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OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND: An Analysis of Rave culture.

Introduction

This dissertation is an analysis of the phenomenon of 'rave culture'. Implicit within my writing is the notion that rave is a part of popular culture rather than a subculture. I think it would be useful at this point to provide a definition of subculture: Subcultures define themselves as other' and 'subordinate' to 'the dominant' culture. The early work of Stuart Hall and Dick Hebdige has been chiefly concerned with the ways in which subcultures subvert and pose a resistance to the 'established order' through their expressive dress codes and rituals. Rave departs from these theories of youth culture, since it has not established an identifiable dress code nor consciously set itself apart from the wider culture. Cultural critics have found it difficult to argue that rave poses any resistance to anything at all. This essay is really an exploration into what rave does do, if its objective is not to subvert. What is rave an expression of? What is its function? What is its position politically? These are the questions that I am fundamentally concerned with.

I came to rave culture as an outsider looking in, and from a rather peculiar position of a young person commenting on the activity of my peers. I have found it a rich subject to explore, enabling me to discuss some of my own creative, personal and political interests which relate very closely to my studio practice: the use of collage, the notion of subversion, and the expression of gendered identity. The research has reasserted my belief in the value of looking at and learning from popular culture.

It is also worth outlining the direct links between rave and theatre. The origins of theatre, according to the Greek tradition, are in the Bacchic rites (or drunken orgies) of ancient Greece. Later, with the

building of amphitheatres in Greece, the orgiastic element was replaced by more stylised representations of human life, which were given a text and performed repeatedly. The element of spontaneity and direct experience was reduced as the participator became the spectator. The modern rave begins where theatre also began. Raves are spontaneous, participatory events, which create a powerful emotional experience for the raver as they revel in dionysian bliss. They are also popular, unique events. My studio practice is largely concerned with finding ways to involve the audience, and to put them inside the theatrical world with the performers. I aim to create an emotional event for the audience, so perhaps these roots are worth re-living and re-learning from as theatre struggles to compete with more popular media like film and TV.

The sources for my research have been diverse: psychoanalytic theory, art history, subcultural theory, cultural studies, television documentaries, newspaper coverage, rave and music magazines, my own interviews with ravers, visits to raves, and listening to the music produced for raves. This essay is really a collage created out of all of these discourses, and I hope it goes some way towards an understanding of a rave event.

I shall begin this dissertation with a brief history of the development of rave events and rave music. I shall then consider the structure of rave music, the way in which meanings are communicated, and what possible interpretations could be made from recent rave output. I will consider the narcissistic and pre-oedipal sexuality of ravers, and the pleasure they experience through loss of 'self' and 'fixed' identity. I shall also look at the use of collage within raves, in the context of both surrealism and subcultural theory. All of these areas involve a discussion of the related issues of boundaries and difference. I shall finally conclude my research by considering the political dimension of rave which is manifested in the loss of traditional boundaries, in the questions it raises about the ownership of culture and about the prevailing

The Rave Experience

The experience of taking part in a rave is a highly sensory one. This has to do with the loudness and repetitiveness of the music which ravers can physically feel, the effect of the drug Ecstasy which is most commonly associated with raving, and the physical effects of non-stop dancing. This is not to say that other types of club events are not sensory, they are in varying degrees, but sensory overload is an essential part of the experience of raving. The point is to dance until you do 'lose control'. Rave dancers reach the point of frenzy, rather like the religious dances of Santa Maria where the people dance until the spirit enters them. This emphasis on dancing to a frenzy is not new to Britain but is perhaps a new phenomenon for large numbers of British people to experience. Rave provides ways to 'dance yourself back into your body', and is about self acceptance, and self-love.

"There was just this massive rush of, to me, happiness, because there was a genuine brilliant atmosphere in the club and everybody was basically feeding off each other, where everybody's shouting and screaming and dancing. And all of a sudden I got this huge whoosh running through my body and out of it sort of thing - I don't know where it went - a huge energy force almost. And then going mad again, just dancing again and going crazy."

'And this would just build up and the whole crowd would just be like going along with it and becoming more and more frantic until you did actually feel as if you were slightly losing control."

"It hits you and it bombards you and it breaks down any of those barriers between us. The rhythm just grabs hold of you."

