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Playing With Visibility: Underground Electronic/Dance Music Culture in the Smartphone Era

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The adoption of smartphones has reconfigured the situational contexts in which people imagine, understand, and, in turn, calibrate the visibility of their self-expression, information sharing, and relationship building. This article expounds on how participants of underground electronic dance music culture (EDMC) maintained their shared culture of secrecy with the advent of smartphones. Drawing on an autoethnography that spanned 20 nights at live music events and 27 semistructured interviews with promoters and attendees, I bring attention to how their spatial-temporal tactics of smartphone use (and non-use) not only served as the means of secrecy—but also bolstered the corporeal, affective experience of scene participation. I thus developed *visibility play* as a concept to describe the tactical configuration of visibility grounded in the playful experience of joy and pleasure.

Keywords: visibility, smartphone, secrecy, nightlife

Visibility is a double-edged sword that swings between an empowering (visibility as recognition) and a disempowering (visibility as control) pole (Brighenti, 2010; Thompson, 2005). It is something we both love and loathe. On one hand, we make ourselves visible as we long for connections with and recognition by others (Bucher, 2018; John, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). Yet with the emerging prescriptions for visibility, sharing, and exposure, we are also wary of who is watching us and how they might perceive us (Duffy & Chan, 2019; Humphreys, 2011; Litt & Hargittai, 2016; Lyon, 2018; Marwick, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011, 2014)—even when such gaze is only imagined.

Such push-and-pull dynamics with visibility make it a site of *tactics* and *strategies*. According to Michel de Certeau (1984), strategies are how powerful institutions create the conditions in which we

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operate, whereas tactics are what we do as shortcuts, improvisations, and workarounds to navigate those conditions. Given the Janus-faced nature of visibility, the tactical negotiation of visibility has become emblematic of contemporary sociality. We are constantly recalibrating the delicate balance between secrecy and promotion, between exclusivity and inclusivity, and between hypervisibility and undervisibility (Abidin, 2021; Duffy & Chan, 2019; Lingel, 2017; Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013). We may simultaneously employ both tactics of visibility (Cotter, 2019; Willson & Kinder-Kurlanda, 2021) as well as "tactics of invisibility" (Talvitie-Lamberg, Lehtinen, & Valtonen, 2022, p. 5445). How we navigate these scenarios reveals the power structures in which we are operating (see Gray, 2009).

Since their proliferation in the late-2000s, smartphones have become integral to both our visibility and our configurations of visibility. As a metamedium on which we engage with a plethora of "constituent media" that were once separate (Humphreys, Karnowski, & von Pape, 2018), smartphones as the archetypal personal devices are dissolving what we once saw as stable situational contexts of our media environments. We now use social media platforms, texting functions, Web browsers, cameras, and mapping services (and many more) all on a single mobile device. Smartphones play an integral role in a wide array of everyday experiences—from dating (Birnholtz & Macapagal, 2021; Brubaker, Ananny, & Crawford, 2016; Pinch et al., 2022; Yeo & Fung, 2018), working (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013; Sharma, 2014), to concertgoing (Baym, 2018; Hammelburg, 2021a, 2021b; Lingel, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this article concerns the tactical configuration of visibility on and through smartphones in the case of *underground electronic/dance music culture* (EDMC). Given how underground EDMC exists on the basis of the constant maneuvering of visibility between secrecy and promotion, the culture is apt for examining the shifting conditions of visibility in the smartphone era. From getting to the venue to vibing on the dance floor, navigating across spatial-temporal contexts is constitutive of participation in underground EDMC. Through an autoethnography that spanned 20 nights at live music events and 27 semistructured interviews with promoters and attendees, I traced how participants of underground EDMC enacted smartphones as the "media of secrecy"—as "the vehicles through which relations of inclusion and exclusion or similarity and difference are modulated via communicative practices of concealment, revelation, revelation of concealment, and concealment of revelation" (Jones, 2014, p. 56). I highlighted how the spatial-temporal properties of smartphones have accentuated the affective possibilities for people to not only manage but *play with* their visibility. I thus developed *visibility play* as a concept to describe the tactical configuration of visibility–not as a deficit-based management of coping–but as the experiential happening of joy and pleasure. I foreground how spatial-temporal contexts are constitutive elements of such playful dialectics of visibility.

Beyond Use: A Contextual Reading of Mediated Visibility

Scholars studying mediated visibility often invoke late sociologist Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor to understand "impression management" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) considers life as a stage for activity. To present themselves, individuals engage in *performances*, during which they curate their behaviors and selectively give off details. Beyond the face-to-face situations Goffman (1959) describes in his own writing, copresence as a concept remains useful for understanding how visibility is negotiated in

mediated situations of *copresence* (Pinch, 2010). For instance, phone calls (Humphreys, 2005), scrolling on the phone next to someone (Humphreys & Hardeman, 2021), concerts (Baym, 2018; Hammelburg, 2021a, 2021b; Lingel, 2017), and live streams (Brewer, Ruberg, Cullen, & Persaud, 2023; Meisner, 2023) can all be considered bounded situations of copresence even when they do not occur in face-to-face settings.

Visible by Traces

Yet our visibility is mediated not only by interactional situations of self-presentation. Visibility is not fully explainable through the lens of media use for impression management on the Goffmanian stage. From photos, recordings, to social media posts, as media gained the capacity to store, we also become visible through the traces of us (see Hogan, 2010). We create accounts of our lives through the profiles we create, the posts we write, and the photos we share. We may do so to document our lives so we have something to look back on (Frith & Kalin, 2016; Humphreys, 2018), or simply because we feel pressured to share (Bucher, 2018; John, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). Our traces may also be other-generated (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2014). We may become visible through the sharing of our friends and families—even strangers.

