

**Creating Intensities: Affect in Acid Reign Raves**

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### **Abstract**

Through collaborating with a rave collective, this project inquires into Acid Reign Productions (ARP) organizers' strategies and considerations for creating affects. Here, affective situations are conceptualized as smoothed timespaces of intensities that could involve harm reduction (HR). Following Toronto's resurgence of outdoors raves, this work discusses how HR in these raves presents to appease extremes and incoherencies, taking part in the collective's approach of 'maximizing mutual benefit'. Fieldnotes from ARP raves and conversations with organizers and attendees are pulled together, describing ways of augmenting intensities and how they affect and are affected by the contexts from which ARP emerges. Materials, audiovisuals, roles, substances, and conversations take part in creating affective situations and shape forms of HR in ARP beyond biomedical logics. By creating affects, ARP opens up capacities for flux and indeterminacies, even when the group may engage with more formal organizations and frameworks.

Keywords: rave; affect theory; harm reduction; Toronto

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## Introduction

In his writings on a fictional society, Borges ([1964] 2010:25) describes, “At times [objects] are determined by mere simultaneity ... the color of the rising sun and the faraway cry of a bird.” It was on a trip to Berlin in 2019 that I encountered my first rave and began to grasp what this author alluded to. Someone I met at a hostel mentioned a techno festival in an ex-power station, and as a reckless 18-year-old, I eagerly tagged along; the idea I had of raves being a drugged-out space to dance all night was exactly the escapism I sought. Meeting people circulating along the concrete halls, it seemed like we were pulled to different zones, as if each had their own distinct magnetism as permeable as they became. When exhausted, some of us returned to the very back of the dancefloor to rest, but I also noticed how dancers started to stream in the spaciousness for full-bodied movements. Or, we’d crowd around ashtrays, taking in conversation between puffs of smoke, checking on each other’s moods and having strangely vulnerable conversations. The impression the night left me pulsed with the energy of heavy techno rhythms, foggy bursts of light, and unplaceable feelings of connection with the other people there. I have since been curious about the thought that perceivably goes into the preparation of affects in raves, as well as the disjointedness of areas’ experiences – forming fleeting ‘objects’ inseparable from more than human interactions, as indeterminately as affects come together.

Unable to rave during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020-2021, I became more involved with a mutual aid network in Kingston. Many ideas I came across about horizontal organizing, sharing, and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) reminded me of how ravers move about at events. As Ontario began to announce lifting restrictions in 2021, new rave collectives posted about their plans to throw raves, emphasizing accountability and collaborations (Singh 2022). One of the Toronto

organizers I came across, Acid Reign Productions (ARP), caught my eye with their mobile battery system setup, used for hosting outdoors raves as part of their ‘overarching style’. ARP articulated the style further through publishing a Mission Statement, describing their belief in the power of music to ‘free’ people, and equally so the importance of collaborations between organizers and participants to maximize mutual benefits of experiences. My interest then began to hone in on the dynamism of ARP’s prepared and spontaneous approaches for organizing, and their broader imaginary of creating affects in raves.

This research is based in Toronto, where I facilitated two summertime raves with ARP, with a focus on ‘harm reduction’ (HR) and equipment (dis)assembly tasks. Through my participation in such tasks as central to my fieldwork, I set out to understand, how do ARP raves create affects in the summer of 2022? More specifically, how do ARP raves affect and are affected by forms of HR? In describing the emergence of affective situations, I look into repeated and spontaneous tasks, such as DJ’ing and physically moving. I describe these as moments of intensity where HR arises to mitigate excess, but also other situations in the creation of affects in ARP raves. To do so, I draw from a Deleuzoguattarian lens in anthropology to conceptualize affect as fleetingly emergent in becomings and modulations of capacities, and in this case still involving avoidance of excess.

I begin by providing the context of my fieldwork done with ARP as well as situating the project through a literature review of raves and HR, leading into theoretical and methodological orientations in anthropology that will be mobilized in this thesis. This thesis unfolds in a more intense and literary tone in the second chapter, describing in detail affective situations in which some forms of HR appeared. Chapter 3 pulls some threads from these experiences to open

towards further debates in ways of raving, such as ARP organizers' practices of inviting chaos and also frameworks of response.

## CHAPTER 1 - Context of Research Project

### *Entry to Research*

In April 2022, I reached out to ARP and they informally agreed via email to collaborating. There were some unexpected delays in revising the research proposal, but by the following month I had already moved to Toronto. For the most part I drifted around in line with my committee's encouragement to take it as an opportunity for preliminary research between May-July 2022. That is to say, I partied like crazy, met an abundance of colorful characters, and became involved with organizing raves with ARP. It was silly and stressful. I became all too familiar with waking up hungover just barely hanging off a friend's couch, just as I had been living as a teenager. All the same it felt different now – reworked with a new angle of actively co-creating and co-writing with others, and importantly within a tangible sense of community. I was able to get to know other ARP organizers who were present and actively involved during the four raves in the preliminary period. When I read about this 'creative sociality' among ravers in literature reviews, I was compelled as much as I was admittedly frightened that it might be idealistic. Certainly it hasn't come without hurdles, conflicts, standstills, and miscommunications (just as with most community organizing I had experienced in the past). In any case I would be remiss to neglect mentioning the significance of this preliminary research period, and how chaotically some things fell into place.

### *Literature Review of Raves*

Before defining my theoretical approach, I provide an overview of developments in rave anthropologists' approaches and theory, and which findings inform the body of research I draw on to situate this project. After assessing how authors are in conversation with works over time, I

delineate approaches which contrast with or which I found useful to this research, transitioning into the theoretical framing with the drift in orientations in affect theory.

In the 1990s, most cultural studies literature about raves analyzed their stylistic aspects through political-economic contextualizations (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). This early research connected the growing affordability of media technologies such as turntables, for example, to independent musician collectives' development of electronic music in the UK (St John 2009). Researchers' critiques that ravers were misrepresented in the media was met in the 2000s by a shift to interviewing participants, inquiring into rave experiences and sociality (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). Ethnographic accounts of ravers' lasting sense of increased empathy, for example, burgeoned the academic conception of raves as transformative (Kyriakopoulos 2021). In 1969, anthropologist Victor Turner conceptualized 'liminality' as an in-between state that people step into during rites of passage, before attaining a new identity. Anthropologists inquiring into raves' presumed potentiality for social transformation frequently applied this concept (Kyriakopoulos 2021). Following this, anthropologists researching raves referred to a framework for the study of events' forms to modulate the two decades' approaches, contributing to the current turn (St John 2009). Building from Turner, Handelman (1998) proposed that there are common features underlying forms of events, and those designed for change are deliberately organized to orchestrate participants' liminality by amplifying sensory and embodied experiences.

At its time of publication, Takahashi and Olaveson's (2003) work was one of the few anthropological studies of rave, and the first to deploy experiential methodology. The authors conducted informal interviews and participant observation at Ontario and Quebec raves, capturing events' recurrent elements and ravers' experiences of them. Interviewees understood

elements such as music and lighting as being consciously prepared for an atmosphere (Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). Ravers described engaging with rituals such as gift-giving and dancing to accentuate experiences of these elements, and synchronized gestures with other people. The organizers interviewed similarly signified their awareness of this synchronization; for instance, DJs claimed to increase their music's tempo when crowds cheer (ibid). While the authors neglect discussions on raves' histories, their findings highlight the importance of considering how designed elements can change through people's engagements.

Following this, D'Andrea (2007) similarly conducted experiential research in his study of electronic music scenes, referring to them as 'Techno'. He mainly followed parties in Ibiza and Goa, studying Techno's global emergence as an assemblage. Organizers' and attendees' accounts led the author to conclude that feelings of alienation and defeat, stemming from 1990s neoliberalism, induced Techno pioneers' search for meaning through nonconventional routes. Electronic musicians' DIY collaborations were a strategy to foster creative output by sharing skills and tools, increasing permeability for different groups' contributions (D'Andrea 2007). Goa hippies, for example, organized 'healing workshops' at Techno parties that many interviewees portrayed as rejuvenating (ibid). In line with this, the author drew from Foucault's (1991) concept of limit-experiences – intensely traumatic or sublime experiences – to theorize how Techno parties can remove attendees from everyday subjectivity before integrating transformations. D'Andrea (2007) connected Techno organizers' portrayal of their parties as liberating with Goa hippies' ideas of self-discovery and spirituality, and traced this emergence further through archival research into 1960s psychedelia. The author's approach will be useful to study how organizers orient parties' experiences, while discussing his conceptualization of raves as machinic assemblages emerging from economic contexts in tandem with social dynamics.

St John's (2009) experiential research replicated D'Andrea's (2007) finding that electronic music developed transnationally, but highlights ravers' collaborations and adaptations to political struggles. St John (2009) began his study in the UK, and followed developments in the US, Canada and Australia as electronic music became more popular and regulated globally. American Hardcore organizers continued to emphasize liberatory aspects of raving, which factored into their strategies. For example, they promoted raves on invite-only web forums, as a deliberate choice to work outside the mainstream and corporate worlds they felt frustrated with. The author then situated his interlocutors' emphasis on DIY collaborations while constructing raves with the concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones. These are theorized as spaces situated outside of the law, repurposed for specific means – though being constructed and deployed by people's diverse imaginations of alternative worlds (Bey 1985). Understanding them as spaces that subvert conventional norms, St John (2009) claimed that raves can cause liminality, a state of transformation. This work offers methods to assess raves' multifaceted preparation, but overlooks how the emergent dynamics that loosely assemble during raves.

In examining newer works, Kyriakopoulos (2021) conducted experiential research at European electronic music events, criticizing St John's (2009) assumption that raves inherently cause liminality. Rather, Kyriakopoulos (2021) conceptualized raves as techno-assemblages, inquiring into how stylistic elements come to composition and affectively unfold. Organizers said they were most concerned about the 'vibe' of events while preparing and reconfiguring lineups and spaces (Kyriakopoulos 2021). Ravers primarily feel drawn to events' vibe, and assess lineups to decide how they navigate spaces and timings of rituals, which are ways participants can travel into flows of images and sounds. This work illustrates how raves have

elements prepared for amplifying sensory experiences, but which compose through ravers' and organizers' relations with tools and each other.

St John (2020) later inquired into actions and oppositions during events' preparation, conducting fieldwork at Burning Man, an annual Nevada electronic music festival. Every year, Black Rock City – the constructed space of Burning Man – is created and destroyed by participants, but maintains some consistencies for behavioral and creative norms as outlined in the festival's documents. The author compared Burning Man's promotional materials to facets of Foucault's concept of heterotopia, as a way of analyzing how people experiment creating new worlds without establishing rigidly fixed orders. Despite overarching aesthetic and social themes, participants and organizers experienced and engaged with them differently, while negotiating with each other and authorities over meaning, resources and space. St John's discussions on conflicts refer to how they were addressed historically or in design, or otherwise only mention them, as in the case of an interviewee's claim that the Ten Principles reflect white privilege. While his archival research was thorough, it would be worth inquiring more into actions at the event experientially.

Talking with ravers has offered other ethnographers (D'Andrea 2007; St John 2009, 2020) insight into how organizers prepare raves, through sociocreative inspiration and experiences of political-economic striation. As Van Veen (2010) discusses, ravers lean towards models of self-organizing beyond state and capital institutions. Considering the centrality of these DIY notions, organizers' considerations and strategies for collaborating will continue to be discussed. ARP prepares raves to set tempos and tones of situations, but raves' design are generative through people's affectations, as alluded to by some works (D'Andrea 2007; Kyriakopoulos 2021; Takahashi and Olaveson 2003). This challenges the contemporary leanings

in anthropological works on raves towards Handelman's (1998) notion that events can be deliberately organized for liminality, which prompted my ensuing drift. Following Kyriakopoulos' (2021) discussions on emergent 'vibes', I focus especially on intense situations in raves, and the uncertainties of how they unfold (or not) with HR.

### *Literature Review of HR*

Since my thesis is specifically interested in emergent forms of HR in raves, a short review of this literature is useful to contextualize further how they appear in affective situations. HR emerged in different decades between the 60s-80s in North America and Western Europe, primarily through front-line workers' and activists' then-illegal initiatives to distribute syringes (Roe 2005; Smith 2012). HR efforts became platformed in their respective localities as HIV/AIDS rates increased in the 80s-90s in Canada and the US, with local administrations reassessing harsh enforcement for minor drug offences (Fischer et al. 2004; Roe 2005). These changes in authoritative stances to substance use could also be attributed to economic pressures, with public injection viewed as a 'nuisance' and legal enforcement considered economically unsound in Canada and the Netherlands (Roe 2005). In challenging criminalization, some HR activists increasingly sought legibility through institutionalization, such as medical and municipal petitioning.

HR works in the 90s forked into two major groups: biomedical fields' statistical analyses, and social sciences' ethnographies (Agar 2002; Bourgois 1998; Campbell and Shaw 2008). Of these two groups, ethnographers were viewed to be more critical of political and medical authorities, with some anthropologists holding that quantitative methods did not allow for discussions on systemic issues related to substance use (Bourgois 1998).

Where 60s-90s works demanded that addiction be treated as a medical rather than criminal matter, anthropologists in the 2000s onwards argue that HR researchers still reified biomedical logics' assumptions on substances' inherent social and health risks (Campbell and Shaw 2008; Fischer et al. 2004; Roe 2005; Smith 2012). Drawing from Foucault, HR is often conceptualized by post-2000s anthropologists as a form of governmentality, creating the user/addict as a moral subject responsible for their own health through interacting with various power structures (Campbell and Shaw 2008; Stalcup and Wallace 2021). With this, some users/addicts are legitimized as 'deserving' of HR by voluntarily accessing services such as Safe Injection Sites to use substances (Fischer et al. 2004; Stalcup and Wallace 2021). HR does not necessarily challenge the institutions that still continue to cause carceral outcomes, and the gaps in research can perpetuate or invisibilize stigma towards 'undeserving' groups that do not access these services.

Since the 2010s, anthropologists researching HR have increased their attention on intersecting political-economic inequalities, with some authors highlighting the invisibilization of pleasure in the research which has primarily centered on risk and consequences. They approach this in inquiries by conducting participant-observation in fieldsites atypical to early works, which tended to center around North American and Western European public health sites. Harris (2016) suggests that Argentinian HR differs from 'Anglo-Saxon HR' frameworks on individual behavior change, in that it intervenes in the social settings of substance use. Argentinian HR workers also employ similar strategies such as distributing paraphernalia, but additionally discuss community members' challenges such as unemployment and violence "as material and affective exchange" (Harris 2016:6). Along these lines, Zigon (2015) interviewed Vancouver HR activists distributing clean needles as "an inseparable part of their political

activity related to housing” (516), connecting housing insecurity to overpolicing and illness. These HR activists described their actions as direct responses to particularized issues, but situated how these emerged from other assemblages as an enclosure of potentiality (ibid). In line with this, I inquire into and engage with forms of HR at ARP raves that are both spontaneous and emergent from striations.

