# 1. Introduction

This thesis aims to compare analog and digital DJ technologies with regard to the performativity of the disc jockey. The DJ has been historically underrepresented in academic discourse despite his cultural relevance. The human ritual of collective dancing to music is an ancient pillar of culture and society. The emergence of the DJ in the twentieth century constituted a detachment of this ritual from the performance of live music in favor of recorded music. His peculiar postmodern function as a “meta-musician” has exerted considerable influence on dance culture and the development of numerous music genres.

Traditionally, the craft of DJing has been bound to vinyl records, but recent technological developments have increasingly digitalized the profession, which has facilitated access for aspiring DJs such as myself, but also generated some criticism for “devaluing” the art of DJing. As a digital DJ who has always worked with DJ-software and a MIDI controller instead of turntables, I have attempted to learn to mix songs in the traditional way of using vinyl records over the course of this project. I have also explored Traktor Scratch as a Digital Vinyl System (DVS), the popular hybrid of digital and analog DJing methods which enables DJs to use turntables to play digital music formats via timecode vinyl. My goal is to examine how the aesthetic and technological options and challenges of these different systems affect the performativity of the DJ as an artist and as a mediator between the world of music and the audience.

The thesis will be divided into a creative and a theoretical part. The project will involve the real-time production of at least one DJ mix with each technology to illustrate the aesthetic differences I will describe in the theoretical analysis. The essence of DJing is invariably attached to the live performance in front of an audience, which loses its unique atmosphere in any recording. Nonetheless, most DJs develop, practice and expand their skills in solitude at home before they display them in front of an audience, a process about which I will provide some personal insights. Additionally, the recording of mixes to distribute for promotional purposes has been a widespread practice among DJs for decades, whether on tape, CD or online. However, I will also draw on my experience from live gigs, which were mostly conducted with a Mixvibes U-Mix Control Pro and the corresponding software Cross DJ, except at one recent private house party, where I played a spontaneous vinyl set. Unfortunately I did not have an opportunity to use vinyl, regular or timecode, in the context of a club appearance.

To ensure a reasonable scope I want to remain within the boundaries of just one genre, and I have chosen to confine myself to hip hop music for a number of reasons: Most of all, since hip hop is my favorite genre next to funk, privately as well as in the context of my DJ activity, it makes up the bulk of my music collection. I also want to counterbalance the dominance of EDM (electronic dance music)[[1]](#footnote-1) in most general research on club culture. It is easy to ignore hip hop as one of the many genres that owe their existence to the DJ. Where it does get mentioned, the focus is usually on the art of turntablism, which originated in hip hop culture but has become somewhat detached from the dancefloor and occupies a different niche than what I aim to investigate here. I am also excluding the aspect of production. Instead, I am restricting myself to the domain of the typical club DJ, the DJ in his essential, most basic function, as an archivist and performer, who plays a “collage” of songs or tracks by creating transitions through beatmatching or other methods.

In the theoretical component I will first provide a brief history of the DJ to establish a working definition of the term and illustrate his[[2]](#footnote-2) cultural significance. Following this, I will compare the aforementioned technologies – vinyl, controller and DVS - with regard to the three central aspects of DJing: selection, composition, and presentation. The recorded mixes will serve as points of reference, but based on existing research, interviews I conducted with other DJs and my own continuous performing experience I will transfer my observations to the realm of live performance as accurately as possible.

First, I will analyze how the shift from vinyl records to digital music formats impacts the music selection process, both in relation to what is colloquially referred to as “digging” – the constant search for and acquisition of new music – and concerning the general preparation of the musical material that precedes every DJ performance. Secondly, I will describe the differences in how these technologies are used to produce a mix by arranging songs in a specific order while constructing transitions between songs or even creating mashups through beatmatching, looping and other practices. Thirdly, I will discuss the wider context of the performance: the DJ’s self-image and self-portrayal as well as his interaction with the audience.

Even though objectivity is an illusion, a utopian academic ideal that can never be fully achieved, this study takes on a comparatively subjective perspective since I am simultaneously the observer and the target of observation. While I strive to gain a certain degree of distance through my readings, interviews and elaborate self-reflection, I also ­­­­­­­­want to embrace the individuality of this experience *(why?)*. In order for my observations and conclusions to be more comprehensible and hopefully relevant, I will first provide some context concerning my relationship with music and my development as a DJ.

