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G/Rave Culture ; How The Low Can Get High  
By Stephen Killane

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German Culture: How the Law Can Get High  
by Stephen K. Jones

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I wish to thank Dr. Paul O'Brien for his help and patience.



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## INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis came about when I was painting in my studio and a passer-by said to me, "don't you know painting's dead?", this person was sharing a private joke because we were both so used to reading how many art critics expressed how they thought painting was no longer an appropriate means of artistic endeavour. It suddenly struck me that painting had gone out of fashion. Stiletto shoes go out of fashion as does heavy metal rock music or floral wallpaper but painting, surely never. I always thought that high culture was above external pressures, enabling it to pioneer human expression. Could there be trends in high culture as there are in mass culture and, if so, is there really a difference between the basic structure of each branch of culture?

In my first chapter I will investigate "elitist" writings on high culture. What shall be illustrated, especially through the work of Theodor Adorno, is a total disregard for mass culture, its producers, their products and its audience. The second chapter will be based on the "populist" views of mass culture, views that credit mass culture as being different but not lesser than high culture, an opinion which credits its participants with intelligence and decision-making abilities. Mass culture is not the one level phenomenon that writers such as Theodor Adorno would have us believe. It is a complex subject that possesses such "high culture" properties as invention, risk, even, in some cases, elite sections within that culture. I don't believe that culture can any longer be categorised into just two sections, high and mass. Postmodernism has broken down the barriers of what is acceptable for all culture and as a result the



expansion of high culture and the expansion of mass culture overlap making it hard, in certain circumstances, to pigeon hole an individual cultural happening. Culture has branched out into so many levels that there can no longer be just high culture and mass culture. New classifications must be named, maybe mid culture, popular high culture, ultra low mind numbing culture (in the case of American day time chat shows).

The third chapter of this thesis is a case study of rave culture. It is this cultural event which will illustrate my feelings for the need of new cultural labelling. Rave culture started as a subculture, evolved into mass culture and then into an "elitist" culture inventing its own language, experiences, and acceptable behavioural patterns in the same way as many high arts have done. Rave culture has been in existence for over a decade and is an enduring phenomenon rather than a passing trend. It differs from other subcultures in that it has survived commercialization and dilution of its ethos. Through evolution it has the ability to remain one step ahead of the mass culture machine.

My aim in this thesis is to show that rave culture does not fit into the cultural categories supplied to us by culture analysts and so proves the need for a re-evaluation of these categories.



## CHAPTER 1

### ADORNO, ELITISM & JUSTIFIED PARANOIA

Given the contemporary nature of this thesis my choice of quoted sources in this chapter could be viewed as strange . Some of the writings referred to here are over sixty years old, yet I believe they still have relevance in a cultural debate today. I also feel they are accessible and accurately illustrate the point I am making. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their essay "The Culture Industry : Enlightenment as Mass Deception" are bold in expressing their thoughts and so it is a relationship with this essay on which I am basing my first chapter. I am intrigued by cultural elitism as I witness it regularly as a practicing artist. I am a painter and am therefore a 'high artist'. Knowledge being power is another cultural interest which relates to this thesis, intellectuals have knowledge which is powerful, but also masses have mass which is powerful. Adorno and Horkheimer do not see the masses as having decision-making abilities, they are easily moulded into any shape necessary and therefore they do not see them as been powerful. Their elitist attitude sees mass culture as a great machine, the cultural monopoly, with the ulterior motive of only wanting to produce money.

Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of the artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no





longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972, p.30)

Adorno and Horkheimer indicate that all aspects of mass culture are related and are ruled by a small group of people at the top of a very large cultural pyramid. It is this dominance by similarly-thinking cultural controllers that leads to complete power over the masses. The idea of infrastructure, or as it is called in the 'Culture Industry' essay artificial framework, related not only to cinema or radio but to every aspect of the lives of the masses. It is suggested that all cars are basically the same as are all fridges, all movies, all fashion, in the sense that there was nothing radically new. Culture was produced in culture factories, then marketed and sold to the people with the sole intention of making money. Culture was produced constantly, each new model a slightly modified version of the old one, starting a new set of desires which equalled a continuing intake of money. The culture industry which Adorno writes about is so vast that there seems to be little alternative to it for the average person. This person has little choice but to involve himself in this culture.

