

Masked: Depictions of Anonymity in Electronic Dance Music

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Declaration

Parts of 2.3 The Kraftwerkian Slave and 2.4 Daft Punk and the Artificial Image were incorporated within a paper initially presented at the Extremity and Excess Conference in Salford, 2011. That version was also later revised under the title of 'Post-Human Pop: From Simulation to Assimilation' in Bevan, G., Cookney, D., Darlington, J. and Taylor, E. [eds.] (2012). *Extremity and Excess*. Salford: University of Salford. A draft version of 3.5 Dead and Buried: The Author and Dubstep was also delivered at the CASS PGR event at the University of Salford in 2012. Extracts from the interview with David Bray were also used within a feature on the designer and illustrator for DummyMag.com in 2013.

Abstract

This thesis explores anonymity as an aspect of identity construction within electronic dance music (EDM). Its specific focus is on the production and control of image within genres that have arisen since the development and expansion of the club scene in the UK from the latter part of the 20th century and, then situated in visual culture and performance research, its examination of anonymity represents an area that, to date, has been overlooked in EDM. As part of this investigation, the thesis' chapters notably analyse elements that are external to music recordings including record sleeve design and press interviews: components that are essential elements in the development and distribution of these performative identities.

Following Thornton (1995), Rietveld (1998), Hesmondhalgh (1998a) and Gilbert and Pearson (1999), the research critically reviews a range of issues that are determined as associated with these representations – including the influence of technologies, a resistance to mainstream assimilation and the impact of collective 'scene' – while explaining some of EDM's distinctions and hierarchies within a post-subcultural setting. To do this it uses case studies focusing on the approaches of Daft Punk, Burial, Zomby and SBTRKT: examples that are presented as unique demonstrations of image construction within the field. It also places the role of identity within a more expansive history of electronic music by aligning contemporary practice with the earlier presented image of Kraftwerk.

Ultimately, and while observing this lineage of often counterintuitive practices, the thesis argues that the EDM producer's separation from the high visibility 'star system' model favoured by pop and rock performers reflects commitment to a marginal status: a commitment also communicated through its visual aesthetics that reinforce an underground cultural context to celebrate the peripheral whilst, simultaneously, highlighting the EDM producer's perceived condition as that which is inferior to his or her rock counterpart.

1.1 Introduction

Whatever is profound loves masks; what is most profound even hates image and parable. Might not nothing less than the *opposite* be the proper disguise for the shame of a god?

(Nietzsche, from *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886)

It's blasphemous to compare Burial to God. I mean he's good and everything, but he's not a patch on Burial.

(KhubaLibre, from YouTube comment on Burial – 'Loner', 2012)

This thesis investigates a proliferation of anonymous practices used in electronic dance music (EDM). It examines how the deployment of pseudonyms and other 'masked' forms of representation have typified descriptions of the composer within genres that have arisen since the development of the club scene in the late 1980s. The research question asks: 'Why is anonymity so prevalent within EDM?' As such, the research is concerned with the motivations for these methods and the subsequent implications regarding perceptions of authorship within EDM. For example, do theses represent an iconoclasm inherent to what might be described as 'underground' music? Can these practices truly denounce the 'pop star' while giving folk hero status to the outlaw, the enigma, the cyborg or the shaman? And how do music technologies contribute to the development of these representative forms? The following chapters then aim to deliver an account of anonymous practices while also questioning other influences such as music sampling, 'scene' and the DJ set as an authored text.¹ However, the reference to 'depictions' within the title of the thesis acknowledges anonymity as presented or performed. Integral to the cited presentations of anonymity, elements that are external to music recordings are examined: culminating in research that does not represent a musicological investigation but, instead, is a study situated within performance and visual culture. Largely overlooked until now, the analysed texts – including record sleeves and press interviews – are viewed as highly significant: more than by-products that arise from the dissemination of music recordings. These are then alternatively assessed as cultural artefacts intrinsically linked the construction and furthering of identity within EDM.

In 2012, The Washington Post published a story that drew attention to a number of “vanguard” musicians including Daft Punk, Deadmau5, Redshape, SBTRKT and Zomby alongside the claim that “anonymity is the new fame” (Richards, 2012, online). “Some wear masks,” it explained. “Some conceal their names. Others refuse to perform in public” (ibid.). However, despite this acknowledgment, to date there has been scant critical engagement with real life cases that exemplify these ideas to try and ascertain the possible intentions and effects of what are argued here as unique examples of image construction; examples that, on closer inspection, share some commonalities. Therefore, the aim of this study is to develop a theory to assist the understanding of the multiple realities involved in these practices. In order to achieve this aim the thesis reports and analyses the actions of participants whose work has involved aspects of anonymity. It also critically reviews a range of issues associated with these representations while explaining some of EDM’s distinctions and hierarchies within a ‘post-subcultural’ setting.

As such, the following chapters respond to Sarah Thornton’s call for further studies into “the generation, evolution and dissolution of subcultural distinctions” to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research area of EDM (1995, p.168). While acknowledging Thornton’s ethnographic approach alongside historical/sociological accounts of dance music cultures, the questioning of developments as radical/resistant, EDM’s use as a representation of modern youth culture and the employment of critical theory to define activity on the scene, so far there has been a notable bias towards the study of sites of consumption rather than sites of production.² The focal point, to date, has largely been a specific place: the nightclub or ‘rave’. Typically, this focus has also been prone to the engendering of a discourse that has been preoccupied by any tendencies towards transgression within this particular environment. However this problem may transcend music style and could be an endemic trait within popular music studies. Nicola Smith’s research into the northern soul scene, for example, similarly notes a tendency in popular music studies to document “the extremes of popular music practice”, including “the spectacular; the shocking; the rebellious; the deviant; the politically loaded; the ethnically marginal [and] the ground-breaking” (2009, p.2). Indeed, much attention has been given to these aspects as they have emerged within EDM’s associated genres. While this research is acknowledged as useful, composers/producers have been at risk of being reduced to background noise. Additionally, while operating on scenes that have been described as “without stars, spectacle, gaze and identification” (Melechi, 1999, p.37), a defining characteristic of facelessness within dance music culture has – perhaps understandably – been considered unremarkable and worthy of

only a cursory glance within focuses on other phenomena. This neglect has even occurred despite these practices of supposed low visibility having paradoxically generated a series of visual statements. This, I argue, is a significant oversight and, as Foucault advises, “we must locate the space left empty by the author’s disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers” (in Rabinow, 1984, p.105). Therefore an analysis based on anonymity’s role as it relates to cultural production within the dance music industry (following Hesmondhalgh, 1998a) is determined as being worthy of further research.

Consequently this thesis neither rejects nor revises previous theories on identity within club culture but, instead, redirects attention. Furthermore, it perceives the existing literature as offering a position that, however prescient, has been rooted in the period that it was published and therefore does not represent the altered dynamics of the clubbing industry and its ancillary services in more recent times. The contribution of the research is then, in part, a contemporary overview of post-acid house culture that engages with EDM’s expansion *beyond* the nightclub.³ It demonstrates how - within a broader commercial context and alongside identified areas of growth, fragmentation and increased visibility - the employment of anonymizing strategies by composers/producers has particular significance.

The next part of this introduction outlines the context of this research in greater depth and includes a section titled The Researcher’s Gaze that addresses the problematic nature of undertaking research of this kind. This is further clarified by a discussion of the research methodology. The section concludes with an explanation of how the thesis is organised.

1.2 The Research Context

This section outlines the context of the research and establishes the content and importance of the topic. It isolates three key elements within the thesis before reflecting on the role of the researcher. It begins by situating ‘electronic dance music’ (EDM) to explain the use of the preferred terminology while also navigating a series of alternative definitions to document their limitations in order to clarify the core issues herein. Although, as will be discussed, any attempt to categorically define EDM raises issues regarding the existence of a reliable history. Nevertheless, the negotiation of any discrepancies within the purported EDM genealogy is approached and the section defines parameters for the purpose of this study.

The section then ascertains the nature of anonymity and its connection to authorship as they relate to the thesis. Again, this description requires the observation of what is a lineage of relevant practices - albeit from both within and outside of the culture surrounding EDM. The purpose here is to highlight some of the consequences of – if not always the initial intent behind – a history of covert or subversive identities that allow for a hypothesis based around such practices as having the potential to be counterintuitive and tactical.

The final part of the section questions the notion of “subcultural capital” as put forward by Thornton (1995). This follows the distinctions outlined by Bourdieu (1979) and the writings of Hebdige (1979; 1988) that distinguish between ‘mass culture’ and a clearly separated ‘subculture’. Regularly perceived as a mutually exclusive dichotomy that can alternatively be reconfigured as concepts surrounding ‘mainstream’ and ‘underground’, the section considers the relationship between these two categories: specifically with regards to sites of production and the mediation of consequent texts.

1.2.1 “Electronic Dance Music”

In order to frame the research, it should be acknowledged that the overview of electronic dance music (EDM) in this thesis comes from a British perspective. While the culture has been claimed - albeit with no real evidence to support that claim - as the UK’s “most significant cultural export” (How Clubbing Changed the World, 2012), I do not define EDM’s musical heritage as indigenous to the UK. The associated post-acid house scene can, however, be argued as being cultivated within Britain following a period of trans-Atlantic exchange with the music itself traceable to the United States.⁴ This aspect is discussed further in chapter 4 where EDM’s origins have particular resonance with regards to specific performed identities. However, at this particular juncture, it should be noted that any differentiation that leads to a British perspective is not to define the culture as an insular culture. In fact, the UK scene still continues to retain an international focus and, consequently, the thesis’ chapters reference worldwide EDM scenes and producers from various territories whose actions are particularly relevant to the discussed themes.

However, even after establishing this initial geographically-rooted context, a definitive explanation of the scenes based around EDM continues to be problematic. As Gilbert and Pearson state, electronic dance music cultures “are fluid multifarious formations which will always exceed any attempt to map them” (1999, p.vii): an observation that echoed Garratt’s

assertion that they are “restless, fluid, constantly changing” (1998, p.11). More recently this was confirmed by Idris Elba’s *How Clubbing Changed the World* documentary (2012) through its struggle to present a clear linear structure that could explain EDM either chronologically or thematically. Instead, the film began by shifting from footage of 1980s Chicago and 1970s New York through to the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony, the northern soul scene and, international pop-dance star, David Guetta. Essentially, the documentary was constructed as a series of vignettes: a collection of impressionistic scenes that each attempted to define a characteristic or an associated object. Similarly, the literature on EDM can follow this pattern of loosely connected memes that cumulatively attempt, but ultimately fail, to represent the culture’s completeness.

In his ethnomusicological investigation, Mizrach suggests that the difficulties caused by EDM’s restlessness may be overcome by researchers “waiting until their subject is ‘dead on the table’ before they can begin their analysis” (1997, online). However, and while in addition to a broad two decade-collated archive of material to reflect upon, the issue that both he and I have faced is a notable lack of deceleration in EDM’s evolution (or mutation) that arguably halts its actual demise. So while this thesis (and the earlier texts that it references) may, in fact, discuss aspects of EDM culture in the past tense, it is notably still developing. As part of this development, new terminology continues to be introduced to help organise the splintered musical variations that are routinely added to an already expansive series of subgenres. Some of these subgenres, such as techno and drum & bass, become established and canonical. As such, audiences with only a rudimentary knowledge of EDM may still have some understanding of the musical aesthetics that define these more established subcategories. Yet new EDM formations (including ‘trap’, ‘footwork’ and ‘moombahton’ to give just three fairly recent examples) may be solely familiar to individuals that are more entrenched within niche scenes. This recognition of genre and subgenre will be discussed at length in chapter 3 but the subject is raised at this point in an attempt to provisionally describe the complexities involved in classification and to explain my own preferred terminology. ‘Electronic dance music’ (and, its abbreviated form, EDM) could be seen as too ambiguous to be utilised within studies that are based around the minutiae of genre. But while also used by Peter (2009) and linked to the area defined as ‘EDMC’ (electronic dance music culture) – as favoured by scholarly research networks such as Dancecult (<http://www.dancecult.net/>) – it is employed within this thesis as a descriptor that primarily illustrates music and associated music scenes that are built around particular methods of production.⁵ It then additionally assists with a further aim to avoid the undiscerning encompassment of disparate styles that “precludes any true understanding”

(Sicko, 2010, p.1) given that, while not a classification in a completely taxonomic sense, it can be used in conjunction with more precise terminology that will capably define smaller subsets of electronic dance music (that, in turn, may relate more distinctively to subgenre, aesthetic or participants).⁶ It is also deemed as especially suitable within the following chapters due to its ability to cover music that comes via both analogue and digital technologies and, while not as temporal as alternative attempts at demarcation, additionally allows for the consideration of its link to a longer history of electronic dance music: including music that pre-dates house music (the style of post-disco dance music that is credited with triggering the development of further club-oriented genres and subgenres in the late 1980s).

The various written accounts that precede this thesis have instead relied on a broad range of terminology to discuss EDM. It is argued that many labels that were once viewed as fit for this purpose have since developed associations with concepts that are too narrow or too broad to work within the context of this particular thesis. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, for example, refers to ‘rave’ but this definition has connotations with particular events that emerged from the diversification of house music in the early 1990s alongside an identifiable aesthetic within specific musical sub-genres (such as ‘hardcore rave’). Rave – perhaps due to its prominence in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act – is also widely used within discourses that demonstrate an interest in issues of legality (see McKay, 1996; 1998 and Redhead 1999).⁷ Despite a usage within more general texts, ‘club music’ can be perceived as vague whilst describing either a heterogeneous approach or an ultimately subjective locality. Collin’s preference for ‘ecstasy culture’ (1997) is identified as suitable for a particular ability to plot a narrative based around drug use (and therefore of value within the discussion of acts of transgression as cited earlier in this chapter’s introduction). Other terminology can also be closely associated with an author’s personal perspective. ‘Intelligent dance music’ (IDM), for example, may be perceived as delineating a contentious higher purpose: predominantly through its suggestion of dance music forms that are beyond the supposed simplicity of bodily pleasure. IDM is further viewed as problematic due to having had more currency outside of the scene it has aimed to describe and, contributing to a notion of distance, also appears to have been rooted in the dance and rock media’s more international focus during the mid to late 1990s. A related term ‘electronica’ has also been described as a “media contrivance”; criticised for the ease in which it has been arbitrarily applied to a varied selection of music for the purposes of “categorizing, marketing and cashing in” (Sicko, 2010, p.1). However, these classifications can be interchangeable within certain texts. For example Tagg uses “rave” as a descriptor yet considers, within his first footnote, whether “house” or

“dance” might be a more accurate definition (1993, online). Therefore, to avoid confusion, ‘electronic dance music’ has been employed within the following chapters to assist, but not *simplify*. On the contrary: its use is testament to the fluctuating and often ambiguous nature of the music (as both a composition and a commodity) and its surrounding culture.

1.2.2 Anonymity and Authorship

Concentrating on sites of production, anonymity is intrinsically linked to the concept of authorship. On its most basic level anonymity can describe the absence of an attributed author. However, both anonymity (as the absence of attribution) and authorship (as the presence of attribution) are understood in their relationship to how attribution has functioned historically. Yet the position within this thesis does not recognise anonymity exclusively as a binary opposite of authorship. Incorporated within a performance of identity, anonymous practices can become aspects of the author’s image. However, that more basic understanding of anonymity as eradicating authorship is still commonplace and has implications for the EDM producer that will employ a variety of tactics including the removal of a name from a work. Standard definitions of anonymity itself also tend to be based on the idea of the unnamed yet the broader use of actual assigned names in relation to EDM and anonymity will be discussed in chapter 4. The thesis therefore considers positions of anonymity as a more nuanced and, indeed, more varied performance of identity. This section reflects on these positions in relationship to authorship to establish the subsequent use of these terms.

In cases, the verification of authors by name can simply dictate ownership. With the ease of reproduction brought by the printing press (and the subsequent emergence of copyright law), attribution has commonly been used in this way. Yet this “system of property” (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p.108) is but one aspect of attribution. Further to this, the identification of the author contributes to a ‘system of *properties*’: that is, that the process of attribution offers more than an arbitrary identification of who is speaking to instead contribute to the notion of an author as having specific qualities or characteristics. As Foucault states, the introduction of ‘author’ represents “the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas” (in Rabinow, 1984, p.101) and the association with a named individual has subsequently assured a “classificatory function” (p.107). Pokorn discusses the stance of 14th century English grammarian William Wheteley with regards to this acknowledgment of authorship, stating that his belief was that the determination of the author is a key issue when approaching a text; that it was “the guarantee” that it would be worthy of the reader’s attention (1999, p.495).

Therefore a name is “more than an indication, a gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description” (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p.105). This “description” is, in turn, also integral to “the diffusion of authorship” (Jones, 1992, p.177) where that ability to attribute a text to an individual serves to situate the author as a brand or commodity (Negus, 1997, p.178). Such a process has become essential within music. As Will Straw elaborates:

Ideas of authorship are bound up with the commodity status of music in a variety of ways. It is not simply that the performer becomes the hook through which musical performances are given distinctiveness and marketed (as “stars” have long served to differentiate films). Over the long term, the continuity of performer careers is seen as a way of bringing order to the musical marketplace by introducing a particular kind of predictability. The identities of performers help the music industries to plan the future, to see this future as a sequence of new releases that will build upon (and draw their intelligibility from) the activity of the past.

(1999, p.203)

Yet this sequential diffusion of authorship which is based around performers has not been without its detractors. McColvin, for example, questions the focus on performing artists rather than composers within “announcements of concerts, gramophone companies, or wireless companies” (1930, p.317). Concerned by the emphasis on “personalities”, he states that “it is fairly certain that a stranger to music would believe, after surveying our present conditions, that the performer was far more important than the music he performed” (ibid.). This reticence regarding music and the cult of personality then prompts an additional, and vital, issue central to discussions of authorship and anonymity: that of whether attention *should* be placed on the composition rather than the performer to culminate in “the art as an ideal, not the ego” (Hazlitt, 1930, quoted in Ferry, 2002, p.198).

Hesmondhalgh observes the claims that EDM – through its lack of a star system – actually concentrates attention on “the music itself” (1998a, p.234). This is a suggestion that will resurface elsewhere within this thesis and deserves some clarification regarding what is meant by both ‘the music itself’ and where there is a reference to an emphasis being placed on ‘the music’. Underpinning this idea is music identified as musical composition and, alternatively, music positioned as a commodity that also incorporates factors external to the composition or recording. Such factors may be determined as aspects including those that McColvin highlights such as the biographical detail that gives rise to ‘personalities’. The use of ‘the music itself’, by contrast, suggests a concentration on the composition – the musical output or recording – without the influence of back-story: often used with an assumed inflection of a

‘purer’ music experience unhindered by the external influences surrounding image and personality. While this will be considered in subsequent chapters, there is also the suggestion that this proposed rejection of image and personality within EDM actually “deconstructs the function of the author” (Ott and Herman, 2003, p.205) and can lead to the identification of musicians/composers as ‘anonymous’; even in cases where aspects of their identities – such as their real names – may be publicly known. As evident in The Washington Post article cited at the beginning of this chapter, anonymity is not always determined on the basis of work that cannot be attributed. Anonymity can instead be defined by the musician/composer’s relationship to that diffusion of authorship. For example, a refusal to be photographed or interviewed, the wearing of a mask or a reluctance to actively participate in social media may all be seen as indicators of a performed anonymity. Subsequently the use of ‘anonymity’ within this thesis relates to all of the varied practices that have been involved in the deconstruction of the author and the renegotiation of diffused authorship.

The variety of ways that anonymity has been utilised to distinguish from more typical forms of authorship is not unique to EDM. Archive-based investigations into published literary works have similarly noted the impact that such practices can have on the way that texts are reviewed and consumed. These examples contribute to an understanding that - while the origination of a work may be unknown due to its creation taking place prior to copyright laws that required the recognition of authorship - anonymity has additionally been employed historically to fit specific purposes. In literature there has been a rich history of such activity that has included surreptitiously published works by authors including Austen, Byron, Brontë, Defoe, Plath and Tennyson. This lineage is certainly capable of demonstrating how the concealment of identities (at least at specific points) has not ultimately detracted from the recognition of the author. However, as Mullan explores in *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature* (2007), anonymity can be seen as a temporary state. Additionally, it can be recognized as a statement of intent with anonymity functioning as a demonstration of diffidence or even mischief. In other circumstances, the motivations found in Mullan’s case studies have overlapped with El Guindi’s overview of the literal wearing of veils (throughout their various multicultural incarnations) to represent “modesty, privacy and resistance” (1999). Essentially, the approach within this thesis follows Negus (1997, p.178) in his consideration of the author as both a producer and a brand: thereby situating him or her as not just a holder of copyright but more as a performed identity that can encompass a range of understandings regarding the use of image and non-image that, in turn, will impact on the perceptions of the work that they produce.

1.2.3 “Subcultural Capital” and Separation

‘Resistance’ is a word that has already appeared on numerous occasions within the first part of this introductory chapter. It is at this point that it needs to be disentangled from its association with another term: ‘subculture’.

A definition of subculture recounts: “a cultural group within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture” (Anon. #1, n.d., online). When considered as representational of groups that are in opposition to dominant codes, subculture can be attributed with a negative bias. Associations with delinquency, for example, can give groups observed as subcultures a position that is assumed as a threat to wider society and its moral codes. Although, as Hebdige suggests, while this still represents a subversion to normalcy, these groups can simply indicate the unity of like-minded individuals in order to define identity; to culminate in groups typified by semiotic signs that simultaneously gesture to something larger than themselves (1979). Yet subcultural studies - as influenced by the sociological work of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) - has been less prominent within sociology, cultural studies and anthropology in recent years with ‘subculture’ itself questioned regarding its suitability in adequately locating and describing contemporary youth/music/style-oriented groups. Bennett is particularly suspicious of subculture: suggesting that the term “has arguably become little more than a convenient ‘catch-all’ term for any aspect of social life in which young people, style and music intersect” (1999, p.599).

In response to the aforementioned criticism, a post-subcultural approach represents an alternative theoretical framework that will recognize a number of weaknesses in subculture. For Bennett, this revised stance attempts to overcome problematic issues such as its associations with solidarity; it functioning as a representation of working class resistance; and a supposed deviant relationship to dominant culture.⁸ This was especially required in order to negotiate EDM’s status due to doubts surrounding the scene’s definition as a bona fide resistant culture; especially since McKay’s conclusion that - while struggling between its “narcissistic hedonism” and “teenage rebellion” - EDM culture never really finds itself oppositional to the hegemony (McKay, 1996, p.114). Further to this, any potential ability for EDM to unite the disenfranchised is argued here as having flickered only briefly within pockets of fleeting social communion. It is then worth observing that much activity has simply been recreation/entertainment despite some nightclub ephemera having suggested that EDM scenes can be ‘a way of life’.⁹ As such, these are better understood *as* scenes (rather

than subcultures) that have routinely been based around “a series of temporal gatherings characterised by fluid boundaries and floating memberships” (Bennett, 1999, p.600).¹⁰

Where EDM scenes *have* displayed a more committed distancing from the dominant culture has been through their resistance to ‘the mainstream’. Specifically via sites of production, this perceived separation from commercial forms of music has been driven by a preoccupation with staying ‘underground’. The term underground may be used to describe that which is hidden, concealed or secret: then linking it with many of the anonymous practices outlined in this thesis. Yet it has further political overtones due to its use to describe groups that have worked covertly to subvert a controlling power. While acknowledging that some practitioners have aimed to correlate their activity with the latter definition, the use of underground within the following chapters pertains to cultures that operate as an alternative to more established codes: where ‘underground music’ is then perceived as an alternative to the more widespread and more ‘commercial’ (as in, more commercially successful) forms of music. While arguably elitist in principle when applied to EDM, Gilbert and Pearson do note that this obsession with remaining underground is also “politically defeatist”: criticising how that commitment to a subordinate position (which similarly consigns others to that same position) is to “concede social authority” to dominant discourses (1999, p.161). Seemingly then a celebration of oppression, it is routinely utilised to offer a counterpoint to mass culture and, within EDM, it has worked alongside observed tendencies by participants to be “attracted to obscurity, to secret knowledge about music which kept their music away from the prying eyes of the mainstream” (Hesmondhalgh, 1998a, p.239). This influence of ‘underground’ can then trigger a rejection of both the star system and the diffusion of authorship (as introduced in the previous section) with ‘underground music’ then actively seeking to avoid the tropes associated with the fame-based methods of distribution that have become commonplace in the late 20th and early 21st Century. It may even be argued that throughout the whole development of what is termed popular music (or music that has emerged outside of the classical canon from the early part of the 20th century onwards), this hierarchal system has been emphasised: where the dominant culture has increasingly been reliant on highly visible TV and media-friendly celebrities, personalities or what might commonly be identified as pop stars. As part of the primary research for this thesis, high visibility and its function as oppositional to ‘the underground’ is addressed in interview by Tom Kerridge: owner of, independent record label, Ramp.

This is the point of ‘the underground’ - as much as I despise that term
- it’s about the music. If artists’ opinions or image become more

important than the music, then we end up with Bono or *Pop Idol*, which is a world we have actively chosen not to have any involvement in. We are offering an alternative to the people who find that world vacuous and offensive.

(In interview, appendix #1)

Simultaneously noting ‘the art as an ideal’ as previously discussed, Kerridge’s quote highlights the formation of an identity as “a refusal of the banalities of ordinary life and in particular, of massification” (Gelder, 2007, p.i). This desire to move away from mass society has also been reflected in responses to the process of ‘crossing over’: the growth in interest in a record, musician, genre or other aspect of EDM culture that facilitates a degree of commercial success and mainstream assimilation. Crossing over, in turn, demonstrates the complexity of the marketplace that assures “the dubious differentiation between ‘underground’ and ‘mainstream’ as social scientific categories” (Kühn, 2011, online). Once again, the boundaries between the two categories are flexible with classification being fluid and temporal while responsive to the changing nature of what is most popular. Furthermore, assumed hierarchical differences based on popularity have been used to define economies within EDM itself.

These internal hierarchies – while applicable to individual genres or larger segments of EDM – subsequently allow alternate value systems based on either financial or critical success: a clear delineation between economic and cultural capital. The distinctions have emerged in conjunction with EDM’s establishment as a recognised and often highly profitable component within the British music/entertainment industry but, while providing an ideological slant and giving importance to a value system that is based on cultural capital, it is important to consider how EDM’s initial development took place *outside* of the mainstream.¹¹ ‘House music’ by its original definition *was* a marginalised type of music. Initially unknown outside of the predominantly gay and black audiences that frequented ‘underground’ nightclubs in Chicago and New York, Brewster & Broughton demonstrate its unpopular status when stating that “if a song was ‘house’ it was music from a cool club, it was underground, it was something you’d never hear on the radio” (2000, p.314). However, throughout EDM’s development in the 1990s (a growth that prompted a degree of mainstream attention and, certainly, radio play) a number of EDM composers/producers have continued to describe their activities as being within an area still characterised by its marginalised status to contribute to “the widespread assumption that electronic music producers are divinely-inspired auteurs” that “remain true to their ‘art’ by remaining in unprofitable underground markets” (Loza,

2004, p.xv). Essentially this reflects tensions that are prevalent within all areas of the culture industries that Stratton articulates as the split between “the aesthetic” and “the commercial” or ‘art’ and ‘capitalism’ (2004, p.9). The blurring of these boundaries between art and capitalism can be problematic. As Hesmondhalgh notes, commercial success can achieve short-term economic capital but it risks the loss of “credibility” (1998a, p.241). While these concerns are prominent in Thornton’s research, the acknowledgement of these traits within dance music audiences prompted Hesmondhalgh to reference a quote from Bourdieu on the interplay between aesthetics and economics that had been overlooked by Thornton: a statement that clearly qualifies the economic value of ‘underground’ and the potential for deferred remuneration.

Producers and vendors of cultural goods who ‘go commercial’ condemn themselves, and not only from an ethical or aesthetic point of view, because they deprive themselves of the opportunities open to those who can recognize the specific demands of this universe and who, by concealing from themselves and others the interests at stake in their practice, obtain the means of deriving profits from disinterestedness.

(Bourdieu, 1993, p.75, cited in Hesmondhalgh, 1998a, p.241)

The “disinterestedness” as the seeming lack of concern for profit is a touchstone of much creative practice that Loza describes as “romantic notions” (2004, p.xv). House and Shaughnessy also touch on this aspect while identifying two distinctive approaches to creative practice. The first of which are “The Romantics”: a group that sees their output as culture or art while boasting a belief system rooted in self-expression over profitable commodity (2000, p.4). This, they say, contrasts with “The Pragmatists”: a group that instead sees their approach as “one of the key constituents of modern business strategy” (ibid.)¹². As a model, this can be applied in the discussion of author and publisher or director and film studio as easily as it can composer and record label and it especially assists in re-enforcing an industry dichotomy that creates a boundary between ‘the major’ and ‘the independent’. It also assists attempts to widen the gap between what is perceived as underground and mainstream culture.

It could be tempting to use the Romantic/Pragmatic model to explain differentiation, but it is too simplistic to accurately represent the various, and often nuanced, stances prevalent within McRobbie’s sprawling “culture society” (1999). Naïve as it would be to identify the natural environment of the reputedly rival camps as the garret and the boardroom, many commentators have still resorted to such clichés (alongside those out-dated definitions of

subculture) in order to maintain the cynical view that the creative industries are so clearly divided. Hesmondhalgh's case study, on the other hand, addresses many of the key points within this Romantic/Pragmatic argument while also drawing attention to a post-Fordist, flexible industry where majors and independents converge at various points. Gilbert and Pearson also broach this: suggesting that "opposition" or "incorporation" may not suffice in describing the relationships between different formations – especially the kind of interaction that often results in "ambivalent outcomes" (1999, p.160). This is particularly useful in understanding the nature of crossing over due to capitalism allowing for "ideological flexibility" where previously marginalised culture can be repackaged and sold "as the latest stylistic innovation" (Ott and Herman, 2003, p.250). Certainly, there are claims that, materially, there is no real differentiation between underground and mainstream. Rachel Newsome – when interviewed as editor of style magazine *Dazed & Confused* – stated that "there is no such thing as underground anymore, because corporate culture has infiltrated and co-opted youth culture" (Dodson, 2001, online); a suggestion that was supported by DJ, producer and label owner Loefah who insisted that "underground is the wrong word these days—nothing underground really exists anymore" (Keeling, 2012, online). Newsome's version of events clearly suggested an invasion and subsequent conquest by corporatocracy, but is notable for ignoring the potential for what Gilbert and Pearson view as the "democratizations of the cultural field" (1999, p.160): specifically in the negotiation of new spaces.

Despite the apparent denouncement of 'underground' via co-option and the observed fluidity and flexibility between different types of organisations, Hesmondhalgh still states that it might be premature to completely remove and the dissolve the perceived distinctions between different organisations: in particular, those between major and independent labels (1998a, p.243). After all, as Newsome's citing of "corporate culture" perhaps demonstrates, major record labels are still routinely treated with suspicion by 'grass roots' scenes. The co-opting of so-called subcultural signs by major corporations, for example, has been viewed as having no real stake in specific music outputs. And while it would be advised to be apprehensive about the near apocalyptic description of major label intervention that has been offered by some critics, within EDM an amount of distrust may be justified. For example, in order to co-opt and maximise sales of appropriated outputs, major labels have not just looked for already popular records that feature a recognisable and catchy 'hook', they have also altered EDM texts to make them more palatable for the widest audience. This re-shaping has involved assuring a composition is also available as a generic radio edit (club records tend not to be

created as three minute versions). Also within this process of adaptation, an otherwise unconnected vocal element can be added to turn what was considered a track (a functional rhythm-based dance record often without lyrics) into a song (a vocal-based piece of music that adheres to the standardised pop format).¹³ This has then initiated the mainstream diffusion of authorship with a featured singer – as performer – often becoming the focal point rather than the originator of the work. Again raising the subject of credibility, this focus on guest vocalist may be preferable for some producers/composers given that there can be significant consequences for supposedly underground figures that are identified as associates of major corporations. Such activity can prompt accusations of ‘selling out’: a far more damning version of ‘crossing over’ that often involves the alteration or simplification of creative works and the compromising of artistic integrity. Thornton raises this issue - drawing from Hebdige’s definition of selling out as incorporation into the hegemony – and observes a transaction that can be translated as an “aesthetic metamorphosis” (Thornton, 1995, p.123).

The EDM marketplace is subsequently complex with its careful navigation required by self-identifying ‘underground’ producers if they are to avoid their ‘selling’ equating to ‘selling out’. Designated channels for dissemination (including a specialist dance music press and niche radio programming) can be useful: especially given how they too may be perceived as employing an ideological position of underground. Still, these channels are not a prerequisite within promotion and independent labels are especially notable for their ability to adapt their methods within a multi-tiered approach to distribution and promotion.¹⁴ A smaller label, for example, can consider further collaboration with larger independents or even major labels: then explaining how an independent label like R&S Records establishes names like James Blake and Delphic before they move on, after some acclaim, to release their albums through major labels. It also indicates how XL Recordings can, through its work with Adele, be releasing some of the world’s biggest-selling records while still issuing material by ‘anonymous’ artists such as Jai Paul and Various Production. Interviews undertaken for this thesis also support the idea that this flexibility is a key characteristic within independent labels and, moreover, covert authorship was identified as presenting no problems for the consulted labels if requested by the producer/musician (see fig.1).

The freedom that subsequently emerges in EDM’s independent sector may be one of its attractions for musicians that have an aversion to the more populist methods involved in the diffusion of authorship. The complex nature of representation and markets does, however, hint at how EDM has been “difficult to control according to the existing rules of marketing” (Pesch and Weisbeck, 1999, p.5). Flexibility is key here: especially in finding the right

balance between audience exposure and assumedly compromised mainstream visibility or creative entrepreneurship and ‘selling out’. At times it requires a separation that is influenced by the belief that “the music’s force comes from its resistance to co-option” (Hesmondhalgh, 1998a, p.240). Externally it may be necessary to highlight an altruistic, auteur-driven or romantic spirit (that is reputedly incompatible with the ideology of major record labels). But to retain the ability to issue new music, the careful negotiation of market conditions and a certain amount of commercial success is essential to producers and labels.

Tom Kerridge - Ramp label owner	“...It's my job to promote an artist's image however they choose to present themselves. If an artist comes to me wanting photo shoots, then we support that. Alternatively, if they say they don't want their face shown in the media, then we support that too.” (Appendix #1)
Mike Paradinas - Planet Mu label owner	“...It's up to the musician/artist. We will support whatever... however they want to present themselves.” (Appendix #2)
Marcus Scott - Hyperdub label manager	“...Everyone is completely free to do what they want.” (Appendix #3)

Fig.1 – Independent label responses regarding autonomy

It is partly due to such difficulties that ‘subculture’ is then avoided within this thesis - even despite the influence of Thornton’s text and its citing of “subcultural capital”. Grossberg also argues against “intrinsically politically resonant categories” of this kind: explaining that “the margins are not inherently marginal” but that they are only defined in their relationship to a fluid mainstream (1997, p.220). ‘Underground’, by contrast, is a term that *will* feature prominently throughout its chapters simply *because* it can be more clearly understood as operating in tandem with an identifiable but evolving mainstream. It should be understood that it is not used as a politically resonant or formal classification. Instead it is utilised to indicate a context of self-marginalisation; especially in instances where EDM is aligned with ideas of resistance to and/or a separation from mass culture by agents and organizations.

1.2.4 The Researcher's Gaze

A notable contentious issue that has routinely accompanied youth and popular culture studies is the gaze of the researcher.¹⁵ Griffin refers to a position that offers a “privileged claim to truth” before highlighting how academics can never completely overcome the voyeuristic elements of research, nor the power imbalances between researcher and researched (1993, p.2). As Hebdige suggests, even the use of “culture” within these contexts can be loaded with the word’s typical use perhaps prompting a bias towards the cultivated and intellectual aspects of civilization. However a broader interpretation of culture, as defined by Williams (1965), additionally asserts the importance of “ordinary behaviour” as much as the values in art and learning (Williams, quoted in Hebdige, 1979, p.6).

This point has been highlighted here to expressly address a personal dilemma: that my own engagement with the research area has, at times, felt duplicitous. On the one hand, my interests have been similar to those of the research’s participants and firmly located within what would be considered to be ‘ordinary behaviour’. Simultaneously, I adopt a role where that ‘ordinary’ is subject to lengthy analysis. This conflict had similarly been described by journalist John McCready when acknowledging a disparity between the way he viewed and categorized the recorded output of EDM producers and the way these producers perceived their work as a transient and spontaneous form:

I’m always trying to see some meaning in it, and that’s the problem with English people who like dance music... We’re like historians, the way we approach the whole package, doing interviews and placing it in a context.

(McCready in Savage, 1992, p.61)

Further to this, there can be another discrepancy when both the critical readings and academic framing of behaviours and actions have threatened to produce scenarios that – while maybe fascinating to the outsider – are perhaps an unrecognisable portrayal for the study’s participants. The ‘Researcher’s Gaze’ may then have the power to “penetrate the object” and “liberate”, but it could ultimately “destroy it” (Barthes, 1977, p.159). Or as Hebdige says of sociologists, it could lead to a position that threatens “to kill with kindness the forms which we seek to elucidate” (1979, p.139). Yet the real scepticism for these approaches has come from outside of academia with commentators like Brewster and Broughton stating that:

Most writing on dance music hasn't stuck. We keep on reading the same old repeated mistakes, the same well-worn myths, the same poorly researched articles written completely without context. And we're just too thick to deal with all the books that have copied all these together and used them as the basis for a lot of abstract nonsense about postmodern intertextuality and Hegelian Gesundfarbensextenkugelschreiber.

(2000, p.2)

This position is clarified further within Brewster's foreword to the revised edition of Dan Sicko's *Techno Rebels* alongside a more explicit suggestion that scholarly approaches have been a key contributor to a spate of misjudged texts. "Sicko is never afraid to throw in cultural theory when it's relevant," he wrote, "but *Techno Rebels* is, first, a book grounded in hard facts, common sense, and a real storyteller's eye for the truth. In a market saturated with ill-informed cash-ins and overwrought academic theories, *Techno Rebels* is a classic of its kind" (Sicko, 2010, p.viii). Sicko is seemingly applauded by Brewster for his resisting of the intellectualizing of the scene and its output. Yet it may be perceived that this descriptive kind of narrative has failed to meet the demanding requirements of a text that reflects the complexities of EDM culture. For example, Ott and Herman insist that such an undertaking:

...entails a set of complex negotiations surrounding the meanings of artist, authorship, and authenticity. It reflects deeply fought rhetorical/ideological battles around communalism and commercialism, performance and product, and sharing and spectacle. It evokes criticism from youth who feel that the 'true spirit' of raving has been lost and praise from parents who applaud the end of this delinquency. It is, in short, a process that highlights the dynamic tension between resistance and reappropriation, between counterculture and commodification.

(2003, p.250)

Alternatively "don't make a point, make a feeling" (McKay, 1996, p.114) has been cited as the club scene's simple *raison d'être*, and this, in turn, has assisted many commentators to assume that these environments are simply banal, apathetic and apolitical and should be treated as such. Thornton notes how "dance cultures have long been seen to epitomize mass culture at its worst" (Thornton, 1995, p.1) yet this has not prevented a number of academics from exploring its significance through the kind of discursive sets that elevate the subject to extract its meaning. This has then led to assessments where the "functionalist interpretation of dance culture is in thrall to a 'rationalist' imperative, which requires the postulation of a

function or purpose beyond the zone of immediate bodily pleasure” (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.16).¹⁶ In turn, it presents an additional dilemma that prompts McKay to consider whether the scene’s “simple activity and pleasure” is only a problem for the “writer/academic needing to make rave fit the orthodoxy of his argument” (1996, p.115). Thornton also questions her own gaze: specifically with regards to the research’s intents and their suitability within the studied environment:

Despite having once been an avid clubber, I was an outsider to the cultures in which I conducted research for several reasons. First and foremost, I was *working* in a cultural space in which everyone else [...] was at their *leisure*. Not only did I have intents and purposes that were alien to the rest of the crowd, but also for the main part I tried to maintain an analytical frame of mind that is truly anathema to the ‘lose yourself’ and ‘let the rhythm take control’ ethos of clubs and raves.

(1995, p.2)

However, texts focussed on sites of consumption may not be considered as entirely relevant to this thesis but I make reference to this literature as I understand that I have observed the area with my own researcher’s gaze: a viewpoint that is (intentionally) neither completely critically distanced nor totally immersed. The position taken is then especially wary of Reynolds’ concerns of acting “like one of those researchers who lives with the tribe, gets too involved, and compromises his objectivity” (Reynolds, 1999, online). I should also note here that my own position is influenced heavily by my own role as a practitioner: as both a music journalist and a graphic designer working within the music industry. This has certainly clarified where my gaze has been directed (hence the use of interviews and the analysis of record sleeves) yet I would argue that, alongside the earlier knowledge that I gained when I identified closely with EDM as a fan, a clubber, a music buyer and even as an assistant in a record shop, my experiences have provided insights from which this work has been built.

1.3 Research Methodology

The previously discussed lack of a single trusted historical account of EDM has informed the research methodology meaning that the contextual analysis undertaken looked for rhetorical connections between texts that may solely be personal testimony. When assessing this given detail in the discussion of EDM, personal accounts are validated within what is positioned as an anti-positivist stance that aims to corroborate what are already a number of hermeneutic

perspectives. Additionally, these viewpoints have been mediated alongside texts that are perceived as having a more authoritative tone. It is with this in mind that the following chapters do not always try to make aspects of EDM culture fit into established schools of thought. Instead a focus can be given to the individual philosophies of participants and consulted texts. The thesis then eschews what Rietveld describes as “imposing a theoretical ‘strait jacket’ upon an object of study” (1998, p.5) while also observing Gelman’s dissatisfaction with the constraints involved in adhering to specific doctrines where an ‘ism’ – as in modernism, postmodernism, functionalism, expressionism or rationalism – can fall short in explaining processes (2000, p.16). While Rietveld’s subsequent theoretical ‘tool-kit’ is enticing, the following chapters take a related approach that is explicitly linked to how many key EDM recordings have been constructed. Subsequently the approach may result in a narrative that is assembled, in part, through the direct quotation of existing texts. It may, on occasion, involve the decontextualisation and reworking of ideas from other works. But these paraphrased (or sampled) fragments, notably sit alongside original elements with this composition – in its totality – representing a new, original work.

The research journey for this work may even represent a series of remixes with the ‘original’ initially proposed as research into the varied visual codes contained within EDM record sleeves. Within the rudimentary stags of the work, it became apparent that references to anonymity would repeatedly surface in literature without substantial consideration of this as a concept that influences image in EDM: thus highlighting an original area beyond graphic design that encompassed broader areas of cultural production. The further investigation of this theme within interviews also changed my position to the research with participants expanding on the detail within the existing literature to highlight emergent practices and new lines of enquiry that offered alternative approaches to EDM authorship alongside their identification of codes believed to be established, if not institutionalised, presentations of image. At this stage, it also became noticeable how a large amount of research into EDM from a sociological perspective was not addressing its visual materials while, at the same time, a substantial amount of publications that *were* considering visual ephemera within a graphic design setting were reluctant to engage with a wider cultural context. Again, this presented an opportunity to reconfigure the research proposal to situate it within an area of cross-disciplinary image building: an area that, especially within EDM, has been under-explored.

The completed investigation now traverses these areas: representing qualitative research that makes use of a mixed methods strategy in order to gain an overarching view of a complex subject. While the methodology can be broken down to illustrate the respective strategies and

its prescribed relationship to the data, it can additionally be divided into two sections: synchronous and asynchronous methods for data collection. The former took the shape of the aforementioned interviews conducted with participants that initially came from a sample of existing professional contacts (largely courtesy of my role as a music journalist although some I had engaged with through my role as a graphic designer). This information-oriented sample was expanded through additional interviewees that came via snowball sampling. The final sample then represents a selection of producers, designers, DJs, journalists and label staff that were recruited due to their professional output having negotiated some diverse concepts of ‘anonymity’ within electronic dance music. The justification for some participants being selected for interview was due to their points of view having not been put forward on the topic previously – despite their proximity to the subject. Subsequently a journalist such as Lisa Blanning was contacted to discuss not only the interviews that she has conducted with some of these ‘anonymous’ producers, but also the dialogues that preceded the interview process. Conor Thomas of online music retailer Boomkat (and “curator” of, record label, The Death of Rave) was recruited due to being seen as instrumental in the mediation and distribution of texts by these producers yet had not discussed his role at length prior to participating in this research. Staff from the Hyperdub, Ramp and Planet Mu labels were also seen as instrumental within the releasing of music by producers that have been notable for their use of anonymity so were asked to specifically comment on the relationship between producer and label and, as already touched upon, the expectations of independent labels regarding a producer’s visibility with regards to the promotion of music. Other participants like David Bray and Kate Moross are based in visual production (as designers/illustrators) and, with EDM musicians and labels amongst their clients, they were well placed to comment on the relationships between visual representation and image.

There were no major ethical concerns within the research design although, while a detailed overview of the methodology was submitted to the University of Salford ethics board for approval, it was deemed necessary to offer participants the opportunity to contribute while, themselves, remaining anonymous. Participants were also advised that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point if they so wished. While there are a number of individuals that were approached who rejected the request for interviews, all participants that took part have agreed to be included and for their names to be used in conjunction with their quotes.

Data Collection

The undertaken synchronous interviews were semi-structured (being recorded and transcribed) and carried out either in person or via the use of telecommunications. Denscombe (2007) identifies the semi-structured interview as being especially suited to uncovering the thoughts, feelings and associations particular to the individual and these ‘real-time’ communications may also be assumed to provide more insight due to the researcher’s presence. It may additionally be argued that the face-to-face interview is a richer and more reliable form than the telephone interview, especially given a heightened presence and a supposed capability to allow the researcher to perceive the “sociability, warmth, sensitivity, personality, or closeness in a mediated world” (Lombard and Ditton, 1997, p.124). Furthermore, such interactions may also be suited to specific research situations where behaviour and non-verbal communication would be analysed. However, in this case, it was prudent to offer interviewees a number of options regarding their preferred means of communication. Rather than assuming an academic hierarchy of effective interview situations based on the researcher’s presence within the interviewee’s environment, it was essential to allow participants that perhaps identified themselves as on the fringes of popular culture the option to remain where they felt most comfortable. This devalued what would be the privately-expressed mannerisms or the subtle conversational ticks of the interviewee to, instead, concentrate on what were personal definitions of the projected self-image and discussed work. The emphasis was placed solely on what the participant would state in response to the questions and, as such, this could take place in the participant’s preferred environment. Arguably, this ‘ease’ may have even prompted more candour from the interviewees¹⁷. The recognition of e-Research as part of a trusted methodology additionally allowed for a number of other approaches to be considered by the researcher. The e-Research options that were identified as available for use included (but were not limited to) distribution and retrieval of surveys, email interviews, computer-networked video and audio conferencing, analysis of behaviour within social networks or virtual reality environments, web-based assessments and the measurement of online activities. Within this study - where a large part of the discussed material was in circulation prior to the proliferation of the World Wide Web - online activity as *subject* proved far less interesting than e-Research’s communication-based potential. Subsequently, synchronous electronic communication platforms such as Skype were additionally offered to (and accepted by) participants as suitable interview methods.

However, it was the asynchronous data collection afforded by electronic communication – the “internet as chrono-malleable” (Markham, 2004, p.103) – that has assisted in overcoming a

further issue. The move away from real-time situations offered flexibility in terms of *when* an interview could take place. The email interview allowed the effective crossing of time-zones and followed the observance of a networked global society where such communication was ubiquitous. Effectively this approach collapsed both time and distance within the interview process while, again, communicated with individuals in a way that *they* would feel most comfortable. Perhaps regarded as flawed due to making the researcher even less present within the interview process, the computer screen could be observed as a barrier between researcher and researched but, in this instance (when sourcing information from individuals within a technology-literate sector that had previously demonstrated reluctance to converse in ‘conventional’ ways and who may have had issues surrounding privacy), that barrier was completely necessary. In response to a view of this approach as providing less rich data, it should be noted that the potential advantages of a less intrusive approach – in actually gaining access to participants that had notoriously been resistant to discussing their work in the past – outweighed the disadvantages that, in any case, mainly seemed to concern losing the nuances of face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, it has been argued that regular users of computer-mediated communication have become adept at compensating effectively “for the absence of non-verbal and paralinguistic elements of conversation” (Witmer and Katzman, 1998, p.95). Additionally while using the email interview, the interviewee – particularly those inexperienced in or suspicious of such practices – was given the opportunity to carefully consider their replies to the questions. The asynchronous communication also ensured that any required fact-checking on the interviewee’s part could be completed before presenting confident, definitive answers.

The main issue with the email format, however, is in carrying out a semi-structured interview. Rather than a rigid structured series of questions or the completely unstructured interview that runs the risk of becoming a conversation, an unstructured approach benefits from having its key objectives firmly embedded within the design of the questions while there is still flexibility to divert from an agreed list of enquiries and further explore any ideas that the interviewee may raise. This allows for the uncovering of phenomena that may not have already been considered and can assist with theory building. However, an asynchronous email interview is most likely to involve the sending of a message to the interviewee that lists the various questions on the agenda. By its nature, this *is* structured but, as a potentially unsatisfactory way of collecting substantial qualitative data, it needed to be addressed in order to maintain the flexibility to further explore any surrounding topics in tandem with the other forms of data collection. To improve this discussion, and engage in an actual dialogue with

participants, an approach was devised that would attempt to recreate the unstructured interview's ability to divert from the next question to probe further on a raised subject. For this, the first questions-based email (that usually followed at least one initial conversation requesting the interview and outlining the research's purpose) was solely treated as a starting point. On receipt of the answers to this email, a request was made that a follow-up could be carried out if further clarification was required. In addition to seeking elaboration on particular points, this also facilitated fact-checking on the interviewer's part while it tentatively left the communication channel open for the duration of the research - something that would have been more difficult to arrange through more intrusive or 'present' interviews.

Case studies that explore some of the chapter's key issues within a particular setting and as applicable to a specific example were also used as part of the research methodology. Despite being stereotyped as prone to bias and "a weak sibling among social science methods" (Yin, 2003, p.xiii), case studies have continued to be used extensively within a range of disciplines. Their advantages as a research strategy tend to be in investigating the 'how' and 'why' of a particular phenomenon, although this *explanatory* type is able to be complemented by two further variations: the *exploratory* and the *descriptive* case study (Yin, 2003, p.1). In general, however, each aims to explore the complexities of a case in point (Gray, 2003, p.69) and within this study the case studies built on initial textual analysis to gain a more enriched analytical perspective. The thesis subsequently presents cases that are typical to the discussed themes (cases that may, in turn, be atypical to an industry standard) although these were selected due to a belief that these represent the more interesting examples of performed anonymity. Each sought to situate data from a variety of sources alongside other discussion of the key ideas and, again, assisted with theory building. The strategy has then allowed for the juxtaposition of interview material and external discussion of the thematic topics to construct a chain of evidence and build a more complete picture. Particularly important in cases where the boundaries between context and phenomenon were not always clearly evident, the case study helped to coordinate a holistic approach. This addressed multiple accounts that explained the dialogues and operations within the organisations and agents involved in the production of the discussed work alongside documentation of its eventual reception amongst consumers and the media; including the strategies involved in building identities that retain the mystique that has surrounded anonymity.

Other researchers have produced work that analyses the compositional elements of EDM. In chapter 2 there is some consideration of how the music has been constructed but this is offered to help demonstrate how it differs from other forms of popular music. It assists in locating characteristics within the music and the reception of EDM that can then be observed as factors that impact on its performance, visual incarnations and representation of the producer/composer. However, the textual analysis in this thesis - with its emphasis on sites of production and identity construction - then looked beyond compositional elements to recognise the record as a primary artefact: an output made up of music, images and text that culminates in products that can suggest artistic intentions through their totality. Argued as a medium that “engenders a semiotic configuration and an aesthetic experience that is not reducible to music alone” (Grønstad and Vågnes, 2010, p.11), this physical ephemera is argued as having become intrinsically linked with and having expanded upon aural statements. Despite this, it has been noted that there has been little rigorous critique when quantified as a composite medium. Indeed, while popular music’s reverence continues to grow in academia, its visual counterpart has been more often detached and relegated to coffee table book imagery. Furthermore, it is argued that no academic discipline has truly “staked a territorial claim” on this area (ibid.). The reason for this may be due to the cross-disciplinary nature of the medium and, in response to this, one further objective is to address this shortfall with the help of experience gained from a personal interdisciplinary background. Related to this interdisciplinary interest, the thesis looks to analyse visual material alongside existing literature and new interview content in order to expand on its context and aid its reading rather than using the kind of approach that would exclusively conduct semiotic analysis on the imagery alone. It also does this while considering a long history of image projection within sleeve design that continues to exercise influence regarding representation, image and performed identity.

It had already been observed that even by the mid-1950s “the notion of a record cover as more than a ‘protective overcoat’ was well advanced” (House and Shaughnessy, 1999, p.9) and had already demonstrated “the creation of modern myths of popular culture... the intersection of youth, beauty, and self-destruction” (De Ville, 2003, p.8). The cultural significance of the music release has then become defined by this incarnation as a multi-media product. As a *designed* object, it can additionally be aligned to Derrida’s deconstruction: where representation inhabits reality. And it’s here, while interrogating the philosophical stance of the designer, that Lupton and Miller recount Derrida in asking exactly how that external

image gets inside an “internal essence” (Lupton and Miller, 1999, p.3). Grønstad and Vågnes assert that the creation of what are metonyms is truly representative of Genette’s “paratext”: the construction of “a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction” (Genette, 1997, cited in Grønstad and Vågnes, 2010, p.10). So, while still external to the musical text as composition, artwork is argued as playing an important part in the music release as a communicative device: becoming firmly embedded within and also reshaping that text. As House and Shaughnessy note, this process has also succeeded in altering responses to that originally intended music statement:

Record covers have been fetishized and adopted as tribal and sub-cultural emblems. Unlike nearly all other forms of packaging, they are not thrown away. Instead, they are kept, often treasured and venerated. And since sleeves can affect our response to music, our appreciation amplified by the degree to which we can engage with the cover, the argument that we keep record covers merely to ‘protect’ discs (vinyl particularly) is of no consequence to the serious music lover

(2000, p.5)

However, the visual aspects – as part of that interest in the physical music release and its role in the dispersal of ‘anonymous’ products – are considered alongside the narratives that accompany their wider dissemination. These include interviews, music videos and press photos. Again, the focus represents a personal interest and is, in fact, grounded in my own extensive experiences working within EDM-based journalism and design for the music industry. Similarly, a dismissal of the definitions of ‘subculture’ is additionally influenced, in part, by a further personal perspective. Having utilised a number of pseudonyms (primarily employed to offer the freedom and flexibility to operate within a number of disciplines including journalism and graphic design), I argue that my work as a practitioner has already questioned some of the established models used to differentiate between underground and mainstream.⁷

1.4 The Organisation of the Thesis

To comprehend the nature of performed identity within EDM it is necessary to compare it with alternative approaches within other styles of music. Under examination it becomes clear that technological representations are far more widespread within EDM than in more established forms like rock music and it is initially argued that some influential visual manifestations are related to production methods based around definitive electronic audio technologies. The repercussions of this reliance on technology (in both the generation of

music and in the provision of a visual aesthetic) are subsequently the focal point of chapter 2. While Gilbert and Pearson express concerns regarding the way that the discussion of technology often implies a predisposition towards new or “high” technology (1999, p.110), the chapter draws attention to a fascination with misuse and mistakes that, while barely promoted as a characteristic of progressive technological production, have been integral to EDM’s development.

Chapter 3 scrutinizes the role of anonymous practices and identity within the framework of the collective system or ‘scene’. It contemplates a historic use of genre as a replacement for the individual author and addresses how this has been compounded through means of dissemination that have been commonplace within EDM (particularly the DJ set and the genre-oriented record label). As such, it acknowledges generic codes that have been used to present group identities and subsequently debates the implications and influence of this communal approach within the marketplace. Further to this, it details and discusses examples where this rejection of individuality has been manipulated to capitalise on what have been routinely assessed as ‘underground’ ideals.