I have been obsessed with music since childhood. From the beginning I had an aversion to the snythetic sounds and four-to-the-floor beats of EDM and a tendency to favor music with a certain “black” aesthetic, starting with (in retrospect) latently funky teen pop in the 90s and gradually getting into actual hip hop and R&B in the early 2000s through MTV and the influence of my oldest brother, the first in a series of male impulses that I appropriated to shape my taste, skills and self-image. Non-feminist though it may be, it’s the truth: From the mid-2000s onwards my first boyfriend introduced me to the boombap sound of the 90s; a few years later the second one opened up the wide world of more current underground hip hop for me. My passion for music had been accompanied by a shy small-town enthusiasm for dancing as well, taking lessons in rock’n’roll dancing as a child and coming up with choreographies in the basement with my best friend as a teenager. Around the time I came of age these interests coalesced into an instant fascination with nightlife. I resolutely frequented and soon got organizationally involved in a nearby funk/soul/hip hop party called “Soulfood” that ran regularly in the next biggest city. Back then it wouldn’t have occurred to me in my wildest dreams to be a DJ myself as I danced through the night and made friends with local hip hop and funk DJs.

After I moved far away from my small town to attend university in Potsdam, in my second semester I followed an appeal to bring an external hard drive to the annual media studies summer party. That’s when I first saw and used DJ software (in this case, Virtual DJ). With no prior knowledge about the program or any DJing experience whatosever - and the extent of the girl’s instructions being limited to “press ‘sync’ and slowly move this thing in the middle to the other side” - I jumped in at the deep end. I kept the small crowd dancing with an array of crowd pleasers along the lines of Michael Jackson and MC Hammer despite my blatant deficiencies, such as cluelessly syncing two tracks that were 20 BPM apart with my tech-expert-underground-hip hop boyfriend behind me quickly grasping the basic concept of the software and falling on deaf ears trying to explain it to me. I didn’t even know what BPM was. I got such a kick out of seeing people dance to music I selected that I made sure to get a DJ slot at every subsequent media studies party.

I soon acquired Virtual DJ myself, which I used with just a mouse and an increasing amount of keyboard shortcuts for two and a half years, mostly making hour-long mixes for campusradio podcasts and delightedly experimenting with mashups late at night in my dorm room (in addition to performing live at the semiannual media studies parties), until I finally gave in and bought my humble Mixvibes controller, even though I still didn’t conceive of myself as a DJ. DJs to me were the likes of the Soulfood guys with tons of fancy equipment who knew what they were doing; I felt I really didn’t know what I was doing except a little private tinkering and relying on the assumption that well-known songs make people dance (which is true).

The controller opened up a new world to me and over the years I started taking my DJing efforts more seriously, excessively cultivating countless playlists, thinking my selections through more than before, learning about bitrates and similar technicalities, getting small gigs through acquaintances. Eventually I ended up doing warm-up for my heroes, the Soulfood DJs, who were positively surprised by my endeavors and welcomed me to the stage with open arms.

It took a long time, at least three to four years overall, for me to consider myself a DJ more comfortably and not ridicule myself as a presumptuous amateur, though I still felt inferior whenever I was the only one in a DJ line-up not to use the turntables. I teamed up with a like-minded friend and fellow aspiring controller DJ, who also played at the media studies parties and participated in campusradio, to initiate our very own funk-based party in Potsdam, which recently celebrated its relatively successul premiere. So this is the stage I was at when I started working on this project: a young and motivated controller DJ trying to establish herself and to learn how to handle vinyl using her boyfriend’s turntables.

