

Carleton University

Beyond Gender?: Women in the Cultural Economy of Electronic Music

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by

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Abstract

This thesis will demonstrate that women face structural limitations with respect to gaining access to the necessary technologies and technical knowledge required to participate equally with men in an exclusive cultural fragment of post-rave, the IDM (intellectual dance music) scene. These structural limitations are evidenced by the greater proportion of men than women that produce and perform this kind of music. I attribute these limitations to the persistence of gendered stereotypes that are in evidence in women's historical roles in subculture, and also in women's relationships with technology. Such stereotypes that emerge and take effect in post-rave culture are interesting because they contradictorily co-exist alongside discourses of post-identity (a residual ideology of rave culture) and discourses of a DIY production ethic (where traditional identity demarcations are not believed to limit an individual's capacity for participation). Although these discourses of post-identity and the DIY ethic claim to advance the way in which we conceive of and accept difference by asserting that traditional identity demarcations such as gender, class, race and sexuality are no longer of any consequence, they also tend to diminish, and thus mask over, social divisions that persist in material relations of production.

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Introduction

Gender in the Cultural Economy of Electronic Dance Music

Sound reminds people that there is a world of depth which is external to them, which surrounds them, which touches them simultaneously from all directions, and which, in its fluidity and dynamism, constantly requires a response.
John Shepherd and Peter Wicke, Music and Cultural Theory

Discussion of the Problem

The study of subcultures provides a lens for viewing how young people create and inhabit new identities that play with, and challenge, dominant social codes and regulations of behaviour. Rave or acid-house culture, following such principles of playful opposition, is founded upon long periods of collective dancing, often involving psychedelic and/or amphetamine drug use (MDMA, commonly known as ecstasy), for the purposes of experiencing both an altered state of mind and being with others. Rave culture arose in the late 1980s in Western industrialized societies and arguably declined shortly thereafter in the mid 1990s, and has been claimed to provide a cultural space for the temporary alleviation from historical forms of racial and sexual oppression, and from the consequences of stringent class structures. Furthermore, rave has been heralded as providing an open forum where emergent subjectivities could be experienced and also transcended through such avenues as dance or drug consumption (Collin 1997, Gaillot 1998, Gilbert and Pearson 1998 and Jordan 1996).

Recent feminist scholars have particularized the claims made for rave's democratic practices of identity constitution as they affect the experience of women. They argue that rave provided a novel, creative space for women to create their own cultural identity, a possibility that was in contrast to their earlier experiences of post-war

subcultures (McRobbie 1994 and 1999, Pini 1997 and 2001). In this literature it can be argued that Pini and McRobbie are speaking largely about women's experience of early rave culture, and do not attend to their roles in contemporary electronic music culture (a period that I will identify as post-rave). Specifically, their scope of inquiry does not address the tension between the experiences of identity constitution they claim women experience in rave, and the larger ideological practices of 'transcendence' or post-identity that other scholars claim to be at work within both rave and post-rave cultures (Gaillot 1998, Jordon 1996, Ueno 2003). In addition, they do not extend their consideration of women's participation in rave to the realm of electronic music production. Although concerns of gender disparities regarding the relations of production in electronic music culture did not appear as pertinent in the early rave scene of the late 1980s, rather coming to the fore in subsequent years, such disparities were indeed present. However, the possibilities for making concerted efforts to define, and attend to, such gender disparities, I argue, were suspended due to the centrality of rave's ideological practices of post-identity. These premises of post-identity rendered the relationships of gender to traditional definitions of cultural production and, more specifically, the relationships between electronic music on the one hand and issues of gender and technology on the other, irrelevant in light of the new importance lent to the collective, de-individualized production of the dance floor.

In this thesis I argue that contemporary cultures of electronic music production and, specifically, production that falls within the genre of IDM (intellectual dance music), are predominantly populated by men because women face structural limitations with regards to accessing the knowledge and technical skills required to participate equally in

these high-tech cultural areas. From a political economy perspective, the kinds of structural limitations that I will focus on in this thesis involve first, the ideological foundation of rave as a culture that attempts to transcend traditional identity distinctions – specifically gender, but also class, race and sexuality (i.e. post-identity). These residual tendencies towards identity transcendence in post-rave culture, it can be argued, fundamentally render questions of gender and production irrelevant. Second, I will draw attention to the perpetuation of gendered stereotypes found in post-war subcultures and in respective studies of them. In the ethnographic accounts of post-war subcultures, it becomes evident that men are predominantly the heroic focal points, while women are stereotypically spoken of as having passive attitudes towards cultural participation, and as being located only in peripheral spheres. I will argue that this trend resurges in the IDM community. Third, I will adopt a historical perspective to examine gendered stereotypes in cultures of technology, and argue that they persist in contemporary techno-cultures, specifically the ‘tech-savvy’ segment of electronic dance music culture, IDM.

For present purposes, it is not my objective to invalidate the arguments provided by feminist scholars such as Pini (2001) and McRobbie (1994) that I reproduce in Chapter 1. These scholars claim that rave culture provides the possibility of exploring new modes of femininity. However, I maintain that, when the novel combinations of drugs, music, technology and dancing wore off in the post-rave setting, the spaces once claimed to provide women a more participatory and autonomous experience – distinct from previous accounts of women in subcultures – also diminished. The cultural and aesthetic shifts to post-rave which gave rise to the IDM community as a genre of electronic music, I argue, returned the roles of production and consumption to their

traditional (i.e. pre-rave) definitions. The consideration of the relationship between audience consumption and electronic music production is particularly interesting in rave because, as electronic music culture has matured over the past fifteen years, prevalent trends have appeared to re-establish the relationship between the performer and the audience in terms of more traditional definitions, in contrast to the elevated status of the audience in rave. The resurgence of the central presence and importance of the performer in contemporary electronic music culture has inevitably affected the way in which Pini and McRobbie claim women connect to, and participate in, this culture. This shift predominantly rendered men as the creative 'intellectual' producers and women as their passive consumers or audience. Because of this shift, gender relations in electronic dance music culture need to be re-examined within a wider scope that considers the relations of production

Reflexive Methodology

My interests in electronic dance music were cultivated around the age of nineteen. I was backpacking through Europe, and some fellow travellers I had met along the way cajoled me into stopping at an electronic music festival in Prague. At this massive festival, I spent my time investigating the various tents, each with its own unfamiliar genre of electronic music; for hours, dancing peacefully with thousands of other people I would probably never see again. I chatted with a few people, and we exchanged niceties over bottles of water. When saying where I was from, "Windsor, Ontario...Don't know it? ...Well, do you know Detroit?" I was always met with enthusiastic responses from avid techno fans: "Techno was born and still thrives in Detroit. Juan Atkins, Derrick

May, Jeff Mills and Richie Hawtin all those old guys... you must be part of a great scene." they would claim. These statements proclaiming Detroit infamous for electronic music set me on a determined road to discover this great music sitting underneath my nose this whole time.

In 1998, I returned to the Windsor-Detroit area and began going to 'parties' (the term 'rave,' although now making an ironic comeback, was then outdated and largely referred to the commercialized segments of dance culture). My coming-of-age in the scene was, therefore, well after rave by its 'pure' definition had come and gone. However, the pioneers of the rave movement were still spoken of as having a legendary status. My tastes soon refined to Detroit-style minimal techno, also called 'tech-house.' Both labels were encompassed within the umbrella genre of IDM mentioned above. (IDM as a cultural term will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 3, particularly where the relationship this culture has with new technologies is concerned). Being immersed in the culture, it was not long before I began investing in records, learning how to mix them, and hosting a campus radio show dedicated to playing minimal tech-house. Having moved away from Detroit as a proximate cultural resource, I have learned that Montreal's electronic music scene displays a similar penchant for minimal experimentalism, particularly in their annual music festival 'Mutek', a five-day event that showcases performances and discussion panels of international artists and music industry types. I have attended this festival for the past four years.

Over the eight years of being involved in the electronic music scene, I have had the opportunity to play a number of different roles in the culture: dancer, club and radio DJ, electronic music analyst, bartender, 'door girl' and 'coat check girl.' However, when

I attended the Mutek festival discussions over the past few years, the selected topics of discussion largely catered to an audience of producers or industry sales people in an exclusive, self-referential, entrepreneurial manner. There was no discussion of the larger social significance of dance cultures, the history of electronic music culture, or the philosophy behind experimental music. An entrepreneurial tenor dominated the festival and, quite noticeably, those who were busy networking and demonstrating the techniques of the latest music-making technology were predominantly men. In the program roster of 2005, of more than 70 performers only 6 were women. These observations extend to previous years of the festival, as well as to my experiences of the techno/house scene in Detroit, where most music producers, their sound technicians and party organizers/promoters, are men. Thus, the way in which I approach questions of gender in electronic music culture is informed by my personal experiences and observations being a member of electronic music culture.

The observations I have made from my experiences at Mutek have led me to bring questions of gender to other forums of electronic music culture. Although the following examples are anecdotal, I argue that they are still demonstrative of at least a portion of attitudes present within electronic music culture, specifically the IDM scene. For instance, often times on music sharing programs, while chatting in 'minimal techno rooms,' it has been my experience that there is an inherent assumption that all avatars (chosen online identity of program users) are men. Another example of gender bias was discussed on a list-serve that I am a member of. This list-serve is dedicated to the scholarly study of electronic dance music culture. In this discussion, I have shared stories with other women who have had experiences of being ignored or treated as ignorant in

audio equipment stores. On a similar note, a local record store salesman has once asked me if I buy records for my boyfriend. Another made a comment on the large presence of women at electronic music performances, and attributed their attendance to merely following their boyfriend's musical interests, thus having no genuine interest of their own in electronic music. Although these experiences are scattered over time and place, I argue that their occurrence points to the persistence of gendered stereotypes with respect to women's peripheral position in contemporary electronic music culture, and their supposed inferior relationship to technology.

This thesis will contribute to an area of feminist cultural studies already devoted to exploring the social relationships and processes of identity constitution that transpire within electronic music culture. In particular, this thesis will contribute to an understanding of some of the cultural and aesthetic attitudes located in IDM culture. There is as yet little scholarly material on this subgenre of electronic dance music. However, IDM is a cultural term that a number of electronic music enthusiasts identify with. Since the thesis is concerned largely with women in technical fields such as programming and technical literacy, this thesis will also make a contribution to contemporary studies on women in the information technology field.

The Intellect as Cultural Capital: The Shift from Rave to Post-Rave

Kristian Russell, in her article accounting the development of psychedelic culture, argues that rave is a culture that accepts and celebrates differences in identity. She claims that "the rave scene and acid house culture had begun to reunite multiracial priorities through dance, challenging outdated racial attitudes" (Russell 1999, 138). Matthew

Collin also suggests such democratic politics in his detailed account of the history of acid-house/rave culture. He argues that the ideological template for dance cultures was established in the black and gay discos of New York in the late 1970s and 1980s and describes the beginnings of electronic dance music culture from such origins. He suggests that both disco and rave were “euphoric” cultures “born of necessity” that exhibited a playing out of desires “without fear or inhibition.” He continues that “the rhetoric of unity and togetherness … echoed down through club cultures to come … [and] contributed to an exalted mental state: the club became church, bedroom and family” (Collin 1997, 17).

Rave as a social practice, along with the democratic ideals that once supported a politically progressive cultural community is, however, generally proclaimed to be dead (Reynolds 1998, 206-217). Shortly after its honeymoon period in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the popularization of rave culture brought an influx of new members, commercial enterprises, the media, and regulatory forces such as the government and police. This over-commercialization of rave culture served to distinguish ‘rave culture’ from ‘club culture’: raves were generally free, or relatively inexpensive, and were not based on alcohol consumption; while clubs, on the other hand, often charge a prohibitive entry fee, and attendees are often obliged to purchase drinks when inside. As Collin suggests, “slowly, raves became integrated into the infrastructure of the entertainment establishment; shepherded back into licensed premises, contained and commodified if not eradicated” (Collin 1997, 119). Pini agrees. She attributes an increase in cynicism within the rave scene to its “commercialisation and incorporation into the mainstream” (Pini 2001, 123). For the sake of clarity, we can speak of contemporary club culture and post-

rave in equivalent terms, because both – consciously or not – proclaim the death of rave culture. IDM (intellectual dance music) can be viewed as a peripheral and exclusive niche within the larger milieu of post-rave culture.

The dissolution of rave culture precipitated the emergence of many subgenres and communities of electronic music, each giving rise to its own symbolic and stylistic characteristics, as well as different patterns of attitudes and behaviours. The pluralism of what once was (or at least nostalgically theorized to be) a unified rave scene poses a challenge in highlighting common cultural attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, the way in which women have been claimed to identify with and celebrate the newfound freedom rave culture has offered (McRobbie 1994 and 1999, Pini 1997 and 2001) has necessarily shifted given these cultural and aesthetic changes. These changes instigated a shift in the cultural politics of electronic dance music, involving the definitions and values of the performer as cultural producer and the audience as cultural consumer.

The unravelling of idealistic notions embedded within rave ideology that suggest that the DJ and dancer share equally in the creative production of the event (claims made in Brewster and Broughton 1999, Jordan 1996, Pini 2001) has implications for women who have also laid claim to a public space for creative cultural experience and expression (McRobbie 1994, Pini 2001). As mentioned above, these new creative spaces which largely valued individual expression through dance (made possible through rave culture) stood in contrast to earlier roles in post-war subcultures, where women only participated peripherally. In contrast to rave, IDM culture requires the participant to approach these electronic dance music sites with a greater amount of technical knowledge as to how the music is produced, or as a producer him or herself. These practices serve to distinguish

the discerning 'intelligent' few from the many who simply (banally) dance to the music.

Resulting from the high cultural value placed on production knowledge in the IDM community is the increased importance placed on the artist as producer of the environment. The re-emergence of the centrality of the artist shifts the ideological practice of rave, where the dancer plays an equal part in the production of the environment. The new situation between the producer and the audience in a post-rave setting tends to render the audience as passive.