An expansion of ideas surrounding representation that is primarily concerned with reinvention informs chapter 4. It addresses a *literal* employment of facelessness within EDM as a ritualistic process that, for some producers, can be perceived as an essential element in performative metamorphosis. It additionally considers the role of the mask and other so-called ‘primitive’ disguises alongside music texts that are machine automated, thus altering potential readings of the producer’s identity through a suggestion of exotic and ancestral ‘roots’. Within the subchapter, the concept of roots and lineage is further examined in relationship to geographically-linked mythologies within EDM. Prior to the chapter’s case study that reports how these various theoretical strands have converged to assemble the complex identity of, EDM producer, SBTRKT. Before this, there is also a focus on the prolific use, and potential benefits, of pseudonyms within EDM.

Finally, chapter 5 summarises the findings of the research and communicates the conclusions. It reviews the research and considers the contribution to knowledge before evaluating the research methodology. The thesis closes by documenting the over all conclusions drawn from the research before making recommendations for further research.

Notes

¹ The use of 'text' is employed throughout this thesis in place of 'song' (due to that fact that not all pieces of EDM music are actually song-based) or 'track' (because 'track' has become understood on EDM scenes as having specific connotations with largely instrumental club-oriented compositions). Text is also used with regards to other produced materials including visual materials. Importantly, 'text' is also an alternative to 'work' in the Barthesian sense where the former is open to interpretation or multiple readings while 'work' is more limited or assured in terms of its meaning. As will become apparent throughout this thesis, EDM compositions are open to interpretations (dependent on placement, varying understandings of quotation via sampling, etc.) and are therefore argued as befitting this use of 'text'. Furthermore, 'text' is used to suggest a single unit that can be read in this way. As such, it is utilised to describe single compositions but can also be used to describe a DJ set that – as explored in chapter 3 – can be observed as single 'text' despite it being constructed from multiple compositions.

² For historical and sociological accounts of dance music cultures see Collin (1997a), Garratt (1998), Rietveld (1998), Reynolds (1998), Sicko (2010) and Brewster and Broughton (2000). McKay (1996; 1998) alternatively questions developments as radical or resistant while Redhead (1999) looks at dance music scenes as representations of modern youth culture. Gilbert and Pearson use critical theory to quantify the scene's effects within *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (1999).

³ Acid house is both a form of music typified by the use of the Roland TB-303 (as discussed in chapter 2) and a term connected to the development of the late-1980s UK club scene. Unless it is cited within the discussion of specific records, its use is indicative of the development of EDM culture that followed the emergence of house music (that had gained popularity from the mid-1980s) through the influx of the drug Ecstasy (MDMA) into the club scene.

⁴ The defining of EDM as of US origin is intrinsically linked to Chicago where 'house music' was developed from the mid-1980s. The cities of Detroit and New York have also been integral to its modification and growth. However, largely due to the circumstances surrounding its appropriation in conjunction with MDMA, it has been developed significantly after being imported by both the UK and the Spanish island of Ibiza in the later 1980s. Accounts of this development and the role of Ibiza (particularly as experienced in 1987 by instrumental scene figures Paul Oakenfold, Danny Rampling, Nicky Holloway and Johnny Walker) has been well documented as the birth of 'acid house' or 'rave' (Collin, 1997a; Bussman, 1998; Brewster and Broughton, 2000; Phillips, 2009). The British experience of EDM is also tied to its wider dissemination within its borders and is distinct from other territories when linked with the economic and political climate of late 1980s and 1990s Britain (Redhead 1999; McKay, 1996).

⁵ I've personally resisted using EDMC as, while still indicative of what is a consistently shifting research territory, a large amount of the innovative work being carried out under this term appears to be organized around sites of consumption. On Dancecult, for example, there is a significant amount of fieldwork that culminates in studies of club and festival spaces. (Although there are some very notable exceptions here including, for example, work by Mark Fisher.) I then perceive EDMC work as weighted towards 'the dancefloor' that may, in turn, be (mistakenly) understood as being representative of the 'culture' within EDMC. By opting for EDM, I feel that – whilst incorporating the culture that surrounds the music production – I can concentrate on EDM as recording, commodity and producer network.

⁶ Despite my argument that EDM avoids misappropriation as a catch-all term, I'm aware that it has recently become a buzzword in the U.S. media to describe a generation of dance-oriented productions that are identified as having crossover appeal. Currently afforded 'Next Big Thing' status in some quarters, EDM's sudden, more widespread popularity in the U.S. appears to be prompted by rap, R&B and pop performers incorporating elements of uptempo 4/4 club music into their tracks and, similarly, these kinds of performers featuring (or 'guesting') on hit records by European producers such as Calvin Harris, Avicii and David Guetta. Also prominent within this sudden U.S. interest in an (albeit media-redefined) 'EDM' has been its high profile inauguration within the club spaces of Las Vegas and the emergence of a new wave of North American producers that would include Deadmau5 and Skrillex.

⁷ In chapter 2 The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 will be discussed further to highlight its employment of specific terminology that is especially relevant to the way that EDM is produced.

⁸ While the use of subculture in relationship to working class resistance may have appeared in discussions of EDM, issues of class are notably not as dominant within the surrounding culture as they have been within other groups or movements that have similarly been defined as 'subcultural'. One of the interesting aspects of EDM – specifically within its social spaces – is how actors represent a number of different backgrounds. So in defining EDM as subculture and clarifying 'subcultural capital' (1995), it might seem peculiar that Thornton would draw heavily from Bourdieu's noted critique of Kant. At first glance, the paraphrasing of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1979) could be suspected as likeminded in its approach to elitism and take a similar stance regarding the role of education and upbringing in defining taste. This could be especially problematic given club culture being fabled for its ability to break down class distinctions. However, Thornton's interest was piqued by Bourdieu's ability to present his argument within a structure that additionally incorporates an axis based around social capital: adding an element stemming from "not so much *what* you know as *who* you know" (Thornton, 1995, p.10).

⁹ London club night A.W.O.L. took an acronym more usually associated with the U.S. military's description of a recruit's unpermitted abandonment of their post but insisted that it stood for 'a way of life'. This was circulated on flyers (printed advertising handbills) as part of its branding to conversely suggest a serious, unwavering commitment. In this case, it was a commitment to its sound: 'jungle' - a genre that was a precursor to drum & bass. Other club nights and production projects have similarly pushed a message of 'hardcore' membership that is distanced from casual escapism. Reynolds also alludes to EDM cultures as constituting 'a way of life' (1997, pp.110) although Gilbert and Pearson argue that this appraisal may be "an act of overburdening on a massive scale" (1999, p.22).

¹⁰ This concept of 'scene' is particularly relevant to chapter 3's further discussion of collective identity.

¹¹ As an example, and despite the suggestion that it might have been a "wild estimate" when the British dance music scene was assessed by financial analysts as worth £1.8 billion a year in 1993 (Collin, 1997a, p.267), 2008's high profile 10th anniversary of the EDM-oriented Creamfields festival event attracted an audience of 65,000 (anon. #2, 2008, online).

¹² Negus alternatively describes these distinctions as "determinism" and "romanticism" while acknowledging accounts that stress "notions of human creativity" on one side while, on the other, "ownership and control" (2004, p.24).

¹³ Highly representative of the redevelopment of tracks into radio-friendly songs would be Spiller's 'Groovejet', a track that was initially released by Italian DJ and producer Cristiano Spiller as part of his 1999 'Mighty Miami EP'. The initially vinyl-only release emerged on Italy's Dream Beat a label run by Joe T. Vanelli: a fellow DJ/producer who had ably distanced himself from the Italo 'scream-up' sounds of his home country by releasing U.S. influenced house music that was licensed to New York club-oriented labels like Nervous and Subliminal. After global club play, 'Groovejet' was scheduled for release on U.K. label Positiva – a dance subsidiary of, major label, EMI. Its full 2000 release uses Spiller's original disco-sampling instrumental as its basis but has the addition of a vocal co-written by, singer, Sophie Ellis-Bextor and songwriter Rob Davis (who was previously known as the guitarist in glam rock band Mud while also notable for co-writing Kylie Minogue's electro-pop hit, 'Can't Get You Out of My Head'). The title of the track was also extended to become 'Groovejet (If This Ain't Love)' to recount its new lyrical refrain. After becoming a number one single in a number of countries, this version of 'Groovejet' provided a springboard for vocalist Ellis-Bextor who had first gained some attention through, her previous indie-pop act, The Audience. Ellis-Bextor's subsequent material followed a vocal pop-dance direction that appeared to build on the exposure that came via the success of the single. Christiano Spiller, by comparison, appeared to return to his relatively anonymous roots despite being responsible for a record that had sold more than two million copies. His Positiva follow-up, 'Cry Baby', only achieved enough sales to be listed in the lower part of the U.K. Top 40 singles chart and, in 2003, the producer began to release material through, his own independent label, Nano. Further releases appeared to be indifferent to mainstream success but Spiller managed to achieve further recognition and respect on the club scene. What the repercussions of 'Groovejet (If This Ain't Love)' suggested is that, for producers, the nature of these singles can be viewed as 'one-off'. They can, however, be perceived as more indicative of the featured artist's catalogue due to the preconceptions that link 'the voice' to authorship. The track subsequently appears on the 2002 re-issue of Ellis-Bextor's *Read My Lips* album.

¹⁴ Major labels have been able to invest more money in the promotion of their rosters and will assign sizeable budgets to try and attain a high return from their investments. The model is high risk – something that, in turn, may influence a requirement for an already 'market proven' or 'safer' investment – but it can be highly profitable. Audience exposure comes from clearly established channels of dissemination within mainstream media that, through marketing departments, can result in a fairly uniform, highly visible promotional strategy. Independent labels are instead characterised by more limited expenditure and arguably riskier signings. Although, as discussed, collaboration with other, larger labels – particularly through licensing – is a way of furthering a musician's commercial or 'cross over' success for independent labels and benefits from more established distribution networks and increased financial support.

¹⁵ In the summer of 2012, I produced artwork for a release that was assumed to be a one-off independent dance record with limited opportunities for crossover. It then gained initial exposure when used in a drinks commercial, attained radio support and subsequently became both a UK number 1 single and international hit following its licensing by a subsidiary of the Warner Music Group. Throughout this process, there were no significant alterations made to the release's musical or visual aesthetic: assuring its transition as one based purely on its popularity. Currently it appears to occupy a place in recent pop history as a novelty - with its producers seemingly assigned the dubious profession of 'one hit wonders'.

¹⁶ Building further on this, Gilbert and Pearson stress how this quest to academically contextualize “decontextualised pleasure” (McKay, 1996, p.114) may have implications regarding the aspects of club culture that are discussed in this arena. The act of dance, for example – especially as an element that is largely unrecorded – is often disregarded or marginalised in favour of the more easily documented/recorded aspects of EDM’s scenes such as music recordings (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.16).

2. Machinic Reproduction: Technology and Self

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the questioning of EDM and its representations of authorship can prompt discussion of a relationship to preconceived ideas of ‘the underground’ and an associated emphasis on the music rather than its composer. These ideas will resurface for further analysis throughout this thesis, yet a key characteristic of the underground – that is consistently recounted throughout the subsequent chapters – is the perception of a culture that is somehow marginalised. In questioning how this particularly applies to EDM, this chapter specifically examines how an association with technological production can lead to the recognition of EDM as a marginalised form of music. In conjunction with this, the role of technology can be attributed as a factor in depictions of the composer as marginalised figure: something that will contrast sharply with more conventional approaches that are prevalent in other forms of popular music. Then considering EDM’s alignment with specific technologies, this second chapter subsequently explores the authorial consequences within music that is produced in ways that may be viewed as ‘non-traditional’. The focus here is on the reliance on and a definition by musical technologies and how these, in turn, have altered perceptions of the composer; especially through the automated generation of musical elements and the subsequent depiction of the automated.

Technology has intrinsically been linked to music throughout history so it would be naïve to assume that it is just within recent developments that a connection between technological advancement and musical change has been evident. Style and genre shifts have long been triggered by technological breakthrough: whether via manufacturing capabilities facilitating the invention and evolution of musical instruments; the ability to capture the output of musicians as recordings; or the further modification or manipulation of recorded material. Durant underlines this wide and ubiquitous employment of technologies when stating that:

Virtually all forms of music-making are dependent upon some kind of deliberately designed and specialised equipment or technology [...] The history of musical instruments is always, in this sense, a history of technology.

(Durant, 1994, p.178)

Consequently musical creativity is “inextricably bound to developments in audio technology and the working practices that ensue” (Warner, 2003, p.xi). As such, precision is required in order to determine what is meant by ‘technology’ with reference to EDM. For example, producer Trevor Horn’s response to a question concerning technology’s influence on his own electronic pop compositions highlights the potential ambiguity in a discussion without clear parameters. Countering Timothy Warner’s query regarding the extent that Horn’s output has been defined by the technology involved in its creation, he asserts how this is a “wide question” and illustrates his point by observing how “technology has affected the music since people built cathedrals” (Warner, 2003, p.143). In fact Horn could have picked an earlier era to illustrate his idea given how it is clear that music’s development can be observed as a sequence in tandem with the aforementioned ‘history of technology’.

So to define EDM’s technologies is to first locate a later point in the history of music: not just after cathedrals, but following Edison’s development of the phonograph and the creation of electromechanical instruments. As part of a continuum, it may be difficult to identify the exact starting point for the audio that would come to shape EDM since each development will have a forbear and, as Mackenzie and Wajcman observe, “the history of technology is a path-dependent history, one in which past events exercise continuing influences” (1999, p.19). Therefore – as with the socio-cultural aspects of EDM discussed in the introductory chapter – the description of a clear technological chronology is argued as being too extensive to include here. If that *is* required, Shapiro’s *Modulations: A History of Electronic Music – Throbbing Words on Sound* (2000) provides a comprehensive guide alongside a glossary of relevant genres with particular attention paid to The Futurists, the Dynamophone, Varèse, Theremin, Electroacoustic Echo machines, Musique Concrète and Schaeffer, Stockhausen’s experiments of the 1950s, the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in the 1960s, the Mellotron, the Moog and Moroder through to Roland’s TR-77, its 909, 808 and 303 plus digital synthesis and ‘time stretch’. All of these developments contribute to a lineage of which EDM is a part, yet each boasts its own elaborate and potentially tangential history. So to retain focus, broader examples of technologies within this chapter are used solely when they are relevant to the discussed contemporary work/issues of authorship while the technologies that *are* wholly intrinsic to EDM are defined as both analogue and digital music-generating machines from the latter half of the 20th Century (mainly synthesisers, sequencers, drum machines, samplers and computers).

The ‘Machinic’ - as cited in the chapter’s title - is indicative of Deleuze and Guattari’s premise of unholy alliances formed between human and non-human (1988, p.241). These can

take a variety of forms including, but not limited to, extensions or hybrids that incorporate animal or plant life. In the case of this thesis, the machinic is specifically addressing the use of technologies in defining affiliations between man and machine to culminate in entities that, in turn, can embody an expanded range of capabilities. The cyborg, robot or android is especially relevant to this discussion and this chapter therefore includes two case studies that consider the deployment of the cyborg as representational form. The first of these centres upon German electronic band Kraftwerk that, while predating EDM, have a reputation as both pioneers of and a continued influence on modern electronic music alongside a similarly influential reluctance to utilise typical ‘pop star’ imagery. Kraftwerk’s approach to both music-making and image is then pertinent to the discussion of relationships between man and machine and links to a further section that broadens the discussion beyond this example to address a connection to, a later production unit located within EDM, Daft Punk. These two case studies are then also indicative of alternate methods of production – particularly with reference to the respective producer’s use of the synthesiser and the sampler. In both cases, it is clear that these technologies have contributed to a corruption of the classic/romantic image of the composer.

Prior to this, the ground is prepared with an examination of machinic alliances that queries the technological distinctions between EDM and other forms of music: specifically in their relationship to what are commonly observed as ‘rock’ attributes and values. It will look not only at the characteristics of the music itself but the way in which these aspects have informed ideas regarding how EDM’s composer and culture is subsequently represented.

2.2 Music Made by Machines

The first beat brings to your ear the weariness of something heard before and makes you anticipate the boredom of the beat that follows. So let us drink in, from beat to beat, these few qualities of obvious tedium, always waiting for that extraordinary sensation that never comes.

(Luigi Russolo, 1986, p.25)

We don’t want the song, the melody, the voice... instead, the rhythm, the groove, the functionality.

(Mark Ernestus of Basic Channel in Walmsley, 2010, p.35)

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 has been identified as a unique example of legislation that attempted to define and, in turn, marginalise a specific style of popular music (Brown, 1997, p.99). Section 63 of the act, 'Powers in relationship to raves', described "music" as including "sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats" (Anon #3, 1994, online). In doing so, it noted musics integral to social gatherings that were identified by the British Government as requiring more intensive policing but, through its use of 'repetitive', also highlighted an approach to music production that is connected to specific music technologies. However Rietveld observes that The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act's definition of 'repetitive beats' was problematic: in that it could be understood as similarly relating to Ravel's *Bolero* (1998, p.60).¹ Still, in its identification of the 'beat' as "wholly or predominantly" characterising its sounds, the terminology is intrinsically linked with EDM styles.

References to 'the beat' in EDM can relate to a single percussive component - "a basic unit of temporal measurement" (Hawkins, 2003, p.87) - yet it is also used as a colloquial term for a succession of beats or rhythmic arrangement. These occur in "all types of intervals and permutations [...] with their predictability expressing a principal aesthetic" (ibid.). The most easily identifiable within EDM is the four-in-the-bar arrangement that, with an accent on the kick drum, is closely associated with genres such as techno and house music.² Gilbert and Pearson observe the subsequent popularity of EDM scenes for this predictability or "rhythmic repetition" (1999, p.73) while also noting how "these musics emphasize their particular status as musics to dance to" (1999, p.38). As such, these patterns can also be found in 1970s disco, yet EDM's stripped-back version - with the foregrounding of percussive elements rather than melodic arrangements - are observed as being "located within similar processes of inflection, repetition and development that are intrinsic to African music" (Hawkins in Moore, 2003, p.86). EDM has subsequently been described as a "kind of music that doesn't really have much to do with the West anymore" (Eshun in Shapiro, 2000, p.71) with the beat then "all important in a way never before seen in Western music" (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.38).³ This view regarding a non-Western status could be further debated but, despite compositions employing aspects that may be seen as non-Western, claims of this kind can be counterbalanced when noting a timbral quality within EDM that *would* be closely associated with the West. Furthermore, the pure synchronization of EDM's repetitive beats is clearly distinguished from the more spontaneous arrangements that would more likely be linked to many of the observed African aesthetics.

There are still disparities between EDM and other forms of Western popular music though, and a more compelling case for ‘difference’ may be made when *not* locating the music within an anthropologically oriented ethnomusicological context. Looking less for geographically rooted cultural differences, the role of audio technologies can be argued as generating attributes that still do not conform to values that inform critical appraisals within Western music. Gilbert and Pearson do explore this: with their subsequent discussion of criteria being extensive enough to derive widespread perceptions of musical value as emanating from Western (often European) classical and folk music traditions. Yet it is rock music-based discourses that are identified as particularly relevant in their determining of criteria that have subsequently been used prolifically to judge a broad range of popular music styles; and it is rock-oriented criticism that has viewed EDM genres unfavourably. This has led to observations that rock music is “in opposition to dance forms” (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.61) and, as a dominant music style, rock music’s opposition may then contribute to EDM’s identification as marginalised.

To illustrate the key areas where this opposition and potential marginalisation occurs, I have considered the main characteristics that have historically been prized within rock discourses. These are subsequently discussed under five broad but noticeably overlapping headings. Each of these may be useful in describing some key differences in assumedly ‘typical’ examples of both rock and EDM music, but it should be noted that these are not absolute. As is described, each comes with limitations in their ability to be applied to some notable examples. Nevertheless, the following are presented to help to describe EDM’s assumed shortcomings within a rock-subscribed Western value system:

- The Poetic
 - The Narrative-Oriented
 - The Authentic
 - The Virtuoso
 - The Individualistic
-

EDM, as *dance music*, is explicit in its clear functionality. In maintaining this dancefloor pragmatism, Gilbert and Pearson argue that it can be configured as simply *of itself*: a physical phenomenon that has culminated in artefacts that have “no purpose other than to be used” (1999, pp.78-79). Yet, as they discuss, this utilitarian quality subsequently struggles against a Western value placed on compositions that display poetic ambitions: i.e. those works that look to uncover meaning that is beyond the merely physical (1999, p.3). Subsequently Gilbert and Pearson identify “a culturally-inherited insistence that *value* inheres in attributable *meaning*” and observe how this “collides desperately” with EDM’s resistance to and negating of familiar modes which communicate ideas of value or meaning through a distancing from the metaphysical (ibid.). However, that sheer physicality (alongside its corporeal status as “a source for physical pleasure”) is further highlighted as problematic (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.42). They describe the main issue here as one based around music’s capacity to “affect us in ways which seem to bypass the acceptable channels of language, reason and contemplation” (ibid.). This, they say, leads to the denigration of aspects such as rhythm and repetition in the West due to their associations with physicality - in the exact same way that bodily pleasures are similarly denigrated (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.60). Therefore, it assists in creating a divide between “meaning and melody on the one hand, rhythm and materiality on the other” (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.71): a characteristic that is compounded by Rousseau’s valorisation of melody as equating to *meaning* rather than *sound* (cited in Le Huray and Day, 1988, p.98). It is then argued that, to conform to criteria essential to Western value systems, a composition should “offer itself up as an object of intellectual contemplation” to enable its consideration as a conveyor of feeling and, therefore, be seen as meaningful (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.42). Yet in doing so, a composition is required to avoid the foregrounding of carnal rhythmic elements and maintain emphasis on the melodic.

Not that *all* rock music-based forms are ever conscripted to this view, of course. Post-punk, grindcore and other styles of rock music have similarly foregrounded rhythmic elements and shifted away from typical melodic/harmonic arrangements. At the same time there is a suggestion that repetition need not be akin to an absolute rejection of metaphysics. Highly contrary is the use of repetitive texts in creating transcendental states: arguably deriving meaning from a composition that “pares vocal and melody to a minimum – substituting a mesmeric, repetitive beat as the central element” (Roberts cited in Russell, 1999, p.124). Although the discussion of texts used for this purpose can once again be prone to straying into ethnomusicological territory: then further aligning EDM genres with non-Western musics.

A distinction that exists between melody and rhythm within the Western value system is also evident in copyright law. Reynolds questions why Western society offers little recognition of rhythmic arrangements as intellectual property and questions the crediting of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards as the creative force behind ‘Satisfaction’. He argues that it is, in fact, Charlie Watts’s drums that provide the record’s “killer hook” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.466) and subsequently demonstrates the lack of value placed on rhythm within one of the most prevalent commodities in Western music: the song.⁴

However the song is a traditional composition within Western music that places its emphasis not only on melody, but also on lyrics. Further demonstrating a divide between EDM and other popular music texts of the West is the former’s favouring of instrumental works. As such, it “isn’t based on lyrics” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.xxix) and subsequently “is not based on songs” (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.38).⁵ As a result, EDM tends to lack the romantic themes that have become intrinsic to Western music that have traditionally impacted on the listener’s ability to derive explicit meaning. Instead there is a focus on rhythm, timbre, texture and space; “precisely those elements that rock criticism ignores in favour of meaning, which is extracted almost exclusively from the close study of lyrics” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.464). Then, as a “barrage of intensities without pretext or context” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.xxix), EDM compositions largely feature “no concession to classical demands for narrative meaning” (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.73).

However, in the same way that examples can be found of EDM records that *are* based around song structures, other forms of popular music have also departed from these types of compositions. Post-rock bands, for example, have explored the instrumental ‘soundscape’ while krautrock groups similarly experimented with alternative compositions that have prioritized instrumentation and other technologies over the human voice. When there have been vocals, they have often been subject to a type of manipulation that has also been associated with EDM genres where the voice’s “function is usually phonetic or aesthetic rather than semiotic”; where it becomes “just another instrument rather than a means of conveying a verbal message” (Smith, 2004, p.734). Consequently the resulting texts are subject to particular authorial perceptions. The avoidance of intelligible lyrics by an identifiable orator has the potential to destabilize the romantic notion of the composer/author due to an absence of the songwriter’s narrative.

Contrastingly, songs are often used alongside aspects of the performer's persona (an interview-mediated back story, for example) in order to construct an image of lived experience and present a biographical narrative. Vocalists are most often the focal figure for these logocentric texts although, as Barker and Taylor state, a common problem with these supposed works of seemingly candid self-expression is that, while presented as personal testimony, they *are* distortions: an image that is a fusion of the performer as they are and the person they want to be seen to be (2007, p.186). And even when the writer/composer of the work is *not* the performer/focal point, the song is often presented as an honest autobiographical work: "a talisman of their personal authenticity... to boast of how 'real' they are" (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.105).

Further to this, non-logocentric music texts – as in 'the instrumental' – will still often boast a compositional narrative and therefore be observed as intrinsically teleological. However EDM texts – with their short repetitive units – most often lack the musical dialectic that will be both present and celebrated within other types of composition. Subsequently EDM compositions tend to present no internal melodic conflicts that will require resolution and, while this mantra-like characteristic may be suitable for inducing trance-like states, they are notable for their abandonment of a final goal or an inevitable conclusion. As musician Chilly Gonzales says when reflecting on the construction of 'Digital Love', a track by Daft Punk: this use of unresolved harmonies "begs an answer that never comes" (The Creators Project, 2013c, online). This distinct lack of dialectic – the eschewing of a discursive sense of opposition, tension, progression and fulfilment via that eventual solution – will, in turn, be found exaggerated and yet exemplified in the 'locked grooves' of producer Jeff Mills. Rather than the typical spiral groove of a vinyl record that plays from the outer edge to the 'run-out', Mills designed a number of short music loops that, within a closed circular groove, would play for an infinite amount of time. As will be discussed in chapter 3, the lack of a definite end within these eternal loops is also highly indicative of the role of EDM texts within the DJ set: a positioning that will additionally impact on the observance of individual EDM texts as offering any authorial narrative.

The Authentic

In unpicking how 'pop' is distinguished from 'rock', Warner inadvertently highlights a basis for further tensions between the established Western music measurement of value and EDM (Warner, 2003, p. 4). Visible in fig.2, his model can be used to frame EDM as a 'hyperpop'

form due to the characteristics of pop music being similarly prevalent - although in an even more exaggerated format. EDM's 'triviality', for example, is a trait that can perhaps be too easily defined negatively via the absence of poetic meaning that was previously discussed. Similarly, there's an increased emphasis on technology within its genres that is often so acute that machinery can be addressed as content - especially in conjunction with the absence of both narrative and visible performer – to assist with criticisms of its intrinsic artificiality. As Frith states, technology is considered “somehow false or falsifying” – that it is ‘unnatural’ when compared to more traditional forms of creative production (2007, p.109). In contrast, Warner cites rock's emphasis for the ‘real’ as *authentic* and presents it as a binary opposite of ‘artificial’. However, many modes of authentication for rock music are also evident elsewhere in the right hand column with ‘musicianship’, ‘serious’, ‘lasting’ and ‘albums’ having all been used as evidence to support rock's authenticity whilst simultaneously denigrating other styles. The observed criteria can then be described as devoutly rockist, yet its roots are found in an even more established folk ideology. As Redhead confirms, it is this same folk ideology that came to the fore in rock and pop music discourse in the mid to late 1980s “with a series of arguments over key terms, such as community, authenticity, integrity, roots, and truth” (1990, p.67). These arguments are especially notable within the field of music journalism: an area where rockist values appear to be most vehemently defended.

<i>Pop</i>	<i>Rock</i>
Singles	Albums
Emphasis on recording	Emphasis on performance
Emphasis on technology	Emphasis on musicianship
Artificial	Real ('authentic')
Trivial	Serious
Ephemeral	Lasting
Successive	Progressive

Fig.2 - Warner's table depicting differences between pop and rock

Commonly associated with folk music's priorities as ideological goals and, again, supported within the music press is another of Warner's rockist priorities: the 'emphasis on performance'; more specifically, performance as a display of authenticity within the *live* arena. Live performance has traditionally been less relevant within EDM than other forms of music due to the intervention of modern music technologies having required a predominantly studio-based approach. This, in turn, has led to descriptions of EDM as "intentionally 'artificial' in the sense of [being] obviously synthesized, sequenced and sampled" (Tagg, 1994, online) with that technological intervention meaning that the perceived relationship between live performance and recording has grown "ever more tenuous" (Warner, 2003, p.xiii). However, while Collin suggests that, in its early stages, EDM was "unconcerned with the rock mythologies of authenticity, career development, the musician as Artist and the staples of rock commodification: the live gig and the album" (1997a, p.272), the EDM producer as a live performer (in tandem with the development of the EDM album) has become a commercially viable commodity in more recent years. Steve Beckett, founder of the Warp label, has seen this development as a necessity for his roster to create "a genuine connection with the audience and gives the act longevity, rather than just being perceived as a faceless studio project" (Young, 2005, p.147). This may be seen as EDM's more recent adherence to a rockist agenda due to rock music, and specifically the rock press, having "always struggled with something this faceless, this ephemeral" (Phillips, 2009, p.115). Yet these activities have notably "dispensed with traditional performance as readily as they dispensed with rock's song structure: they replaced choruses with screaming roars of synthesisers, guitar solos with cascades of beats, charismatic singers with visuals and flashing lights" (Phillips, 2009, p.116). Explaining this approach to performance further, Toop recounts another example of EDM presented as a 'live' set:

The machines are playing live and the atmosphere is white hot. Nobody is pretending to replace machine processes with crotch pumping and choreography. There's some knob twiddling, effects processing and track muting, along with a lot of concentration, but the purism of the thing, the idea that music happens in real time as the machines respond to messages stored on data disks, is imperceptible except as an intangible energy – a clarity of sound and purpose.

(1995, pp.53-54)

Toop's citing of "crotch pumping and choreography" may question the more established display of reality by musicians with 'real instruments' then allowing consideration of the fact that "every performance is to some degree 'faked' – nobody goes out on stage and sings about exactly what they did and felt that day" (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.x). This notion is supported by Auslander's consideration of 'liveness' in its suggestion of the authentic: where the stage show has become a highly constructed and mediated spectacle that utilises all the industrialized processes of the studio and pairs it with the televisual; leading to an experience that may be indistinguishable from supposedly 'inauthentic' methods of dissemination such as 'the pop video' (2002, p.7). The consequence is a demonstration of how "authenticity is an absolute, a goal that can never be fully attained, a quest" (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.x), it subsequently allows EDM's live incarnation a paradoxical position of *realness*. It counters rockist criticism regarding artificiality by proudly baring the hallmarks of the synthetic and processed.

The Virtuosoic

From the campaign against 'canned music' in 1930s theatres through to the "Keep Music Live" slogan of The Musicians' Union, it is possible to observe a survivalist imperative behind the distrust of new audio technologies by musicians. However, more recently bound up with rockist quests for authenticity is technologic intervention as anathema due to widespread beliefs that it isn't necessarily a replacement for musicians but, instead, is symbolic of a rejection of musical virtuosity: that its use actually heralds the "erosion of traditional music skills" (Warner, 2003, p.45). The virtuosoic, by comparison, represents the musician with masterly ability, technique and personal style but the definition when applied to the wider arts can add 'learned' to that skill set. By comparison, the use of modern audio technologies within EDM can be addressed as the 'simple pushing of a button': thus no match for the seemingly prized expertise, dexterity and classical underpinning of the trained musician. Notably, such suggestions still remain prevalent in an age where a significant amount of contemporary musics - representational of all styles and traditions - are produced and mediated via state-of-the-art technologies yet with many of these similarly processed genres, unlike EDM, being able to evade the same negation of artistry.

Collin observes how the arrival of EDM "chimed with an exciting, optimistic mood within British pop as it became clear how simple it was to make a record using the new technologies" (1997a, p.59). In turn, Tagg notes that his personal attraction to EDM is that

‘simplicity’. “I don’t have to find a guitarist, drummer and vocalist to make the music,” he explains, “I can do it all at home on my synthesiser and computer” (1994, online). Collin similarly describes the freedom offered by the new machines:

This was do-it-yourself music: anyone could join in and you didn’t need a diva’s vocal cords or a Salsoul orchestra; you could just fire up your box and go. New technology had thrown open the creative process to all.

(Collin, 1997a, p.21)

However, this democratizing aspect was not just based around the ease of the technologies as compositional tools. As the lack of personnel required may indicate, there were also financial benefits. The affordability of readily available equipment presented opportunities outside of the professional studio. Particularly in facilitating the ‘bedroom studio’, the removal of some of the financial and geographical obstacles presented opportunities for the producer to explore the capabilities of their technologies at their leisure. But this has led to production that is far removed from the romantic view of classical composition and musical training - to allow for a process where practice as both a verb and noun will combine. Effectively, the new technologies allowed for EDM to arise from experimentation and anti-virtuosic ‘mistakes’. So while the generating of repetitive beats may enable producers to “set up more-or-less endless repetitions of the same figures which can then be deleted, copied, cut and pasted, transposed, quantized, offset, inverted, retrograded, delayed, inserted or otherwise adjusted” (Tagg, 1994, online), this predetermined rigidity sits alongside a much more haphazard approach. Sequencers and other electronic machines might seem to be “the antithesis of improvisation”, but they do allow “*any* musician to discover and incorporate ‘mistakes’ into otherwise tightly controlled compositions” (Russell, 1999, pp.91-92). Producer, Derrick May has demonstrated this aspect in relationship to his own ‘Strings of Life’ track:

‘Strings of Life’ was a mistake. A friend of mine came over to my home to make a ballad. He had put down a basic piano riff, and maybe one year went by between the time he did this five-minute piano sequence and the time that I listened to it. I was looking for something else on my sequencer, going through all these disks, and I found this little piece of music [...] But the tempo that I had it on the sequencer at the time, compared to the tempo that he recorded it in, freaked me out. I did a digital edit on it. I chopped it down and did a basic loop. I didn’t sample anything, but I looped the main part of the piano, and I created a song around it.

(Shapiro, 2000, p.127)

Rietveld states that there are “numerous” examples of the incorporation of these mistakes or accidents in EDM before paying particular attention to Phuture’s ‘Acid Tracks’ from 1987: a record infamous for the intervention of chance in the recording process that gave rise to a specific sound (Rietveld, 1998, p.141). Operating – or rather ‘playing with’ – an already obsolete machine originally designed as a practice aid for guitarists, the producers behind the Phuture guise teased out a peculiar gurgling pattern of sound that would come to define ‘acid house’.⁶ Subsequently devising a record that has near mythical status within the history of EDM, they were also responsible for the widespread fetishization of Roland’s TB-303 bass line machine amongst a generation of producers.⁷ As Reynolds notes, largely due to the reputation of records like ‘Acid Tracks’, out-dated equipment quickly became the most fetishized by EDM producers while “the latest top-of-the-line equipment is more likely to be in the recording studio used by Celine Dion” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.664). Correspondingly, Collin also raises this subject of obsolescence as connected to technology’s misuse at “street level”:

When technology developed by corporate multinationals reaches street level it is redefined and reinterpreted [...] Using drum computers marketed by Roland of Japan in the early eighties which by this time were obsolete, discontinued and available cheaply on the secondhand market, Chicago’s young hustlers wrenched out possibilities that the manufacturers had never envisioned.

(1997a, p.21)

The misuse, misappropriation and random generation as anti-virtuosic can be identified as a characteristic of EDM, but it is certainly part of a longer history that is indicative of the longstanding, symbiotic and potentially chaotic relationship between music and technology. ‘Planet Rock’ by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soulsonic Force (1982) – a sample-based record that borrowed heavily from both Kraftwerk’s ‘Trans Europe Express’ and ‘Numbers’ records – was also “made quickly and cheaply” and “mistakes were left in” (Toop, 2000, p.99). When discussing this aspect, producer Arthur Baker looks even further back for a reference point stating that “you have to use the equipment you have... The reason the Motown sound was the way it was because they had shitty equipment” (ibid.). The process of making music through methods of “hit and miss trials” has also been traced to Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer’s experiments in the 1950s (Young 2000, p.20) but it is also visible in rock where – via the democratizing impulses that were essential to EDM although categorized as a ‘DIY

spirit' – punk sought to dispense with the notion of the virtuosic. Itself a direct response to the overblown rock pomposity that valorised the virtuoso, this ideological stance allowed for the unpredictability of the untutored to create a musical aesthetic that was similarly aligned with marginalisation.

The Individualistic

Individuality and originality are highly prized concepts in rock discourses - with their contribution to integrity and creativity essential in claiming auteur-like status. Frith states that the notions of individuality form the bedrock of what has been considered to be authentic in popular music (1983, pp.52-53; 1998, pp.26-39) while Stratton sees individuality as tied up with “genius” within rock’s romantic notions (2004). Exemplifying how “notions of authorship and originality do not necessarily apply across forms and cultural traditions” (Schumacher, 1995, p.265), EDM has been described as “a critique of the ‘rockologist’ rationale of individuality” (Tagg, 1994, online): subsequently inferring the image of the composer as distanced from the romanticised hero in rock. However the desire for individuality and originality, in terms of personal creativity, is still apparent in EDM: for example, producers may talk of their avoidance of genre constraints or an unwillingness to repeat themselves within their work. Yet a widespread reverence for the individualistic – particularly as defining the unique and genius – is not as prevalent as it is within rock discourses. After all, production methods that include the use of preset sounds and sampled elements are widespread within EDM: then already creating a tenuous relationship with the concepts of individuality and originality as they will be understood within dominant music forms. Further to this, EDM texts are rarely offered as single and definitive composition with each usually accompanied by a number of variations or ‘remixes’. The approach disregards Walter Benjamin’s description of an original as encapsulating and transmitting an all-important ‘aura’ (1936) to instead place its existence, as Anderson explains, within a system where it is just one version with a purely subjective value (in Pesch and Weisbeck, 1999, p.7). In turn, this availability of multiple variants has been argued as having redefined “the original” within EDM through what is described as “remixism”:

In the context of remixism the original is purely a seed, a part of the process where the process is the idea. Preferring the original version is now valid only as a matter of personal taste not a qualitative judgement. Techno(-logy) music is essentially an on-going dialogue, a cross-fertilization of ideas, a process where

individual elements are not finite but strands in a constant fluid evolution.

(ibid.)

Reynolds touches on this on-going dialogue when discussing a proliferation of remixes in jungle and drum & bass. He notes a particular practice of producing remixes that operate as part of a serialised text “reminiscent of a Hollywood pulp movie sequel” (in interview, appendix #4). Viewing the sequence in this way may suggest a development of an initial narrative, yet the process has led to many texts essentially being little more than a version of a copy; texts that, in turn, may be constructed from other preceding works and still be viewed as available for further translation through ongoing mix processes (whether within the studio or as part of the DJ set). However, Reynolds does offer releases that are “essentially a new track with just a tiny lick or diva-voice in common with the original” as examples and highlights how tracks may even become re-attributed following a reworking: “as if the remixer had absorbed and eclipsed the original author” (ibid.).

Contributing to an idea that these processes are not some compromised version of an idealistic model but potentially revolutionary, Anderson also highlights a present flexibility and broad scope for innovation when stating that the remix:

...provides potentially limitless opportunities for abstraction and diffusion, playgrounds for experimentation and so, route plans for the future. Before it is anything more, music and visual art are simply arrangements of sounds and tones and shapes and colours. For the remixer the restructuring of these components creates a greater focus than the whole, allowing the expansion of horizons beyond the negative anti-mainstream to the productive anti-genre.

(in Pesch and Weisbeck, 1999, p.7)

Lending itself to an ‘underground’-motivated audience’s desire for obscurity, the dispersal of the text in this way also ensures that, while lacking an obvious individuality and originality, each version of the text can contain relatively small but undoubtedly important differences. Dub versions, instrumentals, ‘VIP mixes’, bootleg/mash-ups and myriad interpretations by other producers/remixers allow EDM texts to be disseminated via the newest subgenres and niche scenes while capable of being resurrected within a number of alternative contexts. These texts can thus be described as finding “difference within the same” (Boon, 2010, pp.66-67):

They find “uniqueness” in a place that is not Platonic essence: it resides in the moment of encounter, exchange, and performance, where, especially in the cultivated chaos of the market, in a bustling crowd of people and objects, the status and being of subject and object are literally up for grabs [...] Cultures in the industrial era have understood that industrial products are not merely “objects” attaining form and power through being fetishized commodities; they are samples of infinity, or infinite variety, which is a source of spiritual insight and enjoyment.

(ibid.)

Simultaneously identifying these texts as industrial products, Anderson looks to the Industrial Revolution as introducing a new dynamic for creative works where art has come to bypass the handcrafted in its attempts to represent the human condition. This refutes William Morris’s belief that machines were “useful” but “incompatible with true aesthetic production” (Frith and Horne, 1987, p.173), and it can be argued that there is no longer a need to physically create “each individual element to establish authorship” (Anderson in Pesch and Weisbeck, 1999, p.7). As such, modern production processes can be interpreted as having “embodied a critique of the auteur; that is, the domination of artistic practice by a single originating vision” (Gronh lm, 2011, p.69). This, as an essential component of EDM production, may not be so contentious when compared to the value criteria employed by dominant music forms. Even rock discourses will have to address the multiple roles (occupied by both humans and machines) that are essential to the creation of its most honoured texts. However, the reproductive capabilities that were ushered in by the Industrial Revolution are significantly more problematic when addressing the individualistic and the original in a contemporary setting. In particular, the aforementioned practice of sampling will present a problem for critics that are subscribed to a value system that observes individualism as stemming from the composing of an ‘original’ text. Alternatively involving the appropriation of the music of other musicians, EDM’s sample-based composition is then often “devalued as duplicitous and underhand, or soulless” (Deasey, Forrest et al, 2007, p.2). Indeed, critiques of sampling often focus on “the regurgitative, referential nature of the practice, the gleeful disregard for conventional musical skill and the fact that these records were brazen extravaganzas of sonic larceny” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.452). Adorno, despite having favoured classical texts that have historically undergone endless processes of reinterpretation, is keen to challenge the use of pre-existing texts within other works when seeing the practices he defines as “montage” as futile attempts to awaken a text’s “latent language” (Adorno, 2004, p.54).

The consequent combinatory EDM text then defies Adorno's suggestion of a harmonistic unity and has led to many critics theorising the sample and remix-oriented composition as located within post-modernism's implosion of meaning. Certainly, re-appropriation through sampling has often involved attempts to transform or subvert the intentions of the quoted originals. The juxtaposition of elements from different eras and genres, for example, can be an avoidance of 'pure logicity'; where, if anything, irrationalism is the only ideology. Reynolds recounts enthusiasts for these processes as inverting the criticisms of the practice: turning them "into proof of sampling's subversiveness, its transgression of copyright, its punk-style democratization of music making" (2013a, p.452). Moreover, it is also further explained as constructing "new music out of shards of reified sound, an alchemical liberation of the magic trapped in dead commodities" (Reynolds, 2013a, p.458). This ability to breathe life into the dead is one way of perceiving the practice, but it could equally be argued that the texts that are sampled actually give life by bringing into existence the unborn. Whether observed as 'montage', 'collage', 'assemblage' or 'bricolage', the production of the sample-based text can be seen as an actual moment of creation with processes that can often involve the:

1. Fragmentation of the original object or copies of it;
2. Tactile exploration of material (the use of scissors, "cut and paste", etc.);
3. Juxtaposition with other objects (combinatory methods);
4. Selection of a particular combination of elements or fragments;
5. Naming and framing of the new object in more detail.

(Boon, 2010, pp.144-145)

Boon refers to the process as involving selection, sequencing and editing (as "inventio", "dispositio" and "elocutio") that is "straight out of a classical rhetoric manual" (Boon, 2010, p.55): a rhetoric that reflects a "complicated repertoire of gestures" (ibid.). Similarly, Sanjek made clear the skills that are involved:

While critics of acoustic appropriation deplore what they perceive as the medium's lack of formal authority, the very practice of sampling demands an acute sense of form. The ability to decipher and detach a unique riff, rhythm, or verbal expression from an original context and then determine how it

might facilitate the creation of a separate composition attracts individuals with a sensitive set of ears as well as a connoisseur's proclivity for search and retrieval.

(2003, p.364)

When acknowledging the creativity that can be integral to sample-based compositions, and considering those methods as a component of contemporary authorship, we can see that “concepts such as the author are redefined [as]... is the issue of authenticity” (Rietveld, 1998, p.153). Although rather than explicitly reacting against traditional forms of music making, it should be acknowledged that the use of sampling is largely a pragmatic replacement for such methods. On its more basic level, sampling has allowed producers without access to musicians to create their own backing tracks – as has been demonstrated through its popularity within hip hop music (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.255). Tagg's discussion built further on this use within electronic dance music:

The sampler is central to rave music's originality because it allows musicians to get out of the rut of just singing and playing by providing easy access to practically manageable sonic building blocks.

(1994, online)

It is pertinent that Tagg uses ‘originality’ when defining the use of sampling within EDM (or ‘rave’, as he describes). After all, the use of samples within compositions tends not to be about simple imitation. The choice, manipulation and placing of the sample is varied amongst users. Whilst driven by the subjectivity of personal taste rather than towards an agreed and defined ideal, the resulting works by producers then demonstrate a broad range of interpretations of the practice. Yet the arguments that dismiss methods of re-appropriation still prevail - then assisting with those rockist notions of authenticity and the continued marginalisation of EDM for its lack of inherent ‘originality’ and its distinctive unconcern for individualism.

The discussed five categories – The Poetic, The Narrative-Oriented, The Authentic, The Virtuositic and The Individualistic – may not constitute an exhaustive overview of the demands made within the judgement of musics, yet they do present a basis for highlighting how EDM styles can be viewed as inferior forms. Given that the employed criteria have been derived

from dominant rock ideologies, other styles – such as pop or soul – may similarly emerge as ‘lesser’ within such a system. However, the impact of the technologies intrinsic to EDM subsequently presents unavoidable issues when observing the codes and values that emerge from the dominant rock culture. Within such a system EDM is given a status as a ‘lesser’ form of music while musicians from other styles and genres are lionised for encapsulating the expressions of meaning, authenticity, permanence, originality and technical proficiency: concepts that are believed to be compromised through the obvious intervention of modern audio technologies.

The resulting power dynamic within the system of mainstream music criticism is then akin to that of the conqueror and colonized: where the relations between the dominant and marginalised can be seen as self-perpetuating (Berger, 1972, p.90). The estimate of oneself is confirmed in the view of the other: here, with the rock critic occupying the role of the omnipotent and the EDM producer as “less than human” (ibid.). The title of this section - ‘Music Made by Machines’ – hints further at this position as ‘less than human’; especially when derived from a common misconception that the production of EDM constituting the eradication of human agency. This allows for suggestions that the technology is sophisticated enough that it can fully automate the production of EDM; that it *is* the musician. That opinion fails to observe, as Auner does, that “there is always a human presence pulling the strings, always, as in *The Wizard of Oz*, a man – or sometimes a woman – behind the curtain” (2003, p.100).

Exploring this further, the following sections observe two examples of figures that have been hidden from view: producers that have negotiated and often negated rock-oriented values in conjunction with their machinic reinventions via electronic audio technologies. In both cases, the role of ‘less than human’ is cited as impacting on the depiction of the composer.

2.3 The Kraftwerkian Slave

I call them ‘androids’... sly and cruel entities which smile as they reach out to shake hands. But their handshake is the grip of death, and their smile has the coldness of the grave.

(Dick, 1975, online)

It’s not just Robocop, it is our grandmother with a pacemaker.

(Hables Gray, Mentor and Figueroa-Sarriera, 1995, p. 2)

The musician as non-human made its Kraftwerkian debut on the reverse of the cover for the *Computer World* album in 1981. The robot - as identified by Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) as an extended human and less a futuristic vision than an indicator of man’s current condition – can be viewed as Kraftwerk’s critique of the role of performer within the mechanics of the music industry. As Haraway argues, these forms mark the point where human and animal is transgressed and where consciousness is merely simulated. Initially this same idea was touched on through the band’s earlier representation as mannequins or ‘showroom dummies’ – itself a wry comment on the need for the human figure to sell a commodity within the marketplace. In fact Bussy states that it was a gruelling tour of America that prompted the Dusseldorf band to question if their reinvention as robots or dummies had already taken place (1993, p.107). The dummies were used for a subsequent album launch and their presence – culminating in the provision of an approximation of artist attendance - meant that the band was confident enough to avoid the assembled press until the last five minutes of the event. However radical this may have been in revising authorial presence, a sole shocked account appears to be from a journalist that demonstrated disdain for “the Germans who don’t even say ‘Good Evening’” (Bussy, 1993, p.107) - thus potentially furthering the ‘coldness’ that has routinely been associated with machines of this kind alongside a reported tendency for lifelessness and the omission of ‘feeling’ (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.112).

With a name meaning ‘power station’, Kraftwerk formed in 1970 and were described by the UK’s music press as being part of the ‘krautrock’ genre. Although rudimentary recordings from the Dusseldorf band use manipulation and distortion in post-production, the early Kraftwerk sound is based around what are observed as traditional rock instruments. The now definitive synthesiser-oriented aesthetic that has come to be associated with the group (an

influence that would later contribute to the emergence of the ‘techno’ genre) was not apparent until the band released their third album, *Ralf und Florian*, in 1973. Additionally, this is a music release that highlights the tensions between Kraftwerk and the romantic notion of the composer. Whilst the intimate, perhaps ego-driven, *Ralf und Florian* title might suggest the marketing of the performers as ‘personalities’, the music is somewhat distanced from the conventions within popular music. Sonically more mechanical than its functionally labelled *Kraftwerk 1* (1970) and *Kraftwerk 2* (1972) predecessors, the album features Kraftwerk’s first sacrifice of the human voice in favour of the ‘robotic’ sound of the vocoder to result in an uninflected delivery that could be “almost heroic in its stoic continuity” (Auner, 2003, p.103).⁸ Goodman observes this aesthetic as adding “a contagious machinic orality to the abstract sonic effects and robot rhythms of the ‘postsoul’ tendency” (2010, p.167) then additionally lending his words to the recounting of how Kraftwerk’s output came to usurp any freeform arrangements in favour of the metronomic precision of the drum machine: thereby celebrating “its mechanical and repetitive characteristics” (Warner, 2003, p.47). Barker and Taylor observe how the band “relied on internal structure and texture and avoided personal expression altogether” (2007, p.241). The similarly automated robot form, however, presented a far more contentious metaphor for the pure functionality of the musician as explained by the band’s Florian Schneider:

We always found that many people are robots without knowing it. The interpreters of classical music [...] are like robots, making a reproduction of the music which is always the same. It’s automatic, and they do it as if it were natural, which is not true [...] in fact, we have exposed the mechanical and robotic nature of our civilization.

(Schneider in Bussy, 1993, p.175)

Generally considered to be an automaton made in the shape of man, this “usually pre-programmed or [...] self-adapting and intelligent” being (Johnsen and Corliss, 1995, p.89) has its purpose further demonstrated through the etymology of ‘robot’. The origin of the word (something that has alternatively been described as ‘robotnik’) is tied to the Czech ‘worker’ while additionally having origins in wider Slavic languages to describe ‘drudgery’. This appears to be clearly evident to members of Kraftwerk whose *The Robots* (or ‘Die Roboter’) track from 1978 contains the lyric “ja tvoji robotnik”; or “I’m your worker”. This, in turn, has been echoed in Kraftwerk’s interviews where the band was quoted as stating: “We are not artists, nor musicians... first of all we are workers” (Bussy, 1993, p.72). In turn, it was

potentially explored through performance where movements had the characteristics of the joyless. They remained mechanical and lacked fluidity; they were angular and repetitive. Film footage of the band may have revealed that lyrics such as “we go to into a club... and there we start to dance” (from 1977’s *Showroom Dummies*) may have been accompanied by more vigorous activity, yet these were no less controlled and stilted due to what were suggested as involuntary predefined processes. The facial expressions of the four band members continued to be emotionless - devoid of the pleasure or ‘release’ more usually associated with dance. However, the depiction is still clearly based around physical agitation - and seemingly in contrast to the initial representation of Kraftwerk’s robots via photography. However, whether it was the still image on *Computer World* or other, more iconic, imagery composed in homage to Russian designer Ed Lissitzky, official depictions still appeared to favour the Futurist’s interests in kinesis: something potentially at odds with that static nature of photography. The Futurists had actually accused photography of “stopping time”; even “destroying the energetic dimension of the act, thus consigning the vital moment to an immutable and immobile representation of something that no longer is” (Lista, 2001, p.10) – a concept that could have the potential to curtail the modernist stance of a contemporary electronic pop band. Kraftwerk’s approach to the still image then appears to try and convey movement – or ‘the moment’ - through the dynamism of the diagonal line and what is most often an image of the worker actually *at work*. The suggested activity, or mobility, of Kraftwerk has remained an important component – favouring an expression of energy, however routine and doleful the described task may be.

Returning to Kraftwerk’s ‘The Robots’ there is the lyric “ja tvoi sluga”: translated as “I’m your slave” and echoing Baudrillard’s same “slave” approximation of the robot (2005, p.131). The concept of Kraftwerk as enslaved within the machine (and more recently as adopted by Paris’ Daft Punk) may communicate to an audience a message of “we serve you”. Certainly, this performance through enslavement avoids an immediate connection between performance and financially-driven fame to assist with the notion that “artistic pursuits and financial gain are often regarded as mutually exclusive” (Warner, 2003, p.13). Yet the subjugation that is connected to these seemingly ‘functional’ manifestations also helps to erode the superiority or ego associated with the creation of art and, in turn, the depiction of the artist as a god-like creator. (That said, the aforementioned creation of the machine in man’s image does have its own potentially blasphemous overtones.) It then provides “a reversal of the received dictum that art should elevate us above our surroundings and transcend functionalism” (Toop, 1995, p.204): then celebrating “the obvious artificiality of the machine” while additionally reacting

against “the bourgeois theatre of illusion” (Raunig, 2010, p.41). Kraftwerk’s approach supports Warner’s argument that “certain technologies channel the energy of artists to give rise to particular kinds of artefact” (Warner, 2003, p.12). The technology that influenced a series of musical artefacts from this particular band appeared to be located firmly in the 20th century. The autobahn, the pocket calculator, the computer and the robot were themes explored through appropriately industrial-like processes. In both the making of music and in giving voice to the banalities of industrialization, Kraftwerk then allowed “machines to speak for themselves” (Toop, 1995, p.201) with that relationship between musical narrative and production reaching what is assumed to be its logical conclusion when Kraftwerk’s members transformed into a Fritz Lang-evoking cyborg form. This process completed what the band described as “The Man-Machine”: a retro-futuristic automaton that was as mechanical as the trans-continental locomotive or racing bicycles that had additionally found their way into the Kraftwerk repertoire. But there was an additional weight to this mechanized imagery that comes from the complete history of robots in popular culture: from Von Kempelen’s Turkish chess player (circa 1770) to the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz* right through to B-Movies and the sci-fi blockbusters of the late 20th century.

Despite a visible role within popular culture, the robot can arguably be a perfect vessel for this rejection of celebrity and illusion in its less celebrated state as a mechanical and unemotional apparatus that is created to solely perform a specific function. The reification of the artist as anthropomorphic robot of this kind is noted as an “expression of and a powerful motive force in industrialized mass society” (Von Bertalanffy, 1973, p.28) with the Marxian view stating that humans who interact with these technologies – those that are complicit in its labour – are “cast merely as its conscious linkages” (Marx, quoted in Raunig, 2010, p.18). Kraftwerk may have insisted that “one day, the robots will be the ones that will answer your questions” (Bussy, 1993, p.114) - thereby suggesting a wish for their more mundane tasks to be delegated - but this utopian vision, where machines would undertake hard toil to allow for more leisure time for human counterparts, is in opposition to Marx’s view. Instead there is a glorification of the machine for its ability to exploit and produce “surplus-value” labour (Raunig, 2010, p.21). So, when operating as “an external agent which is supposed to be both a replacement for ‘man’ and ‘his’ perfect simulation” (Zylinska, 2002, p.3), the robot is arguably no less than man: and man no less the slave.

2.4 Daft Punk and the Artificial Image



Fig.3 - Daft Punk press shot by David Black (2013)

The ‘less than human’ and ‘slave’ are bound together as oppressed figures. As discussed, the employment of these forms by Kraftwerk has been in order to define and relate to the oppressed: specifically in offering a metaphor for the musician working within an area of mass industrialization. Auner says that “the act of shedding a skin and adopting a posthuman persona can have considerably divergent implications for those whose essential humanity has already been put into question” (2003, p.105) and this, in turn, opens the discussion of these types of representations to the consideration of race and gender (as demonstrated within Afro-Futurist theories and Harraway’s feminist perspective). But Kraftwerk’s members are white, male, middle-class and European: precisely the demographic that has long defined the dominant, patriarchal powers within the society in which they live.⁹ Similarly, a French production unit, Daft Punk shares that potentially advantageous societal position plus the robot as representational form and its implications of being ‘less than human’ (fig.3). Smith notes how this is “fraught with irony and contradiction” (2004, p.731). However, rather than offering a kinship with the oppressed slave, Daft Punk’s motive appears to be in response to the artificial – already observed as a rockist fear – alongside the ‘art as ideal’. This was highlighted by the duo’s Thomas Bangalter when claiming how:

We don't believe in the star system. We want the focus to be on the music. If we have to create an image, it must be an artificial image. That combination hides our physicality and also shows our view of the star system. It is not a compromise.