# 2. DJ history

Everybody, get in the groove and let the good times roll  
I'm gon’ stay here till I soothe my soul

If it takes all night long

Yeah, it might be one o'clock and it might be three

Time don't mean that much to me  
I ain’t had this much fun since I don’t know when

And I might not feel this good again

- Aretha Franklin, “Good Times”

In their extensive history of the DJ, Brewster and Broughton dive right in by wittily tracing the role of the DJ all the way back to the ancient shaman who conducted the musical accompaniment at mankind’s nocturnal rituals. Though it may seem a somewhat silly or far-fetched idea at first, on second thought it starts to ring stunningly true. In a *de facto* secularized world, we satisfy our spiritual needs through cultural products of the entertainment industry more than anything else. The target of our worship has shifted from deities towards artists and celebrities. Instead of with religion, the notion of “cult” is now associated with films, books, TV series, bands or music genres, even clothing brands; these are the new signifiers that define our identity and divide us into groups.

Our culture is undeniably no longer as deeply permeated by religion, and as a result our celebrations have become detached from their ancient function of worshipping the divine. Yet humanity has retained a deep-seated need for collectivity and transcendence, a desire to unwind after a hard day’s or week’s work, to socialize and perhaps use certain substances, to reconnect with one’s body, to forget about the anxieties of existence, to step out of the drudgery of the everyday and feel *alive*. Some people achieve this by exercising, pursuing a hobby, having dinner with their family, watching television on the couch, going to the movies or meeting their friends in a bar. But none of these activities come as close to the sublime exaltation of that ancient ritual of dancing around a bonfire as clubbing does: You put on your “mask” or “costume” as you carefully dress for the night to take on a different role from your everyday self. You make your way to a special place reserved for festivities, where you immerse yourself in the music and perhaps alter your state of mind with alcohol and other drugs. You let your body take over control of your entire being and you lose your sense of time as you dance through the night with your friends, but also form an unspoken ephemeral bond with a crowd of strangers. The figure who makes this entire experience possible is the DJ.

**On the air**

The story of the DJ is inherently tied to the story of recorded music as well as radio. There was a time when the reception of music was physically bound in time and space to the production of music. If you wanted to hear music, you had to perform it yourself or be within hearing distance of someone performing it. Until, one day in 1877, Thomas Edison recorded himself singing “Mary had a little lamb” onto a wax cylinder as “the first human being to record a sound and reproduce it,” albeit without the intention of using his invention to store music.[[3]](#footnote-3) Around three decades later, Canadian engineer Reginald Fessenden became the world’s first DJ by transmitting a cylinder recording of “a contralto singing Handel’s ‘Largo’ from *Xerxes*” via radio waves “from Brant Rock near Boston, Massachusetts, to a number of astonished ships’ telegraph operators out in the Atlantic” who he had “equipped […] with the necessary receivers.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

In fact, radio was the realm the DJ first conquered, already raising suspicion among musicians and politicians alike because of the power he held “as the gatekeeper at the point where music met its audience.”[[5]](#footnote-5) I cannot go into detail here concerning the development of the radio DJ, but it is worth noting the central aspects of the craft that the radio DJ established – besides of course the term “disc jockey”, which is surrounded by a variety of origin stories.[[6]](#footnote-6) The DJ was characterized by his inherent advantage of being able to play more music more cheaply than any given live musician, as well as his function as a tastemaker and musical ambassador who can provide a platform for all the music that the world’s mainstream outlets are carelessly neglecting or deliberately suppressing. This ability has often put him in charge of the success (and later on even the creation) of entire genres, the first being 1940s rhythm and blues, which at the time meant little more than “records made by black people.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Interestingly, black music has always accompanied the development of the DJ, from reggae to hip hop to disco to house, illustrating his role as an agent of counterculture - as also becomes evident in the historically strong connection of club culture with the homosexual scene.

**Before the DJ**

Recorded music found its calling as a medium of entertainment only a couple of years after it had been invented: Patented in 1889, the jukebox merely lacked the technology of amplification until it gained widespread popularity in the 1920s, conquering a variety of estalishments such as saloons and cafés, so that “ironically, the DJ’s role was automated even before it came into existence.” Both music and DJ culture, each as an art and as an industry, owe a great deal to this machine. The jukebox not only kept record sales going in the Depression era, but also allowed for cheap and adventurous musical programming by the establishments’ proprietors, who determined the selection of their jukebox and thus were basically just one step removed from being DJs.

