

first publication

The article was presented in the Panel IX *Medien und Netzwerke / Media and Networks* on December 12, 2003.

Parts of this paper have already appeared in my thesis of the same title submitted for the MA *Culture, Globalisation and the City* programme at Goldsmiths College (Univ. of London) in 2002. My attendance at this programme and the research itself was in part financed by the *Chevening Awards* donated by the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1 Tomlinson, John: *Globalisation and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Pr. 1999, provides a conclusive review and critique of this line of thinking about cultural globalisation.

2 The investigation of these grass-roots or bottom-up globalizing forces is already under way. Appadurai, Arjun: *Grass-Roots Globalisation and Research Imagination*. In: *Public Culture* 12/1 (2000), pp 1-19, coined the term ›grass-roots globalisation‹ to refer to globally networking not-for-profit organisations that counter the negative effects of economic globalisation. My understanding of ›grass-roots cultural globalisation‹ is closer to what Guarnizo, Luis Eduardo / Smith, Michael Peter: *The Locations of Transnationalism*. In: Guarnizo, Luis Eduardo / Smith, Michael Peter: *Transnationalism from Below*. A thematic Iss. of *Comparative Urban and Community Research* [New Brunswick: Transaction Publ.] 6 (1998), available on the Internet: <http://hcd.ucdavis.edu/faculty/guarnizo/LocaTrans.pdf> (Last accessed on December 15, 2003), mean by ›transnationalisation from below‹, when describing transnational cultural networking of migrant communities.

3 On the flexibility and adaptability of networked organisations cf. Castells, Manuel: *The Rise of Network Society*, London: Blackwell 1996, pp. 167-173. On the networked nature of independent music business cf. Maughan, Tim / Smith, Richard J.: *Youth Culture and the Making of the Post-For-dist Economy: Dance Music in Contemporary Britain*. In: *Journ. of Youth Studies* 1/2 (1998), pp 211-228, and Hesmondhalgh, David: *The British Dance Music Industry: A Case Study of Independent Cultural*

›Cultural globalization‹ is a term that is often used with reference to large scale processes of transnational cultural transmission stemming from the expansive strategies of the ›culture industries‹.¹ However, it would still be a mistake to conceptualize all productive forces of cultural globalization as highly institutionalized and industrialized entities that follow centrally plotted top-down plans and strictly profit-maximizing strategies in the production and distribution of cultural goods. We already see the emergence of alternative networks that bind together autonomous actors in the field of cultural production and consumption. These regional or transnational networks are usually organized from the bottom up, as the locally isolated or marginal cultural producers and consumers look for information and potential partners in their specific fields.² Networking is also a way of sharing resources and creating a bigger market that reaches beyond one's limited immediate surroundings. However, these grass-roots networks don't always follow the economic rationality of capitalist production and are often created and maintained out of personal interest, enthusiasm or the psychological need for belonging to a bigger community of like-minded people. The flexibility and adaptability of the networked organization³ coupled with the above mentioned enthusiastic attitude allow these alternative networks to successfully produce, promote and distribute marginal cultural goods in localities that would not be considered profitable markets by corporate cultural production.

Although claims can be made that these practices transform local cultures just as much as corporate forms of globalized cultural production do, they certainly provide alternatives – and thus help maintaining cultural diversity – in the face of mass-produced global culture, especially in localities with relatively weak economies and small cultural markets.

Following a broad definition of ›culture‹ as intellectual activity, the notion of cultural production stretches from scholarly and artistic activities to political activism. Grass-roots forms of cultural transnationalization have existed long before the Internet: the early world religions, scholarly networks of the middle ages – invisible colleges –, and the First International established in 1864 by socialist political activists are just a few telling examples. The emergence of such transnational networks used to be dependent on travelling, later postal services and early telecommunication and media technologies. As mentioned by Manuel Castells, the development of the Internet is strongly tied to the communication needs of the globally expanding and decentralizing corporations, however, this technology offers a relatively cheap and effective means to creating and maintaining transnational connections also for marginal cultural groups with limited resources.⁴ We must not forget that the new potential for transnational networking through the use of the Internet remains out of reach for the most deprived social strata, hence widening the gap between the haves and have-nots. Nevertheless, the Internet has unquestionably opened new horizons for marginal cultural groups as it is obvious in the case of world wide networks of globalization critical political movements,⁵ the world of international organized crime and terrorism⁶ or academic networking⁷ – just explore how we all got to know about and got to this conference.