Thus, although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary; there are an object of calculation, an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not King, as the culture industry would like to have us believe, not its subject but its object. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972, p.134)

The connotations of the culture industry are neither guides for a blissful life, nor a new art of moral



responsibility, but rather exhortations to toe the line, behind which stand the most powerful interests. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972, p.134)

It is in these quotes that we can see the fearful way in which Adorno viewed the culture industry. We can see how the masses are not only entertained by mass culture but are shown ideals of how the ruling people expect the masses to behave. When people are constantly subjected to a concept they will eventually absorb it. Examples of this in contemporary society are readily available. Anorexia, in most cases, is caused by the culture industry's portrayal of what form a human body is supposed to take, annoying washing powder television advertisements obviously work or else their format would have changed by now. We can even view mass cultures condemnation of drug use as being an example of how the masses are made to form opinions. Ecstasy is automatically considered evil yet society feels it is fine to drink alcohol to excess, in fact it's part of our 'great Irish culture', and it is rarely reported if drink related tragedies occur, such as when very often happens a drunk person will suffocate on their own vomit. Yet when Lea Betts died from taking ecstasy it was not only reported on the front page of every newspaper and headlining every television news bulletin in Britain, her home country, but also here in Ireland. And for weeks after her death we were warned in the papers of the risks involved in taking ecstasy and were told of the shady night clubs in town where it was available. The death of Lea Betts also brings another mass culture phenomenon to the fore. It seems that newspapers, radio and television news are incapable of running independent stories, and when one has a scoop the others all follow adding to the mass awareness and hysteria.





Saturation is the culture industry's most powerful tool and if we are shown an image enough times we will eventually take it on board. It is a thought provoking concept and one which I feel Adorno had a right to be cautious of. A contemporary example, to show the culture industry's power, would be Rupert Murdoch's media empire, and its relationship with British sport, especially soccer. Murdoch's television company British Sky Broadcasting bought the television rights to English First Division soccer in 1991. It was at this time when soccer's image was at an all-time low. England had just failed to qualify for a world cup and its clubs had just finished a lengthy ban from European competition due to hooliganism. Sky television renamed the first division as the "Premiership", developed its own sports channel and this was advertised on the other sky channels like Sky News and Sky One. Then in the British newspapers, where Murdoch has a monopoly, special sports sections began to appear promoting the game of soccer. England qualified for European competitions again. Soccer is no longer a white working class male sport, women support it now, as do many middle class people and people from different racial backgrounds. I don't believe that soccer would be as popular now if it were not for the promotional work carried out by Murdoch's companies. The English soccer industry is now worth much more than it was, as is Sky Sports and so its image, popularity, and above all its advertising revenue producing ability could be sold at a huge profit.

I have referred to Adorno and Horkheimer in this essay and have claimed that their views are elitist, which automatically implies a negative feeling, but instead of taking a populist approach in this first chapter I would rather try to understand the elitist



viewpoint. All one has to do to get a feeling of cultural elitism is to watch daytime television. The programme timetable on all the major channels consists of either chat shows or soap operas. These chat shows originated in America and are just broadcasted therapy sessions for disfunctional people. It is possible to, and people do, watch one show after another, the structure of the next show being the same as the last with only minor surface differences, different names and faces. The alternative is soap opera, again each one shares its structure with the next. Whenever I walk into a room to find these shows on the television I automatically become elitist. Is this because I just don't find these shows to my liking or is it because they are cultural deficient? Does Adorno only write about his personal preferences?

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## CHAPTER 2

### THE AUTONOMY OF MASS CULTURE

Walter Benjamin has a more sympathetic view of mass culture than Theodor Adorno. In his essay "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" Benjamin makes it clear that the mass production of an article, while being very different from the original, is no less significant than that original. The reproduction has its own intrinsic values which give that reproduction a new, but different dimension. His essay refers mainly to art and not so much to mass culture but his understanding of the way in which the reproduction is consumed can be paralleled with the consumption of mass culture.

Technical reproduction can put a copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway be it in the form of a photograph or a phonographic record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art, the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room. (Benjamin, 1961, p.220)

Theodor Adorno in his writings seems to imply that to partake in mass culture is to be anti high culture. He sees the mass culture people as one group and the high culture as another group of people, he draws little comparison, as if to be involved with both is an impossibility. Walter Benjamin on the other hand sees



mechanical reproduction as a way to make high culture more accessible, claiming that it 'enables the original to meet the beholder half way'. This is a crucial point in a counter-argument to Adorno's 'Culture Industry' essay. A person listening to their record player is quite aware that they are not listening to an original, once-off performance and neither are they led to believe by the producers of these records that this is the case. Listening to a record and attending a recital in a concert hall are two activities which are different and widely acknowledged to be such. One does not take from the other, it adds to it.