A brief History of Rave

The term rave first came into use in late 50's Britain as a name for the wild bohemian parties of the time. It was then briefly revived by the mods. It did not come back into fashion until the illegal warehouse party scene in London in the early eighties. The crowd was mixed, black and white, and it is likely that the term 'rave' came from Jamaican usage rather than a revival of any previous usage in Britain.

Stuart Cosgrove in his article "Acid Enterprises" argues that the London warehouse party scene was the 'emergent' phase of Acid Rouse. It is this history which is often forgotten in discussion on the roots of raves. The primary aim of these parties was to hear 'good soulful music' (which wasn't being played in the commercial West End clubs of the time) and to dance. The venues were usually old industrial units in Old Street and Rosebery Avenue, which didn't hold an entertainment licence. The events themselves would last all night and sometimes Into the following day. Choice poisons were strong lager and speed for those who could stomach it. There was a thrill at being at an illegal event, being part of a large well kept secret and taking part in something mildly subversive and mythic. There was an atmosphere of being 'cool' as if they were knowingly reinventing a speakeasy during prohibition.

By the mid 80's the warehouse party scene had become more popular and influential. The music was fat-back funk, East Coast hip-hop, rare groove and increasingly Chicago and Detroit house music. It was at this time that 'Soul II Soul' became commercially successful and Kiss FM launched many talented young black DJ's into the mainstream market. The warehouse parties were becoming bigger and more entrepreneurial. Promoters started to hire official venues and toys such as dodgems and bucking broncos. For some, small fortunes were made, but in many instances the profits went back into the scene to fund pirate radio stations and small independent dance labels. At the same time major record companies began to woo the 25-45 age group by repackaging old releases onto CDs. The attention was diverted away from the development of new music and led the way for young people to push for their own developments in music via the independent labels.

Rave also originated from one of the least respected forms of popular culture - the package holiday. It was in the upmarket clubs of Ibiza: Pasha, Amnesia, Glory's and Manhattans, that Balearic beat was created. DJ's would mix together musical forms as diverse as 'Public Enemy' and 'The Woodentops', to create that eclectic, highly danceable, don't care holiday feel A small group of metropolitan ravers would return annually to spend their summer together. In 1987 the 'Shoom' club in Streatham opened to try to resurrect that holiday vibe on British shores. The crowd came in appropriately tacky holiday gear - bandanas, shorts, bright colours, sunglasses and the smiley-logo. In Britain the music became known as Acid House.

By summer 1988 the media, particularly the tabloids, exploded with 'Acid House . As '0' Magazine7 said, it was a "priceless PR campaign" for the emerging Acid House scene. The crowds were bigger, younger, apparently more hedonistic, and definitely more suburban. Warehouses were no longer big enough to hold the crowds and so rural environments were used: grain silos, barns, aircraft hangars and open fields. Many of the parties took place around the M25 (nicknamed the magic roundabout), to maximise their audience. I was at school at this time and friends of mine would hear about a rave on a pirate radio station (usually Kiss FM) and get hold of some tickets. On the tickets was a telephone number, and so at an appointed hour on the evening of a rave, they would phone up and be given another number to phone later on. In this way, the location of a rave was not revealed until the last possible moment, so as not to alert the police. The secrecy and clandestine nature of getting to the event was an important part of the thrill of raving. By the time the police found out the location, it was already teeming with ravers ready for a night of mayhem. The patterns of behaviour at these huge events owed more to Club 18-30 holidays, stadium rock concerts and football matches

rather than the cool sophisti-cation of the early warehouse parties. This period is often read as a reflection of the materialism of eighties enterprise culture .

By 1989 the Acid house cult had died out, but the Rave scene was attracting an increasingly wide audience, including indie kids, football fans and travellers. Music turned towards more soulful melodic forms of deep-house, Italian and Garage. The atmospere at raves became more mellow, as people sought to create a feeling of 'togetherness'.

In 1990, the introduction of the Entertainment Act made it more difficult for raves and clubs to operate. Clubs could have their licence reviewed 7 times a year and the penalties for holding unlicensed public entertainment were increased. As a result the early nineties saw two strands within rave activity, but there was considerable overlap between them.

