

“STRAIGHT UP DETROIT SHIT”: GENRE, AUTHENTICITY, AND APPROPRIATION
IN DETROIT GHETTOTECH

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the genre of Detroit dance music known as ghettotech based primarily on ethnographic data collected from music producers and DJs. After constructing a genealogy tying together ghettotech's influences from Detroit techno, hip hop, and Miami bass, I discuss how ghettotech rearticulates authenticity discourses present in antecedent genres in the production of its own authenticity. I also examine how ghettotech producers negotiate with Detroit's economic decline and the increased corporate control of the city's media, as well as the implications of the increased globalization of the genre.

For Katie

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PREFACE

My interest in this project stems from a long-standing interest in popular music, particularly electronic music and hip hop. I have been fascinated by the synthesized sounds of electronic music since I first heard Harold Faltermeyer's "Axel F" theme to Beverly Hills Cop as a young child. These sounds seemed to come from some disembodied future world, and would inspire countless headphone-assisted reveries throughout my childhood and teen years. My introduction to hip hop was far less innocent. I was first attracted to the rebellious lyrics and bass-heavy grooves of the West Coast rap of Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, and Warren G as a teen, absorbing the music and imagery streaming into my home via MTV. This interest soon blossomed into a full-blown love affair. While I kept up on more soul-inspired "conscious" hip hop during my undergrad years, the machine-programmed synth beats of the adamantly hedonistic "Dirty South" – Cash Money Records, Three 6 Mafia, and the like – that really got under my skin. In spite of loads critical and academic scorn heaped upon these manifestations of hip hop, I felt there was something far more interesting – indeed, *important* – going on than most writers detected. Ghattotech – a Detroit-bred crossover genre between techno and hip hop, with an emphasis on bass frequencies and raunchy rhymes – seemed an excellent (and largely overlooked) genre that I could delve into in order to explore the possibilities of wild and irreverent bass music. Not only was it a meeting ground between hip hop and techno, but its birthplace was within striking distance of Bowling Green State University, enabling me to interview DJs and producers, and observe the music in action.

Part of my motivation in this project is to rescue the vast swaths of music deemed unfit for deeper analysis. The bias against ghattotech and related genres of hip hop stems from a relentlessly textual approach to hip hop that prioritizes lyrics and authorship over music and

dance. Not only has this drastically limited the amount of hip hop open for serious consideration, but it completely leaves electronic dance music – birthed from similar social situations and roughly the same time as hip hop, and in continual conversation with it – out of the continuum of important African American musical contributions in the postindustrial era. My concern in this study is not to pick and choose the music that represents the political messages I find most worthy, nor to criticize music for failing to express these messages. It is to point to what has yet to be adequately included in these narrow definitions of hip hop: that even what seem to be the most explicit, offensive lyrics can contribute interesting and valuable nuances to hip hop's discourses on race and gender, especially because these explicit messages are rarely read in the literal way most critics assume. Furthermore, it is to add the contributions of overlooked artists to the histories of Detroit techno that focus exclusively on the middle class producer-intellectuals that spawned the genre, contributions that speak to the pleasures, desires, and conflicts of Detroit's working class. In effect, I hope to not only challenge extant hip hop and dance music scholarship, but to argue for an increased conversation between the two in order for each to remain relevant to current popular music.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Somewhere In Detroit...

I can't keep the disappointment completely at bay as I observe the crowd at Club Palladium. I'm in this rough part of Detroit to observe ghattotech, Detroit's homegrown fusion of electronic dance music and hip hop, in what I thought would be its native environment. I'm a guest of DJ Body Mechanic, a creative local DJ working hard to establish his own unique musical output in the Detroit scene, and who has been an enthusiastic guide in my fieldwork. Body Mechanic's sets touch several bases at once, from old school hip hop, '80s synthfunk, and some frenetic ghattotech mixing – quick changes, furious scratching, and “doubles” (cutting back and forth between two copies of the same record, giving a hiccupy feel to the track) – but the crowd at the Palladium wants one thing: chart rap, particularly the low frequency poundings of crunk emanating from Atlanta. This younger generation, raised on nationalized radio playlists and corporate video shows, has no patience for the music made in its own city – the small doses of ghattotech actually clear the dance floor, while the catchy hooks of the latest Lil Jon productions garner enthusiastic cheers and hands thrown in the air. Does ghattotech have a place in Detroit anymore? I ask myself. Did it ever really have a place, or did the “Detroit mystique” that insiders chuckle at overwhelm the journalistic accounts, in turn shaping my own preconceptions?

Ghattotech was never a subculture as much as it was Detroit culture. While the genre's glory days in Detroit may be behind it, it's been kept alive in the place of its birth by devoted and often underappreciated local DJs and radio jocks as the big players from a decade ago tap more

receptive markets overseas. Body Mechanic and H3O – the crew of DJs, producers, and rappers he belongs to – are working the terrain between the D’s eclectic dance past and the present hegemonic presence of bass-driven popular hip hop. Tonight the Beast Side Crew, an aspiring local rap group produced by H3O, is working the club, dressed in their finest outfits, hyping up the crowd when Body Mechanic slips their latest single in between radio hits. H3O is working the local circuit the only way they can – from the bottom up. They’re building grassroots support while trying to penetrate the near-impervious playlists of corporate radio. A good ghetto record used to move ten or fifteen thousand units, but the vinyl market has bottomed out, and younger club-goers resist the sounds that made Detroit instrumental in the world’s rave scenes.

Techno has an uneven history in Detroit. Its originators hailed from the suburbs, and left the city long ago for greener pastures in Europe, leaving the next generation free to experiment with its spare parts. The city’s musical consciousness has been forever altered by revolutionary radio DJs the Electrifying Mojo, Gary Chandler, and Jeff Mills a.k.a. the Wizard. This younger generation didn’t eschew the hedonism of the club, nor the street-centered sounds of hip hop booming from the East and West Coasts – and perhaps most importantly, Miami. This early-90s confluence of styles aligned in a special way in Detroit, a city known for its musical creativity. As techno’s pioneers were packing up their belongings, and the chaotic Miami bass scene was slowly dying off, young Detroit producers jumped into this vacuum, filling strip clubs and airwaves with a distinctly Detroit brand of raunchy techno-bass – ghettotech. It didn’t always have a name, and once it did no one agreed on it, but the genre’s trajectory has much to reveal about dance music, hip hop, and American music in the 21st Century. While the following work will outline a history of ghettotech, it is no paean to a dead or dying scene. While ghettotech encounters ambivalent reactions in certain contexts, it’s still burbling underground, a vital part of

a larger global underground of bass music. The present, and indeed, the future loom large in the minds of most of the artists I interviewed.

Purpose

This thesis will provide a history of ghettech as well as an examination of its treatment of race, gender, and geography. My purpose is twofold: to illuminate significant oversights in the histories of each of ghettech's parent genres – techno and hip hop – as well as examine how ghettech freely borrowed not only the sounds and styles of these genres, but also their discourses of authenticity – the values that shape creative expression within the genres. Broadly, techno values a freedom independent of embodied identity, one achievable through the use of technology. Although techno originated with a core group of black men, these producers played down gender and especially racial signifiers were in favor of envisioning a posthuman futurist utopia. Conversely, hip hop relentlessly and deliberately centers black underclass experience – or at least must claim to do so. Battles over “realness” revolve around whether rappers represent the realities of street life, not merely through their lyrics but also through their ability to embody authentic “hood” personas.

While techno and hip hop have many common origins, their fates have diverged considerably. Although Detroit techno draws from black artistic traditions (funk, Afro-Futurism), its authenticity does not rely on signifiers of blackness. Thus, while white claims to techno authenticity have not gone entirely unchallenged, techno has for the most part been appropriated by white – specifically white European – producers and DJs exposed to the imported sounds of techno during the rave explosion of the late 1980s. While many black

Detroit techno producers still maintain careers, the majority of current techno producers and DJs are white Europeans.

Hip hop did not experience the same type of appropriation, although it has been incorporated into the dominant power structure in a number of important ways. Hip hop performers are still overwhelmingly African-American. A postindustrial impoverished inner-city upbringing (in the “ghetto” or “hood”) remains an essential part of hip hop authenticity. Because hip hop authenticity requires artists to verbally emphasize race, gender, and geography, it has not been infiltrated and taken over by white performers to the same extent as other traditionally black genres. Even while whites have had considerable involvement in hip hop since the 1980s, and several white rappers have had considerable success, they are cross-over exceptions, not the rule. To hear rap music is to instantly recognize it as militantly and unapologetically black (as well as masculine and urban). Techno does not conjure up this specific identity; if anything, it conjures up an image of an androgynous white European.

Ghettotech deploys hip hop authenticity in a bid to define a portion of the techno genre as black, masculine, and urban – a direct opposition to techno’s vision of a technologically mediated humanity that has shed race, gender, and place from its identity. The repeated deployment of profane hip hop slang, particularly sexually explicit language, marks ghettotech as a masculine black terrain. Musically, songs scale back the melodic inventiveness characteristic of techno, instead emphasizing syncopated rhythms and deep bass sounds that have become associated with black music. Ghettotech productions occasionally sample or remix hip hop songs, and ghettotech DJ sets may feature well known rap songs. This foregrounding of hip hop tropes not only secures a place in techno’s development for a black aesthetic – it also provides a way for techno producers to tap black urban markets that prefer hip hop to electronic dance

music in social dance venues. However, in spite of (or more intriguingly, directly related to) black signification, ghettotech too has been subject to appropriation. Many leading producers and DJs are white, and the genre's most recent trajectory mirrors that of the first wave of techno: increasingly, white European producers make up the most devoted fan base and the reserve of up-and-coming producers and DJs.

My goals for this thesis are not limited to musical concerns – economic ones loom large, especially in a city like Detroit that has experienced long-term economic decline. Ghettotech, a genre still “underground” – that is, outside of the purview of the mainstream mass media – is by necessity distributed through independent labels, often labels run by DJs and producers themselves. While paying the bills solely from music is difficult, most DJs and producers hope to turn a profit from their work, if not make a living. Therefore, generic concerns are intertwined with economic ones – marketing and promotional needs interpenetrate the needs for creative expression of ghettotech artists. Unlike rock authenticity, and similar to hip hop authenticity, business concerns do not threaten the “integrity” of the artist. Producers identify financial successes as a result of their own sound business practices as much as their creativity, rather than hold it at arm's length.

Method

The primary methodologies I will employ in this study are textual analysis supplemented with ethnographic work. In particular, ethnography has been an essential tool for delving into the muddy waters of Detroit's early '90 dance scene that spawned ghettotech. I will present the history of ghettotech's evolution through primary source interviews with DJs in the scene. I

contacted numerous DJs and record labels via the Internet. When possible I arranged face-to-face interviews; for DJs outside of the Midwest, I conducted phone interviews. In both cases, I conducted open-ended questioning, beginning with a set list of questions about the DJ's personal biography, the genre's history, production techniques, and the business decisions each DJ had to make. Respondents signed consent forms following Human Subject Review Board requirements; interviews were digitally recorded, uploaded to a protected folder on my computer's hard drive, and transcribed to documents. These interviews have been cited in the text according to MLA convention. In addition to interviews, I attended several DJing gigs to observe ghettotech *in situ*: the Twilight 76/Databass Records showcase at the 2006 Detroit Electronic Music Festival; DJ Godfather's residency at Club Sevin in Pontiac, Michigan; and the aforementioned event thrown by Body Mechanic and H3O.

While the bulk of my ethnographic work was conducted through face-to-face and phone interviews, I have also used the internet as a research tool. Most artists use MySpace.com profiles as a means of reaching fans; I in turn used MySpace as a means of reaching and researching artists. I made contacts with several ghettotech fans via an online messageboard and conducted interviews via an emailed list of questions. I also observed videos uploaded to YouTube.com of DJ events and dance competitions, as well as the accompanying comments. The record database at discogs.com was an invaluable aid in organizing ghettotech's history. Finally, I drew from extant literature on techno and hip hop, as well as the few popular press articles and interviews on ghettotech.

Chapters

What will follow in Chapter Two is a genealogy of the development of ghettech as a genre, a history like most – full of contradictions, occasional hazy dates, and struggles for meaning. Mapping antecedents is a crucial task for any study of music based on DJing and digital sampling – the past continually resurfaces, often literally, within live mixes and digitally sampled riffs. Thus, sound technology will figure prominently in this history. Bringing the ghettech story up to the present, I will outline the important conventions of the genre as it stands today. All kinds of music, but particularly dance musics (including hip hop) experience rapid change. With a relatively small and independent group of producers, the sound of ghettech can vary widely from producer to producer. I wish to focus on conventions remaining more or less constant over time and from artist to artist in order to better understand the values inherent in this music.

I will cover these values – expressed in music with recourse to the term “authenticity” – in Chapter Three. Ghettech does not exist in a vacuum; rather, like many musical styles of the so-called postmodern era, it soaks up elements from other elements of mass media, particularly other forms of music. Crucial to ghettech’s authenticity, I will argue, are certain discourses of race and gender. I wish to view this authenticity as a particular manifestation of discourses of race, gender, and sexuality within ghettech’s antecedent genres of techno and hip hop – in important ways, ghettech’s attitudes towards these subjects is in reaction to and conversation with other versions of musical authenticity.

Chapter Four will examine the economics of ghettech production, and their consequent effects on meaning. I will cover how my interview subjects utilize new technology as the dance music market undergoes significant change. Furthermore, I will contextualize ghettech DJing within the larger political economy of nightlife. Nightlife has become big business, which I will

suggest has shaped ghattotech's sound while also limiting its power as a coherent aesthetic or cultural movement. The market for dance music that celebrates hedonism and sexuality has exploded as the nightlife economy has grown; however, this has meant that larger corporate entities are more deeply involved in nightlife, controlling access and attempting to provide a variety of consumer choices rather than sustained cultural commitments, a double-edged sword for an underground genre such as ghattotech. I will also suggest that the ghattotech economics – cottage industries operated by artists with considerable creative control in spite of economic pressures – reveals an important arena of political resistance applicable to other forms of independent music.

Chapter Five will cover appropriation of ghattotech, particularly among dance music fans overseas. The genre's no-frills aesthetic sets the bar for creative forays into ghattotech rather low. This is further facilitated by the widespread availability of computer software designed for producing tracks as well as making mixes: in many cases, fans use the same programs as professional producers. However, although ghattotech was born from a specific urban American experience, many devoted fans (some of whom have become successful artists in their own right) reside in Europe. While the artists I talked to expressed excitement about the enthusiastic support they receive overseas, they met the increased "outsourcing" of ghattotech productions with ambivalence.

I wish to conclude with both summary and extrapolation. Ghattotech is but one facet of a network of hip-hop-influenced dance musics with indigenous scenes all over the world. I wish to draw parallels between ghattotech and related genres of Chicago ghetto house, Baltimore club, Brazilian baile funk, and their subsequent export around the globe, and point toward new opportunities for hip hop and dance scholarship throughout this bass-heavy diaspora.

CHAPTER 2 – GENRE

This chapter will attempt to construct a genealogy for ghettotech, integrating it into the larger trajectory of Detroit dance music of which it is an integral part. I will begin with an overview of techno's development, and how hip hop aesthetics made inroads into the style. I will pay particular attention to Miami bass as a highly influential and oft-overlooked style of hip hop that exercised an indelible influence over Detroit music. After sketching this pre-history, I will describe the early days of ghettotech production through the height of its popularity at the beginning of the 21st Century. I will conclude with a description of ghettotech as a genre.

It is not my interest, nor is it within the scope of this project, to attempt to unravel the complex web that makes up contemporary genre theory. Suffice it to say, music genre definitions are a site of struggle between many interested parties – artists, marketers, fans, and critics to name the most important – who often work at cross purposes (Frith, *Performing Rites* 88). Furthermore, genres change over time, often quite rapidly, in response to commercial pressures, technological advancements, artistic competition, and shifts in social organization. Finally, the genre to which a particular piece of music belongs may shift depending on the context in which it is discussed. For instance, DJ Assault's "Ass and Titties" is considered ghettotech by most using the term; however, the song may also be claimed by the larger umbrella genre of "techno" as well as the related genre of "electro." In this chapter, I will not provide a definitive definition of ghettotech; indeed, genres inherently resist attempts to pin them down once and for all. Rather, I will provide a historical genealogy of the antecedents that fed into the creation of a distinct form of dance music in Detroit that would be variously dubbed "ghetto

bass,” “ghettotech,” “accelerated funk,” “booty,” or sometimes simply “dance music.”¹

Mapping out the polymorphous origins of ghattotech will allow me to further examine how the genre evolved from a style of mixing into a codified (and marketable) sub-genre of dance music with distinct conventions.

Instructive in this process is Tony Kirschner’s identification of the spatial mobility of popular music (he uses the term “rock”).

Spatial mobility refers to the unique ways in which rock travels across geographical space, borrowing from and influencing other music in a subtle process of cultural diffusion. [...] Therefore, while the local band or “scene” phenomenon occurs in virtually every city, small or large, it is misleading to talk about the music of particular locales apart from larger global processes (250-251).

The spatial mobility of mediated popular music did not merely influence the sound of Detroit ghattotech – the “flows” of recordings, individuals, and sounds were instrumental to its creation. Kirschner borrows this concept of flows from Arjun Appadurai. “Culture, according to Appadurai, is in motion, and must be examined through the difficult procedure of identifying the articulations of global flows transterritorially from one’s particular position, depending on the task at hand” (260). These flows intersect in a particular space – the scene. According to Mark J.V. Olson,

The designation of a scene always entails reference to some geographical marker (most commonly a city, but also a locality or region, a set of dance clubs, or even “the world”) but the place of the scene itself does not necessarily correlate with

¹ Even the spelling of “ghettotech” is up for debate. “Ghetto-tech,” “ghetto tech,” and even “ghettotek” all appear in articles and promotional materials about the genre. I have opted for the spelling “ghettotech” primarily for aesthetic reasons.

the boundaries of its geographical referent, for the reach of its effects does not respect geographic borders (275).

Nevertheless, geography remains important: for Olson, a scene's "identity is not interchangeable with any other scene; it is unique in its own geographic particularity, its own historical development, its own temporality, and the particular configuration of practices operating within it" (279). What follows is a genealogy of ghettotech that pays attention to the particular articulations of national and global flows within a geographically delineated (but not determined) space, and their role in the genrefication process.

Genealogy

Ghettotech originated in the interplay between two divergent strands of African American music: techno and hip hop. While techno and hip hop evolved along radically different trajectories, their beginnings are closely linked. Both emerge from black cultural production within an urban, postindustrial, post-disco context. Both utilized technologies that had just become affordable to amateur musicians: direct drive turntables, digital samplers, synthesizers, and drum machines. Finally, both arose in contexts in which music was consumed through participation in social dance. In the Bronx, now-legendary DJs such as Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaataa rocked crowds by mixing funk breaks at block parties. Concurrently, the youth of Detroit organized a system of private party clubs where DJs played the latest European disco imports.