In an entirely different context, the early twentieth century witnessed a peculiar setting in which people gathered to listen to recorded music. Starting with the “tone tests” held for the Edison Diamond Disc Phonograph from 1915 onwards, new sound recording technologies were often introduced to a group of invited guests at staged demonstrations, not to dance and have fun but to be amazed by the “realistic” reproduction of live music. In this context the technology did not serve the purpose of enjoying music, but music was a means of experiencing the technology. However, Edison was also already interested in the effect the music itself had on the guests, intuitively formulating the essential concern of the future club DJ: to guide the audience’s emotions. He paid psychology professors to study the mood changes triggered by music, one of whom “developed a Mood Change Chart that Edison dealers were encouraged to use at Mood Change Parties, to show their ‘Analysis of Mental Reactions to Music, as Re-Created by the New Edison, the Phonograph with a Soul.’”[[8]](#footnote-8) *The Phonograph with a Soul*. A simple marketing phrase that carries so much baggage, considering the eternal accusation of technology threatening our humanity, which has permeated the discourse surrounding not only the history of recorded music, but also the role of the DJ himself as well as the technologies he uses.

**The human jukebox and post-war partying**

In 1943, the first official dance event based on recorded music had six couples dancing to a small selection of swing records in a small town in Northern England. This “Grand Record Dance” in Leeds, UK, was organized by “eccentric young entrepreneur” Jimmy Savile, who “hit upon the bright idea of playing records live, armed only with brittle 78s and a makeshift disco unit,” a home-made fusion of a gramophone and a valve radio. Unfortunately the party soon came to an end as the equipment “had melted at several soldered points and died quietly, but not before giving a final electric shock to its inventor, causing him to weep openly.’” Nevertheless, the club DJ was born that night - a downright revolutionary incident, because after all “transposing the idea [of the radio DJ] to a live format required a quantum leap of imagination.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Savile proceeded to successfully spread his alternative to live music events all over the country, confusing technicians by having them set up the record player on stage instead of in the lighting man’s booth and even adding a second one to reduce the gaps between records, which he filled with talking. Eventually, he launched a successful career in media as a radio DJ and the first host of *Top of the Pops*, making him the “first superstar DJ.”

While Savile was instituting the bandless dance in dance halls across the UK, American radio DJs in the fifties promoted their shows at so-called “sock hops” in high school gymnasiums, where guests had to take off their shoes for the sake of the flooring material. It didn’t take long for the concept to catch on, as amateur DJs emerged on the scene. Eventually it also occurred to one of them to use twin turntables, even with separate volume controls, and to talk between records.

Despite these developments in the anglophone world, the origin of the disothèque is to be found in continental Europe, where the Nazi regime banned jazz musicians from playing and left rebellious young jazz lovers in Germany and occupied France no choice but to sneak their swing records into cafés and basements to dance to them.[[10]](#footnote-10) The word “discothèque”, which tanslates to “record library”, referred to both a collection of records and the place where it was stored. Although the term only started being used for dance venues after the war, “the first place to employ the word is said to have been La Discothèque, a tiny bar in the rue Hachette in occupied Paris, where you could order your favourite jazz 78 along with your drink.”

In the Post-World War II Era a multitude of discothèques opened up in France - such as the legendary Whiskey-A-Go-Go in Paris - and the UK, where “the first British all-nighters took place” (a party format that later came to be primarily associated with the Northern Soul scene).[[11]](#footnote-11) While New York’s underground was partying heavily in small live music clubs to the new sensation called bebop, it took until 1960 for a DJ-based discothèque to open on the western side of the Atlantic: frenchman Oliver Coquelin’s Le Club. Meanwhile, Jamaican DJs were turning up the bass and battling each other on their cutting-edge sound systems, revolutionizing DJ culture unnoticed by the Western world as they invented the remix before disco did and the MC (Master of Cerermony) before hip hop did: “[Reggae] laid down the principles of remixing, it made an artist and a star of the producer, it transformed playing records into live performance, and it showed how music could be propelled into whole new genres by the needs of the dancefloor.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