The most visible part of rave activity now took place in clubs such as 'The Seven Aces' in Hackney, a licensed venue which held regular rave nights and sent out newsletters to members to keep the scene going. This can be seen as the beginning of the institutionalisation of raves. The market research group 'The Henley Centre For Forecasting' predicted in 1993 that "rave is not just a cult but part of a whole new formation of leisure patterns." Commercial official rave events were now held in sports arenas and large venues in every major town throughout Britain. The first rave to arrive at Wembley was in April of 1994 and there have been many others since.

The other strand discernible in the early nineties was the convergence of hippie, traveller, squatting and crustie cliques in the summer free festival circuit, for example Glastonbury, Urban Free Festival, and The Hackney Homeless Festival. These witnessed some of the biggest and longest gatherings. For example the week long occupation of public land at Castle Morton in May 1992 was initiated by a nomadic sound system collective called Spiral Tribal and their festival-going followers. By the end of the week numbers had swelled to 50,000 as weekend ravers converged on Avon. These events would be a cross between a rave, a fun fair, a festival, and a pagan event. Collectives began to spring up all over the country such as Exodus, Cool Tan Arts and Rainbow Tribe. These groups would put on raves for free, or to raise money for housing, environmental or arts projects. Ecology, paganism, ancient culture and ethnicity were revived, alongside the appropriation of yuppie icons such as the mobile phone and fax machine which were used for producing sociable raves and at the same time created an atmosphere of social protest.

What is a rave today?

A rave is a place where a group of people meet together to dance to electronically engineered music. It could take place in a derelict warehouse, a club, a beach, a field, an aircraft hangar or a sports arena. It may be free, and it may charge an entrance fee or raise money for charity. Each has its own discourse. A beach may signify the escapism of a holiday; a warehouse may signify the decline of industrialisation; and a sports arena may signify commercial profiteering. The sort of people that go to any particular one will vary according to the place where it is held, the way in which it is advertised, and the price of the ticket. For example, the London Jungle scene is predominantly black-led and attracts a racially diverse section of urban youth; the location of these raves is communicated by the pirate radio stations and those 'in the know'. Conversely, a rave held at the Ministry Of Sound (a club reputed to have the best sound system in London) sells tickets at £25, advertises on commercial radio and in 'Time Out', and targets a wealthier, predominantly white middle class section of society. In 1991, as Hillegonda Rietveld notes, the first 'Gay Raves' were organised in the North West. So it seems that while raves do not necessarily create a melting pot for people from different cultural backgrounds, they do not exclude any section of youth on the grounds of race, gender, class, or sexuality. "There are no barriers" within rave since there is no authentic rave; each is just as much a rave as the other.

The Sources of Rave Music

The roots of all electronic dance music start most clearly with 'disco'. Disco music was characterised by an emphasis on the beat as the most dominant element in the music. Disco also opened up the question of authorship, since it was difficult to ascribe authorship to records which were sung by a session singer and put together by anonymous 'producers . Rave music poses the same question, since who could be said to be the 'author' of a track which is made up of samples from other peoples' music, and put together using a computer? Hi-NRG music grew out of the disco scene, and fused funk and soul. It was this fusion of different musical forms which made hip-hop, electro, house, garage, and techno all possible. It is the recent development of new technology which has enabled music makers to extract one element of a piece of music (such as the vocals, or a bass line), take it out of its original context and mix it together with any other chosen sounds. This can be done using a computer and mixing desk, or in the early days by getting a 'dub plate' made. Phil Hartnoll from the rave outfit 'Orbital' describes the development of rave music:

"(Rave) evolved almost from the early days of people taking a record and getting even a voice-over on a record and spinning the voice-over. When I used to go to Hip Hop warehouse parties, that's all people used to do, you know - getting their own records made of their favourite bits and pieces and shoving it on and spinning it in. British people picked up on it and sort of mutated it and did their own versions of it."

Acid House was a blend of House from Chicago and Techno from Detroit with Balearic. 'Techno' is hard edged with digitally computorised dancebeats. 'House' is known more for its soulful harmonies. Both originated in the gay black clubs of Detroit and Chicago and sample from a rich repertoire of pop, rock, funk, and disco music.

Further musical developments in the nineties include Ambient, Techno and Jungle. Ambient samples largely from nature and synthesized planetary sounds, Techno uses futuristic noises and machine-like bass, and Jungle (like Acid Rouse) has returned to a more musically based repertoire, sampling reggae and hip-hop basslines, ragga style toasting, horror sounds, TV, and snippets of jazz, soul and funk.