Agro (2016), meanwhile, does research on HR in Toronto raves after identifying the lack of ethnographies on recreational substance use. She argues that raves, as informally understood by police to be sites of substance use where communities are able to self-regulate, are less policed than poorer and street populations of users. At raves, HR encompasses more than the use of sterile paraphernalia, but also “nutrition, sleep, sexuality” (Agro 2016:96) in spaces for pleasurable substance use. Similarly, Duncan et al. (2017) consider the consistencies in the design and dynamics of spaces of substance consumption and the extent to which these (im)material dimensions (fail to) generate pleasure. They call for a framework which encompasses the nonhuman forces in a consumption event, and seeing pleasure as emergent and multiple.

I suggest to situate HR within the broader ARP approach of seeking ‘a good time’ and ‘maximizing mutual benefit’, inquiring into creating and augmenting potentialities in raves. By situating this research at raves, I follow among organizers’ and attendees’ forms of HR that engage with public health but also takes it elsewhere. Ethnographic works in the 90s sought to discuss political-economic connections to addiction. Authors since the 2010s still maintain attentions to inequities, but some challenge the reification of risk and consequence as a central focus underlying HR works. Through organizing raves and HR on-site, I approach research in the manner of 90s HR ethnographies, inquiring into gathering and disseminating materials (Agro

2016). Building from this, I look into the dynamics of creating intensities – not inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’ - with a focus on the DIY negotiations and nonhuman forces that take part in a rave’s unfolding.

### *Theory*

Among these lines, I engage more in depth the literature that follow Deleuzoguattarian approaches in anthropology. For instance I engage with Van Veen’s (2010:45) argument that raves are only one formation of a multitude towards an opening to the new. He conceptualizes raves as ‘technics’, which “remix ... the constitutive scripts contained within the conditions of its becoming”, such as through embracing the capitalist tendency towards producing excess yet “intensif[ying] to the point of ... pleasure” (Van Veen 2010:35). In writing about renegade parties and electronic music festivals, Van Veen (2010) suggests a framework of conceptualizing the practices of raves (e.g. lights, drugs, soundsystem, music) as means of augmenting sensory intensities experientially. Ravers might engage in a type of ‘workplay’, a Deleuzoguattarian hybridity of labor and leisure, while engaging with practices for rave experiences (Van Veen 2010). Through this, he suggests that future research on raves focus on “the lived praxis of continuous and collective re-invention in the ongoing encounter” (ibid:45). The messiness of technologies, ‘vibes’, roles, and improvising are consistently underscored by ARP ravers, and will be discussed to flesh out the conceptualization of emergent affective situations.

My research into raves is informed more broadly by Deleuze and Guattari’s approach. Referring to the authors’ concepts of smooth and striated spaces, I suggest to understand that raves “extract their territoriality from milieus ... where they decode fragments” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:503). On a plane of composition, these fragments assume properties through gradients of speed and intensities, and corresponding affects. Through this semiotic

inventiveness, fragments take on meaning through spatial and temporal movement and interaction in flux, where potentialities are loosened from the striated.

I am interested in the corresponding Deleuzoguattarian notion of affects while considering how ARP prepares music, spaces, and practices to create and attend to affects. While Deleuze conceptualized affect as non-representative and fleeting (Gregg and Seigworth 2010), it can be invoked through signified means and received differently depending on bodies' situatedness (Bialecki 2019). Art and symbols can orient people to modes of anticipation through producing affects, orienting how one senses their surroundings and decides on future-oriented actions in the present (Bryant and Knight 2019). I am thus interested in how practices and affective arrangements take part in shaping raves' events.

With this interest in creating and augmenting intensities in mind, I look more deeply into Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of affect as "beings in themselves ... man's nonhuman becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994:173). These writings are grounded in Spinoza's theorization of affect, for which he used various terms - *affectio* as the force of bodies interacting, and *affectus* as bodies' variations in capacities (Spinoza [1849](2002) as cited by Laplante 2020). *Affectio* can drive bodies to orient towards further movement, suspension, or not affect them altogether (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Immediate modes of action can be the means through which bodies modulate their openings for capacities (Gregg and Seigworth 2010), variably expanding and contracting, while also calibrating ways to persevere in existence (Bialecki 2019; Laplante 2020).

This spontaneity is described to be a normative state of everyday life, but becomes more complicated at a societal scale where there are striations which delimit potentiality (Bryant and Knight 2019). Rather, collective anticipation tends to "forestall or alter the coming event ...

expected to transform ... the present” (ibid:41). As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, striated spaces delineate potentialities, where flows of bodies and rhythms of relationalities are more enclosed. In contrast, smooth spaces also hold a potentiality for aggregates, although within a “continuous variation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:476). These may also co-constitute striated spaces, where “the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:500). To provide an example, Adams et al. (2009) suggest that anticipation has become increasingly material through technological and medical practices, which reify constant vigilance through knowledges and embodiment. There can be disruptive moments of intensity which shake people out of their ‘anchored’ daily lives, which can abide by or surpass the potentialities of collective anticipation (ibid). Through theorizing these as affective situations, I discuss moments that (almost) exceed collective anticipation, and how these shape out in ARP raves through HR and otherwise. After describing affective situations as loosely assembling in Chapter 2, I discuss forms of HR more thoroughly in Chapter 3 as applied to Deleuzoguattarian smooth and striated spaces, conceptualizing affect in connection to conversations that mention ‘energy exchange’ and ‘becoming one with the crowd’.

In searching for a style that invokes immediacy while also incorporating discussions on theory, I turn to Taussig’s focus on encounters and events which seems to mobilize his earlier writing that “potentiality is political ... encouraging us to act in certain ways with very concrete results” (Bryant and Knight 2019). With the project’s approach being participant-observation, reflexivity takes part with people and materials I encounter, as well as turning back on questions of practicable actions. Potentiality is senseable and involves affects, pertaining to both a body’s openness to others and capacities for action (Bryant and Knight 2019). It is both concrete and

indeterminate, but also a “withdrawn ... “permanent energy” that may be sensed” (Bryant and Knight 2019:120), a discussion which can illuminate ravers’ frequent conceptualization of a ‘vibe’ (see, St John 2013).

### *‘Vibes’ and Affective Situations*

I broadly conceptualize affective situations as how affects flow, akin to how ARP organizers describe sensing and setting a ‘vibe’. To draw from Spinoza, an affective flow could include: bodies opening up or closing in, to expand or persevere or stay unaffected at all. Garcia-Mispireta’s (2023) work similarly conceptualizes vibes in relation to Spinozist affect, and interviews with ravers. Here, the author describes a vibe as a “collectively experienced affective tone or atmosphere that is shaped by sonic experience ... a fundamental aspect of the embodied experience of sound” (Garcia-Mispireta 2023:129). Where art and music can be considered affects, I conceptualize raves as a space for affective situations. In Chapter 2, I describe my attentions of these moments in speeds and slowness, tones, (dis)pleasures, and being “caught” in sensing and wondering (see, Favret-Saada 2012). If affects in raves can be understood as energy exchanges and stepping outside oneself into becoming-crowd, I suggest that vibes are: how affects resonate indeterminately (if at all) in encounters, and the affective situations themselves of particular intensities or disjointedness.

### *Methodology*

Smooth and striated spaces and spontaneity are relevant to my entry as a HR facilitator, especially considering ARP’s focus on mutually enhancing benefits while mitigating risks. While organizing raves, I discussed and negotiated actions and materialities with ARP organizers, who create affects through different angles of entry. I aimed to open up to the affective situations at

ARP raves through different modes of sensing, and conversed with people to particularize how they engaged with dynamics.

For the most part, my tasks involved HR and equipment (dis)assembly. I learned from other ARP organizers how to setup and teardown raves, being asked to load out gear from shared vehicles and untangle cables as needed. Through observing others' tasks during preliminary fieldwork raves, I was also clued into repeated choices, such as placing water bottles near the speakers and tying garbage bags onto the speaker stands. Relatedly, Favret-Saada (2012) describes her approach to methodology and ethnography as centralizing around "situations in which I, the ethnographer, was "caught," as well as the ways in which I came to understand and accept (or not) the demands made of me" (437). Specifically, I explore my tasks in ARP raves assessing 'harm' through encounters with other people, where I referred to my Naloxone, psychedelic trip sitting, and street medic trainings. Seeing someone shaking, for example, would be a cue for me to offer a blanket. My actions were aimed to affect them positively, but may have been received negatively, or not land at all.

I planned out a HR space for ravers to take items and/or interact with me as an HR volunteer ahead of each rave. I researched local organizations to obtain free supplies from, while encouraging other ARP organizers and attendees to give feedback or ideas. The city of Toronto's website contains a list of partner HR organizations with funding and gear distribution services. Some things organizers and ravers ask for, like candy, is not the kind subsidized by municipal HR initiatives. The HR supplies I managed to obtain were gathered from a variety of different community organizations, all of which were registered as HR agency partners to the municipality (by some officiated means I knew as little about as the volunteers I'd bothered for more information). We were able to obtain a variety of supplies for free, namely: alcohol pads; glass

pipe kits; Naloxone; straws; condoms and lube; and sterile water. Other supplies considered as part of HR but were not typically subsidized included: gum; water; blankets; stickers. With feedback from ARP organizers, I also compiled a resource sheet for ravers' reference, reminding them that organizers are ready to help or even just chat. This sheet also listed emergency crisis lines, local substance checking centers, and websites with more information on substances and where to buy testing kits. I coordinated with Audi to discuss printing costs, and they used funds from the group to prepare the stickers and resource sheets. Consumable items such as water and snacks were internally funded through ARP's pool of donations.

While I had intended to take photographs of spaces and discuss the visual aspects of marketing and rave setups, the loss of data (following a phone theft) coincided with a time period where I drifted towards a framework emphasizing phenomenological intensities of writing and experiences.

At ARP raves, I took fieldnotes with a focus on interactions, particularly fast-paced or slow moments, and how my attentions shifted. Online ethnography also figures into this methodology, as the medium for a bulk of the communications involved in planning and meeting took place on Facebook and Zoom. For Chapter 2, I draw from these situations within ARP raves to hone out the dynamism between some planning, spontaneity, and ambiguities in becoming.

Five ARP organizers and a DJ who performed for an ARP rave formally agreed to participate in the research, returning signed electronic forms over email, and I had a one-on-one conversation with each of them virtually between August-November 2022. The conversations were mostly unstructured, but there were consistent prompts about how they became involved in raving and ARP, and what they do at raves. I centralize virtual conversations with ARP organizers who agreed to sign consent forms as a reference point, laying out the groundwork for

discussion points in the following sections. Since each person was aware that I was involved with HR tasks, they addressed that topic unprompted. I draw from these one-on-one conversations as well as fieldwork encounters during our two raves. Audi is a DJ and the longest-running consistent organizer of ARP. Tim is also a DJ who joined ARP in 2021 and MCs along with coordinating bookings and planning. Since these two are the most actively involved and have the lengthiest experience with Toronto's rave scene, I primarily draw from our online conversations to contextualize ARP's emergence as I learned about it through this entry. With this, I follow other lines of discussions spanning to the broader rave scene in Toronto, and situate it at times through discussions of striations (e.g. municipal policy) and other localities described to be relevant.

I turn to conversations with ARP organizers who became involved with the group in the past year, with an interest in how they became involved through specific tasks and converging interests. Michelle is a new DJ and has been somewhat involved with ARP for years, sometimes helping with door management at indoors raves, but has become more involved in the past year with other organizing activities. Luca is a resident DJ and since 2021 helps with transportation, planning, setup and takedown. Anthony is a sound engineer and since 2021 helps with sound mixing, planning, setup and takedown, although he was not present at the raves involved in fieldwork. Through online conversations, I invite their perspectives into spontaneous and repeated tasks that emerge in ARP raves (that may be dispersed throughout the group and/or specialized to certain skillsets such as DJ'ing). I inquire into how they affect and are affected through embodied and sense-able ways. Through being positioned as an ARP organizer myself, I also learn about tasks for organizing raves from these organizers through raves and group-wide meetings.

Finally, Lukøje is a DJ who ARP booked for a rave during preliminary research, and he is involved with organizing raves with local Techno collectives. I had a conversation under a bridge with him at an ARP rave during preliminary research, and randomly ran into him again in a warehouse. This is a nice thing about raves. They're like little interstices of moving points, which become nodes of condensed movement-stillness-movement flows. As a DJ who is primarily affiliated with a different rave collective, I inquire into the flow of tasks and affect in the Toronto scene. Due to Lukøje's active role in organizing with multiple rave collectives, he discusses a wider perspective of these flows which add to the descriptions of situations where affects emerge in raves.

Being new to Toronto's scene myself, I also seek out informal conversations with ravers I encountered through ARP's raves. As I continue to attend other raves in Toronto and Berlin, I additionally draw from these experiences to flesh out and contrast with ARP's specificities. These ravers are mostly people I happened to strike up conversations with from May 2022-2023, with the majority of them now being friends or mutual friends, if not people I only encountered once. I invite conversations to orient towards a polyphonic mode of discussion of how affect is created in ARP raves. Random encounters with strangers seem to me a major part of raving as an experience, and I partake in spontaneous conversations at raves. All the ravers mentioned in this thesis have been made aware of my research verbally, but as for the people who did not sign consent forms, I use pseudonyms for anonymity and clarify details of each personal communication in footnotes. I invite stories from situations, akin to Taussig's (2018) commitment to "...writing [that] can summon what it refers to into itself ... It is not a label. It is a call, just as the cry of the donkey is a call" (187). (Earlier, Taussig had claimed that "sound ... takes the human body out of itself ... [accessing] a network of metamorphoses." (2018:179-180))

Most of all I try to invite the felt intensities of experience, the people, the material, the words/stories - into co-writing, as suggested in anthropologist Graham St. John's (2009; 2020) prolific writings on raves. When recalling intense experiences, I relate stories to what ravers have shared with me across different raves of how differently people take part in the intensities of situations and create affects. In these conversations where the people I encounter describe timing their doses for substances or DJ'ing techniques, I inquire into how ARP attendees are affected by raves and open up to situations.