What follows is a re-routing of techno history through hip hop. While several comprehensive techno histories exist, including British journalist Simon Reynolds' *Generation*

Ecstasy and Detroit music writer Dan Sicko's *Techno Rebels*, the standard techno history focuses only on a select, albeit important, few names and labels from Detroit – the Belleville Three, Carl Craig, Plus 8 records, Underground Resistance. This approach provides an adequate introduction to techno, but as with many music histories, such accounts construct an illusion of relentless forward momentum, of linearity and progress. What of the horizontal changes, the strange mutations on the fringe of techno history, the experiments that never garnered international press? No history could possibly account for all of them – indeed, to construct a historical narrative is inevitably to create margins, to deem certain events, figures, and records worth examining at the expense of overlooking the “unimportant.” I do not begrudge the efforts of Reynolds and Sicko, who both provide excellent narratives of particularly diverse and divergent groups of music. However, I wish to supplement their histories by examining what happened in Detroit when techno touched audiences beyond its narrow subculture of upwardly mobile black suburbanites. What new configurations occurred at the edges of these narratives, as imported and indigenous music styles bled into each other through the DJ mix? An examination of the trajectory of Detroit's music scene from techno to ghettotech follows.

Techno In Detroit

Techno in Detroit was the sonic manifestation of a distinct social milieu originating in a unique disc culture – where the energy of a live band is displaced on to “the interaction of records, DJ and crowd” (Thornton, 29). In the late 1970s a generation of relatively affluent black teenagers, the children of middle-class auto workers, was eager to express their class status through the organization of social clubs. These youths invested their identities in the imagined

sophistication of European discothèque scene and turned it into a self-contained social world of competing dance clubs, DJs, and teenage fashionistas. According to Dan Sicko, “Crews of young club members booked DJs, arranged for lights and equipment, and rented space to provide something between homespun backyard parties and professional DJ services” (33). These clubs aspired to exclusivity and pretension as a means of distinction from the poorer black youth of the city. According to Reynolds, “The Europhilia of these middle-class black youths, says [techno pioneer Juan] Atkins, was part of their attempt ‘to distance themselves from the kids that were coming up in the projects, the ghetto’ (15) – the so-called “jits.”

The soundtrack for these clubs was an eclectic mix of European synthpop, new wave, and Moroder-esque “progressive” disco. This not only reflected the Europhilic leanings of Detroit’s middle-class high schoolers, but also another aspect of Detroit’s own idiosyncratic musical history. From the late 1970s through the mid 1980s, radio DJ Charles Johnson, a.k.a. “the Electrifying Mojo,” put together self-consciously genre-bending radio playlists almost every night of the week. Mojo’s goal was specifically to alter the consciousness of Detroiters by breaking down radio format barriers: “I would go and bridge the gap that separated young from old, rich from poor, black from white, and informed from uninformed as opposed to my joining the circle of radio celebs who pretty much dominated the airwaves and the psyche of the people” (quoted in Sicko, 89). Mojo’s show not only exposed the Detroit area to such idiosyncratic musical gems as the robo-pop of Düsseldorf’s Kraftwerk, the electronic atmospheres of Tangerine Dream, the manic new wave of the B-52s, and the electrified funk of Parliament, Prince, and Zapp, along with early Detroit techno productions – he charted connections between music that traditional radio formats kept segregated. This logic is readily apparent in another formative outlet for Detroit eclecticism – the local access dance show *The Scene*, in which

Detroiters strutted their stuff Soul-Train-style to early Detroit electronic experiments like A Number of Names' "Sharevari" (1981) and Cybotron's "Clear" (1983) along with white synthpop and new wave like Kano's "I'm Ready" (1980) and Tom Tom Club's "Wordy Rappinghood" (1981).

In the social clubs, boundaries broke down as well. As Simon Reynolds notes, "the social club party scene got so successful that the *GQ* kids found that an undesirable element began to turn up: the very ghetto youth from the projects that they'd put so much energy into defining themselves against" (17). Reynolds quotes early techno artist Derrick May: "It was the beginning of the end. That's when the guns started popping up at the parties, and fights started happening" (18). Sicko's account of the party scene's decline is more even-handed. The east side of Detroit, where most "jits" hailed from, had rowdier parties and a more welcoming atmosphere. As the social scene opened up, "the parties themselves became faster, hotter, and sweatier" (41). Importantly, the soundtrack on the east side was different: instead of European synthpop and disco, jits listened to the electro-funk – the sound of early hip hop – coming from New York City.

Out of this fertile mixture Detroit techno was born, so oft-repeated tale goes. Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson, made up the "Belleville Three," the nucleus of the emerging techno sound. While they started as DJs on the party scene before branching into producing their own records, none of the trio was heavily involved in Detroit's small club scene. According to them, music was an intellectual pursuit, not one based merely on dancefloor requirements. In techno, heady concepts (inspired by Alvin Toffler's futurist theories), dreamy melodies, and odd sounds contrast and conflict with the rhythm's syncopated funk sensibility. However, as Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton point out, techno didn't have a name until it was

marketed overseas in the Virgin Records compilation *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit* (1988) – up until then, the Detroit producers were happy to be an adjunct to Chicago’s thriving house music scene. In fact, Brewster and Broughton claim revealingly that “techno’s protagonists did a good job of rewriting the music’s history, retrospectively adding layers of intriguing philosophy to their work. And journalists, enamoured by the idea of degree-level dance music, were keen to let them” (322). This journalistic boosterism had little effect in Detroit, where techno had been one piece of a diverse musical landscape, but it set the stage for the style’s integral role in Britain’s rave movement of the late 1980s, in which substantial portions of British youth participated in massive illegal dance parties. Brewster and Broughton summarize:

As well as Chicago, the early Detroit records made a dramatic impact on European dancefloors. However, they failed to ignite much interest in their hometown which to this day has an ambivalent attitude towards its latest, greatest export. As the precious cargo of [...] records started traversing international borders, the trio found their greatest market overseas (330).

What, then, of Detroit? In spite of the innovations of the high school “prep parties,” the city never had the extensive clubbing culture found in Chicago or Europe. Techno touched many lives in Detroit, and while Brewster and Broughton perhaps overstate the irrelevance of techno to the city, they are right that it did not catch on as a genre sensation as it did in Europe. Techno remains a persistent feature of the city’s black dance music scene, but not in its “pure” form. As mixed music, it was integrated into the musical culture of the working class blacks that remained in the city during Detroit’s economic decline. Thus, we must return to the denigrated “jits,” who

are only at the margins of techno's history, but play an important role in the Detroit scene that birthed ghattotech. It is to their tastes – to hip hop – that we must now turn.

Hip Hop and Techno: The Electro Connection

Hip hop has the benefit of an extensive and wide-ranging reservoir of historical accounts.² Yet it too has its oversights and margins that will become important to tracing the evolution of ghattotech. In particular, hip hop's electro phase has been eclipsed by the more romantic visions of street youths dancing to funk breaks, or masses electrified by the political rhetoric of Long Island rap group Public Enemy. But the blip between those moments laid the groundwork for ghattotech in Detroit, in the decidedly unromantic guise of electro-funk, or more simply, electro.

According to Dan Sisko, electro “was a ‘switched-on’ funk variant, exaggerating the electronic sounds that Midwestern groups like Parliament-Funkadelic had perfected and brought on stage” (73). Bambaataa’s “Planet Rock” (1982) is widely credited with spreading the hip hop aesthetic worldwide (Chang, 173), but while doing so it spread the electro aesthetic as well. From coast to coast, the synthesizers, drum machines, and robotic voices that mark electro had a pervasive influence on black music in the first half of the 1980s. Electro beats quickly replaced the disco backing tracks of the earliest rap recordings. In New York City, hip hop was dominated by electro funk acts like Mantronix, Jonzun Crew, and Newcleus along with Bambaataa; even old-school hip hop legends Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five put out the vocoder-heavy “Scorpio” in 1982. On the West Coast, Ice T got his start with electro producer

² Some excellent hip hop histories include Greg Toop’s *Rap Attack* (1984), Nelson George’s *Hip-Hop America* (2000), and Jeff Chang’s *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* (2005).

Chris “The Glove” Taylor (their song “Reckless” was featured in the hip hop movie “Breakin’” [1984]). Other notable West Coast electro funk acts included the lascivious bass grooves of Egyptian Lover and the robotic funk of the World Class Wreckin’ Cru, of which Dr. Dre was a member. According to Ricky Vincent, Bambaataa’s work influenced “the emerging electro-disco sounds coming from Chicago known as ‘house’ music” (483). “Planet Rock” did more than spread hip hop to the rest of the nation: it spread particular types of sounds which were incorporated into emerging black music subcultures.

The dispersal of these sounds was facilitated by the spread of a particular type of technology: the Roland TR-808 drum machine. The “boom” of the 808 bass kick has assumed an almost mythological status in hip hop and dance music, and continues to be used to this day. Tricia Rose notes how the 808 forced engineers of rap records to conform to “Afrodiasporic musical priorities” by “working in the red.” “The Roland TR-808 is a rap drum machine of choice because of its ‘fat sonic boom,’ because of the way it produces bass frequencies” (75). This “boom” is what continues to rattle car trunks and move bodies, an integral part of hip hop’s sonic palette, and a cornerstone of the ghettotech – and any music that prides itself on getting asses to shake – aesthetic.³ Indeed, musical descriptors “bass music” or “booty bass” typically refer to tracks with extensive syncopated 808 kick drum sounds.

Electro emerged at an important time on the hip hop landscape. Hip hop DJing techniques were spreading along with other aspects of the culture. Hip hop music emerged as a DJ technique in which the DJ would isolate particular parts of a song – typically instrumental

³ Roland’s next experiment, the TR-909, would bequeath its distinctive kick drums and handclaps to dance music for years to come.

“breaks”⁴ – and mix between another copy of the break, or a break from another song. As Tricia Rose notes, “This collage of break-beats stood in sharp contrast to Euro-disco’s unbroken dance beat that dominated the dance scene in the mid- to late 1970s” (51). Rose (and many others) credit DJ Kool Herc with the origin of the technique, but identify Grandmaster Flash as the DJ who perfected it, as well as another crucial hip hop DJ convention: scratching. “Although Grand Wizard Theodore (only 13 years old at the time) is considered its inventor,” Flash perfected this technique as well (53). However, hip hop recordings did not exist at this time: breaks were isolated from funk, rock, R&B, jazz, and all manner of other types of records for use in breakbeat collages. Electro provided easy templates for spreading scratching styles. Producers designed tracks for DJs to mix into sets – indeed, most electro producers were also DJs. Electro’s lengthy tracks (usually over six minutes), its steady tempos and staccato beats, and its 12-inch single format all made it a quintessential “DJ tool.” Many electro singles even contained “dubs” as B-sides: instrumental versions which lent themselves to more complicated mixing and scratching techniques.

It was through DJing that hip hop aesthetics infiltrated Detroit’s techno scene. The Electrifying Mojo refused to play it (Sicko, 89), but it wouldn’t take long for hip hop to alter Detroit’s musical landscape as it did everywhere else it touched. Mojo’s protégé The Wizard – the radio alias of future techno superstar Jeff Mills – brought a hip hop sensibility to his own wide-reaching mixes. Mills started out as a guest on Mojo’s show before getting his own radio show in which he mixed techno, house, new wave, and electro with the quick cuts, overlays, doubles, backspins, and scratches characteristic of hip hop DJing. According to Sicko,

⁴ A “break” refers to the instrumental breakdown in jazz and funk songs where the rhythm section moves to the fore. These sections were isolated and repeatedly looped into “breakbeats” by cutting back and forth between two copies of the same record in the earliest hip hop performances.

Besides being more open than [Mojo] to the latest hip-hop sounds, Mills also pushed the boundaries of what could be done in the context of both radio mix shows and live DJ sets. At least as early as the 1980s, mix shows had almost always been created beforehand by street DJs like Mills. These DJs recorded on portable four-track recorders that allowed several different inputs to be blended into a dense thicket of beats, vocals, and anything else that added complexity and intensity. [...] Amazingly, many aspiring jocks (including Mills himself) figured out ways to accomplish this in real time. With only two turntables and a stack of records, they would cue up the records and then tear through them with blazing speed – a modern equivalent to the plate-spinning jugglers who used to appear on the *Ed Sullivan Show* (91).

The ghettotech DJs I interviewed all pointed to this phase as an important one for the development of ghettotech, opening up new possibilities for musical expression as hip hop mixing styles collided with dance music. Big Red emphasized the impact of hip hop DJs Jam Master J and Cut Creator along with Chicago and Detroit DJs (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007). DJ Assault credits Chicago's Hot Mix Five over the Wizard. "I mean, I liked the Wizard who was on the radio in the Detroit. He inspired me to do, with as far as tricks and scratching and stuff, but I think the Chicago DJs were even better than him at all the tricks and scratching" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). The sounds of The Scene and Mojo were complemented with the exciting new sounds of hip hop and house, invigorated by a new mixing style that threw everything into a maelstrom of beats. This process did more than expand the musical palette of listeners – it opened up a new way to approach the sounds themselves. Mills' hard, interventionist mixing punctured the tightly wound sophistication of Euro-disco and early

techno, injecting it with the manic energy and a rebellious attitude of early house and hip hop. This was not merely dance music, it was *party* music designed to inspire delirium. While Mills eventually abandoned such eclectic sets to focus on “minimal” techno, these shows were a formative crucible for ghetto-tech DJs, not only because of the highly technical, irreverent style of mixing. It is also where Miami bass first entered the Detroit music scene.

Miami Bass

Miami bass’s place in the hip hop continuum is possibly even more denigrated than electro, its closest antecedent. Yet it is probably more influential to today’s chart hip hop than Eric B. and Rakim or Public Enemy. Little of its history has made it to official channels, either popular or academic. A network of devoted fans, led by self-proclaimed Miami bass historian “PappaWheelie,” preserves Miami’s legacy through scattered internet ‘zine articles and online message boards. Until Miami’s contribution to popular music is recognized, such sources must suffice.

Hip hop hit Miami in the form that it hit many other places (including the West Coast) – as electro. The synthesizers, robotic voices, and most of all, the 808 drum sound all found eager producers working within the already-established record production infrastructure in Miami in the early 1980s (PappaWheelie, 2003). MC A.D.E.’s 1985 electro track “Bass Rock Express” inspired local imitators, spawning the regional hip hop variant known as Miami bass. Miami bass tracks often used sample sources as a foundation (“Planet Rock” remained a popular sample source), but the emphasis was on increasingly powerful 808 sounds and the lyrics that celebrated them – song titles include M.C.B.’s “Bass Is What We Want” (1986), Rodney O’s “Everlasting

Bass” (1986), and The Third Degree’s “Bass It Baby” (1987). The low frequencies of the 808 are felt, not just heard, especially when fed through a powerful club sound system or souped-up car stereo. The music creates a physical connection to the listener, and can have physical effects as well – according to a globalsecurity.com report on sonic weapons, “High-intensity low-frequency sound may cause other organs to resonate, causing a number of physiological results, possibly including death.” Miami bass producers had far more innocent goals in mind for their own experiments with low-frequency sounds – they wanted to make people dance.

It was promoter Luther Campbell (nee Luke Skyywalker) who started Miami bass on the path that would make it (in)famous. After taking control of West Coast bass transplant 2 Live Crew, he encouraged them to incorporate explicit lyrics into their songs as a means of garnering attention – to great success. According to PappaWhealie, the other major factor in 2 Live Crew’s rise “was simply by focusing more on raw 808 beats, and picking up the tempo of Bass songs to match [their] Electro parent genre, making the songs much more danceable than [their] mid-tempo counterparts.” DJ Body Mechanic concurs with this assessment, explaining the popularity of the group: “They were rappers that picked uptempo beats as opposed to people with uptempo beats which usually don’t have rappers on them” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). While some, such as Alan Light, found 2 Live Crew’s music to consist of “monotonous, mighty uninspired beats” (137), the combination of raunchy rhymes, heavy bass, and furious turntable scratching proved irresistible to audiences. Miami MCs moved from rapping about bass to rapping about sex. In 1988, while the political rhymes of Public Enemy were garnering the group nationwide attention, a different kind of lyricism emerged in Miami. MC Cool Rock and MC Chaszy Chess released “Boot the Booty,” “which was quite possibly the first in a trend that

would eventually sweep the genre: rap songs to place the female posterior on a pedestal” (PappaWheelie, 2003).

These contributions to the rap lexicon may have something to do with Miami bass’s dubious spot in hip hop history. But Miami was far more influential as dance music, and perhaps because of this, DJs remained integral to the music while in New York and L.A. they were eclipsed by rappers. Successful Miami DJs had to scratch, cut, and mix music at higher speeds than most hip hop DJs. This fast pace meshed well with the higher tempos – 130-140 beats per minute – characteristic of techno. Meanwhile Miami bass steadily infiltrated dance music markets including Detroit’s own promiscuous DJ scene. Spread through radio mix shows and *The New Dance Show* (another local TV dance show, successor to *The Scene*), Detroit audiences were increasingly accustomed to hearing syncopated bass and raunchy lyrics with techno and house. The ground was set for what would become ghettotech.

Ghettotech – The Early Years

“Ghettotech was around before all of us, I don’t care what anybody says. It’s a style of DJing,” maintains DJ Nasty. “Detroit is a melting pot of so many cultures. I remember listening to the radio, 107.9 back in the early ‘90s, late ‘80s, and they were playing all this techno stuff and mixing it with house and blending all these styles of music. It wasn’t considered ghettotech. They were playing 2 Live Crew with Juan Atkins. It was just Miami bass with techno” (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). Ghettotech’s conception was similar to that of techno. An unexpected, yet strangely congruous juxtaposition of styles within a mix, coupled with a decline in the output of source material lead to a vacuum filled by a new generation of DJs-turned-producers – the

ghetto-technicians. These were adolescents who knew nothing about the social clubs of the preps, which were gone by the end of the 1980s. While they'd grown up exposed to techno and house through relatives, the radio, and local television, hip hop was their true passion. Taught to DJ by older friends and relatives, these newcomers came of age at just the right time. Techno's first generation had left Detroit for greater opportunities overseas; meanwhile, Miami bass was in decline following the breakup of 2 Live Crew. Detroit was ready for a new sound of its own, one that with characteristic hip hop flair, flaunted desire through braggadocio.