Music as Prophecy

Rave music deals primarily with space rather than (as in traditional pop) with time. Traditional pop is most often talked about as developing and progressing in linear terms. Its structure is usually defined by its narrative and it takes the listener on a journey starting at the intro, followed by two verses, a chorus, the instrumental inter-lude, the final verse and the climax at the end. It could be argued that the structure of traditional pop is inextricably bound up with its narrative content, which is most often concerned with heterosexual relationships and the attainment of climax. This obsession with heterosexual seduction within pop music reproduces conventional social obligations within the spaces that pop music is played (a traditional night club for example). Rave music on the other hand, cuts across linear time, by sampling from many different periods and geographic locations in music history and putting it all together. By divorcing sounds from their physical and cultural contexts rave music creates a de-centred chaotic reality which suggests a different set of sexual goals, which I will explore in the next section. The music is structured around the layering of these diverse sounds, and plays on their spacial relationship. This is possible because of the non-verbal nature of the music and also the accessibuty of computers and the global network that they have created. As Simon Reynolds has commented in his book "Blissed Out", the conventions/

tensions of rave music lie at the balance between fusion and fission, organic and machinic, seduction and alienation, discontinuity and juxta-position.

Reynolds describes rave culture and music as a non-signifying system' . Perhaps Reynolds means that the emphasis is on sounds for their own sake, and it is up to the listener to actively interpret them rather than accepting given meanings. The signs in rave music are vague, they refuse to be pinned down and defined. Music at raves is a way of blending desires with memories, with acts, visions and fears, as they all roll into each other. Rave music disrupts the usual channels of communication and evokes a sublime, intercommunicative 'mood'.

If rave music is mood music then Happy House is uplifting and upbeat, Techno is ambiguously futuristic, Ambient is calming, and Darkside (which was an aspect of 'drum and bass' which developed into Jungle) could be said to express a dystopian mood. Mark Fisher, in his article "Hello darkness, our new friend" has written about Dark-side music (which later developed into what is now called 'Jungle'). Darkside borrows its ontology from horror and science fiction, and layers it over an extremely fast and manic beat. The sounds it borrows suggest casual homicide, ultra-violence, and survivalist individualism. This music sounds as if it comes from the near-future worlds of cyber-punk writers such as William Gibson. Fisher considers the notion of horror as 'social prophecy', arguing that seventies horror writers like Ramsey Campbell seem to closely describe the world that we currently live in - a world of unprecedented levels of crime, drug deaths and atrocities like the Bulger and Capper murders which cannot be rationalised or comprehended. He writes that horror 'provides a readily available description of what society has become". It seems that the postulates of post-modernist theory about the decline of grand narratives are becoming lived social reality. People no longer 'believe in large pure, abstract ideas; socialism, the welfare state, the royal family, capitalism, and all politics have been disfigured and corroded by cynicism. If Fisher is right, perhaps we are witnessing the return of the occult throughout popular culture precisely because it expresses our anxiety as our former certainties tumble, but more fundamentally, it is the 'dark forces' which currently offer a more believable explanation for occurences in the modern world. Jacques Attali in his seminal text "Noise" claimed:

"Music is prophecy, its style and economic organisation are ahead of the rest of society It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible."

It could be argued that rave music is about the relationship between humans and machines. By taking sounds from life and distorting them with modern technology, rave can express a very real fear of technology. On occasions, the sampling process used in Rave music has taken the voice of a young girl and distorted the vocal sound so that she sounds trapped in the computer generated beat. She speaks to us like a poltergeist, from the 'other side' in cyberville. Is she warning of the dangers, or is she in rapt ecstasy there? Is she a synaesthetic embodiment of ourselves as other, or the other as ourselves? Is it us in our childhood, or life in the future? At the same time rave music can be read as a celebration of technology and the 'liberation' it offers us. Ambient offers a 'countryside' more complete and stirring than any real country we could find, just as Techno offers a 'virtual city', cleaner, more efficient and more vibrant. This ambiguous relationship rave music has with technology is understandable, given that technology has been at the forefront of creating new forms of entertainment, alongside massive unemployment throughout the West.

Sexuality and the Self

Rave is also a communal event. It is about sharing of drugs, the creation of an (albeit temporary) community, and the communal creation of an atmosphere where people 'feed off each other'.