Studying these new, computer mediated models of self-organization is essential to understanding the ongoing transformations of the social world. In this article I explore a loosely organized transnational network of DJs, producers, promoters and record store owners in east-central Europe. In June 2002 I carried out a multi-sited ethnographic research in Vienna, Trieste, Ljubljana, Zagreb and Sarajevo – five cities in five countries of the region. Using participant observation – hanging around the town, talking independent music business chit chat, DJing in local clubs and bars, browsing through private record collections of DJs and record store shelves, and conducting about twenty in-depth interviews with local cultural producers as a research method, I tried to trace the flow of information about music and the flow of music itself – in both material and virtual forms – in a rather marginal genre called ›nu jazz‹. Throughout the research I focused my attention on the role that the Internet plays in the grass-roots globalization of this specific marginal cultural form, but also considered the traditional – material – forms of distribution and information dissemination.

›Nu jazz‹ is a loosely defined term that is used to describe a wide range of different styles and tempos. The genre has its roots in the rare groove, acid jazz and underground electronic dance music scenes and is best defined as the fusion of acoustic and electronic; be it a mix of

Production. In: British Journ. of Sociology 49/2 (1998), pp. 234-251.

4 Castells 1996.

5 For a more detailed explanation of global networks of political activism cf. Appadurai 2000 and Klein, N.: No Logo. London: Flamingo 2000.

6 The most publicised examples are probably networks of child-pornographers in the field of organised crime. The importance of the use of Internet by Al-Qaida members in organising and co-ordinating the terrorist attacks 11th of September was also mentioned in several TV-documentaries and news programmes.

For a quick overview of articles that deal with academic networking online cf. Acker, Stephen, R.: Space, Collaboration and the Credible City: Academic Work in the Virtual University. In: Journ. of Computer Mediated Communications 1/1 (1996), available at: <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol1/issue1/acker/ACKTEXT.HTM>;

Gresham, John L.: From Invisible College to Cyberspace College: Computer Conferencing and the Transformation of Informal Scholarly Communication Networks. In: Interpersonal Computing and Technology 2/4 (1994), pp. 37-52, available at: <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~ipct-j/1994/n4/gresham.txt>; Koku, Emmanuel F. / Nazer, Nancy / Wellman, Barry: Netting Scholars Online and Offline. In: American Behavioral Scientist, Vol. 43, special iss.: Mapping Globalization 2000, available at: <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/nettingscholars/scholnet-abs9a.pdf>.

7 Even the above mentioned »corporate« nu jazz records are often promoted and distributed through independent companies.

8 With the exception of well developed DJ markets, like Vienna, where even chain-stores have vinyl sections.

9 The one that is usually referred to, since it – at the time of my research – provided access to the widest selection of nu jazz, was *SoulSeek* and was available at: <http://www.slsk.org> (last accessed on August 19, 2002).

10 Such as the *Acid Jazz Mailing List* and the *Nu Jazz Warriors Forum* (<http://www.cmd.uu.se/AcidJazz/> and <http://pluto.beseen.com/boardroom/t/51176/> both last accessed 19.08.2002).

11 The shortest use was between 30 minutes and an hour, but a DJ who works at an Internet related company in a managerial position admitted up to 3-4 hours daily. It might sound extreme, but as I have a simi-

jazz and drum and bass or a blend of salsa and hip-hop. What matters then is more an eclectic attitude to selection than a set of well-defined musical characteristics. The emergence of nu jazz is strongly tied to the club culture of London, but by now the city has lost its once – about a decade ago – central role. There are well established autonomous local and regional scenes outside the UK as well – for example in France, Germany and Japan – and there are many more still in formation. The local scenes in east-central Europe – with the exception of Vienna – have only emerged in the last three-four years and are not very well developed in terms of the number of missing links from the full spectrum of cultural enterprises: local record labels, specialist record stores, booking agencies, recording studios, clubs and radio shows that make up an autonomous scene.