Benjamin also talks about the movie as Adorno does, but yet again their analysis of this cultural form is very different. Adorno tells us how it encourages people not to think. Walter Benjamin however has a more populist approach to why he sees the movie as being so popular. He observes its attraction to the masses, but considers it another art form rather a mass culture brainwashing tool.

The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the camera-man penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the camera-man consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. (Benjamin, 1961, p. 233)

What Benjamin does for the populist argument in this mass culture debate is provide theoretical back-up to show that mass





culture is not just some diluted, disguised form of high culture but is a cultural form in itself. As mass culture exists openly as itself we must presume that its participants participate consciously and contrary to what Adorno believes. I think this could partly be due to a more aware public who no longer believe everything they see to be true. As Dominic Strinati observes:

Democracy means that not only is everyone entitled to full political citizenship, but potentially everyone's general cultural preferences are as valuable and as worthy of being respected and fulfilled as those of traditional elites. Furthermore, education, as part of this process of democratisation, means that the capacity to be able to engage more fully in cultural activities - the abilities to read, write, discriminate, demand, know, understand - become more available, formally at least, to more and more people. (Strinati, 1995, p.7)

Are the masses I am referring to different to the masses Adorno referred to in his essay? The current generation of mass culture participants have known little else other than the mass culture world. Computer icons, advertising, television, film, fashion have taught us more and more to use our visual sense, we are visually more literate through necessity. Observing the second natured way an eight year old child, using a computer or setting a video recorder, tells us how humans have evolved to fit into the altering mass culture world. Walter Benjamin writes about the circumstances in which we are living and how these can alter our natural instinct for choosing what feels right.

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perceptions



organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well. (Benjamin, 1961, p.222)

These historical circumstances don't necessarily have to be great wars or famines to alter our sense perceptions. The later twentieth century phenomena globalization can also be considered a historical circumstance, and it has had a huge effect on how culture is consumed. Through globalization we witness a much broader range of cultures and so in a sense get cultural education. This education allows us to be more specific about what we subscribe to, it offers us a bigger choice. From this bigger choice the masses can pick the style of culture they prefer. It is the culture industry's goal to produce what is going to be the most popular. Dominic Strinati's idea of interaction between the mass audience and culture producers is appropriate. The power is shared.

What or who determines popular culture? Where does popular culture come from? Does it emerge from the people themselves as an autonomous expression of their interests and modes of experience, or is it imposed from above by those in positions of power as a type of social control? Does popular culture rise up from the people 'below', or does it sink down from the elites 'on high', or is it rather an interaction between the two? (Strinati, 1995, p.3)





## CHAPTER 3

### RAVE CULTURE EXAMINED

Acid House took off in the summer of 1988 - known as the second 'Summer of Love', the first having been in 1967- and spread across Britain via raves or warehouse parties. These organized gatherings held in warehouses, hangers or other empty buildings that were publicised through other underground networks. Celebrants would pay to attend, usually in very large numbers, and the parties could last for several nights if not prevented by police raids. By 1991, however, the term Acid House was out of favour with the younger generation and the musical repertoire had extended to include 'Techno', but the movement had developed into an influential dance floor culture with its own anti-ideology and graphics and a thriving network of clubs, pirate radio stations, record labels and sellers of clothes and accessories. (Thorne, 1993, p.2)

This quote by Tony Thorne gives a brief history of the birth of rave culture, which now seems very dated not because it refers to a summer ten years ago, but because the subject of the quote, rave culture, has evolved so much since that summer. I have decided to write a case study on rave, also known as dance culture in this thesis because it is my belief that it presents a need for a new critique. I have sourced much of my theoretical information from books which is problematic when writing about an ongoing phenomenon, as they are out of date the moment they are published. I will refer to opinions on subcultures such as the punks and reggae music but I

# CHAPTER 3

## THEORY OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background for the study of the paper. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the general theory of the paper, the second section discusses the specific theory of the paper, and the third section discusses the application of the theory to the paper. The first section discusses the general theory of the paper, which is based on the principle of the conservation of mass. The second section discusses the specific theory of the paper, which is based on the principle of the conservation of energy. The third section discusses the application of the theory to the paper, which is based on the principle of the conservation of momentum.

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think that the rave culture has surpassed previous youth cultures with regard to its influence to mass culture and even high culture. It is the information that I have gained from books, combined with personal opinion obtained through experience of dance culture which will construct my points of view.