## CHAPTER 2: Loosely Assembling: Affective Situations or ‘Vibes’?

### Emergence of ARP

"Fuck you John Tory. Fuck you Mel Lastman." –Tim from Acid Reign Productions<sup>1</sup>, 2022

There are thirteen active ARP organizers today, most of whom have been involved in the local rave scene for several years. Outside of rave-planning, organizers have day jobs mainly in the music industry or artistic studios with workshops such as fire-spinning. Audi has been the longest-running and only consistent organizer in the group and puts out calls for new volunteers yearly.

“ARP was always a thing that existed, never really – *formed* ... we started calling ourselves ARP around seven years ago. It’s usually a mess of people who do want to throw parties but are uncoordinated,” Audi says<sup>2</sup>. Along with their former creative partner, Audi used to run two nightlife venues which were shut down soon after transferring over ownership. Jaded by their experiences trying to run and maintain indoors venues, Audi began to turn to outdoors and renegade modes of organizing parties. They depict the risks of outdoors parties to be significantly lower in terms of costs and arrestability; in recent years, police have been less likely to arrest or even fine and confiscate gear at outdoors raves, because the paperwork is more of a hassle to fill out on-the-spot as opposed to having weeks-long fire code investigations prior to an event.

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<sup>1</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022, where he specifically requested for this quote to be included in the thesis as such.

<sup>2</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

While Audi describes there are numerous new organizers every year, they have noticed that most of them drop off in level of involvement overtime, with some people not even showing up to the season's first rave altogether. For the purposes of this thesis, I refer to them as "ARP organizers" to distinguish them from the rave attendees I talked with. The ARP organizers described their involvement situationally through the roles and tasks they contribute to. Given the yearly call for involvement and group-wide process of vetting responses, I consider my positioning in the field partially as an ARP organizer. At the same time, there is an instance<sup>3</sup> where Tim said to the crowd that they are all ARP now, and the blur between participating and organizing is expressed in ARP's dynamics below.

"We're a very ragtag group, we're underground. But it's also low stress in a way," Audi says<sup>4</sup>. I try to prod into what they mean by low stress. "Everyone's here by choice, usually on a voluntary and unpaid basis." Having less resources among ourselves, especially given ARP's free entry for raves, seems to Audi to paradoxically lessen contention around the treasury. The artists and DJs we invite, too, are aware of this voluntary basis. There's also less consistency with who does what, but Tim shares<sup>5</sup> that it is a lasting ambiguity of making do with what we can, and people being able to step in if they feel like.

ARP's ragtag dynamics contrasts with some patterns in the Toronto rave scene's organizers. Regular group practices of meeting before and after each rave facilitates communication between the organizers involved. Lukøje describes<sup>6</sup> how age and experience levels had given way to power inequalities in most rave collectives, with older folks taking on

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<sup>3</sup> An event in ARP:08

<sup>4</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>5</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

<sup>6</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

major roles and performance opportunities, while younger organizers get lodged with repetitive tasks and feel too shy to ask to do otherwise. Lukøje has noticed rave groups tend to be less hierarchical since lifting COVID mandates, especially as people are noticing “it hasn’t been working in our systems anyway”. ARP organizers who were drawn to this call for collaborators vocally resonate<sup>7</sup> with the post’s emphasis on inclusivity and fun. Experience level and skillsets does not seem to factor in the most into group decisions, but rather aligned politics and values for throwing parties.

Michelle and Lukøje describe<sup>8</sup> how raves gave way to reviving their passion for music, and that the general attitude for openness and inviting participation continues to underlie group dynamics and practices. The technologies in lightshows and live mixing transduce affects in ARP raves, and even when conflict occurs between organizers and/or attendees, this can prevent the stagnation of a rave or rave collective “if you’re not stepping over others”, as Lukøje says<sup>9</sup>. This permeates with ARP organizers, performers, and the sense of community among the raver crowds that tends to get attracted by word-of-mouth or otherwise. To this end, Audi and Tim invite multi-genre DJs, and include diversity in their own track selections while performing. When it comes to ARP in particular, a bulk of the crowd attendance consists of anyone within a broad age range between 16-40 year olds. What draws them to our raves, Tim suggests, is an open-minded attitude towards our tendencies towards multi-genre music (some of which may sound outdated); and likewise efforts to plan and organize raves on our end is to prepare people for mutual experiences, hiring smaller artists and promoters.

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<sup>7</sup> ARP meeting in August 2022

<sup>8</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022 and Lukøje in September 2022, respectively

<sup>9</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

There are ambiguities around how precisely the group could be categorized as a ‘collective’, ‘crew’, or even whether it is hierarchical – but these multiplicities unfold through ongoing group dynamics. Michelle uses<sup>10</sup> the term ‘collective’, which may connect with her idea of everyone being involved in safety and also having a good time. While Tim describes<sup>11</sup> his and Audi’s roles as co-leaders, he notes that “it can be natural to collaborate, it comes when it comes. Like you also fell naturally into harm reduction at the events.” Rather than having a prescriptive structure, Audi understands the prominence of their and Tim’s roles as emergent from consistency with taking on back-end duties such as booking and promotion. “We’re all learning as we go, I don’t want it to ever become too formal,” Audi says<sup>12</sup>. “It’s good to try and invite chaos in the collective, and in the Toronto scene too, and even music and arts globally.”

Speaking to this uncertain and sometimes messy dynamic of solidarity, Michelle shares<sup>13</sup> that her motivation for being involved with ARP is to “...try to create a space forefronting alternatives – and it may not be the solution but it’s important to try and do ... The possibility of harm is part of the experience of partying and using drugs, so we need to have conversations to minimize risk.” Along similar lines, Audi stresses<sup>14</sup> the importance of seeking accountability, though through community-centered efforts rather than reliance on policing. “I try not to involve authority for stuff that we can deal with ourselves,” they expand. “I have always had problems with police as a long-time punk; we can’t repair the system so we need to rethink repair itself. I don’t have exact suggestions or tools but I know we need to burn and restart.” Adding to this, Audi criticizes the exclusionary practices of carceral responses as incapable of amounting to any

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<sup>10</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>11</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

<sup>12</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>13</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>14</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

possibility for change, which they tie to their approach to organizing raves and fostering a sense of community. Kicking people out is the norm when dealing with issues in the scene, Audi observes, "... which can help with some cases but doesn't deal with the systemic issues, it's like the police's iron fist approach". Calling people 'out', for example, might dislocate a drug dealer trying to go through a bag check at a venue to instead attend outdoors raves that are all-ages. As it stands, a few ARP<sup>15</sup> organizers highlight the importance of putting down a framework ahead of time on how to deal with issues on the spot constructively, highlighting the continual reflexivity in ARP's approach to organizing raves.

### **Context of raves in Toronto**

Toronto's rave scene emerged in 1991, when the Scottish DJ Mark Oliver moved to the city following a period when raves in the UK were at 'full swing'. Anthony explains<sup>16</sup> that at the time, electronic music and raves were still 'underground' in Toronto - only known by people who had traveled to Europe and encountered the scenes there. He and Tim<sup>17</sup> understand this lack of visibility (to general publics, popular media, and local authorities) to be conducive for the scene's emergence. Mark Oliver's group, alongside new crews that branched off and caught on to rave organizing, were able to run all-night raves at The Hop venue without municipal intervention. Promotion of raves occurred through 'word-of-mouth', between organizers' social circles and mutual friends. This continues to be a way of attracting people sharing similar social/creative tendencies, with selective exclusivity claimed<sup>18</sup> to foster tighter communities and avoid undue attention.

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<sup>15</sup> ARP meeting in August 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>16</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in September 2022

<sup>17</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in September 2022 and Tim in October 2022, respectively

<sup>18</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022 and Anthony in October 2022, respectively

Given these crowds' unfamiliarity with electronic music, Anthony describes<sup>19</sup> how organizers encouraged the use of ecstasy to gain a taste for the genres. Using substances had already been viewed as normalized or a ubiquitous part of raving to the organizers, he elaborates, and having rave organizers offer ecstasy centralized sales – which factored into costs and profits for rave collectives. Since the late 90s there has been a drastic decrease in Toronto's 'safe supply' (of pure MDMA without filler additives), Tim and Anthony note<sup>20</sup>. Both ARP organizers express concerns about how substances may be mixed unsafely by dealers, recalling the presence of fentanyl which can cause fatal overdoses.

Early Toronto raves had different genres to survive and appeal for increasing numbers of crowds, with organizers collaborating with each other loosely. As more things happen this potentiality can close in pockets of striation that persevere, which can be enclosed to its openings (socially, economically, or otherwise). Having spent his adolescence in Toronto's 90s rave scene, Tim often reminisces over ARP meetings and personal conversations<sup>21</sup> about how impactful those raves have been to his music taste and current approaches to DJing. Multi-room sites offered the possibility for different stages where DJs can play simultaneously in the same timeslots, and crowds could move around them. Related to their experiences running indoors raves, venues, and renegade parties, Audi argues<sup>22</sup> that the city's attitude has hurt creativity in the past decade. "80% of venues were lost 7-8 years ago. There's so much less space that there is less risk[-taking] in events too; before this there was more avant-garde, experimental art, more diversity because there were opportunities even for unpopular art," Audi says. "And multi-room

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<sup>19</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in September 2022

<sup>20</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022 and Anthony in September 2022, respectively

<sup>21</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022; ARP meeting in August 2022; personal communication with Tim in ARP:07 and ARP:08

<sup>22</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

venues could have different – vibes – in them, communities too, things to like and discover and crossover; it can't grow if it's stagnant, without exposing yourself to difference.”

Since the 90s, prices have increased exponentially for renting and purchasing property. While indoors arts spaces still exist, if anything goes wrong the liability “is all on the small collectives running those spaces”, and Audi<sup>23</sup> argues this was further entrenched after 4chan's warehouse raids. To preface, in 2017, the Internet forum 4chan began to target art spaces after a leftist art warehouse in Portland burned down (O'Connell 2016). Users of this site coordinated searches for warehouses that might violate fire codes through searching for raves and social media presence, and filed complaints on warehouses across different countries which gave more legal precedence for venue shutdowns (ibid). Audi describes how their own afterhours venue was shut down in 2017 when people who ran a nearby Airbnb filed a complaint in advance of a rave. Their story details the municipal processes constricting the arts scene: “The complaint goes through the police, the city, and then the fire code inspectors who will tell you to get an expensive contractor even if you can fix something yourself.” Audi compares this to arrests at the G20 protest, where they also observed practices of catching and releasing people to keep them off the streets. They recalled SWAT gear raids on artist communes that involved arrests of artists “and anyone left-leaning”, enclosing the city's potentialities.

“There is a serious war over art going on right now in Toronto,” Audi says. “Wards are either pro- or anti-art; some support banning music past 11pm, shutting venues and collectives down, and for years there's been this sense that things can't get any better, if not worse.” To Audi, the city also has an economic stake in mandating which specific and costly contractors

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<sup>23</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

venue owners must go through to meet building code standards. Interviewing artists similarly evicted from warehouses reported by 4chan in Denver, Dean (2018) found that municipal pressure on hiring specific contractors made it unaffordable for most collectives to maintain their spaces. ARP organizers' challenges for creative organizing in Toronto are not unique to the city, but emerges not unlike what Zigon (2015) deems a non-totalizable assemblage: something which "potentially affects every human on the planet" (1), even though it manifests differently in localities and lived experiences. Audi places emphasis<sup>24</sup> on being part of the "small set of people [in Toronto] who are vocal about keeping art alive ... and be the change you want to see" even if they understand municipal politics as revolving around "nothing but money in the past decade".

Further back before even rising prices and venue shutdowns, Tim relates<sup>25</sup> rave shutdowns to municipal politicians' "moral panic around MDMA, when they banned raves for a bit and ... quickly realized people would keep doing it, except in less safe ways, so then there were a bunch more permits. But there were iDance rallies and community organizing petitioning against the ban." In Toronto as in other cities worldwide, the late 1990s were marked with heavy surveilling, policing, and negative media attention on raves (Wilson 2002). This stigmatized reputation garnered increased attention after Allen Ho's death in 1999 (Marsh 2006). Through analyzing Toronto newspapers from 1999-2000, Marsh (2006) argued that local media outlets increasingly associated raves with substance use and danger. In that time period, Toronto mandated safety protocols for raves, mandating: gathering permits, access to water, age restrictions, search areas for weapon and substances patdowns, advertising guidelines, police officers, and hiring pay-duty officers (Hier 2002). These policies substantially increased costs for

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<sup>24</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>25</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

organizers to plan raves, and entailed greater risks of fines and arrests (ibid). Soon after, the municipality voted to completely ban raves on Toronto spaces in 2000, and numerous grassroots organizations formed in response (Marsh 2006). Of note, the youth-run group PartyPeopleProject prepared political rallies with live DJs, and compiled a report on ravers' needs and the scene's economic benefits through peer interviews and research (ibid). By organizing petitions and letter-writing to municipal governance, Toronto ravers reframed the discourse of raving's danger to highlight the potential risks of pushing raves further underground, in locations with less amenities (Hier 2002). In such a way, Toronto ravers attempted to convey that they were capable of mutual responsibility for their health, shifting the perception of where the accountability lay (ibid). Longstanding ideals of rave scenes - such as mutuality and the motto "Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect" - were conveyed by protesters' efforts to legitimize raves to the broader Toronto public.

TRIP is the oldest HR organization in Toronto focused on raves, having emerged around the time ravers organized legible efforts to self-manage safety protocols in view of the ban. The organization was formed by ravers and consists of paid employees and volunteers who are trained in HR, compiling materials and toolkits to share at raves and workshops. TRIP steps into ARP by coordinating volunteers at raves and distributing materials, but there remains uncertainties in how this unfolds or whether they actually show up. Reflecting on this, Audi points out<sup>26</sup> that HR is relatively new in Toronto's rave scene altogether, and generally HR organizations are as underfunded and lacking in numbers as ARP. Despite seeming impossible for me to contact or join, TRIP shared with other ARP organizers how they are low on volunteer

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<sup>26</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

numbers, and Audi and Michelle talk about possibly doing a fundraising rave for them in support.