The practice of nu jazz DJing is of course dependant on the networks that distribute the musical recordings. Although there have been a couple of corporate buy outs of small independent record companies as well as remix projects that build on the back catalogues of classic jazz labels that are now owned by major record companies, the vast majority of nu jazz related recordings are released by independent labels and distributed through independent distributors that are the gate-keepers to specialist record stores.⁸ Vinyl is the traditional format for DJing and it is usually obtainable in these shops only,⁹ my research has shown that the lack of these outlets in certain locations leads the DJs to using alternative formats – CDs, CD-Rs and mp3s – as well looking for alternative channels of distribution.

Ordering records from on-line specialist stores was also mentioned in a number of cases, however, DJs who live in locations where postage costs are high – particularly in Bosnia – almost never do that. Most of my interviewees also receive promotional records for their radio shows from independent labels they contacted via e-mail. Where the official channels of distribution fail – like in Sarajevo – the alternative network of the pirate industry steps in and creates a pricing model that builds on what people can actually afford based on their local salaries. Peer-2-peer mp3 file-sharing software¹⁰ is also used by those few of my interviewees who had broadband Internet connections – mostly at their workplaces. Some of the DJs even had certain songs in mp3 format long before their official release dates, probably ripped off from the already circulating promotional CDs. All my interviewees have stressed the importance of travelling abroad for obtaining records, and those who did not live there all mentioned Vienna as their most usual destination for record shopping journeys.

As the amount of nu jazz releases is overwhelming and they are released in a highly decentralized institutional structure, there is no single department – like in major record companies – that organizes world-wide media and marketing campaign around each release. As the case of Vienna shows, better developed scenes offer better chances for obtaining information about nu jazz, such as visiting multiple specialist stores and browsing through the »new arrivals« shelves on a daily basis, personal meetings – in shops, clubs and the street – and exchanging information with a high number of other DJs who are active in the same field.

In Vienna, the Austrian national radio station *FM4* strongly supports the genre and a number of available specialist magazines such as the British *Straight No Chaser* or the German *Groove* provide further sources of information. As specialist magazines are usually not available in cities with less developed scenes, all of my interviewees use the Internet to obtain information about records and artists. As reviewers most often lag behind the pace of releases, the most up-to-date resources on new and upcoming releases are the websites of independent record labels and the charts, club and radio play-lists of other nu jazz DJs. These are usually published through the DJs' web sites or posted on nu jazz-themed online discussion groups.¹¹

Online radio shows are another important source of information, but are usually listened to by the few DJs, who have broadband connections at work. In Sarajevo, a city with very slow Internet connections and expensive telephony, the syndicated radio shows on *Radio 3* play a similar role.

I have found that the Internet plays a key role for obtaining information about this marginal cultural form in cities without strong, well developed scenes. The centrality of the Internet in the everyday practices of nu jazz DJs is well shown by the fact that all my interviewees used it for acquiring information about music or sending and replying to e-mails in music-related matters for at least an hour daily on average.¹²

Most of the transnational communication of nu jazz DJs even within the regional network happens via e-mails, mostly because it is a lot cheaper than making phone calls.

lar work and DJ history, I can certainly testify: it is possible, I did it myself at a time.

12 I have organised my research trip/ DJ tour from London in about a week's time only using e-mails, without making any phone calls at all.

13 The particular newsletters all differ in terms of their content and style, but most usually they are in English and include radio playlists, charts as well as information on upcoming local events and international tour dates.

14 Rheingold, Howard: *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World*, London: Minerva 1995, p.5, defines virtual communities as »social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on [...] public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relations in cyberspace.« However, separating an individual's on-line and off-line activities and identities would be a mistake, as the two are strongly interrelated, as stated in Wellman, Barry: *The Persistence and Transformation of Community: From Neighbourhood Groups to Social Networks*. Report to the Law Commission of Canada 2001, available at: <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/law-comm/lawcomm7.pdf> (last accessed on December 15, 2003).

15 Looking for contacts in Budapest, running the search query »+»nu jazz« +Budapest +DJs« on www.google.com will get results.