**The nightclub comes of age**

The sixties were a defining decade for DJ and club culture in a number of ways. The symbiosis between American and European dance cultures continued to blossom, with the US usually supplying the content, i.e. music (and often the dance styles), which the European underground, especially in the UK, fed off as it kept raising club culture to new heights: “It was in Britain that club culture was founded, even if the records which filled it were from across the Atlantic.”[[13]](#footnote-13) With its impressive architecture and music connoisseur Ian “Sammy” Samwell on the decks playing American rhythm and blues rarities at lunchtime, the Lyceum in London “was the first place in which all the recognisable elements of a modern club – lights, up-front dance records, disc jockey and dancefloor – came together.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Other clubs like the Scene, the Flamingo, the Roaring Twenties and Tiles made history with phenomenal DJ sets and drug-fueled all-nighters and/or lunchtime dances that partygoers merged into three-day weekends. This British club culture was largely dominated by the "mods", a young, hip working-class subculture defined by their love of black American music, fashion and amphetamines.

Even in the States, a striking number of the initial groundbreaking clubs were owned by Europeans, such as Oliver Coquelin’s aforementioned Le Club in New York and later Cheetah during the acid craze in San Francisco, or British celebrity divorcee Sybil Burton’s illustrious club Arthur in Manhattan, where Terry Noel, “the prototype of the modern DJ”, was the first DJ to mix records and take full control of the lights and sound system, turning the dance night into a spectacle.

Starting at New York’s Peppermint Lounge, the sixties also hit both sides of the Atlantic with a dance revolution. Dancefloors were liberated from step-based couples’ dancing when a certain new solo dance called the twist “dropped an H-bomb on dance conservatism.”[[15]](#footnote-15) A few years later, the new chemical drug LSD spread from San Francisco to New York and London, temporarily saturating club culture with bizarre sensory journeys and increasingly undanceable psychedelic rock music at places like the Electric Circus in New York or UFO in London. It was time for the transition into new territories.

**The DJ comes of age**

“In less than a quarter of a century, the idea of dancing to someone playing records had evolved form a bizarre experiement in a Yorkshire function room to an intricate world of nightclubs, DJs, drugs and music.”[[16]](#footnote-16) The seventies solidified the basic characteristics of the DJ that had surfaced in the previous decade and have defined the craft to this day: The obsession with unearthing rare treasures, the art of mixing and beatmatching and last but not least, the skill of manipulating the crowd through the power of music.

As London and the rest of Southern England got caught up in flower power, the mods proceeded to establish the world’s first real rave culture as they carried on dancing to their beloved sixties soul “stompers” in otherwise unremarkable Northern small towns, unperturbed by the popular music industry and the new developments of funk and disco. The DJ’s quest for rarities was practically built into the nature of the scene as black music in America moved on from the uptempo soul that had defined the Motown sound of the sixties and its unsuccessful imitators. Finding “new” songs could only be achieved by digging deeper and deeper into an ultimately finite pool of music from an era that was already over. Dancers drove for hours to clubs like the Twisted Wheel, the Catacombs, the Torch, the Wigan Casino and the Blackpool Mecca just to hear certain records that literally could not be heard anywhere else in the country or sometimes even in any of the other clubs, because the only available copy was in the hands of a single DJ, such as Blackpool’s Ian Levine, who had rescued it from a scruffy record store in New Orleans. Suddenly, dance music was about more than just “playing the hits of the day”, and connoisseurship was the primary way for a DJ to distinguish himself.

On the other side of the ocean, as the newly liberated blacks and gays were flooding New York’s nightclubs, the burgeoning disco scene changed DJing forever. To begin with, the “godfather” of the modern DJ, Francis Grasso, “stormed the profession out of servitude and made the DJ the musical head chef.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Taking the throne from Terry Noel at the Salvation club and later perfecting his skills at the Sanctuary, he was the first to put flow in the DJ’s performance, to take the crowd on a musical journey through the night with his unique musical programming: “Before him, people had played records as if they were discrete little performances, Francis treated them like movements in a symphony; continuous elements in a grand whole.”[[18]](#footnote-18) He also claims to be the first DJ who was able to beat-mix, even without being able to adjust the tempo of records or touch them while they were playing: “All you had to do was start at the right moment.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

There’s a long line of legendary DJs that passed the torch to each other and shaped the disco era: Francis Grasso establishing beatmixing and teaching it to his disciples Michael Capello and Steve D’Acquisto; David Mancuso creating an inclusive, emotional atmosphere at his private parties at the Loft; Nicky Siano tranferring Mancuso’s message of love and unity to a more commercial setting at the Gallery; Walter Gibbons creating live remixes at Galaxy 21; Tee Scott overlaying records into long blends at Better Days; David Rodriguez joyously challenging the crowd at the Ginza; Larry Levan championing the original disco sound at the Paradise Garage even after its commercial overkill.