The first ghettech records were the result of aspiring hip hoppers making their way through Detroit's established musical infrastructure. DJ Assault and Big Red started as a hip hop group, but, in collaboration with several others, made some of the first Detroit records mixing techno and Miami bass. Assault and Red were old friends in Detroit who attended college together in Atlanta, ostensibly studying business, but also soaking up the bass sounds big in Atlanta clubs. After returning to Detroit they started working at Buy-Rite Records, a hub of sorts for aspiring Detroit DJs and producers owned by Cliff Thomas. Juan Atkins himself had gotten his start working at Buy-Rite in the 1980s, using a back room for studio space. Thomas pushed his employees to incorporate techno sounds into their songs. Red recounts the time:

With Assault and Battery, we both were rappers. We were a DJ group, but we were both rappers, we were strictly hip hop, but we DJed with the fast stuff because we were Detroit DJs. But we were trying a strictly hip hop group, we both were rapping and doing hip hop tracks. But Cliff, when we signed with him, he started talking to us about – because he goes way back, he helped start Juan Atkins and all of them – so he started talking to us about the actual techno dance music stuff. So we were into hip hop and we didn't really know how to do techno,

house stuff, even though we spun it, but we didn't actually produce that type of music. So the fast stuff we would do, the dance stuff we would do had a hip hop or R&Bish feel because we didn't know about the different sounds for techno and all that stuff. So I guess that's where they started talking about the ghettotech stuff (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

DJ Assault met future collaborator Ade Mainor while working at Buy-Rite. “[T]he rap thing didn't work out, and that's how I met him. But we did dance records for the shop that we both worked at” (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). Ade recalls how DJ Assault got him into the dance sound of Detroit. “We were using samplers to sample stuff like Technicolor and Kraftwerk. We combined it with rap and it started this whole sound around here that they later dubbed ghetto-tech” (interview with Native Instruments). Production work was initially highly collaborative, as the group learned the ropes of their equipment – another common thread between the early days of ghettotech and the early days of techno. Red explains,

We started in '95. And we all started. It was a record series named Supply N Demand that me, Craig [DJ Assault], and Ade and a few other producers, Butch Strange, Gary Romales – he'd done some house records – we all were part of the Supply N Demand thing under Cliff's record label. That's what started (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

The Supply N Demand series belongs to a phenomenon originating with breakbeat compilations for hip hop DJs – underground bootleg DJ tools based on retooled and remixed versions of other songs. The tracks themselves are pure pastiche: “How U Like This,” from the second Supply N Demand record, chops up its titular refrain, sequencing repetitions of “This” over loops cribbed from other Detroit electro records. On the B-side, “Wha' U Got” throws sampled 2 Live Crew

against a burbling synth bass line. Both tracks move through iterations of their respective arrangements for upwards of six minutes. Neither was meant to be played straight through: they are built so that portions can be worked into DJ sets – DJ sets increasingly fusing Miami bass with the futuristic sounds of Detroit techno.

Thomas operated several labels out of the store, selling the records exclusively at Buy-Rite in order to secure a customer base. This arrangement did not suit Assault as his music career blossomed. “[Thomas] got us making records to build a clientele to shop with only him exclusively. So I was thinking that’s stupid, I’ll do my own records and sell them to everybody it would make way more money than it could out of one shop.” Soon he and Ade (whose recording alias is Mr. De) parted ways with Thomas.

I left because I was DJing the biggest party in Detroit every Friday night, and I didn’t need the money. I was just there because it was a record store. I was off making money in Detroit DJing and doing mixtapes. So I didn’t need that job. Really, when I was leaving the record store I felt [Ade] was talented at the time and I thought he could do more than just be there. That’s how we became partners (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007).

The two’s subsequent experiments, on the Electrofunk and Assault Rifle labels, would go on to create some of the most revered ghetto-tech tracks set to wax. Many of these records were little more than sample collages of earlier techno and electro records supplemented with more powerful drums and funky bass lines. “Numerals” reworks the robotic voices and twitchy electronics of Kraftwerk’s “Numbers” into a pounding drum workout.⁵ Full scale raps hadn’t yet been incorporated into the songs, but sampled black vernacular – “crank this motherfucker,”

⁵ This kind of bass-heavy electro without rapping is sometimes referred to as “techno bass.” Detroit artists Aux 88 are one group that openly uses this term.

“now what’s up, what’s up” – were interspersed through many of the productions. This juxtaposition of futuristic sounds with street-level black music is jarring in a way that 1980s’ electro often is not – these concentrated distillations of black voices, undiluted by narratives of space travel or the electronic distortions of the vocoder, deliberately inject an embodied blackness into techno’s continuum.

Many experiments of this sort were going on throughout the Detroit area – aspiring producers were trying their hand at grafting hip hop and bass on to techno with cheap samplers. Most of these records, small pressings released on tiny independent labels, have slipped into obscurity, their producers moving on to other endeavors. Others achieved success and continued to pursue this new hybrid aesthetic. Like the Buy-Rite crew, they began as DJs attuned to the sounds of hip hop, electro, and bass. Unlike the Buy-Rite crew, they were white.

DJ Godfather was a talented teenage DJ gaining notoriety around the Detroit area for his skills on the turntables. He and friend and mentor DJ Dick had put together a couple of bass singles in 1993 and 1994 as Bass Association. In 1995 they founded the Twilight 76 label, moving their productions in a more techno direction. DJ Nasty, a friend and collaborator, recalls the time. “What we did in the mid-90s after the Miami bass died off, what we did was take techno elements and putting chants on top of it, and that’s how it blended. Instead of mixing that record and that record, we could take that record and that record, put it together and see what it sounds like. So it was like a mad experiment” (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). Like the Supply N Demand series, these early records were rough arrangements of techno and Miami bass samples, and collaboration was common as the producers pooled their resources and learned to master their equipment. DJ Nasty described producing his first ghettotech record, *Some Ol’ Pimp Shit* (1997). “I was one day sitting in the studio, and I sampled some stuff together and I

played it for Godfather and he was like, ‘Man, this is ghetto,’ because I took Luke [Skywalker of 2 Live Crew] and you could hear the drums in the background and it was cut off and I’ll have another beat, and it was just like fucking unprofessional. I was 17, 18 years old and I didn’t know what I was doing” (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). Nasty’s paradoxical use of “ghetto,” which combines both positive and negative connotations, is further discussed in the next chapter.

As the output of both Detroit techno and Miami bass dwindled during the mid-Nineties, Twilight 76 and its associated label, Databass, found increased success. So too did the Electrofunk and Assault Rifle labels. Local radio DJs, such as Gary Chandler and Wax Tax ‘N’ Dre who were already spinning mixes of techno and bass, lent their support in a show of hometown pride. Detroit dance clubs, radio stations, and strip clubs ate up the bass-heavy beats, accelerated tempos, and deliberate signifiers of blackness in their dance music. DJ Assault and Mr. De put out the first mixtape of this still-unnamed style, *Straight Up Detroit Shit* in 1996. The rapid-fire mix of electro, techno, and raunchy bass music was a huge success in Detroit. DJ Assault also dropped another important milestone that put ghattotech on the path towards genrefication. The *Pimps and Players* EP (1996) featured “Ass-N-Titties” in which DJ Assault raps about sex, clubbing, and dancing over a bouncy electro throb. This was the closest yet the new Detroit style had come to a pop song, with vocals, a loose theme, and even verses and choruses.⁶ Refrains built from a looped vocal snippet of “Ass – Ass – Ass – Ass” made “Ass-N-Titties” an excellent DJ tool as well. Ghattotech had its first pop hit – “Ass-N-Titties” remains the genre’s best-known song, a sonic novelty that soundtracks dozens of internet videos and even a Dave Chappelle skit.

⁶ Certain underground house producers in Chicago had made similar productions even earlier. DJ Deon’s “Yo Mouth,” from 1994, also had a pop song structure, albeit with looser rapping than “Ass-N-Titties.” This “ghetto house” (released on the Dance Mania label) appeared in mixes alongside Detroit’s own productions. Some of Deon’s work is featured on *Straight Up Detroit Shit*.

Ghettotech's spatial mobility picked up speed between 1996 and 2000. The DJs who first experimented with making their own records mastered their gear, releasing more professional-sounding recordings. Vocal hooks had become recognized convention of the music, even though many tracks were instrumental. While DJ Assault was the voice of Electrofunk Records (with occasional unnamed female accompaniment), the Twilight 76/Databass camp had a stable of MCs taking over the vocal duties. Mix CDs (and even artist albums from DJ Assault and DJ Godfather) worked their way through local and national distribution chains. Detroit DJs played raves across the Midwest, spreading the sound to dance music fans beyond the confines of the 313 area code. Dave Shayman, an ambitious Ann Arbor teen with the DJ handle Disco D, started DJing ghettotech after seeing Assault and Godfather at a rave, and eventually coined the oft-debated moniker for the style. "The whole thing about ghettotek to me, I actually can take credit along with a journalist named Hobey Echlin for making the name Ghettotek up. People would call it Detroit Bass or booty or whatever; I just kind of made that name up for marketing purposes" (riotsound.com). However, as Simon Frith reminds us, "[T]he genre labeling process is better understood as something collusive than as something invented individually, as a result of a loose *agreement* among musicians and fans, writers and disc jockeys" (*Performing Rites* 88, italics in original). When it was contained in Detroit, ghettotech needed no specific name – it was "mix show music," "fast stuff," or just "dance music," a ubiquitous presence wherever social dance occurred. But in order to be marketed to outsiders unfamiliar with the Detroit scene, it needed a brand that distilled its particular charms into one catchy moniker. As Frith notes, "The issue then becomes how to draw genre boundaries" (ibid). The "tech" marked the music as part of Detroit's techno lineage while the "ghetto" portion dredges up a host of meanings and boundaries to be covered more extensively in the next chapter.

By 2000, ghattotech had a worldwide profile, with DJ Assault, DJ Godfather, and Disco D its main ambassadors, playing gigs and selling records around the world. Internationally known recording artists such as Lords of Acid, Westbam, and Fatboy Slim commissioned ghattotech remixes. A new generation of ghattotech DJs and producers, based primarily throughout Europe is currently adding its chapter to the story, working and reworking with the set of conventions established by the Detroit scene.

Ironically, this next installment in the ghattotech story will likely have little to do with Detroit itself. Local radio, such an essential part of the development of techno and ghattotech, devotes less and less time to local music. “You don’t hear as much as you used to,” says DJ Spade. “Radio is a problem. Radio is a big problem” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). The decline in outlets for local music affects the Detroit scene as a whole. “When we start coming to the newer shit it starts to fall off because people aren’t familiar with it any more, because it doesn’t get played like it used to get played,” says Body Mechanic. “I don’t really like DJing in Detroit, to be honest, because you can’t play what you want to play” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). These assertions were supported by the Detroit-area club nights I observed. While he travels the world to play booty bass, DJ Godfather spun exclusively popular hip hop at his residency at Club Sevin. The small portions of ghattotech DJ Body Mechanic slipped into his DJing set at the Palladium cleared the floor. DJ Assault spends much of his time in Atlanta; Disco D moved to New York City after he graduated from the University of Michigan.⁷ While certain support networks exist, and ghattotech makes it on the air regularly (if sparingly), Detroit’s scene shows signs of torpor. Nevertheless, all the DJs I interviewed saw a bright future for ghattotech, if not in Detroit, then in markets elsewhere.

⁷ After a history of suffering from bipolar disorder, Disco D committed suicide January 22, 2007.

What Is/What Became Ghattotech

As I have demonstrated through the preceding genealogy, ghattotech has had a circuitous and extensive history before the term had even been invented. According to Simon Frith, “It sometimes seems, indeed, as if a genre is only clearly defined [...] at the moment when it ceases to exist, when it can no longer be exclusive” (*Performing Rites* 88). I am sympathetic to this position – where the music once meant something particular to Detroit, at the time of its labeling it expanded beyond the point where its originators could control its meanings. It has become a set of sounds and a way of arranging them. Yet ghattotech certainly still exists. Like other genres, its sound, and especially its meaning, is in a state of perpetual flux. What follows is my attempt to outline the major conventions of the genre, the meanings of which I will explore in my discussion of ghattotech authenticity in the next chapter.

An archetypal ghattotech track consists of little more than a synthesized drum beat at a tempo of at least 150 beats per minute, a bass line, and some vocals. The vocals are not accurately referred to as “verses” in most cases, as they typically consist of little more than refrains repeatedly looped – for instance, DJ Godfather’s “On Da Flo” (2004) loops the phrase “get on the floor” throughout its running time. These refrains, or “hooks,” often contain explicit sexual content or deliberate uses of the black vernacular – a repeated loop of “Let me bang” or “Where the ho’s at.” Longer verses for the most part are unnecessary – a ghattotech DJ mixes songs so quickly that most tracks get no more than 90 seconds of play. The rest of the production comes from the techno and house palette of sounds, with heavy emphasis on deep 808 bass and punchy 909 kicks and hand claps. Some recordings feature sped-up breakbeats akin to jungle. If melodies exist at all they are simple arrangements – emphasis is on a funky

bass line. “Funk” is an ambiguous word, but in this case closely adheres to the kinds of syncopations that facilitate dance. DJ Nasty explains,

[T]o me funky means you feel it. The hairs on your arm stand – to me that’s funky. You just get mad, you get up, you gotta move. To me, music can speak to you, tell you a story without words, just by listening to the melodies, the music, the drums, and to me, that’s what I try to do, make a beat out of just the drums and the clap, make a rhythm out of that. The more simple it is, the more funky it is (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007).

Even recordings not produced as ghettotech can make their way into the genre. Ghettotech DJ sets often include house, techno, electro, or hip hop tracks “pitched up” (elevated in tempo) by adjusting the speed of the turntable, often using the 45-revolution-per-minute (RPM) setting instead of the “proper” 33-and-a-third RPM.

Ghettotech started as a mixing style, and this informs much of the recorded output of the genre. As with most dance music, individual ghettotech recordings are typically referred to as “tracks,” not “songs.” A song is “written”: the language calls to mind “high” arts of musical composition, of literature and poetry. It is an act of individual creativity emerging *sui generis* from the artist as a self-contained, stand-alone work. A track is “produced” – the industrial metaphor is deliberate. Pre-made sounds are sequenced into a digital grid by producers who often have no musical training; thus, technology is a primary creative force in dance music, and often acknowledged as such. A track is less precious art object than a science experiment conducted for maximum functionality on the dance floor. A track does not stand alone as an art object – it is designed to be mixed with other similar tracks in a live context, to interlock with other sequences of sounds. In this sense, the producer does not complete the track – it is

“finished” by the DJ who employs it in a continuous mix. The stripped-down feel of ghattotech tracks, with only one “part” (no chorus, no bridge, no verse⁸) necessitates the ghattotech DJ’s quick mixing while facilitating virtuoso scratch techniques.

I believe historical and musicological analyses of genre to be interesting and vital, but less helpful in explaining a genre in terms of meaning. Ghattotech articulates a particular world. The sounds, words, and meanings in which it traffics go deep to the root of contemporary issues in cultural studies – race, class, gender, sexuality – and deal with them in highly public ways. As Frith notes, “Authenticity is a necessary critical value – one listens to the music for clues to something else, to what makes the genre at issue valuable as a genre in the first place” (*Performing Rites* 89). The next chapter analyzes the “ghetto authenticity” articulated by ghattotech.

⁸ The biggest ghattotech hits (or “anthems” as they are often referred to in dance music circles), such as DJ Assault’s “Ass-N-Titties” (1996) and DJ Godfather’s “Player Haters In Dis House” (1998) follow a more typical pop song structure with identifiable verses and choruses

CHAPTER 3 – AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity is a contentious term in popular music studies, “a word of ominous import” as Lionel Trilling describes (93). Authenticity refers to a kind of truth: an authentic work must be of uncorrupted origins, or the creation of an uncorrupted artist who is true to him- or herself, bucking external pressures. Thus authenticity is frequently opposed to hybrid origins, commercial concerns, and even ethical commitments to others – in the words of Nietzsche, “every person is a prison” (56): a potential obstacle to the unfettered realization of the individual creative will, the necessary precondition for authentic art. So how can a mongrel genre of music cobbled together from samples of other recordings, often made collaboratively, and produced with profit in mind have any kind of authenticity in these terms?

Certainly no popular music genre has “pure” origins – music, perhaps more than other forms of culture, lends itself to hybridity, to the mixing of sounds and styles. The idea that indigenous music is “pure” has more to do with the exoticization of non-modern cultures – that is, the production by “moderns” of others’ “primitivity” – than the music those cultures produce.⁹ And as Charles Taylor has convincingly argued, authenticity has as much to do with ethical obligations as it does to pure unrestrained creativity. “When we come to understand what it is to define ourselves, to determine in what our originality consists, we see that we have to take as background some sense of what is significant” (35). Significance for Taylor is primarily a social concern, necessarily determined through contact and negotiation with others: “To shut out demands emanating beyond the self is precisely to suppress the conditions of significance, and

⁹ For example, Richard Middleton, criticizing the “curatorial” bent of ethnomusicology, derided sound recording as “yet another result of the colonial quest of the Western bourgeoisie, bent on preserving other people’s musics before they disappear, documenting ‘survivals’ or ‘traditional’ practices, and enjoying the pleasures of exoticism into the bargain,” further noting that “[t]he primary motives for ethnomusicological exoticism, then, obviously lie in value judgments about ‘authenticity’ in musical culture” (qtd. in Lysloff and Gay 3-4).

hence court trivialization” (40). Following Simon Frith, we might say that authenticity in a genre of popular music, its significance to others, stems from how well it adheres to the values of its genre as articulated by producers, consumers, and critics: “An individual’s liking for punk or opera, for country music or progressive rock, whether as performer or audience, is a commitment to a taste community” (*Performing Rites*, 89). Thus, authenticity is not merely musicological or social – it is ideological as well.

Furthermore, genres and their authenticities are defined *differentially*. Chapter Two’s genealogy demonstrated how ghettotech owed much of its sound to techno, but also how it involved the *not-techno*, marking itself distinct from techno by incorporating other regional sounds into the mix. As John Frow remarks, “A sermon is defined by its relation to other sermons, even though the kind of thing this is changes over time; but also by the fact that it is *not* a prayer or a eulogy or a political speech” (24). These distinctions are not merely formalistic ones, but also ones of value – how genres define their purposes, contexts, audiences, and ideologies in relation, and in opposition to other genres.

What follows in this chapter is an examination of the values of ghettotech – how ghettotech constructs an authenticity of its own – a “ghetto authenticity” – that distinguishes itself from Detroit techno, its immediate precursor.¹⁰ Following this examination, I will identify the particular ideological positions, articulated through recordings and interviews with producers, ghetto authenticity circulates regarding gender, race, and class. Due to the hybrid origins of ghettotech, I will draw from scholarship on both dance music and hip hop authenticities.

Techno Authenticity

¹⁰ As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, ghettotech existed before it had a name or was codified as a genre. Therefore, even though the genre hadn’t fully been recognized and marketed as such, it did possess a form of authenticity related to ideological positions on race, class, and gender neatly encapsulated with the term “ghetto.”