Although Pini (1997 and 2001) addresses the gendered politics of early rave culture, I wish to render her work contemporary with respect to present day electronic music cultures. I also make substantial reference to Sarah Thornton's analysis of club cultures (1996). This thesis conforms to her methodology of explaining subcultures in terms of cultural capital and accumulation, but extends her framework to incorporate questions of gender. Specifically, the framework of this thesis considers the way in which gender is implicated in the spectrum of technological knowledge, skill and accessibility to technology related to music production and programming. Therefore, in post-rave IDM culture, technology and technical knowledge is regarded as cultural capital that is sought after and accumulated by its cultural members.

Organization of Chapters

Concerns of consumption, production, gendered identity, and technology are all interrelated in the larger questions of this thesis. There is, therefore, a significant overlap of these concerns in each of the chapters. The organizational framework for the chapters of this thesis follows closely the main points developed in McRobbie and Garber's article

“Girls and Subcultures” (1976). Although this article was written thirty years ago, I find the organization of the article instructive for pursuing contemporary inquiries as to the relative absence of young women in electronic music cultures.

The first series of questions adapted from McRobbie and Garber to the contemporary cultural setting asks if there is a significant presence of women in rave culture and, if there is, in what areas is this participation occurring. In Chapter 1 “*Making Sense of it all: Affect and Identity for Women in Rave Culture*,” I reproduce the argument that the rave scene provided women with a new public cultural space in which to explore and experience new modes of femininity (McRobbie 1994 and 1999, Pini 1997 and 2001). These scholars note the novel way in which women were involved in the cultural production of electronic dance music culture, namely, through giving rise to an autonomous and creative experience through dancing, and also through experiencing altered states of consciousness through the use of drugs in a safe environment. I put into relief the alternative experiences rave has been claimed to provide for women by briefly reviewing traditional gender roles in post-war cultures, as well as the gender roles as revealed in early cultural theoretical studies of these cultures. The early cultural theory coming from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) traditionally identifies and describes subcultures as groups of working-class young men who express their opposition to mainstream society through symbolic and stylistic gestures (Cohen 1980, Hall & Jefferson 1976, Hebdige 1979). As Angela McRobbie highlights in her seminal article “*Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique*” (1980), the symbolic and stylistic archetypes that are emphasized and in fact authenticated within these traditional cultural theoretical models most often involve only

male embodiments of style as articulated in public spaces, and fail to address female expressions of leisure and subculture that occur within private spaces such as the home and the bedroom, and through the private consumption of fanzines and music. It is in terms of these critiques of early cultural theory that McRobbie and Pini claim a novel experience for women in rave culture.

I conclude this chapter, however, by situating Pini and McRobbie's claims to new modes of femininity within the larger discourses that discuss identity in rave culture, noting the tension of such claims with respect to the prevalent ideology of post-identity within rave and post-rave cultures. Such discourses of post-identity often leave the rave participant unsexed or gender-neutral, claiming that traditional identity demarcations are of no effect. The residual reluctance to make gender matter in rave and post-rave culture makes it difficult to move to questions regarding gender and production, as well as gender and technology in contemporary electronic music culture.

The second series of questions adapted from McRobbie and Garber ask: where present and visible, are women's roles the same or more marginal than men's in cultures of electronic music? The answers to these questions I begin to explore in Chapter 1 by reproducing the arguments made by Pini and McRobbie. These arguments suggest rave provided a novel way for women to participate and authenticate their membership within a subculture. In Chapter 2, "Reconstructing the Self: Consumption and Production in the Cultural Economy of Electronic Dance Music," I in contrast examine the way in which discourses of consumer culture historically relegated women to the passive areas of post-war culture, predominantly construing them as consumers to male-made cultures. The discourses that relate gender, consumer culture and rave culture need to be put in context.

Within rave ideology, simply attending a rave event was considered an act of creative and active participation. The roles of cultural production were thus loosely granted to all who attended, essentially rendering a situation of passive consumption in rave culture impossible. However, in the post-rave IDM scene, the modes of participation celebrated in rave culture are largely taken to be banal and mindless, and in contrast to 'intellectual' exercises involving technical knowledge and the ability to produce electronic music. Since men predominantly are the producers of IDM music, I argue that women have resumed their traditional roles as passive consumers within the post-rave setting.

In Chapter 2, I also suggest that the ideology latent within electronic music production closely follows a DIY (do-it-yourself) production ethic characteristic of cultural production within post-war cultures. In his book reviewing the history of 'partying and protest' in 1990s Britain, George McKay (1998) insists that the Do-it-Yourself (DIY) ethic, finding its origins in 1970s punk culture, to a large degree encourages the democratic production of local culture outside the expanding monolith of the popular culture industries, and has been revived in the ethics and production methods of 1990s counterculture. In an article written on *doofs*, the local Australian name for rave events, Graham St. John agrees with McKay's position. He states:

From the early eighties, developments in production and recording technologies permitted a means of access and level of independence which had enabled increasing numbers of young electronic (techno) musicians to assume ownership and control over the means of production (in their own homes) and distribution (through informal channels and independent micro-labels). (St John 2001, 9)

DIY culture is thus saddled with democratic connotations of universal access and ability, ideals that supposedly take expression in the subculture of electronic music production. I connect these discourses of DIY production to issues of gender and

technology within electronic music culture. Using Thornton's framework that explains the organization of subcultures by processes of capital accumulation, I argue that, within the IDM community, where cultural capital is intimately linked with technology and technical knowledge, certain structural limitations prevent women democratic access to the means of production. These structural limitations regarding women in cultures of technology will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The third series of questions modelled after McRobbie and Garber's article ask whether the gendered roles present in electronic music culture are specific to this subculture, or if they are reflective of a more general social condition regarding women and technology? In Chapter 3 "Technology and Identity: An Exploration of Historical Stereotypes," I argue that the position of women in IDM culture is indicative of larger relationships of gender and technology. Specifically, cultures of electronic music production demonstrate the perpetuation of gendered stereotypes also evident in professional fields of information technology. Since both electronic music producers and IT workers involve similar technical skills and requirements of programming and technical literacy, I argue that these two occupations are comparable.

In this thesis, I maintain the positive cultural achievements postmodern feminists such as McRobbie and Pini have claimed for women in rave culture. I believe these scholars have provided a step forward for the discipline of cultural studies in the recognition of new ways of producing subjectivities and inhabiting cultural spaces. Their work has also been informative with regards to new ways of considering women in consumer society. However, I also maintain a sensitive and critical position regarding the historical trends of gendered modes of production, particularly in the cultural fields

where art and technology intersect. Although positions of post-identity or post-feminism claim to advance the way in which we conceive of and accept difference by asserting that traditional identity demarcations such as gender, class, race and sexuality are no longer of any effect, they also tend to diminish, and thus mask over, social divisions that persist in material relations of production.

Chapter 1

Making Sense of it all: Affect and Identity for Women in Rave Culture

Listening, looking, and reading ultimately amount to a kind of self-invention By initiating the attempt at signification that comes from the other, by labouring, digging up, crumpling, and cutting the text, incorporating it within ourselves, destroying it, we help erect the landscape of meaning that inhabits us
Pierre Levy 1998

The very dynamic of rave itself felt so liberating – democratic rather than hierarchical. The dancers' focus was not on the stage, but on each other. The hegemony of the performers was usurped; the energy was coming from the participants themselves. They, no one else, were making this happen!
Matthew Collin 1997

Introduction

A way in which we can think through issues of gender in the musical spaces of a subculture is to consider the way discursive practices within the particular subculture construct gendered archetypes. Gendered archetypes, including both the role of artists as producers and their audiences as consumers, may be constructed in the musical spaces of subculture in the following ways: first, in the written and spoken texts of the subculture itself (e.g. song lyrics, commentaries of live events, artist interviews, academic and popular accounts of a subculture, etc.); second, by the dominant codes of behaviour at cultural events among artists and audiences alike; and third, within the cultural economy of the music industry, where images incorporating gendered archetypes target and appeal to specific demographics and consumer markets. These three areas of activity illuminate the relationships of producer and consumer - or artist and audience – where specific relations of power are articulated and grappled with. Whether we are considering the role

of the producer or consumer of culture, the emergence and persistence of gendered archetypes articulate and reproduce certain ideological positions that trace the lines of permissibility and transgression as to the ways in which men and women produce and participate in a given culture. These archetypes are effective in both the social and material worlds, influencing the way individuals form and express their identity, as well as maintain an affinity with others in their respective cultural milieus.

In this chapter I reproduce the argument that, in contrast to the subcultures that preceded it, rave culture opened the possibility for a new female cultural archetype – for the possibility of transforming a normative gendered identity that is closely adhered to. In other words, it is argued that rave provided women an autonomous and creative space on the dance floor to actively explore alternative modes of femininity (McRobbie 1994, Pini 1997 and 2001). These new, active and participatory roles were made possible in the rave scene because the value of such affective experiences that served to constitute identity was a fundamental condition for the existence of the scene itself. On both an individual and collective level, rave was ideologically premised on notions of idealism and political experimentation that provided for alternative ways of being with others.

In the context of the claims made by Pini and McRobbie regarding women's active and participatory roles in rave, I wish to highlight problems that arise when applying their framework to contemporary electronic dance music culture. First, Pini suggests that a substantive number of women have difficulty in connecting their positive experiences of rave to their wider social lives. Pini's observation speaks to the insecurity women feel with regard to establishing these altered experiences of identity as genuine cultural practices (Pini 2001, 4-6). As the novel combination of drugs, dancing,

technology and music wore off in the later rave years, the autonomous cultural spaces women enjoyed therefore also diminished.

The second problem in accepting uncritically Pini and McRobbie's analyses is the tension between the particular experiences Pini and McRobbie claim for women in rave, and the larger ideological practices of 'transcendence' or post-identity that other scholars claim to be at work within both rave and post-rave cultures (Gaillot 1998, Jordon 1996, Ueno 2003). These discursive practices of identity constitution and transcendence are, I argue, fundamentally irreconcilable. While it is not my purpose to detract from the value of these feminist scholars' studies, I do suggest that Pini and McRobbie are referring largely to the experiences of women in early rave culture. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will critically examine the tension between their claims of 'new modes of femininity' and discourses of post-identity prevalent in rave and post-rave culture. In addition, in Chapter 3, I will critically examine their claims of an increasing participation of women in rave in the light of the cultural and aesthetic changes that took effect in the 'tech-savvy' post-rave culture.

I will now set the scene for this Chapter by presenting a few earlier feminist critiques that provide a context for the work of McRobbie and Pini referred to above (McRobbie 1976, 1981 and 1994). These critiques deal both with the relative absence of women in positions of authority or influence in postwar cultures, and attend to the lack of attention given to women's alternative cultural experiences in the work of early cultural studies theorists.

History of Gendered Archetypes in Subculture: Romantic Longing for Heroic Figures

Scholars of the early cultural studies tradition predominantly focused on public embodiments of subcultural style and image – i.e. the Teds, the Mods, the punks, and the rockers (Cohen 1972, Hebdige 1976 and 1979, Jefferson 1976). These subcultures were linked closely, and appealed to the identities of working class young men of the time. In popular media, these cultural stalwarts were often drawn up to be quite the heroic figures: fashionably trendy and a visible public embodiment of the subcultural narratives of resistance and disobedience. Conversely, women were construed as passive consumers of these heroic man-made cultures, their experiences confined to the periphery of public cultural spaces alongside their male counterparts, to the private listening spaces of their bedrooms, and to their imagination, often taking the form of romantic longing and desire narrated through lyrical content of popular music targeted toward a market of young women. As McRobbie and Garber claim, “very little seems to have been written on girls in youth cultural groupings … when girls do appear it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women … or else they are fleetingly or marginally represented” (McRobbie and Garber 1976, 209).

The first publication in cultural studies that considers gender identity as a part of popular music culture is McRobbie and Frith’s article “Rock and Sexuality” (1979). In this article, these authors suggest that much of the rock music produced at the time is ‘cock rock,’ a type of music they argue celebrates, and thus appeals to, the brute and aggressive characteristics of male sexuality. They compare ‘cock rock’ to ‘teeny-bop,’ a pop culture phenomenon they describe as highly feminized and passive, in which much of the music is targeted for a female audience. This music was taken to appeal to

emotions of sensitivity and to narratives of romantic longing both of which young girls were thought and taught to easily identify with (McRobbie and Frith 1979). The notion of masculine aggression in cock rock becomes evident in the lyrical analysis of such music, as the narratives create and appeal to a misogynistic, freedom-seeking and youthfully reckless attitude. Such cultures of masculinity are also revealed in the way these musicians present themselves to, and interact with, their audiences. In other words, young men predominantly identify with these individualistic pleasure-seeking qualities of cock rock through active and public engagement at cultural events. Conversely, the way young women are thought and taught to identify with ‘teeny bop’ is through passive consumption: through privately identifying with narratives of romantic longing (narratives which generally reinforce the idea that happiness is dependent on male company), listening to this music either alone or in the company of other young women. These symbolic archetypes of the aggressive male musician and passive female consumer position men and women in unequal positions of power within subcultures: men as the creative cultural innovators of society, and women as passive, marginal, and forever their fan club. This is not to say, as McRobbie points out, that “women are denied style, [but] rather the style of a subculture is primarily that of men” (McRobbie 1980, 116).

Taylor and Laing take issue with McRobbie and Frith’s line of argument, suggesting that it is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a critical reading of the dominant discourses of sexuality found in rock music because the affective interactions individuals have with music are too diverse to make such generalizations. Taylor and Laing argue that the reactions music can potentially arouse in individuals are too varied to claim that they are reflective of any dominant ideology. They state that “the listening

subject has his or her own *idiolect* based on a historical (class and gender position, conscious ideology) as well as a psychic structure," and that "when the authors seem to be offering the *real* meaning of these two records, it is their own reading as listeners among other listeners which is being presented" (Taylor and Laing 1980, 47). This resistance to a generalized semiotic reading of music as a social and cultural text fails to critically engage with the discursive processes that construct gendered archetypes and stereotypes in popular culture. In addition, Taylor and Laing's position denies the existence of identity constructions through gender, class or race that may be commonly instigated through the music listening process. Rejecting the idea of a dominant sexual code as being present in popular music culture makes it difficult to pursue the interaction of identity politics, issues of gender, and music within the lived relations of a subculture.