ARP organizers discuss the loss of 'authenticity' in raves as being profit- and status-driven, related to the centralization of the scene through costly venues that only larger rave crews can afford to book. Older ravers I encounter<sup>27</sup> often look to the early 2000s period of the Toronto scene as signaling a major 'ebb' or dying off of the scene, wherein raves were largely commercial 'spectacles'. Anthony characterizes EDM<sup>28</sup> as a 'spectacle', putting on a show for popularity and profit rather than being driven by a genuine love for the creativity and art of producing and performing. The genre vaguely stands for "Electronic Dance Music", amalgamating some popular elements of rave music such as House, Techno, and Drum n' Bass. While elaborating on this, Luca mentions<sup>29</sup> that "Between 2016-2019 ... you knew exactly what you were going to expect when going out in Toronto. There was the same energy levels, the same kind of commercial music, even the BPM never changed much." DJ sets in this timeframe never went beyond a "6/10 in terms of energy", Luca elaborates. This was characteristic of club parties and raves alike.

Building from this point, Lukøje theorizes<sup>30</sup> that Toronto's turn to hiphop as the mainstream genre being played at clubs and parties has "pushed electronic music to the edges" again. This sense of underground-ness, he claims, is a major part of raves' appeals in the city. It's a sentiment echoed by ravers<sup>31</sup> within the very warehouses and foresty nooks that I come across

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<sup>27</sup> Personal communications with Matt at ARP:07. Personal communications with Kev at ARP:07.

<sup>28</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in September 2022

<sup>29</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Luca in November 2022

<sup>30</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

<sup>31</sup> Personal communications with Steve in November 2022 and Mel in December 2022, respectively. Both persons were made aware of this project through verbal disclosure upon meeting them.

them in; a breath of relief for this sense of solidarity through the affective charge of ‘underground-ness’.

Michelle understands<sup>32</sup> ‘underground’ raves as ‘poverty culture’. Free entrance is a prominent feature of outdoors raves, especially given the indeterminate flows of people’s entry and exits outdoors without a designated door area or security, but Michelle also threads this further back to ‘its roots’. “People take care of each other, she says. There’s a spirit of prepping and giving, like with water or fruit; even easy stuff can be part of it, spreading the love. So much about this is about vibes, it can leave you with a fun memento of the night, even if you’re all poor too.” These observations are contrasted with her experiences attending larger ticketed raves in her youth where there were food vendors and marketplaces on-site, which lends to a “different vibe” when raving among other poor and queer people who are outcasts, “just as people who use drugs are also outcasts”. Interestingly, Lukøje argues<sup>33</sup> that increasingly unfeasible costs have spurred rave crews like ARP to do more free outdoors raves, which in turn has fostered what he calls the ongoing ‘rave renaissance’. As of recently, Lukøje notices<sup>34</sup> that various social movements’ traction during COVID-19 restrictions have given way to more conversations between rave organizers about power imbalances when it comes to gender and sexuality – both of which having been pertinent in Toronto’s rave scene for decades. When it comes to the Psytrance scene, Audi observes<sup>35</sup> many victims who shared their stories completely distancing themselves from any groups, which is symptomatic of silencing but also further entrenches it. Lukøje highlights<sup>36</sup> that some amount of conflict can be productive within or between rave

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<sup>32</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>33</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

<sup>34</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

<sup>35</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>36</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

organizer groups, but that this recent change fostering more open conversations has been coinciding positively with a more ‘level playing ground’ between new collectives planning to throw outdoors raves for free. COVID-19 health mandates encouraged publishing and discovering music online, as well as a “thirst for events and social gatherings, especially for ravers who are already very social”, according to Lukøje<sup>37</sup>. What changed in between, notably, was also the increasing proliferation of social movements’ visibility online with discussions on inequity and systemic issues that undermine organizing capacity and solidarity in Toronto’s rave scene.

### **ARP:07 – The Art of Resistance**

We plan this rave to coincide with Toronto’s annual arts event, Nuit Blanche, to lessen the chances of an early shutdown by police. On top of legal considerations, I am surprised by how much organized spontaneity is involved. We decide on a location, lineup, and a name for the rave well in advance. Whether DJs or other organizers would actually pull through, however, is still left up in the air. Even gathering equipment we knew to be in our inventory is a toss-up, since that week an organizer had brought the speakers to a protest where they were unfortunately damaged. The ARP planning meetings revolve around coordinating these consistent tasks that we repeatedly need for raves, but while always maintaining an openness, a question mark. Part of this, our sound engineer Anthony says, is because there are the unpredictables at the time and place of the rave; unpredictable like weather, sand, humidity which can affect and be affected by anything from sound quality, to equipment damage, and even the crowd’s mood. Lukøje circles

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<sup>37</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

around an analogy to get to a similar point: he says rave organizers are like the firestarters who collect wood and try to set it on fire, but it's up to the community – who can be attendees or stray passersby or collaborators or someone else entirely – to keep that fire going. I am unsure what he means by this exactly at first, but revisiting this rave and the group meeting that follows illuminates his point. Our planning orients to the unpredictable, while also preparing for the unpredictable to mitigate excesses and incoherencies. Majorly, the other ARP organizers plan ahead to secure some means of A) HR and B) performers.

It's typically very ambiguous whether or not the city's major rave HR organization, TRIP<sup>38</sup>, would have enough volunteers for a given night to enlist their help. On previous occasions, the organization had: cancelled last minute; dispatched a 'Bag Peer' to wander passingly in the crowd with supplies on hand; or abruptly coordinated someone to table fully on the day of. This time it seems clear enough that they would not show up, so I aid in gathering some supplies, referencing others' HR guidebooks and personal experience. Navigating how to approach 'HR' through the group and the broader terrain of Toronto's organizations involves learning on-the-spot, and majorly in this rave through situations and conversations. In the smooth space of ARP's rave, flows of materials and even guidelines for responses are released from codification towards uncertain new openings.

As for performers, one organizer has invited a group of fire dancers he vaguely knew, by some degrees of separation. The troupe's name seems vaguely familiar to me, but I admittedly am unclear how that was coordinated between groups in the end (given the continual flux with planning on our own private groupchat). Nevertheless, our flyers make mention of the fire

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<sup>38</sup> TRIP organizes HR volunteers for Toronto raves with mobile "Bag Peers" or tabling a booth with materials.

performers' appearance. Occluding a specific timeframe reflects the general knowhow of flux surrounding Tim's idea that "we'll get there when we get there, if we do"<sup>39</sup>. Where Tim and Audi make their best efforts as usual to secure lineups, in eager reference to what they deem three of the best local techno DJs, we are quickly clued into how one of them could not make it for sake of mental health. "This is okay, too," Audi is fast to reaffirm. Making up for the gap in the timeslot, our resident ARP DJ Luca decides to take on a longer set time.

ARP:07 is planned to take place at a downtown park for its central location along the span of Nuit Blanche. In terms of timing and location this is a particularly hectic rave for ARP, as two other organizer groups announced raves at the same time and place. We do not hear about one of them until much closer to the rave, upon which Tim felt spurred to contact the groups beforehand to coordinate and get a sense of how to settle on strategies. He has connections with both groups, as does Audi. A few days before the scheduled date, Tim hears back from them, reassured that they were friendly about cooperating. Unexpectedly, they both want to set up at the exact area by a monument, just as we had discussed doing. We come to the agreement to coordinate a triangular shape around the monument to maximize surface area and distance between soundsystems and crowds while still being positioned in the middle of the park, along Nuit Blanche crowds' paths. There are pockets of smoothness in the striations of Toronto's spaces; and practices or ideas which persevere in functionally opening flows or creating other forces. Wedged between the city's Legislative Building and a section of the University of Toronto's campus, ARP organizers<sup>40</sup> describe the park as a high-risk option for renegade parties, usually incurring frequent policing encounters with private and public authorities. The yearly

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<sup>39</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

<sup>40</sup> Personal communications with Brett, Tim, and Audi at ARP:07

municipal arts event make it so that policing attention is more dispersed along different hubs of events, and furthermore, offers some space for legal legibility to characterize our rave as fitting into the criteria.

I arrive at the park via transit, hopping off the train stop positioned right by the University of Toronto campus. This time, Brett<sup>41</sup> had also found the time to participate for this rave in between other work and party setups, and brings some gear of his own. Audi is the first to show up at our spot, which was already marked by some bags and soundsystem gear. As the other ARP organizers streamed in the area, we take turns hauling gear off our shared vehicles into carts that we wheeled back over, if not lugging them over our shoulders.

Setting up is already complicated, but is made further into a mess by coordinating with - or around - the two other raves, all of us with an eye on the center of the park. Among ARP, each of us tends to the items of their own expertise, at times requesting others' aid. Having picked up on some practices from prior ARP raves during preliminary fieldwork, I am now accustomed to hauling gear from carts upon other organizers' requests, and carry a larger inventory of my own HR supplies. Even after we mostly put stuff out and put cables into places, there is a lot of movement as one of us might want to move a light, or a speaker, or the whole damn thing just a few more meters. I find it endearing how particular everyone is. I've taken to gravitating around Audi and Tim for pointers on what to do. Tim and I had gotten attuned to working together while setting up the ARP banner across the main table that hosts the DJ equipment. Meanwhile, Audi often excuses themselves for being a bit more all over the place, in their words - which amounts this time to their harried movements around our designated setup area and further still into the

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<sup>41</sup> Brett is an ARP organizer who has verbally been informed about this project and consented to collaborate orally, though he did not sign a form. He helps with setup, transportation, and photography.

reach of the other rave collectives' circles. Even still we crack jokes with each other about rave turf wars, and coming up with a satisfactory blurb for our Nuit Blanche community art project that was now underway. In a sense, it feels like a festival setup, with the multi-stage outdoors formation. The other raves' lineups centers around Drum 'n Bass, with Nest being the most elaborately decorated with a large art installation of wings and an egg-shaped DJ stage, while the other one is slightly larger than ours with a tent-like (caravan roof) setup and a separate tarped tent room with markers to write and draw with. There are some missing speaker stands in our inventory, as well as redundancies in extra cables. We brush this off lightly, with a couple organizers pitching ideas on what we could use as substitutes at hand or to relay over the groupchat to the other organizers who hadn't arrived yet. We move about as we try to stage how affects emerge throughout the night, staying attentive to missing materials or spatial coordinations in our flow.

More uncertain are our dynamics with the other rave organizers, all of whom I am completely unfamiliar with. I tend to get excited about meeting other people involved with renegade parties, but a couple other ARP organizers quickly hint at their negative associations of the Nest crew. When trying to mitigate sound spillover by moving speakers around, Audi highlights the additional problem of Nest's crowd spillover. Upon asking them what they were concerned about, they vaguely describe them as "not our kind of crowd". Brett picks up on this conversation, and comments that there is probably something more to it that we are not being clued in on. Later, Audi brings up some more specific remarks on sexual harassment and how that has been handled in the past by the Nest organizers. Tim had described ARP's orientation towards 'no rules', but even in the loose assembly of ARP:07, there are these conversation around culminating affects and augmentations to potentialities. How to intensify connections that

can open up affects, while preventing ‘spillovers’? Despite the tension, early into setting up, there is a lot of flow between different rave collectives’ movements as we all try to coordinate between ourselves. We are doing soundchecks, joking that it was a sort of ‘back-to-back’ in its own regard between all the organizers coordinating as we continue ‘coming up’. The ARP organizers seem to display some outwards politeness towards Nest, which may tail off a functional consideration beyond actual personability. Later, a Nest organizer cracks a joke about how ARP’s setups were always susceptible to sound spillover, since we have a more modest sound system owing to the constraints of going fully battery-powered.

Once the first set kicks off, it is downright absurd seeing the random - and familiar - crowds that are gravitating to our rave. There are passersby who happened by our rave on their Nuit Blanche routes, as expected, as well as the neighborhood dwellers who are going about their daily walks or bike rides. Dressed for the occasion, there are folks donning pirate costumes and full-body Elmo suits. Beyond that, the people who had heard about our night from the mailing list are beginning to show up, filtering into the dancefloor. We recognize a few of the regulars, including someone who often wore Jason-style masks and showed up early, especially for the Hardstyle and Gabber lineups. This time, they lean more towards DnB raves nearby, but take to leaving their bags around the other organizers’ as usual.

I am handing out candy and water bottles hurriedly, anticipating that the rave will pick up in pace with all the material having come together, and the music starting to pick up. Eventually the ratio teeters out and there are more stragglers hanging around than passersby hurrying along. Like the others, I take to circulating around and joining in the dancefloor every now and then, hoping to bolster the energy while putting a few last things into place. Even as things come together materially, flows of movements, lights, and sounds continue to oscillate alongside the

dancefloor. In a way this precursory dancing is meant to get the party going, which we start to take more on the role of seeing as our masked regular was wandering elsewhere. Recalling the comment on the ‘awkward comeup’ period, it strikes me how intensifying sounds and movements participates in the creation of affects.

Ravers<sup>42</sup> do not articulate specifics about what constitutes a 'vibe', describing it instead as a way of sensing non/humans at raves. “Raving is an endless flow – in a set, there’s rhythm and sound,” Lukøje says, taking me back to Garcia-Mispireta’s (2023:133) suggestion that sounds can give way to a collective affective experienced, while still resonating in different ways emotionally. Vibes are mentioned in association with embodiment, such as dancing, moving, or touching. To ravers<sup>43</sup>, gauging someone's vibe is elemental to how they sense the overall 'energy' of a rave and tap into it. This can also more broadly expand to sensing creative and political milieus. Lukøje describes that meeting other people who seem passionate and creative, for example, is “infectious<sup>44</sup>” and can feed into each other's excitement at recognizing this. Conversely, when he gets the sense of ego-centric motivations underlying an interaction, he feels the urge to withdraw.

To our surprise, TRIP actually shows up to drop off a bunch of supplies, along with a bag that one of their volunteers lost and is now searching for. Later on, a fresh duo of volunteers comes by and said they'd be sticking around for a couple hours. I take to dancing more, but soon notice they are not talking with people who pass by the booth, as I had. They are dressed like any other park-goer or rave-goer and sitting on a fountain so I guess most folks don’t realize they are

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<sup>42</sup> Personal communications with Jo and Mika in November 2022, and Tre in December 2022. They were made aware of this project through verbal disclosure upon meeting them.

<sup>43</sup> Personal communications with Jo and Mika in November 2022, and Tre in December 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022.

with TRIP. I hang around the booth again and people would ask me if I am with TRIP. Even the TRIP people forget I'm not with TRIP. *Dude, I want to say, I kept emailing you and you never wrote back about accepting new volunteers.* The TRIP volunteers hand me extra Naloxone, which I place on the bottled waters but later move under the DJ table. For the most part, the other ARP organizers are most concerned about the attention that drinking in public is known to draw, with open alcohol containers bearing the risk of an early shutdown. Additionally, Tim always emphasizes the motto of 'leaving no trace', but it is complicated by our quick realization that the park does not have as many garbage bins as we'd expected in our decision to not bring trash bags of our own this time. Meanwhile, it is growing more confusing to navigate HR tasks with the TRIP peers, since we all instinctively jump to answer anyone who approaches our booth. On one occasion, a TRIP peer repeats their answer of how their organization does not distribute reagents (for testing substances at home), even as I try to direct the attendee to our ARP party packs which contains links to online resources where you could order them. There is a lot of ambiguity around how to distribute tasks and material items, especially as TRIP's personnel keeps changing unannounced. Tragically, they disappear completely when I actually need to leave the booth to walk around, feeling antsy while there is so much noise and movement around me.

