ravers, Unwritten rules at festivals, No community feeling, Shared goal, Interaction outside of dance floor, Interaction superficial, Small raves, Negative about other visitors, Social motivation, Social with strangers, Social with friends, Festival visitors of other genres, Withdrawing from dancing, Festivalgoer in general, Festivalgoer social, Festivalgoer music, Festivalgoer happy, Social connectedness, Big festivals, Decreasing connectedness, Friends as motivation