Feminist critiques of early British cultural studies literature largely revolve around questioning the general ubiquity of these heroic male cultural archetypes (McRobbie and Garber 1976, McRobbie 1981). In statements made by members of these early subcultures (uniformly men), and in second-hand, ethnographic accounts provided by the early cultural theorists (also predominantly men), most references to women and their position within these postwar subcultures were pejorative in nature and rendered the women peripheral in status compared to the heroic male figures. Both the media and scholarly publications were far more interested in studying the sensational events of subcultures – i.e. violent conflict within and between the groups. Women were excluded (McRobbie and Garber 1976). The lack of discussion of women's experiences in these popular postwar subcultures – either their peripheral role relative to their male counterparts, or the alternative cultures young girls and women developed in the privacy

of their bedrooms - led McRobbie and Pini to write about and celebrate the positive and constructive experiences a culture like rave brought to many young women.

McRobbie and Pini celebrate rave culture as the harbinger of greater social and cultural opportunities for women to give expression to their cultural experiences in a more public forum. These authors gathered their information through an ethnographic and participatory approach, observing the social relations prevalent in rave culture, and obtaining first-hand testimonies from women who rave and feel a personal connection to the scene. In essence, the work of these authors provides a textual vehicle that gives voice to these women's experiences and legitimizes the women's stories of exploring rave's technologies of pleasure - drugs, dancing, and music – as part of cultural history. These women thus had a public forum in which to indulge their pleasures and their desire for escape, in contrast to a time when these activities were reserved as a privilege predominantly for young men. As a result, these writers shed light on a new female archetypal role that was emerging in rave culture.

However, in order to better understand and appreciate the way in which these scholars describe the possibilities of experimenting with 'new modes of femininity,' the conditions in which rave emerged as a cultural and social movement will now be explored. What values did rave culture celebrate that allowed women an autonomous and creative space within this subculture?

Staring at the Strobe Light instead of the Bedroom Ceiling: New Identities Discovered at the Rave

Since its inception, electronic dance music culture has been concerned with much more than simply making fun and danceable music with machines. Characteristic of many postwar subcultures that define themselves against the dominant ideology of capitalist society, members of rave culture largely engage in personal and collective narratives and political fictions, its members suggesting that something revolutionary is at stake in taking mind-altering drugs and dancing together until points of exhaustion. As Pini agrees, “The material and discursive assemblage which makes up rave culture can be seen to include a particular, historically and culturally specific version of subjectivity-in-context... [The female raver]...is considered to be involved in a wider staking-out of new possibilities for being-in-culture” (Pini 2001, 157). These expectations of having a space to conceptualize and idealize these fictions of themselves are brought to the dance floor by rave goers, thus both recreating and reflecting the idealism of the culture itself.

Common sentiments and positions expressed by ravers surround a general politics of diversity and acceptance. In his article referring to rave as ‘a neo-tribe,’ Graham St. John comments on the politics of rave culture. He suggests that “rapid developments in electronic media have shaped an aesthetically inventive youth culture, characteristically tolerant, non-sexist, ecological, global and detached from partisan politics” (St. John 2003, 71). Daniel Martin agrees in his article regarding the politics of rave. He states “Raves attract a wide variety of people, transcending class, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation differences” (Martin 1999, 78). Because of this, he continues, “rave culture tends toward an inclusive egalitarianism” (Martin 1999, 85). Dancing, drugs and openness to sexual diversity were the fundamental catalysts for these cultural changes.

Since these catalysts are not isolated occurrences but interact with one another to give rise to a total immersive cultural experience, I will speak of their effects interchangeably.

Maria Pini asserts that the role of women in the rave scene has marked a definitive shift from previous readings of women in domestic spheres in general and in subculture in particular. She states that “the growing presence of such women within the world of house-parties, techno-music clubs and raves, is testament to the changing social structure within which we are living – a situation within which femininity’s traditional life-course and its rightful place are shifting” (Pini 2001, 3). Pini suggests that the practice of rave for women provides an autonomous zone between traditional fictions of femininity: of enclosure within the parental home to enclosure in the marital home. Within these practices, the possibilities for the meaning of femininity are reconfigured and women’s identity is not subsumed by the dominant social ideals of the maternal caregiver. Pini also notes that this new openness for a public cultural experience has offered women a sense of ‘belongingness’ in and to a scene, a sense of community gained through their own efforts and commitments unachievable elsewhere. Angela McRobbie, in a 1994 publication entitled “Shut up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity,” explores the shifting definitions of feminism and femininity. She asserts that rave culture provides its female participants with “new emergent modes of femininity,” where new identities are developed and “new and unanticipated social meanings are actively produced” (McRobbie 1994, 156). The possibilities for women to engage in playful identity deconstruction and reformulation within the spaces of rave

have generally been heralded by McRobbie and others as a progressive movement for feminists.

The Rise of the Dancing Queens

The primacy of dance as an individualized activity separates rave from earlier practices of social dancing in subcultures, in that no partner is needed in order to participate. This circumstance of solitary dancing soon became somewhat of a required social code ravers implicitly adhered to. This code created a relatively safe environment in which women could go out dancing alone or with a group of other women, and thus encouraged a more autonomous and public connection to a shared cultural practice unknown in previous subcultures. Coupled with the primacy of solitary dance, the traditional dichotomous demarcations between the active producer/performer and passive consumers/audience are challenged in rave culture. Both DJ and dancer are fundamentally necessary for the culture to materialize, and the dance floor is valued as a production itself. Both roles essentially built off the other as part of a feedback loop: the dancers are enslaved to the beat as much as the DJ must work to make the dancers move. But above all, the rave encourages attention predominantly on the individual, her affective states, and the immediate radius of other people around her. These women were able to regard their cultural participation as individually essential for the occurrence of the scene as a whole: as a collective exploration of creativity through movement.

Dance as a social activity thus played a critical role in forging a sense of community or belongingness among participants of rave culture. Pini emphasizes the importance dance plays in forging communities. She states that, “Regular participation

within social dance groups can come to play a fundamental role in the construction of new communities... With the erosion of traditional communities, the disintegration of both religious institutions and the nuclear family ... *new* communities [and] *new* sense of affective identity...emerge" (Pini 2001, 104). The essential and highly valorized status given to dance in rave leads to a significant change in the way women identify with their roles in maintaining a cultural community. As McRobbie states, social dancing has most often historically been linked with "the inherently unserious attitudes of young women" (McRobbie 1984, 132).

The experience of social dancing altered for women when notions of masculinity shifted and liberalized in the disco era. Martin has argued that rave culture has "drawn heavily from gay culture," and is thus characterized by a certain sense of "openness and self expression not seen in traditional clubs" (Martin 1999, 85). For this reason, he continues, "victims of violence of some previous cultures (women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities) participate in rave culture without the same threat of violence found in traditional pubs and clubs" (Martin 1999, 85). Therefore, once it was no longer an oddity to see a man dancing alone on the dance floor without the objective of female sexual predation, women were granted a new autonomy in regards to dancing in these public spaces. As McRobbie states in reference to the rise of disco, men eventually adopted the "narcissistic, auto-erotic dimensions" historically cited more prevalently in experiences of women, and thus the sexual politics of the dance floor became increasingly premised "on patterns of friendship than on its possibilities for sex or romance" (McRobbie 1984, 144). Women were thus privy to this new auto-eroticism in the rave scene.

These shifts in the definitions of masculinity allowed for hyper-sexualized expressions of femininity in the cultural spaces of rave, as women generally felt increasingly safe from male sexual predation. These women subverted conventional sexualized stereotypes of the sultry female dancer often found in popular consumer culture. The playful display of women dancing in advertisements, on television and in music videos presents highly sexualized female archetypes of dancers: an image of women designed to appeal to male fantasies. Since the overall trend in rave culture is solitary dancing, I argue that, through dancing at raves, women re-appropriate these over-sexualized male-made female images that are prevalent in our society, and transform them into auto-erotic self-pleasuring practices. These women are not dancing to capture the attention of male onlookers, or to sell the latest beauty product, but to create and fulfill their own desires of identity exploration through their individualized experience on the dance floor.

Despite these advancements for women with respect to an increase in autonomy and sexual freedom within rave, Pini's study reveals that these cultural shifts have not fully left women in a position of confident autonomy in their enjoyment of cultural rituals. Although rave has provided a forum for women to experience themselves outside the confines of traditional roles of domesticity, a significant number of accounts given by the women interviewed for her study still exude concerns for the effect their individual involvement in rave culture has on their monogamous heterosexual relationships. As "men have long been afforded the opportunities for an investment in both outdoor 'adventures' and domestic intimacy" (Pini 2001, 129), these women express the difficulty of maintaining a heterosexual relationship as well as personal interests - such as

clubbing – simultaneously. As Pini astutely states, “as women they cannot, it seems, be both clubber and ‘steady’ partner – without this causing tension and difficulty. Being a clubber is in conflict, it seems, with accepted definitions of adult femininity” (Pini 2001, 131).

Along similar lines, Pini suggests that there is a general reluctance among the women ravers she interviewed to articulate the personal importance they place on the practice of raving outside their own immediate social circles. This reluctance, Pini believes, points to a sense of “embarrassment [that] has a lot to do with their perception of the everyday world as one in which open displays of friendliness and excitement [values cherished in the culture of rave] are either lacking or considered somehow ‘uncool’” (Pini 2001, 139). She continues: “much can be said about these women’s references to a subcultural capital hierarchy in relation to which a ‘positive’ and seemingly ‘overexcited’ take on rave culture would appear ‘naff’ or ‘uncool’” (Pini 2001, 140). Again, the reluctance to connect rave to their wider lives suggest that some of these women have a lack of confidence regarding their integrity as members of a culture. Insecure that their personal values towards rave are inflated, and their expression is childish and superfluous – qualities often related to women’s experience of cultural populism – I suggest that these women are carrying the historical weight of gendered stereotypes. Their reluctance to give expression to their subcultural lives harkens back to the peripheral and passive roles women played in earlier subcultures.

Developing the Capacity for Pleasure: the Politics of Post-Identity*

Graham St. John, in his article “Post-Rave Technotribalism and the Carnival of Protest,” explains rave as a nomadic culture. He states that “post-rave identities are complicated and fluid, not unitary or fixed – a circumstance wherein traditional structural determinants (especially class, gender, religion) are transcended” in a society where “sensory, consumer and spatial practices” take precedence (St. John 2003, 66-67). Tim Jordon, in his article situating the politics of rave with the postmodern framework of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972, 1975, 1982, 1994), is also interested in the transcendence of identity markers, suggesting that the overall objective of ravers is to reach a state of post-identity. He states that the participants in such events “gradually lose subjective belief in their self and merge into a collective body” (Jordan 1996, 125) with an “ongoing inducement into a desubjectified state of something like rapture” (Jordan 1996, 129). How does this postmodern framework of transcending identity fit in with the claims of women exploring and embodying new modes of femininity? Does not the transcendence of identity imply that the experience of gender is no longer important and necessary? Given these statements, women’s experience of rave it thus a contradictory one, claiming both a de-subjectified identity as a nomad, as well as ‘new modes of femininity.’

On a similar note, a substantial amount of electronic music lacks lyrical or narrative content, and can be claimed to be gender-neutral, as it does not construct male or female archetypes as much popular music does. At times, however, these ideal notions of gender-neutrality – or what I have called above, post-identity – are over-extended. The

* Statement ‘to develop the capacity for pleasure’ taken from Simon Reynolds (1998)

lack of substantial lyrical narratives within the music itself does not imply that there is an absence of gender and sexuality altogether in the rave scene, as some care to imagine (Jordon 1996, St. John 2003). Many unspoken codes of conduct exist at electronic music events, and are expected to be adhered to from those who regularly attend; codes which serve to both produce and reproduce certain active modes of sexuality. A few examples of such active modes of sexuality widely prevalent, and generally accepted, in rave culture are homosexuality, transgender and a large presence of female strippers.

Conventional identity affiliations of gender, race, sexuality and class unquestionably re-emerge in such situations, as particular sexual lifestyles that are often times subject to discriminatory judgement and violence outside of the rave context are accepted and even welcomed at rave events. These instances do not represent a culture of identity transcendence, but rather a celebration and embodiment of these individual identity differences. As Pini affirms, “Selves are *done* as much as they are *undone* in rave” (Pini 2001, 176). Therefore, although dominant ideology of rave culture often leaves the participant unsexed and gender-neutral, the testaments of experience gathered in Pini’s work do not necessarily lead to attestations of disembodiment. Rather, as revealed above, the sensual experiences of rave lead to a situation of hyper-embodiment, to an increased self awareness or self-conscious identity. In particular, she states, “the sensations of which they [the participants] repeatedly speak are intensely *physical* and they are about an acute awareness of their bodies – rather than about any kind of disappearance from embodied identity” (Pini 2001, 47).

Yet the achievement of post-identity is often viewed as a fundamental component or aim of raving, where participants forfeit or sacrifice their individual identity and self

interest to the collective aesthetic transcendent experience. Although the history of transcendence in musical cultures is too lengthy to be rehearsed here, it must be noted that rave culture is not the first to embrace these values of transcending the self by way of a collective trance dancing experience. However, rave culture is often set apart from earlier cultures that practiced transcendence through dancing, as some reduce rave's communal sentiments and utopian ideals to being merely a shallow and synthetic product of the prevalent synthetic drug used at raves, MDMA (Thornton claims that "ecstasy turns banal thoughts into epiphanies" (1996, 91)). McRobbie adopts a less extreme version of this position, and hints at the connection of identity transcendence to the relations of production. She contends that, while the perspective of post-identity sustains "narratives of euphoria, rush and exhilaration" achieved through the use of drugs, dancing and other bodily pleasures, "gender dissolves on the dance floor [and] the men behind the turntables are left unchallenged in their control over the whole field of music production" (McRobbie 1999, 146). Since the major and accredited innovators of the scene, such as producers, DJs and promoters, are not subject to the same loss of identity as the participants, it can be argued that there is a selective application of postmodern concepts of post-identity. Whose interests are maintained in this selective application of post-identity?