Visibility is Spatial

From situations and traces, our visibility is bound up with the spatial and temporal contexts in which we operate. Seemingly placeless communication that takes place online often brings us back to face-to-face situations, as seen in how online disputes may lead to offline violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Stevens, Gilliard-Matthews, Dunaev, Woods, & Brawner, 2017), as well as how Black digital publics can bring isolated others in unfriendly spaces together (Brock, 2020). We may want to be visible only in certain spaces (e.g., music festivals, public spaces, cool neighborhoods) but not others (e.g., home, vacation spots, boring places; Brubaker et al., 2016; Hammelburg, 2021a; Humphreys, 2007). For certain places (e.g., protests, cruising spots, illicit gatherings, crime scenes), the situation is more ambivalent, where we may want to be visible only to some but not others (Lingel, 2017; Neumayer & Stald, 2014; Pinch et al., 2022; Richardson, 2020). Visibility may be contingent on access to certain places, such as public libraries (Marler, 2023), places with Internet connection (Dye et al., 2017), or places with electrical power (Galperin, Bar, & Nguyen, 2021). Other times, visibility escapes the physical confines (e.g., prison; households of intimate partner violence), where our traces continue to follow us through the digital Webs (Gurusami, 2019; Tseng et al., 2020).

Visibility is Temporal

With mobile media, the temporalities of our visibility are often characterized by constant connectivity (Frosh, 2018; Mazmanian et al., 2013; Vanden Abeele, De Wolf, & Ling, 2018; Yeo & Fung, 2018; Ytre-Arne, Syvertsen, Moe, & Karlsen, 2020). Yet we may also break off from this flow through acts of delaying (Burchell, 2015; Farman, 2018; Mannell, 2019; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). We may also choose to disconnect (Karppi, 2018). Oftentimes, this is meant to be temporary, and we may choose to reconnect (Baym, Wagman, & Persaud, 2020; Brubaker et al., 2016; Jorge, 2019; Syvertsen & Enli,

2020). Other times, disconnection is not a choice, but an ongoing experience of uncertainty (Dye et al., 2017; Galperin et al., 2021; Marler, 2023). Our traces may be intended only to be ephemeral for a limited time frame (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2016; Haber, 2019; Handyside & Ringrose, 2017; Kofoed & Larsen, 2016). Other times, they may also endure over a longer period of time. Sometimes, this is an intentional choice, particularly when we want to document and remember (Couldry, 2012; Frith & Kalin, 2016; Humphreys, 2018). Yet other times, our traces endure in ways that go against our will—or without us knowing (Ayalon & Toch, 2017; Brandtzaeg & Lüders, 2018; Cho, 2018).

Visible is Corporeal

A fundamental (yet often neglected) aspect of mediated visibility is that it is always already conditioned by who we are as we exist as corporeal bodies. We all face different conditions of visibility as different beings—as young adults (Duffy & Chan, 2019; Kofoed & Larsen, 2016; Marwick & boyd, 2014), as queer people (Birnholtz & Macapagal, 2021; Brubaker et al., 2016; Gray, 2009; Haber, 2019; Handyside & Ringrose, 2017; Lingel, 2017; Pinch et al., 2022), unhoused people (Galperin et al., 2021; Marler, 2023), or as formerly incarcerated people (Gurusami, 2019). Our corporeal experiences are also bound up with the spatial and temporal contexts, such as the unique conditions of visibility experienced by young Black girls in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Patton, Stevens, Smith Lee, Eya, & Frey, 2020).

Mediated Visibility is Contextual

Although the Goffmanian stage remains analytically useful in understanding interactional situations in mediated contexts (Pinch, 2010), our visibility is also bound up with the traces of us. Furthermore, space, time, and corporeality are all constitutive elements that shape the possibilities of how visibility is mediated. These contextual aspects are pertinent to understanding visibility in a media environment marked by seamlessness (Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2015; Cumiskey & Humphreys, 2023; Farman, 2012) and "anytime, anyplace connectivity" (Vanden Abeele et al., 2018, p. 5). And although smartphones remain the analytical focus of this article, a sole emphasis on what people *do* with these technologies is insufficient in grasping the full picture of the mediated conditions in which we operate (see Humphreys et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, I advance a contextual reading of visibility—in which where (space), when (time), and who (being) are all constitutive elements that are closely bound up with the possibilities of our visibility. In the case of underground EDMC, visibility is inherently spatial (i.e., centers around physical congregations), temporal (i.e. orients around events), and corporeal (concerns embodied experience of dancing with others). A contextual reading of visibility is critical for a holistic understanding of how scene participants maintained their shared culture of secrecy.

Meaning of the Underground

Underground EDMC is exemplified by the practices of dancing, raving, clubbing, partying, and vibing with disc jockeys (DJs) mixing tracks of electronic music at collective congregations (McLeod, 2001; St. John, 2004). These events take place "all night and into the early morning hours" (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007, p. 503). Although there is great heterogeneity in musical styles and aesthetics, from techno, acid house, to trance, I use underground EDMC as an umbrella term to refer to the collective experience of "risky pleasures" as the emblem of participation (Hutton, 2016). The riskiness of such a culture is bound up with the illegality of venues, the presence of recreational drugs, the public culture of moral panics, and the threat of law enforcement crackdowns (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995; Reynolds, 1999; Vitos, 2017).

