Bobby Ross

12/10/2014

UWRT100-02

Raveolution: The Assimilation of Rave Culture into Popular Culture.

Ecstasy pills being passed around. Massive amounts of people jumping up and down. A song with a “four on the floor” beat was playing through the PA system. The DJ was kept high on a podium where he overlooked the crowd he was to entertain. Every second adjusting a knob on his equipment while making the decision on what to play next. Everyone around me wasn’t paying attention to anything except them and the music. Each was one with the music. They didn’t care about the person next to them, they didn’t care about me. They cared about having the best time they possibly could. This was my experience at a music festival, which some people may refer to as a ‘rave’.

In my opinion, a rave is very different from a festival. Raves are more of a thing of the past. They were illegal parties thrown in warehouses and in the middle of forests. Similar in style to these more modern festivals, there was a DJ at the front playing tunes. It was a different kind of music though. In Detroit you had house music. In the United Kingdom you had a mix of different styles, such as Acid House or Gabber. Hardcore and Gabber was really popular in the Netherlands, specifically Rotterdam. They were such a problem in the UK that it became a criminal act to have one with a law that was passed in 1994. Drug use was more prevalent than it is during festivals today. The music was different. The people were different. My question is, what caused this shift over the past twenty/thirty years?

There’s many factors that went into how rave culture has evolved. Various laws have been passed, such as the RAVE act. Certain things were becoming more and more socially acceptable. Modern pop music has a range of influences taken from house and other electronic music genres. Actually a lot of songs that are produced these days are considered to fall under the modern progressive house genre. They contain “drops”, a rise in energy until the bass kick comes in, and a disco-esque four on the floor beat. What caused all of this and why did it happen?

Brian L Ott, and Bill D Herman state that “The transformation of rave culture from underground, and frequently illegal, dance parties organized by electronic music lovers to highly publicized popular concerts sponsored by local radio stations and major music labels was predictable, if not wholly inevitable. After all, part of capitalism's appeal lies in its ideological flexibility-its capacity to embrace transgressive subculture, repackage it, and sell it as the latest stylistic innovation” (Brian L Ott et al, 250). However, I feel his most important statement is the sentence that follows, stating that “rave culture's evolution was and continues to be anything but simple and straightforward” (Brian L Ott et al, 250). I’m so inclined to agree, however I feel looking at capitalism as the reason, while not wrong, isn’t giving us the full picture. I believe certain things have accelerated the natural assimilation of the underground culture into the mainstream.

One of the biggest influences in my opinion were the various laws passed. One of the most influential and most infamous laws surrounding the culture was the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994*, passed by parliament in the United Kingdom. The act defined a rave as a “gathering on land in the open air of or more persons (whether or not trespassers) at which amplified music is played during the night (with or without intermissions) and is such as, by reason of its loudness and duration and the time at which it is played, is likely to cause serious distress to the inhabitants of the locality; and for this purpose— such a gathering continues during intermissions in the music and, where the gathering extends over several days, throughout the period during which amplified music is played at night (with or without intermissions); and “music” includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterized by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats” (Michael Howard, 63). This act introduced one of the most famous definition of a rave. The act gave officers the right to stop people from planning to and attending raves. Enter property and seize if they have “probable cause” that a rave is occurring. Most importantly, it also allowed them to seize sound equipment (Michael Howard, 63-66). This had such an impact, and rightfully so, people do not want to risk sound equipment being seized. One of the main protests against the act was a song: Flutter. Released in 1994 by the IDM group, Autechre. The song was engineered to have non-repetitive beats so it could be played without the gathering being defined as a rave. Jokingly, the album had a sticker on it advising the DJ have a lawyer and musicologist present to confirm the non-repetitive nature of the song. Another strong act which still has an impact today is the RAVE act passed by the US senate. RAVE is an acronym that stands for Reducing Americans Vulnerability to Ecstasy, with Ecstasy being one of the popular drugs taken at raves. One of the specifics of the law was that it made property owners responsible for drug related incidents on their property. This would indirectly cause the amount of raves happening to go down significantly, suddenly the people who used to host them won’t because if something happens, such as an overdose, they would face serious charges.

How does this affect the evolution of the culture though? Well, various corporations started to spring up as they saw it as an opportunity to cash in on a once free culture. As Brian said, “part of capitalism's appeal lies in its ideological flexibility-its capacity to embrace transgressive subculture, repackage it, and sell it as the latest stylistic innovation” ( Brian L Ott et al, 250). Well how did they repackage it? How did they sell it? There’s one important line in the original enactment of the law simply stated that it does not apply to licensed events. All a company had to do to cash in on this culture was find an event that would inevitably happen, and give them a license to do it. Something that was illegal, and had serious consequences with it, now became something supported by the law.