In the next section, I will begin to develop a spectrum of subcultural capital with respect to the roles of production and consumption that are adopted within rave and post-rave cultures. I will also consider how gender figures into this spectrum of subcultural capital.

Conclusion: Gender as a Spectre in the Politics of Cultural Production

Thornton's account of the social organization of club cultures points to the reality that subcultures move according to similar logics as capitalism in that members seek to accumulate what she calls 'cultural capital' (Thornton 1996). According to this schema, roles of production (DJ, producer, event organizer/promoter) carry more cultural capital (highly valorized) than roles of consumption (attendees of events, fans of music). However, Pini disputes Thornton's account of club culture, in that she suggests that by focusing mostly on the production of music and the organization of events, Thornton confines her argument to the *masculinized* areas of club cultures. Pini argues that this disproportional focus on these *masculinized* areas as a consequence fails to consider the numerous female participants in the consumption side of club cultures which Pini defines as "other levels of event participation and other experiential sites" (Pini 2001, 7). Pini's argument tends to essentialize certain areas of production and consumption to specific gender categories, and thus tends to make assumptions as to what activities men and women are most suited for. In essence, Pini critiques Thornton's analysis in that it does not permit for an adequate exploration into the important issues that are specific to women in electronic music, and rather falls back into reproducing what is most often glorified in textual accounts of subculture - the realm of production and public representation traditionally considered as masculine, and consumption generally a feminine pursuit.

However, without discounting Pini's enthusiasm for the transformative potential the active participation of dance and playful identity formation bestows to women, I view Thornton's position as being informative of the material relations of the scene: a realist

observation with regard to a culture criticized largely for its tendencies towards inflated ideals. Pini's position does little to counter the reality of a male-dominated culture of technological fetishism. However, in Chapter 3 I will draw these two elements together, celebrating the achievements realized through the valorization of dance floor culture, yet sustaining the critique regarding the relative lack of women involved in the areas of electronic music production.

McRobbie adopts a similar position to Sarah Thornton regarding the entrepreneurial character of club cultures. McRobbie suggests that these social networks which comprise and sustain subcultures "also provide the opportunity for learning and sharing skills, for practising them, for making a small amount of money; more importantly they provide pathways for future 'life-skills' in the form of work or self-employment" (McRobbie 1994, 161). Yet, what also must be considered is how these employment and skill acquiring opportunities are allocated according to gender divisions of opportunity and access. McRobbie comments on the time when the rave scene mushroomed as a result of its growing popularity among youth in the UK, and an increasing amount of organizational levels were added to the production of such events. A witness to these cultural changes, she states, "Girls appear to be less involved in the cultural production of rave, from the flyers, to the events, to the DJing, than their male counterparts" (McRobbie 1994, 168), and continues that,

Most rave organizers as a result tend to be older, male and with some experience in club promotion, often starting as DJs in smaller clubs and in illegal radio-stations. Girlfriends help on the till, work behind the bar, or else do "PR" by going round pubs and distributing flyers. The rave culture industry thereby reproduces the same sexual division of labour which exists not just in the pop music industry but in most other types of work and employment. (McRobbie 1994, 170)

Coupled with this asymmetrical access to opportunity based on gender, McRobbie discusses in an earlier work the underpinning ideology behind what was commonly believed to be the increasing democratization of music production with the greater accessibility of people to production technologies. She speaks of a utopian egalitarianism that pervades popular fictions of becoming an artist, in that one does not need to be especially “rich, privileged or special, to fulfill these fantasies of the self.” This ideology, she continues, provides the necessary framework for the proper functioning of a bourgeois capitalist society, where all that is said to be needed is “hard work, talent, and determination” (McRobbie 1984, 135.). She continues that, “For both the black and much of the white working-class populations (male and female), sport, art, leisure and entertainment have provided this utopian space, carved out between, against, and amidst stronger forces of domination and control. Such gestures do not then exist *outside* dominant cultural forms” (McRobbie 1984, 136). These comments speak to specific relations of power and knowledge, and hint at the possibilities of certain structural limitations that certain segments of the population may face when attempting to exercise their newfound democratic right in the realm of creativity and production. These concerns will be explored in the following chapter, which considers the relationship of post-identity within the cultural spaces of production and consumption within the rave and post-rave settings.

In briefly surveying the way in which women have been depicted in cultural studies literature (and to a large degree in the subculture itself), we have been able to highlight the new spaces and forums rave culture has opened up for women in regards to public cultural expression. Through the social activities of dance, fashion, drug

consumption and attending clubs, women have assuredly experienced a far greater autonomy in the cultural practices and rituals used in the ongoing project of self construction and identity formulation. The significance of these achievements, again, I wish in no way to undermine. Yet, this chapter sought to map out the relationships of gender, the material relations of rave, and discourses of post-identity. These relationships are important, as they reveal the continually evolving relationship women have with technology and, more broadly, with the world of cultural production.

Chapter 2

Reconstructing the Self: Consumption and Production in the Cultural Economy of Electronic Dance Music

Distinctions are never just assertions of equal difference, they usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of others
Thornton 1996

Introduction

As explored in the previous chapter, electronic music culture is often historicized as one that welcomes diversity and difference, ideals enacted through a collective celebration of individuals coming together to dance for extended periods of time. I wish to take a deeper look into the discursive practices supporting these idealistic notions within the rave scene. Specifically, I will explore how these transcendent states, claimed within the spaces of rave, are largely situated in an ideological rhetoric of post-identity: for the participants, transcendence of identity is both promised and expected through participation on the dance floor; and for the producers, a veneer of post-identity is projected in the inflated democratic ideals promising universal access to the means of production. Post-identity, as identified in the previous chapter, signifies a type of cultural ideology that claims that traditional identity markers, such as gender, class, race, and sexuality, no longer determine or have influence on the limitations and capacities of any given individual. In this chapter, I argue that although the ideology of post-identity – applied in different ways to consumers and producers of electronic music – promises a utopian social organization where individuals have equal social standing and fluid mobility to undertake any creative role of their choice, this particular ideology serves to

erect structural limitations regarding the entry of women into more advanced and valorized areas of electronic music production.

As most areas of electronic music production continue to be populated predominantly by men, the perpetuation of these myths of post-identity within electronic music cultures has been counter-productive concerning the greater inclusion of women in the productive realm of this culture. Given the common declaration of the 'death of rave culture,' the valorization of individuals contributing to the creative production of the electronic music event through dance has declined relative to the increased attention given to the artists themselves, and their work with new technologies. Similarly, the rhetoric of post-identity embedded within discourses of DIY (do-it-yourself) culture – discourses that have historically informed much 'underground' music production – supports a general belief that anyone can access the means of production necessary to succeed in these cultures of electronic music. While not accusing male electronic music producers of explicitly practising exclusionary behaviours towards women, I believe the ideological residue of identity transcendence in rave culture plays a part in the exclusion of women in the cultural economy of post-rave. In addition, attachments to ideals of post-identity do not leave us in a productive position to examine these issues of gender and technology, concerns that are prevalent in, and extend beyond, the scope of the cultural economy of electronic music.

I will begin by briefly reviewing early cultural studies literature, yet this time from a slightly different perspective. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these cultural studies early scholars took part in profiling the personalities and events of post-war subcultures, and thus played an essential role in the development and prevalence of

heroic male archetypes (Cohen 1972, Hall 1976, Hebdige 1979 and Willis 1978). The ubiquity of these male archetypes delineated significant gender tendencies in popular culture, whereby these cultural heroes were considered to be the active producers of their respective subculture. Conversely, women were often relegated to the passive spaces of observation or consumption. Yet, in concert with the growth of the consumer society, new theoretical trajectories analyzing the benefits and ills of these social changes emerged, both glorifying and critiquing the expansive role consumption played in regards to the processes of an individual's identity constitution. In what follows, I will trace the theoretical developments in cultural studies that provided for the greater valorization of the consumption experience in constituting an individual's identity, and how this specifically affected women's role in culture.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the ways in which the ideology of rave culture intended to alter these traditional roles of passive consumer and active producer, specifically in the way the culture valorized the participation of individuals through dance, taking the dance floor to be a cultural production in itself. Dance as a form of active participation (consumption) in rave culture, has however, always been ripe with contradiction, as exemplified in the tensions drawn out in the previous chapter: the exploration of new embodied identities in a culture that seeks to transcend such traditional identity markers as gender, race, class and sexuality. Yet, as the idealism of rave diminished, women's newly claimed roles in cultures of electronic music seemed to have returned to their previous role of passive consumer as in the subcultures that preceded it.

In the post-rave period, the electronic music scene has fractured into innumerable genres spurring a renewed interest in specific artists and their respective areas and techniques of production. This particular increase in attention given to the role of the artist as the primary creative producer arose in conjunction with a technological boom that provided new techniques with which to make electronic music. The glorification of, and the increasing competition between, the creative autonomy of artists in a culture that once defined itself in terms of principles of non-hierarchical social organization has led me to a more nuanced interpretation of electronic music production, and its relation to cultures of masculinity. In an attempt to tie together the prevalent discourses of post-identity, the valorization of specific roles in the cultural economy of electronic music, and issues of gender and technology, I suggest that these male artists have been celebrated as cultural heroes because of their embeddedness in a DIY (do-it-yourself) production ethic, and their intimacy with cutting edge technologies. The DIY ethic refers to the ability to produce music using one's own means, skills and resources, and thus not being reliant on external systems of power and organization to help fund, produce, and consequently influence the work in question. Yet the DIY sentiments that can be traced among cultures of electronic music production are also contradictory, as these artists rely intimately on capitalist technological growth and development. The democratic rhetoric of DIY crumbles when applied to such knowledge-intensive activities as programming, sequencing and the ability to learn computer languages, as these skills are allocated according to differing levels of technological accessibility and technical skill capacity.

In this chapter, I will make the connection between the lingering effects of post-identity for the participant and producer of contemporary electronic music culture and the

way in which these ideological discourses have affected women. In terms of the consumption of such music, women, as a passive audience, are left without any political platform on which to contest structural limitations based on 'traditional identity markers' such as gender within this culture of post-identity. In regards to the politics of production, women must negotiate their way through the DIY discourses that are steeped in utopian notions of democratic accessibility and technological progress. These discourses glaze over the materiality of real identity demarcations of gender, class, race, and sexuality, all of which may play a part in determining one's capacity for social mobility and opportunity. To reject as unreal – i.e. unimportant – the very qualities that have historically disadvantaged some individuals relative to others in regards to education and capital denies the history and possible perpetuation of such structural limitations based on gender, class, race, and sexuality.

A Brief History of the Cultural Subject

Steve Redhead suggests that much post-war cultural theory has been informed by the same discourses that construct rock ideology. Redhead defines rock ideology as a series of myths that support notions and expectations of authenticity and truthfulness in the production of music. He claims, "Rock and pop discourses have produced, over the last forty years, a range of individual positions (styles, poses, identities, narratives, desires) which youth culture can occupy" (Redhead 1990, 10). He suggests that "there has been a pronounced tendency in both 'academic' and 'popular' histories of youth culture to promote a concept of linear time; subcultural styles are seen as unfolding, generationally, from the Teds to the casuals or from punk to the present" (Redhead 1999, 23). Sarah Thornton agrees with Redhead's critique in her discussion of Dick Hebdige's

work. She asserts, “Hebdige’s multiple opposition of avant-garde versus bourgeois, subordinate-versus-dominant, subculture-versus-mainstream is an orderly ideal which crumbles when applied to historically specific groups of youth” (Thornton 1996, 93). Ultimately, Redhead argues that, in the post-punk world, this type of cultural theory is inadequate as current cultural signifiers do not correspond to earlier rock signifiers, and therefore cannot be read along similar lines of logic. Pini inserts concerns of gender into the critique of the traditional narration of subcultures. She states,

All too often the debate on contemporary youth cultures displays a continuing fixation with the 1960s and 1970s as an era of youth revolt. If hanging onto the concept of ‘resistance’ indicates a fixation with the 1960s and 1970s, then as it has been suggested throughout, it also indicates a continuing fixation with the actions and experiences of young men, nostalgic fabrications of a lost unity of people, ideas, and direction had through cultural rituals. (Pini 2001, 54)

Since the work of Paul Willis (1978), originator of the key cultural studies concept ‘homology,’ there has been the tendency in cultural theory to consider subcultural development in a structurally organized manner: as a serial elaboration of ‘resistance through rituals’ (Hall 1976). Following Redhead’s critique, this approach fails to address a complex of forces and events that inform and express subcultural style in unconventional ways, for example, cultural expression in the private sphere. These homological tendencies are connected to the dominance of masculine cultural archetypes in the history of cultural studies. Perhaps those cultural spaces hidden from the public eye provide a wealth of detail that cannot be communicated through the concept of structural homology, hidden culture spaces where participation may predominantly be that of women.

Redhead suggests narrating cultural theory from a post-subcultural perspective: a non-linear theoretical method that is able to capture the dynamism of subcultural image and change in these unconventional cultural areas (Weinzierl et al. 2003). Increased attention to these alternative cultural spaces has resulted in new theoretical trajectories, such as audience studies and analysis (Abercrombie 1998, Dickinson et al. 1998). Audience studies traces out the social and cultural importance of sites of consumption and forums of fandom – traditionally the locations where most women are found – that, historically, have been given a passing attention in cultural studies. Barbara Bradby, in her article regarding the sexual politics of sampling music, comments on the contributions of audience studies to cultural theory. She states, “the renewed interest in audience research in cultural studies has allowed a revalorisation of girls’ and women’s experience as fans of popular music and as creators of meaning in the music they listen to” (quoted, Pini 2001, 57). Feminists such as Bradby have adopted some of the tenets of these new cultural theories in their analysis of contemporary cultures, studies that promise an increase in attention to the neglected areas of culture where many women locate themselves.