I circulate around a lot, dancing when it seemed like there was opportunity for me to do so. There is a certain vibe when the intensities in a rave flow smoothly, even at a higher peak, with the indeterminacy of roles and space-times. In these moments the sounds, movements, lights, and chatter resonate in waves without clumsy gaps or dismantling connections. Later I realize some people did not notice the HR space and I start to offer water by carrying bottles, or motioning them over to the space. Whenever I notice people inquisitively approach the space and look over the table, I would rush over to make myself available to interactions. Making visible a

space with HR materials affects attendees in different ways, if they pick up on it altogether. For the most part, people assume that what we had laid out was available only for sale. I realize after a couple instances that it may have seemed like I was guarding the items we had up for offer by hopping back so urgently. In part, I also have in mind that a TRIP volunteer asked to leave behind a bag of stuff for their friend to pick up. This area, like the rest of ARP's raves tends to be, seems to be a hybrid of stray parts washed ashore; another rhythm in the fuzzy aggregations of the smooth space.

Once we are a couple DJs in, dancefloor all filled up, the fire performers come. We move around the HR booth to carve out some space for them to put down miniature traffic cones, a zoning area for their dancing. I had been chainsmoking cigarettes leading up to this, and am a touch upset that I could no longer smoke there for safety's sake. It is also weird being situated right behind a speaker and subwoofer, since I was further away from the sound before, and I find it increasingly difficult to disassemble my attention as someone is simultaneously recounting an absolutely hilarious story to me (involving milk and LSD). Where the other organizers had called our setup period the 'awkward come up', I suppose this could be considered the peak. In absence of strobe lights or ceilings from which to attach them, it is the searing streaks that trailed the dancers' calculated movements which mute the mottled projections to our left – and yes, even Nest's giant winged egg.

Trace of an unlit cigarette ushers in a dying wisp into the air. Meandering conversation unsettles this trace of smoke. Someone had been to Goa once, astonished by sight of milk carried as a ripple by sheer force of gravity down exposed nipple in glint of moonlight, the beach, how it beckoned absurdity of the arbitrary. Fall into place. We are here now as nothing was really there then. Still we trade stories in fervent madness, wandering merchants on a trading route, wild

gesticulations of hands and eyebrows thrown into the air; what to call the particularity of this feverish mode of speech? Not long after our conversation, I run into an acquaintance I had met at another rave, and he pitches the idea of doing a collaborative rave with his circle. I come to notice again how ravers get swept up in this and that project, and how positively refreshing it is to strike up connections with semi-strangers in that particular way. Because sometimes you don't want to come across as cheesy and have to say things that read like bad poetry, something along the lines of: I have this deep sadness inside me and I don't know where it goes. So you just instead follow in the footsteps of its rhythm, try to match the tempo, kind of how our brainwaves sync or even interlock during a conversation — regardless of spatial or technological separation — and it comes out as a dance somehow, how we sidestep the soft parts we're not quite ready to cast in the red strobelights just yet, and it's also this small miracle how we've found ourselves here in this slightly musky warehouse and for awhile the jawlock loosens enough to cave into a smile and a hug, oh hi how are you doing, well you know how it is. Unspoken honesty. Convivial distance. It's the most truthful thing sometimes to live in admittance of the perpetual distance between one and another, the gap in understanding, but then the DJ rattles off the high pass filter and suddenly sashay into a sense of here-ness, because where else could we be but march in desirepaths that hint faintly of an alien belonging, us in our sweaty rolled up mesh sleeves bleeding ink from handpoke tattoos done in a shady basement of a friend of a friend you pretend to remember the name of, and then it's lost again and here again, desirepaths in becoming, our footwork like a language of its own accenting and undulating the four on the floor constancies, do you hear it too? Do you hear me too?

Usually I'm not fully sober at our raves, but I decide to go the straightedge route that night. Still I find myself falling in and out of step with the flow of the night, at times losing track

of my own movements and directed attention. Others take candy and leave right away, not intending to linger longer after stumbling across our rave, or pitching in a donation or returning later in the night. In particular, people voice how they are surprised by this availability, and highlight the demand for water. Audi and Michelle had made their own ‘HR party packs’ in preparation, and they urge me to hand them out because they had put in the effort and they contained ARP stickers, although TRIP also provided their own stock. ARP’s party packs mixes in a sticker gift along with HR objects and an informational sheet, taking part in how organizers affect forms of HR at our raves. Funnily enough the people I talk with are so eager about HR availability that many of them offer me free drugs. I politely decline, simultaneously hoping not to give the impression I was a square. One such of these folks invites me to join an art and HR training session at the studio where their group does this type of stuff. I come to realize that this person had been fronting the efforts to give out free water at a local festival where people were expected to camp and bring their own reserves in preparation, claiming that people already had to pay for the entry tickets. He had grown gradually disappointed with the direction of the festival, growing larger from the DIY setups into a more popular and commercialized trajectory. He drops several squares of alcohol prep pads, suggesting how we could repurpose glass pipes from HR organizations in the city as reusable insufflation tools rather than the disposable paper straws offered by both ARP and TRIP party packs. Repeating his suggestion to other ravers later, I am struck by how informal forms of HR extend capacities of materials beyond striated frameworks.

Michelle appears later on that night, having been practicing for her debut DJ set, but quickly starts to give out some of the ARP party packs she helped prepare. I give her a hug hello, and she remarks on something I had also been noticing: “Nobody wants these earplugs! I guess

that's the thing about harm reduction: you can offer, but that's the most you can do, it's what they actually do with it." She likens this to her training as a social worker, which she approaches by sharing therapeutic toolkits with clients while remaining sensitive to their own individual desires for outcomes beyond what is recommended by her training. Audi and Michelle prepared the party packs in expecting attendees to take substances at our rave, and with the uncertainty that TRIP would show up. Somehow we get to talking about our own drug experiences, particularly with timing doses. She must have her DJ set on her mind, as she was debating whether to pop ecstasy so soon before her set time. Michelle and I agree that we can sometimes get flashbacks getting close to our impressions of intense MDMA experiences just by talking about it, being around others with similar vibes, or repeating typical things you'd say. Taking MDMA is one way to orient those intensities, but also figures into and can be affected by the other vibes of the night. From what I could pick up on, it seems like there was a lot of MDMA and ketamine circulating alongside various types of stimulants.

A new TRIP person replaces the other ones, but I figure this one is a little fucked up or something, as they fall down a couple times next to me and soon after takes to being engrossed with the fire performance. Most of the crowd is also intently watching the fire, or otherwise dancing hard as Techno rhythms slapped through us in waves undulated only by sporadic vocal samples like, 'KILL YOUR GENDER'. Having tilted the booth in parallel with the DJ's, the division between audience and performer and crew now feels a bit more palpable. People have caught on more visibly that they could navigate to the front of the crowd to reach the HR table, and requests for candy are getting sparser as the night went. Where at first there seemed to be a lot more disjointedness in explaining what the booth was for, or interrupting flows in the dancefloor by my approaching ravers, there was a smoothness to the area and its rhythms. I am

glad for the opportunity to wander back and forth some more. Quite quickly, a couple random people fill up behind the HR space, somewhat familiar with the ideas of HR from conversations with Michelle, and they were happy to chill there and talk to folks. I step into party mode fully, then switch back to step behind the booth once they were wanting to dance again. At this point the fire performance is done, and the music is slowly starting to teeter down.

On the dancefloor, I tend to feel compelled towards pockets where people are dancing the most. There is a vulnerability to being completely engrossed in music and letting go of cognizant bodily control to rhythm and atmosphere. It's a minor loss, a shedding of the self, as Lukøje alluded to - folding into the mass of the crowd. The smoothing of space, with bodies loosened from their affixed processes and in more intensified motion with the vibe. This may relate to how Tim and many other ravers conceptualize the 'self as fluid' – and raves in particular as being conducive for opening up to potentiality for alterity, or as Lukøje deems it, “to become part of something bigger than yourself; stepping outside yourself, and your daily bullshit, into this collective energy exchange.” As Deleuze and Guattari ([1991] 1994) write, affects arise in the “passing from one to the other ... zone of indetermination” (173) in becoming-other.

Vibe-sensing is described<sup>45</sup> as a continuous process of learning, and the more one is experienced with raving, the more it comes “naturally” to take notice of it immediately and even averbally. At the start of our conversation, I am touched to hear that Anthony say<sup>46</sup> I have a “good vibe”, as we had never met prior to that. Some of this is attributed to his understanding of ARP organizers as generally being “good people”, which he describes as those “look out for each other”. To recall another averbal affective situation of vibes, part of myself is actively aware of

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<sup>45</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in October 2022

<sup>46</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in September 2022

people's movements around me at a rave. It seems like muscle memory and conscious attention at once, perhaps the confluence of one priming the other - or a coalesce of something hard to narrowly define. I am a small person, and that often comes with the tribulations of stumbling against body parts or people trying to wave through my immediate area for ease of movement. Almost instinctively, I sidestep, return back to enclose the gap, or let someone pass into the crowded spaces. It's in these moments I find myself falling in step with the rhythms of encounters around me, coming together as striations even as they untether.

All of a sudden the dudes behind us who were doing lines of speed tap me on the shoulder and say someone's passed out on the statue overhead. I run over with water and Naloxone in hand, but her partner says she was just taking a nap on GHB. She doesn't display any signs of an opioid overdose, and the other person doesn't seem to have any creepy intentions as they'd gone out of their way to call out for a bit of water. None of the official HR training I have received prepared me for this situation, but I recall my friends' anecdotes about taking naps on GHB. I bring them a blanket and leave it at that, periodically looking over to check whether they were both still lying down on the statue. Uncertainties are abundant in ARP raves and play into the creation of affects, and people seem to navigate situations bordering on excesses by communicating concerns or needs.

The rave is coming to a downward slope in tempo. My ambient DJ companion, in all his stimulant-enlivened enthusiasm, is trying to get me to do a documentary as part of my thesis and win some film awards. I nod along amusedly. After some time the last set ended, nearing the break of dawn, and I run into a friend who always carried some extra party favors on hand. I gratuitously accept, eager for the extra kick to get me through tear down. More people in the crowd are starting to sit or dance lethargically in the back near the sculpture. As people step

more into dancefloor mode and then fizzle out in momentum, there is just a handful of attendees who make their way to puzzle over the table's offerings later on. One person in particular hangs around for an extended period of time discussing his excitement over returning to the rave scene, which I only much later (at a different rave he and I stumbled upon each other again) registered as an attempt at flirting.

Around this point, our batteries are starting to run out of power, with lights and then the subwoofer turning off in succession to prioritize the main speakers and DJ setup. Still, people are streaming in from other parties that night, like some of my friends who are disappointed to find out we are just about to wrap up. Like the other ARP organizers, I start to pack items up from my table and coil up unplugged cables even as the last DJ set was still coming to a close. The dancefloor is also slowing down as people begin to notice us packing up. Packing up is simple enough, though everyone seems out of it, either lethargic or on a comedown. There is a comradery to our shared enthusiasm and gratefulness for how it'd turned out, and the dynamics between everyone. I check my texts for the first time in a while, and am alarmed to find out the buddy I am crashing with wants to turn in for the night - possibly leaving me stranded without a key or couch to find solace in. Most of the cables are back out of their places, anyhow, and I'd set aside gear at a record pace (by my own meandering standards). I hug everyone goodbye rushedly, including the random who was sticking around so they could crash on Tim's couch. A whole ecosystem of strays finding their places, as transient as they can be.

### **Group meeting**

We discuss how our last rave went and the glitches along the way. Although it was a great turnout and the vibes and music were great for the most part, it was brought to our attention that there was someone in the crowd being very handsy and pushy about drugs, and Tim relents

how he doesn't feel like he knew how to deal with that adequately. Audi suggests that we should actually come together to work out a process for dealing with boundary violations as a group, which they'd been meaning to do since the start of the year. I am excited by how everyone was genuinely committed to tackling this issue, while voicing their concerns about avoiding physical confrontations and police when possible. I want to chip in more, but I am new to this all still, so I listen and take meeting minutes to share with the group.

Michelle proposes that we might reach out to the rape crisis center and see about paying or sponsoring a peer volunteer with lived experience and crisis/deescalation training to attend our future raves. It would be practical on our part as we can't feasibly expect the HR facilitators at our raves to be trained in both drug stuff and sexual harassment. I recall Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:497) writings that the "abstract line is the affect of smooth spaces, not a feeling of anxiety that calls forth striation". The ways in which other forms of HR figures into ARP maneuvers through the variations in how affective situations present in raves, beyond a strictly public health orientation of preventing substance-related risks.

We also go through ideas for upcoming raves, and how we could more equally distribute promotional activities throughout the group by taking turns. We want to do at least two or three more outdoors raves; however, this would be dependent on the weather and people's capacity. Tim is all booked up for the coming weeks and furthermore feels burnt out by the amount of work he put into the group over the summer. He and Audi bear most of the heavy work in terms of organizing for ARP, and voice how they've felt dejected in the past in suggesting ideas, and the half-hearted responses or lack of follow through others chipped in with. I feel bad that I haven't been contributing as much as I could have (like leaving early at previous raves) and resolve to be more on top of that in the future, pitching an idea for a rave in collaboration with a

different collective. Interestingly, the ARP organizers in the meeting stress the importance of staking out whether their collective's values align with ours.

Michelle, on her part, has a lot more tangible ideas already set and ready to go underway for the next rave - a daytime rave at a park. I offer to reach out to Sarah<sup>47</sup> to ask about park permits or how to get around that. Like myself, the ARP organizers in attendance voice their appreciation about Michelle's emphasis on accessibility and comfort.

### **ARP:08 – BBQ**

Michelle wants to stage the opportunity for attracting crowds that typically could not participate, such as families with kids and people who have physical accessibility needs. Framing ARP:08 as a BBQ is spurred by wanting to do something different and that ravers could share in with eating for the last rave of the season.