The opening quote of this chapter describes the start of the rave culture in Britain, although similar events were happening soon after across Europe. As with all subcultures we must first determine the reason for its birth. After years of Thatcher-led Conservative rule the youth of Britain felt isolated from the ruling powers. They had seen coal mines, railways and most other public companies sold to the private sector for profit, what they also saw was the lack of regard for average peoples livelihoods, unemployment was at an all time high, capitalism had betrayed them. What seemed to follow was a mass opting out of regular society as it had no relevance to youth.

Ecstasy helped define the later 1980s and the early 1990s, both contributing to and reflecting the hedonistic, non-cerebral tendencies of progressive youth culture" (Thorne, 1993, p.68)

As with all subcultures the rave culture has distinct qualities that distinguish it from mass culture. The first and most obvious feature of any youth culture movement is that movement's music. The second is its style of fashion. What is also noticeable in youth cultures is a different approach to life, a different ethos. Most recognisable are the anarchic aims of the punks, hash-smoking ways of the Jamaican Rastas or the taking of ecstasy within the rave scene.

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## DRUGS

Ecstasy has a long history and was put to many uses, such as being prescribed as a slimming pill, or by marriage guidance counsellors to calm arguing couples. It was only made illegal in America in the early 1980s. It was the first so called 'designer drug' and became popular in the late 1980s as a perfect accompaniment to the new style of music which was emerging at that time. It was relatively inexpensive compared with cocaine and it would probably cost less to buy an ecstasy tablet than it would to buy enough alcohol to get drunk. The taking of 'E' helped rave goers to forget about the dismal outside world and was a way of rebelling against society. A similar reason for taking drugs was noted by Paul Willis when he studied 'Hippies' in the early 1970s.

This encapsulation by the 'now' and the feeling of freedom to 'walk around and feel the moment', led to a total breakdown of conventional notions of time. Industrial and job-orientated time is crucially concerned with order. (Willis, 1975, p. 109)

Drugs also made their impact on everyday social interaction : they were just about the central topic of conversation on the scene, great stress was laid on knowledge of various types of drugs. There was widespread resentment at the policies and societies attitude to drugs." (Willis, 1975, p. 106)

The policy resented in rave culture, above all others, was the illegal status of Ecstasy. Club goers could not comprehend that the government allowed the sale and consumption of alcohol but not of 'E', after all most fights or disturbances in most towns were drink



related, whereas in general the people who took dance drugs interfered little with other people. Most legitimate nightclubs did not produce the right ambience for raving and as a result the best clubs were illegal ones, as they did not have dress codes or closing times. Due to these clubs having no licence they were often invaded by the police and closed down due to suspicion of drug dealing. If drug dealing could not have being proved to have occurred then the clubs were often shut for other reasons, such as noise pollution or inadequate fire safety. But policies acted out by the police were not the only anti-rave polices clubbers had to deal with. There did (and possibly still does) exist some legitimate nightclubs which were good for raving. It is suspected that the owners of these clubs were getting a percentage of the profit from drug transactions that occurred in their clubs. What these nightclub owners were not getting however was the large turnover that other nightclub owners were getting from selling alcohol. To remedy this situation all taps in all toilets were disconnected, as a result, ravers (who use, and need to replace, huge amounts of fluid) had to buy bottled water from the bar. No matter how much a bottle of water cost it had to be bought, this action by nightclub owners was not only very dangerous, but also caused a lot of resentment within the rave culture.

Ecstasy was also known as the 'love drug' because it heightened people's sensuality, even touching someone on 'E' was enough to give a rush (a high within a high). It seemed that there was so much angst in the outside world and the rave culture had no intention of letting it into its clubs. In the rave scene it seems that everybody is equal, and it is in this respect that the rave culture differed so greatly from subcultures that went before it. When reading any essay on subculture (previous to the rave culture) one





can't help noticing the phrase 'working class, white, male' cropping up somewhere in the text. Some subcultures even based their ideals on the extreme 'working class, white male' ethos to the extent of being racist and sexist, the skin heads being one such group. The refreshing thing about the rave scene was that once you entered a rave club, social background, colour, gender, sexual preferences and even age did not matter (although by its physical nature rave culture predominantly involved younger people).