Furthermore, it has emerged precisely at a time when the traditional idea of community has been all but been destroyed.

Rave is a lot to do with re-connecting something perceived as lost - a community, our bodies, nature, and ultimately the womb. In his book "Cyberia" Doug Rushkoff noticed that much house music runs at the speed of 120 bpm which is the rate of the foetal heartbeat. The cultural critic Simon Reynolds1" notes the atmosphere of a kindergarten with its use of kids' TV themes, baby voices sampled from vocals, the fashion for girls to suck dummies, wear baggy unisex clothes such as dungarees, and the camoflaging of drugs as sweeties. Some have argued it reflects the refusal of citizenship, adulthood and responsibilities. It could be suggested that it is less to do with a refusal to grow up but more a hatred of the boundaries which are imposed between adulthood and childhood.

I am also inclined to go along with Reynolds' analysis of sexuality of rave which he looks at through the discourses of psychoanalysis. Reynolds writes that the effect of Ecstasy is to make sexual climax near impossible and returns the sexuality of the body into a pre-oedipal polymorphous state of desire. E androgenises. The music itself is structured around the delay of climax with its lack of closure and narrative structure. It is an ongoing 'pleasure plateau' which never reaches its potential to be released. The music's structure is like a continual state of foreplay. Reynold's analysis is colourful, but couched in somewhat pretentious terms:

"Male ravers' relationship to the hyperorgasmic soul-diva vocals on jungle tracks is one not of lust but of identification and aspiration. Rave is a culture of clitoris envy, a lowbrow version of Lacan's green eyed feelings about the mystic St Teresa. In his book on Lacan, Malcolm Bowie, paraphrasing the psychoanalyst, describes women as 'perpetual motion machines programmed to produce their own rapture'. Pure rave! Rave's epileptic bombardment of stimuli (staccato beats and strobes) reflects the subcultures's essence: 'nympholepsy' an ecstasy or frenzy caused by the desire of the unattainable'."

'The Future Sound of London' make rave music and have held 'live' concerts on the internet. One of their members, Gary Cobain talks about the sexuality of their music:

"I judge it from the reactions we get. One of them is impotence - if you're becoming impotent then you've been listening to FSOL. We're just some of the weird illnesses that seem to be sweeping the country - it comes through the TVs, it comes through radios and it comes through vinyl or art, or whatever. We've had stories about guys stopping midway through fornication. Now that sounds like a pretty good reaction to me, because twice I've heard so much about 'this is the perfect fornication music, baby" you know. Sounds too ordinary to me, sounds like everybody' does that, everybody makes the perfect fucking music. What I mean we're not into fucking, you know. If we can make people impotent, we're doing something."

Cobain's aim is, presumably, to make music that is so powerful and mind altering, that it will give you the sexual experience of the drug ecstasy', and the rave environment. Though regression to a state of polymorphous pleasure may' be desirable, the experience of infinity is ultimately' a painful and annihilating one. In an interview in 1977, Michel Foucault articulated this ultimate experience of pleasure in a very moving way:

"I think that pleasure is a very difficult behaviour. It's not as simple as that to enjoy oneself. And I must say that's my' dream. I would like and I hope I die of an overdose of pleasure of any kind. Because I think it's really difficult and I always have the feeling that I do not feel the pleasure, the complete total pleasure and, for me , it's related to death. Because I think that the kind of pleasure I would consider as the real pleasure would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it. I would die."

Neitzsche also sees an intimate relationship between dionysian pleasure and death. He argues that to the god Dionysus death is 'not unwanted nor unforeseen, but actively' desired as an inner condition for the affirmation of life, its overfulness and his own re-creative power.

Rave culture, like the gambling houses of Las Vegas, offers pleasure and danger in equal measure. In Las Vegas the risk is monetary, and is subliminally' present in the titles of casinos, which often allude to the great slaughters and battles of history. When you go to a rave, you embark on a dionysian voyage through a vast and chaotic world which offers a myriad of possible adventures. Titles of raves have included 'InnerVision', 'Labyrinth', 'Final Frontier', 'Cyclone', 'Lost', and 'The Edge' all of which imply a mythic journey' into the unknown, where the price of the pleasures incurred is probably' paid with blood. The risk undertaken in raves, and paradoxically' the desire involved, is the loss of the self. When ravers lose themselves in the chaos of the music, the vastness of the space, and the stream of their unconscious, they' give themselves over to the larger forces at play': to 'Shiva', 'Energy', 'Phantasy", and 'Biology'.