Out of the group, I am the first to arrive at Christie Pitts. We have a specific meeting point: the gazebo. As the first ARP organizer to arrive, I feel responsible for the group's request to scout it out (or rather, specific organizers messaged this but others reacted in agreement) and ensure we could have the space clear enough to setup. As luck would have it, I correctly guess which gazebo they meant from the start. Audi hopes that there would be nobody sitting on the benches, so we could move the layout around to have a clearing for the soundsystem and some dancing room as well. Additionally, the park is nestled right by residential zones, so it is crucial to ensure the speakers could face away from the nearest apartments to reduce sound spillover and potential complaints - especially later in the night when bylaws come into effect. As much as we

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah is a rave organizer affiliated with a separate rave collective, with whom I collaborated prior to meeting ARP.

prepare the rave to enhance intensities, there are some due considerations for mitigating extremes.

It is a strategic decision to set the start time for this rave so early. In addition to volume bylaw hours, there is overall less policing scrutiny on daytime raves, and in this particular case it aligns with how the rave is promoted as a community gathering and foodsharing rave (which just happens to also have music). Second, natural lighting facilitates unpacking, organizing, and setting up materials. Notably, since the rave is scheduled for a Sunday, the earlier end-time would accommodate typical weekday working hours for ARP organizers and attendees alike. Relatedly, there are other raves earlier that week that were frequented by the crowds ARP usually attracts. One of the raves was attended by some ARP organizers themselves, who know the organizers well. Tim invited their resident DJ to play at our rave, and as a pleasant surprise, they also pitch the idea of bringing their headliner along. Additionally, nobody in the group had ever thrown a rave here before. A few of them had gotten the lead that it is a feasible option from accidentally wandering into a rave here one night. While ARP's major group considerations relate to avoiding interruptions in the creation of affects, the organizers are vocal about still being affected by and opening up to uncertainties.

I dilly dally long enough in waiting until Audi and Michelle appears at a far corner of the park adjacent to the subway station, ushered in gear and all by one lucky chance Uber driver who was willing to take on the collective material load. After brushing off their apologies for the tardiness we make fast progress in unloading the trunk, escorting heaping bags of wires and metallic gizmos into the red wagon. Noticing the steep incline of the dirt path before us, Audi and I fall into step on both ends of the wagon, guiding it through gravel bumps to finally find a standstill somewhere by a tree. Agreeing we shouldn't leave it unattended, I scurry back up to see

what else remained in limbo for further movement. Michelle amasses some tote bags full of snacks, but the bulk of the food supplies is to be transported over by Luca, the chef for the occasion. While I've scoped out the gazebo and tried to secure our spot there by sole virtue of just occupying one of the benches and scattering about the couple bags I'd brought to deter passersby from sitting down, Audi quickly pitches an alternative idea to find a more open clearing instead. This is a spur-of-the-moment idea I shared an affinity for, as the gazebo seems a bit confining and the weather warning for a chance of rain has cleared up and it is in fact sunny. Additionally, Audi and I aren't enthused about how close in proximity it was to the playground. After some more rounds of scurrying back and forth, I find it a bit funny how much I was overthinking how to identify the meeting point which ended up being quickly dispelled by the others as the setup node. The others would be arriving soon, Audi assures me, though none of us knows when that means exactly. Something endearing about lateness, which comes to be expected of so many groups I'd run with in the past; a point of infamy among punks and anarchists.

Tim is next to arrive, and at this point we've mostly harried the stuff over by this one patch of tree, which we then take turns escorting once more to a clearing in the field Audi senses has the most potential for being at once accessible (flat and centered enough for attention and dancing) and out of the way (for volume concerns and the other activities in the park). Even as we move our gear again, Audi is still pacing around to ascertain the distance we'd be from the skatepark structure, and the football field where people may still be playing rounds.

First comes the soundsystem, which Audi and Tim attend to, as is common practice in our group. They plop down the table unceremoniously, which teeters seeking balance in the uneven grounding and damaged legs. Poised as the centerpiece, the two of them lay out CDJs

and cables and a laptop on the surface before Tim remembers about the ARP logo poster we need to dress the front of the table with. I am setting up the other table for food as Luca synchronously arrived with the lasagnas and sides in hand, but noticing the poster dilemma I head over to give Tim a hand with spreading it out somewhat evenly as Audi taped it down between or enveloping some cables that stretched out like nerve endings gliding past the reach of the table's softened plastic edges. Audi is quick to put the stands into post in a square-ish formation lining the sides of the table, and I hardly notice while I am lugging out bags of chips around the lasagna pans, but all of a sudden we have the sound ready and the food to boot. Along with the common confusions of detangling and grappling with wires, the food component offers a new array of challenges, with how the paper plates beckon to get carried away in a gust of wind. A few of us flitter around the table affixing lighter objects to slightly heavier ones as anchor points, making use of cardboard boxes containing utensils and the foils trays of warm food. Owing to one of the organizers' line of work, we are able to keep the unopened extra servings warm in their Uber eats delivery heat bag. The food itself had been almost entirely scavenged from Luca's workplace, a catering service that sometimes produces too much food or has ingredients nearing the best before date. As for the snacks and utensils, ARP had composed a grocery list ahead of time which I stocked up on using our shared group funds and borrowing someone's Costco membership for cheaper bulk deals.

As with our previous raves, ARP had sent out mailing lists and organizers did promo through inviting friends and posting on rave groups on Facebook. People interested in attending also invite their social circles, though one of the attendees comments how carelessly a friend had invited an ex, not accounting for the possibility of awkwardness. There are attendees who arrive with flutes which they play before the first set kicked in, and a bit into Michelle's opening tracks,

people brought poys or other custom-made lights to dance with. One raver brings their dog, who is very friendly and wandered around striking up conversations with others and culminating to a round of frisbee. The dog is a wildcard overall, later picking through emptied plates for leftover bits of food through people's carts and belongings, and peeing right on the ARP logo banner. Michelle and I want to clean this up, but quickly come to realize this wasn't feasible as we only have Lysol and the mix of bleach would cause toxic gas fumes. The ones who come before we even finished setting up, for the most part, took it upon themselves to find a nearby space on the grass to sit around and watch us go about the motions, chatting and smoking on (makeshift) picnic blankets. The earliest attendees are regulars who had found out about the rave through Facebook invites and/or the mailing list, and I notice they are attending to the announcement on the online event page to bring extra food or drinks to share. As with our other outdoors raves, there are also the curious passersby who often take some food and mostly leave soon after, but a handful of them return later in the evening.

There are also considerations for the food elements. We keep sharp metal knives in plastic squares meant for doling out partitions for servings. Additionally, we mark each tin with "V" or "M" to designate Vegetarian or Meat options (which an organizer later joked actually signaled Veal and Meatless). As the surface is quickly becoming crowded with compact layouts and stacks of things, we decide to move the donation QR code which we originally laid out there over to the DJ table area. We had also posted the tentative menu offerings on the Facebook event page beforehand, which attendees could refer to in case they had dietary restrictions. Similar to the HR model of offering/making available, we stock Lysol and hand sanitizer on the table. As we set up, people approach us to ask about the food offerings. Later, as the music picks up in

volume and crowds are starting to amass, Tim takes on his usual role as an MC to announce the availability of free food and water.

When it comes to substance-related setups, we decide it would be wiser to forego our earlier model of having a dedicated booth for HR supplies. With the addition of food and unpredictables in the park, there are more striations and stoppages with this rave than our previous one. We still have plenty of supplies left over from last time; doing HR at this rave seems to hinge more on disseminating items less explicitly, while still finding ways to maintain our crowd's recognition that we continue to offer HR variably. As with open alcohol being described by ARP organizers as the major point of consideration for bringing on a shutdown, having a visible HR booth would conflict with how we were publically presenting this rave as a community food rave to officials. I place Naloxone near the DJ booth, while Audi scatters party packs around the speaker stands. On the other hand, Luca half-jokes how it is a very real possibility that if we told the cops we were feeding those who needed food, we might get shut down anyway, recalling the controversy around Food Not Bombs chapters worldwide. As was the situation with ARP:07, our rave now also (dis)assembles affects and their levels of intensity and visibility in variable directions.

This time I feel a little looser in my role, unbounded spatially. I wander around and speak to people to give notice of how we were running late with setting up. For the most part I keep an eye on open containers of alcoholic drinks, which was unanimously identified by other ARP organizers as bringing the greatest risk for shutdown. This carries over throughout the crowd, with attendees reminding each other, and I also overhear people pointing out the Naloxone cases that remain most visible of what has now been scattered from the previous rave's HR booth design.

The rave started quite early in the afternoon, and I notice through conversations with ARP organizers and rave-goers that this factors into their decision making for substances - in terms of types used, as well as timing. Interestingly, an ARP organizer says they decided against drinking until later in the rave, as “getting drunk feels bad afterwards when you're not drunk, and I don't want to be drinking the whole day<sup>48</sup>”.

Compared to indoors raves, these attendees' movements seem a little looser while simultaneously also bounded in shifting ways. I notice someone dancing near their friends' loosely-tethered pile of belongings to protect them from theft as other people continued to wave through the rows of dancers. Indoors venues, however, usually offer some item-checking services. Some aggregates of movement emerge more spontaneously here, even as this rave orients towards the openings of smooth space. Nearby, I strike a conversation with a friend I met at a festival, who introduces me to his coworker tagging along. “These kinds of parties really bring people in of all different milieus to dance,” he observes. I agree, recalling how my other friends were baffled to notice the higher ratio of people in leather dog masks at ARP raves, compared to other raves they'd been to. On my end, I usually notice our crowds are generally more dispersed in age ranges, scenes (e.g. goths and hippies), and class. Since these raves are free and multi-genre, there can be more crossover between crowds and class. Being perched in public spaces also opens up to invite the oddball assortment of randoms who pivot their way into the raves by chance. Strategically, having random attendees also aided in making the case that it was not a rave to authorities, and bringing in children was agreed on by several organizers as greatly diminishing the risk of a complete shutdown.

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<sup>48</sup> Personal correspondence with Brett at ARP:08

Ravers are cheering along the DJ or talking with them, with a handful passing behind the booth. Then someone announces that we aren't partying hard enough, and everyone cheers and starts dancing more. The waves of dancing open and close; they don't seem to condense into cliquy circles, even as people continued to break in and out of chatter. For once I don't feel out of tune following along this sway. It's a different kind of catharsis from the pure heft of techno. As the headliner DJ put it, "There's an energy to tap into with the crowd". Even Tim, who always MCs for the group, attests to his uncertainty in navigating when to make announcements to hype the audience up and introduce the lineup without interrupting the flows of each DJ's sets. I notice he is positioned more frequently behind the booth at this rave, watching for when the audience starts to get really in the groove after the USBs are switched out in between DJ transitions. It's a delicate thing, this dynamic; people dance or talk or cheer along or take a rest. They do other things too that I don't always notice or even know about. When the crowd starts visibly leaning more to one type of engagement, it beckons others to reorient themselves similarly. People are slowing down now. I still dance away, being pulled towards the handful of ravers at the front who are really going at it. Later the DJ who was playing this set tells me, "I saw you carrying on the dancefloor earlier, I appreciate that." When the headliner comes on the crowd sways into recording on their phones at first. Soon enough, it's high activity in the dancefloor again, but with enough wiggle room to move around without shoulder-checking each other on accident. There's a vague reminder of connection like being within company and community, but without direct eye contact or explicit acknowledgement: but the echoing and reverberation of expression side by side.

Raves are a place for going elseward, a place where I could meet others who also delved in these pursuits, supporting and collaborating with each other. And for the most part that doesn't

come from nowhere – in our conversations, Michelle and I describe our encounters with traumadumping, stories of loss and grief and confusion and dispossession. How relieving it is, and completely unfathomable, the amount of genuine tenderness people are still able to offer each other surrounded by strobe lights and earsplitting rhythms. How would you describe this space inside your head that you go into? In moments, capable of deconstructing moments themselves; the weight of a night shared together, or the edge of the tip of a second. Beating too close side by side. Before my first rave I could hardly conceive of such a state outside the ache of moshpits: the sweat, of not knowing where one end of a droplet ends between bodies, how it trembles even in the air as the crowd grasps for a collective breath, moved by the pounding of drums.

Escapism? Meaningful practices? What I can say is that it echoes in exchanges at raves, and sometimes it ensnares you. (This is a broad way of putting something that evades being fully formed.) Continuous variations in smooth spaces, and the intimate unspeakable livedness of moments and bodies un/tethering at the velocity they emerge. It isn't beauty, or ugliness, but seizes you. At raves it can come out as sprawling conversations that vaporize in the hangover of daylight. Rarely, at peaks of intensity, it's so incomprehensible - ungraspable though unyielding - that it slivers away only to arrest you again at another particular situation. The unformed thing I am trying to get at is intense states, in any form. I think to a Harsh Noise rave that I attended in Berlin. Less structure, rhythm, melody; stripped of these things, I am pulled closer to the tones, the textures – a kind of language where even silence conveys a story. Getting down to a sparser field a bit further than in waking life from the symbolic, verbal, material. The way your skin raises in goosebumps instinctively, before you could consciously register all these layers of sound – yet your body just knows. People screamed, sometimes together – an intensity that was

neither good nor bad. Kind of like the way the smell of something can take you right back to an absent space. Music can cut right through and evoke a passing wave, fleeting as it may seem.

Time gets a bit more finicky to tell apart, only recognizable through the slight reorientations to what we'd already laid out whenever we do take notice of it. We'd set up lights early in the afternoon, wiring them in preparation for the quickly coming sunset. Interestingly, I come across an attendee who lived nearby and noticed our rave through the lights from his balcony view, rather than the sound of the music. Audi is careful to attune the rest of ARP to set up our soundsystem away from the direction of the neighboring buildings, as well as the direct paths of movement from the nearby skatepark and soccerfield. We don't find the need to move tables around as we had during our previous rave, where we doubly had to consider the crowd and sound overspill from the other rave organizers. Instead, the potluck food and lights move around throughout the course of the evening.

Things are going along this undulating flow, with sporadic bursts of more energy or much less movement. The rave is coming together loosely, with all its shifts as affects pass through and diverge, and here HR seems to slide through more seamlessly than the hiccups of the tabling setup we had at ARP:07. Some ARP organizers and attendees mention pacing themselves with drinks and other substances for a 'chiller' night out. As battery-powered raves, on both occasions the party keeps going until whenever the soundsystem runs out of power. At ARP:07, we went over the announced time for ending, though it was written as an open-ended estimate. With ARP:08 being promoted as a 'community BBQ', we set a more certain finish time on promotional materials in trying to occupy a space with bureaucratic striations. The decision to end at 11pm is related to its timing on a Sunday, and geographically at a park where it would run a higher risk of a noise complaint and nighttime security drive-throughs.