What can also be witnessed during the 1980s is a rejection of the primacy of the youth and social class couplet which had underpinned the development of 'subculture theory' and its replacement by another set of concerns, the most significant of which are race and sexuality" (McRobbie, 1994, p. 181)

It is claimed by many people that it is possible to partake fully in the rave culture without taking ecstasy, I would disagree. The music is made by people who take ecstasy and who often produce this music while on ecstasy. The music has its lulls and its crescendos and as the music builds up to this high so too does the ravers adrenalin level. The build up in rave music is essential. A tune will start off quietly and with every four or eight bars, layers of sound are added to that tune. Simultaneously the raver (having taken ecstasy) feels his / her high building up to what is called a rush (a rush of adrenalin). The music gathers momentum, as do the ravers. Then the music bursts into its loudest point with an explosion of sound. As this happens the ravers also explode with energy, aided by the mass frenzy of other ravers around them. The total effect of music, drugs and the excited crowd "kicks in" spontaneously. I believe this happening can only occur when everybody's mind is

and a comparison of the present with the past. The first part of the book is devoted to a study of the various theories of the origin of life, and the second part to a study of the various theories of the origin of the human race. The author is a student of the history of science, and his book is a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the history of the human mind.

The book is written in a clear and concise style, and is well illustrated with numerous diagrams and figures. It is a valuable book for students of the history of science, and for anyone interested in the history of the human mind.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part is devoted to a study of the various theories of the origin of life, and the second part to a study of the various theories of the origin of the human race. The author is a student of the history of science, and his book is a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the history of the human mind.

synchronized by the same high and the same drug. To feel the total effect of the music one must be on the same frequency as that music, which in my view involves taking drugs. However it is possible for someone who has taken 'E' previously to go to a dance club and not take ecstasy while still understanding the music. Again in his study of drug taking 'hippies' Paul Willis observes what can now be seen as similarities with drug taking ravers.

One could be 'high' without the use of drugs, and the quality of normal experience, apart from drug experience, was changed. In certain respects, the passage through the symbolic barrier separating the 'straight' from the 'hip' presents us with a classic faith paradox. Either you understand or you do not, and there is no way of bridging the gap with logical argument. (Willis, 1975, p. 113)

## MUSIC

Probably the most intriguing aspect of any subculture / youth movement is its inseparable partnership with the chosen music of that subculture. It is as if music needs subcultures to be constantly refreshed while subcultures need music to strengthen the bond between the members of that subculture. I can't imagine Punk without Punk Rock, Rasta without Reggae or rave culture without dance music. A comprehensive study of dance music would fill volumes. Unlike the music from other subcultures, the music of dance culture is presented in a new way. The usual set up for a D.J. would be double turn tables (record players) and a mixer, to fade one tune out and a new one in. The idea is to keep the beat of the bass drum constant as one record is mixed into another. This





facilitates a constant steady beat to dance to. Each D.J. has his or her choice in music and brings their own collection of records, the D.J. then plays these records at different speeds and in different sequences to other D.J.'s, so the final musical output is not played 'live' but is played 'live' at the same time. Each tune is pre-recorded yet each set (the time the D.J. plays for) is different. This accounts for the fact that there are good D.J.'s and bad D.J.'s. This chapter started off by mentioning Acid House and Techno in a quote from Tony Thorne. Since the early nineties we have seen 'House', 'Trip Hop', 'Trance', 'Acid Jazz', 'Garage', 'Drum'n'Bass', 'Jungle', 'Hard House' to name but a few. In each of these categories there are thousands of 'tunes', dozens of remixes of these tunes, different speeds at which they are played and played by different D.J.'s who provide their own style and sequences.

As with the rave culture in general, dance music is anti-establishment. Instead of being produced by the multi national recording companies, dance music is more a 'bedroom' phenomenon. With the rise in availability of more powerful personal computers and the programming of software to create digital music, all one needs is this basic equipment to make dance tunes. Then instead of expensive Compact Disc making machinery, much cheaper vinyl was pressed in Eastern European countries in quantities as small as one thousand. Technological parallels can be seen in other cultural forms such as desk top publishing.

If you desire perfect quality you no longer send the printing firm text and pictures on paper, but instead you send information by means of a data storage medium. The printer is no longer responsible for the creation and setting of work, but now only reproduces it."  
(Kammarmeier, 1992, p.22)





The way in which dance music is produced is new as far as technology goes but its 'borrowing' nature is millenia old and can be noted in verbal story telling, folklore (particularly close to Irish heritage), but this 'borrowing' nature has even closer links to 'black' music. The history of jazz music can be compared to that of dance music. Because jazz was developed by black people in a white hierarchy country ( America at the turn of the century ) it had to be 'underground' and was produced against the dominant music. But jazz has other links to dance music apart from its creative background. When listening to early jazz one will notice that sometimes the same tune or song will keep reoccurring such as "Sweet Georgie Brown" or "Summertime" but each time will be played differently by different musicians. It has been said that dance music has close links with "African" music as the primitive beat is more natural to dance to. Dick Hebdige also notes that Reggae music has these same qualities and again they relate closely to dance music.