“Detroit techno is an ambitious sonovabitch,” Brewster and Broughton claim. “It is a music which aims at evolution. It wants to free itself from the baggage of all the world’s previous music and take a few brave steps into the future” (320). If Brewster and Broughton hold techno at arm’s length at times, deflating techno’s mythology as “a good job of rewriting the music’s history” (322), their initial description is quite apt. Even a primer on how to program techno tracks through Reason software emphasizes the sophistication of the genre: “Conceived as a purely electronic style, the techno producer uses the sequencer or the computer and synths and drum machines as his orchestra. There’s no limitation like you’d get with a band – in fact you don’t necessarily have to be a skilled player” (Jones, 71). With this kind of intellectual and creative freedom, the producer may transcend the “baggage” of music lineage, and even his or her own limitations as a musician – in Brewster and Broughton’s words, techno allows “the clarity of pure creation” (320). These values assert a conceptualism to techno, and a predilection for abstraction – for moving away from reference to reality, or even to other genres of sound. Ironically – or perhaps, quite aptly – this led to an uncomfortable tension within techno – whether to service the mind or the body. This tension manifested itself when Detroit’s first wave started playing raves in Europe, where use of ecstasy and other drugs was practically compulsory. As Dan Sicko relates, “Drugs were almost completely absent in Detroit’s techno scene, small as it was, and the artists were undoubtedly a bit shocked to find their music fused with any kind of drug-related experience” (116). While Detroit’s pioneers certainly valued dance music, they were never fully immersed in club culture, approaching producing tracks as an intellectual endeavor, not an activity to promote embodied experiences. Simon Reynolds, in an

interview with Jeff Mills (who abandoned the kitchen-sink-party approach of his Detroit radio days for stripped down “minimal” techno) neatly hones in on this point.

Instead of inspiring thoughtless, sweaty fun, Mills believes dance music should be the vehicle for lofty intellectualism and weighty concepts. “Let me be very very clear,” he says with the barest hint of annoyance. “Underground Resistance¹¹ wasn’t militant, nor was it angry.... I’m not angry now.... The music that I make now has absolutely nothing to do with color. It has nothing to do with man/woman, East/West, up/down, but more [to do with] “the mind.” The mind has no color (233, brackets and ellipses in original).

Ghettotech’s reliance on the sounds of techno (for all the rhetoric, certain core sounds of particular machines were integral in the formation of techno as a genre) has been established. Furthermore, it draws one chief value from techno – total creative freedom. Producers I talked to highlighted this aspect of ghettotech. Says DJ Nasty, “When I make music I strive to be different. I think the reason the genre blew up was because we all tried to do something different that wasn’t out there. [...] Each record I try to emphasize on, one, I want to make it better than the last one and two, I’m gonna make it totally different.” Big Red echoes this sentiment.

I’m one of those people, I don’t really stick to one script. Since I was raised playing so many different things and DJing so many different styles, and producing so many different styles, I can’t really – I can, but I don’t really like to sit down and say, I want to make something that sounds like this. I like to sit down and explore and see what comes out (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

¹¹ Underground Resistance (UR) is an important Detroit techno group emerging in the “second wave” after techno’s originators had left the scene. UR’s sound and imagery draw upon militaristic themes, and they are sometimes referred to as techno’s Public Enemy.

Disco D puts it succinctly (and bluntly) in an interview with Laron Cue, “To me Ghattotech was always about drawing from whatever and not giving a fuck” (Cue, 2005). A creative freedom, explicitly linked to techno’s own open horizons, informs ghattotech’s values as well as its sounds. “I think that’s what techno is, it’s freedom,” explains Body Mechanic. “You can use any sound you want to go, any mood, you can be happy, be sad, and it’s all good” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

However, ghattotech’s values differ from techno’s more than they align. While techno edges towards abstraction, and seeks to free itself from its musical lineage, ghattotech is perfectly comfortable acknowledging its roots rhetorically and sonically. The description of ghattotech from the ad copy on the back of *Da Godfather Chronicles* defines the genre as “an amalgamation of Electro, Techno, Hip House, Miami Bass, and Hip Hop rolled up into one exciting frenetic audio mayhem.” Samples from many of those aforementioned genres – and any others – show up in ghattotech recordings. DJ Assault’s “Disco Guitar Remix” (1996) reworks the first verse of “Pusher Man” (1972) from Curtis Mayfield’s *Super Fly* soundtrack while DJ Nasty’s own “Supafly” (2003) cribs the main melody from John Williams’s theme to *Superman* (1978); Starski and Clutch’s “Bounce” (2003) samples R. Kelly’s “Ignition” (2002). Ghattotech does not aspire to a future bereft of historical ties – it is caught in today’s perpetual present in which practically every recorded sound may be summoned at will for use in new productions. It is decidedly *of* the world of popular music, particularly black popular music, not beyond it.

Nor is ghattotech beyond deliberately representing the embodied identities of its producers and consumers, particularly racial identities. Sarah Thornton’s work on dance authenticities identifies this break as the difference between racialized discourses of authenticity.

“The ideological categories of ‘black’ and ‘white’ define the main axes of authenticity within dance music” (72).

“Black” dance music is said to maintain a rhetoric of body and soul despite its use of sampling and other computer technology. Whereas “white” or “European” dance music is about a futuristic celebration and revelation of technology to the extent that it minimizes the human among its sonic signifiers. Of course, these categories often have little to do with the actual colour of the people making the records; rather they are two discourses about the value of dance music (ibid).

Thornton’s use of quotation marks signifies her awareness that these values are not essential characteristics of a particular group of people, but rather the distinctions applied within dance discourse from fans, magazines, and even interviews with producers. Within a racialized culture, certain musical signifiers attach themselves to particular racial identities, becoming a kind of (not unproblematic) shorthand for making sense of abstract sounds. Ghattotech constructs sonic worlds based on culturally constructed notions about black identities. The deployment of sampled black pop achieves this effect, putting ghattotech in conversation with black musical traditions.

The voice is another primary way ghattotech signifies an embodied black identity, one noted by Thornton: “The ‘black’ tradition [...] maintains a key interest in vocals” (73). While early Detroit techno experiments did contain vocals (increasingly techno abandoned them), producers often masked them through effects processing, or delivered them with an air of detachment and distance. For example, Juan Atkins’s “Night Drive,” (1985) released under the Model 500 moniker, buries whispered deadpan vocals under synthesizers and sequenced drums, with only a vocodered “Time – Space – Transmat” emerging from the mix – nothing deliberately

signifies blackness. In contrast, DJ Assault and Mr. De's "Hoez Get Naked" (1998) begins with the refrain, "Ho's take off your clothes / Ho's get naked" delivered without any kind of effects processing or even musical accompaniment. DJ Assault's voice is readily recognizable as black through its intonation and use of African American vernacular. While both techno and ghettotech originate in black musical production, only ghettotech deliberately signifies as black.

An even more nebulous, yet important, value of ghettotech is funkiness, tied to the ability of music to induce movement and dance. Thornton identifies "'funky' instrumentation" (once again with scare quotes to denote the problematic, underdefined nature of the term) as a crucial aspect of so-called black dance music authenticity (73). DJ Nasty, who is phenotypically white¹² but works with "black" authenticities in his music, stressed the value of a funky beat in his productions. "To me funky means you feel it. The hairs on your arm stand – to me, that's funky. You just get mad, you get up, you gotta move" (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). An emphasis on low-frequency bass sounds plays into this musical signification of blackness. A "thick" or "fat" bass frequency generated from a sustained 808 kick is felt as much as heard. As Thornton summarizes, "Whether it be soulful house or rap, musical authenticity resides in a rich, full, emotive and embodied sound" (ibid).

Hip Hop Authenticities

In the above quotation, Thornton perceptively locates rap within the realm of "black" dance music, a fact often overlooked in critical examinations of rap and hip hop. However, hip hop has its own set of values distinct (if not wholly independent) from dance music discourses.

¹² DJ Nasty is of Middle Eastern ancestry. His family, who are Iraqi Chaldeans, immigrated to Italy in 1981, and finally to Detroit in 1983.

If dance authenticities revolve around sets of sounds, hip hop authenticities center primarily on the discourses constructed by the rapper – the lyrical content. Indeed, it is not, à la Thornton, merely the sound of the voice that signifies blackness; both the subject matter and the believability of the performer’s relationship to it figure prominently. While rap covers a wide variety of themes, Murray Forman has persuasively identified a common value running through most hip hop discourse – the identification and prioritization of particular spaces and places, specifically those associated with the black working class – the ghettos. “The discourse of ghetto authenticity and the evolution of a ‘real nigga’ mentality in the late 1980s and 1990s emerge as prominent and complicated features of hip-hop culture” (54). “Ghetto” in this sense refers to particular bodies (namely, black working class) in particular places – the decaying inner city, the source of “real” life. Ghattotech shares this prioritization of black working-class urban life, but for the most part leaves violent “gangsterism” out in favor of more quotidian, sometimes mundane, but more often sexual topics. Nevertheless, producers emphasized the “reality” of these themes.

An excellent example is DJ Assault’s “Ponytail” (1997). Samples of DJ Assault saying “Pony / Tail” are looped over a quick 4/4 beat. The verse comes in, accompanied by a funky bass line and sampled funk guitar riffs. “Fake-haired girls thinking they got it made / Shaking that ponytail but really got a fade / There’s glue in your hair, and you’re on welfare / I be doggin’ these tricks, man, cuz I don’t care.” These lyrics pick up on a common African American cultural practice – hair extensions and weaves. DJ Assault humorously deflates the ego of the target who “think[s she] got it made” by calling attention to the shoddiness of her extensions. DJ Assault explained his inspiration for this song (along with another track entitled “Gel-N-Weave” [2002]): “It was something else that I took and tried to make funny. I basically had a girlfriend at

one time that was a hairstylist, so I was just around her, so I ended up taking that stuff and putting it in songs. It's just normal. That's where the hair stuff came from" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). DJ Nasty also draws from the "ghetto everyday" in his music. Nasty, who became immersed in Detroit black culture as a young boy helping out at his father's store, described the thought process behind some of his lyrical topics.

I did a track called "Sperm Doner" [sic], and I had a girl, the whole hook was, "He's not my baby daddy, he's just a sperm donor." And what she's saying is, that man ain't shit. Yeah I slept with him, I got pregnant by him, but he ain't shit. I'm not even gonna call him a person. And when you play a track like that at a club, to a crowd that has a single mother or a single father or whatever, of course they're gonna relate to that (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007).

Drawing from everyday experiences authenticates the song for listeners, who presumably come from a similar background and can evaluate the "realness" of the lyrical sentiments.

Forman also identifies a trend in the geographic specificity in hip hop lyrics – the move from the "ghetto" to the "'hood."

With the discursive shift from the spatial abstractions framed within "the ghetto" to the move to the more localized and specific discursive construct of "the 'hood" occurring in 1987-88 [...], there has been an enhanced emphasis on the powerful ties to place that both anchor rap acts to their immediate environments and set them apart from other environments and other 'hoods as well as from other rap acts that inhabit similarly demarcated spaces (179).

The abstract space of the working-class black ghetto provided a context relatable to black youth (and others) outside the narrow confines of the South Bronx in which hip hop was born. As hip

hop nationalized, regional and local hip hop scenes increasingly emphasized their specific place, as a means of “creating a broader profile for the home territory and its inhabitants while showing respect for the nurture it provides” (180), as well as marketing the location to both insiders in the know and outsiders looking for a piece of the exotic. Spatial authenticity inflects ghettech production in numerous ways. Lyrics may refer to Detroit-specific themes. The lyrics to Starski and Clutch’s “East to West” (2001) refer to the city’s notorious divide along Woodward Avenue,¹³ positing that the duo’s music can bridge this intra-city rivalry – “From the East Side of Detroit / To the West Side of Detroit / You know what we’re about / Gonna turn this party out.” More often, release titles will reference Detroit culture and geography. DJ Assault has one mix series entitled *Straight Up Detroit Shit*; another is dubbed *Belle Isle Tech*, named after a popular spot for cruising and partying. DJ Nasty’s side project, 313 Bass Mechanics, cribs its name from the Detroit area code. Finally, a host of ghettech (and techno and electro) tracks pay homage to Detroit’s local dance step, the jit,¹⁴ whose fast-paced footwork is well suited to ghettech’s blistering tempos. DJ Surgeon’s “Duel of the Jit” (2004), DJ Shortstop’s “Just Jit” (2004), DJ Godfather’s “Piano Jit” (2003), and Erotex’s “Jit Shit” (2001) are just a few compositions devoted to the Motor City’s unique dance style.

Ghettech’s spatial authenticity differs sharply from hip hop’s in one crucial respect – the primary site constructed by the music. Hip hop valorizes “the street,” not necessarily the literal street, but, in the words of Forman, “the conceptual, symbolic, and mythical construct” that ties hip hop production to the ghetto. The street was the original site of hip hop production

¹³ West Side neighborhoods were typically more affluent than those on the East Side, a source of tension since at least the 1950s. See Turner, 2004.

¹⁴ “Jit” reportedly descends from the jitterbug, a dance originating on Detroit’s East Side, perhaps the reason for the “jit” label for street-centric black youths who also hailed from the East Side (see Dunham, 2005). According to Sicko, “‘Jit’ remains in popular use today, although more often used in reference to the dance than to a group of people” (39).

and consumption, via block parties, graffiti tagging, and break dancing; in ghettotech, “the club” and its associated imagery – dancing, intoxication – loom largest. “Put your hands up / if you don’t give a fuck / ‘Cause you’re blowed¹⁵ in this bitch / Tear the fucking club up” is the chant on DJ Nasty’s “Don’t Give A Fuck” (2002). Other songs veer towards more explicit content, suitable for the sexually charged atmosphere of a dance club. Mr. De and DJ Assault’s “Asses Jigglin” (1999) paints a (male) fantasy portrait of the club.

Every night
 I like to let them ho’s fight
 In the club
 Sayin’ Now what’s up, what’s up
 I’m a mack
 I like to hit it from the back
 Everywhere I go
 I see the same hoe
 Shaking that thang
 Trick bitch, let me bang
 You want to fuck
 That’s what I’m figuring
 When I see asses wiggling
 And titties jiggling

This hypersexual masculine fantasy of “the club” is analogous to the hyperviolent masculine fantasies of “the street” in songs such as “Straight Outta Compton” by N.W.A (1988). The club becomes less a literal place than a “mythic construct” that promotes a certain type of sensibility –

¹⁵ “Blowed” is slang for intoxication, typically from a combination of marijuana and alcohol consumption.

one of open sexual advances, vocalized desire, and commands to dance, delivered with a dash of humor. In fact, this authenticity was deliberately opposed to street authenticity at several points during interviews with artists. DJ Assault openly challenged street authenticity as reality. “It’s like the songs that come out, you know they’re just trying to be something they saw on TV somewhere. No one is really like that because if you were really like that you wouldn’t be rapping, you would be doing the stuff you’re saying” (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). Big Red argued for club-based values over those of the street.

What I love about [ghettotech] is it’s not about shooting somebody up, it’s not about that element, it’s about fun. Now sometimes the fun might go to the real element, but as far as the fighting and all that, they don’t have to worry about that on [dance music] sets, because people are trying to grind on each other. When you’re horny, you’re not thinking about fighting, that’s the last thing you’re thinking about. That’s what I like (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

This open flaunting of sexual desire, frequently (but not exclusively) from a heterosexual male perspective, is a crucial source of ghettech’s authenticity, and as mainstream rap discourse moves to more club-centric locations (a la 50 Cent’s “In Da Club” [2003]), it inflects hip hop authenticity as well.

Authenticity of Performance

Thus far I have limited myself to the authenticities constructed through ghettech recordings and their relationship to authenticities of recorded techno and hip hop. Sara Thornton has demonstrated how advents in recording technology dispersed authenticity, reconfiguring the

aura of live experience into aspects of the recorded commodity (26-7). Concurrent in this process were changes in live musical performance: “Only when records began to be taken for music itself did performed music really start to exploit the specificities of its ‘liveness’, emphasizing presence, visibility, and spontaneity” (27). In dance music, performance implies two interrelated characteristics of club culture: the live performance of the DJ mixing records and the performance of the audience through dance.

What authenticates contemporary dance cultures is the buzz or energy which results from the interaction of records, DJ and crowd. ‘Liveness’ is displaced from the stage to the dancefloor. [...] The DJ and dancers share the spotlight as *de facto* performers; the crowd becomes a self-conscious cultural phenomenon – one which generates moods immune to reproduction, for which you have to be there (Thornton, 29-30).

While Thornton’s analysis of the shared performance duties of DJ and audience is apt, it does not cover the specific performance expectations of the ghettech genre. Ghettech DJs do not simply facilitate social dance through mixing; rather, they are expected to perform as both mixers and virtuoso turntablists, masters of complicated tricks and techniques. A major part of the authenticity of a ghettech DJ comes from his ability to pull off spectacular displays of talent, not just from possessing an obscure record collection à la Thornton. This is an important way that ghettech DJs differentiate themselves from most dance music DJs who focus on smooth mixing and gradual builds. DJ Assault, who travels all over the world to play gigs, gave his take on this distinction: “Most DJs are boring to watch. All they do is mix one record, let it play three or four minutes, mix another record. That’s not a DJ, he’s just playing records.

Anyone can mix records. It's excitement that people like. It's going to be different from the usual, it's unique, something we haven't seen" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007).

Typical tricks include scratching, doubles (where the DJ cuts between two copies of the same record, which produces a partial rupture in the flow of the track while preserving the beat), and mash ups (in which DJs play two tracks in time over one another – often rap *a capellas* over instrumental tracks). Because of the fast tempos of ghettech, pulling off these tricks – which means not losing the beat – requires precise timing and a substantial amount of practice. A DJ who can execute these tricks becomes a visual spectacle in addition to a source of music. Nevertheless, DJs must evaluate the effectiveness – visual or otherwise – of their tricks against the reaction of the audience. Says Big Red, who makes a large portion of his livelihood from DJing:

I play off the crowd. I do [tricks], but I play off the crowd. Sometimes you'll get to a club and you'll have that type of crowd where everybody wants to look at you and see what you're doing. Sometimes the crowd wants to hear what you're doing. So when you have people that want to see it, that's when you do a show. When you have the people that want to hear it, you feed off them and have the show that way (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

In spite of the centrality of tricks, of the visual display of virtuoso ability, in ghettech authenticity, the most important mode of performance authenticity comes through soliciting audience response, something common in DJ-curated dance cultures. This principle is as much economic as aesthetic – DJs make their living on their ability to please audiences. Even so, the desire to entertain stems from needs beyond economic ones. Body Mechanic summed up his approach to DJing succinctly. "Crowd participation. That's the whole purpose. The DJ does

have a lot of control. I want people to go home happy” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

However, this control is not dictatorial – the DJ makes his choices based on feedback from the audience. Big Red explains, “I feed off of the crowd. I can sense the crowd’s energy, I can tell what they want.” This aiming to please inflects the visual aspects of his performance as well.

“My goal when I’m out there is to get the crowd hype as possible, do whatever you can, even if it’s MCing and DJing, or coming from behind the decks and then going back, it’s supposed to be a show to me” (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

Ideology

Ghettotech authenticity – or “ghetto authenticity” – articulates a set of values, a social world constructed through the genre of music. This process is ideological – it naturalizes a set of contingent values, beliefs, and power dynamics. To the extent that ghettotech “argues” for an embodied sound (as opposed to techno’s “disembodied” one), it comes as no surprise that embodied identities – gender, class, and race – are at the forefront of ghettotech’s ideological positions.