One of the reasons that this escapism is possible in a rave is that it's a place where the traditional dominance of the male (and female) gaze is subverted. Ravers have freed themselves from the tyranny of being a part of the spectacle, which, since it was first described by' Guy' Debord in his book 'Society' of the Spectacle' in 1967, seems to be inflicting itself upon more and more aspects of daily' life. It is noticeable, especially to a single female at a rave, that the distinction between male and female is more blurred than in the 'normal 'disco-club' environment. Men do 'not pick up girls, nor do girls passively' stand waiting to be approached (both of which can still be observed in any' club on a Saturday' night in Britain). The social organisation within raves is much more egalitarian: people dance alone or among a group, and interactions with strangers are common-place. People do not watch one another's appearance or how they' are dancing. Appearance does not matter in raves, they' are all too busy' enjoying themselves. This may' be part of a larger trend in a post-aids society where we avoid and perhaps even fear physical intimacy with strangers, but it is also specific to raves themselves. As I pointed out earlier, rave music is 'not structured around heterosexual goals of climax as is traditional pop, and herefore offers the raver a space freed from conventional sexual expectations and obligations.

It is then perhaps ironic that female sexuality can appear to be quite explicit at raves, but at the same time it is unobtainable, and therefore safe. This is borne out in a conversation with one of my female interviewees:

"Flirtation on the dance floor is very distant from you, it's like watching a pop video".

Being at a rave is like playing out narcissistic infantile fantasies. It is totally' masturbatory'. I have been told stories of porno-movies being shot during a rave and have also read about soft porn stars making guest appearances at continental raves. The fashions among female ravers draw a lot from the gay' scene and soft S & M fashions, such as skimpy' lycra, rubber, pvc and leather corsets, miniskirts and hotpants, bras and g-string bikinis.

By 'drawing on the conventions of gay fashions and heterosexual pornographic dress codes, rave culture blurs the distinctions between these 'others'. 'Differences are disregarded, and old hierarchies discarded in the atmosphere of euphoria. In a rave you are temporarily' freed from 'fixed identity' defined by gender, race, class or sexuality as the divisions and boundaries surrounding these identities become blurred. Signs which are usually read as having a fixed meaning and binary opposed become fluid in their meaning. It doesn't matter who you are, what is important is that you are present and participating. But ultimately the interplay between infantile polymorphous sexuality and adult 'other' sexuality is less bout blurring boundaries of difference and more about self love and self adoration.

Collage and Authorship

Rave can essentially be seen as collage, on many levels. Collage is nothing new to youth culture. Dick Hebdige in his classic text Subculture and the Meaning of Style", drew attention to the breakdown of image and referents presented to us by punk, but instead of collage he used the anthropo-logical term 'bricolage'. ('Bricolage' can roughly be translated as artisan-like inventiveness.) Hebdige likened bricolage to early surrealist experiments with collage and spontaneity. He quotes Alfred Jarry:

"It is conventional to call 'monster' any blending of dissonant elements....I call 'monster every original inexhaustible beauty."

Hebdige describes these acts of bricolage as subversive practices'. He also argues that the 'subculture punk bricolages together bits and pieces of previous subcultural worlds to 'disrupt and reorganise meaning' and it is this activity which makes punk subyersive, for example the use of rips and saftey pins in punk dress codes which were put together with school uniforms.

But his analysis of the subversive activity of bricolage is confined to visual signifiers. In rave, the concept of 'bricolage' could be applied to the techniques of collage/sampling. Rave music effectiyely destabilises the listener's values and common sense perceptions, which is reminiscent of Andre Breton's Manifestos of 1924 and 1929 which established the basic premise of surrealism: that a new surreality would emerge through the subversion of common sense, the collapse of prevalent logical categories and oppositions (e.g. dream/reality, work/play) and the "celebration of the abnormal and the forbidden". I think these oppositions are to some extent broken down in a rave, as the music, the lights and the atmosphere conspire to take the raver out of the restraints of body and fixed identity to a new, altered state. The experiences of yirtual reality and raves have close connections with dreaming, in that they are like giving in to the sublime flux of the unconscious.