(Grant, 2004, online)

There is then the notable observance of a further contradiction here: one that positions a symptom of and a reaction to consumer culture alongside a popularity and commercialisation that perpetuates that consumer culture (Smith, 2004, p.731). With steady growth since the band's 1993 inception, Daft Punk has become highly successful internationally. In 2013, the duo's fourth full studio album *Random Access Memories* entered the UK album chart at number one. It also debuted at number one in territories including the US, France, Germany, Italy, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Spain, Finland, Portugal, New Zealand, Belgium, Austria, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Norway and Switzerland.¹⁰ Any marginalised status – that subordinate 'underground' position – was certainly not reflected in sales. (Reviews of *Random Access Memories* had also marked it out as a critical success.)

Nevertheless, sales figures are cited as just one of two principle ways by which popular music events are assigned historical significance (Thornton, 1990, p.89): the other is that of personality/biographical importance (ibid.). The latter, it seems, has been far more problematic for the Daft Punk duo with both its members – Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo – detailing their reluctance to share personal information to help market their music. This assumed resistance to disclosure also extends to the revealing of their faces; a display that Bangalter describes as amounting to the sharing of "information data" before insisting that, instead, Daft Punk likes "to work with artistic data" (Osborne, 2001, online). The irony is that statements of intent promoting an emphasis on the music rather than persona actually emerge *via* interviews with Daft Punk. These engagements with media organisations - despite Bangalter and de Homem-Christo's reported issues surrounding "information data" - have also proved to be quite conventional in content: especially through their use of biographical detail. For example, in The Guardian interview that the previous Daft Punk quote was drawn from, the reader was also given a large amount of background information: from the pair's names to their upbringing. This also included the identification of Bangalter as the son of Daniel Vangarde: the writer of two hit records that were recorded in 1979 - 'Cuba' by The Gibson Brothers and 'D.I.S.C.O.' by Ottowan.¹¹ In the interview Bangalter even discussed his father's influence with regards to his own activities within the music industry. This connection has helped to situate Daft Punk within a European disco

tradition and – perhaps *knowingly* revealing – has potentially presented the duo’s emergence within the field as predestined: as prompted by a hereditary claim to the role of musician.

While otherwise conventional, the more anomalous aspect within Daft Punk features has been the contradictory insistence that the pair has avoided participating in interviews. Relatively speaking, it could be said that the duo has granted fewer interviews than some other musicians, but it is clear that the very existence of the quote-heavy articles that attempt to support this claim indicates a fallacy. While demonstrably misleading, the statement can be viewed as simply functional when appearing to serve two purposes: 1) it reiterates Daft Punk’s anti-stardom position from the outset and 2) it enables a claim to ‘the exclusive’ by the respective publication and subsequently generates cultural capital. A presented anonymity then has a potential value for media organisations even when – and perhaps *especially when* – it can be read as a reluctance to engage with media or, rather, *other* media. Offering a musician that works from this perspective exposure means a publication can simultaneously achieve a position of ‘trusted insider’. In turn, the publication’s status as important is supported though verification by musicians notorious for a supposed resistance to media and a somewhat discerning approach to press coverage. For a reader that may similarly be suspicious of media saturation (and what it can indicate in terms of ‘selling out’), the caveat of the described interaction as being a rare and intimate occurrence can also prove satisfactory: helping to construct the image that “at a time when, quite often, process (marketing) seems to outweigh product (the music), Daft Punk’s integrity, creative focus and knack for anonymity is [...] a welcome breath of fresh air” (anon #4, 2012, online).

Daft Punk’s relationship to the media can then be one of collusion and mutual benefit. Vesey argues that, when considering the duo’s presentation of anonymity, we should then be mindful that “there is a privilege to masking one’s identity that is not equally distributed or uniformly motivated” (2013, online). Essentially she identifies Daft Punk as having occupied a comfortable space; that their faceless practices have not been due to oppression or fear of reprisals as a result of their activities and Vesey goes on to cite Russian punk/protest group Pussy Riot’s employment of anonymity as its antithesis. Certainly, there is a huge divide between the two practices of masking described here. That disparity is further confirmed when observing how the control of Daft Punk’s self-image is actually the result of certain freedoms that have already been formally agreed. Explaining this liberty, Bangalter has discussed their negotiation of contractual stipulations that offer them a high level of control. This includes the retaining of the right *not* to reveal their faces but also extends to other aspects: especially those that relate to their business interests. For example, through a

portfolio of self-owned businesses – including production, management, art, film and publishing companies that all trade under the ‘Daft’ banner – Daft Punk enters into licensing agreements with the organizations that distribute their output internationally: an arrangement that allows the duo to function fairly autonomously. This is almost in the same way that independent labels have, as discussed previously, worked with major labels.¹² However, Bangalter has suggested that this position of control has been treated with suspicion within the industry and hints at the Kraftwerkian slave in his response. He has criticised how “a lot of artists today are just victims, not having control, and they’re not free” (Moayeri, 2001, online). But while perhaps locating the aforementioned difficulties in aligning art with commerce, Bangalter is quick to downplay the economic factors within this control:

We’ve got much more control than money. You can’t get everything. We live in a society where money is what people want, so they can’t get the control. We chose. Control is freedom. People say we’re control freaks, but control is controlling your destiny without controlling other people. We’re not trying to manipulate other people, just controlling what we do ourselves.

(ibid.)

There is also the idea that their use of a disguise offers protection yet, at the same time, visibility. As Bangalter has said: “if you can stay protected and get noticed then it’s all good” (anon #5, 2012, online). For this purpose, the explicit use of the robot – like that of Kraftwerk - has also allowed them to orchestrate a mythology that is in conjunction with the all-pervasive influence of technology. Ahonen recounts Bangalter’s claim that the robots were initially the result of an accident: specifically a sampler’s explosion in 1999; an incident that resulted in the pair’s realisation, on regaining consciousness, that they had become robots (2007, p.60-61). However this incarnation has just been the latest of the duo’s disguises. Before settling on the robot as preferred physical form (an image that was first distributed in conjunction with 2001’s *Discovery* long-player), Bangalter and de Homem-Christo had used a number of masks. These included clowns, frogs, wrestling and hockey masks, fearsome characters from Japanese theatre productions and even MTV’s inane and grotesque Beavis & Butthead. Each of these was solely used as a method of obscuring rather than as a presentation of a specific image. As Bangalter explains:

Maybe what we did at the beginning, staying anonymous, maybe we just wanted to have a regular life with regular people, and interact with everybody the same way. We like

this approach and have normal communication with people, because that's what we are – regular people. We are low-key... We try to do everything from a regular human-being point-of-view.

(Prevatt, 2007, online)

The “regular human-being” may seem like a contradiction when faced with Bangalter and de Homem-Christo's more recent and arresting, metallic alter-egos yet this does not appear to be the duo's confrontational holding up of a mirror to society (as Kraftwerk have appeared to do). Instead they curiously view the robots as quite everyday: with their use highlighting a modest desire for homology or ‘sameness’ that does seem to fit with the egalitarian dynamic of EDM's dancefloor. This rejection of the narcissistic in favour of an association with the observer appears to be explored in a video for a version of Daft Punk's ‘Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger’. Constructed from footage captured by 250 cameras located within the audience at 2007's live-based *Alive* project and directed by Olivier Gondry, there was a clear association with the dynamics of the rock concert such as the performers elevated above the audience.¹³ However it was purposefully delivered through a grainy ‘amateur’ process to suggest a spectacle as defined by the audience rather than mediated by the music industry. Its delivery also suggests the inclusivity of participatory web 2.0 technology: in this case, as distinctly defined by YouTube's aesthetic to, again, deconstruct the notion of stardom. As de Homem-Christo explains, it is essential that Daft Punk avoids the trappings of fame:

We don't want to run into people who are the same age as us, shaking our hand and saying, “Can I have your autograph?” because we think we're exactly like them. Even girls, they can fall in love with your music, but not with you. You don't always have to compromise yourself to be successful.

(Collin, 1997b)

The discussion of purely platonic relationships with female fans, in turn, fits with EDM discourses that have identified the post-house dancefloor as a ‘safe’ space for women. The quote by de Homem-Christo may also be interpreted as a comment on rock star-oriented excesses: where fame has been used in order to attract (often casual) sexual partners. The alternative anti-‘groupie’ stance of Daft Punk (if ignoring the potentially demeaning “girls” that may simply be an unfortunate French to English translation), is then one that further

speaks of equality. But can this employment of non-human form truly promote egalitarian ideals and maintain ‘normality’? Or are the robots destined to be interpreted and worshipped as distanced deities or icons? Bangalter has said that:

The robot outfits work both ways. They bring us down to earth, to a really normal level. Having met celebrities and seeing how their everyday lives are affected, we have something that we share much more in common with the audience than with other famous artists. I think we are closer to our fans when we are robots than we would be if we were just far-away stars.

(anon #5, 2012, online)

The use of “other famous artists” can then be read as an acknowledgment of how Bangalter and de Homem-Christo are *not* the same as Daft Punk’s fans. The pair may dismiss stardom as central to their work, yet it is clear that they – “having met celebrities” – are privy to a particular world. However there is that recognition of their association again with more everyday lives. Song-writer Paul Williams, who collaborated with Daft Punk for the track ‘Touch’, contrasted his own experiences of celebrity with that of the duo saying that: “I’m very much addicted to the attention [...] on that level I love that they [Daft Punk’s Bangalter and de Homem-Christo] choose to be anonymous. I am deeply respectful of somebody that expresses their craft and their art without the hunger for the public attention. They disconnect who they are to allow you to experience what they create” (The Creators Project, 2013a). Williams also makes reference to his own battles with addiction that he relates to the pressures of being in the public eye. Daft Punk, on the other hand, has always appeared to have exercised a high level of self-control in this respect. Jockey Slut editor John Burgess recounts a 1994 coach trip with the duo alongside a fifty-strong group of “hedonists” whose amyl nitrate and MDMA-fuelled activities are said to have left the pair “terrified” and “traumatised” (2007, online).

Daft Punk’s apparent sobriety and tendency towards reclusiveness - plus the masking and the alter ego, the myth and legend plus the ability to walk amongst us undetected when *not* wearing the disguise – can additionally promote the sense of the superhero at work. And this aspect has already been observed: Reynolds says that the robot masks are “a shield from fame [that] came from superhero comics and movies” (2013b, online) whilst Bangalter noted that “it’s like we have superpowers but nobody knows who we are. We’ve created something world- famous, and at the same time we’re anonymous” (Perry, 2013, p.27). The superhero –

as ‘superhuman’ – has also been identified through the use of audio technologies. Warner describes the intervention of modern audio technologies as creating a situation where “the performer becomes superhuman, and the machine enables them to transcend their actual performing capabilities” (Warner, 2003, p.43). It is evident where the beats-per-minute of compositions are not restricted by the physical capabilities of the human player, but also with regards to the generation of sounds that, previously, would have been emitted by individual instruments that, in each case, required specific training. This has been facilitated by a popular practice in EDM that is not just concerned with the *utilisation of* and a *specialization in* single machines and more the use and ‘playing’ of the studio as a more expansive instrument. However, the superhuman or ‘more-than-human’ assessment of a composer who works in this way conflicts with the implied role of ‘the engineer’: the largely invisible figure that has routinely navigated the use of studio equipment. Far from the romantic notion of the composer, the engineer has been perceived as technician; an individual with practical or functional knowledge that can enable others to realise their more ambitious, artistic objectives. And despite Goodwin’s insistence that producers and engineers have gained access to the creative process through the multi-tracking and subsequently ceased to be technicians (in Lull, 1992, p.82), there may still be an issue regarding studio-based composers perceiving themselves as musicians. Daft Punk’s Thomas Bangalter states:

We consider ourselves musicians at some point because we write songs and play some instruments, but I guess we prefer to consider ourselves producers. A producer is not about just the music, but instead making something happen, having an idea and making it real.

(Wohleski, 2001, online)

While questioning a position as ‘a musician’, Bangalter does appear to elevate the producer beyond the usual placing of the engineer or technician. In fact he reclaims this usually ‘operative’ role to be the decisive figure within the “idea” and therefore above that of the musician; perhaps to suggest that a musician is – as maybe described by the industry’s employment of the session musician – the mere technician; or a cog in the machine. Further locating the studio-hand as the visionary presence within the recording process, Daft Punk has created music that – like Kraftwerk’s output – described the influence of the producer’s electronic technologies. Compositions like ‘Digital Love’ and ‘Revolution 909’ have been titled to explicitly reflect the technologies involved in their creation.¹⁴ The track ‘Technologic’ (2005) can also be seen as offering insight into the duo’s working practices: particularly with regards to the processes that are involved in shaping and modifying EDM.

Following the duo's earlier use of repetitive vocoder-delivered material [1997's 'Around the World', for example, has its title repeated within it 144 times], 'Technologic' is notable for its use of vocoder-intoned commands that predominantly describe methods of digital manipulation. Beginning with "Buy it, use it, break it, fix it / Trash it, change it, mail - upgrade it / Charge it, point it, zoom it, press it / Snap it, work it, quick - erase it", the lyrics may be lent to a number of processes – including those involving analogue technology - yet other instructions (such as "surf", "scan" and "scroll") are more explicit in locating these tasks within the capabilities of the modern computer. Somewhat self-fulfilling, the lyrics' depiction of further manipulation was addressed with 'Technologic' eventually being used as the basis for Busta Rhymes' 'Touch It' (2006), Zomby's 'Daft Punk Rave' (2008) and 'Kingstonlogic' by Terry Lynn (2008).

While evocative of Apple's iMac "Rip. Mix. Burn." advertisement (and with the track actually used in a 2005 iPod campaign), the lyrics of 'Technologic' could be assessed as an optimistic view of the flexibility afforded by emergent technology. Despite this, the accompanying promotional video for the single was a more dystopian interpretation: a Daft Punk-directed three minute pop promo that reacted against an idealist's view of what has been described as "post-industrial light and magic" (Ross, 1991, p.127). Beginning with graphics akin to those associated with vintage video games or a movie such as 1982's *Tron* [Daft Punk would go on to soundtrack its 2010-released *Tron: Legacy* sequel], a television monitor flashes the lyrics as text in a darkened room. Here it is possible to locate a direct relationship here between the communication of lyrics and Daft Punk's 'Television Rules the Nation': a track recorded as part of the same studio sessions as 'Technologic'; it's dominance a reminder that "the screen is the most important political body, gradually eclipsing the national logo as the sign of the postmodern terrain of power" (Gray and Mentor, 1995, p.457). The on-screen doctrine is then revealed as demands issued by a skeletal mechanical figure seemingly with lifelike teeth and eyes that had first been glimpsed observing the screen in the darkened room. Perhaps even more grotesque than the monster from Shelley's *Frankenstein* [a character that's often referenced as the cyborg's forbear], this unnamed figure was created by Tony Gardner of special effects specialists Alterian Inc. Additionally, it appears to have similarities to, another Gardner creation, the antagonist Chucky that was first made famous in, 1988 horror film, *Child's Play*. For the 'Technologic' promo, this de-fleshed Droid of Chucky is often revealed in such extreme close-up that it seems to be additionally dismembered. The unsettling reciting of the lyrics – that, while automated in this way, suddenly feel endless and particularly futile when punctuated by the "erase it" command - touches on the observations of the early

automata. In its potential dismemberment, it particularly recounts one famous attraction: Professor Faber's 'Euphonis' talking machine of 1830. Hillier, discussing Faber's invention, writes that "during the performance, the audience saw only a girl's head with long ringlets but the mechanism and operator were hidden behind a curtained framework which made the mysterious voice more eerie" (1976, p.52). This eerie quality is consistent with the use of the close-up in 'Technologic' yet when the camera eventually pans away to reveal more of the Gardner's creation, the full scale of the horror is clearly visible. The figure is miniature – seemingly as small as a human baby – yet cut off at the waist and flanked on both sides by Daft Punk in their now typical robot guises. The use of robots of two sizes may depict a hierarchy within the depicted claustrophobic post-human society: one where models can be constructed for either physical strength or cerebral prowess; where there is a requirement for detached brains and brawn. The fact that the smaller robot is vocal yet immobile while the more imposing figures remain physically imposing yet silent and compliant also fits with a number of nightmarish science-fiction conquest narratives. The scene is particularly compatible with the feared but "ultimate progression of a robot capable of assembling robots" (Hillier, 1976, p. 192). The power hierarchy between the two forms is further highlighted when the smaller is filmed again in the darkened room watching itself on the TV screen: an act of narcissism that may lend itself to consideration of the diabolical genius. This, however, contrasts with the position of Kraftwerk whose preoccupation was one involving being watched by others. Within 'Showroom Dummies', the lyrics state "we are standing here, exposing ourselves" and "we're being watched, and we feel our pulse" suggesting a more passive role - in keeping with the role of slave. Daft Punk's position in 'Technologic', however, is one that, again, is leaning to the technological self as one of potential power: the extolling of the more-than-human's technological superpowers.

The reliance on electronic devices within Daft Punk's earliest tracks resulted in what was observed by Eshun as "a radical, simple efficiency" (2000, p.84). One of the key characteristics of this work was the modulation of repeated disco refrains – as also used by producers such as DJ Sneak and Armand Van Helden – where the same short piece of music progresses through a series of audio processes. As Reynolds recounts:

On their two most influential albums, 1997's *Homework* and 2001's *Discovery*, the duo were sampling virtuosos. They had a knack for finding the killer riffs secreted within obscure songs from the past and, through deft recontextualization and processing, unleashing their incandescent potential.

(2013b, online)

Reynolds has describes the use of the ‘low-pass filter sweep’ effect within Daft Punk’s music where “riffs or vocal samples feel like they’re receding tantalizingly into the background before surging back in full ecstatic force” (2013a, p.616). Eshun also notes the favouring of “loops that locked into interminably filtered grooves so that the slightest modulation in frequencies triggered a jolting sense of relief” (2000, p.84). This ‘filtered disco’ style has been akin to visually blurring and sharpening the focus on an object: its shape altered by techniques that suggest changes in the viewer’s proximity to the object. For the listener, it similarly presented sound as defined within a spatial context. The intensity of Daft Punk’s early material ultimately proved effective on the dancefloor, but this method of construction ultimately presented (usually re-appropriated) fragments of music that would come to be wholly defined by their subjection to readily-available processes. If the source material within these compositions had already raised doubts when considering commonly understood definitions of ‘originality’ and authorship, the availability of the filters required to modify these sounds ensured that the approach could be easily replicated by others. Furthermore, the focus on the applied processes as the generative element in terms of a musical idea may lend itself to the concept of the automated as an idealized output, but even practitioners within EDM see a limitation – if not an emptiness – in working this way. As Daft Punk collaborator (and notable sample manipulator) Todd Edwards has said: “when the music become focused on the effects that are being used or the presets of sounds it’s just, like, *computer*” (The Creators Project, 2013b). Daft Punk’s Thomas Bangalter has similarly been referenced as recently locating problems with the use of the modern audio technologies. Giorgio Moroder (who also appears on the duo’s *Random Access Memories* album) recounts how Bangalter has said “that with technology you don’t have to be a musician or an engineer. You just have to know a little bit about the computer and you can make great songs, but unfortunately they all sound the same” (Perry, 2013, p.24). De Homem-Christo was also disparaging: highlighting a recent wave of EDM productions as being “energy only” whilst lacking what he defines as depth and emotion (Perry, 2013, p.25).

Daft Punk’s more recent rejection of automated processes appears to be part of their larger concern for elements in music that may be seen as more “human”: essentially the attributes that more closely adhere to rockist notions of value. This was first evident on the *Human After All* album (2005): an undeniably synthesizer/computer-based release that features just one sample. Widely considered to be both commercially and critically the least successfully of the duo’s studio albums, it eschews the more memorable hooks of its predecessors in

favour of a darker, more industrial-sounding collection of tracks with punk and new wave elements to culminate in a mutant style akin to ‘electroclash’ musicians such as Peaches and Soulwax. The machine-generated elements may not have conformed to a rockist value system, but it was an almost wholly self-written set and its guitar riffs – particularly on, track, ‘Robot Rock’ – were a trope that assists with the association with authenticity (and, particularly, ‘liveness’).

In 2007, Daft Punk’s ambitions to be made more ‘human’ were explored more explicitly in the largely silent *Electroma* movie. The melancholic film documents Bangalter and de Homem-Christo’s robot alter egos as they undergo the surgical application of unconvincing and comedic human-like latex faces within a story reminiscent, in part, of that of Pinocchio. However, as the consequences unfold, the reaction from other robots to Daft Punk’s attempts at ‘realness’ is hostile. Resigned to their fate represented solely as electronic beings, the pair drives to the desert where they self-destruct. Baudrillard stated that this theme of the self-destructing robot is common and that it is tempting to define such an act as one that indicates “a moral denunciation of the diabolical nature of science” (2005, p.132).¹⁵ But it is indeed a compelling theme that had arisen in the latter part of the 20th Century. Graphic designer Ian Anderson, for example, described the era’s culture as being “drunk on science” with the following years tipped as likely to be “its antithesis where we use technology creatively to rediscover our humanity” (Pesch & Weisbeck, 1999, p.7). The theme of technology and rediscovering humanity has since been central to the discussion of Daft Punk’s *Random Access Memories* album (2013). Todd Edwards insisted that, through this album, “two androids are bringing soul back to music” (The Creators Project, 2013b) and, again, drew attention to de Homem-Christo’s claims that the current generation of EDM producers have been creating music that avoids emotion, feeling or ‘soul’. Edwards furthered this argument by indicating that to capture soul - and also to find originality - Daft Punk had to investigate the human elements found in pre-EDM musics:

There was no going further into this direction. It’s been constantly replicated and imitated and emulated and so the concept was they reversed gears and went back to a time that no-one’s really focusing on... the magic was that it’s live instrumentation... a lost art form.

(ibid.)

2.5 Conclusions

The reliance on electronic technologies by EDM producers has had consequences with regards to how those producers are identified: particularly with respect to their consideration as ‘musicians’ or ‘composers’. This chapter observed how the use of technology in music generation culminated in five distinct but overlapping areas where the subsequent musical output can be perceived as an inferior music. Such music has then been described as “artificial intelligence secondary to the ‘purity’ of country, blues, and jazz” (Gabriel, 2010, online) and has additionally been linked to a wider suspicion that “we’re being replaced by all this technology, that eventually all of what we know to be human will dissipate” (ibid.). The examples of Kraftwerk and Daft Punk can be seen as addressing and, indeed, visualising this fear by explicitly representing the machinic as a hybrid man-machine. The description may further suggest equality - and perhaps the blurring of boundaries - between man and machine due to their places being defined within a larger system or network. Deleuze and Guattari supported this idea when stating that both human and tool are now “machine parts on the full body of the respective society” (quoted in Raunig, 2010, p.18). Kraftwerk’s position, however, has been described as one of slavery within such a system where human endeavour is viewed as no more autonomous than that of the machines. In contemporary practice, this technology-based machinic alliance – whether as a depiction of enslavement or the rise of the superhuman – has been exploited by a wide range of producers: where the machine becomes a figurative representation of the musician as functional tool (see figs.4 and 5). Almost in response, Toop asked: “when do we give up our humanness and simply accept the machines?” (cited in Shapiro, 2000, p.viii) and it could be argued that EDM musicians may have already sacrificed their humanness in their embracement of their technologies.

That sacrifice of humanness may be seen as extreme. Especially within music where ‘human’ content - the biographical narrative of the ‘outsider’ musician at one end of the spectrum through to the social media-enabled celebrity pop star at the other - has real currency. But, as Palmer and Roberts argue, EDM has represented “a rapid development towards something else. Admittedly more alien, more faceless [...] perhaps not the death of rock ‘n’ roll but its reconstruction” (1997, p.67). This may suggest that, despite those detractors looking for conformity within a Western rockist value system, EDM’s removal of the human figure – or what Tagg described as “the rise of ground” (1994) – is pointing towards the future within an era where technology has already facilitated the ‘non-physical’ for playable music formats. This may be plausible were it not for a traditional rockist critique regarding how a musician is defined having actually come from Daft Punk’s 2013 interviews. To quote Reynolds, these

rejections of EDM's pure energy have marked "a full-scale retreat from the most radically post-human and hedonistically functions [sic] aspects of rave music towards more traditional ideas about creativity, namely the auteur theory of the solitary genius who humanizes technology rather than subordinates himself to the drug-tech interface" (2013a, p.193). Then, discussing the creation of the *Random Access Memories* album, Thomas Bangalter has subsequently referred to recent influences as coming from Fleetwood Mac and Pink Floyd rather than the house and techno records that would have once formed the bulk of Daft Punk's sometime DJ sets. This does fit with a pattern in EDM for established artists to eventually investigate "rock notions like the 'concept album'" (ibid.) and other "middlebrow signifiers" (Reynolds, 2013a, p.426). It may also be representative of the more lucrative potential in writing, rather than sampling, one's own melodies. However Bangalter's explanation for the move away from EDM is due to it having become "mainstream" (Osborne, 2001, online): that "stylistically, the revolution is over" (ibid.).

"We are questioning the limits of artificial intelligence and of digital-music programming," he has said. "On the one hand, this album [*Random Access Memories*] sounds like it could have been made before the age of electronic music, but on the other hand, this wouldn't have been possible. We are hiding the machines on this record maybe in a similar way that Peter Jackson tries to hide the machines in his *Lord of the Rings* movies" (Hoffman, 2013, online). The hiding of the mechanisms involved in production is in stark contrast to the duo's earlier incarnations. The use of the 'real' with regards to instrumentation alongside an approach to musicality [including the recruiting of Chilly Gonzales specifically to bridge two tracks on *Random Access Memories* with a harmonic 'concept album'-like segue] also brings Daft Punk closer to the orthodox value systems commonplace within rock criticism. The subsequent music, in turn, then appeared to be more contemplative than its forbears yet this redressing is the kind of "myopic orthodoxy" described by Reynolds that has been responsible for "resurrecting progressive rock's elevation of head over body, melodic complexity over rhythmic compulsion" (2013a, p.193). While presenting this as a newfound maturity, such a move can be perceived as being indicative of issues that led to the initial use of anonymity: that, prior to this 'real', arguably more complex and cerebral approach, these producers were not self-validated as musicians; that "underneath the bravado and the futuristic rhetoric, a secret inferiority complex lurked" (Reynolds, 2013a, p.426).

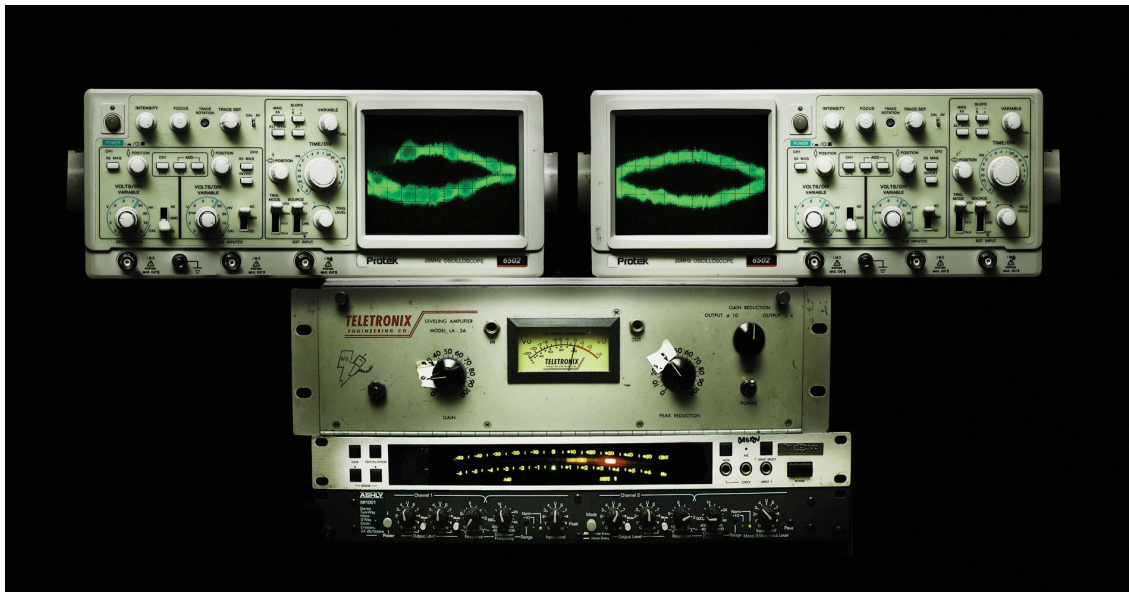


Fig.4 – Shit Robot album photography by Timothy Saccenti (2010)

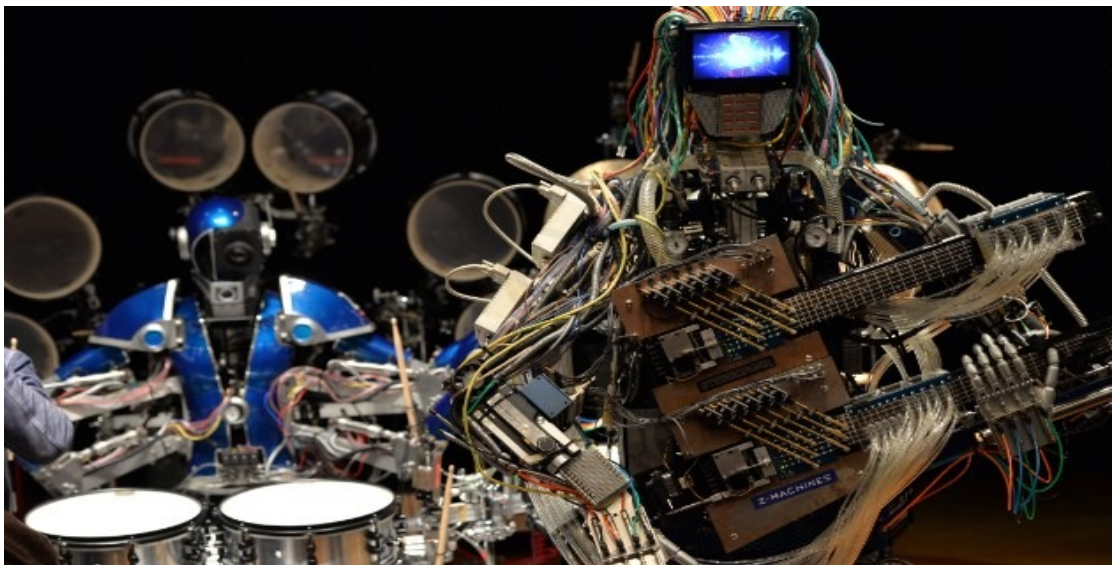


Fig.5 – Squarepusher 'Z-Machines' photograph by Yoshikazu Tsuno (2014)

Notes

¹ This observation may be a case of Rietveld piercingly demonstrating both the similarities and perceived inequalities between the ‘serious music’ of the bourgeoisie and popular music production. In fact, there may be shadows of Theodor Adorno’s polemic *On Popular Music* (1941) here suggesting that – alongside moral panic regarding supposed subversion and anti-establishment tendencies – there are bourgeois (specifically ‘Middle England’) perceptions that will prompt and support a piece of legislation like The Criminal Justice bill. It is then interesting that Rietveld brings up the repetitive qualities in one of Ravel’s most famous works given Adorno’s praise for the composer despite the his disdain being demonstrated for repetitive motifs - as standardized and infantile – when considering popular music.

² Tagg also notes that a significant amount of this music operates around “regular two-bar periods of 4/4 (or 4 bars of 2/4, if you prefer)” and observes that these periods are about half the length of those found in an average rock track and more closely aligned with the short modules of fast disco records (1993). He also says that “tempos generally range between 116 and 144 bpm” (beats per minute) which may be true of the house/euro-techno examples he selects for discussion but newer EDM genres like the aforementioned ‘moombahton’ and ‘footwork’ will respectively be based around tempos of around 108 and 160 bpm. Drum & bass, now a pretty established EDM genre, operates between 160 and 180 bpm.

³ Some of the consequences of this recognition of EDM’s supposed Afro-diasporic aesthetics can be connected to a main theme within chapter 4 regarding origins and ‘primitive’ identity.

⁴ Negus states that music industry copyright is based on “assumptions about the character of composition” that date back to the nineteenth century (Negus, 1999, p.94).

⁵ There are still examples of songs within EDM genres. Early house music and more vocal-based genres like ‘garage’ are especially notable in this respect: particularly in their reflection of gospel traditions. Hesmondhalgh (1995) is also keen to avoid suggestions that EDM styles are song-free when responding to Tagg’s deterministic use of examples that eschewed the song. Hesmondhalgh asked specifically about the omission of a style like ‘hip-house’: a distinctly a logocentric form. His query could be echoed if looking at a similarly rap-oriented EDM genre like ‘grime’. However, with producers discussing their use of the voice ‘as an instrument’, the foregrounding of rhythmic elements and the subsequent remix/dub techniques that will eschew traditional song-based structures and the approaching of all audio components as similarly adaptable sound, the song doesn’t have quite the same currency as it does in other types of popular music. As discussed in the introduction, many contemporary examples of song-oriented EDM records have also been aimed at the ‘pop’ market: either with the addition of traditional verse/chorus lyrics to tracks with crossover appeal or when created by producers that seemingly embrace more conformist Western values – perhaps while anticipating subsequent crossover potential.

⁶ The idea of ‘playing with’ technology further compounds the suggestion that they do not rely on virtuosity. ‘Playing with’ – rather than just ‘playing’ – also suggests a lack of seriousness and the idea of instruments being used as ‘toys’: thereby infantilizing the producers that compose their work through these machines.

⁷ Phuture’s creation of ‘Acid Tracks’ has similarly been recounted by Reynolds (2013a), Gilbert and Pearson (1999) and others.

⁸ Foregrounding the interaction between human and machine, the vocoder was developed as a

military device for encoding communications. Its reinvention for the provision of distinct vocal aesthetic has also since been further explored through the (mis)use of Auto-Tune: a software product intended to correct imperfections in sung vocals that, when taken to extremes, creates a synthetic effect that impacts on inflection and phrasing.

⁹ This European aspect may still be interesting with regards to an inferior position. Within popular music there has been a dominant American ‘pop’ and ‘rock’ aesthetic within Western music that promotes English as a first language. The tendencies for groups such as Kraftwerk and Daft Punk to have avoided more conventional approaches associated with authorship could be argued as, in part, reflecting their own origins: respectively German and French. It *has* been argued that European countries like Germany and France haven’t had “their own supply of indigenous rock groups” (Bussy, 1993, p. 14). In Kraftwerk’s case there is a more compelling argument regarding the reasons behind an unconventional approach that centres on a “fatherless” break with tradition (Cunningham in Albiez and Pattie, 2011, p.45): a post-War response to defining a new Germanic culture in “die Stunde Null” or “the hour zero” (Bussy, 1993, p. 29). The latter concept is discussed in greater detail within the Sean Albiez and David Pattie edited *Kraftwerk: Music Non-Stop* (2011) with its relevant chapters highlighting how part of this new national identity is seen as in tandem with notions of Teutonic efficiency.

¹⁰ In addition to Daft Punk’s four studio albums up to and including 2013 (*Homework*, *Discovery*, *Human After All* and *Random Access Memories*), there are also a number of other non-single releases. These include two ‘live’ albums (2001’s *Alive 1997* and 2007’s *Alive 2007*), two versions of their soundtrack for, the Disney science-fiction movie, *Tron* (one is a remixed version of the music written for the film) and a number of compilations or retrospectives featuring non-album tracks and alternative versions such as *Musique Vol. 1 (1993-2005)* and *Daft Club - The Remixes*.

¹¹ Daniel Vangarde also worked with producer/writer Jean Kruger; culminating in the obscure 1971 pseudo-Japanese Yamasuki Singers project and their cult album, *Le Monde Fabuleux Des Yamasuki*. This curious release had been used as a sample source by a number of EDM producers and was reissued by the Finders Keepers label in 2005.

¹² Both Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo have each operated their own record labels alongside their recording as Daft Punk. Respectively known as Roulé and Crydamoure, these have been used as outlets for other producers’ work but Bangalter has notably released music on Roulé under his own name and also used it for collaborations including his co-created international hit ‘Music Sounds Better With You’ as Stardust. However, at the time of writing, neither label has issued a new record in ten years.

¹³ This version of ‘Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger’ additionally utilises elements from other Daft Punk songs including ‘Around the World’ and ‘Television Rules the Nation’ to culminate in a kind of medley or mash-up.

¹⁴ ‘Revolution 909’ follows a pattern in EDM of devising guises and naming tracks while incorporating references to audio technologies. 808 State, Electribe 101 and Altern 8’s ‘Infiltrate 202’ are just three other examples that bring a functional quality through the use of model number.

¹⁵ Baudrillard is more convinced that the robot is a symbol of a subjugated sexuality and that its self-destruction represents “the atomization of his [as in ‘man’s’] own sexuality”.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the idea of a collectively-assembled identity and questions its bearing on authorship and anonymity. Already broached in the introductory chapter's discussion of mainstream and underground, the mere suggestion of the composer as 'anonymous' can be a reflection of a separation from more widespread approaches to representation. This is identity as defined by sameness or difference: the observation of which prompted Jenkins to make the point that "who we are is always singular *and* plural" (2004, p.5). However, as will be explored, the composer that is cited as anonymous has not always been the individual who has actively sought out the position of 'other': the assignation of a role distanced from fellow practitioners. At the opposite end of the spectrum from the composer that identifies with the enigmatic recluse, many EDM composers – at the expense of a much valorised rockist ideal – actually reject the position of the individual: instead allowing their recognition, if any, to be defined as single component of something far larger than the individual. As Jenkins – who draws from a number of propositions set out within Anthony Cohen's *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) – states, this will involve the use of a "mask of similarity that all can wear" (2004, p.110).

In furthering an exploration of collective identity within EDM, the following subchapters build on a definition of the particularly malleable 'scene' (as already introduced in section 1.2.3 "Subcultural Capital" and Separation). Straw discusses 'scene' as being significantly distinct from more traditional notions of a music community (1997a, pp.494-505): especially through its indication of a group that is substantially less stable than traditional music communities in terms of both the music forms that it represents and its membership. Building on this, the chapter's use of scene acknowledges Straw's definition of a more flexible cultural space to examine the numerous ways that a collective identity has been deployed within EDM. Subsequently it represents multiple nuanced definitions that can represent a more traditional geographically specific context yet can also be employed where locations are largely irrelevant. Furthermore, scene can also be used within commercial contexts to define demographics and/or aid market differentiation by genre but can also be applied to those areas where, collectively, there has been a move away from the constraints of popular genres or commercial interests. Ambiguity regarding how individuals interpret scene may be problematic at times, but it is argued here as an unavoidable aspect and one that represents the

complex nature of contemporary music communities. Eschewing many of the out-dated, more absolute connotations involved in the use of subculture (as described in the thesis' first chapter), the flexibility of scene is required to assist the articulation of complicated dynamics within EDM; particularly those that arise from ever-changing boundaries and alliances that have contributed to Maffesoli's network of "villages within the city" (1996, p.97).

To begin a deeper discussion of collective identity and scene within these conceptual villages, the previous chapter's introduction of 'remixology' will be expanded in regard to the incomplete or indefinite music text to acknowledge the DJ as a potential author. This involves the recognition of how sites of consumption inform production. It subsequently questions what constitutes the finished text and, in turn, which figure is then asserted as the creator of that text. As will be discussed, this line of questioning also reveals specific consequences regarding who, within EDM, has historically been given the most recognition by audiences and what effect this may have regarding the visibility of the composer.

The use of individual pieces of music to assemble a larger unit - or a more expansive text - is further considered in subsequent sections that address identification as deriving from other collective-oriented methods. The examination of the EDM record label as signifying style will be argued as offering an alternative to singular authorship; a trait that can be further understood when considering the EDM audience's observed prioritising of genre over individual producers. Analysis of label outputs has also been undertaken and this is presented under the heading 'Denoting the Elusive'. This section specifically argues that visual codes have been employed to maintain obscurity within areas of EDM in the pursuit of ideology-rooted aims. The chapter also includes a case study based around Burial and Zomby: two producers known for links with the genre of dubstep that have been observed by critics as employing anonymous practices within their work and also have released tracks on the same record label, Hyperdub. While aware of those explicit connections, the case study explores notable differences to highlight alternative stances in image construction and, in effect, correspond with the previous chapter's similar observance of discrepancies between the approaches of Kraftwerk and Daft Punk. In outlining these distinctions, it also scrutinizes anonymity's links with exclusivity and elitism: aspects that are argued as being utilised in order to both reflect and reject collective/community ideals. Finally the chapter includes an overview of two useful concepts for identifying EDM's collective or scene identity before drawing a series of conclusions.

3.2 The DJ as Author

Given that this thesis is focused on sites of production over sites of consumption, the discussion of the DJ poses a dilemma. Essentially the DJ (disc jockey) embodies a role that is linked both to consumption *and* production. The space that the DJ inhabits – the nightclub – has already been subjected to much research as an environment for consumption but it is also here that the DJ adds an element of performance or even creation to proceedings. Yet those links to consumption run through that creative process with, producer, Moby arguing how “DJs are like glorified consumers. They have some sort of Gnostic appreciation of things that the average person doesn’t have; they’re better consumers than someone else” (Ross, Owen et al, 1995, p.72). Reynolds actually cites DJs as “chronic consumerists and collectors” (2013a, p.458). However, it is not the mere “stockpiling” (ibid.) of this music that leads to creativity. As with the previously discussed practice of sampling, it is the radical re-use of these pieces of music that impacts on the assessments of both DJs and the original producers of the compositions that the DJ plays. Rietveld notes that selection *is* integral - but not just of the text in its capacity as a completed or finished work. She describes the use of these texts that instead views them as a series of modular components that can be separated when observing that, “as consumers of records themselves”, DJs will choose “only a specific part of the record as relevant, as well as sometimes simultaneously combining two or three tracks” (1998, p.146). This act of live mixing essentially involves the (re)organisation of sonic elements – a process that has been described via an example offered by Fikentscher:

[DJ David] Morales doesn’t play records so much as he transforms them. He can’t let a piece of vinyl simply be. Many of the 12-inch singles Morales mixes are grating and monotonous when left unaltered or heard outside of their club context. But layered on top of another, cut up, stretched out, and paced to create an evening of multiple climaxes, these bass-and-drum machine-generated records turn into grand, almost symphonic soundscapes of urban life... Morales often takes an instrumental or a dub version and adds vocal fragments from other records. Or he layers one instrumental on top of another. He adjusts his mixer to create unexpected shifts of volume and tone. Sometimes he plays two copies of the same record with the needles in exactly the same place, and the sound whooshes like a jet plane taking off.

(2003, p.302)

The overview of this American house music DJ emphasises an ability to convert the individual pieces of music through methods of reconstruction. Fikentscher is clear regarding

the limitations of each track in isolation – clarifying an ability to be negated or even derided outside of the DJ set – to suggest that it requires an individual as masterful as Morales to mould these records and unlock their real power through combination and duplication. His account states that, up to the point of the DJ's intervention, these productions were unresolved and inadequate. Gilbert and Pearson present another example of the same process that actually comments further on the DJ's ability to find completeness and coherence whilst noting an alternative technique that actually breaks down the individual pieces of music into even smaller fragments:

DJs like Jeff Mills construct polyrhythmic plaits out of tracks which are 'minimal' in composition and highly repetitive in structure – by their nature 'incomplete'. These begin to signify when placed not only in series but in parallel by the DJ, who sequences, layers and cuts between them to create a larger musical exposition [...] Tracks only realize their potential when woven into a larger context, when acted on by the DJ, who, through a process of mixing and cutting adds vertically to their horizontal linearities.

(Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.127)

The EDM track as 'incomplete' has already been discussed when noting repetitive, unresolved compositions in the previous chapter. However, the observance of the DJ as completing these works presents an important dynamic within EDM. Relevant to issues of authorship, EDM tracks can be viewed as willingly succumbing to these processes with club-oriented records being constructed to facilitate their place as a single element within what then becomes acknowledged as another, larger text. The qualities that assist in this flexible method of reconfiguration will include the tempo of an individual piece of music having a BPM (beats per minute) within a specific range (usually as dictated by a specific genre or subgenre) that, via adjustments in pitch, will allow for it to be 'mixed' into another recording.¹ This ensures that, via the DJ, there is a continuous flow of music that will be connected by a consistent beat to aid the audience's uninterrupted dancing. Individual pieces of music or 'tracks' have also tended to feature clearly defined sections that are musically sparse and drum-oriented to be easily mixed in this way (these especially occur within an intro and outro or via a defined 'break').² However, the DJ's console also allows the control of 'EQ': thus allowing the manipulation of frequencies to effectively gain or lose specific ranges in order to aid the transition between different texts.

Then similar to the remix or the sample-oriented work, the subsequent 'DJ set' is thus a combinatory text. Yet, as with the arguments in favour of montage-oriented materials expressed earlier, it *can* be validated as a creative output in its own right. Ott and Herman note that many DJs use their playback/performance devices such as record players "as samplers" (2003, p.256): an acknowledgement related to the technique of extending and/or repeating musical elements as evident in Fikentscher's overview of David Morales' DJ set (this live process is also closely connected to the less spontaneously configured studio-oriented practice of 'the edit'). Other commentators have similarly addressed the creativity involved in live mixing. According to Giorgio Moroder, for example, the DJ has become "the conductor of an orchestra" (The Creators Project, 2013d, online). Bennett also identifies the DJ as embodying the "composer, arranger, producer and performer" (2001, p.120).

While the degree of reconstruction methods may vary significantly from one DJ to another, it should be stated that these descriptions of the DJ as omnipotent occur even in cases where a DJ has not composed or even significantly modified any of the individual pieces of music that will be a constituent of their DJ set (Herman, 2006, p.31). Rojas defined this process as "combining elements of other people's works in order to create new ones, in effect challenging the old model of authorship and presupposes that the building blocks of creativity should spill forth directly from the mind of the artist" (2002, online). However this - the "stringing together songs in a way that diminishes the uniqueness of each" (Herman, 2006, p.36) - poses what Straw describes as "one of dance music's unending problems: that of granting distinctiveness to performances and performers within an unbroken sequence of musical tracks" (1999, p.205). It has been stated that, within the context of the nightclub's DJ set, identification of the original artists is "both unimportant and nearly impossible" (ibid.) and that the music is "enjoyed purely in itself rather than because of who wrote it" (Mizrach, 1997, online). Critics have also documented this "presence of a founding voice sacrificed into a digitally complex wall of reconstituted sound" (Redhead, 1999, p.34) in reference to a sizeable EDM audience that will be unable to locate the original composers within the DJ set and will instead come to define their musical tastes by reference to particular DJs (Brewster and Broughton, 2000, p.386). Toop's position was that the merging of records within the DJ set denies the musician (as in the creator of any selected individual piece of music) their identity as performer to enable the DJ to be observed as "the artist" (Toop, 1995, p.43). Alternatively, Hesmondhalgh may argue *against* the insistence that there has been a loss of individualism in these cases when stating that the audience is "still aware of the idea of a musician: the locus of virtuosic individuality is transferred to the musician programming the

technology” (1995, p.261). However this can be countered with the observation that, to audiences, the individual programming the music – as in visibly, physically manipulating the technology – is not the producer, but the DJ. Herman supports such a rebuttal when arguing that the DJ’s role:

...comes at the expense of the authorship invested in composers who produce electronic music. Only the bona fide beat enthusiast, generally a DJ or record collector, can even identify most non-DJ producers. For the vast majority of electronic music fans, the DJ is the author behind the music.

(2006, pp.31-32)

This identification of DJ as author may then appear to be both misplaced and potentially problematic yet it has been used to assign distinctiveness while opening up opportunities for EDM scenes where the DJ becomes the “marketing tool” (Peter, 2009, p.38). For example, a press release accompanying a new EDM release will make reference to the DJs that are ‘supporting it’ with this recommendation attributing value based on its selection over the many other disregarded pieces of music that have failed to gain that support/play. The highlighting of the relationship between an individual record and a specific DJ can also help situate the piece of music within a specific ‘sound’: with individual tracks then attributed an identity based on the DJs specific tastes and, in turn, how they correspond with other pieces of music that are similarly selected. So while EDM authors may have consented to the loss of an individual identity by preparing texts that risk their disappearance through no fixed beginning or end or through their apparent similarities to other texts (as per the demands of the DJ set), the DJ’s position can still aid promotion. A track gains prominence through the association made through the combinatory text and also via the connection to the individual that has selected it for inclusion. However the wider exposure of a single piece of music from this combination – especially as a notable or ‘highlight’ element of the DJ set - has the potential to contribute to the building of a more personal reputation or identity for the individual composer.

Still, the DJ retains that influence and often remains as the primary focal point. The EDM press, in particular, has elevated these individuals to positions of power within their respective scenes. Herman acknowledges this when observing how “the industry instilled the DJ with authorship to fill a vacuum left by the increasing anonymity of dance music producers” (2006, p.21) while documented extensively by former editor of clubbing magazine Mixmag, Dom

Phillips, in *Superstar DJs: Here We Go!*, the growth of EDM in the 1990s, in particular, contributed significantly to the power differential between the EDM producer and the EDM DJ. This era witnessed DJs able to charge fees up to £140,000 a night: a figure argued by Phillips as being wholly indicative of the club scene's ego, excess and stardom-oriented years (2009). Conversely the production output representative of this era tended to be overlooked by Phillips unless it featured as an extra-curricular pursuit of some of the international DJs that populated his book. But this was not a simple oversight. As Peter describes when turning her attention to the period of growth:

The DJ booth came under the spotlight. Performing centre stage, the DJ became an entertainer who was visible, positive and motivating [...] the DJ could be considered a celebrity.

(2009, p.96)

The marginalisation of the makers of EDM records in support of DJs as marketable focal points in the 1990s then prompted a separation between anonymous entities on one side and celebrities on the other. Phillips notes that it was the UK's Sasha who was the first DJ to be on the cover of magazines and have his own recognisable fan-base (2009, p.84). Before this "DJs had just been a name on a flyer, elusive, shadowy figures, hidden in the DJ booth" (ibid.). Or, more simply, "a rather anonymous figure" (Brewster and Broughton, 2000, p.386). Although, according to Peter, there has been the emergence of a DJ in subsequent years that has reverted to this position of anonymity: the "introvert DJ" whose personal fulfilment in the expression of inner processes through music outweighed their need to be popular (2009, p.146). This development has been argued as a reaction to a scene becoming too "brand oriented" (Phillips, 2009, p.82) with many DJs withdrawing to "the niches of club culture" (Kühn, 2011).

The further countering of DJs as 'stars' takes the form of Borneman and Senders' observations regarding how DJs in club nights and festivals are essentially interchangeable: that they occupy a role similar to the records that they play and "downplay their individuality and accentuate mutual replaceability" (2000, p.301). This corresponds with Mizrach's comment regarding how "people may not even know when DJs are switching during the night" (1997, online). However, these accounts of DJ's in negligible secondary roles are in the minority within writing on EDM with Mizrach actually conceding that "the 'stars' (if there are any) [...] are the DJs" (ibid.). Furthermore, it is quite common to read of DJs as "deified"

(Ross, Owen et al, 1995, p.72). Rietveld, for example, states that these figures “approach the meaning of a demi god” (1998, p.113) while Herman’s approximation is of “a musical author-god, a sonic master of all he or she surveys” and that, en masse as a DJ community, they are “powerful conquerors who control and dominate the crowd” (Herman, 2006, pp.28-29). Also noting that influence, Peter subsequently says that EDM’s focus on the egalitarian collective can be disregarded “insofar as the DJ is always, despite the creation of a collective identity and a subsequent immersion, in a unique position” (2009, p.128). She subsequently contests that the DJ – in that privileged and influential position - is an exception to an observation by Melechi (1999) whereby EDM intrinsically functions as a culture of disappearance (Peter, 2009, p.128).

The cynical might state that the DJ is undeserved of that heightened visibility and power due to their reliance on the work of others; that the DJ’s position is only really exemplary in as much as it fits with Barthes’ critique that “his only power is to mix writings, to counter ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (1977, p.146). Yet it is the role as scene benefactor that may prove more contentious in cases. To maintain their positions of power, some DJs have been known to protect the origins of the records that make up their sets. This practice has long been commonplace on the northern soul scene but Rietveld also acknowledges how EDM DJs have obscured the details of the records they play (often physically by removing or obliterating centre labels) to “prevent people from buying ‘their’ records” (1998, p.110); thereby contributing to the marginalisation of EDM composer in order to protect the DJ’s “right of authorship” (1998, p.145).

3.3 Labels: Style and Seriality

The use of ‘seriality’ in this subchapter refers to the nature of serial texts: a series or a sequence that emerges in succession.³ These serial texts are especially prevalent in the outputs of EDM record labels where, as with the aforementioned DJ set, the work of an individual composer can subsequently be understood in relationship to the sequence of released music of which it is a part. Organisations known for releasing this music can, in turn, be seen as assisting with the definition of the music that they issue through the establishing of an overarching aesthetic. This can then influence consumers whose understanding is informed not only by a specific piece of music, but by those which have preceded and followed it. This placing within a lineage then impacts on the composer whose work can be at least partly measured by its connections to the company that brought the release to market: a trait that can

be traced back through companies from Blue Note to Factory, from Motown to 4AD and where, in such cases, the label offers William Wheteley's aforementioned "guarantee" that the text should be worthy of attention (Pokorn, 1999, p.495). These types of organisation subsequently rebuff Cimino's suggestion that "labels hide behind the artists" (1992, p.6). Yet, while inverting this idea where EDM producers, in particular, will hide behind their labels, there remains truth to be found in Cimino's assertion that "the production, manufacture, marketing and distribution of records is the art that conceals" (ibid.). The logo of a reputable EDM record label may then conceal the image of its composers in order to further a collective identity but it also suggests quality control or vetting; with that mark then a signifier of a "reasonably consistent" series of "tastes and values" traceable to the individuals responsible for signing musicians to the label (Hodkinson, 2002, p.30). For example, owner of the Ramp label, Tom Kerridge insists that his roster is united simply through "having great music" (in interview, appendix #1). But 'great music' remains subjective and the (albeit unclear) criteria employed by Kerridge and Ramp's staff means that the label's releases will have certain qualities that relate to the value judgements of individuals; qualities that will then permeate its back-catalogue. Conor Thomas – a DJ who works for online EDM retailer Boomkat in addition to programming releases for the associated Boomkat Editions and Death of Rave labels – states how this process works: "It's curation. That's what we do. We curate: we gather stuff and present it in groups - put it under different labels" (in interview, appendix #5).⁴

Notably, constructed genres and subgenres already work in this way and, especially in EDM, the use of categorisation through identifying terms has served as a shortcut for audiences: then locating the sound of a particular record within an existing musical microcosm and highlighting a 'shared music' through its relationship to records from other producers. Hesmondhalgh highlights how EDM has long placed its emphasis on genre rather than the identity of individual performers (1998a, p.234) and notes that, across various styles of music, consumers will need genre information when encountering a "less well-known" performer (1998a, p.238). However, a heightened emphasis on genre has resulted in EDM's splintering into numerous musical factions: a development cited as an opponent to its sometime potential to be a "unifying cultural movement" (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.3) or what Reynolds highlighted as "a collective sense of going somewhere" (in Redhead, 1997, p.102). Yet, within EDM – where DJs can offer a semblance of unity whilst simultaneously replacing the names of the individual texts they play – both genre and record label provide a way for

consumers to find works and support the kind of producers (plus their associates) who may otherwise go unrecognised. As Hesmondhalgh observes:

The record company has come to serve as a brand instead of the name of the performer. Dance fans flicking through 12-inch singles in record shops, often look for the name of the company [...] in order to gain an indication of what the record will sound like.

(1998a, p.239).