Given these new directions in cultural studies, the terms of participation have shifted to include more unconventional roles. For example, conspicuous consumption and individual adornment have been upheld as important in constructing subcultural and individual identities. As Redhead astutely points out, “counter-cultures [are] pregnant with double-meaning... [they have] as much to do with shopping and consumption as with opposition” (Redhead 1990, 17). However, private consumption has always had close links with the domestic sphere traditionally occupied by women (Nava 1992,

McRobbie 1994 and 1999). Has the idea of consumption become gender neutral given the growth of significance to cultures of conspicuous consumption and such trends as male fashion?

The Feminization of Consumer Culture

The post-war years saw a rise in consumption and consumer culture responding to the upward economic trends of productivity and prosperity. Mica Nava explains these changes, in that “this was the moment of the expansion of domestic markets, of the suburban housewife, ‘consensus’ and McCarthyism.” She continues, “it was a period of political conservatism in which the ‘free choice’ of goods came to symbolize the ‘freedom’ of the free world” (Nava 1992, 162). There was a new focus on the activity of consumption and the pleasures of being a member of the market economy: communication and self-identification increasingly became defined in and through the circulation of symbols and images.

Faced with enticing products and new, alluring ways of life custom-made to meet endless individual needs, attention to the experience of the consumer armed with critical, discriminating taste was soon recognized as a fundamental component of the growth of both popular culture and, more broadly, the market. Some of these new theoretical trajectories glorified the processes of critical consumption and their formative relationships with identity constitution (Barthes 1983, Wilson 1985), while others condemned the ruthless and degrading marketing practices of profit-seeking institutions (Marcuse 1964). A critique of consumer society often takes the form of considering individuals as passive victims of market ideology and bearers of false consciousness. Often these critiques were directed at women, as traditionally they were the homemakers.

and also were stereotypically considered more connected to the world of fashion, and therefore to practices of consumption. As Nava suggests, “conventionally, consumerism has been seen to confirm women in their subordination” (Nava 1992, 167)

McRobbie also draws attention to the way consumption often carries passive or negative connotations. She highlights the historical relationship between femininity and consumption, and insists that women should no longer be conceived as passive actors in the world of shopping and entertainment. Rather, it should be remembered that these women have the capacity to be critical and enjoy the pleasures of consumption in the engagement of their everyday lives (McRobbie 1999). Nava further points out that these new theories of subjectivity in consumer society “take much more seriously notions of personal agency, discrimination and resistance” (Nava 1992, 165). Consumption, for McRobbie and Nava, becomes a creative activity as it is implicated in the critical processes of identity construction. For present purposes, I will refer to this position as ‘active consumption.’

Active consumption is somewhat of a postmodern concept that regards as positive and creative those acts and processes by which individuals negotiate – through a complex of discriminations and acceptances, and through a myriad of media images consumed and exchanged – their identity and social position in the world. These activities can be considered constructive and creative as these selective decisions materialize into processes of identity constitution. With respect to subcultures, theories of active consumption challenge the dominant narratives of masculine heroism embedded in modernist discourses of post-war cultural theory. The various accounts of female participants in rave culture explored in the last chapter represent such a postmodern

strategy as analyzed within cultural studies. The testaments of these women gives rise to an emergent system of validity assigned to the alternative cultural practices in question, namely, identity constitution through involvement in the cultural production of the dance floor. The concept of active consumption can be applied to the women in Pini's ethnographic research (outlined in the previous chapter) through the way in which 'new modes of femininity' are explored in the spaces of rave: female ravers discriminate between which types of parties to go to, thus exercising their tastes in music, dance, drugs, crowds and fashion, all of which play a fundamental role in what women will experience in terms of playful identity exploration that night at the rave.

However, the identities achieved through processes of active consumption proposed by McRobbie and Nava, encounter problems when applied to the specifics of the rave scene. The first problem involves the contradiction between the claims to new modes of femininity expressed by the women in Pini's study, and the discourses of post-identity on which the rave scene collectively operates. These tensions were highlighted in the previous chapter through the difficulties these women experienced in connecting the meaning they found in the practices of rave to their wider lives. The second problem in consumption-based identity formation in rave culture is revealed through a critique regarding the integrity and truthfulness of the identity constituting experience itself. A critical Marxist analysis of the social practice of rave would most likely concern its political disengagement with everyday life – as a culture of disappearance (Melechi 1999) – as well as the culture's financially prohibitive nature. This perspective would also view identity transformations that occur in the spaces of rave not revolutionary in the least, as the entire culture is premised on a type of apolitical hedonism. Although Pini

does not make this argument, the disengagement of rave's identity politics from any larger political concerns can be evidenced in the difficulties these women have in carrying over their experiences of identity transformation into their everyday lives. Also, the perpetuation of exclusionary practices within rave and club culture, based on hierarchical scales of cultural capital, renders the rave scene a meta-narrative of capitalism itself (Thornton 1996).

The third problem in valorizing identity constitution through consumption practices lies within the internal politics of rave itself. As the utopian idealism of rave diminished, and the scene fractured into a multitude of genres, there was an increased focus on areas of production and the artists themselves. The cultural roles of consumer and producer shifted from idealistic egalitarianism to an increased valorization of the individual role of the artist as a creative genius. The increased attention to such areas of production inevitably led to a de-valorization of the spaces of consumption. The details involved in the cultural and aesthetic shift from rave to post-rave will be discussed in Chapter 3. Having discussed the way in which gendered identity is implicated in cultures of consumption in electronic music, I will next explore the politics of the DIY attitude in contemporary electronic music culture as well as the way in which gender figures into the politics of production.

The Ideology of DIY

Steve Redhead seeks to explain how subcultures beyond 1970s punk are often accused of having no 'authentic' qualities or genuine spirit of resistance. These subcultures do not qualify as oppositional as earlier ones did, as the effects of "a once bohemian impulse [has been] incorporated [into the late capitalist system] and remain[s]

an implausible future project" (Redhead 1999, 79). Bearers of such myths of authenticity and resistance accuse contemporary subcultures of having lost the folk sensibility that provided the backbone of their own cultural movements. Critical of this rampant nostalgia for a wholesome and resistant culture, Redhead notes that popular culture in the 1980s appeals largely to such nostalgic ideals best alive among older generations, and appear to largely coincide with the commercial tactics of the cultural industries (Redhead 1999, 79). While the music industry compiled and commodified the music of older generations into box sets and 'best-of's', circles of artists and music producers practiced their own ideals of resistance and authenticity.

With respect to music production, organization and distribution, the bohemia of the 1980s began to herald their own version of DIY ethics (the independent music or 'indie' movement). However, this new found 'independence' of labels, as Redhead argues, no longer signifies 'deviance' in the way rock ideology once claimed. Various cultural institutions, such as record labels, music retail stores and recording studios, (as well as artists themselves) that wished to survive the laissez-faire economy of the 1980s, could no longer ideologically oppose the logic of late capitalism without contradiction, as the state of the economy forced those intent on participating in the cultural economy to adopt 'Thatcherite' entrepreneurial attitudes and practices (Redhead 1999, 79).

Although often portrayed as a working class movement, DIY can be viewed as a system of entrepreneurial capitalism supported by a spurious ideological framework of democratic participation where the producers or other cultural workers are seen to be devoid of class and gender distinctions. Supported by a rhetoric of creativity and glazed over with presuppositions of democratic access and ability, the DIY ethic often skirts

around issues of access to the means of production, as well as around issues of time and the opportunities required to develop the technical skills and practice necessary to gain entry into lucrative areas of the cultural economy.

The rise of rave culture coincided with a time of fast technological development, and was bolstered by utopian notions of social progress and the transcendence of identity ‘made possible’ by such technological development. Traditional identity distinctions carry less weight in the virtual world of global information and communication networks. In terms of the globalization of electronic music culture – an inevitable trend given its necessary links to the world of technology and the general absence of lyrics that ground music in particular locations – a sense of placelessness or post-nationality is often expressed through electronic music and its artists. As electronic music stretches to the far reaches of the globe, more artists and members of the cultural industry have the opportunity to migrate among different countries and urban centres. The movement of artists along certain global pathways determine developments in specific urban locations in the cultural economy of electronic music. The artists’ presence contributes to the development of local taste cultures, the growth of which encourages financial backing for music festivals, record labels, music journalists, and other cultural infrastructure. These ideals of placelessness appear to underpin the attitudes of many migrating electronic musicians (understandable given the highly lucrative nature of DJing), and are compatible with the tenants of DIY culture: if one simply *wants* to be this type of musician with this type of lifestyle, it is equally attainable by all: get the gear, record some music, make some contacts, and pack your bags. This attitude was exemplified among the panellists discussing ‘Cultural Hybrids’ at Mutek 2005. Mutek is a five-day

electronic music festival held annually in Montreal. The following observations are informed by my cultural participation in Mutek 2005, information that I gathered with the intent of contributing to my research topic. The ‘Cultural Hybrids’ panel, which involved 4 out of 5 ‘ex-pat’ artists, provided insightful comments on the migratory experience of an artist. Given the title of the panel, many of these comments surrounded the cultural politics of ‘appropriating’ the regional sounds of the artist’s new location into their work (Mutek 2005).

The discussions at Mutek evidenced ideals of post-identity, notions that emanate from ideological positions that mask the socio-economic privileges that allow individuals to adopt such a placeless position in the first place. The implicit yet prevalent sentiment among this entirely male panel was that attaining a politics of placelessness is a matter of choice and not privilege. This sentiment is founded on vague ideals of post-imperialism and supported by a ‘neo-tribal’ attitude to being a global citizen. The claims to being an ‘orbiting’ musician detached from locality or place – again, as a matter of choice and not of privilege – represents an uncritical claim that does not adequately address the material and social relations of cultural production, relations that surround and support this type of *nouveau-romantic* nomadic lifestyle for the select few.

The Eurocentric view of the globalization of electronic dance music was clearly contrasted with the infrastructural concerns of Latin American panellists. Appearing far less involved in theoretical problems of identity or place, the Latin American panellists expressed the need to bring more cultural capital back to their local communities. Their economies are historically less stable, resulting in volatile local and regional cultural industries and infrastructural development. While artists and cultural producers from the

West prodded at the philosophy and ethics of cultural hybridity and sonic appropriation, the artists of Latin America were calling for more economic resources so that their own populations could hear their music, artists could afford to record and reproduce their work, and local fans could have more opportunity to purchase domestic music. The divergence of material and philosophical issues discussed at this music conference reflected the disparities and variances in cultural capital according to geographical region. This divergence demonstrates the incommensurability on a global scale of the idealistic DIY discourses of production with the actual material relations of production of electronic dance music.

Conclusion

In an attempt to tie together discourses of the production and consumption of electronic dance music, I return now to the rave or, more contemporaneously, the club. Sarah Thornton, influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), emphasizes that club cultures (like almost all subcultures) operate largely upon capitalistic principles of conspicuous consumption that serve to form discriminating hierarchical taste cultures within the club culture itself (Thornton 1996). These competitive, hierarchical tendencies, she maintains, invalidates the non-hierarchical idealism members of rave and club cultures claim, as entry to and movement in such spaces is restricted by practices of exclusion, such as cover charge, discriminatory door policies, and VIP areas. She claims, in contradistinction to a common foundational myth of rave culture:

Despite their discourses of liberty, fraternity and harmony, raves have distinct demographics – chiefly white, working-class, heterosexual and dominated by the lads. Rave may have involved large numbers of people and they may have trespassed on new territories, finding new spaces for youthful leisure, but continues that, they did little to rearrange its social affairs.
 (Thornton 1996, 25)

Thornton points out the contradictory ideological distinctions made by members of rave or club culture, in that they are both “exclusive and egalitarian, classless but superior to mass-market institutions that preceded them” (Thornton 1996, 56). Despite the ideological buttressing of discourses of utopian egalitarianism, only those ‘in the know’ are able to find the party. Thornton adds that “class is wilfully obfuscated by subcultural distinctions [because]… the assertion of subcultural distinction relies, in part, on a fantasy of classlessness” (Thornton 1996, 12). Perhaps the blurring of gender distinctions within electronic dance music culture operates upon a logic similar to that which gives rise to popular conceptions of subcultures as being devoid of internal class distinctions.

Thornton points to the reality of gender divisions. She remarks that, at most levels of rave culture, women are often in a subordinate position, predominantly absent from the occupation positions of DJs, producers, promoters and organizers. It is often required that “women prove themselves twice over if they want to do more than sing, check coats or tend the bar” (Thornton 1996, 56). However, it is generally acknowledged within electronic dance music culture that the number of women in electronic music relative to men has increased. Yet, by what criteria do women find themselves included in the various fields of the electronic music industry? It is not difficult to find examples of an archetypal role of the female DJ as a “male-made female image:” topless DJs, models, and attractive women with sexual flare and appeal get gigs (for more on the industry of

topless DJs, please see: <http://www.portiasurreal.com/index.htm>, <http://www.djdiva.nl/>).

At times, women must acquiesce in sexually demeaning marketing slogans for parties, for example, ‘Women on Top’ and ‘Girls on Girls’ (found on the local Ottawa online forum for electronic music culture: www.xvi.com). Perhaps some women, such as Misstress Barbara, even choose to market themselves in sexually connotative ways. Can it be argued that women are welcome to be consumers of electronic music, but not to the world of music production unless they fit the stereotypical prototype of the sexualized and attractive female DJ?