Historically, underground EDMC has been exemplified by antiestablishment, grassroots organized, and unlicensed "rave" parties (Anderson, 2009; St. John, 2004). Yet with the corporate takeover of the nighttime economies in urban spaces and club owners' interest in profiting from rave cultures (Chatterson & Hollands, 2003; Hae, 2012), the original traits of EDMC are "being jeopardized by threats of assimilation into the mainstream culture" (Marcuse, 1964, as cited in Formilan & Stark, 2020, p. 574). Presently, it is more appropriate to locate underground EDMCs on a "rave-club culture continuum" between underground venues and commercial nightclubs (Anderson, 2009, p. 307). Against this backdrop, underground EDMC fragilely coalesces around their participants' shared taste in the underground (Thornton, 1996), as well as their preference for a crowd that shares their distinctive styles and preferences (Malbon, 2002). Oftentimes, such preferences go beyond musical styles but also encompass the preferences for others to be young, cool, and hip (Malbon, 2002; Thornton, 1996). And different local scenes may privilege differently racialized and sexualized bodies (and occasionally aging bodies; see Böse, 2005). These scenes often "come together and dissolve in a single summer or endure for a few years" (Thornton, 1996, p. 3). Given the contested boundaries of the underground (Tofalvy, 2020), I follow sociologist Giovanni Formilan and David Stark (2020) in seeing the term to be "of analytic interest precisely because its meanings and the boundaries to which it refers are highly contested by the participants themselves" (p. 574).

In such loosely bounded social collectives, rituals and codes are crucial as "a group commitment to protecting shared practices and activities" (Lingel, 2017, p. 115). As a manifestation of the codes of the underground, participants in underground EDMC adhere to collective norms for "locating, sharing, and hiding information" of their gatherings (Lingel & boyd, 2013, p. 981). Such norms of information practices serve as a "test of identity" that reinforces a sense of belonging (Malbon, 2002, p. 68). They "[create] social bonds but also [distinguish] between insider and outsider groups" (Flyverbom, Leonardi, Stohl, & Stohl, 2016, p. 104). The codes and rituals of secrecy are continually renewed as new media technologies render "information that had long been hidden easier and easier to find" (Lingel, 2017, p. 27). From mobile telephony to social media platforms, these technologies complicate the community's shared culture of secrecy as they present greater possibilities for being exposed to outsiders, bonding with insiders, and welcoming newcomers. Against this backdrop, this article set out to examine how participants of underground EDMC have reconfigured the codes and norms of secrecy with the advent of smartphones.

Studying the Scenes

To examine how participants of underground EDMC managed their visibility on and through smartphones, I conducted an autoethnography between April 2021 and November 2023 as a scene participant finding out, attending, and observing 20 nights of live music events, as well as 27 offsite, semistructured interviews with promoters and attendees.

In line with Alice O'Grady (2012) and Luis-Manuel Garcia (2013) on the ethics of nightlife research, my guiding principle is to respect the fun and minimize my interruption. During fieldwork, I focused on being there when I was on the dance floor; I used my personal smartphone only for brief and discreet note-taking, and I would move to the lounge area where phone use was socially acceptable or do so privately in the bathroom. In addition, instead of in-situ interviews on the dance floor, I conducted interviews offsite to respect the realm of nightlife. To minimize the impact of the publication of this article, I redacted all sensitive information to the extent possible, such as by using pseudonyms (e.g., Emma, Zain) to refer to my interlocutors.

To understand underground EDMC as a youth culture with global, translocal, and local qualities (Bennett, 2004; Carrington & Wilson, 2017), I adopted a multisited approach (Marcus, 1995) by studying five scenes in distinct sociohistorical contexts—New York City (especially the borough of Brooklyn); Ithaca, upstate New York; Los Angeles, California; Taipei, Taiwan; and Berlin, Germany. I recruited the interview participants among those who self-identified as scene participants in these local scene(s) for more than a year. I recruited the initial participants (n = 6) through my personal networks, and I then turned to snowball sampling for further recruitment (n = 21). For the 20 nights of fieldwork, the initial field sites were selected among the venues that my interview participants mentioned. For each night of field observation, I would visit additional field sites beyond the initial entry points based on information gathered during my night out.

I iteratively collected and analyzed data until I reached meaning saturation (Charmaz, 2006). Below, I foreground how the rituals and codes of secrecy have been reconfigured in two scenarios: (1) getting to the venues and (2) event experience at the venue. In the following section, I highlight how the spatial-temporal properties of smartphones have accentuated the affective possibilities for scene participants to not only manage—but *play with* their visibility.

Navigating to the Venue: The Passage of Authentication

Since the inception of underground EDMC, the obfuscation of event locations has been serving as a crucial means through which promoters and attendees maintain their shared culture of secrecy. Before mobile phones, scene participants would learn about gatherings by way of physical flyers and zines in local record stores (Malbon, 2002; Thornton, 1996) or through website postings (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007). Oftentimes, these promotional materials would not reveal the exact locations of the gatherings. Instead, they would direct interest parties to ask scene veterans for further details. With the adoption of mobile phones, the practice of texting and calling a number became a gateway to the last-minute reveal of venue locations (Fitzgerald, 1998).