We started set-up late, so the first DJ comes up around 30 minutes later than what was written in the lineup. It was around 930pm when Luca is playing that a couple glitches occurs. While Audi is putting a light back to its previous place and repositioning a QR code, they accidentally knock over the laptop stand, disconnecting the cable from the DJ table. They apologize and quickly took to reconnecting the soundsystem, while the crowd reassures them it was fine and some cheer on. Later, the light almost falls again and I rush over to catch it as Audi and a random raver do so simultaneously. Further into the set, someone dancing by the booth disconnects another cable around the same area as he is trying to get a better view of the donation sign. He is chatting with a couple of my friends, who jokingly reprimand him about what he had done. After apologizing and saying it was by accident, we laugh it off as a group reverberating through the crowd who again exclaims that it was no problem, and Luca along with the other ARP organizers smile a bit and shrugged it off. Luca and Audi quickly attend to the gear.

About 25 minutes later, the sound and lights come to a sudden hushed darkness, save for the traces of scattered conversations and grassy footfalls of dancing in unison with gasps and excited jeers. Audi announces that the battery was completely dead, musing out loud about how it was the first time it had happened that way since ARP's first rave. The crowd stops and there's a thick silence in the air that hangs like an unsaid question, but almost as quickly, people start to cheer it on and sing along the melody and rhythm. Funnily enough it seems more energetic than the dancefloor had been before, and people were surprisingly in sync. There is more movement with interactions between friend groups and people who move around or approach those who they had been dancing next to and hadn't addressed directly until then. "Acapella rave!" I don't know who among the crowd says that. Tim, too, has a loud enough voice for his words to carry

through the rows of people. He thanks everyone for coming out for this outdoors rave season or finding their way here tonight somehow, and announces that although this is our last one of the season, “you are all Acid Reign now.”

Luca leaves the booth and along with other ARP organizers is starting to do a visual check on gear to pack up and how to prioritize next steps. As we start to slowly pack up, people in the crowd are still hanging around and chatting, eased by the sudden onset of the speakers around us brought by other ravers. After a quick chat with someone who organizes ‘bike raves’, I fumble back to the arrays of re-tangled cables that were still waiting to get packed up. Most of ARP had gone home at this point, so it is just Tim, Audi, Luca and I still there. Audi is wandering around as always, offering and handing out the last remnants of our water bottle stock to the slowly whittling crowd. Everyone seems tired, but with the sorts of gaits and expressions as you’d have after a good workout. Take a little sit-down, a little breath and sip of water. Our takedown is slow, chatterful, but easy. There does not seem to be a lot of attendees on substances, and mostly people brought their own drinks for the “BBBQ”, so there’s a lot of spare water bottles. We leave a pack behind when we are finally ready to leave the park, tugging along the wagons behind us uphill. We divide the stuff in the wagons into two cars, one of which is to be driven by our usual designated driver, Luca, who also happens to be the last DJ playing before the batteries gave in. With everything dismantled and packed up, we take off in separate ways to rest and bring things forward for the next outdoors rave season.

### CHAPTER 3 - Smooth and Striated Spaces

As the colder weather ushers Toronto's music indoors, I begin to think more into the terrains of raves, creating and riding off affects. The divisions between areas in an outdoors rave like ARP's are much more unclear when typical activities (like smoking, or even eating) are more loosely dispersed than indoors. It also brought to mind how my friend<sup>49</sup> once witnessed me flounder in an interaction I did not want to be a part of, and when I joked how he should have rescued me, he simply chimed in how he considered it a simple matter of being able to walk away – “there's so many vibes in a rave, I just think when I'm not hitting it off with someone, we could both move somewhere else and that's not unusual to just leave either.” A couple ARP organizers<sup>50</sup> highlight that leaving is more uncertain and/or self-determined by how attendees are feeling in the night, like people leaving early if they feel too high or uncomfortable. In this sense, managing affect can be a way of maintaining a rhythm enough but without getting too carried away into excess, to keep open potentiality in a field where relations are unsettled in outdoors raves.

At the BBQ, I fall upon an acquaintance with whom I exchanged precursory small talk, running by the usual mutual expressions of not having expected to run into each other, and what else have we been doing in our lives and what parties have we gone to since last time. It is a play between the surface-level and the genuine. At this point I am keen on returning to my own party-mode of just dancing. I have no strong feelings about her from our previous interactions, though she comes across as sweet and very driven about niche passion projects; she loves to build things

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<sup>49</sup> Personal communications with Pat in December 2022. The person was made aware of this project through verbal disclosure upon meeting them.

<sup>50</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022. Personal communication with Tim and Audi in ARP:08.

like the skatepark we were situated right by, and frequented punk houses. On paper, we should get along splendidly. All the conversations I've shared with her, though, mostly consisted of my interest in doing something else. A long-winded anecdote, but a core experience that provided some insight on what some ravers were alluding to when they mused on rave scene stratifications through genre preferences and different vibes to partying. I get some ideas during our conversations about sensory particularities, like all-black outfits in Techno raves, or Burners with dreadlocks dancing along in a more full-bodied way to House with 'global music' samplings. To me, House-dominated crowds seem to mix in chatting with dancefloor activities, which I mentally separate to moving to a different area especially with smoke breaks. Some people can mix having a good time through chatting with the 'flow' state of embodiment and presence and musical immersion. I just personally seek out 'a good time' in the sense of full immersion and intensity - not particularly only positive or negative - which I tend to find more in Techno's darker atmospheres and crowd norms of dancing alone-ish together. As the prolific music journalist Reynolds (1998:25) stresses, "rave isn't oriented around lyrics ... you no longer ask what the music 'means' but how it *works*. What is the affective charge of a certain kind of bass sound, or particular rhythm?" A House fan tells me<sup>51</sup> that Techno pulls people in with its heavy, deep kicks and atmospheric layering; he even notices it in how people dance to it more singularly. Conversing feels offtempo when I am in that 'flow/trance' state. In some ways the rave conversations seem to me one way to process what comes up inside us singularly in a collective wave on the dancefloor: even small comments like, man that last track gave me chills. And riding off the vibe that's coming together and reaching into the more ineffable parts of

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<sup>51</sup> Personal communications with Syd in September 2022. The person was made aware of this project through verbal disclosure upon meeting them.

affecting on this, beyond the substance of the flow riding off the milieux you share or converged from.

For ARP DJs<sup>52</sup>, they accentuate and reduce sounds while staging a musical vibe and engaging with the energy of the crowd. While they play existing pieces, they transition to different tracks often in endless 'flows' to join or break out of with room for spontaneity in next track selections and the engagement of strategies such as mixing and adding novel sound elements in. The ARP DJs I speak with describe this process as a method for conveying a story to the audience, and importantly too, in a dialogical way through 'reading the room' as well as taking into account lineup timings. Even if they have been invited to play with a specific idea for a mood or genre of music in mind, they pay attention to the crowd and previous DJs to gauge how they should ride off the energy; whether to continue the flow, change it gradually, or taper it down upon noticing the dancefloor's exhaustion. In this sense, they are still partying with others in tangible ways like making eye contact and dancing, even with the reoriented (spatial) positioning. Michelle describes<sup>53</sup> the mutuality involved in not overstepping other DJ's timeslots or opportunities to shine, and not choosing tracks in a 'narcissistic' way that disregards crowd preferences. At ARP:07, Tim announced his spontaneous decision to change his set to Techno for the night, having noticed the crowd's energy and enthusiasm of the DJ before him. This sustained the tempo and 'vibe' of the dancefloor even as the fire performers neared the end of their show, which tapered down some of the sensory happenings of the rave. Lukøje describes<sup>54</sup> how this back-and-forth is a means of going outside his own head (or the isolatory mode of his creative process for producing), inviting non/verbal feedback to continually learn and

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<sup>52</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>53</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>54</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

reconfigure his musical output. While Audi<sup>55</sup> doesn't consider DJ'ing to be necessarily creative, they stress how important it is for them to "have fun with it" even in the absence of a plan. This fun is likened to Audi's affective situations where they don't have to think about what to do, which they admit breaks some conventions in the scene especially with Techno crowds that weigh in more importance about proficiency of techniques and being proper or 'pure' about selections. I think to Deleuze and Guattari's ([1991] 1994) suggestion that "artists are presenters of affects ... They not only create them in their work, they give them to us and make us become with them" (175). Tracks and samples are taken and reorganized to create affects as the vibe unfolds with the course of the night.

I recalled various ARP organizers<sup>56</sup> connecting their initial involvement with raves with trying substances, which can unsettle people's ways of sensing and reacting to music as well as other ravers around them (Kyriakopoulos 2021; Van Veen 2010). Raving affected Audi's sensed experience of their surroundings; they are vocal about having ADHD and struggling with attention and memory, yet practices deep listening and memorization while curating tracks for DJ sets. Reflexivity is an attitude that accompanies ravers' stories of their lives, but seems to drop off during peak intensity at raves (Reynolds 1998; Van Veen 2010). Audi steps into "automatic mode"<sup>57</sup>; Lukøje "taps into the flow"<sup>58</sup>; Michelle is "shift[ing] gears from intellectual to emotional"<sup>59</sup>. Anthony and Tim<sup>60</sup> describe trying substances as partaking in the creation of

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<sup>55</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>56</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in October 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

<sup>57</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>58</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022

<sup>59</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>60</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in October 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

affective situations, as with sounds and dancefloor flows. Anthony told me<sup>61</sup>, “It was like hearing a new dimension of sound. When I started ... moderating – I was scared I would lose that ... But I think I can still notice those subtleties in tracks in a different way, and beyond that, I have the attention to remember things more.” The centrality of substances as a way to access the intense experiences of raving is destabilized here, as it presents as a culmination of relationalities and sensing and anticipating affect.

The tasks in ARP raves orient towards what Audi<sup>62</sup> had deemed “inviting some chaos in the collective”, which presents anywhere from the multi-genre selections to people at ARP:07 stepping in with their own items and presence at the HR booth. There is the affective charge of anticipating ARP as a community event, self-managing these intensities through mutualities that relate with or expand outside of policing and public health. Deleuze and Guattari speak to state apparatuses, such as medical professionalization, delimiting potentialities through striating how non/humans can relate. With striations, some bodies can become more passive, but there may still be the schizophrenic experiences – situations that cut across expected flows and seem incomprehensible – in becoming. Positioned in the field as I am, there comes the more tangible questions surrounding organizing; the distribution of roles and communication between collectives and ravers, in particular. How, then, to figure out when I should intervene, or take a step back? How to offer, without forcing? A continuing question.

While doing HR I wander around raves, looking around dancefloors and talking with staff and ravers about expectations, as a way to open up to affective situations. I think back to Favret-Saada’s (2012) own reflections on moments where she felt ‘caught’, reassessing her

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<sup>61</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in September 2022

<sup>62</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

entanglements with “the demands made of me” (437). With ARP, organizers circulate around the sensory-feel-space of our raves. They typically remain in the rave area, though falling in and out of 'roles' - by way of dancing with the crowd; engaging in conversations with other organizers, performers, and attendees; maneuvering to and from our pile of gear to change the layout of something; and at times leaving momentarily for food or to buy drinks. It is lively work of paying attention, improvising in tentative useful ways, in spite of - or made all the more so with the continued recognition of risk. There are situations that seem to relate to Deleuze and Guattari's ([1991] 1994) discussion of affect as a “zone of indetermination ... preced[ing] their natural differentiation” (174), with affects loosely assembling to persevere or untangle in intensities. In ARP raves, I don't feel ‘caught’ as much as I feel loosened from an idea of a specific ‘role’ by varying gradients rather than meeting predetermined demands. I tabled the HR booth, or wandered around when things winded down; I let other people step behind the booth, sometimes leaving items of their own; and surprisingly, I noticed how ARP's ideas of HR circulated in the crowds, as with organizers and attendees alike reminding people to hide open alcohol containers.

This seems aligned with DIY raves' approach of making do and “[doing] it because we could” as described by an organizer interviewed by Matos (2011) in speaking to his experiences with illegal raves in Milwaukee. As a group without a dedicated staff for certain roles, ravers often seem to pick up on gaps in our capacity and sometimes step in – for instance, I had people filling in behind the HR booth when I needed to step away, or after winding down there are always some stragglers left behind offering their help with packing up. Perhaps this also harkens back to Toronto's older generation of ravers petitioning for lifting its municipal ban by contending that ravers are capable of self-management. At ARP:07, I found myself wandering in

and out of the booth; dancing while I was at the HR space, or carrying bottles of water into the dancefloor. Modulations of intensity in overlapping rhythms. There is more anticipation for indeterminacy with boundaries of events that occur within these ARP raves, compared to indoors raves that entail more striation.

Where renegade parties can be described to have a ‘structureless structure’, indoors raves are more closed into the boundaries of how they were prepared from the start. Tim contrasts<sup>63</sup> ARP raves to his experience working nightlife venues, finding it funny how long our shifts are and exhausting they can be at the end, but also fulfilling in a different way seeing how outdoors raves unfold through others’ contributions. Spatially, there are certain areas at indoors raves where ravers are expected to show their tickets, enter and exit the venue, go to the bathroom, and dance. Divisions between rave crew and attendee are more tangible, with ‘green rooms’ being set aside for use by the crew, and dedicated teams of light and soundsystem technicians positioned behind fenced areas. In terms of liability, too, Toronto’s mandates place the responsibility on venues to ensure that buildings are up to code and that certain measures are in place for ‘safety’, such that the venues themselves would be fined if an injury occurred. The material striations of indoors raves codify behaviors and delimits possibilities to extend outside of them, although they also give way to extension in the sense of persevering. When a raver passed out at a warehouse rave, I noticed how the security physically maneuvered him to stay seated and drink soda, before proceeding to escort him outside to call a cab back home.

Granted, there are some practices and technologies of medical/state apparatuses which have normalized collective anticipation around critical moments of life and death (Adams et al.