While it is noted that some DJs already “arrange their records by label” (Fikentscher, 2003, p.300), this practice suggests there is a cumulative value for a record label that comes from each subsequent release. While that seriality is relevant to the music itself, it also requires record labels to make use of visual identities that are instantly recognisable – a “point of difference” (Young, 2005, p.26) – that offers cohesion or uniformity. It subsequently creates a lineage that can immediately “highlight the serial nature of the releases” (Pesch and Weisbeck, 1999, p.5). Shaughnessy adds how “for genre-based labels” a strong visual identity has “quantifiable benefits” (1999, p.60). However, Warp Records founder Steve Beckett notes how his label’s consideration of its identity was initially prompted by a move *away* from uniformity given the deluge of similar records that were released each week:

A lot of the dance music around had gotten really throwaway, just white labels from people jumping on the bandwagon to make a quick five hundred or thousand quid out of it. It felt like somebody should start paying attention to the production and the artwork – the whole way the music was presented.

(Reynolds, 2013a, p.194)

As Pesch and Weisbeck recount, EDM’s earliest years were “in black and white” with records being “plainly packaged for rapid use” (1996, p.14). This will be raised for further discussion in section 3.4 in direct relationship to the functional, non-identity of the Beckett-cited white label 12” single. However, as a response to such lo-fi and monochrome methods of production, Warp’s earliest establishing of a more vibrant visual identity was in collaboration with Ian Anderson of the similarly Sheffield-based graphic design agency, The Designer’s Republic (TDR). Making use of the kind of decentralized cottage industry often associated with music-oriented youth scenes, distinctiveness was achieved through Warp’s subsequent use of the purple record sleeve. The colour that, according to Anderson, “other people weren’t

using” (Young, 2005, p.26), marked out its ‘housebag’: a generic label sleeve that could package releases from all of its artists (fig.6). The financial benefits of these housebags are obvious: individual artwork doesn’t need to be commissioned while single print-runs can be expansive enough to cover a number of releases and with no wastage given how the sleeve will be used for future vinyl pressings. Yet these financial benefits are also linked to the kind of material that is then produced. Individual full colour artwork can stop the signing of “more ‘out there’ material because of break even points” (i.e. the recouping of a financial outlay) while the ready-made sleeve can avoid any delay of the record’s release (Barrott, 2014, online). This is important in its relationship to EDM given how these releases (traditionally as 12” vinyl records) were singles that had to be issued quickly to assure their relevance to an ever-changing club-based soundscape whilst feeding the weekly demand for productions to be used within DJ sets. However, Stuart Hammersley, of design agency Give Up Art, additionally notes the creativity that can also arise from such financial restrictions when giving an account of the process behind the packaging for, record label, Tempa:

It was really nice just to be told it had to be two colour to keep it cheap. The first few didn’t even have the Tempa sleeves, they were just generic black bags then they said they wanted to do a housebag, still using the cheapest stock [‘card’] they could find, so we had this white board. The back of it was grey which we thought would be a bit more interesting so we just flipped it inside out. Those budgetary necessities drove us to what became quite a nice little solution really. The restrictions helped to make us think a bit smarter.

(anon #6, 2014, online)

There is a direct connection to EDM’s music production within Hammersley’s account of sleeve design through its creative use of limited resources. Producer William Orbit says that the housebags for his own Guerilla label were also developed within such constraints. He, in turn, notes the advantages of these generic sleeves to a label “on a shoestring”, yet he explains the further potential of the housebag within the marketplace:

Consistency and collectability. Collectability being such a plus regardless of genre. And, yes, non-specific ‘bag’ meant less ‘pop’ also. Our base, being discerning, didn’t need eye candy, they needed basic info.

(In interview, appendix #6)



Fig.6 – Warp housebag designed by The Designers Republic (1989)



Fig.7 – Inspiration, development work and housebag by William Orbit, Steve Cook and Neville Brody (1993). Photographs courtesy of William Orbit.

The design hints at what has been described as a “delicate balance” that often needs to be found to ensure in visual work that is “striking and distinctive” yet does not disrupt the content with “unnecessary decoration” (Shaughnessy, 2008, p.71). Guerilla’s resulting aesthetic (fig.7) was then distinctive yet utilitarian where, alongside a logo created by Ian Anderson’s TDR, the label’s sleeves made use of a camouflage pattern (itself derived from a Thai air force shirt but reinterpreted by, The Face magazine’s seminal designer, Neville Brody). Yet camouflage used as a style detail within the urban setting is something of a paradox: it becomes distinctive – even obvious – while underpinned by the idea that it is actually designed to be invisible.⁵ Here the pattern was used unsubtly in conjunction with the Guerilla name in order to suggest a role that was “undercover” and “intriguing” while allowing for the release of the tracks that Orbit had been unable to get signed elsewhere (in interview, appendix #6).⁶ However, Guerilla’s militant approach to label identity – instigated by an industry perceived as in opposition to a label’s manifesto - is exemplified by Detroit’s Underground Resistance (UR) whose own military insignias and covert activities – alongside its commitment to avoid compromising its musical objectives – have proved hugely influential within EDM. Reynolds describes the personnel involved in UR as presenting themselves “as a paramilitary unit, sonic guerrillas engaged in a war with ‘the programmers’ (the mainstream entertainment industry)” (2013a, p.252). Sicko observes how the approach contributed to Underground Resistance’s “mystique” when expressing how “UR’s label art, wardrobe, and rhetoric were all couched in military terms – more a token of respect than mere appropriation. Neither were the sentiments behind UR’s music especially violent – foreboding would be a more appropriate description” (2010, p.100). As a collective made up of black musicians, Reynolds also highlights an “obvious parallel” between UR and Public Enemy and, specifically, the latter rap group’s incorporation of what were dubbed the ‘Security of the First World’ militia into its ranks: thereby similarly positioning visible, foreboding troops to add further force and power to what was already a charged, politicised rhetoric (2013a, pp.252-253). There are further examples of EDM’s militaristic interests and Reynolds considers other applications within a chapter titled ‘War in the Jungle’. He notes rave events with names “like Desert Storm and Wardance” and cites Dego McFarlane of hardcore/drum & bass production unit 4 Hero recounting how releases were conceived “as ‘raids’ on the rave scene” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.439). Thus presenting an example that furthers the idea of separation from wider culture where, explicitly, producers view themselves as partisans.

Still, labels that *did* look for further integration via mainstream channels – including both the Positiva and Deconstruction imprints that were respectively backed by major labels EMI and

BMG – also made use of a uniform approach.⁷ Perversely, these sleeves (figs.8 and 9) take on the appearance of the generic house bag yet are not restricted by budgetary requirements. Subsequently, while giving the suggestion of seriality and even ‘underground’, these are actually printed as individual, original artwork. They are not making use of cheap, identical packaging but instead operate as a series that asks to be collected whilst utilising the guise of the discerning independent. Nick Halkes, founder of Positiva, states that his use of the faux-housebag was about the establishing of “reliability” and “trust” (in interview, appendix #7).



Fig.8 - Positiva sleeve concept by Nick Halkes. Design and layout by Jaffa at the Unknown Partnership (1993)



Fig.9 - Deconstruction sleeves designed by Mark Farrow (1995)



Fig.10 – 3024 vinyl designs by Jeroen Erosie (2011-2012)

Other labels also employ the housebag or, at least, a ‘house style’ including Berlin’s PAN that will boast of individual approaches within the visual aesthetics for its releases that are “still relating to and complementing each other as a whole” (Tucker, 2012, p.25) or London’s Numbers which claims that artwork goes through multiple versions before “all members of the label and the artist are happy with the final result” (Tucker, 2012, p.27). Some approaches articulate the way the label is organised around community ideals: essentially operating as a serialised “visual manifesto” (Shaughnessy, 2013, p.167). Jeroen Erosie, for example, creates new original sleeves for releases on his 3024 label (fig.10) that use the sleeve of the preceding 3024 release as its starting point (Cookney, 2012, online). Effectively, each subsequent record has remnants of its immediate precursor located within it. Similarly France’s Kitsuné label has connected its sleeves through an evolving series that furthers a concept collective identity via an illustrative style that evokes Klaus Voorman’s cover for The Beatles’ *Revolver* (figs.11 and 12). As co-founder and sometime Daft Punk art director Gildas Loaec explains:

We make drawings of family members, the musicians, our printer, colleagues, new born babies, etc. We are never allowed to take a face out, it can only get smaller. By now we have something like 680 people on there. It’s a growing family [...] For us, this can continue forever, it never gets boring as long as we keep meeting new faces.”

(In interview, appendix #8)

It is then tempting to view a label-oriented collective identity as furthering a common argument in EDM discourses based around the importance and general positivity that surrounds scene unity. And, to a degree, there *are* benefits for producers including a connectivity linked to the dancefloor’s fabled and egalitarian ‘one nation under a groove’. Being associated with a label and its roster, for example, offers a perceived seal of approval in a crowded marketplace and implies links to an already established reputation. However, this may only offer freedom up to a point. Larger independent labels like Warp have more recently moved away from collective identities to establish producers that are capable of being judged on their own merits. These producers also make albums: a long-playing format that has significantly different connotations (more in-keeping with rockist values) to the more fleeting, scene-oriented single format. In tandem with this support of and investment in the producer/composer/author as an individual, Warp’s own identity as a label known for a specific ‘sound’ has been eradicated. As such, an argument emerges for the use of the collective label identity as being at the expense of the producer as an individual: a further form of marginalisation that can suppress the likelihood of author visibility.



Fig.11 - Kitsuné sleeves by Masaya Kuroki, Gildas Loaec, Patrick Lacey, Benjamin Reichen, Kajsa Stahl and Maki Suzuki (2005-2014)

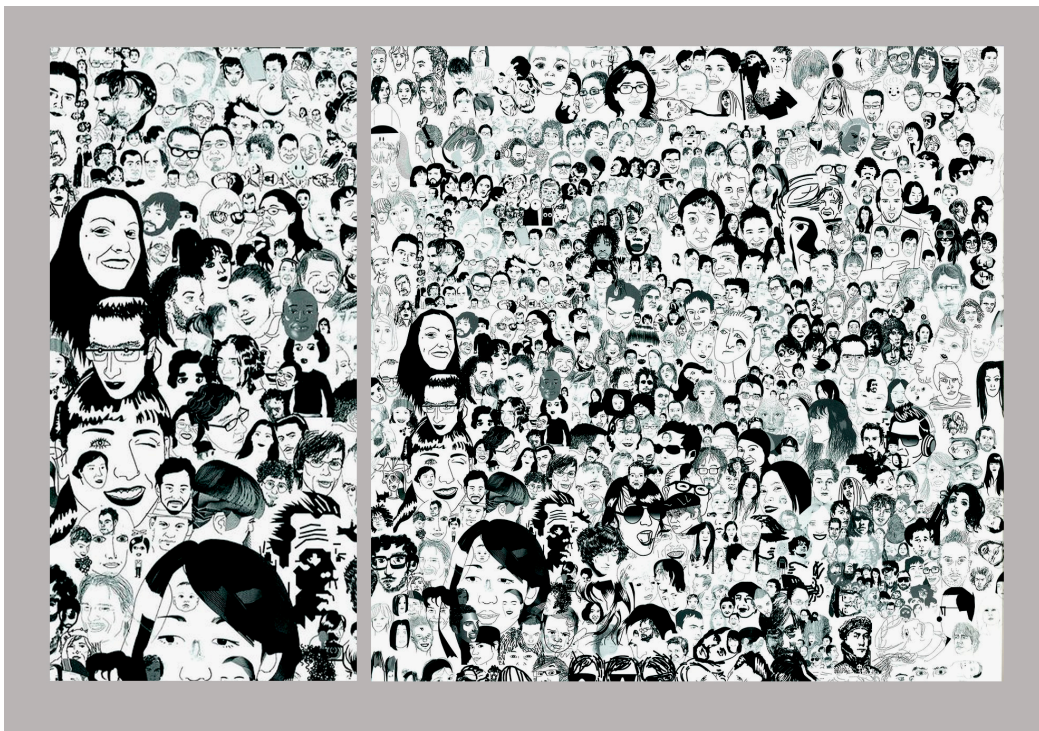


Fig.12 - Detail from Kitsuné Remixes Album #1 (2009)

3.4 Denoting the Elusive



Fig.13 – Soulwax design work by Trevor Jackson and Richard Rogers (2004)

When Trevor Jackson devised the artwork and advertising campaign for Soulwax's *Any Minute Now* (2004), he incorporated a technique that would leave the name and title barely legible at close proximity. Created in collaboration with Richard Rogers, the imagery itself was ultimately text-based but, rather than use written language to aid communication, its letter forms were hidden within a monochrome op-art grid in a considered attempt to challenge its audience (fig.13). As Jackson explains:

You don't want to have a big poster on a street full of information as everyone would ignore it as it looks like every other poster. It grabbed people because they would walk past and then think: "was there a bit of text in there?" and would study it. The reaction from the public far outweighed the fact that the information wasn't immediate.

(In interview, appendix #9)

This correlates with Edgar Allan Poe's much earlier observation that overly large and overtly legible street advertisements "escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious" (from *The Purloined Letter*, 1844). But the effect of Jackson's approach also provides an example of what Negus discusses regarding emergent practices in the marketing of music: where, despite not being "directed, controlled or understood by the major entertainment corporations" (1999, p.171), the connecting of musicians and consumers in innovative ways can prove successful. As Fitzgerald observes, "challenging music is difficult music – difficult to sell" (2010, p.117), yet EDM and other scene-oriented musics build connections through what is often a rejection of dominant image impression strategies throughout their "scene-specific" networks (Kühn, 2011). Jackson's typographic approach, for example, eschews the portrait of the performer, and this iconoclasm has been prevalent within EDM "whereby the lack of photographs of musicians on record covers continues to be a distinctive moment of the design" (Pesch and Weisbeck, 1999, p.5). The approach contrasts starkly with the more widespread treatment where a visual image of the performer will often be used to link the music with the physicality and/or personality of the musicians involved in its recording. The irreverence for this fame-oriented means of dissemination has been known to have inspired artwork elsewhere too - with promotional material forming the campaign for *Richard X Presents His X-Factor Volume One* (2003) observed as an explicit example of this (fig.14).

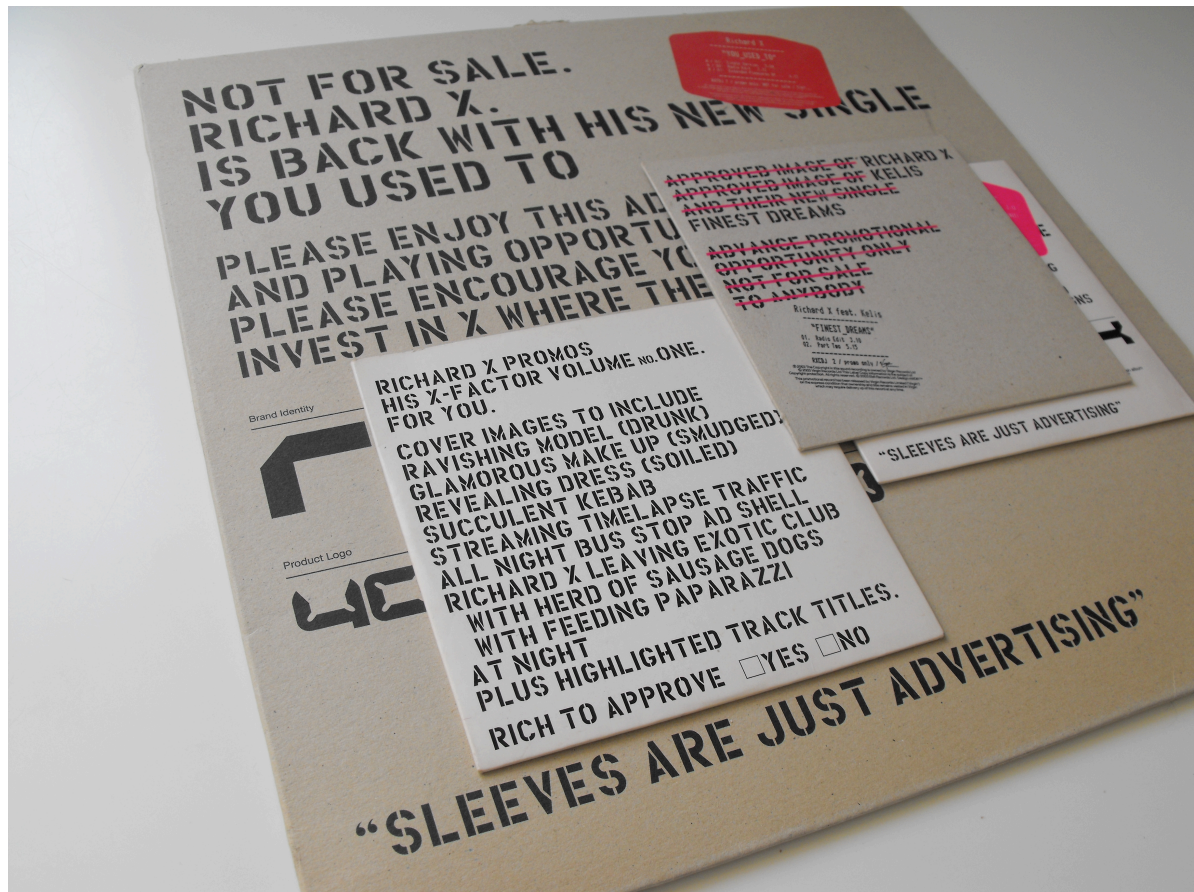


Fig.14 – Richard X design work by The Designers Republic (2003)

The album at the centre of the campaign contains a selection of musical references to pop music traditions: the title appears to respond to both the prevalent TV talent show-reared pop of X-Factor while its series of disparate vocalists serve as a reminder of both the compilation album as consumptive device and EDM's requirement of the named guest performer for mainstream success. Developed by Ian Anderson's TDR, the 12" vinyl Richard X releases amplify a message of cynicism with artist and title information preceded by the headings "Brand Identity" and "Product Logo". Beneath this is printed the slogan "sleeves are just advertising" and, when carried through to the CD versions, the message continues with indicative notes stating "approved image of Richard X" [albeit with no image] for what appears to be an uncovering of more typical design development as some committee-based marketing process. For the promotional cover – seemingly an 'insiders' product that could play-up its cynicism – text is used to describe the intended album artwork campaign for retail copies. Above two boxes labelled "yes" and "no" and alongside the words "Rich to approve", it reads: "cover images to include ravishing model (drunk), glamorous make up (smugged),

revealing dress (soiled), succulent kebab, streaming time-lapse traffic, all night bus stop ad shell, Richard X leaving exotic club with herd of sausage dogs with feeding paparazzi at night plus highlighted track titles”. The suggestion here is that the sleeve as a marketing tool is generally more a convoluted industrial product than something approaching a true reflection of an artist. It is possible to observe this sleeve as a rejection of the cover art in a way that emulates the releases from less commercial artists who would celebrate their ‘underground’ credentials through low-key visual communication. Yet this approach – which, paradoxically, has its roots in the minimalist art direction for The Beatles’ *White Album* (1968) – is additionally revisited by Hard-Fi’s *Once Upon a Time in the West* album (2007); an album that is notably emblazoned with an ironic “NO COVER ART” statement. Furthermore, this subversive activity regarding the rejection of cover art alongside the exposing of the mechanics of the music industry had been even more clearly defined by Hipgnosis’ 1978 sleeve for XTC’s *Go 2* album (fig.15). Utilising a long diatribe that makes full use of the 12” x 12” space of the LP cover, the record buying public is confronted with *Go 2*’s crudely typed explanation that “this is a cover” before being informed that the writing is the design and the design, in turn, is intended to sell the record. It continues in order to highlight how this would hopefully generate sales and, subsequently, revenue for label, band and management. “This is called luring the VICTIM,” it proclaims but, at the same time, its candour supplies an air of authenticity and honesty. One line reads: “at least we’re telling you directly instead of seducing you with a haunting visual that may never tell you”. The artwork of *Go 2* then equates to a bold attack on other record sleeves. Given its year of release – when punk’s non-conformist spirit was dominant – the cover can be viewed as maintaining a dependable authenticity through its disdain for its fake, style-oriented counterparts. Importantly, part of this process involves shifting the focus onto the product’s content: the music recording. The concluding part of its sleeve oriented monologue is essential as it offers a sense of inclusion to the viewer: insisting that “a good cover design could be considered as one that gets you to buy the record, but that never actually happens to YOU because YOU know it’s just a design for the cover”. Exposing this “normally invisible processes of market persuasion” (Poyner, 2007, p.168) in order to seduce an audience fearful of the idea of ‘selling out’ has repeatedly been a strategic way of retailing music to supposedly underground scenes. In the case of *Go 2*, “it was as if a magician had suddenly revealed how magic tricks were done,” argues Shaughnessy, “it was an early step in the unravelling of commercial codes” (in Powell and Thorgerson, 2008, p.17).⁸

This is a RECORD COVER. This writing is the DESIGN upon the record cover. The DESIGN is to help SELL the record. We hope to draw your attention to it and encourage you to pick it up. When you have done that maybe you'll be persuaded to listen to the music - in this case XTC's Go 2 album. Then we want you to BUY it. The idea being that the more of you that buy this record the more money Virgin Records, the manager Ian Reid and XTC themselves will make. To the aforementioned this is known as PLEASURE. A good cover DESIGN is one that attracts more buyers and gives more pleasure. This writing is trying to pull you in much like an eye-catching picture. It is designed to get you to READ IT. This is called luring the VICTIM, and you are the VICTIM. But if you have a free mind you should STOP READING NOW! because all we are attempting to do is to get you to read on. Yet this is a DOUBLE BIND because if you indeed stop you'll be doing what we tell you, and if you read on you'll be doing what we've wanted all along. And the more you read on the more you're falling for this simple device of telling you exactly how a good commercial design works. They're TRICKS and this is the worst TRICK of all since it's describing the TRICK whilst trying to TRICK you, and if you've read this far then you're TRICKED but you wouldn't have known this unless you'd read this far. At least we're telling you directly instead of seducing you with a beautiful or haunting visual that may never tell you. We're letting you know that you ought to buy this record because in essence it's a PRODUCT and PRODUCTS are to be consumed and you are a consumer and this is a good PRODUCT. We could have written the band's name in special lettering so that it stood out and you'd see it before you'd read any of this writing and possibly have bought it anyway. What we are really suggesting is that you are FOOLISH to buy or not buy an album merely as a consequence of the design on its cover. This is a con because if you agree then you'll probably like this writing - which is the cover design - and hence the album inside. But we've just warned you against that. The con is a con. A good cover design could be considered as one that gets you to buy the record, but that never actually happens to YOU because YOU know it's just a design for the cover. And this is the RECORD COVER.

Fig.15 – XTC – Go 2 cover by Hipgnosis (1978)

Trevor Jackson discusses his own rejection of the icon as traced back to his earliest design work when stating that “sleeve design was largely a photo of the artist with a bit of type on it. I thought ‘this is a bit of a piss-take – there’s nothing to it’. So I made a considered effort to do something that was a bit more ambitious” (in interview, #9). More recently described as “subtle brand strategies” (Kate Moross, in interview, appendix #10), these carefully considered communicative processes can navigate problems linked to visibility: in particular where record labels have been “extensively criticised over the years by artists, fans and critics” for “treating performers like puppets” (Negus, 1992, pp.64-65). Yet, as Jackson suggests, there are benefits to working tactically with visual reception/perception that leaves a

message that will still require some decoding. The success of the Soulwax campaign seemingly answers Fitzgerald's question regarding whether "strategies of low visibility" will prove "effective for longevity" (2010, p.192). Moreover, the connectivity that comes from the decoding process may also suggest that Poe was correct and invisibility – that is 'invisibility' as defined by audience indifference – is "hastened by ubiquity" (ibid.). Certainly, this theory appears to have credence when applied to EDM and its concerns with underground scenes. The approach of Skam Records, for example, epitomises this direction with 12" singles released with A4 'information sheet' inserts that simply state "No information at this moment in time". Products by such sources then make visible the manufacturing process inherent of music releases and - like *Go 2* or *Richard X Presents His X-Factor Volume One* - demonstrate their immediate disdain by subverting practices. Further to this, Rob Hall – label owner of the Skam – has additionally stated that "if the quality is very high and it's in short supply, if you hold back and don't give away much information, stay mysterious, you can get people's attention, it makes them want to listen" (anon #7, 2009, online). Capitalising on this idea, his label is known for signings like Gescom and VHS Head that have hidden their identities. Meanwhile Skam sleeves have made use of cryptic methods of communication including Braille as a further subversion of music artwork.

The use of the sleeve to obliterate rather than facilitate verbal communication is through an understanding of its role as "the deceptive mask of recorded music" where it becomes the "arbitrary signifier, the specular preamble to the stories told by the music, the attention-grabbing façade, music's other, its totem" (Grønstad and Vågnes, 2010, p.14). However, the EDM releases representing the first wave of 'house music' often didn't include persuasive artwork; many pieces of music that were integral to embryonic scenes didn't even exist as official releases with DJs like Ron Hardy playing productions by new producers on reel-to-reel tape. With further interest in house music, official releases from labels like Trax and DJ International may be linked with commercial success, yet the design of these products furthers dance-floor functionality with a general appearance of basic DJ-oriented tools that were, to a degree, seemingly "ignoring graphic design" (Redhead, 1999, p.142). Yet even by the early 1990s when substantial growth within the club scene had ensured a market for even more crossover potential for EDM records, Tagg notes that scene "credibility" can be derived from "anonymously recording tracks on white labels" (1994, online). James also weights this argument when stating how "because no-one had the time or the inclination for fancy artwork and typography, the white label became something of a symbol of the scene, the mystique and kudos of a blank sleeve giving the records inside a status above neatly packaged product"

(1992, p.51). Here both commentators draw from a practice also discussed by Barker and Taylor where the freedoms of bedroom production had allowed for a “preponderance of white labels (records without normal identifying information) for tracks that traditional companies would have regarded as unreleasable” (2007, p.255). These, “the hundreds of self financed, self-produced white labels”, have subsequently been described as something that the more established sectors of the music business “couldn’t deal with” (Brown, 1997, p.97). Brown expands further to demonstrate that such releases would be “very limited edition” with “no record company involvement”: arguing that the separate methods of distribution that have been associated with white label pressings essentially mean “a bypass of the music industry” (ibid.). Yet Rietveld’s own understanding of the white label as a commercial product highlights how cultural artefacts that supposedly bear the hallmarks of ‘underground’ scenes are not only the preserve of small grass roots organisations; how, in fact, they may not always be predisposed to the circumnavigating of those more established areas of the music industry. As she describes:

A white label is a test pressing, which larger companies use as a marketing tool in order to test the market. A DIY producer can use this type of product as a one off release which is sold directly to specialist shops and DJs. It is called a ‘white label’ since a test pressing is manufactured by the pressing plant without a marker on the label to indicate the source of production.

(Rietveld, 1998, p.136)

The ability for these to be used as a marketing tool by larger companies (record labels with fairly substantial release budgets) can, in turn, be addressed in a number of ways. Firstly, this testing of the market has provided opportunities to ensure that a fully distributed release could be adjusted to prove most commercially effective. At the time of issuing white label or promo versions, a record label would be receptive to feedback – especially from DJs – regarding which mixes were proving most popular and modify the final finished release package accordingly. In turn, the exposure of the record ahead of the release would promote the forthcoming commercial release. However, the white label has also been used for its cachet: its semiotic relationship to underground music scenes that (as Tagg, Barker and Taylor, Brown and James have all supported) can create an immediate connection between the white label and its place outside of large corporations. In fact major labels have exploited this supposed connection on numerous occasions to contextualise artists from its roster via the white label. The object itself has been capable of transmitting a message of ‘underground’ while the lack of information required has subsequently enabled the kind of subterfuge where

even a remix of Paul McCartney – as with Parlophone’s obscure ‘Deliverance’ white label from 1992 – could find its way into DJ sets and magazine pages that reputedly represent underground ideals. The vinyl record itself – described by Warner as “the central artefact” (2003, p.xi) – is then, independently, capable of communicating a series of messages regarding its place in the marketplace and the 12” single, in particular, has a distinct reputation in EDM as “the area in which tastes, ideas and fashions have been formed [...] the arena for the tastemakers” (Piccioni, in interview, appendix #11). However, the advent of digital technologies that enable the distribution of music have allowed for an even more ‘upfront’ approach where music by producers can be made instantly available. This development then means that a club-oriented track does not even have to be manufactured while a producer or label does not have to endure any of the delays involved with either pressing or the negotiation of a distribution deal for a record. Given the commitment by EDM scenes to music that is ‘new’ and that which, in turn, is free from the intervention of industrial processes associated with the music business (including the production of image-based products), this ability to immediately disperse potentially anonymous sound files such as MP3s may be seen as EDM having finally achieved some of its industry-circumnavigating goals. Yet, conversely, the ubiquity of the MP3 has created an environment where the 12” single – and particularly the white label 12” single – has become a signifier of something more meaningful than its sound file counterpart within specialist scenes. Essentially, the committing of music to the white label vinyl single in more recent times has been less to do with the promoting of an eventual ‘finished’ commercial release and more – in an age of easily downloadable audio – a statement of intent where music is firstly deemed *worthy* of the expense involved in its production as a physical release yet is then presented in a format that retains mystery and avoids its understanding as a solely commercial product. And it does all this whilst seemingly exploiting its connections with the white label’s established legacy and its established “cult value” (Benjamin, 1936, p.109). Producer Adam X, for example, explains the lasting cultural value of the white label as providing some of the impetus behind his Traversable Wormhole guise:

[...] I thought, ‘Wow, this is cool, maybe I should do a white label thing,’ because at the same time I was playing in Scotland a bit. I was in Rubadub, the record shop, and I saw those Seldom Felt records and I was like ‘Wow, this looks cool,’ and I was trying to get the information on who did them and they wouldn’t tell me. I was like, ‘Whoa, this is some old school shit, some old school, white label, UK breakbeat shit from back in ’91 when everybody was doing white labels.’ But you know there were only a few things I

saw like that — and maybe the WAX records — and I thought, ‘This could be a cool way to sneak into the scene without people realizing who it is’.

(Ryce, 2011, online)

Adam X’s account also touches on the surreptitious nature of the format that, as discussed, had previously been used by major labels to situate music within so-called ‘underground’ scenes. In his example, he suggests that the mysterious nature of the distributed product has that potential as a tool for reinvention: a concept that is further explored as a key theme within chapter 4. The overview of Traversable Wormhole’s origins additionally points toward the independent specialist record shop as an instrumental component within these releases: particularly with regards to the withholding of additional information. Conor Thomas of Boomkat insists that it is integral as a retailer to be “sensitive to the record or artist” (in interview, appendix #5): that while information is known, it is “part of the culture to keep tabs on information” (ibid.).



Fig.16 – Hard Wax shop, Berlin

Adam X specifically recounts a record store in Scotland while Boomkat’s activities are online but the phenomenon that is described has actually been most closely associated with ‘scene hubs’ based in Berlin. In fact the recent growth in EDM white labels – primarily linked with the techno genre – do compound what Thomas describes as “a Berlin way of being” (in interview, appendix #5): with releases often seeming to take their cue from the Hard Wax record store and distribution company (fig.16) alongside the notoriously covert approach of the city’s Berghain nightclub.⁹ It is difficult to gauge the exact connections between the two

cited organisations and whether there is, in fact, an agreed shared ethos (when approached, representatives from both did not wish to contribute to this research), but a complimentary, or even *combined*, influence has been remarked upon elsewhere: Playground Magazine stated that some “producers who make and release ‘anonymous techno’ cite Hardwax and Berlin club Berghain as being the drivers of the trend” (Brophy, 2010, online). This source goes on to quote some of those producers, including Adam X:

“I would definitely agree that there is a connection to the Hardwax shop as that is where they are mostly to be found first,” says 19.26.1.18.5, who released on the Horizontal Ground label, while veteran techno producer Adam X, who released the Traversable Wormhole series last year, cites Berghain and the focus and passion of its residents, Ben Klock, Marcel Dettmann and Norman Nodge for classic techno and the vinyl format as the underlying support mechanism for the recent wave of anonymous techno. “There has been a big change in the techno scene in the past few years and it all goes back to Berghain,” says Adam. “There is a feeling in Berghain that it is different from the rest of the techno scene, that it is something new, a change from, without naming names, the same people who had been doing the same thing for 10 years. Really, this is what techno is all about - it’s not about big-name DJs getting paid 10,000 dollars to spin - and it took some of the older people and some newer artists to remind us of that...”

(ibid.)

That purported “Berlin way of being” has then united a number of EDM musicians and labels that have emerged in the early part of the 21st century with intentions appearing to be based around a rejection of fame-oriented success. But that is *not* to say that all are even German. In fact, not all are found to be residents of Berlin. But these are names – such as Pom Pom, Lost Trax, Horizontal Border, Frozen Ground, Ancient Methods, Seldom Felt, Redshape, Skudge and Shifted – that have been intrinsically linked with the Berlin scene’s clubs, record stores and distributors and that seem to be taking inspiration from an insular and reputedly underground network. The explicit connections between the white label 12” and the Berlin scene can, in turn, also be evidenced through the communication of releases from specialist reviewers that simultaneously demonstrate an understanding of the cult value of and the connections between these products. Three such reviews have been collated on a table (fig.17) to highlight the understanding of a record’s context within a lineage of anonymous white label 12” singles. In the case of the Kettenkarussell release, the product itself is not a white label vinyl record yet it is framed as remarkable due to its alternatively presented format whilst still

maintaining perceived ties with such products. In the subsequent review's discussion of the output of the Pom Pom label, the white label is instead reinvented as 'the black label'. This is essentially performing the same function although, arguably, with even more commitment to the withholding of information. Each review essentially is focussing on a release from within this same Berlin-centric scene that are simultaneously reacting against the music industry's traditional forms of image-making where "record covers have been fetishized and adopted as tribal and subcultural emblems" (House and Shaughnessy, 2000, p.5).

Source	Review
junodownload.com	It's sometimes difficult to recall the original purpose of the anonymous hand stamped 12" in the wake of so many adopting it as their means of distribution. Trend is all too often the enemy of creative purity, and so what has rapidly become de rigeur for the latest slab of analogue house and techno seems a far cry from the original intention; removing the context of personality and design and letting the music speak through unfiltered means. Of course it's just as trendy to moan about how trendy things are, and so this Rhythmic Theory 12" comes as warmly received slap in the chops to drop the pontificating and just enjoy what is good. (Warwick, 2012, online)
pitchfork.com	Let's start with my favorite record of the month: Kettenkarussell's inaugural release for Giegling. Quasi-anonymous, Hardwax-distributed titles are becoming so commonplace that my eyes are beginning to blur over with every new hand-stamped, coyly uninformative, white-label sleeve. But this one stands out, and not only because the jacket happens to be a recycled LP cover turned inside out and stamped in shaky lettering on the outside. (Sherburne, 2009, online)
cyclicdefrost.com	Pom Pom revel in obscurity, welcome more than ever in today's promotion-obsessed reveal-everything world: their releases are anonymous black-on-black vinyl-only editions, all tracks untitled, defined only by (unwritten) number. It's high time more were aware of their unique sound, and this CD should hopefully help matters: just look for the all-black text-free digipack. (Meggit, 2009, online)

Fig.17 – Extracts from online techno record reviews

However, Sherburne's identification of "a trend" within his review corresponds with Brophy's overview of "the trend" of 'anonymous techno' white labels. As Sherburne states, the notion of a trend can be suspect given how it creates an approach that is the antithesis of originality or what he refers to as "creative purity" (2009, online). Yet this particular trend also presents a framework that can be utilised to achieve exactly what the format is argued as being resistant to: the notion of industry practices based around marketing and the discussion of factors that are outside of the music. Considering this, Karl O'Connor – a producer and DJ that works under the name 'Regis' – picks up on Adam X's identification of a way to "sneak into a scene" (Ryce, 2011, online) when recounting how he has personally "heard producers saying 'I'm going to do a white label series and then let people know who it is'": a way of then using this trend as a way to conversely *attract* attention (O'Connor, in interview, appendix #12). As Thomas says of the potential of the covert release, "it is a bit of a tease and people do respond to it" (in interview, appendix #5). This can be connected to particular audiences that are seeking music that requires a high level of engagement. For example, record buyers that could be argued as being 'collectors' rather than casual purchasers have already been identified by Straw as having an "obscurantist interest in the marginal" (1997b, p.11). Shuker, in turn, observes that in these more committed, fanatical, circles "metaphors of desire and the hunt are present" with "emphases on the thrill of the chase" (2004, p.317). When considering these types of buyers – particularly those participating in EDM's niche scenes – it can be argued that the withholding of information prolongs that chase and heightens the thrill: and that the value of the release is perceived in correlation to the intensity and level of engagement that is required to obtain and subsequently decode a record: a trait that sits neatly alongside Shaugnessy's observation that anonymous releases "establish a relationship with the fan that is not simply one of seller of buyer". Stating that "intrigue keeps interest alive", Shaw finds that the withholding of information to encourage engagement is, in fact, preferable to the more invasive process of 'selling' within the marketplace when explaining that:

It is better for people to want to buy from you than for you having to sell to them. Being sold to is an invasion of privacy and it's annoying [...] Make use of intrigue. It's hard to resist finding out about something that we think we really want to know about, especially when it's right there in front of us.

(2009, p.14)

While Shaw suggests this as a strategy that can be widely employed within advertising and marketing, the instigation of this intrigue and, particularly, the ‘hunt’ will have its limitations. More casual audiences will not be invested enough to participate. In fact, what may be generally defined as ‘outsiders’ will most likely find the process frustrating. The term “faceless techno bollocks” (Reynolds, 1998, p.131) may testify to this as a media/music industry slogan used in the early 1990s to deride something that could be neither understood nor controlled outside of EDM’s specialist scenes (Brophy, 2010, online). Yet this obvious disdain by more traditional areas of the music industry may be favoured by producers operating within such niche scenes due to it contributing to a further separation from mainstream culture and potentially allowing for the identification of the composer as resisting co-option. Certainly, Reynolds notes how “faceless techno bollocks” subsequently became “a defiant slogan/rallying cry for ravers” (1998, p.131).¹⁰



Fig.18 – Basic Channel releases (1993-1994)

However, the trend for these methods of covert distribution also appears to place pressure on producers operating within scenes such as techno where that so-called ‘underground’ sensibility requires the negotiation of perceived rules regarding selling within the

marketplace. Even the (non-)appearance of a record must adhere to such scene-ingrained principles with producer Mark Archer insisting that “artwork and typography can make or break a tune, it sounds odd but if a sleeve doesn't ‘look’ techno, then someone who’s into that style of music may well have been put off from buying it” (in interview, appendix #13). A benchmark for this ‘techno look’ that is notable for its lasting effect on records since 1993 and has since proven to be a unifying influence on the recent wave of releases from the Berlin scene has been provided by the Basic Channel records (fig.18). Perhaps more deserved of the description of looking like a “petrified fossil with some archaic runes scratched into it” than the white label vinyl releases that Mark Leckey’s quote actually refers to (2010, p.71), the output of Moritz Von Oswald and Mark Ernestus under their Basic Channel guise appears to revel in its obscurity. With minimal details (the material is most clearly united by its catalogue numbers), the duo’s tracks became identifiable through an uncompromising sound and a stark monochrome scheme. A Basic Channel logo is present in the initial releases – its letterforms stretched to read around the circumference of each record’s label. Yet as the series progresses, legibility is lost as the logo undergoes a series of treatments that erodes the identifiable parts of each character until what was once readable type becomes no more than its degraded re-Xeroxed reduction of dots and dashes arranged almost as mere blips on a radar. The same obscurity also applied to the individuals behind Basic Channel as they rebuffed media interest while continuing to issue material (including that of their more reggae-oriented Rhythm & Sound alter-ego) while one half, Ernestus, also founded Hard Wax alongside, his mastering studio, Dubplates and Mastering. Despite such commercial interests, an apparent disregard for the demands of the marketplace continued when, after issuing Basic Channel music primarily on vinyl, a CD collection was eventually released. Reviews noted that this tentative move towards wider distribution actually resulted in a product that was “very grudgingly brought it into being” (Kopf, 1996, p.19):

They have let it out unprotected in a coarse cardboard postal envelope, stickered with a photocopied label containing a minimum of information; while on the back the only indications of its source are a barcode, a Berlin fax number, brief publishing details, and another sticker listing the catalogue numbers of the nine Basic Channel 12” singles from where the music has been lifted and reconfigured anew. The communiqué concludes with a terse instruction: “Buy vinyl”.

(ibid.)

While it has been said that the “connecting bond” of anonymous techno releases is *not* sonic and that “the stripped-back aesthetic does not necessitate stripped-back music” (Brophy, 2010, online), the Basic Channel artwork and its gradually growing obscurity turns out to be quite representative of the music itself. As Reynolds says, it too pursued “abstraction though a million shades of lustrous grey” (2013a, p.274). And, similarly, it is not output that is designed to register immediately. By way of illustration, Eshun describes Basic Channel as responsible for “lightening the weight of the kick drum and emphasizing the alteration of timbre [to generate] chiming metallic tunnels” (2000, p.850) while Reynolds notes how, on each track, the “initially monotonous [...] gradually revealed themselves to be endlessly inflected, fractal mosaics” (2013a, p.627). The recordings are additionally noted as having a “curious quality” where, after listening, “it’s hard to retain anything but the faintest flavour of the experience” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.468). Reynolds argues that this is caused by the tracks foregrounding of rhythm and timbre: elements that are difficult to commit to memory (ibid.). However, there is a further element of the fractured or ruptured within Basic Channel’s output that comes from their use of dub reggae aesthetics. Essentially, the musical elements are abstracted almost to the point of disappearance with their sonic manipulation – particularly with regards to echo – aurally defining space or distance between the composer and the listener. Toop addresses how this manifests in dub music: “like a long echo, looping through time” (1995, p.115). He goes on to write:

Sometimes so quiet that only a disciple could hear, sometime shattering loud, dub unpicks music in the commercial sphere. Spreading out a song or a groove over a vast landscape of peaks and deep trenches, extending hooks and beats to vanishing point, dub creates new maps of time, intangible sound sculptures, sacred sites, balm and shock for mind body and spirit. When you double, or dub, you replicate, reinvent, make one of many versions. There is no such thing as an original mix, since music stored on multi-track tape, floppy or hard disk, is just a collection of bits. The composition has been decomposed, already, by the technology.

(ibid.)

Shaughnessy states that dub is, in turn, “defined by a process of stripping things away, breaking things down” (2001, p.12) and this aspect is immediately apparent in Basic Channel’s music and, in particular, through its influence on ‘minimal techno’: an EDM subgenre based around the reduction of musical elements. Yet the paring-down of the work

was also coupled with a ‘muddying’ of sonic components (as opposed to the precise and arguably sterile output of other producers). Sicko refers to this alongside its relationship to the artwork when writing that:

Basic Channel’s music was a near-total reconstruction of techno and house: starting from the principles of Jamaican “dub” and working back to the four-count beat conducive to club play. Records like ‘Phyllys Trak’, ‘Quadrant Dub’, and ‘Octagon’ (all released in 1994) incorporate basslines that sound like pond ripples and beats buried under a mile of gauze – even the ultra-distressed typography of the label art reflects a murky composition.

(Sicko, 2010, p.120)

Kopf reflects on the whole attitude of Basic Channel: the combination of music, creativity and outward image before summarising what might be deduced from Basic Channel’s activities. After spending a day shadowing Von Oswald and Ernestus in Berlin he says:

If there is any conclusion to be drawn from the Basic Channel family's way of working, it is that, in dance as in any other popular music form prone to be despoiled by the raging egos of its participants, a state of grace is best achieved and sustained by pursuing an aesthetic of disappearance that preserves its makers from the distorting gaze of the media and its public.

(Kopf, 1996, p.20)

But does this kind of detachment contribute to the understanding of the potentially anonymous 12” and its creator as ‘elusive’ or ‘exclusive’? Thornton argues that the whole concept of underground is ultimately tied to exclusivity and elitism rather than opposition (1995, pp.87-115). Meanwhile Hesmondhalgh queries the suggestion that the “high value attached to anonymity” in EDM was egalitarian and puts forward a suggestion that, instead, this feature puts a premium on specialist knowledge to result in “a distinctly non-collectivist insider culture” (1995, p.263); the same insider culture that has also been referred to by Gilbert and Pearson as “equally exclusive, equally elusive” (1999, p.175).

3.5 Dead and Buried: The Author and Dubstep

The individual is not only condemned to disappearance, but disappearance is also its strategy; it is a way of response to this device for capture, for networking, and for forced identification.

(Baudrillard, 2001, p.216)

In their early stages of development, EDM genres and subgenres tend to employ aspects of anonymity purely by being ‘off radar’. During this gestation period – where genres and/or their associated scenes may be relatively undersubscribed and may not even be functioning under an agreed name – they may be perceived as simply lacking widespread recognition rather than actively seeking exclusivity and elusiveness. Further to this, in its rudimentary form, a scene or genre may be too complex or ill-defined to be acknowledged and comprehended on a large scale. Gelman supports the latter when stating how “all ideas in their formative state are complicated” but argues that a practice of “subtraction” – or a kind of simplification – are a way of processing and clarifying these ideas (1999, p.12). In terms of establishing new varietals of EDM, this may often require the grouping of distinct aesthetic elements by retailers, commentators and other organisations (including record labels) in order to define the characteristics of the emerging style. Yet this also presents a problem: that in widely locating a genre by selecting its most obvious and dominant elements, the more nuanced characteristics within the music can be ignored. Dubstep provides one such example of this process.

Reynolds notes that in its early stages, dubstep was a development or “mutation” of the earlier UK garage genre that had notably “dropped the songs and pop-fizzy euphoria in favour of... empty space” (2013a, p.641). Clark agrees when stating that dubstep “used to be a niche concern, often dismissed as a dark UK garage mutation from the South London margins of Croydon, Streatham and Norwood” (2007, p.65). Yet Reynolds additionally acknowledges that it represented “a consolidation sound rather than a great leap forward” (2013a, p.641) as it heavily bore that influence of UK garage alongside aesthetics derived from the jungle genre and the once Warp Records-associated sound of ‘bleep and bass’. Additionally, he references Philip Sherburne’s observation that dubstep paralleled a techno development that had ushered in its Basic Channel-inspired minimal subgenre: so that both were notable for the almost subliminal placing of pared-down sonic elements within empty space (ibid.). But it is within

Reynolds' discussion of both dubstep and minimal techno (or, his preferred variant, "microhouse") as "homeostatic" that he presents a case for a "self-correction mechanism" that has allowed both scenes/genres to avoid moving in one definitive direction whilst simultaneously offering flexibility for producers to experiment within a scene that becomes recognised for and defined by its commitment to variety (2013a, pp.641-642). However, while records by producers including Horsepower Productions and Hatcha can retrospectively be seen as having pioneered the dubstep genre (just as Basic Channel and Robert Hood may be credited as minimal techno's innovators), it is notable that this first wave of releases would have been contributing to a scene that was barely there: that their introduction as part of dissemination mechanisms (DJ sets, radio play, specialist record shops) involved their placing alongside records that did not share the same musical components. Most likely first featured alongside UK garage releases where – amongst some of the more experimental and dub-influenced tracks of garage figureheads like Wookie and El-B – dubstep tracks would have initially been perceived as a new inflection within a pre-existing sound. Therefore growth in this inflected version would have been needed so that such output could be positioned exclusively alongside similar material and culminate in a distinctively separate scene. This appears to have been advanced significantly around 2001 when documented by Goodman in a magazine article on, London club night, Forward. While it was observed that the club, at that point, is still soundtracked by a fusion of EDM styles, he notes that a particular sound popular at Forward which is identified as 'dark garage' is now substantial enough to be considered as more than a subset of something else. As he puts it:

Dark garage certainly is no new phenomenon, and there have been several rival strains competing for evolutionary selection. The only difference now is that there is enough quality dubs on the market to make it potentially autonomous as a scene, with all the black holes and dead ends which that can pose.

(Goodman, 2001, online)

However, there is a tentative quality to this article – particularly in the naming of the emergent genre. When Goodman states that "as a sign of things to come, it is deeply promising" (ibid.), his enthusiasm for the latest musical developments are clearly evident yet there appears to be a reticence for the clear categorization of the scene. Subsequently he offers more than one option:

This sound could be termed ‘nu-dark swing’ [...] ‘Nu-dark swing’ is driven by scuttling, sidewinding, 2step shuffles, treble and bass scattered with woodblocks and rim shots, often completely snare-less drum patterns, with accents in all kinds of strange positions.

(ibid.)

Further to this, Goodman mentions ‘dubstep’ once yet only in conjunction with the Tempa label which had itself already utilised the term. Only hindsight allows our understanding of the nascent 2001 scene that is described as being what is now widely known as ‘dubstep’: back then it was operating under a number of banners and, despite the connections between the aesthetics of this transitional music, producers similarly lacked a real uniformity or cohesion. As such, Reynolds’ citing of variety as an important part of dubstep isn’t then exactly incorrect. Essentially, it *was*. But, to a degree, this has changed.

Within dubstep’s growth – as it has moved through a process of transition that has established its agreed name and a sound – it has come to be perceived as representing a specific direction. This direction is particularly evident where its growth has resulted in more mainstream interest and where a widespread reductionist understanding has shifted focus from the music’s use of space to its occasional use (or ‘the drop’) of aggressive bass effects. Even despite how seemingly radical and supposedly ‘un-commercial’ extreme bass elements may have once been viewed as being, these more totemic components of the music have been subsequently used as both dubstep’s signifier and as a sometime shorthand for ‘underground’ that has been incorporated by everyone from major label pop stars to advertising agencies in order to communicate the youthful expression of a particular moment. As Reynolds concedes, “in its formative years, dubstep had been a connoisseur’s sound: deep and dark” yet its growing accessibility became linked to an almost cartoonish ‘wobble’-linked strain (that, in some quarters, would eventually be defined as ‘brostep’) that was “increasingly in-your face and hard-riffing” (2013a, pp.698-699).¹¹

Dubstep’s subsequent mainstream assimilation (at least in terms of the more general understanding of ‘dubstep’ as being linked to a number of overtly pronounced musical aesthetics) has prompted many original producers to, if not abandon the scene, at least distance themselves from some of the genre’s more obvious aesthetic details and, in some cases, avoid the term dubstep.¹² Thus a “self-correction mechanism” may, instead, involve a resistance to both an established category and an increasingly predetermined or even ‘generic’

sound in order to retain originality and maintain an individual's own cult value. So while Reynolds may be choosing to view the on-going variety that provides a continued impetus behind the genre's participants, he may be giving consideration to work that is being produced by composers that are actively avoiding that classification. By way of illustration, a number of key producers from the scene – such as Benga and Skream – have more recently disassociated themselves from dubstep by moving towards house and techno music: genres that had already outlasted a 'next big thing' status and be perceived as having further potential for longevity. Alternatively, Reynolds discusses how many of dubstep's "scene elders and original converts" dispersed via "semi-experimental or house-influenced realms that eventually acquired the unsatisfactorily vague umbrella term post-dubstep": a development that he insists produced much the same effect of previous club-rooted genres that had sought-out a contemplative and supposedly more 'intelligent' position (2013a, p.703). His criticism then not only focuses on the change of style – in its sacrificing of sound system dynamics for what he describes as a "tepid interzone" between dance music and home-listening – but in the change of format as ambitions shifted from DJ-oriented 12" singles to full-length albums (ibid.). But it is through these more expansive canvases that dubstep originators have been provided with the opportunity to demonstrate an original perspective and subsequently could distance themselves from other, similarly rooted producers. Market conditions have simultaneously determined that less established (as in newer and/or lower status) producers would not have been offered such opportunities: for them, the shorter and more disposable single format is a less financially risky option while the continued links to genre as a marketing device would continue to maintain importance.

Hesmondhalgh observes that genre is ultimately integral to non-established composers when stating how "in general, the less well known a performer, the more important it is that the consumer has genre information" (1998a, p.238). The bigger names, he argues, are operating within a space that is beyond genre. Subsequently genre is initially essential to align composers/producers/performers with purchasers while it simultaneously becomes a component in the building of personal profile. To then be considered beyond genre is then beneficial to musicians for two main reasons. The first is that it allows creative flexibility where a musician is not tied to a specific sound or scene. This has the potential for both further self-fulfilment and career longevity. Yet being 'beyond genre' can simultaneously be testament to an individual that has, in fact, outgrown or transcended genre and – like Madonna, Prince or Bjork – suggests a musician that can use genre conventions yet avoid being defined by them. In the post-dubstep environment, the album format has proved

important in this differentiation between the genre artist and the ‘beyond genre’ name. It has additionally allowed a number of producers to make music that is of interest to listeners that are also outside of a specific scene. Yet, unlike its pop counterpart, this has been done within dubstep whilst maintaining a low profile and actually taking a position of “deliberate self-marginalization” (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999, p.161) and while releasing music that, according to Reynolds, was typified by “a fantasy of public inwardness” (2013a, p.705). This has been documented most clearly in the cases of, sometime dubstep-aligned producers, Zomby and Burial: two album-issuing musicians with audience interest outside of a particular scene who both utilise aspects of anonymity within their work. In particular, this anonymity has been apparent through their public engagement, yet it becomes clear that, while related, each is typified by a very different stance that appears to suggest two almost opposing personality types: with Burial’s introvert tendencies contrasting with the arguably more extrovert activities of Zomby. The connections between the maintaining of anonymity and the introvert are likely to be more easily understood: the concept of ‘shyness’ may be instinctively viewed as underpinning low-key behaviour.¹³ The suggestion of the anonymous producer as being an extrovert, on the other hand, may be perceived as contradictory - yet this weights the argument for anonymity also functioning within the media as a supposedly counterintuitive practice.

In Blanning’s interview feature with Zomby for *The Wire* magazine (2011), she attempts to negotiate potentially difficult ideas surrounding both the subject’s participation and his notorious reluctance to participate. The benefit of a suggested media aversion elsewhere is clearly evident: it highlights the journalist’s ‘exclusive’ whilst carving out the publication’s role as a trusted and authoritative source of information. As discussed in chapter 2, this is an aspect that typified many of the interview features with Daft Punk while, within dubstep itself, Clark’s previously cited article on the DMZ club night framed quotes from dubstep DJ/producer Mala with an explanation that they were sourced from “a rare interview” (2007, p.65). In Blanning’s case, this is similarly not implied as subtext: the reader is explicitly reminded of the feature’s exclusive nature. In turn, it suggests that the reader – courtesy of the media outlet’s own standing – has been granted a privileged position: one that facilitates the rare opportunity to penetrate an elite inner circle. Potentially considered even more privileged when the feature is revealed to have emerged from a face-to-face interview (although the subject’s face was not revealed in any of the accompanying photography), the producer’s own position on visibility/invisibility is additionally justified: “Zomby engages with those who seek him out,” it states, “on his own terms – which can change at any time” (Blanning, 2011,

p.41). The purported fragile and fleeting nature of this engagement places further importance on this relatively unrestricted access. Although this could additionally be argued as being integral to maintaining the producer's mystique: especially when considering how it is used to illustrate the subject's personal disregard for the mechanics of music promotion and, by association, the suggestion of creativity as commerce. Certainly, Blanning's discussion of Zomby highlights an unpredictable and tempestuous disposition that often stands in the way of high profile, revenue-generating opportunities. This can be interpreted as an essential element in constructing a romantic image of the subject as the independent and rebellious artist. For example, the producer is presented as having a disregard for the record label to which he is contracted and both its and his own profits. Furthermore, when Blanning details how Zomby has earned a reputation for not turning up to gigs, it also allows for the feature itself to be perceived as outside of contractual obligations – or even that Kraftwerkian enslavement – to assist with the notion that “artistic pursuits and financial gain are often regarded as mutually exclusive” (Warner, 2003, p.13). Essentially it can be viewed as pre-empting accusations of ‘selling out’: a concept that Hebdige details as an ideological process where previously subversive signs are translated into mass-produced commodities (1979, p.97). The positioning of Zomby, by contrast, refuted an accepted place within mass media: something that Thornton had described as “the kiss of death” for subcultural affects (1995, p.122). The Wire magazine's introduction to the six-page profile piece additionally states that the producer is “preserving his anonymity to underwrite his dedication to the music” (Blanning, 2011, p.36).¹⁴ However, this is never truly expressed within the article's body text: neither Zomby nor the credited writer infers that the covert activities are an absolute requirement in order to demonstrate that commitment to his output. However, this does link to assumptions regarding anonymity “as an attempt to move focus away from the identity of the author or artist, and onto the work itself” (anon #9, 2013, online). This has been echoed elsewhere with – as one example - the Swedish production duo Skudge being quoted as saying: “we choose to be anonymous because we want the listeners to put focus on our music and not our personalities. For us the music speaks for itself” (Brophy, 2010, online). However, following her interview with Zomby, Blanning states that the suggestion of anonymity as being reflective of this focus is merely something that is “tagged onto the action” (in interview, appendix #14); that the assertion of a low profile as being ‘about the music’ is offered after the event as an almost altruistic justification for a particular approach. In fact where Blanning personally raises the subject of the producer's anonymity within The Wire feature, she actually concedes that his approach felt “like a stratagem” (2011, p.41).