My fieldwork and interviews highlight that with the advent of smartphones, the introduction of mobile-centric event-sharing platforms has reconfigured how the communities circulate event information. As the availability and immediacy afforded by event-sharing platforms has made it easier for newcomers to gain entry into the scenes, promoters, in turn, tightened access to the communities by stipulating a passage of waiting and navigating. With these platforms, the obfuscation of event locations was not only the pragmatist means of secrecy—it has also become the experiential dialectics that bolster a sense of scene participation. Although the attendees might find out about parties on event-sharing platforms within minutes, to actually arrive at the dance floor, they must wait for late-minute announcements and learn to navigate to the location. It was precisely through the embodied experience of waiting and navigating that attendees authenticated themselves as insiders.

Waiting for Announcements, Waiting for Approvals

With the advent of smartphones, mobile-centric event-sharing platforms have become the main gateway through which potential attendees would learn about the events that were happening. These platforms can range from Web-based community forums, standalone apps like Resident Advisor, to mainstream social media platforms like Instagram. Taken together, they have made it faster and easier for interested parties to find out about events. As Kevin (P2) put it:

> It's so easy to find a party these days. I can just turn to these [event-sharing] platforms [on my phone] as I'm pregaming with my friends at a bar. And I know for sure I'll find something. There are usually so many events on a Saturday night [in Los Angeles] . . . I usually don't even get to scroll through all of them [on my phone]. I can even find something at 3 am [*sic*] if I want to migrate to another party.

Kevin's quote here reflects a common expectation among partygoers—that with these event-sharing platforms, one could find out about events within minutes, and they could simply do so on a night out. There was also the expectation that one could find the next stop of the night on the go. Figure 1 is the screenshot I took on logging onto an event-sharing platform. It shows the abundance and immediacy of events that have been made accessible through these platforms, on which one could (expect to) find multiple events happening on a night out.

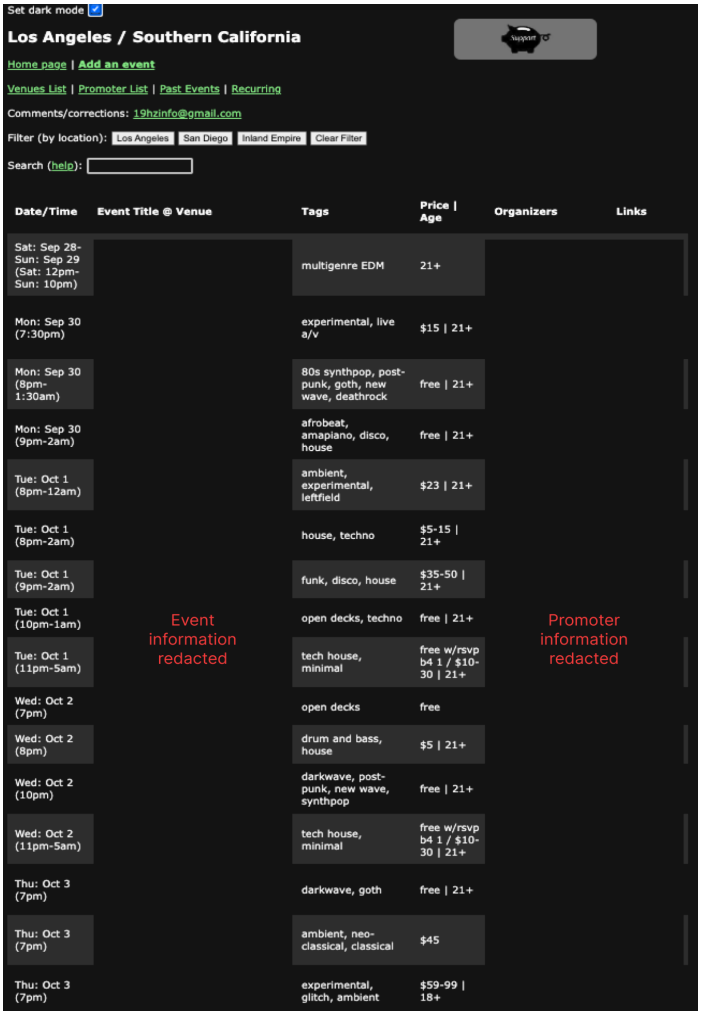

Figure 1. Screenshot of the landing page of an event-sharing platform (with sensitive information redacted; Yang, personal communication, 2023).

And although the attendees expected to find out about events immediately, they could not, however, simply started heading to the party upon learning about them on these platforms. Consistent with the historical practices of obfuscating the exact gathering locations in these "first-wave" promotions (Tina, Brett), the promotional materials on these platforms provided just enough details for interested attendees to roughly confirm the area in which the event would take place so that they could plan their night accordingly. Figure 2 provides an example of where a promoter listed only the approximate neighborhood (Brooklyn, New York) and the date (Friday, October 4) on which it would take place. It was rather common for promoters to list their events as "TBA"—an acronym for "to be announced"—to indicate that the details would be shared at a later time. This "later" usually means sharing the location "on the night of" (Sasha, James, Dmitri), or "only a few hours ahead of" (Angel, Jessica, Quinn) the event.