Jon Savage has suggested that in the field of popular culture "to ambitious musicians, the past is a memory bank from which the future can be constructed". It is by endlessly and seamlessly sampling from a-historical and international sources that rave music creates a sublime atmosphere of an ever-lasting present.

The art critic Mario Perinola says in his essay "Time and Time and Time Again":

"Now we are dealing with a confusion between past and present which excludes the possibility of authenticating the lived moment."

A dance track which was being played on the radio a month ago can seem as remote as music from the seventies, and traditional tribal drumming from another continent can seem closer and more familiar to the present. Rave music plays on this confusion between past and present to create an intense, chaotic reality for the raver. In this synthesized contraction of the past everything is available, everything can be delayed, slowed down, speeded up or distorted. It is this contraction of the past which excludes the possibility of authenticating the lived moment. If everything can be manipulated and distorted, is anything real, authentic, to be accepted at face value? Gary Cobain, member of 'Future Sound of London', said in Equinox:

"If you look at the sounds that we collect, it's basically a very very cheap way of making yourself look anything but the truth. It's a very clever way of making yourself look like the most cosmopolitan, travelled, interesting, multi-headed individual. We're masters of the machine, and that's all."

Perinola argues that we are on a passage from European derived aesthetic to a 'planetary' one. He later calls this a trans-aesthetic, which cuts across historical, geographical and cultural boundaries and in so doing dissolves traditional oppositions:

"....trans-aesthetic communication no longer occurs through forms that are inseparable from determined historical contents, but through structures that can sustain the most diverse meanings, in accordance with the concrete historical situations in which they are called upon to operate."

Using the structure of collage, rave can intersect the past from this new perspective. The essence of rave is that there are no boundaries, and all music is interchangeable. However, traditions have grown up around rave enabling young people to forge identities around it, and media and entertainment industries to make profits from it. But there have been times when rave does succeed in cutting across defined boundaries: by mixing hip-hop and euro-pop and rock, Balearic beat broke down traditional subcultural boundaries, and made similarities out of apparently diverse forms. Likewise, Jungle puts together a diverse range of musical styles not witnessed since Acid House on the rave scene.

This sampling process can become very interesting in certain contexts. For example, when Junglists sample from Jazz, a form which is considered 'art', they are disrespecting it and 'using' it. At the same time they borrow from the ontology of horror movies, a cultural form that society sees as trash culture, and turn it into something semi-religious. It's a celebration of dark forces, and of underclass life. By putting the two of these things together, an art form with trash culture, it throws open the whole question of what is high or low culture and what is art. It questions the value system which is commonly ascribed to various cultural forms, and suggests that all culture may be of equal value, if its ultimate purpose is the reclamation of the alienated objects of 'mass society'.

Gary Cobain has made the same point in an interview for Raygun magazine: "I'm constantly torn between what the history of music says has value and what I've found has value."

As Ian Chambers has observed in his essay "Maps for the Metropolis", collage dressing and musical eclecticism dominated the 80's.

"Previous rules gave way to more open prospects of mixing the already seen, the already worn, the already played, the already heard."

Rave culture has been able to take this cultural eclecticism further by embracing new technology which has made it possible to seamlessly and endlessly collage from any aspect of life. In doing so it problematises prevailing notions of private property. Gary Cobain describes the activity of collage when creating rave music:

"The whole authorship of sounds changes. We carry on sound that we're receiving. I wasn't the girl screaming in the park, that wasn't me. There's a performance there - she did it; thanks a lot, I took it."

Of course rave is not unique in this activity; hip-hop raises the same questions of authorship and the accessibility of anyone being able to produce rave culture is reminiscent of the punks' mythical calling to urban youth: "Here's one chord, here's two more, now start your own band" . Like punk, raves offer a liberation from the notion of expertise.

The sampling process also enables people to repossess culture, create something new out of it, rather than treating culture as alienated objects handed down to the individual for passive consumption. By changing and mutating the sounds that we receive, and ideas that are given about the function of objects and technology, people reclaim them as their own. Michel De Certeau in

"The Practice of Everyday Life" describes the activity of reclaiming culture by reading, but this could equally be applied to sampling music and sound:

"He insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation; he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body ... A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place."

Rave poaches or squats on everyone else's culture. And it is an irony that the 90's have witnessed the convergence of rave culture with other DIY cultures such as travellers and squatters.