Today, disco is one of the historically most misunderstood genres of all time, still suffering from the lingering echo of the heavy backlash that followed its commercial appropriation triggered by the hit film *Saturday Night Fever*. It was the first time club music conquered the mainstream, as the DJ fully revealed his promotional power and tastemaking influence. The era witnessed the rise of the mix tape, the extended dance remix, the 12-inch single and independent labels. Disco also introduced the repetitive kick drum accentuating the exact individual beats of a bar in four-four time, thereby prefiguring the rhythmic style of house and other future EDM genres, which are essentially all rooted in disco.

**Hip Hop**

In the late seventies, disco and most of all funk provided the bulk of the source material for the Bronx DJs that created hip hop music. In a way it was the first truly postmodern music genre, the first to base its entire creative process on the rearrangement of building blocks from existing recordings. Fueled by dance, it was a purely DJ-driven meta-genre, an “*omnigenre*” that introduced a “genreless concept of music.” The central foundation of hip hop music was the break, referring to the stripped down drum passages with no or minimal instrumentation that appear frequently in funk songs, but can be found in a lot of different genres, from latin music to rock and others. In his historical portrait of the hip hop DJ, musicologist Mark Katz elaborates on the notion of “funkiness” as a “rhythmic, textural, and timbral profile characteristic of funk” that hip hop DJs look for and find in all kinds of music.

DJ Kool Herc was the first to reduce records to the drum breaks that he noticed certain dancers waiting for, although still without the quick cutting and precise beatmatching of his successors. Being from Jamaica, he incorporated elements of reggae culture such as the elaborate sound system and the accompaniment of a “Master of Ceremony” rhyming to entertain the crowd. It was Grandmaster Flash who, inspired by Herc and tutored by beatmixing expert Pete Jones, spent months locked up in his room developing the technique of “manual sampling and looping of a record […] without losing the beat,” only to be disappointed by the public’s initial lack of enthusiasm that preceded the eventual hype.[[20]](#footnote-20) Afrika Bambaata, aside from founding the Zulu Nation, enriched hip hop parties and surprised the crowd with unusual selections from his vast and infamous record collection.

The style of hip hop DJs was soon transferred to the level of production, where the sampler enabled DJ-producers to carefully loop and layer pieces of music in a new way. Over time, hip hop music has expanded its style way beyond breakbeats, but the looped sample has remained the essential structural element of the hip hop beat. Turntablism became a niche as DJs were no longer needed to create the beats live on stage, so today people speaking of a “hip hop DJ” usually refer to a DJ who plays hip hop tracks, not a live recomposition of other genres. The non-live production of hip hop music has introduced an additional step between the original source music and the hip hop DJ in the club. This is the perspective I am taking in this project.

# 3. DJing – analog vs. digital

In the following chapters I will examine the differences beween analog and digital DJ technologies ­­in reference to the performativity of the DJ. I will deal with the three basic categories of the club DJ’s craft: 1) The *invisible* work of collecting and archiving music, 2) the *audible* work of mixing and 3) the *visible* work of performing in front of an audience.

I am approaching the analysis both theoretically and empirically. In a somewhat ethnographic mindset, I have employed practices similar to those of an anthropologist’s “participant observation” which could in this case perhaps be summarized as “self-experience”. I have made myself the subject, instrument and object of observation: For the past few months, I have been teaching myself how to mix with vinyl records on a traditional setup of two turntables connected to an analog mixer. During this process, I have filmed some and recorded all of my practice sessions and kept a diary documenting my progress. After I perceived my skills to have reached a basic functional level, I planned and recorded a DJ-mix. Following this, I proceeded to explore a Digital Vinyl System: I purchased a Traktor control Z2 (including the corresponding software Traktor 2), a device that functions as a DJ mixer, a DVS interface and a controller at the same time, thus uniting elements of both vinyl- and controller-based DJing. Using this technology, I produced a second DJ-mix with the same selection of songs in the same order. Finally, I recreated the mix a third time with the MIDI controller I have been using for years. Occasionally I will refer to CDs, but blabla explain

In addition to my own experiments, I conducted several interviews with other DJs, three male and one female (oder so), who I know personally and who have been active much longer than myself, working with a variety of DJ technologies. They all specialize in funk, soul and/or hip hop and two of them also regularly host radio shows at non-profit community radio stations.