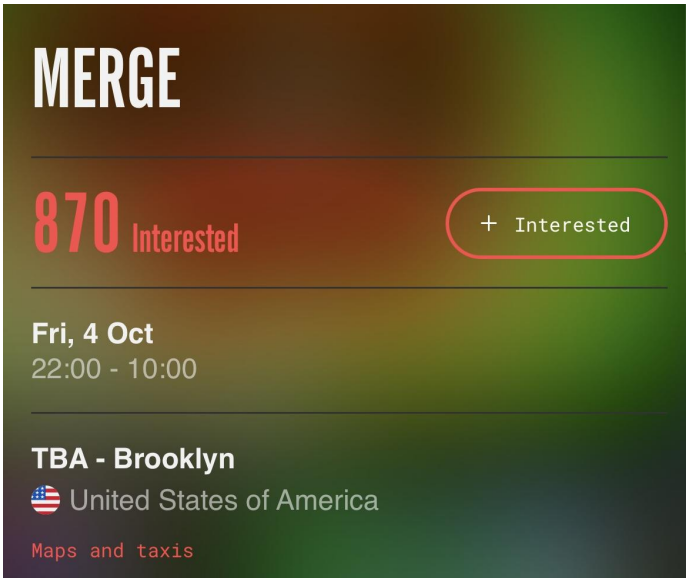

Figure 2. Screenshot of event information as it was displayed on an event-sharing platform (Yang, personal communication, 2023).

In fact, the attendees did not even expect to learn about the details of an event immediately as they learned about the event. Rather, they expected to wait for promoters to share the details later. This sentiment is captured in the following quote from Aaron:

> It's become clear that it's easy to find out about events on these apps. This becomes an issue. We don't want too many people who don't know the music and the community. That ruins the fun. That's probably why now the promoters always make us wait for location. That will probably dissuade the ingenuine posers. Waiting is totally fine with me. It is kinda fun and makes the experience [feel] more "underground," if you know what I mean. It makes me feel like I'm part of something.

Max's comment speaks to the general willingness of scene participants to wait for further information. In fact, besides Max, many informants I spoke with (Tina, Lexi, and Cynthia) have expressed that they are quite happy with how the promoters would make it harder for people to access their scenes. They saw the passage of waiting as resistance to the logic of abundance and immediacy brought forth by these platforms. It affords the community to maintain a reduced level of visibility—as only those who went the trial of waiting would actually arrive on the dance floor. Such an affect of waiting served as the very means through which attendees could authenticate themselves as insiders. As Cynthia would say, "It makes me feel like I'm part of the crew."

Other than directly revealing event locations on event-sharing platforms, the promoters would often share event locations via some *update mechanisms*. In this case, as part of the information they shared on event-sharing platforms, the promoters would typically direct interested parties to sign up for

further updates by entering their phone numbers (Figure 2), by texting a specific phone number (Figure 3), or by direct messaging (DMing) on social media (Figure 4). In the case where one signed up for updates via their phone numbers or by texting a specific number, the event details would typically be automatically shared. In this case, the passage of waiting entailed a simple temporal delay, where anyone would receive the details eventually. Here, the update mechanisms served to hide the event details from plain sight, only sharing them with self-selective parties who indicated interest in the event.

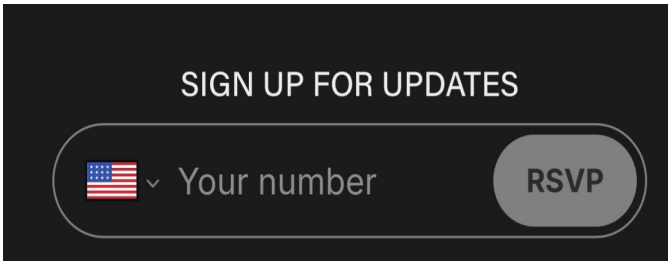

Figure 3. Screenshot of a sign-up form for further details via entering one's phone number (Yang, personal communication, 2024).

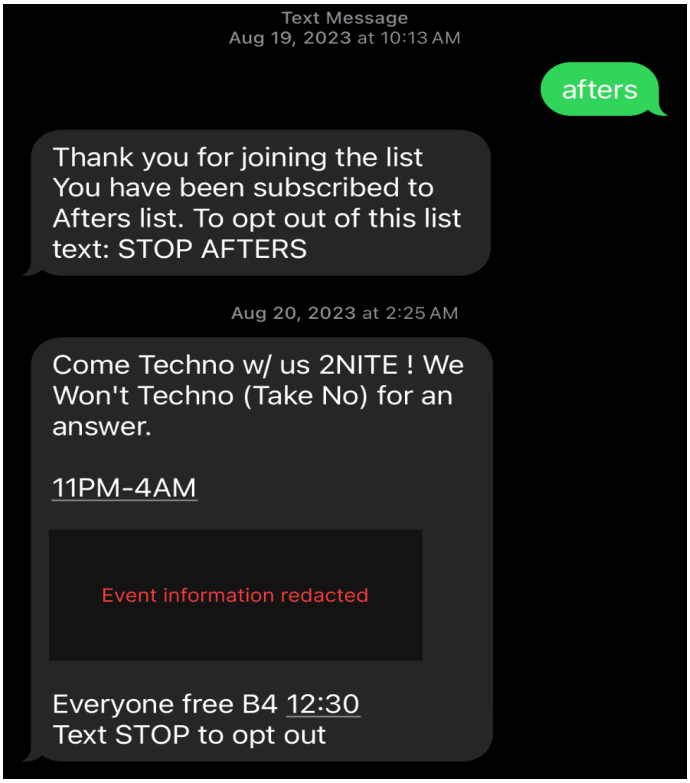

Figure 4. Screenshot of automated text messages sent by event promoters after I signed up for further information (Yang, personal communication, 2023).