One of the most important words in Reggae is 'version'. Sometimes a Reggae record is released and literally hundreds of different versions of the same rhythm or melody will follow in its wake. Every time a version is released, the original tune will be slightly modified. A musician will play a different solo on a different instrument, use a different tempo, key or chord sequence. A singer will place emphasis on different words or will add new ones. A record producer will use a different arrangement. An engineer will sketch the sounds into different shapes, add sound effects, take out notes and chords or add new ones, creating empty spaces by shuffling the sequence of sounds into new patterns. To give just one example Wayne Smith made a record called 'Under the Sleng Teeng'. It has been estimated that by

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October, 1985, no less than 239 versions of this tune had been made." (Hebdige, 1987, p.12)

Not only does Hebdige's description of the way in which Reggae music was produced draw parallels with dance music but also his account of where and how it was broadcast.

The sound system played imported R&B records at large dances which were held in large halls or out in the open in slum yards. The music had to be heavily amplified at these venues if it was to convey the right sense of conviction. And if people were to dance they had to hear the bass" ( Hebdige, 1987, p. 62 )

## STYLE

The dress code of the Punk culture was most definitely a staged event to attract and shock the establishment. Studded leather, body piercing, ripped tartan trousers, knee high leather boots and most noticeably, brightly dyed spiked hair or Mohicans. The dress code for the dance culture was quite different in its concept. Instead of being less practical than the mass fashion of the time, as punk was, it seemed more practical. The mid to late eighties fashion world produced what is now referred to as power dressing. This top-heavy look consisted of pointed shiny leather shoes, very high heeled for women, tight leg ware, be it skirts or trousers, and jackets with large shoulder pads. Women's hair styles of that time were large, volumized, hair sprayed solid spheres. This power look, for women especially, coincided with more women getting high powered jobs and an economic boom. The dress code for the rave culture was very different. In my view there were two main objectives in the style of

The first part of the book is devoted to the description of the "Hilbert" problem.

It is only after a long and difficult struggle that the author has been able to establish the truth of the statement.

The second part of the book is devoted to the study of the "Hilbert" problem in the case of the "Hilbert" problem.

The third part of the book is devoted to the study of the "Hilbert" problem in the case of the "Hilbert" problem.



rave clothes. The first and most important was practicality, the second (and some would argue more important) sexuality.

If a rave is not interrupted by the police, it can go on for a long time. I have been to parties that lasted in excess of sixteen hours, but parties can go on for even longer. Most of this time is spent dancing. Raving is physically very demanding, hence people commonly collapsing in raves due to fatigue. The ravers body is exerting itself in a room crammed with others also dancing vigorously for long periods of time. I have been to clubs where the ceilings and walls dripped with evaporated sweat from peoples bodies which left puddles of water on the floor. To say the least the heat is intense. I believe that it is this heat above all else that determines the clothes of a raver. Guys wear tee-shirts, light cotton baggy trousers and light canvas shoes or trainers. Girls often wear the same but sometimes fashioned skirts and short tee-shirts (belly tops). This basic inexpensive kit again broke the elitist barriers as there was no room for people who posed around in expensive jumpers and coats. This fashion was born from necessity as much as from a stylistic perspective. Staying cool is far more important than looking cool.

In the Dublin Rave scene in the early nineties it was quite common for dancers to strip off throughout the course of the night. This happens less nowadays as it is not seen to be trendy. But it was possible to be in a club where at the end of the night all the guys were topless and all the girls wearing little more than bras, some of the smaller more underground clubs even had people only in their underwear. While this was partly to do with the intense heat it was also to do with the sexual frame of mind ecstasy put a raver in. An immense sensual feeling overcomes people when they are on ecstasy



but if one looks up to see a beautiful person (all people are beautiful to someone on 'E', hence the name 'love drug' ) semi naked this feeling is increased dramatically. And this, also, is how the fashion of rave culture may seem to an outsider to be undramatic but to a raver is significant.