In sexually explicit music such as ghettotech, gender dynamics are worked and reworked in a number of ways. First, and perhaps foremost, ghettotech producers and DJs are almost exclusively male, as are the vast majority of dance music producers and DJs¹⁶. While female vocalists are recruited for some tracks, the bulk of ghettotech’s attitudes on gender come from a decidedly masculine perspective partially by virtue of the people producing the music. Lyrical themes are quite simple, as lyrics are secondary to the beat or groove of a track, and therefore the

¹⁶ There are of course many notable exceptions to this rule in other dance genres. However, I came across no female ghettotech DJs or producers in my research.

refrains are distilled into short bursts of sexuality, often peppered with misogynist epithets such as “bitch” and “ho.” However, unlike hip hop, ghettech rarely expounds on what it means by these terms. Where many notable hip hop tracks describe gender relations from a heterosexual, misogynist, masculinist perspective (examples include N.W.A.’s “A Bitch Is A Bitch” (1988), Too Short’s “Blowjob Betty” (1993), or the more recent posse cut “Make It Rain” (2006) featuring R. Kelly, Lil Wayne, Fat Joe and others), ghettech tracks describe very little about what it means to be a bitch or a ho. A rapidly repeated chant such as “Hoes take off your clothes / Hoes get naked” (from DJ Assault’s “Hoes Take Off Your Clothes” (1999)) offers no definition of who is or is not a ho, or what constitutes a ho. Compared to Ice Cube’s assertion that “all women got a little bitch in them” (from “A Bitch Is A Bitch” [1989]), DJ Assault’s dirty lyrics contain far less of the “fear and hostility expressed towards women” that Tricia Rose finds in sexist rap lyrics (171). The use of “bitch” and “ho” certainly derives from hip hop discourse, and therefore the attendant meanings of the words rely on how they are popularly deployed in rap music – “ho” can never be completely innocent of sexism. However, ghettech discourse does not circumscribe the boundaries of what “ho” may signify – it becomes an open subject position for listeners to occupy and disengage from.

The production of subject positions in ghettech must suit its primary contexts for consumption – that is, dance clubs. Clubs bank on their ability to provide an arena suitable for courtship among strangers. Effective music for these contexts must engage listeners on the level of sexual desire by constructing sexually open fantasy subject and object positions. This means interpellating listeners (a la Althusser, 1971) as sexually confident, desirable, and erotically charged. The repeated sample of “I’ve got a big dick” in DJ Deon’s “Suck It Deep” (1994) constructs just such a position, based on masculine phallic power. Yet the deliberately repetitive

nature of the refrains propels these verbal affirmations of power and prowess into the realm of campy self-critique. A repeated sample does not function in the same way as a lyric does. The repetition calls attention to the digital construction of the track: the “lyrics” are generated by a machine as much as a human being, a fact audible from the second repetition of “I’ve got a big dick” or “Where dem hoes at.” Technology audibly mediates these simple come-ons, both on the level of production and within the mix of the DJ, manufacturing a distance between the “speaker”¹⁷ and the listener, one not as pronounced in hip hop, which thrives on providing proximity to its narrations. This encourages an ironized reading of ghettech lyrics, in which these excessive pronouncements of masculine power end up turning on themselves by calling attention to their rampant exaggerations. Indeed, not only did all the producers I talked to emphasize the lack of seriousness in ghettech lyrics, but female fans did as well. Kia Baker, a Detroit native now attending college at Bowling Green State University, said she had “no problem” with the lyrics. “I think it’s funny” (personal interview, 23 Apr. 2007). Miss Cleo, a Belgian fan who has recorded vocals for some European ghettech productions, affirmed that ghettech lyrics should “be seen as ironic and not serious or offending” (email, 13 Apr. 2007).

Female vocalists in ghettech (almost always provided by anonymous women) are similarly exaggerated sexually – not as submissive, vulnerable feminine objects, but as potent desiring subjects. DJ Assault’s counters his own inflated masculinity in “Dick By The Pound” (1997) with female response verses. Assault begins the track bragging about his endowment: “This dick is so long / This back is so strong / And when it’s on bone / It’s damn near 12 inches long.” The female vocalist, unfazed, counters with “I hope your back is strong / ‘Cause I can go on and on,” challenging Assault to live up to his braggadocio. While this may further play into

¹⁷ The “speakers” in ghettech can be the producer himself (in the case of DJ Assault and DJ Deon), a vocalist hired by the producer (typical of DJ Nasty and DJ Godfather), or a sample from an a capella version of a song (a practice used widely in ghettech).

male fantasies of a woman who is an enthusiastic participant in sex, it also presents a confident female subject who may actually best her male counterpart in sexual prowess. These response tracks make up a small proportion of ghettech productions, but they point to a persistent engagement with female desire.

Carolyn Cooper's work on "slackness," the explicit sexual wordplay in Jamaican dancehall, is relevant to ghettech's own dealing with sexuality. Cooper designates slackness as "a metaphorical revolt against law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency" (141), noting that many slack lyrics "celebrate the economic and sexual independence of women, thus challenging the conservative gender ideology that is at the heart of both pornographic and fundamentalist conceptions of woman as commodity, virgin, and whore" (142-3). For Cooper, the excessive condemnation of explicit lyrics reveals a discomfort with empowered female sexuality and a reactionary backlash against the upending of phallogentric and patriarchal power.

Perhaps this is why ghettech resonates with female listeners. In every interview, ghettech producers disavowed the sexism in the music, pointing out that women respond more to the music than men do. "The funny thing is, the biggest fans are the women," says DJ Nasty. "I remember I was DJing a party last year and some girl was disappointed, she was like, 'You came all the way from Detroit, where's the nasty stuff?' I was like, 'Well, I played a couple.' She was like, 'Why you even called Nasty then? I want to hear that "choke me, cum on my face,"' and I'm like, 'Damn!'" (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). The sexual content of the music actually appeals to many women, constructing them as dirty-talking desiring subjects – a feat few other genres of music pull off.¹⁸ As DJ Spade explains, "What this music allows them

¹⁸ Hip hop also has a long tradition of songs about assertive female sexuality, as Tricia Rose points out.

to do, it allows them to release their carnal intent without repercussion. That's pretty much what this music allows. It allows you to be free" (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

This free play of desire has allowed homoeroticism to figure in ghettech to a much greater extent than in hip hop. One reason for this is that in the United States, which did not have the widespread rave scenes of Europe, dance music is often associated with gay men and women; gay dance music fans make up a substantial portion of ghettech's audience.¹⁹ DJ Nasty has delved into this experimentation with "Pussy Hole" (2004) in which a female vocalist commands a woman to strip. Aaron-Carl, an openly gay Detroitier who produces house and techno in addition to ghettech, has queered the genre even more. "Down" (1998) is an explicit meditation on oral sex, in which Carl coos, "I want to drive your body crazy / I want to make you scream like a lady / Even though we can't have babies / We can still have fun." Interestingly enough, "Down" was a huge hit in gay and straight clubs alike in Detroit. As Body Mechanic recalls, "But 'Down', every motherfucker in four or five years wanted to hear that, it didn't matter, it was banging. 'Play that [sings bass line] song'" (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). Carl also released another queer experiment with "21 Positions" in which he assumes the persona of a woman, pitch shifting his vocals to disguise his gender. The success of these records shows an affinity for sexual experimentation outside of the heteronormative within ghettech.

Nevertheless, this does not completely undermine the sexism in which ghettech lyrics traffic. Sexuality in ghettech is still narrowly circumscribed within the realm of explicit erotic display in dance clubs, a burden that falls most heavily on women. While the sexually assertive subject positions can construct liberating fantasy worlds for female audience members, allowing women to lose themselves in the dance, in doing so they assume the position of sexual objects.

¹⁹ That hip hop, with its rampant masculine posturing and homophobia, is the heterosexual clubbing music of choice in much of the U.S. is perhaps not a coincidence.

The absence of female ghettech producers and DJs also calls into question how well male producers represent female desire. The explicit nature of ghettech has allowed some experimentation with sexuality, but it remains to be seen how far these experiments will go.

Perhaps most troubling is the racial dimension of ghettech's treatment of gender: all this explicit sexual content is – perhaps *must be* – voiced primarily by African Americans. Black bodies have long borne the weight of Western sexual desire and fantasy. As cultural historian Sander Gilman observes, “The black, both male and female, becomes by the eighteenth century an icon for deviant sexuality” (81). Explicit sexual content certainly has an audience, as 2 Live Crew's career has shown; what is troubling is that such “deviant” sexuality is transmitted to the masses through black cultural forms – hip hop, Miami bass, and ghettech. The intertwined currents of racism and sexism in American popular culture run deep, and ghettech producers are by no means responsible for creating them. However, their engagement with these discourses demonstrates the pervasiveness of the ideology of black hypersexuality while reproducing it.

“Deviance,” of course, is in the eye of the beholder; as Gilman notes, iconoclast Denis Diderot praised the supposed hypersexuality of blacks while others at the time condemned it (99). For post-Enlightenment Europeans, blacks represented the physical realm of the primitive; whites the mental realm befitting an “advanced” civilization. This mind/body dichotomy held that, in the words of Simon Frith, “feelings were now taken [...] to be best expressed spiritually and mentally, in silent contemplation of great art or great music. Bodily responses became, by definition, mindless” (*Performing Rites*, 125). Nevertheless, the supposed access to bodily passion – to sex, to rhythmic music, to dancing – that “primitive” and “childlike” blacks possessed held intense fascination for whites, who required black bodies as signifiers of what

their supposedly advanced civilization had left behind, yet still desired. In a white-controlled culture industry, this meant that for blacks to achieve visible success, they had to conform to white stereotypes of blackness – “that they embody sensuality, spontaneity, and gritty soulfulness” (Echols, quoted in Frith, 131). Techno’s black originators distanced itself from these traits (perhaps aware of the racial baggage they carried), and thus, techno is not “heard” as black music (as Frith points out, “cultural ideology produces the way of hearing the music” [*Performing Rites*, 127]) – in the words of Jeff Mills, it “has absolutely nothing to do with color” (Reynolds, 233). But for audiences who want to hear blackness in their music, or who desire access to the sensuality and the bodily experience that Western ideology associates with blackness, techno must put on a deliberate black face. It must get ghetto.

“Ghetto” is a colloquialism that conflates several meanings together. Originally, *ghetto* referred to Jewish enclaves in European cities which kept Jews segregated from the rest of the city’s population. Often these areas were poor and crowded, particularly in their incarnation in Eastern Europe during Nazi occupation. As a noun, the term still denotes a low-income closed-off area inhabited by an undesirable ethnic minority. In its primary contemporary use as an adjective, it denotes cheapness or shoddiness – essentially, it connotes the perceived shortcomings of the “lower class.” It also has indelible associations with inner-city African-Americans, longtime heralds of poverty in a culture that repeatedly collapses class into race (cf. Jhally and Lewis, 81-83), an association more potent due to black popular culture’s own centering of the ghetto in black life (examples include Curtis Mayfield’s “Little Child Runnin’ Wild” [1972] and Rick James’ “Ghetto Life” [1981]). In a reversal typical of oppressed groups’ appropriation of language used to denigrate them, “ghetto” can be used with an ironic pride.²⁰ Ghettotech as a genre is just this sort of celebration. Tracks, whether produced on bootleg

²⁰ Body Mechanic described himself to me as “a ghetto-ass nigga [who] listen[s] to techno.”

software or expensive custom-built studios, strive for a stripped-down, simplified structure – they sound cheap to produce, and especially in the early days, they *were* cheap to produce. Black voices, hip hop samples, heavy bass, and explicit sexuality all deliberately signify black working-class identities, the very identities that are supposed to have a closer relationship to the unbridled passion that is the music’s chief draw. The ghetto aesthetic recovers not only racial identity, but also a class status that techno’s originators found uncomfortable.

In ghettotech, class is tied not only to racial signifiers, but to gender antagonisms. Paul Gilroy, in recalling Stuart Hall’s suggestion that race is the modality in which class is lived, pushes the formation even further: “gender is the modality in which race is lived” (85). For Gilroy, gender becomes the terrain on which black cultures make sense of racial and class oppression. Ghettotech’s own dealings with class support this. DJ Assault’s “Check Stub” (1998) is a snapshot of gender antagonism based in class oppression. A female voice coaxes, “Let me see your check stub”; the male response: “Get your own check stub.” The male protagonist wishes to keep his finances secret from his partner, either out of selfishness or embarrassment. More explicit is DJ Nasty’s “Child Support” (2006) which has a similar structure. A woman implores, “Nigga, I need some child support / ‘Cause I’m kinda broke”; the man responds with “Bitch, go get your ass a job / And leave my ass alone.” Both of these songs articulate anxieties based in class through gender. While this may indeed reify the collapse of gender, race, and class into a kind of ghetto masculinity, in Gilroy’s conception, it is an integral part of the African diaspora’s cultural resistance.

This chapter has demonstrated how ghettotech’s authenticity is constructed through oppositions and affinities with its parent genres of techno and hip hop. Ghettotech has a somewhat unique mode of performance authenticity, but its most important values stem from a

spatial authenticity symbolized by “the club” and “the ghetto.” The latter value as articulated in ghettotech wraps together several ideological threads crucial to understanding the meaning and the pleasure found in the music. The following chapter will continue this examination into meaning and value with regard to the macro-level factors of political economy: how the structures of the nightlife economy and dance music market affect creative output and authenticities, and how ghettotech producers negotiate this terrain.

CHAPTER 4 – PRODUCTION AND ECONOMICS

While particular values and ideological positions certainly play a major role in the construction of any music genre, economic factors exert a tremendous effect on the nature of musical output, particularly as multinational corporations continue to centralize and rationalize the music industry. There is no shortage of texts decrying the damaging effects the profit motive has on musical creativity, particularly the pernicious strategies of the major labels. Reebee Garofalo's *Rockin' Out* (1997) is just one example, a history of American popular music as continual cooptation of independent and regional sounds by large companies. However, this critique neglects an important fact of music making that Simon Frith points out, "Rock fans and rock performers alike want their music to be powerful, to work as music *and* commodity" (*Sound Effects*, 91, italics in original). While the producers I interviewed had different beliefs and approaches to marketing their music, all shared the desire to release music that fans would enjoy, and therefore want to purchase. Making music is an expensive and time-consuming pastime; ghettech producers actively seek returns on these investments by devoted a substantial portion of their efforts to marketing, distributing and promoting their music.

This chapter discusses the economics of ghettech productions, from the creation of tracks to their promotion and distribution worldwide. These processes occur within wider economic contexts, most prominently within the established media infrastructure of the city of Detroit as well as the globalized dance music market. Market pressures shape how ghettech is made, and especially how it is marketed and distributed to an increasingly dispersed fan base, and therefore have an indelible effect on the values articulated in the music.

The Detroit Infrastructure

The city of Detroit has long been a poster child for postindustrial economic decline. As jobs in the manufacturing sector dried up, the city experienced an exodus of middle-class workers (often referred to as “white flight” in another conflation of race and class) and an accompanying collapse of the tax base. While this had drastic effects on city services as the Detroit’s coffers dwindled, it also negatively impacted local businesses, which had to cope with ever dwindling numbers of customers, a struggle that continues today as Detroit’s population continues to shrink. Furthermore, largely abandoned downtowns in Detroit and its satellite cities were ripe for “redevelopment” conforming to corporate interests, referred to by critics as “gentrification.” Much of this redevelopment focuses on transforming city centers into designated zones of nightlife entertainment. Crucial to the local music scene, many segments of the infrastructure vital to both Detroit techno and ghettotech have evaporated or altered substantially under multinational control.²¹ I will elaborate on some of these issues before examining how ghettotech producers have adapted to them.

Vibrant local radio played a key role in Detroit’s music scene, as illustrated in Chapter Two. Currently, the vast majority of Detroit’s radio stations are under corporate control, their playlists established in centralized locations not even located in the metro area. Broadcasting cartels now own large portions of Detroit’s radio dial devoted to “urban” formats (radio business jargon for stations courting a black demographic): Clear Channel owns WJLB, which plays contemporary hip hop and R&B; WMXD, a “classic soul” station for an older black demographic; WKQI, which plays Top 40, among others. Citadel Broadcasting controls

²¹ These issues are not necessarily Detroit-specific. Similar (although arguably less drastic) changes are occurring as other cities built on industrial sectors experience decline as manufacturing jobs move overseas.

Contemporary Hits station WDVD; Radio One owns the oldies R&B station WDMK as well as Detroit's biggest hip hop station, WHTD. These stations fill the bulk of their broadcast hours with syndicated shows or computerized playlists constructed at regional offices. While Detroit has a large pool of talented DJs (many with radio experience), local mix shows are limited to late nights on weekends. I was fortunate enough to catch a short set of ghettech (along with some Baltimore club²²) sandwiched between chart hip hop on WHTD when I was in Detroit doing fieldwork. The bemusement of my host, Body Mechanic, indicated that this was atypical of the Detroit dial on a Friday evening – indeed, the host, DJ Jinx, was filling in for the regular jock. WGPR, former home of the Electrifying Mojo and mix shows by techno's founding fathers (as well as the first black-owned FM radio station in the country), remains independent, but devotes most of its time to smooth jazz with some dance music on "Old School Saturdays." WGPR also used to own the local television station that aired *The New Dance Show*, which it sold to CBS in 1994.

This is a far cry from ghettech's heyday in Detroit, from 1996 to 1998, when according to DJ Nasty, "you could listen to three, four different radio stations and it was on." Another Detroit radio tradition largely replaced by standardized formatting was live broadcasts from local clubs where radio DJs spun on the weekends. DJ Nasty recalls,

So you had four hours from 10 o'clock to 1 o'clock they're at the club, and they're playing stuff people want to dance to. They're not playing, they might play one or two songs from the radio, but people are like, "We listen to the radio, we heard this shit, we want something different." But as politics grew more and more, they started, "Ok you can't play this stuff. You have to play what we tell you" (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007).

²² "Baltimore club" is the current favored term for Charm City's own local hybrid of dance music and hip hop.

As this anecdote shows, Detroit's music infrastructure was highly integrated, as radio DJs took their skills (and records) to the city's nightlife spots. To a large extent, this integration remains, albeit subject to tighter management as corporate interests now control the most popular club destinations.

Strip clubs (or as residents refer to them, "titty bars") exercised a pronounced influence on Detroit music. "The titty bar DJs is pretty much what ghettotech is," affirmed DJ Spade (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). Body Mechanic chimed in, "That was the inspiration for it" (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). As traditional jobs evaporated, the sex industry (both illicit and legal) became an important supplement to the local economy, as well as a natural spot to promote sexually explicit dance music. Strip club DJs are important gatekeepers in local music scenes where such venues are popular. DJ Assault credited strip club DJs, as well as other underground jocks, for getting his records on to the radio. "Most radio DJs told me in the beginning they weren't gonna play my records. But in the end they ended up having to play the records because the streets: [what] they played in all the clubs, cabarets, strip clubs [were] my records" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). However, strip clubs too have been subject to increased corporate stewardship. As Chatterton and Hollands point out, "[L]inked to the gentrification of nightlife is the rise of corporately owned table- or lap-dancing clubs" (157). Detroit is home to several corporate strip club chains located in prominent downtown sites. In these larger, more tightly regulated venues, management decisions, including music choices, increasingly come from above, and are increasingly influenced by major label promotional decisions. Major label hip hop is increasingly promoted and market-tested through strip clubs (see Mitchell, 2006), putting further pressure on local independent producers.