This discrepancy – the highlighting of the producer’s anonymity functioning as a tactical device – appears to be a rarity within a narrative of this kind. Where this may have been more evident is outside of the more ‘collaborative’ narrative and within a speculative discourse: particularly the kind that may have emerged outside of the established (as in the more sanctioned and moderated) areas of publishing. For example, Zomby’s stratagem is discussed with suspicion by a user calling themselves Pkay on the online message board, dupstepforum.com: “I think he wants to believe he's having some epic emotional battle going on in his head regarding artistic integrity and the state of music today but he's not. I think he wants to believe he's an introvert battling his internal image and need to express his music but he's not. Instead he's just a very calculated dude who knows exactly how he wants to play the game [...] he wants to make sure his image is constructed for maximum benefit [...] he understands how to hold focus” (2011, online). This accusatory and potentially demystifying stance of Zomby as non-introverted media manipulator isn’t likely to be employed by media channels that may wish to cultivate relationships and collaborate with its subjects. Blanning’s feature in *The Wire* is actually her second Zomby interview feature – the first having been conducted remotely via iChat in January 2009. And there are, it seems, aspects that were left out of the 2011 feature. Blanning (in interview, appendix #14) reveals that in the lead-up to the feature, it was communicated that Zomby required the feature to be magazine’s cover story if he was to participate. This was negotiated despite the fact that he also wished to hide his face (with the finished cover image featuring the producer in the Guy Fawkes mask from the 2006 film *V For Vendetta* which had, by then, already been adopted as a disguise for those involved in, ‘hacktivist’ group, Anonymous). Blanning also states that Zomby disclosed that he had plans to reveal his face following confirmation that he had made “his first million” pounds (ibid.). The cover image and its apparent rejection of the image is therefore not the only contradiction when approaching Zomby’s methods.¹⁵ The rejection of both his label and the professionalism required to generate income conflicts somewhat with the interest in financial gain that is highlighted by Zomby’s insistence that he will eventually sacrifice his anonymity for a price. Burial, on the other hand, appears to have consistently resisted such negotiations. Cain observes that this is typical of introverts: that “they’re relatively immune to the lures of wealth and fame” (2013, p.11). Highlighting how this may apply to Burial, Thomas recounts a rumour that the producer has repeatedly refused an offer of £250,000 to play a set at Manchester’s Warehouse Project (in interview, appendix #5). Furthermore, while his facelessness has continued to prompt discussion and (almost literally) gain currency, he has chosen to issue short statements through the Hyperdub label’s website alongside explanations that they are presented in the hope that they will disperse some of the increased

speculation. Regarding his identity, Burial was also prompted to release a photograph of his face online as a response to a 2008 campaign for his metaphorical unmasking that also included the revealing of his real name as Will Bevan: a process that demonstrated the lengths that some organisations will go to for complete disclosure – or the unified identity - that is described as having been particularly “difficult” for the producer:¹⁶

Being unwillingly unmasked by The Sun’s Gordon Smart was surely difficult enough for the actual Will Bevan. Burial was nominated for the 2008 Mercury music prize for his majestic second album *Untrue*, and the tabloid’s showbiz editor couldn’t cope with the idea that the bookies’ favourite for the award was an anonymous producer with no backstory to trawl, no photos to splash, and no celeb mates to gossip over. He asked for help unmasking the real Burial, and got exactly what he deserved, a tide of misinformation: “the name Luke keeps cropping up”, he mulled – if memory serves, this was a group effort by the users of the dubstepforum to nominate a regular user called Dubluke. Eventually, Will Bevan gave in, posted a solitary photo on his MySpace, and acknowledged his name.

(Hancox, 2013, online)

However, the protection of his anonymity within the scene that Hancox describes has continued elsewhere. In one recent example, Burial contributed to a track by Dusk & Blackdown that was first issued with minimal details regarding its exact origin. As a retailer who is required to distribute and effectively help publicise the record, Thomas discusses the problematic nature of navigating the secrecy that initially surrounded the release. He states that it first becomes necessary to “keep it within the scene” (in interview, appendix #5) whilst he hesitatingly acknowledges that, to increase that exposure, information regarding Burial’s involvement was slowly released whilst teasing the audience with clues and suggestions of contributions from ‘you-know-who’:

That was basically them [the label] specifically saying don’t mention it and then afterwards... I’m not too sure what changed, but we was like... hmm, I don’t know what to say... because there are cases where you know you’re gonna sell more copies of that record even though people can use their brain and use their ears and listen to the samples and anybody with half a brain can tell that’s a Burial track [...] Sometimes you know who the artist is so while you got an anonymous 12” there, you actually know who’s behind it. You have the option there: you could actually say in the open that it’s somebody incognito or you could just give the game away a bit. But it is kind of fun.

(ibid.)

Burial also reveals his own consideration of the potential value of maintaining a low profile and its association with 'the tease': "Everyone goes on about themselves," he states, "they reveal everything and give it away. It's an obsession in London, people and the media are too blatant, trying to project this image, prove themselves and trying to be something. They should just hold back a bit, it's sexier" (Fisher, 2012, online). So, here, Burial's stance on anonymity can also be viewed as a way of manipulating the marketplace. Like with Zomby, the non-persona - located alongside a culture identified as favouring exposure and projected image - can be argued as having a rare element of intrigue and mystery. Horizontal Border-signed producer 19.26.1.18.5 has similarly observed a power in such an approach, arguing that: "mystery is always more romantic than reality, and nobody can, in person, do justice to the music they make" (Brophy, 2010, online).

The absence of Burial has not only meant that he has avoided the need to justify his music, his "holding back" has allowed his audience to independently interpret the work. As Sumner insists, the withdrawal of the composer creates "space between the artist and the listener" (Church, 2009, online) and subsequently "leaves it wide open for anyone listening to put whatever they want in that empty space" (Blanning, 2011, p.41). In Burial's case, it has infamously prompted what has been described as a deluge of "metaphor, dodgy poetry and urban imagery" (anon #10, 2012, online). This has included its instigation of prose such as: "His recordings ask similar questions of their audience as a broken toy in an abandoned house might: who did these traces belong to? Who were they? Where are they now? And are these things left behind signifiers of happiness or sadness?" (ibid). Yet this kind of open/collective interpretation is an essential component in all areas of EDM and it has been said that it "problematizes the whole notion of reception and consumption, and fosters a collaborative experience in which all the participants (artists, DJs, dancers) contribute equally to a living text" (Ott and Herman, 2003, p.262). Furthermore, this transference of the text from that of a single author to a collectively co-authored text through its interpretive readings will invoke Barthes's post-structural 'Death of the Author': the doubting of a given author to ever really provide unequivocal meaning to a text following "the birth of the reader" (1977, pp.142-149). Barthes' argument is then based on the text's ability to stand alone whilst subject to interpretation by the reader: with subsequent generated interpretations prescribed as unrestricted by the limitations of the author. The text then exists outside of any cultural, economic or social vacuum that further enables its multiple understandings. While this Barthesian approach has been viewed as undermining the "strong institutional hold of the author" (Pokorn, 1999, p.497), Burial's absence can be perceived as instigating or even

inviting this kind of independent reading. Certainly, the fervour for deciphering Burial's ambiguous intentions has generated an extensive, if speculative, discourse that has arguably come to describe those musical texts and what is an otherwise unknown author. The prevalence of this dialogue is, of course, assisted by the fact that it has emerged in an age of mass electronic communication. And while it may have been described as an era of "instant Google searches and expanding social networks" where "sustaining a hidden identity is as easy as winning first division Lotto" (anon #11, 2011, online), the internet has actually assisted dubstep-associated producers like Burial and Zomby who want to control their level of media engagement. Yet there is a real disparity in the two producers' actual use of online communication: with Burial ignoring a continued dialogue when largely relying on relatively rare statements that are forwarded via the Hyperdub website and with Zomby proving to be an active user of Twitter. Cain states that introverts will "welcome the chance to communicate digitally" (Cain, 2013, p.63) and while this applies to Burial's use of online activity for defence - as a way of maintaining distance - Zomby's Twitter account (@ZombyMusic) has gained notoriety as a confrontational space where the screen can seemingly be used for attack. In fact, the turbulent nature that Blanning describes as typifying his business dealings is furthered through what was described as his "debilitating penchant for Twitter" (anon #12, 2013, online): where death threats become seemingly commonplace (including those which Zomby has issued to other producers) to culminate in assessments of the producer as being both "a social media marketing genius" and "simply psychotic" (ibid.). However, there is a further explanation for Zomby's incendiary Twitter usage particularly with regards to how it works in conjunction with his anonymity: a concept described by psychologists as "deindividuation" (Adams, 2011, online). This has links to scenarios where an individual may direct abuse at someone that they are not in close contact with. For example, the driver who responds unfavourably when frustrated by other motorists: where that detachment (due to being inside a vehicle) may prompt behaviour that would be uncharacteristic of the individual in other social settings.

In classic cases of deindividuation, social norms are also more likely to be broken down when the individual is subsumed into larger groups. Yet it is argued as also especially applicable to practices such as internet 'trolling' where the detachment and personal anonymity allows for the transgressing of what, in other circumstances, would be perceived appropriate actions: a phenomenon described simply as "what happens when social norms are withdrawn because identities are concealed" (ibid.). Breen hints that such acts may themselves be part of the attraction to anonymity when saying that:

People use online anonymity to vent their spleen, to rant and rave, to attack others, to hurl insults at those they will probably never meet. Because of this, today we associate pseudonyms and anonymity as an agent void of moral or legal obligation. They live above the law and outside of society. Crucially they lack accountability.

(2010, online)

Zomby's anonymity fits with this: it subsequently allows him to use Twitter to say whatever he wants without retribution. However the lack of 'moral obligation' – his circumnavigating of conscience or responsibility – that is associated with deindividuation may also underpin some of Zomby's other internet-based activities with 'Natalia's Song' (from Zomby's aforementioned *Dedication* album) having been revealed as largely the work of a producer named Reark who Zomby had been corresponding with via email. Reark later alleged that Zomby was unresponsive to his claims as a writer and subsequently detailed a "sequence of events" from the earliest recordings through to his eventual recognition as composer:

1. I wrote this loop back in October 2007, entirely by myself, posting it on Myspace.
2. Zomby, with whom I was communicating, hears the loop and offers to collaborate to finish it. I agree and send him the original Reason song file + Rex file of the vocals.
3. Zomby posts the loop on his Myspace without crediting me, I complain, he takes it down.
4. In the next months Zomby suggests where the track might get released. I continue to remind him that it's a collaboration.
5. Without my knowledge, a slightly revised version is aired by Mary Anne Hobbs on Radio 1, you can hear Zomby's revised drum variation from 1:06—1:36.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDLXRtbeLg0> This is the only significant change he's made to the track. The rest is looping, and some slight editing of the vocal cuts.
6. The track gets released on 4AD in May 2011, I notice in August 2011. I complain first to Zomby with no effect, then to 4AD, to whom I send this loop plus an e-mail sent from me to Zomby with the original Reason song file from October 2007. 4AD accept my evidence and change credits to include my name.

(Reark, 2012, online)

This serves as a reminder of authorship's relationship to copyright as highlighted in section 1.2.2 Anonymity and Authorship. Additionally referring back to the discussion of sampling in chapter 2, it is clear the appropriation of existing works within EDM tracks is widespread. In

this case, the similarities between Reark's production and the version that appeared under Zomby's name substantiated a plagiarism claim. Despite this, the more established producer appeared to be unrepentant immediately following the publicising of the track's originator and composed tweets seemingly aimed at Reark that included "sold about 4 records and you want hype off me" (Zomby, 2012, online): an accusatory statement based around a perception that the relatively unknown Reark had attempted to use Zomby's reputation to further his own name within the scene. The concept of anonymity here was then multi-layered with Zomby's acknowledgement of Reark's own anonymity – that one supposes may have validated the uncredited use of his original composition – being viewed as being of a lower status to Zomby's own presented anonymity. Essentially, and while still under the cover of anonymity, infamy was suggested by the 'beyond genre' Zomby as preferable and more powerful than the kind of anonymity that comes from simply being unknown.

This confrontational and unapologetic Zomby may then be seen as wholly removed from the more introspective Burial. However, reflective of the connectivity that exists within scenes, the latter is still implicated with regards to 'Natalia's Song'. An omitted detail from Reark's citation of the track as being played on Mary Anne Hobbs' show, it was actually aired as part of a guest mix by Burial and Kode 9: thus a rare appearance from the former producer as part of Hobbs' final transmission on Radio 1. In fact prior to the controversy surrounding 'Natalia's Song', Zomby was quoted as saying that "I wrote it to give to Burial, really. It wasn't intended to be a single" (Parkes, 2011a, online). An alternative print version of that same interview begins with Zomby stating: "I don't take anything from other people's music to make my own" (Parkes, 2011b, p.44) yet, ironically, we see Reark's re-appropriated work being presented as a gift to Burial: an individual that Zomby appears to view without contempt and - as that same interview goes on to describe - as an inspiration. However, whether it is Zomby's perception of producers that are lesser or those rare few names that are actually cited as impacting on his output, the notion of 'scene' is used to situate his own place. Even for the anonymous or reclusive producer – and from the genre artist to the 'beyond genre' name to the relatively unknown producer - each scene participant is ultimately defined within an understanding of the collective.

3.6 Scenius and Tribus

The previous section's examination of scene dynamics within an EDM genre such as dubstep revealed them to be integral to the identity of participants. Even those producers that were perceived as beyond genre have still operated in an area that has been defined in terms of a proximity to scene and in comparison to generic codes and conventions. Furthermore, individual achievements may be defined as the result of the collective due to the support or pressures of these communities having informed music outputs. Steve Goodman frames these tendencies within EDM as "rhythmic collectivity" - stating that they represent "people moving together, differently, in time" (Walmsley, 2009, online). For him, there is "something very fundamental or basic that comes before any political affiliation, ideological affiliation, almost underneath social categories, a basic model of what a collective is [...] people coming together, joined by one thing, rhythm" (ibid.). Writers such as Reynolds have subsequently seized upon EDM's neo-tribal collective traits when noting that it allows for an understanding of how its genres have "evolved without the traditional music historian's reflex of fixating on specific individuals" (2013a, p.661). Additionally, he refers to scenes built around Goodman's rhythmic collectivity as simultaneously promoting "the collective disassembly of the author" (2009): thereby further challenging typical genius or auteur theories. Yet that disassembly also risks destabilising the whole star system by promoting a more egalitarian assessment of personal contribution as just one part of a more communal development. Eno's "scenius" (Radiocitizen, 2009, online) offers an effective, practical way to see the way that this has worked within EDM scenes and, furthermore, how it has lead to creative endeavour. A combination of the words 'scene' and 'genius', Eno described scenius as:

The intelligence of a whole... operation or group of people. And I think that's a more useful way to think about culture, actually. I think that – let's forget the idea of "genius" for a little while, let's think about the whole ecology of ideas that give rise to good new thoughts and good new work.

(ibid.)

Maffesoli's own interest in collective intelligence, stemming from unity and shared interests, culminates in an overarching concept that he alternatively defines as "tribus" (1996). This, in turn, is linked to the products of that communal activity, but also to the loss of individual identity. Essentially, social cohesion then offers support for creativity alongside a semblance of community but, as Hetherington argues of these neo-tribal formations, "individuality is

subsumed” (1998, p.95). However, when offering belonging and a shared identity, there does remain an internal framework within scenes for more novel identities to be enacted. As Maffesoli says:

The constitutive groupings of sociality; each in its own way, creates the ideology and pieces together its own small history from disparate elements culled from the four corners of the Earth. They may be borrowed from local tradition or they may cut across these traditions. Nevertheless, their assemblage shows similarities which will constitute a sort of matrix, giving rise to and reinforcing individual representations.

(Maffesoli, 1996, p.68)

Yet there is also ephemerality within these EDM structures: that while these groups may “recall somewhat the archaic structures of village clans or tribes” (Maffesoli, 1996, p.139), we should be mindful of “the very temporality of these tribes” (ibid.). One small strand of such a potentially fleeting tribe is documented in fig.19. Describing an example of “underground centrality” (Maffesoli, 1996, p.ix), it represents both the collectivity and connectivity that exists around a small number of independent record labels and their associated EDM signings. The particular area that has been selected (as just one small section of a much more expansive network) is that which is relevant to a number of producers that have incorporated aspects of anonymity. However, despite assumptions that many of these names are perhaps understood as elusive individuals, the diagram’s purpose is to explain how there are established relationships between participants and organisations. Then, while not fully articulating all of the complex arrangements within EDM’s more sprawling network, by highlighting a number of known connections it responds to Maffesoli’s claims that “just like the person who dons masks in the theatre of everyday life, sociality is structurally deceptive, unknowable” (1996, p.5). Further utilising Eno’s *scenius* concept (which some online sources say first originated in 1996 - although this appears to be lacking a definitive citation), it helps to illustrate how these collectives are “nurtured by several factors” including mutual appreciation driven by friendly competition, a rapid exchange of tools and techniques that give rise to new developments, network effects of success and protection for those that transgress the scene (Kelly, 2008, online). The Beggars Group, for example, operates as an umbrella for a series of successful independent labels including, as demonstrated, XL Recordings, Young Turks and 4AD. It has the resources available to offer sizeable support and assist with further sales for producers that have already been releasing music through smaller labels. Yet it can also offer further connectivity (SBTRKT working with both the XL-affiliated Thom Yorke and Ezra

Koenig, Various Productions' remix of Adele, etc.). As documented in the first chapter of this thesis, these independent labels can also offer flexibility. So while Zomby may now be part of 4AD's roster, he has also recently started his own label, Cult Music. While this project has, so far, released records by other producers, his Q&A with Jones reveals Zomby's plans to use it as outlet for his own output:

Will you be releasing your own music on Cult?

Zomby: Fuck yes.

What's next for you?

Zomby: I've new material coming on 4AD in the near future and a few other labels we all know and love.

(Jones, 2014, online)

Then, further to work via Cult, there is the potential for Zomby to use the kind of flexibility that would *not* be associated with more restrictive major label contracts to produce further music for some of his previous outlets including Hyperdub, Ramp and Actress' Werkdiscs should he wish. Meanwhile, he has built on his kinship with Darkstar – also a sometime addition to Hyperdub's roster and with whom he also shared a 2007 split single, 'Memories/Saytar' – by remixing their music. Fig.20 then includes references to producers that have explored these opportunities for collaborative labour to contribute to the building of *scenius* and *tribus*. Thus described as "affinity groupings" (Maffesoli, 1996, p.78), these formations are said to evoke the extended family of ancient anthropological tribes. As such, they provide "a structure in which the negotiation of passion or conflict is carried out in close quarters" (ibid.). In the case of EDM, these are largely based around "music released by underground labels run by single-minded visionaries; music from obscure labels catering for hyper-rarified tastes" (House and Shaughnessy, 2000, p.4). An alternative approach may have been found in the multinational clubbing brands that packaged such sounds for wider consumption. Yet the latter, as materials intended for a wider audience, are unlikely to utilise scene dynamics for success: instead favouring marketing based around iconography, more traditional song formats alongside the star system mode of delivery is more likely invoked whilst a neo-tribalist focus on shared success and internal verification is largely disregarded. The opinions of a wider public to EDM scenes are of less consequence in comparison to those of the participants within the community. As Maffesoli says: "the enemy is less important than the social glue which the group secretes" (1996, p.93). Still, Peter's reading of Maffesoli argues that 'neo-tribes' – including the scene groupings that have come together through EDM – are primarily on a quest for belonging or "searching for a home" (2009, p.24). Yet

this home, once established, is one that will in turn be built around a series of rules that all within the commune must respect. This culminates in the “internal-external dialectic” (Jenkins, 1996, p.21): whereby participants may subscribe to the idea that “what people think about us is less important than what we think about ourselves” and that “it is not enough to assert an identity. That identity must also be validated (or not) by those with whom we have dealings” (ibid.).

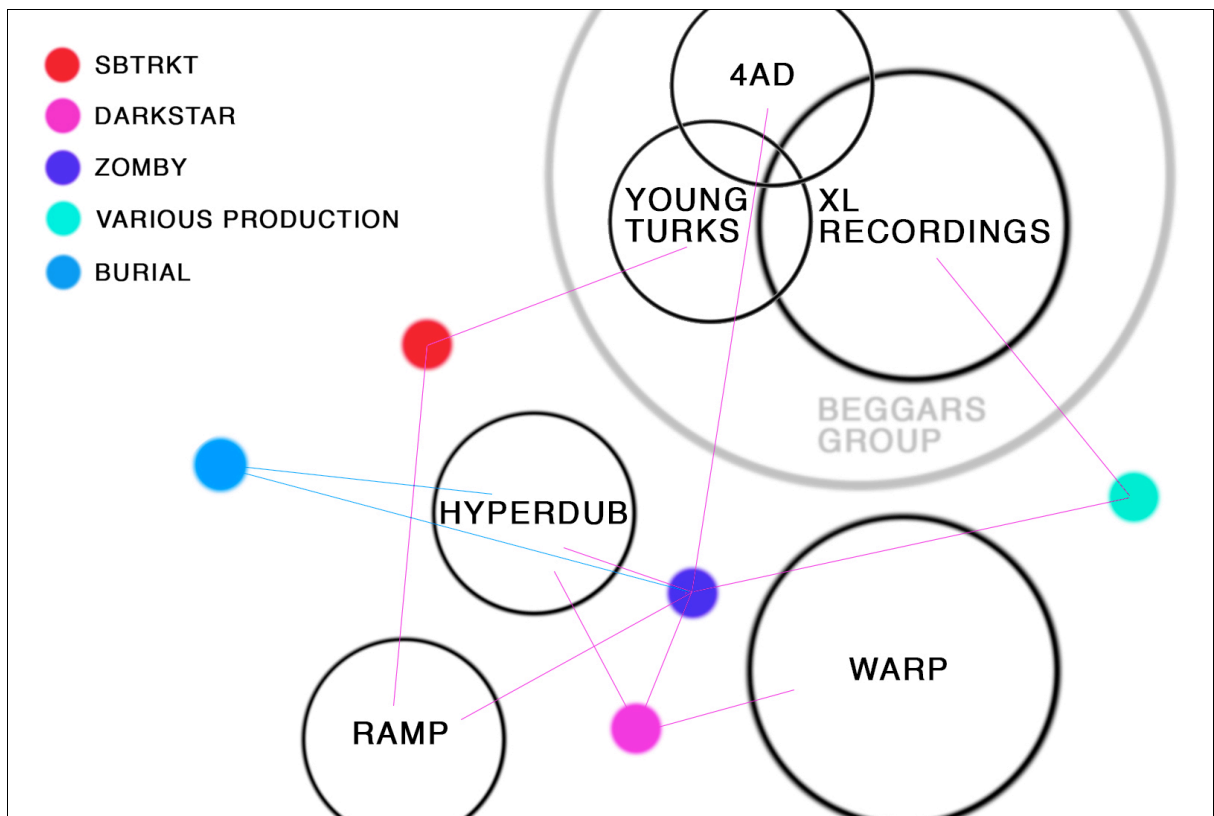


Fig.19 – Diagram of connectivity between a selection of labels and producers

Maffesoli (1996) relies on a further term “puissance” in order to encapsulate in the vital energy of the people (as opposed to the power of institutions). This may be determined as the driving force behind notions of tribus and scenius. Yet, as Maffesoli explores, puissance functions as an influence behind wider sociality and, ultimately, identity. As he describes: “Our consciousness is but a meeting ground, the crystallization of various currents which, with precise moments of symmetry, intersect, attract or repel one another [...] Thus we say that a personal thought follows from the ‘inclination of a collective thought’”(Maffesoli, 1996, p.68); that, to some degree, all activity is essentially communal activity.

3.7 Conclusions

Chapter 2 already described a number of technological interventions that have impacted on the EDM producer and their claim to authorship. Throughout chapter 3, some of the ideas already introduced within the discussion of practices such as sampling were increasingly relevant when focusing on texts that were, in a variety of different ways, perceived as being part of larger co-authored texts. One of the key areas where this had occurred regularly was via the DJ set. Subsequently the chapter required some consideration of the DJ's role to clarify how this has altered the perception of what was originally created by the EDM producer as an individual piece of work. When reviewing a wide range of literature a number of arguments emerged. The primary argument was based around the DJ as a figure with the power to ultimately 'complete' the EDM text when assembling his set on the understanding that his or her records were modular units that – building on the previous chapter's argument regarding non-teleological EDM compositions – can be overlaid, duplicated, rearranged or manipulated in any way that the DJ desired. Essentially they were viewed as unfinished prior to the DJ's reconfiguration with the value of the individual track understood by some audiences in terms how successfully it contributed to the larger composite text. The consequence of this is that it marginalises the contribution of the EDM producer through the defining of the primary text as one that is a communal effort. Further to this, the composite text gives authorial recognition to the DJ: subsequently turning these individuals into deified figures within scenes whilst the creators of the individual pieces of music, by comparison, are anonymous. However the fame-oriented need for scene names that gave rise to the 'superstar DJ' have also contrasted with a number of factors that have been integral to scenes. Eno's 'scenius' provides a lens through which we may view this more iconoclastic spirit: thus presenting EDM as favouring an egalitarian approach that demonstrates a commitment to communal values. Similarly related to and often represented through texts that would be presented in succession, this can be found in areas where label identity became more essential than the identities of individuals. Confirming such an approach, the collective is explicitly expressed as an actual motive for anonymity within an interview with the Frozen Border label on, website, Resident Advisor:

Were there any specific reasons behind your anonymity?

Well it's more of a collective really, so we present it this way out of a shared responsibility.

(anon #13, 2009, online)

Particularly with sleeve design, the move away from unique identities to shared identities by record labels may initially be argued as driven by economic constraints yet it has more recently become an ideological feature of EDM that could even be used by major corporations to gain consumer trust due to facelessness' relationship to underground ideals - although this, too, suppresses author visibility. Thus an alternative to the star-oriented products associated with rock and pop genres, EDM music can be viewed externally as being purposefully – or wilfully – esoteric. Furthermore, in terms of the visual aesthetics associated with EDM output, releases can be seen as similarly abstruse with non-figurative imagery that perhaps has most in common with other notably niche music such as that released through jazz-rooted labels like ECM whose records are said to be typified by “the absence of flamboyant graphics and the refusal to bow to the pressure of information” (Müller, 1996, p.46). This particularly resonates within the discussion of EDM in chapter 2 and, in particular, the noting of Daft Punk's refusal of information data to culminate in the perception of the author as further distanced from the audience. However, the suggestion that information should not be immediate has meant that details regarding individual producers has only really evaded the casual audience: an especially important point given the underground ideals regarding scene membership that has long underpinned niche music scenes. To describe such distinctions, Sweetman then advocates a clear distinction between what he terms “travellers and tourists” (2004, p.80): with the former more embedded within the culture of a scene whilst the latter has more superficial ties and is “happy to play around with the options available to them” (ibid.) The traveller, it is said, will then claim “authenticity on the basis of greater depth of involvement – whether real or imagined” (Sweetman, 2004, p.91). The elusiveness of the producer within EDM can be argued as prompting that greater depth of involvement from its more committed fans (or travellers): culminating in active participants and perhaps even strengthened bonds through an almost delayed gratification where personal investment is required if one is to be rewarded with the sharing of the scene's secret knowledge. Hesmondhalgh actually refers to Straw's discussion of this secrecy but links it further with the anti-rockist stance discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis:

The relative lack of concern with authorship within post-war dance music culture (as compared with rock and other forms) perhaps reflected a lack of interest amongst dance audiences in rock notions of authenticity, sincerity and integrity [...] but also, as Will Straw (1993) suggests, a pleasure in secrecy and obscurity, in the idea that a sound would not become known to everyone.

(1998a, p.238)

Relatedly, this preserving of information within EDM scenes has been linked to longevity: where producers operating seemingly outside of mainstream media have remained most relevant to their committed audiences by maintaining cult value. Notably, the genre of techno has provided an arena that is dominated by the longstanding influence of production units such as Underground Resistance and Basic Channel: producers that have similarly been typified by the avoidance of mainstream visibility and the retaining of cult value. Lessons learned through this genre and its associated scenes also seem to be permeating newer EDM formations such as dubstep where the ‘self-correction mechanism’ as proposed by Reynolds perhaps functions more feasibly as a ‘collective correction mechanism’: a communal instrument governing, to an extent, the actions of individuals within the scene in order to present shared objectives and also survive attention outside of the specialist area. This especially seems to relate to forms of music where the aesthetics of the actual music – in accordance with the impact of technology as presented in chapter 2 – is, in turn, related to themes of disappearance (e.g. via spatial dub influences or minimal arrangements). The ethos of Eno’s *scenius* is then far reaching within EDM. Yet, as discussed, the anonymity associated with communal activity has been commonly isolated and perceived as solely representing the intentions of a reclusive individual. Within chapter 3, the suggestion that it is then the individual producer’s choice to maintain this anonymity in order to put focus on the music recording was treated with suspicion. Especially given how these responses have often been related to a paradox where media attention was directed towards the individual *because of* their presented or performed anonymity. While it is observed how this has occurred in the discussion of Burial and Zomby, producer Nick Zanca sums-up his own dalliance with anonymizing strategies after he (unsuccessfully) attempted to hide his identity under the guise of Mister Lies when stating: “you realize later that by going anonymous, there is an image, and it’s mysterious. So that kind of backfired” (Fitzmaurice, 2012, online). Essentially this again supports the idea that anonymity has the potential to be used counter-intuitively or strategically in order to invite attention. Certainly, this is expressed in the materials that relate to Burial and Zomby - even despite the producers employing alternative approaches regarding their use of the media. However, the collective scene is still consistently used as a reference point with regards to even the most well-known of producers: then compromising the individual within a communal setting that ultimately destabilises notions of genius in favour of *scenius*.

Notes

¹ Fikentscher observes: “while the tempo of a piece of recorded dance music is fixed, the tempo of the music on a TechnicsSL-1200 turntable is adjustable from minus eight percent to plus eight percent” (2003, p.299). This has had consequences through the evolution of genres with Reynolds noting how ‘speed garage’, as a notable example, emerged as producers began to make tracks that sounded like the records that DJs had been playing at +8 (2013a, p.521). With more recent uses of digital technology (including CDs and audio files that can be manipulated and blended using software like Traktor and Ableton), the potential for adjusting pitch has furthered those limits to the point that it is now possible to play a track at any speed.

² As Tagg says, EDM tracks “rarely start with all tracks sounding simultaneously and often build up several two-bar units of other tracks before the quantized kick drum sets in” (1994). Kühn states that “the music has its own highly specific characteristics: it begins with an aesthetic (e.g. house/techno), develops according to its genre-typical structure (intro, breakdown, main section, breakdown, main section and outro) and ends with the intended goal of making an audience dance when played on a loud sound system in a club and being intricately and individually mixed by DJs into their hours-long sets (2011, online).

³ There is an alternative definition of seriality as in ‘a seriality’ which instead relates to clearly named groups or population sub-sets. This version – while, at face value, suggesting a link to a chapter concerned with collective identity groups – proves insufficient here. EDM groups have already been described as fluid and, despite sometime external assessments of “ravers” or “clubbers”, this trait has not been conducive to either the adoption of or the imposing of a definitive collective ‘name’. Subsequently these have avoided an agreed ‘label’ (a marker, docket or tool for categorisation) that can immediately identify and indicate specific attributes.

⁴ A record label’s established, defined aesthetic can also be argued as contributing to a cycle that concentrates that aesthetic given that an association with a particular ‘sound’ will inevitably lead to it being targeted by producers who are interested in making that kind of music. However, many labels will be keen to display their credentials for innovation and will refuse to sign producers that it sees as copying or ‘bandwagon-jumping’. An example of this would include The Glasgow-based Lucky Me label that expressed its apparent weariness at the amount of submitted demos based around a subgenre called ‘trap’ following the success of, an artist on its roster, Baauer and the international success of his trap-oriented ‘Harlem Shake’ track (2012).

⁵ Manuel Sepulveda is a designer (also working under the name of ‘Optigram’) who is known for his use of camouflage patterns. He has developed these predominantly for the Maharishi fashion label – an operation that describes its approach as ‘Pacifist Military Design’ – but these have appeared predominantly on Hyperdub sleeves including 2014’s *Hyperdub 10.1* compilation.

⁶ The position of the label as an ‘underdog’ operation that acts as a home for musicians that are perceived as not commercial enough to be signed elsewhere has been echoed by Trevor Jackson. Discussing his now defunct but once critically revered Output label, Jackson says: “most of the artists we worked with were rejects. Nobody else wanted them” (in interview, appendix #9).

⁷ Multinational clubbing ‘brands’ found ways to package sounds for wider consumption that actually involved a more familiar kind of aesthetic. In some cases imagery has been

incorporated that is authoritarian and establishment-evoking including Ministry of Sound's portcullis logo and the heraldic lion icon of Sheffield 'superclub' Gatecrasher. Both of these far less oppositional approaches may just betray the anti-establishment roots of EDM (in particular, 'the rave scene') and suggest a conforming culture merged into mainstream society. These thoroughly corporate identities have appeared to debunk anonymity in favour of an ultra-homogenous aesthetic that, via the suggestion of an 'official' stamp, can be applied to any commercially viable strain of club music (most notably through a succession of compilation albums). Ministry of Sound – as a record label – also appears to be attempting to live up to its name by moving outside of EDM's parameters and has recently released compilation albums based around 1980s pop and R&B.

⁸ Despite the design for XTC seeming to further Jamie Reid-like punk credentials, design agency Hipgnosis closed in 1982 after its founders felt themselves vilified through an association with progressive rock – most notably due to its association with clients including Pink Floyd and Genesis who, in turn, had become despised by the more youthful creative spirit of the age.

⁹ While a relationship between Hard Wax and Berghain may not have been explicitly confirmed by either party for the purposes of this thesis, there *are* connections between the two that have been discussed publicly. Speaking to XLR8R, Hard Wax store manager Michael Hain says of the Berghain-owned Ostgut Ton label: "We get our Ostgut releases directly and it's amongst the best-selling labels in the shop. We are connected to Ostgut personally through our former and current colleagues releasing on the label or being residents at Berghain or Panorama Bar. It's hard to say when [the association] started" (Johnson, 2014, online). Berghain is additionally notable for its strict door policy and a ban on photography within its former power plant venue: as much a reflection of the hedonistic activity that takes place within the space as a requirement to maintain any of its own underground credentials. That said, a Twitter account using the handle @insideberghain and detailing line-ups and set times for the club's events includes a biography stating: "No pictures from inside. No leaks. No sellout. No selfies. No secret handshakes. Just a few anonymous insights from the world's most notorious nightspot" (anon #8, n.d., online).

¹⁰ "Faceless techno bollocks" has been attributed to rock music writers seemingly expressing disdain at the amount of anonymous white label electronic dance music releases that followed the explosion of dance music scenes in the late 1980s. It was later appropriated by Rising High Records as a t-shirt print in the early 1990s alongside other label merchandise emblazoned with slogans such as "you're going home in a fucking ambience" (sic). The latter is in reference to its championing of 'ambient' music yet alters ambient's more anodyne 'muzak' reputation with a subversion of a violent football terrace chant threat of "you're going home in a fucking ambulance".

¹¹ Clark identifies 2006 as the year that dubstep "exploded" – or, perhaps, 'crossed over' – saying that "suddenly, after six years of struggle, it started appearing in Hollywood films (Children of Men), was reviewed favourably in broadsheet newspapers including *The Observer* and *The Telegraph* and got played in clubs from Baltimore to Brazil" (2007, p.67).

¹² Beeler says that this assimilation is part of a "continuous process of transition" where what was once perceived as in opposition to mainstream entertainment becomes incorporated within it and "as the cycle continues, the newest factions and subgroups are rapidly subsumed by the popular expressions of the movement" (2007, p.4).

¹³ Steve Goodman has defined Burial's lack of media participation as being down to his "shyness and introversion" (McFadden, 2008, p.29). However Cain has argued that introverts aren't necessarily shy. She states: "shyness is the fear of social disapproval or humiliation, while introversion is a preference for environments that are not overstimulating. Shyness is inherently painful; introversion is not. One reason that people confuse the two concepts is that they sometimes overlap (though psychologists debate to what degree)" (Cain, 2013, p.12).

¹⁴ The suggestion in The Wire article's opening statement that Zomby is "preserving his anonymity to underwrite his dedication to the music" (Blanning, 2011, p.36) is then not a true reflection of the producer's motives. Actually not part of the contribution by Blanning and most likely added by an editor or sub-editor, it is assumed to be worded to directly reference, Zomby's then current album, *Dedication*.

¹⁵ In addition to the paradox where Zomby wishes to put forward an image whilst maintaining links with anti-image is consolidated when observing the amount of coverage of his interest in high fashion. While he does document an interest in designer clothes as being linked to creativity/self-expression, there has long been a divide in EDM cultures between style-oriented scenes and music-oriented scenes. However Zomby rejects the anonymous and utilitarian garments associated with many revered EDM producers in favour of luxury/status labels including Givenchy and Balmain.

¹⁶ Steve Goodman – in his Kode9 producer guise – issued a track 'Black Sun' as a response to the treatment of Burial's privacy by The Sun. However while the tabloid was especially determined to uncover personal details, it should be acknowledged that the speculation regarding Burial's identity has been widespread. In the same year that The Sun made its enquiries, The Independent newspaper revealed that he was a product of London's Elliot School stating that "another former student is William Bevan, aka Burial, a dubstar [sic] artist who enjoys a cult dancefloor following and who likes to retain a Banksy-like anonymity" (Brown and Kinnear, 2008, online). Additionally there have been much-publicised conspiracy theories suggesting that Burial's output is in fact the work of another individual already working in music. Suggestions as to the identity of this individual have included fellow Elliot School alumni Kieran Hebden (see Hancox, 2013, online) alongside other claims that 'Burial' is Steve Goodman, Thom Yorke or Zomby.

4. Transformation: Ritual and Reinvention

4.1 Introduction

The previous parts of this thesis have observed a number of EDM producers that have created and controlled guises with regards to the release of music and their engagement with both collective ‘scene’ dynamics and widespread media. When these were discussed in relationship to their presented personas there was little detail regarding the adoption of guises as an actual process of transformation. Chapter 4 rectifies this with an examination of these processes in order to consider further the motives behind identity construction and, in particular, where these work alongside notions of anonymity.

The first section looks at the role of the mask as a transformative device. However, while there have been many references to ‘masking’ throughout the previous chapters, it has largely been used to define the use of a metaphorical mask in terms of actions that obscure or redefine information. The use of this metaphor is substantially expanded upon throughout chapter 4.2 yet this is alongside further examples of EDM producers who literally employ facelessness within their own anonymous practices via the wearing of masks. To comprehend the broader understandings of physical masks and how this links with perceptions of identity, it was deemed essential that the subchapter should also engage with texts that have explored and analysed such practices; thereby shaping the context by placing these actions within a history of performative transformation.

The discussion of masks leads on to 4.3: a section that examines how the adoption of a name can also act as a catalyst for reinvention. This is worthy of consideration as EDM is primarily argued as being a culture based that makes use of the pseudonym. It is within this culture that producers have employed multiple guises that, as will be discussed, can be problematic in terms of presenting a fixed identity and therefore contribute further to obscurity and anonymity. Adding to that complexity, the subsequent subchapter reworks some of chapter 3’s basis for identity constructed around ‘scene’ to discuss the impact of perceived ‘roots’. It uses a number of examples including scenarios where anonymous activity is considered to be part of a lineage of subversive practices that can involve the assembling of biographies that have been interspersed with mythology.

The chapter’s case study focuses on, EDM producer, SBTRKT: a mask-wearing figure who, while utilising his pseudonym and performed anonymity, has additionally employed imagery

that can be argued as drawing from a post-colonial or transnational tableau. There is also an aspect of this particular transformation that links to ritual and, in particular, that which may also be associated with non-Western cultures. This factor is also considered with regards to how these ritualistic practices may be incorporated to counter some of the technological interventions that, as discussed in chapter 2, have been integral to EDM. But while additionally suspicious in its disconnection from what might be described as the British producer's 'true identity', the addressed behaviours and their association with a specific type of identity construction are then believed to typify the key concepts that are intrinsic to chapter 4.

4.2 Masks and Metamorphosis

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

(Wilde, from "The Critic as Artist", *Intentions*, 1891)

This section's exploration of the mask as a device for transformation requires a discussion of Marx's 'character mask': a metaphorical incarnation, but one that is addressed as being essential for 'role-taking' within the social world. While Marx's concept has been further developed throughout the 20th century (particularly through the work of Linton, 1936; Mead 1934, 1938 and Parsons 1937, 1951, 1968), it should be noted that, in various forms, the character mask and its associations with role-taking have emerged for discussion throughout ages, cultures and schools of thought. Consistently, the central feature of this character mask has been built on the tenet that roles are essentially 'acted out': that social environments require the enactment of a role that is, in turn, linked to a further concept of persona. England, for example, recounts that, according to the Romans, 'persona' was itself the actor's mask - with his more complete definition offered as "a thing for speaking through" (1912, p.19). He then goes on to remind his reader that persona provides us the word 'personality' before expanding further on this personality to suggest that it functions as "the fleshly veil arranged to form a certain mask" (1912, p.21). He also remarks that:

This mask should indeed be a matter of grave concern to us. From the time when reason first awakens in us, to the last day of our life, each man is or should be concerned largely with the moulding of his mask into the likeness of *that which is behind the mask*. Let me try to make this conception clear. In each of us there is the *ego*, the

self, the soul – whatever you choose to call it; in front of that *ego*, concealing it from the eyes of our fellows, is the mask, the personality.

(ibid.)

This persona or personality may, in turn, be understood within the constraints of ‘the social mask’: the presented or performed identity. That is to say that the self is ritualistically performed: where even aspects that are often viewed as intrinsic such as gender can be argued as being “created through sustained social performances” (Butler, 1988, p.528).¹ Further to this, while the roles that relate to the social mask are additionally perceived as falling into fairly consistent categories, Marx’s character mask has been understood as more flexible given that it can also be applied to groups/organisations in addition to class relationships and social settings. It is also viewed as being responsive to societal influences that may be linked to specific eras and their respective dominant ideologies but, in all cases, these theories of identity can concern the use of multiple identities and the renegotiation of identity in response to the availability of roles. For example, Stryker’s identity theory (1980) argues that individuals in social structures will subsequently designate an identity within broader structures to correspond with the generally perceived expectations regarding a role and its associated behaviours. However this does not mean that behaviour is then wholly controlled by the adoption of specific roles: for Stryker the notion of identity still operates as a component within a larger sense of self.²

An alternative position is that of McCall and Simmons’ “role identity” where behaviour is improvised in order to maintain what is described as a preferred or even idealized version of oneself (1960). As with Stryker’s further elaboration of his own identity theory, such a practice also relies on external verification: that an identity – and the ideals that it represents – must be supported and ultimately legitimized by others. Barker and Taylor warn that these “deliberate attempts to project a certain persona” will inevitably lead us to question whether what is put forward is “the truth, a self-deception, or a construction intended for public consumption” (2007, p.186). The mask of identity then operates as “an object of orientation” (Parsons, 1968, p.14): where the perceptions (and, indeed, the roles) of others will also work in conjunction an individual’s role to culminate in a socially verified identity.

A literal use of a mask, on the other hand, may be seen as adjusting these variations in role-taking through a more deliberate - or at least far more *conscious* - act that can be instead described as ‘role-playing’. The adaption of these roles as play may in turn be linked to

Mead's observations that the metaphorical character mask has its own roots in infancy where roles are imitated by young children prior to their eventual understanding of what is defined as "the generalized other" (1934, p.154). Yet these more explicit enactments may similarly be associated with the presentation of an idealized version within the somewhat less playful relinquishing of an established self: where the literal mask provides an escape from the confines of the social mask. After all, McLuhan makes the point that "every environment that we make and assume is a mask that can become a crushing weight distorting our sensibilities, unless countervailed by imaginative response" (1971, p.522). Similarly, the erosion of commitments to specific identities has been said to result in new "novel" identities: identities that are more closely linked to cultural values (Turner, 2013, p.334). So while the wearing of an actual real mask is frequently placed within popular culture with a "sinister quality" – especially given its common concealment of the distorted or disfigured (Warner, 2003, p.94) – we may also view its use as a more free and potentially more accurate portrait of the individual that it adorns; that unlike masks adopted, or assigned, through social constraints, it embodies the real thoughts, interests and emotions of the wearer. More specifically, there is the argument that adopting a different persona actually reveals what is the true character (Fitzgerald, 2010, p.173) through – to borrow from Foucault – "implicit significations, silent determinations, and obscured contents" (in Rabinow, 1984, p.105).

In terms of a relationship to music, perhaps the hiding of the physical or the figurative through the use of the mask also helps to concentrate on the metaphysical properties: again prompting that much uttered suggestion that anonymity serves to shift the focus onto the music. However, there is a risk from the 'crushing weight' of the mask itself: that such a device becomes the definitive characteristic. Where rather than the producer as wearer of the mask, the mask wears the producer. And, as the primary indicator of the guise, the mask – as both signifier and novelty – becomes more prominent than the music. It can then become an inconvenience that in no way performs the tasks for which it may have been designed. Producer Drums of Death, for example, has referred to his eventual moving away from performing with a mask due to his pigeon-holing and the preconceptions that had become associated with the projected image (anon #14, 2013, online). Label owner Rob Hall also notes what he sees as the futility of such an approach given how information regarding identities becomes freely available on the World Wide Web. He considers the actions of techno producer Redshape (fig.20) who, after some acclaim, was identified online as German producer Sebastian Kramer. Hall says: "everyone knows who Redshape is, but he still has to wear a mask" (anon #7, 2009, online); thus observing that - despite the official biography of

the once unknown figure now being freely available, the producer's back-catalogue being revised as extending back to 2000 and the availability of unmasked images online - Kramer insists on employing the masked guise. Kramer, by contrast, states that his red mask "symbolises the 'unknown' space around or behind the music and the scene" (Smith, 2008, online) yet there is an argument that any ambiguity that may have once been connected with the device has been lost. If anything, it now rejects the unknown and distinguishes Kramer within the scene.



Fig.20 – Redshape press photograph by Shaun Bloodworth (2012)

England similarly suggests that masks were ineffective when noting that those used in the amphitheatres in Ancient Greece "obviously prevented any play of facial expression" to the point that they "cannot have been of much interest to the spectators, except as conveniently distinguishing the characters represented" (1912, p.19). But this remains a key aspect of the mask: it is there to "represent the transformed person" (Pollock, 1995, p.584), but also, and perhaps more importantly, to demark a separate and specific character. Altern 8, for example, used "chemical warfare protection suits, yellow dust masks and gas masks, which cleverly managed to turn techno's 'faceless anonymity' into a marketable image" (Reynolds, 2013a, p.147). Yet, one half of the Altern 8 production duo, Mark Archer, insists that the masks were

indexical: that they designated where the guise began and ended in conjunction with his other alter egos. The name Altern 8 itself – in its suggestion of ‘alternate’ – already suggested interchanging properties and this becomes especially important in its relationship to the duo’s other production guise, Nexus 21. As Archer insists:

The whole idea behind the suits/masks was to stop the crowd at the Eclipse in Coventry recognising us as we’d played a gig there early 1991 as Nexus 21 and were then booked as Altern 8 when [track] ‘Infiltrate 202’ was doing the rounds. I didn’t want anyone to think they were being blagged.

(in interview, appendix #13)

4.3 Pseudonymous Cultures: Anonymity as “The Unnamed”?

As with Mark Archer and his Altern 8 and Nexus 21 projects, many EDM producers have operated multiple identities to covertly distribute their work. Essentially this practice defies the notion of anonymity as being that which lacks a name and instead addresses the potential for the anonym or what, otherwise, is commonly known as the pseudonym. As will be explored throughout this section, the use of these often veiled incarnations rely on processes of transformation that are similar to those involved in mask wearing. There is, for example, the representation of a conscious delineation of identity as removed from one that has already been established. In cases where the pseudonym is signifier, this has required the adoption of a guise and an associated moniker that is distinctly removed from what may be described as the composer’s so-called true identity (as in an official or ‘core’ identity that bears their full name). Yet this process may also be undertaken to develop an identity that has been designed as being different to at least one other recognised unofficial guise that has been solely constructed by the composer for the issuing of his or her music.

However, this rejection of a single fixed identity clearly impacts on the easy identification of the author and diffuses authorship at the expense of a single, concentrated persona. As discussed in previous chapters, the more typical industry approach to authorship – the ‘star system’ – tends to rely on the building of a single identity to maximise exposure through the establishing of ‘the name’. The alternative option that has become prevalent in EDM consisting of a disregard for fixed names/single identities means that the composer risks less recognition for their cumulative work. But whilst referring to the government’s policing of early EDM events (including a described “process of invasion” and the media’s subsequent “moral panic”), Rietveld offers what has become a historic basis for EDM’s refusal of a fixed

identity (1999, p.65) that has, in turn, assisted with “the articulation of a new space of the non-spectacle” that escaped “traditional sites of surveillance” (Melechi, 1999, p.34). Therefore the resisting of the fixed identity – while observed as a device for the recognition/easy identification of scene participants – is thus defined as “the only ‘tactic’ left [...] an escape, a moment of moving to the other side of the mirror which is held up by established discourses such as the media discourse” (Rietveld, 1999, p.65). Rietveld and Melechi’s discussion of this type of disappearance is notably applicable to a broad range of behaviours within early EDM scenes, yet the continued and prolific nature of the pseudonym suggests a continued refusal of fixed identities despite on-going media and commercial pressures for EDM – while expanded as a potentially profitable area within the music industry – to incorporate typical star system indexes.

Sicko subsequently documents how “this type of anonymity remains a hallmark of modern electronic dance music, in which the number of artist pseudonyms has risen exponentially” (2010, p.24) with further commentators observing how “names change and shift; production teams appear under different pseudonyms; artists hop from label to label” (Shaughnessy in House and Shaughnessy, 2000, p.8). Meantime, Barker and Taylor address EDM’s pseudonym alongside the proliferation of both guest vocalists and the DJ as replacement for live performance. They state that EDM tracks were “often recorded under fleeting pseudonyms, adopted and discarded at will by producers and teams” (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.254). However Hesmondhalgh argues that these pseudonyms are firstly “deliberately adopted” in order to “create confusion” regarding an individual producer’s identity (1998a, pp.238-239). Rubin similarly observes that such aliases a) require agency and b) have the potential to disorient when stating that producers have “camouflaged themselves behind a dizzying variety of alter egos” (2000, p.116). To illustrate, he notes that Detroit techno producer Kevin Saunderson has recorded as Kreem, Inner City, Inter City, Reese, Reese & Santonio, Reese Project, Keynotes, Tronik House and E-Dancer yet suggests that the resulting complexity within the marketplace has been purposeful. He recounts Saunderson’s insistence that it was to “help Detroit seem bigger” with the number of supposedly ‘different’ active, participating names on the scene helping to suggest how “there was more going on” (ibid.). Yet the consequent intricacies involved in piecing together fragmented discographies by producers that operate multiple identities of this kind means that it may, in fact, deter more casual fans; and that only the most committed followers of scenes may become aware of the prolific nature of many EDM producers. Yet this is of little consequence within niche areas: in chapter 3 the benefits of such an approach have already been highlighted. In particular, it is

possibly to identify connections that can be made with audiences that are actively seeking engagement with music that will prompt a high level of engagement due to its more immediately challenging and/or elusive qualities. Concepts such as ‘the tease’ and ‘the hunt’ should not be underestimated here: especially when considering the culture of EDM’s self-designated and often exclusive underground scenes complete with their specialist record stores, often elitist nightclubs and cryptic communication methods. The inaccessibility of the composer via the flexible approach to identity is potentially in tandem with these methods of dissemination: offering a counterpoint to that highly visible and arguably over-shared music persona that is often seen as intrinsic to a mainstream counterpart. However, not just to confound, there are additional practical reasons why pseudonyms may be employed to avoid surveillance. O’Connor, for example, candidly states that he and, fellow DJ/producer, Surgeon utilised aliases because they were “on the dole” (in interview, appendix #12). Their renouncement of their official identities then avoided drawing attention to casual DJ work conducted while in receipt of unemployment benefit.

Akin to the mask’s use within EDM, the pseudonym has had most currency in its ability to also be used for indexical purposes; where it “draws upon dimensions or extensions” to “signal representation” and help to categorise productions (Pollock, 1995, p.582). Mark Pritchard, as one particularly prolific example, has utilised a number of monikers to organise his output as a producer. Chameleon, Vertigo and Use of Weapons have operated around drum and bass. His collaborative Reload, Link, Jedi Knights and Global Communications projects have alternatively been rooted in ambient, techno, electro and electronica while the names Harmonic 33 and Troubleman tend to respectively be reserved for Pritchard’s hip hop and funk-influenced experiments. It has subsequently being described as fitting into a tradition within EDM: a “way of fleeing the constraints of being pigeon-holed [...] you can be as many people as you want to be without confusing everyone” (Bray, in interview, appendix #15). Of course, this contradicts Hesmondhalgh’s insistence that the pseudonym is there to confuse and Mark Archer similarly refers to these clarifying indexical practices when noting how his Altern 8 guise was essential in creating distance between his output under that name and what he was recording as Nexus 21. For him, it allowed him to “keep the moody techno thing” that surrounded Nexus 21 (in interview, appendix #13). Reynolds notes that Altern 8 then functioned as “a jokey alter ego [...] to keep Nexus 21’s reputation clean of hardcore’s taint” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.147): thus highlighting a division between playful, disposable work which was free from the seriousness of the ‘taste-making’ areas within EDM scenes and his other output that conversely aimed to be as revered as many of the American scene

innovators that were being admired by both fans and the burgeoning dance music press. Yet, while attempting to hide those origins, Archer concedes that there will always be indicators of his production style that he will struggle to hide. He says that, even despite the pseudonym, he has been told “that ‘you can tell it’s one of yours’ no matter what style” due to recurring musical motifs or other production traits (ibid.). Yet that ability to detect an individual producer that will use multiple identities isn’t always easy. Many EDM musicians have used the flexibility that a pseudonym can offer to make a radical departure from the music with which they were already associated. The duo that utilised the guise of South Central for a number of abrasive electro-oriented records appeared to have stylistically severed all ties with their earlier house music incarnation of Rhythm Masters. Tahita Bulmer similarly left little trace of her work as Blue States – a production unit known for music often labelled as ‘chill out’ – when re-emerging as the front-woman for the punk-funk oriented band New Young Pony Club. While in 2014, ‘My Love’, a track attributed to Route 94 (featuring vocals by Jess Glynne) reached the number one position on the UK singles chart and, for some observers, indicated a new production talent. This had followed substantial support for Route 94’s productions from former dubstep associates Skream and Benga on the pair’s Radio 1 show. It later emerged that this ‘deep house’ record was itself created by another former dubstep producer that had gained more specialist scene exposure under the name Dream.

Such flexibility is subsequently far removed from the employment of an alias as described by Kraftwerk’s choice of a *nom de plume*: i.e. one that translates as ‘power station’. Here Kraftwerk’s utilitarian and labour-oriented connotations that were discussed extensively in chapter 2 as linked to slavery and oppression give way to its antithesis elsewhere: identities as driven by freedom and choice. Furthermore, the composer’s perceived flexibility to choose is an all-important factor: it facilitates the invention and reinvention of identity in order to negotiate the type of formulaic expectations within the music industry that had been critiqued by the deployment of Kraftwerk’s enslaved ‘man machine’. For example, the more playful approach to identity by Altern 8, Route 94, Mark Pritchard et al. allows for the producer to reinvent when they are perceived as being located (and potentially constrained) within a specific genre. The ability to reinvent can then regain and further explore freedoms. Again highlighting a disassociation with what may be perceived as the individual’s established style or kinship with a specific subgenre in favour of creative freedom, producer Theo Keating has recounted how his Fake Blood guise was initially developed so that he might remix a track by, one of his own collaborative projects, Black Ghosts (McIrvine and Stevenson, 2010, online). Having subsequently maintained the anonymity that surrounded this new guise so that

observers might not remark on the somewhat incestuous nature of that particular process, he inadvertently triggered a significant amount of speculation regarding the actual identity of Fake Blood.

