BitTorrent: For the People

A critical moment has been reached in the constant struggle between the producing and appropriating classes. In a normal scenario, the workers of the producing class expend time and effort at the hands of the appropriating class, who compensate them for their trouble, but only at a fraction of the actual value they produce. Modern business has evolved to encompass not only the Capitalist’s material goods, but the Vectoralist’s transferral of information that enables said production and dispersion. The digital nature of this age has made informational property of the utmost importance; it controls the material world from which it was once hacked. However, somewhat ironically, the ceaseless march of technological development has created a way for the masses to obtain certain forms of property (information), free of charge.

The use of a BitTorrent client allows anyone with an internet connection and a chip on their shoulder to download files and programs from other users across the globe, without any sort of payment. This capability has opened a massive wealth of information to the public, hacking the normal process of purchasing commodified goods from those with the means of production. This is especially true in the realm of music; infinite varieties of “some kid” will download digital audio workshops (DAW’s) and attempt to learn methods of digital production simply because they can do so for free, becoming “bedroom producers” in the process. Even this “theft” is does not technically deprive the creators of any physical resource; as Wark says, “information is the most easily reproducible object captured in the abstraction of property.” The non-rivalrousness of these goods can make torrenting easier to justify, despite its illegality, as an infinite number of copies *could* be made at any time, with the only cost being the power consumed by the machine that runs it. Due to this exponentially increased availability those with simple creative curiosity are no longer bound, except by the law, to foray into the realm of musical production.

The concept of “some kid” in his bedroom has a dual nature, simultaneously feared and revered by both artists and music industry executives. The aforementioned availability of such powerful programs (for free) enables the masses, and floods the world with aspiring young bedroom producers. Most of them will be the equivalent of the kid who learns the G, E, and D chords on his guitar, never moving beyond the most simple, casual level of experimentation. However, there are “some kids” who will dump countless hours into these programs, honing their “skill” through practice while excavating their own natural “talent.” The greatest of these may achieve some notice, be it through a moment of genius that the public simply cannot ignore, the ability to network with those in power, or exceptional musical ability. However, on the flip side of this American Dream story is the far more likely reality of ghost-producing. With ghost-production, a big-name DJ simply purchases completed works from “ghost-producers”, typically those without the ability to sell these tracks themselves, claiming them as his/her own. In this instance, “some kid” must decide if having his song played and attaining *some* recognition is worth being robbed of the true value of his work (he will receive roughly 5% of the profits made). Here, the bedroom producer must compromise, or attempt to make it “on his own”. These (typically) young men are used to existing as permanent subjects of Capitalist society, producing goods while at work, or occupying the role of consumer elsewise. However, instead of having to draw this validation from the appropriating classes, the bedroom producer is now free to sate his creative appetite with no cost, circumventing the “lack” that he has been taught to quell through traditional financial purchases. Thus, the creation of a BitTorrent program has had a dichotomous effect; the number of mediocre productions has increased tenfold, but so has the potential for a moment of genius to be sparked, setting the next hit DJ along his path to Vectoralist success.

The methodology of a BitTorrent program serves as a near textbook definition of the hack, bringing a tangible result from immaterial origins, transforming the virtual into the real. This process is further exemplified by the nature of a DAW itself, a conduit through which garbled samples, bits, and sound bites are shaped into familiar sound waves, perhaps even something reminiscent of a traditional song. Though even this process has begun to be commodified through ghost-producing, it still remains a distinct opportunity for the common youth to take his stab at climbing the ladder of the American Dream. Though BitTorrent is still illegal, it constantly evolves, filling in holes that have previously allowed it to be attacked from a litigious standpoint. By moving files directly between computers, instead of touching down on a central server, the power dynamic has truly shifted into the hands of the people, allowing producers the freedom to produce as they see fit.