According to de Certeau, marginality is no longer limited to minority groups, but instead is massive and pervasive. It is the non-producers of culture who are the marginalised, and it is through their anonymous, unreadable and unsymbolized cultural activity within daily life that the marginalised articulate themselves.

Conclusion

Traditionally, it has been the place of 'subculture' to subvert and challenge. As I stated in the introduction to this dissertation, rave is not a subculture but could be defined as a part of popular culture, and it exhibits all the symptoms of the post modern condition. I am also going to argue that it can be a more effective cultural position than the oppositional stance to official culture taken by traditional subcultures.

Popular culture critic and D.J. Hillegonda Rietveld argues that rave ".... offends the established order by negating its rationale, through the surrender to the void." The 'established order' is the logic of counter-culture and the binary codes of opposition that it assumes. For example, punk is defined as being 'other' than the dominant culture, and exists in relation to it. She argues that in rave, youth escapes this logic by refusing to be defined as 'other', and 'disappears', rather than resists. Rietveld goes on to conclude that:

"Beyond the binary oppositions of private-public self or death-rebirth, it is difficult to find an opposition with regards to politics. When one escapes instead of opposes, no alternative moral vales are proposed at all."

It is true to say that rave does not offer any direct political opposition, but this does not mean that rave has no political dimension to it at all. The major distinction betwen rave and traditional subcultures is that rave is defined by an activity rather than as an identity. Traditional subcultures, such as punk, set up their resistance through visual signifiers. Punks defined them-selves as 'different' from mainstream culture, as outside it, and in so doing they inevitably became vunerable to attack and appropriation as punk became assimilated into fashion and absorbed into British folklore. By setting themselves apart from and different from mass culture, subcultures become implicated in mechanisms of social control. Rave, on the other hand, 'tactically' escapes from fixed identity, despite official culture's attempt to force a fixed identity onto it. There is a case for arguing that rave is a procedure which enables young people to manipulate' the mechanisms of discipline and social control, through their tactical activity rather than through their identities. De Certeau defines his notion of tactical acts:

"I call a 'tactic', a calculus which cannot count on a proper' (a spatial or institutional localization)... It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances ... because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the wing'.

Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'. The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them."

Rave has no place, 'base' or defined territory. It escapes definition by neither positioning itself as opposed to mass culture nor as a part of it. Rave manipulates mass culture, intervenes in the mass cultural myths that are constructed for passive consumption. It re-appppropriates that which has been appropriated. It is politically realistic, it doesn't naively believe it can overthrow or opt out of a whole system but learns to live under it, to manipulate it to its own ends. Rave has arisen out of the latest technological advances and is in this respect utterly linked to late twentieth century advanced capitalist societies. It can be read as essentially about people coming to terms with the new (post)modern world. Rave is about making it possible to live under the culture imposed on us, by reintroducing into it a "plural mobility of goals and desires - an art of manipulating and enjoying." Like the blues parties of the seventies and eighties, it is flexibility and spontaneity, pleasure and anti-discipline, that lie at the heart of rave culture. A rave is set up for a weekend, a large group meets up to experience the event, it is then dismantled and everyone keeps their ear to the ground to find out where and when the next one will be. Any rave outfit operating in the last 5 years has to know how to get away with things, how to manoeuvre in order to pull off a rave and survive.

By merely surviving, rave culture makes more explicit the formal rules of British culture: Rave offers an arena for entertainment which is freed from the surveillance imposed on us by institutional procedures, apparatus, architecture, private security and closed circuit television. It takes place on the margins (sometimes outside the law), in the dark, invisible and uncontrolled. Escaping from surveillance and order, the virtual cyberspace of the warehouse and mobile phone is about interaction, fluidity, chaos and contradiction.

Rather than retreating behind subcultural boundary lines, rave has worked to erase them. It is as difficult to define rave as a subculture, as it is to see it as fully integrated with passive popular culture. Rave is able to poach on diverse cultural sources which may sometimes appear opposed or contradictory. By putting these signs together, without necessarily appropriating the conventions that belong to the original context, rave reveals a previously perceived boundary as false. In the blurring of these boundaries rave creates a space for a more open-ended range of possible sexualities, cultures and indeed identities, which are freed from their fixed positions. Not least rave has added a lot of pleasure into mundane lives dissolving the imposed boundary which divides the quotidian from the dionysian.

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