People were saying it was Fatboy Slim, then Switch. Then someone said Switch thinks it's Jacques Lu Cont. Someone put on a blog as a gag that it was Tiësto and people thought it was serious. And then the thing with Erol [Alkan] telling NME it was Soulwax was a joke to wind up the NME. But then people were on Youtube saying 'It's actually Soulwax!'

(ibid.)

What Keating's account demonstrates is that the name now occupies a place in EDM where its use is often assumed to be indicative of just one guise operated by a producer: that the pseudonym can be treated with suspicion due to its potential as an indicator of further musical incarnations elsewhere. Given the attention that Fake Blood and Route 94 immediately achieved (particularly the support of their productions by established scene figures), it may also be appropriate to assume that especially lauded anonymous talent may, in fact, be representative of individuals that are making use of the flexibility that a new moniker will provide, albeit alongside the scene connections that would likely evade the novice producer. Yet records under shadowy pseudonyms still emanate from producers that *aren't* established. These, too, can become caught-up in the suspicion that surrounds the pseudonym with the Sleeparchive name being just one example. Finding exposure via the kind of hand-stamped vinyl that Berlin's Hardwax store had distributed, producer Roger Semsroth, "while not seeking to his identity", often had his work as Sleeparchive attributed to, well-known techno, figure Richie Hawtin (Brophy, 2010, online). The pseudonym then may work alongside Hesmondhalgh's observance of EDM's obscured authorship as "a key ideological goal" (1998a, p.238). However, the expectation of scene participants based on a historic diffusion of authorship that comes via multiple identities still makes it a "distinctive and challenging feature" (ibid.).

4.4 Rewriting Roots

For the purposes of this section, the use of anonymity in conjunction with concepts of ‘roots’ is explored while grouped under three distinct categories. The first of these takes the form of ‘alignment’: signalling those producers that have explicitly attached themselves to preceding music forms. This is connected to chapter 3’s discussion of collective identity in EDM: where individuals have configured their work within a scene dynamic. However, this further alignment is not just representative of a contribution to a communal body of work but also involves the framing of new work by making public any links to direct influences and thus claiming the work’s ancestral beginnings. A further direction is similarly based around origins but, under the title of ‘displacement’, the section highlights how a number of EDM producers have significantly reconfigured their own back-stories in response to market conditions. Using a cloak of anonymity for subterfuge, these individuals have presented themselves as having originated from other territories to successfully navigate some of the expectations within scenes. Lastly, a further heading ‘mythology’ describes how anonymity has similarly allowed for the rewriting of biography for those maverick producers that have wished to construct new identities linked to fables or other novel concepts to give further inflection to and/or contribute positively to assessments of their work. In all three cases, these are viewed as approaches that divert from the typical autobiographical accounts that may be associated with the rock and pop music’s more widespread star system.

Alignment

A celebration of obscurity – a pleasure in disappearance and the subversion of traditional rockist values based around authenticity and visibility - has notably been recounted by Burial and Zomby as being part of an established scene tradition. On the track ‘Gutted’, Burial incorporates the spoken word sample “sometimes you’ve got to go back to the ancient ways” (Bevan, 2006) and, seemingly clarifying this statement, he discusses his anonymity in similar terms when saying that it’s “not a new thing [...] it’s one of the old underground ways” (Fisher, 2012, online). While the worshipping of ancestors has long been a common theme throughout cultures, Burial revealed in interviews with both Clark and Fisher that these ‘ways’ had been demonstrated by his formative musical influences: producers operating within what Reynolds observes as the “Hardcore Continuum” (2013c, online). Burial explicitly points to this lineage that can be traced back to the early 1990s EDM style of hardcore rave that laid the groundwork for subsequent styles (including jungle, drum & bass,

UK garage and dubstep) to culminate in “a musical tradition/subcultural tribe that’s managed to hold it together for nearly 20 years now” (ibid.). Zomby, meanwhile, paid his respects to those same forebears given their influence on, his own nostalgic album project from 2008, *Where Were You in ‘92*, when saying that “they paved the way” (Blanning, 2009, p.12). Interestingly, these are two producers that have also indicated that they are actually too young to have been active participants within EDM’s early developments, yet they have both independently claimed that their introduction came vicariously through the post-club listening of an older brother (see Blanning, 2009 and Fisher, 2012). Burial has also noted that “at school I just loved jungle/drum & bass, I fell totally in love with it” (Clark, 2006, online) and observed how “when you’re younger that stuff blows your mind” (Fisher, 2012, online). Subsequently the influence that this era has exercised on Burial and Zomby appears to be in conjunction with the impressionable nature of young fans that were clearly distanced from the source. It may also be perceived that the detached position has offered an even more romantic point of view that considers the spread of this music by artists as a particularly enticing and/or aspirational type of “underground folklore” (Fisher, 2012, online). Yet this culture was also one that was itself distanced from mainstream culture when built around covert producers with names like Origin Unknown and while supporting the release of obscure records that were often only distinctive via the utilitarian and almost ciphered application of the catalogue number. As Reynolds argues, the Hardcore Continuum has then been “an oddly unmediated culture” that often functioned outside of a more widespread public consciousness (in interview, appendix #4). Yet, in its autonomous state, it also has demonstrated some insular tendencies that have seemingly left some participants oblivious to events outside of its scenes. Reynolds offers one example of this when recounting: “I was always struck by this grime lyric circa 2005 where the guy talks about being on the cover of *The Face* (i.e. wanting to be a superstar), unaware that the magazine had gone out of business many years earlier” (ibid.). This self-contained continuum can then be viewed as offering a frame of reference or even a model for aspiring producers regarding how they, in turn, should operate: insular and covert while appealing to those that similarly romanticise such behaviours.

Reynolds’ Hardcore Continuum may offer a compelling structure for the development of this urban folk tradition, yet the importance of roots obviously runs through other established music ecosystems. Reynolds notes how the Hardcore Continuum shares some similarities with “the Jamaican continuum - ska to reggae to dancehall” (ibid.) yet anonymity does not function as a particularly notable and recurring feature here. Similarly, other descriptions of connected styles - including Kodwo Eshun’s ‘Afro-Futurism’ or ‘Global Ghattotech’ (the

sounds associated with the focus of Mike Davis' *Planet of Slums*) – are not essentially based around covert authorship. Yet there are also names clearly outside of the Hardcore Continuum that have been oriented around concepts of anonymity who are also described as influential to producers that have borrowed the approach in more recent times: thus suggesting that, while not quite instigating anything approaching an 'anonymous continuum', anonymity begets anonymity. Burial, for example, notes his encountering of Basic Channel's output yet he does describe himself as having immediately been resistant to it given that their work was outside of his preferred scenes based around "vibes, urban, that sound I love, proper UK" (Clark, 2006, online). The undercover Skudge duo demonstrates less reticence for the style when stating that they "have been more or less influenced by the music from Basic Channel and other 1990s techno artists" (Brophy, 2010, online). Techno itself – from its origins in Detroit through the Berlin scene discussed in chapter 3 – has frequently associated itself with low visibility and this continues to be a central theme that, alongside the music and its marketing, suggests behaviours for those with which it is aligned.

Displacement

While anonymity has been remarkable as a recurring motif within the arenas of techno and dubstep (plus other developments within the aforementioned Hardcore Continuum), there are areas of EDM that are rarely characterised by such practices. House music, for example, has utilised pseudonyms extensively yet these have tended to be indexical and, even within the most niche house scenes, there has been relatively less concern for hiding one's identity to indicate one's commitment to an underground tradition. However, despite having been described as "post-geographical" (Reynolds, 1998, p.30), house music's own roots in the United States have, at times, presented a preference for American releases: a penchant that may be described as "trans-Atlantic empathy" (Smith, 2009, p.141) that has urged a number of British producers to utilise ambiguous identities in conjunction with highly convoluted methods to distribute their work as U.S. imports.

Reynolds observes that a nascent EDM scene had formed as "a subculture based almost entirely around import records" and that around 1988/1989, there was already "several years' backlog" of American house records for DJs to build their sets around (Reynolds, 2008, p.65). Related to this, Piccioni recounts how "there was a general respect for the fact that this musical genre had been formulated in the States" (in interview, appendix #11). Yet as the scene grew and an indigenous British variant on the house sound gained prominence, both

within clubs and commercially, it was still the U.S. where British commentators would turn in order to describe “authentic origins” (Thornton, 1990, p.91). Russell may note that early EDM scenes had “rejected established club culture based on snobby exclusivity” (1999, p. 95), but the early 1990s British scene had given rise to an influential number of “purists who still swooned over their U.S. imports” that was able to promote such discernment through a growing specialist dance press (Brewster & Broughton, 2000, p.469). Reflecting such tastes, Justin Berkman and James Palumbo’s opening of London’s Ministry of Sound venue in 1991 was driven by the desire for a space devoted to the sounds of New York, Chicago and Detroit. Decorated with oversized logos of the most beloved of the American record labels, Ministry of Sound’s first night featured Larry Levan, David Morales, Tony Humphries and Roger Sanchez – an all-American line-up that confirmed a commitment to dance music from across the Atlantic. In 1993, club night Hard Times launched in Leeds with an approach that was similarly evangelical about imported house records and, in turn, operated a booking policy built around U.S. DJs like Sanchez plus Todd Terry and Masters At Work. (Hard Times later launched a British-based record label that licensed or sourced new material from those same American names.) Also that year, Liverpool’s enduring Cream club marked its first anniversary with sets from, U.S. DJs, Frankie Knuckles and David Morales that was revealed to have been at a cost of “£5,000 plus flights from New York and expenses” (Turner, 2002, p.32). However, while this was considered to be significant expenditure, the high-profile event was observed as having “elevated the club to a new level” (ibid.).

The focus on American talent – and the kudos with which it was attached – was likely to be problematic for those organisations without the resources to ‘buy-in’ the services of these names. However, it appears to have been particularly detrimental to British producers where the kind of adulation for American music ensured that dance music’s supposedly less-established Anglicised version was often assumed to be inferior. Then gaining a reputation as an unsophisticated scene interloper outside of the dance cognoscenti’s legitimised tastes, British EDM configured its own mechanisms for survival. A fracturing of scene via the cultivation of specialist areas meant that newer subgenres could still thrive even without the approval of largely self-appointed, American-biased tastemakers. However producers whose sounds were located close to what was then already being viewed as ‘classic house’ would struggle to be heard while invariably presumed to be “second rate” (Piccioni, in interview, appendix #11). Piccioni further explains how it affected the house music releases that he had poised for his house-oriented Azuli label when observing that “there was a real snobbiness at the time about that kind of music if it was made in the UK” (ibid.) while Mark Archer

similarly notes “an incredible amount of snobbery between UK released house tracks and those that were on import from America” (in interview, appendix #13).

While Archer had already navigated some of the issues within techno music that required a new guise if he was to maintain his revered status as part of Nexus 21 and still be able to contribute to the burgeoning rave scene, he also negotiated the discrepancies between U.K and U.S. house music. In what appeared to be part of his role as a serial scene manipulator, he worked *with* the snobbery of the scene in 1993 to produce a fake import single as Slo Moshun before capitalising on the subsequent interest by issuing it as a supposedly licensed U.K. release via, his usual outlet, Network Records. By this point, Archer’s activities appeared to be an established practice. Phillips has remarked on how “producer Joey Negro pretended to be a black guy from New York, when he was actually Dave Lee from Essex” (2009, p.123) and labels like Z Records and studio acts including Hustlers Convention similarly “disguised themselves as American” (ibid.). For all of these examples, vinyl releases were shrink-wrapped (as was common practice with import releases) in an attempt to be comprehended and sold as American and make use of the cachet which U.S. labels of the era had in U.K. record shops. In 1990, Dave Piccioni had already issued records via his Azuli label with the first four releases making clear their English origins. A year later he re-launched the label with considerably more success courtesy of his catalogue’s AZNY1: a 12” single titled ‘In a Fantasy’ by Chocolate Fudge that was packaged as a debut offering from a New York record label. The record (and the subsequent releases by a roster that also included Sensory Elements, Underground Mass and KCC) bore the markings of imported products. Azuli’s carefully shrink-wrapped vinyl was also made available to specialist shops via an independent distributor that already serviced the releases of a number of American labels. Plus each record notably featured New York contact details. Despite this, Azuli’s actual base was, London record shop, Black Market Records and its initial roster was made up of British producers. Piccioni explains the lengths that he went to in order to suppress this information:

We had a US telephone mailbox with a Manhattan dial code. So we simply had people call our answer machine there. We sat in London collecting the messages and my ex-wife – who was American – simply returned the calls from our flat in Battersea [...] It was a cheap and effective way of getting noticed. We had no money for marketing and it seemed that American records sold without any PR companies or press, whereas the UK releases at the time needed a fair amount of promotion.

(in interview, appendix #11)

Piccioni describes this approach as cheating: largely due to his records, as ‘imports’, selling for higher prices due to that presumed American status: thus ensuring the label a higher return on each release. Yet he notes how this cheating required the use of an aesthetic that paradoxically suggested low value processes. “American labels were always printed very badly using old printing presses,” he recounts. “We had real problems in that our labels were coming out looking too good and obviously English. The printers just didn’t understand that we wanted crap work so, in the end, we photocopied our original artwork and then told the printers to work from the photocopy” (ibid.). Archer similarly notes how the Slo Moshun record initially surfaced on New York’s fictional Dansa label: complete with a hand-drawn logo created “on the bus back from Stafford” (in interview, appendix #13). As he explains: “It was intended to look like a very small American label and so a flashy design wouldn’t have made it look authentic [...] and may not have had the initial impact with the DJs that it did.” (ibid.).³

The quest for authenticity – a pursuit of provenance – had existed in scenes that pre-dated EDM. The U.K. northern soul scene, for example, was built on American releases while additionally sharing a preoccupation for rarities. As a ‘collector’ culture, the practice of hiding release information in northern soul (as previously discussed in chapter 3.2) can be seen as having contributed to the mystique of the records: where hard-to-find music releases from American cities could achieve mythical status through their reputed elusiveness. The (perhaps self-explanatory) ‘rare groove’ scene – still an active area of clubbing as EDM styles infiltrated the U.K. – was similarly based around the highly competitive search for vinyl obscurities. In both cases, the hunger for the most in-demand records would also result in high-priced transactions: where a premium would not just be charged due to being observed as an imported product, but due to a perceived status as a rarity. In the case of rare groove, this collector culture and its ties to obscure American releases had been exploited by, band, the Brand New Heavies who attracted the attention of scene participants in 1988 with a fake import single that offered a pastiche of vintage U.S. label design (Rose, 1991, p.37). Then appearing to fit in neatly with tracks from the likes of Maceo & the Macks and Bobby Byrd, this accomplished approach mirrored that of an even more successful record from one year earlier when, mainstream pop producers, Stock, Aitken & Waterman duped many critics who may have written-off the trio’s work had it not been circulated as an un-credited white label – an initially assumed American bootleg – titled ‘Roadblock’. This latter example perhaps exemplifies the ability to subvert origins in order to contextualise a music release: where

value judgements based on what might be categorised as ‘scene snobbery’ (or, more simply, ‘elitism’) have been pre-empted and reacted to by producers and label owners.

Mythology

The building of mythology is an aspect that was already considered in chapter 3.5 where it was established that Burial’s absence had prompted listeners to construct their own narratives regarding the meaning of the work. It should be noted how the track titles that the producer selected may also have led the audience in their conclusions regarding themes of estrangement and disaffection. In places he has opted for titles such as ‘Homeless’, ‘Broken Home’ and ‘Foster Care’. To suggest that these are autobiographical concessions would of course be presumptuous, but such contributions within what is a career that has routinely evaded image construction means that they cannot be ignored either. The emphasis here has appeared to be on a depiction that suits the often melancholic nature of his recordings while assisting assessments of the work as that of the haunted or troubled auteur: enabling descriptions of a loner who – via his further referencing of the banalities of contemporary urban life through tracks like ‘Night Bus’ and ‘In McDonalds’ – appear to further assist with any interpretations surrounding concepts of alienation. Thus allowing Burial to follow a succession of EDM producers who have an association with “the bleak non-spaces of the urban landscape” (De Ville, 2003, p.201).⁴

The metropolis itself has also emerged as a mythological presence within EDM. Techno, for example, has been driven by modernist or futurist principles that have been indulged around the theme of the city. Juan Atkins’ pivotal track from 1984 was even titled ‘Techno City’. Meanwhile earlier pioneers of such mechanical sounds – like Eno and Kraftwerk – have similarly been drawn to man-made environments: respectively finding inspiration at the airport and the autobahn. So, even despite EDM’s growth having been assisted greatly by rave events in fields throughout the UK, rural ideas have been noticeably absent within the music: perhaps through assumptions that machine-made processes do not lend themselves to the rustic and pastoral.⁵ Scenes, meanwhile, have most often been defined as municipal structures that make full use of vast multi-cultural populations and their infrastructures. However, the prevalence of the city could easily obscure the exact location of participants. Aphex Twin and Luke Vibert, for example, may be producers whose music may be located within some metropolis-situated technosphere, but both hail from coastal Cornwall. The minimal techno movements of, fellow producer, Troy Pierce similarly may not evoke what might be expected of his experiences growing up in a farm town in Iowa: a place that he personally describes as

“about as Midwest Farmville as you can get” (in interview, appendix #15). However, Pierce states that his work may not be entirely autobiographical when discussing the themes of his music when saying how “it’s less about where you come from and more about how you want to be perceived” (ibid.). As he insists: “It’s actually a desire to be different and wanting to work outside ‘normal’ conventions”. He is also quick to cite fellow Iowan Arthur Russell – who had an ability to shift from cello pieces in collaboration with Allen Ginsberg to his making of dubby disco with François Kevorkian – as being just as removed from his particular background. Furthermore, for Pierce’s studio work, the lack of a local ‘scene’ is said to have prompted him to look at what was happening in Chicago and Detroit with such fervour and fascination (ibid.).

Conversely, despite having emerged in Detroit, the covert Drexciya avoided associations with a typical techno city myth to focus on their own preferred place of birth. The duo built an alternative narrative – a “complex personal mythology of the Drexciyan race” (Young, 2005, p.162) – based around a ‘black Atlantis’ which was populated by an advanced tribe descended from pregnant African slave women jettisoned from ships crossing the ocean: each child then having adapted to a life underwater.⁶ Again, the notion of slavery is recounted and the further explanation of Drexciya’s James Stinson and Gerald Donald having “remained hidden behind their alias” (ibid.) may have some kinship with Hebdige’s observance that actual victims of the slave trade would have “had to resort to secrecy and disguise to keep their beliefs and customs” (1987, p.30). Drexciya has used their own secrecy to retain mystique while – in their reluctance to engage with mass media in a way that was similar to, Detroit cohorts, Underground Resistance – they perhaps also recounted how “slaves fought back through their music”: expressing their resentment and frustration at the society which tried to hold them captive (Hebdige, 1987, p.26). And while having developed as a fable – or, as Young describes, “sonic fiction” (ibid.) – the duo’s actual African-American heritage can give further meaning to the story.

However, the development of personal mythologies has often been even more whimsical. Dean Blunt may be a producer that has said to “sit comfortably with Burial and Zomby in the ‘who-really-gives-a-fuck-anyway’ seat” (Gibb, 2011, online) yet rather than eschewing publicity like the former or proving to be a volatile individual on social media like the latter, he takes a personal approach to story-telling. His interviews and other external communications (including YouTube clips and art exhibitions) do suggest an interest in the esoteric but, often, also that which is patently untrue. The internet has been instrumental within this process: Gibb notes how Blunt’s collaborative Hype Williams project had operated

from a position “safely tucked behind a veil of email, net speak, video art and artifice” (Gibb, 2011, online) while another journalist referred to his encounter with Blunt via Skype’s instant messenger as having put him in “a terrifying position” (Ravens, 2013, online). Via his filing of a somewhat cryptic transcription, the journalist explained that “the balance of power shifts subtly towards the unseen subject who, hidden from the inquisitor’s gaze, is able to pause and reflect before answering, to brush off unwanted questions with a blank screen or leave non-sequitur replies hanging limply in the ether” (ibid.). Around the same time as this interaction (when Blunt is similarly cited as being in Atlanta while carrying out press interviews following his *The Redeemer* and *Stone Island* albums), a Guardian writer finds the producer to be in a “thoughtful” and substantially more compliant mood (Beaumont-Thomas, 2013, online). Although it should be noted that, here, Blunt is still referred to as a “prankster” with “a reputation for lying outrageously”. Indeed, a previous interview is recounted where the producer has stated that he only ever listens to, the band, Oasis and that he announces that Hype Williams was splitting up to allow him “to go to wrestling school and Inga to a motor-racing career” (ibid.). Elsewhere Blunt states that his music first came to the attention of Steve Goodman at Hyperdub following his purchasing of an apple with a USB stick embedded in it as distributed by Copeland at Brixton Market (Gibb, 2011, online). He has subsequently gained a reputation for being an awkward figure within EDM, yet Blanning suggests that there may be a link between the mystery that surrounds both him and the playfulness of his communication methods that is akin to the approach of, anonymous art-pop band, The Residents (2011, online). In response to this, Blunt says: “Yeah, the best art is funny. The best art has humour in it. You can’t take yourself too seriously” (ibid.).

While equally irreverent, the approach to media by Richard James/Aphex Twin is alternatively described as resulting from his discomfort with being cast as EDM’s saviour (Young, 2005, p.76). However, this reluctance has resulted in a series of stories that have only increased his messiah-like stature. Through these, he has gone on to be described as “an irresistible character” with his activities documented through “the legends of the tank, the submarine, the homebuilt ‘magic boxes’, the lucid dreaming, the tracks released under unknown aliases, the collaboration with Philip Glass, the DJing exploits with a sanding machine and liquidizer” (Young, 2005, p.72): or what are otherwise known as the varied results of his press engagements. Described as one of Warp Records’ “reluctant heroes” (Young, 2005, p.101), James has then simultaneously earned a reputation as a synesthete, a pre-teen electronics prodigy, a purchaser of military hardware and someone that lives in a bank vault and shares the name ‘Richard James’ with a stillborn older brother. Warp’s

sometime press officer Chantal Passamonte has been quoted as stating that such an approach does represent an alternative to “faceless techno bollocks” but there is still always the danger that, with such an irreverence, he will simply refuse to “show up” for his interviews (in Young, 2005, p.102). Highlighting this threat, Young refers to an occasion when Richard James cancelled a 20-date U.S. radio tour the night before he was about to leave the U.K. “because he wanted to go on a picnic with his girlfriend” (2005, p.149).

The unreliability of producers as a by-product of their irreverence for both the press and record business may be traced to an indifference for marketing and, by association, the star system. Yet these, in turn, can contribute to mythology through their associations with rebelliousness and underground values. So while perhaps problematic within more conventional areas of the music industry, they can be used to promote a label’s signings: thus responding creatively to the “conundrum” of how to “package an artist who does not want to be packaged” (House and Shaugnessy, 1999, p.20). Former head of the Network label Neil Rushton has explained his own attempts to turn these potential obstacles into opportunities when managing Detroit techno producer Derrick May and trying to sign him to, record label, ZTT:

I said, “what you’ve got to understand, and this isn’t a problem – this is the plus: Derrick’s completely mad, he’s a creative genius. So as long as you understand that, we’re absolutely fine. It’s going to be great”.

(in interview, appendix #16)

Regardless of Rushton’s reassurance, the deal itself eventually broke down. May, who gained notoriety for his outspokenness and occasionally erratic behaviour, had been supportive of the record deal until a potential appearance on *Top of the Pops* was raised. Tellingly (and seemingly in tandem with the discussed ideas of ‘subcultural capital’ and separation addressed in section 1.2.3.) the producer insisted that he would be unwilling to participate in a TV programme that had become recognised as a byword for mainstream success and, ultimately, “selling out” (Thornton, 1995, p.123). ⁷

4.5 SBTRKT as Shaman



Fig.21 – SBTRKT press photograph by Dan Wilton (2012)

When the musician known as SBTRKT appeared as part of 2011's Bestival festival, his view from the stage was that of an audience comprising of people wearing a "cardboard version of the producer's mask" (Fahey, 2011, online). Then reflecting SBTRKT's own presented image of the tribal figure, the quasi-ritualistic qualities of the performance were seemingly made clear. But while this mass adoption of the producer's guise supposedly indicated its popularity via the willingness of others to engage with it, the action was alongside the highlighting of a premeditated strategy to construct this particular scene. The 2,000 printed versions of the mask – as designed by, longstanding visual collaborators, A Hidden Place – had been distributed throughout the crowd prior to the live set. Then despite offering the potential to view this example as linked to chapter 3's discussion of a shared or collective identity, the calculated ubiquity of SBTRKT's likeness can be interpreted as its antithesis: almost the ultimate manifestation of ego where the community's identity is usurped by that of a musician that has literally been elevated above them.⁸

Outlining his earliest conversations with SBTRKT, Tom Kerridge - founder of the Ramp label - suggests that the aforementioned scenario is the result of years of careful planning. He recounts: "I asked where he wanted to be, where he wanted his career to go, and he very clearly said he wanted to be as big as possible" (in interview, appendix #1). Notably this

statement that highlights the producer's aspirations comes from a label manager that is no stranger to the anonymous practices that have been employed by EDM producers. Having issued records by Zomby and, more recently, by the equally elusive Gerry Read, Kerridge is familiar with requests to avoid press photographs and evade some of the more widespread attention that can come with the development of a producer profile. Through that experience, he appears to be simultaneously aware of such approaches functioning counter-intuitively: how these can help to build careers by using a purported reticence for media engagement to conversely invite attention from media and public alike. Yet, despite similarly engaging with these practices, SBTRKT is still described as "very different" from his own label signings plus other covert producers like Burial. Kerridge expands on this disparity when noting that SBTRKT has "used the mystery anonymity brings to launch his career in the mainstream world" (ibid.). Saxelby relatedly describes the producer as being amongst a number of producers that are "leaning away from the centre yet still reaching mainstream ears" (2001, online). The difference for Kerridge is then due to ambitions that are outlined as being driven by a quest for success articulated as being "as big as possible" within what is observed more widely as the mainstream. This contrasts substantially with other producers that have used aspects of anonymity when operating within an area controlled and inevitably constricted by associations with scene concepts such as 'underground'. SBTRKT is alternatively presented as driven towards the maximisation of a broader and less scene-oriented popularity. In order to accomplish this, Kerridge goes on to note that, for SBTRKT, "shying away from the media was not on his agenda" (in interview, appendix #1). Yet here there appears to be a convergence with other producers employing aspects of anonymity due to media aversion having *not* been observed in any of the previous examples. (In fact, only Burial came close to this via a relatively small and select number of press interviews.) SBTRKT's own media engagement actually has a kinship with that of Daft Punk and Zomby: where interviews are granted and the content of those subsequent features will often fixate on the subject of the producer's anonymity. As discussed in earlier chapters, this offers a contradictory by-product of such engagements that can be linked to a publication's insider or exclusive access and the associated notions of cultural capital. Then further to cultural capital and the related attribution of cult value, the producer places his supposed evasion of such interaction alongside his preferred focus on an assumedly 'purer' practice of making music. As he insists in interview, the use of anonymity has been so he "can just get on with writing music and not spend my life talking about it" (Parker, 2011, online). Within the same interview, his masking is also offered as a reflection of him not being "the most sociable person" (ibid.): a suggestion that enables the temporary alignment of the producer with the introverted tendencies

associated with the reputedly shy Burial. However, presented alongside a reported search for maximum impact and market penetration, SBTRKT's series of bespoke masks and the anonymity that they have brought are suggested to just be "a nifty bit of branding" (ibid.). The producer, in turn, acknowledges this accusation; conceding that people "think you're trying to create hype by being anonymous" (ibid.) but states that this was never his intention. The mask and its implied anonymity are instead described as being employed to redirect rather than attract attention: creating a diversion that will place focus on a whole new character. As he insists: "being an artist is about creating an imaginary place and soundscape. I'm creating an identity for that – a new identity that fits SBTRKT" (Yates, 2011, online). In any case, it is clear that SBTRKT's presented identity primarily operates as 'costume': it is used for the purposes of his work. As McLuhan argues, there is a distinction between this and 'dress' given that "dress is private and individual" while "costume is corporate putting on of society": its function is then to transmit a specific outward message (McLuhan, 1971, p.526). SBTRKT supports this when stating that:

I created the mask as its own creative, artistic entity; not so much as a way of creating mystery, but presenting a singular image. Giving the world something to sell that wasn't just my own face and name.

(Carew, 2011, online)

It subsequently becomes apparent that SBTRKT and the SBTRKT image is one purely developed for corporate purposes. In interviews, he has even stated how he would "rather not talk about myself as a person [...] The name SBTRKT is me taking myself away from that whole process" (Parker, 2011, online). This is also embodied within the chosen moniker: a name that operates as a version of 'subtract':

The subtraction being myself, I suppose, that was where it came from. The letters thing, that was a way of shortening it, a way of taking out letters and subtracting that way, as well. It wasn't anything specific about vowels, or anything like that. There seem to be a lot of copycat artists now doing similar things, which I find kind of funny since I didn't really think it out that much when I did it. I think in terms of music, it really doesn't have a direct reference to what I produce or how I produce. It's more of an identity.

(Trunick, 2011, online)

Where he recounts how other artists have developed guises with similarities to his own ‘SBTRKT’, he may be referring to other electronic musicians such as MSTRKRFT (‘Master-Craft’) and STRFKR (‘Star Fucker’): both of which were actively recording prior to SBTRKT’s inception. The band Primal Scream also utilised a similar method involving the eradication of vowels for an album titled XTRMNTR (2000). O’Reilly observes that these formats, “with their pared-down linguistic aesthetic”, are linked to the text message: “the new language of mobile communication” (in Shaughnessy, 2001, p.8). Yet while still legible, he argues that this ‘diminym’ (my term - for want of an appropriate alternative), highlights communicative gaps that are representative of something “dehumanized” (ibid.).



Fig.22 – SBTRKT masks by A Hidden Place (2009-2010)

However SBTRKT’s requirement for a “new identity” – for transformation – has not been solely for the establishing of these gaps and the maintaining of personal privacy. Unofficial reports emerged alongside some of SBTRKT’s earliest recorded output that his music had followed an earlier established discography attributed to what was the producer’s real name of Aaron Jerome. Later confirmed, it was under this moniker that jazz-influenced ‘broken beat’ tracks had been released through labels such as BBE and Wah Wah 45s. Yet this was a number of years before Jerome incorporated the mask and the new name as a catalyst for personal reinvention – then establishing a new identity that would allow for the distancing from that earlier output and, while avoiding the actual details of his musical and personal back-story, would allow for his eventual consideration as “the next big thing in UK bass culture” (Parker, 2011, online). But some discrepancies have arisen through the producer’s distancing from biographical details. For example, Denney states that he is “Cambridgeshire-born” (2014, online) while Jonze describes Jerome upbringing in rural Hertfordshire (2014, online). While this is a fairly minor oversight for a producer with an international profile, such accounts also sit alongside Saxelby’s more startling claim that he is, in fact, “Kenyan-born”

(2011, online); a detail that has a relationship to Carnes' assertion (back when Jerome's name was *not* associated with the SBTRKT guise) that his background includes a "childhood spent with his Indian family growing up in Kenya" (2010, online). The emphasis on the links to Africa and Asia is a recurring aspect of early features on SBTRKT. Yet as Jerome's involvement becomes clearer, the focus on a sometime association with the non-Western becomes less prominent as his expanded biography comes to reveal formative influences of the Hardcore Continuum's pirate radio (something he had encountered being transmitted from London whilst living in the English countryside). Prior to this development, the use of biographical detail as incorporating both Asia and Africa alongside SBTRKT's use of masks (figs.21 and 22) seemed to encourage associations with 'other' cultures. In turn evaluated by the mask's makers as a "modern version of ceremonial masks from native societies" (Killakam, 2012, online), Carew documents Jerome/SBTRKT's own explanation of the mask as "inspired by tribal societies where they use masks in rituals to take on a character, to be able to be someone else in that moment you're wearing it" (Carew, 2011, online). Trunick's further questioning of the tribal aspect prompts a related response from the producer:

The tribal masks work in that in some tribal cultures they're part of a dance or some tribal ceremony. When they put them on, [it's] like they've got the spirit of an ancestor in them. They have this meaning that when you wore the mask, when you put them on you could become that persona and without it you go back to normal.

(2011, online)

As Sieber seemingly concurs, tribal masks can be viewed as "symbols or foci for the spiritual forces that loaned their authority to the edicts and acts that emanated from the masks" (1962, p.9). However, as with Jerome's own biography, there is an ambiguity regarding which culture his masks would be associated with. When attempting to explain their origins, the producer has observed how "people said African but it was actually Asian that we were thinking of at the time" (Suprowicz, 2014, online). Yet this lack of clarity may be assisted by Jerome himself with one SBTRKT feature stating how "he's come prepared, revealing a bag full of African cloth should we wish to use it for a backdrop, as well as his famous mask, which is packed in bubble wrap in an old kit box" (Saxelby, 2011, online): then indicting the producer in his construction of a scene that is culturally confused. However, explaining this transnational bewilderment, the masks' designers describe their complex imagining of "native

societies” that culminates in a SBTRKT image that knowingly transcends geographical borders:

They’re inspired by many native and ancient societies from a global viewpoint. It’s been said that they are African perhaps because of the triangles, but when you look into it you’ll find many influences that also stem from India to Central & South America. I do like the 3D masks of the Dogon people and perhaps the triangles you might see on masks from the Congo. I love the use of colour from Aztec art in general, but I’m also really into colourful wildlife too. It’s difficult to say really, after you expose yourself to so many different images they seem to merge and your output becomes an imagined commune of them. It’s really the ethereal quality that’s so fascinating with “native societies”... the fact that it all becomes surreal. It is an escapism from the ordinary.

(Killakam, 2012, online)

The composite ‘tribal’ aesthetic that is subsequently presented by SBTRKT is also connected to similarly trans-national, pan-national, post-national or ‘world’ influenced styles of EDM. Beeler notes that the progression from EDM’s beginnings in the late 1980s has involved “the fracturing of the music into sounds that often claim to be based upon various ethnic foundations and preferences” (2007, p.75). The emergent subgenres – such as ‘tropical’, ‘tribal house’ and, to a degree, even ‘jungle’ – can similarly be presented through a post-colonial palette and via somewhat broad strokes. Then highlighting a tokenistic approach that is suspicious in the use of the tribal ‘other’ as a replacement for a more detailed anthropology, Loza’s glossary of subgenres cynically acknowledges how this becomes configured within the example of ‘tribal house’:

The modern primitive’s hodgepodge of thumping electronic beats, pummelling digital basslines, “primal” percussion (mainly congos and bongos), “Third World” rhythm patterns, vaguely “exotic” vocal samples (preferably chanted), and warm “ethnic” elements (anything that sounds African, Brazilian, Indian, or Native American will suffice). Paced between 120 to 128 BPM, tribal tracks are repetitive and driving; their stripped-down arrangements and simple melodies supposedly re-establish the connection between modern-day raving and ancient dance rituals.

(2004, p.243)

Formations such as ‘tribal house’ are not to be confused with EDM styles that are essentially rooted in or indigenous to specific areas for example, Brazil’s ‘Baile Funk’, South Africa’s ‘Kwaito’ or Angola’s ‘Kuduro’; styles that have been connected under an aforementioned broader term of ‘Global Ghettotech’. Although many of these global dance genres have since been utilised as ‘other’ or ‘exotic’ motifs within Western scene output via producer/DJs such as Diplo or musicians including M.I.A. Perhaps relatedly, Tagg questions EDM’s use of the phrygian – a mode that is rarely seen in areas of Western popular music yet is prevalent within music associated with “Spain, gypsies, Balkans, Turks and Arabs” (1994, online). He considers whether this represents explicit aims by producers to align themselves with travellers or “the pan-Islamic movement” (ibid.). While this potentially opens up a discussion of EDM and political intent, the likelihood is that the use of the phrygian is no more significant than all those ‘other’ aspects of tribal house: they are merely arbitrary signifiers that perhaps once suggested the exotic but now exist as some kind of EDM folk memory. Yet this idea of the arbitrary cultural signifier may correspond with criticisms aimed at the rise of sounds packaged as ‘World Music’ too: releases that are marketed as ‘other’ yet are translated via musical elements and processes of the non-indigenous cultures of the audience and more profitable markets. By contrast though, the EDM releases that pull from the ‘tribal’ aesthetic do so as a continuation of sample culture which, in itself, betrays any real suggestion of authentic. The re-use of these cultural motifs – culminating in “a facsimile of authenticity” (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.300) – only regards the sound for its aesthetic properties and, ultimately, becomes removed from any particular source. However Loza insists that:

Electronic dance music may cross borders and create communities of desire but it travels with cultural baggage; it always carries sonic suitcases messily packed with an assortment of supranational sounds, regional influences, national genres, and local styles. Never mind the grandiose rhetoric of transcendent techno beats and universal house grooves, such sublime global- speak merely conceals how computerized dance products actually circulate through transnational traffic and postcolonial passages.

(2004, p.231)

While Loza addresses an area that has increasingly incorporated multinational influences since the advent of digital technologies, SBTRKT still utilises imagery that explicitly refers to a particular type of cultural baggage. Afro-Futurism, for example, may be observed as reconciling diasporic African musics within less ‘primitive’ scenarios, but SBTRKT leans more to what are described as “crude and inaccurate” depictions of “savage” places (Hebdige,

contemporary Western palates. In fact, his use of the ‘tribal other’ tends to be restricted to his visual incarnations yet, rather than working towards the taming of what colonialists might describe as wild influences, he is more likely attempting to inflect his otherwise relatively restrained work *with* such qualities: maybe even recounting musicologist John Lomax’s own wish to capture blues music that was free of ‘white’ influences that would have him “carried across to Africa... as if I was listening to the tom-toms of savage blacks” (in Barker & Taylor, 2007, p.15).

Still, it is in his evoking of the tribal ‘shaman’ – an intermediary between the natural and supernatural – that SBTRKT’s choice of guise has most resonance: thus giving prominence to a figure that has been described in EDM terms as the “techno-mystic who developed a science of total sound in order to create spiritual experiences for his followers” (Reynolds, 2013a, p.35). This role with its explicit links to rituals of transformation may encompass SBTRKT’s own journey from Aaron Jerome to masked bass music deity, yet he has also exercised similar power over others. For example, he states that while working with vocalist Sampha, the singer shifted into a trance-like state where his contribution became almost involuntary: resulting in a vocal delivery that Sampha is unaware has taken place until listening back to the recording (Saxelby, 2011, online). In 2012, SBTRKT also had a track remixed by ‘Sisi BakBak’: a then unknown producer that was described as “the latest shadowy figure to slink upon the scene” (Sherburne, 2012, online). Despite many circulated rumours regarding the mysterious techno-inflected version of, the track, ‘Hold On’, it was only confirmed in 2014 that Sisi BakBak was an alter ego of Thom Yorke when eventually listed on Radiohead’s website under Yorke’s extracurricular production output. Then suggesting that SBTRKT’s ability to use anonymity to transcend identity could actually be shared as part of his growing personal mythology as scene shaman.

4.6 Conclusions

The previous chapters address some of the voids that exist when a producer utilises anonymity. The void, in itself, has a certain power. As Maffesoli insists: “It is impossible to stress enough the unifying function of silence, which has been seen by the great mystics as the ultimate form of communication [...] we are in the presence of a ‘collective privacy’, an unwritten law, a code of honour, a clan morality, which, in a quasi-intentional way, is protected from anything that is outside or overarching” (1996, p.91). Yet seemingly breaking that silence, chapter 4 discussed some of the enactments that these gaps allow: offering opportunities for participants within EDM to realign, reassign and reinvent identity. The role of the mask – both literal and physical – represented a delineation of identity which traversed that which is adopted due to social constraints through to the ‘novel’ identity that one can act out more freely as a purported representation of an idealized self. As Pollock explains: “the mask is normally considered a technique for transforming identity, either through the modification of the representation of identity, or through temporary – and representational – extinction of identity” (1995, p.582). But so commonplace has the mask become within society, they may even be discounted at points and behaviours are instead used “to build up a picture of the person, even when hidden behind masks and conventions.” (Barker and Taylor, 2007, pp.186). As such, the chapter followed a pattern that England identified where the real fascination is for what is actually behind the mask (1912, p.19). But there are also links here to chapter 3’s discussion of other visual incarnations with O’Reilly referring to how “sleeves are the contemporary equivalent of the primitive mask” (in Shaughnessy, 2001, p.8) before noting that:

The primitive masks of ancient societies had no value in themselves. It was only when worn that they had some significance, the person becoming a storyteller, a myth-maker, an actor. And this is for the most simple reason. The primitive mask, like the technology of the record sleeve created an audience. By putting on a mask, you are ‘putting on’ an audience.

(ibid.)

While Peter, for one, expresses a desire to avoid discussion about primitive versus civilised cultures, as “it implies a somewhat colonialist view” (2009, p.81), when considering issues of identity such a focus may be useful. Personally, I do still remain highly sceptical of the ‘savage versus sophisticated’ colonial framing of such arguments (discussions highlighted by

many of the consulted texts when addressing the actions of SBTRKT), but there does remain a disparity between how identity conventionally functions in Western society and how it has operated more flexibly within tribal societies. With regards to how this has explicit links to the adoption of identity within EDM, the ‘putting on’ of audience echoes the importance of scene and collective identity as observed in chapter 3. Similarly drawing on non-Western societies, the concept of *tribus can*, once again, be invoked if giving further consideration to the use of these guises: where, in conjunction with the paradigm of the network, these totems may be viewed as part of “the re-actualization of the ancient myth of community” (Maffesoli, 1996, p.148). There are further arguments that similarly allow the tribal or so-called primitive ‘other’ to be cast as occupying a sophisticated and complex place. McLuhan, for example, observes that “after the centuries of conceiving ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ as *matching* rather than *making*, Western man was not disposed to face the fact of faking as a legitimate feature of human consciousness” (McLuhan, 1971, p.520). This then documents an ability to transcend traditional notions of identity within other cultures. Yet Maffesoli argues that this can also be associated with collective identity when observing “the attitudes of ‘pretending’ as manifestations of *puissance*” (Maffesoli, 1996, p.49). He states that “duplicité is what allows us to live [...] not just applicable to the solitary genius, it is also a fact of the collective genius” (ibid.).

Throughout chapter 4, the EDM producer is also demonstrated as having become adept at duplicitous practices: resulting in processes that accept artifice as a viable conveyor of the true self. In addition to Mark Archer, Dean Blunt, Aphex Twin and SBTRKT, there are also further recent examples of this approach to identity within EDM. The Warp-signed Patten has been said to think about “what his music means from a conceptual perspective before a musical or personal one” (Bulut, 2013, online): a reflection of a producer that has issued a variety of often re-appropriated audio and visual material (including an image of a stealth bomber or an old photograph of, the model, Kate Moss to advertise a series of parties he promotes under the banner of 555-5555). But this flexibility and perceived fakery has also created the ability to adopt more than one identity. In addition to the chapter’s observance of Mark Pritchard and Kevin Saunderson’s complex discographies, one further (otherwise unnamed) producer has clarified the quite convoluted organisation of, his guises, ‘Milton Bradley’, ‘The End Of All Existence’ and ‘K209’ when stating:

My real name is not Milton Bradley [...] Milton Bradley stands for my current moods and sounds. At the beginning, The End Of All Existence was only a track title. I was working on the track and the result was that I had several tracks I was able to combine

under this alter ego. It is the soundtrack to the down of the world. No club music. It is more an album type of music, but I prefer the DJ friendly 12" format so I decided to release the music as EPs. K209 is my project together with Henning Baer who is the one part of Grounded Theory Berlin. K209 is the name of the label and the artist when we both produce together. K209 stands for raw club tracks.

(Kerr, 2011, online)

These indexical properties of a guise – whether through the use of masks or pseudonyms – can offer one way to situate work yet, as the discussion of alignment and displacement reveals, the cover of anonymity can also assist with the contextualising of music according to scene conventions. The negotiation of market conditions through identity often becomes an extension of creativity: a novel way of controlling the way that music is seen and, in turn, judged. But this has been especially relevant in terms of a relationship to dominant practices regarding a commitment to ‘underground’ culture. Whether this manifests as the producer masquerading as American or as consolidated through the mythologies of the erratic ‘mad genius’, each practice uses the ambiguous nature of ‘true’ identity alongside the idealized communal view to construct a more favourable version.

Notes

¹ The definition of the social mask tends to apply solely to an individual's external communication of a specific character in response to an available role and Butler, for one, does argue that gender, whilst 'performed', isn't truly indicative of a 'role' that defines the 'self'; that, instead, the performance of gender constitutes an "act" (1988, p.528).

² A further dynamic within this organisation of identity is the "salience hierarchy" (Stryker and Serpe, 1982, pp.199-218) with the individual's use of an identity – as taken from the range of available identities – is largely based on the constraints within structures. It is suggested that in cases where constraints become ambiguous, the individual can interact socially in a more flexible way and operate a number of identities. In more constrained organisations or situations, the individual is more likely to enact a single identity in response to a clearly designated role and its respective expectations. This may be most clearly understood within organizations that require a clear division of labour but is also relevant to other areas of social interaction. Stryker and Serpe's adoption of identity is also described as related to "commitment" (ibid.): that an individual's dependence on a particular role – the requirement to exhibit specific behaviours within their interactions – will place a particular identity high within the salience hierarchy and ultimately influence behaviour that will increasingly conform to expectations. It is also proposed that self-esteem is, in turn, linked to the successful deployment of this identity: that a more enhanced sense of self and self-confidence can arise when the designated role is convincingly performed – or enacted – according to expectations and societal norms. Furthermore, Stryker and Serpe state that identities high within the salience hierarchy – particularly those that are linked to self-esteem – will be employed more as the individual seeks opportunities for them to be enacted.

³ An even more convoluted reconfiguring of roots in music is detailed by director Jeanie Finlay in *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* (2013). This story documents how two Scottish rappers operating as Silibil n' Brains adopted American accents in order to present themselves as originating from Los Angeles and conform to expectations within rap music of 'the authentic'.

⁴ Burial also has a track titled 'Loner' and this suggestion of the loner also lends itself to the idea of the producer as an introvert as discussed in the previous chapter. This aspect may also be seen as contributing to understandings of 'the innovator' given that Cain states that introverts prefer to work independently, and solitude can be a catalyst to innovation (2013, p.74)

⁵ There are some very brief occasions where the rural idyll has managed to be incorporated within EDM outputs. Examples, while few, would include The KLF's *Chill Out* (1990) with both its artwork imagery and recordings of sheep while, for a time, the visual aesthetic of James Holden's Border Community label centred on green pastures, rolling hills and windmills. In 2013, Kansas producer Brian Leeds also announced an album under his Heurco S. guise that would attempt to "ruralise the historically urban sounds of house and techno" (anon #16, 2013, online).

⁶ While Young describes the Drexciyan myth as "personal", it is used as the basis for a 2011 film that was also titled *Drexciya* by Ghanaian director, Akosua Adoma Owusu. Similarly, American artist Ellen Gallagher's series *Watery Ecstatic* explored the theme of Drexciya as propagated by the Detroit duo.

⁷ Thornton identifies the key arena for 'selling out' as the BBC TV programme *Top of the*

Pops: describing it as “the unrivalled nemesis of the underground and the main gateway to mass culture” (1995, p.123). She gives attention to youth-oriented publications such as *Mixmag* and *i-D* that have expressed contempt within editorial features on EDM for the long-running show due to its role as “so domestic, familial and accessible” (ibid.). That disdain has additionally been tied to the Top 40 singles chart: the sales-based list that was used to determine the programme’s weekly content while additionally used externally to signify what is popular or *populist* music.

⁸ The mass proliferation of one’s own likeness appears to be unprecedented on this scale within EDM. Unlike within the more icon-driven ‘pop’ arena, it is a rarity to see an EDM audience emulate the appearance of a musician. One example where this concept has tentatively been explored is through some of the output of Aphex Twin who, via work with director Chris Cunningham, created masks of the producer that were worn in videos and on record sleeves. But rather than being images that expressed an adulation for the image of Richard James a.k.a. Aphex Twin, ‘Come To Daddy’ (1997) and ‘Windowlicker’ (1999) respectively featured young children and bikini-wearing women wearing James’ face: thus presenting an unsettling series of images that aimed to subvert notions of an adopted identity rather than further the likeness as something to aspire to. However, James is notable as being one of the few EDM producers whose own face is used on his record sleeves and has described his motives for this: “I did it because the thing in techno you weren’t supposed to do was to be recognized and stuff. The sort of unwritten rule was that you can’t put your face on the sleeve. It has to be like a circuit board or something. Therefore I put my face on the sleeve” (Hoffmann, 2001, online). However Reynolds suggests that this particular feature is “reflecting his Genius Auteur Status” (in interview, appendix #4). Furthermore, Young notes that all of James’ music “is about himself” (2005, p.78) and points to the amount of produced tracks bearing titles that are actually anagrams of his aliases.

⁹ Barker and Taylor also state that there are wide beliefs in music that “the real music of a culture is local, acoustic, uncommercial, and pure, whereas the degenerate form is hybrid, commercial, loud, and Westernized” (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p.307).

5. Summary and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the thesis' findings and the conclusions drawn from the study. It begins with an evaluation of the research process including a review of its objectives before outlining what are viewed as the research's contribution to knowledge. In further evaluating the quality of this research, the section also assesses the chosen methodology and questions its suitability within the field. Following this, it interprets the findings under three distinct headings that, in turn, reflect key factors that are argued as impacting on how authorship has been diffused within EDM in conjunction with concepts of anonymity to assist with the development of novel performative identities. Each of these headings are discussed with reference to their creation of a framework where depictions of anonymity are seen as valid, and often preferred, methods of image construction. The study is brought to a close with some final conclusions and recommendations for future research.

5.2 Evaluation of the Research

This section evaluates the research and reviews its objectives whilst first highlighting what should be acknowledged as some of the limitations of the research. In the introductory chapter, a series of questions had been raised that centred on the employment of anonymity by EDM producers. To recap, the main question asked why such strategies have become so prevalent within this area of music and suggestions were put forward that it perhaps highlighted an iconoclasm that has been oppositional to the mainstream 'star system'. This aspect has been addressed throughout the thesis' chapters whilst corresponding such behaviours with a number of notable influences or drivers (namely based around technology, scene dynamics and flexibility). Such factors will be further scrutinized when interpreting the research findings. However, these initial ideas were already built on ideas regarding anonymity as being presented or performed that had emerged in the early stage of the research. It should then be observed that the case studies selected for more detailed analysis conformed to this rudimentary thinking: that they were seen as being both typical to the outlined themes whilst atypical to the dominant rock/pop approaches to authorial representation/image. Yet a further admission should be made that, quite perversely, these are also representative of some highly visible examples of EDM's anonymity. As such, they indicate well known or high profile cases that exemplify what may be perceived as low-key

instincts and a desire for disappearance. The obvious paradox here, in turn, informed an early premise regarding such actions as being counterproductive. However this may lead to questions regarding whether such strategies manifest within the work of other producers that were *not* selected for case studies; and whether the thesis then relies on insufficiently diverse data.

It should then be acknowledged that the work of lesser-known producers has traditionally been based around an even more acute degree of anonymity. As highlighted via the discussion of Zomby's interaction with the producer Rreak (that had resulted in, the track, 'Natalia's Song'), anonymity functions on various levels within EDM. In the aforementioned scenario, Zomby maintained his anonymity in the face of increased media attention whilst Rreak had been anonymous through a lack of media attention. As the consideration of the genre artist and the white label record also suggested, anonymity then represents a first position: a base level for embryonic producers and scenes that can either be sustained as a role through a lack of further exposure or – as demonstrated throughout the featured case studies – via the determinations and strategies of those whose work has the potential for 'crossing over'. The latter, while given the most attention within the thesis, admittedly represents the minority. The majority of EDM producers (as with all musicians) are actually consigned to their positions of anonymity due to a lack of acclaim. The limitations of the chosen examples are then due to not being typical of EDM producers as a whole, yet their concerns for being represented as underground do, in fact, correspond with the anonymity that permeates whole EDM scenes due to both a championing of the margins and general mainstream indifference. So while acknowledging this particular limitation, it may also be seen as the research's strength: that these high profile cases are just the tip of the iceberg – a visible clue to an unseen mass and where the demonstrated enactments hint at the even more covert activity that exists below.

Examining the research's limitations further, the introduction to this thesis included the observance that the various studies that preceded it were representative of a particular time. This thesis is no different: the research made apparent emergent practices that suggested alternatives to anonymizing strategies amongst younger EDM producers. There are suggestions that the quest for anonymity is then an "older thing" (an observation by Thomas, in interview, appendix #5) and recent developments by more youthful EDM producers are argued as having more interest in identity that is more closely connected to established practices that have typified the dominant rock and pop forms. The quest for fame by an emerging generation of producers may be connected to the growth of EDM in other territories that has created major international scene 'stars' and piqued the interest of mainstream media.

Yet it might also be worth noting a change that has come from the ubiquity of mass personal electronic communication. While the thesis' discussion of producers such as Zomby and Dean Blunt already demonstrated the potential for the World Wide Web to work in conjunction with notions of anonymity, there is also the potential to look at internet platforms – in particular social media – with regards to a heightened self-promotion; particularly whilst addressing the impact of online identity and the sharing of personal information within and outside of supposedly niche scenes. While notable image-making and identity-building strategies for EDM have been examined in this thesis, like the music itself, such practices are subject to change due to the impact of new participants and the arrival of alternative approaches to the presentation of one's image within the public sphere. (Further recommendations for future research will be outlined in section 5.5.)

5.2.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This research makes a contribution to knowledge in the following ways:

1. The thesis provides new insights into the fields of visual performance and design cultures. Its use of a multi-disciplinary focus - including the consideration of physical and visual ephemera as part of its textual analysis - provides original ideas related to how identity is performed within EDM. To date, there has been little engagement with such material within the field and, in addition to generating new knowledge regarding these processes, the work also highlights an underdeveloped research area.
2. The research discusses anonymity within EDM in a way that hasn't been approached before. Focused on sites of production, it (further) develops the discussion of how authorship is perceived within EDM: examining how identities are produced and performed. It is therefore representative of a study that engages with EDM and identity beyond a more typical setting of the dancefloor to see its role less from the perspective of the participant clubber and, instead, is engaged with the construction of image within an area of cultural and commercial production.
3. The thesis contributes to existing literature on EDM by not challenging those texts but building on them with further detail regarding the use of visual communication within the field. As such, the research offers new understandings of existing work within the area that is related to human, social and organisational aspects of image management: in particular, the rejection of dominant codes and conventions.

4. The experiences documented within case studies and those drawn from interviews assist with new understandings of the distinctions within the EDM market especially through its involvement of participants that are self-aligned with concepts of 'underground'. While these understandings further dissolve some of the preceding distinctions that have been defined as 'subcultural', it also offers further consideration of the implications for consumer behaviours within niche scenes: particularly from the standpoint of how ideas of underground are emphasised within press interviews, photography, video and record sleeves.
5. The research additionally addresses the role of dominant areas that have been oppositional to EDM: then furthering a series of ideas regarding an inherent inferiority that, in turn, has been reclaimed and subverted by EDM participants to assist with that preferred image of underground. The development of this thinking has also allowed for a new theory regarding the prevalence of EDM's performed anonymity as being driven by its wider denigration. Further to this, the research unveils flexible performative practices that are, in turn, linked to this subversion alongside other drivers: namely the influence of a hidden history and a propensity towards collective identity within EDM.

5.2.2 Appropriate Methodological Choice

The use of interviews that were initially considered to be wholly indicative of where the required information would be found proved to be valuable, yet a substantial literature review actually revealed a lot of detail that was often offered as a mere aside or digression. The reading across other disciplines, for example, yielded results that were highly pertinent to the research. The subsequent collating of this archived discussion of anonymity proved crucial while a substantial amount of interview content, by contrast, only really refined the research focus. A number of interviews with individuals such as Alex Jenkins, who had worked as in-house designer at XL Recordings, and Glen Gibbons, who has occupied an important role within EDM as a co-founder of Soma Recordings, was essential in this way: both parties influenced the direction of the work in its rudimentary stages. Still, the responses were not of the type that later fitted with the discussion of 'performed anonymity' once that focus had become increasingly clear. The same can be said for the many off-record conversations that occurred in the early shaping of this thesis. However, that embryonic stage where the focus was narrowed proved to be completely necessary. Extensive early discussions were also

required just to clarify the parameters of EDM for the purpose of this research. It is observed that the quantifying of EDM and its affects had proved to be problematic due to the criteria on which it had been judged. The employment of terminology to describe its scenes is also viewed as having framed subsequent discourses in specific ways and early consultations were also used to determine that the use of 'EDM' as a descriptor would prove to be the least problematic.