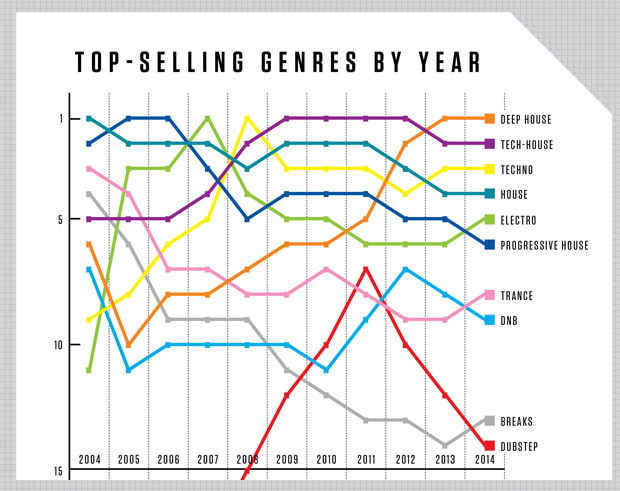
Rave culture has also been taken out of the underground and has been assimilated into popular culture through various other ways. One thing Tammy Anderson mentions is “In the fall of 2000, I was downloading ‘‘free’’ music to my PC and found that, among the available songs, there were ‘‘remixes,’’ or extended EDM versions of popular songs I liked.” (Tammy L. Anderson, 313). Electronic music has become a part of modern day music. She stated that in the year 2000 there was EDM in pop music. While I’d agree that popular songs from around that era such as Kylie Minogue’s *Can’t get you outta my head,* which had strong influences such as the simple four-on-the-floor beat; or hit Eurodance song *Around the World (Lalala)*  by the German group A Touch of Glass, had strong electronic music influences. I’d go as far to say the influences are even stronger today. Still today, you can turn on a top 40 radio station and hear the 2013 song *Animals* by Martin Garrix, a song which defined the Big Room House genre. Even stronger influences are other non-EDM (As in, you would not see them preform at an Electronic Oriented festival) artists who use Electronic Music as a background for their signing. For example, the 2011 track *Where Have You Been All My Life* by Rhianna has a Minimal/Electro House styled bass line and beat. This may only be temporary though, as popular genres are shifting all the time. More and more I notice country music becoming more commonplace and “normal” to listen to. Even within the Electronic Music culture, what’s popular changes every year, as you can see in figure 1.

Figure 1

Deep house in the “In” genre right now, and it’s trickling into pop culture. You can turn on a top 40 station and hear the tracks *White Noise* and *Latch* by Disclosure, an electronic duo who started in 2010. What’s extremely popular in Electronic culture tends to trickle its way into popular culture. Such as Dubstep around 2010 and 2011 when you could hear *Bangarang* by Skrillex on top 40 stations, or in 2012 when you could hear the song *Spectrum* by Zedd.

Another way Electronic Music trickles in, is the fact that it’s very easy to have as background music for an event. Because it’s all produced and preformed electronically, there’s no need for a live band. One thing I noticed is that, if there’s no band, there tends to be house music. It’s also typically very easy to obtain a license to play it in a commercial event and even more, there’s plenty of license free house music. Because of the rise of commercial parties, they have been depicted in movies and other entertainment. In the 2014 movie *22 Jump Street* there’s a scene of an electronic festival on a beach, in which well-known electronic songs were played, such as the song *Freak* by Steve Aoki, Deorro, Diplo, and Steve bays. In fact, at least half of the entire soundtrack was Electronic songs. Another area where the use of electronic music is huge, are gaming conventions. Some go as far to use Live DJs. Deadmau5 made an appearance at E3 in 2010, back during his height of popularity. Electronic music has trickled into popular music, and with it, its culture has as well.

The culture has followed where the music has made its way into the light of popularity. It shows in the diversity of people who attend commercial “raves”, more than just the Electronic Music fan who would many years ago. One thing Tammy L. Anderson mentions is the decline of EDM events year-by-year in favor of Hip-hop oriented (Tammy L. Anderson, 312). However, that was back in 2005. Since then, there has been a collision of EDM and Hip-hop. Especially with the rise of the genre Trap. While there may be a decline, I never see Electronic Music dying. Even though laws are trying to crack down on the commercial parties due to the overdoses, such as the early end and potential future shutdown of Electric Zoo after two people overdosed and died in 2013. Even if it dies out of popular light and resorts back into the underground, it will always have a following. It will always be able to be performed, as it does not require a band to be alive. Electronic Music and Its culture will always be around, even if it’s only underground once again.

Works Cited

Anderson, Tammy L. "Understanding the Alteration and Decline of a Music Scene: Observations from Rave Culture." *Sociological Forum* 24.2 (2009): 307-36. *Wiley*. Web. 10 Dec. 2014. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2009.01101.x/pdf>.

"Electric Zoo Canceled After Two People Die From Suspected Molly Overdose." *News*. N.p., n.d. Web.

10 Dec. 2014.

Ott, Brian L., and Bill D. Herman. "Mixed Messages: Resistance and Reappropriation in Rave

Culture." *Western Journal of Communication* 67.3 (2003): 249-70. *ProQuest.*Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

"Industry Insider: Ten Years of Beatport Stats” *Mixmag* 21 Aug. 2014: n. pag. Web.

Reflection

The first challenge to writing this paper was “What the hell am I going to do a topic on?”. I’ve done tons of research papers in my career and I had no clue on what I wanted to do. I talked to my friends and they suggest Esports but that wasn’t something that really piqued my interested, even though I play some competitive games. I thought about raves and glanced over doing the culture many times. I always struggled to find stuff in the databases and what not on it, but I knew it happened. I can see it happening every day. Then one day I was just like “Screw it, I’m going to do it”. At first I struggled to find stuff, really only one article (And really I’m only using two now), but I think the two I used were good enough that I was able to establish a platform to communicate on.

This course hasn’t really changed my writing all that much. Maybe smoothed out some grammar issues and the like, with excellent feedback on all my papers. I don’t really know why I was placed in this class over writing seminar to be completely honest though. Given I come from a background of As in English class and even honors, at a good school too. I think ti may have been I just screwed something up on the writing placement exam when I took it, given I took it at 12am. But hey, I enjoyed the class. It was an easy writing class, as I’ve heard writing seminar can be a bitch. It was a good refresh of essay writing since I haven’t done any for a long time, not since junior year (senior year I had film (Sleeping class) and Honors Creative Writing).

All of my papers have been well and easy for the class, I never really stressed for this class, except for the final paper. However, once I started writing it became easy. So thank you for a good class!