## COMMERCIAL RESISTANCE

The emergence of a spectacular subculture is invariably accompanied by a wave of hysteria in the press. This hysteria is typically ambivalent : it fluctuates between dread and fascination, outrage and amusement. Shock and horror headlines dominate the front page while, inside, the editorials positively bristle with 'serious' commentary and centrespreads or supplements contain delirious accounts of the latest fads and rituals. Style in particular provokes a double response : it is alternately celebrated (in the fashion page) and ridiculed or reviled (in those articles that define subcultures as social problems). (Hebdige, 1993, p.93)

The rave subculture as with all subcultures was soon noticed, adopted, then commercialised by the culture industry. As usual commercialisation diluted the original rave concept to make it more accessible for the uninitiated. This can be seen in contemporary popular music. Most pop tunes have taken rave musics steady thumping bass drum beat and even some established rock bands have adopted electronic instruments to mix with their electric guitar sounds. The fashion of the dance culture has also filtered onto the streets . But there is a definite dance culture feeling, now, to all



aspects of mass culture which is hard to pin point. It is as if it is an underlying aura which is the foundations for all design and style in general. This feeling for some reason is blurred, in some way hidden, but still influential, as if subliminal.

As the subculture is commodified for the mass market so also is it de-politicized and made palatable for popular consumption." (McRobbie, 1994, p.160)

The structure and the meaning of jazz has been modified in the process. As the music fed into mainstream popular culture during the 20s and 30s, it tended to become bowdlerized, drained of surplus eroticism, and any hint of anger or recrimination blown along the hot lines was delicately refined to inoffensive nightclub sounds." (Hebdige, 1993, p.48)

It can be seen from these two quotes that this 'modification' process has been happening to subcultures for as long as subcultures have been. There are however exceptions to this rule notable in punk culture. Instead of it being the anti-establishment movement it states to be, Angela McRobbie claims it was commercially motivated and manipulated from its beginning.

It soon became clear, particularly after punk, that this romanticism of authenticity was a false and idealized view. Not only Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, but the whole punk phenomena used the predatory, easily exploited and above all open-ended mass media for publicity, and actually set up, right from the start, a string of shops selling clothes directly to young people." (McRobbie, 1994, p.161)

I believe, maybe naively, that the rave culture's set-up was different to that of the punk's set-up. Of course there was

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commercialism in the rave scene from the beginning, people earned money by organising parties, hiring sound and lighting equipment and selling drugs, but I feel that if there is such a thing as 'subcommercialism' than the rave culture's origins possessed it. When rave culture started it was totally underground, even its money making ability was hidden from mass society.

Glam rock tended to alienate the majority of working class youth precisely because it breached such basic expectancies. By the mid 70s, the fans were divided into two main factions. One was composed almost entirely of teeny-boppers who followed the mainstream glitter bands (Marc Boland, Gary Glitter, Alvin Stardust). The other consisting of older, more self-conscious teenagers, remained fastidiously devoted to the more esoteric artists (Bowie, Lou Reed, Roxy Music ), whose extreme foppishness, incipient elitism, and morbid intentions to art and intellect effectively precluded the growth of a larger mass audience. (Hebdige,1993, p.62)

This quote refers to music and a culture that is nearly a quarter of a century old yet it would be hard to find more relevant wording for the state of the dance culture in 1998. It is the contemporary relevance of this quote that makes me feel that the dance culture is intrinsically different to many of the subcultures that went before it. Most subcultures existed at an 'underground' level for 'x' amount of time, then were gobbled up by the mass culture machine, became mass culture, and lost their cult, hard-core following. Most other subcultures 'sold out' to mass culture, and so were popular until the next fashion came along. The masses who partake in what was once a meaningful subculture do so now only for fashion's sake and have no deep feeling, belief or reason for



subscribing, as a result they don't try to save it when the culture industry wants to change it for 'the next big thing'.

Dance culture, however, started underground and then its essence was commercialised, but this did not mark the end of dance culture, instead it could be said only to have made it stronger. Dance culture has the facility to evolve so that when the culture industry comes to steal its musical ideas it seems to remain one step ahead. The small dance culture can move so quickly that by the time the Goliath mass culture machine promotes a new form of dance music it is already old hat to the underground. The perfect example of this is 'Jungle' music ( a very fast form of dance music ). The culture industry caught on to 'Jungle' , promoted it, but by the time the 'teeny-boppers' were aware it existed the underground clubs were playing another style of dance music, 'Drum'n'Bass', an evolved, funkier form of 'Jungle'.