16 It is very easy to describe the newsletter phenomenon in Sharon Zukin's terms as »creating a buzz« on a transnational level. Zukin, S.: *How to Create A Culture Capital: Reflections on Urban Markets and Places*. In: *Tate Modern Catalogue 2000*, p. 261, describes buzz in the context of the symbolic economy of cities as being »comprised of publicity, gossip and anticipation [...]». In part, the importance of buzz reflects the priority that has been placed since the late nineteenth century on the commercial application of technological innovation. Partly, too, buzz reflects the importance of media – newspapers, glossy magazines, cable television, websites and chat rooms – in diffusing knowledge about commodities and celebrities. [...] Buzz also plays a key role in the careers of cultural producers. Buzz intensifies the tendency to organise credentials in terms of »portfolios« that telescope producers' track records for creativity [...] Moreover, buzz is a major medium of communication among the interconnected networks of cultural producers, employers, clients and

E-mail communication is used when contacting record labels for promotional records and sending charts, play-lists and direct feedback about the particular records received. It is also a common way of negotiating contracts when releasing one's own music through independent record companies that are based abroad, as well as the main medium of organizing DJ tours¹³ abroad and inviting foreign guest DJs. All interviewees agree that without keeping up a certain level of e-mail communication – most of them check their accounts at least once a day, always answering urgent letters immediately – one soon falls out of the international network: labels and artists stop sending promotional records, and the number of invitations for DJ gigs abroad soon declines, as does the chance of receiving further contact e-mail addresses.

The most usual solution to the problem of maintaining regular communication with the ever-increasing number of other cultural producers one is in touch with is to send e-mail based newsletters¹⁴ on a regular basis. The list of recipients usually includes all the other cultural producers – DJs, producers, labels – in one's own personal network, as well as local and international fans and nu jazz-themed mailing lists and discussion groups. Mailing lists and discussion groups are the platforms of communication for the international »virtual communities«¹⁵, so newsletters sent here – besides reaching a further 500-1.500 people, who share a similar interest – maintains visibility in the public channels of transnational communication and debate focused on nu jazz. Besides posting newsletters to these places, not many of my interviewees participate in the life of these virtual communities, but these forums still play an important role in the formation of regional and transnational networks among cultural producers. When looking for specific contact addresses,¹⁶ search engines often point to old newsletters in the web-based archives of these forums.¹⁷

The complex connectivity among spatially dispersed cultural producers allows for the development of new forms of cooperation such as the case of Bosnian *Radio 3* that at the time of the research broadcasted nine radio shows from around the world¹⁸ in Sarajevo.

While the first steps of developing international connections almost always depend on the Internet in one form or another, the first phase in the development of the east-central European regional network relied on a combination of virtual encounters¹⁹ as well as real ones. Mutual visits among the DJs in the region are usual, using occasions like guest DJ gigs and other cultural events, such as film festivals and concerts. Besides computer-mediated communications, these personal meetings serve as further occasions for the most usual form of cooperation: sharing information about music, and contacts as well as exchanging know-how about organizing events, producing music and survival in the independent music business.

My research has shown that although traditional material forms of distribution, travelling and face-to-face meetings still remain important for transnational cultural cooperation, and that the use of the Internet plays a central role in the formation and functioning of this specific marginal music related club culture. The Internet allowed independent cultural producers on the periphery to link up with each other and the global scene and maintain the presence of a global, but marginal music related club culture in their respective localities providing alternatives to corporate forms of cultural globalization out of enthusiasm on a rock-bottom budget.

As I mentioned in the beginning, this grass-roots model of transnational cultural self-organization and cooperation is not limited to the field of music, but is present in other spheres, such as the world of academia and political activism. I strongly believe that further studying these new, emerging models of grass-roots cooperation that use the Internet as their main communication platform and to a limited degree as a distribution channel for cultural goods in digital form is crucial to understanding the redistribution of power within societies, and also provides a deeper insight to the transformation of the cultures of cities.

patrons who circulate among the city's consumption spaces and cultural institutions.«

17 From London, Hamburg, New York City, Vienna, Munich among other cities. For a detailed list of shows, playlists and listening to the radio, cf. <http://www.radio3.ba/news.htm>.

18 E-mails to contacts addresses that were either found on the web or were passed on by other nu jazz DJs in the region.

19 Personal meetings at the yearly *Kontrapunkt Future Jazz* Festivals in Zagreb, that besides providing entertainment also served as an informal conferences for regional and international nu jazz DJs.

Gábor Vályi is Assistant lecturer at the Department of Sociology, University of Technology in Budapest and researcher at the Centre for Media Education and Research.

Contact: valyi@mokk.bme.hu