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<sup>63</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

2009). I want to flesh it out by starting with a recurring phrase said by this security guard at the warehouse rave: "If he needed naloxone he'd be dead by now."<sup>64</sup> What he could sense, through his years of being a frontline medic, is death. I have only come across the giggling, the revelations, the hangovers, and addictions and relapses. In other words, my direct experiences of situations in ARP raves are particularized differently – not separate from ‘bad trips’ nor medicalized understandings of risk, yet still recognizing different tones to risk which Tim had alluded to tolerating. The most useful reference points I've found are the ones you can't get off a book - that is to say, through using substances firsthand and getting a sense of what they are like for you, in different settings. This seems particularly pertinent when it comes to HR at raves, because if I'm high at home I'm painting and writing, but in an overstimulating setting I might sit at the corner of a dancefloor. The security demanded I administer naloxone on the raver, but I asserted he was on ketamine and needed some time to come down. The raver was growing visibly more agitated by being restrained to a chair by the security, but I convinced them to leave while I accompanied him sobering up and ordering a cab. Once the raver was outside the warehouse's limits, we were freed from security to sit on the grass and smoke. The co-constitution of the smooth/striated is particularly tangible in this story, where an affective situation moves differently in an indoors rave that has certain legal mandates and a physical means to remove a person.

Somewhat differentiated from indoor venues' legal liability, ARP organizers' notion of being unprepared<sup>65</sup> refers to people who assume that substances - especially psychedelics – are guaranteed to bring on energy, sociability, as well as happiness. Most of them emphasize the

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<sup>64</sup> Personal communications with Pow in March 2023. The person was made aware of this project through verbal disclosure the third time I volunteered to do HR at their venue of work.

<sup>65</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Anthony in October 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022; online one-on-one conversation with Lukøje in September 2022.

importance of using substances in a way that does not place oneself or others at risk, which can include the risk of getting the rave shut down. They criticize the occurrence of ravers taking substances solely for 'fun', and likewise, they challenge the presumption and attitude of raves being an 'excuse' to take substances. At the same time, these same organizers describe their own and other people's motivations for raving as 'looking for a good time'. Organizers elaborate that to them, altered states of mind entail both positive and negative experiences, and can be rewarding when approached as something to open up possibilities of exploration and integrated into everyday life. When speaking to their own tales leading up to their own non/sobriety, ravers<sup>66</sup> describe their motivations for taking a certain substance in a certain setting (e.g. "I wanted to take a tab of acid today since it's a long event and goes well with psytrance music") or conversely, their decision to step away from a substance (e.g. "It starts so early, so I don't want to drink because it'll just make me too sleepy by the middle of the rave"). Their examples tended to draw from personal anecdotes about 'bad trips', framed as occurring when a person who is unprepared takes substances and has negative experiences. Repeated HR tasks, like reminding people to be mindful of open alcohol containers and staying hydrated, are dispersed among ARP organizers and ravers alike. As Van Veen (2010) observed, raves can be situations where (self)organizing is conducted without recourse to policing or state apparatuses. This applies to situations of HR in ARP raves, similarly "calling for ... the lived praxis of continuous and collective re-invention" (45). These ravers' lived experiences of using substances is in conversation with striated spaces of public health and 'HR' understandings, but also in confluence with the creation of vibes.

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<sup>66</sup> Personal communications with Alex and Mo, respectively, at ARP:08.

Perhaps particular to ARP, given its absence from most other Toronto raves that I have attended, is Tim's MC announcements cheering on the DJ, crowd, and reminding people about safety and respecting the space. As far back as the 90s, Matos (2011) remarks on the emergence of this as a mainstay in Detroit raves, with the crew making lineup announcements on the microphone, "reinforcing the idea of broadcasting to the world". Where these organizers sought to vocalize their ideas about raving and their scene, ARP's approach is articulated by a couple of the organizers as being grounded in practical considerations of what Audi deems<sup>67</sup> "wrangling ravers". "There are no rules to raving, and definitely no rules in ARP either," Tim clarifies<sup>68</sup>. "But we have to make it clear we aren't putting up with any bullshit harassment, even if that means repeating ourselves about things that seem obvious like consent, to any meatheads out there that still don't get it." Simultaneously, the MC announcements struck me as ways to bolster the performers' and crowd's energy.

I find it resonates with how I've approached HR roles at our raves, moving from behind the booth to join in dance or approach lone attendees. While leaning into the vibe, I sometimes try to invite conversations about substances' effects and how ravers might go about dosing or mixing them. Rather than condemning use or even mixing substances, some of these conversations involve mutual reflections on substances as tasks falling into play with other vibes in a night. Here I turn back to Garcia-Mispirota's (2023) observation that ravers contrast 'rough' intense experiences to describing the night going 'smoothly', emphasizing the oscillations between both in how they engage with parties. In a couple ARP organizers' views, substance use can be conducive to sexual assault by reducing inhibitions and people's capacity to read external

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<sup>67</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>68</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Tim in October 2022

cues. “They can get caught up in their own internal state and be out of touch with what’s going on,” Michelle elaborates<sup>69</sup>. In a separate conversation, Audi tells me that their worst experiences at raves have tended to be with people on ketamine, the dissociative drug popularly held to be ‘horse tranquilizer’ despite its prevalent use as an anesthetic in human hospitals. While tripping on K, people seem to Audi<sup>70</sup> to be more introspective – “But not in a healthy or productive way. They can dwell on stuff in their own heads ...” Michelle and Anthony<sup>71</sup> make similar observations of Toronto ravers, and discuss the tenuous dynamic between psychedelics being conducive for opening up to collectivity and losing track of sensing or responding to what is outside of oneself.

At what point does it just become a ritualized charade trying to get to the same plateau you've already come down from for the time being, before the next weekend comes around? Van Veen (2010) speaks to technics as a means of “ritual displacement” (44), a schizophrenic experience which nonetheless remains in capital and hierarchical power. Maybe it just feels nice to belong, even for a few confused hours; take a pause among other fellows who are used to running around all the time. This unplaceable, hazy comradeship of letting loose in one way or another through the same oscillations of tension kept on a four-on-the-floor beat every coming weekend. As Van Veen (2010) says, self-management and continual re-invention take part in raves, even if they lack legibility through representative modes of politics. However differently these emerge in raves, I think to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) suggestion that ideas persevere through the variations of maintaining openings, perseverance, and other forces created (234). There's a scary kind of beauty in that. Raw, tender and forceful, unshakeable once you get pulled

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<sup>69</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>70</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

<sup>71</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022 and Anthony in September 2022, respectively

into its motion. At times it's a whirlwind, and just as quickly it seems to come to a standstill. I think back to the attendee who accidentally disconnected a cable at ARP:08, and people in the crowd teased him about it as the music came to a momentary stop. An ARP organizer quickly reconnected the cable, and the crowd laughed off the misstep, creating an affect that passed through the dancefloor along with the returning sounds.

To revisit ARP organizers' concerns about substance use in excess, I refer back to something Audi said<sup>72</sup> and stuck with me, "[Abuse] is particularly worse in Toronto I've noticed. It comes with the territory of heavy drug use, and certain organizers taint the scene in advance, expecting people only to party and shut up and dance." Upon prodding more into Audi's observations, they indulge me with more backstory about their longer experiences with Toronto's Psytrance scene. These groups often appeared to Audi as an echo chamber, reaffirming each other's beliefs in an effort to uphold a "community spirit of good vibes... they're just very vibe-based, which can be nice, but ... they only want peace and love all light, no negatives, so they end up pent up and alone with their dark thoughts." Audi links this rejection of 'bad vibes' further back to their connections "from generations long ago of New Age hippies in the psychedelic scene". Along these lines, concerns about transphobia, homophobia, racism, and harassment are shut down in conversations; people who speak to their negative experiences are usually called out themselves, typically resulting in their silencing and/or departure from the scene. There is a sense of community, Audi is careful to still clarify, but no space for conversations and accountability with the people involved. While these issues are not exclusive to Psytrance in the Toronto scene, or to the city itself, Audi has a sharp understanding of these particularities through the view of how they emerged in this local configuration through

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<sup>72</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Audi in November 2022

confluences. Michelle, in a separate conversation<sup>73</sup>, connects the Toronto rave scene's problems of abuse and lack of transparency to the wider "culture of capitalism ... where people work constantly and use their night off to party". People might go to raves to seek release for "things that are usually never mentioned", which can present in different ways, such as dancing for a good time or overusing substances. This can also result in repeating harmful patterns or symptoms of systemic issues; Michelle understands harassment at raves, for example, as isolable from a wider "culture of rape [in society]". As Zigon (2015) writes, overdoses and HR organizing can present as a situation emerging from the non-totalizable assemblage of the war on drugs, which is inseparable from colonialism and capitalism. There are instances in the Toronto scene where HR situations in raves follow along these movements, but transversal actions such as those found in ARP raves can destabilize these flows (see, Kanngieser 2012; Zigon 2015). At both ARP raves, I encountered someone who was impacted by the HR offerings and thanked the organizers for it, promising to carry it forward to the warehouse raves he was involved with organizing himself. Despite ARP's 'no rules' approach, affects that are created in ARP raves are continually unfolding and sometimes mitigated, in a way where "it is positively motivated by the smooth space it draws" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:496).

As highlighted by all ARP organizers, the 'ragtag' dynamic of the group spurs more spontaneity in community-based responses (often even on-the-spot in situations), and accordingly the consistency of capacities is thrown into disarray. The analogy of a trip was often used<sup>74</sup> as an umbrella timeframe for the configuration, comeup, peak, and comedown of a rave. Kyriakopoulos (2021), too, mobilizes this concept as a rejection of representation but rather

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<sup>73</sup> Online one-on-one conversation with Michelle in November 2022

<sup>74</sup> Personal communications with Brett and Tim at ARP:07; personal communications with Pat in October 2022

raves as a field of non/human possibilities. It is helpful again to understand these stories through conceptualizing smooth spaces with “the continuous variation of free action, passing from speech to action, from a given action to another, from action to song ...” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:491). Connections multiply; I turn back to stories of DJs extending themselves through music, people moving and dancing as part of an energy exchange, and even the boundaries between organizer and attendee blurring as random ravers stepped in to take my place to help with the HR booth when I just felt like leaving. Where affective situations can seem identical, the bodies at play are particularized to each event’s emergence and unfolding. As mentioned, ARP organizers describe both striving towards a framework for affective situations and also being open to chance and the unexpected. The flows of bodies and sights and sounds take on a different rhythm that extends beyond the usual striations that are occupied in that space, in terms of relationalities between bodies and more rigid methods of public health organizing for HR or how a rave can be planned through permits, or even anticipating the turnout of a rave altogether. There are some indeterminacies in the continual becoming of an ARP rave, Toronto’s broader rave scene, and the non/humans that compose inasmuch as cut across these flows.

## Conclusions

Through organizing raves with ARP and conversing with organizers and attendees, I inquired into how ARP raves loosely assembled. In the summer of 2022, we planned ARP raves in outdoors locations without seeking officiated supports, such as legal permits or arts council funding. ARP organizers ‘invite chaos’ with multi-genre lineups, being open to ravers’ requests to perform for future raves, and encouraging attendees to partake in organizer tasks such as cleaning up. The ARP organizers and attendees give importance to having a good time and the ‘power of music to free people’, simultaneously stressing more-than-human uncertainties in how affects flow (or not). Through describing tasks such as DJ’ing or sound engineering, I inquire into sensory amplifications and linking up affects at ARP raves. As with audiovisuals, substances take part in intensifying experiences, and organizers consider the possibility of early shutdowns, (dis)comfort, finding and expressing a ‘good time’, and mutual benefit.

While ARP organizers highlight ‘no rules’ in creating affects, they also attend to and are affected by ‘vibes’. Forms of HR in affective situations unsettle the centrality of biomedical risk logics. Ethnographers researching HR criticize a gap in discussing pleasure and instead reifying medicalized ‘risk’, but ARP raves offer stories of extending capacities and perseverance or demanding openings. It is a question grafting spaces for transient and sustained expression and organizing; to find oneself among others, with others.

In line with the anthropological literature on raves, I inquire into ARP organizers’ practices and political-economic considerations as particularized to their Toronto rave scene experiences. I pull through conversations with ARP organizers to discuss the Toronto rave scene’s landscapes and stratifications, leading into the collective’s frameworks for responding to abuse and inequities. Where spontaneity of response becomes troubled in striated spaces, such as

coordinating with TRIP or liable venue owners, ARP's framework encourages more fluid DIY dynamics of what and who it involves through the idea of 'maximizing mutual benefit'. As an HR volunteer, I was positioned in the awkward ambiguity between working along striated spaces (such as the HR booth containing some TRIP materials) and opening up to affects, stepping away to dance and chat.

Building from this, I bring in stories emerging in situations of interest, in conversation with anthropological works on raves' critiques that raves are oriented only towards excess. By highlighting the haptic in expanding or persevering capacities, I describe how striations emerge in ARP raves, and likewise how preparing for the unpredictable can have moments of smoothness. TRIP steps into the raves, as do ARP organizers and attendees with formalized HR training. Referring to stories and conversations as a centerpoint, I highlight the emergence of spontaneous forms of HR that can smoothen spaces of professionalized (e.g. medicalized) practices that reify and materialize striations. In conversations, ARP organizers reflect on how this carries over to people's lives outside of raves as well as experiences of striations (e.g. capitalism, sexuality), which also affect future ARP organizing.

With experiential research as my methodology, I lean away from rave literature's emphasis on inherent transformational experiences, towards Deleuzoguattarian affect theorists' approaches which emphasize the relationalities of smooth and striated spaces (see, Favret-Saada 2012; Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Seeking out the immediacy of sense in writing, or the vibes that are felt and embodied...this stuff is prone to get lost in translation. What lingers is the accumulated, the stratified, the stratifying: the lived implications of these in organizing; practices; momentum, or rhythm. As importantly, too, ARP's raves aim to enable the spontaneity of bodies that unsettle flows.

Particularly in Toronto, the question of space is articulated by ARP organizers and attendees I encountered as a direct challenge to its local arts scenes. To contrast, I was met with confusion upon asking an attendee about outdoors raves in a Berlin conference about nightlife. They told me<sup>75</sup> that since there are so many nightclubs available, new and old rave collectives alike almost exclusively rely on indoors venues, even as the conference addressed the growing gaps in feasibility for organizers who had less money or experienced marginalization in the scene (e.g. gender, sexuality, racialization). With regards to Toronto, inquiring into changes in the rave scene following the period after 4chan's targeting of warehouses in 2017 would be worthwhile, especially given the coinciding growing unaffordability of venues during that period. In line with Zigon (2015), this could be an assemblic inquiry into the emergence of certain creative and social organizing practices as situations from the very assemblages enclosing the possibility of 'alterity'. It would be interesting for further research to inquire into how (use of) space is contested by ravers in various localities, and how this has (de)centralized relationalities with spaces, materialities, and people in raves.

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<sup>75</sup> Personal communications in November 2022 with Lee, a Berlin-based party organizer who has verbally been informed about this project.

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