This then brings me to what I see as the most intriguing aspect of dance culture, a factor which could be said to make Theodor Adorn's views on mass culture less than relevant today. It is easy to see now how rave culture has influenced the mass media / mass culture. It could also be said by an elitist cultural observer, like Adorno, that the masses have this culture forced on them and make few choices and were always destined to accept it. But the true ravers still exist, although now under different names (the term raver is no longer commonly in use). They constantly avoid, through evolution, absorption into mass culture. What interests me though is the existence, still, of the dance subculture. The people involved in this are on new territory, they are neither mass culture participants nor high art intellectuals. They share the elitism of high art intellectuals and the lifestyle of the masses.





## CONCLUSION

Low culture, as it is sometimes called, will always be the more prevalent form of culture in our society, hence its other title mass culture. Everybody responds to mass culture. To reject it is just to respond to it in a negative manor. To claim not to be aware of it is simply an impossibility in contemporary Western society. It is democratic, we can choose, although it could be said from few options. My aim in this thesis was to examine Theodor Adorno's "elitist" theories and introduce them into a contemporary situation, to see if I could show that partaking in mass culture was not as bleak as he made it out to be. This is not to say that his theories no longer have relevance, or that his paranoia about the culture industry's power should be dismissed. The thought of all multi national companies conspiring against the masses is a scary one. Can they really make us consume anything they choose to produce? The way in which the whole western world makes cultural moves in unison would certainly make me wonder. We all switched to unleaded fuel, then bought our personal computers and now each night recharge our mobile phones. Yet conspiracy theories are easy to come by. Giving humans credit for free thinking, on the other hand, is not commonly done.

Where I feel Adorno's essays lose contemporary status is that they do not deal with what I see as the fragmentation of society. High cultures many departments, art, literature, drama and so on, all used to develop simultaneously, the Romantic movement being an example. Anything outside high culture was mass culture. The fragmentation of high culture coincides with the birth of





postmodernism, which promotes the idea of no boundaries, broadening the horizon of expression. Postmodernism has allowed high culturalists to venture into mass culture territory. This has caused a split in high culture and creates the platform for people to say 'that's not art' or inversely 'anything is art, if it is intended to be so'. As a result we can see many "high artists" dealing with mass culture themes, such as Roddy Doyle's portrayal of working class Dublin or Willie Doherty's photographs of burnt out cars on the roads of Northern Ireland. These two high artists make art about the masses and their culture.

Also, as with high culture, fragmentation has occurred in mass culture. Intelligent, thought-provoking mass culture exists alongside the type of mass culture Adorno referred to, the kind that disengages the brain. This can be witnessed in film or television. For example satirical comedy has never had such a healthy existence, and it requires, on the part of the viewer, knowledge, such as an awareness of current political situations.

I decided to study rave culture in this thesis because I believe it cannot be slotted into predetermined cultural categories. A diluted version of rave culture is now part of our mass culture but its origin and its authentic participants are not. The dominant culture has, in fact, done everything in its power to try and stamp out rave culture by outlawing its drugs and breaking up any congregation suspected of attempting to participate in this culture. I cannot consider the rave culture as a subculture either because it lacks what I see as the essential elements. These elements include class, gender and eventual death through suffocation by the mass culture. The rave culture allowed all classes and genders to participate, and has evolved so that what mass culture sells as rave culture is not true



rave culture. Mass culture's selection process, through which mass culture takes what it thinks will sell, killed off the punk movement but has not done it to rave culture, because participants in rave culture go clubbing not because they feel pressure from outside but because they feel a pressure from within to express themselves.

I feel the closest comparison to rave culture is that of jazz music and its culture. There is more than just fashion involved in these two cultural forms, an element of thought and cultural experimentation is needed to fully appreciate either form. Musical elitism also exists in both outlets, and what is played on the national radio stations is considered low-brow. So while the masses are happy listening to what they believe to be rave music the elite ravers are happy that their music is still undiscovered and exclusively theirs.

I would traditionally be considered a high artist, due to my chosen profession, I go to a high culture college and am surrounded by high cultured people and yet I can discuss rave culture with them in the same intellectual way I would discuss an art exhibition. Yet this is not the case with some aspects of mass culture, people are jeered for participating in what is seen as low culture activities. I don't feel that the rave culture is high culture but I know it is not low / mass culture. It fits comfortably in between . Which is the reason for a need to rename the cultural categories. "Synthesis Culture" could be the title given, to a new intellectual middle ground, which rave culture exemplifies. The terms high culture and low culture, alone, no longer suffice.





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