My theoretical foundation consists of literature on DJ culture and performance theory. The former is itself often based on anecdotes and interviews or some form of participant observation. The latter stems from the field of theatre studies and will have to be adjusted as I apply it to elements of the DJ performance.

In the context of this study, “performativity” is to be understood on two levels. First, it relates to the *situation* of the performance in the classical sense - to put it simply: people going to a place to watch somebody do something. Secondly, it indicates a specific *quality* of an action, a unique and fleeting event-like process. This description certainly applies to most of the things a DJ does, but more on that later.

\*festival, ritual?

## 3.1 Acquiring and organizing music

Your job starts in the record store, not on the decks. Your worth as a DJ begins and ends with what’s on your shelves and in your bag. For every overpaid hour in a club, a good DJ spends days, months, and years picking out tunes and learning about music.[[21]](#footnote-21)

If the DJ is a modern-day shaman, the superior world he delves into and channels for his audience is not the world of gods or spirits, but the entire universe of recorded music. The human lifespan is barely long enough to listen to a fraction of the world’s virtually infinite and constantly growing music archive, therefore the DJ’s eternal struggle to “distil musical greatness” is doomed to imperfection (but not necessarily failure). The product that the crowd receives on the dancefloor is the result of what really makes up the bulk of a good DJ’s work: a certain activity called “digging”. A bad DJ might just play basically the same set with minimal variation from a small music collection he barely cultivates.

This is one of the many unwritten, but definitely not unspoken rules of DJ culture: a DJ must be on the constant quest for new music. “New” can mean “recently released”, but it can also refer to old music that might be new to the DJ and hopefully his audience. Like myself, most DJs are obsessive music collectors first – as they should be - so digging is hardly a burdensome chore, but a natural instinct we can barely stifle. Obivously, the more music a DJ collects, the more challenging the task of organizing it becomes. A helpful, if not dispensable trait for a DJ to complement this compulsive obsession is a sense of order, ideally coupled with some actual organizational talent for the benefit of thouroughness and efficiency.

Digital music formats have revolutionized the way music is distributed as well as how it can be stored and filed. In the following chapters, I am going to examine how the internet has transformed the practice of digging and how DJs organize their digital and physical music libaries.

### 3.1.2 Digging

I […] spent time searching for records to scratch and mix in record stores, thrift shops, library sales, and the homes of friends and relatives. DJs call this *digging in the crates*, the ‘crates’ referring to the typical way records are stored. As I discovered, it’s called digging for a reason – it’s tiring, hard on the back, and often leaves the digger with dirty hands. But it can also be hugely rewarding, and plays an important role in the education of DJs.

It is no coincidence that the figure of the shaman appears prominently in literature on performance theory. Though in different ways, the authors all relate theater to ritual, which in turn overlaps with the realm of cult and celebration, which is where the DJ happens to dwell - and so the circle is complete. What all of these things have in common is their constitution as an event that involves a group of people gathering in a designated place at a an appointed time. Time, place and purpose of this event are situated outside of the domain of the everyday; as opposed to the daily cycle of working, eating and sleeping, it is not a necessity of survival. It is non-productive, meaning its function lies in the process itself instead of a tangible external “result” in a narrow sense.

1. Explain. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Say something about gendered writing [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Milner 2010, 4) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 28-29) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 30) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Brewster first chapter [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 39) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. (Milner 2010, 47) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 56) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Nazis also „grudgingly tolerated“ native jazz musicians playing in France. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 61-63) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 130) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 84) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 69-70) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. (Brewster and Broughton, Last Night A DJ Saved My Life. The History Of The Disc Jockey 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 83) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 139) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 141) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 145) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. (Brewster and Broughton 2006, 235-239) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Htdjr 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)