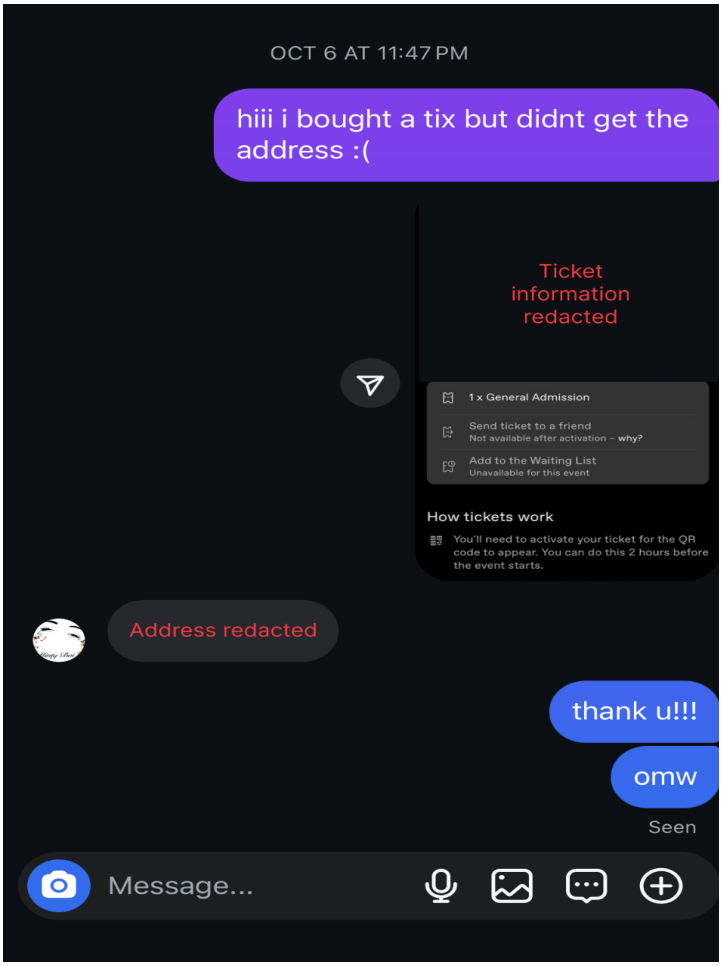

Figure 5. Screenshot of my direct message (DM) conversations with a promoter (Yang, personal communication, 2023).

Other than a simple temporal delay via automated mechanisms, in the case where the promoters prompted interested parties to DM them on social media (Figure 5), the pattern of waiting also manifested as a rite of passage for approval when it involved human responses. As the promoters manually handled these inquiries, other than obscuring the event location from the public's eye, they held the additional power of screening potential attendees. Through this process, the promoters could screen out ingenuine attendees based on the tone of their inquiries and/or their social media profiles. Such a screening process widely differed across different promoters and reflects varying levels of exclusivity, ranging from the least exclusionary to only "screen out the cops" (Zandar), to a stricter approach to determine whether they would respect the community, and to the most exclusionary to assess whether their aesthetics aligned with the scene. Although the criteria vary, cutting across these scenarios was an inquiry-then-approval model that was constitutive of an embodied experience of waiting for approval.

Smartphone as the Infrastructure for Navigation

Other than the temporal stipulation for attendees to wait for event details, my fieldwork and interviews also point to the prevalence for the promoters to share event locations via instructions in lieu of the exact addresses. The following excerpt from the promotional materials I encountered during my fieldwork in Taipei illustrates what such instructions tended to look like (the local details have been redacted to maintain my informants' anonymity):

1. Exit the subway station from Exit 1 and go left.
2. Walk until there is a bridge on your left. Go under it.
3. Turn left again, walk up the ramp, and follow the trail straight until you arrive.

Although this mode of navigation via instructions is not novel to the smartphone era, mapping platforms like Google Maps emerged as the critical infrastructure that afforded scene participants to "figure it out on [their] own" (Jason). This made it possible for the promoters to make their instructions evermore obscure. For instance, some promoters might even use GPS coordinates as the sole piece of locative information they share. Comprehending such information would only be possible as the attendees had access to locative platforms like Google Maps on the go. As another example, the promoters might also cultivate an interactive, multistep experience of navigating, such as by asking the attendees to send photos of specific cues in their physical surroundings via text messages to receive the next-step instructions.

These practices foreground a new landscape where the leveraging of smartphones became an integral part of the experience of navigating and entering the scenes. The attendees I talked to expressed that following through with such a process of navigation made them feel like "they are being inducted into a secret society" (Zain). Notably, Zain also stressed that he enjoyed the experience as "it felt like a challenge that did take me a while." As he further explained, "If it was easier and didn't take as much time, I would not have felt as exhilarated as I was when I finally arrived on the dance floor."

Off the Dance Floor: Dual-Disciplining via Venue Policies and Social Etiquette

Other than rendering event information more accessible to newcomers by way of event-sharing platforms, the constant connectivity associated with smartphones has also been taken up to coordinate impromptu gatherings (Møller, 2023; Moore, 2006). At the same time, they were also seen as an "interference into the pleasure of the scene" (Møller, 2023, p. 318).

