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Afterhours

Anton Krebs

You are welcomed by an overpowering energy of ecstatic people under the guidance of electronic music. A gloomy room pierced by bright flashes of light revealing glimpses of a landscape made of restless bodies in movement. It doesn't take long, and you become part of it. You find yourself amidst a torrent of bodies, moving to the oscillating waves created by synthesizers and drum machines. You can feel the ebb and flow by which the mass is being directed as you are constantly being swallowed and washed up again. Condensations of sweat is dripping from the ceiling and softens your skin. Your body starts to erode, decay, dissolve, and is reborn as part of a collective entity. High-pitched noise interweaved with a relentless bass vibrate across the room. Linearity is replaced by recurrence, as the echoing sounds penetrate your chest, your brain, your cells, filling you up with new energy and meaning. You feel neurotransmitters escaping your body radiating brightly into the night. Music and dance are bending the space and time around you. Timeless moments blur and defy the boundaries between you and other bodies. It is in this collective body where you find a new freedom and imagination. It is where you form new alliances and kinships. (1)

What I appreciate about rave culture is that they question the notion of the individual. They break them apart and reestablish them as parts of a bigger whole. Single units are attuned to one another and form a group. It is within this group where we start to think and act collectively, and therefore it is the work of this collective body that I would define as culture. By most definitions, culture is inherently a human product and therefore by definition human centered. Yet, through a collective experience such as the one at the rave we start to reconsider that culture making is not the heroic doing of a lonely genius but a joined endeavor. Now, how come we've only danced with other humans so far? Where are all the other beings? I would argue that most of them are already present, we just chose to ignore them. After all, they never were properly invited. If we take the planetary question seriously, we must learn how to dance with them, as well as understand what it would mean to perceive culture not just as a human monopoly but as a planetary resource. But before we start with the next party, maybe we

A



A Dawn, 2023. Image: by the author

B



B Rocks in a Park, 2023. Image: by the author

should first consider letting the present one come to an end. A gentle wind is stirring under the rising morning sun. You feel dizzy as you start walking away from the party, away from all the people, all the noise. Now, you don't hear a single thing. Nothing but a beeping sound in your ear, your mind anywhere but here. Tired and empty you try to find your way back home. As you walk you can feel the air getting warmer around you. You notice the things around you slowly waking up from their sleep as the sun is breathing new life into the atmosphere. The light of the new day quietly settles upon the city, activating humans and non-humans alike. You sense it, too. It is within this silence that your brain starts to overcompensate and is looking for new stimulants to fill the voids inside you. You feel the sunrays itching on your skin before sinking in completely. You perceive the water slowly evaporating through your pores, as your cells are drying out slowly under the heat of the sun. A swelling numbness creeps up inside you, as your eardrums still try to adapt to the absence of music, which has kept you going for hours. Only after a while you realize that the silences around you have given way to other presences and since you currently lack the energy to filter out external influences you just let them all in. The monotonous buzzing of insects accompanied by the rhythmical flaps of birds chasing them, the rustling leaves against the morning winds and the almost imperceptible crackling of worms wriggling underneath your feet. You're completely submerged in a pandemonium of crackling, bustling, screeching, and humming. You wanted to leave the party but accidentally entered a new one, where everyone and everything is dancing together under the radiant influence of the morning sun.

It is the aftermath of a party. And since we've spent all our energy dancing we tend fall back on our instincts. Afterhours in the end, are more about feeling than rational thinking. They represent a space between two temporalities – a day has finished, yet in our mind, the following one hasn't quite started. They represent a time of transition – from one state to another or, in our case, quite literally the passage from the party to our home. Trapped in this limbo we struggle to focus on singular things and filter out other impressions accordingly. All the things we are so used to ignore, suddenly become visible. Similar to a dramatic plot twist, where the bystander has just been revealed as the main protagonist, with the only difference that in our case there isn't just one protagonist, but many. As we are trying to follow each and every one of them at the same time, we end up overstimulating ourselves. Most people in this state would probably react in a hypo-sensitive way (under-responsiveness), after all it's a scary and brave thing to do, not to ignore. But maybe just this once we react in a hypersensitive manner which opens up a door to a whole new way of looking at our environment. Similarly to how we lost

ourselves in the collective entity of a rave, we find our bodies dissolving again. Only that this time we start eroding amidst other entities such as non-humans, earth, or stones. After all, we are all made up of the same components, share the same materials and thereby can also be reduced to those again. So where does the collective begin and the individual end? If we need these afterhours to shift our ways of perceiving the other, they might be something we should embrace: Leaving the party we're currently at and start looking for a new experience, which is more inclusive, more solidary, and more ecological than the one before.

You finally arrive home. Nauseous and exhausted from all the strange encounters outside, you close the shutters of the window in your room and drop onto your bed. Being fully exposed, as you've just experienced, is something you have to get used to and right now you're really lacking the energy to do so. You feel the linen on your skin as your body slowly sinks into the mattress. Finally alone you struggle to fall asleep. After all, you've just experienced how beautiful it could be to be amidst other bodies. You look one last time to the empty side of your bed and consider how it would feel to have someone lying next to you, but deeply inside you know that you just need some time on your own. After all, in the past few hours you've just witnessed that you are many.