In addition to male-dominated areas of music production, Pini reiterates that women tend not to be involved in certain profit-making activities of club culture, for example, event organization, technological innovation and drug sale. These activities also tend to be dominated by men (Pini 2001, 30). In the next chapter, I will explore issues of gender with respect to technologies of production in post-rave culture. I consider the history of gendered stereotypes with respect to technology and consider their persistence in post-rave culture. Specifically, I wish to consider the historical lineage of such masculine archetypes as the tech-geek and the hacker, and the how these images continue to live on in certain genres and niches of electronic music. Furthermore, I will explore how these stereotypes affect and influence women’s relationship to technology, where by convention women have been thought, and at times taught, to take a passive role towards technology. In the cultural and aesthetic shift from rave to post-rave, I will explore how certain activities involving the use of certain technologies come to signify, represent, and maintain ‘meaningful’ participation, and how gender is implicated in this shift to post-rave culture.

Chapter 3

Technology and Identity: An Exploration of Historical Stereotypes

Behind the decks, in the studios, across the pirate airwaves and in the newspapers and magazines, the voices, bodies and images are male
Angela McRobbie, In the Culture Society Art, Fashion and Popular Music

Introduction

In this chapter, I ask if women face structural limitations with respect to technologies of production in certain cultures of electronic dance music. This query itself is situated in, and speaks to, the broader context of issues concerning gender and technology. I argue that women do face such structural limitations, limitations that can be revealed through the consideration of enduring historical stereotypes of women and men within cultures of technology. Such stereotypes figure in the hierarchical allocations of cultural capital within the contemporary spaces of the production and consumption of electronic music, in particular, within IDM (intellectual dance music) culture. Such structural limitations may include, but are not limited to, the unequal opportunities that girls experience in accessing the same technical competencies as boys, an inequality based on differing attitudes towards the sexes in the social institutions of school and family, as well as on the persistence of gendered stereotypes that portray women as irrational and therefore technologically incapable. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as rational and more capable of abstract thought, and thus more technologically inclined. Our popular understandings are inevitably influenced by such idealized and demeaning concepts of gender, the historical weight of which plays an active role in limiting the conditions of possibility that, I argue, continue to encourage a larger proportion of men

than women in fields of technical knowledge and expertise. This is a trend that is exemplified in certain areas of post-rave culture, specifically IDM.

This chapter will first explore the subject of gender with respect to the growth of information technologies, with the intent of highlighting and deconstructing some popular gendered stereotypes that have emerged and continue to persist within cultures that celebrate and often fetishize technological advancement. This deconstruction of stereotypes profiles the historical disability women were both thought and taught to have with respect to technology, and sheds light on an idealized masculine image intimately associated with technology, rationality, and progress (Turkle 1986).

The possibilities have since increased for conceptualizing alternative approaches to women's relationship with technology (For more on contemporary feminism and technology, see Haraway 1991, Pini 2001, and Wajcman 1991). This increase couples with and responds to the dramatic changes and complexities new technologies have brought to systems of production and consumption, to social relationships, and to the reproductive tasks and awareness of our daily lives. With respect to the IT field, although the number of women has increased, the tendency for women to fill lower-level positions requires an examination of how access to, and technical capacity in, the IT field are delineated along lines of gender (in addition to class and race).

The initial exploration of the gendered stereotypes that have emerged and persist in cultures of technology will be followed by an examination of how these stereotypes are related to the cultural and aesthetic values symptomatic of and articulated through the production and consumption of electronic dance music, specifically IDM (intellectual dance music). First, I will lay out a spectrum of distinctive values based on the discursive

practices and rhetorical strategies at work within this particular segment of post-rave culture. I place the production and consumption of rave as described in Chapter 1 (as an open and encouraging forum within which new modes of femininity could be explored) on one end of the spectrum, and the values of IDM on the other. With regards to the latter, I argue that dominant tastes and trends within the culture of IDM – a musical community populated predominantly by men – encourage the acquisition and employment of certain technical skills and computer languages (a culture of production) or, likewise, an appreciation of specific analog or digital sounds and a technical knowledge of the music itself (a culture of informed consumption). Furthermore there is often in IDM culture a denial of affective corporeal responses to the music. The aesthetic and social expectations of IDM prioritized the ‘brain dance’ over the perceived banality, easy accessibility, and over-commercialization of rave culture (For more on the politics *off the dance floor*, see “Fuck Dance, Let’s Art: The Post-Rave Experimental Fringe, 1994-97 in Reynolds (1998). Reynolds coined the term ‘brain dance’ in the aforementioned article). These particular tastes and trends of IDM enthusiasts led the scene to be fairly exclusive, essentially creating a hierarchical system of valorization intimately linked with a kind of technological fetishism. This hierarchical system resonates with the framework Sarah Thornton develops for understanding the social mechanics of club cultures, cultures that operate within hierarchical networks of taste, distinction and cultural capital (Thornton 1996). The development of exclusive tastes associated with specific technologies of production will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

After establishing this spectrum for the IDM scene, particularly with regards to its relationship to gender and technological innovation, I will compare the spectrum to the gender demographics of the labour field in the IT sector (e.g. programming, development of hardware/software, assembly, data entry). This comparison draws upon the examination of gendered stereotypes with respect to information technology in general. As some authors maintain, the lower-level technical positions – determined by salary and skill requirement – are, and continue to be, a feminized sector of the IT labour force (For a history of the feminization of the IT labour force, please see Gordon (1983), and Gordon and Kimball (1985). For a more contemporary look at this subject, see Green et al. (1993) and Haraway (1991)). I believe that it is possible to draw a parallel between the feminization of certain areas of the ‘techno-savvy’ post-rave culture and the work that has been done on the feminization of the IT labour force. Although access to the necessities of labour and income (e.g. the acquisition of technical skills to be employable and socially mobile) appear more fundamental and immediate than a perceived structural gender limitation within the world of culture, I argue that it is possible to draw an analogy between the world of culture and the world of IT labour. This suggests that the gender divisions evident in culture speak to larger realities concerning gender and technology in other occupational fields.

By engaging these various discourses, I pursue the question of whether these seemingly dated stereotypes of women and men persist and carry weight in the current configurations of contemporary electronic dance music cultures. There are no studies that explore the historical continuity of these gendered stereotypes in contemporary culture, particularly their intersection with popular music produced with new

technologies. The absence of such studies has led me to question whether gender is still an important issue with respect to the persistence of a difference in technological access and knowledge. Perhaps, with the ubiquitous presence of technology in our lives, especially among young people's daily engagement with popular culture and communications, a generational gap is more of an issue with regards to knowledge and skills with information technology, where the older generations are perhaps more likely to display a gender disparity. However, the memories of IDM events I have attended where most, if not all, producers were male prevents me from disposing of this question, and leads me to maintain a keen interest in issues of gender within cultures of technology.

Historical Gendered Stereotypes within Cultures of Technology

In the mid-1980s, Sherry Turkle wrote a seminal piece concerning women's relationship with computers (Turkle 1986). The 1980s were a time when there were increasing pressures to allow more women entry into the exponentially expanding and highly lucrative IT fields. Turkle deconstructs a commonly held notion of the time that women have an 'intimate fear of the machine,' in this way bringing into question tendencies towards gendered essentializations with respect to technology. Turkle's work also provided the groundwork for feminist theory to explore how such reductive stereotypes figure into and live on in our popular imagination, particularly with respect to their role in constructing identities. Judy Wajcman (1991) asks similar questions concerning identity. She explores how technology affects women in both domestic and professional spheres. She astutely points out that "the absence of technical confidence or competence indeed becomes part of a feminine gender identity, as well as being a sexual

stereotype" (Wajcman 1991, 155). Processes of social construction through the institutions of the family and the school generate and regenerate the way in which individuals construct their subjective, gendered identity. Moisala and Diamond agree in attending to issues of gender and technology, avoiding "essentialist conclusions while nevertheless recognizing the power of socially reinforced, essentializing gender constructions" (Moisala and Diamond 2000, 286).

With regard to the structural limitations women face with respect to technology, Wajcman elucidates the historical bond between men and technology. She suggests that our very conceptions of technology tend towards the exclusion of women, as popular images of technology often invoke industrial machinery, weaponry, and cars – objects and activities often associated with cultures of masculinity (Wajcman 1991, 137). The emphasis on such technologies, she continues, de-emphasizes the importance and levels of competence with regards to the traditional technologies associated with women, "such as horticulture, cooking and childcare." This "reproduces the stereotypes of women as technologically ignorant or incapable" (Wajcman 1991, 137). Yet, do these seemingly 'natural' associations of specific technologies with gender have currency 15 years after Wajcman writes? And are these examples of technology commonly associated with masculinity relevant for the understanding of IDM culture? I answer both questions in the affirmative. The cultures of the individuals and institutions that celebrate, and often fetishize, technological advancement – high-tech companies in the field of information technology and hackers, for instance – still represent professions of predominantly men. Also, since the producers of IDM culture are mostly men, it can be argued that this segment of electronic dance music culture perpetuates particular essentialized gendered

associations with specific technologies of production or a particular type of technical knowledge. Moreover, the predominance of men in all of these high-tech occupations and leisure past-times serves to reproduce the common gendered stereotypes with regard to these technical occupations.

For example, the hacker represents an extreme archetype of a computer user: an endlessly devoted, malnourished, unsociable, unshaven man working until the small hours of a Saturday night obsessively finishing a project. Turkle makes some observations on the sociality of hacker culture – which she claims to be an almost exclusively male domain – where such values as technical rationality are cherished and excessive displays of competition are common. She states “though hackers would deny that theirs is a macho culture, the preoccupation with winning and of subjecting oneself to increasingly violent tests make their world peculiarly male in spirit, peculiarly unfriendly to women” (Turkle 1984, 216). The tendency of hacker culture to deny its machismo characteristics can also apply to the world of electronic music producers. Both involve an ascetic-like attitude towards programming and keeping up to speed with the latest technological innovations. However, neither involves any physical component of strength, force or endurance. Furthermore, this need to master specific technologies, I argue, is common to both hackers and electronic music producers – where both display the same obsessive and fetishizing tendencies towards technology and technological development. As well, the elements of time, competition, and winning enter into the equation as the focus on novelty in both cultures is prevalent. The race to master the latest technology is necessary to be successful as a hacker or an artist in the IDM scene. I suggest that the mastery over such technologies affords an element of power within each

respective culture. Specifically, it provides a form of subcultural capital in post-rave culture. Wajcman summarizes the kind of power exercised existing on the cutting edge of technology, as “being involved in directing the future.” As a consequence, “it is a highly valued and mythologized activity” (Wajcman 1991, 144). The valorization of technology and technological knowledge in IDM culture, however, will be discussed at greater length later in the chapter.

Andra McCartney’s work provides insights into the historical and epistemological constructions of gender, with respect to traditions of science and technology. She examines the soundscape work of Canadian female composer Hildegard Westerkamp and discusses the significance of her compositions for the development of a feminist epistemology. In order to locate Westerkamp’s compositions in a social, cultural, and political context, McCartney begins by deconstructing the fundamental dichotomies of gender entrenched in the history of Western thinking, and attributes the endurance and longevity of gendered stereotypes to such dichotomies. She states:

Gendered stereotypes associate the feminine with nurturance and the ability to foster relationships, while masculinity is associated with the ability to individuate, separate and objectify. Thus affinity (bridging through relationship) would be perceived as feminine, and definition (contrast through difference) would be perceived as masculine... it is [this] particularly persistent dichotomous thinking [that] is an entrenched part of Western culture.

(McCartney 2000b: chapter 3, not paginated)

McCartney further suggests that “although the definition of masculinity has not remained a constant over the years, conceptions of reason have varied to remain in line with conceptions of masculinity...[and] objectivity has historically been associated both with masculinity and with scientific knowledge” (McCartney 2000b, chapter 3).

McCartney highlights the social construction of gender in the following example, in which technology is considered to be most intimately tied to ideologies of masculinity. Although, as she suggests, the artificial distinctions receded within a few months of the founding of each school, she references the divergent beginnings of electronic music in the 1950s, comparing the German tradition of *elektronische Musik* to the French tradition of *musique concrète*. She links commonly held stereotypes of gender to the distinctive modes of production to the aesthetic preferences of both the German and the French schools, and discusses how these styles can be placed along a spectrum of technical knowledge and keenness in keeping pace with technological growth and change. *Musique concrète*, she suggests, is tape music largely composed from found sound and field recordings, thus representing stereotypical feminine qualities of utilizing dated technology (magnetic tape), and locating the primary source of sound in the natural world. She compares this with German *elektronische Musik*, a tradition that worked with serial techniques of sine waves and oscillators. At the time this was considered to be more engaged “with scientific knowledge, [and] the ability to know the physical magnification of sound as exact data, or objective knowledge, a stereotypically masculine domain” (McCartney 2000b, chapter 3). Wajcman agrees to the existence of these tendencies that associate women with the natural world, and links these tendencies to prevalent stereotypes of women. She states that “the notion that women are closer to nature than men contains various elements such as women are more emotional, less analytical and weaker than men” (Wajcman 1991, 145). In contradistinction to the organic associations with *musique concrète*, McCartney claims that, “electronic music [is] associated since its inception with the stereotypically masculine approaches to

knowledge of objectivity, scientific thinking and technical exploration” (McCartney 2000b, chapter 3).

In a discussion that connects the technical excellence of *elektronische Musik* to notions of masculinity, McCartney refers to the work of Robin Maconie, an authority on the work of Karlheinz Stockhausen (a member of the *elektronische Musik* school).

McCartney states

Maconie praises Stockhausen's work as potent and authoritative, qualities associated with masculine mastery. He is also described as intelligent, establishing purely formal relationships, associating his work with the formal qualities of absolute music. The reference to a higher plane establishes a hierarchy of intellect. In contrast, composers like Schaeffer who work with *musique concrete* are portrayed as capricious and technically ill-informed, characteristics also used to create denigrating stereotypes of femininity (McCartney 2000b, chapter 3).