Against this backdrop, my fieldwork and interviews highlight how a state of reduced phone use was achieved via the dual-disciplining of the promoters' venue policies and the attendees' folk theories of phone etiquette. Across Taipei, Ithaca, New York City, Los Angeles, and Berlin, promoters embraced a similar set of explicit policies about phone use at the venues. These policies ranged from banning flash use, warning against phone use, taping the back and front camera of each attendee's phone on entering, to confiscating each attendee's phone at the entrance. Although not all venues in underground EDMC embraced the same set of policies, these policies were consistently enforced at numerous venues in each of these scenes, thus warranting their representativeness.

Meanwhile, the attendees also developed their own tacit, unspoken folk theories of phone etiquette. Jake provided a glimpse into how such folk theories were picked up from his personal observation:

> As you meet other people in the scene, you will pick up on the dos and don'ts of the community. You will pick up on social etiquette by observing how they use social media and phones. And if you ever cross the line, others will let you know. They may stop you in action when you're taking photos with your flash on, or they may reply to your Instagram story and tell you to delete it. So yeah, you just kind of pick [it] by observing and hanging out with others.

When I further asked him how he felt now that he knew the rules, Jake explained: "It feels great. It makes me feel like now I'm part of the community."

Through my fieldwork and interviews, I noted that the acquisition of such insider knowledge was a crucial experience of "entering the scene" (Julia). Furthermore, my observations foreground how the attendees would corporeally enact such knowledge to perform as insiders to be recognized by others as such. In turn, the same attendees would also subject others around them to the same gaze. As Jake went on to explain, "It was a feeling of mutual nods when you notice other people are following these rules and when others notice the same about you too." Once such knowledge became "ingrained in [their] body" (Kate), the enactment of such knowledge came to serve a dual purpose—both as the pragmatist means of secrecy, as well as the affective means through which scene participants bolstered the corporeal, affective experience of scene participation.

Below, I highlight two tactics of secrecy as a result of the lateral disciplining via social etiquette: (1) nonuse or reduced use on the dance floor and (2) ephemeral and delayed sharing via surroundings.

Nonuse or Reduced Use

While phone use was outright banned on the dance floor at some venues, many venues did not explicitly ban or discourage phone use on the dance floor. In these spaces, the norms around phone use on the dance floor were left rather ambiguous and open-ended. Despite the lack of explicit mandates in these spaces, I noticed that a considerable number of the attendees would still forfeit their phone use as they had already internalized the etiquette based on their past experiences and observations. For Cade, "no phone on the dance floor [sic] has become part of [his] muscle memories as [he's] been clubbing for years." He saw it as "[his] own commitment [to the culture] and there's no need for the venues to tell [him] what to do." On a communal level, the adherence to "no phone on the dance floor [sic]" can be seen as the lateral disciplining of social etiquette at play. If people like Cade were not using their phones on the dance floors, others around him were likely to follow suit because "no one else around [them] pulls out their phone [on the dance floor]" (Jonathan). Beyond nonuse, the attendees would also embrace alternative spatial-temporal tactics to perform their insider status through partial, reduced, or discreet phone use. Such tactics include dimming their screens to minimize the disturbance, moving to the back of the dance floor to check their phones, or leaving the dance floor to use their

phones in the lounge area or the bathroom. All these tactics similarly served the goal of signaling their respect for the dance floor environment to promoters and other attendees.

Ephemeral and Delayed Sharing via Surroundings

When the attendees did use their phones at the venues, one prominent practice was to signal their in-situ participation at live events to "distant others" (Hammelburg, 2021a) via social media. From my fieldwork, it was rare to see the promoters stipulate explicit rules that banned attendees from sharing such traces on social media; the ideas of what constituted oversharing (and the need to avoid sharing such cues) were largely informed by the attendees' folk theories of the do's and don'ts of social media etiquette. I observed two central tenets that many participants held—that one should signal their in-situ participation on social media with as little information about the event as possible, and that such traces were not meant to stay. In particular, Cade further elaborated on this logic during our interview:

> After all, when you post on social media, you're not trying to promote the event; all you're trying to tell people that you're at a cool underground event and that's all. No one really needs to know what event it is, and you don't need to keep it on your profile.

When it comes to what *not to* share, many of my informants pointed to the faces, names, and social media tags of the performers, the promoters, and other attendees (Emma, Zain, Aiden). In terms of whereabouts, attendees would often avoid sharing "any cues that are traceable to the gatherings" (Emma, Jessica, Jim), such as the streets outside of the venues or the name of the venues.

In terms of temporality, the scene participants favored ephemeral media, such as Instagram Stories and Snapchat Stories, that would archive shared content after a short period of time to render their content untraceable in retrospect. In addition, instead of sharing "on the night of" (Claire), many would opt to share "the next day or at a later time" (Max). All in all, such norms reflect their collective commitment to pushing against the accumulation of their traces in an attempt to uphold their shared culture of secrecy.