This environment feeds into the city's club culture. As Chatterton and Hollands point out, urban nightlife has become increasingly subject to rationalized and centralized production techniques, particularly branding. According to their study, nightlife has become "a series of packaged consumer experiences based around emotive feelings, such as success, glamour, sex, risk, youth, and social status" (42). The clubs at the center of nightlife strive to become recognizable brands associated with these desirable experiences, where the music becomes secondary: "as the manager [of Pacha, a successful nightclub chain] explained, the venue isn't driven by the DJs or the music, but by the Pacha brand" (39). In these contexts, music is essential, but only in a secondary role, as another means of creating a particular atmosphere. In the Detroit area, this even affects top ghettech DJs. On February 7, 2007, I attended DJ Godfather's residency at Sevin Nightclub in Pontiac, a satellite city of Detroit. Much of Pontiac is a decaying industrial core, but a stretch of several blocks boasts shiny new nightlife outlets: bars, clubs, restaurants, and combinations thereof. Sevin's design was quite elaborate, replete with private booths draped in gauzy fabric, scantily clad servers, and flat-screen TVs. The DJ booth was perched on the second-floor; go-go dancers in lingerie writhed on a tier above the dancefloor. While DJ Godfather has made his name as a ghettech DJ, and accrues gigs around the world based on this style, his set at Sevin was exclusively popular hip hop. Unfamiliar music may have constituted an unwanted distraction from the Sevin experience, an undesirable strangeness added to an otherwise easily read packaged experience based on the consumption of alcohol and sensual spectacle.

The hegemony of mainstream major label music puts additional pressure on ghettech producers, many of whom DJ as a partial source of income. "People say, 'Do you want to DJ here,' and I say, 'OK, what do you want me to DJ?' and they say Top 40, hip hop, this and that,

I'm like I can't, I don't have the records," DJ Nasty explains (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). "I don't really like DJing in Detroit to be honest, because you can't play what you want to play," says Body Mechanic. "If I gotta play Young Jeezy [or] 'Make It Rain' 50 times – unless you want to walk it out for a minute," he quips, referring to "Walk It Out" (2006) the popular song by Atlanta's DJ Unk that bears more than a passing resemblance to ghettotech (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

Producing and Selling Ghettotech

While the environment in Detroit is not an ideal one for ghettotech, producers have adjusted and adapted in many ways, finding their own methods of producing and promoting their music, and building their careers in the face of increased obstacles. Producers form their own networks, based on labels, groups of DJs, and sundry other contacts in efforts to penetrate increasingly corporatized media environments. They produce on small scales, taking charge of much of the work involved in releasing their music. They utilize technology to spread their music beyond local confines. These methods are not without their own difficulties and contradictions, as I will establish below.

A persistent feature of ghettotech producers, characteristic of most dance music production, is the establishment of independent labels. Every producer I talked to had their own independent label geared primarily towards releasing their own music²³. Because major labels, and even most independents, have no interest in releasing ghettotech, producers must take business matters into their own hands, taking financial responsibility for recording and

²³ DJ Nasty runs the Motor City Electro Company; Body Mechanic and DJ Spade are part of H3O; DJ Assault releases under his Jefferson Avenue label; Big Red owns Big Red Entertainment.

distributing their music. The first ghettotech labels were formed around groups of friends working together to release records. Collaboration was the rule, with label-mates sharing gear, assisting each other in production work, and playing each other's records at gigs. This environment spreads out the burden that operating a label, even a small one, entails; it also allows producers to have control over their creative output and their career direction. However, it can also lead to tension and acrimony when friendships collide with financial matters.

DJ Nasty initially released records on Twilight 76 and Databass, the two labels started by DJ Godfather, DJ Dick, and Brian Gillespie. "We were like one big family," he recalls. However, releasing a record is a substantial financial undertaking – a label must not only produce a record, but pay to have it mastered, pressed, and distributed in shops. Often new records won't be released until a return has been made on previous releases. "At that time they were trying to get Godfather established," says DJ Nasty. "They were trying to get one artist established, and then he can work on another artist, and so on. And I was like I'm making these tracks and I'm like, 'When is it my turn, when is it my turn?'" Finally Nasty set up his own label, Motor City Electro Company, as an outlet for his own records, distributing his releases through Twilight 76's distribution company. He credits his later success to this freedom over his music career. "I got creative control on if I want black sleeve, white sleeve, what kind of naked bitch I want on there²⁴, what tracks I want on there, and that's where my success started to build up" (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007).

H3O, a confederation of DJs and producers including Body Mechanic, DJ Spade, B. Calloway, DJ Dee, and others, is working to establish itself in Detroit dance music. The group works closely with Electrofunk Records (Body Mechanic and B. Calloway have releases on the label), but have opted for the creative control of having their own label. "We're really going to

²⁴ Many of DJ Nasty's releases feature appropriated pornographic images on the labels.

focus on ghettotech, because no one wants to accept it,” Body Mechanic explains. “You got [Detroit techno label and Electrofunk distributor] Submerge Recordings but they’re not really trying to do ghettotech.” H3O is also affiliated with the Detroit Techno Militia, a group of DJs and promoters dedicated to preserving techno in Detroit. “[T]hey keep it active and in view,” Body Mechanic says. “Without [the Techno Militia], it wouldn’t get on radio,” DJ Spade concurs (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

Big Red also emphasizes the creative control of having his own label, Big Red Entertainment.

It’s real important to me. It’s not easy, that’s for sure. It’s important to me because you want the things that you do represented how you want them represented. And everybody has their different thoughts on how they want to perceive you, but only you know how you want to come off. When you’re in the studio, when you’re doing different things, only you know how you want it to come off, so it’s real important.

David Hesmondhalgh identifies similar workings in the British dance music industry.

The success of dance music in one regard seems clear: it has been the basis of a significant *decentralization* of British subcultural music production. [...] This is partly a result of the widespread availability of production technology, symbolized by the metaphor of the “bedroom studio” – relatively affordable (though not “cheap”) compact digital recording technology (236, italics in original).

Many producers do indeed work out of their homes, and their production techniques are based in scarcity. Samplers and computer software, technologies based on the reproduction of

sounds, figure prominently. DJ Nasty continues to produce with the MPC 2000 sampler he started with as a teenager. The sampler contains allows the producer to sequence sounds together, but the sounds themselves must be collected from elsewhere – typically from records or analog equipment.

I could barely scrape enough money together to get the MPC, which was like \$3000. I didn't have no job at McDonalds or nothing, so I had just started working and hustling here and there, so by the time I bought that I had no money for anything else. So what I used to do was, Godfather would have keyboards at his house. Gillespie would, he used to have keyboards, they would let me borrow their keyboards. I remember taking the Pro One, and for the month straight I would tweak sounds and sample them. So I used to gather all my sounds that way, make up kicks and just sample them. And when I had enough stuff to work with, I would produce my stuff (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007).

Big Red also identified the MPC sampler as part of his recording arsenal, but software even more so. Body Mechanic started producing in Detroit studios, but now works entirely with software; he credits DJ Spade with his conversion. DJ Nasty also uses software in some of his productions. The main attraction is the expense – software comes cheap compared to all the gear required to produce and sequence a track; furthermore, software is easily bootlegged. “As far as piracy, I'm the front man,” confessed DJ Spade (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). Whether cribbing samples from copyright-protected recordings or using pirated software, ghattotech producers regularly subvert intellectual property law. This low-budget approach has inflected ghattotech's authenticity, where the rough-hewn sound of a scratchy sample off a vinyl record becomes a point of pride, the auditory evidence of a do-it-yourself aesthetic for urban dance

music. “[My music is] ghetto because I don’t have a million dollar studio, I don’t have keyboards, I don’t have none of that. I had to work with the little that I had,” explains DJ Nasty (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007).

Recording the track may actually be the most inexpensive part of the process of releasing ghattotech. After a track is recorded, it must be mastered and then pressed to wax at the expense of the label, and therefore coming out of the producer’s pocket. Detroit’s vinyl sales were solid in the mid-90s, bolstered by both an active and diverse club scene and one of the nation’s most developed rave circuits. DJ Nasty recalls the days when ghattotech was the biggest vinyl seller in the city. “Ghetto records were selling more than LL Cool J. For vinyl. We’re selling thousands of records. We were the number one seller, then hip hop as far as vinyl records” (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). However, as major label music took over the clubs and the rave scene succumbed to increasingly vigilant law enforcement, vinyl sales took a significant hit. Compounding this was the overall downturn in the record retail industry, causing supportive local shops to close down or scale back on their ghattotech purchases.²⁵ Body Mechanic states,

If you get it on wax, you can’t charge what you need to. You got a limited market already. It’s not like you used to be able to service it. You can serve them, you can make your money two or three times over and eat off a single. You pull 10,000 singles, you’re doing pretty damn good, but you’ll average 1000; 2,000; 3000. Now that’s going down to eight or six, seven hundred (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

The expense of vinyl production coupled with the drop-off in sales has led ghattotech producers to turn to the Internet and digital downloads of mp3s. DJ Spade affirms, “Yes, digital is the

²⁵ The Detroit Metro Times ran a story in May of 2006 detailing the struggles facing independent record stores in the city, available online at <<http://www.metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=9191>>

primary business focus [because] there isn't much being done with vinyl. With things like Serrato and Final Scratch, and real DJs that actually defend digital" (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). As Sarah Thornton documents, DJs were once resistant to digital technology, which threatened the value of their record collections (63-4); currently few traces of this sentiment remain. Many DJs still use vinyl records, but turn more and more to mp3s, distributed through mass marketers like iTunes and dance-specific outlets like Beatport.com. Digital DJing packages, such as Serrato, allow a DJ to play mp3s like vinyl, complete with scratching and turntable tricks, and have found credence with previously skeptical DJs.

A growth in online promotion accompanies this virtualization of sound. In addition to running websites for their record labels, most ghettech producers and DJs have personal MySpace.com accounts in order to network with fans and other artists. During the course of my research I "friended" many ghettech artists, and even used MySpace as a means to contact artists for interviews. I receive daily bulletins announcing shows, links to mp3 download sites, and announcements for new releases. As with running personal labels, ghettech producers must take on the duties of constructing their own websites and MySpace profiles. MySpace offers access to millions of fans at no cost to the artist – promotional costs are measured only by the time invested in keeping the profile up to date. "The economy is so crazy I don't try to put so much [money] into promotion," DJ Assault says. "MySpace has helped" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). DJ Spade enthusiastically endorsed Internet promotion, clearly proud of the time he spent designing the H3O website. "What makes H3O visible enough for you to find us? There's the fact that we're on the Internet and been there for [eight years]" (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). Big Red was a bit cooler about the role of the Internet in promoting his music.

Recently the Internet's gotten real big, but that's like recently. The main way [of promoting music] is DJing. The main way is DJing sets. Local record stores are real key because they get the word out. Some radio, but not really radio.

Definitely the strip clubs, definitely the clubs, and even the radio jocks that are big club DJs. [...] The core way to promote it is when you go to the clubs you can see people's reaction (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

Big Red's ambivalence illustrates the tension currently facing ghettech. As localized outlets for promotion – radio, clubs, record stores – become more difficult to access, artists increasingly turn to the virtual world of the Internet, where geography counts for much less. This has allowed certain DJs to reach receptive fans dispersed throughout the world, bypassing the indifferent attitudes of the Detroit scene. These new opportunities also affect the direction of the genre as a very different demographic has become the prime fan base and market for the music, to be covered more extensively in Chapter Five.

Licensing music has become an increasingly important outlet for ghettech producers trying to make money off their work. As media soundtracks increasingly rely on popular artists, some ghettech producers have made licensing deals with large entertainment companies, providing the soundtrack to a commercials, television segments, and video games. DJ Assault has licensed “Shake It, Work It” to an iPod commercial and “Ass-N-Titties” (1996) to a Chapelle show sketch (www.djassault.net). DJ Godfather and DJ Nasty, along with other Twilight 76/Databass artists, appear on the soundtracks to the 2K series of sports video games (2ksports.com). Disco D took this marketing concept one step further, composing themes for the VH1 Hip Hop Honors special, as well as ads for Sprite, Best Buy, Xbox, and even ring tones (discod.com). With the increased importance of licensing tracks to other outlet come certain

aesthetic pressures, notably related to ghettech's flaunting of copyright law. DJ Assault, whose early productions snatched recognizable riffs from 2Pac's "California Love" (1995) and 2 Live Crew's "Hoochie Mama" (1995) among others, now avoids sampling because of his high profile. "I know, with owning a publishing company, you can't get paid off of sampling stuff. I really don't sample anymore [because] it don't benefit me [because] I'm already trying to license something for like a film or TV or commercial or something" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). DJ Godfather's newer productions also eschew recognizable samples, no doubt for similar reasons. Much ghettech still burbles with pitch-shifted vocals snatched from popular rap records (for example, DJ Surgeon's 2006 release on Databass, "Boss Up," samples Slim Thug's 2005 hip hop hit "Like A Boss"); however, this circumscribes the licensing opportunities for a track, potentially harming its economic return to the producer.

Because of the intensive business side of ghettech production, many producers make efforts to learn business and marketing techniques (formally through postsecondary education, and informally through work in retail and promotions). DJ Assault and Big Red studied business at Clark University in Atlanta; Disco D received a business degree from the University of Michigan while working on his music career. Twilight 76/Databass artists take part in the Red Bull Music Academy (sponsored by the energy drink brand) designed to provide business advice to aspiring artists. With the sheer volume of responsibilities required for a ghettech artist to become successful, it's no wonder that business acumen has become an important part of ghettech authenticity. DJ Assault consistently evaluated his creative decisions from a business standpoint; evaluating his success compared to others in the Detroit scene, he stated, "I'm a business man, that's why I'm more successful at the end of the day" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). Even DJ Nasty, who stated, "I've lost thousands of dollars [releasing records], but I

do it because I love doing it” (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007), boasts on his MySpace site that he’s sold over 50,000 records. Part of the identity of a ghettech producer includes the business side.

The Politics of Business

Angela McRobbie detects this phenomenon in a wide array of creative professionals. “[W]here in the past the business side of things was an often disregarded aspect of creative identities best looked after by the accountant, now it is perceived as integral and actively incorporated into the artistic identity” (520). According to her analysis, this development is a response to the neo-liberal “reforms” of the 1980s that “result[ed] in new social groupings replacing traditional families, communities, and class formations”: those based on supposed individual career choices (518). McRobbie’s concerns are twofold: first, that by encouraging modes of labor that emphasize the individual, capital is “offloading its responsibility for a workforce” (ibid); second, that because individual creative labor is enjoyed, workers “self-exploit” themselves, and have less time to pursue work that won’t turn a profit (such as political projects). McRobbie’s concerns are certainly warranted: ghettech producers necessarily work hard, handling creative duties along with distribution, licensing, and promotion. DJ Godfather states, “This is 18 hours a day of work. I’m in the office until five, I go home, go to the studio, and relax two hours after that, go to sleep do the same thing over again. It’s hard but a label is not going to get done correctly unless you do it yourself.” However, I would like to suggest that ghettech DJs not only spend time on projects that do not have tangible financial rewards, but

that they reappropriate music derived from concentrated capital accumulation (i.e. mainstream pop) in ways that save labor.

Producers often experiment with styles outside of ghettech, never intending to release their creations. “I do a lot of hip hop stuff actually,” says DJ Assault. “It don’t necessarily come out, but I do it to do it, just [because] I can, really” (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007). DJ Nasty produces a wide variety of music. “I think I produce everything except heavy metal. I produce house, hip hop, rap” (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). Because digitally produced music shares production techniques, equipment, and sets of sounds, hopping from style to style is relatively simple: just a matter of sequencing and layering new patterns of rhythms and sounds.²⁶ Digital music production is well characterized by DJ Nasty’s metaphor of a “mad experiment.” Sequences of sounds are layered, edited, and reprogrammed with ease, manipulated until the producer finds a winning combination, or abandons the project for something else. Producers’ hard drives are littered with these open-ended experiments, half-finished sequences, sketches of tracks to come or tracks that will remain tucked away indefinitely inside a file folder. Digital production means tracks are never truly finished – they can be picked up again and toyed with indefinitely.

This aesthetic mode inflects ghettech producers’ attitudes towards recordings. If “[r]ecording stabilized the musical work,” according to Jacques Attali (141), DJing and digital sampling unmoor the work entirely. As ghetto-style DJs, these artists routinely altered recordings by speeding them up, scratching them, and mashing them up with other tracks. As producers, they can manipulate tracks with far greater freedom by remixing songs from the ground up. Occasionally a producer will be commissioned to do an official remix; more often,

²⁶ Releasing the music profitably is another matter; the crowded market for hip hop beats makes crossing over difficult without industry connections. Disco D successfully made the jump, producing beats for 50 Cent’s “Ski Mask Way” (2005) and Nina Sky’s “Turnin’ Me On” (2004).

producers toy with the sounds monopolizing the airwaves, retooling chart pop for their own ends. This bootleg remixing is more than just an idle pastime, although it is that. It is a means of conscripting pop performers into the ghettotech production process, where the high profile and marketing budgets of the stars can benefit those laboring in the underground. Big Red, who distributes remixes popular hip hop artists such as Ciara and Yung Joc through his MySpace site, stressed the importance of these remixes.

The remixes to me are like practice before the show, or whatever. Because the thing is with your style, it gets people used to your style. Because if you come out with a record, if you come out with a record every few months or whatever, you're gonna have a gap in there – everybody has a short attention span now. If they haven't heard you do anything in the past month, they'll be like, "Who are you? What is that?" You start all over. But with the remixes you can have a new remix every week. You just keep it fresh and you keep people's ears tuned to your style, what you have to bring forth. So I think they're real important. They're fun too. If you like the song, and you're a producer... If you like a song, but you want to hear it a different way, you do a remix, you know? It's like keeping your chops up as they call it in playing instruments, keeping your chops up (laughs) (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

Because of the time and expense involved in releasing underground records, quickly assembled remixes can keep a producer's name in the public eye. They also serve as a stepping stone for the uninitiated into a producer's signature style, a crucial tool for musicians who promote their music through DJing. A familiar hook can keep a conservative dancefloor moving, or provide a recognizable framework for audiences unaccustomed to dance music. This is not just the

appropriation of sound, but the appropriation of an entire promotional scheme – using the voice of Kelis or Justin Timberlake (as DJ Nasty does in his remixes) instantly catapults an underground track into the realm of the familiar. The echoes of Timberlake’s radio repetition rub off on to Nasty’s gritty breakbeat workout. And it works: DJ Nasty’s remixes sell better than his originals on iTunes; he explains that he’s aiming at the consumer market, not DJs (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). McRobbie’s critique misses that politically charged creative projects, such as openly ignoring copyright to make bootleg remixes, are often borne out of economic necessity. She assumes that progressive or radical work must come from the artist’s ever-dwindling free time, rather than out of the pressures neo-liberal economics places on producers.