It is noted that there has been 'on scene' criticism regarding the employment of scholarly approaches within the discussion of EDM while individual methodologies have also been critiqued according to the level of participation by the respective researchers and the data that had subsequently materialised. One issue that had to be overcome within the research was the idea of closeness as negating analytical distance whilst, on the other hand, distance had been blamed for the precluding of true understanding. While both arguments have been noted in relationship to specific texts, this again raised an issue of multiple realities and the use of disparate accounts to assemble complete pictures. Rather than viewing any discrepancies as problematic, it was perceived as preferable to navigate the various texts quoted within the thesis whilst aware of their individual contexts but while also confident of the benefits that come from unique standpoints and interpretive readings. Reynolds talks about his own methodology somewhat reluctantly due to it requiring him to operate from two positions: researcher and fan. My research started from a similar position yet also was influenced by experiences working as a music journalist and graphic designer within the area. Perhaps due to the passing of years (and the life changes that this can bring) or maybe due to the increased focus on work commitments (including the actual completion of this thesis), my approach to the research changed whereas I became more the outsider looking in. However, this adjustment was not problematic: it hasn't meant being any less involved. In fact, I believe that it has occasionally assisted in the shifting my critical approach to a more impartial position in order to test some of my earliest ideas on this topic: particularly with regards to my own experiences as a fan. While gaining distance from scenes, it has also allowed space to gather my thoughts and consider the connections between the varied interpretations of image and identity as diffused across a range of media, platforms and channels. Additionally, benefitting that critical distance, the use of interviews and case studies are subsequently argued as being more thorough yet still representative of an empathic methodology. Used in conjunction with the interpretive textual analysis that gave consideration EDM's physical and visual artefacts, the data may not be considered as empirically triangulated, but the mixed methods strategy is understood to have offered substantial depth.

5.3 Interpretation of Research Findings

The concluding section of each chapter within the thesis has already drawn attention to key arguments and findings in response to the exploration of a particular theme. While not wanting to completely repeat those verbatim, this section documents the research findings in more detail while grouping some of those main ideas in alternative ways. This is done to highlight some connections between discussions that have taken place in separate chapters: prompting ideas that have to be joined-up, reported more explicitly and, finally, allowed to communicate what are positioned as the key reasons why performed anonymity has prevailed within EDM.

5.3.1 EDM's Obscured History

What was, at one point in the early stages of this research, assumed to require the detailing of a history of obscurity actually meant firstly engaging with what was already an obscured history. The literature that defined the initial research context subsequently identified EDM as difficult to categorise due to the lack of a definitive, reliable account of its development. As documented in the introductory chapter, this often led to the assemblage of any historical narratives as coming through the negotiation of various individual accounts. The 'collective construction' approach additionally included personal perspectives that had a tendency to focus on illicit activity within EDM scenes over the past two decades. Areas of transgression – particularly EDM's drug-oriented aspects – had been a particularly dominant theme within both academic texts and journalism reports. However, this focus and its emphasis on black market economies had distracted from the consideration of EDM's established commercial interests within the wider economy and, especially, its connections to major corporations. That emphasis on the non-corporate and often illegal elements, in turn, could be argued as assisting with the notion of EDM as 'underground'. The consequences of this underground status will be discussed further in the next section. However, EDM's esoteric nature alongside the suggestion that it has functioned outside of societal norms is said to have then made its products problematic in comparison to how typical music commodities have been controlled within the marketplace. Consequently, the difficulty in marketing EDM commercially coupled with both its supposedly transgressive qualities and an ambiguous back-story has then assisted with its widespread invisibility.

This hidden aspect has simultaneously impacted on identity construction for musicians operating within the area. Similarly low-key, representations of the EDM producer can be viewed as in tandem with a historic invisibility. Yet this creates a cycle or circularity through the emergence of ‘faceless’ producers (perhaps attracted by the ability to maintain a low profile) who adopt identities that similarly lack biography and descriptive imagery: creating new additions to underground scenes that will continue to reinforce the notion of EDM as essentially anonymous. The Berlin techno scene – as discussed in chapter 3 – provides an example of how EDM cultures have arisen with this unseen ‘underground’ status then manifesting almost as a dominant gene: culminating in an environment where covert production units like Basic Channel and Underground Resistance continue to influence a series of newer names with regards to their approach to performed identity. These practices subsequently contribute to what is destined to remain an ill-defined area of music and - seemingly representing an inversion of the way that portraiture has been used to document historical significance elsewhere – the scene, with its white label records as visual embodiments, continues to be largely concealed. Further to this, I would suggest that what has now resulted in an extensive legacy of unsung producers has the potential to be viewed retrospectively – with this anonymity also contributing to observed romantic notions that this forms part of a strategy to virtuously eschew external activities whilst being exclusively devoted to their generation of music recordings. Certainly, this idea has been circulated in press features that centred on the producers that retain high levels of anonymity. In addition to these communications, this information can seemingly be built retroactively: Burial and Zomby, for example, cite the influence of anonymous predecessors that have been perceived as conforming to these principles whilst connecting such ideas to the anonymous practices within their own respective roles; thereby giving further credence to this approach to identity as institutional and contributing to EDM’s underground folklore. The area can then continue to be seen as wilfully impenetrable and under-documented while support is further given to the abstruse and obscure.

Anonymity, in its relationship to more recognisable forms of authorship, has further been identified as having a substantial history of its own – particularly within works of literature. Yet the research context acknowledged the multitude of reasons for its employment and the various effects that these individual strategies have had. Importantly, there have been documented examples where hidden authorship assists in generating the interest in a body of work; where anonymity subsequently becomes a key component in the demand for what has been produced. In EDM specialist scenes where anonymity’s repeated use might suggest the

loss of its mystique, the producer's unattainability still prompts a high level of attention. So it should be observed that even despite such codes being commonplace, acclaimed EDM musicians that maintain an anonymous identity are still perceived as remarkable and, ultimately, marketable. However, this is less because it offers novelty value, but more because it displays a commitment to historical traits: that it conforms to and exists within what is assessed as an obscured history. As such, an alternative approach to identity that would be based around a commitment to the star system would not only be less desirable within scenes due to the associated availability, it would also be considered to be essentially uncharacteristic and ultimately unfounded given what has been understood to be EDM's inherent marginality

5.3.2 Marginality and Inferiority

Commentators – including Rietveld and Brewster and Broughton – have considered how early EDM scenes were formed from already established minority groups based on race and/or sexuality. There is subsequently an argument for scenes as preceded by a position of intrinsic marginality to continue as self-identifying with that position: where such a legacy continues even despite the wider prevalence of a culture. However, more distinctly, EDM's scenes are governed by complex internal relationships that, in turn, have evaluated genres, sub-genres and individual participants with respect to their levels of invisibility and a related (if assumed) distance from that mainstream assimilation. This can additionally be viewed as having responded to criteria that reflects the more low-key initial origins of EDM: then, as discussed in the previous section, prompting the championing of a series of principles that have seemingly demonstrated a commitment to the scene's roots. This is of further importance when this marginality is seen as being applicable to its minority audience.

The associated low-key behaviours within these scenes then communicate these properties externally: appealing to participants that will favour secret knowledge and, simultaneously, allowing EDM to continue its occupation of an uncompromisingly esoteric position for more casual observers. From this emerges a romantic view that champions this sphere as representative of an idealistic or even utopian music ecosystem that is in opposition to the star system. It is an approach that champions the unprofitable areas of the music industry and simultaneously demonstrates a disdain for the record business. Still, rather than completely pursue the suggestion of an underground rebellion that may conform to old approximations of subculture, the consideration of EDM should observe its relationship with the wider entertainment industry: where what were often assumed to be exclusive modes of

dissemination of the independent label and the major label are revealed to involve a degree of overlap. Image-wise, this connection to corporate culture is not EDM's preferred option and, as evident in the thesis' chapters, the anonymous strategies employed by producers have often assisted in distancing the individual from these connections to major corporations. As was apparent in chapter 3, even the controllers of these businesses have used visual aesthetics and distribution methods that will downplay their major label identities in order to be perceived as underground and independent within the EDM market.

While also understanding the potency of underground status, Gilbert and Pearson still argue that the maintaining of this position of marginalisation – of the underdog – is ultimately defeatist. Certainly, the research undertaken within this thesis suggests that, while the position of the marginalised may be preferred within scenes, producers have also chosen to be represented through embodiments that are arguably those of the defeated or conquered subordinate. For example the slave (plus its android/cyborg/robot incarnation) has become a common theme within EDM. Even the discussed citing of the tribal figure has been fraught through its suggestions that it represents a primitive 'inferior'. But this role as 'lesser' is argued as one that has been assigned externally following a continued disregard for EDM from outside of its scenes and this thesis supports the idea that it has been the Western rockist value system – most prevalent in music journalism – that has actually suppressed EDM most voraciously. Observed in chapter 2 through five distinct (but overlapping) areas, EDM's music output was routinely observed as inferior due to its ignorance of principles that have become prized within rockist discourses. Instead responding to alternative criteria linked to its own specific technologies, its marginalisation is then furthered through the suggestions that it lacks authenticity, meaning, originality and virtuosity. It is put forward here that this, in turn, impacts on self-identification with conventional approaches to authorship and identity eschewed by producers that use these technologies due to the widespread belief that they are subsequently invalidated as musicians. Further to this, it has also been addressed how EDM producers that *have* managed to achieve a high level of success and gained substantial label/financial support eventually gravitated towards more traditional ways of working that surrender to that Western rockist value system. Seemingly then finding validation through the use of vocals and what are still routinely defined as 'real' instruments, such transgressions are viewed as conceding authority to dominant discourses whilst further aligning EDM's marginality with inferiority. Such inferiority – the consigning to the status of 'less than human' – is then perceived as a self-perpetuating force within EDM that can prevent the building of a more assured self-image.

5.3.3 The Loss of Selfdom

Chapter 3's scrutiny of the role of anonymous practices within the collective system or scene contemplated a historic use of genre and subgenre as a replacement for the individual author. Following Hesmondhalgh (1998a), this highlighted the understanding that can come from knowledge of genre or style over the individual performers. The chapter also addressed how this was compounded through means of dissemination that have been commonplace within EDM. The DJ set, for example, has offered one significant format where the work of separate producers could largely be disregarded by audiences and notions of individuality were sacrificed in favour of the success of a larger, combinatory text. The consequence of this is the potential to invalidate the musicianship of producers by communicating the message that their work - reduced to a standardised unit of production – can be disregarded as secondary when giving both control and visibility to DJs as omnipotent assemblers of the complete text.

Similarly, the EDM record label has promoted a similar ethos with collective identity helping to shape the understanding of the record company - if not always the various producers on its roster. Records have often been designed as DJ tools that support the idea of the label's series rather than highlighting the individual producer. Additionally, the placement of the record label within genre or style constraints adds a further layer of categorisation that precedes the identification of the composer of the music. In cases, even a catalogue number can be used more widely than a producer name to further erase the individual that composed the work. These methods of categorisation and dissemination are tied to the support of underground-based secret knowledge that permeates scenes yet they consign each producer to that first position as a functional and anonymous component within the larger text. Even when a musician crosses over – as in the case of the 'beyond genre' name – the role as modular scene component is still never far away: the understanding of scene hierarchies is built on the connectivity within EDM networks while, ultimately, the work of even the biggest producers is destined for DJ play within the larger set. It is due to this assessment of the EDM producer as modular that assists with notions that, in isolation, his or her compositions would always be incomplete. As with the previous discussion of marginality, there is then the potential to view the EDM producer as perceived as unworthy of personal identification: then continuing the self-perpetuating image of the less than human or, in this case, 'less than musician' to relegate their input and signpost their role as anonymous contributor.

5.4 Conclusion

In spite of what may have been indicated in preceding texts, the anonymous positions that are undertaken within EDM are worthy of interrogation. These may indeed represent voids that are more widely perceived as unremarkable yet it is actually these spaces – particularly when they relate to gaps in knowledge – that need addressing in order to gain more understanding regarding how identity is adopted within the area. I do understand why these have been overlooked: I will concede that anonymity may have been viewed as rather indistinct due to its representation of a first position or base level for producers. As indicated, it is that exact point that will be inescapable for many producers simply due to a lack of advancement within their music careers: something that will never allow many contributors anything but anonymity. However, it is the continued use of practices by established producers that allude to that same invisibility which makes their investigation so compelling.

The research subsequently responds to the insistence of Thornton (1995) that further work is required in order to disentangle the cultural distinctions within EDM. It also expands on the all-too-brief but highly influential examination of cultural production developed by Hesmondhalgh (1998a). However, while noting a relationship to this literature alongside disparate texts by Gilbert and Pearson (1999) and House and Shaughnessy (1999, 2000), it is the trans-disciplinary exploration of the spaces between these works that aids an enhanced understanding within a niche area where performance, design and music are connected in the building of identity. In fact, I do consider the ability to test the method of working across disciplines as important as the opportunity to generate original findings. That said, there *is* new knowledge within this study that, in turn, can be of use to scholars in performance, design and music given its implications for redressing how identity is produced, performed and supported within specialist scenes.

In the introduction, the thesis poised the question ‘Why *is* anonymity so prevalent within EDM?’ This has been explored in tandem with the other queries that were first approached in that same section regarding whether certain behaviours were an indication of EDM’s underground status or, indeed, whether the role of technology contributes to these atypical representations of authorship. While prompting the findings detailed previously, I would also argue that my actual generation of these questions was significant in as much as the described behaviours had long intrigued me. As a follower/buyer of reputedly ‘underground’ electronic dance music, I took interest in the producers hidden behind pseudonyms, those that were not photographed, the ones that only rarely granted interviews and the individuals who seemingly

had no biographical detail attached to their work. As an aficionado, the reputed unattainability of production talent invited me to delve deeper and to mine for further information. But at times, as with the compositional structures that were discussed in chapter 2, the interest begged “an answer that never comes” (The Creators Project, 2013c, online). However, under the guise of scholarly enquiry, I’ve been able to advance that interest while attempting to resolve these questions. Yet I have needed to critique that original position as an ardent music fan once reminded that the mystique that surrounded the employment of anonymity can be a large part of its attraction: for some producers, but especially more invested EDM followers like myself. As a journalist, I have also recognised how the described strategies would prove enticing to the press. This factor was documented clearly at those points where a producer’s facelessness and wilful obscurity *became* the story: used to highlight both novelty value and to claim cultural capital following the publication’s new position as trusted insider.

However, while the above scenarios outline positive, provocative aspects to performances of anonymity, the research undertaken simultaneously highlights a distinct lack of validation for EDM producers that has impacted negatively on self-image and contributed to anonymity’s prevalence. Rockist notions of musical integrity may have routinely been deployed in the judgement and subsequent suppression of all kinds of music styles but in the case of EDM, such dominant value codes are argued as having denigrated music that has been mediated by specific technologies. The consequence of this denigration has been in its prompting of producers to either attempt to conform to such codes or be driven further into their specialist scenes where, within the collective scenius, individuality and identity has been further eradicated.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

The research presented here suggests a number of avenues for further study. While far from being an exhaustive list of future research possibilities, I have chosen to highlight several that I think are particularly interesting and significant. The role of the World Wide Web with regards to concepts of authorship and anonymity, for example, was already highlighted in section 5.2. The potential for this as an area for study is already demonstrated through aspects that emerged towards the latter part of my own research that suggested that newer or younger EDM producers were not demonstrating the same disdain for visibility as their forebears had. Yet such a focus may have to consider the impact of online presence through social media amongst a whole generation of users of mass electronic communication to determine whether this truly represents a change of behaviours with regards to understandings of the depiction of ‘self’ within a connected society.

A further area for study would be in the consideration of anonymity that looks elsewhere and engages with other areas of music. This thesis specifically considered practices within EDM, but there is still the potential to look further at some of the addressed anonymizing behaviours that have become apparent within a broader musical context. For example, such activity has noticeably infiltrated the more mainstream arena of popular music. In chapter 4, it is noted that Thom Yorke of Radiohead has utilized anonymity whilst deploying, a covert electronic guise, SiSi BakBak. However, an external interest in disappearance by musicians had already been highlighted when David Bowie was interviewed in 1992. He stated that:

There is an analogy with craftsmen in terms of church builders and painters. The idea of putting their own names on anything was an anathema. Nobody actually has a clue who built these cathedrals. With music, it's coming to a situation where anonymity is a virtue. I find that really interesting.

(Phillips, 2009, p.124)

More recently, the reluctance to engage with the more typical ‘star system’ model has additionally been explored by musicians such as Sia and FKA Twigs. There may also be a further kinship between their avoidance of media saturation and the ‘surprise’ album releases by Beyoncé and Björk. Given that these latter displays within popular culture have been applicable to female performers, there can be additional questions raised regarding whether such a reluctance to participate in the extraneous actions of music marketing is, in turn, linked to the media’s objectification of women in music. Or, indeed, whether such developments are

alternatively indicative of a confidence within female musicians who, whilst working within the music industry, have gained control of their image alongside a level of support that allows freedom regarding how that image is used (or not) alongside their musical output. There are related areas here that were raised in chapter 2 by Daft Punk regarding discrepancies between a musician's control and financial security that could also be further debated. Highlighting the complexities of cultural vs. commercial production, Steve Goodman, for one, has insisted that:

The bind most artists are in, one way or another, musicians, producers, is, how much do you just give to the system to allow you to be sustainable to just do what you want to do, to just get on with producing and making stuff. And, it's like a drug. In other words, are you always in this position where you have to give and take a little bit more in order to give and take a little bit more in order to get that little bit more autonomy? So this is like, the question of being any kind of cultural producer. Because what you want to do is in front of you, you just want to do music, or write, or make films, or paint... whatever. But the issue is having economic autonomy, and time and space to do things which are in front of you but everything is competing for your attention and your time... the idea of just being left to your own devices to just get on with what you know you want to do is certainly appealing.

(Walmsley, 2009, online)

I also advocate far more consideration of music's physical and visual ephemera to further examine relationships with such artefacts across a whole range of music styles. I would also suggest that such undertakings would not necessarily have to take the form of a written thesis. By way of illustration, and within my sometime role as a designer, I have already considered a number of practice-based outcomes that could synthesise and disseminate some of the ideas within these chapters. While this was not seen as an immediately appropriate outcome within the completion of this thesis, I will be looking to personally expand on the findings through a series of work that explores EDM's continued fascination with the vinyl record and, in particular, the white label 12" single.

The following appendices are transcriptions of interviews that were undertaken and quoted within the thesis. Each interviewee was able to specify whether they wished to be named within the research or not. As demonstrated, all of the featured participants were satisfied that their contribution could be credited to them. To clarify, the format of the interviews within each appendix follows a convention prominent in journalism articles where the interviewer's questions and comments are in bold type with the interviewee's responses following. There are some inconsistencies regarding the format of track titles with how these are documented elsewhere within the thesis. However these few irregularities have been maintained in order to document the emailed responses from participants accurately.

Appendix #1 – Tom Kerridge interview

So when setting up the labels, were there any preconceived ideas regarding how the artists might be represented (within the media, visually, etc) as part of 'underground' forms of music?

Not really. It's my job to promote an artist's image however they choose to present themselves. If an artist comes to me wanting photo shoots, then we support that. Alternatively, if they say they don't want their face shown in the media, then we support that too.

How did Zomby's approach fit in with your ideas for Ramp? And how far does/did that anonymity extend? Does it, for example, typify your working relationship with the producer too or is Zomby's approach more to do with his relationship with the media? How has that example differed from your working relationship with other producers that may be seen as less guarded?

The only way these artists approach fits in with Ramp is by having great music - and I suppose that is the point. If you do take identity away from the music, it is just music, and people should be able to enjoy it as that, without photoshopped and stylised images accompanying it. I don't believe Zomby, and now Gerry Read, who also has chosen to remain anonymous, do have a relationship with the media. I know both of them are not unwilling to speak to the media, but they have both done a couple of interviews, anything further, questions just get repeated, and giving too much of themselves away personally to the public doesn't really have much of a purpose for their music. This is the point of 'The Underground' (as much as I despise that term) - it's about the music. If artists' opinions or image become more important than the music, then we end up with Bono or Pop Idol, which is a world we have actively chosen not to have any involvement in. We are offering an alternative to the people who find that world vacuous and offensive.

How about working with SBTRKT? How does that differ from Zomby. SBTRKT's is a very visual approach to hiding his face yet and may be seen as based on different

motivations to Zomby. But how do you think these ideas help or hinder the opportunities to gain exposure for the actual music?

Well SBTRKT is very different to Burial, Zomby, Gerry Read, and any other anonymous artist I know of. He has used the mystery anonymity brings to launch his career in the mainstream world. I remember the first time I met SBTRKT, when I first signed Laika, before the masks, before the SBTRKT name existed and was still Aaron Jerome - I asked where he wanted to be, where he wanted his career to go, and he very clearly said he wanted to be as big as possible. Of course, this is no bad thing, and he has achieved exactly what he set out to do - he used the long tradition of anonymity in electronic music to launch his career in the mainstream. I was surprised when I switched on his first television appearance to see him very clearly showing his face, but obviously shying away from the media was not on his agenda when donning the mask.

Outside of just your labels, what function do you feel anonymous practices (pseudonyms, resistance to photography, masks, white labels) work within that idea of 'the underground'? Is there anything in what's described elsewhere as putting the emphasis on the music rather than celebrity? Or is there such a thing as 'mystique': something that can be created outside of the music that can affect our interpretation of the music - whether that's Burial, Basic Channel, Underground Resistance or whoever?

I don't believe the "anonymous practices" are something that were planned, but those things described are just commonplace in our industry, and have been for a very long time. The fact is that somebody's face doesn't affect how a certain piece of music makes you feel. When I find a new producer, the last thing I worry about is their face. Has anybody been truly anonymous? I know what Mike Banks looks like, I know what Guy Manuel de Homem Christo and Thomas Bangalter look like, I know what Will Bevan looks like. If you do actually follow this music passionately their identities are not that secret. Once an artist sell more than a few thousand records, people start asking questions. The concepts often only happen after an artist has been initially camera shy, then the media decide to probe as to why - so really it is something that is fuelled by the media. There are thousand upon thousand of anonymous artists out there, but as they are not showing up on the media's radar, the issue of their identity never comes up. Another thing you have to remember is this isn't us 'not conforming' with the mainstream. This is what we do. This is our world. When the spotlight isn't on us, we would still be doing exactly the same thing. Mainstream pop throughout history has taken it's queue from underground music, so when we are dragged into their world, why are we the ones expected to change? I think DOOM's anonymity is possibly most interesting - from being chewed up and spat out by the industry in KMD, and then re-launching himself behind the mask, giving himself a new rap persona on the NY underground. When Operation: Doomsday came out all those years ago, I don't think anybody thought he would get as big as he did. How the media and mainstream music industry treated him through his time in KMD, they turned him into something that was so much more marketable than KMD ever were.

Lastly, do you think such practices are relevant now and what would you suggest as motivating them?

I don't think it is a question of being relevant. If an artist doesn't want his face online and magazines, it's their decision, and I think it is something that should be respected. I can't say I know exactly what every artist's motivation is, but I fully respect their personal choices, as should the media.

Appendix #2 – Mike Paradinas interview

So I just wondered to what degree anonymity – in its various guises surrounding facelessness – matters to Planet Mu?

It's up to the musician/artist. We will support whatever... however they want to present themselves.

What, for you, are the pros and cons of an artist carving out a clear image and backstory?

It's best if there is a reason for any subterfuge, obviously a clear backstory is good if it's true but making your image part of your identity or part of a bigger project, and part of the art itself can be beneficial. Sometimes there is no dividing line between backstory/personality of artist(s), etc. I think it's probably okay to lie about it if that is part of the artist's personality, we can also make a benefit about making stuff up. Jokey/obviously untrue stuff for humorous effect.

What, for you, is the benefit for artists that are purported to “let the music speak for itself”? Is there anything, for example, in this oft-reported “mystique” that can accompany low visibility and intentional obscurity?

Again, it's all down to the artist's personality: it has to chime with it. It has to all make sense together. It becomes obvious/second nature to a label to know what to do when confronted with certain types of people.

Appendix #3 – Marcus Scott interview

I'm keen to know if there are issues negotiating what the media wants and what Burial, Zomby and Dean Blunt & Inga Copeland want to give. Plus whether those individual approaches are of any consequence to Hyperdub, whether such 'low visibility' is part of a tradition?

Everyone is completely free to do what they want and everyone except Burial and Dean and Inga do press in the usual way. That's all I've got to say on the subject really, both artists have carved out a way of doing things without needing to do interviews and Dean and Inga are hardly anonymous, they do shows, have done occasional interviews and do videos and downloads but they don't really care if they're being truthful or not.

I think that it has been viewed that Dean and Inga have their own motivations for playing around with identity and, whether it involves information or misinformation, it appears to be related to the ways that they see the project. But have Dean and Inga changed from 'Hype Williams' by request? Like from the director of the same name?

Dean and Inga do interviews when they want to - they're in Hype Williams but called themselves Dean and Inga for this record - they record and tour as Hype Williams - but yes they're having fun.

Out of curiosity, do you still have to deal with interview requests from journalists? Or have they got the hint?

People still email asking for all kinds of stupid things with Burial but are always just trying their luck.

Appendix #4 – Simon Reynolds interview

So how did this development of the Hardcore Continuum project come about? This is something that you've referred to in the past, yet this is actually expanding on the idea, isn't it? Why was there a need to do that at this point of time?

Do you mean the talk at FACT? They contacted me and asked me to do it! It's not particularly timely, but nor is it untimely. I think maybe there's a sense at the moment of "where next for the hardcore continuum?". So it's a good point at which to survey the length and breadth of it--which is almost 20 years now, and arguably a dozen or so significant subgenres of UK dance music--and also speculate on the future.

The hardcore continuum idea is something I've been developing in my books, like *Energy Flash*, especially the expanded/updated version that came out last year, and in my journalism for years now. And since 2002 I've been refining the idea on my blog, Blissblog. The notion first began to take real shape in 1999 around the time of the 2step garage explosion. Obviously I was aware prior to this about how hardcore rave evolved into jungle, which turned into various styles of drum'n'bass, and then there was this drastic mutation into speed garage circa 1997. But by the time speed garage was becoming 2step, I was really noticing the musical continuities that cut through all these styles that on initial hearing sounded quite different. Underneath there were these enduring elements: bass pressure sourced ultimately in the Jamaican sound-system influence; choppy rhythms that were either sampled breakbeats or very syncopated drum programming; the use of diva vocal samples that were then texturised with digital processing and micro-edited into percussive voice-riffs; and the role of MCs both in the clubs chatting live over the DJ's sets and increasingly appearing on vinyl tracks too, and doing this style of rapping that was fast compared with US hip hop and often heavily influenced by dancehall ragga. I was also noticing that 2step had all these remakes of hardcore rave tunes, using the same samples or hooks, but with a slower, sexier groove. So as much as speed garage/2step was a reaction against its immediate precursor, the noisy style of drum'n'bass called techstep, it was pledging allegiance to hardcore and the old skool spirit of rave of the early Nineties. Hardcore was the foundation and stepping-off point for this whole culture.

While you join the dots between these forms of music, their audiences and their influences, there still appears to be a contrasting approach where every new development is treated as a totally new entity; almost as if it was created in a vacuum. Some of that is down to dance music's reactionary nature, isn't it? What do you make of that rejection of the past: that backlash mentality? And how do you feel this fits in with the cycle of club music as sub-genres shift from underground culture to a commercially viable form of music?

I think what makes this musical culture so strong, so fertile--and it's similar to how hip hop works, how Jamaican music culture works--is the combination of traditionalism and iconoclasm. Producers will have grown up on the earlier music (like grime people having listened to jungle pirate stations when they were 10 years old) but they're not hidebound by reverence for it, they'll use ideas from when if they feel it adds something to a track, but their consciousness is focused on now, on next week. So I see this running thing of "roots 'n' future" to borrow a phrase off Phuture Assassins, this old rave outfit. There's a tremendous forward-drive, an ethos of making it fresh (and partly that's because of the ambition of individual producers and DJs and MCS, they're looking to make their name and to make a living, it's a highly competitive ideas market they're stepping into!). But at the same time the culture is grounded in tradition. There is this enduring infrastructure (pirate radio stations that have been around through several different genre-shifts; certain key independent record stores

that have also changed with the styles) and there are abiding rituals (dubplates, rewinds, MCing). It's only if you're outside the culture that it can seem like a series of disconnected genres. The further you are from the UK and from London, which is the heartland, the harder it can be to see the continuousness of the continuum. Some American friends of mine who had gotten into jungle just couldn't make the leap to speed garage and 2step, it seemed too house music, too R&B, too poppy.

You've mentioned ethnomusicology as relating to the scenes that have reverberated to jungle and garage. How integral has race, and particularly multi-racial communities, been to the way that this music has developed? And what effect does it have on the way the media reports on the scene? I mean, there's been suggestions in the past that often white artists - like, say, MJ Cole - will be more prominently backed by major labels than their black scene counterparts. But does this new, supposedly accessible and more commercial stage just contribute to its further development? Perhaps in the same way that when these strains become more melodic and chart-friendly, there is a movement that champions a more extreme form?

I think of the hardcore continuum, from rave through jungle to UK garage to grime and beyond, as being one single culture. I see it as our equivalent to hip hop, or to the Jamaican continuum (ska to reggae to dancehall...). But the crucial difference between the UK thing and those other countries is that the hardcore continuum is multicultural. You could say that musically it's dominated by black influences, but in terms of its population it's a mixture of black, white, Indian subcontinent, you name it. I'm always amazed by the mix of people involved in these scenes: grime has a lot of people of African descent involved, apparently, which is culturally quite different from people whose parents or parents' parents came from the Caribbean. You'd come across London-bred Cypriots in the UK garage, Turkish kids, people from all kinds of places. And a lot of people who are just mix-race, all sorts of blends. I think that's one of the most inspiring, most *hopeful* things about this culture. I don't necessarily agree about the MJ Cole point, because while it's true the record industry will hone in on the artists who seem to have more pop potential or are more "musical" in a coffee-table sense, often as not those will be black artists. Like LTJ Bukem, who was seen as a potential cross-over drum & bass act and did have some success reaching an audience outside the core scene. And often the most ruffneck, uncompromising, anti-melodic tunes are by white producers.

You wrote: " My own role as an ethnographer is a bit like one of those researchers who lives with the tribe, gets too involved, and compromises his objectivity". Isn't that the thing with dance music is that to truly understand it, you can't just observe. You have to get involved. To understand the music, you have to understand the various drugs and the crowds and, to a degree, submerge yourself in a less cerebral and spontaneous relationship. Could this be why you're one of the few people effectively examining it as a complex subculture? I mean, what you do doesn't really find a place in the bulk of the dance press, does it?

I always wondered why there wasn't more writing in the dance magazines that had that first-person sense about it. Not necessarily *written* in the first person but clearly drawing on your own experiences as a raver, and also a fan, a partisan for particular scenes and sounds. Mostly it tends to be written in a more reporterly fashion, i.e. aiming to be objective. Obviously most dance journalists are fans of the music and go out clubbing, or so I imagine--I can't see why else you'd do it, because it's not a lucrative line of work! But it didn't seem to seep into the writing that much, with a few exceptions like Tony Marcus, this great writer who used to work for *Mixmag* back in the day and had a bit of a gonzo vibe to his stories.

Do you feel that being in New York and therefore having a more distance from London has helped in appraising/dissecting/analysing these scenes?

Actually no--from the perspective of keeping on top of the hardcore continuum, it would be better to be in London, definitely. I'd love to be in broadcast range of the pirate stations! But I do all right because of having been so steeped in the culture before, I can "top" that up with whatever tapes or download DJ sets I can get my hands on. The web has changed things a lot, in a sense the scene's become less localized, which may actually be a bad thing ultimately. New York had quite thriving jungle, 2step, and--for a minute there--grime scenes, with performers coming over to play. Dubstep also has a foothold here. In most other respects I prefer New York as somewhere to live.

When we discussed your writing in that class I did, the main thing was putting across how your writing examines music while also considering gender, sexuality, race, politics, economics, etc. So are you able to consider a record without looking at the wider picture. I imagine that some people making the music might be surprised that you have theorized, contextualized or even intellectualized their music in such a way. Has that been the case? What feedback do you get from the artists that you reference?

I can totally just listen to the records as music, experience it on that level, but when it comes to writing about it I find the larger picture--all the things you mention, the identity politics, the subcultural rituals aspect, factors like changes in technology and drug use and the economy--it enriches my understanding of it.

I don't tend to get feedback from people in the scene that often, except early on some jungle people were very pleased that I was paying them attention because the dance magazines and other music papers were totally ignoring that scene. And a couple did say they were surprised by how much I'd got right, considering I was an "outsider". I've also had negative feedback once or twice when I dared to criticize certain trends in the scene -- I think they were so not used to media attention, that when it came and was all positive at first, they were then taken aback that it could also take the form of criticism (pretty constructive, but forcefully expressed).

But I don't really feel I'm writing for the scene as such--it can thrive perfectly fine without media attention-- but more to convince people on the periphery that this is worth checking out, and just because it's very interesting and inspiring to me. Overall, the continuum, I think it's an oddly un-mediated culture, for all that it gets this sporadic media interest every few years or so when a new style pops up. I was always struck by this grime lyric circa 2005 where the guy talks about being on the cover of *the Face* (ie. wanting to be a superstar), unaware that the magazine had gone out of business many years earlier. I think it's a bit Marshall McLuhan-esque in the sense that it's an oral culture, with a highly developed sense of the visual: style, film, technology, rather than text or literature, is what inspires it. I got blank looks interviewing drum'n'bass people if I mentioned the name J.G. Ballard, but they often had cool, aesthete's taste in cinema.

The rock press has always found dance music tricky. It doesn't fit with their ideas of what a musician should be or what they should do. What's your take on that relationship? And what are your thoughts on dance music's functionality?

They tend to be looking for the album-oriented artist, so are suckers for anything with a conceptualist bent. And also for mavericks and singular characters, people who do wacky things (like Aphex Twin buying a tank) or who are real characters. So they went nuts for Goldie cos he did concept albums and was a quote machine with a colourful past. And I can understand that: when I did my early pieces on jungle, Goldie would take prominence, partly

because his early music was amazing but also because he was the only one who said anything that had any real flava to it. He was a journalist's dream in that respect. Music papers have always had a bias towards "the good talker", it's natural I suppose, but it has led to some all-mouth-no-trousers types getting more coverage than they deserve.

I think the core of the music, its living pulse, is tracks and what the DJ and MC do to them, which is put them in the mix and then amp them up with the fast chat vocals on top, all that creates "vibe". Tracks heard on their own, as isolated pieces of music, can be great but they're so much *more* when they're activated by being put in the mix and MC-ed over. The single-artist album is pretty irrelevant as far as the hardcore continuum's concerned - there's been a few good ones, Omni Trio, Dizzee Rascal, but for the most part this is functional music, about making you dance.

The Hardcore Continuum and Remix Culture: are they intertwined?

No more than any strand of dance music, I don't think. Jungle and UK garage always had a big thing for remixes. I used to like the way that the jungle and drum'n'bass people would do a *series* of remixes, ie. an artist remixing their own track from some while back, and giving it a title reminiscent of a Hollywood pulp movie sequel. So Goldie did Terminator, and then Terminator II later that same year, and then years and years later, he returned to it and did a late period Terminator refix (I forget the title, something quite pompous and "artist, moi!"). Sometimes it would be quite a big gap, like Doc Scott's "Here Come the Drums" from 92 was revisited by him a couple of years later as "Drumz 95". I like that idea because it's a bit like an obsessive artist returning to a canvas, or to a subject or model they're fixated on. There's a million variations--VIP remixes, re-remixes, "re-produced by"--which meant essentially a new track with just a tiny lick or diva-voice in common with the original. Foul Play remixed *their own* earlier remix of Omni Trio's "Renegade Snares"--the first remix was outstanding, the later VIP one was just earth-shattering. They were a group who were more famous for their remixes of other people's stuff --like Hyper-On Experience --than their own tunes. When Foul Play did a PA they played their remix of the latter's "Lord of the Null Lines" as if it was their own composition. Which it almost was. And sometimes the tracks would be credited to Foul Play by pirate deejays, as if the remixer had absorbed and eclipsed the original author. Another thing you'd get in jungle often was the multiple remix package, an EP or double-EP with different people's takes on a track. But I don't necessarily think the hardcore continuum is any more remix-obsessed than most other forms of dance music. And for every fantastic remix there'd be five nondescript or duff remixes.

In a larger sense, as "sampladelic" music, the continuum genres could be said to be remixing pop culture as a whole. I love the way all through the tradition, things from TV themes, or movie soundtracks, or the archives of pop music (especially black music) or just the current Top 30 would be sampled and sometimes subverted. One of the defining 2step songs, Dem 2's "Destiny" from 1999 uses a vocal by Tracy Chapman of all people--I only worked that out a few years ago--and gives it a *completely* different mood. Another favourite is the hardcore rave tune I've never been able to identify that takes Tasmin Archer's #1 hit from 92, "Sleeping Satellite"--a touching song about Mankind's premature trip to the Moon before we as a species were mature enough--and turns it into a song about trips of a different kind: Ecstasy and acid! Or grime, with Dizzee taking that song from Buggy Malone, "so you wanna be a boxer" and turning it into "wanna be a gangster" and mocking little wannabe bad boys in East London. But there's thousands and thousands of examples of this kind of mischief.

Appendix #5 – Conor Thomas interview

So I'm just interested really about this idea of anonymity. The scene kind of like Hardwax and the whole Berlin scene, and then on the dubstep side: Burial and Zomby and those things. With Boomkat is it something that you have to address and that you have to deal with, or does it help sell?

Erm, yeah. Sometimes you have to be sensitive to the record or the artist. Sometimes you know who the artist is so while you got an anonymous 12" there, you actually know who's behind it. You have the option there: you could actually say in the open that it's somebody incognito or you could just give the game away a bit. But it is kind of fun and it's part of the culture to keep tabs on information... do things secretly. Erm, I think it is a bit of a tease and people do respond to it.

It is that sort of thing. Like the Dusk & Blackdown single with the Burial remix on it. And the first Boomkat subscription email wasn't explicit about Burial's involvement and it was instead described sort-of as "you know who". Then a bit later it's a bit more information and then...

Yeah that was basically them specifically saying don't mention it and then afterwards... I'm not too sure what changed, but we was like... hmm, I don't know what to say... because there are cases where you know you're gonna sell more copies of that record even though people can use their brain and use their ears and listen to the samples and anybody with half a brain can tell that's a Burial track but at the same time, you know, you have to sort of keep it within the scene, so...

And what about the other way around? I mean there are cases where that mystery sort of works in a producer's favour. I know it's kind of the usual ones that we see or big name producers operating under different names. But are you not getting a lot of unknown producers, that'll use anonymity or mystery to drum up interest?

Not much. I think the most recent example would be Zomby who took it as far as he could go, but then it got to the stage where people realised who he was and yeah, his cover was blown. But there's not actually..., there's not anybody taking it to extremes but I think actually it's got less impact now - there's a lot here of kids doing it now. I do see kids now who are more market savvy and they just, go "right yeah, I wanna sell records, I wanna sell them, that's what I'm doing, I wanna make it for the telly", and they don't even bother with the anonymity thing. I think there are still people who keep that up but we [Boomkat staff] are seeing less of it.

But labels like Frozen Border and Horizontal ground, and things like that that are still defined by that kind of anonymity and you know...

You know, I think that label is owned by somebody who's a lot older so he comes from the era that we come from where that's the done thing to protect your music. Even then, they only did that for the first five or six pieces and then after that they started using their names. So, I think even that guy came to a point where he realised that actually you have to start using names because you have to sell records basically.

And the other thing is, a lot of people are DJing as well and to actually get them out working they've actually got to be physical.

Yeah, exactly.

As much as, you know, they might wear masks or whatever but then it starts getting silly and then the mask – the image - gets all the attention. I asked Drums of Death about it and he was saying “You know, I’ve started moving away from all that now” as suddenly people start thinking you’re Daft Punk or Deadmau5, or whatever.

What about that other guy...?

SBTRKT?

Yeah he still does it though, to be fair. But actually his cover has been blown, hasn’t it? It came out that he used to be on BBE...

Yeah, he did a broken beat album under another name...

Yeah jazzy sort of stuff.

But it’s kind of intriguing because it only lasts a certain amount of time. I mean, for me at first I thought there was a certain romanticism, just used to go out to clubs and you wouldn’t know the tracks and there was a kind of “I don’t know who this is” and you’d hear track after track all night and it’d be just white labels. Or like experiencing an Underground Resistance record for the first time... any of that, is it a kind of romanticism? That people want to believe in things that they don’t know?

I think it’s kind of, yeah I think the romance has been lost a bit. There are still people trying to keep it, a lot, but the kids now, I don’t think the romance is there in a way. Yeah I think, I see it now most kids now wanna be celebrities in their own scene, it takes some balls really to do what used to be done. I’m trying to think of examples of really young kids now who do that and I can’t really think of one actually.

I mean it’s harder to do as well, because normally someone can find out within two clicks, you know I’ve seen interviews like with Redshape, for example, and the intro is saying “you know this producer through other work” and a quick search on the internet demonstrates that the information is out there. So I can’t see how that’s all maintained easily really. You know, we all kind of know... we wanna find the picture of Mad Mike and all that kind of stuff.

You know, the internet has blown everyone’s cover so if you did wanna do it nowadays you’d really have to go to some lengths to make sure you’re not known anywhere, not even have a Facebook or anything. It’s kind of what we’re doing. Do you know this label I run? Death of Rave? There’s a guy on there, Powell. He’s kind of doing that, he’s not got a fanpage or anything like that, there’s nothing. There’s Soundcloud for his label, but apart from that you don’t see any images. Actually there’s two images and there’s one on our website where he’s wearing like a Scouse curly wig and a ‘tache, there’s another one where he was in The Wire last month wearing a pink curly wig and some glasses, so to be fair yeah he is doing that but he’s playing around with it in a daft way which kind of really gels with his music which is actually really industrial and almost serious: so kind of playful but serious but he’s been very playful with it.

Yeah, I mean I’ve been speaking to people and some of these people who play around with these things do it as just a bit of fun for a bit and get of excitement. You know that’s how it functions for them. I guess there’s the whole other thing of doing it with that release for just a couple of weeks just to get people talking and speculating. And that speculation itself turns into marketing for it. The fact that if a record’s got a name attached to it, it’s kind of clear and the buyer knows what it is. The fact that it’s not got

that further layer of intrigue. But I'm also really interested in the whole technology aspect and that it drives some of these ideas forward because it means that people aren't out necessarily performing their music so they don't have to stand or sit in front with a guitar and then say, well "this is the music and this is me". I'm just wondering if that facilitates it as well.

[Hesitates] Yeah, yeah to an extent and I suppose you're gonna get to the stage where people are gonna be able to present themselves or just.. 'cos most DJs and a lot of producers who do live sets just press the space bar and I can see it getting to a point where they won't need to be in the venue, they could do just like 2Pac and do a hologram representation of themselves.

Yeah, it's that thing I think, 'cos I teach students on some courses and they're all geared up to music stuff and part of what they do is getting on stage and doing little showcases or presenting themselves and then you've got some these people producing music who are doing it at home or whatever and not necessarily considering sharing all the details of themselves. For years people have wanted to make some of these records just to hear them out but that's the full extent of what they want to do. I guess they wanna stay part of the audience rather than being a pop star?

Yeah. I think it comes down to whether or how you will be able to make money. I think a lot of kids now just wanna make money and the anonymity thing... it seems like it's just an excuse for them to make more money. Unless you play it right, I just don't think there's many kids who've got the nous to sort of do that.

In terms of the proper, non-established artist, the only way that they can function with that anonymity I guess is through coming up with something that manages to get through to you at Boomkat or to Hardwax or something like that and gets that exposure.

Yeah, I can't see... there's not that many though who actually do that. I'm trying to think of examples of young kids now who do it and, I think that Burial was one of the last people really to go the whole hog and not even do live performance or anything, and he was the last of the generation. He was on this transition zone between the pre-internet era and the internet era now where everything is shown, everything is out, you know you can't escape it.

But it's become almost political regarding which people do or don't have a Twitter account. If you know what I mean. Like there's that the distinction between Zomby and Burial which is really heightened over that punter-facing interaction. The fact that he's kind of reclusive you know, and I spoke to various people who worked with Burial and interacted with him and they said he's just happy to make music, right to the point that he doesn't really talk about it a great deal with other people who he knows personally about making his music, doing this and doing that...

Yeah, just a personal thing. Obviously he's not seeking that celebrity status which I see a lot of youngsters now, they want that celebrity that comes attached with it. They want a bit of... they see that's part of making your music that you get that as well.

I guess that just comes in a different way because, you know I imagine kind of, you know the way that Burial's sort of... I mean, he's not completely reclusive. He's not averse to collaborating with other people like Martin Clark or Four Tet...

Or with Massive Attack...

Yeah and Jamie Woon as well, so it's not completely reclusive. But everything that he seems to do within music is all to be judged solely on the basis of the music if you know

what I mean. Which I suppose is an obvious thing to do. But compared to Zomby who just wants to give death threats on Twitter and go shopping... do you know what I mean? The distinction is kind of huge.

Well I think that's something to do with his personality. From what I've heard he's just got a very... erm... paranoid personality and that's why he doesn't really wanna present himself. There's a thing with Burial, say, ten years ago the way Burial put himself across that was quite rare and wasn't really respected and now you've got like, I don't know if you've seen this Burial Soundcloud and Burial Facebook, and somebody's put B-E-R-I-E-L and he's like pretending to be Burial and putting up these statuses that are atrociously spelt and he's actually gone to the expense of producing tracks that are up on his Soundcloud so he's making tunes. It's just a total pisstake. And that's kind of where it is now with the kids, they're actually just taking the piss out of him now.

It's actually a bit like that Who Is Dubstep Twitter account from someone who is obsessed with Burial and he makes badges and sells them and they say things like 'Why is Burial shy?' (C: *[laughing]*: Not seen that) D: And he's got this thing how he's a bedroom DJ who works at Shoe Express and he's gonna be a big dubstep star... and then I think he made up some a thing about how he's got this idea for a reality TV show called 'Dubstep Island' in a tweet. And ten minutes later somebody set up a Twitter account called 'Dubstep Island' and started tweeting the latest news from Dubstep Island: about how Burial won't come out the bushes. And it just becomes this parody of everything else and you know, it becomes a joke after a while. But you say the kids aren't really into it that much, so is it a sort of, an older...?

I think it is an older thing, I think it's a hangover from that whole generation where guys used to bring blank centre labels to put over the info on a record.

Cos it's got it's got that northern soul thing going through with people protecting their tracks and, you know, VIP dub plates and all that kind of stuff.

Loefah still does that, but he's from old school. But he's actually set up a new label that is going in totally the opposite direction that's like all out: this is us, we're doing digital, we're doing the whole thing... It is a hangover but *I* still respect it. I feel personally that I arrived into what I do at a time when it was in a transition so I guess I've seen all the 'heads' doing it, but I've also seen young kids why they're not bothered.

It is weird as well, the other thing is I kind of see like, the younger kids; they all have a web presence, they're on all kinds of stuff, they all have followers on Twitter... I'm not even talking about young producers and young people who make music, I'm talking about young people just at school and they grow up with this kind of visibility.

It's the sharing culture.

And you know, you get that –you've got so many friends on Facebook. I've just seen one of my friend's kids, they meet each other the first time and add them and then add their mates, you know.

It's accumulating numbers, it's just...

Yeah, cos Lisa Blanning did the Zomby interview in The Wire and in the text she kind of sounded a bit suspicious about Zomby and how he needed the numbers for reassurance... she did say how he said he would show his face after he made his first million.... it just becomes hilarious after a while... the whole thing. But I am interested

in that idea of those artists that build their own mythology – like Drexciya, for example - and how retreating a little bit can actually create this space to tell this series of lies and have mischief and stuff.

With us, we do zero marketing we do one bit... which is a small advert... we had that same spot in The Wire, right at the back where the record shops are listed we had that same spot for about 10 years. That's the only piece of marketing that we do. I can see that the fact that we don't market there are a lot of people that do respect that, that we're not in-your-face and it also gives me the freedom to pretty much write whatever I want. I'm not lying when I write, but I've got a licence, I've got more licence than say like FACT or Resident Advisor they've got to fulfil their advertisers needs, and we don't have to do that, so I don't have to pander to anyone so I can write whatever I want. Sort of, a sonic fiction if you want. It's sort of extrapolating a truth just from those records. But just your opinion really. There are a lot of magazines that talk in a certain way because it reflects their advertisers. But because we're more anonymous and we're not restricted by those we can communicate in a way that's a bit cleverer and hopefully has that longevity...

Yeah, then again I guess it's got a relationship to Hardwax cos they've got that more sort of... their aesthetic is built on their links or their origins... where the shadow of Basic Channel is cast across it.

I think that's just a very Berlin way of being you know they're not very... erm... they're not showy or loud.

Yeah, I mean I'm thinking of some of the stuff that you had a Boomkat and ... you just didn't have probably some stuff that's local though and when I read it I think you must know who that is but you have to be kind of shadowy about it, you know like the Akkord records for example.

Yeah that's a good example.

So, you know, it's kind of like well, you've got a release that nobody else seems to have...

That's why we can hide lots of things in the review but, yeah... it's playing around with it.

I'm interested in the imagery that those kinds of producers us like so there are Akkord press shots where they're blacked out and Shifted had some similar press shots where he was all blacked out. I'm just interested in that kind of thing as well, looking at those images, the whole idea of facelessness that's kind of this sort of idea. Actually, the weird thing was when I was coming to meet you – even though we've spoken before - I thought I don't really know what he *looks* like so let's see if I can Google him and find a picture. The only one I could find was from a DJ Chart I think on the Boomkat site that came up on the Google image search and you've got your hood over your head but you can't see your face.

Is that still floating around?

Erm, it was just on a Google image search linking to somewhere on the Boomkat site from an old chart you did. And it was kind of like, oh God that's just the way of doing this work: you're looking for people and you don't know what they look like. It's funny 'cause I think some of the people I talk to about this idea say interesting things like Regis says "well, when me and Surgeon started out, you had to be anonymous 'cause everybody was signing on". So all these people were all DJing and the only way to sort

of... you kept a low profile 'cause when you went and signed on to get your Giro for the fortnight they didn't recognise you from the magazines.

That's why they all have pseudonyms and have, like, ten pseudonyms...

Yeah, there's all that thing about creative freedom as well, of doing something that's in a different style and being able to hop from genre to genre a little bit, and maybe not meet people's expectations. So, that whole idea of freedom to do things, there's loads of them, I suppose looking local again, that Skam thing - the MASK releases or VHS Head or Gescom - or whether it's some of the Downwards stuff and Ancient Methods and all that kind of stuff, there's always this kind of... stuff appears for a while and then generates its own mythology and I just wondered how that works for you because sometimes it's nice to connect those things up into some sort of narrative as well, so when you see some of those anonymous techno records... I mean now, in some ways the hand-stamped Berlin record has become a bit of a cliché now 'cause it's kind of everywhere.

I think it's a cliché but it's actually more a necessity, it's the fact that you have to trim every cost down that like 15 years ago you could sell 20,000 copies of an average/good 12" and now you might be lucky if you sell 500 of a pretty good 12" and that means that if you want to maximise profit on that 12" that you've got to forgo having artwork, and if it you have artwork, it comes to a toss-up between colour artwork or black & white, or just hand-stamped, you know it's got to that point where you have to trim all your margins right down. It's come out of necessity really that thing.

Have numbers dropped off that much?

Oh yeah, massively. The last one we did on Death of Rave, there was no real money to play around with it so I went to the extent of not having a label on one of the sides, so it's just like black vinyl one of the sides just trying to take it as far as you could really. The pressing plant wouldn't actually do a totally naked vinyl, they have to have a centre label on one side at least so I was trying to see how far we could go. We've actually just today released 15 copies where, my mate's like inscribed on the actual vinyl, that's the artwork - a hand-etched thing. I mean, it cost me twenty quid but, yeah, it looks good.

The other thing is, the whole technology stuff as well, I know there'll always be that hunger for vinyl but, now if you wanted to release music anonymously and you weren't bothered and if your only ambition was just to release music and just make music and put music out there in the hope that somebody might buy it, you could just do that digitally and just put it online so the fact that music's actually getting released suggests that actually now there are... that it's actually getting put down on vinyl, it's symbolic of a bigger...

I think if it reaches vinyl it's general good quality.

'Cause nobody's taking those risks really?

Yeah exactly, if you're gonna take the risk it's got to be good enough to put on vinyl, so that's generally a mark of quality if it ends up there, but saying that there's still loads of stuff floating around on digital. It depends though, you need somebody to curate it, you need a media between these anonymous people.

That's why I find it sort of find it kind of fascinating: by the time you deal with these specialist shops some of the hard work is done, because there's so much stuff out there

and it's just not possible to go through it, you do need someone to sift through. I mean in terms of that stuff, how much is actually being put your way?

Erm, I couldn't really tell you. I think we go about it in a sort of, *'don't call us, we'll call you'* sort of thing. We'll approach you if we think it's good enough... I know my boss has got an inbox full of stuff, but he doesn't check it. He'll dip into it now and then but he literally doesn't have the time so he'll pass a few bits to me to check and usually they're pretty average.

Are labels important now, the actual labels? Is it as important to get signed now? With the amount of stuff, because some people say *'you can just get your stuff out of it yourself'* and all that but I think 'cause everyone can do that, and having a label involved is some way of getting you heard.

It's curation, that's what we do. We curate, we gather stuff and present it and present it in groups, put it under different labels.

That must be weird, so many artists are like *'oh I don't like to be categorised'* and then that's what you have to do, go *'right, you're going in that section...'*

Well yeah, but at the same time you can play around with that like I'm trying to do with Death of Rave. Like the Mark Lecky record and the Powell thing, they're both completely different but at the same time they're both sort of subcultural studies, actually on a similar level but totally different, that's where we come in as a curator. We say "Actually these are all very similar and whatever" so...

Yeah I guess it's just that thing about distribution and categorisation and how you get these things to people. I'm always really interested about how artists approach certain labels. You see these people being picked up on certain labels and you kind of think why. I suppose some of those people in middle get more and more important... you're looking for more people to mediate and kind of put together and make sense of all that stuff. How's it going anyway with the label?

Yeah good man, good. Going really good actually. I'm doing two: do you know the Boomkat Editions thing?

Yeah I've seen some bits.

I do that as well so I do two; Death of Rave and The Boomkat Editions. The Boomkat Editions allows me to... 'cause I want the Death of Rave to be something specific and special while still a wide range of styles, whereas The Boomkat Editions is non-specific and really wide.

Just little things that you pick up?

Yeah exactly. Just things that we think are really interesting that should be more widely available and artists that we think are really interesting. I've just started speaking to... do you know Happa?

Yes.

Yeah, the 15 year-old kid: just sent me the link to his Soundcloud last night and it's like, unreal for a 15 year-old kid making this stuff. This is what I'm saying about the lack of anonymity with kids now. He's 15 and he's got like 6,000 followers on Facebook and he's

had one release and it's like fucking hell, that's how it operates now, there's no secrecy, everybody knows who this kid is. He's got his photo up there, that's how they do it now I think.

I'm sort of glad they're doing this now. It's interesting but I do think that my keenness on the anonymity thing comes from my own interest which is probably centred on something which is a romanticism for the past.

I totally get that, I really appreciate it but how it actually is, I think is different to how we'd like it to be.

Yeah 'cause there's this idea that there're two choices: you're either a pop star or you're underground and it's not actually like that anymore.

Yeah the boundaries are blurred. You can pretend you're underground but there's no real underground now.

I remember the year when you had major label artists putting out remixes of their crap record by somebody else, now as a white label with some vague kind of... I mean even people like Paul McCartney... and sometimes I also think that a lot of this is done for journalists and the people writing about it. I know they can chase it up, they can feel in-the-know: sharing this with you and they've got a secret to share. I think there is a bit of that as well 'cause I think journalists especially... and you look on something like Little White Earbuds for example and loads of the articles to start off with 'Shadowy Techno Producers....' It's just developed this kind of aesthetic of *shadowy techno producers* that journalists especially seem to like. Whereas I guess it comes back to what you want to write about dancing whereas on the dance floor nobody's bothered about how shadowy they are.