Furthermore, I noted how the scene participants embraced particular aesthetics of obfuscation in the content they shared on social media. As workarounds for sharing on social media while maintaining their culture of secrecy, the attendees embraced specific cues that were recognizable only to insiders. They did so by visually depicting their surroundings at the venues, including the decor on the dance floor (Jim, Caitlin, Aiden), the color of the light (Jade, Sebestian), and the looks of the lounge era (Jade, Sebestian, Kelly, Jim). Here, I used a selfie I took as part of my fieldwork (Figure 6) to visually illustrate such insider cues:

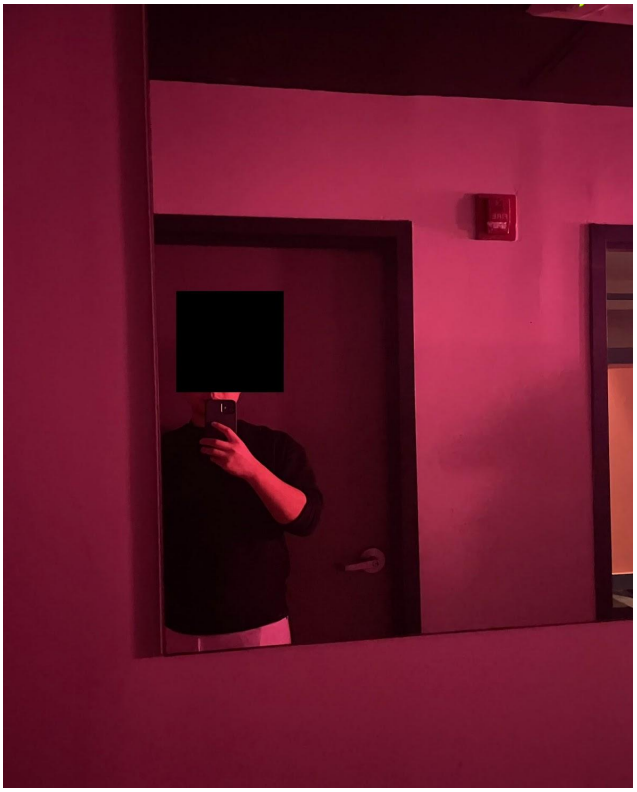

Figure 6. A selfie I took during my fieldwork in Brooklyn, New York (Yang, personal communication, 2022).

As shown in Figure 6, the selfie includes the iconographic details specific to a particular venue, specifically the red light and the position of the mirror. As these cues would be recognizable only to insiders who had been to the specific venue, they could serve as the means for attendees to signal their in-situ participation at a particular venue without sharing excessive details with potential outsiders.

From Visibility Management to Visibility Play

From navigating to the venue to dancing at the venue, I highlight how the promoters and attendees of underground EDMC maintained their shared culture of secrecy in the smartphone era. The case of underground EDMC illustrates how secrecy was still possible despite the greater possibility of exposure with the advent of smartphones. In fact, it was precisely against this backdrop of the possibility of exposure that the means of secrecy gained new meanings. In underground EDMC, the tactics to reduce visibility also served as the experiential means through which the scene participants bolstered a sense of communal participation. As illustrated by the tactics of secrecy in underground EDMC, the spatial-temporal properties of smartphones have accentuated the affective possibilities for people to not only manage but *play with* their visibility. It was precisely through the embodied experience of waiting for last-minute announcements,

navigating to the venue with smartphones, and learning and adopting the tacit phone etiquette that attendees authenticated themselves as insiders.

To this end, I developed the term "visibility play" to describe the tactical configuration of visibility–not as a deficit-based management of coping–but as the experiential happening of joy and pleasure. Given the prevailing emphasis on "impression management" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) as well as the influence from management scholarship (Flyverbom et al., 2016; Treem, Leonardi, & van den Hooff, 2020), recent scholarship on the configuration of mediated visibility often positions visibility as something to manage. This reflects an analytical emphasis on the *how*—the *strategic* actions through which people calibrate their visibility to achieve specific outcomes (Pearce, Vitak, & Barta, 2018), wherein visibility is an end itself. By contrast, *visibility play* reorients the question toward *what* people might experience through the maneuvering of visibility. It shifts the attention away from the end of the journey and toward the wonder along the way. As illustrated in the case of underground EDMC, while the original goal of the scene participants' tactics of secrecy was indeed to maintain their shared culture of secrecy, these tactics gained new meanings as the proxies for their affective dialectics of communal participation. In turn, the experience of visibility became *visibility play*, through which scene participants bonded with and authenticated one another as insiders.

Yet visibility play may not be accessible to everyone. Returning to my earlier reading of visibility as corporeal, we can see how visibility play may not be enjoyable to certain beings given the environment in which they operate. In the case of underground EDMC, the experiential dialectics of visibility play is often a privilege exclusive to those who are perceived as young, cool, and hip and are thus allowed to be part of the experience (Malbon, 2002; Thornton, 1996). In this vein, the dialectics of secrecy is both its fun and its curse—fun for those who can enjoy it, and damned for those that are denied.

Despite such exclusionary caveat, visibility play can nonetheless be appropriated as the everyday experience of *joy–resistance*. Rooted in Black philosophies, the dualistic operation of joy–resistance is most eloquently articulated by Cornel West (2009)—that for Black folks, joy and pain live together. Against this backdrop, visibility play speaks to the liberatory potential of pleasure and catharsis (together) despite the persistence of isolation and oppression. André Brock's (2020) *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures* is seminal in highlighting how the spatial-temporal properties of smartphones are constitutive of the liberatory potential of visibility play. Theorizing smartphones as a "deviant Black cultural and informational artifact" (p. 136), he highlights how smartphones foster a "digital third place" (p. 138) by bringing isolated others in unfriendly spaces together to share the cathartic moments of "Black Kairos" (p. 218).

To sum up, I advanced visibility play as a concept to foreground a particular dynamic of mediated visibility that has been undertheorized in scholarly conversations. While visibility play in the context of underground EDMC centers around the use (and non-use) of smartphones, visibility play as a concept extends to other forms of media cultures that coalesce around other technologies. In closing, I encourage future work to explore visibility play in other contexts beyond underground EDMC to see its boundaries, changing contours, and other possibilities.

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