While all of these strategies keep ghettotech producers active in a less-than-favorable local economy, the major shift in the ghettotech industry (as with dance music in general) is to pursue more receptive markets outside of Detroit, particularly Europe. For a music that so pervasively signifies a black, urban, working-class masculinity to find audiences in the party scenes of France, Belgium, and the U.K. seems at first counterintuitive; however, in the next chapter I will examine how overseas audiences address “ghetto authenticity” and how dance music is marketed to these audiences. Finally, I will discuss how appropriation – both within the U.S. and outside of it – affects how ghettotech articulates its values.

CHAPTER 5 – AUDIENCES AND APPROPRIATION

Ghettotech spread out of Detroit club culture into the wider flows of the global dance market. In doing so, many things about the music changed. While the core set of sounds, the mixing style, and the central record labels remained constant in ghettotech's globalization,²⁷ the move to other markets changed the music's audience, and therefore the genre's meaning. In this chapter, I will evaluate how the move from a regionally specific sound with a primary audience in urban Detroit to a branded and marketed subgenre of techno with a worldwide audience constitutes appropriation. In their introduction to a compendium of articles on cultural appropriation, Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao state, "The need to describe a community of insiders and outsiders is implicit in most of what has been said about the practice of appropriation. Once we speak of a relational activity, a boundary line must be drawn, and problems of definition emerge" (3). This is certainly the case in ghettotech. Boundaries between insiders and outsiders are drawn in different ways by different groups. While I will address how individuals fit "inside" or "outside" ghettotech (acknowledging that these determinations can never be definitive), I am also interested in analyzing how and why these boundaries are deployed among different segments of the music's audience. In this negotiation, discourses of race and geography are sometimes openly addressed, sometimes articulated through debates on recordings, sounds, and styles. In redefining who is inside and who is outside, ghettotech's authenticity is continually revised.

What's In a Name?

²⁷ By globalization, I refer to the process by which ghettotech moves from a geographically grounded musical culture to a genre of music available for consumption anywhere within the reach of global communication and distribution channels.

Arguably the first important appropriative act in the ghettotech story was its naming by Disco D. Disco D's role in ghettotech is controversial; while he has since been accepted as one of the most important artists in the genre, someone who has paid his dues and was instrumental in expanding the audience for ghettotech outside of Detroit, he is also the quintessential outsider in the sound. A precocious young DJ from Ann Arbor, from a middle-class Jewish family, he initially raised eyebrows in the insular Detroit music scene, which he alludes to in an interview with Joshua Ostroff in Toronto paper *Eye*: "I think maybe people that were skeptical about it [DJing ghettotech], once I started putting out records and they saw me play, they kinda shut their mouth" (2002). The "kinda" is instructive: criticisms are still lodged, often in the circuitous language of those not wishing to tread on toes. Gary Chandler, whom Disco D credits as "his biggest influence" (Ostroff, 2002), had this to say about the controversial naming of the genre:

People have given it the label of ghetto tech, but we have always called it tech on the streets. Ghetto tech I don't know who made the term up, because a lot of the music that is being played is not ghetto music. You have to live in the ghetto to understand ghetto music anyway. You know whoever gave the term ghetto tech to the music never grew up in parts of Detroit that you would call the ghetto. (Ewy)

Chandler makes a complex argument grounded in ghetto authenticity. "The streets" and "the ghetto," terms referring to inner-city blacks, determine the truth of the music. Those that use "ghetto" as a modifier for the sound are obviously not part of the intended audience for the music. This anecdote calls attention to the highly problematic usage of the term "ghetto": it is frequently used by outsiders (white, middle class, suburban) as a descriptor, often ironically positive, for working class black culture. The implication is that in this transference, original

meanings – those generated by black folks for other black folks – are lost or changed as outsiders make sense of the phenomenon and move it to new contexts of consumption. This dynamic seems to follow the old truism of American music, in which, in the words of Perry A. Hall, “Black musical innovations eventually cross over into mainstream culture, and African-American cultural traits manage to penetrate social boundaries” (37). However, a few questions must be answered first. Is ghettotech black? In other words, does ghettotech represent an authentic black cultural sensibility past its obvious deployment of “ghetto” signifiers? And if it is, do “outsiders” – whether they are outside the black inner city, outside Detroit, or outside the U.S. – steal this culture from black artists?

Is Ghettotech Black Music?

The question of whether ghettotech is black music is more complex than it initially seems. Even black artists working with musical forms widely deemed “black” can still be accused of peddling inauthentic blackness, as Duke Ellington, Jimi Hendrix, and countless rappers have discovered. The tension often comes from the relationship of aesthetic expression to commerce – do commercial concerns, in particular, opening up a sound to a wider (and whiter) audience, diminish a performer’s authentic expression of blackness? However, this distinction itself becomes difficult to uphold in a postmodern context in which commodification has swept over practically all forms of cultural expression. Greg Tate, building on the ideas of Nelson George, dubs black cultural expression in the postmodern era as “post-Soul.” Soul culture was “built around the verities of working-class African-American life” under segregation (6). Post-Soul’s “signature was not its smooth Blackness but its self-conscious hybridity of

Black and white cultural signifiers” (ibid). This seems a perfect term to apply to the Detroit scene that would give birth to ghettech, in which 2 Live Crew and Afrika Bambaataa rubbed up against Kraftwerk and Gary Numan – exaggerated blackness meets exaggerated whiteness at 45 revolutions per minute. Indeed, Detroit techno was born from black youth attempting to make white synthpop – the traditional narrative of appropriation turned on its head.

Yet crucial to arguments of appropriation are who the music is made *for*. Perry Hall notes “the tendency of [cultural] forms to become dissociated, in the discourse and perceptual framework of the white-dominated mainstream, from the African-American experiential context that created them” in appropriation – while the cultural forms themselves translate (or at least transfer), the contexts that birthed them become unrecognizable in those forms. Detroit club culture becomes “ghetto”; the complicated musical interplay, drawing on generations of Detroit musical production and consumption becomes “not giving a fuck” and partying. Inextricably tied to this process is commodification – music irrevocably tied to a particular social context becomes objectified by recording it, turned into an artifact able to be used in any context by any group, particularly groups with money to spend on records. Plenty of hip hop scholarship has focused on this issue, and whether the kinds of rap heard on the airwaves or purchased in retail chains can be considered authentic in any way. David Samuels argues that from its birth as a commodity form, hip hop was marketed towards whites through a “conscious manipulation of racial stereotypes” (150). Samuels notes the irony that with hip hop “white demand indeed began to determine the direction of the genre, but what it wanted was music more defiantly black” (149), and concludes that “what whites wanted was not music, but black music, which as a result stopped being either” (153). For Samuels, catering to outsiders has destroyed the racial authenticity of the music: its “horizons of significance,” in the words of Charles Taylor, no

longer adequately include the black underclass from which it came. However, implicit in Samuels's argument is an idealized universal black underclass subject who only makes authentic black music for other underclass black subjects, somehow transferring this black essence through the music. This ignores not only the fragmented subjectivity inherent in identity, but also the schisms and differences within the black community, and the necessarily impure origins of musical expression. Here Samuels comes across as what Paul Gilroy has neatly summarized as an "ontological essentialist" (31). For Gilroy, ontological essentialists pursue a "highly prized but doggedly evasive essence of black artistic and political sensibility" (ibid): they believe there is a core authentic mode of being for black people. In Gilroy's estimation, such a position "registers incomprehending disappointment with the actual cultural choices and patterns of the mass of black people," prioritizing the views of a small cadre of intellectuals (32). Instead, Gilroy emphasizes the hybridity of cultural forms, calling attention to how music functions not as an "unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time," but as "a response to the destabilizing flux of the post-contemporary world" (101). Changes in audience or context do not shatter authentic black culture; black culture has always been formed in the crucible of white desire, white capital, and white surveillance.

For Kembreu McLeod, however, the posturing Samuels finds so detestable is less about selling records to whites and more about preserving racial authenticity in the face of commercialization and appropriation. "Authenticity claims and their contestations are a part of a highly charged dialogic conversation that struggles to renegotiate what it means to be a participant in a culture threatened with assimilation" (147). Authenticity does not derive from the essence of the artists or audience, but is a method for preserving aspects of the hip hop subculture – being an individual, staying underground, maintaining a "hard" masculine

demeanor, staying close to the roots of the “old school.” For McLeod, emphasizing facets of “blackness” and “the street” are ways that rap polices its boundaries, keeping its main focus on the black inner city, keeping the influence of white suburban audiences and major labels at bay. Ghattotech artists do employ authenticity in this way, but with less recourse to race, no doubt because in the U.S. electronic dance music does not signify blackness to the same extent that hip hop does. Instead, a residual racial authenticity is mixed with a more general “street” (particularly working-class Detroit) authenticity. DJ Nasty emphasized the influence of black culture in his life as crucial to his creative approach. “What influenced me making this music was growing up in Detroit, growing up working with nothing but black people, watching the *New Dance Show*, those were my influences. Someone in Germany is not going to understand” (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007). Here he makes a distinction between based on a confluence of racial and geographic authenticities. Europeans, far removed from both black culture and Detroit, do not understand the music enough to be able to produce it well. White artists such as DJ Nasty and DJ Godfather stake a claim to the music based on their Detroit roots and their many years in the scene – they are “old school.”

However, white ghattotech artists’ authenticity is contested by black DJs, although perhaps less strenuously than in criticisms of white hip hop artists. There were tensions between black artists and white artists in the early days, not unlike the tensions when the first white techno artists emerged in the Detroit scene.²⁸ The extent of the conflict remained mostly obscure to me – while friction between artists is common in the competitive Detroit scene, artists are

²⁸ As Dan Sicko relates, Plus 8 Records founders Richie Hawtin and John Acquaviva, two European transplants living in Windsor and DJing in Detroit, raised ire among Detroit’s black techno community when they released a record bearing the stamp “The Future Sound of Detroit”: “many Detroit artists felt that Plus 8 was cashing in on a reputation it hadn’t yet earned” (126).

understandably reluctant to share details with outsiders. DJ Assault did shed some light on the schism between white and black artists, with heavy recourse to racial authenticity.

[T]he other DJs that try to do it, you know they're white, but it kind of dug a hole for them because it made themselves unbelievable. The music is so urban, it made them look fake. And that was the whole trap. People took their side versus my side with different booking agencies and tried to promote them over me, but it's like I say. Anything that's done in the dark, it comes to the light, and you see stuff for what it is, and they just looked fake after a while. It's like, ok, it's no way he could have created this stuff. He's playing all this music but he couldn't be the originator of this, how? And that's really all I want people to see, is the reality of the thing (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007).

The tension between DJ Godfather's Twilight 76/Databass labels and DJ Assault and Mr. De's Electrofunk label meant that the two biggest camps for ghettotech in Detroit refused to collaborate. While some cross-licensing has occurred (Databass has reissued older DJ Assault tracks in two EPs), each sticks largely to the releases on their own respective labels when performing or releasing mixtapes. DJ Assault made it clear that the race of his audience does not matter. "I really don't look at who likes the music. I look at more who's doing the music" (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007).

Body Mechanic and DJ Spade had a nuanced take on racial authenticity in ghettotech. "The direction that makes it different to me," Body Mechanic explains, referring to white producers' output. "Even if it's ghetto, [pounding drum pattern], the whites took it and marketed it, when we just do it" (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). An important distinction is the performance of blackness on a record – black producers do not make a conscious decision to

perform blackness – they “just do it,” from a quasi-essentialist framework. One way white producers add authentic black performance to their records is by hiring black vocalists. “[Y]ou got Flex, he does a lot of the tracks, Coon Daddy does a lot of the tracks, Omega. Now all of these guys are just vocalists. They might have been a rapper, then [DJ Godfather will] let them on these ghetto tracks. I haven’t heard Godfather on a record” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). DJ Spade followed up on this point. “If it makes it quote unquote authentic, if it makes it sound a little blacker—it’s one of those things that when you’re approaching it from the perspective of not being black, you have to think about stuff like that, which for us, is kind of difficult because we just happen to be black. It’s not something we have to focus on” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007). However, they don’t completely write off Twilight 76/Databass producers as inauthentic – they derive pleasure and inspiration from many of the productions, even while they have an ambivalent reaction towards the producers. DJ Spade explains,

[T]he way I look at it, I don’t find it weird. What the weird thing happened—it was what the hip hop culture did, it—It’s no longer just a black cultural thing. It’s an American thing. It knocked down every wall there was and just seeped into every nook and cranny everywhere. So if you have ghettotech in you, it doesn’t matter that there’s no melanin in your complexion. Because it’s no longer a black thing (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

What all these usages of authenticity, from both scholars and artists, skirt around is *why* authenticity becomes an issue at all. How do “outsider” audiences enter into the picture of a locally contained musical subculture? How does a music “seep into every nook and cranny” as DJ Spade puts it? The answer: when it becomes mass mediated, commodified, and distributed. Particularly important to ghettotech (as to hip hop): when it is recorded and manufactured into a

commodity form – a record. The local scene that birthed ghattotech made its music available to anyone, black or white, in the Detroit area via local television, radio, and dance clubs. White artists like DJ Godfather and DJ Nasty possess credibility from being exposed to the music this way, and releasing records from the beginning – they are “old school,” to borrow a term from hip hop’s authenticity discourse. However, issues become more complicated and contradictory once music starts traveling outside the community in the form of records, which require no particular social context to play. Music can be grafted to individual experiences far removed from the environment that produced it. Jacques Attali describes how recordings do not merely abstract music from social context, but proceed to destroy those contexts as inessential. With the advent of recording, “[m]usic became an industry and *its consumption ceased to be collective*” (88, italics in original). Obviously Attali overlooks how recordings were adapted to new collective experiences, such as nightclubs and raves, but his overall point is valid. Once ghattotech becomes a commodity itself, codified into a genre and marketed as a group of recordings and not as a particular performance style, social context fades in importance: “Reproduction, in a certain sense, is the death of the original, the triumph of the copy, and the forgetting of the represented foundation: in mass production, the mold has almost no importance or value in itself; it is no longer anything more than one of the factors in production” (89). Authenticity claims in ghattotech are ways that artists attempt to recover the “mold,” the performance context that shaped the ghattotech sound as well as the musical lives of its original producers. And even though this context lives on – ghattotech still makes it on to Detroit airwaves and into Detroit clubs – it no longer drives the genre, which is now oriented towards a dispersed consumer base. If bringing outsiders into the music is appropriation, then appropriation is a necessary result of music’s commodification.

Ghettotech Overseas/Overseas Ghettotech

Alex Seago identifies how electronic music production typifies certain trends in globalization such as decentralization and fragmentation, optimistically pointing out how such an environment provides new opportunities in the pop marketplace to marginal locales. While “Anglo-America” was once the “epicenter” of global pop (87), “global pop today is less of a coherent ‘scene’ than a plethora of atomized, non-linear, globally inter-connected “micro scenes” loosely held together by global media” (88). Seago’s position is a technologically determinist one: “digital technologies have resulted in a new decentralized geography of music making and distribution, which the majors find difficult or impossible to predict or control” (95). Yet the dispersal of regional and local sounds into globalized cultural flows does not proceed in the haphazard way Seago presents – it has a logic of its own. David Hesmondhalgh perceptively notes that dance music consumers “focus on genre and sub-genre, rather than on authorship” (238). “Dance music” or “mix music” in Detroit becomes a sub-genre once it travels into wider circuits of distribution, in which it must be classified as an exclusive type of sound, and differentiated from others.

This can lead to idiosyncratic mistranslations of the music that insiders detect. DJ Nasty found European response to the music to be very different from its hometown reception.

In Europe it’s a different culture. Over here you’ll see a guy dancing with two girls, freaking the shit out of each other, basically fucking with their clothes on, and somebody asked me, why you make your stuff so fast? I say the faster you play it, the faster they gonna shake their ass to it. [...] When you go to Europe it’s

not like that. Everybody's dancing in front of speakers and they're spaced out on drugs and techno, bam bam bam, and they don't know how to dance with—they're off beat, they're jumping around, they got no rhythm. So that's why I say culture has a lot to do with it (personal interview, 8 Feb. 2007).

In the situation Nasty describes, ghettotech has been integrated into the European dance culture, and enjoyed as such. While the European response to ghettotech is a bit jarring to DJ Nasty, other producers appreciate the comparative open-mindedness of European dance fans. Big Red affirms that in “Europe, just overseas period, they aren't into the marketing ploys the way America is. If they like the music they like the music. You can go to Europe and not really have super hits, but people will hear the music and say, ‘Wow I like that.’ Here, they're like, ‘Where did he place, how many units has he sold, where did he place on the top 100?’” (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007). DJ Spade shares this sentiment. “[T]here you have the freedom of ‘we're gonna play what we want to play and you'll like it because it's good music.’ I don't think there's a division to it” (personal interview, 18 Mar. 2007).

The decline of ghettotech in Detroit coupled with a small but growing interest overseas has led to Detroit artists collaborating with those outside the U.S., and relying on their connections to secure overseas gigs. European ghettotech scenes typically throw a party based around a handful of “name” DJs, with European DJs supporting. Some overseas artists have had their creative work integrated into Detroit's. DJ Godfather has featured releases from the Non Stop DJs in his latest mix; Dutch producer Mister Ries has released a twelve-inch on Databass records. “Jizmatron,” a ghettotech enthusiast from New Zealand, runs the main ghettotech Internet forum (<http://forum.dickride.com>) and has done design work for Detroit labels Databass, Juke Tracks, and Motor City Electro Company. Fans often organize themselves as DJ collectives

and party crews via websites²⁹. Most discovered ghattotech in the late 1990s into the early 2000s, after it had become a Detroit staple. They discovered the sound through typical music consumption channels – record stores, Internet research, and the odd show from a U.S. artist, then mastered the battle-style mix techniques characteristic of ghattotech but very different from most dance music mixing demonstrating their conversion to the sound. Overseas ghattotech releases tend to be highly imitative of American models, hewing close to the genre as the Midwest originators established it. For instance, French DJs Goon and Koyote’s 2005 *Diamond Grills* mixtape draws from staples of Detroit ghetto sets – Detroit ghattotech and electro, Miami bass, pitched up rap and R&B, and Dance Mania releases mixed rapidly with plenty of scratching – not substantially different from a DJ Assault or DJ Godfather mix (aside from a few shoutouts from French rappers). The few European ghattotech tracks I came across did not sound substantially different from stateside releases. As the genre spreads across the continent, its sound has not radically altered. While this might seem counterintuitive, it makes perfect sense based on how ghattotech as a reified commodity form traveled around the globe.