A link can thus be made between technological innovation, the role of the artist as genius, and cultures of masculinity. These connections, as present within the early cultures of electronic music, are significant. The IDM scene largely derives its historical and aesthetic roots from such early experimental music cultures (For an exhaustive 20th-century history of experimental electronic music, please refer to Prendergast (2000) and Shapiro (ed.) (2000)). As I argue, distinctions based on technical mastery in the production process not only elevate the artist to the position of genius, but also demand an informed consumer, whereby such music, if properly understood, promises an experience of the ‘higher planes’ of the intellect. The connection between the artist as technical genius and the composition of absolute music will be made as the next section discusses in greater depth the emergence of IDM in the larger context of electronic music.

Issues of gender and technology figure in the contemporary experience of many women who seek careers or already work in professional technical fields. Boden Sandstrom (2000), for example, expands on her coming-of-age experiences as a professional sound mixer in 1970s America. Her concerns surround the relative difficulty women experience in accessing the technical skills required for entry into the field of sound mixing. This suggests that there are structural limitations operating with respect to gender within the music industry. She comments on this, stating that “the men owned the companies; they weren’t hiring unless you had experience and the only way to get experience was to work with your friends’ bands who were all male.” She concludes that “therefore, men had access to the experience” (Sandstrom 2000, 283).

Sandstrom places the question of gender and technology centrally within issues of power and control. She explains that these tendencies towards power and control emanate mostly from the high-pressure demands of the industry. She highlights the critical role the sound mixer plays in live performances as well as in the recording process. This role results in the degree of control and power exercised by the sound mixer, who inevitably plays a crucial part in generating an artist’s fans and profits (Sandstrom 2000, 290). She hints that the prevalence of power and control in the industry is a product of the social construction of cultures of masculinity, cultures that structurally affect the processes of selection and/or exclusion women face in attempts to gain access to this field. However, there are problems with Sandstrom’s arguments. In her discussion of working with other women in the field, she makes generalizations about female sound engineers who, according to her, on a whole listen better, are more attentive, sensitive and responsive to the needs of both performer and audience, and are therefore better sound mixers than men.

(Sandstrom 2000, 296). Despite these questionable generalizations, I believe that an analogy can nonetheless be drawn between the structural limitations Sandstrom experienced entering a male-dominated technological field and those experienced by female producers of electronic music.

Cultural-Aesthetic Scale of Electronic Dance Music: the Rise of Intelligent Dance Music

Simon Reynolds coined the term ‘post-rave’ in reference to a new type of music considered to be “electronic listening music...dance music for the sedentary or stay-at-home” (Reynolds 1998, 181). He links the aesthetics and ideology of post-rave to a culture that has grown weary of the social idealism of rave. Electronic listening music, according to Reynolds, which soon after became known as ‘intelligent techno,’ was a response to what post-ravers saw as an over-commercialization of electronic music embodied in the culture and aesthetics of rave, and was a term thus used “to delineate a firm border between the discerning few and the undiscriminating masses” (Reynolds 1998, 181). The aesthetic affiliations to this music began in the ‘chill-out rooms’ of huge clubs and raves, where DJs would play a mix of ambient-style atmospheric music with lower BPMs (beats per minute), inducing less of a bodily and a more cerebral reaction. It was psychedelic music to ‘trip out’ to, and served to ease the ‘come down’ from the drugs often used at raves. However, in the early 1990s, the demand for this ‘heady chill-out vibe’ grew larger than what the peripheral rooms of raves could house, and as a result, this culture began to take on a greater definition and identity. The crowd of ‘intellectual techno’ increasingly distinguished themselves from the ‘massive mindless hedonism’ of rave.

Reynolds' description of post-rave culture is the only academic account that examines the aesthetics and cultural connotations of the term 'intelligent techno,' a term used to signify the shift that occurred within the larger milieu of rave culture. He relates the discerning aesthetic attitudes common among artists and audiences alike (symptomatic of regarding early rave idealism as a malaise) to selective attitudes towards the tools of electronic music production (an enthusiastic fetishization of new hardware and software technologies) as well as to the generally exclusive sounds and sentiments such music carried along with it (some of it so un-listenable and intentionally undanceable that it might be assumed to be a lesson in 'sonic toleration'). Yet, in the mix of this new post-rave culture, political questions arise that Reynolds does not specifically address, questions such as: by what processes are the specific skills and knowledge that elevate some participants in the culture above others acquired?; to what degree is technology implicated in these cultural-aesthetic shifts, and who are the forerunners who are able to participate in this technological vanguard?; do issues of gender figure in the demographics of these new *aficionados*, who define themselves against others in terms of increasingly 'intellectual' characteristics?

Electronic listening music and intellectual techno soon became more widely known as IDM (intellectual dance music), something of a 'supragenre' that has persisted. IDM includes other styles of electronic music under its social and stylistic rubric (ambient techno, glitch, tech-house, micro-house, drill and bass, illbient, etc). The first-known uses of IDM as a term for a genre was in 1993, when a mailing list called IDM involving mostly artists on England's Rephlex label was started (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligent_dance_music). As a web mailing list, IDM

united a group of producers and listeners who wished to be surrounded by people who appreciated similar kinds of experimental sonic soundscapes. IDM, a name encompassing both a genre of music and a musical community, presents itself as a loaded term. There are certainly pejorative connotations of ‘genius’ extending to both those who listen to and produce this certain kind of music. However, some argue that the social and cultural effects of its use are benign. An anonymous user contributing to the definition of IDM on Wikipedia describes the social and musical context of IDM relative to other kinds of dance music.

I take it as meaning average dance music is just for the simple pleasure of dancing, and is repetitive [sic] and childish in that manner. Therefore the more you break away from this, the more you add interesting sounds, abstract rhythms, etc[.] it becomes more intelligent and can be appreciated more for being experimental and not conforming to the easy/simple production of *other types* of dance music. Simply put rave/trance type music is for morons who just want to dance and trip-out, and IDM is for people who are there to enjoy the actual creation/production of the music.

(user entry on Wikipedia: 5 July 2005,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Intelligent_dance_music, accessed on February 15, 2006).

Another user suggests that IDM is “music that goes out of its way to do something different.” an obvious reference to the ‘uninspiring’, ‘tedious’, and ‘non-progressive’ music that came before it (user entry on 29 September 2005,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Intelligent_dance_music, accessed February 15, 2006). It is therefore possible to see that, within this culture, there are pretensions of artistic and technical genius that are related to and combined with a requirement for novelty in production technique. This requirement is a precondition of success in this culture, a culture intimately bound up in discourses and practices of technological progress.

The emergence of a cultural-aesthetic spectrum within electronic music culture thus developed with the increasingly discerning tastes of post-ravers. The cultural politics

of this spectrum are crucial to understanding both the consumption and production of electronic music. In contrast to rave, IDM requires the consumer to approach the music with a greater technical knowledge of how it is produced. The intellectual component of IDM expresses itself as practices of informed consumption. These attitudes were created as a part of the way in which rave culture has been conceptualized and degraded as a mindless, banal, and commercialized experience. Before I explore the effects of this cultural-aesthetic shift on the values and practices of consumption, and how this shift affects the experiences of women who have claimed autonomous creative and sexual spaces at rave events, I will first briefly examine how the shift from rave to a post-rave IDM culture affected perceptions and requirements regarding the production of electronic music.

The Shifting Politics of Production and Consumption in IDM Culture

The new sounds coming out of the IDM community reflected the generally progressive and competitive attitudes of the information technology field as a whole. To be included a *bone fide* and respectable producer in this community individuals had to master the skills of mixing that earlier rave culture was built on, as well as having to develop the keen aptitude, technical background, and social connections that allowed them to keep up to date with the development of new music-making hardware and software. The development of IDM in the early 1990s came at a time when women were generally not present in the field of DJing as either an occupation or leisure activity. Most of the subgenres that fall under the IDM umbrella were, and continue to be, populated predominantly by male producers. Although it has been generally noted that more women are becoming involved in the DJing community, or providing vocals on various

electronic compositions, the cultural value of such skills and avenues of participation has inevitably decreased.

These shifts in focus away from consumption or simple production techniques, both associated with rave culture, occurred during a technological boom in the early to mid 1990s, feeding a growing culture of techno-fetishism. Alongside the necessity of producing music with these novel technologies, there was also a growing ubiquity and democratization of access to mixing technologies. With the introduction and growing online piracy of easy-to-use mixing software, and the proliferation of digital playback devices equipped with mixing capabilities, the cultural importance of acquiring such skills as mixing within IDM culture on a whole has decreased.

With respect to the ideological shifts from rave to post-rave, Reynolds has observed that

With all its rhetoric of ‘progression,’ intelligent techno involved a full-scale retreat from the most radically posthuman and hedonistically funktional [sic] aspects of rave music toward more traditional ideas about creativity, namely the auteur theory of the solitary genius who humanizes technology rather than subordinating himself to the drug-tech interface. (Reynolds: 1998, 182)

The valorization of production at the expense of the importance of audience experience glorified the role of artist as genius, and transformed or rather reasserted the role of the audience as either passive consumers or irrelevant.

The devaluing of the spaces of audience pleasure as once celebrated in rave culture occurred for a number of reasons. The mid 1990s saw the increasing mediatization of rave events which brought the images and practices of rave to mainstream audiences. This was a result of both the curiosity for, and general popularization of, rave as a social event for young people, as well as of the increase in

moral panics related to the seemingly rampant drug usage in rave culture. The increase in media attention infringed upon the secret way in which ravers practiced their ‘subversive’ politics, generally expressed as a non-predatory, non-self interested sexuality, and this despite the intense physical sensuality of the events. Also, the increased raiding and subsequent prohibition of after-hours venues resulting in severe crackdowns on MDMA possession inevitably led to the devaluation of rave idealism. Thornton agrees with this analysis, and adds that this scene thrives predominantly on secrecy. She claims that the “club scene sees itself as an outlaw culture, but its main antagonist is not the police (who arrest and imprison) but the media who continually threaten to *release* its cultural knowledge to other social groups” (Thornton 1995 90).

In effect, the over-mediatization of rave resulted in the devaluation of the spaces of audience pleasure. These changes within electronic music culture led many long-term, committed, and ‘aesthetically refined’ members of the scene to disregard ‘inauthentic’ expressions or methods of participation as being of ‘kitsch’ or superfluous value. In colloquial terms, this was not a reflection of what the scene *is really all about*. These attitudes were formalized in discriminating sentiments towards younger generation ravers and certain styles of dress reminiscent of early rave style, particular selections or excessive amounts of drugs and, most importantly, tastes in electronic dance music. These new cultural distinctions that developed in the early 1990s no longer lay between electronic and non-electronic listening audiences but, as the genres of electronic music proliferated and spawned, the producers and consumers of electronic music increasingly became parasitically critical of themselves, forging an elitist vanguard of techno intelligentsia, the IDM community.

How do these competing definitions of taste and experience affect the way women have been represented as participants within this culture? In other words, how do these aesthetic and cultural shifts of rave to post-rave affect the feminist position outlined in the two previous chapters, a position that certain authors celebrate as advancement for the participation of women in the spaces of electronic music culture? Pini and McRobbie recount an experience of post-identity gathered from the stories of female ravers, where rave offered – through its cultural values that gave importance to dance as a creative act within the event space of rave – an autonomous space for women to feel included in activities of a subculture without relying on their relationship to a male counterpart (i.e. not viewed simply as a girlfriend or a passive consumer). These women also spoke of how these liberating experiences of dance provided them with increased levels of confidence and a general satisfaction in that they were able to go out with other women in a highly sensual environment, and feel free of sexual predation or excessive cultures of machismo. However, in the transformation from rave to post-rave, there appears to be a reduction in the space once used for identity play. Or rather, the cultural value of it is displaced. Importance is no longer placed on audience experience (dancing, affectively responding to the music), but is rather unduly focused on the acquisition of cultural capital: extensive knowledge of the production techniques and gear used by the performers who, as mentioned earlier, are mostly men.

However, the discourses of IDM – the use and mastery of cutting-edge technology, or re-using old technology in novel ways – support and perpetuate the typically masculine archetypes of technology and obsessive techno-fetishism. How do women fit into this culture built and predominantly populated by the masculine

archetypes of the hacker, obsessive programmer or tech-geek? As established earlier, care needs to be exercised in describing trends with respect to the relationship of men and women to technology. There is a need to resist accounts that essentialize gendered identities.

In a certain way, post-rave or IDM culture positions itself, like its predecessor rave, as a techno-utopian celebration: a culture that supports notions of post-identity, where gender seemingly no longer figures in how an individual is socially located, or as a limiting element of his or her capacities. There is, however, a significant difference, or rather a different emphasis, between post-identity in rave culture and in post-rave. In the former, bodies dance together in the hope of reaching a state of transcendence (or collective exhaustion). In the latter, the importance of the body is pre-emptively removed from the equation, as the real appreciation of the music is taken to occur in the mind. Post-identity in post-rave culture, as suggested in the previous chapter, is expressed through a DIY ideology of music production, where traditional identity demarcations are believed to be of no consequence with regards to accessing the means of production. Rave celebrates the corporeal, and IDM the cerebral and intellectual expressed in the mastery of cutting-edge technology. *Irony* is flaunted in the pastiche of musical styles thrown together, or in the BPMs sped up so fast as to create a laughable and un-danceable cacophony. This is not to assert that *all* music produced and performed after the proclaimed death of rave is un-danceable, or at *every* contemporary electronic music event the dance floor is scoffed at among the perimeter of shoe-gazing outliers. There are as many grey areas in the corporeal-cerebral spectrum of electronic music as there are genres of electronic music itself, and IDM does derive some of its historical roots from

the experimental (i.e. un-danceable) electronic music tradition. Yet one thing remains true along the entire spectrum of this musical culture: the common realization and acceptance that the mindless, breezy and banal days of dancing to raver music are over. On the 'matured' dance floor, individuals must carry the weight of cultural capital as knowledgeable and skilled consumers to know exactly what they (he or she) are participating in.