Yeah at the same time like you're saying we've got this image of how we'd like it to be all romantic and everything, I was speaking about this and I reckon there will be some scene that will emerge in the next year or two that is completely anonymous. There will be a group of producers who realise that over exposure as it is now, they will go as far as they can; there won't be any Soundcloud, there won't be anything and we'll just... I suppose like Akkkord, like they were doing, but there were always hints with Akkkord that you knew who it was and I think there was somebody who...

...There were always hints that there was other work. But I guess again it comes down to people getting paid. How long can you keep it up for? 'Cause someone like Burial who makes that transition, do they then go and do remixes or to cash-in on the success. Although I guess it's always going to be limited within a mainstream sector because of the music itself. You know, lots of people like it, lots of people respect it, a lot of people think it's amazing, you know it lends itself to Massive Attack, it lends itself to Radiohead but it's limited, it's introspective. He's not going to be offered silly money like ABBA to do something...

Well, I know for a fact that The Warehouse Project offered him a quarter of a million to come and play live and he turned it down, which ... well... respect.

That's a lot of money to turn down and given you can probably dictate the terms and conditions on that. 'Cause you know I really like Dean Blunt and Inga Copeland, how they piss about with identity and they try and reinvent themselves every single week. They're just constantly trying to confuse people and I really, really like that because

they have their own terms about what they're gonna do in terms of performance and how much they're gonna say and how much of this is true and how much isn't true and whether any of it matters. I just think that that's a lot of money to turn down, when you can probably specify exactly what circumstances that performance is gonna happen.

Exactly. But I think it's just the fact that he knows if he turns up some people are gonna see him, he'll just get mobbed. It's got to the stage with him, I think where he knows that it would be totally destroyed if he did do a live show.

The other thing was with Burial, was when there was the Mercury prize and then The Sun got interested and they were keen to unmask it because the mainstream media can't get their head around why somebody would not want to be famous. But it's not even in their reader's interest - they don't care one way or another. But the writers at the newspaper probably think 'there must be something suspicious and we're gonna get it' 'cause it's like a little exclusive. Even though it's an exclusive that's gonna be about *that* big in their paper 'cause it doesn't matter to them but it matters shitloads to loads of other people who don't want to know.

It's probably they'll have had more interest underlined over that, that they know that they'd stir up loads of interest with more... 'Cause that came out around the time when everything was online, about 4/5 years ago. Like I was saying I think there's an issue of capitalism, The Sun's an uber capitalist paper and that's just a paper and they've got to make money but I think there will be some scene that comes out that they will have a strong political angle where, basically there will be some sort of anti-capitalist sort of thing and they'll realise it is a political statement to now have your identity and to totally try and submerge that.

Appendix #6 – William Orbit interview

So when you and Dick O'Dell started planning Guerilla, how much thought was put into the design of the label? And how did you see that look complimenting the sound?

In 1988, whilst building my new studio in Crouch End, I had been listening to a lot of the pirate radio stations that were broadcasting in London. I had been messing around with some tracks and couldn't get them signed so decided to start a label in order to get the tracks to the pirates and the clubs. John Gosling (the deejay Sugar J) was helping me with the studio carpentry and he gave me a lot of advice about this world of pirate radio. I named the label after my company Guerilla Studios (which had started out in 1979 in a squat in an abandoned school in West London). I was introduced to Steve Cook who was a designer at 2000AD comic and together we set about creating label art. I'm not quite sure how Neville Brody came to be associated with the project. Maybe because I had worked with him before. In fact we were at school together in North London in the seventies. Anyway, Steve had found a Thai Air Force shirt in a thrift store in Chiang Mai with that unique blue camouflage pattern. We used the shirt. I drew the typeface. We had fun doing it because it was all very new. We pressed up the discs and it was pretty basic. I decided to call my own recording project Bassomatic - for no particular reason - and I drew up the Bassomatic logo in a cartoony style. I used to do cartoons a lot in those days. So it all kicked off in the Spring of '89. I remember running a few club nights - not so legal, mostly - with John Gosling at that time so the Guerilla aesthetic was part of that too. Dick did not come on board until later. He had heard about my new material: he wanted to be my manager and wanted to get a record deal with a major label. Bassomatic was subsequently signed to Virgin although we continued to put out promo copies on Guerilla. And as Dick got more and more involved with Guerilla, the label developed. We worked well as a creative team for quite a while but I did not share Dick's

style of doing business and by the end was much less involved. Also Bassomatic had kicked off in quite a big way.

What was the idea behind the logo? The one with the 'explosion of the head'?

I cannot recall the genesis of the exploding head logo except that it was designed by The Designer's Republic who carried on with all the art from that point. The exploding speech bubble and thought bubble was something that I used a lot in my cartoons but I only got the idea from Gilbert Shelton, Bill Griffiths et al. I don't recall if that had any bearing on it.

Was there a reason behind the use of house bags? Was it a financial decision? Only I feel that a generic label sleeve adds an authenticity to a dance release as a 'DJ product'. Plus the records, for me, become more collectable as a series of releases, have a certain dance-floor authority - i.e. are less 'pop' - and continue a lineage of house bag releases that goes back years through Motown, Salsoul, Nu Groove, etc. Plus they look nice when records are filed by label! So was any of this taken into account?

Budget was definitely a factor - we were on a shoestring. But mainly for the consistency and 'collectability'. Collectability being such a plus regardless of a genre. And yes, non specific 'bag' meant less 'pop' also. Our base, being discerning, didn't need eye candy, they needed basic info. Deejays would so often preview the tracks in the specialist record stores and they would make up their minds about a track based on their ears. And eventually on trust. By the way, I don't think I ever used the term 'bag'. It was always 'sleeve'.

Were there other labels that had inspired the aesthetic of Guerilla?

Not really. It was just made up on the spot. I didn't really know much about the field at the time.

But are there other labels now that you particularly admire in terms of their look?

Although a totally different style, I have always loved the artwork of 4AD. Vaughan Oliver's work. I just bought his book actually. It's a beauty.

Some of your other output (Strange Cargo, etc) also shared a similar greeny-blue hue of the Guerilla house bags. Was this just coincidence? Or are you naturally drawn to a particular colour range/design style? Is there something in the design, say, that just relates to the kind of music that you release? And, if so, how would you define that?

It is possible to get addicted to certain colour combinations for a spell of time.

Lastly, does design even matter? In an age where music exists as artwork-free computer files, should a label's aesthetic be irrelevant now? And, for you, is this a step forward or a step back? Is it now 'just about the music'? Or are buyers not getting the full experience?

It certainly does matter. Even though most people do see only a 'thumbnail' when they are browsing for music. Buyers are getting a very different experience these days: postage stamp sized art. Mp3s at low bandwidth with DRM so they can't play it wherever they want to. Totally squashed audio trying to be as loud as possible but making the ears tired. Nothing to put on the shelf and fondly gather dust. But paradoxically, it's better because you can go on a musical journey and find whatever you like and broaden your horizons in a single evening of browsing. And there is a boom in special editions so people get what they want. We can actually have our cake AND eat it. And I don't mean that in a 'Magical Thinking' kind of way. The timing of this interview is interesting, by the way. I am starting a new 'label' at the

moment with my long time friend and musical collaborator Laurie Mayer. Its first release will be my brand new album. So Laurie and I together with Richard Shea - designer of williamorbit.com - have been asking ourselves many of the questions that you posed here. We are all incredibly excited about the design side of it.

Appendix #7 – Nick Halkes interview

You're still working with The Prodigy. Is this current period - where they're on a new label with a new album and seemingly even more autonomy - particularly exciting for you?

It's thrilling for me to see the band doing so well again as I was there at the very beginning and when I signed Liam, there wasn't even a band... just Liam. I've obviously been enormously impressed with how the act has developed and it's really something to see them back on top form. I think when a band is on their own label, there isn't really anywhere to hide and, in working with Liam as A&R on the new record, I found he was keen to simply deliver a record that he loved. He's done that and a lot of other people love it too.

How does that early 90s era of early Prodigy and SL2, etc inspire your own Kicks Like a Mule project? What do you reckon music from that age still offers us now?

Richard and I both love the raw excitement of lots of records that were made in that era. Technology has moved on but there's still plenty of room today for great music that has an edge, attitude and an uncompromising, direct approach.

What do you make to how XL has developed: from what was once a very club-oriented label to one that now features the likes of White Stripes and Radiohead?

Richard has done a fantastic job taking the company from its rave roots and turning it into something very different and special.

How important was your leap from XL to Positiva? How did that signify a new chapter in club music for you?

The Jump from XL to EMI was a big decision for me. It coincided with the fragmentation of what was once a more unified dance scene into multiple distinct subgenres like house, jungle, happy hardcore, etc. However great records will always be out there whatever is going on in the 'genre' sense so I just looked for good stuff regardless of what tag people gave it. And I think that records like 'Circles' by Adam F and BBE's 'Seven Days and One Week' are kinda timeless. Those two will always have a special place on my iPod. ?

Who designed the Positiva sleeves?

I designed the Positiva, XL and Incentive range bags in terms of core concept. Jaffa at the Unknown Partnership brought my basic concept to life and made them look ace based on my scribbled sketches.

Why did you go for a uniform design? Only each of the Positiva sleeves is effectively original artwork (as in it's a different print run) but still has that 'housebag' quality.

Reliability , building trust , retail confidence.

Which act do you wish you'd signed back then? Was there anyone that slipped through the net? Anyone like The Prodigy that had that real potential to move forward and grow that you missed?

I had moved to Positiva by the time Basement Jaxx were coming through. I met up with them and almost certainly should have pushed harder to sign them. Obviously they went to XL instead and I've been impressed by how well they have done. So it worked out well in the end for my Kicks Like A Mule partner in any case.

Who inspires you?

I'm impressed by anyone brave enough to take risks and then really deliver. Kanye West fits with this. On the label front, it's the same with XL.

Appendix #8 – Gildas Loaec interview

Who came up with the idea of the hand-drawn artists?

We at Kitsune came up with the idea of the faces. We had an article in The Face and we thought 'lets have faces in The Face. After this article we started collecting and making faces of people that we meet and find interesting. We make drawings of family members, the musicians, our printer, colleagues, new born babies etc. We are never allowed to take a face out, it can only get smaller. By now we have something like 680 people on there. It is a growing family. Since started some of the people on the covers have grown older like the babies and others have died. For us this can continue forever, it never gets boring as long as we keep meeting new faces. Only one artist did not like their face, as far as we can remember. Anyway we don't care since it is not a beauty competition.

When deciding on the single sleeves as a series, did you consider their collectability?

Absolutely. Love = food, midnight = travel, X = hybrids, Maison = people. All these things important in life.

With the labels/stickers, is there any reason for what colours are used?

We are slowly making our way through the pantone book: trying not to use the same colour twice.

How would you say Kitsune has been able to deliver an aesthetic that can still represent a number of different sub-genres?

We have indeed a very strict template, but it should work because of that. We hope that the Maison covers – those with the faces - are personal enough for each musician. After all we do make a portrait of each and every one.

What other record labels do you admire in terms of their design?

It must be Factory Records since they numbered everything: even the flyers, the building etc. That is radical.

Appendix #9 – Trevor Jackson interview

Looking at the *Design After Dark* book and then the first *Sampler* book, it's interesting to see how your style developed. The old designs are very different to the modern high concept ones that you've done more recently, aren't they?

I was a teenager when I did those first sleeves. Back then I was just into the music – the house music and the hip hop that was coming out – and it wasn't quite so conceptual. It was just fun. But it was always this learning process. I started those while I was still at college and left and started working for myself.

When you started did those particular music styles already have their visual language? Were there already preconceptions about what kind of aesthetic should be involved?

I don't know. I consciously decided at the time to try and do something that was different. I'm trying to remember what the early stuff was off the top of my head and, if anything, I wasn't trying to fit in with a style: I was trying to do my own thing. I never thought "this is a genre or movement with a visual language that I have to adhere to".

Only sometimes it's difficult for someone to look back and figure whether some of the imagery that is now integral to certain styles was already in place or whether you actually defined it. Like with the Native Tongues-type afro-centric hip hop and the style that you employed that became more hand-drawn and hand-printed in style.

I was very inspired by comic books. Illustrators were my contemporaries. There was this early comic book called *Escape*. Ian Wright and Chris Long were the kind of people that were influential. So I was taking some of the ideas they were working with and was attempting to put it into a more structured design concept. At the same time, the likes of Saul Bass and Paul Rand were really influential too and I think you can see that coming through. But, mainly, I was just into the music.

How much of the success of the work can be put down to good clients?

I was lucky to work for Champion, Gee Street and Network as they were the most pivotal labels of the time. As clients, they could still be a nightmare at times. Still, I respect them for the music: Champion had Todd Terry and Pal Joey, Gee Street had The Jungle Brothers and Queen Latifah while Network had Derrick May and Juan Atkins. You couldn't get much better than that. They were the *right* clients.

Did you ever have to compromise or were the artists receptive to your ideas?

It's weird because artists now have so much power. Artists these days think that they're designers themselves but, at that time, it was a lot easier. I did have good working relationships with my clients. I think there was a trust there. I remember Derrick May being quite specific about what aesthetic he wanted but with a band like The Jungle Brothers, for example, the label here had licensed the records from an American label so there was very little involvement with the artist. That was more about keeping the label happy. At one point I was doing two records a week and I pretty much had free reign to do what I wanted.

What of the idea of defining something that would be anonymous?

When I started, sleeve design in general was largely a photo of the artist with a bit of type on it. I thought "this is a bit of a piss-take – there's nothing to it". So I made a considered effort to do something that was a bit more ambitious. Champion was next door to a record importer and the guys from the label would go and listen to the 12" singles that had just come in with

the latest delivery and pretty much pick them up for licensing there and then. I was living around the corner so they would phone me up and I'd come over and sort out a new sleeve.

Which is weird when you think of the whole gestation period in the industry at present. Particularly surrounding 'promotion'.

But this was mainly one-off singles. I think I only did two albums for Champion in all my time of working for them. And the records then were just flying out so it was important that the releases weren't delayed.

How did that compare to your own Output label where I guess you had complete control?

Well, I let the bands have input into the design of the sleeves but, most of the time, they wanted to sign to the label because they already liked the aesthetic. I never did anything without their permission, but they would pretty much love everything that I'd create for them. The weird thing with Output was that I spent years saying to label owners "I really want to use this printing or this cut-out or whatever" and would be frustrated by how I wasn't allowed. When I had my own label, I began to realise how careful you need to be regarding the budget. At the beginning, I did a few things that were a little bit too adventurous but I had to find the cheapest way of realising those ideas. Sometimes they ended up being hand-made because it was cheaper. I realised that you couldn't keep losing money just by being self-indulgent.

What was the torn sleeve that you did?

That was the Icarus record.

That was because of the whole 'sale or return' policy within music retail?

Yeah, it was weird because whenever I made a sleeve that was black, we would get some returned to us and they would be covered in finger marks. If I did a white one, then it would be really dirty. Plus you had record shops that would return records as the corner was creased simply because they had over-ordered. Some would probably damage the records themselves if their arrangement with the distributor was that only faulty stock could be returned. So we just thought "fuck that" and tore the sleeves up before reassembling them and then sending them out. That way, they were meant to be like that in the first place.

And what of Output's aesthetic? It was always pretty dark, wasn't it? Apart from the promos...

Each of the promo releases were a different colour. As for the other artwork, I like to think that the aesthetic of the label wasn't very brand-heavy. It was always about the artist. Like we never did a house bag as such. Everybody had individual artwork. I was always conscious of how a label like Mo Wax was perceived where, owner, James Lavelle had put out records where the design was perceived as more important than the artist. I never did set out to define a style. The music was diverse so a Fridge record was very different from a Colder record that was, in turn, very different from a Black Strobe record and the design of each reflected that. Most of the artists we worked with were rejects. Nobody else wanted them. And, at first glance, they were perhaps not the easiest kind of bands to get out there. But they all had something about them.

Was it a case of just hearing a recording and immediately knowing what kind of design solution would work?

Absolutely. I watched a Joy Division documentary and Peter Saville was saying how he could do a Joy Division sleeve without hearing the album and that was such an alien concept for me. Every sleeve I've done has been inspired by the music. Most of the music on output had personality anyway. Most of the artists had particularly strong personalities.

A great example of that would be a band like Dead Combo - who you caught brilliantly with that image of them all sweaty mid-performance.

Did you see the single? That came out first and people were like "these aren't good-looking guys" and I was like "it doesn't matter – it's all about the vibe" so I'd done a version of that album shot where their faces were obliterated by the type.

I like that idea of subverting anonymity. The Soulwax *Any Minute Now* project you did is interesting in as much as they're a band that remarketed themselves as a faceless DJ act only to come back and maintain an amount of that anonymity through design. And the solution was very different for what a band would usually go for because it is so subliminal.

That's because the guys in the band are very design literate. I spent a lot of time hanging out with them and that was one of ten ideas. I knew it was a strong idea for a whole campaign. Again, it was going back to my reactionary nature and I thought that you don't want to have to have a big poster on a street full of information because everybody would ignore it as it looks like every other poster. It grabbed people because they would walk past and then think "was there a bit of text in there?" and would study it. The reaction from the public far outweighed the fact that the information wasn't immediate. The fact that it didn't 100% relate to the music with this one was neither here nor there. But, with hindsight, Soulwax were trying to make refined, underground pop so perhaps it did have a relationship to the music. For me, it was a defining point in my career. Immediately, I was really proud of it. I spent so long on it.

Is it a difficult process? I wasn't sure if it was easy once you had the concept idea or whether it hadn't already been done because it was so painstakingly difficult to design.

It wasn't like just applying a filter or something like that. I'm not going to say exactly how it was done though. But it was difficult to render as we didn't just have the one design. It had to work across a number of different formats and in a number of sizes.

I looked at it again and tried to figure out if it was overlayed text that had been given the same optical effect and then shifted or whatever and couldn't work it out.

It was done in a really anal way. Unbelievably, after I'd done it I saw a couple of things that had been done in a similar way. Not exactly the same, but I was still amazed that it was something close to what I'd done.

I'm also really interested in how the rise of dance music culture coincided with the Mac revolution and how that could be linked: like, for example, how both graphic design and the music production was both facilitated and inspired by the new technology. Some people would suggest that the DTP revolution made design more democratic in the same way that bedroom producing created opportunities.

Yeah, but what you've got to remember is that initially Macs were out of most people's reach. Teenagers like me couldn't afford them. A lot of my work was very anti-computer. And up until a certain point, all what I was doing was done with photocopies and by hand. The printers had a nightmare with a lot of it as it was so complicated with all of these different

layers. The bigger design agencies started getting Macintoshes and Quantel Paintboxes – which were stupidly expensive – and went against all that. I was doing these ZX Spectrum 4-bit graphics and that was my reaction against the bigger companies that could afford the new technology. And even when I did get a Mac, my work never really looked like it was designed using the latest technology.

Interesting that you say that as lots of people who did seize upon it reached a point where they wanted to go back to something lo-fi. Sometimes to suggest that they are more ‘underground’ or that they are ‘keeping it real’ or whatever it is that suggests that the work and the music it packages is somehow more authentic.

Alternative graphics already have the edge. Whether that’s punk, new wave or hip hop, it’s always been that street music where people have to be as creative as they can with the smallest budget. Even though I’ve been through many different styles, I still find simplicity consistently wins out. My work always reflects my frame of mind and I get a sense of inner peace when my work has a balance to it.

Interesting that you mentioned the economic impact on design because the climate work is created in does have an impact. Politics have an impact.

I agree. And some of the best work comes from those difficult times. People have to think about how to express themselves creatively when they don’t have money.

So “bring on the recession”?

Yeah. We need it. Young people are complacent now. I’ve never considered myself an anarchist, but there’s so much stuff that goes on now that seems to go unchallenged by our youth. I dunno. I specifically remember being inspired by On U Sound. What they were doing was so gnarly. It had that post-punk and it just had weight to it. And for me, every mark still has to mean something. I’ve never been into just creating wallpaper.

Who do you admire in terms of sleeves?

I like Julian House at Intro. His mix of lo-fi and technology especially.

What’s up next?

I’m working on an art show. I’ve been working on it all year. I can’t talk too much about it. The gallery that originally was going to be hosting it shut down. This whole credit crunch thing. But now there’s another space and that should happen in 2009. Since I closed the label, I’ve not been so concerned with needing to create and would rather do two or three great jobs a year than loads of projects.

Appendix #10 – Kate Moross interview

What do you think about the relationship between music and sleeve design?

I think that there's a pre-existing pathway that has been walked by many: Malcolm Garrett, Mark Farrow, Peter Saville, Vaughan Oliver, Barney Bubbles... it's an exciting place to work: interesting, creative clients and unlimited ways to approach the work.

Has this changed with the rise fall and rise of specific physical formats?

Physical formats aren't exactly dead but I've realised that our canvas has really become everything else. When we do a CD cover these days, it tends to be for a promo CD - so it's not really aimed at buyers. But that's interesting as it has to work for taste-makers: for the press and radio people.

So what do you do most of?

The days of *just* doing a record sleeve are gone. What we find ourselves doing more and more is linking everything together. That's what everybody seems to be looking for: subtle, cohesive brand strategies. Creating work that doesn't even look designed.

What about the dance-based artists?

With dance music it's always more about the song than the artist. The turnover is high – in terms of the amount of records – and it's all about having that one track that people remember. Building on that. A lot of what I do might even be adapting what's already there. The logo for Banks, for example. Why change it? It's already great. In general we don't disregard: we embrace and look for collaboration.

How has your style changed?

A lot of my early work was illustration-based and I don't do that so much now. So the Jessie Ware work, for some people, might not look like what they expect from me as it looks like a fashion editorial and doesn't have any triangles in it. It's about expanding the repertoire but still being driven by ideas.

How about your work for Zomby? Did you engage with him during that process?

Not for that EP on Ramp. I was commissioned by Tom Kerridge for the centre label but ended up doing a custom sleeve. Then I noticed that Zomby had starting using that logo I did on Twitter. But with the bleed marks still on it.

Did you speak to him directly after that?

There was talk of doing some more work plus I was releasing a track on my Isomorph label by Pictureplane that I'd asked Zomby to remix. But it got really weird. He insisted that I could only communicate with him through Twitter and in Arabic. It was bizarre. Sadly, we never did get that remix either. But it's one of those things: his attitude is something that I love and hate at the same time. He's an amazing artist.

Appendix #11 – Dave Piccioni interview

So when Azuli emerged, it was consistently in the Hype Charts as 'US Azuli' alongside 'US Strictly Rhythm', etc. So, for you, what were the reasons for covering up the Soho base and giving the impression that it was an American label?

It was a cheap and effective way of getting noticed. We had no money for marketing and it seemed that American records sold without any PR companies or press, whereas the UK releases at the time needed a fair amount of promotion. So we cheated.

What was the scene like at the time?

People really hunted for new releases. It's hard to imagine now, but there seemed hardly enough new releases to satisfy the keen demand from new dance music enthusiasts.

How much cachet did American labels have?

Even though the rave scene exploded here in '87, I think there was a general understanding and respect for the fact that this musical genre had been formulated for many years in The States.

What do you make of Dave Lee's Z Records and Hustler's Convention and that similarly deceptively US approach? And what of Cleveland City when that first emerged as a supposedly American looking label?

It's the same thing that we were doing, but I think we may have been first to do it.

To what lengths did you go to in order to maintain the impression that it was an American label? I know they were shrink-wrapped, but were the records actually imported?

They were made in the UK. Otherwise it would have been too expensive. American labels were always printed very badly using old printing presses and we had real problems in that our labels were coming out looking too good and obviously English. The printers just didn't understand that we wanted crap work so, in the end, we photocopied our original artwork and then told the printers from the photocopy.

Did a New York address exist and did it function as an office?

We had a US telephone mail box with a Manhattan dial code which was a new invention in the past. So we simply had people call our answer machine there. We sat in London collecting the messages and my ex-wife - who was American – simply returned the calls from our flat in Battersea.

Why do you think that buyers were willing to pay a premium for a record it believed to have particular origins?

It was just convention really. US records were always more expensive and people just paid it.

How do you think that design gave identity to music that was otherwise anonymous?

The kind of music we were releasing had a more musical, New York style edge. There was a real snobbiness at the time about that kind of music if it was made in the UK. People considered it to second rate and not as good as the American stuff. We did something to get around that bias and it worked. It was a little ironic as some of our records were massive in New York as, at that time, people loved the UK interpretation of house music.

How important was the 12" single in terms of authenticity?

The 12" single really has been the area in which tastes, ideas and fashions have been formed. It has been the arena for the tastemakers and crucial for people. Not only in the underground scene but for people like Pete Waterman and top songwriters like Cathy Dennis have also taken their lead from it.

Appendix #12 – Karl O'Connor interview

I was interested in your perspective particularly because I think some of those ideas that we talked about previously - about identity and how things are represented - are particularly interesting where you're concerned because, from my point of view, it's something that seems to matter to you: whether it's the actual product mattering and the idea of having some personality to the music and have longevity to it, but at the same time, because of the kind of music you do, you're not really bothered about the more pop variation of that.

The thing is, yes, you're quite right. But in many senses, the opposite's actually true. Everyone loves to say, "Oh, it's all about the music," it never was that for me. Of course, music is central to everything in my life and so important and everything but I think, with dance music... Essentially what happened with dance music, well, I found it quite attractive from the beginning. I never really liked dance music, I was never blown away. Summer of '88 and everything: I always thought it was rubbish. The type of people that were getting into dance music then were thugs that I used to go to school with, had no interest in electro music at all, it was just a kind of pastime to a lot of people. It's like golf, you know, I just go clubbing. You go to a gig, you go to a gig: it's specific. That's what you're going there for, you go for music that you love. What I did find interesting about dance music full stop - you had the DNA of pop music and everything like that, but you didn't necessarily have to have a lot of cool people in the band. I mean, not that it ever was with electronic music and stuff, first-wave electronic music in the early '80s. It wasn't that, I mean, that was anonymous to an extent but it was very pop orientated, so I think they had this great chance to do it and not be pop stars or stuff like that. It was great; you could still sell records, you could have the career in music and everything. I think that was law for what I was doing pretty much then. That was the seduction for me. I thought, okay, this may be opportunistic and it sounds very opportunistic cause a lot of people say, "Well I naturally got into it because it's my passion, man," and everything, but that goes without saying sometimes. Yeah, back to the original thing, I am obviously interested in the music but there has to be more than that. Without the other there's nothing really. Especially with dance music, I think they're against that, I think they're against image of any type really. I think that's what I was always looking to... In a way I was pursuing a non-image or like not giving my name out and stuff like that, I think that's the done thing for people, it's all part of it really.

It seems to be, like you said, there's a culture whether it comes from white labels or this idea based around subculture and underground and that it's selling out to having any kind of imagery, but at the same time there are people like you and I suppose I'd include people like DJ Hell in that way: somebody who's interested in visual materials and the idea that there is more to the music as part of a audio and visual culture: where you can help to join the dots on certain things as well.

From the outset it was like that for me personally but for most, those things dictate what's mainstream or what's relegated to underground. It all doesn't exist, it's complete nonsense. Underground Resistance of course are Underground Resistance but they've still sold, what?

500,000 records? That's that. They've still got the same internal squabbling about money as you and I have, so it's complete and utter nonsense. But people love it, especially kids – Underground Resistance: that's fantastic. We still sold extremely well: huge number of records in the '90s. It's just laughable now when you tell people about it. So it was never that, it was never this urge, "I want to be underground." It was independent, certainly. I think independence is massively important, certainly to me. I always say I've done this instinctively cause obviously things impacted on me when I was young and stuff like that, definitely. Cultures that I grew up with in Britain that were independent were things that I was really drawn to. We're really lucky in England. Especially in the early '80s, all the great stuff was very independent. Of course independent music got into the charts and that's pop music. I'm not against pop music or anything like that, I just love it... I'm massively ambitious. I know it might not seem like it but I love pop and all that. I know people think underground or underground techno and stuff like that – and I agree, Mad Mike Banks is fantastic. I've known him for years and years and years and what he's done is fantastic. He understands his own mythology as well, which I think is important, just like any great pop star did. There's a complete link - you're playing with the boundaries sort of dance music. I think the thing with dance music in particular, what happened was...it was when the engineer came to the fore; some of the back room boys came to the forefront. They weren't pop stars – very, very normal people. It was great; it was like normal people making music. To a degree that's great. But you trawl back to any interview in the last 25 years from dance music journalism and it was mostly a bunch of boring bastards. It wasn't anything of interest and that's when we went, "No," cause they've got nothing to say. All they are is engineers and that's something that I was always aware of. Not that *I'm* anything but I just saw that point, I still got to bring a lot of what means a lot to me into this. I obviously used it as a vehicle - dance music, techno in particular. It was a great way for me to get my ideas through to people and a great way for me to make electronic instrumental music basically, sort of get a band together and everything like that. That was just me and that period that I came from. And that's probably why I always play with the imagery and it's always been important, really, to give something else. And to get back to what I originally said, it has to be more than music; if it's just the music, that's nothing essentially. You know, you make a fantastic record with an apricot on the cover of the record, it would be rubbish. You wouldn't buy it.

I completely agree with everything that you're saying, and to be honest it's the kind of things that have drawn me to it because it's also some of the misconceptions either from the mainstream media and the way that it deals with electronic artists right through to what you were saying about club culture and how you got interested in it and it was a pastime and a weekend escape. And as much as some commentators like to think it was ground-breaking, for a lot of people, it was completely a political weekend-based go and do something and go back to a normal job on a Monday and doesn't fit typical ideas of subculture that have happened before. It's not wholly resistant and that kind of thing.

It's not. For all the talk about it I think it's very recreational and communal. It brought people together but I also think it has done the opposite and people actually went into themselves. Club music wasn't communal, like for instance when you used to go to gigs and stuff. I used to go to Manchester quite a lot for gigs, especially in the mid-'80s, it was great. Pretty awkward dancer really. I still know a lot of people, I can actually pick their faces out, I can still see them and say hello to them. I always thought it was some else's thing, dance music. I always felt I was just merely observing it really. I felt I had my huge kick basically, but I hadn't. I think I was always trying to be ahead of what I was. It was kind of weird, it never fitted for me. A lot of the people were... It was just too...I don't know. I mean, a lot of my friends still say, "Oh, God, you're still making that music for secretaries." They hate dance

music still. It's kind of funny really what it's become now. It's just... I don't know, I don't know. Like I said, for me personally I just saw an opportunity to really subvert something.

What about the subverting of the scene by using anonymity?

I don't know. I mean that has become a bit of a standard approach in some scenes. I've even heard producers saying 'I'm going to do a white label series and then let people know who it is'. They actually tell people this: that they're going to generate this interest for a bit and then step forward so that they can get all this recognition.

But didn't you and Surgeon actually do something similar? Even the use of the pseudonyms is likely to create intrigue...

Honestly? The reason we had our DJ names was because we were signing-on. Both of us were on the dole so it was a way of doing this little bit of DJ work on the side without getting caught out.

So it wasn't just about being "about the music"?

I think some people do quite like that blankness: where they can get into something and there's no baggage with it. But that wasn't ever our intention. The thing is, people assume that we're all about being marginal. But that's just the way it was. This was pre-internet. We were marginal because we weren't being offered anything else.

Appendix #13 – Mark Archer interview

So the Altern8 masks became a symbol of rave culture but how much was their initial use to do with preserving anonymity? And what was involved in deciding on that particular image?

The whole idea behind the suits/masks was to stop the crowd at the Eclipse in Coventry recognising us as we'd played a gig there early 1991 as Nexus 21 and were then booked as Altern 8 when 'Infiltrate 202' was doing the rounds. I didn't want anyone to think they were being blagged and also wanted to keep the two groups totally separate as musically they were both very different. The deciding was a lot easier as my brother was in the RAF at the time and had two old NBC suits knocking about (it was all very last minute) so that was the main part sorted, I'd always loved the fluorescent paints on acid house t shirts that glowed under UV light so painted 'Altern 8' on the front and an 8 on the arms and to stop us looking like complete tools - I painted up some dust masks and slapped an 'A' on them - voila!

The mask and the guise was supposed to work as an alternative entity to Nexus 21, so why was it essential to 'transform' to release music that would be perceived differently? And how much of that was to protect the mythologies that you may have already built around Nexus 21 and its links to a more classic techno sound?

The whole Detroit techno thing was - probably just by myself - perceived as being, for want of a better word, cooler whereas the Altern 8 side of things although not a piss take, was more about just dancing and having fun so I wanted to keep the 2 separate, almost as if it were 2 groups. Not many people read who produced or wrote tracks so keeping the suits on would (for a long time) keep people wondering who Altern 8 were and also allow us to keep the moody techno thing surrounding Nexus 21 alive.

How much interest do you think the use of masks generated? At the beginning do you think you benefited from coverage because you chose to hide your identities?

Totally, in hindsight the image was a major publicity bonus but it all came around with little thought. I think because we had an image rather than a bunch of lads with ponytails stood behind keyboards, we stood out from a lot of the other groups of the time, the group name was easily associated with the suits and masks and it also gave us a sort of wacky cartoonish persona that allowed us to do some strange publicity stunts.

For you, how linked is this kind of 'covert' activity to dance music in general? Is it a more natural way of working than it would be with other types of music?

I just think that at the time, most of the people making tunes were just ravers who had an idea and wanted to get their tunes played at raves purely for the love of it, so there was no real want for fame or fortune as there seems to be today, so people weren't that bothered about having their pictures everywhere, which obviously helped us as we did everything we could to get our suited up mugs in magazines.

You also did the Slo Moshun record and that was something that presented itself as if it was an American release (like Azuli, Z Records, Cleveland City and Hustlers Convention also did). How important do you think it is to electronic/club music to use these kinds of techniques to cut through the snobbery of elite scenes?

At the time, there was an incredible amount of snobbery between UK released house tracks and those that were on import from America and don't forget, we were from Stafford/Stoke so weren't involved in the scene down in London so had to make our tracks stand out from all the X-Press 2 and Azuli tracks. If we hadn't of created Dansa records it would have looked just like another Network/6x6 release and may not have had the initial impact with the DJs that it did.

How important was design within all this? The look of the records? The use of photography and typography? What freedoms did these offer in the ability to reinvent yourself? And who did you use design-wise? I know Trevor Jackson did the Network logo but I wondered if, during any of your projects, you worked directly with a designer and what that process might have involved?

The Dansa logo was actually drawn freehand by Danny Taurus on the bus back from Stafford after we'd recorded Bells of New York, but it was intended to look like a very small American label and so a flashy design wouldn't have made it look authentic. As Altern 8 we worked a lot with a particular photographer, Peter Walsh, and he did a lot of the photographic work that went into the LP, we were also allowed to oversee a lot of the stages of design work to make sure we were happy with what was going on. Apart from 'Hypnotic St-8' where we weren't consulted at all and I personally thought the artwork was crap. Artwork and typography can make or break a tune, it sounds odd but if a sleeve doesn't 'look' techno, then someone who's into that style of music may well have been put off from buying it. I know dodgy sleeves stopped me from buying a whole host of tunes.

Lastly, with all of these projects - and I know that there are many, many more than the ones I've mentioned - can you still view your back catalogue as the work of one person? Or do these transformations re-work that whole idea of 'authorship'?

I've always been told that 'you can tell it's one of yours' no matter what style as I do certain things in a tune or play certain style riffs. I even did a track called 'Dead Xen' as Danny Taurus said the track I was working on using the name Xen Mantra was 'dead' Xen in style... so there must be some sort of style theme running through all of my projects from the acid house in '88 up to the recent Detroit techno out on Mutate Records maybe.

Appendix #14 – Lisa Blanning interview

I outlined the purpose of this already by email. So, as you know, it's all about producers and anonymity. One thing that comes up elsewhere is this idea that it's all about retreating to put focus 'on the music'. Is that how you see it?

I think that is something that is tagged onto the action. That seems to come around later in order to paint the musician in a certain light. My impression is that there are other motivations at the time.

When you did the talk at Stratford Circus, you mentioned the producer Philip D Kick when referencing his fusion of footwork and jungle. I know he relies on that pseudonym for that particular work. But there's a whole host of producers that work in that way, isn't there?

Yes. He does work under that name plus also what he does as Om Unit. It is something that has gone on for years on the scene: names come and go but some of the same people are still working, producing.

I'm particularly interested in talking to you about Zomby.

Okay.

Because you did the interview in The Wire...

I actually did two with him for The Wire. The second was in person. The first one was done online.

Yes. I'm particularly interested in the second one – some of the things that you wrote there that might have been ignored by some people but perhaps revealed something about that encounter. Particularly that part where you say he was operating a "stratagem". Can you elaborate on that?

He does. When I was saying how producers say "it's about the music", I meant that each name will have their own motivations. And Zomby seems to have his.

So different to, say, Burial?

Yes. I've talked to Steve Goodman so my understanding is that Burial just wants to make music and avoid the attention. Zomby uses anonymity to get that attention.

That's probably evident just by the fact that he was on the cover of the magazine.

Him getting the cover was part of the negotiations for him to do the feature. He was very clear that he wanted to be the cover story. There was a lot of going back and forth to confirm how that would happen.

So he could be on the cover even though he wouldn't reveal his face?

He was very clear about how he wanted the photos. But... I didn't put this in the feature, but he did tell me that he was going to reveal his face when he makes his first million. That was his plan. So he's not completely averse to being photographed. He's just waiting for that moment.

And, in the meantime, getting coverage *because* he doesn't show his face.

Yes.

So how much organisation was required to secure the interview?

I'd actually been talking to him for a while through iChat. That's how the first interview was done. But I know he talks to quite a few people. I mean, it's not like he's completely reclusive. I think he had been speaking to Martin Clark for quite a while too. So he's in touch with a few journalists. And he's prepared to use those contacts to achieve what he wants.

So did he like the finished feature?

I think so.

So no death threats from him?

No. Simon Reynolds has had one. And Joe Muggs. But, so far, I'm not on Zomby's hit list.

Appendix #15 – David Bray interview

What initiated that working relationship with Various? How did you start out working with them?

We met pre-Various in about 1996. I left some postcards in Ambient Soho, Adam picked one up and called me. He was running a fledgling record label. From there I designed a sleeve for a Japanese wonky pop band called Pop Off Tuesday - which I think John Peel and about seven others bought. Adam and I shared tastes in music and visuals. It was a fairly relaxed, casual working relationship. Every now and again I'd do a little bit of design for him. That label folded, but we still kept in touch. Then around 2001 Adam asked me to do some visuals and publicity for a night he was running at a bar in Kings Cross. The night was called Various, was quite an eclectic selection going on. Around the same time an early form of Various Production was born. The artworks evolved for the initial releases, and as we grew in confidence everything started to come together.

When was the issue surrounding the producers' identities brought up and was it integral in defining the imagery you worked on?

It wasn't really brought up. I hate to use the term 'collective', but I think initially the Various Production moniker was an umbrella term under which a group of producers, musicians, vocalists could release their works. That's as I understood it. These things were never discussed as such, it just seemed to flow. I was in a different part of London. I would get

delivery of a cd-r every now and again with versions/rough edits and working titles. They left me to my devices. A week later the artwork would be done. The anonymity ran deep! Nothing was planned, no agendas. I even put a false credit on the sleeve notes. The early sleeves are accredited to "Bonesy" - just a joke between me and them. The imagery was my personal reflection on the music I was hearing. As a step away from the music production, it became about the music rather than any personality/ego behind the music.

What, for you, do you think that mystery contributed to the assessment of both the musical and visual work?

With no pre-conceptions of who made these packages, the music/artwork could be judged purely on their own merits - stand on their own. It really doesn't matter who we are, where we were born, what our shoe size is and all those banalities that get muddled in. So I guess the assessment was purer.

Were there particular guidelines regarding what the band liked visually? Ideas that they wanted you to explore? Like, for example, were they meant to be cryptic? How much of the content of the work was left to you and how collaborative was the process?

There were no guidelines at all. It was me and my reaction to the music. Its unusual to have such a free reign. The music was dark, sinewy, beguiling, feminine, off-kilter. Its what I wanted the artwork to reflect. There was an innocence to it all, so it was put together in an anti-design way. Any text handwritten. Mistakes left in. Maybe a few styles of handwriting - like the schizophrenic nature of the releases. It just felt magickal.

Was the anonymity aspect an inspiration for you?

Totally. Not hindered by ego - they wanted to stay hidden so was'nt stuck with sticking some type over some band portrait. Was complete freedom.

Were the anonymity approaches of other musicians - whether that was Basic Channel, The Residents, Burial, Underground Resistance, Zomby, Drexciya, even Daft Punk and Kraftwerk - ever considered or mentioned? Was there any kind of perception of the approaches to persona (or non-persona) by those artists and various as being part of any kind of tradition? Something integral to electronic music perhaps? Whether that's utilising pseudonyms, hiding faces, being resistant to mainstream marketing strategies, crediting technological production, etc? [Apologies for the long-winded nature of this one - those are just examples, by the way. Don't intend for the question to be leading.]

That was never considered. This way of working/presentation just felt natural. I never thought of this before, but can see how it fits into that tradition in electronic music. I have always been interested in multi-identities. It's a way of fleeing the constraints of being pigeon-holed. You can be as many people as you want to be without confusing everyone. People do like boxes.

For you, what was the motivations behind that aspect? Was it as simple as placing the emphasis on the music? And what does this mean in terms of the visuals - something that, essentially, might be seen as outside the music?

Was freedom from ego. I'm not big into that whole culture of wringing the life out of artists/musicians. I don't care what they had for breakfast, what their favourite biscuit is. I want to judge the music purely on my response. I don't want to know what equipment was used to make it, how long it took, what it meant to the producer - anyone telling me how i should feel about it. The problem I had was by putting my artwork on the sleeve there was a

personal response - a flag or a sign for the music. We could have just sent them out as white labels. But I used the chance to be purely selfish, do something for me unhindered by the usual bullshits of commercial work.

How has the work developed? Did the signing to XL change anything in terms of the artwork? Was there any other criteria you had to consider?

Nothing changed in terms of working with XL except in consideration of barcode. Still maintained the same dynamic of relationship - almost enthusiastic amateurism. Also compact disc for first time. Wanted different design for cd to vinyl to denote the different formats. I hated it when a band/artist/label just shrunk a 12" sleeve to fit a jewel case. Budget restraints considering, I think it worked to a point. Had to deal with A&R man for first time, but just kept him out of the loop. The nature of the working relationship changed when dealing with a series of releases with Fire. Became a bit tougher. Tried to change it up, but they wanted the monochrome drawing for sleeve. Third party interference. To keep interest alive, I presented artworks with intentional mis-hearings - such as for Dave Cloud remix presented artwork of Dave Clown. Petty and juvenile, but that's where I was at during that period.

Was the fetishistic nature of some of your work particularly relevant to any of the ideas that was coming from the music?

Definitely. That's the sense I was getting. Very strong, very feminine.

What has imagery for Various' performances meant in terms of the development of the work?

Had never considered live performance at beginning. Still struggling with how to present it to be honest.

How did the move to the more photographic imagery come about? For you, what is that series of work about? What are the influences? And how does it tie to the music?

The line-up and dynamic of the group changed. Was perfect chance to go another route - keep playing, keep it interesting. Had been working on this technique under alias of Falk Jensen. Fitted the sound perfectly - my relationship with group not changed, same dynamic except no cd-r, now arrives via file sharing site. The imagery is created in a real lo-fi way, but trying to emulate something far more hi-end. <http://hardverge.tumblr.com/> The imagery shares the same interest as the hand-drawn. In the same way as the music is created and shares the same interest as early series of releases. These works are a new volume - denoted by new category code. Was Vars -nn. At present operating under VA-nn.

Lastly, how has this working relationship - where, to me, you're pretty much a third member of Various - differed from that of your other clients?

Complete autonomy. All the mistakes and fuck-ups are mine and mine alone.

What else is coming up?

In talks on how to present music/art in a more entwined format. There is an album's worth of new material - its just how to share this with the outside world.

Appendix #16 – Neil Rushton interview

To start, was there any truth in the story that ZTT wanted to sign Derrick May and Juan Atkins to be “the black Pet Shop Boys”?

Yeah, because ZTT they could see the old Derrick May, Juan Atkins, Kevin thing was perfect for them. And it kind of fitted in with the whole Trevor Horn ethos. And they wanted to sign Derrick to begin with, and then it became they wanted to sign the three of them.

How come that never happened?

Because of Derrick. I went for a meeting with them at first. I said, “What you’ve got to understand, and this isn’t a problem – this is the plus, Derrick’s completely mad, he’s a creative genius. So as long as you understand that, we’re absolutely fine. It’s going to be great”. So I got it all through, they wanted to sign Kevin, couldn’t have Kevin because of his Inner City contract with Virgin, wanted Derrick. We had a meeting and... Derrick typically... Seal walked in and then left and Derrick called him an asshole and said he was an idiot and a liar. After that everything’s fine, you know, no business to take care of. Derrick was saying, “Oh, don’t get me wrong, I’m doing the creative thing now”. So he went to the kitchen with Trevor Horn and I thought they were getting along swimmingly. Two days later, I get the call saying, “We’ve got a bit of a problem, Derrick’s completely freaked out Trevor.” I said, “Well, that’s the point, isn’t it? That’s what you want.” And he says, “Yeah, but he’s really freaked him out.” All this is because Trevor said, “When you do Top Of The Pops it’ll be like this.” And Derrick obviously said, “I’m not going to do Top Of The Pops.”

So it was all about his reluctance to do Top of the Pops?

To be fair, who knows if they need to do Top Of The Pops? But it wasn’t something that couldn’t have been smoothed out. I had to then go off to Brazil within Inner City. Kevin and Paris were already there, so I... I went to New York to do something and then to Brazil. I was really knackered and I got Derrick on the phone moaning. And I just said, “Derrick, I’ll look into bids but I just can’t do this anymore”. And I stopped managing there and then.

I would have thought that the interesting thing with ZTT was obviously what they’d managed to do with the Art of Noise. From my point of view, the whole idea of anonymity and the idea of machine-oriented music and being faceless lent itself to techno.

That was the whole synergy, that was why it was a good place to be. But no. I didn’t fall out with Derrick in a massive sense, I just said, “I can’t do this anymore. I’m just losing the energy because you’ve just sucked it out of me.” We’re both pretty strong characters. And I just said, “It’s not going to work. I know what you’re like: you have to dominate people. I’m not like that but you have to listen to what I’m saying. We didn’t fall out personally, I love Derrick, but I mean I wish I hadn’t have done that cause I’d have loved to have stayed and done that for years and years and years. But it was all down to that. It was just really ridiculous. There was a guy from Notting Hill – Steve Hillage. He was making techno records for Virgin, wasn’t he? He was an ex-rock musician who discovered techno. Anyway... Steve Hillage. Steve Lewis was his manager, and Steve Lewis ran Virgin Music.

Didn’t they all work on System 7: Steve Hillage and Derrick?

Yeah, that was through the connection with Steve Lewis at Virgin. He managed Steve Hillage: a friendship thing from the old days. They knew me already: the Techno compilation plus Kevin was at Ten Records through Virgin Music. So that was the connection. So Derrick

decided to work with Steve Hillage. I'd have thought the ZTT thing could have worked great but it was just this, "No, no, no. He won't do Top of the Pops." And I was going, "Great, he won't do TOTP, that's fine. Let's *not* do TOTP." Like when we did that thing with the music seminar: the New York music seminar - where Factory did that thing? And we hijacked the Friday press conference. Pretty hijacked it which Tony Wilson, only years later, found out that we did that. It's pretty funny. But they had the whole thing about this is this and however. And Derrick walked in with a rucksack on his back. Sorry, I'm not explaining myself very well. Derrick was on the panel. But you had the cream of English house music. And Derrick just said, "Bollocks, this is shit, you're jumping on our bandwagon, you're stealing our culture". He meant it actually.

If I remember rightly, didn't he also have a problem with the fact that it was being very much pushed within terms of the tabloidy drugs angle?

Yeah, they were doing the whole thing about Stone Roses. Sorry, not Stone Roses...

Northside or something?

Yeah, I think so. Cause they all played the night before at the club in New York at Junior Vasquez's place. We'd all been to see them and everything. And Derrick hated all that. And then he got into a real spat with Keith Allen where they both didn't get on with each other and then he just sort of went for it. It was just great cause we got coverage in the NME. That clinched the ZTT thing. I couldn't believe he'd done this, you know. And the joy of it was, when I said we set it up, we didn't have to: you just point Derrick in the right direction. But it was actually completely organic all he was saying... he was good and he believed everything. You know, you couldn't tell Derrick what to do. He was saying, "You're coming in, you're selling it as that and you're hijacking it." And then he was like, "You're all idiots and you all can't mix".

With all this music first and underground and all these concepts that we talk about, was there ever issues with regards to what the records look like? I presume the majority of the people that were working at Network weren't that bothered about having a big picture sleeve with them on the front cover by a traditional kind of artist.

For me the Detroit thing came first - cause the Detroit connection came a couple of years before we started.

That was all first through your Kool Kat label?

We had the worst artwork in the world, we just blundered into that. But it did matter in Detroit... It mattered to Derrick cause he had all those lovely Transmat logos and where he'd changed the sleeves and it was all hand drawn. It was great. Cause you didn't quite get the collectability side of it, not really. Not like I'd be collecting, you know. But with Derrick it mattered a lot. I understood really that it was very important to Derrick. I don't think it was for Juan and Kevin. I mean, Metroplex and KMS looked okay. They looked modernist but it wasn't the same thing. Kevin wasn't into that particularly. But there was a thoughtfulness and a kind of pensiveness about what they were doing. There weren't just making records and throwing them out, were they? They were all intelligent records. I always liked the kind of jazzy side of techno, I mean, which Carl Craig had more than the others before him but I always saw that. So in a way, I wouldn't say they tried to intellectualise it particularly, they were intellectual themselves. But stuff like the Transmat artwork, that to me was fantastic. And because you mentioned the other day the northern soul thing, with the soul thing I'd always loved the American labels because one of the things about them is you'd have these very small labels who'd press final copies and they'd disappear, and some of the artwork was

fantastic. Even some of the majors' artwork was great from the '60s. And I also collected the British soul tracks from the '60s. So I was always into that.

So you knew the value of the idea of having a promo or a pre-release version of the track and also the housebag and all that kind of stuff?

Yeah. Although without being evasive, if you look at what we did at Kool Kat, you'd think I've never seen a record in my life because we just so hand-to-mouth on that. We couldn't afford a designer, you know what I mean? It was just whatever we could do at that stage to get going.

I thought that was a considered thing. I thought it just looked like some of the American labels.

Kool Kat didn't; it was horrible, wasn't it? Kool Kat was that horrible K and it just wasn't very good, you know.

But I think a lot of the... Look at some of the house labels in New York, and I've talked to people like...

That kind of cartoony thing...?

Yeah.

Well, there was a bit of that about it. Yeah.

There was always a bit of... It's funny cause I spoke to Mark Archer about when they first put out the Slo Moshun thing as an American import and he was saying, "We tried really hard to make it look crap because the American labels look crap." And I spoke to Dave from Azuli Records and they said that they had a logo originally and it just looked too clean, that they had to distress it by photocopying over it again so it looked crap enough to pass as an American record. So I thought it was a considered thing.

No, I could say that. I mean, I think the Kool Kat thing there was a cartoony side about it which did fit in with what was going on in America to some extent, but I think really we didn't do a very good job because...

So it was just naivety more than anything else?

Yeah, and it was just about 'are we going to be around next week?', more than anything else. But to answer your question, because of my background with '60s soul music and I suppose following that the whole 4th & Broadway thing and these customised English labels, and at the time I was very aware of FFRR, what they were doing, which I thought was okay, I didn't think it was great but I could see what they were doing. I like 4th & Broadway, I liked. I did make that connection when I got to Detroit and saw what Derrick was doing which was much different from taking him out to Chicago; DJ Tracks or...

DJ Tracks or DJ International?

DJ International. And then as thing moved on, labels like Nu Groove who we got on very well with, who was Frank Mendez, they kind of had identity 'cause they'd done what you said, they did something so crap it was wonderful.

Yeah. Nu Groove and I suppose over here Warp as well they're like very distinct style whether it's the pink sleeves or the purple sleeves. The Network stuff you put out a lot of stuff in the orange sleeves with the...

Yeah, what happened was we'd had Kool Kat and I'd managed various people and we knew we were going to be around, financially we'd be able to survive and there was all the... Inner City had had a lot of success but at the end of the day were still with a major, you know what I mean? I wanted it to be on our terms. At that stage that's when we said, "If we're going to do a label, what are we going to call it?" First name I come up with was 'Network'. Network: it's so obvious, you know what I mean? So derivative. But that's the one we came back to all the time. And from that we spend weeks and weeks getting the artwork and the logo with everything ready to go. I'd actually got Neil Howard in and signed up six months before, which I loved. It wasn't a... If you like, it's a business issue really cause it was all about setting up our label but it was also organically, that's exactly what we wanted to do, we wanted it to be like that. I said there no expense spared but there was lots of sleepless nights worrying about it. And when we did the labels we had the black and whites, the silver and black, the black and gold, changing things around. It was all about the addition thing and the style thing because although I'd made money from managing Inner City and we got publishing deals and whatever and people gave us advances, it was still really tight. And there's no way we could have competed with any of the majors apart from energy, enthusiasm and musical integrity. And so the idea was if we didn't have a million pound in the bank, at least say if you were sitting down to look at a record from, I don't know, Mercury or Sony or us, ours would be the one that looked the best. I used to go up for meetings in London and we had such good contacts and at the time I was plugged into the mains almost the way I was running my life. And I just thought we were so ahead of everybody else when it came to what we were into. I mean, not particularly to having pop records like they were having, and they'd sort of be saying, "What do you think of this as a mix?" And I'd just go, "No, it's shit. We've just got this." We were coming out with things like Rhythm On The Loose – 'Break Of Dawn' you know, it's like ridiculous records, and True Faith – 'Take Me Away' we actually picked up on that and all the stuff from Derrick and Juan. And then Nexus 21 which was great, so it was... Yeah, I've given you a long answer but the whole ethos and integrity to manage what we were doing, it was very important that the designs which went over to the adverts and everything did that. I suppose if you want to use a horrible word – it was branding, but that... Branding kind of says, "Oh, I have to do this in order to make it..." you know what I mean? And making something artificial real, but it wasn't like that. It was a brand, but we didn't sort say, "Let's create a brand that makes us cool." It was like, "This is what we do."

Yeah, I think branding is a dirty word because it sounds very controlling but I think when you talk about it in terms of an organic way is that you want everything to be right, you want this to send out a particular message. What I like about the Network thing was the whole futuristic aspect of it. You know, using the metallic sleeves and the whole circuit logo was really helping to define this kind of future aesthetic. Even though you put out a lot of different signals throughout the years, even going towards pop music and you came to the Us and that, you still had that kind of Network thing.

Yeah. I think we sort of lost it towards the end. When we had 'Please Don't Go' that was just...I mean, that just took us by surprise so much. John McCready left because of that. My thing was with John, we're doing all this and we're pretending we could afford to do it but, you know, we've got no money. If something comes along and makes you half a million quid, it means you can pay for... I know it sounds cliché but it paid for Underground Resistance and the other things. And that's what it was all about, it wasn't to buy a house in the country.

Which is funny really. When you think of a hit record that helps you make another Underground Resistance record and at the same time you've got Mad Mike Banks

basically saying, “We’re against all that top en bullshit”. Yet there is a relationship between the two.

I actually got a call from Mike Banks saying, “I’ve made this record called ‘The Jaguar’, everyone in England wants it”. I said, “I’m not interested. I’ve had enough of that world”. And I seriously did that. Four months later I went down to Universal Music about something else and... I forget her name now... Ruth? She says to me, “Neil, are you doing a record called The Jaguar? Mike Banks rang me, he wants me to sort it out”. I said, “No”. But she’s saying “you don’t understand, Ministry have offered £200,000, we’ve offered £100,000. Mike won’t take our calls.” I said, “Oh, no - I can sort it out in an hour.” So I did. She goes, “Okay.” But what happened was, to answer the question - not about me being great, I engineered this deal where that came out. Mike didn’t want it to come out, he didn’t want it to be pop, he didn’t want this. But in the end he did the deals and I think it failed really because they thought they’d have this great, number one underground record and it didn’t do anything. So there was all that money wasted. And so, I think it’s all very well being underground, it’s all very well being commercial but there’s a happy medium called common sense really, you know what I mean? And Mike had made all the money from ‘The Jaguar’ that he could have made, that helps him run his operation for the next ten years, doesn’t it?

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