In its move to Europe, ghattotech was reduced to a set of sounds, divorced from its unique Detroit context. With digital sampling and worldwide distribution via the Internet, artists who have never been to the U.S., let alone inner city Detroit, can easily become ghattotech DJs and producers. As Walter Benjamin notes on art based on mechanical reproduction, “[I]n permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object produced,” leading to “a tremendous shattering of tradition” (51). Technology facilitates ghattotech production without the Detroit-specific tradition. For Benjamin, whose focus is elite art, this is a democratic development. For a locally based cultural

²⁹ Some notable European ghattotech websites include booty.be, ghentto-tech.be, and the sites for labels Spanking Records (spanking-records.com) and 4 Player (4-player-records.com)

form, this could be the harbinger of stagnation. Increasingly identified with a specific set of sounds, techniques, and tactics instead of with achieving particular effects on a particular audience, ghettech becomes locked into a limited set of options. However, it could pave the way for a revitalization of the genre. If both Detroit authenticity and black authenticity become increasingly moot, and overseas producers and their own contexts become increasingly important, sonic changes in ghettech may follow as the sound is incorporated into extant musical cultures. The European scene is still comparatively small and new; an imitative stage is a natural one to progress through on the way to future experimentation.

An interesting counterexample to the straightforward imitation of the Detroit sound is the so-called “UK Bass” sub-genre put forth by a group of producers, promoters, and DJs (known as WIDE Productions) in the United Kingdom. WIDE started out putting on booty-themed nights, but with nods to British club culture and dance music. DJ Cutlass Supreme’s *UK Bass* mix CD (2003), a concerted attempt to kickstart the genre, mixes in jungle anthem “The Chopper” by Ray Keith, a UK hit, with DJ Deon’s classic “Let Me Bang.” Tracks like “What I Like” and “Furious” by British producers Non Stop DJs incorporate the wobbly sub-bass lines characteristic of jungle and two-step garage³⁰ into the ghettech framework of fast, simple beats. While the viability of UK Bass as a sub-genre is by no means assured (the WIDE Productions website has not been updated in a year), it remains an ambitious attempt to indigenize the ghettech sound in a new geographically specific location.

If this adds up to appropriation, I might deem it “soft appropriation”: a new audience – geographically dispersed, Anglo-European, middle-class, white – increasingly determines the fate of the genre, particularly as localized distribution – records, record stores, radio – dries up.

³⁰ Two-step garage is a British hybrid of jungle, hip hop, and R&B, popular among black Britons after jungle’s initial wave.

But this may be the only way that ghettotech can sustain itself. “Bootytek,” a Detroit denizen and amateur DJ, increasingly looks outside of Detroit for invigorating music. “The radio plays the same tracks every weekend for the past 7 years.... As a DJ, I want to hear something else. So that is why I think I hang out on the dickride forum, to hear others['] new ideas, instead of the same thing every week” (email, 29 Mar. 2007). Ghettotech, adjusting to new contexts and new pressures and new sets of sounds, will ideally form new hybrid cultural forms, which may have little effect on Detroit music culture, but may continue to appeal to devoted fans in any locale. Finally, because overseas ghettotech scenes are constructed primarily through consumption of records and gigs by those records’ producers, many of the DJs instrumental to the ghettotech sound who do not release records – such as Gary Chandler and Wax-Tax-N-Dre – will not figure at all in this future. DJ Assault sees this as a missed opportunity for talented Detroit jocks. “Detroit has all of the talent, and that ghetto dance music could have been huge but Detroit didn’t support Detroit, and it could have took all those radio DJs and club DJs and made it where it was like ten or fifteen DJs from Detroit DJing all over the world.” But it requires more than talent to make a music career – it requires business acumen, as DJ Assault further explained.

They’re just DJs, not entrepreneurs... a lot of my ideas came from listening to DJs even when I was really in Detroit and the music was big. A lot of DJs had a lot of good ideas. I could go to the club and listen to them and know what I’m about to do for the next record because they were never going to invest in themselves... DJs in Detroit don’t invest in themselves and that’s what I did that set me apart. Took the ideas and sold them all over the world what we were doing in little small Detroit (telephone interview, 23 Feb. 2007).

Big Red summarized his feelings on ghettotech in Detroit: “It’s like the crowd takes for granted it’s always gonna be there and the DJs take for granted the crowds are always gonna be there, so it’s a funny time right now” (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007). As more creative energy is spent tapping receptive overseas markets, the scene at home faces stagnation. The music has undergone further revision and definition, and the original audiences are not being consulted. Red, discussing the course of techno in Detroit, may have outlined the most chilling vision of ghettotech’s future.

[W]here they lost the black urban roots, everybody—it was so much easier when they went overseas and they didn’t have to be—they went overseas and you didn’t have to prove yourself. In the inner city, whenever you have something new, you have to hit the street, you have to hit the club, you have to hit the afterhours, you have to go into those spots that a lot of people are scared of, literally. I don’t know what else to say, people are scared of. But those were the spots we hung in without a record. That’s how we partied, you know. When they found out they were accepted overseas without having to do all of that stuff, they just stopped dealing with Detroit altogether. Except for a namesake type of thing, to say they’re from Detroit (telephone interview, 1 Apr. 2007).

Ghettotech has not reached this point yet: the DJs still live in the area, even if they don’t play out like they used to.³¹ However, the difficulties of marketing independent local music in Detroit have only gotten more difficult in the years since techno first broke. The economy has continued to decline, and media outlets are unsympathetic to particular local needs. Europe, with a large base of dance music consumers with disposable income, could lure the sound away. But for a

³¹ DJ Assault splits his time between Detroit and Atlanta; Big Red, who makes his living as a touring DJ, also spends part of his time in the south.

genre so tied to blackness, to the streets, and to Detroit, the move to Europe may be too fraught with contradictions. If ghettech has a future, I believe it must come from a devoted home base.

The Future

While European markets may benefit existing ghettech producers, it does not enliven the local Detroit scene, where “mix music” is taken for granted by much of the city. In opposition to the increasing globalization of the sound, in which the connection to the Motor City becomes just another marketing tool, I would like to see a reassertion of the locality of the music, a deepening of the links between ghettech and Detroit culture, without repudiating or ignoring the globalized digital flows that greatly affect music distribution and reception. What this requires is a move away from the commodity form as the ultimate expression of the music, and to a reassertion of the ephemeral aspects that construct a recognizable local culture without excessive reification. One potential for the reassertion of local identity in the music is through the local dance style – the jit. While jitting has been associated with Detroit culture for some time, a new generation of youth is using the dance to assert local pride and construct empowered identities through the distribution of amateur video on YouTube.com. Not only do jitters connect with each other through the site, providing feedback and competition, but they also connect with urban youth in other cities with their own dance steps and musical styles. The rivalry is strongest between Detroit’s jitters and Chicago’s jukers or footworkers. Couched in the oft-blunt language of teenage posturing, comments reveal a deep investment in possessing a distinct local culture. User “bimal80” asserts pride in Detroit in the face of “haters” from Chicago. “She-cago just like Atlanta look to the D for inspiration. Detroit influence the whole

country's Music, Dance, Fashion, Shoes, Cars, and the list can go on forever! Only if you was from here would you know how long we been doing the shit ya'll think is new” (YouTube.com). Music enters the debates often – Chicagoans dance to juke, the latest term for the hybrid of house and hip hop that bubbled in the Second City’s underground for over a decade. The sound is close to ghettech (indeed, many releases on ghettech labels are from Chicago producers like DJ Deon and DJ Slugo), but distinct enough for a lively rivalry. This kind of competition fuels creativity as dancers try out new steps and routines; it could be part of a grassroots invigoration that ghettech needs in Detroit.

It may also have progressive political implications as well. While ghettech remains technically independent, the increased courting of dispersed dance music connoisseurs at the expense of the local Detroit audience risks reproducing the failings of corporately controlled music – it gives nothing back to the community that produced it. However, I am not suggesting independent labels abandon commercial concerns in order to satisfy social or political ones – these are not necessarily mutually exclusive. S. Craig Watkins, questioning whether the hip hop subculture ever truly opposed capitalism, suggests that penetrating popular markets in order to generate income can be an oppositional practice:

The potential economic benefits and prestige associated with rap music production are viewed [by producers] as a direct challenge to a social and economic structure that is becoming increasingly impenetrable for a number of black youth. From the perspectives of black youth, then, the production of popular commodities and economic success belie the widespread belief that they are criminal-minded and lack industriousness, intelligence, and commitment to work (570).

This integration of hip hop and dance music into regional dance music scenes in U.S. cities with large black populations: Chicago (juke), Baltimore (club), Miami (bass and freestyle), Oakland (hyphy), as well as countless variants throughout the black diaspora (jungle and garage in the U.K.; funk carioca in Brazil) provides a way for black youth to resist the deterritorializing logic of corporate capitalism by forming their own localized dance music markets. Produced cheaply on small independent labels, full of rapid stylistic changes, and disseminated in live performance in local environments or through illegal bootleg mixtapes, and fueled by a competitive creative spirit as much as a desire for income, these micro-genres can succeed at generating capital for members of marginalized groups outside of corporate control, albeit not completely immune from corporate influence, nor completely opposed to the logic of consumer capitalism. But once labels turn their attention to wealthier overseas audiences, a local style such as ghettotech can lose its relevance to its hometown. Coupling the genre with an intensely competitive local dance tradition like the jit can reinvigorate the music and maintain it as a cultural resource for the Detroit community.

CH. 6 – CONCLUSIONS

Part of the impetus for this project was admittedly based in a kind of contrarianism – the desire to explain the significance and worth of music that would seem to resist any kind of intellectual interpretation. This was not merely a specious task, but one quite relevant to the state of current popular music, particularly hip hop. Bass-heavy electronic beats meant for dancing infiltrate corporate urban radio and nightclubs alike, but are largely ignored by academia and the popular press, as if they were simply not as important as “conscious” rappers who hold far less sway in either the streets or the suburbs. Similarly, electro and its bastard children (such as ghettotech) largely disappear from techno’s history – they do not fit established narratives so important for articulating Detroit techno’s distinct identity, its particular authenticity. Yet it lurks below the surface as a kind of repressed other, containing everything not-techno, and subject to far less examination and discussion (even as it outsells techno in its own birthplace).

Chapter Two was my effort to reintegrate ghettotech into techno history, and give it a history of its own, told through the producers who created it. This history worked in the fertile spaces between genres, where sounds and styles collided and produced new exciting sonic possibilities. These possibilities came from a particular kind of logic, which prioritized dance floor functionality and playfulness over contemplation and seriousness – ghettotech’s authenticity, discussed in Chapter Three. As befits its origins, influences, and audience, in Chapter Three I show that ghettotech’s authenticity deals with race and gender in a highly direct way, subsumed by the overwhelming logic of moving crowds. It plays with stereotypes of blackness and gender dichotomy, and certainly traffics in some of the worst excesses of these stereotypes. But it also opens spaces for play with subject positions typically left out of popular music – namely, queer subjects and desiring female subjects. Furthermore, I suggest that the

gender antagonism in the music may reflect a nascent class resentment, befitting a music that, if not always produced by and for the working class, consciously strives for a kind of working-class sensibility. I am cautious in endorsing the positions ghettech advances, but I do think that it opens up interesting interventions in cultural studies: What if producing sexually explicit culture were the most direct way to “queer” the mainstream? Certainly figures from the modernist avant-garde, from Courbet to Manet to Warhol have advocated just such a platform, and if I retain reservations regarding this position (especially because so often it entails men using female sexuality to their own purposes), I do sympathize with musicians (particularly black ones) facing continual censorship pressures when they deal with sexuality.

Chapter Four discusses the economic pressures inherent in ghettech production, applicable to most independent music production, particularly dance music. Independent music implied (and often still implies) a local scene in which music can be made, performed, distributed, and consumed without undue interference from multinational corporations; this is no longer true in the U.S. Now that media distribution operations, even traditionally localized ones such as radio, are in the hands of a few corporations, local scenes struggle in their native contexts. Even venues such as strip clubs, an important crucible for ghettech that major companies once held at arm’s length, are now embraced by the tendrils of Big Capital, which turns greater profits by providing standardized experiences. Because of the individualized nature of independent music production, where artists are also responsible for managing careers, business acumen is not only a necessity for success as a ghettech producer, but also valued as an achievement. And while this business-minded atmosphere may limit certain kinds of resistant expression, it also leads to greater appropriations of mainstream popular music: producers use recognizable samples and vocals as a promotional tool, making their own sounds more familiar

to new audiences, if technically illegal. Artists' adoption of their own business practices also leads to increased use of the low-cost promotional features of the Internet, which comes with its own benefits and shortcomings. The Internet allows ghattotech artists to access a much larger audience than ever possible before; however, this audience connects with ghattotech in very different ways than ghattotech's original Detroit audience, which encourages producers to focus their attention on these overseas markets at the expense of meeting needs in Detroit.

This globalization of ghattotech, and its relationship to cultural appropriation, is the topic of Chapter Five. In it I demonstrate how shifting notions of "inside/outside" are repeatedly deployed within ghattotech, often with recourse to authenticity. I address whether ghattotech music can be considered "black," siding with the notion that "blackness" and other deployments of authenticity often mark culture off as a kind of threatened territory, but do not reside in any kind of ontological or essential core of being. Indeed, ghattotech's origins are too obviously hybrid for any kind of racial essentialism to make sense. Rather, I examine how authenticity claims arise as local music becomes "genre-fied," a process often tied to marketing the music to outsiders. When this complex local culture becomes reduced to a genre based on certain sonic conventions, the door is wide open for outsiders to experiment with the music. Coupled with the contraction of independent Detroit media outlets, this has led to consumers and producers overseas determining the course of ghattotech more than Detroiters themselves. Ghattotech producers largely support European interest in their music, but have ambivalent reactions to overseas producers – they are too distant from the "insiders" to be completely authentic performers.

While I do not criticize overseas fans for their love of ghattotech, or their desire to creatively take part in the genre, the future I find most promising for ghattotech resides in the

city of Detroit. A globalized genre must rely on the agent of globalization – that is, multinational capitalism – and that rarely benefits many of the people who helped shape the genre to begin with. Exporting the genre around the world goes hand-in-hand with the corporate control over other aspects of Detroit culture, even though local artists remain independent. This project argues for increased local control over media, and the retention of a local orientation in localized music genres, not as a means of keeping ghettech “authentic,” but as part of an urban renewal process driven by the residents of Detroit instead of venture capitalists and real estate speculators. I point to the vibrant competition among the youth of Detroit, Chicago, and Baltimore to see who has the best dance moves; these dances are inextricably tied to each city’s unique hip-hop/dance-music hybrid. This kind of competition can spur creative energy and renewed interest from an audience that takes ghettech for granted. Dance, an ephemeral embodied reaction that takes place within social gatherings, can keep music (which is so easily reified into commodities) grounded in a local context. Genres created from specific local scenes are best preserved by preserving the integrity of the local communities that produce them.

The preceding work has wider relevance to work on independent music, particularly local hip hop and dance scenes. As the music industry undergoes radical transformations to adjust to the digitalization of recordings and their distribution through the internet, the balance between independent producers and large corporations changes as well. However, this is no simple shift in favor of the little guy; rather, these changes must be approached in all their complexity, as they contain a host of difficulties of their own. In particular, I believe that if scholars are to prioritize local music, they must recognize that the commodity form, particularly in digital formats, potentially works against locality. Local scenes come from the face-to-face interaction of live performance, which commodities cannot adequately replicate. This should be the concern

of anyone interested in the politically progressive implications of music. The politics of music do not begin and end with simple *content*, lyrical or musical; rather, the politics of music are realized through its use. Music, even music with simplistic sexual lyrics, can have positive social implications, especially when marginalized groups can use the music as a means of exercising greater control over their sources of entertainment, socialization, and income. I would like to see scholars of popular music move away from prioritizing the music that says what they want to be said, towards dealing with music that creates the conditions in which people can have real agency over their lives. While ghettech perhaps does not fully meet this need, I see in it an unrecognized potential for positive action.

The Internet looms large in every form of media, particularly music. This project has attempted to deal with the Internet, not as merely a novel form of media distribution, but a technology that drastically changes the relationship of artist and audience. With the Internet, producers not only have the potential to reach dispersed audiences, but *must* reach these audiences as local markets become integrated into national and international ones. I would like to see future scholarship reckon with the Internet, not as simple distribution tool, but one that can radically alter the trajectories of both individual careers and entire genres of music. Its effects are still poorly understood; I hope that this thesis will provide some jumping-off points for subsequent work.

Following this, I would like to see hip hop scholarship move past the nostalgia keeping it bogged down in the pre-gangsta “Golden Age,” towards an engagement with rap as it occurs *now*: as both popular music and dance music. Scholarship has also been insufficiently attuned to localized articulations of the hip hop aesthetic outside of West Coast gangsta rap, particularly those that remain underground and tied to the dance floor. Yet rather than engage with hip hop

as it is produced now, and the types of anxieties and desires it might speak to, too often critics simply bemoan the music's sorry state. This does a great disservice, both to hip hop's still-massive audience, and to academics who with their condescension only court irrelevance. Instead of merely pining for the sophisticated lyrical manifestoes of the past (which are still alive in hip hop's underground), academics must engage with today's unique sounds, styles, and usages. Increasingly hip hop turns its attention to the clubs, its lyrics working with impressionistic sensuality instead of street-level narratives. How does hip hop function in club contexts, and how do these contexts shape the music's aesthetics, authenticity, and the promotion behind it? How are youth engaging with the music, putting it to use?

While I feel this project was successful, there are many improvements I wish I could make. Foremost, I would like to gather ethnographic data from more producers. During the time I had for ethnographic work, I was unable to interview producers at Twilight 76/Databass Records, the most successful and well-organized ghettech label, as well as home to DJ Godfather, a pinnacle (along with DJ Assault) of the genre. In addition, I would also have liked to interview other important local figures, including record store owners and radio station DJs. Once again, time constraints and difficulties in making contacts curtailed this portion of my ethnography. I would also have liked to have gone to more live events, to experience more ghettech in the appropriate contexts, both in nightclubs and strip clubs within Detroit and in dispersed gigs on national touring circuits as a point of comparison.

Perhaps most ambitiously, I would like to further contextualize ghettech as part of a larger phenomenon of the hybridization of dance music and hip hop that takes place in other cities around the world. Bass-heavy hybrids of hip hop and dance music have sprung up in Chicago (juke), Baltimore (juke), Atlanta (Atlanta bass), Rio de Janeiro (*funk carioca*), and

London (jungle, garage, and grime, among others), drawing localized audiences as well as attention from abroad. This may mark a distinct, but important, new phase in hip hop's globalization in which new forms of beats take priority over lyrical content, making music that translates more easily across different cultures that consume their music in similar ways – through the live playback of recordings, manipulated by DJs, in large spaces for social dance. These musics have their own distinct histories, contexts, and usages, but also converge on the dancefloor. Chicago and Detroit have long been in musical conversation with each other; more recently Baltimore club tracks have shown up in ghettotech sets; ghettotech DJs play shows with East London grime rappers; Brazil has assimilated exported Miami bass and electro classics into its own rhythms and rhymes. The implications of this assemblage will remain obscure until these diverse scenes are analyzed in their own right, a daunting project, yet one that may speak volumes about the future of music in the industrialized portions of the black diaspora.

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