The shift from the corporeal to the cerebral enjoyment of electronic music resonates with distinctions between high and popular culture. Western traditions regarding the enjoyment of classical music emphasize that appreciation is a learned practice that exercises and cultivates the higher functions of the spirit. This tradition is in contradistinction to the fundamental principles of rave, a culture – like many twentieth-century popular cultural practices – that de-emphasizes the sedentary enjoyment of music. Rather, the existence of the culture was founded and sanctioned in the bodily enjoyment of the music being produced, as well as in the sensual environments in which these events were held. Yet, a discernable aesthetic quality found in a variety of IDM compositions is a kind of ascetic restraint that echoes the structures of tension and resolution found in much Western classical music. The idea of restraint and of the postponement of pleasure is in direct contradistinction to the hedonistic and pleasure-seeking activities of rave, an aesthetic quality that serves to separate the mature post-ravers from the adolescent ravers. Can we say that the movement to post-rave is a return to a more conservative appreciation of music?

Frith suggests that the differences between high and low culture lie in the discriminating discursive processes that both construct, comment on, and reinforce these

cultural distinctions, and are not necessarily differences which lie in the cultural objects themselves (Frith 1996, 19). There are a variety of cultural media that can be invoked in order to understand how the discursive practices of IDM construct and maintain their cultural distinction from the remainder of electronic music culture. These include: the culturally specific language present at electronic music events; the way members of the culture reflexively describe and agree upon their interests, revealed through such communities as online forums, list serves and label websites; culturally specific magazines such as XLR8R, Grooves and URB; and also popular and academic literature devoted to social and sonic history of the scene.

Since post-rave or IDM culture defined itself in terms of intellectual parameters, a useful conceptual comparison in regards to the subject of high and low art, as well as cerebral and corporeal enjoyment, can be drawn between the distinctions of form and function Simon Frith discusses with respect to Pierre Bourdieu's work on taste cultures (Frith 1996, 18). Post-rave culture is much more focused on the technical aspects of production and, in their formal presentation these values of production are expected to be evident to audiences. This quality elevates the piece of music or the event to one possessing an autonomous and self-referential aesthetic value, transcending the context of time and space. This distinction attempts to position the events of post-rave as a more mature cultural form than the earlier function of rave. These high and low cultural distinctions and their reference to form and function can be understood in the following example. IDM can be positioned as *absolute music*: in other words, as the 'high culture' of electronic music. McCartney describes absolute music in the following terms:

Absolute music must be understood as pure form, according to canons that are internal to itself ... Music becomes absolute by being an 'objective' art. and it

acquires objectivity through its structure. To say of music that it is objective is to say that it is understood as an object in itself, without recourse to any semantic meaning, external purpose or subjective idea. Absolute music is understood as objective, acquiring this characteristic through its pure, formal structure (McCartney 2000b, Chapter 3).

Does IDM practice exclusionary tactics of elite creativity through its use of the latest technologies of production, coupled with intellectual tastes that serve to distinguish it from popular culture practices?

Paul Willis comments on the processes of socialization involved in the appreciation of high art, which depend on “a prior educational process lodged within its own kinds of institutions” (Willis 1990, 2). Noting these practices of exclusivity, which aim to position IDM apart from the everyday practices of other electronic music listeners, can we rightfully ask whether IDM works against the principles of the further democratizing of technology? Related to this question, Willis further suggests that “since the early eighties, a number of developments at the bottom end of the domestic hi-fi and recording technology markets have revolutionized the potentials for the symbolic creativity of young people in music and greatly increased the possibilities of music-making, particularly around the practices of mixing, sampling, bootlegging and home recording” (Willis: 1990, 77). However, with the increasing democratization of mixing culture (ipods and other digital devices, CD-DJs, etc.), the cultural-aesthetic value attached to these very skills decreases in the post-rave IDM setting.

In the next section I make a connection between the larger proportion of women in the DJing field relative to those who produce electronic dance music – as well as those women who have remained on the dance floor since the hey-day of rave – and the way in which IDM culture has quarantined and attached certain cultural connotations to these

seemingly low-level technical skills. I pursue an analogy with the feminization of the labour force in the IT field, as both display similar trends of gender differentiation relative to a hierarchy of technical knowledge and occupation.

Relationship of Gendered Stereotypes in IDM Culture to Labour in the Information Technology Field

To conclude this chapter, I will relate the persistence of gendered stereotypes that manifest in the disproportionate number of male producers in the 'tech-savvy' culture of IDM, to the larger issues of gender in the field of information technology. The cultural-aesthetic spectrum within electronic music culture places those with a background in and greater access to technical knowledge in an elevated social position within a hierarchy of cultural capital relative to those who simply (passively and mindlessly) participate in the form of dancing or who have had the ability to obtain elementary technical skills of mixing or using software programs that are freely distributed within online file sharing programs. Given that the gender demographics of electronic music culture place a higher proportion of men in the high-tech areas of IDM, while women are more generally to be found as DJs or as vocalists, it might be concluded that the areas that require a lower level of technical skill and knowledge are a feminized segment of electronic music culture. Some writers have made similar claims regarding the gendered demographic trends in the labour field of the IT sector.

Haraway (1991) makes reference to the persistence of the homework economy: women in Silicon Valley and its satellite production zones dependent on jobs in the electronics field, where the labour structure reflects divisions of class and gender within the high-tech professional field. She cites Richard Gordon who describes the 'homework

economy' as "work [that] is being refined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women" (quoted, Haraway 1991, 166) (For more on the homework economy and related arguments, see: Gordon (1983) and Gordon and Kimball (1985)).

Gordon's statement references both the high proportion of women in the low-skilled technical work of data entry and assembly, and also the fact that this work is generally considered more suitable for female workers who are perceived to have a greater agility and dexterity for manual work.

In an attempt to overcome the divisions of gender found in cultures of technology, Haraway encourages women to become more hybridized with machines (Haraway 1991, 181). This describes her notion of a cyborg: "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway: 1991, 149). Haraway's definition of a cyborg seems to have a different emphasis to Pini's use of the concept, particularly when considered from a materially rooted, political economy position rather than a feminist postmodernism stance concerned primarily with identity politics. The way in which Pini adopts the notion of a cyborg in regards to women who rave is in the nature of a novel political fiction: it becomes a new way to think through the possibilities women *may* harness in regards to their relationship to technology (Pini 2001). Yet, how many of these new political fictions are relegated to the purely imaginative realm and do not become actualized in lived social relations? Is Pini's account an over-textualization of the semiotics of women in electronic music culture that leads to utopian claims of freedom that are not realized materially?

Sustaining concerns for the social divisions of gender, race, and class as part of the new information society is a fundamental key for improving the conditions for those

who, through structural limitations, are faced with less opportunity and social mobility than others in the field of information technology. Haraway advises that “socialist-feminist politics should address women in the privileged occupational categories, and particularly in the production of science and technology that constructs scientific-technical discourses, processes, and objects” (Haraway 1991, 169). If greater attention is paid to the material structures of labour relations and the gendered demographics within, perhaps there can be real achievements with respect to more women being involved in occupational areas of higher technological knowledge and expertise. With respect to the way in which this materialist position relates to gender divisions in electronic dance music culture: rather than focusing on the now devalued autonomous spaces in which women could once stake a zone of creative and sexual freedom, there is a need to renew interest in the gendered demographics of production. There is a need to know why more women are not included in the performance line-ups at major festivals. There is a need to critically examine the way new technologies are advertised with a targeted gendered audience in mind, and to deconstruct the use of traditional stereotypes prevalent in the marketing and use of these new technologies. There is a need to deconstruct ideals of post-identity prevalent in cultures of consumption and in the DIY discourses of production, as issues of gender, race, class and sexuality are still important.

Conclusion

The Re-Entry of Gender into the Cultural Economy of IDM

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that women face structural limitations with respect to gaining access to the necessary technologies and technical knowledge required to participate equally with men in one segment of post-rave culture, the IDM (intellectual dance music) scene. Given that the vast majority of such music produced and performed is by men, I sought to provide reasons as to why more women do not participate in this techno-culture that generally proclaims itself to be democratically accessible. One answer is that the solitary activities of learning electronic music-making programs simply do not appeal to women as they do to men. The validity of this answer relies on either explanations of nature (that men are more technologically inclined) or nurture (through their early development, boys are more honed and encouraged in areas of technology than girls are). In this thesis, I chose to adopt the latter explanation in an attempt to analyse the gendered stereotypes that emerge. Such stereotypes that emerge and take effect in cultures of technology such as rave and post-rave are interesting because they contradictorily co-exist alongside discourses of post-identity (as evident in electronic dance music culture) and DIY ethics of production (where traditional identity demarcations do not limit an individual's capacity for participation). Although these stereotypes are generally not explicitly expressed in the ideologically 'refined' and 'intellectual' culture of IDM, I argue that they are latent within disproportionately gendered relationships to the technologies of production, where a greater proportion of men than women produce and perform this kind of music.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I reproduce the arguments of feminist scholars of cultural studies (Pini 2001 and McRobbie 1994) that suggest that rave culture provides women with a new forum for the playful constitution of their cultural identity. According to Pini and McRobbie, women in rave culture are able to experience new avenues for the expression of their sexuality autonomously and without threat from a male presence, something that was not possible in earlier post-war subcultures. However, I add to their arguments by suggesting that these scholars are mainly referring to women's experiences in early rave culture. Such experiences of identity constitution have dissolved in the post-rave setting because traditional definitions of performer and audience have been resurrected. This cultural and aesthetic shift toward post-rave culture, I argue, discounts the claims made by Pini and McRobbie regarding women's new experiences within rave.

I conclude this chapter by pointing to the incommensurability of the prevalent discourses of rave culture that articulate an ideological objective of post-identity with the claims regarding the processes of constituting 'new modes of femininity' made by both Pini (2001) and McRobbie (1994). Such discourses of post-identity often leave the rave participant unsexed or gender-neutral, implying that traditional identity demarcations are of no effect. The residual reluctance to make gender matter in rave and post-rave culture makes it difficult to move to questions regarding gender and production, as well as gender and technology in contemporary electronic music culture. In revealing my personal involvement in the post-rave scene for eight years, I suggest that the claims made by Pini and McRobbie regarding the gender relations in electronic dance music culture should be revisited.

In Chapter 2, I examine the way in which men and women have historically been relegated to the roles of production and consumption respectively. I develop this line of argument, demonstrating the historical instance of men embodying heroic roles as active producers of subculture, while women were often relegated to the passive areas of consumption as spectators of a male-made culture. As Pini and McRobbie suggest, rave culture dissolved these traditional roles of producer and audience, and privileged the kind of cultural participation (individual dancing) where many women culturally locate themselves. Yet, in the cultural and aesthetic shift from rave to post-rave, I demonstrate that traditional roles of performer as producer and participant as consumer re-emerged. I attribute the return to conventional definitions of performance to the over-popularization of rave, which forced those who disliked rave's over-commercialisation to forge a renewed, exclusive culture. I also give precedence to the role of technology in the forging of this new elitist techno vanguard that increasingly defined itself apart from the hedonistic masses by means of their superior technical know-how and cutting-edge musical gadgetry.

The conclusion of this chapter examines the DIY (do-it-yourself) discourses of production that contradictorily support this exclusive community of post-rave culture. I exemplify the way in which electronic dance music culture operates within democratic discourses of production, in the belief that anyone can access the skills and technology required to produce IDM through the consumption of ready-made music producing programmes. The ideology of post-identity latent within DIY ethics of production does not address the structural limitations that prevent universal access to technology according to traditional identity demarcations of mostly class, but also gender.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I examine unequal access to production technologies according to gender by considering the persistence of gendered stereotypes within cultures of technology. Specifically, IDM as a culture of electronic music production demonstrates the perpetuation of gendered stereotypes with respect to cultures of technological expertise. Competence within these cultures of technology, I demonstrate, is most often associated with traditional definitions of masculinity, stereotypes that maintain that men are more logical, rational and capable of abstract thought than women, and thus are more technologically inclined. Conversely, women have traditionally been associated with irrationality, and in cultures of technology this stereotypical quality is expressed as technical incapacity, and persists alongside the masculine associations with competence.

I do not however, fully attribute the relative absence of women in IDM culture to the persistence of these seemingly dated gendered stereotypes. The social institutions of school and family also have a structural influence in fostering different interests among young boys and girls that later become expressed as differing levels of technical competencies and general confidence towards technical programmes. Yet, the age bracket of twenty- and thirty-something electronic music artists that figure into the cultural trends I have considered in this thesis grew up in a different technological era from the adolescents of today. I argue that in upper-middle class families these gendered trends that used to reveal young boys as more technologically inclined and thus more capable than girls are shifting given the increasing ubiquity of personal computers in households made accessible for uses such as chatting and internet browsing, thus moving away from boyish gaming pastimes. Young girls today have more opportunity to become familiar

and comfortable with the operation of computers as well as their rapid rate of change than the young girls of my generation, yet the latter group is the scope of what this thesis considers.

Since IDM culture requires its producers to be well versed in the latest technical languages and competent with the most cutting-edge music-making technologies, such requirements represent the highest value of cultural capital within this exclusive segment of the post-rave scene. I argue that the relative absence of women in the productive realms of IDM culture is indicative of larger relationships of gender and technology. In the conclusion of Chapter 3, I attempt to draw an analogy to the gendered trends in the professional fields of information technology.

As intimated in the Introduction to this thesis, I maintain the positive cultural achievements postmodern feminists such as McRobbie and Pini have claimed for women in rave culture. I believe these scholars have provided a step forward for the discipline of cultural studies in the recognition of new ways of producing subjectivities and inhabiting cultural spaces. However, I also maintain a sensitive and critical position regarding the historical trends of gendered modes of production, particularly in the cultural fields where art and technology intersect. Although positions of post-identity claim to advance the way in which we conceive of and accept difference by asserting that traditional identity demarcations such as gender, class, race and sexuality are no longer of any effect, they also tend to diminish, and thus mask over, social divisions that persist in material relations of production.

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